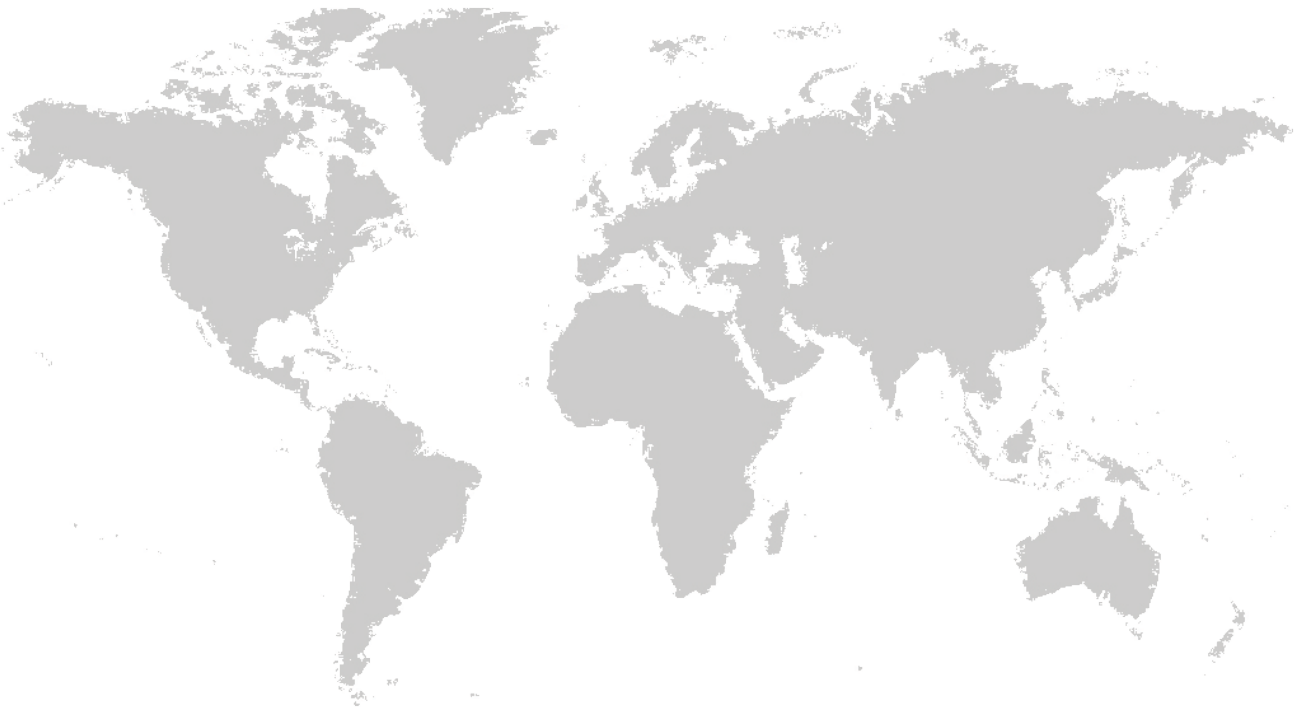


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Don't Run from Controversy

'No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.' —1 Corinthians 11:19

As a college undergraduate, I heard allegations that a charismatic Christian community active on my campus was exercising authoritarian control over members' lives. Rather ambitiously, given my limited theological discernment, I found a professor to sponsor me and undertook an independent study of the group.

When the group's leaders decided not to speak to me and threatened legal action, their reluctance to engage strengthened my determination to complete the project, which I self-published six months after beginning my research. Some viewed my work as unnecessarily dividing Christians. But a few years later, one of the group's leaders left, taking as many students as he could with him, and apologized to me. Years after that, I learned that the community's head coordinator had lost his counseling license due to his history of sexual entanglement with single women in the group.

I tell that story to remind us that sometimes, to remain faithful to the gospel, we must attempt to discern whom to treat as fellow believers and who might actually be wolves in sheep's clothing. The World Evangelical Alliance's mission begins with the words, 'Fostering unity in Christ.' But if we had no limits on whom we unite with, we would end up with false brothers and sisters in the tent. We have to set boundaries somewhere.

In this issue, we raise boundary-setting questions with regard to the so-called New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement. See page 132 for my separate introduction to the two articles related to that topic.

Some think that embracing the NAR is a case of setting our boundaries of theological tolerance too wide. On the other hand, we can also make our boundaries too narrow, excluding fellow believers from our circle of fellowship for illegitimate reasons. Jay Matenga, the WEA's Director of Global Witness, addresses that concern in his brief summary of a recent WEA mission consultation. I know of no one who more provocatively and effectively challenges Western understandings of mission than Jay.

Joe Handley of the WEA-sponsored Galilean Movement examines the state of disciple making today. In another probing mission-related article, Thorsten Prill shows how lack of cross-cultural sensitivity hampered early Christian mission to Africa and can remain a problem today.

Joel Pfahler, a knowledgeable practitioner in the realm of sports chaplaincy, presents eye-opening ministry stories and applications, along with some troubling examples of how Christian sports fans can harm the cause of Christ. Brent Neely uses Muslims' view of Christianity as a window to consider how we should think about sin. Danny Kirkpatrick, who specializes in systematic theology, offers a penetrating but readable article on who is responsible for what in our redemption. The two book reviews—on the theology of video games and Philippine evangelicals' political engagement—should be stimulating as well.

