



Apostolicity: The Ecumenical Question in World Christian Perspective (Missiological Engagements)

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Apostolicity and the Continuity of Faith

What constitutes the unity of the church over time and across cultures? Can our account of the church's apostolic faith embrace the cultural diversity of world Christianity?

The ecumenical movement that began in the twentieth century posed the problem of the church's apostolicity in profound new ways. In the attempt to find unity in the midst of the Protestant-Catholic schism, participants in this movement defined the church as a distinct culture—complete with its own structures, rituals, architecture and music. Apostolicity became a matter of cultivating the church's own (Western) culture. At the same time it became disconnected from mission and, more importantly, from the diverse reality of world Christianity.

In this pioneering study from IVP Academic's Missiological Engagements series, John Flett assesses the state of the conversation about the apostolic nature of the church. He contends that the pursuit of ecumenical unity has come at the expense of dealing responsibly with crosscultural difference. By looking out to the church beyond the West and back to the New Testament, Flett presents a bold account of an apostolicity that embraces plurality.

"World Christianity is dealing with issues of continuity with the local heritage, maturity in the faith, a perceived 'foreignness' of Christianity and the contextualization of the faith," says Flett. "The ecumenical discussion of apostolicity addresses a number of similar issues: historical continuity, identity formation, unity within diversity. Many of these problems center on the understanding of apostolicity, meaning that apostolicity is the positive context for a constructive answer. Apostolicity reflects not the continuity of an institution in its singular historical course, but the continuity of the faith as it crosses cultural borders and becomes translated within each local context. Apostolicity is this redemption of multiple histories into the history of Jesus Christ."

Throughout *Apostolicity*, Flett

- develops a positive theory of apostolicity, one that points beyond the established Protestant/Catholic problematic
- treats world Christianity as a positive theological resource informing the tradition
- constructs a unifying concept of mission, one which maintains the tension of mission as essential to the faith and as something which leads the church beyond itself

"In many respects, this work by John Flett is an outstanding contribution to international ecumenism and to the discussion on current issues in mission theology," writes Henning Wrogemann of the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel. "The topic of apostolicity touches on the question of continuity, and it also touches on the question of crossing boundaries in the service of mission. . . . Flett's approach is as integrative as it is innovative

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BOOK DETAILS



John G. Flett (PhD, Princeton Theological Seminary) lectures in intercultural theology and mission studies at Pilgrim Theological College, part of the University of Divinity in Melbourne, Australia. Originally from New Zealand, Flett has taught in the United States, South Korea, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Germany. He is the author of *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community* and is ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

and will certainly stimulate the ongoing discussion. This is a remarkable effort that deserves the highest praise.”

The Missiological Engagements series charts interdisciplinary and innovative trajectories in the history, theology and practice of Christian mission at the beginning of the third millennium. Books in the series, both monographs and edited collections, feature contributions by leading thinkers who work within or across the range of biblical, historical, theological and social scientific disciplines.