Study guide for
The Latter Rain Movement
Latter Rain Movement

A mid-twentieth-century outpouring of pentecostal fervor that proponents compared to the Azusa Street revival, the Latter Rain movement traces its beginnings to a small Pentecostal school in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. In the midst of a Bible study at the Sharon Orphanage and Schools on February 12, 1948, one of the students laid his hands on another student and proceeded to offer a long “prophecy,” a spiritually inspired recitation concerning the life and future of the second student.

Two days later, according to George Hawtin, leader of the school, “all Heaven broke loose upon our souls and Heaven came down to greet us.” Many experienced the gift of healing, and word of the revival spread quickly throughout North America. The Latter Rain was characterized by a “laying on of hands” to prompt a visitation by the Holy Spirit, as opposed to the previous practice of “tarrying” for the Holy Spirit. The term “latter rain” was taken from Joel 2:23, which talks about the “former rain” and the “latter rain.” Leaders of the Latter Rain movement read this passage through the grid of premillennialism: A final outpouring of the Holy Spirit would immediately precede the Second coming of Christ.

One theological justification, The Feast of Tabernacles, published by George Warnock, argued that the Feast of Passover had been fulfilled with the death of Christ, and the Feast of Pentecost had been fulfilled when the Holy Spirit descended on the early Christians on the Day of Pentecost; the final manifestation, the Feast of Tabernacles, was now evident in the Latter Rain movement of 1948. As the movement developed, led by such pentecostal Evangelists as Franklin Hall and William Branham, it was marked by numerous reports of healing and other spiritual manifestations.

As some of the leaders demonstrated affinities for sectarianism, however, many of the pentecostals rooted in de-nominations began to denounce the Latter Rain, sometimes referring to it as the “New Order of the Latter Rain.” Some pentecostal denominations, such as the assemblies of God and the pentecostal Holiness Church, expelled pastors who were associated with the Latter Rain revival. Despite the opposition, however, the Latter Rain movement persisted in independent churches and contributed to the charismatic movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Randall Balmer, Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism, (Waco, Baylor University Press, 2004) 397
LATTER RAIN MOVEMENT HISTORY

A pentecostal movement of the mid 20th century that, along with the parallel healing movement of that era, became an important component of the post-WWII evangelical awakening. Although highly controversial, the “New Order of the Latter Rain,” as it was called by its opponents, bore certain similarities to the early pentecostal movement that originated at Azusa Street, Los Angeles, in 1906. While its impact was on a small scale, its effects were nevertheless felt worldwide, and it became one of several catalysts for the charismatic movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

The movement was characterized by many reports of healings and other miraculous phenomena, in contrast to the preceding decade, which was described by pentecostals as a time of spiritual dryness and lack of God’s presence. It stressed the imminence of the premillennial return of Jesus Christ, preceded by an outpouring of God’s Spirit, which was expected in accordance with the “former rain” and the “latter rain” of Joel 2:28 (KJV). This was interpreted as a dual prophecy of the Day of Pentecost as described in Acts 2 and of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was to immediately precede the coming of the Lord. There was an emphasis on spiritual gifts, which were to be received by the laying on of hands, in contrast to the old pentecostal practice of “tarrying” for the Holy Spirit that had become widespread during the years prior to the revival.

Some of the influence precipitating the Latter Rain includes (1) William Branham, who exercised the laying on of hands in his healing ministry; (2) healing evangelist Franklin Hall’s emphasis on fasting and prayer; (3) the church government format in use by the Independent Assemblies of God, which stressed the autonomy of the local church; and (4) the emphasis on the “new thing” of Isa. 43:19 (KJV), which had found its way into the movement years after it was stressed during the meetings of the early pentecostal revival at the turn of the century.

The Latter Rain movement originated at Sharon Orphanage and Schools in North Battleford, Sask., Canada, as a spark igniting an explosion of revival among many pentecostals. It spread quickly throughout North America and many places around the world.

The president of Sharon’s “Global Missions” was George Hawtin, who had been a pastor of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) and had founded Bethel Bible Institute in Star City, Sask., in 1935. Two years later the institute moved to Saskatoon, and it became PAOC property in 1945 in order to achieve full PAOC recognition. Disputes between Hawtin and PAOC officials led to Hawtin’s resignation under pressure in 1947; another Bethel teacher, P. G. Hunt, resigned in sympathy.

In the fall of 1947 Hawtin and Hunt joined Herrick Holt of the North Battleford, Sask., Church of the Foursquare Gospel in an independent work that Holt had already established. Milford Kirkpatrick joined them as global missions secretary, while George Hawtin’s brother, Ern, came as a member of the faculty. During this time, the students began to gather to study the Word of God, with fasting and praying. According to Ern Hawtin, on Feb. 12, 1948, God moved into their midst in a strange new manner. Some students were under the power of God on the floor, others were kneeling in adoration and worship before the Lord. The anointing deepened until the awe of God was upon everyone. The Lord spoke to one of the brethren, “Go and lay hands upon a certain student and pray for him.” While he was in doubt and contemplation, one of the sisters who had been under the power of God went to the brother saying the same words and naming the identical student for whom he was to pray. He went in obedience, and a revelation was given concerning the student’s life
and future ministry. After this a long prophecy was given with minute details concerning the great thing God was about to do. The pattern for the revival and many details concerning it were given. (Hawtin, 1949, 3)

After they had spent a day searching the Scriptures, it seemed on Feb. 14 “that all Heaven broke loose upon our souls and heaven above came down to greet us” (G. Hawtin, 1950, 2). Ern Hawtin wrote, “Soon a visible manifestation of gifts was received when candidates were prayed over, and many as a result began to be healed, as gifts of healing were received” (E. Hawtin, 1949, 3). As people became aware of these events, they flocked to North Battleford from all parts of North America and many parts of the world to the campmeeting conventions at Sharon publicized by The Sharon Star. Before long, the teachers from Sharon began receiving invitations to minister throughout North America.

At the invitation of Reg Layzell in Vancouver, B.C., George and Ern Hawtin held meetings at Glad Tidings Temple during Nov. 14-18, 1948. Myrtle D. Beall, pastor of Bethesda Missionary Temple in Detroit, MI, traveled 2,500 miles by car to attend these meetings and returned to her church to spark revival there, attracting people from all parts of the country, including Ivan and Carlton Spencer (the founder of Elim Bible Institute and his son). They had been in attendance at the Zion Evangelistic Fellowship in Providence, RI, for a Pentecostal Prayer Fellowship gathering in Dec. 1948 when a latecomer arrived and shared “what he had heard of a visitation in Detroit.” Ivan Spencer and his wife went to Detroit within a few days and returned to ignite revival at Elim Bible Institute.

Mrs. Beall wrote a letter describing the revival at Bethesda to Stanley Frodsham, who had been a pioneer of the early pentecostal movement, a leader of the Assemblies of God denomination in the U.S., and the editor of the Pentecostal Evangel, its official periodical, for 28 years. As a result of this letter, he went to Mrs. Beall’s church in Jan. 1949, where “he was moved deeply by scenes of people under great conviction of sin, making confession and finding peace” (Menzies, 1971, 232).

In Feb. 1949 Thomas Wyatt of Portland, OR, invited the Hawtin party to his church, Wings of Healing Temple, where George Hawtin and Milford Kirkpatrick ministered to 90 preachers from almost every part of North America. One of the pastors attending was A. Earl Lee of Los Angeles, CA, whose church became a center of revival soon after he returned.

By 1949 the North Battleford brethren were becoming less central to the movement, and leadership began to emerge in other circles, partly as a result of tendencies toward sectarianism among the former. This was one of the reasons that the Latter Rain soon became anathema among many denominational pentecostals. However, such pentecostal stalwarts as Lewi Pethrus of Sweden continued to endorse the movement. As leaders of the Apostolic Church, Elim Bible Institute in New York State, and Bethesda Missionary Temple in Detroit continued to move in the revival, the movement progressed with lasting effects.

