

4-1-2002

Apostles for Social Transformation

C. Peter Wagner

Wagner Leadership Institute

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/jascg>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wagner, C. P. (2002). Apostles for Social Transformation. *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, 13(2), 25-36. Retrieved from <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/jascg/vol13/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of the American Society for Church Growth by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

Apostles for Social Transformation
C. Peter Wagner

I believe that recognizing and affirming territorial apostles will be a major step in tuning in to what God wants to do in the decade of the 2000s. Right next to that will be recognizing and affirming marketplace apostles. Here I want to explain, as best I can, why this kind of apostolic leadership is necessary if our dreams for social transformation are going to come true.

Our Goal: Social Transformation

During the 1990's the idea that the kingdom of God is not confined to the four walls of the local church began to take hold strongly among Christian leaders. We began to take our prayer, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" more seriously than we had in the past. We believed that not only did God desire to save the lost and bring them into our churches, but that He also desired to change the world we live in for the better.

We began to talk about "city taking" and "city reaching" and "community transformation." But gradually, toward the end of the decade, "social transformation" seemed to be the most satisfactory way of expressing our outreach goal. The renowned Transformations video, produced by George Otis Jr.'s Sentinel Group, helped sharpen our thinking. "Social transformation" includes all of the other terms, but it is broader. It encompasses spiritual transformation (both church growth and public morality), economic transformation, educational transformation, and governmental transformation. This can be applied to neighborhoods, cities, regions, and nations. The most manageable unit of them all is still probably the city, so I will focus on city transfor-

Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, Spring 2002

mation in this article.

Our Premise: Territorial Apostles

The major purpose of this article is to affirm that there are individuals today, just as there were in biblical times, who have been given the gift and office of apostle. This implies that, among other things, they have been entrusted with an extraordinary amount of spiritual authority in the body of Christ, but this authority only functions under divine anointing when it is exercised within the apostle's God-assigned sphere or spheres. Knowing this highlights the importance of understanding apostolic spheres as much as possible. One of the spheres in which some apostles serve the body of Christ is territorial, so it is proper to surmise that we have such a thing as "territorial apostles" among us.

Paul

We do have some rather straightforward biblical examples of territorial spheres. Paul, for instance, suggests to the Corinthians that he does not consider himself an apostle to the whole world or to the whole body of Christ. "We, however," he says, "will not boast ["boast" refers to boasting about apostolic authority as we see a few verses earlier (2 Cor. 10:8)] beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you" (2 Cor. 10:13). Corinth was a city in the Roman province of Achaia. Other provinces which we know were included in Paul's apostolic sphere of authority were Macedonia, Asia, and Galatia. Notice, as I have said before, that Paul's sphere would not include places like Alexandria or Jerusalem or Rome or any number of other cities or provinces where churches had by then been planted.

Titus

Titus, a member of Paul's apostolic team, operated as an apostle in the territory of Crete. Paul writes to him, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you (Titus 1:5). But Titus might well have had other territorial spheres as well. His name is frequently mentioned in connection with Corinth. Paul had sent him there to trouble shoot, and then he writes back to them from Philippi, saying,

Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, Spring 2002

“Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Cor. 7:6). Paul’s obvious relief suggests that Titus probably did some fruitful apostolic work in Corinth. There is also a strong hint in Paul’s last epistle that another of Titus’ territorial spheres could have been Dalmatia (modern Yugoslavia) (see 2 Tim. 4:9).

Peter

Likewise, Peter lists what are undoubtedly his own major territorial jurisdictions when he writes 1 Peter. He begins the letter: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). It is interesting to observe that Peter doesn’t mention Achaia or Macedonia, two of Paul’s spheres.

Cultural Spheres

Just as interesting, however, is the fact that Peter does mention the other two of Paul’s provinces, Galatia and Asia. This could lead us to deduce that within territorial spheres there can also be cultural spheres. Look at the words in Peter’s greeting: “to the pilgrims of the Dispersion.” This means that his epistle is directed specifically, not to the Gentiles, but to the Diaspora Jews who were located in the five provinces he mentions. Paul, who was an apostle to the uncircumcision, was assigned to the Gentiles who lived in Galatia and Asia. Peter, who was an apostle to the circumcision, was assigned to the Jews who lived in the same provinces.

