

# The New Apostolic Reformation An Examination of the Five-Fold Ministries Part 2

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Having surveyed the foundation of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) and some of its theological distinctives in the first part of this article, we will now press on to investigate its infiltration into wider evangelical circles. We will then put the teachings of NAR to the test of Scripture.

## **Infiltration**

The influence of NAR has become broader, and therefore more dangerous, as many of its ideas are being accepted by traditionally non-charismatic churches and organizations. This acceptance is due to a number of factors.

- Bethel, Hillsong and IHOP music has found enthusiastic reception in churches, youth ministries and among young adults throughout the evangelical spectrum.
- Many have no understanding of the teachings of NAR and no concept of what it is.
- Influential NAR teachers and books are making in-roads into evangelical circles.
- Due to rampant biblical illiteracy and general apathy toward Scripture and theology, fewer Christians are alarmed or even aware that false teaching and deception is taking place. Not surprisingly those who attempt to warn about NAR or other false teachings are often vilified and labeled as negative, legalistic and haters.

The mainstream evangelical church is ripe for the infiltration of NAR and so it should come as no surprise that many are embracing this errant teaching. As an example of how this is taking place I will be referencing a book, published in 2016 by Nathan Brewer entitled, *The Pulse of Christ*. Brewer is founder and director of Kyrios Ministries which is devoted to international discipleship and missions. He has fully embraced, and in this book is promoting, the five-fold ministry as propagated by NAR. Both in Europe, where he presently lives, and in the United States, his book and ministry are being endorsed by non-charismatic evangelical churches and Christians. Two interesting observations should be made at this point. First, Brewer never actually mentions NAR although he references some of its resources and adopts its theology. Secondly, Brewer never attempts to explain or defend his interpretation of Ephesians 4:11, an understanding which is held by very few Christians and virtually no conservative Bible scholars. However, Brewer is concerned not with exegesis but with application, toward which end he offers numerous practical exercises to develop the five-fold gifts. He believes that all five gifts are not only operational today but to some extent all Christians possess all five and should develop them<sup>[1]</sup> (pp. 25, 32), although some have a distinct calling (p. 32). These gifts need to be pursued and developed (p. 172), therefore Brewer devotes a chapter for each of the five gifts, complete with several exercises to be used in small groups. Some of the exercises, especially on evangelism, teaching and shepherding, are useful. The problem comes in the areas of apostleship and prophecy. Let's take a look.

## **Apostles**

If apostles exist today it would be expected that the rest of the church would submit to their authority. With this in mind we learn that "the NAR practice of submitting to an apostle is referred to as seeking spiritual covering (or spiritual protection) under the authority of an apostle."<sup>[2]</sup> In the New Testament apostles were chosen specifically by Christ (Matt 10:1-4), had to be eyewitnesses of the resurrected Lord (1 Cor 9:1; 15:7-8), were assigned the task of laying the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20), and were limited to 12 men (Rev 21:14). The NAR apostles, by contrast, are chosen by other "apostles", have not seen the resurrected Lord (although some have claimed to have done so), have no need to add to the church's foundation,

and number 400 and counting. The need for apostles in the NAR system becomes evident when one notes from the New Testament that the apostles received prophecies and gave God's people inspired revelation (1 Cor 2:13; 1 Thess 2:13; 1 John 1:1-3; 1, 2 Tim 1:13; 2:2; 3:14-17), performed signs and wonders and miracles (Acts 2:43; 3:3-11; 5:12), and had authority over the churches (1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20; Phile 9). It is based on the idea that the office of apostleship has been restored. NAR teachers believe additional revelation, prophecies, miracles, healings, and exorcism, are all fully functional today. They contend we have returned to the apostolic age, the Kingdom has begun, and the new super-apostles of NAR are leading the way.

Brewer believes that both the gift and office of apostle exists today,<sup>[3]</sup> and that every Christian possesses and should develop this gift, although some have been distinctively called to be apostles.<sup>[4]</sup> Coupled with apostleship are the miraculous sign gifts, in particular healings and demonic warfare. Concerning healings Brewer patterns his thinking after the "Power Healing" ministry of John Wimber and the Third Wave Movement.<sup>[5]</sup> Those implementing these methods are encouraged to go out into the streets, find someone they think needs to be healed and "command the pain to go, or the certain body part to be restored in Jesus name."<sup>[6]</sup> Brewer offers no guarantee that the healing will be successful, but promises "the outcome of increased intimacy with the Father for praying outweighs healing."<sup>[7]</sup> Concerning spiritual warfare, including tearing down demonic strongholds, Brewer says these can take place through the "apostolic strategy" of going to "a high place overlooking the city and transform your city through prayer."<sup>[8]</sup> These apostolic gifts and strategies are not an end in themselves; they are a means by which the kingdom of heaven is brought to earth. Brewer writes, "As ambassadors of the King and his culture in heaven, we bring heaven to new areas of earth, which moves toward the Kingdom in its fullness of healing and wholeness."<sup>[9]</sup> As was mentioned earlier in this paper, NAR leaders believe they have been called to take back dominion of the earth from Satan and his demons. This is done largely through the use of miraculous powers spearheaded by apostles who have authority over all that opposes Christ.

