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Apostles before and after Paul

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A. M. Hunter makes the rather startling claim in his little book, *The Parables Then and Now*¹ that, as a result of an immense amount of scholarly work this century, 'we may now claim to understand them (i.e. the parables) better than any Christians since the apostolic age'.² This comment is quoted because exactly the same thing may be said about our understanding of apostles in the New Testament.

Very early in Christian history the idea prevailed that the twelve plus Paul were apostles and no one else and since an encounter with the risen Christ was essential to be an apostle, this ministry was limited to the first generation of Christians. It is, however, a far too limited view of what constitutes an apostle for, as we will see, the New Testament presents a much more varied and dynamic picture.

The old dogmatic conception of apostleship remained unchallenged until modern methods of critical study were applied to the New Testament. Such a methodology demanded that the writings of each canonical author be studied in terms of themselves first and only then compared with other writings. This approach enabled scholars to see the pieces in the mosaic and thereby appreciate the overall picture better. Any modern study of apostles in the New Testament must follow this route. No longer can we just take texts at random and build up the picture we would like to see. Instead we must let the evidence produce the picture. Some who have taken this path before have argued³ that such a critical study of the apostle in the New Testament should begin with Paul's epistles for these were almost certainly written before the Gospels and try to see past their final form to the days when the twelve were Jesus' constant companions.⁴ But before we consider the ministry of the twelve the apostleship of Jesus will be discussed.

Jesus the Archetypal Apostle

Only once in the New Testament is Jesus explicitly called 'apostolos' and that is in the epistles to the Hebrews (3:1).⁵ This title may, however, reflect something of Jesus' own understanding of his person and mission. Thus, in the Gospel of John, on some 41 occasions, Jesus speaks of being 'sent'⁶ by God. Rengstorff goes so far as to say that in this Gospel Jesus' relationship to the Father is 'very largely

governed by the verb 'apostolein'.⁷ John speaks of Jesus in this way to stress that his authority is grounded in the Father who participates in his mission (5:36, 6:57). The corollary to this argument is that, 'He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him' (5:23 cf. 15:23). This language takes up the Jewish idea that, 'the one sent by a man is as the man himself'.⁸ In Hebrew, as it has been frequently noted, the term for one officially sent as a representative is *shaliach* which is rendered in Greek by the word *apostolos*. This means that in John, Jesus is presented as the authoritative representative of God himself who speaks and acts on his behalf.⁹

These ideas are a development on what is found in the Synoptic Gospels but here also emphasis is placed on the sending of the son by the Father and on his authoritative representative role.¹⁰ When Jesus departs from Capernaum he explains his actions by saying, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other cities also; for I was sent (*apestalen*) for this purpose' (Lk. 4:43, cf. Mk. 1:38).¹¹ In his sermon at Nazareth Jesus applies the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1–2 to himself. 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'. 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... he has sent me (*aposteilai*) to proclaim release to the captives' (Lk. 4:18). Later in his ministry, when speaking to the Syrophenician women, he says, 'I was sent (*apestalen*) only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Mt. 15:24). And finally in the parable of the wicked husbandmen, which can be found in all three Synoptic Gospels, Jesus, it would seem, alludes to his mission when he speaks of the father sending his son (Mk. 12:1–11 and par.).

The Jewish idea that a man's officially appointed representative (*shaliach*) stands in his place is also used in the Synoptics to explain Jesus' own authority and that of his disciples'. In his mission charge Jesus says to his disciples, 'He who receives you receives me and he who receives me receives him who sent me' (Mt. 10:40 cf. Lk. 10:16). Similarly, in response to the disciples' debate about greatness, Jesus says, 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me and whoever receives me receives not me but him who sent me (Mk. 9:37 cf. Lk. 9:37, Mt. 18:5).

These twin themes found in John and the Synoptics suggest that Jesus was deeply conscious that he had been 'sent' by God and that he was God's authoritative representative. They also invite the conclusion that Jesus be recognised as God's *shaliach*—God's apostle. Jesus does not explicitly claim this title but the Gospels imply that he fulfilled this role.

The Twelve

The first surprise on approaching the Gospels is the discovery of just how infrequently the term apostle is used as a title for the twelve. It appears only once in Matthew and Mark, not at all in John and five

times in Luke.¹² At the very least the implication would seem to be that the term apostle was not the usual designation Jesus himself gave to the twelve. Many scholars in fact argue that Jesus did not at any time call the twelve, 'apostles' during his lifetime.¹³

The Gospel of Mark which is widely held to be the earliest Gospel virtually restricts the term 'disciple' to the twelve and often speaks simply of the 'twelve' as if this was quite sufficient in itself as a title for the innermost circle of Jesus' followers.¹⁴ In the one place the word apostle appears (Mk. 6:30), its force is much disputed.

