

BOOK REVIEWS

Apostolic Function In 21st Century Mission by Alan R. Johnson. William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA, 2009; 258pp. Reviewed by Peter Chiwaula.

In his book *Apostolic Function*, Allan Johnson, an Assemblies of God missionary for over 20, years seeks to address a growing lack of clarity in his constituency as to what missions is and how it should be conducted. The term “apostolic function” that he uses does not explicitly call for the affirmation of the office of apostleship, but it looks at the function of an Apostle, particularly from a Pauline perspective of seeking to go where the gospel has not gone before.

Johnson reviews a variety of approaches to mission that by their nature have tended to emphasize distinct frameworks in the conduct of mission such as social concern, planting and growing of churches and unreached people groups. While Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic approaches (EPC) all appeal to the authority of the scripture, 21st Century missions may best be conducted by integrating insights from all of these streams and their associated frames.

Johnson’s main idea focuses on missionary identity and “apostolic function. He therefore seeks to give clear insight of who an apostle is according to the New Testament. First a distinction in function and office of an apostle is made in order that misconceptions of the idea of the early apostles should not be mixed with today’s function in missions. In reference to Ephesians 2:20 these were called by Jesus personally and were the initial founders of the church. So a brief summary of what the New Testament apostles did is given to give an overview of who an apostle is. But, the notion of the apostolic roles does promote people to take up the title of apostleship as an office; rather, he implores missionaries to carry the identity of its function, the apostolic function. The term takes us back to the backbone of the book which is to practice cross-cultural missions: to focus where the gospel has not been reached, to plant churches where they do not exist, and discipling others for a global missions impact. In the book Johnson highlights the now standard definitions of reached and unreached people groups. Unreached peoples are made people group who have no indigenous group of believers in adequate numbers and resources to evangelize the locals without external or cross-cultural assistance. While a reached people is a people group with adequate indigenous Christians, and resources to evangelize their local people without cross-cultural assistance. This definition is foundational to understanding missionary ministry apostolic function according to Johnson-it must reach the unreached.

In conclusion Johnson tackles the “where” question of missions and his answer is that missions should “Go where the church does not exist” (222). This is the prime purpose of the gospel and the cross, to seek and save the lost.

My assessment of *Apostolic Function* is that, I find it beneficial to describe the term apostle within the context of the role an apostle plays and to use that as missiological paradigm because it helps place missiology in a healthy and biblical posture of focusing on reaching the unreached.

His assessment that the focus of missions is often on places, but with this apostolic paradigm there is a need to join forces through integration of paradigms to fulfil the apostolic function in reaching the unreached people groups. I believe if missions workers expand their understanding of missions from concentrating on what needs to mature to a more radical mindset such as Johnson proposes as apostolic function, the *missio Dei* fulfillment of God’s mission will be hastened.