

# The Role of “the Twelve” in Acts: A Model for the Witnessing Church

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## 1. Introduction

The apostolicity of the Church is a blessing to Christianity. Without the Twelve and without the apostolic tradition, the link between yesterday and today would be in oblivion—all affairs in a cul-de-sac. No faith, no evangelism, because the subject has no object to witness to. The movements end in the opposite directions, away from the epicentre.

This statement summarises the thesis of this essay. It underscores the fact that the apostles and the apostolic tradition are basic and significant to the life of the Church as a witnessing Church. It highlights the fact of the historical and symbolic role of the apostles as witnesses of that transition that links the Church with Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection. The witness of the apostles always reminds the Church and all believers of the radical demands of repentance and forgiveness as captured in the apostolic kerygma. It tells the truth of the witness of “the Twelve” as fundamental (cf. Eph. 2:20) for the Church’s continuing faith and evangelization.

Therefore, there is today a note of urgency for the Church to remain faithful to witnessing to Jesus Christ in the spirit of the apostolic tradition. The Church is called to always take its bearing from the examples of “the Twelve” and the apostolic Church in order to live out its vocation fully and fruitfully as a witnessing Church. Hence, the objective of this essay is to survey Luke’s understanding of the concept of apostle, “the Twelve” and witness, and the challenges it poses to the witnessing Church in the context of faith and evangelisation. In achieving this, the study adopts a multi-dimensional interpretative approach with canonical, ecclesiological and missiological tonality. For one to appreciate this fully, the need for the clarification of the Lucan notion of “apostle,” “the Twelve” and “witness” becomes obvious.

## 2. Clarification of Concepts

Among the dominant concepts found in Acts of the Apostles are “apostle,” “the Twelve” and “witness.” The first two are closely associated with the first-half of the book, and the last runs through the entire volume.

### Apostle

The term, *apostolos* (ἀποστολῆς) denotes in the NT tradition a person who is sent with the sense of full authority. It is a comprehensive term for the “bearers of the NT message.” More than 35% of the use of the term is credited to Luke, of which over 79% is located within Acts, and always appear in the plural form *apostoloi*.<sup>1</sup> Outside the Judeo-Christian scripture and Josephus, there is no common use of *apostolos* elsewhere.

However, Luke’s understanding of the term, apostles, as a title goes back to the circle of “the Twelve” (cf. Acts 2:37, 42f; 4:33-36; 5:2, 12, 18, 29 & 40; 6:8; 8:1, 14, 18; 9:27; 11:1; 15:2, 4, 6, & 22ff.; 16:4, 9),<sup>2</sup> which is constituted from the group of the disciples, who are closely

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<sup>1</sup> It is attested about 79 times in the noun form. Thirty-four of them are found in Luke, out of which 28 in Acts alone and always appear in plural form.

<sup>2</sup> Roloff, J., *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen and Berlin: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht and Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1981, 1988) 169.

associated with the pre-Easter Jesus (Luke 6:13; 9:10; 22:14; 17:6; 24:10).<sup>3</sup> Luke's connection of the group with Jerusalem (8:1; cf. also 1:4, 12), and his prejudice for the pre-eminence of Peter among the members of the group (2:37; 5:29; cf. Matt 10:2 and Mark 6:30), is traceable. Acts 1:15-26 contains the essential criteria that qualify one as a member of the group:

- i. A close companion of Jesus from his baptism (cf. Luke 3:21) to his ascension (1:9-11);
- ii. Chosen by the pre-Easter Jesus (1:2, 24; cf. Luke 6:13; 9:1); and
- iii. A witness to Jesus' resurrection (1:22; cf. 1:3-4; Luke 24:36ff.).

In other words, there must be a connecting line running from the commission and the conferment of the title by the earthly Jesus (Luke 6:13) through the announcement of the mission by the risen Christ (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:46-48), with the promise of the Spirit (1:5, 8; Luke 24:49;) to the reception of the Spirit, and with it the proclamation of the gospel, newly initiated from heaven (Acts 2ff.) and manifested in the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> The apostle, therefore, must be an eyewitness to the deeds and teachings of Jesus right up to the time of ascension, and must have been among those who received the instruction not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the realisation of the promise of the Holy Spirit (1:1-4). So, it may seem at first sight that Luke reserves the title apostles to "the Twelve" and, accordingly, may seem to hesitate to allow any other person to share in it, except in another sense (cf. 14:6,14).

