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# The Apostolate: Its Enduring Significance in the Apostolic Word

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OUR Lutheran Confessions state: "We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with all teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone."<sup>1</sup> In using the word "apostolic," they are confessing to something which is not merely a historical but also a theological entity. For the conception "apostle" and "apostolic" is one which is determined entirely by its relationship to the Lord, who establishes the apostolate and sends the apostles.

## I

### THE APOSTLE

The linguistic and formal side of the term already brings this out.<sup>2</sup> The verb ἀποστέλλω even in profane Greek has its center of gravity in the will and the intention of the sender and in the fact that the person sent is not only sent but also commissioned and authorized by an authority which is above him. The Septuagint uses the verb over 700 times, usually to translate מִשַּׁלַּח; and a passage like Is. 6:8 serves to show how the emphasis on the sender and his will and the authorization of the person sent can from the context acquire a specifically religious tone and content. In the New Testament also, while the verb πέμπειν emphasizes the act

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<sup>1</sup> Of the Summary Content, Rule, and Standard, FC Ep. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. K. H. Rengstorff in Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* [cited hereafter as *ThW*] I, 397 ff. While Rengstorff's conclusions have been widely adopted, some of his inferences—notably with reference to the antiquity of the *shaliach*—have been challenged, for example by Arnold Ehrhardt, *The Apostolic Succession in the First Two Centuries of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1953), pp. 15—20.

of sending as such, the verb ἀποστέλλειν emphasizes the commission involved in the sending and is by far the more frequent of the two terms.<sup>3</sup>

The noun ἀπόστολος as used in the New Testament has few or no real analogies in classical and Hellenistic usage (*TbW* I, 406 ff.). The immediate formal background of the New Testament usages of ἀπόστολος is probably the Jewish legal institution of the מִשְׁלֵּחַ (ibid., pp. 414—420). That institution has its ultimate source in the rights of the Semitic messenger as we find them reflected, for instance, in 1 Sam. 25:40 ff. and 2 Sam. 10:1 ff.; but it seems to have achieved its real and peculiar form about the time of Christ. The *shaliach* is a man's proxy, authorized and commissioned to represent him and to act for him in a designated matter. How complete and how far-reaching this power to represent, this authorization, was, can be seen from the rabbinical maxim "The *shaliach* of a man is as that man himself"; and from the fact that, for instance, a man could become engaged or divorced through the agency of a *shaliach*. Since the *shaliach* could sabotage his commission by misusing the authority committed to him (and this could not be prevented, neither could its effects be revoked), being a *shaliach* involved a resolute subordination of the will to that of the person who gave the commission. Fidelity was therefore the quality most sought after in the *shaliach*, and the statement is occasionally found in the rabbinical writings that God is pleased with a *shaliach* who sacrifices his life for the sake of his commission. The institution was basically a legal one; it acquired a religious accent only when used for religious purposes, as when the Sanhedrin commissioned certain rabbis to go into the Diaspora to execute its will there; and Paul was probably such a *shaliach* of the Sanhedrin when he went to Damascus. (Acts 9:1 ff.)

In contrast to the New Testament the term is *not* used of Jewish missionaries and the fact that although the word was often used in a transferred religious sense (of the leader in prayer in the synagog and of the sacrificing priest who is the *shaliach* of God), the term is not normally used of the prophets. When it is used of Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and Ezekiel, it is in connection with the

<sup>3</sup> For the usage peculiar to John cf. *TbW* I, 403 ff.

special authority and power given them by God to perform miracles, not in connection with their usual prophetic task. The rabbis tended to mechanize the prophet and thus to deprive him of all initiative and individuality; when Jesus put His apostles in parallel with the Old Testament prophets, He was perhaps consciously correcting a Jewish misconception of what constitutes a man of God and was again emphasizing the fact that "the true mission from God lies in the fact that man is united in his whole will and his whole person with the word and will of God" (*ibid.*, p. 420). But, whatever differences may exist between the Jewish conception of the *shaliach* and that of the New Testament apostle, the word came to Jesus and His disciples freighted, on the one hand, with the idea of a comprehensive authorization by a higher authority, and, on the other hand, with a complete and resolute self-subordination to that authority on the part of the person sent. Given a religious authority, a divine authority, as we have it in the person of Jesus the Christ, the term, it is obvious, becomes a highly theological one.

How completely the conception of "apostle" is determined by the apostle's Lord; how theological and religious, therefore, a confession to the writings of the New Testament as *apostolic* writings is — this we see fully only when we consider the apostolate historically, or genetically, and see what goes into the making of an apostolic man.

The New Testament apostle is determined wholly by the Lord Jesus; he is therefore a creation of God's grace, and this grace is, first of all, pure giving. The gift character of this grace is marked in Matthew 16 by the fact that the initiative in the disciples' confession of Jesus as the Christ lies completely with Jesus. As Schlatter has put it: "The confession which celebrates Jesus as the promised King does not originate with the circle of disciples, as if the disciples in a moment of excitement conferred upon Jesus the royal name; rather, it is occasioned by Jesus Himself. On this point the recollections of Jesus preserved in the Gospels are completely unambiguous; any attempt on the part of the disciples to impose their thoughts upon Jesus and arbitrarily to determine His action appears as wholly impossible."<sup>4</sup> It is Jesus who provokes

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<sup>4</sup> *Der Evangelist Matthäus*, p. 503.

the confession; it is Jesus who points out its significance; and it is Jesus who gives the apostle Peter his function and his authority.

