

# NOTES ON THE APOSTOLIC AND APOSTLES

(Taken from the book, "Apostolic Architecture" by Dr. Ron Cottle) (Emphasis by Thomas Hale)

Since the late 1990's, the Christian world has been challenged with a rapidly expanding perception of how the Church should operate. It has been labeled as a New Apostolic Reformation or neo-apostolism, and not everyone agrees with its conclusions.

They believe and understand, that the apostolic role is as essential to the Church today as it was in the first century. **They believe in the apostolic as a contemporary reality. It is the natural extension of Church expansion, from the ministry of Jesus Christ to the present day.** He named and commissioned the first Christian apostles, and they in turn found it expedient to name and commission others. This is evidenced in their writing, as numerous individuals were appointed to carry on the work with which they were entrusted.

Early in Church history, apostles became increasingly localized in cities and regions whereby they found themselves providing order for more and more congregations. Their administrative function grew while the transient nature of their ministries diminished. Thus, they eventually became known as bishops (episkopoi), with teams or clusters of elders (presbuteroi) addressing the immediate needs and ministry of local congregations. **Yet, the ministry of an apostle never became purposeless, nor was it superseded or replaced by the pastoral office.**

Today, in many Christian circles, the office of apostle is utterly ignored, or worse, denied. The role of prophet is delegated to that of merely proclaiming the message of the Gospel (preaching). The term prophet has become a working nomenclature for a preacher—a "forth-teller" whose role is to proclaim. The term apostle has been sparingly applied as a somewhat honorary designation rendered to an elder statesman with broad appeal. **In neither case does the terminology reflect the biblical role or purpose of these offices of the Church.**

**TWO IMPORTANT CONCLUSIONS:** The first is that the office, role, ministry, and significance of apostles has never been removed nor replaced within the Christian Church. Although many ignore it, and many others deny it, this biblical office stands as continuing evidence of Jesus Christ's involvement in the order and structure of His Church. **The second conclusion is that the office and ministry of apostles is being profoundly and visibly restored in vastly increasing numbers globally.**

Apostle! The word itself stirs up all kinds of theological and emotional implications. What is an Apostle? Who can truly be considered to be, or to have been an apostle? Are there apostles in the world today? And if there are apostles—significant numbers of apostles—in the world today, who are they? How can they be identified? How do they function? And in what way are they relevant to God's purposes in the earth today?

The Gospels provide three parallel accounts of Jesus' naming that original company of apostles (note also: Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19). **It is interesting to note that from the day He named the twelve from among a much larger company of disciples, he established no other office, governmental figure, or Church structure.** From Matthew 10:1-4 through Acts 6:2, there were no deacons or elders or

any other officers within the Church; only apostles. In fact, it was the initial apostles who established the governmental order of the early Church. Most assuredly we believe they were led by the Holy Spirit since scripture offers no evidence that Jesus appointed elders or deacons or any other offices beyond that of apostles. Why then would He cause this office to be abandoned or ignored? The simple and obvious answer, of course, is that He wouldn't. **Thus, we conclude that apostles are as relevant today as they were in the first century.**

## **APOSTLE—WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

The word apostle is a transliteration of the Greek word apostolos. This is a compound word using apo—away from; and stellos—one sent as an authorized representative; an ambassador. In other words, **an apostle is one who is consecrated (set apart) from the larger community of people to fulfill a specific commission.**

**THE OLD TESTAMENT PATTERN:** One of the most notable Old Testament examples of such a commissioning was Ezra, a Jewish scribe commissioned by King Artaxerxes of Persia to return from Babylon to Jerusalem. There he was given authority to restore the worship of Yahweh in Israel and rebuild the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. Another such individual was Nehemiah. He too was commissioned by Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city wall and continue the restoration. Each of these men was given a specific commission by the king, with all of the authority of the king's office to accomplish the mission that was set before him. While they were not "apostles" in the framework of a Christian Church, their story demonstrates the nature of Jesus' naming of apostles to establish His Church.

**The first and primary concern of apostles is to establish kingdom order.** They are set in place, by call and commission, to bring order out of chaos. Apostles lead, not merely by words, but by executive administration. They have unusual authority to direct, command, encourage, and establish God's purposes within the Church, and by extension within the community at large. They are given significant revelation (rhema) that allows them to see what others often cannot see.