City Transformation

With this in mind, let’s take a look at the state of affairs in regard to our efforts across America toward city transformation.

The widespread interest in city transformation began in 1990 with the publication of John Dawson’s bestseller, *Taking our Cities for God* (Creation House). During the decade of the 1990s virtually every major city in America launched a city transformation project of one kind or another. Some of the finest of the nation’s Christian leadership was involved upfront. A quality library emerged with authors such as Francis Frangipane and Ed Silvano and George Otis, Jr. and Jack Dennison and Jack Hayford and Ted Haggard and Frank Damazio and many others joining in to help point the way. Mission America also launched a major nationwide project aimed at city transformation.

Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, Spring 2002

It looked to many of us as if the 1990s would see tangible answers to the prayer “Thy kingdom come” in city after city. But it didn’t happen. In fact, after ten years of intense effort, it would be difficult to pinpoint cities or communities in America that have been transformed (past tense) as a result of proactive, strategic planning. One result of this is that we seem to be experiencing an epidemic of transformation fatigue. Some are throwing up their hands in despair.

Persevering Leadership

Our front line researcher for social transformation is George Otis, Jr., and a major vehicle for his reports are documentary videos. His first one, *Transformations*, has sparked powerful movements for changing society in many parts of the world. In that video he reports on four cities in various stages of transformation, with one of them, Almolonga, Guatemala, unquestionably deserving to be classified as “transformed” in the past tense, in the sense that it likely would be so described by a disinterested sociologist.

One of George Otis’ extremely useful discoveries was a list of five commonalities of cities experiencing significant stages of transformation. They are persevering leadership; fervent, united prayer; social reconciliation; public power encounters; and diagnostic research (spiritual mapping). The first two were common to all the cities researched and the last three were common to 90 percent. I want to focus here on the first commonality, persevering leadership, in an attempt to show that territorial apostles are, at least in my mind, essential for successful, proactive city transformation.

Theological Compass Points

The accelerated and widespread efforts toward city transformation in the 1990s surfaced what I would consider three theological compass points which now mold our thinking about the way we develop strategies for our cities. Each one, however, carries an important “however.”

Unity of the body of Christ is a prerequisite for social transformation. However, we have also discovered that not any unity at all will do. We can end up with either functional unity or dysfunctional unity. The church of the city or region is spiritually one church with multiple congregations. However, the idea of the city church can

be unwisely applied, precipitating debilitating egalitarianism.

The foundation of the church is apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). However, this applies to city transformation in two dimensions: apostles of the nuclear church and apostles of the extended church or marketplace.

Apostles, Not Pastors, Are the Gatekeepers

City transformation will rise or fall on persevering leadership. This pivotal phrase, which I have italicized, combines verbiage from my two friends, John Maxwell and George Otis, Jr.

If this is true, a central question becomes: Who, then, are the God-appointed leaders or “spiritual gatekeepers” of the city?

I am afraid that we reached a misguided answer to this question in the 1990s. Our assumption then was that the local church pastors were the spiritual gatekeepers of the city. I even carried this questionable idea into my book *Apostles of the City* (Wagner Publications), which was released in 2000.

One reason why many agreed with this conclusion in the 1990s is that back then we were only beginning to learn about apostles. We knew there was a church of the city all right, but we were not mature enough to understand that the God-given foundation of that church is apostles and prophets (see Eph. 2:20). Nor was the governmental order clear to us: “First apostles, second prophets, third teachers...” (1 Cor. 12:28). We were actually getting it backward! Since most pastors who preach weekly sermons function also as teachers, they fit quite well into the third category. Biblically, 1 Corinthians 12:28 shows that the true spiritual gatekeepers of the city are apostles, not pastors (or teachers). Territorial apostles are the ones who most likely will provide the persevering leadership that is required for city transformation.