And so it was throughout Jesus' association with His disciples and His apostles (cf. *ThW* IV, 444—460). It was Jesus who took the initiative in creating the band of disciples, that matrix of the apostolate. It is in this point that the rabbi-disciple relationship between Jesus and His disciples differs most strikingly from the ordinary rabbi-disciple relationship in Judaism. The disciples do not select their rabbi; Jesus *calls* His disciples, and they obey His call as the Messianic call that it is. Over their discipleship is written the word of Jesus: "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). And their whole discipleship bears the impress of the initiative and the Lordship of Jesus. They do not, for instance, ever appear as partners in a discussion with Jesus. Where there are discussions, it is always the opponents of Jesus who give rise to them (Matt. 21:23 ff.). Jesus' own disciples always remain in the role of hearers. At the most they ask questions when Jesus' word remains incomprehensible to them (Mark 4: 10 ff.). Moreover, the decisive thing throughout is not an intellectual appropriation of Jesus' word but taking it up into one's will and translating it into action. (Matt. 7:24 ff.)

The same holds for the apostles. Jesus "ordained [created] Twelve that they should be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach" (Mark 3:14). It is Jesus who authorizes them and sends them out. Their activity begins when Jesus decides (Matt. 10:1; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1). In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark they bear, significantly, the title "apostles" only in connection with their being sent out; after their return to Jesus the title is not applied to them (*ibid.*, I, 428). And there is, furthermore, no mention of any independent activity of the disciples while they are in the immediate presence of Jesus.

How completely the apostolate depends on the initiative of Jesus is seen also in the situation at the time of Jesus' death. Here is no stalwart band of faithful followers, holding to Him through thick and thin and carrying on where the Master has left off, but rather flight, denial, fear, and hopeless sorrow. Without Jesus they are hopeless, helpless, and desperate. It is the risen Christ who again makes the scattered band a troop of men ready to work for

Him. It is His grace which recreates and reconstitutes the apostolate (Luke 24:36). Not what "men" (Matt. 16:13) may say and not what "flesh and blood" (Matt. 16:17) may reveal have anything to do with the origin of the apostolate; it is all the uncaused, sovereign love of God, the God who is revealed in Jesus as the Father. *Amor Dei non invenit sed creat suum apostolum*, to paraphrase a saying of Luther's.

It is the calling grace of God which originates the apostolate; and this calling grace is a grace which gives. "Blessed art thou," Jesus tells Peter in response to his Messianic confession. And this word "blessed" (μακάριος) never speaks of what man by his efforts acquires (not even when it is applied to the merciful who shall find mercy in God's judgment, for their mercy is but the echo and reflection of the divine mercy which they have received); it speaks of the gift of God. Matthew makes this the first word which Jesus utters as teacher to His disciples (Matt. 5:3 ff.). And Jesus writes God's perfect grace in large white letters on a very dark blackboard in the first lesson which He gives His disciples, the grace which gives to the poor, to those who have not *because* they have not, to those who mourn *because* they mourn, and to those who hunger and thirst *because* they hunger and thirst.

"Freely ye have received; freely give" (Matt. 10:8), Jesus tells His Twelve when He first commissions them and sends them forth. They are to go and bring peace to men as the vehicles of the freely giving grace of God. "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11), Jesus tells His disciples when the gulf between Him and a people who did not have what was given to them, who had ears and did not hear, grows wider and deeper. What kept the disciples from sharing the fate of Israel was the giving grace of God. When Peter asks the question, "How often shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" Jesus gives him the answer by pointing to the giving grace of God. He makes plain to Peter what has happened to him when He, Jesus, came to him, called him, told him, "Fear not"; when He let Peter sit at table with Him and to walk the paths of Palestine with Him: God has forgiven him that insuperable debt and has released him from prison, has set him free for forgiveness. When the desire for greatness threatens to create envy and dissen-

sion in the band of the apostles, Jesus eradicates the lust for greatness from their hearts by pointing them to the Son of Man, who came to minister and to give His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). In the Gospel According to St. John the farewell discourses have before them the signature of love — “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (John 13:1) — that love which ministers and washes the feet of men who have no claim or right to such a ministry, that defenseless love which Satan can attack and lovelessness can betray (John 13:2). Jesus’ Last Supper with His apostles again marks Him as the Incarnation of God’s giving grace.

In His last action He stood before them, as always, as one completely poor. He had nothing to leave to them, nothing to distribute to them; the only thing He had was His body and His blood. . . . But His poverty makes evident His riches. He fulfilled His office by uniting His disciples with Himself; for in their union with Himself they have their part in God and His kingdom and therefore the equipment for their task. Therefore He described His body to them as a food which gives them life and His blood as the drink which will give them part in the Messianic feast in the kingdom to come. In giving Himself to them that they might eat and drink, He placed them before His cross as men who by His death gratefully received life.<sup>5</sup>

And at Easter the consummate giving grace of God appears once more. Jesus takes the disciples, who had failed Him utterly, who had fled and denied Him, back into communion with Himself; He gives them fellowship with Himself anew. And He crowns all the self-giving of His communion with them with the final gift of the Holy Ghost. Small wonder that the men of the New Testament look back on their days with Jesus with a jubilant astonishment — “He gave Himself to us!” The evangelist John is speaking for all the apostles when he says: “Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16).

And this calling and giving grace which creates the apostolate is also a revealing grace. Peter confesses Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). In calling Jesus the Son of the living God he is expressing the fact that God in and through

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<sup>5</sup> A. Schlatter, *Die Geschichte des Christus*, 2d ed., p. 487.

