

THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF APOSTLESHIP

As one begins to assess those who serve as church planters, there is a need to explore the early history of the church to discover the uniqueness of the calling those men and women who have been a part of the church planting endeavor. From the establishment of the New Testament church in the first century to present times, church planting has been a strategic factor in the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. Within the church planting movement there has been a selected group of leaders who have carried out the call to start new congregations. From the calling of the first apostles by Jesus, the setting apart of Paul and Barnabas and to today's missionaries there is a special call that God puts upon the life of those who plant churches. Along with this calling, God equips these leaders with specific competencies that enable them to fulfill that call. There are some who say that these special ones are called *apostles*. It is from the term *apostle* that some scholars believe that the word missionary is derived.

Missionary which comes from the Latin term *mitto* which means "I send" is not an Old or New Testament term. Etymologically, however the word does carry the same connotation as apostle. Both words carry the idea of one sent forth to carry out a task.¹ Even though *missionary* is a widely accepted term used to describe those who plant churches overseas and in North America, the term *apostle* raises some objections among scholars and denominational leaders alike. When evaluating those who will plant churches, one should address the issue of the role of an apostle and assess the qualities of such a person in light of their calling, and their authority to carry out that task.

In the New Testament there are two types of apostles. First, there is the small band of those chosen and instructed personally by Jesus called in many cases "The Twelve." These men hold the office of apostle to which there is no succession. The criteria for these men are that they must have a personal encounter with Christ and be directly commissioned by Him to carry out His work.

¹ David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 137-138.

The second group is those men who Paul describes as apostles who were not among the twelve. In this group were included such men as Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Epaphroditus, Andronicus and Junias.

It is at this point of discussion concerning “apostleship” that a debate is raised among scholars. There are scholars today who believe that the term *apostle* or *apostleship* as stated earlier in this paper, is synonymous with the term *missionary*. There are other scholars that believe that the term *apostle* was limited to the New Testament era and the disciples who were selected personally by Jesus.² These scholars such as Everett Harrison believe that *apostleship* is not relevant to today and that to relate it to *missionary* is erroneous teaching. Harrison writes: “Warrant is lacking for making ‘*apostle*’ the equivalent of ‘*missionary*.’ In the practice of the modern church, prominent pioneer missionaries are often called apostles, but this is only an accommodation of language.”³

John Calvin in his New Testament commentary on Ephesians makes this statement: “I take the word ‘apostles’ not generally and according to its etymology, but in its peculiar signification, for those whom Christ particularly selected and exalted to highest honour. Such were the Twelve, to whose number Paul was afterwards added. Their office was to publish the doctrine of the Gospel throughout the world, to plant churches, and to erect the Kingdom of Christ.”⁴ In this Calvin was referring to the twelve and Paul and their direct commission from Christ. Yet, Calvin would refer to Martin Luther in these terms: “Now again, as before, we expressly declare that we hold him to be an excellent apostle of Christ, by the labour and ministry of whom, above all others, the purity of the Gospel has been restored in our times.”⁵

² John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justin Anderson. ed., *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998), 336.

³ Everett F. Harrison. ed., *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 58.

⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, W.M. Eerdmans, 1964), 179.

⁵ John Calvin. *Treatise in Treatise on Free Will Against Pighius* (1543), 6, 250 quoted in Francois Wendel, *Calvin Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Phillip Mairet, Durham, North Carolina, Reprint 1987, 133-134.

Even with Calvin, there is some confusion at first glance as to his and others usage and understanding of the term *apostle* and its relevance to the church.

The debate over the usage of *apostle* is a debate over office and function of ministry. The twelve and Paul held an office of authority given to them by Christ which is referred to as the office of an apostle; those sent out by the church to do missions would be the function of an apostle.⁶ These distinctions can be seen by a study of the usage of this term throughout Jewish, Greek and Biblical history.

This debate over apostleship has also made an impact in the area of church planter assessment. There are some who would argue that an assessment process should discover if a church planting candidate has the calling or gift of apostleship before they be allowed to plant a church.⁷

The Etymological History and Usage of Apostle

To understand apostleship and its relevance to church planting, it is important to understand the usage of the word *apostle* or *apostolos* and its historical and theological background.

The word *apostolos* in the Greek carries the meaning of one who is an envoy or ambassador. Before its usage in the New Testament the word had a history in the Hellenistic culture. The term *apostle* in Hellenistic culture was used to describe the dispatching of transport ships or an army. It later came to mean any group of men sent out for a special purpose. The *apostle* is not only a messenger, but also a delegate of the one who has sent him and is entrusted with special powers to fulfill that role.⁸

⁶ George Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 248-256.

⁷ Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2001), 47.

⁸Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, "Apostleship," in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel ed. vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdemans Publishing Company, 1964), 421.

Before the Hellenistic and New Testament usage of the term, the Hebrew language had a word that was similar in meaning and implied the idea of sending. That word was *shalach*. *Shalach* is a verb that appears several hundred times in the Old Testament. It basically means “to stretch out,” “to let go,” or “to send.” The latter definition is its most common reading. The word carried the meaning of one sent with the authority of the landowner or master to conduct the business of one by whom they were sent.⁹ The use of the word also carried in some instances a secular connotation and in others, a religious usage. A biblical example of the secular type of authority is found in Genesis 24:54-59.

Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night there. When they got up the next morning, he said, ‘Send me on my way to my master.’ But her brother and her mother replied, ‘Let the girl remain with us ten days or so; then you may go.’ But he said to them, ‘Do not detain me, now that the LORD has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master.’ Then they said, ‘Let’s call the girl and ask her about it.’ So they called Rebekah and asked her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ ‘I will go,’ she said. So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham’s servant and his men.

Here we find the servant of Abraham, Eliezer, visiting Laban and wanting to take Laban’s daughter Rebeckah back to marry Isaac. In the phrase “Send me on my way to my master,” the word for send is *shalach*. Even though the term is not used in this passage exclusively to describe Eliezer’s role, Eliezer was serving in the authority of his master, Abraham. This is clearly seen when Laban allowed Rebeckah to be taken back to Abraham.¹⁰

The religious authoritative use of the word, in most cases, relates to the sending character of God. An example is when Joseph spoke of God’s providence in placing him in Egypt. In Genesis 45:5,7, Joseph told his brothers that “God sent me ahead of you.” Another example of this usage is Moses’ experience at the burning bush. God tell Moses: “I am sending you” to free the Hebrew people from their

⁹ Francis Agnew, “The Origin of the New Testament Apostolic-Concept: A Review of Research,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (March 1986):75.

¹⁰ Larry Caldwell, *Sent Out: Reclaiming the Spiritual Gift of Apostleship for Missionaries and Churches Today* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), 28.

bondage in Egypt (Exodus 3:10). Here the word *shalach* is used to describe God's sending authority in the life and ministry of Moses.¹¹

Later, in time the Jewish community and especially with the Jew of the Christian era the term *shalach* came to be known as a title born by those who were dispatched from the mother city rulers to another race or foreign country to collect the tribute for the temple. It would be after the destruction of the Jerusalem that the term *shalach* would describe the council of men who worked with a Jewish patriarch in dealing with household matters and business abroad.¹²

In a conversation with Dr. John Fischer, a Messianic Jewish rabbi and director of Menorah Ministries, I was informed that the term *shalach* is still used today in Jewish culture. According to Dr. Fischer, term *shalach* is used to describe officials of the Israeli government that assist those who wish to immigrate to Israel. This *shalach* work as foreign envoys in other countries for the nation of Israel and represent Israel's national interest.¹³

The significance of the understanding of the term *shalach* is very critical to understanding the role of apostleship. The word is the etymological foundation upon which the later New Testament word "to send" is based. That word being the Greek verb *apostello* (whose root is *apostellein*).¹⁴

The Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew New Testament, uses the term *apostello* over 700 times to translate *shalach*. Just as *shalach* in the Old Testament world, the term *apostello* in the New Testament world carried both a secular and sacred connotation. In the classical Greek world of the time, the word *apostello* was used to communicate religious or ethical authority.¹⁵ In

¹¹ Ibid., 29.

¹² J.B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968),93

¹³ Rabbi John Fischer, Director of Menorah Ministries of Clearwater, FL., interviewed by author, 11 September 2001.

¹⁴ Caldwell, 29

¹⁵ Norval J. Geldenhuys, *Supreme Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 47

both secular and sacred uses, *apostello* came to be used with a sense of authority. In many cases the one sent had the full powers and was the personal representative of the one who sends.¹⁶

In the New Testament, the word *apostello* occurs some 135 times. In most instances the word is used with a sense of authority, in which another sends one with authority to carry out a definite purpose or mission. An example of this is found in John 3:17: “For God did not send (*apesteilen*) the Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through Him.” Another example is found in Acts 26:17-18. Here Paul shares his calling and commission: “... and from the Gentiles. I am sending (*apostello*) you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.” In each of these verses the stress of the word *apostello* is not in the idea of sending but rather that the sending is done with a definite purpose.¹⁷

The early church use of the word “sending” came directly from their understanding of the Greek usage of *apostello* which in turned came from the Hebrew understanding of *shalach*. However, the question must be asked: “What is the derivative of the term *apostle*?” A study of the noun form of *apostello* is critical to a study of apostleship.

When studying the noun usage of *apostolos* in the New Testament, one will find that the word is not used in the same way as in the classical Greek. The word in the classical Greek refers to seafaring activities. It is descriptive of a group of men or a leader of such a group going overseas.¹⁸ For example, a fleet of ships could collectively be called as “the apostle.”¹⁹ All of the uses of the word in the classical

¹⁶ Erich Von Eichen and Helgo Lindner, “Apostle” in *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 127.

¹⁷ Peters, 249.

¹⁸ Rengstorf, 421.

¹⁹ Robert Duncan Culver. “Apostles and the Apostolate in the New Testament.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April-June 1977), 132.