Apostles are positioned to reveal the wisdom and mystery of God within the boundaries of their assigned spheres. They are, in a very real way, the voice God uses to clarify His revealed plan and to direct His purposes. The voice of an apostle is not about verbalization, not about deep, resonating, persuasive, and compelling oratory. It is about profound insight, clear and concise revelation from God's throne. It is insight and direction received in times of communion with the Holy Spirit, delivered with the confidence of one prepared to die for the faith.

Perhaps the most significant way in which apostles establish a righteous response to the leading of the Holy Spirit is through order—government that leads and inspires. **Apostles establish their ministries in biblical government.** They establish biblical parameters. They appoint elders. These individuals become wise counsel to them and provide those who follow an assurance of participation in vision and ministry. They ground their ministry in biblical order, setting sound, reasonable, and understandable policies that give stability to the organism called Church (Ekklesia). In so many ways, apostles embody the perspective prescribed to the sons of Issachar when they joined themselves to King David at Ziklag (Note: 1

Chronicles 12:32). They are men (and women) who understand the times and know what the Church is about, what it should do, and how it should be done.

**Apostles are also responsible to extend the apostolic line through careful and intuitive succession.** They are responsible to ordain, appoint, commission, and install other leaders within the five-fold ministry offices of the Church.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. (Ephesians 4:11)

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:28)

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:20)

These three verses set the tone for apostolic succession. First, apostles are given to the Church by the Lord Jesus. Apostleship is more than a gift given to an individual. **An apostle is a gift given to the Church. None of the biblical listings of spiritual gifts list apostle as a gift.** Prophecy, exhortation, administrations, healings, and miracles, plus a great many more are listed as gifts. These offices—apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher—are not listed in this way. They are men and women set apart by the Lord Jesus Christ to become the leading overseers within the government of the Ekklesia.

Secondly, an order of authority is provided in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Apostles are first within that order, and well they are, for there must be a clearly established order to government. **Apostles, from their earliest commissioning in the Gospels, were assigned the responsibility of founding the Church, and by extension many, many churches.**

They were also empowered to define and design the spiritual, practical, and governmental architecture of the Church, grounding it in God's order according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Thus, **they are charged with overseeing and managing ordinations, appointments, commissions, and assignments.**

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(Taken from the book, "A Shift in Leadership" by John Eckhardt) (Emphasis by Thomas Hale)

You cannot fulfill an apostolic calling with a pastoral mindset. A pastoral mindset will limit a leader and confine him to the local church. **Many leaders are beginning to realize that what they have been doing is apostolic, yet they have been limited by a pastoral mentality.** They are now being challenged to fully embrace and walk in an apostolic call.

In order to move into this new position, we are challenging some of the traditional ways we have been taught. Restoration will always challenge our theology and adjust our way of thinking. The New Testament pattern of planting and building churches is being restored. **In the book of Acts, churches were planted by apostles and apostolic teams, not pastors. There is not one place in the New Testament that shows a church being planted by a pastor.** The planting and building of churches is an apostolic function, not a pastoral one. It takes a pioneering anointing to plant churches. There is a grace upon apostles and apostolic teams to pioneer and breakthrough. Because much of the Church does not believe in present-day apostles, many leaders who perform apostolic work have been identified as pastors. This is the title we place upon the leader of most local churches.

**Apostles, prophets, and teachers are the governmental gifts of the church.** These anointings have been left out of the government of most local churches and have been replaced by the office of pastor. This is unscriptural and grieves the Holy Spirit. We have violated God's order and have suffered for it. The result is that we have many pastors trying to build and plant churches that require an apostolic anointing, and they do not have the necessary grace to succeed. The result is many small, weak churches that cannot properly manifest the power of the kingdom of God.

The word first in reference to apostles in First Corinthians 12:28 is the Greek word *proton*, meaning first in time, order, or rank. First also means principle or primary. **The apostolic anointing should be the primary, foundational anointing of the Church.** We are first and foremost sent by the risen Lord. As sent ones, we have a purpose and mission. The commission Jesus gave the church is an apostolic commission. This is why the apostolic anointing should be the dominant anointing of the Church.

The word *proton* is also the root of the word *prototype*. **We need to see prototype churches built that will be models for the 21st century.** These churches will have strong apostolic leadership. They will also have strong prophetic, teaching, pastoral, and evangelistic gifts. They will be fully functional churches. They will come behind in no gift (1 Corinthians 1:7). This will result from leaders making the necessary shift and transition into apostolic ministry. This will position the Church to receive the new wine that God is pouring into the new wineskins that are being created around the world. This will happen once the Church recognizes and walks in God's divine order of ministry for the Church.