Jesus has in such a way revealed Himself as the living God that Jesus is thereby marked as His Son.<sup>6</sup> Jesus "has not forced His royal name upon them, He has not bidden them repeat after Him: 'I am the Christ,'" but He has nevertheless given them the revelation of Himself; for "He has let them see what He did, has let them hear what He said, has served God and man before their eyes, and has given them the basis for their faith."<sup>7</sup> The promise which Jesus had given to Nathanael: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1:51), had already been richly fulfilled. They had seen the power of His gracious deeds, had seen the hungry fed (Matt. 16:8-10), had seen the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead raised up (Matt. 11:5), and had heard the unsurpassed authority of His word and knew that He, and He only, had the words of eternal life (Matt. 7:29; John 6:68). The revelation given by the revealing grace of God was revelation *in Jesus Christ*; the apostolate is inseparably connected with the once-for-all, unrepeatable event of Christ and partakes of its unique character.

The Father of Jesus, the Father in heaven, has revealed this to Peter. Only He knows the Son (Matt. 11:27), and only He can reveal Him. He it was who gave them eyes to see and ears to hear and minds and hearts to know the mystery of the kingdom of heaven, to see and know that kingdom present in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the living God. And in revealing the Son, the Father has revealed Himself. The apostles saw the Father's face and knew the Father's name in Jesus Christ (John 14:7; 17:6). And Jesus also had given them new eyes for the older revelation of God, for the Old Testament Scriptures. He had given them ears to hear the Father's voice in that inscripturated revelation.

"Flesh and blood" had not given this revelation. The only possible antithesis to the flesh is God as the Spirit, and there is a hint here of the gift of the revealing Holy Ghost, whose coming and activity John the Baptist had already foretold (Matt. 3:11),

<sup>6</sup> Th. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, 4th ed., p. 536.

<sup>7</sup> A. Schlatter, *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament: Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, ad loc.



that Spirit whose inspiration Jesus had promised His apostles for the time when they should stand before governors and kings for His sake and must needs give full and valid testimony: "It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matt. 10:19, 20). That Spirit was to come to them as the Spirit of Truth. He would remind them of all that they had heard from Jesus' lips; He would teach them, He would guide them into all truth; He would take of what is the Christ's and show it to them and show them therein all the glory of the only-begotten Son, together with all that the future yet held of the full and final manifestation of that glory (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:13-15). By the renewing and creative and illumining power of that Spirit they were to become full and valid witnesses of Him whom they now confessed (Luke 24:48, 49; Acts 1:8; John 15:26, 27).

The gates of death shall not be strong enough to hold back those who died in Christ when the Christ calls them to rise again (Matt. 16:18). For Jesus not only must "go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed," but also *must* "be raised again the third day" (Matt. 16:21). The calling, giving, revealing grace which creates the apostolate is also the grace which begets men anew to a lively hope. Their sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh with the morning, the morning of the resurrection of their Lord. When they see their risen Lord again, they shall know that death is finally and forever conquered, and this joy no man shall ever take from them (John 16:22). The apostles can face persecution with the sure and joyous conviction that their reward is great in heaven (Matt. 5:12); they can confess their Lord with courage amid persecution here and now, for they know that He will in turn confess them before His Father in heaven (Matt. 10:32). The apostles can hate their life in this world and follow their Lord and serve Him; for they know that where He is, His servants shall also be; and they know that if they serve Him, His Father will honor them (John 12:25, 26); they know that they who have left all for His name's sake will sit upon twelve thrones and reign with the Son of Man when He comes to sit in the throne of His glory (Matt. 19:27-29). The apostles are not apostles of the dead but of the

living; they perform their service in the triumphant certainty that even death cannot frustrate their work or destroy it.

If the grace which creates the apostolate is a gift and an invitation, it is also (as God's grace always is) a claim and a summons. It is a separating and severing grace which sets the apostle on the narrow way and leads him through the strait gate into the Kingdom. "But whom say ye that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). Jesus separates His apostles from the men of Israel who admire and respect Him, who deem Him to be the Baptist returned from the dead, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (Matt. 16:14), from the men who give Him every honor except the one great honor due Him, the confession that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He separates them from the undecided just as He separates the apostles from those who have decided against Him, from the wicked and adulterous generation which seeks after a sign and shall receive none except the sign of the prophet Jonah, the sign connected with the scandal of the cross and death of the Messiah (Matt. 16:4); He keeps them free from the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 16:5-12). Indeed, Jesus' whole activity as teacher is the task of separating His own from the Judaism round about them: from the falseness and the hardness of Jewish piety, from Judaism's perversion of the Law, from Israel's false conception of the Messiah, from Israel's guilt that plunges Israel into destruction (Matthew 5—7; Matthew 23). Jesus separates His own from all false prophecy and false piety which also claims to be Christian (Matt. 7:13-23). In short, Jesus separates His disciples and apostles from "flesh and blood," from all human magnitudes and all human standards, and binds them to Himself alone. The grace that has appeared in Him is a sundering and a severing grace.

