

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php

The Limits of the Apostolate.

PROF. E. Y. HINCKS.

ANDOVER, MASS.

STUDENTS of the New Testament all agree that the first generation of Christians contained a body of men separated from their fellow-believers by consecration to a special work, and designated apostles. They are not agreed as to whether the number of these apostles was or was not variable. Some (they are the great majority) think that the limits of the apostolate were rigidly fixed by the extraordinary act of Christ which called it into being: that there were no apostles except the men whom he selected in his earthly life for this position, save only one, who was added to their number by a call miraculously given.

Others, among whom I may name Lightfoot, Weizsäcker, and Seufert (*Der Ursprung des Apostolates*), believe that the limits of this body were more elastic, that it was enlarged by the addition of members other than Paul, and that this increase began in the lifetime of the first generation of believers.

The present essay attempts to answer the question, which of these conflicting views is correct.

Our method of inquiry obviously is to seek in the passages of Scripture which mention or allude to the apostolate such information as they may give as to its limits. We naturally go first to our oldest documents, the Epistles of Paul.

In 1 Cor. xv. 7 he says: "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles." In verse 5 it is said: "He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve." The *τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν* of verse 7 can hardly be identical with the *τοῖς δώδεκα* of verse 5. The word "all" suggests a contrast with some person or persons thought of as being a part of the apostolate. Very likely with James (this can hardly be another than the Lord's brother of that name), who has just been mentioned. If he were an apostle, there were, of course, more than twelve *ἀπόστολοι*. If James is not meant, the *πᾶσιν* goes for its implied contrast to the *τοῖς δώδεκα* of verse 5, and "the Twelve" are a part of the *πάντες οἱ ἀπόστολοι*.

In Gal. i. 19 Paul says, “. . . ἕτερον δὲ τῶν ἀποστόλων οὐκ εἶδον, εἰ μὴ Ἰάκωβον τὸν ἀδελφὸν τοῦ Κυρίου.” I cannot but think, with Lightfoot, that this means that James was the only apostle Paul saw besides that one whom he says in the preceding verse that he saw, namely, Peter. The alternate rendering, suggested in the margin of the Revision, ‘but only,’ *i.e.* ‘I saw no other apostle; but I saw only James,’ seems to me to have a comparatively slight claim to acceptance. The εἰ μὴ certainly has an exceptive force, and the subject of the exception is naturally found in the preceding ἕτερον δὲ τῶν ἀποστόλων, just as in 1 Cor. i. 14 it is found in οὐδένα ὑμῶν (. . . εὐχαριστῶ ὅτι οὐδένα ὑμῶν ἐβάπτισα εἰ μὴ Κρίσπον καὶ Γαῖον).

Some think that James is here called an apostle, but in such a way as to suggest that the apostolic dignity did not belong to him. But Paul did not say one thing by direct statement and its opposite by insinuation. The form of his sentence may have been chosen to suggest a certain distinction between James and the Twelve (that to Paul such a distinction existed we know from 1 Cor. xv. 5, 7). This, however, is somewhat doubtful. Why may not Paul have said, ‘I saw no other of the apostles except James,’ instead of, ‘I saw James too, and besides him I saw no other apostle,’ because for some unknown reason, perhaps its brevity, the visit to James was of less consequence than that to Peter?

Taking the two passages together, we can hardly resist the conclusion that Paul regarded the apostolate as including others than the Twelve. That conclusion I believe to be confirmed by 1 Cor. ix. 5; notwithstanding the fact that many have found a contrary teaching in the passage (ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Κηφᾶς). ‘The brethren of the Lord’ cannot be said to be separated here from ‘the apostles’ in any way other than that in which Peter is distinguished from them. The interpretation, ‘the other apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and especially Peter,’ I believe to be an impossible one. Peter did not so tower above his fellow-apostles as to make his matrimonial example of such immense importance as this interpretation would imply; cf. 1 Cor. i. 12 (“I of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas”). If Paul had wished to lay especial stress on Κηφᾶς, he would, I believe, have shaped the sentence differently by putting Κηφᾶς at the beginning. Paul’s contention that his apostolate gives him, as it does other apostles, the right to decide the question of marriage for himself, implies that all those whose example he cites are apostles. I believe then that the passage, rightly interpreted, harmonizes with those previously

examined. It may be made to do so by referring, as Holsten suggests (*Evangelium des Paulus*, p. 316), *οἱ λοιποὶ* not to Paul, but to the *ἀδελφοὶ τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Κηφᾶς*. I prefer Weizsäcker's rendering (*Das N. T.*, ad loc.), "*Wie die übrigen Aposteln auch, selbst die Brüder des Herrn, selbst Kephas.*"

