

Apostolicity of Free Churches: A Contradiction in Terms or an Ecumenical Breakthrough?

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• SUMMARY

The question of apostolicity as a mark of the true church has been given a different twist by that most 'free' of free churches. They understand apostolicity as faithfulness to the apostolic doctrine and life rather than in terms of any 'apostolic succession'. The concept of apostolicity is explored and seen to be less restricted to the latter interpretation even among Roman Catholic statements. It is meant to be a reminder to the whole church, not a

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• ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Frage der Apostolizität als Kennzeichen der wahren Kirche stellt sich aus der Perspektive der 'freiesten' aller Freikirchen anders als üblich. Hier versteht man Apostolizität als Treue zu apostolischer Lehre und apostolischem Leben und weniger anhand der Konzeption einer apostolischen Sukzession. Das Konzept der Apostolizität wird untersucht und es wird festgestellt, dass es sich sogar in einigen römisch-katholischen Verlautbarungen nicht auf die letztere Interpretation beschränken lässt. Es soll als Erinnerung

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Sukzession zuzulassen.

• RÉSUMÉ

La doctrine de l'apostolicité comme marque de la véritable Église est considérée de manière différente par les Églises non officielles. Elles comprennent l'apostolicité comme la fidélité aux apôtres quant à la doctrine, et non pas en termes d'une quelconque «succession apostolique». En étudiant la notion d'apostolicité, l'auteur montre que son interprétation est aujourd'hui moins stricte que par le passé, y compris dans les déclarations venant de l'Église

litmus test of true church. The early Pentecostals were more concerned for the apostolic character of the whole Church than might have been thought. The difference comes with the means of connection with 'the apostolic' – the current dynamic of the Spirit vs. transmission through history. Seven aspects of apostolicity acceptable to all Christian churches are outlined, and it is hoped that on the basis of the Lima text it might be possible to admit 'a large measure of apostolicity without apostolic succession in the ministry'.

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allen Gemeinden dienen und nicht als Litmustest für die wahre Kirche. Die frühen Pfingstler waren mehr um den apostolischen Charakter der ganzen Kirche besorgt als oft angenommen. Der Unterschied besteht in dem Mittel der Verbindung mit dem Apostolischen – der gegenwärtigen Dynamik des Geistes steht die Überlieferung durch die Geschichte hindurch gegenüber. Es werden sieben für alle christlichen Kirchen akzeptable Aspekte der Apostolizität skizziert. Es wird die Hoffnung geäußert, dass es möglich wird, auf der Basis des Lima-Textes ein großes Maß an Apostolizität unter Absehung der apostolischen

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catholique romaine. Elle est vue comme un rappel adressé à l'ensemble de l'Église, et non plus tant comme un critère servant à délimiter les frontières de l'Église véritable. Par ailleurs, les premiers pentecôtistes avaient une préoccupation plus grande qu'on aurait pu le penser pour le caractère apostolique de l'Église dans son ensemble. La différence porte sur la manière dont l'Église se trouve reliée aux apôtres: pour les Pentecôtistes, le lien est établi par l'action actuelle de l'Esprit, plutôt que par une transmission au fil de l'histoire. L'auteur fait apparaître sept aspects de la notion d'apostolicité qu'il juge admis ou recevables par toutes les Églises chrétiennes. Il espère que, sur

la base de la déclaration de Lima, il pourrait être possible d'admettre «une bonne part d'apostolicité sans succession apostolique dans l'histoire».

Introduction

IT IS one of the ironies of church history that the very first church of the modern Pentecostal movement – currently the second largest Christian constituency with more than 300 million adherents – called itself Apostolic Faith Mission (Azusa Street, Los Angeles, CA). The irony of this title lies, of course, in that if there has been any claim in Free Churches that the traditional churches have hotly contested, it surely is the claim for apostolicity. By definition, especially in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theologies, Free Church ecclesiologies represent the quintessence of what is not apostolic.

It is in the dispute concerning apostolicity (and the related issue, catholicity) that the episcopal churches and Free Churches have stood at the opposite extremes. Because apostolicity is related to other traditional 'notes' of the church – holiness, oneness, and catholicity¹ – the very foundation of Free Church ecclesiology is at stake. The apostolicity of Free Churches is uncatholic because it lacks the connection to the whole church in its history, which is assured by the *successio apostolica*, episcopal churches contend.²

Free Churches have insisted on the holiness, oneness, apostolicity, and catholicity of their own churches although they have rarely argued along the classical canons. Free Churches understand the holiness of their churches primarily in the holiness of their members,³ the oneness of the church as 'spiritual unity' of all born-again Christians,⁴ the apostolicity as faithfulness to the apostolic doctrine and life,⁵ and the catholicity as self-evident fact consequently.⁶

On the other hand, Free Churches have looked at the traditional churches and accused them of the lack of ecclesiality. Their holiness is impaired by the presence of mixed membership, their claim for the apostolicity on the basis of apostolic succession is biblically unfounded, etc.

Furthermore, Free Churches have asked of traditional churches, what the price would be for 'earning credentials' in the older churches' eyes. Would that not mean losing one's identity altogether?⁷ Were Free Churches, for example, to become apostolic, they should incorporate bishops in their ministry patterns. But would that lead to a

contradiction in terms?

