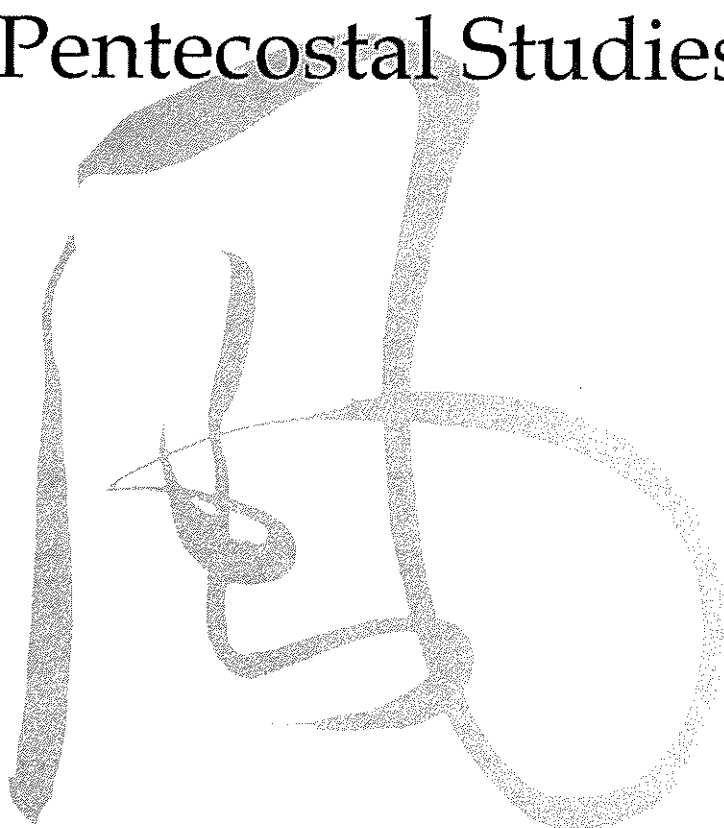


Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies



Volume 6, Number 2 (July 2003)

David Cartledge, *The Apostolic Revolution; the Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Assemblies of God in Australia* (Chester Hill, NSW, Australia: Paraclete Institute, 2000). 446 pp., ppb., ISBN: 1-876785-01-2.

Since the birth of the modern Pentecostal movement a century ago, a variety of emphases and fascinations have punctuated the remarkable growth of this latter-day Christian awakening. Periodically the issue of whether or not the present day church should expect to see a reappearance of apostles and prophets has surfaced. Until recently, flagship Pentecostal bodies such as the Assemblies of God dismissed attempts to restore the offices of apostle and prophet as recurrences of dangerous practices associated with the destruction of previous Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, such as the British Irvingite movement of the nineteenth century. It was generally perceived by mainline Pentecostal bodies that the attempt to restore these offices opened the door to dangerous abuses, and, therefore, were dismissed as untenable. Pentecostals readily acknowledged the value of the prophetic gift, but generally rejected the notion of identifying individuals as “prophets.” Likewise, Pentecostals recognized that God called some individuals to creative pioneer ministries, such as David Wilkerson and his Teen Challenge Program—but limited their designations for such ministries as “apostolic” in a broad sense, without titling the individual as an apostle.

In 1948 and 1949, a flurry of apostolic and prophetic excitement centered in what came to be known as the “Latter Rain movement.” This brief attempt at renewal, begun in Canada and emerging in parts of the United States, was confronted by leaders of the Assemblies of God as an abuse of the biblical ministry of prophecy, since personal guidance given through prophetic utterances was featured. An attempt was made by some of the Latter Rain practitioners to identify some individuals as exhibiting the office of prophet. Congregations in both Canada and the United States were plunged into division and controversy. Swift and decisive action by key Assemblies of God leaders short-circuited this foray into what were thought to be excesses in the realm of the apostolic and the prophetic gifts. Since the advent of the Charismatic Renewal, some independent ministries have widely advertised individuals among themselves to be apostles and prophets. Traditional Pentecostal groups, such as the Assemblies of God, have generally been aloof from such Charismatic ministries, at least until quite recently.

