

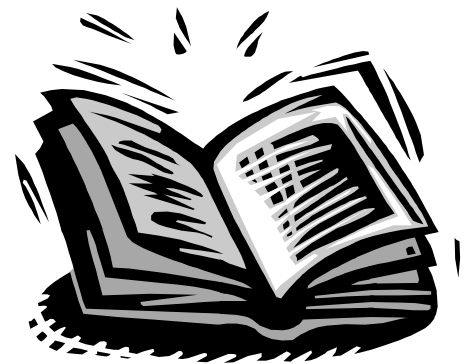
# Apostolic Anointing and Application

Eastern Region Board of Directors<sup>1</sup>  
Open Bible Churches  
April 2002

**O**pen Bible Churches believes in the authority of God's Word. Fundamental to what we believe is that the gifts and callings of God, as described in the Word, did not cease, but continue today. Indeed, Jesus proclaimed, *"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father"* (John 14:12). Accordingly, we seek the fullness of and long for manifestations of the Holy Spirit, neither contrived nor feigned by people. From its inception, Open Bible Churches has valued balance, as evidenced by our desire to offer *"affiliation with freedom, accountability without undue control, holiness without narrowness, pentecostalism without fanaticism."*<sup>2</sup> We are committed to pursue interpretation and application of God's Word with integrity, founding and grounding who and what we are and what we do upon His Word, rather than interpreting the Word to satisfy our desires or preferences. So, we humbly ask the Lord to guide and direct us, to grant us wisdom and revelation, endeavoring to be people of truth and authenticity.

## Division over Interpretation

Differences of interpretation and application of God's Word have been a cause of division among believers and the church since the first days of the church. One of the early conflicts, recorded in Acts 15, was over whether Gentile believers had to, in essence, convert to Judaism first before becoming Christians. In America, the powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in the early twentieth century, brought both joy to those who received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, and hostility from those who were convinced such gifts had ceased and would have to be of the devil if they reappeared. For years, the church had become comfortable with a lack of power and supernatural manifestations. But, the church was not complete. God, choosing to be faithful to Himself and the restoration of His Word, chose to override the clerical fence-keepers of the day and pour out His Spirit. God will be God, whether or not we grant Him "permission."



## Charismatic Renewal

In the 1970s, God again chose to not be confined by church boundaries as the charismatic renewal swept far beyond the exclusive “ownership” by Pentecostals. Again, He did not ask our “permission.” Truth be told, were we Pentecostals ready for the extent and breadth of what God wanted to do through denominational groups that we criticized? Such is the nature of the Spirit. Like the wind, He moves as He will, often ready to move before we are ready and often in a manner outside our comfort zone. Beyond Azusa Street, the modern day charismatic wave ushered in fulfillment of Joel 2:28-29 in a way that few could have envisioned, *“And afterward, 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.”*

But, even after the Azusa Street and charismatic outpourings, separation over matters of the Holy Spirit still exists among those that call upon Christ as Savior. We also recognize that, even among Spirit-filled people, differences can arise, as happened in the early church. Indeed, a dispute between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:39) became so great that they went separate ways. Sometimes, disputes are doctrinal in basis. Sometimes, disputes are rooted in other differences, such as determination of leadership and philosophy of ministry. Sometimes, disputes are declared to be doctrinal or Spirit-guided, only to later be revealed as fleshly in nature.

## The Five Fold Ministries

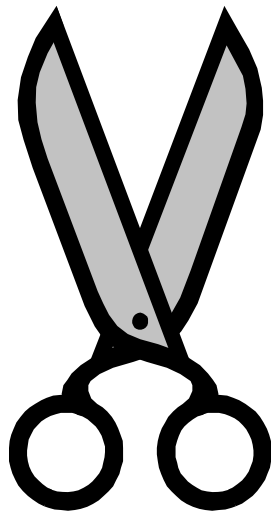
As Spirit-filled people, committed to the full gospel, we believe in what is often referred to as the five fold ministries, as recorded in Ephesians 4:11, *“It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. . .”* In his book, *Body Life*, pastor Ray Stedman compares leaders to the basic systems of the body. (Stedman 1972:72-79)<sup>3</sup>

System	Explanation	The ministry of...
Skeletal	Gives form and structure to the body.	Apostle
Nervous	Takes the message from the head to the body.	Prophet
Digestive	Converts the bread of life into flesh and bone.	Evangelist
Circulatory	Maintains the life of the body.	Pastor/Teacher

## Gifts and Titles

As with the renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the church became accustomed to and comfortable with some of the five fold ministries, but was unfamiliar with others. We know about evangelists, pastors and teachers. We are comfortable with referring to people by those designations. But, who and what is an apostle? Who and what is a prophet? In some circles, people are accustomed to identifying gifts and individuals as

prophetic or apostolic in nature and title. In other circles, the primary exposure people have had to the terms has been through negative experiences and clearly false claims to prophetic and apostolic authority and office. The tendency, in light of problems and



divisions that have occurred, and in the interest of protecting the church, has been to ignore, limit, or deny discussion of and openness to these two gifts. In particular, in most Pentecostal circles, we have been reluctant to confer the title of prophet or apostle upon any person: *“If any in modern times want to take the title of ‘apostle’ to themselves, they immediately raise the suspicion that they may be motivated by inappropriate pride and desires for self-exaltation, along with excessive ambition and a desire for much more authority in the Church than any one person should rightfully have.”*<sup>4</sup> The fallout in terms of pride and of confusion about authority that can result from such conferrals of titles has caused many to conclude that they do not want to move in that direction. It is our conviction that true apostles usually shy away from the title because the gift and calling are by the Holy Spirit, not title.