To Paul, then, the apostolate included not only the Twelve, but other members of the original Christian brotherhood. These men had, along with the Twelve, such external claim to deference as belonged to the apostolate. Their allowed liberty showed what was permissible to an apostle. An apostle could marry, for they were married (1 Cor. ix. 5). One of them at least, James, had an influence in the church to which that of only two of the Twelve could be compared (Gal. ii. 9).

No doubt Paul followed the example of the mother church in calling these men apostles. He wrote to those who had some knowledge of the leaders of that church and of its affairs. He had good reason; too, for trying to be accurate when speaking of so prominent a feature of its life. When he told the Galatians the circumstances of his first acquaintance with the leaders of the church, when he recounted to the Corinthians the several appearances of the risen Lord, he evidently meant to be exact. Can we believe that in speaking of two of those appearances he would have used a technical word so loosely as to invite misunderstanding? Surely if the mother church recognized only twelve men as apostles, he would not have called men not included in the Twelve by that title. We may infer from Paul's language, therefore, that an enlargement of the apostolate took place very soon after the resurrection of Christ. For, only seven or eight years after that event, the Lord's brothers are reckoned among the apostles. Do we find evidence in his writings of a further expansion? Yes.

In 2 Cor. xi. 5 ff. Paul calls men who are trying to undermine his influence with the church in Corinth self-styled apostles. Verse 3: "I fear lest by any means, as the Serpent deceived Eve in his craftiness, your thoughts may be corrupted from the simplicity that is toward Christ. For if he who comes herald another Jesus whom we did not herald, or if ye receive another Spirit than that which ye received, or another gospel than that one which ye accepted, ye might properly endure him. For I think that I fall short no whit of the superlative apostles." Passing over to verse 13: "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, who have metamorphosed themselves into apostles of Christ."

The persons referred to are not the Twelve nor individuals among them. Paul elsewhere owns that these are true apostles (1 Cor. ix. 5, etc.). He is now dealing with other bearers of the apostolic name. The nature of their work shows that they have no right to that title. They have assumed the apostolate for unworthy ends, as Satan took upon himself an angel's form for the help it would give him. They have set up their apostleship against Paul's and obliged him to vindicate his right at the expense of theirs. So he says (verse 5): "I reckon I am not behind the superlative apostles." (The words τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων are ironical; 'apostles of the first water,' for such they claim to be. Weizsäcker renders, *die extra-aposteln*.) The sarcasm evidently gets its point from a strenuous claim made by these men to the apostolic name. This claim they would not have preferred had the mother church known no other officers of that name than the Twelve and the brothers of Jesus. Their assumption of the title would in that case have been a presuming act which Paul could have used against them with great effect. Their employment of the title shows that a state of things existed in which they might at least lay a plausible claim to it; *i.e.* it shows an enlargement of the limits of the apostolate. We may infer with Weizsäcker that as the Lord's brethren had become associated with the Twelve and assumed the apostolic name, other laborers had gradually come into prominence and had received the title. Whether the church had recognized their call and their fitness by ordination, as Weizsäcker² supposes, we can only conjecture. How many of the new apostles there were, we have, of course, no means of knowing. Of their qualifications we know only that suggested in 1 Cor. ix. 1. It seems to have been required in the Jewish-Christian church that an apostle should have seen Jesus.

The Pauline letters tell us of a yet further extension of the apostolate. It was enlarged not only by the addition of new members of the mother church; it also received increment, other than that made in the person of Paul, from that great branch of the church led by him. In 1 Cor. iv. 9 (cf. verse 6) Apollos is called by implication an apostle. In 1 Cor. ix. 6 the same claim is indirectly made for Barnabas. In Rom. xvi. 7 Andronicus and Junias, Paul's kinsmen, are said to be "distinguished among the apostles." In 1 Thess. ii. 6, Silvanus and Timothy are associated with Paul in apostolic dig-

¹ *Das Neue Testament*, ad loc., and *Das Apostolische Zeitalter*, p. 610; ed. 2, p. 588.