### **Prophets**

Prophets are second only to apostles in the New Testament; NAR, along with many in the Pentecostal/charismatic movement who are in lockstep with NAR, believe that the office of prophet has been reinstated. However, virtually no one believes that today's prophets have the same status that the biblical prophets had. Biblical prophets, when prophesying for the Lord, were incapable of error (Deut 18:20-22) and faced death if they were wrong. But many in the contemporary church have accepted Wayne Grudem's thesis that New Testament prophecies were and are fallible, being a mixture of a word from God and one's own ideas or imagination. In his *Systematic Theology* Grudem writes, "Prophecies in the church today should be considered merely human words, not God's words, and not equal to God's words in authority."<sup>[10]</sup> Jack Deere, who claims to be a prophet himself, admits that modern prophets are prone to errors and mistakes and says, "Prophets are really messy. Prophets make mistakes."<sup>[11]</sup> As is obvious, prophecies of today are not in the same league with the inspired prophecies of the Scriptures, and one has to question the value of fallible and mistaken prophecies. Nevertheless, supposed prophecies today are often published in places such as the Elijah List and *Charisma* magazine, apparently with little concern for their accuracies.

Brewer believes the gift of prophecy has been restored and defines it as "receiving from God his love and perspective about a person, church, city or nation, and communicating it for the purpose of encouragement, strengthening and comfort."<sup>[12]</sup> All Christians have the ability to prophesy,<sup>[13]</sup> and when God gives them a message they should write it down and refer to it later, much as one would the Bible.<sup>[14]</sup> So convinced is Brewer that all can prophesy on demand that he provides an exercise in his manual in which participants draw random numbers and prophesy on the spot concerning those who correspond to those numbers.<sup>[15]</sup> Brewer admits that not all prophecies are fulfilled and that the source of these supposed revelations might very well be our own spirit, or even an evil spirit.<sup>[16]</sup> But none of this keeps him from encouraging all believers to exercise the gift of prophecy.

## **Extrabiblical Words from God**

In a related category, but perhaps not quite up to the level of prophecy, are the constant references throughout NAR of God speaking to virtually all believers, audibly and inaudibly. Such assertions are hardly shocking today since they are prevalent throughout all spectrums of evangelicalism. Indeed, those who are far removed from any official form of Pentecostalism regularly declare revelations from the Lord. These revelations are seldom elevated to the level of inspiration, but we would have to ask in what sense does God ever speak in a non-revelatory manner? Can God speak in a non-authoritative way? Can God whisper fallible, errant ideas and words into the minds or ears of His people. If so, no such revelatory example can be found in the Scriptures. As with all other modern day charismatic practices, whether they be tongues, miracles, healings, or prophecies, hearing from the Lord apart from Scripture does not match what took place in the New Testament. Nathan Busenitz addresses this subject in the book *Right Thinking in a Church Gone Astray*, “When we approach the continuationist/cessationist debate by first defining the gifts biblically, it becomes apparent that modern charismatic practice does not match the New Testament precedent.”<sup>[17]</sup> For example, tongues in the New Testament were the supernatural ability to speak authentic foreign languages unknown to the speaker. But virtually no one in the charismatic movement today would make such a boast. D. A. Carson, himself a continuationist (that is, believes that the Lord speaks to us today apart from Scripture), confirms, “The few instances of reported modern xenoglossia are so poorly attested that no weight can be laid to them.”<sup>[18]</sup> Modern tongues simply are not languages as was true in Bible times. Turning to prophecy, we find biblical prophecy authoritative, inspired and inerrant, but such is not the case concerning modern prophecies which can be in error, partially given by God and partially from one’s imagination. This is admitted by even the strongest supporters of contemporary prophets, as earlier quotes demonstrated. When we turn to miracles and healings, the same disconnect between Scripture and present day practices is evident. At the hands of Jesus or the apostles, healings were immediate, complete and undeniable but these features do not attend the claims of healing ministries today. As stated earlier, whatever is going on today in the charismatic movement is not equivalent to what was taking place in the New Testament.

