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## The Church's One Foundation: Part One

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**The Church's One Foundation  
Part One**

**C. Peter Wagner**

*What is the foundation of the church?*

One of the best known traditional hymns, sung across almost all denominational lines, is "The Church's One Foundation Is Jesus Christ Her Lord." It is easy to see why the author of that song would affirm that Jesus is the foundation of the church. After all, it is His church. He founded it. Jesus said, "I will build *My* church." To suggest that Jesus Christ might not be the foundation of the church could be considered by many to border on heresy. So, in a broad and irrefutable sense, I want to affirm that Jesus certainly is the church's foundation.

Once we agree on that theological truth, however, we must move from there to its practical implementation in our world today. Jesus not only founded the church, but He also built into it a dynamic for ongoing expansion and development. He later gave us a revelation that He wanted his followers to see Him as the *cornerstone* of the church that He would be building through the centuries, but that His design for a *foundation* was apostles and prophets.

*A Foundation of Apostles and Prophets*

This was revealed through the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:20: "[The household of God has been] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."

We may wonder why Jesus would put this strategic design

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in place for the church. I think the most obvious reason is that He knew that He would not be here in person to execute or to help execute any of the direct implementation of building His church here on Earth.

The first thing that Jesus did was to assure his apostles that His leaving them would actually be to their *advantage*. Peter was so upset when Jesus first told them He was going to leave that he got into an argument with the Master. It must have been pretty intense, because that is when Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mt. 16:23). Later when things calmed down, Jesus explained: "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart I will send Him to you" (Jn. 16:7). The "Helper," of course, is the Holy Spirit.

The upshot of this is that Jesus was telling his disciples that the immediate presence of the Third Person of the Trinity would be more important to them than the immediate presence of the Second Person of the Trinity for the purpose of building His church. And the place where the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit is now located is precisely in each believer who has been filled with the Holy Spirit. So, while Jesus is omniscient and omnipresent and is always the head of the church, He is now building His church, as He has been doing for two thousand years, through men and women who are empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit.

*Apostles and Prophets Are Gifts from Jesus*

To be certain that His church would be supplied with its proper foundation, Jesus gave gifts to the church when he ascended into heaven from Earth. The Bible says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men . . . And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:8,11).

When I was in seminary I was taught that the apostles and prophets were given only to get the church started in the first century, and that they were no longer needed after that. My professors presumed that when the New Testament was completed and accepted by the church, the foundational role of apostles and prophets was completed. Therefore, all biblical references to apostles and prophets should be understood as a historical record, not suggesting a contemporary reality.

In fact, until recently, most of the church in general has operated under that assumption. Most of us were comfortable with pastors, so we had no problem with calling someone "Pastor So-and-So." Teachers were OK. Like many others, I am sometimes referred to as "Dr." or "Professor" Wagner, signifying that I have been duly recognized as a teacher. We frequently speak of "Evangelist" Billy Graham or "Evangelist" Luis Palau as a matter of course. But to think of any individual as "Apostle So-and-So" or as "Prophet So-and-So" has been considered by a large number of Christian leaders as inappropriate at best or even heretical at worst.

This is curious because among those who have held this position have been many who profess to have a very high view of biblical inspiration and authority. Yet it does not seem logical to attempt to draw some exegetical line between apostles and prophets on the one hand and evangelists, pastors and teachers on the other. It seems that such interpretation could reflect a view of 60% biblical accuracy instead of 100%.

Furthermore, to postulate that apostles and prophets were needed for only a century or so is also to sidestep the implications of the rest of the sentence in Ephesians 4 which establishes a specific time frame for the operation of these five gifts: "till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Very few, if any, Christian leaders whom I know would claim that the body of Christ has reached the stage of perfection described here. And if this is the case, it would follow that there is still a need for apostles and prophets in the church.

This helps us greatly to understand why God would tell us that the church's foundation is "apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20).

#### *First Apostles*

Not only do apostles and prophets constitute the foundation of the church, but it is also biblical to state them in that specific order: apostles first and prophets second. This is found in one of the great chapters on spiritual gifts, 1 Corinthians 12: "And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets. . ." (v. 28). To my knowledge, this is the only place in the Bible where some of the spiritual gifts are listed with a specific

numerical order. When seen in conjunction with the other scriptures which tell us that apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church, it makes perfect sense. What other gifts could possibly precede the foundational gifts?