One of the most important publications of the Latter Rain movement was The Feast of Tabernacles by George Warnock, which later came to be republished by Bill Britton of Springfield, MO, and was widely disseminated during the next several decades. The thesis of Warnock’s book was that although the Feast of Passover was fulfilled in the death of Christ and although the Feast of Pentecost had had its fulfillment in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the third of Israel’s great feasts, the Feast of Tabernacles, is yet to be fulfilled. Those involved in the Latter Rain revival felt that this and many other insights into the Word of God had been given by the Holy Spirit within the context of the 1948 revival by prophetic revelation. This “blaze of prophetic light” was not restricted to the penetration of mysteries within the Bible but included the “unveiling of peoples' lives and hearts through the
agency of the Spirit of God” working through the laying on of the hands of “prophets and apostles of His choosing.” While many people received renewed faith and hope with respect to their gifts and callings as a result of prophetic ministry of this type, there were a few people whose faith had become shipwrecked, perhaps after receiving the laying on of hands with prophecy from inexperienced people or from others who may have engaged in these practices with mixed motives. The controversy that raged as a result of these problems served to discredit the entire movement in the eyes of most of the major pentecostal denominations, including PAOC, the AG in the U.S., the Pentecostal Holiness Church (PHC), and the Apostolic Church. Many experienced pastors were dropped from the rolls of these and other bodies for their involvement in the Latter Rain movement. At the third annual convention of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA) in 1950, for example, Ivan Q. Spencer resigned under pressure from membership in the PFNA board of administration. He discovered later that the Elim Missionary Assemblies had been dropped from the list of associates because Spencer and this group of churches, which he represented, were actively involved in the Latter Rain movement.

Stanley Frodsham was also active in the movement. In a letter to his daughter, Faith Campbell (May 7, 1949), he wrote that it was inappropriate to associate “this new revival which God is so graciously sending, where so many souls are being saved, where so many lives are being transformed, where God is so graciously restoring the gifts of the Spirit, with the fanatical movements of the past 40 years.” In 1949, under pressure and eligible to retire, Frodsham resigned from the editorship of the Pentecostal Evangel and withdrew his name as an ordained minister of the AG.

While there was not a general acceptance of the doctrines and practices of the Latter Rain within the denominational churches, there was a significant extent to which they were received outside of the major pentecostal denominations. Many hundreds of “revival churches” became visible, particularly in North America, during the Latter Rain revival, not a few of which had been in existence prior to the revival. Most of these churches were independent and autonomous, and many became mother churches to numerous others that were established or nurtured by members of the mother church.

There were many other similarities between the early pentecostal movement and the 1948 Latter Rain revival, both of which were known as the “Latter Rain movement.” Both arose during a time of spontaneous evangelical awakening, and both were characterized by a strong expectation of the imminent coming of Christ. Both employed the laying on of hands for the impartation of gifts of the Spirit, and both reported the supernatural occurrence of “heavenly singing” by “Spirit-filled” congregations, the sounds of which were likened to the sounds of a great pipe organ. Both recognized the existence of present-day apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, and both were characterized by widespread repentance and “brokenness” before the Lord. People such as Stanley Frodsham, who had been present at both revivals, often remarked that there was the same strong atmosphere of the presence of the Lord in both cases.

Both movements were also severely criticized by the denominations of which they were originally a part. Walter J. Hollenweger (1965-67, 02a.02.144, 758) has observed that the institutional pentecostal denominations at this time began to experience anew what had come about at the inception of their own movement, but this time from the opposite standpoint: that of the conservative denominations that they had criticized at the time of their own inception.

The churches either spawned or influenced by the Latter Rain were usually independent assemblies with little or no central organization, and for this reason the extent of the influence of the Latter Rain was not always fully evident. However, many of those involved in the Latter
Rain carried on and developed principles that had arisen in the late 1940s, becoming a vital part of the charismatic renewal in the 1960s and 1970s. Marion Meloon wrote of a blind woman on the staff of Elim Bible Institute, Rita Kelligan, who, at a convention in 1949, developed a gift of setting psalms to music, “giving us the rich heritage that forms part of the charismatic renewal worship today” (1974, 160). Some of the other distinctive beliefs and practices of the Latter Rain that found their way into the charismatic renewal were the “foundational ministries” of Eph. 4:11, tabernacle teaching, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the “foundational truths” of Heb. 6:1-2.

The influence of the Latter Rain on the charismatic renewal of the 1960s and 1970s can also be seen in the continuity of many of the institutions of the Latter Rain with those of the charismatic movement. For example, Logos Journal, one of the most widely circulated magazines of the charismatic renewal, grew out of an earlier publication, Herald of Faith/Harvest Time, edited by Joseph Mattsson-Boze and Gerald Derstine. Mattsson-Boze played an important part in the 1948 Latter Rain revival, and Gerald Derstine was associated for several years with J. Preston Eby, who had been forced to resign from the PHC in 1956 due to his Latter Rain teaching and practice.

Other important components of the charismatic renewal also had roots in the 1948 Latter Rain revival, including John Poole’s church in Philadelphia, which had been pastored by his father, Fred C. Poole, who had been very active in the Latter Rain movement until his death in 1963. The Elim Missionary Assemblies, a fellowship of churches closely associated with Elim Bible Institute, located first in Hornell, NY, and later in Lima, NY, also helped to carry on the beliefs and practices of the Latter Rain into the charismatic movement. The same was true of the Bethesda Missionary Temple in Detroit, where James Lee Beall succeeded his mother, Myrtle Beall, as pastor. The Independent Assemblies of God International, a loose fellowship of several hundred churches of Scandinavian origin, also served to carry on the principles of the Latter Rain after a serious split over this issue in 1949 with the Fellowship of Christian Assemblies, of which it had been a part.

J. Preston Eby succinctly stated a major emphasis of the Latter Rain when he made reference to preparation for the coming outpouring of the Holy Spirit

which shall finally bring the FULLNESS, a company of overcoming Sons of God who have come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ to actually dethrone Satan, casting him out of the heavenlies, and finally binding him in the earthlies, bringing the hope of deliverance and life to all the families of the earth. This…great work of the Spirit shall usher a people into full redemption—free from the curse, sin, sickness, death and carnality. (1976, 10)

Beliefs and Denouncement

• The latter rain. Central to the Latter Rain movement was an expectation of the imminent return of Jesus. Based on an allegorical interpretation of scriptures such as Joel 2:23, the movement held that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost had been the "former rain" that established the Church, and that the current "move" of the Spirit was the "latter rain" that would bring the Church's work to completion, and culminate in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. (Spiritual restorationists)

• The baptism of the holy spirit. Unlike mainstream Pentecostalism, which holds that the baptism of the Holy Spirit usually comes after prolonged "tarrying" or waiting for the Spirit, the Latter Rain movement taught that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be imparted on one believer by another through the "laying on of hands."

• The fivefold ministry. The Latter Rain taught that of the five ministerial roles mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher), the foundational roles of apostle and prophet had been stolen from the Church by Satan, but that God was restoring these ministries in the present day.

• Christian ecumenism. The Latter Rain taught that God saw the church organized not into denominational camps, but along geographical lines. They expected that in the coming last days, the various Christian denominations would dissolve, and the true church would coalesce into citywide churches under the leadership of the newly-restored apostles and prophets.

• The Manifest(ed) Sons of God. Some leaders of the Latter Rain movement taught that as the end of the age approached, a select group of "overcomers" would arise within the Church. These Manifest Sons of God would receive the "spiritual bodies" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15. They would become immortal, and receive a number of divine gifts, including the ability to change their physical appearance, to speak any language, to teleport from place to place, and to perform divine healings and other miracles. They would complete the Great Commission, spreading the gospel throughout the world, and at last usher in the millennial reign of Christ.
1949 Assemblies of God resolution
From 1949 the Assemblies of God resolution denouncing the order of the latter rain

There was also concern that it espoused a post-millennial rather than pre-millennial scenario of the "End times." In 1949 the Assemblies of God condemned the doctrine of the 'Latter Rain Movement' as heresy.

A Resolution affecting the so-called new order of "Latter Rain."

WHEREAS, We are grateful for the visitation of God in the past and the evidences of His blessings upon us today, and

WHEREAS, We recognize a hunger on the part of God's people for a spiritual refreshing and manifestation of His Holy Spirit, be it therefore

RESOLVED, That we recommend to the ministers of the Assemblies of God and to churches affiliated and associated with us, that we set our hearts to seek for a continued outpouring of the Holy Spirit founded upon the clear teaching of the Word of God, and be it further

RESOLVED, That we disapprove of those extreme teachings and practices which, being unfounded scripturally, serve only to break fellowship of like precious faith and tend to confusion and division among members of the body of Christ, and be it hereby known that this 23rd General Council disapproves of the so-called "New Order of the Latter Rain," to wit:

1. The overemphasis relative to imparting, identifying, bestowing or confirming of gifts by the laying on of hands and prophecy.

2. The erroneous teaching that the Church is built on the foundation of present-day apostles and prophets.

3. The extreme teaching as advocated by the "New Order" regarding the confession of sin to man and deliverance as practiced, which claims prerogatives to human agency which belong only to Christ;

4. The erroneous teaching concerning the impartation of the gift of languages as special equipment for missionary service.