Somehow this seems to go unnoticed by many, and that is true of those connected with NAR. Turning back to Nathan Brewer he writes, “Many Christians struggle to hear from God or say they can’t, but that’s a lie from the enemy. Come to him with an expectation, he loves to communicate with His children.”<sup>[19]</sup> Brewer even teaches techniques on how to hear from God:

Prepare your heart and mind to receive from the Lord. Relax by taking a few deep breaths. Tune out things around you... Invite the Holy Spirit to come into your mind, fill your heart, and speak to you in a personal way. This process to relax and tune out may take a few minutes, so just be patient and wait for his presence... After you sense something, write it down. Even if you are unsure if it was from God, just write it down.<sup>[20]</sup>

It is instructive to read the biblical base given for these prescribed techniques. While stating in other places in his book that God speaking to believers today is not equal to the inspired revelation of Scripture, Brewer nevertheless uses God’s words given to the biblical writers as his rationale for God speaking to us now and for us writing down His supposed words. God told Isaiah, Brewer confirms, to “take a large scroll, and write on it with a man’s pen” what the Lord had shown him (Isa 8:1). Habakkuk was exhorted, “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets” (Hab 2:1); the apostle John is commanded to “write what you see in a book regarding the churches” (Rev 1:10-11), and again “write this down” regarding the vision of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:5).<sup>[21]</sup> Somehow Brewer, and most others who accept the view that God is speaking to us today outside of Scripture, misses the clear implication of what they are saying. Certainly the human authors of Scripture were inspired of God and directed to write down their revelations. But that does not give other Christians the right to give the words that come to their minds inspirational authority, nor are they commanded to write them down because the biblical authors did. There is a link missing between how God spoke to those who would record His Word and the supposed words from God that many are claiming today. That link is Holy Spirit inspiration. The biblical authors confidently spoke and recorded the very words of God (1 Thess 2:13). They did not need to learn a technique on how to discern the voice of God,

nor did they have to wonder if God was speaking to and through them, or if their imaginations had deceived them. But Brewer, representative of so many others, is not concerned, “Do not be discouraged if you feel like you can’t sense the Lord’s voice. It is a gradual learning process, like a skill that can be continually improved.”<sup>[22]</sup> In contrast, those who heard from God, as recorded in the Bible, did not need to learn a skill, never doubted if the voice they heard was God’s or their own, never mixed revelation from God with their imaginary thoughts, never spoke of inner voices that were inaudible, and never doubted the authority of the words they heard. They were hearing from God, and their witness of God speaking was very different from the claims we hear in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Biblical Examination**

Challenges to NAR’s theology have already been addressed throughout this article but it would be good to briefly summarize the biblical teachings on some of the key components of the movement:

### **The Cessation of Apostles and Prophets**

At the heart of NAR’s theology is the interpretation of Ephesians 4:11-13 which NAR leaders unfortunately believe teaches the present existence of the “five-fold” ministry. Two exegetical mistakes are made with the text. First, and of lesser consequence, is the separation of “pastor” and “teacher” into two offices. While English translations give the appearance that pastors and teachers are distinct, the Greek implies otherwise. John MacArthur summarizes the consensus view in his commentary, “‘Pastors’ and ‘teachers’ are best understood as one office of leadership in the church. Often the word “and” (*kai*) means ‘that is’ or ‘in particular,’ making teachers in this context explanatory of pastors. This meaning cannot be conclusively proven in this text, but the text of 1 Timothy 5:17 clearly puts the two functions together...” If this is the case, then the five-fold ministry is quickly reduced to the four-fold ministry.

But more important are the positions of apostles and prophets. Both roles were clearly foundational in the New Testament as the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). If there were additional apostles and prophets today their function would still be that of laying the foundation of the church. That is, additional doctrines and instructions to God’s people would be laid on what is already found in the New Testament – which would be a recipe for confusion and disaster. The apostles and prophets received divine revelation to pass on to God’s people (Eph 3:5). It was to them that “the faith” (the New Testament body of truth) was “once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3, cf. v. 17). Peter called on his readers not to seek additional revelation but to “remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandments of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles” (2 Pet 3:2). The book of Hebrews concurs, “After it was at the 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 the gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (2:3-4). The NAR leadership knows these passages but reject their meaning by teaching that God is doing a new thing in our age. In order to do a new thing there needs to be new authority. And new authority, authority to add to or supersede the teachings of Scripture, requires apostles. And thus the rise of the office of apostleship, an office even historic Pentecostals recognize as no longer operative. Not only does Revelation 21:14 clearly teach that there were only twelve apostles of the Lamb, we also recognize that nowhere in the New Testament is found a plan or instructions to replace the original Twelve. As they died they were not replaced by others and, with the death of John, the last of the apostles left this earthly scene and none has taken their place.

