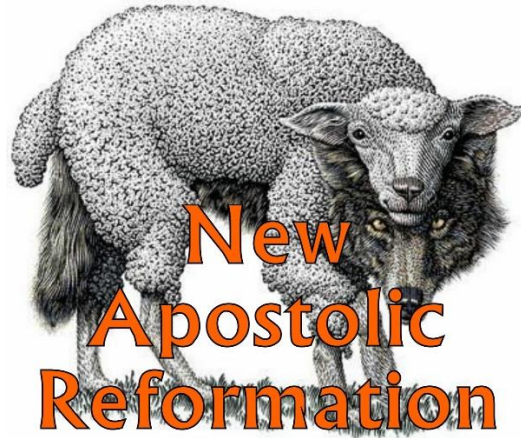


# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## What Is the New Apostolic Reformation?

R. DOUGLAS GEIVETT & HOLLY PIVEC



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*We are now living in the midst of one of the most epochal changes in the structure of the Church that has ever been recorded. I like to call it the “Second Apostolic Age.”*

—C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today: Biblical Government for Biblical Power*

Many Christians in the United States go to their traditional churches every Sunday morning unaware of the existence of a reformation that has been underway since the 1980s—a religious movement that has radically transformed other churches throughout their city and the world. The movement is called the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR).<sup>1</sup> It's *apostolic* because its leaders claim they're restoring the lost office of apostle to the church—an office endowed with astonishing authority, miraculous powers, and divine strategies for establishing God's kingdom on earth. It's a *reformation* because proponents say the movement will completely change the way church is done, and its effects will be as great—or even greater than—the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation.<sup>2</sup>

The biggest innovation of NAR is the belief that apostles, working together with prophets, must take over governance of the church—taking the reins from the pastors, elders, and denominational leaders—so that God's end-time plans can be fulfilled and Christ can return.<sup>3</sup> Churches that do not submit to the authority of these present-day apostles and prophets will sit on the sidelines as mere spectators.

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<sup>1</sup> It is also sometimes called the apostolic-prophetic movement. Throughout this book, we will use the acronym NAR (pronounced NAHR) as shorthand to refer to the New Apostolic Reformation.

<sup>2</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2004), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Many NAR leaders, though not all, see the restoration of apostles as eschatologically significant. David Devenish does not make such claims, but rather simply sees “the need for the restoration of New

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These are astounding claims. Belief in present-day prophets and apostles who are seen to be on a par with the Old Testament prophets and Christ's apostles was virtually unknown in Protestant Christianity until the 1980s and 1990s when the New Apostolic Reformation emerged.<sup>4</sup> NAR leaders say apostles and prophets were suppressed in the early centuries of Christianity, leaving the church powerless to complete the Great Commission and advance God's kingdom. But that's changing. In 2001, the NAR claims, the church entered what proponents refer to as the Second Apostolic Age. "For the first time this side of the initial few centuries of the Church, a critical mass of the Body of Christ once again recognizes the contemporary gifts and offices of apostle and prophet,"<sup>5</sup> declares NAR spokesman C. Peter Wagner, a former professor of church growth at Fuller Theological SemiNARy in Pasadena, California, and former presiding apostle over the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (ICAL), the world's largest network of apostles with about four hundred members.<sup>6</sup> With the biblical government of the church in place again, the apostles and prophets can raise up God's end-time army. This army will be invincible. Its troops will work miracles, prophesy, and help the apostles cast out high-ranking super-demons that presently rule over cities and nations. The NAR will also cash in on the "Great End-Time Transfer of Wealth," a divinely orchestrated redistribution of the world's wealth from the wicked to the righteous. The result of these awe-inspiring activities will be a global revival. More than a billion souls will be saved—more than at any other time in world history.

Some prominent leaders in this movement claim that their followers will overcome sickness and death and execute God's judgments on earth by prophetically calling down the plagues described in the book of Revelation. And some teach that any Christians who oppose this movement are under the control of a powerful demon known as the spirit of religion.<sup>7</sup> Though these teachings will sound radical to Christians, they're sweeping through churches in the United States and throughout the world.

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Testament patterns of church life, in which the work of the apostle should arguably be a part." David Devenish, *Fathering Leaders, Motivating Mission: Restoring the Role of the Apostle in Today's Church* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media Limited, 2011), Kindle edition, chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> The Roman Catholic Church does not refer to its leaders as apostles or prophets. But the church does hold to a doctrine of apostolic succession, in which the teaching and pastoral authority of the bishops is held to be derived from Christ's original apostles. This longstanding doctrine bears no relation to NAR.

<sup>5</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2008), 22.

<sup>6</sup> "Connecting Apostles for Kingdom Advancement," Oslokirken, November 17, 2012; accessed February 20, 2014, <http://www.oslochurch.org/maler/article/article/131282>. In 2013, the International Coalition of Apostles was renamed the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders.

<sup>7</sup> Wagner, *Changing Church*, 18–21.

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Yet not all churches that are part of this movement look the same. As with any other large, multi-faceted movement, participants in NAR hold to a spectrum of beliefs, accepting some NAR teachings and being unaware of or rejecting others. Indeed, many people taking part in NAR don't even realize it is a movement, let alone embrace all the radical teachings surrounding it. Furthermore, not all NAR leaders work together or agree on everything.

