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apostle (traditional) (Gk *ἀπόστολος*)

The standard Gk word for an ambassador or messenger (denoting one who is sent (Gk *ἀποστέλλω*, 'I send'), used in the early Church to designate the function and title of certain leaders (1 Cor. 12: 28), esp. missionaries. Christ himself could occasionally be designated an 'apostle' (Heb. 3: 1), although the Gospels never use this term of him despite frequent references to his being 'sent' (cf. Mt. 10: 40; 15: 24; Lk. 4: 43; Jn 3: 17; 20: 21). Paul prominently claimed the title for himself (Rom. 1: 1, Gal. 1: 1, etc.) on the basis of a commission from the Risen Christ, and used it of others (e.g. Rom. 16: 7), incl. James the Lord's brother (Gal. 1: 19). It is used, most frequently by Luke, of the twelve disciples whose names are recorded with slight variations in Mk 3: 14–19, Mt. 10: 2–4, Lk. 6: 13–16. The later restriction of the title to the twelve (cf. Rev. 21: 14) was apparently unknown to Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 5 with 15: 7), or at least resisted by him. It was popularized by Luke, who sees the election of Matthias (Acts 1: 15–26) as the reconstitution of an apostolic twelve after the defection and death of Judas Iscariot. The distinction was soon relativized; Eusebius includes a 'large number' as well as the twelve (*HE* I.12); in the E. later tradition made the 70 disciples (cf. Lk. 10: 1, 17) 'apostles of the Seventy'. In modern (esp. Catholic) usage the term is sometimes applied to the leader of the first Christian mission to a country, e.g. to Patrick, the 'apostle of Ireland', and Cyril and Methodius, the 'apostles of the Slavs' (in Orthodox use, the term *ισαπόστολος* ['equal to the apostles'] is used also of sovereigns who converted with their people, e.g., Constantine or Vladimir); the term 'apostolate' can denote a lay or religious organization engaged in service or mission to the world. Catholic, Orthodox, and some other church communities hold that grace and authority were entrusted by Jesus to the twelve apostles and to the line of their appointed successors (see APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION; EPISCOPACY). Acc. to later tradition, all twelve apostles, except John, were also martyrs.

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