### **Prophets**

Gradually, understanding and openness to the biblical place and role of prophetic ministry have been growing among Spirit-filled people. As we learn to articulate how prophetic ministry must be exercised in accordance with the Word of God and does not supersede His Word, and as we learn to walk in discernment, we have grown more comfortable in allowing God to speak prophetically through imperfect vessels. We still avoid using the title, prophet, because we still see the conferral of apostle and prophet titles as fraught with danger of misinterpretation and abuse of authority. Is it more important that a gift function or that we gain title? We, as Spirit-filled people, are learning how to walk in and receive what God speaks prophetically through His servants. We want to be teachable and open to what the Lord desires and where He desires to lead us.

### **Apostles**

In recent years, spirited discussions have arisen in charismatic circles about the role and ministry of the apostle. Again, as with other gifts of the Spirit, the church for some time found it easier to avoid dealing with the apostle. But, in 1 Corinthians 12:28, the Apostle Paul stresses the inclusion of apostolic ministry, *“And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.”* Pastor Frank Damazio believes that, *“The Body of Christ will be ‘perfectly joined together’ [1 Corinthians 1:10] only when these ministries [five fold] can fulfill this work in the Body.”*<sup>5</sup> Stirred by the gap between biblical provision and actual practice, a number of voices have begun calling the church’s attention to the role and place of the apostolic gift.

## **Departures from Eastern Region**

In the mid 1990s and in the early 2000s, and concurrent with a growing interest in and openness to apostolic ministry, Eastern Region experienced the departure of a few ministers who concluded that they had received an apostolic anointing. Their applied conclusion of the apostolic anointing was that they could no longer function as part of Open Bible Churches, that such affiliation impinged on their calling. Our response has primarily been one of silence, to release our brothers and sisters to their sense of calling and anointing. But we have become increasingly uncomfortable with our silence because silence has allowed others to define terms, declare interpretations, and prescribe applications.



## **It is Time**

The Eastern Region Board of Directors has arrived at a conviction, that we have a responsibility to humbly establish where we stand regarding apostolic anointing. ***We are not targeting any people.*** Just as with the separation between Paul and Barnabas, people who have left Open Bible to pursue what they view as their apostolic calling are still our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Though we may disagree at some points with their apostolic interpretations and applications, we desire that the Lord grant them fruitfulness for His Kingdom. Rather than reacting to what has taken place (though spurred on by those events) we choose to cast our eyes on the future and to clarify how the apostolic fits into Eastern Region's vision. The following is not intended to be an exhaustive study. Indeed, the more we study, the more inadequate we feel. But, it does outline our perspective on the following:

- 1. Who is an apostle and what are the characteristics?**
- 2. What are characteristics of someone who claims to be an apostle, but is not?**
- 3. Do apostles resemble one another in anointing and office?**
- 4. Is there such a thing as an apostolic church government?**
- 5. How do apostolic calling, authority, and office interface with Open Bible Churches?**

# 1. Who is an apostle and what are the characteristics?

The word apostle, which appears 81 times in the New Testament, refers to:<sup>6</sup>

1. The twelve disciples of Jesus (Matthew 10:2, Mark 6:30, Luke 6:13, 9:10, 17:5, 22:14, 24:10, Acts 1:2, and Jude 17).
2. The principal leaders of the early Church, among which were Matthias (Acts 1:26; 6:2), Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), James (Galatians 1:19), Apollos (1 Corinthians 4:9), Timothy and Silas (1 Thessalonians 2:6), Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7).
3. Even broader is the reference to “messenger” or “missionary” in Philippians 2:25, 2 Corinthians 8:23, and John 13:16.
4. The spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:28-29, Ephesians 4:11), that is, the function of an apostle.

We know that the Greek word, *apostolos*, means one who is sent forth or sent away from one place to another to accomplish a specific mission. Jesus, according to Hebrews 3:1, is called “the Apostle.” All other apostles derive their position and authority from Him. The first apostles were the twelve selected by Jesus to be with Him and to whom He entrusted the organization of the early church. The original qualification of an apostle, as stated by Peter (Acts 1:21, 22) was that he should have been personally acquainted with Jesus’ ministry, from His baptism by John to His ascension. They were men who could give personal testimony to Christ’s life, crucifixion, resurrection, and departure for Heaven. Upon Jesus’ ascension, the first apostles were much consumed with planting and guiding churches.

## The Spirit Moves Today

Dispensationalists claim that, with the passing of the early church apostles, the anointing and office of apostle also ceased. But Spirit-filled people do not mark out sections of God’s Word as inapplicable for today. Though we may have struggled with how to identify and understand apostolic function, we believe that the Spirit still moves through that gift.

According to C. Peter Wagner, a proponent of modern day apostolic office and ministry, *“The gift of apostle is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to assume and exercise general leadership over a number of churches with an*

*extraordinary authority in spiritual matters that is spontaneously recognized and appreciated by those churches. Apostles are those whom God has given especially to pastors and church leaders. They are those to whom pastors and church leaders can go for counsel and help. They are peacemakers, troubleshooters and problem solvers....”*

According to Wagner, a distinctive attribute of apostles is their focus on the big picture,

***Apostles are those  
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an overview and vision that is not restricted by or narrowed to the circumstances and problems of one local church.<sup>7</sup>

Professor J. Robert Clinton defines the gift of apostleship as “...*a special leadership capacity to move with authority from God to create new ministry structures (churches and parachurch) to meet needs and to develop and appoint leadership in these structures. Its central thrust is Creating New Ministry.*”<sup>8</sup>

### **Distinguishing Characteristics**

Apostles, in addition to living and ministering in harmony with the whole Word of God, are distinguished by certain characteristics of calling, character, and mission to expand the Kingdom of God. They are servants, not overlords. Saul, who became the Apostle Paul, was marked by the very name that God gave him; Paulos, of Latin origin, means little or “I am the least.” The Apostle Paul, in his counsel to Timothy, defined servant leadership, “*And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct...*” (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Jesus taught that, in the kingdom of God, everything is reversed from the world’s standards of leadership. The greatest is the least and the leader is the servant. To the disciples Jesus said, “*But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers...But the greatest among you will be your servant*” (Matthew 23:8, 11).