5. The extreme and unscriptural practice of imparting or imposing personal leadings by the means of gifts of utterance.

6. Such other wrestings and distortions of Scripture interpretations which are in opposition to teachings and practices generally accepted among us.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we recommend following those things which make for peace among us, and those doctrines and practices whereby we may edify one another, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit until we all come unto the unity of the faith.

At the end of this document I have attached the
The 2001 Position paper on apostles and prophets by Assemblies of God

This statement on apostles and prophets was approved as the official statement by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God on August 6, 2001
Lectures

André Gagné is Full Professor in the Department of Theological Studies at Concordia university. His research focuses on the Neocharismatic-Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism, fundamentalism, the Christian Right. He has some academically driven lectures on the latter rain movement. Remnant radio does not endorse or support Mr Gagne. His work on this issue is academically sound and for the most part unbiased which is good for such a topics.

(1) How the latter rain movement began

(2) Who were the apostles and prophets in the latter rain movement.

(3) The “manifested sons of God” doctrine in the latter rain movement

Link to the whole series of lectures. Here
Assessment and influence of the latter rain movement

From Pentecostalism: a very short introduction, William K. Kay

Regardless of the way the government of Pentecostal churches was designed, the crucial and distinctive question about the life of Pentecostal congregations was addressed only in the 1920s and 1930s. What were the implications of believing that every single member of a Pentecostal congregation was filled by the Holy Spirit and therefore able to voice a prophecy or manifest some other charismatic gift? The British Pentecostal writer Donald Gee began to work out a participatory ecclesiology that showed how the various gifts of the Holy Spirit might contribute to an overall church meeting. The Holy Spirit democratized Pentecostalism by distributing spiritual gifts widely so that, if there was a secret to Pentecostal growth, it lay with this capacity of Pentecostal churches to energize every member. In a sacramental or liturgical church, the professional clergy read the services and lead the prayers while the congregation is restricted to prayerbook responses or other minor contributions. In the Pentecostal congregation, every Spirit-filled member might have vital light to shed on what should be done next because every member is in some sense a minister.

A harmoniously functioning Pentecostal congregation might begin to resemble the Pauline description of the church in Corinth:

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. (1 Corinthians 14.26)

Here was a congregation that valued the contribution of every member and, because it did so, every gathering was unpredictable. This gave a sense of excitement to attendees of Pentecostal congregations: they did not know what to expect next because the Spirit might move anyone to do anything. Visitors to Pentecostal congregations which function in this way are often surprised at the ‘organized chaos’ of the meetings. Actually, these meetings settle down into discernible patterns with many variants and, in this respect, resemble a jam session of jazz musicians where each instrumentalist provides an impromptu solo that adds up to a satisfying new composition. By contrast, the liturgical service resembles a classically orchestrated production following a written score in which there is no room for improvisation.

The freedom found in Pentecostal congregations is impressive, but it is a delicate freedom. If it moves too far in one direction, it is lost when dominant individuals begin to hold sway over other members of the congregation and, by inflating their own spiritual gifting, suppress everyone else’s. If it moves too far in the direction of ministerial control, services will start to run with a clockwork precision that transforms Pentecostal congregations into energetic singing machines. The balance between freedom within the congregation and freedom within the ministerial cohort is difficult to achieve. What Pentecostal churches aim for is the presence of spiritual gifts within the congregation as well as the presence of spiritual gifts within the lives and work of their ministers. As Pentecostals strive to achieve this freedom, they do so by noting that the restoration of spiritual gifts also logically leads to a belief in the restoration of the role of apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers. In short, Pentecostalism invokes a double restoration to the life of the church. This logic was quickly picked up at the beginning of the 20th century by the Apostolic Church in Wales, and later relaunched with great effect after 1948 in what came to be called the ‘Latter Rain revival’.

In essence, the Latter Rain movement, which began in Canada and spread to other parts of North America and then more widely still through the itinerant healing evangelists, was premised upon the appearance of gifted new apostles, prophets, and evangelists. Within a short time, these new claimants ran into heavy opposition from denominational officials, Pentecostal bishops, and other members of Pentecostal organizations. The Latter Rain protagonists, being independent of denominational control, saw themselves as initiating a renewal movement within Pentecostalism designed to return the churches to the
early free-flowing days of the Azusa Street revival and its immediate aftermath. About 40 years had passed from the beginnings of Pentecostalism, and here was a new downpour of the Spirit to bring the supernatural refreshment which over-organized and over-bureaucratized Pentecostal denominations had lost. Prophets would prophesy, eschatologically amazing miracles of revelation and healing would follow, religious organization would wither away, and the church would return to apostolic vibrancy. Such was the hope.

As the years passed, the Latter Rain movement fizzled out. Yet, it left a legacy that was to be fulfilled in an unexpected way. In the 1960s, the charismatic movement began. This was the arrival of Pentecostal or Pentecostal-style experiences within the traditional mainline denominations. All over the world in Lutheran, Episcopalian, Methodist, Baptist, Brethren, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and other churches, men and women began to speak with other tongues, to pray for healing, and sing the songs that Pentecostals had for so long enjoyed. The Pentecostals understood the Spirit to have been poured out upon the rest of the church. The movement was interdenominational and expressed its interdenominational nature in big international conferences where denominational differences were eclipsed by a common mode of worship and shared spiritual experiences.

The charismatic movement inevitably asked ecclesiological questions of the Pentecostals. For instance, while Pentecostals had believed that the experience of the Holy Spirit followed evangelical conversion (‘new birth’), Roman Catholics who experienced glossolalia fitted their explanation of this experience into a sacramental theology of initiation which believed in the impartation of the Spirit at infant baptism. Similarly, while Pentecostals were, in many cases, open to the notion of 20th- and 21st-century apostles and prophets, many of the mainline denominations found these ideas impossible to stomach - and they would have been very difficult to fit within the traditional hierarchies of Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism. Even so, the charismatic movement brought Pentecostals into contact with mainline denominations, and official dialogues began to take place between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics and between Pentecostals and the Reformed church. However, these prolonged theological discussions were of little interest to emerging radical charismatics who began to break free of the charismatic movement but did not want to join the Pentecostals either. They did not want the administrative machinery that many Pentecostal denominations had accumulated. Nor did they want to remain within mainline denominations which, despite welcoming the Spirit, left intact too many historic structures and precedents.

From the 1970s, these radical charismatics started what were first called ‘house churches’ and later ‘new churches’ or apostolic networks. These networks were characterized by two distinct features. First, as the name implies, they believed in modern-day apostles who had the ability to plant churches and lead spiritual advance. Apostles were men (usually) who were spiritually gifted and who had a proven capacity to initiate and run churches. They were people who gradually gathered churches around them, sometimes by attracting small independent congregations in need of a mentor, and at other times by building their own large congregations which they subsequently used as a base of operations for a traveling ministry. Second, the churches were deliberately organized on relational lines - by which they meant that these congregations were not to be governed by constitutions, committees, church meetings, voting, or other purportedly non-biblical decision-making methods found in most denominations. Rather, the churches were to be led by apostles who would be guided by charismatic gifts of revelation and knowledge and loosely networked to each other by being connected with the apostle. The apostle was a kind of bishop, although different from other kinds because the role was not defined by a written constitution. In the best apostolic networks, the stress on relationships and the lack of a constitution led to a refreshing emphasis upon the grace of God.

The charismatic renewal may have had roots not only in classical Pentecostalism but also in the 1940s Latter Rain Revival in Canada and Healing Revival in the United States. In 1948, the Latter Rain Revival broke out in a pentecostal Bible college in Saskatchewan, Canada. George Hawtin and his students had prayed and fasted for weeks, inspired by Franklin Hall’s Atomic Power through Prayer and Fasting (1946). With the leaders’ laying on of hands, and accompanied by prophetic declarations, participants reported not only tongues-speaking but also manifestations of the “nine gifts” of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8–10). What made the Latter Rain Revival controversial was its opposition to denominational patterns of church organization. It also affirmed contemporary “apostles and prophets” whose leadership was said to be essential to the unity and to the proper functioning of the church. Although neglected in scholarly literature, the Latter Rain foreshadowed themes that emerged from the 1970s to the early 2000s, for example, personal prophecy, the “five-fold ministry” (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers), prolonged fasting, Christian unity, and contemporary worship. Latter Rain participants – ousted by the pentecostal denominations – became a diaspora of the Spirit. The 1950s–60s charismatic renewal, the 1970s Shepherding Movement, and the 1990s New Apostolic Reformation all owed something to the Latter Rain Revival.