However, limiting the understanding of the title to "the Twelve," even for Luke himself, may appear too narrow. Luke is equally conscious of another meaning that extends beyond the circle of "the Twelve," probably thanks to the material coming from the *Missionspredigt*. The motif of commission and witness assumes prominence in the *Missionspredigt* material. It is in this very context that the description of Paul and Barnabas as apostles (14:3-7, 14) makes a better sense. Granted that "the Twelve" are the apostles, Paul and Barnabas are also *avpo, stoloι* without any sense of impropriety on the part of Luke.<sup>5</sup>

The development of the term *avpo, stoloι* ("one sent") by the Christians includes those commissioned and sent, who could bear witness to Jesus' victory over death (1:8; Luke 24:47-48). The act of sending involves not only those who had known Jesus during his earthly ministry ("the Twelve," James, etc.), but also, those who saw him only after the resurrection are commissioned to proclaim him to all. This is seen at various constituents in Paul's notion of an "apostle of Jesus Christ - a vision of the risen Jesus (1 Cor 9:1; 15:7-9; Gal 1:17) and a commission by Jesus to preach. Such an understanding of what constitutes apostle also shows some resemblance between the OT prophets and the NT apostles (cf. Luke 11:49).<sup>6</sup> But then the place of "the Twelve" as the apostles is not only presumed. It is also given certain absolute pronouncement within the studies of the gospels.

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<sup>3</sup> "The Twelve" becomes almost a fixed group alongside that of the *presbu, teroι* (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22f.; 16:4).

<sup>4</sup> Buehner, J.-A., "avpo, stoloι" in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 Vols.; eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1990) 1:142-145, esp. 144.

<sup>5</sup> Rengstorff, K. H. "avpo, stoloι ktλ." in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (9 Vols.; eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich; Transl. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1972-1981) from PC Study Bible DVD.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, R. E., Donahue, J. R., Senior, D., and Collins, A. Y., "Aspects of New Testament Thought," in *The new Jerome Biblical Commentary* (eds. R. E. Brown; J. A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy; (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990) 1354-1381, esp. 1380.

## “The Twelve”

The figure “twelve” (*dw, deka*) has, among the Judeo-Christian scriptures and writings, its greatest significance in the NT. It is both symbolic and real. It comes from one of the oldest known NT traditions (cf. 1 Cor 15:5; Acts 6:2).<sup>7</sup> It primarily refers to an enclosed circle of disciples, whose formation is attributed to Jesus himself.

It is to be noted that the NT use of the term, *dw, deka*, is in the absolute grammatical form, though with Matthew standing out as an exception. Matthew alone qualifies *dw, deka* with *avpo, stoloi* (Matt 10:2; cf. also Rev 21:14) and more frequently with disciples (*maqhtai*, Matt 10:1; 11:1; 20:17; 26:20).

From the early traditional usage of the term, one can deduce that “the Twelve” is the fixed name of an institution, which in fact is constituted by twelve specific people but functioned together as a college.<sup>8</sup> In this wise, it is not necessarily the individuals that counts but the college. This is also seen from the perspective that this group retained some importance in Christian thought even after the individual members were long dead.<sup>9</sup> This idea highlights the symbolic meaning of “the Twelve.” Even in the tradition of the completion of the circle of “the Twelve” (Acts 1:15, 21-26), there is a betrayal of the precedence of the institution over the number in the simultaneous necessity of filling the number.

Interesting also for this paper is Holtz’s attempt to re-establish the missing link between “the Twelve” and the “apostles.” According to him, both “the Twelve” and the calling-mission narrative are entirely joined together as eschatological-prophetic signs that give credence to witness. “The Twelve,” however, lost their significance in the post-Easter Church, as did individual members of the group. As confusing as the situation might seem, Mark could no longer understand their essential function, and therefore, identifies them with the apostles (Mk 6:30). That is to say, the *dw, deka* is originally different from the *avpo, stoloi*. Mark equally stumbled into another challenge by his inability to identify the functional difference between the *dw, deka* and the *maqhtai*.<sup>10</sup> This development drifts in different literary directions; Matthew would then identify the *dw, deka* even more with the *maqhtai*, and Luke entirely with the *avpo, stoloi*. But John preserves them only with his tradition. Holtz further observes that in the Gospels’ explicit reference to “the Twelve” is on the decline (only in Matt 11:1; Luke 8:1; 9:12 and beyond Mark). Even the effort of Matthew (11:1) and Luke (8:1) is understood in the light of the Q tradition of the commission motif.

One finally detects in Acts an effort to “historicize” the understanding of “the Twelve,” which is now oriented to the number in the reference to “the Eleven.” The tradition would soon no longer have the understanding of the institution of *dw, deka*. The tradition, however, preserves the knowledge of the existence of the institution, and fills it with new content, namely, that of the apostolate. That is to say that in the functional realm, a new continuity is preserved.<sup>11</sup> This will show itself clearly in Luke, above all, in Acts. Although this will become more determinative in

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hengel, M., *Between Jesus and Paul* (London: SCM, 1983) 3f: stresses that the term has already a wider usage.