Another exegetical fallacy NAR makes with the text is that the grammar of the passage does not support the assertion that all of these ministries were expected to continue throughout the church age. Nathan Buzenitz writes, “Rather, it is the ‘building up’ process of verse 12 (and not the ‘giving’ of apostles and prophets in verse 11) that is said to continue until the church reaches a state of maturity (v. 13). Though the apostles and prophets were limited to the foundation stage of church history... the ‘building up’ of the church has continued throughout the centuries.”<sup>[23]</sup>

## **The Working of Miracles**

A key teaching of NAR is that people can be trained to work miracles today. Yet not only is there no evidence in the New Testament that anyone was ever taught how to do miracles, instead miracles were performed only by a very select group of people and for a very particular reason. Jesus, of course, performed miracles of all kinds, but as a sign pointing to the fact that He was “the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). Almost all miracles recorded in the Bible subsequent to Jesus were at the hands of the twelve apostles, “Many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles” (Acts 2:43). Numerous miracles in the book of Acts come through the ministries of the apostles, but there are only two instances where non-apostles did so: Stephen (Acts 6:8) and Philip (Acts 8:6), and these men would easily fit the category of biblical prophets who laid the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20). To our knowledge no one else ever worked a miracle, nor do the New Testament epistles, from which we derive our church-age teachings, do anything more than mention miracles in passing (e.g 1 Cor 12:28-30). It is obvious that miracles were not a key ingredient in the early church. We do find, however, that they had an important function – to authenticate the true apostles. In the face of some who claimed to be apostles, whom Paul called false apostles (2 Cor 11:13), he verified his apostolic credentials by saying, “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Cor 12:12).

Add to this biblical evidence the fact that the supposed miracles and healings today bear little resemblance to the New Testament counterparts. Whatever is going on today in the charismatic movement, and within NAR, it is not the same thing that happened in the first century.

## **Demonic Warfare Strategies**

Lastly, because of the prominence of spiritual warfare within NAR a quick look at what the Bible says about this is warranted. Almost nothing that NAR advocates concerning battling demons has a biblical base. Spiritual mapping is never found in Scripture, there is no evidence for territorial demons, nor prayerwalks, nor rebuking demons, nor ancestral curses. Jesus and a handful of apostles addressed demons, but believers are never instructed to do so in the New Testament. There are only three texts in the epistles that inform us of how to war with demons, and all three say the same thing. In James 4:7 and 1 Peter 5:8 we are told to resist the devil, and when we do he will flee from us. Ephesians 6:10-18 expands on the instruction of James and Peter by commanding the believer to be strong in the Lord’s strength, stand firm against the schemes of the devil, resist in the evil day, and put on the full armor of God. Paul concludes by calling us to prayer. But at no point are we told to take an aggressive stance, to rebuke the devil, break down his strongholds by marching around his territory, or any other such techniques. Resist and stand firm are defensive stances, and to that we are called. Our mission is to draw near to God (James 4:8), be firm in our faith, (1 Peter 5:9), apply God’s spiritual armor (Eph 6:14-17), pray at all times in the Spirit (Eph 6:18). In other words, focus on Christ (Col 3:1-4) and the means that He has supplied to grow in grace. Fixation on the devil is a distraction and a trap and never called for in the Scriptures.

## **Conclusion**

Hopefully this paper has given the reader enough information to recognize and guard against the influences of NAR. Identification is often difficult, not only because there is no official organization or membership but because those who are involved, as is evident by their common views on the five-fold ministry and all that is associated with it, often claim to be evangelical and hold many orthodox theological views.

For example, the website for a newly planted NAR church in my city offers this in its section on what they believe:

We are “Good News” Christians; in church lingo that means “Evangelical Christians.” We believe that God is in a good mood and brings Good News through Jesus Christ. Our beliefs have foundations in the Apostles’ Creed (c. A.D. 215) and the core principles of the Protestant Reformation (A.D. 1517), namely the ultimate and essential authority of the

Scriptures for Christian faith and practice, salvation by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers and the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe in the Trinity; that God is the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, died on the cross, that He was physically raised from the dead, ascended to heaven and will someday return. We also believe that an individual's personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior determines an individual's eternal destination of heaven or hell.