Jesus segregates His own, but He does not segregate them for mystic contemplation, or meditation, or any other form of religious hedonism (or for that matter, for an existence as a self-contained sect). This segregating grace is a grace which calls men into service, a grace which commissions and authorizes them. "I will build My church," the Christ says, and He builds that church of men; but the men who form a part of the church are living stones and have, therefore, an active part in the building. The apostles

have a fundamental, never-to-be-repeated part in this Messianic work. They are to act, to use the keys given to them, to bind and to loose. This thought was nothing astonishingly new for the disciples by the time of the confession at Caesarea Philippi. When He called them, Jesus had told the first disciples, "I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19); He had told Peter when Peter in his sense of unworthiness exclaimed: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" — He had told Peter: "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke 5:8,10). Jesus had compared the activity of His disciples to that of the prophets who were before them (Matt. 5:12), and no prophet in Israel ever led a life of idle contemplation. He compared His disciples to salt and light, and salt salts and light shines by the very fact that it is salt or light; in salt and light nature and function are one. When Jesus first gave His apostles part in His Messianic task, He sent them forth as workmen who are worthy of their hire (Matt. 10:10; cp. 9:37). The attitude and action of the disciples in their association with one another is to be like that of God Himself, who in restless, strenuous love seeks the sheep that is lost and spares no pains to find it (Matt. 18:12 ff.). Jesus had taught the Twelve that the greatness of the Son of Man lay in His ministry and that all human greatness therefore arises from being servant and from being minister (Matt. 20:26-28). He repeated that lesson in greatness once more, drastically, on the night in which He was betrayed, when He washed His disciples' feet and said: "If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14,15). The same grace which sought them out in uncaused love has given them work to do: "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you *and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit*" (John 15:16).

The grace which calls to service also gives the commission and the authority for that service: "Upon this rock I will build My church. . . . And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:18,19). Now, as when He had first sent them out (Matt. 10:1,7,8), Jesus gives them part in

His own Messianic authority. Their word of witness to the Messiah whom they have confessed shall be a divinely effective word, potent for forgiveness where it is received, and mighty for destruction where it is rejected. When after Easter Jesus authorizes His disciples anew, He sends them out again with full authority to make disciples, to baptize, to put men under the will of Jesus, the Lord and the Christ (Matt. 28:18-20). He sends them out with His authority and with His purpose. He bids them preach repentance and remission of sins in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47).

Because they had lived with Jesus, had seen Him upon the cross and had seen Him again alive, they knew what His name signified and to whom He belonged; therefore they must tell all nations what must be proclaimed in His name. But they still needed a special instruction from Jesus as to how they were to act over against Jerusalem. Will repentance and forgiveness of sins be proclaimed once more to the city which crucified Jesus? They are to bring the good news to all nations by beginning at Jerusalem. To Jerusalem the Gospel comes first. In the fact that Jesus can give His disciples this commission, the petition "Father, forgive them," which Jesus uttered on the cross, is fulfilled.<sup>8</sup>

Their word is a divine word of forgiveness: to hear them is to hear Jesus Himself (Luke 10:16; cp. Matt. 9:6, 8); to receive them is to receive Jesus Himself (Matt. 10:40 ff.). They are, as it were, a living extension of their Lord. The same divine action that took place in Him repeats itself for grace and for judgment in them. As the Christ came not to judge the world, but to save the world (John 12:47; cp. John 3:17), so it is not the function of the apostle to judge (Matt. 7:1); and yet, just as judgment was the inevitable cast shadow of that proffer of divine grace and forgiveness which came with Jesus — Jesus could also say: "For judgment I am come into this world" (John 9:39) — so also judgment is executed in the word of the disciples who freely give what they have freely received (Matt. 10:14, 15).

It is an overwhelming thing, this commission the issues of which are life and death; and who is sufficient for these things? Flesh and blood cannot reveal the Christ to man, and men of flesh and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., ad Luke 24:47-48.

blood cannot be witnesses to Him. The keys to the kingdom of heaven, the power to bind and loose, belong to the future, that future when Jesus will empower men to be His witnesses by giving them the Spirit from on high (Luke 24; Acts 1). Jesus will breathe upon His disciples, as God breathed life into the clay of Adam and made Adam a living soul, and thus make of them men capable of speaking with an authority that remits and retains sin (John 20:22). On Pentecost the Spirit will come and will through the Word of the disciples convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment (John 16:8-11), will make the disciples' mission the direct elongation of the mission of Christ Himself, whose coming into the world proved to be a condemnation because in Him light came into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil (John 3:19; cp. John 7:7). Through the empowering Spirit their Word will confront men with the Christ in such a way that they will behold His glory and will be compelled to decide for or against Him (John 16:13-15; cp. John 1:14).

"Repent . . . and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). What Peter asked of the men of Jerusalem also holds of the disciples and apostles. If they are to receive the power of the Spirit, there must be a radical inner change. And so the grace which creates the apostle is also a grace which puts men under the call to repentance. The grace that makes apostles does not lay hold of religious geniuses and merely give them the finishing touch of a divine χάρισμα. This grace lays hold of men in their utter failure and desperation, the desperation of men who cry, "Lord, save us; we perish!" (Matt. 8:25). This grace lays hold of Simon Bar Jonah—the Simon who had completely collapsed in the presence of the grace of God made visible in Jesus and had fallen down before Him in the conviction of his complete unworthiness (Luke 5:1-11); the Simon of flesh and blood who when he walked upon the water toward his Lord, "saw the wind boisterous," and grew afraid, and began to sink, and had to cry out, "Lord, save me!" (Matt. 14:29, 30); the Simon who became an offense to His Lord and a Satan to tempt Him, because he could not endure the thought of the Messiah on the cross (Matt. 16:21-23). The grace which creates the apostle took this Simon and

made him the rock upon which the church was to be built. The love of the risen Lord took this Simon and made him the shepherd of His lambs and sheep (John 21). It took the Twelve who had all fled at the critical moment and left their Lord alone (John 16:32), and it wrote their names upon the twelve foundation stones of the wall of the New Jerusalem, the city of God (Rev. 21:14). The apostles remembered that the grace of God had taken them to be apostles in their own utter failure; therefore "apostolate" and "grace" are closely conjoined in apostolic thought, and the life of the apostle became a life of constant prayer.<sup>9</sup>

This grace that puts men under the call to repentance is therefore a grace which cuts athwart all the thinking and designing of man. Jesus is confessed as the Christ, the Son of the living God — and He commands His disciples to tell no man. He says, "I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" — and then goes on to predict His suffering, disgrace, and death. He gives men the keys to the kingdom of heaven; He promises them that they and theirs shall triumph over death — and then bids them renounce themselves, their honor and their life, for His sake. Flesh and blood would not have invented such a Christ; and men did not recognize this Christ. No wonder that Peter protested! No wonder that the only two disciples who were active at the arrest of Jesus did what was completely wrong: the one betrayed Him, and the other drew the sword!