Trends and Themes in Global Neo-Pentecostalism

The term “neo-Pentecostal” embraces various churches. In China alone, there are innumerable indigenous groups. In the United States, the so-called Word-Faith (or prosperity) teaching was long associated with Kenneth Hagin, Sr., and his Rhema Bible Institute (Tulsa, Oklahoma). Hagin – together with Kenneth Copeland, Frederick K. C. Price, and others – helped launch a global movement. Rhema has more than 23,000 alumni, many of whom planted churches. Ray McCauley’s Rhema Bible Church in Randburg, South Africa (16,000 members; with 270 affiliated congregations) is one example. Another is the 2,000-member Word of Life Church in Uppsala, Sweden. In Brazil, an influential neo-pentecostal church is the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), founded in 1977 by Edir Macedo, a former lottery worker. The UCKG embraces the Word-Faith message and establishes new churches worldwide. During the 1980s, the UCKG conducted a holy war against Brazilian spiritists, desecrating their temples and “tying up” their spirit beings through prayer. Their prosperity message has become controversial. Another controversial feature in neo-Pentecostalism is an allegedly authoritarian style, whereby leaders are regarded as God’s “anointed” and not accountable to anyone else. In Western Nigeria, two neo-pentecostal churches founded in the 1980s were William Kumuyi’s Deeper Life Bible Church and David Oyedepo’s Living Faith Church (renamed Winners’ Chapel). Oyedepo claims that his main tabernacle – located near Lagos and seating more than 50,000 – is the world’s largest church building. Mensa Otabil of Ghana is known for his Afrocentric teaching, stressing the global role of the black race.

In surveying neo-Pentecostalism, a thematic approach may work best. Here we will consider a series of movements in rough, chronological sequence. Healing ministry – although never absent from Pentecostalism – was reemphasized in the late 1940s by independent, itinerant healing-evangelists (as noted earlier) and has continued since the 1970s (Benny Hinn, Randy Clark, Mahesh Chavda). In many global regions, healing rather than tongues-speaking is the most widely known charismatic manifestation. Moreover, healing stimulates church growth. Non-Christians who report divine healing later affiliate with pentecostal churches, often accompanied by family members. All around the world, popular religion is pragmatic. Because many of the sick are healed after receiving pentecostal prayers, people regard Pentecostalism as true. Of those in certain Chinese churches, 90 percent attribute their conversion to a healing experience. Episcopal and Catholic Charismatics – catering to a more upscale clientele – practice “inner healing,” redressing emotional wounds from traumatic experiences. Agnes Sanford and Drs. Frances and Judith MacNutt have been leaders in this area.

From their earliest days, pentecostal-charismatic Christians have been proponents of media ministries in their successive forms – radio, television, cassette tapes, CDs, DVDs, and the Internet. A recent development is the live streaming of worship and revival services. The International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City, Missouri, maintains twenty-four-hour prayer, now broadcast over the Internet.
God.tv broadcasts services from various locations. Modern media makes it possible to penetrate new public and private spaces and thus goes hand in hand with a missionary impulse. African neo-Pentecostals believe that recorded scripture or preaching (on tapes, CDs, or DVDs) has curative powers.46 During the 1970s, the Shepherding Movement appealed to a notion of “five-fold ministry” to argue that every believer needed to submit to a higher authority. To critics, the movement looked like pyramid marketing, with its own leaders (“the Ft. Lauderdale Five”) at the apex. There were reports that disciples had to consult with their authority figures over decisions regarding education, finances, and marriage. To proponents, the movement was a pastoral response to the rootless, undisciplined ethos of 1970s charismatic Christianity. When televangelist Pat Robertson branded it as heresy, things soon unraveled. The 1980s witnessed a Pentecostalization of North American evangelicals, exemplified by John Wimber and his Vineyard Churches.47 Wimber used the term “power evangelism” to refer to a phenomenon better known outside of the United States – namely, healing ministry as a means of witness to nonbelievers. Wimber’s course on healing – co-taught at Fuller Seminary with C. Peter Wagner – provoked controversy over signs and wonders in Christian ministry.48

In the 1980s neo-Pentecostals began to emphasize prophetic gifts and hold conferences at which self-described prophets delivered personalized messages to individuals seeking their spiritual guidance. This development – like the Shepherding Movement – raised issues of spiritual authority. Debate centered on the “Kansas City Prophets” (Paul Cain, Bob Jones, et al.), associated with Mike Bickle and his Metro Christian Vineyard Church. The failure of high-profile predictions – including Wimber’s forecast of a Christian revival in England – led to greater caution. Prophetic statements had to pass tests before being promulgated; prophets too had to be tested.49 Some written prophecies were less personal and more apocalyptic, predicting a harvest both of wickedness and of souls to be saved before Christ’s return.50

The 1990s witnessed the rise of strategic-level spiritual warfare. C. Peter Wagner taught that demons could dominate not only individuals but also whole communities. “Warfare prayer” could break satanic “strongholds” and thus facilitate evangelism.51 Such teachings fit well in an African context, where exorcism or deliverance ministry is understood as a part of conversion.52 One step in the process was “spiritual mapping” – that is, locating sites of false religion, violence, or broken covenants that may have given demons a “legal right” to infest a territory. Another step was “identificational repentance,” whereby believers verbally confess the sins of others, asking for God’s forgiveness. For some neo-Pentecostals, overcoming evil requires action as well as prayer. In 1990, the New Zealand native John Dawson founded the International Reconciliation Coalition to redress historic crimes and injustices.53 Some Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals began to show greater interest in social change and social justice. Donald E. Miller’s research – based on interviews at twenty-nine sites – revealed a shift toward social engagement among global Pentecostal-Charismatics.

The 1990s witnessed major revivals in Toronto, Canada (from 1994), and Pensacola, Florida (from 1995).55 Canadian Vineyard pastors, John and Carol Arnott, welcomed more than two million visitors to their congregation over several years. The revival’s physical manifestations – laughing, weeping, shouting, trembling, and even “animal sounds” – disturbed many observers and led Wimber to cut ties of fellowship with this congregation. Despite opposition, Toronto became a neo-pentecostal pilgrimage site. Thousands of churches in North America, Britain, and East Asia were affected when their members returned from Toronto. Holy Trinity Brompton (a London suburb) embraced the Toronto movement (and launched the Alpha Program – as noted earlier). After migrating to London, the movement spread to Pensacola, Florida, where the Brownsville Revival broke out in 1995 in an Assemblies of God church. The Pensacola revival centered on repentance. The Toronto Movement, by contrast, offered a deep, refreshing experience of God’s love, especially welcome to beleaguered pastors.

Worship is central for neo-Pentecostals. With roots in the California counterculture, and in the “Jesus rock” of Larry Norman and Keith Green, contemporary Christian music has mushroomed since the 1980s.56 The Australian megachurch, Hillsong, is emblematic of this trend.57 In what we might call the manifestational approach to prayer, worshippers do not petition God with specific requests but instead seek to “draw God’s presence.” Today’s younger neo-Pentecostals see worship as evangelism, worship as
healing. Sins, addictions, and burdens will be lifted – if only God’s people worship. The 24/7 or house of prayer movement, led by Mike Bickle and Lou Engle, and centered on the IHOP in Kansas City, encourages prolonged and intense prayer, often accompanied by fasting. The DVD of George Otis, Jr., Transformations (1999), offered case studies to show that prayer changes entire cities and nations, preparing the way for church revival and even for economic revitalization. Global migration has produced migrant/immigrant missionaries, who see themselves as sent not to earn money but to effect spiritual revitalization. African Christians are generally more hopeful about Europe’s religious future than are European Christians. They believe that God will save Europe from secularism.

One overarching neo-pentecostal theme is dominionism. Beginning with the Latter Rain Revival, neo-Pentecostals began to reject the eschatological pessimism of premillennialism and to embrace postmillennialism and the vision of a restored or “glorious church.” Some have insisted that Christ’s earthly reign will be exercised through an elite corps of disciples, led by super apostles whose authority will exceed that of the first-century apostles. Others – such as C. Peter Wagner – offer less grandiose visions for the future and yet insist that the church must seek to influence all “seven mountains” of human life (business, government, media, arts and entertainment, education, the family, and religion). This approach has appeal in Africa, where many Christians see no problem in public expressions of faith. Frederick Chiluba, president of Zambia from 1991 to 2001, declared on national television: “I submit the Government and the entire nation of Zambia to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.” The preamble to Zambia’s constitution declares the republic “a Christian nation.” The Nigerian-based Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) seems a case study in dominionism. The RCCG plants not only churches around the world but also banks, supermarkets, bakeries, and other businesses thus challenging any division of spiritual and physical.