² *Das Apostolische Zeitalter*, p. 609.

nity. The interpretation here given to these passages is not, I grant, in every case an indisputable one. A different rendering may, without exegetical perversity, be given to some of them. It is possible that in 1 Thess. ii. 6 the apostle uses *ἀπόστολος* in its general meaning, forgetting for the moment its specifically Christian sense. It is possible, although I think unlikely, that in 1 Cor. ix. 6 Barnabas is thought of only as a fellow-workman, not as a fellow-apostle. (Yet note the plural *ἔχομεν*, verse 4.) But admitting that the assumption in question is not certainly found in this one or that of these passages is not admitting that it is not certainly found in any of them. It is exceedingly unlikely that so many passages should seem to say the same thing, if Paul did not mean to affirm it. Taking the coincidence into consideration, we can hardly help thinking that he called some of his associates apostles.

We may not think that he used language loosely in doing this. He was not the man to employ important words carelessly, and this one was very important. It had a special Christian meaning; it had gathered about itself sacred associations; it had played a prominent part in the attacks made upon Paul by his enemies and in the vindications of himself which these attacks occasioned. He had a definite meaning when he called himself an apostle. It is altogether likely that his meaning was equally definite when he applied the same term to Barnabas or Apollos, an application made in one instance as a part of the very utterance in which he claimed a place in the apostolate for himself (1 Cor. ix. 5).

We are, therefore, to understand Paul as claiming that some of his associates were Christian apostles, called by the Master into the specific service which the church associated with this name. When he said to the Corinthian believers (1 Cor. xii. 28), "God has set some in the church, first apostles," etc., he designated by the word not only the Twelve and himself and the Lord's brothers, not only other workmen of the mother church called into the apostolate, from among those who had followed Jesus during his earthly life, but certain of his own associates. Indeed, such inclusion is suggested by this very passage. It puts the apostolic work among the forms of service which believers were called to render to the church and suggests that the limits of the apostolate were not fixed once for all, but, on the contrary, like those of other orders, were elastic, because expressing the present action of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community. "Ye are the body of Christ," etc. "God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then

mighty works, then gifts of healing, services of help, labors of administration, tongues of various kinds." This is the church as his readers knew it; primarily their own church, with its rich variety of gifts and of corresponding services. "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all doers of mighty works? etc. But be emulous of the greater gifts." Is it not as though Paul said: "These are the different services to which God is appointing his servants in Corinth? You are not all called to render any one of them. Yet there is no one of them into which some of you may not be called. Desire the best." The gentle exhortation, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets?" etc., assumes that some of his readers might covet the apostle's or the prophet's place.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians (iv. 11) the apostolate is assigned a place somewhat different from that given it in the Corinthian letter. Instead of being put into immediate connection with the officers of the local church, the apostle is classed with the prophet and the evangelist, and placed before the pastor and the teacher. A certain distinction is thus suggested between those forms of service which have their sphere in the universal church and those whose sphere is the local church only. This leads Harnack to suppose¹ that by the 'apostles' are meant here only the Twelve and Paul. If this is a just inference, the passage shows a conception of the limits of the apostolate other than that expressed in 1 Cor. xii. 28, and adds one to the reasons for thinking Ephesians post-Pauline. But does not the inference seem hasty, when one considers the close association of the prophets with the apostles both in this passage and in that one in which the writer's thought of the apostle's dignity is most fully expressed, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets" (ii. 20)? The "prophets" are an indefinite number, — all who are called to the prophetic office; so the "apostles" are all those called to the apostle's work.

What led Paul to think that some of his fellow-laborers among the Gentiles were apostles? We have only such material for answering the question as we find in his own claim to a place in the apostolate. If he insisted that he was an apostle because he received an inner call of God to be one (Rom. i. 1; Gal. i. 1), and because his converts were a divine seal upon his apostolic commission (1 Cor. ix. 2), he would recognize as fellow-apostles others who claimed to have had a call like his, and whose work had the same marks of divine approval.

¹ Commentary on Didache, p. 100.