To see and know that thus, just in this way, the Christ will build His church, by being a ransom for many; that just thus the judgment on the world and on the prince of this world will take place; that if the Christ be raised on high, just thus He will draw all men to Himself — if a man is to see and to know this, grace must inwardly transform him and teach him to savor the things of God. And Jesus does teach His apostle this, unsparingly and radically. He does not spare him the hard polemic of "offense" and "Satan." He shocks His apostle into the consciousness of where he now is standing, in order that He may point him and lead him the way he must go: "Behind Me!" — This binds the disciple completely to the will of Jesus; this compels him to savor

<sup>9</sup> A. Schlatter, *Die Theologie der Apostel*, 2d ed., p. 28.

the things of God as Jesus savors them; this means renunciation of human thinking and devising; this means renunciation of Satanic self-seeking and self-will; this means complete surrender to Jesus and to the will of God that appears in Him; this means what Jesus in the Gospel of John so often calls the keeping of His commandments (John 14:21, 23, 24; John 15:7, 9, 10). It was this complete nay to the satanic and the human — so perfectly displayed by Jesus Himself in the temptation (Matthew 4) — which Jesus had striven all along to implant in the hearts of His disciples. He had taught them to pray for the hallowing of God's name, the coming of God's reign, the being done of His will. He had in the Sermon on the Mount sought to bring them to say a complete and unbroken yea to the will of God, His will of love, in meekness, mercy, peaceableness, and purity of heart; He had sought to make them bow without reservation or restriction before the written Word of God; He had sought to cleanse their piety of Pharisaic self-seeking and pride; He had sought to eradicate from their will the desire to judge; He had sought to win them to renounce the majority and to go the narrow way of God alone; He had sought to make them renounce the human desire for greatness (Matthew 20); He had sought to give them an eye and a heart for the little ones (Matthew 18) — and all this not as an ethical demand or a moral system but as the gift of the Christ who made them living branches in the life-giving vine (John 15:1 ff.). The grace that lays claim to the apostle is a grace that comprehends him, transforms and transfigures him. The apostle is not a will-less vehicle of the revelation he has received but one who by the Word and work of Jesus has been struck, moved, reshaped, reformed, one who has been inwardly laid hold of and claimed. He is not only the servant and slave but also the friend of the Messiah; and the friend has a countenance and a will of his own (John 15:15).

As friend of the Messiah the apostle is capable of receiving the grace which calls upon him to deny himself, to follow his Lord, to take his cross, and to lose his life (Matt. 16:24, 25).

With these words, which Jesus now gave His disciples, He makes them free of that which makes His death a difficulty for them. How does one unlearn being intent upon that which de-

lights and honors and exalts man? Jesus answers: "Deny yourself." Whoever denies someone breaks off friendship with him and dissolves his communion with him. "I do not know the man and do not want to know anything of him," said Peter when he denied Jesus. Jesus advises us: "Say that to yourself." You dare not be your own friend, and you dare not listen to what you advise and what you desire for yourself as your greatest good fortune. Free yourself from yourself. We have the high privilege of becoming strangers to ourself, of being capable of listening to the course of our own thoughts with the answer: "We care nothing for it." And we are capable of answering our own desires with: "We will not let ourselves be led by you." And so we can also with a potent will lay hold of that which separates us from the world and from men [the cross]. . . . Whoever is led by himself and advised by himself will never lay hold of the wood of the cross. And on the other hand, that cleavage which separates us from earthly things makes us free also from our own heart. We can do it only if a love draws us which is greater in our eyes than we ourselves are. We learn not to be intent upon what belongs to us when we learn to be intent upon what is God's. Only he ceases to be a friend to himself and to the world who wills to follow the Christ, who is determined not to lose Him and wills to remain with Him. That is the new and stronger love which releases us also from ourselves.<sup>10</sup>

The call of grace which reaches the apostle in Jesus, as it gives all, likewise claims all: it demands of him that he renounce the majority (Matt. 7:13), wealth (Matt. 6:19 ff.), his body (Matt. 5:29, 30), his family, his honor, and his life (Matt. 10:37-39) — all things (Luke 14:33). The claim of God's grace in Christ demands to be heard and followed without delay, without reservation, and without illusions (Luke 14:15-32). The apostle goes the way of his Lord *per crucem ad lucem*.