This seems so elementary to me now, that I marvel at the fact that we have been running our churches for generations in reverse order. I say "we" because until recently I was as much a part of that mindset as anyone else. The church has actually functioned this way, and it has in fact done some remarkable things for the kingdom of God. But I also suppose that one could actually drive an automobile in reverse gear from Toledo to Cincinnati. It is possible, and the distance could eventually be covered, but no one does this, because a car traveling for such a distance in reverse gear is obviously not being operated as it was designed to operate. As we begin this 21<sup>st</sup> Century, I believe it would be better to shift the church into forward gear and even into overdrive!

*Teachers and Administrators*

The numerical order continues in 1 Corinthians 12:28: "...third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues." Let's focus on teachers, the third in order, and on administrators who are listed later in the verse without a specific number.

When it comes right down to it, we have to admit that even a cursory analysis will show that for the most part Christian churches are being run by administrators and teachers.

Traditional Christianity is largely structured around denominations, and most denominational executives are administrators, many of them excellent administrators. Thus, day after day and year after year, administrators are those who make decisions which affect the life and the ministry of the churches under their jurisdiction. There is, of course, nothing wrong with administrators. The Bible teaches that they are necessary for the church to function as it should. But administrators will only do all they are supposed to do if they work under apostles and prophets.

Many have recognized the fact that a large number of Christian organizations which flourish in the first generation tend to lose some of their initial vigor after their founder passes off the scene. One of the reasons for this is that the founder was very likely an apostle who exercised apostolic leadership in the organ-

ization whether the term "apostle" was ever used or not. But when the apostle goes, more often than not the replacement turns out to be an administrator. There is a vast difference between an apostle and an administrator. While a few leaders have the ability to bridge that gap, the great majority do not.

If administrators have been running the church translocally, teachers have been running the churches locally. Ever since the sermon became the focal point of the worship service, the pastor of the local church has been expected to be a teacher. Some pastors are known to spend 20 hours a week or more in order to prepare their teaching for the next Sunday. In fact, some stress this so strongly that they argue that in Ephesians 4:11 "pastors and teachers" should not be understood as two separate offices, but they should be combined into one pastor-teacher office. I do not agree with that conclusion, but the point remains that teachers have largely been those who have attempted to lead our local churches. It has been difficult because in reality most traditional churches do not see their pastor-teachers as leaders but rather as employees.

Researcher George Barna agrees. He says, "As long as the church persists in being led by teachers, it will flounder. Identifying, developing, deploying, and supporting gifted *leaders* will renew the vision, energy, and impact of the church."<sup>1</sup> New apostolic churches typically have pastors who are primarily leaders, most of whom also teach well. This is a very significant different emphasis.

No wonder that some today have difficulty with the suggestion that the foundation of the church is apostles and prophets. They have always thought that the foundation of the church should be administrators and teachers!

Fortunately important changes are rapidly taking place. As I view trends, I can clearly observe that these changes are taking place at a crucial time, just when the church has moved into the Third Millennium.

*A Springboard to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

One of the privileges of our generation has been to have watched the transition from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and thereby from the Second Millennium to the Third Millennium after Christ. Extraordinary things have been happening as we have crossed the line.

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I believe that God prepared the church for this transition by raising up apostles in the 1990s. To use a graphic analogy, I see apostles as having taken off from a springboard to make the leap for the church and to carry us into this new century.

*The Springboard*

The springboard itself was set in place before the 20<sup>th</sup> Century began. To scan history, here are the major components of what I am calling the "springboard:"

*16th Century: Reformed Theology*

The move into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is not calling for radical adjustments in theology. Across the spectrum there is widespread agreement on the basic tenets of theology set in place during the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century by Martin Luther, John Calvin and others. Reformed theology includes three major theological convictions that most church leaders consider non-negotiable:

