

APOSTLES TODAY

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Abstract: This paper begins by offering a sampling of apostolic claims in church communities in various parts of Africa. It next outlines several theological principles drawn from the Bible and from our shared Lutheran heritage that may be helpful while navigating this topic. Finally, the paper identifies what participants see as the most critical issues of apostleship facing the church today and which principles should be kept at the forefront as the church goes about its commission to make disciples of all nations.

INTRODUCTION

In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul asserted, “Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph 4:7). Then he enumerated, “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles...” (Eph 4:11). These verses set the itinerary for our time together. Who or what are these “apostles”? And what is the significance for today of this gift that Paul said Christ gave to the Ephesians?

First of all, we looked at Biblical materials to ascertain the origins of early Christian apostolicity. The most important conclusions of this initial study of apostolicity were twofold: that we must seek our understanding from the words of the New Testament and that various New Testament writers do not use *ἀπόστολος* in the same way.

Paul uses *ἀπόστολος* as his primary self-designation and fills that word with his particular experience –What God made of and did through Paul is the primary meaning that Paul gave to the term *ἀπόστολος*. But it was not the only meaning, for Paul could use the term as a designation for other fellow workers and even the “apostles and prophets.” For Paul, the term is specific to himself but also applies to others.

Luke has a narrower range of usage. For the most part, the *ἀπόστολοι* are the Twelve, especially in their roles as leaders of the community and authoritative witnesses to the words and deeds of Jesus. This usage also is replicated in most other occurrences of *ἀπόστολος* in the New Testament.

Who or what is an apostle? And who were the first apostles? The usage in the New Testament is not uniform. It depends on the writer and the situation being addressed by the writer.

In the post-apostolic period, a synthesis emerged in the second half of the second century that *ἀπόστολος* referred to the Twelve and Paul. No other carried that designation. The authority exercised by the apostles was transferred to the bishops through a process of succession that developed in response to disunity in the church. This apostolic succession protected the teaching of the church and clarified authority within the church. Simultaneously but more gradually, the canonization of the New Testament came to preserve the content of apostolic witness and teaching about Jesus, his death and resurrection, and the theological implications of his person and work for the church. The church catholic emerged with a bi-polar structure that vested authority in a monarchical bishopric succeeding the apostolate and a canonical text preserving the teaching of the apostles.

Over the centuries the church would grow and spread and struggle about matters of apostolic authority and teaching, which continue to impact the church today. We are gathered here because Africa is a place where such topics swirl and where Mekane Yesus is uniquely positioned to help the church navigate issues of apostolic authority today.

In this session, I propose to do three things. I shall begin by offering a sampling of apostolic claims in church communities in various parts of Africa. Secondly, I shall outline several theological principles drawn from the Bible and from our shared Lutheran heritage that may be helpful as you navigate this topic. Thirdly, I will turn to you and ask you to identify what you see as the most critical issues of apostleship facing the church today and which principles you think should be kept at the forefront as the church goes about its commission to make disciples of all nations.

Let us begin, in the name of Jesus.

A SAMPLING OF CLAIMS FROM AFRICA

Walter J. Hollenweger, professor emeritus in Missions, Birmingham University, has written:

That Christianity is growing more quickly than the world population is due to the churches in the Third World and in particular to the African Initiatives in Christianity and their relatives.... The center of gravity of Christianity is shifting to the South—certainly numerically but also, I would suggest, theologically.¹

Serious contemporary study of Christian theology can afford to ignore the southern continents, particularly Africa.²

No one understood that fact better than Pope John Paul II who made twelve trips to Africa between 1980 and 2000. His interest in Africa was driven largely by the rapid expansion of the Church during those years. Vatican sources said the church gained 2.5 million new adherents in Africa in 1989 alone. During his travels he was not afraid to criticize Marxism, apartheid, or the attempts to impose Islamic law on Christians in Sudan. In a homily in Lome, the Togolese capital, he said he wanted to preach a faith that was "authentically Christian and authentically African" in response to the matter of Catholicism adapting to traditional African practices. His visit to Angola coincided with the 500th anniversary of the coming of Christianity to the Central African country. In 1995, he came to South Africa and was welcomed by President Nelson Mandela. Pope Benedict the XVI would visit Africa twice. And Pope Francis has visited four times.³

Nearly one out of every five Africans – 19.2% – is Catholic. The Pew Research Center expects the number of African Christians south of the Sahara, including Catholics, to double by 2050. During the transition from colonialism to independence, Catholic leaders often spoke in favor of that transition and supported movements toward independence.