In Mark 6:7 Jesus is said to have called to him the twelve and sent (*apostellein*) them out two by two. Later Mark tells us they returned and told Jesus what 'they had done and taught' (6:30). Mark this time uses the noun '*apostoloi*' which is quite correctly translated into English as 'apostle' but it has often been argued that in this context it means little more than 'those who had been sent, returned'.¹⁵ In other words it is not really used as a title. Furthermore, the word is not placed on the lips of Jesus. It is a Markan editorial comment.¹⁶ In reply, however, we need to note that those whom Jesus sent out were given 'authority' (6:7) and entrusted with furthering the mission of Jesus himself by preaching, healing and exorcizing. It would seem, therefore, that in the context of this limited mission Jesus may well have used the word '*shaliach*' and Mark accurately reflects this fact.¹⁷

As we have just noted in Mark 'the disciples' and 'the twelve' are often used as synonyms but Matthew's distinctive title for Jesus' closest followers is, 'the twelve disciples'. The word 'disciple' in Matthew as in Mark is never used of a large group and is almost always restricted to the twelve.¹⁸ Just once Matthew introduces the title 'the twelve apostles' (Mt. 10:2). Again the word 'apostle' is not put on the lips of Jesus and Matthew may be simply saying, by way of editorial comment, 'the names of (those who later would be known as) the twelve apostles are . . .'. The context, however, is once again the mission of Jesus¹⁹ and so Matthew may also be using the term, on this one occasion, deliberately. In words which so clearly reflect the representative role of the *shaliach*, which we have already noted, Jesus says to the twelve 'He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me' (Mt. 10:40).

Luke's use of the term 'the disciples' stands in marked contrast to what we have just observed in Mark and Matthew. He speaks explicitly of many disciples. Once he refers to 'a great crowd of his (Jesus') disciples' (6:17) and at another time of 'the whole multitude of disciples' (19:37). A comparison between Luke and Mark's account of the choice of the twelve highlights the differences. In Mark 3:13-19 the twelve are chosen from an anonymous group whereas in Luke 6:12f 'the twelve apostles' are chosen from among Jesus' 'disciples'. We thus have in Luke two separate groups who are followers of Jesus. The many 'disciples' and the twelve 'apostles'.

This change is more one of terminology than anything else for all the Gospels allow for an inner circle around Jesus and an outer one.

The question, however, must be asked, did Luke introduce the title apostle in his role as editor of the various historical sources he used,²⁰ or was it there already? In most instances a good case can be made for the argument that Luke did add the word²¹ as he believed it was an appropriate title for the twelve but at least once he took it over from Mark (Lk. 9:10, Mk. 6:30) where we have argued it may well reflect something of Jesus' own understanding of the twelve on mission.

But this mission, we need to remember, was of limited duration and only to the house of Israel (Mt. 10:6). It was after the resurrection, according to Matthew and Luke, that Jesus commissioned his closest companions for a more permanent and universal mission.²² It was this momentous sending forth that earned those whom he had previously called his 'disciples' the title 'apostle'.

John stands somewhat apart from the Synoptic Gospels in his treatment of the disciples as he does in many other matters. Four times he speaks of the twelve²³ which shows that he knew of the extent of Jesus' closest followers but nowhere does he call them apostles. On one matter he agrees with Luke. He too uses the term disciple quite freely.²⁴ It is a designation that he can use even of those who follow for a while and then fall away (John 6:60–66).²⁵

We can conclude then, from our brief survey of the Gospels, that it would seem most likely that Jesus himself usually referred to his closest followers as his 'disciples' or as 'the twelve' (In this latter case the word disciples was taken as understood). The selection of this limited group, twelve in number, almost certainly had symbolic implications. They were to be seen as the nucleus of a restored Israel gathered around the Messiah.²⁶ If Jesus did use the title apostle in its Hebrew or Aramaic form during his ministry it would have been used at the time of the mission of the twelve but it finds its appropriate context after the resurrection when the risen Christ commissions his constant followers as heralds and witnesses of the resurrection.

Acts

The book of Acts reflects a situation in which the twelve are recognized as apostles in a unique sense. Luke emphasises both the significance of the number twelve and their role as authenticating witnesses of the life, teaching and resurrection of Christ.

The appointment of Matthias (Acts 1:15–26) highlights the importance of the fact that the apostles are twelve in number. Luke draws the scene with great vividness and locates it in a context that accentuates its significance.²⁷ It does not seem to overstate the case to say that Luke believed that the Spirit could not be given until the number twelve was restored. The point of the story is not that twelve men are needed for the task, but that by his apostasy Judas had

forfeited his ministry and another is needed to take his place. At a later stage when James is martyred (12:2) no thought is given to his replacement. Death removes James from the work but not the number.²⁸ Judas' apostasy, on the other hand, removes him both from the number and the work.

That there are twelve apostles and twelve only is consistently maintained in the early chapters of Acts. Acts 1:2 speaks of 'the apostles whom he had chosen'. The use of *exelaxato* clearly reflects Luke 6:13—'he called his disciples, and chose (*eklexamenos*) from them twelve whom he named apostle'. In Acts 1:12f the names of the eleven are given and they are set apart from the other disciples present with them. In Acts 6 Luke equates the titles 'the twelve' (6:2) and 'the apostles' (6:6). In contrast to Luke's practice in his Gospel, the twelve apostles are never called in Acts by the more general title 'the disciples'. The tendency, if anything, is rather to clearly distinguish between the twelve apostles and the disciples (see Acts 2:42; 6:2,6; 8:1; 11:1; 15:22).