Happy reading!

— Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

Introduction to the Next Two Articles

Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

With the next two articles, the *Evangelical Review of Theology* seeks to tread gently into a new area: handling contemporary controversies within global evangelicalism with grace and sensitivity.

The World Evangelical Alliance seeks to empower and unify the global evangelical movement. With that role comes a responsibility to relate discerningly to all streams of Christianity and, sometimes, to speak up regarding erroneous teachings. Ever since New Testament times, the church has had to decide when a difference of opinion is not crucial to gospel witness (Mk 9:40; Rom 14:1; Phil 1:16) and when it involves false teaching that must be rejected (Mt 7:15; Gal 1:8; 3 Jn 9–10).

Several months ago, we received a submission from Richard Moore regarding the controversial impulse known as the New Apostolic Reformation. In reviewing Moore's essay, we recognized that his description of the movement and its various connections encompassed a range of participants, from relatively 'fringe' voices to more theologically grounded ones, along with widely varying interpretations of what contemporary apostolic leadership should mean.

Accordingly, we contacted Joseph Mattera, international ambassador to the global church for the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, a WEA partner organization. Mattera graciously granted us permission to reprint relevant sections of his recent book.

The two resulting articles by Moore and Mattera are not a pro-and-con pair. Rather, you will find them complementary, sharing particular concerns in common while presenting different perspectives. Moore seeks primarily to counter the inroads of questionable theology within global evangelicalism; Mattera seeks to clarify and preserve a role for modern servant leaders, similar to that of the original apostles, within today's church while distinguishing that legitimate role from self-serving versions of apostleship.

Grappling with hot-button issues is never easy, but we don't think the WEA should shirk this task. I especially appreciate WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirmacher's personal involvement in determining how best to address this and other difficult challenges facing the contemporary evangelical church.

We welcome your feedback as we seek to address this and other tough issues with grace and mature wisdom.

The New Apostolic Reformation and Its Threat to Evangelicalism

Richard P. Moore

The New Apostolic Reformation, among the latest in a long series of theological and practical controversies among independent charismatics, has significant impact on evangelicals globally, especially through the music produced by Bethel Church in California. Along with conducting extensive research using primary sources, the author of this article has personally experienced the NAR's impact in Europe.

In 2019, a worship leader's daughter from the influential Bethel Church in Redding, California, USA unexpectedly passed away in her sleep. Her name was Olive. In response to this sudden tragedy, the family called on the global church to pray for the resurrection of baby Olive. The hashtag '#wakeupolive' trended on social media platforms for several weeks. Bill Johnson, senior leader of Bethel, endorsed the appeal, saying, 'Not everyone dies in God's timing ... Jesus set a precedent (i.e. resurrection) for us to follow.'¹

Southern Baptist seminary president Albert Mohler, a leading representative of orthodox evangelicalism in the US, reacted strongly to this episode. He called Bethel an outpost in a 'heterodox ... fringe movement' and 'infamous' for its theology centred on signs and wonders. Mohler provided evidence that Bethel and the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement for which it is a flagship stand outside historic Pentecostalism. He concluded that 'the theology of Bethel Church actually detracts from the gospel of Jesus Christ.'²

What should we do about this popular but controversial movement? We should start by grasping its historical and theological underpinnings so that we can respond effectively to its threats.

History of the New Apostolic Reformation

The NAR movement's history starts with C. Peter Wagner, a professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission until his retirement in 2001. While at Fuller, Wagner became enthralled with what would become

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1 Bethel Music, 'A Message from Pastor Bill Johnson' (2019), <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47215>.

2 Albert Mohler, 'The Briefing', 20 December 2019, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47216>.

known as the NAR, and he connected with it after leaving Fuller to create the Wagner Leadership Institute.³

In 2012, Wagner praised the NAR as ‘an extraordinary work of God at the close of the twentieth century that is, to a significant extent, changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world.’⁴ He defined the main characteristic of this new movement as ‘the reaffirmation, not only of the New Testament gift of apostle, but also of the office of apostle’.⁵

Wagner originally gleaned most of his information and framework for the NAR from his missiological research in the Global South. He then applied the model of what he viewed as apostolic movements and their characteristics to encourage similar pragmatic outcomes in the West.⁶ In 2014, Wagner wrote that churches must embrace the paradigm of apostolic government.⁷ He claimed that the traditional pastoral paradigm was not working and that a switch to the apostolic paradigm was the only viable future for the church.⁸

The NAR has no official organization or formal membership, but several apostolic organizations that do have formal memberships are associated with the movement. The International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (ICAL), founded in 1999, claims to include 400 apostles from 45 nations.⁹ The United States Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (USCAL) has 64 council members.¹⁰ Wagner was instrumental in the founding of ICAL and was the ‘presiding apostle’ of ICAL when it founded USCAL.¹¹ ICAL defines apostles as people with ‘authority to establish the foundational government of a church or business within an assigned sphere by hearing what the Holy Spirit is saying’.¹²

Some leaders in the movement have recently sought to distance themselves from critiques connecting the NAR with the right-wing Christian nationalism movement in the United States. To that end, an ‘NAR and Christian Nationalism Statement’ was published in October 2022. The statement disavows Christian nationalism at length but presents no extended articulation of the NAR’s theological premises

3 Peter C. Wagner, ‘My Pilgrimage in Mission’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 23, no. 4 (1999): 164–67.