In an apostolic church, the governing gifts of apostles, prophets, and teachers are set in place. The overseeing gifts of pastor and the outreach gifts of evangelist are released. The people learn to draw from all of these gifts and not depend upon the senior pastor for everything. The minds of the people must be renewed to accept and receive this order of ministry. They must be taught that this is God's order, and much of what the Church has inherited was based on tradition more than revelation.

**The apostolic ministry has been set in the Church to oversee and release all believers into their callings and destinies.** The apostle's mindset is conducive to accomplish this. The apostle should not think only in terms of maintaining, but also in terms and areas of expanding. There is room for all of the gifts to operate in an apostolic church. This ministry provides a framework large enough to house all God desires to do. There is a capacity to contain the new wine without breakage and spillage. There is no limit to the numbers of ministries released when the leaders embrace and walk in an apostolic call.

This concept of ministry needs to be taught to the Church. Believers must come into agreement with it and make the necessary changes to accommodate it. **The Antioch church becomes our model church.** The Church begins to migrate from a pastoral position to an apostolic one without losing the pastoral dimension. The members will still be cared for because of the release of pastors. The Church will move beyond being a parish and have a greater impact in different regions and territories. This includes planting churches and building apostolically in the places where teams are sent.

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(Taken from the book, "The Permanent Revolution" by Alan Hirsch) (Emphasis by Thomas Hale)

If we believe that the New Testament codes are authoritative and function in the same way genetics does in biological systems, then we must be sure to align with those codes. **We believe that the church's lack of adherence to the teachings of Ephesians 4 is a clear case of how we have altered the genetic codes and paid the price.** It is time to correct this egregious flaw in our ecclesiology.

The Ephesians 4 typology (the fivefold ministry that we call APEST: apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher) **is a major piece of Pauline ecclesiology.** The rediscovery and reapplication of this one piece of Pauline ecclesiology has massive consequences in our time and place.

Although many buy into the concept, they are unwilling to recalibrate the ecclesiology. **Christendom church has been run on a largely shepherd-teacher model,** and because it has had a privileged position in society, it has been inclined to dispense with the more missional or evangelistic ministry types (apostle, prophet, and evangelist).

Here are some brief working definitions of each of these gifts: **THE APEST GRID**

- **The apostle** is tasked with the overall vigor, as well as extension of Christianity as a whole, primarily through direct mission and church planting. As the name itself suggests, it is the quintessentially missional ministry, as "sentness" (Latin *missio*) is written into it (*apostello* = sent one).
- **The prophet** is called to maintain faithfulness to God among the people of God. Essentially prophets are guardians of the covenant relationship.
- **The evangelist** is the recruiter to the cause, the naturally infectious person who is able to enlist people into the movement by transmitting the gospel.
- **The shepherd (pastor)** is called to nurture spiritual development, maintain communal health, and engender loving community among the people of God.
- **The teacher** mediates wisdom and understanding. This philosophical type brings comprehensive understanding of the revelation bequeathed to the church.

In this light, one can see how perhaps society in general can be interpreted through the APEST grid:

- **Apostles** in the generic sense are those sent to pioneer something new—for example, teachers who are called in to turn failing schools around, along with people who start movements of sorts, architect systems, or start entrepreneurial business ventures. Can we see non-Christian people who fit this category? Definitely.
- **Prophets** tend to be visionaries, but in a very different sense; they often have a keen interest in issues of justice, environmental responsibility, or the creative arts. Are there such people outside the church? Of course.

- **Evangelists** are particularly gifted at enthusing others about what they stand for, selling the significance of their work, company, or product outside the group itself. These are easy to spot. The United States is full of them.
- **Pastors** are those with a special concern for seeing and affirming what is human within structures. They might not be the most appropriate people to put together a policy for addressing drug abuse, but if they are not part of delivering the policy, the addicts are in trouble. Are there people who create community and bring healing to others in the non-Christian world? Indeed.
- **Teachers** are those who are effective trainers and inspirers of learning. They are philosophers, thinkers, people who understand ideas and how they shape human life. Do such non-Christians exist? No brainer.

Ephesians functions as something of a **constitutional document of the church as Paul sees it**. In fact Markus Barth calls this section “The Constitution of the Church” and considers verses 11 and 12 to be the means of operationalizing it. We can apply the metaphor of constitution to the whole letter itself. For instance, if you were to say to Paul, “Tell me your best thinking about the church,” he would without doubt slap the book of Ephesians on the table.