It is widely agreed that this stress on the number twelve carries symbolic or typological significance. Often it has been interpreted to mean that the twelve apostles are the counterpart of the twelve patriarchs and are thus the founding fathers of a new Israel—a new religion. But this is certainly not Luke's understanding of the twelve. The Christian way for him is not a new religion but a restoration of Israel. For Luke the twelve symbolise the fact that God in Christ is restoring Israel to what it should be. The Christian community is Israel—true Israel. All who recognise Jesus as the Messiah are drawn within this fold (15:14) and those Jews who reject him are 'to be destroyed from the people (*laos*)' (3:23). The number twelve therefore emphasises not a break with the past but continuity with it.²⁹

The qualification of those numbered amongst the twelve apostles is clearly set out by Luke. They must have accompanied Jesus from the time of his baptism until his death and be a witness of his resurrection (1:21–22). Their special function is to act as witnesses.³⁰ Luke does not draw them as missionaries,³¹ (they remain in Jerusalem) nor as ecclesiastical leaders,³² but as guarantors of the Word which brings the Christian community into existence. In the early chapters of Acts Luke frequently repeats the claim that all that is proclaimed is based on apostolic witness (2:22f, 3:12f, 4:8f, 5:29f, 10:34f). In Acts 4:20 (cf. 26:16) we read that the apostles, as reliable witnesses, only bear witness to what they have seen and heard. The language and thought reflect common Jewish legal parlance.³³ True, other disciples may bear witness to Christ's life and resurrection (cf. 1:21–22) but for Luke the twelve are the witnesses *par excellence* in the early chapters of Acts.

According to the definition of an apostle given in Acts 1:21–22 Paul

cannot qualify as an apostle in the same sense of the word as the twelve. Luke never suggests that Paul witnessed Jesus' earthly ministry and as this is one of the essential qualifications needed to be included amongst the twelve, Paul cannot be numbered with them. Twice, however, he speaks of 'the missionaries' to the Gentile world, Paul and Barnabas, as apostles (14:4,14). This is not Luke's normal usage and why this 'slip' occurs here has aroused a lot of debate.³⁴ The best solution to this problem is one which recognises that in these references the word apostle is being used in a different sense. Paul and Barnabas are apostles in the sense that they have been 'sent out' as pioneer missionaries. This usage we will find is reflected also in the Pauline epistles.

The fact that Luke deliberately excludes Paul from the company of the twelve apostles should not be taken to mean that Luke had anything but the highest regard for Paul and his work. Indeed Acts could be read, at least in part, as a defence of Paul. This point becomes evident when we note how Luke builds-up his picture of Paul. First, he makes Peter and Paul virtual equals in the overall story.³⁵ Secondly, he emphasises the significance of Paul's vision of the risen Christ by recounting it three times³⁶ (this gives Paul one half of the demanded qualification for membership of the apostleship of the twelve). Thirdly, in the vision to Ananias Paul is described by Jesus as 'a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles and Kings and the sons of Israel' (9:15), while in Luke's second account of Paul's conversion he is commissioned by the risen Christ with the words: 'Depart, for I will send you (*exapostelō*) far away to the Gentiles' (22:21) (Paul also has been commissioned and sent). And fourthly, Luke stresses that Paul also is a witness of the resurrection in a very special way. He is quite clearly the witness *par excellence* in the second half of Acts rather than the twelve. He is commissioned by the risen Christ as a 'witness' (22:15; 26:16) and he is frequently said to bear witness (18:5; 20:21, 24; 23:11; 26:22; 28:23).

This, however, does not obliterate the fact that for Luke the twelve are apostles in a unique sense and he does not include Paul within that circle. Paul is an apostle, in Luke's mind, only in the sense that he has been sent out as a pioneer missionary. Luke insists, nevertheless, that Paul, by way of his special commission from the risen Christ, has a unique part to play in the Gentile mission.

Paul

In regard to apostleship, the most immediate impression we gain on reading Paul's epistles is his own overwhelming certainty that he is an 'apostle'. He does not withhold this title from others but he sees his own position as in some way exceptional. Surprisingly, he does not

mention any of the twelve save Peter and nowhere does he explicitly speak of 'the twelve apostles'.

In fact it has been argued that Paul does not know of the apostleship of the twelve³⁷ but this is probably too dogmatic a conclusion.³⁸ We cannot say he did not know of the apostleship of the twelve but we can say he says little or nothing about it. Two passages shed some light on this question but both of them are difficult. In 1 Cor. 15:5-6 Paul recounts the tradition he had received about the resurrection appearances. He says, Jesus 'appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren ... then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all ... he appeared to me'. The passage explicitly singles out the twelve as a special group but are we meant to understand that they were called apostles? Opinion is quite divided and no agreed answer is possible.³⁹ The second passage is only slightly more helpful. In Galatians 1:17 Paul speaks of 'those who were apostles before me' at Jerusalem. As he seems to understand that this group is of limited number it may well be he has the twelve in mind plus James⁴⁰ (1:19 cf. 1 Cor. 15:7) but again certainty is not possible. Not here or elsewhere does he speak explicitly of 'the twelve apostles'.

We can, however, be quite certain that Paul recognises a large number of people as apostles. In 1 Cor. 15:5-6 Paul says that Christ appeared to the twelve, James and 'all the apostles'. Twice Paul disparagingly speaks of certain men as 'superlative apostles' (2 Cor. 11:5, 12:11) and once of 'false apostles' (2 Cor. 11:13). The criticism is not that they call themselves apostles but that what they preach is not the true Gospel. In 1 Cor. 12:28 and Eph. 4:11 apostles are said to be ministries given to the Church. The first passage certainly, and probably the second also, do not allow for any circumscription in the number of apostles. The Spirit will raise up those whom he will for this ministry.