And all this resolute and radical change of mind, heart, will, and action is not for the apostle a means to a mundane end, a way to success; the grace of God puts it on a level immeasurably higher than that. The grace of God calls the apostle to a life lived in eschatological responsibility: "For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward

<sup>10</sup> A. Schlatter, *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, ad Matt. 16:24.



every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27). As the life of the apostle is filled with a buoyant hope, so also it is filled and dominated by the sober expectation of judgment. John the Baptist had already filled all men who would hear with the sense that the last days were upon them, that the ax of God was already laid to the root of the trees, that the Mightier One who would baptize with fire was at hand, and that He would inexorably burn up the chaff of His threshing floor with unquenchable fire. Jesus threatened judgment to those who presumed to judge (Matt. 7:1), while He promised mercy in the judgment to those who are merciful (Matt. 5:7); Jesus had told His disciples that no activity for Him, however brilliant or successful, if it was not done in full obedience to the will of His Father, would exempt a man from His judgment; that only a hearing of His Word which took that Word deep into a man's heart and will would lay the foundation for a house which would stand in the storms of God's judgment (Matt. 7:21-23; Matt. 7:24-27). When Jesus commissioned and sent the Twelve, He gave them this word as their *viaticum*: "Whosoever . . . shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32, 33); He had told His disciples that He would send forth His angels on the Last Day and that they would gather *out of His kingdom* all things that offend and them which do iniquity (Matt. 13:41); and He threatened judgment without mercy upon the disciple who was not ready to forgive "unto seventy times seven," even as he had been forgiven; "So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:35); and He had told His disciples that drowning in the depths of the sea would be an end preferable to that awaiting the man who offended one of Christ's own little ones (Matt. 18:6). Our Lord's discourses to His apostles on the last things, wherein He fortifies them with hope, the hope of His return, have nothing in them to satisfy a searching curiosity; the recurrent refrain in them is: Be faithful, be ready, be sober, be vigilant, be found at your post. All is addressed to the will and to the conscience of the apostle (Matt. 24:25).

And Jesus did not permit His apostles to think of these things

as coming at some dim and distant future; He taught them to be ready at every hour. Whatever puzzles Jesus' predictions of the near advent of the Son of Man may impose upon us intellectually, theologically they speak most clearly; and they are no puzzle for our will, as, for instance: "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:28).

The apostolate is, then, the creation of the creative grace of God; is a vessel of the grace of God; is a gift of grace to the church, for the apostle has what he has received in order to transmit it: the power of the keys is Peter's not to have and to hold and to use but to give to the church (Matt. 18:18).

## II

### THE APOSTOLIC "WORD"

#### *In the Apostolic Word We Have the Quintessence of the Apostolate Alive and Active in the Church*

Of all that the apostles received and were, we have only their Word. Does this mean that our generation has less of them than the first generation among whom they lived and worked? The apostle is as He who sends him; the apostle is determined by his Lord. And the apostle of Jesus learned from Him a high and serious evaluation of the Word. Jesus called John the Baptist the greatest of woman-born, and yet John did no signs. But what he *said* did prove true (Matt. 11:11; John 10:41). The fact that Jesus appeared in history as a rabbi, as a teacher, with disciples (John 18:19-21), not as a priest or a king or a wonder-worker, puts a strong emphasis and the highest value on the Word. "The Word was the means of His working. But He proceeded thus not because He had nothing greater and more effective for the first but because in His judgment God attests Himself to man in the Word, and man needs nothing other and can receive nothing greater than the Word of God."<sup>11</sup> Jesus' words and His works cannot be separated from one another or made to compete with one another: "The *words* that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself; but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the *works*" (John 14:10). Jesus performs His miracles by the Word and drives out demons

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<sup>11</sup> A. Schlatter, *Die Geschichte des Christus*, 2d ed., p. 135.

by His Word (Matt. 8:8, 16). How completely Jesus' Word and work are one, the story of the paralytic shows (Matt. 9:1 ff.). Jesus' words are a deed done to men, for they are Messianic words; and His deeds are an enacted proclamation. "Let us go into the next towns that I may *preach* there also, for therefore came I forth," Jesus says to Simon. St. Mark, in the following verse, describes this preaching thus: "And He preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee *and cast out devils*" (Mark 1:38, 39). Jesus was a prophet (and more than a prophet) mighty in word and deed (Luke 24:19). Jesus' words decide a man's fate forever; they spell life or death in that they are received or rejected. "The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the Last Day" (John 12:48; cp. Matt. 7:24 ff.). In the Fourth Gospel particularly the person and the Word of Jesus are often used practically interchangeably. He tells those who believe on Him to continue in His Word (John 8:31); to those who refuse Him belief He says: "Ye seek to kill Me because My Word hath no place in you" (John 8:37). In John 15 the expressions: "Abide in Me, and I in you," and "Ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you," and "Continue ye in My love," mean essentially the same thing. For Jesus, person and Word are one.

When Jesus confers His Messianic authority upon His disciples, this is primarily the giving of the Word, the Messianic Word, to them.<sup>12</sup> Jesus had impressed upon His disciples the seriousness and the weight of the Word (Matt. 12:36, 37) and had placed the accent of eternity again on their simple yea and nay (Matt. 5:37). The first and basic parable, that of the sower, with which Jesus enriched His disciples and executed judgment on unbelieving Israel, in which He gave to those who had and took from those who had not, was a parable of the Word (Matt. 13:3-9; 18-23). When Jesus conferred on Peter and the apostles the power to bind and loose, they knew that He was conferring upon them a power exercised by the Word, for in that sense the terms were already current in Judaism.<sup>13</sup> Even on first sending them out Jesus had freighted the words of the apostles with judgment: "And who-

<sup>12</sup> A. Schlatter, *Die Theologie der Apostel*, 2d ed., pp. 49, 243.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Buechsel, in *ThW* II, 59—60, esp. p. 60, "durch Lehrentscheidung für verboten oder erlaubt erklären . . . den Bann verhängen und aufheben."

soever shall not receive you, *nor hear your words*, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city" (Matt. 10:14, 15).

