

“LAID AT THE APOSTLES’ FEET”: ADMINISTRATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH LAWNA TERRITORY, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Discourse on apostleship has been robust in academic domain, paying much attention to the subject matter’s historicity, the continuation or cessation of the apostolic office in the contemporary time as well as the description of the social life of the apostolic community in the earliest century of the Church. However, little or no attention has been given to the old apostles’ administrative and accountable leadership particularly with regards to The Apostolic Church LAWNA Territory Nigeria (TACLTN), a contemporary Church-denomination that patterns itself on the heritage of the first century apostles. The problem of bustling Church membership called for the provision of the basic material needs of the teeming but poor members in the early Church. The issue was resolved through the cheerful donation of public-spirited individuals in the early Church’s community; the donated booties were aptly attended to through the accountable administration of the apostles. The donations, “laid at their feet,” were fairly distributed to the community’s needy; hence the phrase, “laid at the apostles’ feet,” occurs severally in the early chapters of Acts as the members looked up to the apostles for responsible management of the community’s affairs. The study objective seeks, by application, to view how much of this ancient apostolic administrative and accountable virtue can be put into place in the contemporary TACLTN to boost its systems and polities. The paper opines that TACLTN will flourish more in its ecclesiastical polities should it internalize the transparent administration and accountability sense of its forbears in Acts. The essay employs observation method and relevant literature on the subject matter to arrive at its goal.

KEYWORDS: Early Church, administration, accountability, apostle/apostleship, TACLTN

INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, all Christians can be considered Christ’s apostles wherever regions they are localized in the global world because they represent God’s mission on earth. However, it is not all Christians that are apostles in the technical sense of the term.

From a technical perspective, this study borders on the ancient men appointed and designated Apostles by Jesus Christ during His earthly career in the first century AD. As a result of their priority, the early Church members looked up to these earliest apostles for administrative direction. In this essay, I engage the term “Apostle” with reference to its connotation in the ancient Greco-Roman world. This paper, from the continualists’ perspective, argues for the presence and activities of apostleship alongside other charismatic gifts in the contemporary Church. After this, the essay delves into discussion about Jesus’ historic apostles and the apostolic office as entrenched in Eph. 4:11. For providing a historical background for this study, I also examine the provenance of Acts of the Apostles. Later, I give ample attention to the phrase, “Laid at the apostles’ feet” more especially in the light of its implication for The Apostolic Church LAWNA Territory, Nigeria, a denomination that patterns its doctrinal practices after the first century apostles.

Erudition of scholarship on apostleship has been very sumptuous. Discussions on the subject have revolved around cessation and/or continuation of the apostolic office, alongside other spiritual gifts, in the contemporary times. Following the instance of John Calvin’s opinion on the subject matter, scholars such as B. B. Warfield, J. Grescham, D. B. Wallace, Richard Gaffin and John F. MacArthur among others adhere to cessationism (Cited in Mayhue, 263; Resane, 2020; Gromacki, 2013). Conversely, Samuel Abogunrin (1988), Wagner (1979) and Hagin (1975) argue against such notion as continualists. Both schools of thought have heavily relied on the interpretation of biblical passages such as I Cor. 13:8-13; Acts 2:22; II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3, 4 among others to contend for their positions each. This article adheres to the continualists’ approach, whose explication takes place later in the body of the discussion. Scholars such as van Houwelingen (2012), Schuler (2023) and Just, Jr. (2010) have also argued brilliantly, citing relevant biblical texts and patristic attestations, for the historicity of the apostles as the foundational officers for the Church (alongside the prophets) in the 1st century AD (cf. Eph. 2:20; 3:5; I Cor. 15:1-7; *Did.* 15:1). According to this group of researchers, to deny the historicity of the apostles is to deny the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth. Akin et al (2004) also subscribe to the historicity of the ancient apostles. According to their joint research, Akin et al state that the apostles, who transformed the socio-religious landscape of Syro-Palestine and beyond in the 1st century, began to experience gradual death one after another but were replaced by the Bishops, beginning from the 2nd century (*Did.* 15:1, 2). These scholars aptly refer to the primacy of Apostle Peter among the Twelve and point out the later inclusion of James (the brother of Jesus) in the Church’s leadership. Other cerebral authorities (E.g., Adelakun, 2010; Capper, 2016; Draper, 1988) have written, commending the cooperative and lovely communal life of the early apostolic Church in spite of the poverty in the city of Jerusalem, which served as the headquarters of the Church then. This academic enlightenment commends the apostolic band’s communal life, which involved living in a relatively small community, where the members shared a common interest and ideals. Such essays have

been employed as panaceas for mitigating poverty among Christians in Africa in general and specifically in Nigeria among others. These levels of scholarship above are very robust. However, little or no attention has been accorded the early apostles' administration and accountability spirit and how this can help to improve the ecclesiastical system and politics of TACLTN. This is the academic gap this study seeks to fill, and, in turn, the justification for it.