There is some debate as to whom Paul explicitly names as apostles, and the contenders for the title can be listed in two categories—the certain and the probable. In the first list we have Paul himself, Peter⁴¹ and Barnabas.⁴² In the second we have James,⁴³ Junia and Andronicus,⁴⁴ Silvanus,⁴⁵ Timothy,⁴⁶ Sosthenes,⁴⁷ and Apollos.⁴⁸

That 'the apostles' are not a closed and universally known group in the Pauline churches is also evidenced by the fact that frequently Paul has to contend for his right to call himself an apostle. He is absolutely convinced that he is an apostle on the basis of the call and commission of the risen Christ⁴⁹ but others question his claim. Foremost in Paul's mind in regard to his own apostleship is the divine initiative. He has been 'called to be an apostle' and 'set apart for the Gospel of God' (Rom. 1:1), not by men, but by 'Jesus Christ and God the Father' (Gal. 1:1). But what then are the criteria by which a person may rightly claim to be an apostle? Several qualifications are mentioned.

1) To have seen the risen Lord was considered to be foundational to Paul's own claim and it was obviously very important in the minds of many others. But to have seen the resurrected Lord was not enough, (Paul does not imply that the 500 were all apostles, cf. 1 Cor. 15:6), nor was it absolutely necessary for every one who claimed the name apostle. It is nowhere argued that Barnabas, Junia and Andronicus, Silvanus, Timothy or Apollos had seen the Lord.⁵⁰ Furthermore, 1 Cor. 12:28 and Eph. 4:11 do not list qualifications for those whom the Spirit will raise up as apostles—the implication is that the Spirit can empower any Christian for this work.⁵¹

2) To have brought a church into existence is another qualification Paul mentions. In arguing for his right to be called an apostle in 1 Cor. 9:1 Paul not only appeals to his vision of the risen Christ but also to the fact that the Corinthians were his, 'Workmanship in the Lord'. The importance of this Paul underlines in the following sentence: 'If to others I am not an apostle (i.e., if they reject me as an apostle), at least I am one to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord' (1 Cor. 9:2; cf. 1 Cor. 3:1–2; 2 Cor. 12:11).⁵²

3) But to be a pioneer evangelist is not sufficient in itself. A genuine apostle must proclaim the one true Gospel. In 2 Cor. 11 and 12 Paul assails some who call themselves apostles not for calling themselves apostles, nor for lack of a personal commission from the risen Christ (which he could have if this was foundational) but because they preached another gospel.⁵³ The same argument appears in Galatians 1:6f although here we are not told that the proclaimers of 'the different Gospel' claimed to be apostles.

4) Just once Paul speaks of 'the signs of a true apostle' (2 Cor. 12:12). The context is one in which Paul is contending with those Corinthians who thought that an apostle should be a more impressive figure than he was. A true apostle, they seem to have argued, should be able to boast of visions and miracles. Paul's reply is that he has known these things but for him the more important 'signs of a true apostle' are suffering endured in the service of Christ (2 Cor. 11:16–33; cf. 1 Cor. 4:8–13).⁵⁴

So far we have been speaking of the qualifications of what Paul would call, 'apostles for Christ' but twice he speaks of 'apostles of the churches' (2 Cor. 8:23, Phil. 2:25). These men, the contexts demonstrate, are not missionaries but church envoys commissioned for a specific task of limited duration.⁵⁵ The significance of these references is that they bear witness to yet one more usage of the term 'apostle' in the New Testament period. These 'apostles' are not sent out by the risen Christ nor are they charismatic pioneer evangelists but they are simply church messengers.

We may conclude then that Paul viewed his own apostleship as quite unique but he allowed that others also could be called 'apostles of Christ'. These other apostles were Spirit-empowered pioneer

missionaries who preached the Gospel faithfully at some personal cost to themselves. Paul's lofty view of his own apostleship rests on his never fading awareness that the risen Christ appeared to him personally and sent him out to preach the Gospel to the Gentile world.

The Rest of the New Testament

In 1 Peter 1:1 the author calls himself an apostle but nothing is said of the basis or nature of this claim. Jude v.17 and 2 Peter 3:2 seem to reflect more the Lukan understanding of apostleship for we may take it that these two references speak of the twelve as apostles in a somewhat exclusive sense.⁵⁶ The book of Revelation, on the other hand, allows for a twofold use of the term. In Rev. 21:14 the twelve apostles are seen to be foundational in the establishment of the new Jerusalem but in Rev. 18:20 and 2:2 the term apostle is used much more widely. The first reference reflects 1 Cor. 12:28 and Eph. 4:11 in speaking of 'apostles and prophets'. The second suggests that there were many who travelled around claiming to be Christian apostles and sometimes, as in this case, the claim was quite false.

Women Apostles?

Before we leave the New Testament a comment about women apostles seems appropriate because the whole question of women's ministry is a pressing contemporary issue and many have argued that the fact that the twelve were all men is of great significance to the present debate.

By historical necessity the twelve apostles had to be men. If they were to be seen as the counterparts of the twelve patriarchs, maleness was of the essence of their role. However, since this typological role was a once-for-all thing it is hard to see how any inference can be drawn for any other ministry. It should be added also that in the male-dominated Jewish society of Jesus' day the law excluded women as witnesses. It was thought that their testimony was worthless.⁵⁷ For this reason also the twelve apostles had to be men.

But despite the cultural depreciation of women in Jewish society the synoptic authors agree that it was women who first found the empty tomb and Matthew and John record that Jesus appeared first to women. The encounter between the risen Christ and the women is drawn as a commissioning scene.⁵⁸ The Lord says, 'Go and tell my brethren' (Matt. 28:10 cf. John 20:17). The women are chosen and commissioned by the risen Christ to be the first to proclaim the fact that, 'He is risen'.

