

IS APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP THE KEY TO THE MISSIONAL CHURCH?

Assessing the Leadership Model of Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost

John E. Johnson, Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon

jjohnson@westernseminary.edu

ETS 2009

INTRODUCTION

A fundamental understanding of the church is that we are a sent people, a *missionary* people. It stands to reason; God is a *missionary* God. As Christopher Wright notes, “The Bible presents to us a portrait of God who is unquestionably purposeful. The God who walks the paths of history through the pages of the Bible pins a missionary statement to every signpost on the way.”¹ Clearly in our day, mission has become a central theme of practical theology.

However, too many ministries have lost sight of their missional reason for existence, and have hence plateaued and become irrelevant. They have missed the signpost and have forgotten their way. This is the conviction of writers like Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost and explains one of Hirsch’s titles, The Forgotten Ways. After Pentecost, the missionary church, empowered by the Spirit, and led by the apostolic leadership, took the gospel to the world. But today, too few are coming to Christ, and too little genuine and lasting transformation is occurring. In certain cases, the congregation is little more than a haven in a heartless world. A number of churches have forgotten how to access and trigger our “sentness”, engage in mission and make disciples. And when this is lost, we are no longer the church, for only when the church is in mission is it the true church.² If we are not drawing people to Christ and making them like Him, then, to quote Lewis, “all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible, are a waste of time.”³

Those in the missional movement cite a number of reasons for an existing amnesia. The first has to do with our **message**. The whole of Christ’s work must be presented. He is the incarnate, crucified, resurrected, ascended Christ, present among us in the Spirit and taking us into his future. But in too many cases, the gospel has been reduced to one aspect of Christ’s work, or something individualized and private. We have ended up with a truncated gospel.⁴ The breadth and length and height and depth of the love of God have been deprived of their radical power.

The second reason goes back to **structure**. We have forgotten we are a movement. With the advent of Christendom, the church began to devolve from movement to institution. The early Christian church was established by the Spirit to be a missionary people to the world, but once legitimized, it began to concern itself with structure and survival. The white hot convictions that were part of the early movement began to cool down and

¹ Christopher Wright, The Mission of God, 23

² Alan Hirsch, Forgotten Ways, 82

³ W. Vaus, Mere Theology: A Guide to the Thought of C.S. Lewis, 167

⁴ David Bosch, Transforming Mission, 518.

become “crystallized codes, solidified institutions, and petrified dogmas.”⁵ Mission began to serve the institution. The horizon was no longer the world but the boundaries of the local church. New religious orders emerged to renew the church, such as medieval monasticism, but even these eventually struggled with the powers of institutional conservatism.

A third reason for losing our bearings centers around **leadership**. We have missed how God intended the church to be led. This is the focus of the paper. Hirsch in his books points to a dysfunctional leadership model as the main reason for the loss of missional emphasis. Along with Michael Frost, in their The Shaping of Things to Come, they see a current system weighted in favor of teaching and pastoral care, directly marginalizing the apostolic, prophetic, and evangelistic ministries. Hence, the emphasis of ministry has shifted from missional communities, releasing their missional imagination, to ministry focused on maintenance, caring for and teaching the congregation.

To put it another way, Frost and Hirsch see a church in need of transition, from one locked in Christendom to one that is missional. This will require missional leadership to navigate the church. It will necessitate the reemergence of apostolic types (to be defined in the next section) who have been previously ‘frozen out’, exiled from the existing church for disturbing the equilibrium.⁶ They have often ended up in parachurch ministries, where they have found greater freedom to unleash their giftedness. Predictably, the results have been “disastrous” for the church.⁷ If there is any hope of becoming missional again, the church will need to recover the kind of leadership that has the courage to question the status quo, dream new possibilities, and innovate new ways of reaching the lost. Without this apostolic leadership, the missional church is unlikely to rise at all.

This is not new language. Nearly 35 years ago, John Noble spoke with the same passion for apostolic leadership. He wrote to arouse the church to look for apostles who will unite and release an army under God.⁸ Others, like Alan Roxburgh, have called for a reinstatement of the apostle and prophet and evangelist in light of the rapid, discontinuous change going on in culture.⁹ Like Frost and Hirsch, he believes the predominantly pastoral conception of the church and ministry constitutes a major hindrance to the church re-conceiving itself as a missional agency.¹⁰ A pioneering, innovative type of leadership is missing, and will only be recovered when we come back to embracing the apostolic role, rooted both in the early church and Jesus Himself (Hebrews 3:1).

