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Pentecostalism and the Claim for Apostolicity: An Essay in Ecumenical Ecclesiology

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Introduction: The Dispute Over the Ecclesiality of the Church

One of the ironies of church history is that the first church of the modern Pentecostal movement called itself Apostolic Faith Mission (Azusa Street, Los Angeles, CA). The irony

of this title lies, of course, in that if there has been any claim in Pentecostalism—or other Free Churches—that the traditional churches have hotly contested, it surely is the claim for apostolicity. By definition, especially in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theologies, Free Church ecclesiologies represent the quintessence of what is not apostolic.

As far as the conditions of ecclesiality are concerned, the episcopal¹ and Free Church traditions (Pentecostalism included), differ in three main respects:

(1) According to Catholic and Orthodox tradition, Free Church ecclesiology lacks a bishop to ensure the presence of Christ, while according to the Free Church tradition, such a bishop is not permitted.

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¹ The term 'episcopal' in its general theological sense means those churches that regard bishops as a necessary condition of the ecclesiality of the church.

(2) In the episcopal model, Christ's presence is mediated sacramentally. By contrast, Free Churches speak of Christ's unmediated, 'direct' presence in the entire local communion.

(3) According to the episcopal tradition, the church is constituted through the performance of objective activities, and Christ's constitutive presence is not bound to the subjective disposition, even if the latter is not unimportant. The Free Churches, however, have come to emphasize subjective conditions, namely faith and obedience, to the point that where these are missing, even if the objective side is there, a serious doubt of ecclesiality arises.²

Because apostolicity is related to other traditional 'notes' of the church—holiness, oneness, and catholicity³—the very foundation of Free Church ecclesiology is at stake. The apostolicity of Free Churches is

uncatholic because it lacks connection to the whole church in its history, which, episcopal churches contend, is assured by the *successio apostolica*.⁴

Pentecostal and other Free Churches have insisted on the holiness, oneness, apostolicity, and catholicity of their own churches, although they have rarely argued along the classical canons. Free Churches understand the holiness of their churches primarily in the holiness of their members,⁵ the oneness of the church as 'spiritual unity' of all born-again Christians,⁶ the apostolicity as faithfulness to the apostolic doctrine and life,⁷ and the catholicity consequently as self-evident fact.⁸

On the other hand, Free Churches have looked at the traditional churches and accused them of the lack of ecclesiality. Their holiness is impaired by the presence of mixed membership, their claim for the apostolicity on the basis of apostolic succession is biblically unfounded, etc.

Furthermore, Free Churches have asked of traditional churches, what

² Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 133-35.

³ So Yves Congar, 'Die Wesenseigenschaften der Kirche,' *Mysterium Salutis. Grundriss Heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik IV/ 1*, hrsg. Von Johannes Feiner & Magnus Löhrer (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1972), pp. 362ff.; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 405; Thomas C. Oden, 'Life in the Spirit,' *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 349: 'Apostolicity is intrinsically interwoven with the other marks of the church: Only that church that is one can be catholic. Only that church that is united in the one mission of the one Lord can be apostolic. Lacking that holiness which is fitting to the obedience of faith, one finds neither apostolicity nor catholicity. Only that church that is formed by the apostolic memory can be united in one body with the Lord.' See also, Vladimir Lossky, 'Concerning the Third Mark of the Church: Catholicity,' *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. J. H. Erickson & T. E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 171.

⁴ See Volf, *After Our Likeness*, pp. 259-60.

⁵ See, e.g., Volf's (*After Our Likeness*) critical discussion of Free Church ecclesiology, as represented by the first Baptist, John Smyth, in critical dialogue with Catholic (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger) and Eastern Orthodox (John D. Zizioulas) ecclesiologies.

⁶ For a Pentecostal understanding of unity, see, e.g. my 'Spiritus ubi vult spirat. Pneumatology in Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue 1972-1989', *Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft* 42 (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1998), pp. 314-323.

⁷ For a Pentecostal understanding, see, e.g. my 'Spiritus ubi vult spirat', especially p. 355.

⁸ See, e.g. John Smyth, *The Works of John Smyth*, ed. W. T. Whitley (Cambridge: CUP, 1915), p. 745 and R. Flew and R. E. Davies, eds., *The Catholicity of Protestantism* (London: Lutterworth, 1950).

the price would be for 'earning credentials' in the eyes of the older churches. Would that not mean losing one's identity altogether?⁹ If Free Churches, for example, were to become apostolic, they should incorporate bishops in their ministry patterns. But would that lead to a contradiction in terms?¹⁰

The purpose of the present essay is to take a critical look at the possibility of and theological conditions of apostolicity in Pentecostal ecclesiologies. First, I will survey the current situation in ecumenical theology concerning apostolicity (a rather complicated topic, loaded with both practical and theoretical disputes). Second, I will ask what kind of 'apostolic roots' and inclinations might be found in Pentecostal ecclesiology compared to a traditional Roman Catholic view. Pentecostals have had theological dialogue at international level with Roman Catholics since 1972, and one of the topics discussed is apostolicity and corollary issues. We therefore have some ecumenical material available. Third, I will present seven theses pertaining to an ecumenical understanding of the notion of apostolicity, a notion that I believe all Christian churches can accept, and I will ask what possible implications may follow from

these statements. I will conclude the essay by focusing on the most disputed question of all, namely, apostolic succession, and look at alternative solutions to the problems.