Greek have two common connotations: an expressed commission and a going overseas.²⁰ However such an overseas commission has no authority attached to it.

The above stated summary gives an explanation of the classical Greek usage of the noun *apostolos* prior to the New Testament era. The key to understanding the New Testament usage of this word is not found in the classical Greek usage but rather in its link to the New Testament verb of *apostello* from which it is derived.²¹

As has been shown, in New Testament times the verb *apostello* was used largely in the same manner as it was used in the classical Greek, Septuagint and Hebrew Old Testament. In the first century, the noun *apostolos* was a rather obscure word and primarily used in connection with seafaring activities. Since the Israelites of that time had very little to do with sailing it is not surprising that *apostolos* was not as understood as the word *apostello*. This would explain why the Septuagint translates references to types of messengers both secular and sacred with the word *angelos* (messenger) or *keryxh* (herald) and only once with *apostolos*.²²

It is at this point that the question must be asked, "Why would the New Testament writers use the word *apostolos*?" Karl Rengstorf in his study entitled "Apostleship" seems to give us some insight on how the word *apostolos* became a word of importance to the early church. His thesis also sheds light on the New Testament's concept of sending.²³

Rengstorf's thesis states that *apostolos* in the New Testament can best be understood by tracing the original word to the pre-Christian Jewish word *shaliach*. Rengstorf claims that just as in first century Rabbinical Judaism the Hebrew noun *shaliach* was used to mean messenger of one sending and was

²⁰ Eichen and Lindner, 127.

²¹ J.P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Chico: Fortress / Scholars, 1982), 27-28.

²² Rengstorf, 398.

²³ *Ibid.*

derived from the Hebrew verb *shalach*. With this thought in mind, Rengstorf believes that the early church gave a new meaning to the Greek noun *apostolos* by using it to mean the messenger of the one sending him and deriving this meaning from the verb *apostello*. Since *apostello* was used as an equivalent of *shalach*, as the Septuagint indicates, it would not be difficult to imagine the early church using *apostolos* in the sense of *shaliach*.²⁴

What was the first century Rabbinical Judaism understanding of *shaliach*? According to Herman Vogelstein, these Jews borrowed the *shaliach* idea during their time of captivity in Persia. Vogelstein believes that Ezra was commissioned to be a *shaliach* of the Persian King. According to Vogelstein, Ezra had the authority of the Persian king to complete a specific task and that once the task was completed his authority ceased and that is why we hear nothing about his activities after he completed his mission.²⁵

Rengstorf writes that the term *shaliach* was first used in Rabbinical Judaism as a legal term authorizing another person to represent them in a court of law.²⁶ Closely following this legal use is the religious usage. The *shaliach* represented either one man or an entire congregation. An example of this was the one who read the prayers for the entire congregation was called a *shaliach* of the local congregation. The Mishnah even states that if this *shaliach* made a mistake in reading the prayers before God it was a bad thing for the *shaliach* and the congregation. The reason for this was that the *shaliach* was the representative of the congregation before God.²⁷

²⁴ Culver, 133.

²⁵ Herman Vogelstein, "The Development of the Apostolate in Judaism and Its Transformation in Christianity," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol.2: 1925, 99-124.

²⁶ Rengstorf, 14.

²⁷ Gregory Dix, "The Ministry in the Early Church," in *The Apostolic Ministry*, Kenneth Kirk, ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), 229.

In the same way, the high priest was the authorized representative or *shaliach* for the entire Jewish nation, especially on the Day of Atonement.²⁸ The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem even sent rabbis to represent them in receiving collections both in Jerusalem and throughout the Diaspora.²⁹

Later Jewish commentators applied the term *shaliach* to Old Testament persons who acted as only God could. Examples of these personalities would be Moses, Elijah, Elisha and Ezekiel. These four were commissioned and given authority by God and gave evidence of this authority by performing miraculous signs and wonders.³⁰

T.W. Manson in his book, The Church's Ministry, supports Rengstorf when he summarizes the first century Jewish understanding of the *shaliach*. According to Manson, five points define the shaliach role:

1. The shaliach performs on the behalf of someone, whether an individual or corporate body, functions which his principal is himself entitled to perform.
2. The nature of his activities and in some cases their duration is defined so that his authority does not go beyond the terms of his commission.
3. His commission is not transferable. When he ceases to exercise it, the authority reverts back to the principle.
4. Shaliach is a term of function and not status.
5. Shaliach, who has a religious commission, that commission is only exercised within the borders of the Jewry and does not involve missionary activity.³¹

²⁸ Rengstorf, 16-17.

²⁹ Linder, 128.

³⁰ Rengstorf, 26.

³¹ T.W. Manson, The Church's Ministry (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949), 43-44.

Whether the *shaliach* was functioning as the authorized representative of an individual, community or a representative of God, the *shaliach* was bound by these five conditions.³²

There are some scholars who believe that neither word nor function of an *apostolos* can be derived from *shaliach* nor can its meaning be derived from the first century Judaism usage of *shaliach*. One of these scholars, J. Andrew Kirk believes that the idea of *apostolos* may have come from Rabbinical Judaism. Its usage in the New Testament has a Christian origin and emphasis. Kirk maintains that the meaning of the word is interpreted more by its New Testament context than the word's general background.³³

Both Rengstorf and Kirk have made contributions to the understanding of the word *apostolos*. A combination of both of their thoughts seems to give a better insight of the word *apostolos*. The early church did appear to take the word *apostolos* and give it an entirely new meaning. The reasoning behind this change is based on the fact that Jesus took the concept of *shaliach* and applied it to Himself and His ministry. Because of this, the early church needed to portray Jesus in this light. This portrayal could be best done by adapting, enlarging and redefining the word *apostolos*. This development was with the influence of the Jewish usage of *shaliach*. Such an affect was the natural influence of the close alignment of the verbs *apostello* and *shalach*. This influence was so great that eventually *apostolos* developed a meaning that would become the primary usage of *shaliach* in the New Testament: "one chosen and sent with a special commission as a fully authorized representative of the sender."³⁴

³² Ibid., 44.

³³ J. Andrew Kirk, "Apostleship Since Rengstorf: Towards A Synthesis," *New Testament Studies* 21/2 (January 1975), 252.

³⁴ Geldenhuys, 53-54.

Apostleship and the Ministry of Jesus

The definition of *apostolos* can be used to describe the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself stated that He was sent by God. Jesus viewed Himself in *shaliach* imagery. There is no better place to view this than in Luke's Gospel. In Luke 4:16-21 we find these words:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

In stating that the scripture had been fulfilled, Jesus was declaring Himself in the role of the *shaliach* of the Isaiah passage.

Jesus' sense of His authority as God's *shaliach* is best evidenced by the number of times He uses the phrase "he who receives me receives the one who sent me" or similar phrases (Matthew 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48; 10:16; John 5:24; 12:44; 13:20). Jesus' own understanding of His apostleship, even with its increased authority and responsibility, was consistent with the overall understanding of a *shaliach* of His day.³⁵ However Jesus never referred to Himself as an *apostolos*. This could be explained by the fact that *apostolos* was a Greek term and the vernacular language of Jesus was believed to be the Hebrew cognate of Aramaic.

Jesus' understanding of Himself and His role was one who was sent by God with the authority of God to carry out God's mission of redemption. Jesus did not view Himself as having any authority of His own except that which God had given Him. Again this role is consistent with the Hebrew understanding of *shaliach* and with later New Testament understanding of *apostolos*.

As a result of Jesus' understanding of His role as a sent one or apostle, Jesus in turn exercised authority to send others out in His name to do the mission of God. As discussed earlier, in Luke 6:13 Jesus selected the twelve who were referred to as apostles. In Matthew's account found in chapter 10,

³⁵ Caldwell, 42.

Jesus appoints the Twelve and then bestows on them authority to preach, teach and heal in His name. However, after this chapter and along with Luke's gospel, the writers of both books switch from referring to them as apostles and call them disciples. This is best seen in Luke 9:10: it says that the apostles reported to Him everything they had done after He had sent them out. Then in verse 14 they are no longer called *apostles* but rather *disciples*. Why the change in terminology?

Scholars such as J. Norval Geldenhuys believes that at this point in the ministry of the disciples, they were appointed with power and authority (apostleship) to carry out their "field education." Once they had carried out this responsibility and they were back in the presence of Jesus, their authority had ceased and they were once again disciples.³⁶

Their temporary apostleship would soon become life long at the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel states it best. In Matthew 28:18-20 we read these words of Jesus:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

In this passage, Jesus states that His authority was received by God and was confirmed by His resurrection (Ephesians 1:19-23). He sends out His disciples and His future disciples to fulfill the mission of God, that being the redemption of man.

In John 20:21-23, we see Jesus addressing His disciples, with the exception of Judas who is now dead and Thomas who is absent from the gathering and sharing with them their mission:

Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

³⁶ Geldenhuys, 58.

This is the same mission and authority that God has given Him. Jesus came into the world to carry out His Father's purpose and that task was completed. He now commissions His disciples to carry on that task. He even bestows upon them the power to fulfill that task, the power of the Holy Spirit.³⁷

This passage is significant to confirming the authority of one who is sent by Jesus. In John's Gospel, Jesus refers to His being sent or *apollustos* by the Father. This was His authorization to do the things that He was to do. Now this same authority was being given the disciples and subsequently given to every believer to carry out God's plan. If Jesus had not been sent by God, then He had no authority and thus the church has no authority to do what we do.

This commission found in John, and Jesus' other commissions found in Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15 and Luke 24:44-49 and Acts 1:8, were and still are the basis for the church's activity as sent ones to the world. As J.D. Graber writes: "The Christians of the early church always labored under, or to express it more accurately, were motivated by, the thought that they were a "sent" people, sent to accomplish the purpose that God had for them."³⁸

As one reads the Book of Acts, it is seen that the Twelve, the original eleven along with Matthias who was added after the death of Judas, spent the majority of their mission work within the confines of the Jewish community. It is not until Peter's encounter with Cornelius and the persecution of the church that the apostles began to carry out the sending command of Christ.