The purpose of the present essay is to take a critical look at the possibility and theological conditions of apostolicity in Free Church ecclesiologies. First, I will survey what the situation is in current ecumenical theology concerning apostolicity, the topic of which is rather complicated and loaded with both practical and theoretical disputes. Second, using Pentecostalism as a case study, I will ask what kind of 'apostolic roots' and inclinations there might be found in a Free Church ecclesiology when compared to a traditional Roman Catholic view. The reason for selecting Pentecostalism as my case study is twofold: it is currently the largest, and in that sense at least representative of the Free Church movements. Furthermore, Pentecostals have had theological dialogue at international level with Roman Catholics since 1972, and one of the topics discussed is apostolicity and corollary issues. We have therefore some ecumenical material available. In the following I will present seven theses pertaining to an ecumenical understanding of the notion of apostolicity, a notion that I believe all Christian churches can accept; and I will ask what possible implications may follow from these statements. I conclude the essay by focusing on the most disputed question of all, namely the apostolic succession, and alternative ways to solve its problematic.

Apostolicity in the Current Ecumenical Context⁹

Apostolicity is a complex concept. Even in the New Testament there is not a single notion of what it is to be an apostle, but rather different suggestions.¹⁰ James D. G. Dunn has argued that already in the New Testament there was a 'parting of the ways' between different orientations, such as those that championed enthusiastic charismatic spirituality over against those building on the office.¹¹ With regard to apostolicity, Paul seems to regard establishment of new churches as the essence of apostleship (1 Cor 9:1-2), and in consequence can speak of each church having its (own) apostles (1 Cor 12:27-28), whereas in the Acts apostleship was determined exclusively on the basis of a commission by the risen Christ during the limited period of his resurrection appearances (Acts 1:21ff.; cf. 1 Cor 15:8).¹²

In modern discussions of the idea of apostolic succession the insight has established itself that the primary issue is succession in the teaching and faith

of the apostles and only secondarily is it a matter of succession in office.¹³ According to the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, the church is apostolic insofar as it stands on apostolic faith; the criterion is the apostolic witness, i.e., apostolic teaching of the Gospel.¹⁴ From the Free Church perspective, it is interesting to note that according to that document, the commission of the church that goes back to the apostles, 'is carried out through a variety of charisms.'¹⁵ Also, the same document defines the much disputed question of apostolic succession in conciliar terms: 'The basic intention of the doctrine of apostolic succession is to indicate that, throughout all historical changes in its proclamation and structures, the church is at all times *referred to its apostolic origin*.'¹⁶

The ecumenical consensus-document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, provides us with the most detailed conciliar outline of apostolicity; according to it, apostolic tradition (the term that the document favors) is

continuity in the permanent characteristic of the Church of the apostles:¹⁷ witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love and joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each.¹⁸

This definition is helpful, since its focus is on spirituality and ministry rather than in quasi-juridical notions of succession of office(s). It includes the whole people of God and it entails even diaconic dimension.

In the New Testament there is one essential aspect to apostolicity, one that is too often neglected both in history and in modern times, namely the pneumatological and charismatic quality of apostolicity. The concept of apostolicity in the New Testament is indeed more pneumatologically and charismatically loaded than most of the historical, or even more modern views let us know. The birth of the Christian Church goes back to the pouring out of the Spirit; the first apostles ministered in the power of the Spirit, and the focus of the early church's worship was the transmittance of the Spirit and a Spirit-experience. Catholic F. A. Sullivan is one of the theologians of traditional churches who has enthusiastically argued

for a pneumatological concept of apostolicity.¹⁹ Orthodox Vladimir Lossky concurs saying that the apostolicity 'dwells in the power of the . . . Spirit infused into the apostles by the breath of Christ and transmitted to their successors (Acts 20:28) . . .'²⁰ Lutheran Eduard Schlink uses Paul's doctrine of charisms as the starting point of what he has to say about the relationship between charisms and apostolic ministry. He deals with the apostolic ministry before discussing charisms.²¹ He stresses that this ministry is itself a charism in 1 Cor 12:28, and he does not think it any accident that this charism is mentioned first. The apostles were church-founding charismatics.²² One way they exercised charismatic ministry was in healing of the sick, as explained for example in Mark 6:12-13.²³ It has been the legacy of the Free Churches, especially of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, to remind the church universal of this crucial part of New Testament apostolicity.²⁴

There is also a pronounced missionary orientation in the New Testament and in more recent approaches to apostolicity. The church is 'apostolic because it remains in continuity in essentials with the original witnessing of the first-century apostles.'²⁵ What is originally apostolic is sending to bear witness to the universal and definitive truth of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.²⁶ 'The apostolicity of the Church is ultimately grounded in God's mission to the world.'²⁷ Primarily, then, the church's apostolicity means that the sending out of the apostles to all humanity is continued by the church. The task of mission did not end with the age of the apostles.²⁸ Part of continuing the apostolic mission is fidelity to the apostolic beginnings, especially to the apostolic gospel.²⁹ Consequently, the stress on the teaching rather than the office itself has come to be emphasized in recent discussions.