Jesus' gift to His disciples is the Word. When He describes Himself as the Door and the teachers that come to Israel with His authority as the shepherds that come through that Door, He emphasizes again and again that it is their voice which identifies them as the true shepherds (John 10:3, 4, 5, 8; cf. v. 16). They represent their Lord in their Word: "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20). In creating the apostles Jesus is giving these men the Word which the Father has given Him (John 17:8, 14). How great the gift is, how essential in character the Word is, can be seen in the fact that in John 17 the Word is paralleled by "name" (vv. 6, 26) and by "glory" (v. 22). And when Jesus prays for the church to be created by the apostles, He prays "for them also which shall believe on Me through their Word" (John 17:20).

And the activity of the Spirit has to do with the Word. He reminds, He teaches, He leads into all truth, He convicts. He is the Paraclete, the Counselor. And the final command of Jesus to His disciples is that they should be witnesses of Him. The work both of the Spirit and of the disciples involves essentially the Word.

This same decisive accent on the Word is found also in the apostle Paul. In his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus the prime emphasis is on his Word: how he taught them, reported to them, attested to them, proclaimed to them, admonished them. And he warns them against false teachers, who will speak perverted things; and in conclusion St. Paul commends them to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build them up and to give them an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:18-35).<sup>14</sup>

How completely the apostolic Word makes present God's own activity may be seen from two examples, chosen almost at random. When Paul speaks as apostle, it is Christ Himself speaking in him

<sup>14</sup> Cf. K. H. Rengstorff, in *TbW* I, 441 f.

(2 Cor. 13:3). The Thessalonians, Paul says, are taught by God to love one another. God has reached into their life and reshaped it. And how did this take place? It took place by means of the apostolic Word, which they received for what it really was, the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13).

*The Apostolic Word Loses Nothing of Its Power and Effectiveness by the Fact that It Comes to Us as a Written Word, as Scripture*

There is nothing in Jesus' training of the Twelve or in His commissioning of St. Paul which points to an apostolic Word *in writing*. But this does not yet mean that there is a gap between Jesus and the Church of the Reformation with its emphasis on *sola Scriptura*. There is, after all, nothing very surprising in the fact that we have no express command on the part of Jesus to write. The prophets of the Old Testament, whose Word as Scripture was an unquestioned authority for Jesus and for His apostles, with whom, moreover, Jesus parallels His apostles (Matt. 5:12), did not always or even usually receive an explicit command to put their words into writing. The fact of writing, the phenomenon of γραφή, is given, rather, with the once-for-all character of God's Word to man.

There is, furthermore, no aversion in the mind of Jesus or in the mind of His apostles to the written Word as such. The verdict of Paul on the γράμμα is not a verdict upon the written Word as *written*, but on the Law as not having the power to give life. In fact, the whole Bible knows nothing of the modern romanticizing aversion to the written Word — after all, the Law was written by the finger of God Himself.

Again, one might ask: "Can we expect a command to write from the incarnate Son, who did not Himself know the times and the seasons of His return, whose hope was so strong and so sure that He could, apparently, think only of its being realized *soon*?" (Matt. 10:23; 16:28). Let it be noted that the exalted Christ as seen by the seer on Patmos does give a solemn command to write (Rev. 1:19); Paul demands full obedience to his *written* Word (1 Cor. 14:37). John parallels the written apostolic Word with the spoken Word, quite naturally and easily and without apparently feeling any need for explanation, and he does so with considerable solemnity (1 John 1:3,4). And it is John again who

links the important and central conception of witness with the act of writing (John 21:24; cf. John 19:35), and he makes his written witness, his book, the means whereby faith may be attained and eternal life be won (John 20:30, 31).

This is, of course, not said to depreciate the peculiar force of the *viva vox*, which was Christ's own way and is Christ's will for the church. Men are to be confronted with the Christ by means of the Word. A detached and idle contemplation is easier for us with a book than when we are confronted by a living, urgent, and waiting person who will not let us off without a decision. But there are exegetes and Bible readers aplenty whose hearts have burned within them in the quiet of their chambers as they sat over the Book. And, above all, the living voice of the apostles is not lost but guaranteed by the fact that we have the Word of the apostles as a written Word given for our learning.

### III

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE APOSTOLIC WORD FOR THE CHURCH

The apostolic Word, written or re-echoed in the living voice of "apostolic" men created by the apostolic Word, is the enduring embodiment of Jesus' "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"; for, as Rengstorff has said, "the apostolic office is no 'office' in our sense of the word; it is a function of the exalted Lord."<sup>15</sup> As such, as the Word of God's grace (Acts 20:32) and as the Word of faith (Rom. 10:8), it is indispensable to the existence of the church. By it the church is perpetually being called into being:

For the New Testament church stands and falls with the apostolate, that is, with the church's communion with the apostles of Jesus Christ as His representatives in person, word, and work. As true as it is that salvation is bound up with Christ and with Him alone, it is equally certain that none can receive salvation except in communion with the apostles, that is, *extra ecclesiam apostolicam*.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> K. H. Rengstorff, "Wesen und Bedeutung des geistlichen Amtes nach dem Neuen Testament und in der Lehre des Luthertums," in *Welt-Luthertum von Heute*, 1950. *World Lutheranism of To-day: A Tribute to Anders Nygren*, 1950.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 247 f.