Apostles are anointed and called by God, with the witness and affirmation of people, not the reverse. Apostles may or may not hold an office, but operate under an anointing. Apostles:

- Are sent by God, and recognize that they are His bondservants (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Revelation 1:1).
- Are distinguished by boldness wrapped in humility (1 Corinthians 9:16; 15:9; Acts 10:25-26; Acts 13:46; 14:3, 11-15; 2 Corinthians 12:19; Galatians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:6).
- Are submitted and accountable to others, seeking counsel, with permission to speak into one another’s life (Acts 13:1-3; 14:26-28; 15:22; 1 Corinthians 16:12; Galatians 2:11-14).
- Seek to edify the church (2 Corinthians 12:19).
- Function as spiritual fathers (1 Corinthians 4:15).
- Have authority over a specific area to plant churches and advance God’s Kingdom (Acts 6:7; 15:30; 16:5; 2 Corinthians 13:10).
- Must meet the biblical qualifications of an elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
- Are faithful in doctrinal instruction (Acts 2:42; Acts 15:1-2, 6).

- Are diligent in oversight of churches, establishing order, providing direction and counsel (Acts 16:4; 1 Corinthians 7:17; 11:34; 16:1).
- Ordain and set elders (pastors)/deacons into office (Acts 6:1-4, 6; 14:23).
- Demonstrate the power of God (Acts 5:12; 14:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12).

## **2. What are characteristics of someone who claims to be an apostle, but is not?**

There are a number of signs that indicate a person, in spite of claims, fails validity tests by the church (Revelation 2:2) and is not an apostle. Failure to exhibit at least some of the aforementioned signs of calling, character, and mission or, in particular, exhibiting the opposite of those signs, would demonstrate that an individual is not an apostle. Among characteristics that are inconsistent with an apostolic mantle or office:

- Appointment by self-acclamation. Scripture indicates that apostles were chosen either by direct appointment of Jesus or by the revealed will of God to the apostle, or by other apostles, with agreement by the apostles. When a person is called to an apostolic function, God will reveal and confirm this through independent witnesses (Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2, 21-26; Acts 13:1-3; Romans 1:1, 5; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 11:12).
- Spirit of control over others (2 Corinthians 11:20; Galatians 2:4-5).
- Teaching false doctrine (Galatians 1:7; 2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6-7).
- Spirit of pride (Proverbs 16:18; 2 Peter 2:10).
- Lack of submission and accountability (Romans 13:1, 5; 1 Corinthians 16:16).
- Unteachable, judgmental spirit. It has been said that you will never operate in authority beyond your submission. (Romans 2:1; 14:10).
- Unbalanced emphasis on personal prophetic word over the Word of God. (Jeremiah 23:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21).
- Drawing attention to self at the expense of the church (Acts 20:30; 2 Corinthians 11:20; 1 John 2:19, 26).
- Deceitful image or contrivance (2 Corinthians 11:13).
- Worldly viewpoint (1 John 4:5).
- Characteristics as found in a false prophet or teacher (2 Peter 2).

Drs. Nick and Leona Venditti offer seven guidelines for distinguishing between the true exercise of a gift and the work of the flesh:<sup>9</sup>

1. Is Jesus Christ the Lord of his/her life?
2. Does he or she profess Jesus as the perfect God-Man?
3. Is the manifestation of the gift in agreement with the Scriptures?
4. Does their life clearly express holiness and godliness?
5. Is the person submitted to the leadership of the church?
6. Is the church edified through this gift?
7. Is love the dominant factor in his life?

Frank Damazio’s contrast between true leaders and domineering, or false, leaders applies to apostles: <sup>10</sup>

<b>True Leadership</b>	<b>Domineering Leadership</b>
Concentrates on influence from WITHIN by encouraging, inspiring and motivating.	Depends on external controls from WITHOUT, using restrictions, rules, and regulations.
Enjoys a good relationship with co-workers, showing respect for the individual.	Relates to co-workers from an “I’m superior—you’re inferior” standpoint.
Works with co-workers toward long-range goals, with concern for the workers’ development.	Demands immediate results, even if it damages the potential in the co-worker.
Aims to make himself unnecessary.	Creates an atmosphere where the subordinate is permanently dependent on him.
Values individual workers; encourages and praises rather than condemns them.	Has a low opinion of workers; very critical of others’ mistakes.
Desires power WITH co-workers, encourages input and feedback, shares credit for the results.	Desires power OVER co-workers, takes credit for all accomplishments, wants no constructive criticism.
Always willing to discuss decisions and reasons for the decisions, unless circumstances do not allow.	Interprets questions as personal criticism or disloyalty.
Liberates the individual, encourages ideas and participation, equips people to produce definite results.	Limits individual freedoms, prefers to make all decisions, does not train anyone else to function effectively.
Is a “heart” man, portraying a genuine concern for others.	Is a “head” man, showing little or no human compassion.
Is considerate and concerned for others.	Is concerned only with himself.

Damazio also points out that a leader’s gift must be complemented with character in order to be effective: *“The Lord is not concerned with a leader’s gift and anointing only. He also cares deeply about a leader’s lifestyle and character. He desires a balance between gift and character in every one of His true leaders.”*<sup>11</sup> INSTE students are well acquainted with Robert Clinton’s statement: *“Ministry flows from being. Gifts of leadership are indispensable for becoming a leader, but without a character shaped by God, everything we do is like clanging cymbals. Preparation for leadership begins with the shaping of character so that we are ‘gentle and humble in heart’ like our Lord.”*<sup>12</sup>

Damazio adds, “But ministry also requires more than character. A man may be a very honest and virtuous plumber, but if he can’t fix a leaky sink, how much good is he to a person with a leaky sink? Similarly, a person needs God’s anointing (ability), in addition to character, to perform a specific ministry. A person must have the power and ability in the Lord to perform that ministry effectively.”<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Do apostles resemble one another in anointing and office?