Apostolicity, however, is a twofold concept. On the one hand, there has to be fidelity to the tradition; otherwise, we lose any criterion between true and false. On the other hand, the 'church is authentically apostolic only when as a missionary church it remains ready to alter traditional ways of thinking and living, being renewed constantly on the basis of its origins . . .'.³⁰ Thus, apostolicity is a dynamic reality.³¹

In the final analysis, apostolicity, as well as other marks of the church, are objects of faith as much as they are anything else. According to Pannenberg, we must stress the church's apostolicity so strongly 'for the very reason that we detect so clearly that

the church has broken away from its apostolic beginnings and is pushing on into uncertain future.³² Primarily, the assertion of the church as apostolic is meant to be understood eschatologically.³³ Consequently, apostolicity is part of a prayer of longing and hope that the church may in fact become what it is called to be by reason of its lofty vocation.³⁴

Understanding the church's apostolicity in terms of the apostolic mission, points beyond every historical present to the eschatological consummation of the world.³⁵ The apostolic mission of the church aims at the renewal of all humanity in the kingdom of God, a renewal that has begun already with the advent and cross of Jesus of Nazareth.³⁶

Whatever the understanding of apostolicity is in given time, it should be understood clearly that originally apostolicity was not intended any more than other notes of the church (unity, catholicity, and holiness) to be used polemically or apologetically to demonstrate the superiority of one church over another or to imply that one possessed more unity, sanctity, catholicity, or apostolicity.³⁷

The Issue of Apostolicity in a Free Church and Traditional Church Dialogue: Hope for the Future

Since 1972, currently the two largest Christian families, Roman Catholics and Pentecostals, have been engaged in mutual talks at the international level.³⁸ This dialogue, which represents an exercise on the frontiers of ecumenism, took up the issue of apostolicity already during the first quinquennium (1972-1978). This is the first time in the history of modern ecumenical movement that a Free Church engages in serious dialogue concerning apostolicity with an established church to whom the issue of apostolicity is a crucial ecclesiological affirmation.

It is significant that the 'focus of the dialogue bears upon how ministry in the church continues the ministry of the Apostles.'³⁹ Whatever differences there may be between Catholic and Pentecostal ecclesiologies, there is this foundational commitment to the notion of 'one holy catholic apostolic Church' made of all believers (cf. Eph. 4:4-6).⁴⁰

Before we look at some details of the mutual discussions, it is important to note that the issue of apostolicity is not necessarily that strange to Pentecostalism, the 'wildest' of all Free Churches. It might come as a surprise to uninformed observers

of Pentecostalism that the notion of apostolicity is located in the very roots of the movement.⁴¹

The following words form the preamble to the Pentecostal self-understanding of its theology and mission in 1906, when the worldwide movement was born:

THE APOSTOLIC FAITH MOVEMENT

Stands for the restoration of faith once delivered unto the saints – the old time religion, camp meetings, revivals, missions, street and prison work and Christian Unity everywhere.⁴²

There are several items in this preamble which call for a closer look. First of all, the name of the movement itself, 'The Apostolic Faith Movement', clearly refers to the desire to 'go back to Pentecost'⁴³ of Apostolic times as recorded in Acts 2. It also points toward a priority given to primitive religion.⁴⁴ This initial naming gave birth to numerous other titles of churches, movements, publications which bear the same name.⁴⁵ It is also noteworthy that even today several Pentecostal movements around the world, e.g., in Africa and former Eastern Europe, are known only by the name 'Apostolic'.⁴⁶

The insistence on the apostolic nature of the church implied restorationist vision '... to displace dead forms and creeds and wild fanaticisms [of existing Churches] with living practical Christianity.'⁴⁷ The phrase 'stands for the restoration of the *faith* once *delivered* unto the saints' (from Jude 3) clearly suggests that the *Apostolic* faith was in mind here and that a certain body of knowledge was intended to be understood as constituting that *apostolic faith*. That could be summarized as statements concerning (1) Justification, (2) Sanctification, (3) Baptism in the Holy Ghost, (4) Healing.⁴⁸ Furthermore, and this is of immense importance ecumenically, the statement of the Apostolic Faith Movement encapsulates the essence of the confession 'one holy catholic apostolic Church',⁴⁹ though Pentecostals do not so often use the creedal language of older churches.⁵⁰ Robeck summarizes the main elements of this commitment to the apostolic confession based on the above quoted preamble:

The explicit commitment of these early Pentecostals to 'Christian Unity,' and their honest recognition of their role as restoration movement within the Church points toward their affirmation of the *oneness* of the Church. Identification with their Wesleyan-Holiness roots articulated through references to the 'old

time religion' and 'camp meetings' with their deep commitment to personal sanctification, underscore their belief in the holiness of the Church and its impact on the personal lives of each individual Christian. Their recognition that the Church in which the Apostolic Faith Movement participated was 'everywhere' is an explicit affirmation of the *catholicity* of the Church. And their self-designation as the 'Apostolic Faith Movement' is sufficient to demonstrate some kind of commitment to the *apostolic nature* of the church and a deep concern to contribute to a restored or enhanced *apostolic character* of the Church.⁵¹

The formulation of early Pentecostal understanding of apostolicity is important also in that it reaches beyond the issue of faith (e.g., doctrine, creed, theology) to the issues of power and practice. This is the core of 'living, practical Christianity'.⁵² In the final analysis, then, what was the ultimate criterion was not formulations of faith but living out of the apostolic gospel.