CLARIFICATION OF THE ABBREVIATIONS EMPLOYED IN THE ESSAY

For page constraint, some abbreviations are employed in this essay. Clarifying such abbreviations is important to escape ambiguity in the areas of discussion where they are used in the essay. The abbreviations include TACN, LAWNA, TACLTN and LXX respectively.

TACN: As employed in this study, TACN directly means The Apostolic Church Nigeria. It is a classical Pentecostal denomination in Nigeria.

LAWNA This abbreviation stands for Lagos, Western and Northern Areas; hence LAWNA. It is an acronym coined to capture the geographical coverage of the unit of local churches of The Apostolic Church Nigeria contained in the States and domains so represented in Nigeria. By this acronym, the local churches under LAWNA Territory include the whole of Lagos and all Southwestern and Northern states of Nigeria. The coverage encloses 27 states including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, in Nigeria. The churches in other states outside of this geographical jurisdiction belong to other fields such Igbo Field, Cross River Field, Akwa Ibom Field and others under TACN.

TACLTN: TACLTN means The Apostolic Church LAWNA Territory, Nigeria. As mentioned above, LAWNA Territory is a unit among other geographical units of local assemblies under the Apostolic Church Nigeria.

LXX: Ordinarily speaking, LXX refers to the Roman numeral seventy (70). However, as employed in this work, LXX is used to mean the Septuagint i.e., the Greek Translation of the Old Testament traditionally believed to have been done by some seventy (or seventy-two) Jewish scholars before the Common Era (from the 3rd century BC). This was the text employed for communication and worship by the Jews in the dispersion domiciled outside of Palestine, especially in Egypt, who had started to lose the sense of their mother tongue (i.e., Hebrew) at the time.

THE NOTIONAL CONCEPT OF APOSTLESHIP IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

The term "Apostle" (Gk. *apostolos*; pl. *apostoloi*) emerged in the ancient Greco-Roman world where it was employed for socio-political functions and other duties. The term is derived from the Greek present active indicative ἀποστελλω and the infinitive

ἀποστέλλειν respectively – both meaning “I send” or “to send,” and connoting the idea of “being sent forth.” From this perspective, it had emissarial and delegative connotations. Essentially, it connoted socio-political figure(s) commissioned and sent forth with corresponding order and authority of the commissioning officer to accomplish a specified task. Alexander the Great was considered an “Apostle” because he propagated Hellenism among his conquered territorial peoples. Herodotus employed the term, “Apostle,” twice for “messengers” (1.21; 4:38). It was employed in the LXX to translate the Hebrew *shalal* which emphasized the authorization of the messenger dispatched out on a mission. Yet the LXX and Symmachus had one reference to it each respectively but still with the same meaning as conceived in Herodotus (cf. I Kgs. 14:6; Isa. 8:2) (Orimolade 168-169). In ancient Rome, an “apostle” was a commissioned envoy whose function included the expansion of the frontiers of the imperial Empire. As a messenger, the Apostle represented the interest of his superior officer in a foreign land. A high sense of accountability was required of him.

Prior to the New Testament (NT) times, the term was employed only infrequently in the Greek language. Its usage in classical Greek sense was also very sparse. In the classical period, its usage was more or less confined to seafaring contexts. For instance, it was employed of an admiral of a fleet sent out by the king on special assignment(s). Demosthenes gave a word picturing an *apostolos*; but he employed it to describe a cargo ship designated as “apostolic” sent out with a specific shipment to accomplish a mission (Barnett 45; “Apostle – Apostolos,” *Greek Word Study*, 2024). Although it was characterized by scanty references in the Hellenistic world, the word, “Apostle,” surprisingly, appears about 80 times in the NT materials in the first century - a development that indicates that the popularity of the terminology derived largely from ecclesial perspective. Incidentally, in its singular and plural forms, it occurs 35 times in Pauline corpus, and 34 in Luke-Acts (Agnew, 75).

JESUS’ HISTORIC TWELVE APOSTLES

In the NT materials, apostolic connotation exhibits dual meanings and/or usages; the writers of the NT documents did not employ the usage of *apostolos* the same way (Schuler 3). Its usages point at the historic apostles, and then, later, those designated so by virtue of their services as helpers to those historic apostles in the ancient local churches of the 1st century AD.

