

The New Apostolic Reformation An Examination of the Five-Fold Ministries Part 1

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The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is one of the largest, broadest and most powerful movements within Christianity today, yet it flies largely under the radar. Even those involved often do not understand the movement to the extent that they may even deny they are part of it. This confusion is due to the fact that NAR does not have official membership or even leadership. Rather, NAR is a loose coalition of mostly Pentecostal and charismatic Christians, organizations and churches that are united over a particular understanding and interpretation of certain portions of Scripture. The interpretation of these New Testament texts are widely held by those connected with NAR and focus mainly on the miraculous sign gifts. Some have equated NAR with the so-called Third Wave of Pentecostalism (the first wave started with the birth of the Pentecostal movement in 1901, the second wave is identified with the charismatic movement in 1960 and the Third Wave which emphasizes power evangelism, healings and spiritual warfare led by John Wimber and the Vineyard Movement in the 1980s). Yet, while there is certainly overlap between NAR and the Third Wave, they are not identical. The universal mark of NAR is the acceptance of the “Five Fold Ministries.” Most Christians believe that Ephesians 4:11 speaks of five essential ministries and offices needed for the church, those of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher, but that two of those offices – apostles and prophets, have ceased to function for centuries. According to the NAR the Lord has restored these two ministries in order to begin the process of setting up His kingdom on earth. In conjunction with the return of apostles and prophets all the sign gifts have been reinstated as well, and are expected to be evident in the lives of most if not all Christians. There are a number of commonly held doctrines and practices within NAR, as will be demonstrated below, but the unique feature of NAR is the office of apostleship being reestablished. Pentecostals and many charismatics have long held that prophets live among us, but only recently has anyone of significance claimed the same for apostles. Before we get ahead of ourselves, however, we need to back up and take a look at the origin of NAR as well as its leadership.

NAR’s Foundation

Since NAR is an alliance united over a distinctive understanding of the five-fold ministries, there is no organization or established leadership as such. Nevertheless, C. Peter Wagner (1930-2016) is the recognized founder and father of the movement. Wagner held much influence in a wide range of Christian thought and practice throughout his long life. He was a missionary, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary’s School of World Missions, author of over 70 books, president of Global Harvests Ministries, and chancellor of Wagner Leadership Institute which is a training ground for those interested in NAR. In the 1980s Wagner came under the sway of John Wimber and his Third Wave theology. Michael Moriarity explains that

Wimber has been influenced by the view that Jesus’ ministry is to be an inbreaking of the kingdom by combining the proclamation of the kingdom with its demonstration (the casting out of demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, and so on). Christ’s followers have received Christ’s authority and must proclaim the kingdom and exercise the authority in his name. The key for effective evangelism is combining the proclamation (preaching the Gospel) with the demonstrations (signs and wonders).^[1]

Wimber and Wagner would famously teach a course at Fuller Seminary during the 1980s entitled “MC510 – Signs, Wonders and Church Growth.” Later Wagner adopted spiritual warfare ideas and techniques that even Wimber could not accept. These will be explained further below. As Wagner began to draw other unusual doctrines from a number of sources he eventually attempted to bundle them under an umbrella he called “The Postdenominational Church.” Apparently receiving

criticism over this title from some of his friends, including Jack Hayford, he changed the name to “The New Apostolic Reformation.” Wagner, at this point, believed the church had entered the “Second Apostolic Age” which he says began in 2001.^[ii] Many of the ideas that Wagner would come to champion were not new and have been circulating in Pentecostal, Word of Faith, Vineyard and other charismatic movements for years. What NAR has done to a large degree is incorporate and represent many, if not most, of these groups and ideas without actually forming an official organization.