<sup>8</sup> Holtz, T., “*dw, deka*,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 Vols.; eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmanns, 1990) 1:361-363, esp. 362. It may appear less plausible to argue from 1 Cor 15:5 against the pre-Easter existence of “the Twelve” as a group.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, Donahue and Collins, “Aspects of New Testament thought,” 1380.

<sup>10</sup> Holtz, “*dw, deka*,” 363; Best, E. “Mark’s Use of “the Twelve,” *ZNW* 69 (1978) 11-35, 32-35.

<sup>11</sup> Roloff, J. *Apostolat-Verkiindigung-Kirch* (Gutersloh: Gutersloher, 1965) esp. 138-68, 166-68.

the later period, one should not lose the sight of the fact that Luke is the author and originator of “the Twelve” equal to the “apostles.” Another accent in this paper is that the primary purpose for the constitution of “the Twelve” and the “apostles” culminates in witnessing to the deeds and teachings of Jesus, as well as in his resurrection. This act of witnessing calls for repentance and forgiveness of sins.

## **Witness**

Witness as *ma,rtuj* covers a wide range of field in the NT tradition—judicial, moral and religious.<sup>12</sup> It conveys as well the notion attesting to *facts* and *truth* as well as making publicly one’s personal judgement and conviction of facts, situation and/or events. It is within this wide context that Luke presents “the Twelve” and the “apostles” as witness to the facts and events of Jesus and his gospel (eye witness). They are also, for Luke, witness based on their judgement and conviction of the story of Jesus (faith), and their action to pass same to others, so that they (others), on their own judgement and conviction of the message (faith), will make the same known to another “others” (evangelisation). So, one observes the interplay between faith and evangelisation not only in the writings of Luke but also in the lives of the actual and “potential” apostles.

The implication is that the term *ma,rtuj* will be displayed in Acts with a wide range of meanings, which definitely include the notion the apostles as those who have personal and historical experience of Jesus, and also those who declare the facts of these experience, especially the event of Jesus’ resurrection. Though, the resurrection may not be determined by witness through any empirical and scientific demonstration, it is *believed* and *attested* through *proclamation*. It is within this range of thought that the complex world of the Lucan notion of witness is presented. Thus the idea of believing, confessing and evangelising becomes intrinsically connected with the notions of the apostles. They (apostles) bear witness to the factuality of the suffering and resurrection of Jesus, and also, because they have grasped the significance of the experience in faith and can thus attest it, they are witnesses.

However, the authentic witnesses are only those who are qualified, called, chosen, commissioned and sent by the pre-ascension Jesus (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8, 22-26). They are adequately equipped for their task (Luke 24:48; Acts 5:32). It appears that Luke’s concept of witness weighs on this balance. If that is the case, his idea of witness will then coincide with his designation of apostles but in the narrower sense. And unless that idea undergoes deconstruction and then a reconstruction process, it is bound to disappear as history advances.

The argument that Luke’s notion of witness is restricted only to “the Twelve” would seemingly command some acceptance on the fact that *ma,rtuj* mostly refers to “the Twelve” (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8; 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32 10:39,41), in their special role as witnesses to Israel (13:31; *cf.* 10:36-39), having been chosen by Jesus, to be with him from the beginning to the end, and equipped with his Spirit, who then bore witness alongside with them (5:32).<sup>13</sup> Even the Paul of Luke may appear to have attested to the same fact at a point in Acts (13:31-32), where Paul’s address in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch recognises only the “older apostles,” “who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem,” and by whom “he was seen many days,” as *ma,rturej*

<sup>12</sup> The judicial sense is clearly reflected in Mark 14:63//Matt 26:65; Acts 6:13; 7:58 in connection with Deut 17:7; 19:15; the moral in Rom 1:9; 2 Cor 1:23; Phil 1:8; 1 Thess 2:5 and the religious in 1 Thess 2:10.

<sup>13</sup> Bolt, P. G., “Mission and Witness,” in *Witness to the Gospel. The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmanss, 1998) 191-214, esp. 192.

auvtou/. Whereas Paul uses of Barnabas and himself as preachers of the word, euvaggeli/zesqai..