He does not seem to have regarded a knowledge of the Jesus of history, or a sight of the risen Christ, as a necessary qualification for a place among the apostles. For it is not possible that all those to whom he concedes such a place should have had this qualification. Barnabas may have had it, though we should naturally infer from Acts iv. 36, 37, that he probably did not. Apollos could not have had it. Timothy could not. Andronicus and Junias probably did not.

It is plain then that Paul did not agree with the Jewish-Christian church in insisting on an external qualification for the apostolate. He held that the only necessary qualifications were spiritual ones. Any one might take this service whom God called into it. And if any man declared himself to be called to it, and showed by his work that he was so called, Paul would own the validity of his call. It was not for him to say where the Master should find his apostles.

Is he inconsistent here? Does he claim that a qualification was not essential, in respect to others, which was so in his own case?

I do not think so. I do not find him saying anywhere that he was an apostle because he had seen the Lord; 1 Cor. xv. 6 implies that he did not think that seeing the risen Christ of itself made one an apostle. I do not find him saying or implying that if he had not seen Christ he could not have been one.

He says in 1 Cor. ix. 1: "Am I not free; am I not an apostle; have I not seen the Lord?" He refers to a test which had been imposed by others. His claim to a place in the apostolate will, he says, bear that test. He does not in saying this concede that his enemies are right in applying it. May we not believe that in order to remove prejudices he consents to meet his opponents on their own ground, and to let his apostolate be judged by their partial standard? Is this not one of the "all things" that he becomes to all, in order that he may gain some? I cannot think that such a course would have involved even the slightest sacrifice of principle. Paul's own vision of Christ was not a fact unrelated to his entrance into the apostolate. It was the gateway through which he passed into the position to which he laid claim. It was a special source of power in teaching, not possessed by those apostles who did not "see the Lord." It was one of his apostolic qualifications, as the knowledge which the Twelve had of Jesus' earthly life was one of their apostolic qualifications. He could refer to it as such without implying that it was an indispensable qualification. And he could avoid giving encouragement by such reference to his opponents' claim that it was indis-

pensible, by calling in this very utterance a man an apostle who had not "seen the Lord."

Some believe that St. Paul represents himself in 1 Cor. xv. 8, 9 as the last as well as the least of the apostles. But does he mean to imply that the limit of the apostolate was fixed by Jesus' last appearance? "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, but last of all, as to the *ἔκτρωμα*, to me, too. For I am the least of the apostles; who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." His preparatory experience was like that of the earlier apostles, in that the Lord appeared to him as well as to them. "*Ἐκτρωμα* though he was, he had this great qualification along with them through the abounding grace of God.

All of distinction that came from enjoying a sight of the risen Christ he shared with them. Was the exclusive right to bear the apostolic name a part of this distinction? This was not said, nor, as I think, suggested. 'The Lord appeared to me last, and so brought me into the life of faith and apostleship more quickly than he did my predecessors. I am an *ἔκτρωμα*, yet an apostle.'

Does this imply that he to whom the last appearance was made was the last apostle? Does its implication go beyond this, that he was made the last of the apostles, to be prepared for the apostleship by the appearance of the Master, and to have such pre-eminence as this preparation gave? "For I am the least of the apostles," Paul adds, "who am unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." Is not the thought underlying the *γάρ* this, 'I became an apostle through the sight of Christ vouchsafed me'? The clause, *ὁ ἐλάχιστος*, etc., looks forward to the *διότι*, etc.: 'I am the least of the apostles, not because I am the *ἔκτρωμα*, but because I persecuted the church.' The *τῶν ἀποστόλων* does not mean the apostles previously named exclusively; Paul would not help his adversaries in Corinth by exalting the leaders of the Jewish-Christian church above himself. It comprehends all apostles. This reference is supported by the *πάντων* of verse 10, and the plural subject of *κηρύσσομεν* in verse 11, "So we apostles" (whose words are gone out into all the earth) "preach, and so ye believe."

We turn now to the Acts. This book attributes to the mother church the belief that Jesus established the apostolate, and fixed the number of apostles at twelve (Acts i. 15 ff., especially verse 21, *δεῖ*). This belief caused the election of a successor to Judas. A place created by the Master had to be filled.