Nevertheless, some of the leaders and establishments often associated with NAR, and accepting of most of their distinctions, include: Mike Bickle and his International House of Prayer (IHOP), the Kansas City Prophets including Bob Jones and Paul Cain, Bill Johnson and his Bethel Church, Rick Joyner, founder of Morning Star Ministries, Todd Bentley, Brian and Bobbie Huston of Hillsong Church, Cindy Jacobs of Generals International, Michael Brown and Rod Parsley,^[iii] and Youth With A Mission (YWAM).^[iv]

Theological Distinctives

What differentiates NAR from evangelicals and even other Pentecostals cannot be nailed down with precision. That is because NAR, as stated above, is neither an official organization nor monolithic in its beliefs. NAR adherents can be found in the Word of Faith, prosperity gospel, Pentecostal, charismatic and Third Wave movements. Those familiar with Bethel Church in Redding, California, know that it clearly fits the NAR description as does Hillsong, YWAM and IHOP. But, increasingly NAR doctrines and philosophies are creeping into mainline, non-charismatic churches and organizations. Therefore, while there remain significant differences between those aligning with NAR, there are, nevertheless, some common denominators that all would accept. All individuals, churches and organizations that could be identified as part of NAR would agree with the following distinctives:

- **The restoration of the five-fold ministry.** This is the essential foundational doctrine of NAR upon which all of its other philosophies rests. Based on Ephesians 4:11-13, in conjunction with Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 12:28, NAR leaders believe that all five ministries listed in these texts, which were given to establish and equip the church, are fully operational today. Conservative evangelicals have unanimously agreed that the offices of evangelist, pastor and teacher have been functioning since New Testament times, although grammatically pastors and teachers describe one office, not two, i. e. pastor/teacher. Historically, however, Protestants have taught that both offices of apostle and prophet ceased at the close of the New Testament canon as their purpose, which was to lay the foundation of the church, was completed (Eph 2:20). Once the foundation of the church was erected, the roles of apostle and prophet were no longer needed and thus they faded from the scene. Today the work of equipping the saints is carried on by the evangelists and pastor/teachers. Pentecostalism, however, has taught from its inception that the office of prophet has been restored, or never ceased to exist at all. If prophets still roam the earth new revelations from God should be expected, and Pentecostals have long embraced and expected this to be the case. In more recent times, not only have charismatics accepted the existence of prophets but so has much of mainstream evangelicalism. Wagner and the leaders of NAR, however, believe that the office of apostle has now been restored as well. It is thought that God is doing a new thing in our day in preparation for the coming of His kingdom on earth and the modern day apostles will lead the way. According to one source there are approximately 400 recognized apostles as of 2010 who are members of the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders.^[v]
- **Supernatural signs and wonders.** It should first be admitted that signs, wonders and miracles have a base in Scripture, but their frequency and purpose is often overlooked. First, as to their frequency, we find that there have only been three periods of time in which miracles were common in biblical history. The first was during the ministry of Moses, in particular in Egypt at the time of the Exodus, and periodically during the wilderness wanderings. Following the death of Moses, and under the leadership of Joshua, God certainly did some wonderful things, but miracles of the type Moses performed are not evident. Centuries later, during the prophetic ministries of

Elijah and Elisha, a second season of miracles were evident with a combined total of 21 miracles performed. With Elisha passing it would not be until the time of Jesus' ministry, and subsequently that of the apostles, that miracles would reemerge. Signs and wonders, contrary to the assumption of some, simply did not occur throughout biblical history but were confined to these three segments of time.

Why this is true speaks to the issue of the purpose of signs and wonders. God is always able to perform miracles, and often does so as He wills. But when He has chosen to do so at the hands of individuals there is a particular reason. Miracles serve to authenticate the lives, ministries and message of these individuals who were sent by God. Moses came to Egypt able to call down judgments on the Egyptians and their gods in order to demonstrate that God was superior to all the mythological deities worshipped by the greatest nation on earth. At the same time the Jews became convinced that Moses was God's man calling them to return to the Promised Land. Elijah/Elisha show up at a dark hour in the land of Israel to remind the Jews that God still reigned despite the corruption permeating God's people. The time had come for them to choose between Baal and Jehovah, and the prophets' miracles gave forceful and clear evidence as to who was truly sovereign.

When Jesus began His public ministry no one had performed a miracle in centuries, nor had prophecy been given by God since Malachi, some 400 years prior. The ministry of Jesus was filled with miracles including everything from healing the sick (John 4:46-53), to feeding thousands (John 6:1-14), to raising the dead (John 11:1-44), to commanding the weather and nature (Matt 15:28-33), to casting out demons (Matt 8:28-34). The question is why did Jesus do these things? We are not left to speculate. Jesus was not putting on a magic act, nor was He merely relieving suffering. He was giving irrefutable evidence that He was God, and salvation is found only in Him. "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). The signs were not just random acts of mercy and power, they pointed to the person and message of Jesus.