According to Strathmann, the choice of terms in 13:31-32 is no accident. It is controlled by the fact that *ma,rtuj* could not be used of Paul (or Barnabas) in the sense in which it had thus far been used in Acts.<sup>14</sup> This appear to be an over interpretation of Luke's intention. Luke expands the concept of *ma,rtuj* to include Paul (22:15; 26:16) and even Stephen (22:20). In the two passages, where the concept of the witness is applied to Paul, it is rooted in his personal vocation (vision), faith (belief) and evangelisation (confession). It is about the significance of the person and story of Jesus—that is, in the sense of confessing witness, which is clearly manifested in Paul's missionary activities. The witness proves naturally the factuality of the story of Jesus, without the witness standing along with Jesus within that particular historical context.

One may further observe that *ma,rtuj*, as embracing faith and evangelisation, is further drawn from the Lucan notion. Stephen is designated in Acts 22:20 as *ma,rturo,j sou* (your witness). It must, however, be emphasised that Stephen is called a witness in this passage not because he died for Christ as such, but that he died because he is a *witness* to Christ through his (Stephen's) evangelism. In other words, the stress is not on eyewitness. Incidentally, Stephen shares the same fate with Paul as one who has seen not necessary the pre- but the post-Easter Jesus.<sup>15</sup> But unlike Paul, Stephen is not officially commissioned. Nevertheless, Stephen's faith and evangelisation privileged him the title of witness. In other words, Stephen's martyrdom is only as a consequence of that belief (faith) and confession (proclamation), which finally resulted to vision of the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56). So, the reference to Stephen's witness raises the curtain of the faith-evangelisation motif.

The verb form (*marturei/n*) of *ma,rtuj* conveys some positive connotation on the usage of the term. It refers to the person of God, the Spirit or the Scripture and the Gospel. Even the prophets themselves are designated as witnesses. It equally connotes that the subject (whether God, the Spirit, the prophets, the Scripture or the Gospel) has earlier testified to the witness (cf. Acts 13:32; 15:8). These are the guarantors of whatever evidence that is made manifest (Acts 10:43; 14:3). It also refers to the central content of the Gospel, seen from the standpoint of faith as a fact, which God himself has established long ago (Acts 15:8).

The act of witness is the factuality of the higher order, which cannot be observed and attested like earthly occurrences. It is a revealed and believed truth, which can only be experienced. It can only be seen through witnessing, that is, through the expression of faith and the public proclamation of that which is believed (evangelisation). It is understood as an indispensable task that takes precedence over every other priority (cf. Acts 23:11).<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is to the credit of Trites, who first observed that Luke generally does not use substantives to refer to the testimony

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<sup>14</sup> Strathmann, H., "ma,rtuj ktl.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (9 Vols.; eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich; transl. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1972-1981) from PC Study Bible DVD.

<sup>15</sup> This position is contra Bolt ("Mission and Witness," 192-93), who argues that Paul calls Stephen "your witness" because Stephen had also seen the risen Lord.

<sup>16</sup> In sum, *marture,w* is used for God endorsing his word by signs and wonders (14:3), or Cornelius' conversion by his Spirit (15:8); the prophets testify to Jesus and forgiveness (10:43), and Paul, in agreement with them, testifies to Jesus' suffering, resurrection, and proclamation (26:22f.) from Jerusalem to Rome (23:11). cf. Bolt, "Mission and Witness," 193.

or activity of the witnesses. Instead Luke prefers to narrate these things directly.<sup>17</sup> Their testimony is verbal, focusing upon the resurrection, or, more precisely, “Jesus who had been raised.”<sup>18</sup> This invariably opens up another challenge: to what extent does “the Twelve” play their role as witness.

### **3. “The Twelve” as Witness**

The earlier observation on the collegiality of “the Twelve” and the expansion of the notion of apostleship makes a better understanding of Luke’s primary intention in the plots of Acts. The concept of the unity of the mission is inclusive. Consequently, when either Peter or Paul speaks, he speaks for the group of “witnesses.” This may probably settle the minds of those who call for a retitling of the book of Acts to read the Acts of Peter or Paul, or even of the Holy Spirit. The agenda is clearly stated in 1:8. It is a corporate responsibility carried out in collegiality. However, there is always a spokesperson for the college, thus Peter, Stephen or Paul. What is very interesting here is that all do not speak at the same time, and sometimes in the same place. Luke organised his characters in such a way they will fit their respective roles.

