

Book Review

Cartledge, David. *The Apostolic Revolution: The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Assemblies of God in Australia.* (Chester Hill, Australia: Paraclete Institute, 2000). 445 pp.

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As one of the most influential works on contemporary apostleship in Assemblies of God circles, this volume merits serious discussion. David Cartledge deserves much credit for drawing attention to a subject about which there has been a serious lack of Pentecostal scholarly attention. Nevertheless, the book suffers a number of scholarly deficiencies. (Cartledge is not an academic but an activist and—by his own recognition—a *revolutionary*.) However, pastors who have found inspiration and instruction on apostolic ministry from Cartledge's book could not care less whether it meets the highest stylistic standards of the academy. Rather than focusing on the scholarly quality of the book, this review will attempt to summarize it briefly and evaluate its main argument. It will stipulate from the outset that there are apostles and prophets in the contemporary church.

The Apostolic Revolution is composed of seven sections. The first is a mostly edifying defense of "the phenomenon of personal revelation." From both biblical grounds and the testimony of history, Cartledge establishes that Pentecostal churches have always believed in prophecy and in hearing the voice of

God. Apart from a few questionable interpretations of biblical proof texts and fairly shallow historiography (for example, in treating the Latter Rain controversy of the 1940s), this section is marred only by Cartledge's attacks on the Assemblies of God organization in the United States (A/G-USA).

According to him, "from the 1940s to the present time, the A/G in the USA has officially maintained an ultraconservative posture in respect of personal prophecy" (48).

In several places throughout the book, Cartledge tends to direct exaggerated and harsh criticism against the A/G in the United States, but there is much in the book that the Fellowship would do well to hear. Indeed, the evidence of the last few years is that its executive leaders have indeed listened. Cartledge also levels an attack on democratic church government in this section, stating, "There is no evidence for this type of government in the scripture" (76). A discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this review, but it is a matter that needs more consideration than what Cartledge offers.

Section 2 recounts the story of what Cartledge calls "the apostolic revolution

in the Assemblies of God (AOG-A) in Australia.” He tells how the AOG-A, after an “apostolic” beginning, spent “40 years in the wilderness” because of the development of division and denominationalism. This tendency toward centralized or executive control, rather than local church autonomy, was reversed by Andrew Evans’ election as superintendent in 1977. According to Cartledge, Evans’ leadership “was characterized by the recognition and release of many apostolic and prophetic ministries.” After this change in leadership, the church entered a new period of exponential growth. The story is inspiring, but this reviewer has spoken with other Australian witnesses who do not completely agree with Cartledge’s interpretation of their history. Professional historians will no doubt expect a more careful and less ideological telling of the story. Still, Cartledge tells his story well and, in doing so, makes a strong rhetorical case for the value of apostolic and prophetic ministries.

Section 3 treats the fivefold ministry gifts of Ephesians 4:11. Cartledge begins with a too-brief discussion of the need for a Pentecostal hermeneutic. For the purposes of this review, it is enough to agree with him that experience must play a role in interpreting the Scriptures while pointing out that he does not say enough about the limits that should be placed on the subjectivity of the Pentecostal interpreter. After a helpful discussion of the purpose of the fivefold ministry gifts—that is, the unity of the Church—Cartledge makes a less persuasive argument to distinguish among the different types of spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament.

In discussing the purpose of the fivefold or “ascension gift” ministries, Cartledge’s most important argument in this section is that “the freedom of the [apostle] . . . to produce the reality of divine direction is one of the only things that will preserve a church from descending into democracy instead of theocracy.” He interprets Ephesians 4:11 as follows: “Paul states that the apostle is to be the leader of the local church, assisted by the other ministries” (211). He goes on to explain that “apostles are not the product of seminaries, nor do they suddenly burst onto the international scene. They emerge only in the context of the local church . . .” (211). While this statement is certainly true and constitutes a helpful reaffirmation of the primacy of the local church, it also gives rise to the question of whether Cartledge is teaching that every local church must be governed by an apostle. He answers this question by stating, “There are a wide variety of apostles, and not all of them will necessarily be the primary leader of a local church. However, an apostle should lead every significant church” (213).