To many Africans today, in the wake of independence and the church's support for it, the Catholic Church has distanced itself from its colonial past to become an institution associated with sociopolitical reform, education, and health care. This accounts in part for its substantial growth. But the church faces new challenges. In 1970, Pentecostals represented less than 5% of all Africans. They now stand at 12%, a significant shift. And Islam is growing faster in Africa than Christianity. By 2050, African Muslims south of the Sahara are expected to increase from 30% to 35% of Africa's population. Visits by popes, then, reflect a strategic commitment to the continent, for good reason.⁴

This papal commitment also keeps alive a form of apostolicity that goes back to the earliest centuries of Christianity. For even humble and referential popes represent a monarchical bishopric grounded in apostolic succession. This connection to the origins of Christianity is part of their appeal. It is a powerful claim to be the holy catholic and apostolic church. And that claim impacts most of Africa. But

¹ Walter J. Hollenweger, "Forward," in *African Initiatives in Christianity: The Growth, Gifts, and Diversities of Indigenous African Churches: A Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement*, by John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu, Risk Book Series (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998).

² Cephas Omenyo, "Essential Aspects of African Ecclesiology: The Case of the African Independent Churches," *Pneuma* 22, no. 2 (2000): 231.

³ "A Timeline of Papal Visits to Africa: From Paul VI to Francis," accessed April 9, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/1/timeline-of-papal-visits-to-africa>.

⁴ Joseph Hellweg, "Africa's Catholic Churches Face Competition and a Troubled Legacy as They Grow," *The Conversation*, September 10, 2019, <http://theconversation.com/africas-catholic-churches-face-competition-and-a-troubled-legacy-as-they-grow-122611>.

is also a claim attended by problems including the dangers of clericalism and the historic tension between church authority and the authority of the Scriptures, as was the case during the Reformation

Interestingly, a Catholic theologian in Nigeria, Fr. Peter Okafor, concerned about a tendency toward clericalism in the exercise of ministerial authority, broadens apostolic succession to apply not just to the bishop but to the whole church, understanding authority as service. He advocates for the use of an African Palaver model of leadership which is to a large extent characteristic of traditional African society in its political organizations. This model involves the consultation of the people on a wide scale and deliberation at many levels with the aim of arriving at a consensus. The decisions made in this process usually reflect the opinion of the people governed. In Africa, leadership is traditionally a function to be shared by all villagers or community members, rather than invested in one person.⁵

A second more contemporary claim of apostolicity has arisen across Africa in rough parallel with the movement from colonialism to independence.

Take, for example, the African Apostolic Church of Zimbabwe. A key figure in its development was Ernest Paul Mamvura Mwazha. He was born on 25 October 1918 at Holy Cross Mission in Zimbabwe. Having first learned from a Roman Catholic catechism, he then studied in Methodist and Salvation Army colleges. Through a series of visions, he became convinced that God had called him for a special task: to be an apostle to Africa. First of all, in 1946 he had a vision in which he saw Jesus Christ sitting on a cloud. He noticed himself in a field ready for harvest, but birds and animals were destroying the crop. Jesus Christ faced him, reminding him of the task at hand. Secondly, the name of the African Apostolic Church of Zimbabwe was received in a divine revelation and the day of worship was changed from Sunday to Saturday (Sabbath) in 1979. Thirdly, Mwazha was reportedly ordained by an angel to be the Archbishop of Central Africa, giving the movement strong ties to the African terrain. The guiding ideology of the African Apostolic Church of Zimbabwe is to bring the gospel message of salvation to Africans in an African idiom.⁶ His preaching calls for a recreation of Africa. Notably, while claiming a direct call, Mwazha employed both the biblical term, apostle, and a term of apostolic succession, archbishop, as he went about his work. In a way, his usage is more like that of Paul, than the more institutionalized language of Luke.