The first usage of the word has explicit reference to the historic men who were appointed and commissioned by Christ during his earthly career. This sense of the term limits the meaning of the term to the original Twelve Apostles including Paul in a special way. Biblical passages such as I Cor. 15:8-9 and Eph. 3:8, followed by 2nd century tradition, affirm that the *apostoloi* referred chiefly to the Twelve Apostles including Paul respectively. In the *Epistle by Clement of Rome to the Corinthians* (c. AD 96-100), Paul is

said to be, “together with Peter, an apostle of the highest repute” (Section 47.4). In a saying credited to him, Ignatius of Antioch reportedly made a fundamental claim saying, “I am not issuing orders to you as though I were Peter or Paul, they were Apostles and I am a condemned prisoner” (Orimolade 176-177). The earliest apostolic men, as inscribed in the synoptics’ tradition, included Simon Peter, James and John, who were sons of Zebedee (the duo was surnamed “the Boarnerges,” meaning “sons of thunder” by Jesus). Others included Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon (the Cananite) as well as Judas Iscariot. After Judas’ ignominious death, the remaining Eleven decided by casting lots to select Matthias as his substitute (Matt. 10:2; Mk. 6:30; Luk. 6:13; 9:10; Acts. 1:21, 22). Some of them, such as Peter, James and John among others featured prominently in Acts and other NT records, thus indicating that they played major roles in the formation of the early Church for which reason a whole NT material, Acts of the Apostles, is named after them. The Greek *πράξεις* translated “Acts” signifies their “doings,” “transactions,” and “achievements” (Guthrie 739; Russell 12-14). Other inaugural apostles whose names and activities are not documented in Acts or other NT writings, were, nevertheless, not inactive. Most, if not all of them, according to tradition, took Christ’s kerygma to several frontier lands in Africa, Asia, Europe and others where they were confronted with cruel hardships, severe punishments and, eventually, martyrdom meted out to them by their host communities. In a unique manner, all these foremost apostles possessed some peculiarities:

- (i) They constituted eye-witnesses of Christ’s event on earth. They had been with Jesus from the very beginning starting from his period of John’s baptism, and they continued with him until he was taken up to heaven, having completed his earthly mission objective. Hence, they were characterized with prime authority in the early Church (Acts 1:21, 22; I Cor. 9:1; 15:5-80);
- (ii) They were Twelve in number, symbolic of Israelites’ tribes. They received direct call from Christ Himself. They were not called by the Church or any ecclesiastical delegation, for which reason the early Church recognized their fundamental primacy and authority (Eph. 2:20; 3:5; Gal. 1:1; Acts 9:5-6, 15-16; 26:15-18);
- (iii) They became foundational to the existential life of the Church, and were given supernatural and direct revelation from the Lord (Gal. 1:11-12, 16-19; Eph. 2:20; 3:3-5);and,
- (iv) They were entrusted with missionary task, saddled with great grace to perform miraculous signs (Rom. 1:5, 6; Gal. 2:8; Heb. 2:4; Jn. 14:12).

In the similitude of the way the term “apostle(s)” was understood in the Greco-Roman world, the primeval apostles were human agents called to advance God’s global move through the event of Christ for the sole purpose of reconciling God and man as a

result of which their activities were marked by distinctive miraculous events (cf. Luk. 6:12-16; Gal. 1:1; Acts 26:16; 2:43; 3:1; 4:30; 5:12; 14:3; 15:12; Rom. 15:19; II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4). By their historical primacy and priority, they assumed leadership of the early Church (Acts 15:2; Eph. 2:20; 3:5). They were held in such high honour that an *Apostolic Creed* perhaps employed as Baptismal Confession, which emerged in the 2nd century, was named after them. The *Creed* embodies, with much fidelity, apostolic teaching to which the Church tenaciously held in all its expanding branches. It was as resting on this Creed that the Church was referred to as being “Catholic and Apostolic” (Shelley 54). The earliest apostles established local stations, putting them on proper doctrinal foundation. They also imparted charismatic gifts to the local churches’ leadership and membership through their apostolic, enthusiastic careers (Acts 5:12; 2:43; 8:18; 13:51, 52; II Thess. 3:4, 5; II Cor. 7:16; II Tim. 1:6). The apocalyptic reference to the “Apostles of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:14) might not refer to another set of apostles. Rather, the phrase constitutes another reference to the Twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ. By the phrasal reference, the Apocalypse means to buttress the priority of the twelve classical apostles, attaching eschatological importance to their office. Following their gradual death, the authority exercised by the Twelve Apostles was eventually transferred to the Bishops through the process of Apostolic Succession, developed to unify the Church beginning from the 2nd century (cf. *Didache* 15:1) (Schuler 21; Akin et al 35).

Apart from the technical sense above, the term “Apostle” is also employed in a general, non-technical sense in the NT materials, wherein it has reference to someone, but not Jesus’ original Twelve Apostles, sent forth on a mission (Enns, 628). According to Bultmann (cited by Orimolade 170), the restriction of the apostolic men to the original Twelve is somehow misleading because Paul applied the title to some of his co-workers. This usage of the term also applied to Jesus himself (Heb. 3:1), thus attesting to his earthly ambassadorial role as commissioned by the Father (Toon 70-71; Wright 2020). The general usage of the term does not, however, delimit the personalities so designated; they were not less important. They were aids to the classical apostles as the early Church expanded its frontiers to other centres in managing the contextual emerging local stations. They can only be reckoned with as being secondary and not classical as the original Twelve because they were not Jesus’ earthly event’s eye-witnesses. Paul claimed that some of those so-designated apostles in this secondary sense were in Christ before him, suggesting that such individuals offered distinctive, rewarding services in the earliest local church settings unlike the “false apostles,” who cheapishly paraded themselves as formidable apostles in the same milieu (II Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2). Nonetheless, perceived from its classical understanding, Paul acknowledged the restricted nature of the apostolic office, for which reason he referred to himself as the “abnormally-born” and last in the apostolic listing in I Cor. 15:3-8 (see also Gal. 1:11, 19, 12) (Guthrie 768). Even then, Paul applied the title in a non-technical manner to some of his evangelical team such as Barnabas, Silas, Timothy,