Paul and the Issue of Apostleship

As the early church begins to fulfill Christ's command, God raises up men and women outside of the twelve who worked to see God's mission fulfilled. The best known of these is Paul. As discussed earlier in this paper, there is dispute about whether Paul or others can be called "apostles" since they did

³⁷ Frank Gaebelin, ed., Expositors Bible Commentary, New Testament, vol. 9, John by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.), 331.

³⁸ J.D. Graber, The Church Apostolic (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1960), 1.

not actually spend time with Jesus. In Paul's case, he could call himself an apostle based on his Damascus Road conversion experience. It was Jesus Christ, Himself who appeared to Paul and commissioned him for service to the Kingdom. Paul even makes reference to this experience several times in his writing (1 Corinthians 15:3-11; Galatians 1:1, 11-16). Luke relates in Acts 9:1-22 and 22:1-21 the details of Paul's calling and commissioning by Christ. In his book, Supreme Authority, J. Norval Geldenhuys expresses how in these Acts passages that it is definitely Jesus who called, equipped and sent forth Paul to the Gentiles. Geldenhuys writes: "It appears clearly how the Sovereign Lord Himself changed, called and appointed Paul to be His apostle in the fullest sense of the word - one clothed with authority and endued with power of the Sender, to go forth and act as His representative in the fulfilling of the commission given to him."³⁹

Paul's Damascus Road experience gives insight on how Paul viewed his authority in Christ and how the early church could have viewed the role of the *apostolos* as synonymous with *shaliach*. When Paul left Jerusalem to go and arrest the Christians in Damascus, the scriptures tell us that Paul requested letters of the priest in Jerusalem to arrest those in Damascus. In this context, Paul is serving as the *shaliach* of the high priest of Jerusalem. The reference to "letters" is indicative of *shaliach* language. It was by these "letters" that Paul was granted authority to arrest and deliver Christians to the officials in Jerusalem.⁴⁰

From Paul's experience it is not difficult to imagine how quickly the word *apostolos* could have been given *shaliach* meanings in the early church. Paul himself changed from a *shaliach* of the Jewish leadership to a *shaliach* of Jesus Christ. It is important to note that he was still a *shaliach* throughout the entire process. In other words, Paul was still chosen and sent as a fully authorized representative, only now his special commission as well as his Sender (and authority) were changed. His commission as

³⁹ Geldenhuys, 63.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 62.

persecutor of Hellenistic Jewish Christians changed to Christian *missionary* to the Gentiles; his being sent by the high priest changed to his being sent by Jesus.

This presented a problem for Paul, in that his commission was now to the Gentiles. How would they understand the concept of *shaliach* in relationship to his commission? The problem was solved by taking a word that they were already familiar with in a verbal sense, namely *apostello*. Dietrich Muller, would strongly disagree with this solution. However he gives the best evidence in support of it when he says:

‘...in secular Greek ‘to send’ (*apostello*) was used as a technical term for divine authorization, and its substantive was used, admittedly very rarely, with the meaning ‘messenger’. Since the Hellenistic churches could not be assumed to have an understanding of *shaliach*, the Gentile Christians would understand *apostolos* in exactly this sense. If we consider too that the {Septuagint} uses this term for the mission of the prophets, we shall ask ourselves whether [Old Testament] prophecy cannot serve as a positive basis for the special concept of apostleship in the primitive church. If that is so, the primitive church chose, as it so often did, an unfamiliar word, seldom used in secular language, with little ready-made content, in order to fill it with one expressing its own conceptions.’⁴¹

Paul certainly saw his own ministry as being an *apostolos* to the Gentiles in the *shaliach* sense. This is obvious in the way he began the majority of his letters. The phrase--"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" is used three times by Paul to designate himself: 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; and Colossians 1:1. 1 Corinthians 1:1 is very similar but with the words, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." The salutations found in Romans 1:1: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God" and in Galatians 1:1: "Paul, an apostle sent not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father" also give evidence of Paul viewing his own apostleship in terms of *shaliach*.⁴²

⁴¹ Dietrich Muller. "Apostle", Dictionary of New Testament Theology, vol. 1, Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 128-135.

⁴² Caldwell, 58.

Paul understood his ministry in the context of being one given authority to share the Gospel. He believed that others also had an authoritative sending. In Romans 1:5 we find Paul writing these words:

Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

In using "we," in this passage the question must be asked of whom Paul is referring. Some scholars believe that it does not refer to his readers, because they did not possess apostleship. Some scholars believe that Paul is referring to other apostles, of whom the Roman believers must have heard. This is a possibility, though it is an unexpected development and is not amplified. The problem is complicated by the mention of the intended sphere of labor "among all the Gentiles." This wording makes the limitation of the "we" to Paul (as a literary plural) natural, since the Gentiles constituted his special field of labor where the word "obey" corresponds to the word "obedience" in this passage. On the other hand, "all the Gentiles" can equally well be rendered, "all the nations" or "all peoples." This would favor the wider reference of "we" to all the apostles, since Israel would be included as one of the peoples.⁴³

C.K. Barrett and others believe that Paul's use of "we" is an actual reference to himself and his own apostleship. Paul is speaking of receiving God's grace and his own apostolic commission.⁴⁴

Scholars like R.C.H. Lenski view Paul's reference of "we" in a different perspective. Lenski feels that Paul is referring to all Roman believers. Lenski writes, "A great assumption underlines the phrase, namely that, like all Christians, the Romans are moved by Paul's own desire for extending faith's obedience among all the nations. The missionary impulse is native to the church."⁴⁵

The text here in Romans does not give enough evidence for a clear and definite understanding of who the "we" refers to. Knowing this, how does one interpret this passage? This writer feels that Paul is referring to the Roman believers and that he is underscoring the same commission that Christ gave to go

⁴³ Gaebelien, 334.

⁴⁴ C.K. Barrett. *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper Row, 1957), 15, 21.

⁴⁵ R.C.H. Lenski, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1936.), 46.

out into the world. In Romans 1:1 and other passages, Paul gives evidence of his own apostleship and his ministry to the Gentile. Here in verse 5, he speaks of a ministry that we all have as believers in Christ. We are thankful for the grace that we have received in Christ and for the sense of purpose and commission that He has given us to carry out His mission to the world.

Paul and the Gift of Apostleship

As one studies the New Testament, he will find four separate lists of specific spiritual gifts listed for the early church. All of these gift lists are found within Paul's letters to the churches: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11. As we explore these lists, we will find that they are not exhaustive in and of themselves. For example, Paul lists the gift of prophet and prophecy in all four references, yet only mentions the gift of administration in 1 Corinthians 12:28. The reason for this is that Paul was writing to specific churches and addressing their individual needs at that time. Thus he listed those gifts which would be relevant to the audience in which he was addressing. For the purpose of this paper, I will only be looking at the gift list found in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11.

The gift of apostleship is an example of one of those gifts and shows that Paul was not trying to give an exhaustive list since it is only found in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11. Thus to understand what Paul meant by the gift of apostleship, then one needs to look at these two passages. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul lists the gifts in a hierarchal form. Paul writes:

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

This numbering of the gifts either meant that Paul had some form of ranking system⁴⁶ or that he was possibly using a list that was handed down to him.⁴⁷ According to Siegfried Schatzmann, whether or

⁴⁶ Dale Moody, "Charismatic and Official Ministries," Interpretation, vol. 19 (April 1965): 168-181.

not Paul intentionally ranks the gifts according to priority or whether he received them as ranked in tradition, the point is that the three gifts listed here have been given prominence over the other gifts.⁴⁸

Because of his usage of this ranking system Paul was showing that the apostles did come first in the New Testament church. The logic of this ranking is that the church could not have come into existence if it were not for the apostles who started them. The other gifts follow suit since they are gifts used to help build up the church to maturity.

This ranking does not in any way suggest a superiority of one gift over the other. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul speaks extensively against esteeming one gift over the other. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:24-27

...while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

As one continues to study Paul's writings concerning apostleship, the significant role of an apostle becomes more apparent in the gift listing of Ephesians 4:11-12 in which Paul writes:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...

In this passage, Paul writes that it is Christ Himself who appoints these gifts of leadership within the church. According to John Calvin in his commentary on Ephesians, Paul speaks not of gifts, but rather of positions of leadership. Calvin says that when Christ appoints a man to a position of leadership within

⁴⁷ Rudolf Schnackenburg, "Apostles Before and During Paul's Time," trans by M. Kwiran and W. Ward Gasque, In *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.), 289.

⁴⁸ Siegfried Schatzmann, *A Pauline Theology of Charisma* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987.), 44.

the church, He not only appoints him to that position but also endows the gifts that are necessary to perform the functions of said office.⁴⁹

In reading Paul's description of these positions and gifts, one has to refer back to verses 7-10.

Here Paul writes,

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.' What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.

Paul in this passage is laying the foundation for the authority of the leadership gifts or positions found in verse 11. Paul explains in verse 7 that as an individual believer "each one of us" within the body of Christ enjoys a portion of God's grace. The grace he speaks of here is the equipping grace of God rather than saving grace. The use of the word *Charis* (grace) here is not the same usage as *charisma* (grace-gift), but denotes the grace of Christ provided for and manifested within the gift. The distribution of grace, and so the distribution of grace-gifts, is in Christ's own hands and is given as He decides.⁵⁰

In verse 8 Paul includes a quotation from the Old Testament which confirms God's giving of gifts. Paul writes:

This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.'

Many scholars believe that this is taken from Psalm 68:18 with some changes on Paul's part. Here are the Psalmist words:

When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious-- that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.