Taking this statement inversely, however, would give us the definition of an insignificant church, i.e., one not governed by an apostle. One wonders whether Jesus considers any of his churches to be insignificant. This may seem like a petty rejoinder, but its point is at the very heart of this issue. Cartledge will engender opposition from small- and medium-sized churches and their pastors (and denominational leaders) until he finds a more convincing way to value the role of apostles without implicitly denigrating the role of pastors.

Skipping section 4 for the moment, section 5 presents a wonderfully persuasive argument for the ministry of women at all levels of the Church, including the apostolate. While Cartledge does stress the value of husband and wife teams in ministry, he does not do so at the expense of women who are single or are married to men who perceive no ministerial calling. The argument represents a fairly comprehensive display of the best arguments available in today's scholarly literature, and would be improved only by more rigorous citation of the primary source arguments.

Section 6 treats the issue of "Prophets in the Modern Church." In general, the section offers helpful insight on the nature of the prophetic ministry in the Old and New Testaments. For Pentecostal and charismatic readers, the most controversial thing Cartledge has to say, is that "this office is located in the local Church, and is a Governmental gift. It is also 'set' in the local Assembly, and together with the apostle is the foundation of the local church" (363). Unfortunately, he does not fully explain this view of the contemporary ministry of prophets. He does, however, immediately make it clear that "this 'set' position is by the Lord rather than the appointment of man." Still, the adoption of this vocabulary will raise concerns among many A/G-USA readers, as that Fellowship has long opposed the notion of "set prophets."

Cartledge presents the heart of his argument in section 4. He begins with an effective argument against cessationism, especially the relative cessationism of Pentecostals who would argue that pastors, evangelists and teachers persist in the Church, but apostles and prophets

are no longer being given to the Church. He proceeds to discuss the unique nature of the original twelve apostles, noting that: (1) the Church was founded on them, (2) they were eyewitnesses of the Resurrection, (3) they were representatives of the Lord with a special commission, (4) their apostleship was validated by signs and (5) they had apostolic authority (243-4).

Cartledge recognizes that, as foundational apostles, the "Twelve Apostles of the Lamb" had "special honor and unique responsibility," but he also reminds the reader that "they were not the major writers of the New Testament scriptures" (245). He correctly points out that Luke, Paul, James, Mark, and others who were not among the original twelve apostles, wrote the majority of the New Testament. Cartledge goes on to discuss in greater detail the expansion of the apostolic ranks in the Early Church, noting that such luminaries as James (the Lord's brother), Apollos, Barnabas and others who were not among the Twelve were called apostles.

After a persuasive argument of the importance of apostles beyond the Twelve in the New Testament, he goes on to define the term "apostle." He notes that while the term "missionary" is a Latin form of the Greek word for "apostle," not all of those who are called missionaries are apostles in the fullest sense. He defines the apostle as "one chosen and commissioned by the Head of the Church, who is uniquely equipped with the authority and ability to establish churches, set them in order, and provide leadership and direction to the Christian community" (264). Having set this definition, Cartledge goes on to list the biblical signs of apostleship.

The next step in Cartledge's argument is less persuasive. Because Paul wrote the Book of Ephesians to a local church, he asserts, "It must be faced that Paul was referring to the appointment of apostles as the leaders of the local church, rather than merely exercising translocal authority. The idea prevalent in most evangelical and Pentecostal churches that 'pastors' are the usual ministry in charge of a local church would therefore seem to be under challenge" (267-268).