When Jesus said, "Come, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... (Matt 11:28-30) the plea was for everyone to come, no exceptions. Our heart's desire is not to change you but instead to do our best to be **REAL**. To be **RELEVANT** and to walk with each other in **RELATIONSHIP** so that together we might find ourselves being more like Jesus every day.

This can be quite confusing. When one digs deeper they will find that this church has all the theological errors of NAR-related churches, yet they affirm the Apostle's Creed, claim to be evangelical, and hold to the core principles of the Reformation. It is not until one gets to the last paragraph that they begin to wonder if something is askew. After all, the call of the church is not to be real and relevant but to produce disciples of Christ (i.e. to change us).

When a description of the pastors of this church is read things really begin to come into focus. The biography of one couple who are both pastors of the church reads:

Both [husband and wife are] graduates of Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry in Redding, CA. They both have a heart to see the Kingdom of God advance. Although [R's] main focus is in being the Chief Financial Officer for D. Church, his most prominent passion is in pastoring and connecting. [H] is the Director of Administration at DC and has a finger print on everything that needs organized. She is the head of missions as well as the Director of Five Fold International, which is the covering of DC.

While some of these terms will float over the heads of many, Bethel and its School of Supernatural Ministry, advancing the Kingdom of God, Five Fold International, and covering should send up warning flags for any who have read this paper.

How can we safeguard ourselves and those we love from the destructive influence of NAR? First, it is imperative that we have a good, and growing, grasp of Scripture and theology. Deception is most powerful when people are lacking knowledge. A mechanic can take advantage of me, if he wants to, because I do not know much about cars. Similarly, false teachers prey on those who are ignorant of the fundamentals of the faith.

Secondly, even those with a good grasp of biblical truth can be deceived by movements such as NAR if they believe that new revelations, which move beyond and are not tied directly to Scripture, are possible. It is essential to understand that all we believe concerning life and godliness must emerge from the Word of God (1 Pet 1:3; 2 Tim 3:16-17). It is not enough that a particular teaching does not seem to *contradict* Scripture. The real issue is whether it is *drawn* from Scripture.

Third, our discernment skills should be sharp. Hebrews 5:14 calls for maturity and chides believers who have become lax and apathetic in their Christian walk, "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." When virtually every New Testament book warns of false teachers and deception, and 1 Timothy 4:1 says that "in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons," it is time for believers to take these warnings seriously. The contemporary church is woefully unprepared to combat fraudulent theology on the level of NAR, and it is for that reason it, and related groups, are growing rapidly.

Finally, believers should be involved in a church which takes the Word of God seriously. Far too many Christians are content to attend mediocre churches which have entertaining music, fun programs and excellent coffee bars. Churches are to be the "pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15) and, if the one you attend is not living up to its divine job description, a

new one which does should be sought out if at all possible. Believers need likeminded brothers and sisters who are serious about the Word and serving Christ based on that Word (Heb 10:23-25). If you can't find a good church that teaches the Bible faithfully, find a believer or two who shares your commitment to sound theology and truth who will sharpen you in the faith. None of us can afford to be ignorant of Satan's schemes (2 Cor 2:11) and our only safeguard is the inspired, infallible revelation of God in the Bible itself, not the imaginations of people.

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[1] Nathan Brewer, *The Pulse of Christ, a Fivefold Training Manual* (Xulon, 2016), pp. 25, 32.

[2] R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *God's Super-Apostles, Encountering the Worldwide Prophets and Apostles Movement* (Wooster, Ohio: Weaver Book Company, 2014), pp. 10, 11.

[3] Nathan Brewer, pp. 45-75.

[4] Ibid., pp. 25, 32.

[5] Ibid., p. 64.

[6] Ibid., p. 68.

[7] Ibid., p. 69.

[8] Ibid., p. 49.

[9] Ibid., p. 64.

[10] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 239.

[11] Quoted by Nathan Busentiz in *Right Thinking in A Church Gone Astray, Finding Our Way Back to Biblical Truth* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 2017) p. 239.

[12] Nathan Brewer, p. 79.

[13] Ibid., pp. 80-81.

[14] Ibid., pp. 85-86.

[15] Ibid., pp. 87-93.

[16] Ibid., p.90.

[17] Nathan Busenitz, p. 119.

[18] Ibid., p. 240.

[19] Nathan Brewer, p. 83.

[20] Brewer, pp. 84-85.

[21] Brewer, p. 85.

[22] Brewer, p. 86.

[23] Nathan Busenitz, p. 122.