Weaknesses of the Pastoral Approach

Not only is it unbiblical to assume that pastors are the spiritual gatekeepers of the city, but this concept has not worked well in practice. Our disappointing experiences during the decade of the 1990s has turned up three practical weaknesses to the pastoral approach:

Misapplying the valid concept of the city church. The problem came when once we discovered that the church of the city was one church with multiple congregations,

Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, Spring 2002

we then made the mistake to assume that all local church pastors were, ipso facto, "co-pastors" of the city church. This meant that the losers had just as much to say about what to do and when as the winners. It succeeded in stonewalling the recognition of true leadership.

The Billy Graham committee model. For over 40 years, the most effective model for accomplishing a true city-wide inter-church project was the Billy Graham committee. It worked for two reasons: it had strong leadership and it had a united vision. But both the top leadership and the vision were provided by an agency located outside of the city. The city pastors functioned basically, not as the leaders but as the supporting cast for the leader who would come to their city for a week or so. This worked well for one event, but it does not work for city transformation. For city transformation a switch is needed from outside leadership to inside leadership, from event-orientation to process-orientation, and from administrative and diplomatic leaders to risk-taking leaders.

The pastors' prayer summits. In city after city the most appealing way to begin the process of city transformation seemed to be the pastors' prayer summit, originally designed by Joe Aldrich of Portland, Oregon. The premise was that if we only could get the pastors of the city praying together, God would then respond with city transformation. That hope never fully materialized for two reasons: (1) no one was allowed to come to present an agenda (such as city transformation) to the group, and (2) the focus was devotional and relational, but, by design, not task-oriented. The result was that we did see a great deal of united prayer, but without united vision.

Functional and Dysfunctional Unity

No one whom I know would disagree with the premise that unity of the body of Christ is a divine prerequisite for city transformation. But not all have agreed on the form that this unity should take.

I now see the difference between two forms of unity that I did not see in the 1990s:

Pastoral unity. Pastoral unity is mercy-motivated, rela-

tional, politically correct, polite, and peaceful
 Apostolic unity. Apostolic unity is task-oriented, vision-
 ary, aggressive, warlike, and often abrasive.

One of the major differences between the two is that in the paradigm of pastoral unity, unity can, and frequently does, become an end in itself. In the paradigm of apostolic unity, unity is only a means toward a higher end which is the task at hand. Apostles will recognize that the perceived need for pastors to build personal relationships across unfamiliar social, racial, denominational, cultural, and church-size lines is good, but it should not be regarded as a prerequisite for social transformation. Apostles also know that a workable process of reaching the whole city does not require one hundred percent of the churches, nor, in many cases even a majority of them.

Apostolic Unity

While those who lean toward pastoral unity can find some supporting scriptures, apostles will focus on texts such as Jesus prayer in John 17 where He prays, "that they all may be one, as You, Father are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (Jn. 17:21). Unity is not the end, world evangelization is the end and whatever kind of unity ends up helping implement world evangelization is the kind that Jesus was praying for. Jesus actually said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Mt. 10:34).

This concept seems to play out fairly consistently in the history of the church. The major movements of God throughout history generally did not produce unity in the body of Christ, but rather they precipitated serious division. Take, for example, the Reformation with Martin Luther or the Methodists with John Wesley or the Presbyterians with John Knox or the Salvation Army with William Booth or the Azusa Street revival which initiated worldwide Pentecostalism. All of the above were apostolic-type movements.

The cities high on the scale of transformation which George Otis has researched rarely, if ever, began their process only after a successful effort at unifying the churches of their region. Those who became persevering leaders of their cities more often than not first provoked division, as apostolic leaders are prone to do.

Even though they did not begin this way, one of the outcomes of these movements of God was usually unity. However,

Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, Spring 2002

it was not typically a pastoral-type of unity. The resulting unity was usually shaped into a new wineskin, much to the consternation of those remaining in the old wineskins.

Hidden Costs of Pastoral Unity

The pastoral mindset takes comfort in scriptures like “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps. 133:1). They like to meet together, eat together, pray together, confess their sins to each other, exchange pulpits, and love each other. These relationships may seem so much like the fruit of the Spirit that they can gradually acquire an aurora of shekinah glory and when that happens, meeting together can become something that must be preserved, whatever the cost.