We must be cautious lest we require that all apostles look, walk, and talk alike, or even ascribe to them perfection. Nor can we expect each person to possess and exhibit all biblical facets of apostolic anointing in the same dimension. Witness how Jesus referred to James and John (Mark 3:17), sons of Zebedee, as “Sons of Thunder,” probably referring to their boldness and zeal (even fanaticism? Luke 9:52-54) in carrying out their apostleship. These were also the same men who, getting close to Jesus, asked that one



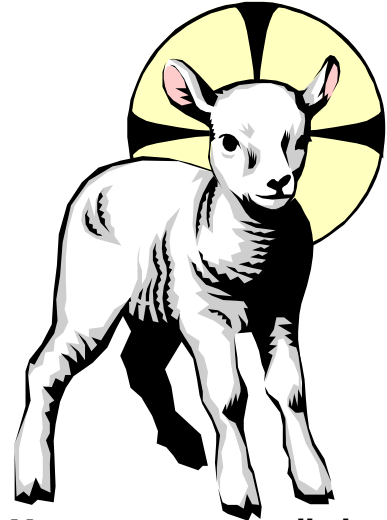
would sit on His right and the other on His left in Heaven (Mark 10:37). James and John, as well as Peter, were of fiery temperament and power. In contrast, note the steady and skillful hand of leadership by James, brother of Jesus, as he presided over the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15), with its difficult debate about the conversion of Gentiles. All of these men were anointed to be apostles, appointed by Jesus, yet each demonstrated a unique and distinct mix of gifts and contributions to the Church. It would be shortsighted to expect the James of Acts 15 to emulate the “Sons of Thunder,” or, perhaps, to expect the brothers, James and John, to administratively guide a council. Even so, the test of

apostleship today should not be based on measurements of specific gifts, relative to others, or be reduced to uniformity of speech, dress, or mannerisms.

However, biblical marks, in some combination, must be apparent in an apostle and will be witnessed by others. In his own instructive style, Harry Eriksen explains: “*When a man applies to a contractor for a job, he will no doubt be asked, ‘What is your specialty?’ Let us say that he declares himself to be a carpenter. This can be verified easily by sending him out to frame a house. At the end of the day, the contractor can tell for sure if the applicant told him the truth. If the studs and beams are plumb, level and square, and properly proportioned, he knows by the work done, that the man did not only say he was a carpenter, but that he was in fact a carpenter. Likewise, if someone says he is a prophet or an apostle, we can tell for sure if he really is what he says he is by his works*”<sup>14</sup>

## 4. Is there such a thing as an apostolic church government?

We have sometimes heard the statement, “*We have an apostolic form of church government.*” Can a local church be apostolic in ministry and direction? Absolutely. Such a church is actively expanding the Kingdom of God by establishing new churches and ministries, with signs following. Do we need apostolic churches with such a passion? Absolutely! In fact, we need to pray for the Lord to raise up a new generation of apostolic pastors in Eastern Region. It follows that pastors with an apostolic anointing lead apostolic churches – extending God’s kingdom through the planting and releasing of new churches and ministries. We need apostolic pastors! Most pastors are not called to be apostles. They are called to shepherd a church, albeit extending its evangelistic outreach and growth of ministry throughout that city. However, some pastors clearly are also called to provide apostolic leadership.



**Most pastors are called to shepherd a church**

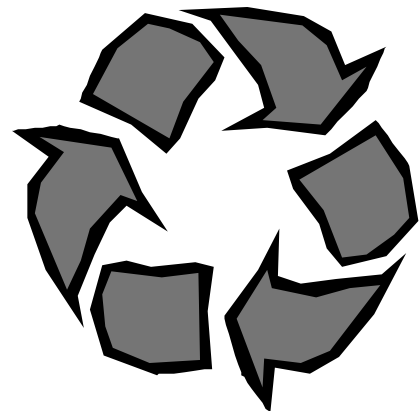
But, in some charismatic circles, pastors have labeled their form of church government as apostolic, though their ministry is not apostolic in terms of a clear expansion of God’s kingdom. If a ministry is not apostolic in nature then there is no basis for referring to its government as apostolic. In some cases, individuals have appropriated the term apostolic to describe their form of government in order to support a philosophy of heavy, if not exclusive, pastoral control. Instead of equipping, empowering, and releasing leaders into the harvest, which are clear marks of apostolic leadership, they dominate and control people. We feel that is an unbiblical usurpation of the term apostolic. As Tommy Tenney succinctly puts it, “*Some people think the only path to power is to put people under you, never understanding that the real path to power is to put Jesus Christ over you and become a servant to those around you.*”<sup>15</sup> There is a dangerous lack of submission and accountability on the part of leaders who wrongfully claim such an apostolic mantle. We find no biblical sanction for leadership that is walled off from genuine accountability. Such leadership certainly does not pass an apostolic test. Lack of submission by leaders usually portends other error and abuse of authority, with an increasingly harmful impact on many lives. Harry Eriksen comments: “*In recent times, some attempts are being made to restore these ministries [apostle and prophet] to the Church, and some mistakes have been made by people who have honest intentions. We must not throw out the baby with the bath water, but we must encourage all moves to make this last-day church stronger. However, those who have the apostolic and prophetic ministries must realize that they are neither separate from the body of Christ, nor above it, but rather, they are also an integral part of the Body. Apostles and prophets above all, are obligated to practice the very things that they teach, and one of the principles they enjoin is humility.*”<sup>16</sup>

