

Do—or can—we know the apostles, and, if so, how?

Yes, we do—and therefore can—know the apostles, in the same way in which we know Jesus himself, or, at least, in an analogous way.

We know Jesus as the "person" component of an "event," the other component of which is the "community." This "event" is the constitution or coming into being of the church—the church of which we ourselves either are or could become members. Thus that there *was* a Jesus and that there *was* a community that responded to him is as certain as that there *is* a church; for the church today is the church that was constituted or came into being through the "event"—the event of the community's responding to the person, which is to say, Jesus himself.

But, then, the same warrant that entitles us to be certain that there was and had to have been a Jesus—namely, the existence here and now of the church—also warrants our certainty that there were and had to have been apostles. For what we properly mean by "apostles" is simply the "community" component of the event, even as what we mean by "Jesus" is its other "person" component. In order for the church to have come into being as the kind of community it is, there had to have been both a person and a community, both a call and a response. But, then, the community or the response is and must be as certain as the person or the call, although there remains the important difference between them that the primary authority that the community or the response is and has for the church derives entirely from the explicit primal source of authority that is the person or the call.

From the textual evidence available to us in the New Testament writings, it appears that there were two distinguishable phases in the event of the church's constitution or coming into being. There was, first, the phase occasioned by Jesus' own witness of faith—what he himself said and did—as this was responded to by the disciples who "followed" him, some of whom, as it appears, also bore witness to his decisive significance through their Jesus-kerygma. And then there was, second, the phase occasioned by Jesus' death as it was responded to by the disciples who experienced him as alive and still

present with them in spite of his death, and who, therefore, also bore witness to his decisive significance through their Christ-kerygma.

The importance of the first phase is that it was the occurrence of the event implicitly, or *in actu*, while the importance of the second phase is that it was the reoccurrence of the same event explicitly, with more or less explicit consciousness on the part of the community both of the decisive significance of the person and of its own significance as a community.

To know the apostles, then, is to know the earliest witness to Jesus in either or both of its distinguishable phases, just as to know Jesus himself is to know the one to whom this earliest witness, Jesus-kerygma as well as Christ-kerygma, is borne.

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