#### **3.1 Peter as Representative of “the Twelve”**

It has been observed that the role of Peter as the representative of “the Twelve” in Acts is foreshadowed in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>19</sup> Peter is made one of the earliest and latest beneficiaries of the Gospel of Jesus (cf. Luke 4:38-39; 5:4-11 and 22:32; 24:12; 24:34 respectively). By crowning “the Twelve” the witness *par excellence* and projecting Peter as a representative of “the Twelve,” Luke underscores his interest and prejudice for the theology of witness. Peter, as the head and representative of “the Twelve,” will always be positioned first and allowed to fill the role of spokesperson (2:14; 3:12; 4:8; 5:29; 10:34). Peter is advised to strengthen the “brothers” (Luke 22:32), which also includes teaching in the Temple and in their homes, and proclaiming the Messiah (5:42). When Luke makes Peter the champion of Gentile mission (10:9-49; also 11:1-18), he is set to establish unity between the mission of Paul and “the Twelve.” And once the unity is achieved (15:25-26), Peter and “the Twelve” will disappear from the stage, thus creating a way for Paul to drive the word of God to the ends of the earth. But the interest of this essay centres more on “the Twelve” as witness.

#### **3.2 The Role of “the Twelve” as Witness**

##### **“The Twelve” and the Mission to Israel**

A careful reading of Luke may suggest that the constitution of “the Twelve” (Luke 6:13-16) precedes the commission (Luke 9:1-5). This aspect of the call does not make “the Twelve” special, for the same mission is shared with the Seventy/Seventy-two (10:1-12). However, in Acts 1:8 “the Twelve” will be commissioned and committed to special mission to be Jesus’ witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (cf. Luke 24:45-49). The phrase “the ends of the earth” anticipates a worldwide mission as opposed to the stationary role in Jerusalem, often associated with “the Twelve.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Trites, A. A., *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: CUP, 1977), 142.

<sup>18</sup> Bolt, “Mission and Witness,” 193.

<sup>19</sup> Clark, A. C., “The Role of the Apostles,” in *Witness to the Gospel. The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1998) 169-190, esp. 172.

<sup>20</sup> However, Peter and John, as representatives of “the Twelve,” both brought to fulfilment the former work of evangelisation through their prayers for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and themselves evangelize Samaritan

However, the emphasis on “world-wide mission” may not be overstretched to obscure the role of “the Twelve” as witnesses. According to Luke, “the Twelve” are called to proclaim before Israel that the turning point in the history of the people of God has occurred, and thereby, to call the people to repentance for putting the Messiah to death. It would be more appropriate to say that Luke assigns “the Twelve” a prophetic role.<sup>21</sup> But if anything may be missing in the missionary role of “the Twelve,” Paul will complement it in his witness to the *same* Gospel.

### **“The Twelve” and the Restoration of Israel**

It has earlier been noted that the concept of witness in Luke (Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31; cf. Luke 24:48) is linked with the title of apostle. The notion is retraceable to an old Palestinian Christian tradition, which understands the apostle as one who is commissioned, obligated and empowered by the Risen Lord. The apostle is the one, who stands up over and against the stubborn Israel.<sup>22</sup>

“The Twelve” as symbolic is significant to the mission to Israel. Their appointment is viewed as an anticipation of the gathering and the full restoration of the scattered people of Israel.<sup>23</sup> They represent proleptically the leadership of the renewed people of God,<sup>24</sup> whose members are measured by the standard of “the Twelve.” They now form the core of the restored Israel.<sup>25</sup> They have the eschatological role of seating on “the Twelve” thrones of judgment for Israel (Luke 22:30). However, their role as judge has also a historical dimension. Their leadership quality is a counter of the failed rulership of Israel,<sup>26</sup> as they summon the people to repentance and prepare the land for the salvation of Israel.

### **“The Twelve” and the City of Jerusalem**

If the role of “the Twelve” is closely associated with the restoration of Israel, it makes sense that Luke should link “the Twelve” to Jerusalem. In this wise, the “word of the Lord” will move out from Jerusalem’ as a fulfilment of scriptural prophecy (e.g. Isa 2:1-4; Mic 4:1-5). Moreover, in Jewish eschatological expectation, Jerusalem is the place where God’s salvation will be manifested and the people of God restored. Consequently, Luke makes the city of Jerusalem the navel of the earth.<sup>27</sup> It is the epicentre of the witness, the missionary city of “the Twelve,” the place of restoration (1:1-6:7; 8:14). It explains why every resurrection appearance in Luke must take place in Jerusalem, and why “the Twelve” must remain in the city until the Holy Spirit comes upon them (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). They must as well endure in Jerusalem even at the heat of the persecution (8:1-2), and after their ministry in Samaria, they must return to Jerusalem (8:25). The Paul of Acts will be brought to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles (9:27), and equally dispute in mission Church (15:1-3) will be transferred to Jerusalem for resolution (15:4-

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villages (8:14-17, 25). Peter also, in the course of his pastoral visitation, works miracles which have a considerable evangelistic impact in parts of Judea (9:35; cf. Luke 5:10). Peter’s trip to Caesarea is the one example of a definitely missionary journey, and even in this case Peter is unsure why he has been asked to come (10:29).