The picture that both Paul and the Psalmist are painting is the illustration of a military victor who has the right and authority to give gifts to those with whom he is identified. Whereas Romans 12 and

⁴⁹ John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 277.

⁵⁰ Frank E. Gaebelin ed. Expositors Bible Commentary, New Testament, vol. 11, Ephesians by A. Skevington Wood (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 57.

1 Corinthians 12 speak more of gifts given to individual believers, Paul is speaking here in verses 8 and 11 of the victor, being Christ giving gifted individuals to the church.⁵¹

In verses 9-10, Paul primarily gives a commentary on the word *ascended* found in verse 8. These two verses are the basis of the authority of Christ to bestow gifts. Paul writes:

What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.

Paul is stating here that because of Christ's incarnation, He has Lordship and authority over the entire universe. It is because of this authority that He has the power to present to His church both gifts and gifted people to carry out His mission to the world, the extending of the Kingdom of God. These gifted positions are not created by the Church but rather positions appointed by Christ. Thus those whom Christ has given to the Church, are also given the authority of Christ to perform the duties of their leadership position.

When one reads verse 11 in an English translation some of the meaning of the Greek text is not fully understood. The word *some* in the Greek is actually *men*. According to Greek scholars H.E. Dana and J.R. Mantey, the common usage for the word *men* is intended to help differentiate between the words or clause with which it occurs from that which it follows.⁵² When *men* are used in conjunction with *de* the difference is enhanced. A good translation of this would be the English phrase "on the one hand." In Ephesians 4:11 *men* is found in the first clause and "de" is found in the next three. Therefore, verse 11 would best be rendered "It was He who on the one hand gave some to be apostles and on the other prophets and on the other hand evangelists and on the other hand pastors and teachers."⁵³ With this

⁵¹ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck ed., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986.), 634.

⁵² H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan. 1927), 261.

⁵³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary, Ephesians* (Dallas: Word Book Publishing. 1990), 249.

translation, the importance of each position or gift is emphasized. These were not positions given only as a group, but rather each one serves an important purpose within the context of the ministry of the church.

In Paul's writing in Ephesians 4:11 the first two groups of leaders mentioned are the apostles and prophets. Previously in Ephesians 2:19-21 and in Ephesians 3:4-6, Paul shares the vital importance of these two positions within the context of the church. In Ephesians 2:19-21, we find these words from Paul:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

Paul expresses here that the apostles and the prophets are the foundation on which the church is built. This phrase could mean possibly four things; (a) that the foundation was built by them, (b) the foundation came from them, (c) they own a foundation or (d) they are the foundation. The Greek text here leans toward the translation "the foundation which consists of the apostles and prophets." This translation fits into the context of "Jesus Himself is the chief cornerstone."⁵⁴ The apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church which needed to be aligned with Christ who was the chief cornerstone. The rest of the church was built upon these men.

Who were these apostles and prophets that Paul spoke of? I believe that Ephesians 3:4-6 gives us an idea of who these men were. In this passage Paul writes:

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Those apostles and prophets were the authorized recipients and proclaimers of the revelation of Christ. The apostles were those with special authority from their commissioning by Christ while the prophets were those with charismatic authority. Both of these gave an interpretation of what God had done in Christ. These apostles and prophets mentioned both in chapter 2 and 3 are with reference to those like

⁵⁴ Walvoord and Zuck, 627.

Paul who had received their commissioning directly from Christ and not traveling apostles, prophets and missionaries that would be seen later in the life of the church.⁵⁵ The gift here is not a particular gift given to someone but rather ones who Christ has gifted to the church to carry out His purpose.

This difference can especially be seen in chapter 3 of Ephesians, when Paul refers to the apostles and prophets as “holy.” Nowhere else in Paul’s writing is the distinction made of any other apostle or church leader being “holy.” Paul’s designation here gives the impression that these apostles and prophets were especially “set apart,” which is the meaning of the word *holy*, to receive the revelation of God. According to scholars this designation or privileged role can only be associated with those who have seen and have been commissioned by the risen Christ in particular the Twelve and Paul.⁵⁶ This would be consistent with Paul’s thought here in this passage due to the fact that Paul is referring to the revelation of God to certain leaders in the church instead of the church as a whole. However, the reader must remember that elsewhere in Ephesians, all of God’s people are “holy ones”, the saints, because they are set apart for God. The designation of “holy” in this passage is a designation of being set apart by God to receive the “mystery of Christ” and to share that mystery with the Gentiles.

This still leaves the question of whom was Paul referring in Ephesians 4:11. Were the apostles of Ephesians 4:11, the Twelve plus Paul; or were these people gifted as were the evangelists, to spread the message of the Gospel and start churches? In light of the reference in chapter 3 in Ephesians, one must assume that these apostles given to the church are the Twelve and Paul. This role however is contrary to many who use the Ephesians 4 reference as evidence that there is a gift of apostleship. In light of Paul’s writing, there is a function of an apostle just as there is a function of evangelist, pastor/ teacher and prophet. However, the role of apostle in this case is the role of the Twelve and Paul. As far as the gift of apostleship, the only gifting is the ability that Christ bestows upon one who He leads to serve in that function.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 153.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 179.

Parts of the role of both groups of apostles are the same; the proclamation of the Gospel and the seeing of new converts come to Christ. The authority is somewhat different. The authority and role of the Twelve and Paul can best be described by Herman Ridderbos in his book, Paul, An Outline of His Theology. In this book, Ridderbos states:

‘As apostles of Jesus Christ their word has absolute authority in the church, and they lay claim to obedience (Romans 1:5; II Corinthians 2:9, Philippians 2:12). They are receivers and bearers of the tradition, the foundational gospel (I Corinthians 15:3-7; 11:23; I Thessalonians 2:13), the guarantors of the *depositum fidei* (I Timothy 6:20; II Timothy 1:12, 14), the layers of the foundation of the church (I Corinthians 3:10; 9:1-2; Ephesians 2:20); their writings are intended for liturgical reading in the church (Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 5:27), the canon for the church to come.”⁵⁷

If the role of the Twelve and Paul is one of laying the foundations of the church, then what is the role of those others found in the New Testament and in Paul’s writings who are referred to as apostles? Again, through researching the writings of Paul, one can see that the apostles mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 is a reference to the Twelve and Paul. These apostles were to help equip the early Christians in the doctrine of the church. These apostles were not the traveling or missionary apostles mentioned later in the New Testament.

Other New Testament Apostles

In Acts 14:4 and 14:14; Paul and Barnabas are both referred to as apostles. In Acts 14, we find these words:

The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. (Acts 14:4)

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting... (Acts 14:14)

⁵⁷ Herman Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 449.

In this we see that Barnabas is referred to as an apostle. The Greek word here being *apostolos*; one sent as an ambassador.⁵⁸ Yet nowhere in the New Testament is there evidence that Barnabas received the same kind of commission directly from Jesus as did Paul and the twelve. However Barnabas did play a key role in the early church. It was Barnabas who was sent to Antioch to report to the Jerusalem Council about the happenings at Antioch (Acts 11:22), and it was Barnabas who was commissioned by the church at Antioch to go out to do the work which the Lord has called both him and Paul to do. These events in the life of Barnabas have led some scholars to consider him equal with the Twelve and Paul, yet as stated above, there is no biblical evidence that Barnabas ever received a direct commission from Jesus.⁵⁹

Even though Barnabas never received a direct commission from Christ, he was commissioned by the Holy Spirit and confirmed by elders of the church of Antioch to fulfill what would later be known as missionary journeys with Paul. In Acts 13:1-4, we find this account:

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul, While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

While Barnabas and Saul were carrying out their activities at Antioch, the Holy Spirit directed that they should be set apart for a special ministry. Luke says, "After they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (*apelysan*; lit., "released them" from their duties at Antioch).⁶⁰ Luke does not tell us how the Spirit made His Will known, though we may assume that it was through a revelation given to one of the believers. Neither does Luke tell us the nature of the special

⁵⁸ Polhill, 311.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Acts of the Holy Spirit: A Modern Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2000), 289.

ministry for which the two were set apart, though from what follows in the Book of Acts it is obvious that we are meant to understand that it was to be a mission to Gentiles. We can see by Luke's words that this was a ministry calling from the Holy Spirit and that the leaders of the Church at Antioch attested to the validity of the revelation received, and laid hands on the missionaries, and sent them out. The calling was not by the laying on of hands by the church, but rather the calling was by the Holy Spirit. The church's laying on of hands was a gesture or symbol confirming that call.⁶¹ This is important to realize when one looks at assessing church planters. The call to serve as a church planter is from God through His Holy Spirit, but that call will be validated by the faith community, the church, just as the Antioch church validated Paul's and Barnabas' call to missions by the laying on of hands. Nevertheless, we may view the details of their call and commission; ultimately, Luke insists in the scripture, that Barnabas and Saul were "sent on their way by the Holy Spirit." This is why Barnabas is referred to as an apostle by many for he had received a calling to go out from the church to share the message from the Lord.⁶² In that role, Barnabas along with Paul, was used to evangelize others to Christ and then lead them to form congregations. His commission is not one directly given by Jesus Christ, yet Barnabas does have a commission of God upon his life to fulfill a specific task as an ambassador for God's Kingdom.

In Galatians 1:19 we find where some scholars believe Paul is referring to James, the brother of Jesus, as an apostle. However, it is not clear from this verse if this is the case or not. Paul writes:

I saw none of the other apostles-- only James, the Lord's brother

James did play a critical role in the Jerusalem church as we see in Paul's reference to him in Galatians 2:9 which states:

James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews

⁶¹ Polhill, 290.

⁶² Ibid.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:7 makes things clear that Jesus did appear to James after His resurrection, “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.” Again the context does not definitely show whether or not James was equal with the Twelve, but it would appear that James functioned with just as much authority as Paul and the Twelve.⁶³ This authority however cannot be stated with certainty because of the lack of New Testament evidence of a commission by Jesus.