Andronicus, Junias (or female, Junia), Titus, and Epaphroditus respectively (Acts 13:2; 14:4, 14; 9:27; I Thess. 2:6; Rom. 16:7; Philp. 2:25; II Cor. 8:23) (Adeyanju, 2024; Schuler, 2023, 21).

APOSTLESHIP AS A SPECIALIZED OFFICE IN EPH. 4:11

Among others, the letter to the Ephesians explicates Christological and ecclesiological presentations, issuing in the appointment of some ministerial officers aptly bestowed upon the Church for its total enrichment and maturity. The ministerial offices are captured in chap. 4:11-16. About the pericope, Barker & Kohlenberger (1994, 768-69) say, “Paul does not just go on to list the grace-gifts, however, but only those who receive them...those...appointed to leadership...” Fleming (2005, 532) avers that, “The grace-gifts mentioned in the passage are God’s gift-of-men to help build His Church.” Hale (2007, 740), followed by Anderson (2024), describes “the leadership positions in the text, their appointment by Christ, and the differential they served from the general spiritual gifts itemized in I Cor. 12 and Rom. 12:6-8. van Wyk (2018) adds, by saying, “The passage focuses on the officers mentioned therein and their importance in the early Church.” Wright (2020) also views that, “To understand what makes a glorious church, one must understand the gifts of men God gave to the church through Jesus Christ.” The quotations above affirm Christ’s gift of men to the Church, and that the men so designated into the offices, especially *tous apostolous* (the apostles), constitute specialized offices although they are different from the classical apostles enunciated above already. Therefore, the specialized *apostoloi* in Eph. 4:11, though not part of Jesus’ earthly careers’ eye-witnesses, were God’s plan for the maturation of the Church. Others include the prophets (*tous prophetas*), evangelists (*touseuangelistas*), pastors and teachers (*tous poimenaskaididaskalous*).

Cessationists (E.g., Akin et al 34-35; Mayhue 263; Resane, 2022) are of the opinion that the passage’s ministerial officers only occur with regards to the Ephesian Elders (cf. Acts 20:17-35). They, therefore, inferred that the ministerial offices had only happened in the historical past having nothing to do with the modern-day Church. But such line of thought seems to be elusive of the fact that the same Paul, who gave insights regarding the gifts of men in Eph. 4:11 equally ordained elders for local churches, including the Ephesians in the historical past (cf. Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5). The point is, If eldership is contextual to the contemporary Church, why not apostleship (and other ministerial offices) listed out in Eph. 4:11? This paper sides with the continuation theory regarding apostleship and other charismatic gifts (cf. Hagin 1975; Wagner 1979). To argue that the ministerial offices (of Eph. 4:11) only refer to the historical past, and that they are not meant for the contemporary Church, is to deny the veracity of the whole biblical tradition, which span many centuries of historical distance from the contemporary readers, for which reason its many tenses are cast in the past (Abogunrin, 1988, 129; cited by Adeyanju & Kaduna 265). Regarding the continuation of apostleship (and prophets), how do the cessationists interpret

Eph. 2:20 and 3:5? According to the passage, all are derived from the ascended Christ; they neither erratic or abnormal. Hence, while not referring to the classical apostles per se, the *apostoloi* in question here are in a specialized, ministerial and leadership class. They labour with other officers to grow the Church to maturity. By their priority on the list, the apostles govern the Body of Christ through their spiritual significance, authority, character and charismatic abilities (Eph. 2:20; 3:5) (Harpur, 1436; Anderson, 2024; Hempenius, 2020).

A SURVEY OF THE PROVENANCE OF ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The document under consideration was initially referred to as “Acts,” “Gospel of the Holy Ghost,” and the “Gospel of the Resurrection.” However, the title, “Acts of the Apostles,” was acknowledged from the 2nd century. The historical gap between the NT writings and the 21st century readers makes all of the NT’s materials belong to antiquity, spanning a period of about 2,000 years. They all contribute to showcasing the different historical facets and events of the early Church especially during the apostolic dispensation. But, in a special way, Acts of the Apostles (πραξειςΑποστολων) (hereafter, referred to simply as “Acts”) is naturally classified as NT’s historical material. It bridges the historical gap between the career of Jesus of Nazareth and the documentation of the Epistles (Han, 1). Standing between these epochal issues, Acts is particularly historical because it has the events regarding the take-off, growth and expansion of the early Church. Acts provides insight into the earliest Church’s organization and structure, its approaching of resolving controversies, the role of the apostles, bishops/elders and deacons as well as the spiritual life of the Church. Major heroes included in Acts are Peter, John, Stephen, Philip, James, Barnabas and eventually Paul – through whom the Spirit worked to achieve God’s purpose.