Raymond Brown believes that it was John's intent to give 'a quasi-apostolic role' to these women.⁵⁹ Taking up Pauline qualifications for apostleship John shows that the women fulfil the two chief requirements. They see the risen Christ and they are sent forth by

him.⁶⁰ (Here we need to remember that John never calls the twelve 'apostles'.) Brown also refers to the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4. Here he sees the fourth Evangelist giving to this woman apostolic missionary status. She is depicted as the founder of the Samaritan Church.⁶¹ In this narrative, he says, we have, 'the most important use of the verb *apostellein* in John' (4:38)⁶² and the comment that the men Samaritans believed because of the woman's *witness* (4:39).

Paul just once refers to a woman apostle. In Rom. 16:7 he greets Andronicus and Junia who he says are 'of note among the apostles'. This is a much debated text because at two points it is ambiguous. The second name can be read as Junias (a male name) and Paul could mean no more than these two were held in high regard by the apostles. But both alternatives are extremely unlikely. The feminine name Junia is preferred for at least two reasons. First, because the early Church Fathers unanimously took the name as feminine⁶³ and secondly, because the masculine name which is created by adding an 's' forms an otherwise unknown name.⁶⁴ The correct masculine form of this name is Junius not Junias. The meaning of the phrase translated by the R.S.V. as 'of note among the apostles' can hardly, in this context, mean anything but that they stood out as apostles.⁶⁵ Schmithals, who takes Rom. 16:7 as one of the certain texts which name apostles other than Paul says, 'this translation ... is the only natural one'.⁶⁶ The only basis for objection to the inclusion of Junia among the apostles is one which rests on the premise: no woman by definition can be an apostle.⁶⁷ Research of Patristic and Medieval commentaries has shown, interestingly enough, that this commonly held modern idea was assumed by no commentator before the 12th century. The early commentators on the epistle to the Romans all accept that Paul here speaks of Junia, a woman apostle.⁶⁸ We cannot be certain but it is possible that Andronicus and Junia were husband and wife working together as missionaries, like Aquila and Prisca. Their pre-eminence, Dodd conjectures, may even arise because 'they had some hand in founding the Church of Rome'.⁶⁹

The Post New Testament Writings

Little uniformity in usage of the term 'apostle' can be found in the immediate post New Testament writings. Those influenced by the tradition that the twelve were apostles *par excellence* reflect this idea and those influenced by the Pauline epistles reflect the thought that the apostles were quite a large group; but often both ideas can be found in the one piece of literature without comment⁷⁰—a thing we have seen already in the New Testament.⁷¹

Hermas suggests that this larger group of apostles numbered forty,⁷² several others mention the number 70 or 72⁷³ while Eusebius, explaining 1 Cor. 15:7, speaks of 'numberless apostles' besides the

twelve.⁷⁴ These writers usually take it that all these apostles were commissioned by the risen Christ but occasionally the view that an apostle was a pioneer missionary also appears. In *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, or as it is more commonly named *The Didache*, the twelve are given pre-eminence as the title shows, but at the same time the term 'apostle' is used simply of itinerant Spirit-led missionaries (*Did.* 11:4–6). The same usage of the term is also found in Pseudo Clement, *Hom.* 11:35 and Hermas, *Sim.* 11:15:4.⁷⁵

Various people are called apostles in the Patristic writings. Not only the twelve, and Paul and James, but also Barnabas,⁷⁶ Apollos,⁷⁷ Philip,⁷⁸ Sosthenes⁷⁹ and Clement of Rome.⁸⁰ One of the most interesting is Thecla. In the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, which was widely read in the second century, we meet Thecla, a fearless woman evangelist and companion of Paul, and who is called an apostle.⁸¹

In this period the thought that the twelve went out to the whole world preaching the Gospel began to emerge. It is first enunciated in *I Clement* and is very prominent in the writings of Justin.⁸² By the time *The Acts of Thomas* was written this tradition was full blown. Here we read of Thomas' recollection of how, 'we (the twelve apostles) portioned out the regions of the world in order that each one of us might go to the region that fell to him ... By lot, then India fell to Judas Thomas ...'.⁸³

Gradually, however, the twelve and Paul came to be seen more and more as 'the apostles'. Wherever Pauline epistles were known Paul was either named along with the twelve or the twelve apostles were spoken of without any intent to exclude Paul from this select circle. It was only when Marcion and later Jewish Christians began to play Paul against the twelve that deliberate thought was given to the number of the apostles. The conclusion that emerged was that only the twelve and Paul qualified for this title.⁸⁴ The more general usage then fell into disuse, even disapprobation, and only appeared, when used almost metaphorically of those who pioneered the evangelisation of some country or region. Thus we hear of Patrick, the apostle of Ireland, or of Augustine, the apostle of England, and Cyril and Methodius, the apostles of the Slavs.

Implications for Today

The old but still widely-held understanding of the term 'apostle' restricts this ministry to a few persons in the first century. As the twelve plus Paul were appointed by the risen Christ as uniquely authoritative teachers and evangelists they are not models for others to follow, except in the broadest sense. The new and more accurate understanding, on the other hand, allows the Bible to speak more directly and much more applicably to the contemporary situation.