In the scriptures, there are three individuals who were sent as apostles from the local churches. These three individuals were Judas, Silas and Epaphroditus. In Acts 15:22-34, right after the Jerusalem Council, it is stated “the apostles and elders with the whole church” felt it proper to send the prophets Judas and Silas along with Paul and Barnabas back to the church at Antioch. In Acts 15:27 and 15:33 the word *apostello* is used to describe the authority of the messengers from the church at Jerusalem. Judas and Silas were the authorized representatives of the Jerusalem church which had the task of sharing the results of the Jerusalem Council and then to return. Once back in Jerusalem, their role as apostle was completed.⁶⁴

In the same way, Epaphroditus is called an apostle by Paul in Philippians 2:25: “your messenger or *apostolon* whom you sent to take care of my needs.” In the context the word *apostle* is used in reference to Epaphroditus in the sense of an authorized messenger from the church at Philippi. His task was to carry the news of the Philippian church to Paul and to take care of Paul. Once Epaphroditus returned to Philippi his apostleship was concluded. There is some speculation that because the actual sending verb in both verse 25 and verse 28 is the Greek word *pempo*, that the actual *shaliach* sending Epaphroditus is questionable. However, Paul’s usage of *apostolos* does imply a *shaliach* connotation.⁶⁵

It is at this point in our discussion that there is some question about the role of these apostles. These men were not commissioned by Jesus; they were not missionaries who went to plant churches (even

⁶³ C.K. Barrett, *The Signs of An Apostle* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 73.

⁶⁴ Caldwell, 73.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

though later Silas would become a missionary partner of Paul's and Paul would refer to him as an apostle in 1 Thessalonians 2:6). These men were messengers who were given authority by their commissioning body (the local church) to carry a specific message and perform a specific task. Once that task was completed, their authority ceased. Unlike the Twelve and Paul, who were commissioned with the direct authority of Jesus to establish the doctrine and foundation of the church, these apostles received the commission of the church to go on specific assignments and to specific places to carry out the message and mission of the church. Other examples of this are Andronicus and Junias who Paul refers to in Romans 16:7. There are some that believe that Andronicus and Junias were a husband and wife missionary couple.⁶⁶ They are also believed by some scholars to be itinerant missionaries who were sent out by the church to spread the Gospel and plant churches just like Paul, Barnabas and Silas.⁶⁷ The apostleship of such individuals is solely based on the authority of the church recognizing that these individuals were best suited for the task at hand and the church authorizing them to carry out the task under its authority.

This understanding can be seen further by the reference in both 2 Corinthians 11:12-13 and Revelation 2:2 of false apostles. In these passages we read:

And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:12-13)

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. (Revelation 2:2)

The context of 2 Corinthians 11:12-13 makes it clear that such false prophets were claiming to be *sheluchim* of Jesus; however both Paul and the writer of Revelation condemn them as being false. They did not have the correct teaching, authority or conduct.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Trent Butler, ed., Holman Bible Dictionary (Nashville: Holman Publishers, 1991), 827.

⁶⁷ J.B. Lightfoot, Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, 8th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1888), 17.

⁶⁸ Barrett, 40.

As seen throughout the scriptures, the role of apostleship is based on the authority of the one who is sending the messenger. As in the case of the Twelve and Paul, their authority, message and mission were commissioned directly by Jesus Himself. Their authority was to continue until their deaths, for it was at that time that the foundation of Christ's church would be established. No one since them would or could be considered in their apostolic role because Jesus had established His church and its doctrine through them. For someone to say that he was an apostle with the same authority as the Twelve, would be committing heresy and would be the same as the false apostles of 2 Corinthians 11:12-13 and Revelation 2:2. Unfortunately this abuse of authority and confusion of apostleship is still prevalent today. Some denominations and sects such as some groups of Pentecostalism, Mormonism and even Catholicism (papal authority based on Peter's authority and apostleship: apostolic succession) feel that many of their leaders have the apostolic authority to create new doctrine within the church.

There are some church leaders, such as C. Peter Wagner, who define the term or role of apostleship differently. Wagner describes apostleship as "the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ which enables them to assume and exercise general leadership over a number of churches with an extraordinary authority in spiritual matters that is spontaneously recognized and appreciated by those churches."⁶⁹

Wagner believes that the gift of apostle is the continuing of the office of apostle and that it is still relevant for today's church. Wagner bases this claim on Paul's words found in 1 Corinthians 15:5,7.

and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,

This definition differs from the biblical and historical understanding of the role and office of apostleship because Wagner states that the one who is recognized as an apostle holds authority over certain churches and gives judgment on spiritual matters and at times be autocratic in their authority. This authority that Wagner speaks of gives one the impression that he who is the apostle can state doctrine and give

⁶⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura: Regal, 1979), 207- 208.

interpretation to all spiritual matters, in essence, serve in the same apostolic role of the Twelve and Paul.⁷⁰ As discussed previously in this dissertation, this authoritative role was only given to the Twelve and Paul because of their direct commission by Christ and that their office ceased at their deaths.

The role of apostle as it pertains as one sent under the *sheluchim* of the Holy Spirit through local churches, is appointed to represent those churches as apostles in preaching of the Gospel, planting of churches and carrying out the mission of the church throughout the world. These apostles, who would later be called missionaries, did not have authority in defining doctrine but rather the authority of proclaiming the Gospel and the teaching of doctrine that had already been established.

These distinctions are important in understanding how the New Testament uses the word *apostle*. This usage is important in understanding how the role of “being sent” was understood throughout church history and how it is understood to represent today’s missionary and church planter. Even though the term *apostle* is no longer used in mainline Christianity, the role of the *apostle* is still being seen in the church. That role is one of doing cross-cultural missions and church planting. Just as *shaliach* who were sent as ambassadors to other cultures to represent their master’s interest, today’s church planter is sent into an unchurched, non Christian culture to represent the work of the Master, Jesus Christ. There are many in today’s church who would say that the role of apostle would only apply to cross cultural situations, namely overseas missions.⁷¹ This thinking does have some merit; however, after examining the scriptures, the role of apostle could be applied to today’s church planter here in North America. The apostle of Biblical times was a special messenger or envoy, sent with certain authority to carryout the task of their master. Today’s church planter is an envoy in service to Christ, granted authority and recognition by the church to carryout the task of the church. This task is the proclamation of the Gospel to a world without Christ. The church planter in contemporary times is like the apostles of the New Testament in the fact that he receives authority based on the authority of the church. This is important for several reasons: the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 208.

⁷¹ Caldwell, 105-107.

church is the representative of Christ here on earth thus has the authority to do His Kingdom's work; the church preserves the doctrine that Christ has established through the Twelve and Paul and has the task to see that any new congregations hold to that doctrine. Also the church has the responsibility to recognize those whom Christ has gifted to do His mission of evangelizing and establishing congregations among the lost.

Historical Implications of Apostleship

In looking at the historical aspects of the issue of apostleship, throughout church history there have been those persons who have exhibited the marks of being missionary apostles and have been instrumental in the establishment of new churches. These persons serve as a model for the qualities in church planters and examples of their authority and role as one "being sent."

As stated previously in this dissertation, there are those scholars who believe that the role of apostleship disappeared after the death of the apostles and the establishment of the office of bishop in the early church. However, these scholars fail to see the various usages of the term apostle. These scholars are correct that after the death of the Twelve and Paul, the official office of apostle (one who sets doctrine and the foundation of the church) ceased functioning. This happened due to the fact that the teachings and doctrine of Christ had been established and put in written form through the Gospels and the Epistles.⁷² Yet, the death of the Twelve and Paul did not cease the sending actions of the Holy Spirit through the church.

Apostleship and the Institutionalization of the Early Church

Some of the difficulty in correctly understanding the continuation of the apostolic ministry beyond the New Testament times is the development of the office of bishop and the eventual

⁷² Caldwell, 78-79.

institutionalization of the church. The early church of the book of Acts started organizing and forming itself early in its life. As we saw in Acts 6, the church soon began to appoint leadership to care for other matters other than teaching of the Word. Even Paul, whose main focus was the proclamation of the Gospel, soon found himself returning to areas where he had made converts and appointing leadership in those emerging congregations (see Acts 14:21-23). Paul gave guidelines to both Timothy and Titus on how to select leadership for the church (see 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:1-9). Even with this organization the main thrust of the early church was the proclamation of the Gospel. This was fueled by the belief of the early church apostles that Jesus' return would be imminent and that the Gospel needed to be spread quickly.

As time passed and Jesus' return was delayed, there became a need in the church to help organize and oversee the now growing church. By this time there begun a three- fold institutionalized ministry of deacons, presbyters and bishops. This structure that was once dependent or started by the work of evangelist, prophets and missionary apostles soon became independent from them. This institutional structure soon became responsible for the operation and growth of the church.⁷³

Through the work of J.B. Lightfoot we receive an understanding of how the early church developed this three-fold ministry structure. According to Lightfoot, the office of deacon was an entirely new office created by a special emergency and progress of the church.⁷⁴ The offices of presbyter and bishop were borrowed from surrounding cultures. The office of presbyter was borrowed from Jewish synagogue government, where a body of elders or presbyters would be chosen to direct the worship and watch over the well-being of the society.⁷⁵

There is no evidence that the role of apostle ever developed into the office of bishop or presbyter. Lightfoot writes, "If the two (apostle and bishop) had been identical, the substitution of the one name for

⁷³ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 168.

⁷⁴ Lightfoot, 192.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 192.

the other would require some explanation. But in fact the function of apostle and the bishop differed widely. The apostle, like the prophet or evangelist, held no local office. He was essentially, as his name denotes, a missionary, moving about from place to place, founding and confirming new brotherhoods.⁷⁶

The developing of institutionalized leadership within the church can be seen in two stages. The first stage, the missionary apostle (Paul or others like him) planted a new church and supervised its growth either physically or by correspondence. The second stage, the missionary apostle appointed another to live in the planted church for a length of time to supervise its growth and development.⁷⁷ This can be seen in Paul's appointing of Timothy to Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3; 3:2) and Titus to Crete (Titus 1:5-7). These two examples show that by AD 60, the church was focusing on instituting and appointing leadership to newly planted congregations while the missionary apostle moved from place to place to plant new churches.