The book can be referred to as a history of the early start of the Christian Church, covering about the first 30 years of its existential life. In it are found key epochal events leading to the Church expansion from Jerusalem to major centres such as Samaria, Antioch, Ephesus and to other major cities in the ancient Mediterranean world until its arrival in Rome, the centre of the imperial world. The Greek word, *praxis*, translated “Acts” was often employed in early Christian literature to describe the great deeds of heroic figures in the ancient past. Thus, “Acts” was the continuation of what Jesus began to do and teach through the apostles, who held prime place in the Church’s scheme of things, starting from its take-off in Jerusalem and in other places (1:1-3; cf. Luk. 1:1-4). It reported the eagerness of the one-time-scarred Body of Christians originally situated in Jerusalem but whose evangelical movement got transmitted to Rome, the seat of the Emperor. Therefore, the record of Acts was partly a fulfilment of the world evangelization agenda issued to the original disciples by Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8) (Swindoll 2024).

Contemporary scholarship has always grouped together the duo of Luke and Acts and designated them Luke-Acts and ascribing their authorship to Luke. This arrangement is pedestalled on certain reasons. Firstly, Acts is believed to be the continuation of Luke’s

gospel because both materials were properly addressed to the same figure, Theophilus (Acts 1:1-3; Luk. 1:1-4). Moreover, medical terms are common to the two materials (cf. Luk. 4:38, 40; 5:31; 6:17; 7:2; 9:11; Acts 3:11; 5:15; 9:37; 28:8) – medical terms, which were contemporaneously identical with those employed by ancient medical writers (E.g., Hippocrates, Arctaeus, Galen, and Discorides). Dissenting voice(s) against their Lucan authorship remains very weak. The “We” section of Acts particularly corroborate Lucan authorship; the section portends the author was a co-traveller with Apostle Paul in his missionary endeavours (cf. 16:10, 13, 16; 20:6, 13-15; 21:1-8; 27:1-5, 7-8, 15-16, 18-20, 26-27, 29, 37; 28:10-14). This submission is further supported by Paul’s own claims in Col. 4:14 and Philem. 24. The internal evidence has external evidential backing, with the earliest surviving witnesses, recognizing Lucan authorship including the Muratorian Fragment (c. AD 170), the writings of Irenaeus (c. AD 180) and the *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* (2nd half of the 2nd century). Further attestations also derived from Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea among others. Luke’s literary Greek singled him out and are more pronounced in his work than elsewhere in the NT, thus sharing affinity with great historians and writers of the time such as Josephus, Plutarch, Lucian, etc. Most possibly, Acts’ narratives were concluded before the fall of Jerusalem (c. AD 70). The document was then likely authored in Rome (c. AD 60s) (Taylor, 12). Nonetheless, the writer did not forget to add the factors that enabled the quick spread of the Church; these included an atmosphere of love and togetherness, zealous witnessing, consistent prayer life as well as the administrative accountability of the apostolic leadership.

THE CONNOTATION OF THE PHRASE, “LAID AT THE APOSTLES’ FEET” IN ACTS

Acts teaches the significant priority of the earliest apostles; they held a prime place in the scheme of things in the early Church. As Wagner (1994, 42) affirms, an Apostle in the early Church was a person who assumed and exercised general leadership over a number of churches with an extraordinary authority in spiritual matters that was spontaneously recognized and appreciated by those churches. It is, therefore, pertinent to unravel the significance of the social phrase, “Laid at the Apostles’ feet” (...ἐτίθουν παρά τούς ποδας των ἀποστόλων) employed in connection with the early apostolic leaders. The credential significance of the phrase is underscored by its three consecutive occurrences in Acts (4:35, 37 and 5:2 respectively). The phrase ranks among figurative expressions in the biblical tradition because phrases connected to human feet replete the biblical pages.

For example, to “cover the feet” is synonymous with obeying the call of nature (I Sam. 24:3); to “speak with the feet” is expressive of the abusive and obscene gesticulation among oriental people, wherein hands, eyes and feet expressed much without the use of words (Prov. 6:13). To “sit at the feet” means to occupy the place of a learner (Deut. 33:3; Luk. 10:39; Acts. 22:3). It also referred to the situation of vanquished enemies, who

submitted to being trodden upon by the conqueror(cf. Josh. 10:24; Psalms 8:6; 110:1; cf. Isaiah 49:23). James (2:3) warned against undue humiliation of the poor by asking them to take inferior place “at the feet” of the richer members of the congregation. At the point of his death, Jacob gathered “up his feet” into the bed meaning that he used his bed as a couch while delivering his charge to his sons (Genesis 49:33). In John 13, Jesus washed his “disciples’ feet” and explained to them the necessity of humble disposition in Christian service (van der Walt, 25; Jatau, 1).