This brief consideration of apostolicity from a Pentecostal perspective reveals that the essence of it is to go back to the faith and experience of apostolic times, to live in consistency with the NT church. There is also a strong missionary orientation there. Although this formulation of Pentecostalism is rather different from that of Catholics, one can see a common denominator: the ultimate criterion is that of 'continuity/consistency' with the beginnings of the church, i.e., of apostolic times. Without artificially downplaying the difference in the *method* of ascertainment, one can perhaps state that there is mutual *intention* in both traditions, serving the same purpose.

Both Roman Catholics and Pentecostals believe that the church lives in continuity with the New Testament apostles and their proclamation, and with the apostolic church. A primary manifestation of this is to be found in fidelity to the apostolic teaching.⁵³ There is, though, a subtle difference in how these two traditions view the history of the Church: while Pentecostals, influenced by restorationist perspectives, have claimed continuity with the Church in the New Testament by arguing for discontinuity with much of the historical Church, Catholics have tended to underline the succession along the lines of church history starting with the NT.⁵⁴ 'By adopting these two positions, one of continuity, the other of discontinuity, each tradition has attempted to demonstrate its faithfulness

to the apostolic faith 'once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).'⁵⁵ Neither Catholics, nor Pentecostals claim that continuity in history by itself would be a guarantee of spiritual maturity or of doctrinal soundness.⁵⁶

The major *difference* has to do with the way fidelity to apostolicity is guaranteed. For Roman Catholics, the succession of bishops in an orderly transmission of ministry through history is both guarantee and manifestation of this fidelity.⁵⁷ For Pentecostals, the current dynamic of the Spirit is regarded as a more valid endorsement of apostolic faith and ministry than an unbroken line of episcopal succession. Pentecostals would look to apostolic life and to the power of preaching which leads to conversions to Jesus Christ as an authentication of apostolic ministry.⁵⁸

Pentecostal H. D. Edwards illustrates how the question of episcopal succession, insisted on by the Catholics, is difficult to decide for Pentecostals: 'Pentecostals would unhesitatingly affirm that they are *both apostolic and in succession*. The joint designation, if understood to affirm episcopacy as being the only method of guaranteeing authenticity and a wholly genuine expression of Christian continuity, would be strongly opposed by the Pentecostals.'⁵⁹ This is understandable, since for Pentecostals to admit the necessity of apostolic succession as the criterion would mean to call in question the whole validity of their spiritual experience and encounter with God, inasmuch as it has occurred outside the framework and the security allegedly guaranteed by apostolic succession.

Pentecostals would like to see Roman Catholics emphasize more the requirements of apostolic life than episcopal succession. Catholics, without in any way ignoring the requirements of apostolic life, maintain that the sovereignty of God's act in the transmission of the Word and the ministry of sacrament is not nullified by the personal infidelity of the minister.⁶⁰ Despite this difference of emphasis, there is strong mutual concern as to the necessity of holiness of life as a qualifier for and mark of apostolicity. It is admitted, though, that the power and sovereignty of God is not limited in the confines of a weak and sinful minister. But the church has to make use of any necessary means to provide seriously for the holiness of the ministers.⁶¹

Toward a conciliar understanding of apostolicity

Charles A. Conniry, a Free Church theologian

(Baptist) has recently presented a synthesis of four major kinds of notions of apostolicity. His categorization of various views of apostolicity is the following:⁶² (1) 'ecclesial apostolicity' emphasizes apostolicity as a means of establishing the institutional authority of the Church; (2) 'biblical apostolicity' looks to the apostolic character of the Church in order to identify a norm by which the legitimacy of subsequent accretions is determined; (3) 'pneumatic apostolicity' appeals to a charisma of the Spirit that is as much a part of today's Church as it was in the first century; (4) a related and yet distinct emphasis, 'kerygmatic apostolicity', sees the Church's apostolic character actualized in the faithful carrying out of its mission. Conniry contends that rather than viewing any one of these legitimate interpretations as final or exclusive of others, they should be seen rather as complementary.

Building on this analysis and the previous discussion, I want to ask two interrelated questions: What are the essential aspects of apostolicity that all Christian churches would be more or less ready to affirm? What are those that could build bridges between traditional, mostly episcopal churches, and Free Churches and other non-traditional Christian groups? These are the two ecumenically pregnant and critical questions that determine the future discussions on the topic.

There are at least seven aspects of apostolicity that I believe every Christian community is ready to accept. These aspects might serve as a 'minimum' for further work on this much disputed question.

