

Apostolic Movements and Institutions

The following are generalizations that may or may not be true for particular denominations and apostolic movements:

I. Apostolic Movements vs. Denominations

1. Apostolic is usually led by one strong visionary/Denomination by a board.
2. Apostolic is usually mission driven/Denomination policy driven.
3. Apostolic is usually missiological in its biblical hermeneutic/Denomination is usually theological, sociological or culturally driven.
4. Apostolic emphasizes covenantal relationships based on voluntary associations/Denominations emphasize hierarchical structures and business in their gatherings.
5. Apostolic emphasizes the present move of God in the earth/Denominations the glory days of the past.
6. Apostolic emphasizes the movement/Denominations the institution.
7. Apostolic leaders are led by the Spirit in regards to ministry placement/Denominational clergy are led by their bishop or hierarchy.
8. Apostolic believes in biblical inerrancy/Most denominations believe in a higher critical form of inspiration. (Their line of reasoning goes like this: because the church gave the Scriptures the church has the right to change them, update them, etc. through church councils and official writings. Another thing said is that only the actual words of Jesus Christ in the Gospels are inspired of God.)
9. Apostolic emphasizes the power of Christ in terms of releasing faith to fulfill ministry/Denominations the power of committees to implement strategic plans.
10. Apostolic emphasizes the local church as the primary training ground for ministry/Denominations emphasizes the seminary.
11. Apostolic empowers the laity to minister (Ephesians 4:11, 12)/In denominations the clergy are expected to do the work of the ministry.

II. Strength of Denominations

1. Have a connection to the historic creeds, confessions and church history.
2. Have infiltrated and have credibility in institutional systems.
3. Have a system of ordination, placement of ministry and criteria for ministry (seminary training, etc.).
4. Once started as movements and have cycled into institutions, thus they are ahead of the apostolic in the usual cyclical norm.
5. Have an understanding of culture and academia along with their theology (doesn't have an anti intellectual bias in its churches).
6. Are involved in lobbying public policy issues (until recently the Catholic church had great political influence in the U.S. because of all of the above).
7. They generally have a clearly defined system of accountability.

III. I Propose a New Synthesis of I and II

1. The Need for a Connection to Church History

(John 17:21 in regards to the need for church unity has to be expanded to include the body of saints already in heaven, Hebrews 12:1.)

The apostolic leadership and churches needs to rejuvenate a love for the historic church writings including the creeds, confessions and theological writings of the church fathers. We need to believe according to Ephesians 4:11-16 that God has been building and the Holy Spirit has been teaching His church for the past 2,000 years. Ignorance of these writings is to dismiss God's historic activity in His church and hinders our ability to build upon the shoulders of those who have gone before us.

2. The Apostolic Should Synthesize Movement and Institution

We need to have both a movement and an institution so that our movement can institutionalize the ground we gain in the culture. Remaining merely a movement will marginalize us by keeping us on the fringe of society instead of infiltrating and reforming it.

3. The Need for Protocol in Regards to Apostolic Recognition

Key apostolic leaders need to convene an assembly whereby they come up with a consensus of protocol that can be used to propose how clergy can be set in and recognized as apostolic leaders and bishops. Too often these folks are self-appointed because there is no universally established protocol. This assembly can only make a proposal, but if key leaders make a unified statement (e.g. the Lausanne Covenant) it will pressure other leaders to follow its recommendations.

I believe at least the minimum procedure should be that seasoned, recognized apostolic leaders in a region should endorse and be a part of the process of setting in a person as a bishop or apostle.

4. The Need to Capitalize on the Cyclical Norms

Since all denominations once started off as an apostolic movement usually driven by a powerful visionary leader, those in the apostolic should learn how to allow for the cycle of movement to maintenance to institutionalization without compromising the missiological nature that gave it birth to begin with.