The phrase, “Laid at the apostles’ feet,” appears to be uniquely present in Acts alone; it does not enjoy parallelism in other biblical texts. An anonymous writer cited Ellicott as stating that, “The words are a vivid picture of one phase of eastern life – when gifts or offerings are made to a king, or priest, or teacher, they are not placed in their hands, but at his feet.” Ellicott’s position, if quoted right, seems to indicate that the surrendered gifts belonged to the receiver(s). However, the communal context of the early Jerusalem Church seems to argue against Ellicott’s submission. For example, Acts 2:44 and 45 relate, “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (cf. Acts 4:32, 34, 37; 5:2). The action expressed in the phrase refers to a situation whereby by person(s) put the proceeds of what they sold at someone else’s feet, and obviously, “at the Apostles’ feet.” Acts 4:35 indicated that the phrasal expression is a significant act, suggesting that the early Church’s members gave the apostles the entire control over the bestowal of donations made among them (cf. Psalms 8:6; cf. I Corinthians 15:27). Accordingly, the action implied by the phrase, “Laid at the apostles’ feet,” suggests that the members were submitting their token of economic relief packages to the apostles as trustees and dispensers of the Church’s funds. This fact is underscored by the use of *παρά* which can be translated, “By the side of” as employed in other Acts’ passages (cf. Acts 4: 37 and 5:2) respectively.

Inferentially, the earliest worshippers explicitly adhered to the Spirit-enabled ecumenical atmosphere in their midst; a radically new gospel-worldview had resulted in such free giving (Acts 2:44). The community had been born of God’s Spirit, who applied to their hearts the atoning efficacy of the event of Christ. Hence, the donors freely acted for the wellbeing of the whole community through their bountiful donations albeit they were nameless. At the backdrop of the situation was the fact that the city of Jerusalem, the earliest Church’s headquarters, was not that economically buoyant (Galatians 2:10; I Corinthians 1:26; Acts 11:27-30). Its economy was only connected to the existence of the temple and its many rituals. Donors were, therefore, necessary to keep the social life of the Church alive. Only Barnabas’ name was acknowledged among such public-spirited individuals in the community (Acts 4:36, 37). The couple – Ananias & Sapphira – also attempted such noble act but theirs was characterized by duplicity, “keeping back part of the proceeds,” for which they met their Waterloo (Acts 5:1-11). The community’s internal philanthropists cheerfully made their donation, laying the donated packages “at the apostles’ feet.” By their noble and

altruistic acts, they acknowledged the administrative leadership of the apostolic leaders in the setting. That is, the donor-members saw their apostolic leaders as trustworthy men, acting diligently and faithfully to manage the donated booties properly in a manner that the distribution would get to all the economically-vulnerable of about 8, 000 members of the fold. Passages such as Acts 2:44; 4:32, 34, 37 indicate that the apostles' coordinated the donated materials well, distributing them to all the concerned members accordingly (6:1-4; 11:27-30). Invariably, the earliest apostolic leaders were not just people of charisma but also persons of proven character and integrity.

APOSTLESHIP AND APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATION IN TACLTN

As we have seen above, this article's major subject matter, "Laid at the apostles' feet," presupposes apostolic administration and accountability in the early Church. How does this subject matter relate to TACLTN a denomination that operates its Church government through officers such as "the Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, Elders, Deacons and Deaconesses (TACN Tenet No. 9), and its denominational objective is to, "Build the Church of Jesus Christ on the Word of God and first century Apostolic doctrinal heritage"? In the denomination, the apostles manage and coordinate all other officers listed out in Tenet No. 9 above. The idea is supposedly derived from the apostolic practice in the earliest Church where the inaugural apostles took on major on leading roles (Acts 1:2, 26; 2:43; 4:33, 36; 5:12, 29; 6:2-6; 8:14; etc.). In this section, the paper relates an overview of the historical emergence of TACN and also discusses the implication of the earliest Church leadership marked by accountability, wrapped up in the saying, "laid at the apostles' feet" for TACLTN.