All churches accept that, first, apostolicity involves a continuity⁶³ in the life and faith of the apostles and the apostolic church of the New Testament. By implication, then, one may conclude that all churches also accept, second, that charismatic life and worship is an essential part of apostolicity. No serious New Testament exegete disputes the charismatic nature of the New Testament church(es). Third, one can say that mission, proclamation of the gospel, is yet another indistinguishable aspect of apostolicity. The risen Lord commanded His disciples, apostles, to continue the missionary work he had begun. Fourth, all churches firmly believe that the Scriptures of the New Testament are themselves apostolic and are the norm of the apostolicity. Fifth, apostolicity is a dynamic concept: it is not only or primarily a question of juridics but rather a question of life and vitality; thus, of obedience, service, and every-

day discipleship.⁶⁴ Sixth, apostolicity concerns the whole people of God, not only clergy or authority. This is, for example, what Hans Küng has argued: he supports and understanding of apostolic succession that involves the whole people of God and is inspired directly by the Spirit anew in each generation as the church renews itself in the witness of the apostles.⁶⁵ Seventh, apostolicity is a heavily pneumatological concept. Only the Holy Spirit is 'the one who makes the Church apostolic'.⁶⁶

The Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue on ecclesiology showed that there are indeed complementary ways of affirming other churches' apostolicity, thus ecclesiality, if no one definition is taken as final or exclusive of others. If the seven aspects outlined above are accepted universally among Christian churches, ecumenically fruitful and hopeful implications follow. Communication between various churches, rather than being fruitless strife about the goodness of one's own apostolicity, has the potential of becoming a truly ecumenical exchange of gifts. For example, traditional churches learn to pay attention to dynamic elements of apostolicity whereas younger churches learn to appreciate tradition. Those churches strong on fellowship and teaching might learn to appreciate the necessary missionary nature of the church. Those churches strong on the biblical foundations might dare to take another look at charisms and the role of the Spirit, and so on.

Catholic ecumenist Avery Dulles sets a fruitful precedent. Dulles is ready to admit that criteria other than the episcopal succession might serve as a criterion for true apostolicity; here he strikes the note Protestants in general and Free Churches in particular have been eager to emphasize:

Unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity are dynamic realities that depend on the foundational work of Christ and on his continued presence and activity through the Holy Spirit. Evangelical communities that excel in love for Jesus Christ and in obedience to the Holy Spirit may be more unitive, holy, catholic, and apostolic than highly sacramental and hierarchically organized churches in which faith and charity have become cold.⁶⁷

This is an example of applying to ecumenical relations fresh perspectives that have arisen out of ecumenical reflections on the notion of apostolicity.

Another recent example from Dulles testifies to the fruitfulness of the approach recommended

above. When apostolicity is understood as a comprehensive, many-sided concept, rather than focusing on a particular aspect disputed by many other churches, one is committed to look for criteria acceptable to all. One such criterion is the aspect number four in our list above, namely that of the Word of God. According to Dulles, 'to insist on the sole lordship of Christ as known to us from the Scriptures is already to accept a large measure of apostolicity'.⁶⁸ All Christian churches affirm the absolute normativity of Scripture and thus of its Lord. This generally upheld criterion can serve as the norm for apostolicity. Even then there are differences of opinion but these can be discussed from the perspective of limited convergence. The importance of Dulles' ideas is enhanced when we take into consideration the context they were presented in: in a Protestant periodical, in dialogue between Catholics and Evangelicals on ecclesiology.

Finally: Is there any Hope Concerning the Question of Apostolic Succession?

As is well known, the most hotly debated question is of course that of episcopal succession and, consequently, ministry/ordination. What the possible outcomes of ecumenical convergence in the understanding of apostolicity will be, is to a large degree dependent on how this question is handled.

Even though most traditional churches are not ready to follow the precepts of Free Churches, or of Karl Barth, who reject any view of apostolicity based on historical or juridical grounds and strongly object to apostolic succession being based on ordination as this would be to predispose the Holy Spirit to act according to human demands,⁶⁹ older churches should, however, listen to the argumentation of others. In fact, those who reject apostolic succession (as understood in the episcopal sense) also have a case, as Baptist theologian J. L. Garrett argues.⁷⁰ First, the role of ministers in the New Testament does not constitute necessarily a threefold hierarchical order and can be explained apart from the theory of apostolic succession. Second, the church at Rome was seemingly led by a body of presbyters in the time of Clement of Rome. Third, the activity of Peter and John in Samaria (Acts 8:14-25) and Paul's teaching authority in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 4:7, 21; 11:16, 34) can be recognized and explained in terms of apostleship apart from any theory of

episcopal succession. Fourth, the canonical New Testament can be reckoned as the 'strict successor' to the apostles rather than the bishops. Fifth, the ministries of the non-episcopal churches since the era of the Protestant Reformation would seem to argue against the necessity of apostolic succession.

Even if these kinds of argument might not be able to convince theologians of traditional churches of the supremacy of non-episcopal argumentation, they are substantial enough to promote honest ecumenical dialogue; especially in light of the fact that anyhow the concept of apostolicity is so diverse and complicated concept that clinging to one aspect exclusively seems not to do justice either to the New Testament data nor to theological developments later on. On what justification, other than historical, do the older churches have the exclusive claim for one particular kind of definition when the view by no means can find indisputable – some would even say: substantial enough – biblical support?

Anyhow, the ecclesiality of any church is of necessity tied up with its apostolicity. There can be no church without apostolic continuity.⁷¹ Rejecting the claim for apostolicity of another church is not a less serious act than bluntly rejecting the ecclesiality of that church.