And by the Word the church is preserved;

for it is the apostles' task to see to it that when He [the returning Lord] comes He may find a church which belongs to Him and is waiting for Him as her returning Savior. . . . Thus it is that the apostle is called into action not only there where there is as yet no faith but equally there where faith is wavering and is in danger of collapse. The apostle's responsibility extends in both directions. . . .<sup>17</sup>

In the apostolic Word the church perpetually hears the voice of the Good Shepherd, with its note of graciously free bestowal, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," and, at the same time, with its note of gracious and inexorable demand, "Repent." The grace which created the apostolate and gave the apostolate to the church is alive and at work in the apostolic Word both in its aspect as a gift and invitation and in its aspect as a claim and summons. Where both are heard and appropriated, there the church is.

In the apostolic Word the church hears both the calling and inviting and the sundering and separating grace of her Lord. The apostolic Word calls for a church which wills to be determined wholly by her Lord, wills to give Him the first word and the last in all her life and work. The apostolic Word calls for a church which can renounce the majority and go the narrow way through the strait gate into the kingdom prepared for her. It calls for a church capable of becoming all things to all men in the continual living echo of her Lord's "Come unto Me"; capable, at the same time, of resistance to the temptation of conformation to the present age, capable of resistance to mass movements and mass impulses around her, impervious to the temptation of becoming another American, British, or German institution.

The grace of God at work in the apostolic Word calls for a church which knows that it exists and lives by God's giving, which knows that it has received all that it has giftwise, and which knows that it can live only by giving what it has received, giving as freely as it has received. It calls for a missionary church and for a church whose love is capable of discipline. The apostolic Word calls for a church which is grateful to her Lord and wills to serve Him whom God has made to be both Christ and Lord

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

for all men. The apostolic Word calls for a church which by virtue of the forgiveness given her is capable of forgiving unreservedly and wholly, "unto seventy times seven."

The revelatory grace of God speaking in the apostolic Word calls for a church which takes *sola Scriptura* with absolute seriousness, not merely by way of pursuing a stringently scientific exegesis or by way of abstracting from it scrupulously correct dogmatic formulations but also by way of unconditional and sober obedience to it, letting the revelatory Word, at every point, cut athwart its own thinking. The apostolic Word calls for a church which wills to live of the Word of its Lord; which in repentance lets that Word judge and renew her and thus finds the strength for renunciation, self-denial, and the cross; a church for which "success," wholly or in part, is not a determining factor; a church which puts obedience first and lets success come *ubi et quando visum est Deo*.

The grace at work in the apostolic Word begets men again unto a lively hope which is not made ashamed, a hope grounded in the love of the Cross; and it puts men under an inescapable eschatological responsibility, filling men's lives with both freedom and fear. The apostolic Word calls for a church which intently awaits the coming of her Lord, exults in His coming, and prepares for His coming. The apostolic Word calls for a church in whose ears the cry of her Lord is alive, the cry: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). The apostolic Word calls for a church which is willing to contend earnestly for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints, willing to strive perpetually for purity and to strain toward maturity (Eph. 4:14-16) — to strive so seriously that it can pronounce an anathema on all who love not the Lord Jesus Christ, lest its maranatha grow false and falter and die out at last.

Who stands in the apostolic succession? The answer cannot be divorced from the apostolic Word. The apostles in their Word are intent upon creating men in their own image: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1; cf. Acts 20:18-35; 26:29). The church which gives ear to the apostolic Word and gives its heart to the Lord, who in that apostolic Word calls for the heart; the church which becomes "apostolic" in obedient



mimesis under that Word; the church which awaits the coming of the Lord in joyously energetic hope and in holy fear — that church stands in the apostolic succession in a sense and in a reality which no unbrokenly successive imposition of palms on pates can guarantee.

St. Louis, Mo.

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#### A VIRGIN AND CHILD FROM MEDIEVAL CHINA

In the *International Review of Missions* (July 1956) Dr. John Foster, professor of church history in the University of Glasgow, discusses the finding of a Latin gravestone in the city of Yang-chou when in 1951 its ancient walls were pulled down. The gravestone goes back almost to Marco Polo's time, d. ca. 1324. Under the Mongol dynasty (1206—1368) there were many foreigners in China. In the 1320's Yang-chou was visited by the Italian Franciscan Friar Odoric, who wrote of the city: "I came to a city by name Ianzu, in which is a place of our Friars, and [in which there are] also three churches of the Nestorians." This was all that was known so far of Latin Christians in Yang-chou. The discovery of the Latin gravestone is therefore of considerable historical importance. In shapely Italian script the gravestone says "In the name of the Lord, Amen. Here lies Catherine, daughter of the late Sir Dominic de Viglione, who died in the year of the Lord 1342 in the month of June." There is also an engraving showing the Virgin and Child. As the writer shows, the "virgin" is St. Catherine, and the picture reminds one strongly of Cimabue's *Madonna Enthroned* (Florence, ca. 1300). According to legend, St. Catherine was a princess who was beheaded in Alexandria after severe torture, at the beginning of the fourth century. Angels transported her body to Mount Sinai, where a monastery was dedicated to her and named after her. In this St. Catherine Monastery, Tischendorf about a century ago discovered the Codex Sinaiticus. Dr. Foster traces the St. Catherine picture on the gravestone in Yang-chou back to John of Montecorvino, the first Italian missionary in China (ca. 1294), who, in a letter addressed in 1305 to his superiors at home, reported that he had baptized 3,000 persons and had "bought 40 boys, sons of pagans, between 7 and 8 years old, who as yet were not learning any religion." These he taught the Latin letters and "our rite" and then baptized them. He then asked for a number of books for the instruction of his students. Dr. Foster believes that it was one of these Chinese students who wrote the beautiful gravestone inscription and sketched the picture of St. Catherine as the "Virgin and Child."

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