The twelve, it is true, held a unique, one-for-all role as the authenticating witnesses of the Word which brought the post-Pentecost Church into existence but our study of the Gospels also showed that the twelve were first and foremost, as far as Jesus was concerned in his lifetime, disciples. They were his closest companions whom he taught and trained and who formed the nucleus of the first community in which Jesus was Lord. The twelve therefore are not to be seen simply as an interesting group who belong to the past but rather as a model for discipleship and church membership for all time. Though dead they still speak. The Gospel writers record the numerous stories about the disciples, not as historians with a love for the past, but as evangelists who wanted the past to speak contemporaneously. They wanted men and women who read what they had written to hear afresh the call to become a disciple and to see in the disciples something of what discipleship will always mean.⁸⁵ Only after Easter did Jesus give to the twelve their unique and unrepeatable role.

Paul's apostleship is also quite distinct. He was the last to have seen the risen Jesus (1 Cor. 15:8) and he was personally commissioned for a specific task (Acts 9:15, 22:21, Gal. 16). But as we have seen, Paul gladly called others by the title 'apostle'. These people we have concluded were men and women involved in pioneer evangelism in the Hellenistic world. Some of those mentioned, or all of them, had not seen the risen Christ. In some less direct way than was Paul's experience, Christ had raised these people up as apostles. This we suggest is still possible today and indeed still happens even if the title 'apostle' is not used. In this sense, the ministry of the apostle is a gift to the Church for all time.⁸⁶

Apostles in all these senses are amongst those whom Paul says God has appointed 'first' in the Church (1 Cor. 12:28). They stand pre-eminent because they are founders of churches for whom they are the first teachers. The ministry of the apostle is foundational to both the universal Church (Eph. 2:20) and to each local church (1 Cor. 12:28) raised up on virgin soil. Those who for the first time hear the Gospel must accept what is proclaimed by the apostle as the Word of God if they are to be saved. They cannot check out what is said with others for they have no other testimony to Christ other than that of the apostle. Only the subjective inner working of the Holy Spirit can authenticate the Word proclaimed. This is not to suggest that the apostle can proclaim what he likes but only to say that in the first instance he is the direct mediator of the Word of Christ.

Because the apostle has this awesome authority it is very significant that women are implicitly and explicitly included in this pre-eminent group. It reminds us that Christ calls both men and women to found churches and trusts them equally to be faithful teachers of the Gospel. We see here also how different the early Christian attitude to

women was in comparison with Jewish and Hellenistic attitudes.⁸⁷ Although later Christians, as a general rule, forgot this liberated viewpoint the Spirit across the ages, and especially since the turn of the 19th century, has continued to raise up women as apostles.⁸⁸ Indeed in the last hundred years, it would seem that more pioneer evangelism in difficult and dangerous places has been done by women than by men.

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NOTES

- 1 (SCM, London, 1971).
- 2 *Ibid.*, p.9.
- 3 So W. Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church* (Abigdon, Nashville 1969), pp.1ff.
- 4 So C. K. Barrett, *The Signs of an Apostle* (Epworth, London 1970), *passim*.
- 5 Later, Justin in his *First Apology* 12:9, 63:5 also calls Jesus *apostolos*.
- 6 *apostellein* is used 17 times, and *pempein* 24 times of this sending. The two verbs are synonyms in John. See L. Morris, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1971), p.230, note 78.
- 7 *TDNT*, 1, p.443.
- 8 Ber. 5:5. Cited from Rengstorf's article, *ibid.*, p.415. The argument, given classic expression by Rengstorf, that the NT use of the title apostle is to be explained in some measure in terms of the Jewish *shaliach* institution has been sometimes abused and often criticised. On this debate see J. A. Kirk, 'Apostleship since Rengstorf,' *NTS*, 21, 1975, pp.249-64. With Kirk we agree that the parallels are useful so long as it is seen that the two institutions are analogous and not identical.
- 9 The fact that John is aware of 'the full identity' between the words *apostolos* and *shaliach* is seen in John 13:16. So Rengstorf, *ibid.*, p.421.
- 10 The discussion of the Synoptic material draws heavily on C. G. Kruse, *New Testament Foundations for Ministry* (Marshall Morgan and Scott, London 1982), pp.13-23.
- 11 Kruse, *ibid.*, pp.14-15 points out that whereas Mk. 1:38 only suggests that Jesus 'came out' from God this is explicitly stated in Lk. 4:43. The repeated use of the verb in these passages in John and the Synoptics is interesting in the light of the fact that it has often been argued that the NT use of *apostolos* is derived not from the Hebrew but from a unique development of the cognate verb *apostellein*. So H. Mosbech, 'Apostolos in the New Testament', *St. Theol.*, 2, 1948, p.166; L. Cerfaux, *The Christian in the Theology of St. Paul* (Chapman, New York 1967), p.120 et al. These opinions on how the word *apostolos* came to be used in the NT need not be exclusive solutions for both could have been influential.
- 12 The word appears a sixth time in Luke 11:49 but it is uncertain whom Luke is here speaking about. The reference may be to OT messengers. Cf. Matt. 23:34 which has prophets, wise men and scribes. See I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Paternoster, Exeter 1978), pp.502-506. It is also used in John 13:16 but not specifically of the twelve—see note 9 above.
- 13 E.g. W. Schmithals, *op. cit.*, pp.98-110.
- 14 This limited use of the term disciple for those who actually accompanied Jesus is quite Jewish. The disciples of the Rabbis were always a small and defined group although others might be listeners. The evidence that Mark understood that the