Luke evidently drew this part of his narrative from Jewish-Christian

sources. These sources were probably documentary. However this may be, and whatever our opinion of the general value of his sources, we can hardly help thinking that in this instance they embody a trustworthy tradition. They are supported here by the testimony of Paul (1 Cor. xv. 5), that Jesus appeared to the Twelve. Paul owed to the first disciples his knowledge of Jesus' appearances, and we may regard his statements about those appearances as equivalent to theirs. If they said that Jesus appeared to the Twelve, they must have thought that there were twelve chosen ones before the resurrection. The slight inaccuracy in Paul's statement does not, of course, weaken the support which his testimony gives to the narrative of the Acts. It is entirely conceivable that he should, forgetting or passing over the fall of Judas, state the number as it lay in the intention of Christ. The narrative of the Acts is also supported by the account of the election of the Twelve, given in our earliest Gospel (Mk. iii. 14 ff.), and by the *logion* of Jesus preserved in Matt. xix. 28, a saying whose genuineness is undisputed.

We must accept therefore the representation of the Acts as entirely trustworthy, and believe that the church began its life with the conviction that Jesus had founded an apostolate of twelve. Seufert's contention¹ that this conviction was of later growth, the product of Judaizing conceptions of Christianity, is hardly to be taken seriously. His suggestion that 1 Cor. xv. 5 may be an ancient gloss makes one suspect that he is not at ease in it.

The primitive belief that Jesus founded the apostolate, and that he put twelve men into it, was undoubtedly due to action taken by him during his earthly life. Just what that action was, we do not now need to ask. Whether he assigned to the Twelve a distinct position and special work in his kingdom, whether he deposited peculiar gifts of power and authority with them, is a most important question, but one which does not directly belong to our present inquiry. We simply take the statement of the Acts that his followers, from his resurrection on, believed that he did give a certain commission to twelve of their number.

And we ask, Why was not the name apostle restricted to these twelve? How can we account for the extension of it, of which we learn from the Pauline epistles? A satisfactory explanation is furnished by the consciousness of fellowship with Christ possessed by the primitive church. Its belief that the Lord was risen went over into

¹*Ursprung des Apostolates*, p. 23.

the belief that he was with his people still. The presence of his Spirit, of which it was vividly conscious, was felt to be his presence. He was accessible, and his mind for his people could be learned. So, for direction as to the management of its affairs the church looked not backward, but upward. It did not undertake, for example, to shape its conduct towards Gentile converts by referring to directions given by the Master before his death. It followed the leading of his providence and his Spirit.

It would naturally show a like freedom in its treatment of the apostolate. If its enlarging life required that the service to which he had called a specific number should be taken up by others, if some of the brethren seemed called by gifts, by opportunities, and by inward drawing to this service, the church would see now that Christ was himself enlarging the apostolate. We see in the election of Matthias a beginning of this free treatment of the apostolic institution. It was inferred from Christ's earthly action that there should be twelve apostles; the church sought a new one to fill a vacancy, following, in so doing, and in its mode of selection, not a remembered direction of the Master, but the inward leading of the Spirit. It was but another step to see that more apostles were needed, and that Christ had called other men into the apostolic work and authority. Paul's demand to be recognized as an apostle implied that the church did not find in the number originally fixed by the Master the limit of the order. Had objection been made to his claim on that ground, we should have found some allusion to it in his writings.

No doubt the eleven original apostles enjoyed a certain distinction. They had a peculiar claim to veneration in their long association with Jesus. They had a richer store of tradition than the rest of the original disciples, and in this they had an important advantage even over Paul. As years went by, and the importance of the Christian tradition was more deeply felt, those of the apostles who survived would be treated with increasing honor.

The second Christian generation would naturally preserve their names. The Jewish-Christian section of the church could not but dwell proudly on their numbers, finding in it a declaration of the Master that the foundations of his Kingdom were laid in Israel, and that the world's salvation was "from the Jews." This exaltation of the thought underlying the number of the apostles is the key to Rev. xxi. 14. Those who find anti-Paulinism in this verse are surely wide of the mark. The writer is not thinking of the Twelve as individuals, and comparing their respective places in the church with the

place held by another man, or the stations of any other men. They are to him a sacred college, the chosen Twelve. They are twelve because there were twelve tribes. Their number is a word of Christ, saying that the church, of which they are the nucleus, is God's Israel.

So he describes the wall of the Holy City Jerusalem as having not only twelve gates, bearing respectively the names of the twelve tribes, but twelve foundation stones, inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.