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE EMERGENCE OF TACN

The original founders of what is referred to as TACN today were members of mission Churches in Nigeria. They descended originally from St. Saviour's (Anglican) Church, Italupe, Ijebu-Ode (now in Ogun State, Nigeria). By their charismatic outlook from the very beginning, the group can be described as the spiritual parent of all other Pentecostal movements in the nation (Barrett, 1982; cited by Fatokun, 1, 11). The original members began as a Prayer Movement (i.e., *Egbe Aladura*) between 1916-1918. Initially, they were known by names such as Diamond Society and Precious Stone Society. In 1923, the Movement later became aligned with American Faith Tabernacle Congregation (FTC) headquartered in Philadelphia (US) because they (i.e., Precious Stone Society and FTC) shared common doctrinal heritages some of which include Divine Healing, Holiness & Sanctification, and Prayer among others. With this affiliation, Precious Stone Society (PSS) became known as FTC, Nigeria. Under FTC, Nigeria, there was an outbreak of a historic Revival in 1930 in Ilesa (in the present day, Osun State) – a Revival characterized by

undeniable and outstanding miraculous signs, wonders and conversion of souls. The Revival attendees came from several countries in the West Africa sub-region aside those who came from different regions in the colonized territory now called Nigeria then. The fallout of the Revival led to the persecution and vilification of the leaders of FTC, Nigeria. Some of them were jailed and treated with all kinds of disdain by those disavowed to the religious development (Adegboyega, 33-37).

Eventually, this incident led the leaders of FTC, Nigeria to seek and perfect another affiliation with The Apostolic Church (TAC) Great Britain because the latter shared their doctrinal positions and practices. As a denomination, TAC had been a religious movement in Great Britain since 1916. It was an offshoot of the famous 1904-1905 Welsh Revival brought about through Evangelist Evans Roberts; its headquarters was localized in Penygroes, Llanelli, South Wales, United Kingdom (UK). Through this second affiliation, the nomenclature, TAC, was adopted as a replacement to FTC (Nigeria) in 1931; the ratification and signing of all formal documents were undertaken on November 15, 1931. The first three visiting leaders from TAC Great Britain included Pastors Daniel Powell Williams, Andrew Turnbull and Jones Williams. These were the first International President, first International Vice-president and International Prophet/Evangelist respectively. These UK leaders ordained the first seven (07) indigenous African leaders of TAC (Nigeria) into the pastoral office in the Church's Headquarters in Lagos. The ordinands included J. B. Shadare (the National Leader under the defunct FTC, Nigeria in Ijebu Ode), D. O. Odubanjo (the Missionary Correspondent/National Secretary), John Aluko Babatope (Ilesa), I. B. Akinyele, who later assumed kingship as Olubadan of Ibadan), S. A. Mensah (Kaduna), E. G. L. Macaulay (Zaria), and S. G. Adegboyega (Ebute Metta, Lagos) respectively. TAC strongly believes in the Church's five-fold administrative offices as stated in Eph. 4:11 (cf. 2:20), hence the first set of Pastors were also later called and ordained into the apostolic office (or apostleship) in 1933 through prophetic injunction. As the evangelical and Church planting activities increased, four major administrative centres in Lagos, Ilesa, Zaria and Calabar, were initially created for managerial convenience (1933) (Fatokun, 2-7). Through the prophetic ministration of the British, Pastor Noah Evans, the centres were formally regarded as Administrative Centres in 1936. In 1940, two new centres were carved out: (i) Ibo Area, carved out from old Calabar Area; and (ii) Kabba Area from the old Ilesa Area respectively.

The ensued Divine Healing controversy between some notable TAC's Nigerian leaders such as Pastors D. O. Odubanjo, I. B. Akinyele and J. A. Babalola (a Divisional Evangelist then) and the resident European missionaries, who were taking quinine for health purposes, resulted in a major schism. The internal conflict happened on February 14, 1940. The TAC's Nigerian leaders above were disavowed to complete non-taking of medicine (or the likes) for health purposes. Hence, by 1943, a splinter group came up whose name later became known as Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) seceded away from TAC in

Nigeria. Not bogged down by the schismatic development, TACN forged on; by 1970, it had expanded to cover major regions in Nigeria, whereof Nigeria General Council (NGC) was formulated by the resident European missionaries. Later, the formation of Federal and Western/Northern Areas Council (FAWNAC) came up for the purpose of unifying Nigeria's administrative centres, with Pastor S. G. Adegboyega, one of the first seven ordained apostles, appointed as the maiden chairman of the National Council. On January 1, 1972, Lagos, Western and Northern Areas, acronymed LAWNA, was created as the first administrative Territory of TACN following an earlier prophetic injunction through Pastor S. O. Soetan on August 3, 1969. Again, S. G. Adegboyega assumed the highest position as the first chair of TACN LAWNA Territory. The Territory began its operational activities with four (04) Administrative Centres – these were Lagos, Ilesha, Zaria and Kabba respectively. Over the years, the four major Centres have given birth to many Areas totalling about 200 as at 2023 (“Annals of Historic Events,” TACN Annual Diary, 2024).

PRIMACY OF APOSTLESHIP IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS IN TACN LAWNA TERRITORY

From the perspective of Acts (and the Epistles), it is conspicuous that the old apostles constituted the consummate administrative officers in the early Church (cf. Acts 1:2, 26; 2:37; I Cor. 7:1; 12:1). The phrase, “Laid at the Apostles’ Feet,” underscores their authority as the Church began in Jerusalem (c.AD 35). They governed on all matters regarding propriety including financial administration. In TACLTN, apostolic office holds similar prime place because the founding fathers of the denomination claimed that the Church of is the Church of the Apostles, and that the Church takes after the earliest Church as presented in Acts.