Botswana presents a second interesting case, for in the country's move toward independence, there was a parallel struggle involving new independent Christian groups, now labelled the African Independent Churches. After becoming the Republic of Botswana in 1966, the first five years of independence saw a phenomenal increase in the number of religious societies. In 1972, the Societies Act was passed requiring all societies, including religious societies, to be registered. The purpose of the Act was to regulate and control the activities of societies and to minimize the chances of citizens being exploited by unscrupulous persons masquerading as leaders of what may be doubtful organizations and to ensure the orderly development of societies.⁷

Obed Kealotswe has detailed the historical background of these churches and offers a five-part typology of what arose. Earliest were were a cluster of churches that adhered to the policies and practices of the Mission churches, although independently of them. The Zionists transformed elements of Botswana traditional religious beliefs and practices, some by special use and appeal to the Old Testament. The best example of such a church is the Head Mountain of God Apostolic Church in Zion of Bishop Mthembu. Notice the terminology. The Apostolics claim to be the followers of the Apostles, imitate their practice of the laying of hands in healing, and strongly attack traditional African religious beliefs and practices. The Indigenous churches are those which accept and practice many African traditions. And then there is the

⁵ Peter Okafor, "Authority as Service in the Nigerian-African Church: Challenge of the Twofold Apostolic Heritage," *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 17 (2005): 54.

⁶ Ezra Chitando, "The Recreation of Africa: A Study of the Ideology of the African Apostolic Church of Zimbabwe," *Exchange* 32, no. 3 (2003): 244-45.

⁷ Obed N Kealotswe, "The Rise of the African Independent Churches and Their Present Life in Botswana: Who Are the African Independent Churches (AIC): Historical Background," *Studies in World Christianity* 10, no. 2 (2004): 217.

collection of churches that have broken off from these other groups.⁸ Notice again the claims of apostolicity and usage of ecclesiological terminology characteristic of a monarchical bishopric.

Theologically, many African Independent Churches in Botswana have indigenized the Christian message. They use some aspects of Setswana culture in their interpretation of the Bible and as a result attract many people. Socially, they generally treat people from all sorts of ailments and give them the courage to face the difficult realities of life in Botswana.⁹

These two examples illustrate a broad trend across Africa of independent churches that indigenize the Christian message. This trend is often associated with a cross-pollination with Pentecostalism. Laura Premack offers an interesting thesis that the Aladura movement in Nigeria grew out of relationships among Nigerian prophets, British missionaries, and American evangelists in the 1930s and 1940s. Further, she argues, that there is mutuality in the formation of American, British, and Nigerian Pentecostalism; instead of emerging *first* in the US and UK and *then* being taken to Africa, Pentecostalism's development across the Atlantic worked both ways.¹⁰

Nigerian historian Ogbu Kalu and British Pentecostal historian Allan Anderson have also refuted the scholarship that postulates an Azusa Street origin for African Pentecostalism. Kalu identifies three phases in its development. The first was early expressions of indigenous Christianity while retaining aspects of the missionary Christianity. The second response to missionary Christianity was the prophetic movements that lasted from 1910 to 1950. The current Pentecostal/charismatic phase of African Christianity is the "third response" to the Christian gospel where Pentecostal Christians take the indigenous worldview seriously and apply biblical resources—especially with an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit—to experiences and demands of Africans.¹¹

Although many African Independent Churches do not refer to themselves as "Pentecostal," most are. "Pentecostal" refers here to African churches that, in common with Pentecostalism worldwide, emphasize the working of the Spirit in the church, particularly with ecstatic phenomena like prophecy and speaking in tongues, healing and exorcism.¹² These churches are known collectively by different names like "prophet-healing" and "Spirit" or "spiritual" churches. They include "Zionists" and "Apostolics" in Southern Africa, "spiritual," "prayer healing" or "Aladura" (prayer) churches in West Africa, and "spiritual" or "Holy Spirit" churches in East Africa.¹³ Also in the grouping are churches of western Pentecostal origin, such as the Assemblies of God.