⁵ Bosch, 53

⁶ Hirsch, Forgotten, 152

⁷ Hirsch, Forgotten, 169

⁸ See John Stott, The Message of Ephesians, 160

⁹ See A.J. Roxburgh, The Missionary Congregation: Leadership and Liminality, as well as the more recent The Missional Leader (2006)

¹⁰ Roxburgh, Missionary Congregation, 64-65

But are they right? Is apostolic leadership the cure? Is it still relevant? The aim of this paper is to evaluate the leadership approach proposed by Hirsch and Frost, for it seems likely to be a pattern of leadership called for in the foreseeable future.¹¹

THE APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP AS DESCRIBED BY HIRSCH AND FROST

In Shaping, Frost and Hirsch devote a chapter to apostolic leadership, entitled “The Genius of APEPT”. The leadership function of the church is five-fold. They base their convictions on Ephesians 4:11ff. Likewise, in The Forgotten Ways, Alan Hirsch writes a chapter entitled “Apostolic Environment.” In his more recent handbook, Hirsch changes the acronym to APEST, preferring “shepherd” to “pastor”. Bringing their writings together, apostolic leadership can be summed up as follows:

1-**Apostle**-one who extends Christianity, establishes the church in new contexts. Hirsch puts it simply, “At core, the apostolic task is about the expansion of Christianity both physically in the form of pioneering missionary effort and church planting, as well as theologically through integration of apostolic doctrine into the life of the communities they are part of.”¹² The apostle must lead congregations as witnesses to the gospel in lands “where old maps no longer work.”¹³ All other functions of the church are qualified by this mission.

If “apostle” is confusing, think of him as an entrepreneur, the idea generator, the groundbreaker, strategist, risk taker, the pioneer who initiates the mission, advances the frontiers of the kingdom of God, and stimulates and guides the process. Not only do apostles pioneer new efforts; they are critical to the revitalization of established works. They ensure that the church remain faithful to its mission, cultivate leadership, and weed out heresy. Hence, they are not just “hot-headed entrepreneurs,” but “working theologians.”¹⁴

2-**Prophet**-one who is particularly attuned to God, discerning his mind and will, and therefore speaks for God. Think of him as a questioner, a disturber of the status quo. The prophet challenges the organization to move in new directions, shakes things up, and calls for covenant community.

3-**Evangelist**-one who is the recruiter of the cause, the infectious communicator of the gospel. The evangelist takes the message to those outside and sells it. In contrast to the apostle, he is less focused on beginning new movements.

4-**Shepherd**-one who cares for and develops the people of God, leading, nurturing, protecting, and making disciples. He is the humanizer, the one who provides the organizational glue by caring for those within the organization.

¹¹ See John Hammett, “The Church According to Emergent/Emerging Church”, William Henard, Evangelicals Engaging Emergent, 251

¹² Hirsch, Forgotten, 154

¹³ Roxburgh, Missionary Congregation, 61

¹⁴ Hirsch, Forgotten, 154

5-**Teacher**-one who clarifies the word of God so that people gain wisdom, the theologian who helps people explore the mind and heart of God. He is the “systematizer” who organizes the various parts and articulates the structure to others.

Hirsch and Frost apply this structure to the whole of church ministry, not just its leadership. The whole community is called to reflect these five functions.

ASSESSING APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP

Both Hirsch and Frost call for a reorientation of the church. They believe we need to unearth what centuries of misguided Christendom have covered up; recover an apostolic genius as laid out in Ephesians 4:11. Some give high marks. Writes Leonard Sweet in the forward of *Forgotten Ways*: “Hirsch has discovered the formula that unlocks the secrets of the ecclesial universe...”¹⁵ Others are more critical, believing the model to be an overreach, a forced view of Scripture.¹⁶ Here are some of the strengths and weaknesses that stand out:

1-The Strengths

a-Frost and Hirsch give a needed challenge to the church to change its environment

Like other leaders of renewal movements, Hirsch and Frost are committed to reform the church, reframe ecclesiology. With others, they see an existing, institutional church that is all too entrenched, captive to the culture, and focused on self-preservation. Too many pastors preach incarnational Christianity but personally lack any real relationship with the unchurched. And too many churches are weighted on the attractional side, pulling congregants’ energies away from their natural spheres of relationships with unbelievers. Hirsch and Frost challenge the listening church to revisit its mission and engage the culture, pursue movement over institution, *communitas* over community, incarnational over attractual. They challenge us to ask ourselves if we are in danger of stifling certain spiritual gifts. Most importantly, the writers do so with an aim to be doctrinally sound. They are committed to engaging the culture without compromising the gospel.