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- twelve and the twelve alone bore the title disciple is clearly set out in R. P. Meye; *Jesus and the Twelve* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1968) passim and in S. Freyne, *The Twelve Disciples and Apostles* (Sheed and Ward, London 1968), pp.23–24, 107–119.
- 15 So Barrett, op. cit., p.29; V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Macmillan, London 1952), p.318.
- 16 So Taylor, *ibid.*, p.319.
- 17 Barrett, op. cit., p.69; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark* (C.U.P., Cambridge 1963), p.214.
- 18 See Meye, op. cit., pp.24, 151–172. The particular terminology adopted by each of the three Synoptic evangelists for the inner circle of disciples is illustrated by comparing the parallel texts, Mk. 14:17 = Matt. 26:20 = Lk. 22:14 which read in order 'the twelve', 'the twelve disciples', 'the apostles'.
- 19 They are to go only to the house of Israel and they are to preach saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matt. 10:6–7).
- 20 Lk. 1:1–4.
- 21 The reason is that when a Lukan passage has a Markan parallel the word does not appear there. See Lk. 6:13, Mk. 3:14, Lk. 22:14, Mk. 14:17.
- 22 Matt. 28:16–20, Lk. 24:36–53, Acts 1:6–11, John 20:19–23. On these commissioning scenes see J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (SCM, London 1975), p.138f.
- 23 6:67, 70, 71; 20:24.
- 24 A helpful discussion of the disciples in John's Gospel is to be found in R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel* (O.U.P., Oxford 1956), pp.68–73.
- 25 I. H. Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God* (Epworth, London 1969), p.179.
- 26 The only place that some explicit reflection on this fact can be seen in the Gospel is in Matt. 19:28, Lk. 22:29–30.
- 27 E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Blackwell, Oxford 1971), p.163.
- 28 Barrett, op. cit., p.48.
- 29 The best exposition of this point is J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* (Ausborg, Minnesota 1972), pp.41–74.
- 30 Their role as authenticating witnesses is stressed by B. Gerhardson, *Memory and Manuscript* (G. W. K. Gleerup, Copenhagen 1964), pp.221f; E. H. Talbert, *Luke and the Gnostics* (Abigdon, Nashville 1966), pp.17ff.; A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (C.U.P., Cambridge 1977), pp.129–33 et al. However, R. J. Dillon, *From Eye Witnesses to Ministers of the Word* (Rome 1978), passim, argues that such authors are one-sided in viewing the apostles as simply 'guarantors of facts' (p.215). He maintains that they are equally to be seen as bearers of the Word of Grace (p.293).
- 31 As was the custom from the mid-second century onwards. Luke emphasises that the twelve stayed in Jerusalem. Peter, according to Luke (see Acts 8:14, 9:32,39; 10:1–11, 12:7; 15:7) was a notable exception. So C. K. Barrett, op. cit., pp.31–2; H. von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power* (Collins, London 1969), p.16 and note 14; R. Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections* (G. Chapman, London 1971), pp.51–2.
- 32 Brown, *ibid.*, pp.52–5. Luke depicts them as influential in the Christian community in Jerusalem in the early days but very soon James and the elders assumed leadership.
- 33 B. Gerhardson, op. cit., p.222; A. A. Trites, op. cit., pp.136–9.
- 34 See W. Schmithals, op. cit., p.277 and note 171.
- 35 Acts 1–12 could be called the Acts of Peter and chapters 13–28 the Acts of Paul. Luke also draws both Peter and Paul in ways which suggest that they are reflecting or imitating the life of Christ. See my essay, 'Imitatio Christi in the New Testament', *RTR*, 38, 1979, pp.66–7. A. A. Trites, op. cit., p.134, however, argues that the pairing of Peter and Paul in Acts is intended to show that the Gospel is confirmed by two witnesses of equal standing in accord with Deut. 19:15.
- 36 Acts 9:1–19, 22:4–16, 26:9–18.