Apostolicity in the Current Ecumenical Context¹¹

Apostolicity is a complex concept. Even in the New Testament, there is not one single notion of what it is to be an apostle, but rather different suggestions.¹² James D. G. Dunn has argued that already in the New Testament there was a 'parting of the ways' between different orientations, such as those that championed enthusiastic charismatic spirituality over against those building on the office.¹³ With regard to apostolicity, Paul seems to regard the establishment of new churches as the essence of apostleship (1 Cor. 9:1-2), and in consequence can speak of each church having its (own) apostles (1 Cor. 12:27-28). In Acts, however, apostleship was determined exclu-

¹¹ An up-to-date survey of apostolicity as it is explained in several international ecumenical documents can be found in Margaret O'Gara, 'Apostolicity in Ecumenical Dialogue', *MID-STREAM: Ecumenical Movement Today* 37:2 (April 1998), pp. 175-212.

¹² See further, R. Schnackenburg, 'Apostolizität: Stand der Forschung', *Katholizität und Apostolizität*. KuD. Beihefte 2 (Göttingen, 1971), pp. 51-73 and Miguel M. Garijo-Guembe, *Communion of the Saints*. Foundation, Nature, and Structure of the Church (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), pp. 29ff.

¹³ See further, J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament. An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1991), especially Chap. IX and idem, *The Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1991), pp. 260-280.

⁹ For Free Church identity, see my 'On Free Churches, Identity in Ecumenical Context: Pentecostalism as a Case Study', *MID-STREAM: The Ecumenical Movement Today*, (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Cf. Volf's (*After Our Likeness*, p. 260) note with regard to catholicity: 'A catholic Free Church is a contradiction in terms; it understands itself as free precisely with regard to those relationships that would tie it to the whole and thus make it catholic in the first place.'

sively on the basis of a commission by the risen Christ during the limited period of his resurrection appearances (Acts 1:21ff.; cf. 1 Cor. 15:8).¹⁴

In modern discussions of the idea of apostolic succession, the insight has established itself that the primary issue is succession in the teaching and faith of the apostles and only secondarily a matter of succession in office.¹⁵ According to the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, the church is apostolic in so far as it stands on apostolic faith; the criterion is the apostolic witness, that is, the apostolic teaching of the gospel.¹⁶ From the Pentecostal perspective, it is interesting to note that according to that document, the commission of the church that goes back to the apostles, 'is carried out through a variety of charisms'.¹⁷ Also, the same docu-

ment defines the much disputed question of apostolic succession in conciliar terms: 'The basic intention of the doctrine of apostolic succession is to indicate that, throughout all historical changes in its proclamation and structures, the church is at all times referred to its apostolic origin.'¹⁸

The ecumenical consensus-document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, provides us with the most detailed conciliar outline of apostolicity. According to it, apostolic tradition (the term that the document favours) is:

...continuity in the permanent characteristic of the Church of the apostles:¹⁹ witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love and joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each.²⁰

This definition is helpful, since its focus is on spirituality and ministry rather than on quasi-judicial notions of succession of office(s). It includes the whole people of God and even entails a diaconic dimension.

In the New Testament, there is one essential aspect to apostolicity, one too often neglected both in history

¹⁴ Dunn, *Parting of the Ways*, p. 273.

¹⁵ Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, Malta Report [The Gospel and Church], 1972, (in, *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, eds. H. Meyer & L. Vischer [New York/Ramsey, N.J.; Paulist and Geneva: WCC, 1984], pp. 168-89), # 60-61; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 403; Lima, III, # 34-36. See also, Congar, *Mysterium Salutis*, IV/1, pp. 557ff., E. Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik*, pp. 614-22; Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), Vol. 2, p. 39. Pannenberg (p. 403) notes that succession in office that comes through ordination by ministers is a sign expressing the unity of the whole church in the apostolic faith because ordained ministers represent the whole church of Christ and in this capacity hand down the commission that the apostles received from Jesus Christ himself. Free Churches, because of a different theology of ordination, do not link ordination and apostolicity this way.

¹⁶ Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, # 52.

¹⁷ Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, # 53.

¹⁸ Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, # 57 (emphases mine).

¹⁹ Cf. the definition given by Catholic Christopher O'Donnell ('Ecclesia.' *A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996], p. 19): 'A broad description of apostolicity is of being in harmony and in communion with the apostolic Church from the beginning.'