A final theme is Christian unity. A French study traced a process of “denominational recomposition” bringing divided Christians back together. Some speak of a “convergence movement,” while others use the phrase “city church” to call Christians to become united with all other Christians in their locality. The Protestant churches of Buenos Aires, Argentina, have begun such a process. Neo-Pentecostals favoring the “five-fold” ministry call for something like a renewed episcopacy, whereby one pastor will coordinate all ministries within a given region. This latest idea on church governance is also the oldest.

APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

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Apostles and Prophets

Modern church statisticians cite the phenomenal growth of the Pentecostal movement and report that Pentecostals and charismatics now make up the second largest Christian group in the world. Pentecostals stand in awe of what God has done and attribute such amazing expansion to their simple trust in the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, which continues to be at work in the church today.

The rapid advance of the Pentecostal revival has also been accompanied by a new openness to the gifts of the Spirit. The evangelical world increasingly has turned from cessationism, the belief the gifts of the Spirit ceased at the end of the New Testament era, to an understanding that New Testament gifts of the Holy Spirit are vital for ministry today.

With the restoration of the miraculous gifts to the Church has also come the question of whether God is restoring the five-fold ministry of Ephesians 4:11: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.” Bible scholars differ on whether the gifts of pastor and teacher are separate in Ephesians 4 (yielding a total of five), or whether a better translation might be “... and some to be pastor-teachers” (yielding a total of four). Greek grammar would seem to dictate four, but the New Testament often discusses pastoral and teaching roles separately. However, the best designation for ministry is neither fivefold nor fourfold but manifold. Ephesians 4:12 gives to all saints the work of ministry, while 1 Corinthians 12:28–30 and Romans 12:6–8 provide aspects of ministry beyond the designations in Ephesians 4:11,12.

Relatively few questions are raised about the validity of contemporary evangelists, pastors, and teachers. However, there are a number of voices in the church today calling for the restoration of apostles and prophets, thinking these offices are the key to continued growth and vitality. The issue is important, and this paper is an effort to seek scriptural guidance.

The Apostolic Church

Some advocate the recognition of contemporary apostles and use the term apostolic. They believe church bodies that do so have moved closer to the New Testament ideal of ministry.

Historically, the adjective apostolic has been used to signify (1) church bodies that attempt to trace a succession of their clergy back to the original 12 apostles, as do the Catholic and Episcopal churches; (2) Oneness, or Jesus-Only, Pentecostal churches, who since the early 20th century have used the description “Apostolic Faith” (previously used by Trinitarian Pentecostals such as Charles F. Parham and William J. Seymour) to designate their distinctive doctrines; (3) churches that claim God has raised up present-day apostles in their midst (“New Apostolic” and “Fivefold” churches); or (4) churches, including most Protestant groups, that claim to be apostolic because they teach what the apostles taught; that is, New Testament doctrine. Therefore, most Christian denominations think of themselves, in one sense or another, as apostolic.

Pentecostal churches believe they are apostolic because (1) they teach what the apostles taught, and (2) they share in the power of the apostles through the baptism in and fullness of the Holy Spirit, who empowers their lives and ministries. They believe what matters is not a contemporary apostolic office but apostolic doctrine and power.

The New Testament Apostles

The origin of the apostolic office is traced in the Gospels to Jesus. The Gospel of Mark reads, “[Jesus] appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:14,15). Matthew and Luke contain...
similar attributions (cf. Matthew 10:2; Luke 6:13). The number 12 seems to have had significance, so the most common title for this group in the Gospels is “the Twelve” rather than “the Apostles” (cf. Matthew 26:14,20,47; Mark 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; Luke 8:1; 9:1; 18:31; John 6:67; 20:24). The designation “the Twelve” also continued in the life of the Early Church through the writings of Luke (Acts 6:2) and the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15:5). In addition, Jesus himself is called by the writer to the Hebrews “the apostle and high priest whom we confess,” (Hebrews 3:1).

The word apostle comes from the Greek apostelos and may be translated by such terms as delegate, envoy, messenger, or agent. Since Jesus probably spoke Hebrew or Aramaic rather than Greek, it is possible the Hebrew/Aramaic shaliach also means much the same as apostelos. This is the actual word used by Jesus and His earliest followers and provides much of the conceptual background. The rabbis of Jesus’ day regarded it as an important legal principle: “A man’s agent (shaliach) is like unto himself.” This meant if a man’s agent made a deal, it was the same as the man himself making the deal. The modern concept of power of attorney is very similar.

When it comes to apostles or other kinds of agents, it is of crucial importance whom the agent represents. The Gospels make it clear the apostles were appointed by Jesus to act on His behalf. Mark’s tersely stated record of their initial commission is “that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:14,15). It has to do with personal fellowship with Jesus, preaching the good news of the kingdom of God on Jesus’ behalf, and participation in the power of Jesus to cast out demons. Jesus apparently sent them out early in the Galilean ministry with instructions to preach and heal the sick (cf. Matthew 10:5–14; Mark 6:7–11; Luke 9:1–5). Like the Seventy dispatched later, their immediate scope of ministry was to “the lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 10:6).

The Apostles and Pentecost

The commission of the Twelve was dramatically expanded following the death and resurrection of Jesus. In John’s Gospel, Jesus anticipated that those who had faith in Him would do “greater things” than He had done by asking in His name (John 14:12–14). The Counselor, identified as the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of truth, who was “with” them during the time of His earthly ministry, would soon be “in” them (14:16,17). The Spirit would also teach them all things and remind them of everything He had said to them (14:26). John noted that Jesus appeared to the “disciples” after His resurrection and said, “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” (John 20:21–23). Luke makes it clear Jesus “opened” the minds of “the Eleven and those with them” (24:33) to “understand the Scriptures” to the end that “the Christ [would] suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins [would] be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:45–47). Jesus then reminded the disciples they were “to stay in the city [i.e., Jerusalem] until [they had] been clothed with power from on high” (24:49).

This promise was so important that Luke recorded it again in Acts 1:4 with an explanatory word from Jesus: “For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (1:5). The reason for the promise is couched in Jesus’ words, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The promise was fulfilled in the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:4) and identified in Peter’s prophetic message as the “last days” gift of God’s Spirit enabling all his “sons,” “daughters,” and “servants, both men and women” to “prophesy” (Acts 2:14–17). Although earlier trained, called, and commissioned by the Lord Jesus, the apostles needed the baptism in the Holy Spirit as the final preparation for their mission. They were granted spiritual giftings and empowerment required for the apostolic office. Previously anxious and insecure, they were transformed and energized by the Holy Spirit.

The apostles began to speak as those who were “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:8) and were instrumental in others receiving the gift of the Spirit (8:14–17; 10:44–46; 19:6). When Paul was converted and called to apostolic ministry, he also received the gift of the Spirit and was similarly transformed (9:17). Barnabas was said to be “full of the Holy Spirit and faith” (11:24). The Holy Spirit guided the mission activities of the apostles, sovereignly selecting Paul and Barnabas (13:2) and sending them on their way (13:4). Later the Spirit prevented Paul and his companions from entering the province of Asia and Bythnia but directed them toward Troas and Macedonia (16:6–10). Paul was the recipient of prophetic guidance by Spirit-directed prophets as to his fate upon his return to Jerusalem (20:22,23). Whatever the natural ability of these early apostles, the genius of their ministry is found in the power and wisdom of the Spirit given to them.
The Place of the Twelve

The opening chapter of Acts reflects a concern to maintain the number of the Twelve. Peter and the other members of the original Twelve, with the 120, looked to the Scriptures and determined that the vacancy created by the defection and death of Judas should be filled. It was important that the full complement of 12 be maintained for the effusion of the Spirit. Luke had previously recorded the promise of Jesus to the Twelve: “I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29,30). The importance of maintaining 12 apostles as a symbol of the 12 tribes of Israel is unmistakable. The apostolate was to be intact for the coming of the Spirit and the launching of a fully equipped church on its worldwide mission.

The way the vacancy was filled is highly instructive. Jesus had personally appeared and given “instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen” (Acts 1:2). Two qualifying issues stand out: (1) personal commissioning by the Lord, and (2) thorough familiarity with the teachings of Jesus. Careful attention was given to both in Peter’s proposal. Any candidate had to have been with them for Jesus’ entire ministry, “beginning from John’s baptism” (Acts 1:22). Two qualified candidates, “Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias,” were presented and prayer was offered. “Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26). After Pentecost, however, there was no effort to replace any of the original 12 apostles nor to perpetuate the number 12 (cf. Acts 12:2).