The apostles followed this same pattern after the ascension. The book of Acts, beginning with 2:43 records dozens of "wonders and signs" which took place through the apostles during the early days of the church. Their purpose was not simply to heal people, cast out demons, or even to cause death (5:1-11), but to demonstrate that God had given them the authority to lead the newly formed church and proclaim the message of the gospel. Power attracts certain kinds of people and so we are not surprised that a number claimed to be apostles who were not sent by God (2 Cor 11:13-15). But how were the people to distinguish between false apostles with their deceitful message, and God's apostles with the message of truth and life? Paul shows the criteria in 2 Corinthians 12:12, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." The supernatural abilities that the Lord gave His early spokesmen verify that they had His authorization and, most importantly, His divinely inspired message. Later the author of Hebrews concurs, "After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." It was for this reason that Jude could confidently write, "But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 17). And Peter affirmed the same, "You should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles" (2 Peter 3:2). The apostles were the divinely appointed foundation of the church (Eph 2:20) who spoke an authoritative message, inspired by God Himself (Eph 3:5). Since the early church did not yet have the New Testament Scriptures, which would be the written record of the apostles' teachings (Acts 2:42), it was necessary that those who had God's infallible communication be vindicated by signs. With the completion of the New Testament canon such vindication is no longer necessary. The Word speaks today from the authority of an inspired, God-breathed, text. It is for this reason Peter could write, "We have the prophetic word made more sure [literally: "we have the even more sure prophetic word"], to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Pet 1:19). God's complete revelation as found in Scripture is more than able to make us "adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 2:17b). Nothing needs to be added, nothing should ever

be taken away (Rev 22:18-19).

With this biblical backdrop, it should be noted that miracles and healings are a key component for NAR and all who are involved. NAR followers believe that modern Christians are called to be part of an army of miracle workers. And it is believed that doing miracles is a skill that can be taught. Witness Bill Johnson's and Bethel Church's School of Supernatural Ministry which boast 2000 students who are taught how to do miracles.^[vi] Some of the miracles border on the ridiculous such as claims of gold dust falling, heavenly clouds (the Shakina Glory) appearing, angel feathers flying about, and teeth being filled with gold are not uncommon. *Christianity Today* reported that Johnson's wife and some other Bethel leaders "have been said to practice 'grave sucking' or 'grave soaking,' purportedly a means of absorbing the spiritual anointing of deceased Christians by lying atop their graves."^[vii] Called by various names, such as Manifest Sons of God and Joel's Army, some believe that greater wonders are taking place than even happened at the hands of Jesus.^[viii] But when we examine the many reports of miracles and healings a serious disconnect between Scripture and contemporary practices is evident. At the hands of Jesus, or the biblical apostles, healings were immediate, complete and undeniable but these features do not attend the claims of healing ministries today. Jack Deere, a charismatic theologian and former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, defends this disconnect: "It is wrong to insist that the apostolic ministry of signs and wonders is the standard for the gifts of healing given to the average New Testament Christian."^[ix] Deere clearly recognizes that modern healings are not of the same nature as healings found in Scripture. Whatever is going on today in the charismatic movement is not on par with what was taking place in the New Testament.