²⁰ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Faith and Order Commission, 1982 (in *Growth in Agreement*, pp. 465-503), # 34.

and in modern times, namely, the pneumatological and charismatic quality of apostolicity. The concept of apostolicity in the New Testament is indeed more pneumatologically and charismatically loaded than most of the historical, or even more modern, views let us know. The birth of the Christian church goes back to the pouring out of the Spirit. The first apostles ministered in the power of the Spirit, and the focus of the early church's worship was the transmittance of the Spirit and a Spirit-experience. Catholic theologian, F. A. Sullivan, is one amongst the representatives of the traditional churches who has argued enthusiastically for a pneumatological concept of apostolicity.²¹ Orthodox Vladimir Lossky concurs, saying that the apostolicity 'dwells in the power of the... Spirit infused into the apostles by the breath of Christ and transmitted to their successors' (Acts 20:28).²² Lutheran Eduard Schlink uses Paul's doctrine of charisms as the starting point of what he has to say about the relationship between charisms and apostolic ministry. He deals with the apostolic ministry before discussing charisms.²³ He stresses that in 1 Corinthians 12:28 this ministry is itself a charism, and he does not think it any accident that this charism is mentioned first. The apostles were church-founding charismatics.²⁴ One way they exer-

cised charismatic ministry was in healing of the sick, as explained, for example, in Mark 6:12-13.²⁵ It has been the legacy of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements to remind the church universal of this crucial part of New Testament apostolicity.²⁶

There is also a pronounced missionary orientation in the New Testament and in more recent approaches to apostolicity. The church is 'apostolic because it remains in continuity in essentials with the original witnessing of the first-century apostles.'²⁷ What is originally apostolic is sending to bear witness to the universal and definitive truth of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.²⁸ 'The apostolicity of the church is ultimately grounded in God's mission to the world.'²⁹ Primarily, then, the church's apostolicity means that the sending out of the apostles to all humanity is continued by the church. The task of mission did not end with the age of the apostles.³⁰ Part of continuing the apos-

²⁵ See further Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 270 with references.

²⁶ See further, Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, Chap. IX.

²⁷ Michael A. Fahey, 'Church', in *Systematic Theology. Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. II, eds. F. S. Fiorenza & J. P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), p. 43.

²⁸ As representative of recent ecumenical documents, see, e.g. Anglican-Lutheran International Continuation Committee, *The Niagara Report*, 1987 (London: Anglican Consultative Council & Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1988), # 21. I am grateful to O'Gara, 'Apostolicity', (p. 195) for this reference.

²⁹ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology. The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (New York: OUP, 1980), p. 135.

³⁰ This missionary orientation in apostolicity was emphasized, e.g. in the *Epistle of Clement* dating from about 96 C.E.

²¹ F.A. Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* (Dublin: Gill & McMillan/Mawhaw: Paulist, 1988), pp. 185-197.

²² Lossky, 'Concerning the Third Mark', p. 172.

²³ Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik*, pp. 591ff.

²⁴ Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik*, p. 598.

tolic mission is fidelity to the apostolic beginnings, especially to the apostolic gospel.³¹ Consequently, the stress on the teaching rather than the office itself has come to be emphasized in recent discussions.

Apostolicity, however, is a two-fold concept. On the one hand, there has to be fidelity to the tradition otherwise we lose any criterion between true and false. On the other hand, the 'church is authentically apostolic only when as a missionary church it remains ready to alter traditional ways of thinking and living, being renewed constantly on the basis of its origins'.³² Thus, apostolicity is a dynamic reality.³³

In the final analysis, apostolicity, as well as other marks of the church, are objects of faith as much as they are anything else. According to Pannenberg, we must stress the church's

apostolicity so strongly 'for the very reason that we detect so clearly that the church has broken away from its apostolic beginnings and is pushing on into uncertain future'.³⁴ Primarily, the assertion of the church as apostolic is meant to be understood eschatologically.³⁵ Consequently, apostolicity is part of a prayer of longing and hope that the church may in fact become what it is called to be by reason of its lofty vocation.³⁶

Understanding the church's apostolicity in terms of the apostolic mission points beyond every historical present to the eschatological consummation of the world.³⁷ The apostolic mission of the church aims at the renewal of all humanity in the kingdom of God, a renewal that has begun already with the advent and cross of Jesus of Nazareth.³⁸

Whatever the understanding of apostolicity is in given time, it should be clearly understood that originally apostolicity, more than any other characteristics of the church (unity, catholicity, and holiness), was not

³¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Die Bedeutung der Eschatologie für das Verständnis der Apostolizität unter Katholizität der Kirche', in *Ethik und Ekklesiologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), pp. 222ff. and idem, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, pp. 406-7. In the beginnings of the church, the authority of the apostles kept the churches in their faith. After the death of the apostles, the church had to rely on apostolic teaching for the truth of the message. See further, J. Roloff, 'Apostel I', TRE, III (1978), pp. 430-45. For the historical development, see Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, pp. 378ff.

³² Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 407. On the missionary dimension of apostolicity, see further Garijo-Guembe, *Communion of the Saints*, pp. 31-36.

³³ This was clearly captured in the dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, *Toward a Common Understanding of the Church*, 1990 [Information Service III: 74 (1990)], #116, according to which apostolicity 'is a living reality which simultaneously keeps the Church in communion with its living source and allows it to renew its youth continually so as to reach the Kingdom'. I am indebted to O'Gara, 'Apostolicity', (p. 202) for this reference.

³⁴ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 409. So also Gerhard Ebeling, *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, Vol. 3 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1979), pp. 369-75.

³⁵ From an Eastern Orthodox perspective, see John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), Chap. 5 which makes a difference between 'historical' and 'eschatological' approaches to apostolicity and attempts for a synthesis.

³⁶ Fahey, 'Church', pp. 42-43; so also O'Donnell, *Ecclesia*, p. 19.

³⁷ The integral relationship between mission and eschatology in the understanding of apostolicity is clearly depicted in Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Apostolizität und Katholizität der Kirche in der Perspektive des Eschatologie', *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 94 (1965), pp. 97-112.

³⁸ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 407.

intended to be used polemically or apologetically to demonstrate the superiority of one church over another or to imply that one possessed more unity, sanctity, catholicity, or apostolicity.³⁹

The Issue of Apostolicity in Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue

Since 1972, the two currently largest, Christian families (Roman Catholics and Pentecostals) have been engaged in mutual talks at the international level.⁴⁰ This dialogue,

³⁹ Fahey, 'Church', p. 42. This is aptly noted in *The Porvoo Common Statement* (Conversations between the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches, 1992 [London: Council for Christian Unity of the General Synod of the Church of England, 1993]) when it affirms that the church as a whole is apostolic (# 37) and 'the primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the Church as a whole' (# 39). In this sense, Karl Rahner's (*Foundations of Christian Faith* [New York: Crossroad, 1982], pp. 357-8) argumentation from apostolicity, that the Roman Catholic Church stands in greater continuity with the primitive church than any other Christian community, is ecumenically fruitless; see also Herman Josef Pottmeyer, 'Die Frage nach der wahren Kirche', in *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie* 3 (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), pp. 212-41.

⁴⁰ For background and themes, see Kärkkäinen, *Spiritus ubi vult spirat*, Chap. 2 and *Ad ultimum terrae. Evangelization, Protelytism, and Common Witness in the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue 1990-1997*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998, Chap. 2. For a summary, see Kärkkäinen, 'An Exercise on the Frontiers of Ecumenism: Almost Thirty Years of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue', *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research* 29:2 (2000): pp. 156-171. For recent appraisals, see Kilian McDonnell, 'Improbable Conversations: The International Classical Pentecostal/Roman Catholic Dialogue', *Pneuma* 17:2 (1995), pp. 163-174; McDonnell, 'Five Defining Issues: The International Classical Pentecostal/Roman Catholic Dialogue', *Pneuma* 17:2 (1995), pp. 175-188; and Walter J. Hollenweger, 'Roman Catholics and Pentecostals in Dialogue', *Ecumenical Review* (1999), pp. 147-159.

which represents an exercise on the frontiers of ecumenism, took up the issue of apostolicity during the first quinquennium (1972-1978). This is the first time in the history of the modern ecumenical movement that a Free Church has engaged in serious dialogue concerning apostolicity with an established church to whom the issue of apostolicity is a crucial ecclesiological affirmation.

It is significant that the 'focus of the dialogue bears upon how ministry in the church continues the ministry of the Apostles'.⁴¹ Whatever differences there may be between Catholic and Pentecostal ecclesiologies, there is this foundational commitment to the notion of 'one holy catholic apostolic Church' made up of all believers (cf. Eph. 4:4-6).⁴²

Before we look at some details of the mutual discussions, it is important to note that the issue of apostolicity is not necessarily strange to Pentecostalism. It might come as a surprise to uninformed observers of Pentecostalism that the notion of apostolicity is located in the very roots of the movement.⁴³

The following words form the preamble to the Pentecostal self-understanding of its theology and mission in 1906, when the world-wide movement was born:

⁴¹ *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 77.

⁴² *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 34.

⁴³ The most detailed discussion of Pentecostal apostolicity is to be found in the paper by the Pentecostal co-chair of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue, Cecil M. Robek: 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity'. A paper presented to Faith and Order, National Council of Churches, Consultation on American Born Churches, March 1992 (Unpublished; to be part of the future publication on the topic of 'Apostolicity in America').