7. *The authority of scripture.* In all matters of Christian faith and practice, the Bible is the final authority. Few leaders of vital, evangelical, life-giving churches are inclined to call this into question. Those segments of Christianity which do raise questions about biblical inspiration have, by and large, become so weak that they have all but forfeited the role of pacesetters for our new century.
8. *Justification by faith.* At the time of Martin Luther, the church was teaching that people could get to heaven only by doing good works. If they could afford them, many were buying so-called "indulgences" from the church in order to shorten the time they would have to spend in purgatory to atone for their sins. Christian people, if asked, had no way of knowing for sure whether they would go to heaven or not because they never knew if they had been good enough. The reformers clearly saw that the blood shed by Jesus on the cross was all that was needed to atone for sins, and that faith in Jesus Christ as personal savior was the only requirement for eternal life. We all continue to agree with this today.
9. *The Priesthood of all believers.* When we are born again into the family of God, God becomes our Father. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father . . ." Before the Reformation, however, Christians were taught that they were

not worthy to approach God directly, but rather that they needed to approach Him through a duly authorized priest or through Mary and the saints. For centuries since then true believers have not doubted that they can go to God directly on their own initiative, and also that God greatly enjoys them doing so.

*18<sup>th</sup> Century: Wesleyan Holiness*

In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, John Wesley was used by God to bring some very important new emphases into the body of Christ. He did not question the three foundational doctrines listed above, but he did question some of the other rigid theological conclusions of the reformers. Part of the fresh air that Wesley brought to Christianity was his view that Christian individuals could actually be holy and live holy lives, just as God is holy. Reformed theology taught that, while believers should constantly strive to be more and more holy, none will actually make it in this life because only God is holy.

I am fully aware that many godly churches today still hold the Reformed doctrine of sanctification, and that is one reason why I would not call a certain view of holiness a "non-negotiable" as I see the three theological convictions above. However, I do feel that holiness is a part of the springboard from which apostles are leading us into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. I am convinced that the churches which will be on the cutting edges of what God is doing here in the new millenium will be churches that teach and practice bona fide holiness. I expand on this greatly in my book, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (Wagner Publications) which I strongly recommend to all who desire to be counted among today's pacesetters.

*19<sup>th</sup> Century: The Modern Missionary Movement*

Surprisingly, the churches of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were not strongly missionary churches. Many historians of mission date the beginning of the modern missionary movement with William Carey's ministry in India beginning in the 1790s. Since then, however, the worldwide expansion of the Christian movement has been remarkable. There has been no diminishing of the burning desire of believers to fulfill Christ's Great Commission to make disciples of every people group in the world. We today are fortunate to belong to the first generation of Chris-

tians for whom there is light at the end of the Great Commission tunnel.

The apostolically-oriented churches which will be moving the body of Christ forward in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century have aggressive missionary outreach in their DNA. That is an established part of the springboard from which the apostles are taking us forward today.

*The Major Steps through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

Let's say, then, that the springboard was in place as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century began. There were several subsequent

*1900: The Pentecostal Movement*

It was quite prophetic, in my view, that God chose to pour out His Holy Spirit on a group of worshippers in Topeka, Kansas precisely on the New Year's eve transitioning from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Pentecostal Movement was born then and it received a greater spark a few years later in the famous Azusa Street Revival.

This first step out on the springboard ultimately leading to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century consisted essentially of bringing the Third Person of the Trinity from relative obscurity and into the mainstream of church life. The reformers had reestablished God as the Father whom we all could approach directly without the aid of a priest. The Wesleyans had reestablished the Son in highlighting our need to be more Christlike in our daily living. The Pentecostals reestablished the immediate presence and availability of the Holy Spirit in the lives and ministries of all believers. So with a more complete understanding of the practical outworking of the Trinity in place, God was then poised to move the body of Christ to new levels.

It did not happen immediately, however. Negative reactions on the part of traditional Christians, especially to the phenomenon of speaking in tongues, caused serious divisions that persisted until the middle of the century. In recent years, however, the work of the Holy Spirit in power ministries, healings, deliverance, prophecy, miracles, ecstatic experiences, and the like are becoming quite broadly accepted across the theological spectrum. The doctrine of cessationism which opposes such spiritual phenomena is currently attracting a rapidly diminishing number of proponents. Even those who do not practice the presence of the Holy Spirit very much rarely deny its value and validity for

the kingdom of God.