b-Frost and Hirsch summon the church back to catalytic leadership

Lots of churches have atrophied, due to leadership that is more interested in maintenance than mission. Frost and Hirsch challenge the church to a leadership structure that will reignite the church’s forward movement towards mission, to use *all* of the gifted leaders mentioned in Ephesians 4, beginning with the apostle, for the following reasons:

1-Apostle, prophet, and evangelist are ongoing gifts waiting to be unleashed

To consign “apostle” to a temporary office and “apostles” to some safely buried relics beneath altars,¹⁷ is to miss the fact that the apostolic gift has been ongoing. Beyond those called to the office were others with the apostolic gift. They included Barnabas (Acts 14:6, 14; I Cor 9:5-7), James (Gal 1:19), Apollos (I Cor 4:6,9), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), and perhaps Silas (I Thess 2:6). Romans 16:7 mentions Andronicus and Junias as “outstanding among the apostles”, hinting women may have also received the apostolic

¹⁵ Hirsch, *Forgotten*, 12

¹⁶ See Hammett, 219ff.

¹⁷ Marcus Barth, *Ephesians* 1-3, 316

gift (though others would say this verse “has too little clear information to allow us to draw a conclusion”¹⁸). Epaphroditus is also included, for he was referred as an apostle, one sent by the Philippian church to Paul (Phil 2:25). All of these were apostles, not in the technical sense, but those gifted and called to the primary function of being missionaries of the early church, taking the message of God’s redemptive reign to the ends of the earth. Their apostolic authority flowed from the first Apostle, Jesus, who came as the “sent one” (Hebrews 3:1), just as ours is still derived from Him. His apostolic ministry continues and will come to an end only when He hands His kingdom over to the Father (I Cor 15:54, 58).¹⁹

Paul himself affirmed the ongoing nature and priority of the apostolic gift, listing it first among the gifts (I Cor 12:27-29). Similarly in Eph 4:11, apostles were cited first among those gifted leaders given by Christ to the church to prepare God’s people. There is nothing in the context of neither Eph 4:11, nor I Cor 12:28, to suggest these functions have ceased.²⁰ History, in fact, affirms their ongoing role. Gifted men and women have functioned in all five leadership roles throughout church history, extending and substantiating the original work. Where apostle and prophet and evangelist have been less visible than pastor and teacher, elder and deacon, it has generally been more about politics than theology. With the advent of Christendom, roles shifted, largely out of a concern to preserve power and authority. But the reality is, wherever pioneering movements have emerged (William Carey, John Wesley, William Booth, Chuck Smith, etc), apostolic giftedness has been evident.

2-Apostle, prophet, and evangelist are a necessary compliment to the other gifted leaders
Without them, the church cannot extend its mission, for they initiate the missional impulse. Beginning with apostle, they each create a culture, an atmosphere, an environment for the next. The apostle senses where the Spirit is moving and challenges the church to follow. He senses the dormant energy and catalyzes it. In all of this, he creates the “field” for the prophet, the prophet for the evangelist, etc. The order is significant, for one logically follows the other. The pioneers have a more critical role at the beginning. To use Garner’s language, they are the risk takers who tackle the impossible, have eyes of faith to see what others cannot, and accept the hardship others are not so willing to endure.²¹ The settlers understandably follow (pastors, teachers, etc), but they were never intended to *replace* the apostle, prophet, or evangelist. To put it in other language, ministry follows mission, but it must never replace it. When it does, the church takes on the characteristics of the early church at Jerusalem, which drifted into a fortress mentality, eventually replaced by Antioch.²²

As long as churches need to be established, as long as areas are not reached by the gospel, as long as churches need renewal, the ministry of the apostle, prophet, and evangelist will be necessary. Where such roles have been neglected, churches have

¹⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 909

¹⁹ Ray Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*, 209

²⁰ See Barth, *Ephesians*, 437

²¹ Martin Garner, *A Call for Apostles Today*, 8

²² See Anderson, *Emergent Theology*, 178ff.

tended to act like Jonah, choosing to sit down in the shade outside the city and wait for God's judgment, rather than reach out with a missional heart.²³ So if "apostolic" remains uncomfortable for us, Hirsch and Frost advise us to simply need to get over our historical cringe in this matter, especially if we are going to grow and mature as a missional movement.²⁴ When all five are operative, in all levels of congregational life, the church is not only protected from stasis, but from the probability of an arrogant, authoritative leader.

