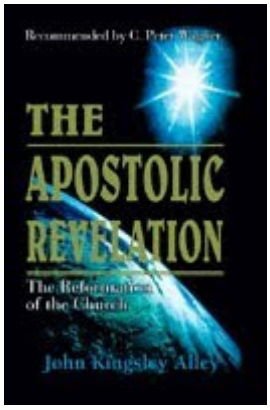
Review: The Apostolic Revelation



I have just read a very frustrating book – John Alley's *The Apostolic Revelation*. It's one of those books that contains much that is right – a great deal of experience, wisdom and understanding, some challenging prophetic truth about leadership and the church – but it is packaged in jargon and concepts made slippery by loose semantics. I found myself often reflecting – "That's sounds about right, that matches my experience but why on earth do you explain it that way?"

As an example let me point you not to the book but to Alley's "Peace Apostolic Ministries" website which attempts to explain (my emphasis):

> *"We are an apostolic community, under the leadership of Apostle John Alley. Together we are called to take an apostolic message to the nations…. John Alley gives apostolic fathering to ministries and churches in Australia as well as the a number of Asian and African nations."*

Even after reading the book I'm not entirely sure what is meant by that. I think the best thing to do is replace the word "apostolic" with the word "Christian" and then some of the heart of author becomes visible. (In fact, upon re-reading the beginning of the book, I see that he himself would agree with that notion but, at this time, "we need terms so that we can define, compare and contrast, for the sake of understanding" Page 22)

It might make the theologically precise wince and the anti-charismatics roll their eyes but my conclusion is that, in the case of this book, the semantical deciphering is, in general,

worthwhile. And although I am unimpressed by appeals to his own authority ("I now feel compelled by the Spirit to write, because time is short, and the power anointing for apostles and prophets is about to be poured out." Page 19) I am inclined to read that in terms of "Here's some truth that God has been laying on my heart that would be timely for me to express in writing" and get over it. So let me be generous.

For instance, for Alley apostles are leaders of today's church who are appointed by God "to represent Christ as head to the body." They carry the "essential anointing that connects the body to the headship of Jesus." (Page 39). The danger in this expression is the promulgation of a priesthood model of leadership – with a priest mediating God to humanity and humanity to God. A generous consideration of the semantics will, however, affirm leadership that is truly an examplar of Christ and therefore a gift of grace to the church where "'Grace' has a specific meaning… it means that God will choose ordinary men and women to do what He purposes." (Page 35)

Similarly, phrases like "when Jesus sends an apostle, that apostle is Christ to you" (Page 46) make my alarm bells ring. But it is caveated by the assertion that "without submission to Christ there can be no real authority" (Page 48) and we can, generously, move on wishing perhaps he had used ambassadorial or representational language rather than ontological.

It is possible, therefore, if we take "apostolic authority" to mean "a gifted leader of the church truly submitted to Christ and representing/imitating him well", to encounter some truth:

> *"The key to apostolic authority is death, and apostles have more authority because they have face more death. The death referred to here is death of self, death to he world, and death to the fear of man and the praise of man." (Page 55)*

Which may challenge us to look for and honour the sort of

leadership “that is substantially different to what we have known of religious, institutional, denominational Christianity” which is marked by a “willingness to suffer” as “servants of the church” (Pages 62-63). We may even be stirred to ask how we might imitate Paul as he imitates Christ as he is called to “give himself for the church, to cleanse her through the word he brings, and to present her to Christ perfect.” (Page 64).

This is a good thing. And I wish more leaders had this aspiration and were willing to carry this burden for the church and for the lost. And, if I’m honest, I wish more Christians understood the pain and death-to-self that sometimes inheres to every step of ministry. It hurts to love sometimes.

His prescription of how apostolic authority might be put into practice is based more on a description of Paul rather than any prescription that might come from thorough Biblical analysis. I certainly disagree with the assertion of an *inherent* anointing concerning finance which is based more on anecdote and prosperity doctrine than on anything biblical. And I raise an eyebrow when he explains that for Paul “relationships were always buoyant, cheerful and full of good hope and expectation.” (Page 97).

But considerations that “we do not have a democracy, but we do have a community… Democracy cannot produce community” (Page 115) are worthwhile when thinking about how new churches are grown and how power is managed. And I can see in his unpacking of “apostolic covering” (Page 149) something of how I “use” the leadership above me – I will serve them as they serve Christ and so am able to ‘hide behind them’ if that service takes me into dangerous ground. A bishop is (can be?) a blessed thing.