Apostleship In the Second Century Church

By the second century the office of bishop became one of greater importance while the role of the missionary apostle took a lesser role. This shift can be attributed to the doctrinal disputes that began to arise within the church. Gnosticism in particular, caused the office and role of the bishop to gain importance as it was now up to individual bishops to maintain doctrinal soundness. The bishop soon became the guardian of the church to see that the authentic doctrine that Christ had given to Twelve and Paul preached be maintained. There was a shift from proclamation of the Gospel to the world to a protecting of the message of Christ from heresy.⁷⁸

In the second century we discover through the *Didache* and the writings of the early church fathers that there is evidence to suggest the work of missionary apostles even though the office of bishop

⁷⁶ Ibid., 196.

⁷⁷ Caldwell, 81-82.

⁷⁸ Arnold Ehrhardt, *The Apostolic Succession In the First Two Centuries of the Church* (London: Lutterworth, 1953), 5.

took more prominence.⁷⁹ These writings show that the missionary apostles worked in tandem with more settled offices of the church such as the office of bishop. These missionary apostles however continued to do cross cultural mission work increasingly without the “apostle” designation. Very little is known of the specifics of the missionary apostles mentioned in these writings, but they do show that these apostles were successful since the Christian church was spread throughout the Roman Empire.⁸⁰

Much of the success for the expansion of Christianity during these early centuries was not due solely to the missionary apostles. Michael Green makes this point clear when he says:

“So far we have been considering the evangelistic outreach of what one might loosely call ‘professional Christian propagandists’. But this must not lead us to suppose that the ‘professional’ played an unduly large part in the spread of Christianity. The very fact that we are so imperfectly aware of how evangelism was carried out and by whom, should make us sensitive to the possibility that the little man, the unknown ordinary man, the man who left no literary remains was the prime agent in mission; ...Christianity was from its inception a lay movement, and so it continued for a remarkably long time.”⁸¹

Thus, it was the ordinary Christians carrying out his and her obligations as sent ones into the world laboring with the more "professional" spiritually gifted missionary apostles working across cultures-who together helped spread the Gospel far and wide.⁸²

Apostleship and the Committed Communities

Progressively, the Christian church became more institutionalized. This became especially apparent when Christianity became the religion of the state under the Roman emperor Constantine. From this time onward the sending bodies of the missionary apostles took on a new form. From the evidence of Acts 13:1-4 it appears that the primary sending vehicle of the missionary apostles in the New Testament

⁷⁹ The Apostolic Fathers, 2nd ed., trans. by J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Hammer, Didache (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 155-157.

⁸⁰ Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity, vol. 1 (New York: Harper Row, 1953), 78.

⁸¹ Green, 172-173.

⁸² Ibid., 174.

church was the mobile missionary team, sent out by the Holy Spirit through the local church. While the evidence of the early church fathers implies that some of the missionary apostles were itinerants wandering about on their own, it is safe to assume that, by and large, the Acts 13 pattern continued well into the second century.⁸³

With Christianity becoming an official state religion changes began to occur. Church historian, Kenneth Scott LaTourette writes: “As larger numbers came into the Church and the descendants of converts remained in it, Christians tended to conform more and more to the social order in which they were set. Against this... came protests in the form of efforts to organize communities which would live according to the precepts of Jesus and the apostles.”⁸⁴

As the church grew in this manner there arose a new expression of Christian organization pertaining to missions. This new organization was what Charles Mellis defines as, “committed communities.” These committed communities or monastic communities as they are generally known, became the main sending base for missionary apostles from the early church to the Reformation. Among some of the best known of the missionary apostles were the Celtic trio of Patrick, Columba and Columbanus; the English trio of Augustine, Willibrord and Boniface; and those monastic order makers: Benedict, Dominic and Francis.⁸⁵

In the fifth century Patrick, originally from Great Britain, was taken as a slave to Ireland. Six years later he escaped only to return, after monastic preparation, to set up a unique monastic pattern that became increasingly mission-oriented. Building on the work of Patrick, Columba and later Columbanus established networks of Irish monasteries that became the headquarters of a variety of missionary activities. Columba journeyed north to the island of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland. From this base he established a chain of monasteries across Scotland which in turn evangelized the various Scottish

⁸³ Ibid., 173.

⁸⁴ Kenneth Scott LaTourette, *The First Five Centuries*, vol.1, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), 354.

⁸⁵ Charles J. Mellis, *Committed Communities* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1976), 20.

peoples. Columbanus repeated the pattern of his namesake. With twelve fellow monks he went from Ireland to the continent and eventually to the Franks in eastern France. Wherever he went he likewise established monasteries and fashioned them into instruments for missionary sending activity.⁸⁶

Why were these Irish missionary apostles successful? Mellis attributes it to the monastic systems: "Since the monks traveled in small missionary bands, they had the felt support of two communities: their immediate colleagues and their monastic house in the Emerald Isle to which, because of their total commitment, they seldom returned."⁸⁷ John T. McNeill adds: "For more than half a millennium a stream of educated and dedicated men poured from the monasteries of Ireland to 'go pilgrimage for Christ' wherever they might feel themselves divinely led. They were not conscripted or appointed by their superiors. They would obtain the consent of their abbots and start out eagerly as response to the divine imperative."⁸⁸

A Christian presence has been in parts of England as early as the second century. Although in the Roman Empire, England retained much of its individuality and the Christians there were more drawn to the Irish churches than to Rome. In 596 Pope Gregory, not pleased with this situation, sent a mission of monks led by Augustine, to England to bring the English churches under the Roman church authority. Stephen Neill comments on this strategy: "Gregory, himself a monk, had seen the vital part that the monk and the cloister could play in missionary work among the new nations."⁸⁹ Augustine was successful and

⁸⁶ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York: Penguin, 1964), 56-57.

⁸⁷ Mellis, 23.

⁸⁸ John T. McNeil, *The Celtic Churches: A History AD. 200 to 1200* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 155.

⁸⁹ Neill, 67.

like Patrick in Ireland, prepared the way for future mission's activity from Great Britain itself. The missionary zeal of the Irish spread south to the Christians in Great Britain in the 7th and 8th centuries.⁹⁰

Years later, the Englishman Willibrord, also a monk, became the apostle of the Frisians in what is now Holland and part of Belgium for whom "the monastery was the center of the whole work and from which the monks went out on missionary journeys and to which they returned for rest and renewal."⁹¹

Upon Willibrord's foundation, Boniface carried out his own mission work. This monk, under the tutelage of Willibrord, became the first missionary apostle to engage in cross-cultural work among the people of the German frontier.⁹²

Gregory and Augustine, and to a lesser extent Willibrord and Boniface, had received their training in the Benedictine monastic system that had been developed earlier in the sixth century. Benedict established a monastery at Monte Cassino in Italy, as well as the rule by which the monastery would run. This rule became the standard in the West and the model from which later rules derived. The basic components of the rule contained the following elements: "a permanent, self-contained, self-supporting garrison of Christ's soldiers" whose basic purpose was not to win the world, but rather to win the spiritual battles within their own lives.⁹³

Nevertheless, almost in spite of themselves the Benedictine monks, by their very adherence to the rule, became the vanguard of cross-cultural missionary activity in the medieval world. As LaTourette stated: "It was chiefly through them that the faith was carried beyond its existing frontiers."⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Terry, Smith, and Anderson, 177-180.

⁹¹ Neill, 73-74.

⁹² Terry, Smith, Anderson, 185.

⁹³ Caldwell, 91.

⁹⁴ LaTourette, 336.

With the passage of time, however, even the Benedictine rule suffered from the sterility of institutionalization and was in need of reform. Both Cluny and Citeaux instituted reforms by starting new monastic houses. Further reforms came from the Dominicans and the Franciscans.

Unlike the Benedictine monks and their reformers, the primary purpose of the Dominicans and Franciscans, from their very inception, was missionary outreach. Begun by Dominic in 1214, the Dominican's target area was Europe and their strategy was to deploy themselves in the cities, and especially in the universities, to reach all unreached Europeans. Likewise, Francis began his Franciscan friars in the spirit of living a simple lifestyle, preaching a simple word so that the common people might see, hear, and respond. Francis' Second and Third Order~ (for women and for laypeople, respectively), were also begun with this goal in mind.⁹⁵

Certainly there were other missionary apostles before the Reformation who did not come from the monastic mold. These were Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, Ulfilas, Clovis, Olaf Tryggvason and Olaf Haraldsson. All these and countless more were missionary apostles sent into the world. They used a variety of strategies in their efforts to take the Gospel across cultures. Their success is as worthy of praise and study as that of the monks. Yet, it was the committed communities of the monasteries from which the great majority of the missionary apostles emerged prior to the Reformation. Each group of these men did ministry in such a way that it would later influence future missionary work and church planting. Their work is still a model for missionaries and church planters of this day and time and is important in discovering the kinds of qualities that the church planter of today should exhibit.