4 C. Peter Wagner, ‘The New Apostolic Reformation’, *Renewal Journal* (blog), 12 April 2012, <https://worldea.org/yourls/47217>.

5 Wagner, ‘The New Apostolic Reformation’.

6 Dr. Rod Nidever, a student of Wagner, said that Wagner’s error was that he was too pragmatic. He said that Wagner latched on to the NAR because he observed its burgeoning and growing nature and sought to translate that growth into the West. Nidever, interview with author, 16 September 2022.

7 C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today: Biblical Government for Biblical Power* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2014), 133.

8 Wagner, *Apostles Today*. 284.

9 R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec. *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014), Kindle location 249. ICAL discontinued publishing a list of Council Apostles around 2010, so current accurate numbers are not publicly available.

10 US Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, ‘Council Members’, <https://worldea.org/yourls/47218>.

11 International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, ‘History of ICAL’, <https://worldea.org/yourls/47219>.

12 International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, ‘About ICAL’, <https://worldea.org/yourls/47220>.

except to say that apostles and prophets exist based on the fivefold ministry (Eph 4:11) and are ‘important for the well-being and mission of the Church’. The statement also gives a short, more neutral definition of apostles and prophets that does not include the governmental function included in Wagner’s and many other NAR definitions. Notably, several signatories gave themselves the title of apostle in their signatures.¹³

Although the restoration of the fivefold ministry (taken from Ephesians 4:11) was originally espoused by the controversial, Canadian-born Latter Rain movement of the 1940s, the NAR and ICAL have advanced it forcefully, presenting Latter Rain favorably as a true move of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ In contrast, the Assemblies of God, a major US Pentecostal denomination, rejected Latter Rain for practices including its approach to imparting spiritual gifts, imposition of personal leadings by supposedly prophetic utterances, and the ‘erroneous teaching that the Church is built on the foundation of present-day apostles and prophets’.¹⁵ ICAL describes two types of apostles: vertical apostles who govern ecclesiastically and horizontal apostles who govern by convening, mobilizing and overseeing territories.¹⁶

In 1998, Wagner founded the Apostolic Council for Educational Accountability (ACEA; the name has since been changed and the first word is now ‘Academic’).¹⁷ Wagner described the forming of this accreditation organization in his colourfully titled book *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*.¹⁸ The ACEA includes 30 schools and 60 other partners.¹⁹

Numerous other NAR-connected training institutions not accredited by ACEA or any other body also exist, such as the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (BSSM)—known internally by students as ‘Christian Hogwarts’ after wizard Harry Potter’s school in the J. K. Rowling book series²⁰—and International House of Prayer University.²¹ In Germany, Awakening Europe started a school in 2022,²² and Schule

13 Joseph Mattera and Michael Brown, ‘NAR and Christian Nationalism Statement’, 10 October 2022, narandchristiannationalism.com. Mattera seeks to distinguish himself from NAR positions in *The Apostolic Movement and the Progress of the Gospel* (Ames, IA: BILD International, 2022), 50–58. See Julia Duin, ‘Pentecostal Leaders Slam Christian Nationalism, NAR Beliefs’, *Newsweek*, 20 October 2022, <https://worldia.org/yourls/47221>; Tim Dickinson, ‘Meet the Apostle of Right-Wing Christian Nationalism’, *Rolling Stone* (blog), 1 September 2022, <https://worldia.org/yourls/47222>.

14 Ché Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles: Operating in Your Apostolic Office and Anointing* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2019), 27.

15 General Council of the Assemblies of God, ‘Minutes of the Twenty-Third General Council of the Assemblies of God’, 1949, <https://worldia.org/yourls/47223>, 26–27.

16 International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, ‘Statement of Faith’, <https://worldia.org/yourls/47224>.

17 Academic Council for Educational Accountability, ‘About ACEA’, <https://worldia.org/yourls/47225>.

18 C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010).

19 Academic Council for Educational Accountability, ‘Partners—ACEA’, <https://worldia.org/yourls/47226>.

20 ‘BSSM—Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry’. <https://worldia.org/yourls/47227>; Molly Hensley-Clancy, ‘Meet the “Young Saints” of Bethel Who Go to College to Perform Miracles’, *BuzzFeed News*, 12 October 2017, <https://worldia.org/yourls/47228>.

21 International House of Prayer University, ‘Front Page’, <https://worldia.org/yourls/47229>.

22 ‘Awakening School of Ministry’, *Awakening Europe* (blog), <https://worldia.org/yourls/47230>.

der Erweckung in Germany has partnered with Bethel Church in California.²³ Many other NAR churches consider themselves training institutions in Wagner's apostolic paradigm.