This can be done by:

- Laboring for continual revival and renewal.
- Keeping a steady flow of prayer, fasting and worship (the Moravians had a 100 year prayer meeting).
- Allowing for God to continue to burden us and activate us for missions and reformation.
- Discipling our spiritual and biological children, and exposing them to the cutting edge of what God is doing on the earth in their generation.
- Having a strategic plan of placing the right homegrown leaders in place to succeed the successful visionary leaders (too often the movement dies or goes into maintenance mode because the next leader is merely a good consolidator/administrator who lacks the passion of the original leader).

5. Apostolic Leaders should be Disciplined Learners and Have an Understanding of the Biblical Worldview, Theology and Apologetics

Apostolic leaders should return to studying both systematic and biblical theology and apologetics so they can train upcoming leaders with a biblical worldview capable of advancing them through the highest universities in academia (instead of being anti-intellectual and running from academia we should be infiltrating them and returning them to their original purpose). Most apostolic leaders are Biblicists who are not well read or well rounded and thus unable to prepare, equip and relate to those who will lead in various realms of society.

6. Apostolic Leaders are now Called to Apply the Biblical Worldview to Public Policy as a Method of Propagating the Kingdom

The next advance for the apostolic will be to go from understanding the missiological nature of the church and our call to have dominion (Genesis 1:28) to applying the biblical worldview to public policy. This will mean that apostolic leaders will have to hold the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other. We will have to do the grunt work of engaging the culture and not just having worldview conversations with other Christians. We need to go from speaking dominion to exercising dominion in the marketplace of ideas. After all, since the Bible speaks truth to every realm of society, we should expect to win and lead in a democratic meritocracy (and in oppressive structures as well). This is nothing new for biblical leaders as we understand the divine callings of people like Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah and Esther who applied biblical principles and the revealed will of God to public policy.

7. Apostolic Leaders should have Various Levels of Practical Accountability in their Personal Lives, Businesses and Ministries

IV. Theocracy, Democracy or Humanocracy as our Ultimate End

I hear many saints speaking against Christian triumphalism, theocracy, etc. Before putting down these ideas we must first see what it is we are after as our ultimate.

Theocracy has received a bad name because of the historic abuses the church was involved with regarding the state. One thinks of Constantinianism, Calvin burning Michael Servetus at the stake, etc. when we think of theocracy. But theocracy means a government under God; what we have experienced in the past are theocracies that may have missed the mark in some capacity.

The other choices we have are democracy, which equals mob rule, or humanocracy, which is a system in which human opinion and law rule the day.

We may believe in the separation of church and state but not the separation of God and state. (Although the Bible teaches that five separate spheres have their own jurisdiction--self government, family, business, politics, and the church--each one should submit to the Law-Word of God.) Every culture was made by God to submit to His moral law codified in the Ten Commandments. (Culture comes from the word "cult" which means religion, thus all cultures were originally created to reflect the will of their creator God.)

In our thinking we must have as a goal establishing nations that submit to commandments 5-10, dealing with how humans function with other human beings in a pluralistic society (in which the free marketplace of ideas is allowed in terms of morality and religion), but ultimately some god or morality will have to lead the country. I believe that all nations (Christian or non-Christian) ultimately deal with commandments 1-4, not just 5-10. (The current religion propagated in the public schools of America is secular humanism, thus commandments 1-4 center around subjective pleasure and situational ethics instead of transcendent law.) Civic leaders can do this principally by favoring the God of Scripture in its civil laws dealing with religion without forcing conversions and replicating the mistakes of the past. This will be the discussion of another generation because presently we are still trying to get nations to obey the moral laws dealing with human behavior.

So to summarize this section, the way towards a biblical theocracy in a pluralistic society is to establish commandments 5-10 and use that to segue into establishing commandments 1-4, without the past abuses that included forced conversions and persecution. This can be done by favoring the God of Scripture in regards to allowing prayer, creationism and the Bible to be taught in public school, Old Testament law again becoming the template that lawyers, judges and legislators use to enact public policy, and Sabbath laws forbidding certain activity on Sunday that would compete with or impede Sunday church attendance.