The Special Case of the Apostle Paul

Paul’s status as an apostle is unique. He was neither a member of the Twelve nor present for Christ’s post-Resurrection appearances; his calling as an apostle came in a later and separate vision of the risen Lord. Recorded three times in Acts (9:1–19; 22:4–16; 26:9–18) and often intimated in his letters (Galatians 1:12), the account of Paul’s conversion demonstrates the authenticity and power of his call to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. Like the Twelve, he recognized the apostolic office was conferred in the personal call of Christ through post-Resurrection appearances (1 Corinthians 15:5–7). Paul acknowledged he was “as . . . one abnormally born [ektroma]” (1 Corinthians 15:8). The word is usually used for miscarriages. But rather than Paul saying he was “born” unnaturally early, he is saying that as a witness to the Resurrection and as an apostle he was “born” unnaturally late. His apostolic calling was thus without parallel and made his credentials vulnerable to attack from enemies who sought to discredit him (1 Corinthians 9:1,2; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12).

Despite the unusual nature of his encounter with Christ, Paul did not consider his apostolic status to be less than that of the other apostles. They had seen the resurrected Lord; so had he. He regularly appealed to his having seen “Jesus our Lord” (1 Corinthians 9:1). While he referred to himself as “the least of the apostles,” apparently because of his earlier persecution of the Church, he “worked harder than all of them” (1 Corinthians 15:9,10). Though insisting on a continuity of the message (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3), he nonetheless distinguished his apostolic authority from the other apostles, even to the point of a public rebuke to Peter (Galatians 1:11–2:21). To his critics at Corinth he pointed out, “I do not think I am in the least inferior to those ‘super-apostles’” (2 Corinthians 11:5; 12:11) and rehearsed his Jewish heritage (11:22), hardships (11:23–33), and his “surpassingly great revelations” (12:1–7). He reminded the Corinthians, “[T]he things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance” (2 Corinthians 12:12).

Apostles of Christ

Paul’s sense of his own calling is reflected in the introduction to most of his letters: “Paul . . . an apostle of Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:1; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1, et al.). The letters of Peter begin similarly: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1; cf. 2 Peter 1:1). Paul used this designation in the text of 1 Thessalonians: “As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you . . . ” (2:6). Jude 17 refers to what “the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.” These references make it appear that the title “apostle of Christ (Jesus Christ/Lord Jesus Christ/Christ Jesus)” was standard nomenclature for all the apostles Christ had personally appeared to and appointed. It is almost always this group to whom the title “apostle” is applied in the New Testament.

Apostles of the Churches

Scholars occasionally point out a distinction between the “Apostles of Christ” and the “Apostles of the Churches.” Paul spoke of unnamed “brothers” who are “representatives [apostoloi] of the churches and an
It is instructive, however, that nowhere in the New Testament after the replacement of Judas is any attempt made to replace James son of Zebedee...
Jerusalem and Paul’s direction of his missionary teams. When they worked together, one of the apostles usually took the lead, as in Peter’s early activity in administrative matters. However, that authority must not be construed in political or bureaucratic terms. There is little evidence of their involvement in local administrative matters.

In fact, there are certain exegetical hints the apostles of Jesus Christ are not to have successors. In 1 Corinthians 15:8, Paul listed all the Resurrection and post-Resurrection appearances of Christ and noted “last of all he appeared to me.” While some disagree, the statement is most commonly understood to mean Paul looked upon himself as the last apostle to whom Christ appeared.11 If this is the correct understanding, only the Twelve whom Jesus personally called and those He commissioned in His post-Resurrection appearances made up His original apostles. Apostles are named first among the offices of the church (1 Corinthians 12:28) and the ministry gifts of Ephesians 4:11 because they are foundational, not necessarily because they are continuous leaders in the church. The Ephesians 4:11 passage must be interpreted in the context of the Ephesians letter itself, wherein Paul had already described the church as “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20), and the form of leadership instituted by Paul in the Ephesian church itself and the other churches he founded (Acts 14:23). Writing to Timothy at Ephesus, Paul entrusts the oversight of the church to “elders” (synonymous with bishop or pastor or overseer) and deacons, not apostles and prophets. When he bids an emotional farewell to the leaders of the Ephesian church, which he himself had established, his meeting is with the elders (not apostles or prophets), to whom he entrusts the responsibility of bishop (or overseer) and pastor (or shepherd) (Acts 20:28).

It is difficult to escape the conclusion of Dietrich Müller: “One thing is certain. The [new] Testament never betrays any understanding of the apostolate as an institutionalized church office, capable of being passed on.”12

The Authority of the Apostles

The authority of the apostles was modeled by the chief Apostle, the Lord Jesus Christ, who taught them that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,” (Mark 10:45). Jesus, on occasion, acted sharply and decisively against certain sins, such as the desecration of His Father’s house (Mark 11:15–17; John 2:13–16) and the exploitative hypocrisy of the teachers of the Law and Pharisees (Matthew 23). However, He carefully avoided the trappings of political and institutional power and modeled extraordinary humility and patience for His apostles. His divine attributes were cloaked in human flesh and He was the exposition and example of His Father’s word and work.

Even a cursory reading of the New Testament demonstrates the apostles of Christ possessed authority. The Early Church was formed around their teaching, which was in turn confirmed by the “wonders and miraculous signs” they did (Acts 2:42,43). They were the recognized spokesmen before the rulers (Acts 4:8ff.), and their authority was demonstrated in such events as the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11). In writing to the Corinthians, a church he founded, Paul threatened to come to them “with a whip” (1 Corinthians 4:21) and did not hesitate to give stern directions for discipline in a case of incest (1 Corinthians 5:1–5). Writing to the church in Rome, which he did not found, he stated his apostolic credentials (Romans 1:1), assumed the prerogative of imparting to them spiritual gifts (1:11), and planned to “come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ” (15:29). He laid out for their belief and practice the most systematic exposition of doctrinal and ethical truth in all of Scripture. He did not hesitate to give directions for their local ethical dilemmas such as relations between the weak and the strong (chapters 14,15). Peter also, claiming apostolic standing, wrote authoritatively to apparently Gentile churches that he did not pioneer (1 Peter 1:1).

Some modern interpreters insist apostolic authority was merely local, not universal, and exercised only in churches the apostles founded.13 To be sure, apostles seem to have been aware of certain protocol in churches they did not pioneer (Romans 15:20; 1 Corinthians 3:10). However, they did cross geographical boundaries. The pattern of evidence throughout the New Testament indicates their authority was universal in doctrinal and ethical matters, binding in some sense upon all the churches. However, that authority must not be construed in political or bureaucratic terms. There is little evidence of their involvement in local administrative matters.

When they worked together, one of the apostles usually took the lead, as in Peter’s early activity in Jerusalem and Paul’s direction of his missionary teams. However, in dealing with the practical and
doctrinal problems of the churches, the apostles often exercised a shared leadership among themselves and
with the elders, a group that appears to have been added quickly to the leadership rolls. For example, the
Twelve called upon the church of Jerusalem to select the Seven (Acts 6). When the Jerusalem Council
resolved the schismatic debate over whether the Gentiles should keep the Jewish law, the issue was decided by
“the apostles and elders” (Acts 15:4,6,22). On this or some similar issue, even the two apostles Paul and
Peter initially came to conflicting opinions (Galatians 2:11–14). James Dunn aptly observes, “Apostolic
authority is exercised not over the Christian community, but within it; and the authority is exercised . . . ‘to
equip the saints for the work of their ministry, for the building up of Christ’s body’” (Éphesians 4:12).14

Since apostles were frequently mobile, local rule in the maturing churches seems to have been exercised largely by elders. In the Jerusalem church, the apostles were the sole authority figures early on (Acts 2:42;
4:37); but perhaps because of persecution and travel, they appear to have been less prominent over time.
Peter reported the conversion of Cornelius and his household to the “apostles and the brothers” (11:1). The
“apostles and elders” made up the Jerusalem council (15:6). When Paul returned to Jerusalem after his third
journey, he called on “James, and all the elders” (21:18). Elders were certainly key authority figures in
Jerusalem, as seen in Acts, and elsewhere as seen in New Testament letters. The absence of apostles on
Paul’s last visit to Jerusalem (Acts 21:18) is further evidence that as the Twelve dispersed, the Jerusalem
church did not provide for further apostolic replacement as they had at the defection of Judas (Acts 1:12–
26).

None of the New Testament letters are addressed to an apostle, as would be expected if each city had its
own ruling apostle. One of the few letters that includes church officers in its title, Philippians, is addressed
to “overseers [episkopos] and deacons [diakonos]” (1:1)—not to a local or city apostle. There seems to be
no concern to place recognized apostles in residence in the various churches or regions.