THE APOSTOLIC FAITH MOVEMENT
Stands for the restoration of faith once
delivered unto the saints—the old time
religion, camp meetings, revivals,
missions, street and prison work and
Christian Unity everywhere.⁴⁴

There are several items in this preamble which call for a closer look. First of all, the name of the movement itself, 'The Apostolic Faith Movement', clearly refers to the desire to 'go back to Pentecost'⁴⁵ of apostolic times as recorded in Acts 2. It also points toward a priority given to primitive religion.⁴⁶ This initial naming gave birth to numerous other titles of churches, movements, publications which bear the same name.⁴⁷ It is also noteworthy that even today, several Pentecostal

movements around the world, e.g. in Africa and former Eastern Europe, are known only by the name 'Apostolic'.⁴⁸

The insistence on the apostolic nature of the church implied restorationist vision '...to displace dead forms and creeds and wild fanaticisms [of existing Churches] with living practical Christianity.'⁴⁹ The phrase, 'stands for the restoration of the faith once delivered unto the saints' (from Jude 3), clearly suggests that the Apostolic faith was in mind here and that a certain body of knowledge was intended to be understood as constituting that apostolic faith. That could be summarized as statements concerning (1) Justification, (2) Sanctification, (3) Baptism in the Holy Ghost, and (4) Healing.⁵⁰ Furthermore (and this is of immense importance ecumenically), the statement of the Apostolic Faith Movement encapsulates the essence of the confession 'one holy catholic apostolic Church',⁵¹ though Pentecostals do not so often use the creedal language of older churches.⁵² Robeck summarizes the main

⁴⁴ *Apostolic Faith* 2:1 (September, 1906). For a helpful treatment of the topic of apostolicity and related issues, see Gerald T. Sheppard, 'The Nicene Creed, Filioque, and Pentecostal Movements in the United States', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31:3-4 (1986), pp. 401-416.

⁴⁵ Cf. Frank D. Macchia, 'The Church as an End-Time Missionary Fellowship of the Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective on the Significance of Pneumatology for Ecclesiology.' A Paper presented to Pentecostal/National Council of Churches Dialogue, March 12, 1997, Oakland California [Unpublished], pp. 20-21), who notes that movements such as Pentecostalism sought 'to discover direct access to the church of the apostles through the mediation of the Holy Spirit'. The implication is, of course, that a 'mediation' through some other agencies than the Holy Spirit (e.g. sacraments) was not regarded as 'apostolic'. Lesslie Newbigin (*The Household of God* [London: SCM, 1953], Chap. IV) concurs by arguing that the Pentecostal understanding of church is neither dominated by Word nor sacrament but by the direct experience of the Holy Spirit as it was believed to have been shared originally among the apostles and early followers of Jesus. See also Peter Hocken, 'Church, Theology of the,' *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess & Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), p. 217.

⁴⁶ Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity', 1-2.

⁴⁷ E.g. *The Apostolic Herald*, *The Apostolic Messenger*, *The Apostolic Witness*, etc.

⁴⁸ See several articles under the term 'apostolic' in the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*.

⁴⁹ *Apostolic Faith* 2:1 (Sept., 1906).

⁵⁰ *Apostolic Faith* 2:1 (Sept., 1906) under the title 'The Apostolic Faith Movement'. These statements were accompanied by a brief apologetic note designed to alleviate any charge of sectarianism which might be raised against the movement.

⁵¹ *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 34.

⁵² Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity', (pp. 2-3) notes that although Pentecostals in general are anti-creedal, it was not to negate the truths which the creed was intended to exalt and protect, but rather, it was to deny that the creed was sufficient to the task. Scripture was more important than creed, and, in some cases, experience consistent with Scripture.

elements of this commitment to the apostolic confession based on the above quoted preamble:

The explicit commitment of these early Pentecostals to 'Christian Unity,' and their honest recognition of their role as a restoration movement within the Church points toward their affirmation of the *oneness* of the Church. Identification with their Wesleyan-Holiness roots articulated through references to the 'old time religion' and 'camp meetings' with their deep commitment to personal sanctification, underscore their belief in the *holiness* of the Church and its impact on the personal lives of each individual Christian. Their recognition that the Church in which the Apostolic Faith Movement participated was 'everywhere' is an explicit affirmation of the *catholicity* of the Church. And their self-designation as the 'Apostolic Faith Movement' is sufficient to demonstrate some kind of commitment to the *apostolic nature* of the church and a deep concern to contribute to a restored or enhanced *apostolic character* of the Church.⁵³

The formulation of early Pentecostal understanding of apostolicity is important also in that it reaches beyond the issue of faith, e.g. doctrine, creed, theology, to the issues of power and practice. This is the core of 'living, practical Christianity'.⁵⁴ In the final analysis, then, what was the ultimate criterion was not formulations of faith but living out of the apostolic gospel.

This brief consideration of apostolicity from a Pentecostal perspective reveals that the essence of it is to go back to the faith and experience of apostolic times to live consistently with the New Testament church.

There is also a strong missionary orientation there. Although this formulation of Pentecostalism is rather different from that of Roman Catholics, one can see a common denominator: the ultimate criterion is that of 'continuity/consistency' with the beginnings of the church, i.e. with apostolic times. Without artificially downplaying the difference in the method of ascertainment, one can perhaps state that there is mutual intention in both traditions, serving the same purpose.