Accordingly, TACLTN's many local stations, otherwise known as Assemblies, grouped together as Areas, are headed by Apostles, called Area Superintendents. An Area Superintendent governs the Area affairs through the Area Council, who are themselves Apostles plus the Area Prophet. By comparison, an Area in TACN organizational structure is equivalent to a Diocese in Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion as well as a District Church Council (DCC) in ECWA among others. An Area comprises a group of Districts while the latter comprises a number of Assemblies brought together in a common environment for smooth administration. As used here, a District is equivalent to a Local Church Council in ECWA. An Assembly is a local parish of TACN. The administrative subset after Area is District, administered by Apostles. A District is managed by a District Apostle. Apostles hold viable place in TACLTN and, in turn, TACN. They are critical stakeholders and members of the categories of Councils directing the affairs of the denominations. Each local Assembly is administered by Pastors but under the supervision of the District Apostles. All doctrinal, administrative cum financial issues, end on the table of the apostles.

IMPLICATION OF THE EARLIEST CHURCH'S NOTION – “LAID AT THE APOSTLES' FEET” FOR TACLTN

By donating their treasured material resources “at the Apostles’ feet,” the earliest Christians acknowledged the administrative and accountable values inherent in their apostolic leaders, who were saddled with open, accountable and transparent leadership. This approach of leadership should be imitable to TACLTN. By implication, TACLTN’s members should be availed of willing and free acceptance of their apostolic leaders without any sense of coercion. The acceptance of their leaders should be natural as it happened in the early Church. The old apostolic administration also recognized, incorporated and managed all men and women from different nationalities, ethnic tribes and social leanings without any form of discrimination. They were all detribalized men. Probity, displayed through fairness and decorum, was their guiding rule. Both the Hebrew and Hellenist converts could access the same and equal material resources in their social setting. Hence, they were freely accepted by their followers. They were trustworthy and transparent while discharging their official and administrative duties in doctrinal practices and attendance to day-to-day occurrences. The congregation saw the nexus between their leaders’ faith on the one hand and their practical and communal social concerns on the other hand (cf. 2:42-47; 4:32-36; 6:1; 11:27-30; 12:1-11). This administrative commends itself to TACLTN. Interestingly, the present R.A.I.S.E. Agenda enacted by the Vice President of TACN and 6th Chairman of TACLTN, Pastor (Dr) S. G. O. Uyeh, JP, is out to promote the laudable administrative and accountable ideals of the early Church apostles. The “RAISE Agenda” is an acronym collocated and appropriated to drive the leadership objective of Pastor Uyeh upon his assumption of office in 2023. In its collocational form:

R stands for “Remove filthiness”;

A for “Admit holiness”;

I for “Institute Apostolic principles and practice”;

S for “Strengthen the weak;” and

E for “Elevate the true gospel of Christ.”

Concerning the RAISE Agenda, Uyeh says, “For this administration, the Lord has laid a burden in my heart to RAISE the standard of the old Apostolic Christianity and identity...” (*Vanguard Newspaper*; December 03, 2023). This is an exciting administrative roadmap, geared at enabling TACLTN display solid and unbiased administration that can inspire and motivate members towards common action as it was obtainable in the early Church. In a way of promising to fulfil these aspirations, Uyeh again says, “Under my watch there will be no room for tribalism, nepotism, clannishness and materialism. These vices are not what the early Church was known for...” (*Church Times*, December 05, 2023. See also *New Telegraph* December 10, 2023). A concrete realization of this idealistic development would involve TACLTN to be in touch with the social life of the early Church. The idealistic development can only be realized through the presence and actions of

apostolic men of exemplary leadership qualities and integrity. Hence, all TACLTN's apostles should rally round this denominational and Christian religious objective to ensure its realization. In administrative system and upholding orthodox practices, TACLTN leadership should continue to prioritize communal welfare package. This should not just get concluded at the payment of workers' wages and emoluments alone but also in the distribution of relief packages for members affected in situations of terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, ethno-religious war, and ecological issues should continue to receive attention. These altruistic actions should also necessarily trickle down to the socio-economic downtrodden individuals such as the orphans, widows and other allied vulnerable groups. Fairness should continue to be a maxim in all the activities of the Church, including clerical and other official ordination issues.

CONCLUSION

In this study, it is clear that the ancient apostles had special calling; they were specially appointed to serve and strengthen the Body of Christ in the early Church. In spite of their human limitations, they displayed unassailable administrative qualities; they were superb in social accountability. They not only heralded Jesus' event and made great converts to God's kingdom, they equally managed well the socio-economic relief packages made available to their poor members. This essay recommends that the present day TACLTN should imbibe such accountable leadership spirit so as to give more room for accountability, transparency and trustworthiness in every unit of the denomination's life, system, and politics.

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