

Should the Apostolic Usurp the Authority of Pastors, Churches?

Recently I have been reading some articles critical of NAR (the so-called new apostolic reformation) which (oftentimes) correctly calls attention to some abuses perpetrated in the name of the apostolic. When a friend told me I should respond to one article in particular, I smiled when I read it because I had nothing to rebut except a few things written that I attribute to misunderstandings regarding language, perspective and intent.

One of the primary fears some opponents of the NAR have is that the apostolic movement can be (or is) harmful to and can overthrow pastors and churches as we know it. That is to say they are concerned that leaders will use their (so-called) apostolic title and or office to usurp authority over the church and even force some pastors or churches to submit to them in a particular region.

Now I must say that based on my own experience, this is possible but not probable in my estimation. Since the mid-1980s, I have only seen this happen a few times (once upon a time a false apostle tried to usurp my pastoral authority and take over the local church I founded in the late 1980s), and I heard of one situation where a person claimed to be the "apostle over a city" but few pastors submitted to him (most pastors have enough discernment not to be fooled by such braggadocious nonsense) and the said so-called apostle quickly crashed and burned and lost everything anyway.

To be fair, I have heard of far more so-called prophets, evangelists, teachers and pastors that abuse their power (to seduce women and solicit funds for themselves and more) than I

have heard of leaders coming in the name of an apostle title. In spite of this, I do not hear of anybody calling for the end of pastoral or evangelistic ministry since the true and bonafide leaders far outweigh the bad.

No, the way forward should be to continue to refine, evolve and work towards attaining a more biblical view regarding our orthodoxy and orthopraxy. One well-meaning and good leader recently questioned me for saying in an article I wrote that the church will eventually go from a pastoral paradigm to an apostolic. (They most likely perceived I was referring to the apostolic overthrowing the pastoral model of church and leadership.)

They did not understand the fact that I was not referring to apostolic leaders usurping authority over pastors and churches but that my hope was that the body of Christ would go back to the "Way of Christ and His original apostles"—which is the NT pattern of making disciples and multiplying churches.

I was referring to paradigmatic change—which has to do with a change of thinking regarding the church that would eventuate in an embrace of the NT pattern of church which elevates and never dissipates pastors and churches (which can be done with or without the use of the title "apostle.")

That being said, any pastor or church that partners with an apostolic leader should do so of their own volition, not because of being manipulated but because they believe that aligning with said apostolic leader will maximize their efforts regarding the spread of His gospel. I have seen true apostolic leaders edify pastors and churches hundreds of times both in the NY region and in the global church.

Am I saying there is no abuse in the apostolic? No. Although I have rarely witnessed apostolic leadership hurt pastors and churches in the context of my region, I cannot speak for other nations and cities outside NYC where I am unfamiliar with

their history and context. I have witnessed some extremes and misuse of the title in other ways as I have already enumerated in past articles (see “the NAR and the Restoration of Apostolic Ministry Today”).

Extreme statements and practices are a common problem historically whenever the body of Christ attempts to restore a new biblical truth. Part of the confusion in the topic at hand stems from the use of the title apostle as an office instead of a function. This is due to the fact that apostle is used as an office in the first chapter of the book of Acts when Matthias was chosen to take the place of Judas (Acts 1:20) since the Greek word is *episcopos*, which, means an office like that of the *episcopos*.

Of course, Peter used this word because the original 12 apostles of the Lamb did have the ecclesial office of apostle conferred upon them by Jesus. (Because their teaching was to be normative for the whole body of Christ for all time as is recorded in the writings of the NT Scriptures and as is illustrated in practice when they convened the first ecumenical council to direct the future of the church as recorded in Acts 15.)

Unfortunately, many in the apostolic restoration movement interpret the passage in Acts 1:20 to mean that those called to serve in apostolic ministry have been given a permanent office that never changes irrespective of where they minister geographically and who they are ministering to.

Only the original 12 apostles of the Lamb have that permanent office. Every other apostolic leader since then only has limited apostolic function related to their particular sphere of influence and is only contingent as far as their teaching and pattern of behavior align with the teachings of the original 12 apostles. That being said, I have taught since the 1980s that the word “apostolic” is governmental not just ministerial—and describes a limited function, even moreso than

the other four cluster gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, which means that a person may function apostolically in their church or network but that doesn't make them an apostle everywhere they go, since their level of governance in their ministry is limited to churches and networks in which they have oversight (see 2 Corinthians 10:10-14).

For example, I may function as an apostle in my church and network but that doesn't mean I have the same kind of apostolic influence when I minister in a Methodist church or in another country. The best I can do is preach in another context as a prophetic voice or as a teacher of biblical principles, but I cannot go to churches or nations outside the scope of my governance and claim to be their apostle in their context unless they, of their own volition and leading, ask me to serve in that capacity.

Because of the above, the past several years I have moved away from using the term "office" in conjunction with the apostolic since it connotes permanent institutional ecclesial authority instead of a mere (limited) function. Because I was taught since the 1980s by many in the Charismatic Movement that the apostolic was an office, I was using this language for many years until recently when I realized it did not comport with my view that it is a function limited to a particular sphere of authority (as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 10:10-15).

Even some of my old articles and a book I wrote may contain that language (which I will eventually revise). The biggest danger I see in teaching the apostolic is an office instead of a function is because those who think they minister in the office of apostle may be more prone to think they have institutional ecclesial authority in wherever region or church group they minister to, which I totally disagree with.

In summary, let me close with some final points:

1. The apostolic is a function and not an office and should

never be used to manipulate and or usurp authority over pastors and churches

2. Pastors and churches can voluntarily submit to and or align with apostolic leaders if they so choose

3. The apostolic ministry gift today is a limited function and not an office

4. True apostolic leaders will edify the Body of Christ and be instruments of fostering biblical unity (Ephesians 4:12-13; 2 Corinthians 13)

5. The restoration of the apostolic paradigm should serve to recognize and release the NT pattern of disciple making and the multiplication of churches. We should plant movements and not mere myopic churches.

6. Recognizing apostolic function can make way for entrepreneurial visionary church leadership with a focus on expanding kingdom influence more than shepherding one congregation in one community

7. Recognizing apostolic function can release those called primarily to pastoral leadership from the pressure of thinking extra-locally, so they can focus on their assignment of caring for the congregation they were called to serve and let the apostolic leaders they are connected with focus on the community, church planting and beyond

8. All of the five cluster gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 should work together—and not in competition with each other—to equip the saints

9. We in the global apostolic movement are still evolving in our understanding and will continue to do so until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (see Ephesians 4:11-13)

10. All true apostolic leaders should endeavor to mimic the servant leadership style of Jesus, who led by washing the feet of those He worked with (John 13).

Consequently, any so-called “apostle” who attempts to use their title (as a big A instead of a small A apostle) to usurp the leadership of pastors and churches is not a true apostle and should be called out by the rest of the Body of Christ in their region of influence.