Still another motivation for all churches to re-evaluate their understanding of apostolicity is presented by Catholic Avery Dulles in these words:

... can we speak of the church as apostolic in view of the radical mutations that it has undergone over the centuries? Many of the structures, doctrines, and practices of contemporary Christians would surprise and baffle the apostles.⁷²

The approach of the BEM-document is helpful in that it distinguishes between the apostolicity of the whole church and the apostolic succession in the ministry, thus treating the latter as subordinate to the former, rather than equating them.⁷³ In fact, Dulles himself concludes from this – although the official Catholic response to the BEM-document expressed reservations⁷⁴ – that on the basis of the Lima text it might be possible to admit 'a large measure of apostolicity without apostolic succession in the ministry'.⁷⁵ While I applaud this ecumenical attitude, I am not sure if we can 'quantify' the notion of apostolicity the way Dulles does. The consequent problem would be just 'how much' one needs apostolicity in order for a church

to be a church (i.e., to be apostolic 'enough').

However the apostolicity is defined theologically; it is of necessity bound to the community of God, the church, the whole church of God on earth. As Catholic C. O'Donnell fittingly summarizes: 'So at its deepest level, apostolicity denotes this possibility of encountering now the Mystery through the Holy Spirit in a community which mediates the divine plan throughout history.'⁷⁶

Notes

- 1 So Yves Congar, 'Die Wesenseigenschaften der Kirche,' *Mysterium Salutis. Grundriss Heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik* IV/ 1, hrsg. Von Johannes Feiner & Magnus Löhrer (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1972), 362ff. and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 405. Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit. Systematic Theology*, vol. III (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992, 349): 'Apostolicity is intrinsically interwoven with the other marks of the church: Only that church that is one can be catholic. Only that church that is united in the one mission of the one Lord can be apostolic. Lacking that holiness which is fitting to the obedience of faith, one finds neither apostolicity nor catholicity. Only that church that is formed by the apostolic memory can be united in one body with the Lord.' See also Vladimir Lossky, 'Concerning the Third Mark of the Church: Catholicity,' in *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. J. H. Erickson & t. E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 171.
- 2 See Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness. The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 259-260. He further notes (p. 133-135) that as far as the conditions of ecclesiality are concerned, the episcopal and Free Church traditions differ especially in three respects: (1) according to Catholic and Orthodox tradition, Free Church ecclesiology lacks a bishop to ensure the presence of Christ, while according to the Free Church tradition, such a bishop is not permitted; (2) in episcopal model, Christ's presence is mediated sacramentally; by contrast Free Churches speak of Christ's unmediated, 'direct' presence in the entire local communion; (3) according to the episcopal tradition, the church is constituted through the performance of objective activities and Christ's constitutive presence is not bound to the subjective disposition (even if the latter is not unimportant) whereas the Free Churches have come to emphasize subjective conditions, namely faith and obedience to the point that where these are missing, even if the objective side is there, a serious doubt arises of ecclesiality.
- 3 See, e.g., Volf's (*After Our Likeness*) critical discussion of Free Church ecclesiology, as represented by the first Baptist, John Smyth, in critical dialogue with Catholic (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger) and Eastern Orthodox (John D. Zizioulas) ecclesiologies.
- 4 For a Pentecostal understanding of unity, see, e.g., my *Spiritus ubi vult spirat. Pneumatology in Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue 1972-1989*. Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft 42 (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1998), 314-323.
- 5 For a Pentecostal understanding, see, e.g., my *Spiritus ubi vult spirat*, 355 especially.
- 6 See, e.g., John Smyth, *The Works of John Smyth*, ed. W. T. Whitley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 745 and R. Flew and R. E. Davies, eds., *The Catholicity of Protestantism* (London: Lutterworth, 1950).
- 7 For Free Church identity, see my 'On Free Churches' Identity in Ecumenical Context: Pentecostalism as a Case Study,' *MID-STREAM: The Ecumenical Movement Today* (forthcoming).
- 8 Cf. Volf's (*After Our Likeness*, 260) note with regard to catholicity: 'A catholic Free Church is a contradiction in terms; it understands itself as free precisely with regard to those relationships that would tie it to the whole and thus make it catholic in the first place.'
- 9 An up-to-date survey of apostolicity as it is explicated in several international ecumenical documents can be found in Margaret O'Gara, 'Apostolicity in Ecumenical Dialogue,' *MID-STREAM: Ecumenical Movement Today* 37:2 (April 1998): 175-212.
- 10 See further R. Schnackenburg, 'Apostolizität: Stand der Forschung,' in *Katholizität und Apostolizität*. KuD. Beihefte 2 (Göttingen, 1971), 51-73 and Miguel M. Garijo-Guembe, *Communion of the Saints. Foundation, Nature, and Structure of the Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 29ff.
- 11 See further, J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament. An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press/ Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), ch. IX especially and idem, *The Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press/ Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 260-280.
- 12 Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways*, 273.
- 13 Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, Malta Report [*The Gospel and Church*], 1972, (in *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, eds. H. Meyer & L. Vischer [New York/Ramsey N.J.; Paulist Press and Geneva: WCC, 1984], 168-89), # 60-61; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 403; Lima, III, # 34-36. See also Congar,