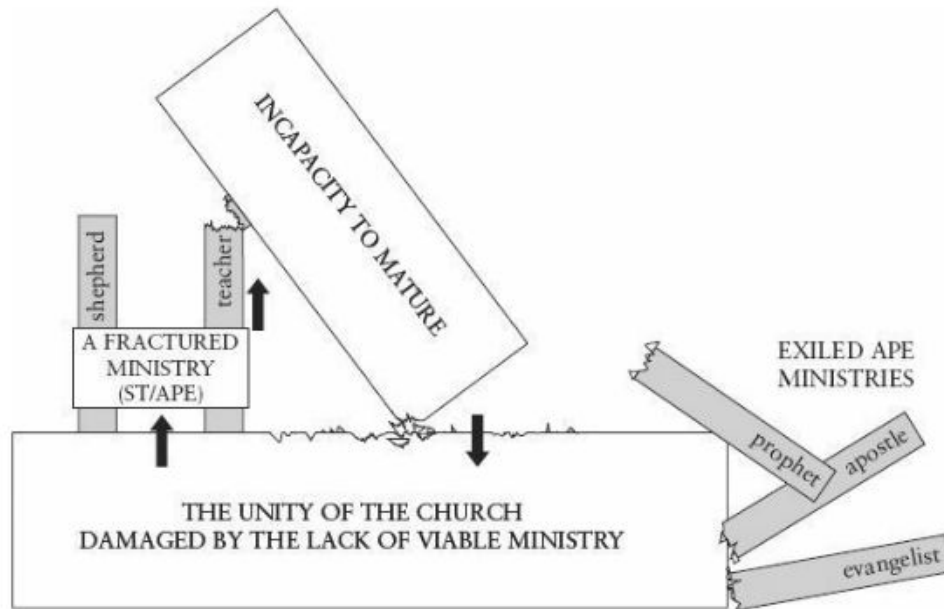
In Ephesians, he is specifically talking about the ecclesia as God intended it to be. **In fact, no other book in the Bible deals so specifically, and so authoritatively, with the nature of ecclesia.** There is a certain distinctly constitutional weight to this document, and like any other good constitution, it sets the criteria about how we must think about the church and provides all the essential frameworks by which it was intended to operate ever since.

This is exactly why we locate the lever for change here in Ephesians, and especially in 4:1–16. It is also why we think the APEST configuration, as opposed to the other possible lists of gifts, operates as the interpretative center for how we conceive of ministry. Imagine trying to act according to a constitution when more than half the leadership provisions provided for by the constitution itself were annulled or dismissed. **It would be like having to run government with no executive powers.** Yes, that is precisely what we have done.

**As far as we can discern, it is simply not possible to be the church that Jesus intended if three (APE) of the five constitutional ministries are removed.** According to the explicit teaching of Ephesians 4:1–16, it cannot be done. But in fact it has been done, and the tragic consequences are dramatically demonstrated in and through the history of the Christian church through the past seventeen centuries.

By effectively exiling the apostolic, prophetic, and evangelistic ministries, we have meddled with the very mechanism Jesus intended for us to be a fully functioning ecclesia. **The result is that all ministry has been forced to fit into the predetermined formats of shepherd and teacher, pastor and theologian, and nothing else has legitimacy.**

**Figure 1.3 The Church Without APE**



Rather than assessing ministry in light of a fivefold form, **we have forced the New Testament to fit our assumptions.** As a result, the pastor (shepherd) (and perhaps, to a lesser extent, the teacher) becomes the catchall title, the procrustean office, on which all subsequent ministry is built.

Just to press the point a little more, how many times do you think the word shepherd/pastor (poimein) is used in the New Testament for people in ministry? The answer is completely astonishing given the universal use of the term—once! Yes, once—here, in Ephesians 4:11 no less. **Although it is a biblical term in that it is used in the New Testament, that one use hardly justifies having everything from pastors of technology to pastors of administration, and pastors of anything in between.**

Remember that the letter is written to, and intended to be read out in, the gathered ecclesia (the various house churches) in Ephesus and not to a leadership conference. It is addressed to all of the people of God as a whole, including women and slaves, and in all their nonprofessional glory. Furthermore, the hearers came from across the racial, social, economic, and gender spectrum. **This means that every believer fits into the APEST typology!** This is a deeply radicalizing text that has huge ramifications for how we both recognize and unleash the ministry of every believer. This is a massive paradigm shift that in itself will take us to the core of what it means to be an apostolic movement. **Seeing APEST through the lens of the ministry of all believers leads us to believe that Ephesians 4 is not primarily a leadership text but rather a ministry text.**