## **New Apostolic Churches**

A current church trend in some circles is to identify what are sometimes called “New Apostolic Churches” or “New Reformation Churches.” Peter Wagner, in his enthusiasm for modern day apostolic ministries, has referred to our time as a post-denominational era, a remarkably abrupt conclusion for a scholar of academic standing. In his book, *The New Apostolic Churches*<sup>17</sup>, Wagner has retreated from that language, but is still clearly enamored with a set of American churches that are said to be led by apostles. We should acknowledge that some, or several, of those apostles/pastors’ anointings and gifts were probably not accepted by their former fellowships and they felt compelled to launch their own church networks. It is not for us to determine whether the churches featured by Wagner are truly led by apostles. We will allow the biblical standard to speak for itself. And, as Gamaliel counseled in Acts 5:38-39, *“Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”*

### **The Key Question**

Without having studied any of the apostles/pastors that Wagner elevates as models we merely pose a key question, *“To whom are they accountable?”* If the answer is, *“To God,”* we find that troubling because of the absence of a recognized, and real, accountability to other leaders. Let us not forget history, extending back to the Bishop of Rome, when unquestioned authority and lack of accountability led to abuse and corruption. Current revelations of clerical cover-ups for priests are contemporary evidence of what can happen when accountability is lacking.



**Let us not forget history**

### **Apostolic or Elder?**

There are well-intentioned pastors who are submitted and accountable to others, quality leaders that do not flow in a biblically defined apostolic anointing, but who still refer to their church government as apostolic. It is our view that what they call apostolic church government is an incorrect description; it is typically an alternative to a congregational form of government, more accurately described as an elder led form of church government, where the pastor and elders make most of the decisions, including the continuance of the pastor’s service. Article IV of Open Bible Churches’ Bylaws is a congregational model of government for the local church. Unless local church bylaws, validated by Open Bible as not being in conflict with the spirit of Open Bible bylaws, are approved and on file with Open Bible, then Article IV is automatically the local church’s bylaw for government. But, Open Bible, historically committed to the autonomy of the local church, makes provision for the local church to write its own bylaws. That provides the means to establish other than a congregational, such as an elder led, form of government.

## Commitment to Balance

Open Bible has developed guidelines in order to help protect the church from establishing government that is vulnerable to abuse. For example, the pastor should not remove himself or herself from accountability. Open Bible's heritage is one of commitment to balance in all things, including government. The alternative to an electoral system is not the absence of accountability.

## Set Apart

What is a scriptural basis for church government and leadership (pastor) selection?

In Acts 13:2 we read, *"While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"*

Unquestionably, the Lord must call leaders to service. The Apostle Paul did not refer to those who laid hands on and prayed for him as his source of authority or legitimacy:

*"When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power"*(1 Corinthians 2:1-4). And, in his letter to the Galatians, though keenly aware of the witness and confirmation by the brethren of his apostolic call, Paul emphasized that he was, *"...sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead"* (Galatians 1:1).

## What is THE Biblical Way?

So, how does the church receive and confirm what the Spirit declares? Though it has become a popular viewpoint, we do not believe it is accurate to describe a congregational, electoral form of government as unbiblical. Acts 15:22, referring to proceedings at the Council at Jerusalem: *"Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to*

**God can work  
through a variety  
of means...**

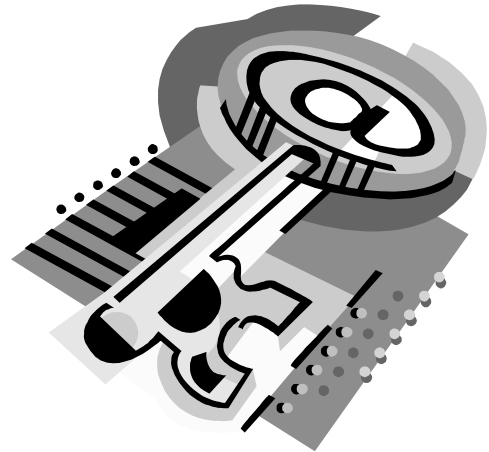
*choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers."* Notice that the apostles and elders, with the whole church, selected representatives/leaders. In Acts 8:14 we read, *"When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them."* In Acts 11:22 we read, *"News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch."* How did such agreement take place? We know that the Holy Spirit spoke. But, how was it confirmed among the apostles and church? We can only conjecture. However, there was some means of arriving at a witness or agreement among the apostles, elders, and whole church. Perhaps it was not an electoral ballot, but do we know that it was not? Rather than using these verses to declare that elections are the biblical way of selecting leaders, we merely state that God can work through many avenues, including elections, if that system is dedicated and submitted to His direction.

## Principle over Form

Interestingly, Patrick Bell, in a 1980 paper submitted to Pacific Region Open Bible, summarized his biblical study of leadership selection in this way, *“Because of the demonstrated flux in leadership style within the New Testament period, it is inappropriate to claim any one style as ‘New Testament’ to the exclusion of others, for there was not single or best style. Principles of leadership are to be imitated rather than specific forms. Although appointment was the predominant mode of leadership selection, election was at the same time practiced, indicating that the needs and expectations of the specific situation determined more than anything else how leaders were selected.”*<sup>18</sup> As long as people are involved, any system will be imperfect, because we are imperfect. But, clearly, apostolic leadership in the early church did not mean denying a participatory voice into determining the direction of the church.