One of the hidden costs of preserving this kind of pastoral gathering is avoiding whatever could potentially be divisive. This inexorably requires the bonding of the group to be geared to the least common denominator. Consequently, we commonly see groups of pastors who are traditional, white, middle-class, Republican, denominational evangelicals. They would like to think that they represent the whole city, but most frequently they don’t. Their leadership is typically consensus-building and maintenance-oriented. The chief duty of the leaders is to preserve the status quo in the most stimulating way possible!

Invisible Walls of Division

Ironically, such groups of city leaders in which, to use a George Otis phrase, “courtesy trumps conviction,” can unwittingly produce division. Rarely do these groups attract the active participation of the most creative and influential Christian leaders of the city. Some show up at first, motivated perhaps by a guilty conscience and a feeling of obligation. But soon they gradually self-exclude from the group. They are not driven out they draw themselves out. They are repeatedly invited back, but they claim that they do not have the time, despite the fact that members of hardly any other profession in the United States dispose of more personal discretionary time than do pastors. The deep down issue is not time; it is really priority.

Who, exactly, are those who have tended to exclude themselves from citywide pastoral gatherings? There are at least six kinds of leaders who quite frequently turn out to have higher priorities:

Vision-driven pastors. Most of them quickly become restless with patching up old wineskins and preserving the status quo.

Task-oriented pastors and parachurch leaders. They clearly see that prioritizing unity at all costs will not help them accomplish their task.

Influential minority leaders. They perceive that presence without power is a form of tokenism. Almost every citywide gathering includes some minority leaders who have a special grace to build bridges to other segments of society, but rarely are they the movers and shakers within their own minority communities.

Pastors of dynamic, growing megachurches. Their personal agendas are usually in a different solar system from 90% of American pastors. The communication gap is virtually impossible to surmount.

Charismatic pastors. The group typically embraces the distinctives of evangelical pastors, but requires that charismatic pastors check their distinctives at the door in order to preserve the least common denominator. This makes the typical meeting more boring than some can handle!

Apostles. They find themselves outside of their apostolic spheres, and consequently they cannot function as apostles within the pastorally-oriented group.

When these six kinds of leaders do not show up, even after they are personally invited, the gossip starts. They frequently may be characterized as “indifferent” or on “ego trips” or “empire builders” or “tooting their own horn” or “they don’t believe in the church of the city” or “if they don’t lead it, they don’t join it.” That last statement is true, however, when you think of it. They are leaders! Asking them to join a group and not lead is like asking a singer to join the choir and not sing. One unfortunate result of this invisible wall of division is that the .300 hitters of the Christian leadership of the city are excluded from the starting lineup! Little wonder that among America’s cities desirous of seeing the power of God manifested in social transformation we have seen few winners.

Can We Make a Switch?

Since our pastor-oriented approaches of the 1990s have not produced the expected results, can we switch to a new para-

Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, Spring 2002

digm? Can we begin the process of recognizing that apostles are the foundation of the church in the city?

If we can, we will do well to bring two kinds of apostles into the equation, namely territorial apostles and marketplace apostles. Let me say up front that if we decide to make the switch we must realize that we are still in the beginning stages. In fact, the concept of marketplace apostles is so new that I do not feel able to say much more about them other than I feel sure they exist. There are some concepts about identifying territorial apostles, however, that I believe will be valuable for opening doors for recognizing and affirming them.

It is important to keep in mind that not all apostles in a city are also apostles of the city. Not all ecclesiastical apostles or functional apostles or mobilizing apostles or vertical apostles also have a territorial sphere. I am one case in point. I am an apostle who lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado, but God has not assigned my city to me as one of my apostolic spheres.

It is likewise important to recognize that every city, in all likelihood, will have several territorial apostles assigned to it, not just one. That means that different apostles of a given city will have different sub-spheres within the city. One apostle of the city, for example, may operate in the black community, another in the Hispanic community, and yet another in the white community, just as in the province of Asia Paul's sphere was Gentiles and Peter's sphere was Jews.