2-The Weaknesses

In working through this paper, with the aim of critically evaluating this leadership model, I have found the following to be the main criticisms:

a-Frost and Hirsch miss the shift from apostolic to pastoral prior to the emergence of Christendom

Christendom is often blamed for the demise of the apostle and pointed to as the time the pastoral replaced the apostle. However, a case could be made that a shift was in motion as early as the first century, when Paul wrote to the churches. In fact, outside of Ephesians 4:11, Paul does not use apostolic language. In the writings to Timothy and Titus, Paul gave the most explicit and comprehensive instructions regarding church leadership, but APEST is neither the structure nor the model used. Even in his pastoral practice, Paul appointed elders and deacons rather than apostles and prophets (cf Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5-6). In gathering the church leadership for his farewell, the normative language was pastoral. He gathered "the elders" and implored them to shepherd the church of God (Acts 20:17-28). Likewise, when Peter gave attention to early church leadership, he addressed the elders and exhorted them to shepherd God's flock (I Peter 5:1-4).

Hence, as one put it, "The APEPT model takes its starting point and acronym from Scripture, and relates helpfully to culture, but elevates a single verse to undue proportions."²⁵ Though Ephesians was a significant letter shared with the body of churches in Asia Minor, Eph 4:11 is simply too slender a thread on which to hang ecclesiology (or a missional church for that matter).²⁶ APEPT may be there as incipient giftedness in the body of Christ, but the rest of scripture does not argue this way. It may be that, in Ephesians, Paul was describing the leadership God gave to the church in its larger, mobile missional structure. But by the time the local church was established, the gift of apostle and prophet seem to have faded into disuse; leadership had transferred to the elders. The church's mission no longer hinged on the apostles and prophets and evangelists—but on the diakonoi, the presbuteroi, and the episkopoi.²⁷

This could explain why the office and gift of apostle and prophet were listed first, not out of importance, but because they were foundational to the beginning days of the church.

²³ S.B. Addison, "A Basis for the Continuing Ministry of the Apostle in the Church's Mission", DMin Dissertation, Fuller, 213

²⁴ Hirsch, *Forgotten*, 153

²⁵ Hammett, *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent*, 256

²⁶ David Fisher, correspondence

²⁷ See Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 64ff

Eph 2:20 refers to the apostle and prophet as having introductory roles; the apostle established the church, while the prophet had the foundational task of communicating divine revelation. Together, along with Christ as the Cornerstone, they provided and provide the lines. The placement of apostle and prophet as first and second in the list of gifts in I Cor 12:28 could further affirm an introductory, restrictive function in the early church. Once their initial work was established, the apostolic and prophetic gifts all but disappeared in the New Testament and church history. Carson makes the point that apostles were appointed in the gospels, the prophets at Pentecost, and then the teachers after Pentecost. Hence, the roles of apostle and prophet are not transferable to persons living in our day.²⁸ This being true, the emphasis of the five gifted leaders logically falls to the last three. The evangelist carries on the activity of the apostle, while the pastor and teacher take over the function of the prophet.²⁹

Outside of the NT, one of the earliest church documents was The Didache. It also uses bishop and deacon language, underscoring that apostles and prophets were replaced by the end of the first century. Later writers came to the same conclusion. Calvin taught that apostles, prophets, and evangelists were given only to the primitive church, and that in later times the gospel would be preached solely by pastors and teachers. Neither Augustine, nor Luther nor Calvin nor Wesley nor Whitefield applied the term to themselves. They seem to affirm that apostle and prophet, in particular, were not instituted in the church to be perpetual, but only to endure as long as churches were to be formed, where none previously existed.³⁰

b-Frost and Hirsch downplay the necessary role of institution and structure

Part of the argument for apostolic leadership is an argument for less structure, institution. In many of the contemporary emergent and missional writings, significant weight is put on the organic over the structural. Hirsch gives a whole chapter to organic systems, believing that apostolic leadership will guard the church from becoming institutional, structured, and unnecessarily rigid.