The Marks of an Apostle

Striving to protect the Corinthians from the seduction of “false apostles,” Paul pointed out characteristics
(semeion, “sign,” 2 Corinthians 12:12) that identified a genuine apostle. From that context and the larger
New Testament background, the following are apparent:

1. The first and most important mark of true apostles of Christ was that they had seen the risen Lord
and been personally commissioned by Him as witnesses to His resurrection (Acts 1:21,22; 1
Corinthians 9:1; 15:7,8). They were thus appropriately called “apostles of Christ.”

2. The personal call and commission of the risen Christ had to be consummated in the baptism in the
Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4 [for Paul, see Acts 9:1–17]), at which time the spiritual gift, or charisma,
of apostleship was granted. This understanding is reflected, for example, in Paul’s statements: “It
was he who gave some to be apostles . . .” (Éphesians 4:11) and “I became a servant of this
gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power” (Éphesians 3:7).
The Spirit with His power and anointing set apostles first among the leaders of the church (1
Corinthians 12:28).

3. Apostles were supernaturally equipped for prophetic preaching and teaching. To illustrate, when
the Spirit fell at Pentecost, the disciples spoke “in other tongues as the Spirit enabled
(apophthengomai) them” (Acts 2:4). Confronted with the confused and contradictory opinions of
the watching crowd, Peter “stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed”
(apophthengomai) them (2:14) in a masterful explanation resulting in 3,000 conversions. The
Greek verb apophthengomai is used to denote prophetic inspiration, which in this context is the
immediate result of the Spirit’s enablement.15 Paul reflected much of the same awareness: “My
message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of
the Spirit’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:4).

4. With the apostolic gift came miraculous spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:8–10). “The things that
mark [semeia, “signs”] an apostle—they, wonders and miracles—were done among you with
great perseverance” (2 Corinthians 12:12). The Book of Acts attributes numerous miracles to
Paul evidently regarded such miraculous ministry as an essential mark of a true apostle. He also
taught and preached among them “with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power” so their “faith
might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:4,5).

5. The apostles were the authoritative teachers of the Early Church in both belief and practice. They
were charged above all with the accuracy and purity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote,
“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins
according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4; cf. Acts 2:42; Romans 16:17; Galatians 1:8; Titus 1:9). The intent of their preaching and teaching is expressed in Ephesians 4:12,13: “so that the body of Christ may be built up ... and become mature.” The apostolic doctrine became the content of the New Testament canon. The apostles were understood either to have written the canonical books or to have been the primary sources and guarantors of their inspired character.

6. Apostles were commissioned as missionaries and church builders. Those the New Testament speaks about did this successfully. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20) was given specifically to the Eleven, perhaps in the company of the “more than five hundred” (1 Corinthians 15:6). The missionary impulse breathes through the accounts of apostolic commissioning (cf. Luke 24:47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8; 9:15; 22:15; 26:17,18; Galatians 1:15–17; et al.).

7. Suffering for Christ’s sake seems to have been a major mark of the apostolic office. Paul validated his ministry and armed the Corinthian church against the seduction of false apostles with a lengthy personal history of sufferings on behalf of the gospel. “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body which is the church” (Colossians 1:24).

8. Apostles were pastoral and relational. Paul’s love for his parishioners and his ministry associates flows through his letters. The warm and extended greetings at the conclusion of Romans are striking (16:1–16). He repeatedly uses parenting language (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:15; 2 Corinthians 12:14,15). On behalf of the Corinthians, he is “jealous ... with a godly jealousy” (2 Corinthians 11:2). To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote that he loved and cared for them gently as “a mother caring for her little children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7). The language in the letters of Peter (1 Peter 4:12; 2 Peter 3:1, NRSV) and John (1 John 2:7, NRSV, et al.) emphasizes the same pastoral instincts.

The New Testament Prophets

“Prophets” are found immediately after “apostles” in one list of ministry gifts (Ephesians 4:11). and their activity is closely linked to that of apostles throughout the New Testament. Paul had a high view of their role: “And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets ...” (1 Corinthians 12:28). Further, the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). Along with the apostles, prophets were complementary gifts to the foundational era of the church.

The historical accounts in the New Testament affirm these complementary roles. New Testament prophets first appeared by name in Acts when a group, apparently residing in Jerusalem, went to Antioch and one of their number, Agabus, accurately predicted the coming great famine (Acts 11:27–30). Antioch soon had its own group of resident prophets—Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul (Paul) (Acts 13:1). Two other Jerusalem leaders and prophets were chosen to bear the council letter to Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, and along the way “said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers” (Acts 15:22,32). On Paul’s return to Jerusalem after the third missionary journey, he stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, who “had four unmarried daughters who prophesied,” and we learn women were active and recognized as prophets. At that time Agabus made his way down from Jerusalem to Caesarea and prophesied that the Jews of Jerusalem would bind Paul and hand him over to the Gentiles (Acts 21:10,11).

Paul’s letters, written earlier than the Book of Acts, indicate the presence of prophets in the churches he had established as well as those he did not (e.g., the church at Rome). For example, he provided instruction on their activities in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:29–32), saying their prophecies were to be tested by apostolic doctrine (1 Corinthians 14:37). Women prophets were active in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:5,6). The Romans were to exercise the gift of prophecy “in proportion” to their faith (Romans 12:6). The Thessalonians were cautioned not to “treat prophecies with contempt” (1 Thessalonians 5:20). The Ephesians letter stated Paul’s understanding that, with the apostles, the prophets were foundational to the church (Ephesians 2:20). In that capacity they were, with the apostles, recipients of divinely given revelation (Ephesians 3:5) and a ministry gift to the church (Ephesians 4:11). To Timothy, Paul noted a prophetic message had accompanied the laying on of hands by the elders (1 Timothy 4:14).
The Book of Revelation is apparently to be understood as a prophecy, thus according John prophetic status (Revelation 1:3). Revelation also says the church was to be on guard against false prophets, in this case “Jezebel,” who by their teaching and conduct perverted the apostolic gospel (Revelation 2:20).

These accounts make clear that (1) there were recognized groups of prophets in the early churches often closely associated with the apostles; (2) the apostles themselves (as Barnabas, Silas [both of whom on occasion appear to be recognized as apostles], Saul [Paul], and John) also functioned as prophets (Acts 13:1; 15:32; Revelation 1:3); (3) these prophets did travel on occasion from church to church; (4) both men and women were recognized as prophets; (5) prophets, while never appointed to ruling functions in their capacity as prophets like overseers/elders did exercise spiritual influence with the apostles and elders in the belief and practice of the Early Church; (6) the integrity of the prophet was maintained by authentic inspired utterance that was true to the Scriptures and apostolic doctrine; and (7) there is no provision for qualifying or appointing prophets as a part of a church leadership hierarchy for succeeding generations.

The Gift of Prophecy

While there were recognized prophets in the New Testament era, even more pervasive was the gift of prophecy that energized the apostolic church. The Old Testament prophet Joel, moved by God, prophesied, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28,29). Significantly, Peter, when explaining the Pentecost event and its evidential tongues, identified them with Joel’s prediction of the outpouring of the Spirit and twice repeated that both sons and daughters, men and women, would prophesy (Acts 2:17,18). Peter’s sermon was clearly a prophecy immediately inspired by the Spirit, as the verb “addressed [apophthengomai]” (Acts 2:14), which means “to speak as a prophet,”17 denotes. When one examines closely the witness to Christ given by the early Christian leaders in Acts, the prophetic impulse is apparent—and doubtlessly intended by Luke. Peter’s words to the crippled beggar (Acts 3:6), the temple crowds (Acts 3:12ff.), the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11), to list a few, are filled with prophetic import. Stephen’s eloquence and power are prophetic (Acts 7). The impact of the preaching of Philip (Acts 8:4–8) and other unnamed believers (Acts 11:19–21) was likewise Spirit-enabled. And so it is throughout the Acts account.

While it is too much to say every utterance of a believer is a prophecy, nonetheless, the theme of Acts is that every believer receives the power of the Holy Spirit to be a prophetic witness to the risen Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). Interestingly, John noted, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). All believers are inducted into a universal “prophethood”18 and are endowed with one or more spiritual gifts, many of which have directly to do with wise, instructive, and edifying utterances (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:8–10; Ephesians 4:7–13; 1 Peter 4:10).