At the upper end, according to the World Christian Database, are Zimbabwe, South Africa, Ghana, Congo-Zaire, Nigeria, Kenya, Angola, Zambia and Uganda, in all of which Pentecostals and charismatics represent more than 20% of the national populations. At the lower end are Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Madagascar and Sudan, where Pentecostals and charismatics make up less than 10% of the population. Countries where the Pentecostal and charismatic population is between 10% and 20% include Congo-Brazzaville, the Central African Republic, Malawi, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia and Mozambique.¹⁴

Most African Independent Churches including those identified as Pentecostal or Charismatic use terms for their leaders like "prophet," "apostle," "bishop," and "archbishop" quite freely.¹⁵ Philip Jenkins says that "Africa has now for over a century been engaged in a continuous encounter with Pentecostal

⁸ Kealotswe, 217–18.

⁹ Kealotswe, 219.

¹⁰ Laura Premack, "Prophets, Evangelists, and Missionaries: Trans-Atlantic Interactions in the Emergence of Nigerian Pentecostalism," *Religion* 45, no. 2 (April 2015): 224, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2014.992108>.

¹¹ Ogbu Kalu et al., *African Pentecostalism: Global Discourses, Migrations, Exchanges, and Connections*, The Collected Essays of Ogbu Uke Kalu (Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2010), 12–55.

¹² Allan H (Allan Heaton) Anderson, "African Independent Churches and Pentecostalism: Historical Connections and Common Identities," *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 13, no. 1 (2008): 22.

¹³ Anderson, 22.

¹⁴ "Overview: Pentecostalism in Africa," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), October 5, 2006, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2006/10/05/overview-pentecostalism-in-africa/>.

¹⁵ Anderson, "African Independent Churches and Pentecostalism," 25.

fires, and the independent churches have been the most obvious products of that highly creative process."¹⁶ It is a process that uses some ancient ecclesial terminology as a means of asserting that validity of its theology.

As I have been reading about African Independent Churches (and there is a lot of literature out there about them), I have also noted two emerging variations that may have some promise.

Peter White points to the Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches' leadership which is based on Ephesians 4, the same text that is the basis for these lectures. It includes five roles: Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher. White looks at them through the lens of missiology and concludes that "is not enough to discover one's spiritual gift or calling; these gifts should be developed and nurtured through mentoring and proper theological education, with the ultimate purpose being to participate in the *Missio Dei*."¹⁷ This shift from the individual to the mission is important and quite consistent with a Pauline understanding of apostleship.

A second example comes from Nigeria involving the "apostles in the marketplace." This development derives from Sunday Adelaja who was convinced that "the church must do more than just address the spiritual needs of its members; the needs of society affect all people, he believes, including Christians as well as non-Christians. Even more important, in this view, is the idea that the unmet needs of society impede the realization of the kingdom that God wants his followers to establish on earth."¹⁸ As a result of Adelaja's influence on a group of pastors in Lagos, the Pentecostals there began shifting their focus to social problems. According to Apostles in the Market Place pastors, the followers of

Jesus must not only focus on learning and implementing God's spiritual laws but also on learning and implementing God's kingdom laws, which govern society.¹⁹ This move is somewhat like our Lutheran understanding of Two Kingdoms.

In summary, "apostles" and the corollary designations have a prevalent place in Christianity across Africa. There are two primary focal points for apostolicity. One is within the Roman Catholic Church which has navigated the move away from colonialism through a deep concern for the challenges of life in Africa. In this space, some seek to move away from the dangers of clericalism through an embrace of a leadership that listens and builds consensus in the best tradition of village life. The other focal point is in the African Independent Churches, the vast majority of which are Pentecostal in theology. They take the indigenous worldview seriously and apply biblical resources—especially with an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit—to experiences and demands of Africans. Here I see focus on *Missio Dei* in Ghana and the kingdom theology of the Apostles in the Marketplace in Lagos, Nigeria, to be potentially fruitful developments.