BSSM has a branch called 'BSSM Planting' that is committed to equipping leaders to build schools of supernatural ministry similar to BSSM.²⁴ BSSM Planting published a roadmap for planting other BSSMs that employs the Wagner apostolic activation paradigm.²⁵ Wagner hoped to circumvent traditional theological training in favor of what he called 'new wineskin' education, with schools, workshops, conferences, boot camps, retreats, stadium events, camps and additional events to impart the NAR paradigm and to 'help reshape the face of Christianity'.²⁶ Apostle Ché Ahn, the successor to Wagner, likewise encourages young people to bypass conventional Bible colleges for what he calls 'power ministry' schools.²⁷

Doug Geivett and Holly Pivec, recognized experts on the NAR, have described how many of the world's largest churches follow Wagner's apostolic paradigm, such as E. A. Adeboye's Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria, which claims more than five million congregants. Likewise, Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations in Ukraine boasts 20,000 people. Another prominent church with 250,000 members is César Castellanos' International Charismatic Mission in Bogotá, Colombia. David Yonggi Cho, the founder of Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea, claims one million congregants. Cho embraced the NAR's apostolic paradigm, stating, 'God is restoring the powerful ministry of the apostle to His end-time Church.'²⁸

In 2010, Ahn edited a book called *The Reformer's Pledge*, in which NAR leaders described their efforts to reform the church towards the theological leanings of this movement. He contended that apostolic networks encompassed 18 to 20 million people in Africa and Asia alone.²⁹ Radio host, author and apologist Michael Brown sometimes suggests that the claim of a cohesive NAR movement is a conspiracy theory comparable to common depictions of the Illuminati;³⁰ however, one clear evidence of the NAR's existence and maturation is the three-volume *Systematic Theology for the New Apostolic Reformation*, written by Harold R. Eberle³¹ with a foreword by Wagner. A movement certainly exists if it has its own systematic theology!

23 'Wer wir sind', Schule der Erweckung, <https://worldea.org/yourls/47231>.

24 Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, 'Supporting a Global Community of School Leaders', <https://worldea.org/yourls/47232>.

25 BSSM Planting, 'School Planting Roadmap', 2017, <https://worldea.org/yourls/47233>, 97–100.

26 C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000), 133; Wagner, 'The New Apostolic Reformation'; C. Peter Wagner, 'Goodbye, Theologians', *Ministry Today*, 31 December 2006, <https://worldea.org/yourls/47234>; Wagner, 'My Pilgrimage in Mission'.

27 Frank DeCenso, *God's Supernatural Power in You* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2009), 80.

28 Geivett and Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?* Kindle location 27.

29 Ahn. *Modern-Day Apostles*. 34–39. Ahn does not give numbers for the movement outside of Africa and Asia.

30 Michael Brown, 'Dispelling the Myths About NAR (the New Apostolic Reformation)', *Christian Post*, 3 May 2018, <https://worldea.org/yourls/47235>.

31 Harold R. Eberle, *Systematic Theology for the New Apostolic Reformation: An Exposition in Father-Son Theology* (Yakima, WA: Worldcast Publishing, 2016).

After Wagner passed away in 2016, Ahn received Wagner's mantle, becoming chancellor of the Wagner Leadership Institute. Ahn is currently the leader of an apostolic network called Harvest International Ministry, which claims 'apostolic covering' for more than 25,000 affiliated ministries and organizations in over 65 nations.³²

Wagner set up his leadership institute with no academic requirements for entrance, stating that the impartation of anointing, not the transmission of information, would be its main goal.³³ Wagner laid the foundation that Ahn continues to build on—namely, the teaching that the fundamental quality of an apostolic leader includes some mystical form of anointing with supernatural power.

Bill Johnson, the lead apostle at Bethel, seconds this approach to the transference of anointings and contends that Christ-like character can be developed only under some anointed leader, presumably an apostle.³⁴ Johnson directs his readers to come under a ministry like his or that of another NAR prophet or apostle, as the only way for Christ-like character to be fully developed. Furthermore, he takes an adversarial posture towards those who do not subscribe to this view of anointing. In one passage, he indicates that people have a religious spirit of the antichrist if they 'reject everything that has to do with the Holy Spirit's anointing'.³⁵

The NAR's broad influence on evangelicals

This may sound like a fringe movement, but evangelicals should not underestimate its global influence. Much of the global growth in independent or 'postdenominational' churches has an NAR connection. Geivett and Pivec estimated that 66 million people have significant contact with NAR teachings, though only an estimated three million are part of NAR churches that explicitly embrace the apostolic paradigm.³⁶

Bethel Church's musical endeavours are probably the NAR's leading global mouthpiece. Nearly every song released by Bethel Music has millions of YouTube views. Their channel has 4.5 million subscribers, and their more popular songs have 50 to 100 million views. When Bethel releases an album, it tops iTunes and other charts. These huge numbers testify to the church's following. Additionally, the NAR controls a large segment of video, music, radio and print media, such as Destiny Image, GOD TV and *Charisma* magazine, all of which have been purveyors of NAR content.

Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) is a global company that licenses Christian music for use by churches and other Christian organizations. As of September 2022, of the 10 songs most widely used through CCLI, eight were from NAR-related churches or artists.³⁷ Another just-completed study found that of 38 songs that made the top 25 for CCLI between 2010 and 2020, all but two had

32 'Harvest International Ministry—Changing Lives, Transforming Cities, Discipling Nations', <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47236>.

33 Wagner, 'My Pilgrimage in Mission', 167.

34 Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth: A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2013), 108.

35 Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 81.