<sup>21</sup> Observation from Jervell, thus cited in Clark, “The Role of the Apostles,” 181.

<sup>22</sup> Buehner, “avpo, stoloj,” 144.

<sup>23</sup> Jervell, J. *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) 75-112.

<sup>24</sup> Thus Rev 21:14, one of the last NT works, pictures “the Twelve” as the essential foundations of the city of God.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Buehner, “avpo, stoloj,” 144; also Clark, “The Role of the Apostles,” 175.

<sup>26</sup> Johnson, L. T., *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, M.N: Liturgical Press, 1992) 79-82.

<sup>27</sup> Fitzmyer, J. A. *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation and Notes I-IX* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981) 168.

29), and the resolution sent back to the mission Church from Jerusalem (15:30-35) as a transformative process.

### **“The Twelve” and the Jerusalem Church**

Besides providing effective leadership to the Jewish people, “the Twelve” function as the leader of the Church (4:35, 37; 5:2; cf. 6:6). They are spokespersons for the Church, who proclaim the gospel to those outside (2:37) and defend the Jewish Church against attacks (5:26ff.). They will witness to the new developments in the expanding mission and appoint the Seven (6:3) to witness to the caritative mission of the Church.

Believers devote themselves to their teaching (2:42), and lay their gifts for the needy at the feet of “the Twelve” (4:35, 37; 5:2). Believers recognised something special and submit to their authority of leadership as they pronounce judgement (5:1-14) and praises (4:36-37). “The Twelve” proffer solutions to the challenging situation of the community (6:2f., 6). Their major responsibility is attending to the tradition, preserving and teaching it (2:42). They authorize the Gentile mission (8:14, 18; 15:22f.; 16:4), and officially declare the free entry of the Gentiles into the fold of the people of God without any precondition (15:1f., 5f., 22f.) since God had already witnessed to it (10:44; cf. 15:8).

### **Witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus**

“The Twelve” are the authorized delegates of Jesus. They are the witnesses to the reality of his resurrection and expounders of its significance.<sup>28</sup> Their witness to the resurrection is harmonised by the witness of God that enables “the Twelve” to perform signs and wonders (2:43; 5:12). Their witness is characterised by the boldness (4:17, 21; 5:26-28, 40) to speak in the name of Jesus (4:15ff.). They proclaimed Jesus as Messiah, wrought miracles (3:1-8; 5:12ff.) to bear witness to the fact of the resurrection (3:12ff.).

Thus Clark argues that “just as the signs and wonders performed by Jesus represented his attestation by God (2:22), so the similar signs wrought by Peter (3:1-10; 4:16, cf. Luke 5:17-26; 5:15f.; cf. 6:40f.; 9:36.; 7:49-56) and the other apostles attest that their message is from God.” They pray together that God would stretch out his hand to heal, and that signs and wonders would be performed through Jesus' name (4:30), and the shaking of the building confirms that God is among them in power (cf. 4:33). Peter has divine insight into the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, and his words carry divine force (5:1-11). The visible activity of God in this and other miracles results in a wholesome fear of God on the part of both the Church and the Jewish people (2:43; 5:5, 11). The abundance of healings and exorcisms results in even more turning to the Lord (5:14; cf. 5:12-16). The witness of the apostles is thus matched by the witness of the Holy Spirit (5:32).<sup>29</sup>

A connection between the wonders and signs in the ministry of Jesus (2:22) and the eschatological wonders and signs of Joel's prophecy is now programmatically realised in the days of the apostles (2:19). The past is now relieved and the future realised in the witness of the apostles. In short, the role of “the Twelve” as witness in Acts is in a sense the fulfilment of the Lucan Gospel prophecy. What Jesus initiated and promised is now being fulfilled through the witnesses of a selected circle, whose members had the honour of personal encounter with the

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<sup>28</sup> For more details, cf. Dillon, R. J. “From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24,” *AnBib* 82 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978) 292; Burchard, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge*, 133-35.

<sup>29</sup> The reflection is based on Clark, “The Role of the Apostles,” 169-190.



risen Lord (10:41; 1:22). Hence the resurrection remains the summit and hallmark of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Witness to Jesus' Tradition**

“The Twelve” are the closest companions of Jesus, and who are blessed to sit at the feet of Jesus both in private and public. Being members of a select circle, who have the honour of personal encounter with the historical and post-Easter Jesus (10:41; 1:22), disposes and privileges them to be the most qualified to preserve, proclaim and teach from first-hand knowledge the doctrine of Jesus (1:22), especially the fact of His resurrection (2:32; 3:15; 5:31f; 10:41) and its saving significance (cf. 10:42). They are, therefore, the authentic witnesses to Jesus' deeds in Judea and in Jerusalem (10:39), and their teachings about the Risen Lord remains authoritative. They are simply his witness before the people (13:31).