However, in the last decade, a sea-change has taken place in at least one national Assemblies of God fellowship. The Australian Assemblies

of God has radically restructured itself, discarding completely the traditional pattern of ecclesiastical bureaucracy. In place of popularly elected national and regional leadership, with a more-or-less centralized bureaucratic authority, the Australian Assemblies of God has moved dramatically toward the autonomy of local churches. National leadership has been unhooked from a traditional bureaucracy by the denomination agreeing to recognize key pastors who exhibit “apostolic” gifts. As a result, a small group of pastors of large, dynamic churches has emerged as the true spiritual leadership of the denomination. Brian Huston, pastor of the largest Assemblies of God church in Australia, has been recognized as the president of the Assemblies of God. Instead of resigning from his pastoral role and moving to a denominational office, the president gives leadership by modeling ministry from his position as pastor. Pastors of smaller churches come under the mentoring and nurture of the leaders, all of whom are pastors large and growing churches. This is a major paradigm shift for the Australian Assemblies of God. Although none of the new leaders employs the term, it is readily understood by others that these leaders are exercising the office of apostle. And associated with this new apostolic structure is a new emphasis on the ministry of prophecy, with specific individuals being recognized as chosen instruments through which God speaks in fresh revelation to the church.

David Cartledge, recognized as one of the leading pastors in Australia, former president of the main Assemblies of God Bible college in Sydney, has emerged as the most articulate spokesman of the new paradigm. His book, *The Apostolic Revolution*, captures from the inside the story of the dramatic changes that have taken place in the Australian Assemblies of God. Additionally, his book provides a theological and biblical rationale for the restoration of apostles and prophets in the church today.

Cartledge’s book, with 57 chapters, plus several appendices and an index, is a substantial document. The author cites a wide array of resources, so that the book is laced with useful documentation. The book is designed not only to tell an important story, but to persuade the reader of the biblical and theological foundations upon which the new emphasis is constructed. He argues for the validity of personal guidance through prophetic utterances, for the value of recognizing apostolic ministry in the church today, and for an openness to “fresh revelation” through the ministries of recognized prophets.

Traditional Pentecostals will likely take exception to various aspects of Cartledge’s presentation. For example, Cartledge applauds uncritically

the Catholic Apostolic Church, established in London by Edward Irving about 1830. He is enthusiastic over the appointment of 12 apostles among these people, and attempts to make a link between that movement and the birth of the modern Pentecostal revival (p. 100). However, some historians would argue that the identification of 12 apostles was a major reason the movement failed—and, further, there is little evidence to suggest any connection between the Irvingites and the birth of the modern Pentecostal revival.

Two more serious questions remain to be resolved. Pentecostals, who readily align themselves with objective Evangelical hermeneutics, will not be pleased with the apparent openness of Cartledge to a high degree of subjectivity in what he calls a “Pentecostal hermeneutic” (p. 175). And the author proceeds with the notion that modern Pentecostals stand in the same relation to the scriptures (the Old Testament in particular) that the first century apostles did, thus being enabled to develop doctrine out of their own experiences (p. 178). I do not think Cartledge appreciates the high degree of subjectivity he has, perhaps inadvertently, introduced.

A further question that traditional Pentecostals are asking has to do with the possible abuses of power the new paradigm in Australia may evoke. Currently, the checks and balances in the standard Assemblies of God national church bodies around the world generally prevent abuses of governance by willful individuals. What Cartledge tosses aside as a structure that inhibits growth and creativity may have some values that he does not wish to acknowledge. The author emphasizes that, thus far in the Australian experience, there is harmony and unity. However, one is tempted to wonder what safeguards are present in the new paradigm to correct an errant leader. For, after all, who can challenge the authority of an apostle?

I have noted a few questions that readers are likely to surface as an appropriate cautionary view. Nonetheless, Cartledge can make a strong case for the current dynamic growth and vitality of the Australian Assemblies of God under the new regime of apostles and prophets. Certainly this volume will be for some time a most important resource for any who would make a serious study of present day supernatural church life and leadership.

William W. Menzies