It was about this time in church history that the term apostle was no longer being used to describe those who started churches or who did missions work. Instead the term missionary was use to describe those “sent ones” to do the work of missions. The first use of this term is not exactly known but it soon represented those who had a heart, passion and calling to extend the Gospel beyond their immediate

⁹⁵ Terry, Smith, Anderson, 188-190.

culture or context. Thus referring to those doing missions as apostles soon was only used in special cases of respect for outstanding missionaries such as Patrick and others.⁹⁶

Apostleship During the Reformation

During the Reformation there was very little missionary activity on the part of the Reformers, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and Knox. It was not until almost two centuries after the Reformation when any really significant missionary enterprise took place. The historian Gordon Olsen calls this the “Great Omission.”⁹⁷ Some missionary historians have compiled lists of some of the factors which partially explain this supposed aberration.⁹⁸

One factor that led to the relative neglect of missions from the activity of the Reformers was faulty hermeneutics. The successors of the Reformers took the passages of Romans 10 and Psalm 19 to explain that the Great Commission of Matthew 28 had been fulfilled by the apostles and those immediately following them. Therefore, the Christians of their day were not under the Great Commission.⁹⁹

A second factor came from the Reformers' struggles to establish their reforms. The Reformers were so engaged in defending and promoting their principles that they had no time to think of a world mission. The survival of their cause was more important than missions at the time.¹⁰⁰

The religious war with the Catholic Church and her leaders also contributed to the neglect of missions among the Reformers. The period of the Reformation was a time of conflict between Catholics

⁹⁶ Hunter, 21-22.

⁹⁷ Gordon Olsen, *What In the World Is God Doing? The Essentials of Global Missions, An Introductory Guide* (Cedar Knoll: Global Gospel Publishers, 1988), 107.

⁹⁸ Terry, Smith, Anderson, 194.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

and Protestants and later with Islam. Because of these conflicts, survival of the faith required a “fortress mentality” and which prevented any mobilization for offensive missionary activity.¹⁰¹

A third factor that led to the lack of missionary activity was the Reformers' limited contact with people of other faiths. Protestants were surrounded by Catholic enemies. This reality limited direct and geographical contact with people of other religious beliefs. This situation provided little challenge for members of the Reformed community to share their faith with person from other religious backgrounds.¹⁰²

One of the central reasons for the lack of missionary outreach among the Protestant reformers was related to their lack of effective missionary organization. Protestantism rejected monasticism and monasticism was the missionary arm of the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformers did not replace the monastic orders with any other type of organization. This lack of organized missionary groups limited Protestant endeavors.¹⁰³

The Reformers were also handicapped from missionary activity by a provincial ecclesiology. The Reformed tradition championed the territorial church. This concept considered those in a certain territory as belonging to a certain local or regional church. Almost all the Reformers maintained the idea of a state church. Because the church was seen as a department of state, then the mission of the church is confined to the national interests of the church state. The territorial church mentality of Protestantism greatly limited any concept of a universal mission.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Terry, Smith, and Anderson, 194-195.

¹⁰³ Ralph Winter. “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” *Missiology* 2/1 (January 1985), 39-52.

¹⁰⁴ Terry, Smith, and Anderson, 194.

The Reformers allowed the above mentioned factors to cloud over sparks of worldwide evangelism and missions. Alarming, these same factors, in modern forms, continue to impede and threaten the missionary enterprise of today. Like the Reformers, many churches and even some denominations, view the unchurched of today as a threat to tradition and doctrinal purity. A quote often heard in many church meetings dealing with outreach is

‘...if we bring those people (meaning the unchurched) to church here they will mess up our sanctuary or want to sing some of those rock and roll songs.’

Survival of the church structure or tradition often keeps many churches and denominations from focusing on new ways and ideas to do the mission task that Christ has called her to accomplish. Maintaining a way of worship and order is more important than evangelizing the world.

Like the Reformers of that time, many churches and some denominations have adopted a territorial mindset. Many church pastors, leaders and denominational leaders believe that the geographic area that their church or churches are located is their private mission field and that no new churches should be planted in that area even if they are not adequately ministering to the population there. This mindset along with the fear of many denominational leaders of losing funding from these established churches often leads to lost mission opportunities and the refusal to plant churches in another church’s “backyard.”

It must be noted that during the Reformation and the period following the Reformation there was some limited Protestant missionary outreach. Several individuals did attempt to mount some Protestant missionary movements. One of these attempts was a failed church plant on the coast of Brazil by some Calvinist Huguenots. This plant failed because of internal corruption and hostile Portuguese and the execution of others by Jesuit priest.¹⁰⁵

The Anabaptist also had some flickering missionary activity during this time. The Anabaptist believed that the New Testament mention of apostle that is found in Ephesians 4:11 gave credence that

¹⁰⁵ Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978), 76.

the role was one of genuine biblical leadership. Furthermore, it was believed that this role was the role of one who started churches.¹⁰⁶

At the same time there was indeed some missionary activity among the Lutherans. Former Catholic monks who were now working as Lutheran missionaries were sent to Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland.¹⁰⁷ As these countries became more involved in colonization (for example, Denmark in India) a few attempts were made to win converts in their new lands. On the whole, however, a real missionary zeal flagged during the Reformation and with it the sending of missionary apostles.

Despite the rebellion within and from their ranks, the Roman Catholics remained actively involved in missionary pursuits. The forces of the Counter Reformation, as Ranson points out, "...kept alive the spirit of missionary adventure in the era of the Reformation." He adds that during this time there continued to be a faith and vision within the Roman Catholic Church who, in a period of conflict and confusion, still took seriously their Lord's command: 'To go ye into all the world,' and kept alive within the church their missionary zeal.¹⁰⁸

Once again, the vast majority of these Catholic missionaries sent to the new world came from the monastic orders. They increasingly came from the newest order, the Jesuits (Society of Jesus) formed in 1534. The Jesuits made a monastic vow that included a willingness to go anywhere in the world to spread the Gospel.¹⁰⁹

Not all of the Reformed faith ignored the mandate of missions. The Puritans, in the seventeenth century, carried out impressive missionary work among the Indians in North America. It was the Pietists, though, who readily took up the missionary mandate, especially under the stimulus of August Franke and

¹⁰⁶ Ernest Trice Thompson, *Through the Ages* (Richmond: The Covenant Life Curriculum, 1965), 212-213.

¹⁰⁷ C.W. Ranson, *That the World May Know* (New York: Friendship, 1953), 62.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 63-65.

¹⁰⁹ Winter, 131.

the University of Halle. Halle became not only the training ground for Lutheran pastors to learn how to convert their own congregations; it "was from this center that Protestantism, at long last, embarked purposefully on the cross-cultural missionary task."¹¹⁰

In 1706 the ensuing Danish Halle Mission sent out Henry Plutschau and Bartholomew Ziegenbalg to India. Later during a furlough, Ziegenbalg went back to Halle and influenced a student by the name, Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Through the leadership of Zinzendorf, a group known as the Moravians was transformed into a missionary movement. A few from this small group of Christians were sent to the West Indies in 1732. From that time on the Moravians sent people to 28 countries in 28 years. At the height of their missionary zeal they were sending out one cross-cultural missionary or church planter for every ten believers who stayed behind at home. LaTourette aptly summarizes their uniqueness:

“Here was a new phenomenon in the expansion of Christianity, an entire community, of families as well as of the unmarried, devoted to the propagation of the faith. In its singleness of aim it resembled some of the monastic orders of earlier centuries, but these were made up of celibates. Here was a fellowship of Christians, of laity and clergy, of men and women, marrying and rearing families, with much of the quietism of the monastery and of Pietism but with the spread of the Christian message as a major objective, not of a minority of the membership, but of the group as a whole.”¹¹¹

It would be the Moravians who would have a profound influence on the life of John Wesley and his subsequent Methodist ministry. Among his significant accomplishments, Wesley would be regarded as responsible for the evangelistic work and church planting that resulted in the transformation of the incipient Methodist movement in England. It was Wesley’s evangelistic zeal and the gathering of converts into small discipleship groups known as “societies.” These societies would gather new converts together and disciple them. Soon these societies were throughout England reaching others with the Gospel. These societies and Wesley’s model of evangelism and discipleship soon influenced those of the

¹¹⁰ Mellis, 41.

¹¹¹ LaTourette, 47.

Baptist faith. There was a shift from just evangelistic preaching to evangelism and forming converts into congregations, thus church planting.¹¹²

Apostleship and the Founding of the Modern Missionary Movement

Among the Baptists there arose William Carey, whose spiritual experience had its foundation in the Wesleyan awakening. In terms of his missionary vision and perspectives Carey was greatly influenced by the Moravians, as well as by the Puritan missionaries working among the American Indians.¹¹³ Carey would become an example of the missionary apostle of his time.

Known today as the "Father of Protestant Missions" it was Carey who was primarily responsible for challenging the current hyper-Calvinism of his day, particularly the view that God in His own good time would provide for the conversion of the nations without human instrumentality.

Through his treatise, "*An Enquiry Into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*," published in 1792, Carey advocated that the New Testament command to "make disciples of all nations" was as binding to the Christians of his day as it was for the New Testament apostles.¹¹⁴

Commenting on Matthew 28:19-20, Carey writes:

"First, if the command of Christ to teach all nations be restricted to the apostles, or those under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, then that of baptizing should be so too; and every denomination of Christians, except the Quakers, do wrong in baptizing with water. Secondly, if the commands of Christ to teach all nations are confined to the apostles, then all such ordinary ministers who have, endeavored to carry the gospel to the heathens, have acted without a warrant, and run before they were sent. Thirdly, if the command of Christ to teach all nations extend only to the apostles, then, doubtless, the promise of the divine presence in this work must be so

¹¹² Caldwell, 97.

¹¹³ Ibid., 97.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 98.

limited; but this is worded in such a manner as expressly precludes such an idea. 'Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world' (Matthew 28:20)."¹¹⁵

Although he did not use the same terminology, Carey was essentially challenging Christians to return to the New Testament's understanding of apostleship. He saw apostleship as continuing beyond the New Testament church, indeed, that Christians of his generation needed to accept the challenge of cross-cultural missions and organize to accomplish it.