## Certain Things in Common

Harry Eriksen observes this about manner of leader selection, *“In His use of men to work out His plan for the redemption of fallen mankind, God from time to time raised up leaders. But God did not raise up all leaders in the same way. Beginning with Moses, God put it in his heart before he was forty years old, that he was to deliver Israel (Acts 7:25), but it was at the burning bush that he was commissioned to carry out the plan some forty years later... Yet with his successor, Joshua, God worked differently. First, it was revealed to Moses that Joshua would be the new leader. Then, Moses made this fact known to the people before his death, and publicly laid hands on Joshua as his successor... God also raised up hereditary leadership when He chose Aaron and his descendents to the priesthood, and Levi’s descendants to the service of the tabernacle... Another way that leadership emerged was that in each emergency that Israel met, God would raise up a judge to deliver them and govern them... God simply raised them up, and providentially placed them where they were needed... the prophets also appeared as men providentially raised up to be His spokesmen to their generations... Though these people were brought into authority by different means, they all had certain things in common. **All** were called, commissioned, and equipped for their work by God. **All** had the manifest confirmation of God as they carried out their assigned work. Also, **all** of them came to be accepted by popular consensus as being truly of God.”*<sup>19</sup>



Again, we turn to Harry Eriksen to gain an historical perspective on church government: *“Some time after Israel’s return from Exile, another religious institution arose – the synagogue. This was an accommodation to the needs of the Jews both in their own land, and also in the cities wherever they remained. There was no Scriptural commandment from God to do this, but we believe that the establishment of the Synagogue was owned*

by God... God showed by this that He accepts and accommodates Himself to governments instituted by man to meet His special needs... It can be safely assumed that the early churches planted by the Apostles were set up with a government similar, if not identical, with that of the synagogues of that period... But there is another principle, too, which must be enunciated as Scriptural. That is, that if the established leaders of any given time were not open to God's working, He would completely bypass them, and raise up a movement of an entirely new group of people to carry out His plan. 'The stone that the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner' (Matthew 21:42).''<sup>20</sup>

We realize that some people are particularly opposed to elections as a means of confirming God's selection of a leader. However, to better understand how elections came to be part of church government, it would be helpful to remember the historical context that precedes our contemporary discussions on the subject. The church, following the original apostles and as defined by Rome, evolved into a system that was called Apostolic Succession. In the early church, all bishops were called apostolical, with the bishop of Rome styling himself as the Apostolical Bishop (pope) of the universal church.<sup>21</sup> In this particular Episcopal form of government salvation could only come through the administration of sacraments, administered by a celibate priest who, thus, had the power to provide or withhold salvation.

History records that the Roman church became corrupt and that Martin Luther was used by God to usher in the Reformation, in reaction to the heavy-handed and even sinful hierarchical control of the church. Church history is replete with demonstration of what Lord Acton wrote, "*Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*"<sup>22</sup>



Though we do not know that Charles Caleb Colton said it in reference to the church, his statement cannot exclude the church, "*No man is wise enough nor good enough to be trusted with unlimited power.*"<sup>23</sup> Men like Calvin and groups like the Puritans continued the Reformation beyond Luther to implement Presbyterian (representational, with elected elders and pastor) and Congregational (all authority vested in the congregation) forms of government. It was their conviction that, in light of corruption and abuse that occurred when leaders had unfettered or unquestioned authority, Congregational and Presbyterian governments were safer, and God-given, bulwarks against abuse of authority.

All three of the primary forms of church government, Episcopal (Catholics and Anglicans), Presbyterian (Reformed and Presbyterians), and Congregational (Congregationalists), are present in the church today. And, workable examples of growing, fruitful churches, of all three types of government, can be found. The cause of church division and splits can be traced to human nature, to battles for control, and not to

the forms of government themselves. It is when the Holy Spirit, sent by Christ to lead the church, and the Word of God, are set aside, and men are ruled by the fleshly lusts, that troubles come (James 4:1-5; 1 Corinthians 3:3-4). Each form of church government has its strengths and weaknesses. The Congregationalists can easily remove a person who abuses his power, simply by voting him out. But they could just as easily vote out the leader called by God to serve. The Episcopalian form can avoid immature power plays by having bishops who carefully and prayerfully select pastors to fit the churches. But the bishop can also play politics, and put favored people in the places of greatest power and influence. The Presbyterian form avoids either of those more extreme possibilities. But it is also possible to drag leadership initiative to a crawling pace when committees predominate.

Let us not forget that there is history behind each form of church government and that no system is automatically free of weaknesses or failures. Each culture, each community, each church has a blend of history, joyful and painful experiences, and exposure to governmental systems that influence a church government preference. ***Often, preference for a form of government arises from a reaction to failures or abuses experienced under another form of government. The pendulum of church government change swings both ways.***

Article IV of Open Bible Churches' Bylaws provides evidence that our heritage is rooted in a modified Congregational/Presbyterian form of government. However, Open Bible has not mandated that as the only acceptable form of government. We respect that, for some pastors and churches, the government pendulum is swinging away from a congregational form of government and that some prefer government that is more elder led in nature. We are developing model bylaws to assist churches that desire to move to an elder led form of government, so that they avoid the potential weaknesses or abuses of an elder led model. It is not our purpose to thwart such government, only to work in partnership with the church to build in wise safeguards and to assure that changes fit into the overall spirit of Open Bible Churches' Bylaws. What seems so appealing in the immediate needs to be tempered with an appreciation for lessons from church history. As Sidney Harris so aptly phrases it, *"History repeats itself, but in such cunning disguise that we never detect the resemblance until the damage is done."*<sup>24</sup>



### **Local Church Bylaws**

The following criteria are currently guiding Open Bible Churches in evaluating local church bylaws for eligibility and as not being in conflict with Open Bible bylaws. Open Bible Churches includes a range of expressions in worship, service, and even structure.

We hold in common our Articles of Faith, our mission, and our mutual accountability within a framework of freedom. Open Bible's position statement regarding the relationship between the Association and the local church is that there exists "*A balance of affiliation and freedom, providing accountability without undue control.*" We believe that same spirit of balance must also be reflected in the leadership structure and relationships in the local church. We are instructed to "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*" (Ephesians 5:21). Open Bible's spirit is to accommodate and embrace philosophies of church government and structure. Our objective is not to look for what is unacceptable. Rather, we look to verify that provision for the following is included in local church bylaws:

### **1. Membership**

There must be a defined membership with defined authority, a procedure with qualifications to become a member, and a procedure for discipline of members. In most churches, the defined membership will be congregational in scope. In other church structures the membership may be a board of elders. When the church membership is less than congregational in scope it must include a majority of members who are not related to the pastor or the pastor's extended family. Provision must exist for the selection or removal of members that requires more than pastoral appointment or decision alone. In structures where membership rights are restricted to a smaller group less than congregational in scope, it is still recommended that the larger body be given a role in ratifying major decisions such as pastoral selection, board member selection, and matters pertaining to sale and purchase of assets. Indeed, state law may require approval of such matters by a congregation-wide membership.