Paul makes it clear not every believer will be a prophet in terms of filling a recognized “office,” or, perhaps, even being regularly used by the Spirit in that way (1 Corinthians 12:28,29). The very identification of a separate gift of prophecy implies that. However, at the same time, he encourages all believers to “desire . . . especially the gift of prophecy” (1 Corinthians 14:1), for the person who prophesies does so for the “strengthening, encouragement and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3) of others. There is no statute of limitations on the Spirit of prophecy. In the words of Peter’s prophetic sermon, “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to study the roles of apostles and prophets within the Ephesians 4:11,12 ministry context and present findings both consistent with Scripture and relevant for this strategic time in the growth of the Pentecostal movement. The intent is not to be argumentative or polemical but to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). With these considerations in mind, the following conclusions are offered:

1. The apostolic nature of the church is to be found in adherence to the Word of God, which has been faithfully transmitted by the apostles of Jesus Christ in their foundational role, and in vital participation in the life and ministry of the Holy Spirit, who baptized, gifted, and led the first apostles.

2. Since the New Testament does not provide guidance for the appointment of future apostles, such contemporary offices are not essential to the health and growth of the church, nor its apostolic nature.
3. While we do not understand it to be necessary, some church bodies may in good faith and careful biblical definition choose to name certain leaders apostles. The word “apostle” (apostolos) is used in different ways in the New Testament: (1) for the Twelve disciples originally appointed by Jesus (and later Matthias); (2) for the Twelve plus Paul and a larger group (1 Corinthians 15:3–8) whose exact numbers are somewhat uncertain; and (3) for others such as Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25) and the unnamed “brothers” Paul wrote about (2 Corinthians 8:23). Groups one and two, personally called and commissioned by the risen Lord, are often referred to in Scripture as “apostles of Jesus Christ” and are foundational apostles (Ephesians 2:20) with unique revelatory and authoritative roles in establishing the church and producing the New Testament. The third group, the “apostles of the churches,” were assigned specific roles and responsibilities as needed by the early churches.

Contemporary apostles, of course, will not have seen or been commissioned by the risen Lord in the manner of the “apostles of Jesus Christ,” nor will they be adding their teachings to the canon of Scripture. Presumably they will demonstrate the other marks of an apostle taught in the New Testament.

4. The title of apostle should not be lightly granted or assumed. Historically, apostles have been persons of recognized spiritual stature, stalwart character, and great effectiveness in the work of the church. Paul’s warnings about “those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about,” his assertion that “such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ,” and his further association of them with “Satan [who] himself masquerades as an angel of light,” (2 Corinthians 11:12–14) are sobering—reminders that unfettered human pride in seeking church leadership can blind one to the machinations of the devil. Persons lacking character may attach the title of apostle to themselves in order to assert dominance and control over other believers, while leaving themselves unaccountable to the members in their care or the spiritual eldership of their own fellowship.

5. The function of apostle occurs whenever the church of Jesus Christ is being established among the unevangelized. As Pentecostals, we fervently desire a generation of men and women who will function apostolically: to take the gospel with signs following to people at home and abroad who have not yet heard or understood that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

6. Prophecy is an ongoing gift of the Holy Spirit that will always be broadly distributed throughout a holy and responsive church until Jesus comes. The Spirit sovereignly chooses and directs persons who are open and sensitive to His gifts and promptings and endows them variously with an array of verbal gifts. Paul admonished, “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy” (1 Corinthians 14:1). Many persons of both sexes may be expected to exercise the gift of prophecy in various ways, as seen in the New Testament.

The New Testament does not make provisions for establishing the prophet in a hierarchical governing structure of the church; in fact, the content of prophecy itself should always be tested by and responsible to the superior authority of Scripture. However, the church should long for authentic prophecy with a message, which is relevant to contemporary needs and subject to the authority of Scripture.

Finally, the Ephesians 4:11,12 gifts are both the historical and contemporary heritage of the Church. Some apostolic and prophetic functions flowing from persons directly commissioned by the risen Lord and acting in revelatory capacities seem clearly to belong to the foundational era of the Church. At the same time, some of those functions having to do with the revitalization, expansion, and nurture of the church ought to be present in every generation. We encourage all believers, led and filled by the Spirit, to allow themselves to be fully utilized as servants of the Lord, since all gifts are needed to edify and complete the body as well as to mobilize the body to reach the world. Then the purpose of all ministry gifts will be realized: “To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12,13).

**Practical Questions Regarding Apostles And Prophets**

1. *Does the Assemblies of God recognize present-day apostles and prophets?*

The Assemblies of God recognizes ministers as certified, licensed, or ordained. The work of district councils and the General Council is overseen by presbyters and superintendents. Local churches appoint deacons. The Assemblies of God believes this practice is consistent with apostolic practice provided in the
pastoral letters of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. The pastoral letters do not make provision for the appointment of apostles or prophets, nor does the Book of Acts indicate that provision for such was given in the churches established on the missionary journeys. The apostles appointed not apostles or prophets but elders (Acts 14:23). At the conclusion of the missionary journeys, Paul met with the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:17–38). Clearly, elders are also given the functions of bishop (“overseer”) and shepherd (“pastor”) (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2).

Thus, within the Assemblies of God, persons are not recognized by the title of apostle or prophet. However, many within the church exercise the ministry function of apostles and prophets. Apostolic functions usually occur within the context of breaking new ground in unevangelized areas or among unreached people. The planting of over 225,000 churches worldwide since 1914 in the Assemblies of God could not have been accomplished unless apostolic functions had been present. In the Early Church, false apostles did not pioneer ministries; they preyed on ministries established by others. Prophetic functions occur when believers speak under the anointing of the Spirit to strengthen, encourage, or comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3). All prophecies are to be weighed carefully (1 Corinthians 14:29). A predictive prophecy may be true, but the prophet whose doctrine departs from biblical truth is false. A predictive prophecy that proves false leads to the conclusion that the person is a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:19–22).

Finally, it must be noted that titles are not as important as ministry itself. Too often a title is worn in an attitude of carnal pride. The title does not make the person or the ministry. The person with ministry makes the title meaningful. Jesus explicitly warned His disciples against engaging in the quest for titles (Matthew 23:8–12). He tells us, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25–28).

2. What is the implication for the local church in the current emphasis on apostles and prophets?

The Pentecostal and charismatic movements have witnessed various excessive or misplaced theological emphases over the years. We look with grave concern on those who do not believe in congregational church government, who do not trust the maturity of local church bodies to govern themselves under Scripture and the Spirit. Such leaders prefer more authoritarian structures where their own word or decrees are unchallenged.

In the current emphasis on Ephesians 4:11, verse 12 is being neglected: “...to prepare God’s people for works of service [i.e. ministry], so that the body of Christ may be built up.” The stress of the New Testament lies with every-believer ministry. The Protestant Reformation recaptured the biblical truth of the priesthood of all believers. The Pentecostal movement has spread like a fast-moving fire through the world because of the Spirit-gifted ministry of the entire body. The church must always remember that leadership gifts are not given for the exaltation of a few but for the equipping of all God’s people for ministry.

3. Should Assemblies of God churches welcome the ministries of apostles and prophets?

We encourage our churches to give close heed to the following provision of the General Council Bylaws: Pastors and leaders of assemblies should make proper investigation of persons who seek to gain entrance to teach, minister, or pastor. Use of the platform should be denied until spiritual integrity and reliability have been determined. Since the use of non-Assemblies of God ministers may bring confusion and problems detrimental to the Fellowship, it is recommended that Assemblies of God churches use Assemblies of God ministers (Article VI, Section 3).

This bylaw provision is consistent with the oversight responsibility given to pastors (Acts 20:28–31) and leaders in the body of Christ (1 Timothy 5:22, 2 Timothy 4:3–5).

Notes

1 Biblical citations are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

2 For simplicity, when Greek nouns and verbs are included they will usually be in the nominative singular and first person singular indicative.

4 Tractate Berakoth 5.5 and several other places in the Mishnah, the oldest portion of the Talmud. While the earliest rabbinical references date from the second century, it seems likely that the institution was much earlier. However, some scholars trace the concept to the “to send” language both of the Old Testament itself and secular Greek. See Colin Brown, gen. ed., The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), “Apostle,” 1:126–136.


6 It is frequently suggested that the Eleven erred in their selection of Matthias because Judas’ place was reserved for Paul. Matthias, it is noted, immediately passes into oblivion. However, there is no hint of criticism in the text and few of the Twelve are mentioned after chapter 1. Paul’s apostolic credentials are established independently of the Twelve by both Luke and Paul himself (cf. Acts 9:1–30, especially vv. 26–28; Gal. 1:15–24).


8 Some commentators identify the “super-apostles” with the Twelve; however, others suggest that the context more readily supports an identification with Jewish-Hellenistic teachers who came to Corinth with letters of introduction, perhaps from Jerusalem.

9 See the discussion in E. Earle Ellis, Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 38.


13 See, for example, James D.G. Dunn, The Theology of Paul the Apostle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 578–579.

14 The Theology of Paul the Apostle, 574.


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