Both Roman Catholics and Pentecostals believe that the church lives in continuity with the New Testament apostles and their proclamation, and with the apostolic church. A primary manifestation of this is to be found in fidelity to the apostolic teaching.⁵⁵ There is, though, a subtle difference in how these two traditions view the history of the church. While Pentecostals, influenced by restorationist perspectives, have claimed continuity with the church in the New Testament by arguing for discontinuity with much of the historical Church, Catholics have tended to underline the succession along the lines of church history, starting with the New Testament.⁵⁶ 'By adopting these two positions, one of continuity, the other of discontinuity, each tradition has attempted to demonstrate its faithfulness to the apostolic faith 'once for all delivered

⁵³ Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity', p. 2. (emphasis mine)

⁵⁴ Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity', p. 14.

⁵⁵ *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 88.

⁵⁶ *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 107, 108.

to the saints' (Jude 3).⁵⁷ Neither Catholics nor Pentecostals claim that continuity in history by itself would be a guarantee of spiritual maturity or of doctrinal soundness.⁵⁸

The major difference has to do with the way fidelity to apostolicity is guaranteed. For Roman Catholics, the succession of bishops in an orderly transmission of ministry through history is both guarantee and manifestation of this fidelity.⁵⁹ For Pentecostals, the current dynamic of the Spirit is regarded as a more valid endorsement of apostolic faith and ministry than an unbroken line of episcopal succession. Pentecostals would look to apostolic life and to the power of preaching which leads to conversions to Jesus Christ as an authentication of apostolic ministry.⁶⁰

Pentecostal H. D. Edwards illustrates how the question of episcopal succession, insisted on by Roman Catholics, is difficult to decide for Pentecostals. 'Pentecostals would unhesitatingly affirm that they are

both apostolic and in succession. The joint designation, if understood to affirm episcopacy as being the only method of guaranteeing authenticity and a wholly genuine expression of Christian continuity, would be strongly opposed by the Pentecostals.⁶¹ This is understandable, since for Pentecostals to admit the necessity of apostolic succession as the criterion would mean to call in question the whole validity of their spiritual experience and encounter with God, in as much as it has occurred outside the framework and the security allegedly guaranteed by apostolic succession.

Pentecostals would like to see Roman Catholics place more emphasis on the requirements of apostolic life than on episcopal succession. Roman Catholics, without in any way ignoring the requirements of apostolic life, maintain that the sovereignty of God's act in the transmission of the word and the ministry of sacrament is not nullified by the personal infidelity of the minister.⁶² Despite this difference of emphasis, there is strong

⁵⁷ *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 108. The text continues: 'The significance of this for the welfare of the whole Church urges upon us the need of further common theological reflection on the history of the Church.'

⁵⁸ *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 107.

⁵⁹ *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 89; see also # 79 and Liam G. Walsh, 'Ministry in the Church', in Jerry L. Sandidge, *Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue* (1977-1982): *A Study in Developing Ecumenism. Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1987), Vol 2, pp. 381-86.

⁶⁰ *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 90; H. David Edwards ('A Pentecostal Perspective of the Church', in Sandidge, *Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue*, pp. 404-409, 419-421) provides a Pentecostal perspective to the role of the Apostles and apostolicity of the Church. He illustrates the Pentecostal insistence on the role of the Spirit with these

words: 'For Pentecostals, Moses and Joshua, Saul and David, Elijah and Elisha illustrate, if not determine, the principle of succession, i.e., that it is a "spirit" matter, sometimes accompanied by structure—laying on of hands—but not always. In fact, they would probably say that to insist always on the laying on of hands is to "limit the Spirit" and by way of analogy and illustration would refer to the experience of the apostles in Acts, that whereas in Samaria and Ephesus the apostles laid hands on Christians that they might receive the Spirit, in the house of Cornelius the Spirit fell on them while Peter was speaking, without his laying hands on them.' (p. 408-409; emphasis mine)

⁶¹ Edwards, 'A Pentecostal Perspective of the Church', p. 419.

⁶² *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 90.

mutual concern for the necessity of holiness of life as a qualifier for and mark of apostolicity. It is admitted, though, that the power and sovereignty of God is not limited to the confines of a weak and sinful minister, but the church has to make use of any necessary means to provide seriously for the holiness of the ministers.⁶³

Toward a Conciliar Understanding of Apostolicity

Charles A. Conniry, a Free Church (Baptist) theologian, has recently presented a synthesis of four major views of apostolicity:⁶⁴

- (1) 'Ecclesial apostolicity' emphasizes apostolicity as a means of establishing the institutional authority of the church
- (2) 'Biblical apostolicity' looks to the apostolic character of the church in order to identify a norm by which the legitimacy of subsequent accretions is determined.
- (3) 'Pneumatic apostolicity' appeals to a charisma of the Spirit that is as much a part of today's church as it was in the first century.
- (4) A related and yet distinct emphasis, 'kerygmatic apostolicity', sees the church's apostolic character actualized by the faithful carrying-out of its mission. Conniry contends that rather than viewing any one of these legitimate interpretations as final or exclusive of others, they should

be seen rather as complementary.