IMPLICATIONS

How does one in the tradition of Martin Luther react to this powerful, creative, and vibrant world of African Christianity and its claims of apostolicity in the church today? What about apostles today?

It seems to me that there are potential positives and potential negatives. As an heir of the reformation, I know that a bi-polar system of authority (church leader/bishop and scripture will at some point led to conflict, and I am on the side of *Sola Scriptura*. One cannot serve two masters. Likewise, when one claims a direct call from God, as did the apostle Paul and Ernest Paul Mamvura Mwazha and Sunday Adelaja, how does one weight the subjective experience of the individual?

¹⁶ Philip Jenkins, *The next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51.

¹⁷ Peter White, "A Missional Study of Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches' Leadership and Leadership Formation," *HTS Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.2865>.

¹⁸ Danny McCain, "Addressing Urban Problems through Kingdom Theology: The 'apostles in the Market Place' Model in Lagos, Nigeria," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 32, no. 1 (2013): 64.

¹⁹ McCain, 75.

On the other hand, the indigenization, the focus on mission to the non-Christian, the creative rethinking of apostolic succession, shifting the role of gifts from their impact on the individual to the mission, and even what looks to me somewhat like two-kingdom theology – all have potential. Paul described their experience when Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "The gifts he gave was that some would be apostles." Certainly, Christ continues to give gift to the church today. But in what form?

Before we move to answer that question, we must make a shift in perspective. As a theologian from the west, where Christianity is not thriving but dying, where the only hope for Christianity in my culture rests with the many immigrants to my country who bring with them a vibrant hope in Christ, it would be wrong of me to attempt to answer these questions for you. You are the ones who must discern for yourselves the place of apostolicity in the mission of the church. You are not the church of the global south, as you are often characterized in the west. You are the majority church; you are the present and future church; yours is the discernment the church needs.

THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Instead, I wish to point you to biblical and theological principles of our common heritage that you may wish to consider as you hear Paul's words from Ephesians 4, "Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Eph 4:7). "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles..." (Eph 4:11). You are the ones who must answer, Who or what are these "apostles"? And what is the significance of this gift of Christ for the church today?

A first principle comes from the Old Testament out of the reality that among God's people there were both true and false prophets. Jeremiah lived at such a time. His call was to speak God's judgment on Judah but also to present the promise of a New Covenant. Many opposed his preaching and he got in trouble for it. But he also provided a test to discern a true prophet: "when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet" (Jeremiah 28:9). Discernment involves waiting, not just waiting to see, but waiting to see what the Lord does.

Similarly, Jesus warns about false prophets, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits" (Matt 7:15–16). Principle 1: The truth matters.

In addition to such calls for discernment, the Bible gives a second principle that aids discernment: the content matters. Isaiah made that point against false prophets: "See, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. Now if people say to you, 'Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living, for teaching and for instruction?' surely, those who speak like this will have no light!" (Isaiah 8:18–20). Paul was blunter with the Galatians, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!" (Gal 1:6-8). Principle 2: The content matters.

And as a third principle, the Bible is quite specific about that content. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (1 John 4:1-2). Principle 3: Christology matters. It is not about you; it's about Jesus. John the Baptist is direct, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

These three biblical three principles that call for discernment. But the Bible also offers a caution. It is a fourth principle. Near the end of 1 Thessalonians, Paul strings together seven short instructions. They seem to be a common block of material, perhaps even an early Christian poem or hymn. The structure seems to be significant with two generic statements at the beginning --"rejoice always" and "pray without ceasing"-- and two at the end – "hold fast to the good" and "abstain from evil." In between are three short instructions that seem to interpret each other: "Do not quench the Spirit"; "Do not despise

the words of prophets"; "but test everything." "Quenching" involves putting out a fire – a significant metaphor about the working of the Spirit that cautions against excessive hesitancy. The Spirit can do new things and does so. It is not our place to limit God. Principle 4: The Fire matters.