- Mysterium Salutis*, IV/1, 557ff., E. Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik*, 614-22; Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), vol. 2, 39. Pannenberg (p. 403) notes that succession in office that comes through ordination by ministers is a sign expressing the unity of the whole church in the apostolic faith because ordained ministers represent the whole church of Christ and in this capacity hand down the commission that the apostles received from Jesus Christ himself. Free Churches, because of a different theology of ordination, do not link ordination and apostolicity this way.
- 14 Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, # 52.
 - 15 Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, # 53.
 - 16 Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, # 57 (emphases mine).
 - 17 Cf. the definition given by Catholic Christopher O'Donnell (*Ecclesia. A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church* [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996], 19): 'A broad description of apostolicity is of being in harmony and in communion with the apostolic Church from the beginning.'
 - 18 Baptism, *Eucharist and Ministry*. Faith and Order Commission, 1982 (in *Growth in Agreement*, 465-503), # 34.
 - 19 F.A. Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* (Dublin: Gill & McMillan/Mawhaw: Paulist, 1988), 185-197.
 - 20 Lossky, 'Concerning the Third Mark,' 172.
 - 21 Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik*, 591ff.
 - 22 Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik*, 598.
 - 23 See further Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 270 with references.
 - 24 See further, Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, ch. IX.
 - 25 Michael A. Fahey, 'Church,' in *Systematic Theology. Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. II, eds. F. S. Fiorenza & J. P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 43.
 - 26 As representative of recent ecumenical documents, see, e.g., Anglican-Lutheran International Continuation Committee, *The Niagara Report*, 1987 (London: Anglican Consultative Council & Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1988), # 21. I am grateful to O'Gara, 'Apostolicity,' (p. 195) for this reference.
 - 27 Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology. The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 135.
 - 28 This missionary orientation in apostolicity was emphasized, e.g., in the *Epistle of Clement* dating from about 96 C.E.
 - 29 Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Die Bedeutung der Eschatologie für das Verständnis der Apostolizität unter Katholizität der Kirche,' in *Ethik und Ekklesiologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 222ff. and *idem*, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 406-7. In the beginnings of the church, the authority of the apostles kept the churches in their faith. After the death of the apostles, the church had to rely on apostolic teaching for the truth of the message. See further, J. Roloff, 'Apostel I,' *TRE*, III (1978), 430-45. For the historical development, see Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 378ff.
 - 30 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 407. On the missionary dimension of apostolicity, see further Garijo-Guembe, *Communion of the Saints*, 31-36.
 - 31 This was clearly captured in the Dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, *Toward a Common Understanding of the Church*, 1990 [*Information Service* III: 74 (1990)], #116, according to which apostolicity 'is a living reality which simultaneously keeps the Church in communion with its living source and allows it to renew its youth continually so as to reach the Kingdom'. I am indebted to O'Gara, 'Apostolicity,' (p. 202) for this reference.
 - 32 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 409. So also Gerhard Ebeling, *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 3 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1979), 369-75.
 - 33 From an Eastern Orthodox perspective, see John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), ch 5 which makes a difference between 'historical' and 'eschatological' approaches to apostolicity and attempts for a synthesis.
 - 34 Fahey, 'Church,' 42-43; so also O'Donnell, *Ecclesia*, 19.
 - 35 The integral relationship between mission and eschatology in the understanding of apostolicity is clearly depicted in Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Apostolizität und Katholizität der Kirche in der Perspektive des Eschatologie,' *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 94 (1965): 97-112.
 - 36 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 407.
 - 37 Fahey, 'Church,' 42. This is aptly noted in *The Porvoo Common Statement* (Conversations between the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches, 1992 [London: Council for Christian Unity of the General Synod of the Church of England, 1993]) when it affirms that the church as a whole is apostolic (# 37) and 'the primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the Church as a whole' (# 39). In this sense, Karl Rahner's (*Foundations of Christian Faith* [New York: Crossroad, 1982], 357-8) argumentation from apostolicity, that the Roman Catholic Church stands in greater continuity with the primitive church than any other Christian community is ecumenically fruitless; see also Herman Josef