Building on this analysis and the previous discussion, I want to ask two interrelated questions: What are the essential aspects of apostolicity that all Christian churches would be more or less ready to affirm? What are those that could build bridges between traditional, mostly episcopal churches, the Free Churches and other non-traditional Christian groups? These are the two ecumenically pregnant and critical questions that determine the future discussions on the topic.

There are at least seven aspects of apostolicity that I believe every Christian community is ready to accept. These aspects might serve as a 'minimum' for further work on this much disputed question.

All churches accept that, first, apostolicity involves a continuity⁶⁵ in the life and faith of the apostles and the apostolic church of the New Testament. By implication, then, one may conclude that all churches also accept, second, that charismatic life and worship is an essential part of apostolicity. No serious New Testament exegete disputes the charismatic nature of the New Testament church(es). Third, one can say that mission (proclamation of the gospel) is yet another indistinguishable aspect of apostolicity. The risen Lord commanded his disciples (apostles) to continue the missionary work he had

⁶³ *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 91.

⁶⁴ Charles J. Conniry, 'Identifying Apostolic Christianity: A Synthesis of Viewpoints', *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (1994), pp. 247-261 (with extensive bibliography relating to various theological traditions and denominations).

⁶⁵ I prefer here the term 'continuity' rather than 'succession', since the latter term is so heavily loaded with a specific kind of succession, e.g. episcopal succession in terms of having continual chain of bishops.

begun. Fourth, all churches firmly believe that the Scriptures of the New Testament are themselves apostolic and are the norm of the apostolicity. Fifth, apostolicity is a dynamic concept. It is not only or primarily a question of juridics but rather a question of life and vitality and thus of obedience, service, and everyday discipleship.⁶⁶ Sixth, apostolicity concerns the whole people of God, not only clergy or authority. This is, for example, what Hans Küng has argued. He supports an understanding of apostolic succession that involves the whole people of God and is inspired directly by the Spirit anew in each generation as the church renews itself in the witness of the apostles.⁶⁷ Seventh, apostolicity is a heavily pneumatological concept. Only the Holy Spirit is 'the one who makes the Church apostolic'.⁶⁸

The Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue on ecclesiology shows that there are indeed complementary ways of affirming other churches' apostolicity, thus ecclesiality, if no one definition is taken as final or exclusive of others. If the seven aspects outlined above are accepted universally among Christian churches, ecumenically fruitful and hopeful implications follow. Communication between various

churches, rather than being fruitless strife about the goodness of one's own apostolicity, has the potential of becoming a truly ecumenical exchange of gifts. For example, traditional churches learn to pay attention to dynamic elements of apostolicity whereas younger churches learn to appreciate tradition. Those churches strong on fellowship and teaching might learn to appreciate the necessary missionary nature of the church. Those churches strong on the biblical foundations might dare to take another look at charisms and the role of the Spirit, and so on.

Catholic ecumenist, Avery Dulles, sets a fruitful precedent. Dulles is ready to admit that criteria other than episcopal succession might serve as a criterion for true apostolicity. Here he strikes the note Protestants in general and Free Churches in particular have been eager to emphasize:

Unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity are dynamic realities that depend on the foundational work of Christ and on his continued presence and activity through the Holy Spirit. Evangelical communities that excel in love for Jesus Christ and in obedience to the Holy Spirit may be more unitive, holy, catholic, and apostolic than highly sacramental and hierarchically organized churches in which faith and charity have become cold.⁶⁹

This is an example of applying to ecumenical relations fresh perspectives that have arisen out of ecumenical reflections on the notion of apostolicity.

Another recent example from Dulles testifies to the fruitfulness of

⁶⁶ See further, Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. 2, p. 45.

⁶⁷ Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), pp. 355-56. So also Lutheran Arnold Bittlinger, *Im Kraftfeld des Geistes* (Marburg an der Lahn: Ökumenischer Verlag Dr. R. F. Edel, 1966), pp. 129ff.

⁶⁸ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. 2, pp. 39-44 (44); J. D. Zizioulas, 'La continuité avec les origines apotoliques kans la conscience théologique des Eglises orthodoxes', *Istina* 19 (1974), pp. 65-94.