In addition to these four general principles, there is in the Bible a case study on indigenizing Christianity. It comes from the correspondence between Paul and the house churches at Corinth of which we have two of at least four letters that Paul wrote. Our 1 Corinthians, the second actual letter, takes up many problematic issues, two of which involve practices from the local culture and how these new Christians might, if you will, indigenize them.

One was the practice of eating meat sacrificed to idols. As Paul points out, since these idols are not really gods, Christian freedom would allow eating the meat from their sacrifices. But that freedom must be tempered by concern for the weaker sister or brother. Principle 5: The weak on matters.

But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So, by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall (1 Cor 8:9-13).

The second example in this case study involves glossolalia, the indigenizing of the religious practice of ecstatic speech, famous in Greece from the oracle at Delphi. Concerning this practice, Paul writes: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you; nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Cor 14:18-19). Principle 6: Clarity matters.

From the Scriptures come several principles that may be applicable as you discern for yourselves the place of apostolicity in the mission of the church:

1. Wait to see if the word of a prophet comes true. By their fruits you will know them. The truth matters.
2. There is no other Gospel. Content matters.
3. It is about Jesus. Christology matters.
4. Don't quench the Spirit. The Fire matters.
5. Consider those who are weaker. The weak one matters.
6. Clarity matters.

In addition to these six, I wish to propose for your consideration a seventh principle, one that comes from our shared Lutheran heritage, one that you of Mekane Yesus have as a unique gift to offer to your Christian sisters and brothers in Africa: *the Solas*.

Recall the point of the second lecture – that the passing of the apostolic generation caused two parallel and competing responses: apostolic succession and the canonization of the New Testament. This bi-polar structure of authority became the central point of contention in the sixteenth century as the medieval church asserted the ultimate authority of the bishop at Rome to determine doctrine and Martin Luther asserted at the Leipzig Disputation that a simple lay person armed with Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope.²⁰

Luther and other Reformers asserted the authority of the Scripture alone, as opposed to tradition and church hierarchy. They maintained that salvation comes by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, by Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. These phrases or theological principles are often called the "Five Solas of the Reformation" (*sola* being the Latin word for "alone" or "only"): *Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, Soli Deo Gloria*.

These Solas are the heritage of our church and are criteria by which we discern doctrine and practice. As heirs of the Reformation, our one and only concern in the church is that which "illuminates and

²⁰ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, Hendrickson Classic Biographies (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 107.

magnifies the honor of Christ and brings the abundant consolation that devout consciences need" (Ap IV 2). Leadership in the church is not about titles and authority (Matt 20:26); but seeking and serving the lost.

I have offered for your consideration seven principles of biblical and evangelical origin that may be of help to you in the process of discernment.

From the Bible:

1. Truth matter
2. Content matters.
3. Christology matters.
4. The Fire matters.
5. The weaker one matters.
6. Clarity matters.

And from the reformation:

7. *Sola Gratia, Solus Christus, Sola Fide, Sola Scriptura, Soli Deo Gloria*

But, I say again. You are the ones who must discern for yourselves the place of apostolicity in the mission of the church. You are the majority church; you are the future church; yours is the discernment the church needs.

AFTERWORD

These lectures over the last three days have explored three topics: The First Apostles, After the Apostles, and Apostles Today. In our work together, I have been presenting a methodology for addressing the big questions that face the church.

That methodology begins with scripture, looking at key texts in the original languages, seeking the meaning of those texts for those who first heard them, and then drawing out principles that endure through the centuries and across cultures. The second step is to consider the history of Christianity with an emphasis on our shared Lutheran theology. Third is the application of biblical and theological principles to the challenges at hand in a way that the gospel predominates, that Christ is glorified, and that the sinner is comforted and encouraged.

I pray that in this task and all those tasks ahead of you, you might be faithful to the sacred scriptures which are able to make you wise unto salvation, that you be faithful to our shared heritage and those insights that grew out of the Reformation and the struggles of Martin Luther and his colleagues, that you are faithful with your outreach all for whom Christ died, and most of all that you are committed to Christ alone. He gives his gifts to you for the church today. His Spirit will prosper all that you do.

In the name of Jesus.

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