Such an assertion raises questions that need to be explored. For now, a couple of observations can be made. First, the reading of Ephesians 4:11 that Cartledge favors would seem to be forced. Second, while the role of apostles in the planting of churches seems clear, it is far from clear how the process of "apostolic succession" should be engaged after the church has reached maturity and the apostle has moved on or passed away. While arguments from silence should not be pressed, it is legitimate to consider why the New Testament makes no provision for such a process. If it is God's intention that churches are to remain under apostolic authority long after the death of the founding apostle, it would seem reasonable that the Scriptures would make provision for such governmental transition. A policy of apostolic succession was indeed attempted and it became the Roman Catholic Church. This historical reality (as well as the tendency of all Christian denominations to drift toward formality and central control) should be enough to caution us against easy assumptions about the proper form of church governance. For now, Cartledge has not made his case that pastors should not be the leaders of mature local churches.

The main functions of an apostle are discussed next in a more or less helpful way, followed by a treatment of the distinctions and degrees of apostles. In this otherwise helpful section Cartledge makes an assertion that needs considerable discussion. He states:

Vast numbers of Pentecostal churches have settled for low levels of leadership, or have consciously or unconsciously confined their ministers to functions that are incompatible with their real gifting. This is referred to throughout this book as the level of the lowest common denominator

. . . . It is frequent for all ministers in Pentecostal churches to be termed 'pastor.' Not only does this confuse the issue but the genuine ministry of the pastor tends to be distorted (276-277).

Here Cartledge argues that the church is being deprived of apostolic leadership because it reduces all ministers to the level of "pastor." He states, "In many cases apostolic or prophetic ministries may function as other ministries due to a misunderstanding, or lack of perception of their true ministry" (288).

The problem with such an argument is that Cartledge stated earlier in his argument that God gives the apostolic gift to the church. He adds:

It matters little whether the person with an apostolic gift is appointed to any specific area of leadership such as a denominational official. His or her gift will make way for the God-given call to be fulfilled. Even resistance or rejection by

officials will not impede a true apostle. The authority he has is not of man (276).

In view of this, it is unclear how not recognizing apostles as an office in the church impedes their function. It is also not clear that God would raise up more apostles as ministry gifts to the church if only we would call them by the right name and thus permit their ministry. Indeed, the New Testament uses such a wide variety of terms to describe ministers (elders, bishops, pastors) it appears it is not *what* we call them that matters, but *who* has called them.

A fundamental (and ironic) problem with Cartledge's whole conception of the apostle is his own cessationism. In suggesting that God has restored apostles and prophets to the Church, Cartledge (and other restorationists such as Peter Wagner) are tacitly agreeing that their function ceased. It is more biblical, and more historically accurate, to claim that Christ has never ceased to give apostles and prophets to his Church. While, relative to other times, the intensity of spiritual gifts has increased in the contemporary church, it is not true that they disappeared in earlier times. Cartledge's own list of apostles throughout the history of the Church is testimony to this fact (250). No true apostle in the entire history of the Church has had his gift stolen by the Church. It is a gift given to the Church freely by Christ himself.

The final section of Cartledge's book makes a clarification about apostolic ministry that goes a long way toward making his message more palatable among A/G-USA leaders, even while it undercuts his belief that the Church's refusal to recognize the apostolic office

as such deprives it of the apostolic ministry. He states forthrightly, "Almost all Australian apostolic ministries are quite emphatic that they will not use the title 'apostle'" (393). He argues that "the terms 'apostle' and 'prophet' were not titles in biblical times," but rather "simply designations of function." He then goes on to make a strong case against the use of the titles "pastor" and "reverend." On the issue of the use of titles, he is to be congratulated. It would appear to this reviewer that in real ministry situations, an ounce of spiritual anointing is worth a pound of title, and the former is far too often replaced by the latter.

To summarize, David Cartledge has done a valuable service to the worldwide Pentecostal church in *The Apostolic Revolution*. Because of the model of apostolic ministry it sets forth, the book has inspired many ministers to increase their church-planting ministry. The A/G-USA has taken the issue of apostolic ministry seriously and is in the process of responding to it formally and practically. Assemblies of God scholars around the world need to recognize humbly that they are late to work in addressing the issue of apostles and prophets with greater precision and detail.