- **Demonic warfare:** Hand-in glove with miraculous gifts goes demonic or spiritual warfare. NAR did not originate today's obsession with the demonic which has roots that go back to the early days of Pentecostalism, but NAR has added some new twists and wrinkles. Many bizarre claims and teachings fall under this grouping. For example, believing a demon called the Queen of Heaven, who rules over the 10/40 Window, was camped out on Mount Everest, some NAR's leaders claimed to have climbed to her encampment to engage her in spiritual warfare (although no independent source has verified this expedition).^[x] Wagner himself taught three levels of spiritual warfare in his book *Confronting the Powers*. The highest level is known as "strategic-level intercession" in which attempts are made to confront and dispose of territorial demons. Popular methods often used include "spiritual mapping" in which research of a city, region or nation is engaged to discover which territorial spirit reigns in that area. Once discovered, the spirit is confronted by name in order to "tear down its strongholds." Another popular method is prayer walking in which teams of believers walk neighborhoods, cities and the like to engage in spiritual warfare prayer. Demons apparently, according to NAR proponents, control geographical regions and must be dethroned by these methods. Demons also seek to bring harm to individuals through generational curses, which are curses placed upon one's ancestors that can be removed only through some form of spiritual warfare techniques developed by means of extrabiblical experimentation. And when one encounters economic struggles and health problems these are often traced to demonic activities. Demons with names such as "cancer" or "poverty" must be cast out in order to bring relief.^[xi]
- **Dominionism:** Closely connected with spiritual (or demonic) warfare is the idea that, since Adam lost dominion of the earth to Satan, it is now our task to take it back. Specifically, there are seven areas that Christians must endeavor to dominate: government, arts, finances, education, religion, family and media. This is known within NARs as the Seven Mountain Mandate. As Christians take control of these seven mountains the kingdom of heaven will be brought to earth, at which time Jesus will return (known theologically as postmillennialism).^[xii]
- **Revivalism:** Some see "revival on a massive scale as key to this movement."^[xiii] By that it is meant that NAR sees itself ushering in the kingdom of God via an end time harvest of souls. In addition to the methods already mentioned in this paper, NAR leaders use music (Hillsong and Bethel set the standard), large rallies in stadiums which are live streamed globally, and a plethora of other big means and events in an attempt to bring about worldwide revival. NAR's postmillennialism allows little place for an end time falling away from the truth, rather

the NAR's message is promoted heavily in order to bring about the revival that will allow for the return of Christ. As reported in *Christianity Today* (CT), "Revival is the unifying theme at Bethel."^[xiv] Interestingly, although Bethel Church can check off every one of the characteristics of a NAR connected organization, Bill Johnson in the CT article referenced above denies any official ties with NAR. This shows the difficulty of nailing down those involved.

- **Extrabiblical revelation:** At every level, and in every related group, personal revelation supposedly from the Lord is central. This should be expected since what distinguishes NAR from most other evangelical teachings is that they are drawing from a different source from that of other Christians. While proclaiming to be committed to Scripture the truth is that prophecies given to their apostles and prophets undermine and add to the inspired Word of God. Even at the grass-roots level the average adherent to NAR expects to hear a personal word from the Lord regularly, and these messages determine what they believe and how they live far more than the Bible. However the Bible itself is being invalidated by such supposed messages from the Lord. Recently the "apostle" Brian Simmons claims that he was directed by the Lord to produce a new translation called the *Passion Translation* which twists Scripture to support NAR's theology.^[xv] At best the *Passion Translation* is a one-man paraphrase designed to give some validity to the methods and teachings of NAR. It is being used widely by those in the movement.

In the second part of this article we will examine how NAR is now infiltrating non-charismatic evangelical churches without awareness of the danger by most.

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[i] As quoted by Richard Fisher in *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2011 p. 7).

[ii] Ibid., p. 8.

[iii] <http://bereanresearch.org/dominionism-nar/>

[iv] R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *God's Super-Apostles, Encountering the Worldwide Prophets and Apostles Movement* (Wooster, Ohio: Weaver Book Company, 2014), pp. 84-85, 89.

[v] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[vi] Martyn Wendell Jones, "Kingdom Come in California, *Christianity Today* May 2016; p. 33.

[vii] Ibid., see also: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wKPjf1mjb8).

[viii] R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, pp. 102-114.

[ix] Nathan Busenitz, *Right Thinking in a Church Gone Astray, Finding Our Way Back to Biblical Truth* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 2017), p. 240.

[x] R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, pp 79-80.

[xi] Ibid., pp. 1, 49, 51, 79-90, 102-114.

[xii] Ibid., pp. 51, 81, 87-88.

[xiii] Bereanresearch.org/Dominionism-nar

[\[xiv\]](#) Martyn Wendell Jones, p. 33.

[\[xv\]](#) R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, pp 67-69.