36 Geivett and Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?* Kindle location 31.

37 'CCLI—Christian Copyright Licensing International', <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47237>.

originated from four NAR-oriented churches or organizations: Bethel, Hillsong, Passion City Church in Atlanta, and Elevation Church in North Carolina, USA. The researchers pointed out that only a few of the most popular songs talk about the cross or salvation, instead highlighting personal experience and blessing. They concluded that the theology of these four churches has deeply influenced the spiritual practices of many evangelical congregations.³⁸

Out of respect for copyright law, I will not quote any Bethel or NAR lyrics directly here. However, Geivett and Pivec's book *Counterfeit Kingdom* commits a whole chapter to themes found in NAR music, such as 'calling down' prayer declarations, the idea that 'miracles start breaking out' by just opening your mouth, an imbalanced emphasis on miracles, modern-day resurrections, and 'open heavens'.³⁹ According to Geivett and Pivec, Bill Johnson instructs his worship leaders to write music anticipating what they want the church to believe and look like in five years, and to integrate those doctrinal perspectives so that the church will 'sing [their] way into it'.⁴⁰ The evangelical church, by singing Bethel and other NAR music, might inadvertently be singing their way into NAR beliefs.

Distinctives of NAR teaching, theology, and praxis

The most obvious distinctive of this movement, a heavy emphasis on apostolic and prophetic government, clearly dates back to Wagner, who taught courses in 2001 at Wagner Leadership Institute called 'Growth Dynamics of New Apostolic Churches'. The course revealed 'secrets of the fastest growing churches in all areas of the world, the New Apostolic Reformation churches. You will understand what the Bible means when it says that the foundation of the church is the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ the chief cornerstone.'⁴¹ Numerous other courses at the institute addressed aspects of apostolic and prophetic ministry. Other common NAR themes covered in the institute's list of courses were deliverance, territorial spirits, spiritual mapping and generational curses.

The NAR tends to subscribe to the Seven Mountains Mandate (7MM), which teaches that the church should move into the seven spheres of culture and spread the dominion of Jesus by taking back territory that Satan usurped in the Fall. The seven mountains are government, media, family, business, education, church and

38 Bob Smetana, 'How Bethel and Hillsong Took Over Our Worship Sets', *Christianity Today*, 12 April 2023, <https://worldia.org/yourls/47238>; 'Study Methodology', *Worship Leader Research* (blog), version of 28 March 2023, <https://worldia.org/yourls/47239>.

39 R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom: The Dangers of New Revelation, New Prophets, and New Age Practices in the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2022), 143–45. The NAR's 'open heavens' teaching refers to the idea that the heavens are opened and pouring the realities that exist in heaven onto earth. Bethel has a conference by this name each year. Bill Johnson has an eight-week online e-course also called 'Open Heavens'. A Hillsong composition called 'Open Heaven' promises signs, wonders, dreams, visions and revelations because Christians live under and are an open heaven.

40 Geivett and Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom*, 147.

41 Wagner Leadership Institute, 'WLI Tracks of Courses', 8 March 2001, <https://worldia.org/yourls/47240>.

the arts. Once these seven spheres are neatly controlled by the church, only then will Christ return to a victorious bride.⁴²

NAR also retains Wagner's strong emphasis on the role of signs and wonders. Wagner initially teamed with John Wimber of the Vineyard movement to organize a December 1989 symposium at Fuller Seminary on how to integrate signs and wonders into missions curricula, thereby legitimizing 'power evangelism'.⁴³ Johnson claims, 'Without miracles, there can never be a full revelation of Jesus'⁴⁴ and 'Miracles provide the grace for repentance.'⁴⁵ According to Johnson and most NAR leaders, signs and wonders must accompany gospel proclamation or it is an incomplete gospel.

Extra-biblical revelation, primarily purported 'words of wisdom' from apostles and prophets, is frequent in NAR settings. Prophetic leaders in the NAR have come together to form 'prophetic councils', which assemble utterances accumulated from various sources within the broader movement that they deem prophetic in nature. The most influential of these councils worldwide is the Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders (ACPE), convened by Cindy Jacobs, which publishes a yearly compilation of prophetic utterances called the 'Word of the Lord'.⁴⁶

A further example of NAR extra-biblical revelation is the commissioning of a new translation of the Bible called *The Passion Translation* (TPT). It was written by Brian Simmons and has been endorsed by NAR leaders Ahn and Johnson, among others.⁴⁷ The legitimacy of this one-person translation has been widely questioned, as unlike Eugene Peterson's *Message* paraphrase of the Bible, TPT introduces NAR theology into the biblical text. Respected biblical scholars have expressed the view that TPT should not be considered a faithful Bible translation.⁴⁸ Andrew G. Shead, a member of the New International Version's committee on Bible translation and head of the Old Testament and Hebrew department at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, commented:

TPT is not just a new translation; it is a new text, and its authority derives solely from its creator. Like Joseph Smith and *The Book of Mormon*, Brian Simmons has created a new scripture with the potential to rule as canon over a new sect. ... TPT is not a Bible, and any church that treats it as such and receives it as canon will, by that very action, turn itself into an unorthodox sect. If the translation had been packaged as a commentary on Scripture I would not have needed to write this review; but to package it as Scripture is an offense against God. Every

42 Geivett and Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?* Kindle location 196.

43 "Signs and Wonders" Back in School? *Christianity Today*, 13 January 1989, <https://worldea.org/yourls/47241>.

44 Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 126.

45 Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 127.

46 Generals International, 'Word of the Lord 2021', <https://worldea.org/yourls/47242>.

47 'A New Bible: The Passion Translation', <https://worldea.org/yourls/47243>.