### **2. Pastor Selection**

A procedure for pastoral selection must parallel Article IV, Paragraph 4: Changes of Open Bible bylaws. Open Bible churches are led by pastors with Open Bible credentials who are selected through the procedure outlined in Article IV.

### **3. Removal**

There must be a mechanism for the removal of the pastor and other officers, along with the grounds for doing so, if circumstances warrant, such as moral failure and heresy. In such cases, when the failure of a credentialed Open Bible minister violates Open Bible policies or ministerial ethics, Open Bible Churches assumes authority to deal with that person under its discipline and restoration procedures. Even if the pastor has received what is sometimes referred to as an indefinite call, without a time-defined term, accountability is necessary. All godly leaders, whether pastors, regional and district superintendents, or other servants, need accountability to others. We are to "*...submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it*" (1 Corinthians 16:16).

#### 4. Property

Property must be held under corporate ownership of the church and not individuals in the church. A mechanism must be in place for the membership to approve decisions to purchase, sell, rent, or lease property.

#### 5. Bylaw Changes

Any changes to the church's constitution or bylaws must be approved by the membership. Furthermore, such amendments must still be validated as not in conflict with the spirit of Open Bible bylaws and on file in national and regional offices.

#### 6. Dissolution

In the case of church dissolution, provision must be made for the distribution of assets so that no individual(s) personally benefit. The first distribution of assets is to be directed to the respective Open Bible region where the church is located.

### 5. How do apostolic calling, authority, and office interface with Open Bible Churches?

Apostolic counsel, from the Apostle Paul, provides a template for how we in Open Bible Churches ought to serve together in unity. According to Philippians 2:1-7 we should:

1. Be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose (v.2).
2. Do nothing out of vain ambition or conceit (v. 3).
3. In humility, consider others better than yourselves (v. 3).
4. Look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others (v. 4).
5. Have an attitude like that of Jesus Christ...who made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant (vv. 5,7).

The New Testament provides us with insight and direction regarding elder/apostolic leadership. The Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) offers a leadership model. In fact, when we as a regional board began a study of the Jerusalem council, searching for guidance concerning how we are to lead, we were encouraged about how God has led those who have gone before us in Open Bible leadership. As stated above, no structure or form of government is perfect, because government establishes a basis for relationship and interaction between people, and people are imperfect vessels. Nor do we believe, as members of your regional board, that we are fully developed and fully functioning as the leaders God has called and enabled us to be. But we humbly press on to take hold of who and what He has called us to be (Philippians 3:12). We feel truly blessed to be a part of Open Bible Churches where we believe consecrated efforts have been made to base structure and government upon God's Word.

***We Are Blessed!***

## **Lessons from the Council at Jerusalem**

The Council at Jerusalem consisted of apostles and elders. Consistent with Scripture, we believe that the Lord has placed the mantle, authority and office of elder upon the national board and president and the regional board and superintendent. Additionally, we humbly state that God has called some of those leaders to apostolic anointing and office. This is not an apostolic succession, but offices that have been filled by God, understanding that He is the One who calls and ordains, irrespective of the system. The office of apostle is not by human selection but by the call of God. Apostleship is a function, a gift, not an office. *“God’s gift to the Church is a person, not a position or office. Apostolic authority cannot be conferred or transferred by man, only the Holy Spirit can do that. It is important that the structure of a church or denomination be sufficiently flexible and open to permit true apostles to exercise their New Testament function”*<sup>25</sup>. The church must be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit so that those who are elected or appointed are those that God has chosen. We prefer to avoid the title, Apostle, for the reasons stated earlier. We do not feel it is necessary to use a title to flow in an anointing or office. We see Open Bible’s governmental structure adhering to the following biblical, apostolic guide:

- Set elders (pastors) in place, in consultation with the local church. Remove pastors under specific, prescribed circumstances of serious sin/failure (Acts 15:22).
- Work together with churches to advance God’s Kingdom beyond the local church (Acts 15:28).
- Provide instruction and correction in doctrine, and discipline (Acts 15:19, 22-29, and 35).
- Establish policies and principles (Acts 15:28; 16:4).
- Provide a forum to settle disputes and disagreements (Acts 15:1-7).
- Regularly visit churches and encourage them (Acts 15:3; 30-31).
- Provide financial oversight and channels of common ministry (Acts 2:42-47).
- Pastors/elders are submitted to apostolic authority and policies and principles into which they have voice.
- The president and superintendent are submitted to the councils of elders/apostles (boards) and to ministers and churches via electoral witness.
- Councils (boards) are submitted to the president and superintendent and to ministers and churches via electoral witness.