- 37 C. K. Barrett, op. cit., pp.38–9; W. Schmithals, op. cit., pp.73–95, et al.
- 38 So. J. A. Kirk, op. cit., pp.256–8.
- 39 See the discussions in Barrett, p.39; Schmithals, pp.73–9 and Kirk, pp.256–7.
- 40 The allusion is to a group of apostles in Jerusalem the number of which is not stated and it would seem to include James who was not one of the twelve!
- 41 Gal. 1:18–19.
- 42 1 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 2:9. See D. W. B. Robinson, 'Apostleship and Apostolic Succession,' *RTR*, 13, 1954, p.35.
- 43 1 Cor. 15:7, Gal. 1:9. In support of James's apostleship, see J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Macmillan, London 1890), pp.84, 95. Schmithals, op. cit., pp.64–5, argues that Paul is deliberately ambiguous on the issue in Gal. 1.
- 44 Rom. 16:7. See below in our discussion of women apostles. W. Schmithals, op. cit., p.62 takes these two as amongst those 'certainly' recognised by Paul as apostles.
- 45 1 Thess. 1:1, 2:6. So D. W. B. Robinson, op. cit., pp.38–9; R. Schnackenburg, 'Apostles Before and During Paul's Time', *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, edd. W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin (Paternoster, Exeter 1970), p.295.
- 46 1 Thess. 1:1, 2:6, 2 Cor. 1:1. So Robinson, p.36; Schnackenburg, p.295.
- 47 1 Cor. 1:1. So Robinson, p.39.
- 48 1 Cor. 4:6,9. So Robinson, p.37; Schnackenburg, p.295.
- 49 Paul sees his own apostleship as unique but this does not lead him to deny the title to some others who are associated with him in the Gentile mission. So Robinson (p.39) and Schnackenburg (pp.295, 301). When Paul says that Christ appeared to him 'last of all' (1 Cor. 15:8) he is only referring to resurrection appearances. If such an experience is not demanded of all apostles (see below), it cannot exclude from apostleship those who have been called to the ministry in some other way. Acts 13:1–3 could suggest another way a person might be called to be an apostle.
- 50 Schnackenburg, pp.295ff. It is possible that this is the case for some of these people but it is not possible in regard to Timothy and Apollos.
- 51 So Schnackenburg, p.299.
- 52 *Ibid.*, pp.292–3; C. K. Barrett, op. cit., p.41.
- 53 On this point see D. W. B. Robinson, op. cit., p.53.
- 54 C. K. Barrett, op. cit., pp.42–3. He concludes his discussion of this point by stating, 'Paul's theology bears the stamp of the Cross and so does his apostolic ministry' (p.43).
- 55 The background to this usage is the Jewish concept of the *shaliach*. It is used here without its specifically Christian content.
- 56 C. K. Barrett, op. cit., pp. 58–9.
- 57 The Rabbis had concluded from Gen. 18:15 that all women were liars while Josephus says, 'let not the testimony of women be admitted on account of the levity and boldness of their sex'. See my *Women and Their Ministry* (Dove Communications, Melbourne 1977), p.24 and note 20.
- 58 J. D. G. Dunn, op. cit., p.128.
- 59 'Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel', *Theol. St.*, 1975, 36, pp.688–99.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p.692.
- 61 On this see R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Doubleday, London 1971), vol. 1, p.xcv.
- 62 'Roles', p.691. Brown believes John intends it to be understood that 'the women's role is an essential component in the total mission although John 4:37 speaks only of the male disciples being *sent* to harvest.'
- 63 See below.
- 64 There is a textual variant *Joulian* but it is very poorly supported and is not seriously considered. The significant variants in the Greek text are due to the accenting of the name. If it is written *Jouniân* it would be the accusative of *Jouniâs* and masculine, but if it is accented *Jouniân* it would be the accusative of the common name Junia. In both cases the accent is secondary but the use of the circumflex to produce a male name has no support for it produces an otherwise unknown name.

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- So C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1979), vol. 2: p.788.
- 65 So Lightfoot, op. cit., p.96, note 1; Robinson, op. cit., p.38; Cranfield, op. cit., p.789; W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1902), p.423.
- 66 Op. cit., p.62.
- 67 Cranfield, op. cit., p.788, says some commentators determine the meaning of the phrase, 'episemoi en tois apostolois', on the basis of the sex of Andronicus' partner. If Paul spoke of a woman it cannot mean 'outstanding among the apostles'. He dismisses such reasoning as 'mere conventional prejudice'.
- 68 So B. Brooten, 'Junia ... Outstanding Among the Apostles (Romans 16:7)'; *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, ed. L. A. Swidler (Paulist Press, New York 1977), pp.141-3.
- 69 *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Fontana, London 1959), p.241.
- 70 So Lightfoot, op. cit., pp.99-100. His discussion of the use of the title apostle in the post-apostolic writings is still probably the best. See, however, also Schmithals, op. cit., pp.231ff; L. Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times* (A. & C. Black, London 1970), pp.178-82 et al.
- 71 E.g. in Acts and Revelation.
- 72 *Sim.* 9:15:6. Cf. *Vis.* 3:5, *Sim.* 9:25.
- 73 Iren. *Against Heresies* 2:21:1; Tert. *Against Marcion*, 4:24 and quite frequently in the Ancient Syriac Documents. See *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 8 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, no date, ed. A. C. Fox), pp.651ff.
- 74 *Ecc. Hist.* 1:12. Quoted from *Loeb Classical Library* edition, ed. K. Lake (London 1926). Origen also understands that the term apostle is capable of very wide application (*Commentary on John*, Chapt. 4).
- 75 So von Campenhausen, op. cit., p.23 and note 59. On Hermas see note 72 above for the comparative references.
- 76 So Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.*, 1:12:1.
- 77 So Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 2. See Lightfoot, op. cit., p.100, note 2.
- 78 For details see Lightfoot, op. cit., note 3.
- 79 Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.*, 1:12-1.
- 80 So Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 2. See Lightfoot, op. cit., p.100, note 2.
- 81 The text of this work is found in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 8, op. cit., pp.487-92. See also E. M. Howe, 'Interpretations of Paul in the Acts of Paul and Thecla', in *Pauline Studies*, ed. D. A. Hagner and J. M. Harris (Paternoster, Exeter 1980), pp.33-49. She argues that the author of this work validates Thecla's ministry by depicting her in male categories.
- 82 Details are given on Justin in W. Schmithals, op. cit., p.535. Similarly, see Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.*, 2:3:1f, 3:1:6.
- 84 So Goppelt, op. cit., p.181 and note 10.
- 85 This is brought out most strongly by Luke. On this theme see F. Hahn et al., *The Beginnings of the Church in the New Testament* (St. Andrews Press, Edinburgh 1970) passim.
- 86 It is of interest to note that Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments* (Fortress, Philadelphia 1980), pp.206, 213, writing from within the Roman Catholic tradition also argues that we need to encourage and recognise the ministry of apostle, in this wider sense of the term, in the church today.
- 87 Notable exceptions can be found in both the Greek and Jewish world but they are exceptions.
- 88 See R. Pierce Beaver, *All Loves Excelling* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1978), passim, who gives a scholarly and fascinating account of how North American women came to play such a prominent part in mission outreach.