The role of “the Twelve” as citadel of Jesus' tradition confers them the concomitant role of teachers (2:42) and leaders of the worshipping community (2:47). And if the scholarship position on 2:44-47, as an expansion of the activities listed in 2:42, 47, is acceptable, then it can plausibly be argued that the meetings of the believers in the temple (2:46) would have been for the purpose of listening to the teachings of “the Twelve.”<sup>30</sup>

Interesting also as that may seem, Luke did not make a difference between teaching (catechesis) and proclamation (kerygma). They are, for Luke, synonymous (cf. 4:2, 30f; 5:20f, 28, 42) and fulfil one function: the witness to Jesus-tradition. For Luke also, the life and growth of the Church is rooted in the growth of the word (6:7; 12:24; 19:20). So, the ministry of the word of God takes precedence over other ecclesiastical (social) activities (6:2, 4). It is simply indispensable to the growth of the Church.

In sum, “the Twelve” are momentous witnesses for the character and content of the teachings and deeds of Jesus.<sup>31</sup> They are the authentic and authoritative witnesses to the Jesus-tradition. They legitimately occupy the place of the authoritative teachers of Israel (4:2, 17; 5:20; 25), and of the Christian community (2:42, 46; 5:42). They bear witness to the fact of the resurrection, and to Jesus as the Messiah (2:35; 3:18, 20; 4:10; 5:31, 42), on the basis of scriptural prophecies and types.<sup>32</sup> This posture will continue to challenge the Church in time and space.

### **4. The Challenging Figure of “the Twelve” to a Witnessing Church**

The reader's attention at this point is drawn to the wider nature and the challenges of the Church as a witnessing Church. The posture of “the Twelve” demands that an apostolic church must be a church rooted in the tradition of “the Twelve” and their legitimate successors. “the Twelve” in this context carries along with it a range of stimulating implications—chosen, commissioned, sent, empowered and witness. In other words, “the Twelve” as a college, is commissioned, obligated and empowered to carry on witnessing to the work of God in Jesus Christ through Spirit. The same goes to the apostolic Church of the present age. The emphasis is, simply put, that the Church cannot cut the umbilical cord of its apostolic model without rendering itself impotent, voiceless and powerless. It loses its taste. It loses its saltiness. It is *good* but for *nothing*.

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<sup>30</sup> Clark, “The Role of the Apostles,” 179.

<sup>31</sup> Holtz, “dw, deka,” 361-363.

<sup>32</sup> Clark, “The Role of the Apostles,” 180.

The second argument in the paper is that it not enough to possess the qualities of apostolicity. The readiness and willingness to actualise these qualities is a timely challenge. In other words, from the self-definition of the Church as apostolic, the role and actions of the Church should and ought to be apostolic. That is to say, mission and witness are the heart and soul of the apostolic Church (1:8; also Luke 24:44ff.). The same is said of the Church today. Striking the same note, John Paul II notes that the nature and “responsibilities of the Church” are missionary. It is a Church of mission, which itself becomes missionary.<sup>33</sup>

The mission and witness character of the Church makes faith and evangelisation an unavoidable option. The Church must not only be a believing Church. It must also be a proclaiming Church since it is the apostolic Church. It is a Church sent to *speak out*, to preach the Gospel in words and deeds. Put in a word: the Church *cannot remain silent*, it risks failure in its mission, except in cases where silence itself would be a way of speaking and bearing witness. Therefore, the Church must always preach in season and out of season (cf. 2 Tim 4:2), in order to build up in charity and truth (EA 71). That is to say, witness is an invariable concomitant of the life of the Church. The Church is called to proclaim, by word and witness of life, the Good News of Jesus Christ, the crucified, died and risen Lord, the Way, the Truth and the life.<sup>34</sup>

“The Twelve” stand over and against stubborn Israel, hence they are appointed in anticipation of the gathering and full restoration of the scattered people of Israel. A church, modelled in the apostolic spirit, stands always over and against its contemporary age, and sees beyond the present. It must be a forward-looking Church that is equally conscious of its apostolic umbilical cord. It is a church that is eschatologically oriented in all intent and purpose. It must be a church that counters the failed leadership of the present age, and always summoning the people to repentance and with the promise of God’s salvation.