Their warnings need to be heeded. What begins as movement often hardens. And when it does, such wineskins can no longer hold the fermenting wine of Jesus (Mark 2). This is where a prophetic voice must be heard. But a caution seems in order. Hirsch describes the early church as having “little or no centralized structures, no ‘ordained’ or professional ministry class, and no official ‘church’ buildings,”³¹ but this is not necessarily so. From the beginning of Acts, ministry was conceived as a definable office (Acts 1:24-25). Paul gave instructions from the beginning to set apart those called to ministry (I Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). He established a learning institute in Ephesus to prepare the next generation of church leaders (Acts 19:8-10). Church buildings were not possible in a persecuted age, but there is little to suggest meeting in cramped homes or caves was advantageous. When the church became legitimate, having a more central place to meet carried certain advantages, as well as facilitated the mission.

²⁸ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 91

²⁹ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 252

³⁰ Noted in the footnote of Addison, 159 (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 173)

³¹ Hirsch, *Forgotten* 153

The reality is institutional formation is unavoidable. The most spontaneous and prophetic of movements cannot last unless they find institutional form.³² Any church that exists beyond a week begins to establish some tradition (time of meeting), some policies (who is safe to work with our kids), and some structure (what should be and not be part of our service). Before the missional church of Acts was barely in motion, they were dealing with who should lead and who should wait on tables. It does not mean that structure will inevitably hinder the mission. The point is, if valued properly, structured roles, trained ministers, and well-designed buildings can enhance rather than hinder the mission.

c-Frost and Hirsch exaggerate the failures of the existing church

Frost and Hirsch, in their earlier writings, gave little hope for the church as it exists. As they put it in Shaping, “At times we feel terribly cynical about the ability of the church to reinvent itself.”³³ They have been dismayed by an organized church that is largely the residue of a flawed Christianity, a Christendom church which has obscured the need for a full fledged missional leadership system. They believe all too many aging churches are “locked in the prevailing Constantinian form of church”, weighted in favor of maintenance and pastoral care, having marginalized apostolic and prophetic leadership styles.³⁴

It seems the existing church is fair game for a lot of emergent and missional writers to criticize. In his The New Christians, Tony Jones begins with the comment that it is the church, not God, who is dead.³⁵ It’s time to leave the “old country”, abandon the sinking, institutional ship. Hirsch and Frost are more tempered in their comments, believing, in some cases, that the existing church can survive. Still, they are quite critical, believing older churches will likely resist the shift, too set in being attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical. Reform can only happen if they unleash the DNA of APEST that is latent within. The church just needs the right setting and direction to emerge and recover an incarnational, messianic, and apostolic impulse, but our best hope and energies need to be invested in emerging groups.

But is this critique really fair? Before we accept the charges made, we should ask some questions:

1-Is the current church really locked in to ancient Christendom?

Given what it represented in Europe, few of us live in anything like Christendom today. There is no Constantine and his court. Yet, most emergent and missional voices seem to make it synonymous with everything that is currently wrong with the church. And this often only serves to create a greater void between existing and new churches, older generations and younger ones who are increasingly encouraged to view anything that looks like organized religion with suspicion.

³² Richard John Neuhaus, Freedom for Ministry, 10

³³ Michael Frost, Alan Hirsch, The Shaping of Things to Come, xi.

³⁴ Hirsch, Forgotten, 169

³⁵ Tony Jones, The New Christians, 4

2-Has Christendom been the great disaster to the missional church, missional leadership?

Christendom has been described as the great fall, charged with obscuring the need for a full fledged missional leadership system.³⁶ It has been contrasted with the primitive church, which was assumed to be pure in doctrine, courageous in witness, and missional in all it did. And it has certainly had an abusive history. But, as Stackhouse brings out, sneering at Christendom is to get church history backwards. Christendom was not so much a grotesque deviation from authentic Christian mission as much as a natural result of faithfulness to the mission.³⁷ God honored the witness of the early church, and the church found increasing favor in culture. Christians could finally participate in the life of culture. And because preaching could be public and church witness could be accomplished unmolested, Christendom actually helped the church to carry out its mission. Christendom's emergence certainly posed threats, but it also enabled missionary success. If there were not a Constantine to call councils together, would a quarreling church even survived?

3-Is the existing church, with its traditions and structures, by and large, really beyond repair?