Other sub-divisions are likely, especially as the size of the city in question increases. One apostle might be recognized among evangelicals, for example, and another among charismatics. One's sphere might be in the northern part of the city and another's in the south. Another's might be the youth of the city. On and on. The point is that all of these territorial apostles have been assigned by God to their spheres, and it is understandable that God would be hesitant to answer prayers for the city if His design for spiritual authority there has not been honored.

Territorial Commitment

How can we recognize who are the bona fide territorial apostles of our city? It goes without saying that they must exhibit the qualities of every apostle. Beyond that, however, territorial apostles must pass the test of territorial commitment.

Bob Beckett of Hemet, California (one of the cities featured on the Transformations video), has written the textbook on terri-

torial commitment called *Commitment to Conquer* (Chosen Books). In it he makes a convincing argument that spiritual authority in a given region is proportional to the degree of territorial commitment of the Christian leader.

This applies first of all to local church pastors, who across the board, at least in America, exhibit a relatively low level of territorial commitment. What do I mean? As a starter, something like 90 percent of American pastors do not expect to be in their present parish ten years from now. Southern Baptists, our largest denomination, for example, show an average pastoral tenure of 2.7 years. United Methodist pastors (the second largest denomination) have a tenure of 3.4 years, and so on. Relatively few pastors have the lifetime commitment to their community that most dentists, lawyers, automobile dealers, law enforcement officers, or general contractors take for granted, just to name a few.

Secondly, territorial commitment applies even more strictly to territorial apostles than it would to local church pastors. In my mind it would be just as difficult to imagine a blind surgeon or a stuttering radio announcer or an obese beauty queen as it would be to imagine an apostle of the city not committed to the city.

Three Fishing Pools

In light of this, what should we do? It is not up to us to create apostles. Only God does that by giving them the gift of apostle and by assigning them their apostolic spheres. But it is definitely up to us to recognize the apostles that God has given to the church, in this case to the church of the city, to encourage them, to award them the office when appropriate, and to submit gratefully to the authority of the apostle who is over whatever territorial sphere in which we might find ourselves as individuals. When we do this, the government will be in place to receive the powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit on our cities.

As we begin to look for territorial apostles, let's look in the right places. I perceive that there are three major fishing pools in which we might be likely to find territorial apostles. Before I list them, let me say as clearly as I know that these are not the only three places where territorial apostles will be found. Furthermore, not all genuine apostles in these three "fishing pools" will have been assigned by God to be apostles of the city. Many of them will have other apostolic spheres. These three, however are a good place to start:

Megachurch pastors. Church growth research has shown

Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, Spring 2002

that, across the board, the larger the church the longer the pastoral tenure. Check it out. Most pastors of churches of 1,000 or 2,000 or more have long since stopped looking for "greener pastures." They see their call to that congregation as a lifetime assignment. They have passed the test of territorial commitment. Furthermore those among them who pastor dynamically growing megachurches would also fit the definition of "congregational apostles."

Parachurch leaders. Not all parachurch leaders are apostles, but some are. Among them, some may have been assigned by God to the city in which they minister as their apostolic sphere. One of the better known at this point in time is Doug Stringer of Somebody Cares in Houston, Texas. He has established a strong track record of territorial commitment and effective ministry toward social transformation in Houston.

Marketplace apostles. It is helpful to recognize that the church of the city takes shape in both the nuclear church form (the local church) and the extended church form (believers in the marketplace). We are becoming tuned in quite well to apostles of the nuclear church, but we have some catching up to do in the extended church. I believe this will happen quite quickly, and when it does, our dreams of transformed cities all across the nation will begin to come true.

May God speed the day!

Writer

Wagner, C. Peter. Address: Wagner Leadership Institute, 11005 State Highway 83 North, Suite 127, Colorado Springs, CO 80921. Peter is a prolific writer in the fields of intercultural studies, church growth, and prayer and spiritual warfare. His book, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church*, was released in 2000 by Regal Books. Peter is currently Chancellor of the Wagner Leadership Institute.