## **Eastern Region and Apostolic Churches**

So, how does Eastern Region interface with an affiliated, truly apostolic local church, a church that is passionately striving to expand the Kingdom of God by planting new churches and ministries? How does an apostolic pastor flow in that anointing and function as part of Open Bible Churches? Open Bible must be alert to an historical observation by Harry Eriksen, and call ourselves to accountability regarding the restoration of apostolic and prophetic ministry: *“Whenever there is a move toward restoration, problems begin to appear. We are confronted with the true and false, and sometimes we are made to grapple with manifestations that are not familiar to us, making*

*us unsure. Yet it is a fact, that every new move in the church to bring back truths that were lost was often strongly opposed by the leaders of the previous movement. Luther drowned the Anabaptists, Calvin executed Servetus. We read about Whitefield and Wesley being fiercely opposed by the established churches. We do not have to go back too far to remember that the Pentecostals were ridiculed as the 'Holy Rollers' in our day. In recent times there have been Pentecostal leaders who were strongly opposed to the new moves to restore the church to its apostolic power. Now there is a move to restore the prophet and the apostle to their proper place in the body of Christ. In remembering church history, let us be careful lest we be found fighting against God.”<sup>26</sup>*

We do not want to be guilty of opposing what God desires to accomplish, through whomever He desires to do it. Neither do we want to fail to lead or fail to speak with the authority of office to which we are called. We believe there is room for pastor/apostles and Open Bible Churches to work together and that Open Bible, not a controlling



denomination, is uniquely suited to do so. Open Bible needs apostolic pastors that are blazing new trails for others to follow. It is our conviction that apostolic pastors and church leaders also need the oversight that Open Bible can provide. We believe this is of critical importance. It seems that with every kind of leadership gift or office, including apostles, there are unique dangers or thorns in the flesh. As stated above, a problem with some apostolic ministries today is lack of accountability, fostered by pride. J. Robert Clinton, in recent research about apostolic ministry, has noted, “*Apostolic workers are dominantly task-oriented leaders with strong*

*inspirational leadership. Usually apostolic workers lack relational leadership skills and must depend on others to supplement this or suffer the consequences of conflict, confrontation, and large back doors in their ministry as emerging workers leave them.*”<sup>27</sup> Perhaps this modern day observation by Dr. Clinton illustrates why the apostles in the early church were so clearly submitted to others. We need that mutual accountability. It is dangerous to think and believe otherwise.

## **Questions that Need to be Answered**

### ***Eastern Region:***

1. Will we embrace and affirm apostolic ministries and leaders as gifts from God?
2. Will we recognize that some apostolic ministries will not fit into traditional boxes or definitions?
3. Will we look for opportunities to partner with apostolic pastors so that we are more effective in ministry together than independent of each other?

***Apostolic Pastors.***

1. Will I accept that, no matter how powerful my anointing, unless it is wrapped in humility and founded on character, I will be my own worst enemy?
2. Will I recognize that God has placed Open Bible in my life for a reason and that I am to accept accountability to Open Bible leaders?
3. Will I acknowledge that my way is but one way through which God works and that other leaders, though different from me, are just as anointed?

**Open Bible Partnership**

We, as Open Bible ministers and churches, choose to co-labor together, networking as did the early apostles and churches. We will work in partnership with the local apostolic ministry, providing a place of accountability, of counsel, of mutual strategy, and even sharing in funding of new works. The local apostolic ministry has a voice into regional ministry through credentialed ministers and church delegates. A synergistic apostolic thrust is possible that honors local autonomy without replacing it with a spirit of independence.

**Walk in the Anointing**

Open Bible must be ready to embrace and partner with apostolic pastors and churches. Apostolic pastors must be ready to embrace and accept accountability to Open Bible’s apostolic leadership. We believe that God’s Word presents us with direction for an Open Bible apostolic flow of authority and accountability. We must humbly reclaim the spiritual authority that comes with an apostolic mantle. We have hesitated to use apostolic terms for the reasons discussed in this paper. It is time that we not allow reservation about title to keep us from humbly walking, without apology, in the anointing of the Lord.

**Open Bible Churches**

***Regional Elder/Apostolic Flow of Authority and Accountability***

**Council (Board) of Elders & Apostles /Superintendent**



**Pastors/Elders**

**Church Elders**

**Congregation**



“I t was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. . .”

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<sup>2</sup> *Policies and Principles of Open Bible Standard Churches, Introduction.*

<sup>3</sup> Nick and Leona Venditti, *Ministry in Leadership*, (Des Moines: INSTE, 1995), p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 911.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Damazio, *The Making Of A Leader*, (Portland, OR: City Bible Publishing, 1988), p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Nick and Leona Venditti, *Ecclesiology*, (Des Moines: INSTE, 1995), p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1979; revised edition, 1994), pp. 181-182.

<sup>8</sup> J. Robert Clinton, "Apostolic Functions," *Monday Morning Memo*, as shared by Paul Leavenworth in February, 2001, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Venditti, *Ecclesiology*, p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Damazio, *The Making*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>11</sup> Damazio, *The Making*, p. 106.

<sup>12</sup> Nick and Leona Venditti, *Church Leadership*, (Des Moines: INSTE, 1995), p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Damazio, *The Making*, p. 294.

<sup>14</sup> Harry Eriksen, "Apostles and Prophets," Report submitted to the Eastern Region superintendent (Dayton, OH, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Tommy Tenney, *God's Dream Team, A Call to Unity* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999), p. 67.

<sup>16</sup> Harry Eriksen, "The Interdependence of all Believers," Report submitted to the Eastern Region superintendent (Dayton, OH, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *The New Apostolic Churches*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Patrick W. Bell, "Biblical Patterns of Church Structure," Report submitted to Pacific Region Open Bible Churches in June, 1980, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Harry Eriksen, "What Guidelines do we Find in God's Word?" Report submitted to the Eastern Region superintendent (Dayton, OH, 1980), pp. 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Eriksen, "Guidelines," pp. 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1976), p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> Lord Acton, "Letter to Mandell Creighton," April 5, 1887, *The International Thesaurus of Quotations, Revised and Updated*, (New York, NY: HarperPerennial (Compiled by Eugene Ehrlich and Marshall DeBruhl). P. 528.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Caleb Colton, "Lacon," 1825, *The International Thesaurus of Quotations*, p. 529.

<sup>24</sup> Sidney Harris, "If He's Not Guilty, Why Is He In Court?" *Clearing the Ground*, 1986, *The International Thesaurus of Quotations*, p. 293.

<sup>25</sup> Venditti, *Ecclesiology*, p. 108.

<sup>26</sup> Harry Eriksen, "Apostles," p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> J. Robert Clinton, "Apostolic Functions," p. 2.