Are we assuming the worst, creating an unhealthy dichotomy? While the data certainly suggests there are far too many insular, dull, lifeless, inept churches, could it be Hirsch and Frost paint with too broad a brush? I'm not defending the status quo, but most pastors I know, whether leading a large, historic church in Eugene, or shepherding a rural work in Ohio, are devoted to building the saints and challenging them to intentionally reach the lost. They carry the burden of being both attractational and incarnational, being a prophetic voice in the pulpit, shepherding the hurting, and with an apostolic heart, looking out towards the horizon to discern where God is moving. I hardly know of a pastor interested in merely providing a haven. It's not a matter of whether we are missional, but how well are we doing it.

d-Frost and Hirsch undermine the necessary role of the pastor and teacher

Reading Hirsch and Frost, one could get the impression that the current leadership of pastors and teachers has been disastrous for the missional calling of the church. Pastors are sometimes charged with forming a separate professional caste system; described by others as vendors of religious goods and services.³⁸ They sometimes come off as having a disinterested heart when it comes to the church's mission, more inclined to an insular mindset.

But could it be Frost and Hirsch miss what may be the greater forgetfulness of the church? Have we forgotten our mission as much as we have forgotten the classic practices of the early church? Is it the apostle who needs to be recovered, or the true pastor and teacher? In other words, have we missed the heart of the problem? The whole point of Ephesians 4:11-13 is to declare that God has given gifted leaders for an aim that transcends the mission of reaching lost people; God gave gifted leaders to corporately

³⁶ Hirsch, *Forgotten*, 169

³⁷ John Stackhouse, *Making the Best of It*, 277

³⁸ George Hunsberger, *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, 338

aim for this one ultimate purpose—“unto maturity.” Everything leads to vs 13—“growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.” As Ian Stackhouse puts it, Ephesians 4 gives us a vision for a robust Christian community where “spiritual formation is considered the basis of all mission.”³⁹

If this is true, it would seem that the lack of maturity is the greatest downfall of the present church, and until this is recovered, the church will not be missional. As Stackhouse puts it, “there is little point seeking to evangelize the world when the church itself remains diffident about the radicality of its own gospel.”⁴⁰ Jesus underscored this in His priestly prayer, praying that the church would first be sanctified with truth and then sent into the world (John 17:17-19). Spiritual maturity is the only guarantee of mission.

This will require gifted pastors and teachers, devoted to bringing a word from God. For God speaks through the stammering lips of the preacher where the preacher’s mind is on the text and his heart is in the presence of the Lord.⁴¹ Apostolic Christianity is first of all a learning community, shaped by the clear teaching of Scripture.

Maybe the church has exiled apostolic types, but I wonder if those with apostolic hearts often leave on their own, preferring to be free from structure and pace of decisions. And given the present landscape, I wonder if a more accurate charge is that we have marginalized the true pastor and teacher.

e-Frost and Hirsch give a model that isn’t so practical

Hirsch uses South Melbourne Restoration Community as a working example. Leadership has been restructured so that all five ministries are represented.⁴² “No longer is the church run by pastors alone but by a developing APEPT leadership team whose aim is to help all other ministers (everyone) to find their parts in the whole and to pursue them.”⁴³ They work together in a dynamic synergy of different giftings and motivations, pulling together in harmony for the building of the whole. Options are assessed through dialogue and debate, and then decisions are made together. It’s when this synergy is lost, when the church gravitates to a top down model, that those at the bottom of the system can feel silenced and resentful.

But is this really a workable solution to leadership for the existing church? It is certainly easier to establish an APEPT model when the church is just beginning. Some, however, like Roxburgh, believe existing churches can learn new capacities and achieve missional results.⁴⁴ With apostolic leadership, an existing congregation can be transformed into a missional community, liberated from a cycle of growth, plateau, and decline. But it will require a willingness on the part of all, young and old, experienced veterans and raw recruits, to discover and embrace the new shape of leadership.