Carey himself sought to implement the sending process by forming the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792. Inevitably, he was the first missionary sent out by this new society, sailing for India in 1793. The formation of this society revolutionized Protestant mission activity and set the pattern for mission work for the next two centuries. Winter comments:

“The resulting Baptist missionary society is one of the most significant organizational developments in the Protestant tradition. It set off a rush to the use of this kind of ‘means’ for the conversion of the heathen, and we find in the next few years a number of societies forming along similar lines. Once this method of operation was clearly understood by the Protestants, three hundred years of latent energies burst forth in what became, in LaTourette’s phrase, ‘The Great Century’.”¹¹⁶

Carey would be the one who would set the pattern of the great mission activity of the nineteenth century, as well as the twentieth. Voluntary organizations not unlike the monastic communities arose out of missionary fervor stirred up by Carey. These voluntary societies sent men and women across cultures to advance the Gospel. Thus a new age was born among Protestant churches to see the Great Commission not only carried out to the world, but also in North America.¹¹⁷

By the 1800’s many Baptists began to move away from an isolationism brought on by the influence of hyper-Calvinistic roots within their ranks and began to take a deeper interest in foreign and home missions. This was due largely in part to the influence of several factors: the news of William

¹¹⁵ William Carey, “An Inquiry Into the Obligation of Christians to Use the Means for the Conversion of the Heathens,” (Original Work published in 1792.) Reprint edition, John L. Pretlove ed., Dallas: Criswell Publications, 1988.

¹¹⁶ Winter, 132.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 132-133.

Carey's work being shared in the churches; missionaries from English Baptist churches stopping in the United States on their way to and from the mission field; a concern for the salvation of the American Indian and expanded religious liberty that allowed Baptists to expand their witness.¹¹⁸

Out of this sparked interest in missions and the influence of William Carey's model of missions there arose a student mission's movement at Andover Seminary and Williams College in New England. Led by Samuel Mills, this movement provided some of the very first missionaries to be named by the early mission societies. These missionaries were Adoniram Judson, Samuel Newell, Samuel Nott, Gordon Hall and Luther Rice. Wanting to serve, Judson sailed for England. After enduring capture by a French privateer, Judson escaped and made it to England. Once there, Judson approached the English mission societies for support. The English societies felt that since these men were from North America, then they should be sent by their own society. This led to the formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions within the Congregationalist and Presbyterian denomination.¹¹⁹

On their way to India, Judson and Rice began a study of the scriptures to help them debate the issue of infant baptism with the Baptists. As a result, Judson and Rice became convinced Baptists and, on arrival, were baptized by William Ward.¹²⁰

Judson and Rice resigned from the Congregational Board and offered their services to the Baptists in America. They decided that Luther Rice would go back to the United States to secure support for the Judsons, who, because of visa problems, sailed to Burma (now Myanmar), where they joined Carey's son, Felix, in a new work. On arriving in the United States, Rice traveled eliciting support from the small Baptist congregations scattered along the eastern seaboard. With unusual persuasiveness, Rice

¹¹⁸ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 343.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 344-345.

¹²⁰ Terry, Smith and Anderson, 204-205.

became known as “the chief apostle of foreign missions” among Baptists of North America and the architect of Baptist denominational life.¹²¹

During this time, Rice also began a relationship with Richard Furman of South Carolina, a Baptist pastor, who not only pledged his personal support, but urged Rice to try to organize the whole Baptist denomination rather than foster the creation of innumerable small societies. Rice’s mission was successful and led to the formation in Philadelphia in May of 1814 of The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the USA for Foreign Missions (later called the Triennial Convention). This convention became the second significant missionary society in the United States.¹²²

In this first meeting Furman was named the first president; the Judsons, the first missionaries; Burma, the first mission field; and Rice became the first promoter. Although called a “convention,” the entity soon became a foreign missions society controlled mainly by the Baptist churches of the North. In 1817 the constitution was changed to include the support of western domestic missions among the Indians, started by John Peck and Isaac McCoy, an arrangement that continued until a Horne Missions Society was formed in 1832.¹²³

By 1816 practically all North American denominations created mission boards; and these, plus a myriad of interdenominational societies, brought American missions into the leadership of the modern missions’ movement by the mid nineteenth century.¹²⁴

In the 1800’s some significant events took place that changed the face of Baptist missions. One of these events was the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention. This forming of a new convention would impact Baptist mission endeavors in a new and unique way.

¹²¹ Ibid., 204-205.

¹²² Baker J. Cauthen and Frank Means, *Advance to Bold Thrust: A History of Southern Baptist Foreign Missions* (Richmond: Foreign Mission Board, SBC, 1981), 9.

¹²³ Terry, Smith and Anderson, 205.

¹²⁴ Kane, 88.

Since the organization of the Triennial Convention in 1814, there had been a sharp difference of opinion among North American Baptists about how to organize and carry out the Christian mission. The Northern brethren favored the "society" method while the Southerners favored the more centralized "convention basis." These latent issues became acute in the west when the abolitionist movement entered Baptist ranks. The Triennial Convention and the Home Mission Society, dominated by the North, refused to appoint candidates from the South who had some involvement with slavery after agreeing that the issue would not be a factor in missionary appointments. The Southerners feeling betrayed met in Augusta, Georgia, in 1845 and formed the Southern Baptist Convention, not to defend slavery, but to be able to fulfill the Great Commission.¹²⁵

This move by Southern Baptists would eventually lead to a new way of missions; the Cooperative Program. This cooperative, voluntary method of missions support, in which a percentage of each church's monies go to the support of both global and local missions has been highly productive, and has been adopted by most of the denominational missions entities in the United States. Today this program has 5000 national missionaries in North America and Canada and over 5000 missionaries around the world. Accomplishment of this task is a far cry from the early days of the sending bodies of the local church, monastic community, societies and early mission boards. Each of the missionaries in a small way represent the tradition of the early missionary apostles. The planter is sent to share the Gospel message by the authority of the Savior through His body, the church.

However, this cooperative spirit along with the formation of mission societies and later boards and conventions has had some negative affects on missions. It has in some ways distanced the local church from being involved as the sending body of missionaries. Missions and sending of missionaries has become the work of the denomination instead of the local church. The local church mainly supports the denomination and indirectly the work of missions. The work of missions and the support and calling of missionaries by the local church is now one step away form the local body of believers.

¹²⁵ William Estep, *Whole Gospel, Whole World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Press, 1994), 55-58.

Summary

Through the research of the usage and meaning of apostleship, one can ascertain that the church planters of today are the representatives of the authority who sends them. Their authority and commission are based on their calling by the Lord to plant churches and validated by the sending church recognizing that call. The Biblical example of this is the church at Antioch who “set apart” Paul and Barnabas for their missionary endeavors.

The role of the assessor is to help the church planting candidate explore and understand if the Holy Spirit is leading with an apostolic call. This call should be confirmed by the assessment process, thus validating the call through the community of faith which the assessor represents. If this call is not confirmed, then the assessor has a responsibility not to grant validation for the candidate to go ahead to the mission field until further prayer and exploration of God’s direction concerning the candidate’s ministry.

When determining whether a church planter has such an apostolic call, an assessor must not let themselves be swayed by the erroneous understanding of the spiritual gift of “apostleship.” An assessor must understand that the gift of apostleship is not a gift specifically given to individuals but rather men equipped by the Holy Spirit given to the church to fulfill God’s mission for the church. In fulfilling that role, the Holy Spirit empowers these men with certain abilities to communicate the Gospel in places other than their own community and culture. The role of the assessor is not to look for one specific gift or ability known as “the gift of apostleship” but rather to look at various gifts and abilities that allow the church planting candidate to carry out God’s call upon his life.

As one continues to look at the history of the church, certain men arise who represent the continuing role of the apostle as a messenger and missionary. Through studying these men, a church planter assessor can observe and learn the traits and qualities that were possessed by these early apostles and missionaries. It is these qualities and the zeal of these men that would provide the model of character for today’s church planter.

Looking at the missionary apostles of church history we can learn valuable lessons for today. First, like the early apostles who were sent out by the church either in missionary teams, monastic communities or societies, there was a sending body for accountability and authority. This is the model of Christ and the early church. The reason for this is to maintain doctrinal soundness. Church planting is the extending of Christ's command to make disciples and "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..." This means carrying the message of the One who has sent us; not our interpretation of the message or our own, but Christ's. This is the work of being a missionary apostle. The role of the assessor is to see that the church planting candidate demonstrates the willingness to submit to accountability by the sending organization.

The second lesson that we can learn from our missionary history is to never let an inward focus for survival or doctrinal purity keep us from fulfilling our missionary mandate. Today's church is facing a crisis. Like the church during the Reformation, we are fighting to maintain a sound doctrine and in some cases the church is fighting to keep its "doors open." However, those fights should never lead us to forget our missionary mandate from Christ. Today's church planters should have the determination to maintain doctrinal truth. Yet they should still have the passion to reach new people with the Gospel even if that means expressing the doctrines of the church in new and innovative forms. Thus the role of the assessor is to determine if the potential church planter can balance both maintaining doctrinal purity while making it relevant for today's generation.

The third lesson is in assessing today's church planters and missionaries, assessors can look at our missionary past for the same qualities and the passion of missionary apostles like St. Patrick, Boniface, Willibrord and Carey. Their passion was to see the church not only grow but multiply and to reach every unreached person in the world. Our mission forefathers have given today's church planter a model of determination to go beyond all obstacles spiritual, physical and religious to see that Gospel be shared. This same determination and ability is one of the most important qualities that today's church planter must possess. Today's church planter could possibly be tomorrow's St. Patrick, Boniface or Carey.

Therefore, it is the role of the assessor to determine if a church planter has such qualities and to help them utilize those qualities.

Because of rising interest of many denominations in the late 1960's, 70's and 80's to pursue church planting endeavors, many denominational leaders struggled to find potential church planters who demonstrated the same missionary zeal and qualities that the early apostles and missionaries displayed. Because of a desire to locate such candidates, research began from several sources to determine if a church planter candidate possessed such qualities. This research would in turn lead to the development of several major assessment processes.