## **5. The Challenge of the Church as Witnessing**

Reading through most of the official documents of the Church leaves one with no doubt that the self-understanding and definition of the Church is concretised in mission and witness. It is also obvious that the primary role of the Church is to reveal the presence of the Father to the world and to present the world to the Father through Christ in the Spirit. Another important emphasis is that the call to witness to God in the world goes beyond speaking words. It includes all aspects of expressing Jesus—love, goodness, revelation and power. It is an enormous responsibility. It touches every aspect of the Church’s life and theology. Consequently, this paper highlights the witnessing character of the Church. It desires the Church to always remain *en route* to actualising this noble vocation by celebrating and proclaiming publicly the faith it bears. The echo from the apostolic Church is that the Church’s prophetic voice must be translated at all levels into concrete actions until it attains a series of necessary reforms.<sup>35</sup>

Important also, argues Trites,<sup>36</sup> is for the witnessing Church to understand that witness is a “live metaphor,” with forensic overtones that challenges the Church to always live out what the Church believes and proclaims. For it is only through Christ-filled actions that the Church can be a true witness to the world. As once wisely advised, the Church should humbly embrace the fact

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<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995) No. 6.

<sup>34</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, No. 57.

<sup>35</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, No. 54.

<sup>36</sup> Trites, A. A. *The New Testament*, chapter 9.

that people today learn more from “witness than from words;<sup>37</sup> they put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. And that the witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission: Christ, whose mission the Church continues, is the “witness” *par excellence* (Rev 1:5; 3:14) and the model of all Christian witness.<sup>38</sup>

Arising from mission and witness, the Church is obligated to touch the mind of the world by living the faith in a simple and exemplary life, thus following the footsteps of the apostles, who through their proclamation, teachings and exemplary lives touch the heart of the people, and command the confidence and loyalty of the believers. If the Church must be alive, it must be a church taking to the model of the apostolic Church. It must be a church open to the call of the spirit. It must be a church of the resurrection, whose eschatological orientation and commitment to the historical experience of the people offer a counter leadership to the failed leaderships of today’s world; a church that is ready and able to challenge all provocative insults against God and humanity, a church that proffers some practical solutions in the model of “the Twelve.”

## 6. Summary and Conclusion

The paper addressed some of the fundamental issues and shaded meanings associated with the concepts of apostle, “the Twelve” and witness, and then went further to examine the role of “the Twelve” as witnesses. It was discovered that “the Twelve” symbolised the continuity of God’s promise to Israel.<sup>39</sup> Their corporate witness also points to the end time, thus functioning as apostolic witnesses to the resurrection and judges at the coming of the kingdom.<sup>40</sup> They function as eyewitnesses (10:41) and transitional figures that connect the Church with the Jesus-Tradition. They provide an essential foundation for the Church’s continuing faith and witness. They affirm, guarantee and interpret the facts about Jesus. They are both evangelizers and legitimate authorizers.<sup>41</sup>

The paper equally argued that outside “the Twelve,” there were other witnesses recognised in the tradition of Acts. The paper argued that the account of Acts was a mission-story concretised on the mission and witness, exemplified by the apostles and the apostolic Church. It affirmed the connection between the Church of the apostles and the Church of today. According to the paper, the commitment of the apostles as witnesses, and the witnessing character of the apostolic Church serve as a role model for the Church. It reminds all of its apostolic foundation, and encourages the churches to always remain apostolic in her witness. The paper argued that the witness of the Church should go beyond rhetoric. It should include true leadership, expression of love and goodness both within and outside the Church. The Church should live in the gift of revelation. It should allow itself room for a transformative generation in the Spirit. It should be a veritable instrument for true repentance. It should be a true healer and reconciler.

The paper, thus, recommends that the Church and all believers should, in the spirit of the year of faith and the new evangelization, embrace the Bible as a “word” that all must hear and to which

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<sup>37</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 62, 52 cited in John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, No. 42.

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*. On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990) No.42.

<sup>39</sup> Giles, K. “Apostles Before and After Paul,” *Churchman* 99 (1985) 241-56, 245.

<sup>40</sup> McBride, D. E., *The Gracious Visit of God according to Luke* (Dublin: Dominican, 1991) 183:

<sup>41</sup> The tradition includes the ministry of Jesus (cf. 1:1), and his death (Luke 23:49) and resurrection (2:32), which are preserved and transmitted through the proclamation and teaching of the apostles. Cf. Clark, “The Role of the Apostles,” 190.

all must testify; and notes that the Church and her members are called to evangelize not only the outsider but also the insider, for *all* must call upon the name of the risen Lord. In doing so, the Church and her members are taking salvation even unto the ends of the earth.