⁶⁹ A. Dulles, 'The Church as "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic"', *ERT* 23:1 (1999), p. 27.

the approach recommended above. When apostolicity is understood as a comprehensive, many-sided concept, rather than focusing on a particular aspect disputed by many other churches, one is committed to look for criteria acceptable to all. One such criterion is the aspect number four in our list above, namely that of the word of God. According to Dulles, 'to insist on the sole lordship of Christ as known to us from the Scriptures is already to accept a large measure of apostolicity'.⁷⁰ All Christian churches affirm the absolute normativity of Scripture and thus of its Lord. This generally upheld criterion can serve as *the* norm for apostolicity. Even then there are differences of opinion, but these can be discussed from the perspective of limited convergence. The importance of Dulles' ideas is enhanced when we take into consideration the contexts in which they were presented: in a Protestant periodical and in dialogue on ecclesiology between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals.

Is there any Hope Concerning the Question of Apostolic Succession?

As is well known, the most hotly debated question is of course that of episcopal succession and, consequently, ministry/ordination. The possible outcome of ecumenical convergence in the understanding of apostolicity is to a large degree dependent on how this question is handled.

Most traditional churches are not ready to follow the precepts of Free Churches or of Karl Barth, who reject any view of apostolicity based on historical or juridical grounds and strongly object to apostolic succession being based on ordination as this would be to predispose the Holy Spirit to act according to human demands.⁷¹ However, older churches should listen to the arguments of others. In fact, those who reject apostolic succession (as understood in the episcopal sense) also have a case, as Baptist theologian J. L. Garrett argues.⁷² First, the role of ministers in the New Testament does not constitute necessarily a three-fold hierarchical order and can be explained apart from the theory of apostolic succession. Second, the church at Rome was seemingly led by a body of presbyters in the time of Clement of Rome. Third, the activity of Peter and John in Samaria (Acts 8:14-25) and Paul's teaching authority in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 4:7, 21; 11:16, 34) can be recognized and explained in terms of apostleship apart from any theory of episcopal succession. Fourth, the canonical New Testament can be reckoned as the 'strict successor' to the apostles rather than the bishops. Fifth, the ministries of the non-episcopal churches since the era of the Protes-

⁷¹ For Barth's view, see *Church Dogmatics* 4:1 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1956), pp. 712-725. When I lump together Barth and Free Churches, I do not intend to assume any connection between them. I just note that they happen to have much similarity in their argumentation.

⁷² J. L. Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 568-9.

⁷⁰ Dulles, 'The Church', p. 27.

tant Reformation would seem to argue against the necessity of apostolic succession.

Even if these kinds of argument might not be able to convince theologians of traditional churches of the supremacy of non-episcopal argumentation, they are substantial enough to promote honest ecumenical dialogue. The fact is that the concept of apostolicity is so diverse and complicated that clinging exclusively to one aspect seems not to do justice either to the New Testament data nor to later theological developments. On what justification, other than historical, do the older churches have the exclusive claim for one particular kind of definition when the view can by no means find indisputable—some would even say, substantial—biblical support?

The ecclesiality of any church is of necessity tied up with its apostolicity. There can be no church without apostolic continuity.⁷³ Rejecting another church's claim for apostolicity is no less a serious act than bluntly rejecting the ecclesiality of that church.

Still another motivation for all churches to re-evaluate their understanding of apostolicity is presented by Catholic, Avery Dulles, in these words:

Can we speak of the church as apostolic in view of the radical mutations that it has undergone over the centuries? Many of the structures, doctrines, and practices of contemporary Christians would surprise

and baffle the apostles.⁷⁴

The approach of the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document is helpful in that it distinguishes between the apostolicity of the whole church and the apostolic succession in the ministry, thus treating the latter as subordinate to the former, rather than equating them.⁷⁵ In fact, Dulles himself concludes from this (although the official Catholic response to the BEM-document expressed reservations⁷⁶) that on the basis of the Lima text it might be possible to admit 'a large measure of apostolicity without apostolic succession in the ministry'.⁷⁷ While I applaud this ecumenical attitude, I am not sure if we can 'quantify' the notion of apostolicity the way Dulles does. The consequent problem would be just 'how much' one needs apostolicity in order for a church to be a church (i.e. to be apostolic 'enough').

However the apostolicity is defined theologically; it is of necessity bound to the community of God; the church; the whole church of God on earth. As Roman Catholic C. O'Donnell fittingly summarizes: 'So at its deepest level, apostolicity denotes this possibility of encountering now the Mystery through the Holy Spirit in a community which mediates the divine plan throughout history.'⁷⁸

⁷³ Ola Tjörhom, 'Apostolisk kontinuitet og apostolisk suksesjon i Porvoo-rapporten—en utfordring for de nordiske Lutherske kirkene', *Nordiskt Ekumenisk Orientering* 4 (December, 1995), p. 10.

⁷⁴ Dulles, 'The Church', p. 14.

⁷⁵ See further, Dulles, 'The Church', p. 26.

⁷⁶ Vatican Appraisal of the WCC Document, 'Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry', *Origins* 17 (November 19, 1987), pp. 401-16.

⁷⁷ Dulles, 'The Church', p. 27.

⁷⁸ O'Donnell, 'Ecclesia', p. 20.