*The 1950s: Evangelism*

Because of the unfortunate opposition to the Pentecostal Movement early in our century, it was not until around 1950 that God set in place the second step out on the diving board toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A strong movement for aggressive evangelism began at that time and it has increased in intensity ever since.

Evangelism took root among the Pentecostal segment of the body of Christ with the rise of the so-called "healing evangelists" represented by the likes of William Branham, Oral Roberts, and Gordon Lindsay. Billy Graham was the most highly visible representative of the evangelical segment of the body of Christ. Since the 1950s the roster of public evangelists has expanded greatly.

Following World War II, the number of Americans who gave their lives to launch out in foreign missions increased dramatically. They were led by G.I.s who had spent time in foreign lands and who had received a strong call to return to them with the gospel. Now that Third World churches are also sending foreign missionaries in large numbers, the evangelistic force for our new century has a stronger base than ever before in history.

*The 1960s: Compassion for the Poor and Oppressed*

During the 1960s the Spirit began speaking strongly to the churches about our responsibility to reach out in a meaningful way to those less fortunate than we. Christian social responsibility, already present in some segments of the church, began to become widespread. Some glitches occurred when certain ones attempted to advocate an unbiblical "theology of liberation" but now it is a fact that churches across the board are feeding more hungry people and housing more homeless people and standing up for social justice and righteousness more than ever before.

It was very important to get this step in place to prepare for what God wants to do with His people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

*The 1970s: A Great Prayer Movement*

The great worldwide prayer movement that has carried us into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century had its beginnings in the 1970s. Few of the dynamic prayer ministries that we are so well aware of now have roots preceding the 1970s. In fact, the 1970s saw the plant-

ing of the seeds of prayer, the 1980s saw the budding of prayer, the 1990s saw the blossoming of prayer, and now we are in the time of the fruit of prayer.

A good part of my personal involvement in the steps out on the springboard toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has been in this area of prayer. During the 1990s I coordinated the A.D. 2000 United Prayer Track, I coordinated the International Spiritual Warfare Network, I authored the 6-volume *Prayer Warrior* series, and my wife, Doris, and I joined Ted Haggard in founding the World Prayer Center of Colorado Springs. The body of Christ is now tooled for prayer to a greater degree than ever before in its history.

One of the most significant developments connected to the prayer movement has been the emergence of the office of intercessor. It was only in the 1980s that certain individuals began to be recognized by others as having a special spiritual gift of intercession. Intercessors have been around wherever life-giving churches existed, but their specialized ministry was largely hidden, and thereby restricted. This is no longer the case. It is now not unusual these days to go into a given church and to be introduced to someone there as “one of our intercessors” or “the leader of our prayer ministry” or even “our pastor of prayer.”

A number of churches distinguish their intercessors by special name badges so that those who have special prayer needs know whom to go to. Intercessors, along with apostles and prophets, are the three major offices that are now recognized and that will equip us to serve God more effectively through our new century.

*The 1980s: The Office of Prophet*

Certain segments of the body of Christ began recognizing the office of prophet in their midst a generation or two ago. But, by and large, they were isolated from the mainstream. It was only in the 1980s that prophets began to be accepted by a wider spectrum. Of these three key offices, it was more difficult for traditional Christians to feel comfortable with prophets than with intercessors and apostles. The reason for this was a strong mindset among many leaders that once God spoke to us through the Bible, no further revelation would be necessary. The idea that God still speaks important things to us today either through prophets or otherwise has been actually considered a heresy by

some.

The significant role of prophets as a foundation for the body of Christ for our new century is one of the principal themes of the rest of this book.

*The 1990s: The Office of Apostle*

With the recognition of the office of apostle in the 1990s, the government of the church came into place for the first time since the early centuries. I am aware that some may question that statement. One of the reasons for this is the fact that in all probability, there has never been a time in church history when the church has been without apostles. I agree with this, and that is why I used the terms "the recognition" of the "office" of apostle, not "the establishment" of what we could call "apostolic function." These nuances will become clearer in later chapters.

There would also be some who would correctly point out that in certain segments of the church the office of apostle has, indeed, been recognized in the past. The Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican or Episcopal Church, and many denominations that have actually incorporated "apostolic" into their name would come to mind as examples. However, like prophets, the emphases of these apostolic movements had not penetrated the mainstream of what I am calling vital, life-giving evangelical churches that now are the cutting edge of the spread of Christianity. This only began to happen in the 1990s.