I also like his ecclesiology that is centred not on denomination but on geography and formed not around

institution but relationship:

> *"No one is going to create unity by amalgamating denominations. Who would want a bigger, more centralised, institutional religion anyway? In any case, there are too many differences and institutionalised errors to overcome… The only way forward is with what comes from heart relationship. In every place, real men and women of God must find each other, and begin to walk and talk together." (Page 175)*

And he is wise to cut across the danger of gung-ho young leaders seizing his thoughts and railroading themselves through churches as the "new apostolic ministry" or something. He assures denominational leaders "no true apostle will raise a hand against you, and the heart of every apostle will be to help you, strengthen you, and support you in battle… Your honour is safe with an apostle… a genuine apostle will not grasp for power, but will wait for only what God gives him." (Page 254)

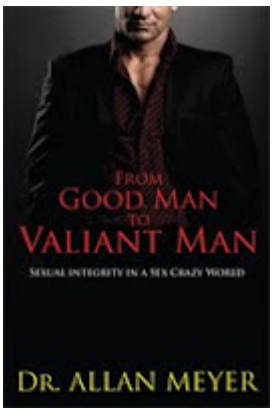
I guess, in the end, even after a generous reading, my problem is that while he may make assertions such as "Jesus is the actual covering of the church" (Page 149) I don't think apostolic leadership was ever meant to be the focus. While I am aware of the biblical examples such as where Paul defends his apostolic authority, the fundamental mode of the apostle is not "we need people like me" but "Jesus, all for Jesus." If I look to the examples that he cites – Moses, Elijah, Paul, in the Bible, people like Wesley and Booth in history – and if I look to some current leaders who I would call apostolic – Driscoll, Piper – the message is not "let us reform the church with apostolic ministry" or "let us take apostolic ministry to the world" but "let us turn to Christ, let us speak Christ, let us live for Jesus."

In other words, there is good stuff in this book. But it is

meta-apostolic – apostleship that speaks about apostleship. Apostles are sent by and for Jesus and they speak of him not themselves. Apostolic ministry is not the hope of the world or the church, Jesus is.

Perhaps a good way to finish up is to tip my hat to Alley's emphasis on relationships. I think I'd like to meet Mr. Alley and have a coffee with him. I think I'd ask him a lot of questions like "What do you really mean by?" but I daresay this brother would bless me and hopefully I him.

Review: From Good Man to Valiant Man



We use some of the Careforce Lifekeys courses in our church. They are a useful tool for discipleship and the promotiong of a practical spiritual engagement with real life. *From Good Man to Valiant Man* has been written by Careforce's Allan Meyer and is closely tied to the "Valiant Man" Lifekeys course which concentrates on the sexual discipleship of men. The sub-title of the book says it all: the aim of both course and book is to promote "Sexual integrity in a sex crazy world."

The discipling of the sexual man is a topic gaining significant ground in recent times. Driscoll's *Porn-Again Christian* is an obvious example of someone unafraid to deal with issues surrounding sexuality and holiness and robustly calls men to responsibility. I also recently scanned through a

Tim Challies ebook called *Sexual Detox* that covers very similar ground to Meyer albeit less thoroughly. Tellingly, both Driscoll and Challies provide their material freely online where it can be of the best use. Meyer doesn't but that does not prevent his book from being a worthy contribution.

The framework of the book is, unsurprisingly, shaped around the Lifekeys course structure – inviting people to discover the blessing of recovery by entering the "arena of healing" (Page 38). While the related exegesis of the beattitudes may be weak, the application of the "eight attitudes" of humility, emotional honesty, teachability, proactivity, forgiveness, pure motive, healing love, and courage is helpful. It means that the substantial topic can be approached from the point of view of a man as a man – not a man within distracting contexts of relationship fraught with the tendency to blameshift.

Meyer makes the framework specific in two ways. Firstly, through a metaphor for masculinity which is, once again exegetically weak but practically useful. This metaphor is the four faces of a man as an "ox" (provider), "lion" (protector), "eagle" (spiritual leader), and man (sexual, physical person). The fundamental thrust is to promote masculinity as servant-heartedness and self-sacrifice – for instance the basis of headship in a marriage relationship is boiled down to "you die first." (Page 23).

Secondly, and much more usefully, Meyer unpacks the physical, psychological and neurological aspects of masculine sexuality. He describes the chemical mechanics of sexual development and physical attraction and makes the most valuable point of the entire book: **"You renew your mind biologically not just spiritually"** (Page 175). This shows how the task of holiness and goodness is so clearly a masculine endeavour – earthy, practical, not a task relegated to the effeminately, ethereally spiritual. Neural pathways built from years of fantasy, pornography and masturbation can be retrained and

bypassed by those willing to walk that path.

> *Retraining the brain requires that you deliberately judge your thought patterns, build an off-ramp, and take your thoughts to godly places." (Page 179)*

This is a call to holiness in grace not shame – an exhortation, a championing for men to succeed in sexual purity and so find the blessing of right-living in themselves and the ones close to them. It is helpful.

Other aspects are less robust. The "ewe-lamb principle" (Page 146) which encourages a husband to consider their wife in terms of the 2 Samuel 12 parable of a "ewe-lamb" in need of their tender protection is not necessarily invalid, but it doesn't avoid paternalism and doesn't interact with the reality of diverse personalities. How would a phlegmatic man married to a choleric wife apply this principle? Our wives are not children in need of father, but women in need of a godly husband.

This book obviously derives from years of experience as a man and a pastor and from a wealth of research and pastoral care. The content is practical and educational. It will need to be unpacked for some – but that's our job. I will be using many of the principles in this book in my own discipleship and in the discipling of others.