48 BibleThinker, 'The Passion Project', <https://worldea.org/yourls/47244>. Academics who critiqued *The Passion Translation* included Tremper Longman, Nijay Gupta, Darrell L. Bock, Douglas Moo, Craig Blomberg and Bradley Bitner.

believer who is taught to treat it as the enscripturated words of God is in spiritual danger.⁴⁹

Greek and Hebrew scholars have presented various examples of mistranslation in TPT that reflect NAR theology. In Galatians 2:14, TPT renders *aletheia* ('truth') as 'revelation of grace', consistent with the NAR belief that apostles and prophets can receive truth by revelation. Galatians 2:20 in TPT reads, 'My old identity has been co-crucified with Christ and no longer lives. And now the essence of this new life is no longer mine, for the Anointed One lives his life through me—we live in union as one! My new life is empowered by the faith of the Son of God who loves me so much that he gave himself for me, dispensing his life into mine!' Besides the verbosity of the translation, the emphasis on the believer and Christ being 'one' seems to be presented in such a way as to reduce the distinction between redeemed humans and the Son of God. Such an idea cannot be gleaned from the Greek or any other English translation.

The word 'activate' is not used in any of the main modern English translations of Romans 12:6, but Simmons inserts it there: 'God's marvelous grace imparts to each one of us varying gifts. So if God has given you the grace-gift of prophecy, *activate* your gift by using the proportion of faith you have to prophesy.' We have seen how a major tenet of the NAR is the activation of spiritual gifts at an apostolic center like Wagner's.

Simmons also incorporates other NAR buzzwords into his translation that do not appear in other modern English translations. The word 'realm' appears 196 times in TPT and none in the ESV. The word 'anointed' appears 223 times in TPT and only 15 times in the ESV. The word 'activate' appears 6 times in TPT and not at all in any other modern English translations. 'Supernatural' appears 37 times in TPT and not once in either the ESV, NKJV, NIV or NASB translations. Overall, Simmons inserts some 800 instances of NAR buzzwords that are not found in other English translations.

A theological response

One way to organize a theological critique of NAR and to grasp the extent to which it departs from evangelical orthodoxy is to apply the framework of evangelical historian and world-renowned scholar David Bebbington, who defines evangelical faith in terms of four distinctives: biblicism (authority and inspiration of the Bible), crucicentrism (priority of salvation through Christ's atoning sacrifice), conversionism (priority of the Great Commission and personal conversion), and activism (priority of faith lived out in action).⁵⁰

In the NAR, biblicism is undermined by the heavy emphasis on personal revelation, visions, dreams, impressions, impartations, manifestations and other novel

49 Andrew G. Shead, 'Burning Scripture with Passion: A Review of the Psalms (The Passion Translation)', *Themelios* 43, no. 1 (April 2018): 70.

50 David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2–17.

means of receiving messages from God called ‘downloads’.⁵¹ Johnson hints at this shift from Scripture to other forms of revelation: ‘None of us has a full grasp of scripture, but we all have the Holy Spirit. He is our common denominator who will always lead us into truth. But to follow him, we must be willing to follow off the map—to go beyond what we know.’⁵² Johnson adds, ‘When I treat the Bible as a road map, I live as though I can find my way through my own understanding of His book. I believe this perspective of scriptures actually describes living under the law, not living under grace.’⁵³ In another book he writes, ‘Revelation is not something that you can dig out of a theological book or study guide. It’s not even something you can unravel in the Bible all by yourself.’⁵⁴ Johnson expounds on what he calls ‘greater revelation’ that people can receive outside Scripture and suggests that those who do not seek such greater revelations might be deceived.⁵⁵ NAR leader Randy Clark likewise indicates that the canon of Scripture is not exclusively sufficient and that we need supernatural visitations for God to continue to communicate with man.⁵⁶

Although Ahn acknowledges that the revelation modern-day apostles and prophets receive is not on a par with the biblical canon, he proceeds to treat them as practically equal to if not more authoritative than Scripture.⁵⁷ Ahn claims that God speaks directly to apostles and prophets regarding his will for the present or the future, by installing apostles over geographic areas and by releasing specific truths for apostolic strategies.⁵⁸

Ahn’s claims of a plethora of means by which God gives special revelation outside of his word do not align with the sufficiency of Scripture. In practice, NAR leaders make the Bible gratuitous and diminish Scripture’s value in people’s lives. The NAR’s emphasis on new and special revelation displays that they disagree with the belief that the Scriptures alone are a sufficient source of God’s revelation for faith and life. In Bebbington’s description of biblicism, all essential spiritual truth is to be found in the pages of authoritative, inspired Scripture.

If asked, most NAR leaders would doubtless agree that the Bible is inspired and authoritative; however, this appears to be only lip service. Teachers cannot claim inerrancy or that the Bible is their ultimate authority while they teach mainly from revelations, visions, dreams, prophecies and other epistemological sources other than the Bible. For such a teacher, the Bible is neither inerrant nor an ultimate spiritual authority. Scripture must be the primary source of faith, teaching and practice for one to claim to be evangelical.

51 Brian Simmons, interview with Sid Roth, <https://worldea.org/yourls/47245>. From 15:50 to 17:00, Simmons describes how Jesus gave him ‘downloads’, a ‘computer chip’ and the ‘spirit of revelation’ to help him translate the Bible and give him the secrets of Hebrew.

52 Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*. 76.

53 Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*. 93.

54 Bill Johnson, *The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind: Access to a Life of Miracles* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2005), 62–63.