³⁹ Ian Stackhouse, *The Gospel Driven Church*, 259

⁴⁰ Ibid, 261

⁴¹ David Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 230

⁴² See *Forgotten*, 174ff

⁴³ Frost, *Shaping*, 173

⁴⁴ See Roxburgh, *Missional Leader*

But does it really work? Five gifted leaders can bring a helpful synergy, but decision making will be hindered if no one has the role of deciding. Furthermore, what makes the APEST model especially difficult is the contrast in styles. Won't apostles, who tend to see the opportunities to move to new territory, feel worn down by the necessary discussion and analysis of an institution? How do they work with elders and deacons? There is much to learn from each other, but can they really lead together? Conder has embraced a similar structure but found it a struggle, especially in working with apostles.⁴⁵

f-Frost and Hirsch dismiss the problematic nature of apostolic language

Finally, there is the problem of language. It is not that they are unaware of negative reactions. As Hirsch notes, "Sadly, church history is littered with false apostles." Nonetheless, we need to find a way to re-embrace apostolic ministry if we want to become a genuinely missional church.⁴⁶ But for others, just the word "apostle" carries too much baggage. Gibbs notes, "The problem with using the term 'apostle' in many church traditions today is that it is open to misunderstanding and misrepresentation."⁴⁷ To Catholics—and some Anglicans—apostolic speaks to a succession of authority. For charismatics, an apostolic ministry is one that continues the miraculous work of signs and wonders performed by the earliest apostles (cf. Acts 2:43).

Despite the fact some Protestants "like the sound of it,"⁴⁸ too often "apostle" has been used to gain authority and exercise autocratic leadership. Some claiming the gift begin to assume the authority of the office. It has led Grudem to give this caution: "Though some may use the word *apostle* in English today to refer to very effective church planters or evangelists, it seems inappropriate and unhelpful to do so, for it simply confuses people who read the New Testament and see the high authority that is attributed to the office of 'apostle' there."⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

So what should we conclude? Here's what I know for sure.

1-The church should always critique itself. God is always raising movements that He uses to reform the church. Hirsch and Frost are part of this, giving a needed challenge for the existing church to recover a missional heart. Their criticisms are painful, but carry a certain weight. Too often, the church is not looking out on the edge with an apostolic heart like the Apostle Paul's. In many places, a fresh prophetic voice, like a Jeremiah's, with a fire in the bones and a disturbing agenda, needs to be heard. The church must speak with an evangelistic heart, that sees a lost world that is surely going to hell if it does not turn from its ways. Many existing works need to return to the primal roots of Christian mission and uncover long forgotten ways.

⁴⁵ Tim Conder, The Church in Transition, 130-31

⁴⁶ Hirsch, Forgotten, 152

⁴⁷ Eddie Gibbs, Churchmorph, 159

⁴⁸ Richard Phillips, Philip Ryken, Mark Dever, The Church

⁴⁹ Grudem, 911

2-We must always evaluate leadership. Frost and Hirsch challenge me to ask hard questions, reconsider new paradigms for leadership. They are dead on when they say the key to the formation of missional communities is their leadership.⁵⁰ Leaders must have, as a principal mission, to call communities to their sentness, to carry on the mandate given by the first Apostle, Jesus (Heb 3:1). Leaders must take sentness seriously, in their own lives.

But Scripture does not give one particular model, and maybe that is why this project has taxed me so much. As Willimon notes, “We search the NT in vain for much stress on continuity of structures of Christian leadership.”⁵¹ Over history, God has raised a variety of leaders—prophets, priests, judges, kings, sages, apostles, prophets, pastors, etc. Each has provided the necessary leadership for the moment, the necessary checks and balances.⁵² Is apostolic leadership the leadership needed for the contemporary church, or one critical for the initial moment the church was formed? There is no clear blueprint. Even in Ephesians 4:11, the definitions of each of the leaders are not clearly laid out. As Lincoln notes, “...it may simply be the case that a question is being asked of the text for which there is neither enough data in the text nor sufficient knowledge of church organization at this time and in this area to provide a convincing answer.”⁵³ At a minimum, Jesus, the apostles and prophets all serve as criteria for assessing present ministry.

Maybe, as Tidball notes, God is giving us permission to take up and adapt leadership forms that are most appropriate to growth.⁵⁴ What is critical is a balanced structure, that equips the church to become like Christ, one that reflects both a level of maturation and a passion to be missional. Hence, whether one believes all roles are operative, or not, the aim is both maturation and missional. Whether the pastor must become apostolic, replacing the gown of the scholar with the shoes of the apostle⁵⁵, or the church must add apostles to the existing pastoral leadership, apostolic is foundational to all the other functions and needs to be unleashed. But its first and principal aim must be to lead the church to become like Jesus.

⁵⁰ Guder, Missional Church, 183

⁵¹ Willimon, Pastor, 29

⁵² Derek Tidball, Ministry By the Book, 14

⁵³ Lincoln, 252

⁵⁴ Tidball, 105

⁵⁵ Roxburgh, Missionary Congregation, 62

