



Nurturing a New Generation of “Pauline” and “Petrine” Apostles

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My early thinking on apostleship was shaped by Watchman Nee, who made a distinction between the Church and the Work – two distinct entities with distinct spheres. The Church is called to subdue the land, bringing the full weight of the gospel to bear on every segment and aspect of society. The “Work” is the apostolic work – taking the Kingdom of God to where the Church does not yet exist. The work of the apostolic community has always been to establish the Church where it does not exist and in such a way that the Church will reproduce locally and subdue the land.

Perhaps the best recent definition of an apostle I have read is by Jack Deere in his book *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*. Deere states that apostleship is a calling, not a gift nor an especially gifted or powerful person. I strongly agree. I do not think that an apostle is such a person, or someone who gives oversight to large churches or groups of churches. (The latter more closely resemble “bishops,” such as those of the 2nd and 3rd centuries.)

The primary meaning of apostle is “an authorized sent one” or “messenger”. Apostles are mobile, dynamic groups of emissaries of the Kingdom. They are called to minister as bands or groups – at the very least in twos, as Jesus taught (cf. Acts 13:3,4; 14:4,14; 15:39-41), and sometimes with helpers (cf. Acts 13:5). Apostles have functioned in communities or networks of communities (for example, Paul’s networks of teams on his second and third journeys as well as during his imprisonment).

The key mark of apostleship is not a big personality, but rather big suffering (cf. 1 Cor. 4:9-13). When Paul is forced to defend his apostleship, he first cites his suffering (2 Cor. 12:7-10) before his signs and wonders (vs. 11,12). He wears his suffering as the badge of his apostleship and only acknowledges his signs and wonders when forced to do so.

Pauline Apostleship

Pauline apostleship is exercised by pioneering, mobile communities which start local communities of the Kingdom where they do not exist. They are dynamic, mobile communities, not solo personalities nor bishops who remain “over” churches. It seems there were many apostles (some true, some false) wandering around in the first century – so many that Paul bumped into a lot of them and took care to go to Spain to ensure that he was building on new ground.

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Petrine Apostleship

A second form of apostleship – what I would call Petrine apostleship – is also portrayed in the New Testament. Until recently my work and thinking have focused primarily on Pauline apostles who usually cross cultures to proclaim and reveal the Kingdom of God. My work with Frontiers has been exclusively in this realm. But I personally have also been engaged in starting house churches in the West, specifically in Rhode Island (USA) and England, and I have also started a number of church-planting teams which have been effective at starting networks of house churches in the West. If I had been pressed as to whether these Western teams were apostolic, until recently I would have replied in the negative or at least been uncertain.



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But recently I was coaching a team in Switzerland which pressed me on whether there exists a Peter-type apostle. I replied that we do not see much of Peter in the New Testament, so I could not comment on whether or not the model exists or not. But I was unhappy with my own reply, and so I went back to search the Scriptures.

What I realized was that the Petrine model is much more prevalent than I had imagined. If we

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read Galatians 2:8-10 as portraying two types of apostleship, then we see some compelling ramifications. In this passage Paul states that Peter recognized his (and Barnabas') calling as apostles to the Gentiles, while Paul and Barnabas recognized Peter's (and James' and John's) apostleship to the circumcised (Jews).

So we see that there is an apostolic ministry to the unreached (the Pauline), but there is also an apostolic ministry to the existing people of God (the Petrine). For me the clincher was that Jesus is, of course, the forerunner of both (our high priest and apostle, Hebrews 3:1), but the bulk of His apostleship was to Israel. This means that much of the New Testament is about Petrine apostleship. So what does Petrine apostleship look like, and why is it important today?

Needed Today – New Apostles and New Ways of Doing Church

Jesus declared that the Kingdom of God was to be torn from the nation of Israel and given to another people who would bear its fruit (Mt. 21:43). Within a generation the Temple would be destroyed, and the nation of Israel would cease to exist. But God is patient and compassionate: He desired to retain a remnant from Israel who would glorify His name. So God sent Jesus to call out that remnant who would follow Him in new forms of community that would follow the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Jesus appointed (Pauline) apostles to the Gentiles and (Petrine) apostles to the Jews that a remnant might bring glory to His name. The Kingdom of God would need new forms and traditions within the era that was to come.

I believe we are seeing a similar pattern today. Western Christendom is in a key transition, perhaps undergoing as large a cultural shift as occurred during the Reformation (when I think that last great era of Petrine apostles brought the Church out of medieval forms and into modern forms). The world is changing, and the Western

forms of church, birthed very much according to modernity, are not keeping up. I believe that the world has changed so much that simply adapting existing church structures will not enable appropriate expressions of the Kingdom to come forth for new generations.

What is needed is a whole new way of doing “church” (and I think we actually need to drop the word, but that is for a different article). New types of communities of the Kingdom need to be envisioned and created to be Good News in a new era. I believe that apostles are the creative agents sent by God to bring about radical, creative forms of the Kingdom. Pauline apostles will seek forms appropriate and indigenous to the new cultures to which they are bringing the Kingdom, not merely exporting Western church culture, as has often been the case.

But apostolic ministry is now needed in the West as well. If the Western church is not going to die out, then we will require new expressions of Kingdom communities. I think this will require a recovery of Petrine apostles – creative pioneers who will explore Kingdom communities appropriate to our post-modern world. These apostolic families will blaze the trail to new kinds of communities and structures suitable to high-powered, mobile, and technological society, as well as communities for the poor and disenfranchised who will largely miss out on the very things that power the new world.

These pioneers are not called to make further adaptations to faltering models, but rather, like Jesus, Peter, James and John, call God's people to move on from old formulations in a journey to the new. Such a journey will be every bit as radical and terrifying as it must have been for those early Jewish believers who watched the destruction of their nation and traditions. Today's Petrine apostles will bear the same primary mark of apostleship – persecution, for their ministry is bound to be misunderstood (at best) by existing churches.

What is needed today is an explosion of apostolic ministry. God is calling Pauline apostles to bring the Kingdom to nations without an indigenous, cultural expression of the Kingdom of God in local communities. God is calling a new generation of Petrine apostles to forge new communities in the West (and where Western churches have become the normative expression of the Kingdom in other cultures). It is my hope that these Petrine apostles can bring the Western church into a new era of fruitfulness where Kingdom communities reflect the glory of the Living God and impart faith, hope and love to those in darkness. 🌐