55 Johnson, *The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind*. 62.

56 Randy Clark, *There Is More: The Secret to Experiencing God’s Power to Change Your Life* (Chosen Books, 2013), 84.

57 Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles*, 135.

58 Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles*, 136–37.

Bebbington's second characteristic, an emphasis on Christ's atonement for sin, similarly often seems to get little more than lip service. There are many NAR documentaries on street healings, such as 'Finger of God', that get millions of views on YouTube. Encounters in these films go something like this. An 'evangelist' approaches a stranger and asks him (or her) if he has some kind of pain. The person responds and says he has pain in his shoulder. The evangelist asks if he can pray for him. He lays his hands on the stranger and prays for him (making declarations for healing). The person indicates that he surprisingly feels better in some way. Then the evangelist says something to the effect of 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life', with nothing more of gospel substance to be said. This pattern of 'evangelism' is repeated by people in the NAR ad nauseam. I have yet to see one of these videos where the cross of Christ, repentance and faith in His name have been presented.

Again, if you would ask people of this movement whether they believe in Christ's death on the cross for our salvation, they would likely say yes, but it is not backed up in reality. One cannot claim that the cross is the centre of one's teaching and faith and yet never speak of it, nor call people to repent and put their faith in that atoning work.

As for Bebbington's third distinctive, the NAR seems to place high priority on conversion, but it is not converting people to faith in Christ to the degree that its leaders claim. In fact, they are undermining evangelical unity by intentionally subverting and taking over mainstream evangelical churches. For instance, a dozen churches in Germany, France and Switzerland have experienced hostile takeovers by this movement, along with countless others worldwide.⁵⁹ When a NAR takeover is enacted, the church leadership structures change, theology is altered, different practices are effectuated, and apostles and prophets are installed as leaders. Rather than conversion, the NAR tends to urge adherents to be 'swept up' into the kingdom. The NAR is drawing people to a wonderful, feelings-oriented experience, not to true conversion, and it is doing so in a divisive manner.

Activism is an area in which this movement takes great pride. NAR leaders claim that they are helping the poor, doing missions, going out into the street, doing good deeds and loving their neighbours. However, activism alone cannot identify evangelicalism. Many non-Christian sects are engaged in their communities, love their neighbours and give to the poor.

Turning to the NAR's key theological distinctive, its commitment to an apostolic and prophetic governmental paradigm, two critiques can be offered. First, there are no New Testament instructions regarding the qualifications or criteria for governing prophets and apostles, whereas explicit directions are given for the appointment and qualifications of pastors, elders, deacons and overseers (1 Tim 3:1–7; Tit 1:5–7; 1 Pet

59 Frank Liesen, 'Bethel Church: New Age Syncretism and the Quest for an Evangelical Response in Germany', July 2022, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/47246>. The German Free Evangelical Church issued an open letter condemning the takeover of G5/MeineKirche by Awakening Europe and Bethel missionary Ben Fitzgerald. G5/MeineKirche subsequently left the denomination in January 2023. I have had contact with at least a dozen churches across Europe where a NAR takeover of a church is being instigated. I have counselled some churches on avoiding such takeovers, but most takeover efforts appear to have been successful. See also Holly Pivec, 'Is Vineyard Anaheim Going NAR?' 11 April 2022, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/47247>.

5:1–2; Acts 20:17, 28). Second, the church fathers did not claim such titles. For example, Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John, but he did not identify himself as an apostle. The immediate generation after the apostles did not take unto themselves the governmental office of apostle or prophet; rather, they spurned such titles. If the office of apostle or prophet were meant to have been carried on as a governing role, then the generation immediately after the apostles would have done so. Therefore, the New Testament apostles were exclusive. These two arguments display that the office of apostle and prophet were not designed by God to be offices in perpetuity.

Another source of theological deviation within the NAR is the espousal of Open Theism, which teaches that humans (and angels) can be considered morally responsible only if they possess ultimate self-determination. This philosophy precludes God's ability to recognize or determine any of their future free actions. The most striking deviation of Open Theism from traditional Christianity is its rejection of the teaching that God possesses exhaustive and definitive foreknowledge.⁶⁰ Wagner claimed that he was 'theologically born again' when he read and embraced Open Theism.⁶¹ Many evangelicals have perceived this perspective as a significant departure from evangelical orthodoxy, which holds that God is omniscient and possesses complete knowledge of past, present and future events. The Open Theists' rejection of God's exhaustive foreknowledge can have far-reaching implications for their understanding of theological concepts such as the nature of God's sovereignty and the other immutable characteristics of God's nature. This diminishing of the sovereignty of God in the NAR leads to an overemphasis on individual responsibility for the spread of the gospel and the introduction of God's kingdom. In my dealings with people who have left the NAR, this openness perspective has led to exhaustion, disillusionment and even despair when NAR adherents' efforts did not produce perceived or desired results.

Wagner's understanding and application of the Great Commission was driven by an emphasis on pragmatic results. He sought to create disciples by any means necessary, and Open Theism served those means. This theology provides the basis for teachers such as Bill Johnson to say such perplexing things like 'God doesn't control everything. He's in charge of everything.'⁶²

Another theological aberration that is common in the NAR is dominionism, or Kingdom Now theology. Dominionism is the view that believers are to reestablish God's dominion by subduing the enemy. Because Adam and Eve did not correctly subdue Satan, supposedly that dominion was lost to Satan in the fall.⁶³ Apostles can

60 John Piper, Justin Taylor and Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 11. Open Theism was hotly debated within the Evangelical Theological Society, and numerous prominent theologians contributed chapters to this book opposing it.

