

Apostles and Apostolic Movements

Anyone observing what is taking place can't help but notice the proliferation of what has been termed "The Apostolic Reformation". Recently our network of ministers, City Covenant Coalition, organized a conference dealing with this subject entitled "The Apostolic Revolution".

Understanding this move of God is so vital for the health and vibrancy of the church I felt the need just to summarize some of the key points needed to understand this term "Apostolic".

When I say "Apostolic", I generally use it as an adjective describing a function or a confluence of networks, associations of churches and ministries. It is not my primary intention to tag individuals with the title "Apostle".

Historically and in contemporary times, we have seen much abuse in regards to the presumptuous and even precocious use of this term, resulting in the further misunderstanding and alienation of many in the church when it comes to recognizing the Apostolic model today.

Furthermore, the term "Apostolic" when describing a movement also carries with it some unfortunate baggage within certain circles because some denominations with the title "Apostolic" have been autocratic in their leadership style while placing extra biblical (legalistic) demands on church members.

This is obviously not what I mean when I use the term "Apostolic".

Although I believe that all the ministry gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4: 11 continue to exist, and that there are many today that may have a legitimate claim to the ministry of Apostle, in this particular missive we are more concerned with understanding the function and flow of apostolic movements as a whole (perhaps we can describe this as a sort of new "wineskin" revolutionizing the church around the world).

Some of the characteristics of Apostolic Movements are:

- I. Bible believing pastors and ministers voluntarily come together regionally to advance the Kingdom of God irrespective of their denominational affiliation and sectarian identities.
- II. Ministerial leaders emerge who have an “apostolic anointing” to galvanize the Body of Christ in their region and give direction to the city church movement.

(This point scares some denominational leaders who exercise leadership over certain ministers and churches only because of political placement, organizational loyalty, seniority, and or administrative ability. Their gifting is more like that of an administrator than that of a pastor of pastors. These folk more than most see the Apostolic Movement as a threat because ministers under their denominational authority may begin to gravitate towards those in their region who have the affirmation of the corporate body of Christ because they see in them the call of God to speak apostolically into the community or city and assemble the Body of Christ to advance the Kingdom.

So, opposition against the Apostolic will most likely be fueled more because certain religious leaders believe it will undermine the influence they have in a region—not because of theological disagreement).

- III. The regional church begins to demonstrate their unity publicly through various corporate events that become visible expressions of the emerging “One City One Church” reality in the Body of Christ. (They come together for “Concerts of Prayer”, “Marches for Jesus”, “Community Development Projects”, “Ministerial Associations”, “Pastors Covenant and Accountability Groups”...)

Pastors involved in these movements not only begin to work together, they even begin to change their language because of the change in the way they think of the church in general:

- A. Examples of the language used:
 1. “One city, one church” ~ In my region there is only “One church, but many congregations”.
 2. “A senior pastor is not primarily called to a local church, but to take a city”

- IV. The united visible church begins to speak prophetically to the culture and begins to influence all of society, not just the church world.
 - A. Crime begins to drop.
 - B. Elected officials start to come to Apostolic and Prophetic leadership for prayer, counsel and political support.
 - C. More and more the spiritual climate of a community begins to change as the Word-Law of God once again becomes the standard and rule of law for the community

- V. Apostolic churches begin to emerge who:
 - A. Have a strong apostolic leader functioning as the senior pastor.
 - B. These churches employ a form of church government that involves a plurality of leaders under the leadership of an apostolic leader (Although this leadership or ministry team may have different names: Eldership team, Ministry team, Deacon board...they all flow out of the paradigm of a “multiplicity of ministries” instead of the “mom and pop shop” mode of church government. that is so common today in many local churches).
 - C. Continually raise up and send out ministers and ministries to plant churches, start new ministries that holistically affect whole communities, and place godly leadership in every sphere of society for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 that instructs the church to “Go and teach (disciple) all nations”.

VI. Apostolic churches nurture and “mother” other pastors, ministers, and churches. Their concern is primarily with building the Kingdom of God and not their own empires.

They have learned to work and bless the Body of Christ in their locale and as such know they are called of God to serve the Kingdom, not just their local flock.

Consequently, as a nurturing church the whole community comes up to another level and the whole Body experiences church growth.

(This is in stark contrast to many of the mega churches that grow primarily off of the smaller “feeder churches” who lose many of their new converts to a church with more programs to offer).

Instead of seeing how they can share their resources, minister to the pastors of smaller churches and help equip them to be more effective in their region, many mega churches actually focus the marketing of their ministry to the attendees of smaller churches.

They don’t target the lost but concentrate on building up their mailing list at the expense of many of the churches around them.

(Though their church may experience tremendous growth, the Kingdom is not enlarged; they are merely “swapping fish”. After awhile the fish begin to stink!)

There is much more that can be said. These were all generalizations and not meant to stereotype any particular individual or group. Within all of these descriptions are also vast variations within the groups and movements and so we are forced to merely classify and categorize but not reflect every possible situation within a movement or church.

(For example, some Apostolic Movements are very loose with very little organization and financial commitments; others are well organized, require tithes or fees, credential their members, provide covering and may even gather around some body of theological agreement).

This was not meant to be a polemic that engenders a judgmental attitude towards certain churches or denominations, but meant to provide a greater understanding of perhaps the most important reformation we have seen since the Protestant Reformation in 1517.

Even so “Come, (continue to visit us) Lord Jesus”. Amen!

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