- Pottmeyer, 'Die Frage nach der wahren Kirche,' in *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie* 3 (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), 212-41.
- 38 For recent appraisals, see Kilian McDonnell, 'Improbable Conversations: The International Classical Pentecostal/ Roman Catholic Dialogue,' *PNEUMA* 17:2 (1995): 163-174; McDonnell, 'Five Defining Issues: The International Classical Pentecostal/ Roman Catholic Dialogue,' *PNEUMA* 17:2 (1995): 175-188; and Walter J. Hollenweger, 'Roman Catholics and Pentecostals in Dialogue,' *Ecumenical Review* (1999): 147-159
- 39 *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 77.
- 40 *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 34.
- 41 The most detailed discussion of Pentecostal apostolicity is to be found in the paper by the Pentecostal co-chair of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue, Cecil M. Robek: 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity.' A paper presented to Faith and Order, National Council of Churches, Consultation on American Born Churches, March 1992 (Unpublished; to be part of the future publication on the topic of Apostolicity in America).
- 42 *Apostolic Faith* 2:1 (September, 1906). For a helpful treatment of the topic of apostolicity and related issues, see Gerald T. Sheppard, 'The Nicean Creed, Filioque, and Pentecostal Movements in the United States,' *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31:3-4 (1986): 401-416.
- 43 Cf. Frank D. Macchia, ('The Church as an End-Time Missionary Fellowship of the Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective on the Significance of Pneumatology for Ecclesiology.' A Paper presented to Pentecostal/National Council of Churches Dialogue, March 12, 1997, Oakland California [Unpublished], 20-21), who notes that movements such as Pentecostalism sought 'to discover direct access to the church of the apostles through the mediation of the Holy Spirit.' The implication is, of course, that a 'mediation' through some other agencies than the Holy Spirit (e.g., sacraments) was not regarded as 'apostolic'. Lesslie Newbigin (*The Household of God* [London: SCM Press, 1953], ch. IV) concurs by arguing that the Pentecostal understanding of church is neither dominated by Word nor sacrament but by the direct experience of the Holy Spirit as it was believed to have been shared originally among the apostles and early followers of Jesus. See also Peter Hocken, 'Church, Theology of the,' *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess & Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 217
- 44 Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity,' 1-2.
- 45 E.g., *The Apostolic Herald*, the *Apostolic Messenger*, *The Apostolic Witness*, etc.
- 46 See several articles under the term 'apostolic' in the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*.
- 47 *Apostolic Faith* 2:1 (Sept., 1906).
- 48 *Apostolic Faith* 2:1 (Sept., 1906) under the title 'The Apostolic Faith Movement'. These statements were accompanied by a brief apologetic note designed to alleviate any charge of sectarianism which might be raised against the movement.
- 49 *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 34.
- 50 Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity,' (pp. 2-3) notes that although Pentecostals in general are anti-creedal, it was not to negate the truths which the creed was intended to exalt and protect, but rather, it was to deny that the creed was sufficient to the task. Scripture was more important than creed, and, in some cases, experience consistent with Scripture.
- 51 Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity,' 2.
- 52 Robeck, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on Apostolicity,' 14.
- 53 *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 88.
- 54 *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 107, 108.
- 55 *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 108. The text continues: 'The significance of this for the welfare of the whole Church urges upon us the need of further common theological reflection on the history of the Church.'
- 56 *Final Report* (1985-1989), # 107.
- 57 *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 89; see also # 79 and Liam G. Walsh, 'Ministry in the Church,' in Jerry L. Sandidge, *Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue (1977-1982): A Study in Developing Ecumenism*. Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1987), vol 2, 381-86.
- 58 *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 90; H. David Edwards ('A Pentecostal Perspective of the Church,' in Sandidge, *Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue*, 404-409, 419-421) provides a Pentecostal perspective to the role of the Apostles and apostolicity of the Church. He illustrates the Pentecostal insistence on the role of the Spirit with these words: 'For Pentecostals, Moses and Joshua, Saul and David, Elijah and Elisha illustrate, if not determine, the principle of succession, i.e., that it is a 'spirit' matter, sometimes accompanied by structure – laying on of hands – but not always. In fact, they would probably say that to insist always on the laying on of hands is to 'limit the Spirit' and by way of analogy and illustration would refer to the experience of the apostles in Acts, that whereas in Samaria and Ephesus the apostles laid hands on Christians that they might receive the Spirit, in the house of Cornelius the Spirit fell on them while Peter was speaking, without his laying hands on them . . . ' (p.408-409; emphasis mine)
- 59 Edwards, 'A Pentecostal Perspective of the Church,'

- 419.
- 60 *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 90.
- 61 *Final Report* (1977-1982), # 91.
- 62 Charles J. Conniry, 'Identifying Apostolic Christianity: A Synthesis of Viewpoints,' *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (1994): 247-261 (with extensive bibliography relating to various theological traditions and denominations).
- 63 I prefer here the term 'continuity' rather than 'succession', since the latter term is so heavily loaded with a specific kind of succession, e.g., episcopal succession in terms of having continual chain of bishops.
- 64 See further, Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 45.
- 65 Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 355-56. So also Lutheran Arnold Bittlinger, *Im Kraftfeld des Geistes* (Marburg an der Lahn: Ökumenischer Verlag Dr. R. F. Edel, 1966), 129ff.
- 66 Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 39-44 (44); J. D. Zizioulas, 'La continuité avec les origines apostoliques dans la conscience théologique des Eglises orthodoxes,' *Istina* 19 (1974): 65-94.
- 67 A. Dulles, 'The Church as 'One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic,' *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23: 1 (1999): 27.
- 68 Dulles, 'The Church,' 27.
- 69 For Barth's view, see *Church Dogmatics* 4:1 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1956), 712-725. When I lump together Barth and Free Churches, I do not intend to assume any connection between them. I just note that they happen to have much similarity in their argumentation.
- 70 J. L. Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology. Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 568-9.
- 71 Ola Tjörhom, 'Apostolsk kontinuitet og apostolsk suksesjon i Porvoo-rapporten – en utfordring for de nordiske Lutherske kirkene,' *Nordiskt Ekumenisk Orientering* 4 (December, 1995): 10.
- 72 Dulles, 'The Church,' 14.
- 73 See further, Dulles, 'The Church,' 26.
- 74 Vatican Appraisal of the WCC Doment, 'Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry,' *Origins* 17 (November 19, 1987): 401-16.
- 75 Dulles, 'The Church,' 27.
- 76 O'Donnell, *Ecclesia*, 20.

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