61 C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion! Your Role in Bringing Heaven to Earth* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2022), 80–82.

62 Bill Johnson, 'The Sovereignty of God', 2021, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47248>.

63 Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles*, 153. Ahn misrepresents the word *kabash* in Genesis 1:28 to mean 'subdue the enemy'. *Kabash* means to subdue, bring into bondage, violate or subjugate. Not once is

restore the dominion and authority that Satan seized by bringing the realities of heaven to earth.⁶⁴ Furthermore, dominionism teaches that only when we have ushered in the kingdom of God through reestablishing dominion will Christ return to a unified, mature and glorious bride.⁶⁵ If we take this teaching to its logical conclusion, then we should strive for a theocratic government before Jesus can return to earth. (Some NAR figures in the United States may have taken this step, as reflected in their ‘prophetic’ endorsements of Donald Trump and their apparent closeness to Christian nationalism.) NAR leaders frequently use the motto ‘on earth as it is in heaven’, by which they mean that the role of an apostle is to align the church so as to bring the realities and culture of heaven to earth and establish the dominion that God originally desired.⁶⁶

But this view runs contrary to biblical convictions regarding God’s sovereign rule. Christ has not relinquished his authority to Satan or any other created being. The Dutch Reformed philosopher and prime minister Abraham Kuyper said, ‘There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: “Mine!”’⁶⁷ NAR dominionists distort the biblical concepts of dominion and God’s sovereignty, whereas Kuyper held a balanced view of dominion.⁶⁸

Conclusion

In a 2006 article titled ‘Goodbye, Theologians’, Peter Wagner advocated for doing away with the term ‘theologian’. He wrote:

Let’s stop submitting our theology and practice to the scrutiny of an office that isn’t even biblical. Let’s do away with the term ‘theologian’. Why? The idea that certain members of the body of Christ are theologians while the rest are non-theologians is traditional thinking embedded in the old wineskins of the church. Those called to lead the church and to equip the saints for the work of ministry are called apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (see Eph. 4:11).

it translated as ‘subdue the enemy’. Ahn changes the meaning of the text to imply that God’s creation mandate included subduing Satan. This then forms the basis for his whole view of dominionism, according to which we were meant to have dominion and authority over Satan but lost that dominion in the Fall, and the church and apostles are responsible for reclaiming it.

64 Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles*, 153–54.

65 Pietsch, ‘The Impact of Open Theism on C. Peter Wagner’s Philosophy of Discipleship’, 107, 153. Pietsch describes how three NAR leaders, including Wagner and Eberle, taught a ‘victorious eschatology’, teaching that the church will rise in ‘unity, maturity, and glory before the return of Jesus’.

66 Ahn, *Modern-Day Apostles*, 23, 39.

67 Abraham Kuyper and James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 488.

68 For a more detailed understanding of Kuyper’s view, especially on Christian engagement in politics, see Abraham Kuyper and Harry Van Dyke, *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015). Kuyper was a founder of a political party, a university and a Reformed denomination; the Prime Minister of the Netherlands; and an incredibly prolific author on diverse subjects. Kuyper is a faithful source for Christians as we seek to understand and engage culture.

Theologians are not on the list. In fact, the word ‘theologian’ isn’t even in the concordance.⁶⁹

These words should be provocative and problematic to the whole evangelical world, including the World Evangelical Alliance. Wagner wants to do away with the office of theologian, but I am not aware of anyone who advocates for an ‘office of theologian’. Wagner’s words are an appeal for the replacement of our indispensable theologians and teachers at institutions around the world by apostles and prophets.

Wagner continued to deconstruct the denominational structures that he thought did not belong to the ‘new wineskins’. He wrote:

Such is not true, however, among the churches moving in the stream of the New Apostolic Reformation. We do not have an ecclesiastical office of theologian, nor do we have recognized functional equivalents. We do not agree that an elite group of individuals who happen to have advanced academic degrees in theology should be recognized as our doctrinal police force. ... In an apostolic network the person in charge of maintaining the DNA of the network is the lead apostle, who consults with those he or she chooses and no one else. ... My point is that mature, distinguished, professional theologians can, and often will, quench the Holy Spirit if the Holy Spirit happens to pull them out of their comfort zones.⁷⁰

Wagner concluded his article by advocating for the replacement of the term ‘theologian’ with the ‘office of apostle-teacher’ for the church to receive the new wine.

Evangelicals must ask themselves if they are willing to be replaced by the apostles and prophets of the NAR. If theologians and global evangelical leaders are not alert and responsive to the activities of this movement, they may discover one day that the NAR and its broad-reaching scope have subverted their institutions, churches, mission organizations and schools, just as has already happened to congregations in Europe. Do we wish to be supplanted by a deviant, non-evangelical in actual practice, and unscriptural movement?

This moment in church history is not unlike the threat posed by Arianism to the church around the time of the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. It may be a threat to evangelical orthodoxy that could redefine us all. To preserve evangelical biblical orthodoxy, we must stay vigilant; otherwise, theological entropy takes hold. This has been the pattern across church history; it could happen to us too. Evangelicalism could wake up one day and discover that it is no longer what it once was.

69 Wagner, ‘Goodbye, Theologians’.

70 Wagner, ‘Goodbye, Theologians’.