A great help to the rapidly-expanding acceptance of apostles and true apostolic ministry in the beginning of this century has been the production of thoughtful and informative literature. Much more will be forthcoming down the road, but at this writing I recommend four books on apostles and apostolic ministry very highly:

1. *Apostles and the Emerging Apostolic Movement* by David Cannistraci (Regal Books). This is the best over all textbook we have at the present time on the most essential concepts for understanding biblically and practically what apostles are and what they do. This book is a good starting point for those who want to get into the subject..
2. *Prophets, Apostles and the Coming Moves of God* by Bishop Bill Hamon (Destiny Image). Bill Hamon of Christian International has been an inside player in the development of apostolic ministries for much longer than most of the rest of us.

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His book puts what is happening in a historical context better than the others. It is very informative.

3. *Moving in the Apostolic* by John Eckhardt (Regal Books). John Eckhardt, an inner city apostle in Chicago, is more fired up with the excitement of actually ministering with an apostolic anointing than most. His book is the most motivational of the four. When you read it, you will love apostles!
4. *End Time Warriors* by John Kelly (Regal Books). Many would agree that John Kelly is the most articulate spokesperson for the nuts and bolts of apostolic ministry on the scene today. His book will help raise your understanding of contemporary apostles to a new level.

*The Jump into a New Century*

What I have been calling the New Apostolic Reformation seemed to come into its own by the end of the 1990s. Although it could appear tedious, I would like to share the formal definition of this movement which I have been using for some time:

The New Apostolic Reformation is an extraordinary work of God at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century which is, to a significant extent, changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world. For almost 500 years Christian churches have largely functioned within traditional denominational structures of one kind or another. Particularly in the 1990s, but with roots going back for almost a century, new forms and operational procedures are now emerging in areas such as local church government, interchurch relationships, financing, evangelism, missions, prayer, leadership selection and training, the role of supernatural power, worship, and other important aspects of church life. Some of these changes are being seen within denominations themselves, but for the most part they are taking the form of loosely-structured apostolic networks. In virtually every region of the world, these new apostolic churches constitute the fastest growing segment of Christianity.

In a word, we are now experiencing what is clearly the most radical change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation. I might go a bit further to even suggest that this could possibly be an even more radical change than the Reformation. The change in the time of the Reformation was largely theological with some minimal changes in congregational life. The New Apostolic Reformation is largely a change in congrega-

tional life with minimal adjustments in theology. That is why I said that it was a change in the way of "doing church."

Just as we have the beginnings of a useful body of literature on the gift and office of apostle, we also have good sources for the New Apostolic Reformation. These are the three books that I most recommend at the present time:

5. *Reinventing American Protestantism* by Donald E. Miller (University of California Press). Sociologist of religion Donald Miller undertook an extensive study of three movements which were among the pioneers of the New Apostolic Reformation in America: Vineyard, Calvary Chapel and Hope Chapel. This is not a dull book on sociology, but an extremely informative description and analysis of these dynamic prototypes. There is no other book quite like it.
6. *The New Apostolic Churches* edited by C. Peter Wagner (Regal Books). As I moved into my research on the New Apostolic Reformation, I had the privilege of building personal relationships with several of its top apostolic leaders. In this book I do an introductory chapter, and then 18 apostles contribute first-person chapters on their own movements. I call this the "catalog" of the New Apostolic Reformation.
7. *Churchquake!* by C. Peter Wagner (Regal Books). This is my 71,000-word textbook on the New Apostolic Reformation. If you feel that you have time to read only one of the seven books I am recommending here, this is the book I would suggest for the over all picture.

#### *Ready to Move Ahead*

The New Apostolic Reformation could not have materialized without the springboard and without the various steps across the springboard during the past century. A major reason for this is that the foundation of the church needed to be in place for God to begin to do all He wants to do in our new millenium.

To reiterate, the foundation of the church is apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. We will look at what this might mean for us and our churches in part 2 of this article.

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NOTES

1. George Barna, "The Second Coming of the Church," *Enrichment*, Winter 2000, p. 18.