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Since NAR is not an organization or denomination there is no official listing of NAR beliefs, leaders, or churches. But the one thing all participants in NAR share in common, in our view, is the controversial belief in the present-day *offices* of apostle and prophet. And as you'll see, those in the NAR have established numerous organizations and developed intentional networks with one another.

## Not New Teachings

Though called the *New Apostolic Reformation*, the movement's teachings are not really new. Fringe groups attempting to restore the offices of apostle and prophet have been around for a long time. These have included the Irvingites of the 1830s and the Apostolic Church of the early 1900s. Apostles and prophets also surfaced in the African Independent Churches movement, which began around 1900.<sup>8</sup> Today, the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons (more technically the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) claim God continues to give them revelation through present-day apostles and/or prophets.

The most noteworthy attempt to restore apostles and prophets in North America, prior to NAR, was the post-World War II Latter Rain movement, also called the New Order of the Latter Rain.<sup>9</sup> The Latter Rain movement sprang out of a revival that broke out at a Pentecostal Bible school in 1948 in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada. This revival quickly spread to the United States and elsewhere around the world. Thousands flocked to North Battleford to take part in the enthusiasm. Leaders in the movement—including William Branham, Franklin Hall, and George Warnock—taught the “manifested sons of God” doctrine, which held that people who received the new apostolic and prophetic revelations could attain a degree of immortality in this life, which would then empower

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<sup>8</sup> Wagner states that NAR's “deepest roots” are found in the African Independent Church Movement, which began around 1900. He believes other “significant connections” can be found in the Chinese House-Church movement, beginning around 1976, and the Latin American grassroots churches, which, he says, became prominent around 1980. See C. Peter Wagner, “The Doc Responds,” *Ministry Today*, accessed December 19, 2013, <http://ministrytodaymag.com/index.php/ministry-today-archives/152-fivefold-ministries/10011-the-doc-responds#sthash.WuwTab-NB.dpuf>.

<sup>9</sup> The name Latter Rain is taken from language in Joel 2:23, where a reference to God sending “the latter rain” is seen as a symbolic prediction of an end-time revival led by the Holy Spirit.

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them to usher in God's kingdom. Wagner writes, "The leaders of those movements [Latter Rain and similar movements] had great expectations that what they had started would reform the entire Church in their generation. But it didn't happen."<sup>10</sup>

The movement was summarily denounced by the leadership of the Pentecostal denominations. On September 13, 1949, the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States passed a resolution that led to the demise of the Latter Rain cause. The minutes of the council meeting noted that the motion was adopted after only a brief debate and by "an overwhelming majority" of members. It states:

Resolved, That we disapprove of those extreme teachings and practices, which being unfounded Scripturally, serve only to break fellowship of like precious faith and tend to confusion and division among the members of the Body of Christ, and be it hereby known that this 23rd General Council disapproves of the so-called "New Order of the Latter Rain," to wit: ...

2. The erroneous teaching that the Church is built on the foundation of present-day apostles and prophets.<sup>11</sup>

Other Pentecostal denominations followed suit. Latter Rain teachings were relegated to the sidelines.

But these teachings resurfaced in the 1980s when many independent charismatic churches began to embrace the idea of present-day prophets. These churches were transfixed by the stories of men like Bob Jones, who claimed that when he was seven years old and walking on a dirt road in Arkansas, the archangel Gabriel appeared to him on a white horse and blew a double silver trumpet in his face. The angel also threw down an old bull skin mantle at Jones's feet, which Jones returned and picked up many years later—accepting the mantle of a "seer prophet."<sup>12</sup> Jones was part of a group that became known as the Kansas City Prophets, along with Paul Cain and John Paul Jackson. These men all became influential in a church called the Kansas City Fellowship in Kansas City,

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<sup>10</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today: Biblical Government for Biblical Power* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2006), 13.

<sup>11</sup> See the entry under "The New Order of the Latter Rain" in *Minutes of the Twenty-third General Council of the Assemblies of God, Convened at Seattle, Washington, September 9–14, 1949: With Constitution and Bylaws, Revised* (Springfield, MO: General Council of the Assemblies of God, 1949), 26. Available online from Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, accessed September 1, 2014, <http://ifphc.org/DigitalPublications/USA/Assemblies%20of%20God%20USA/Minutes%20General%20Council/Unregistered/1949/FPHC/1949.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer LeClaire, "Prophet Bob Jones Passes Away," *Charisma News*. February 14, 2014; accessed June 15, 2014, <http://www.charismanews.com/us/42794-prophet-bob-jones-passes-away>.

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Missouri, pastored by Mike Bickle. The Kansas City Prophets were also given prominent platforms within the early Vineyard movement, under its founder John Wimber.<sup>13</sup>

But the Kansas City Prophets came under heavy fire after a 233-page report was released in 1990 by a local charismatic pastor named Ernest Gruen. Gruen claimed to document aberrant teachings of these prophets, and his report—which was circulated widely—had significant reverberations in the young prophetic movement.<sup>14</sup> Following the report, Wimber found Bickle’s church guilty of making errors in its oversight of the prophets, including failure to provide adequate accountability for their prophecies. The church was also faulted for allowing some of these prophets to establish doctrine based on their prophetic words.<sup>15</sup> Later, at a Vineyard pastor’s conference in 1995, Wimber apologized for leading the Vineyard into the prophetic movement.<sup>16</sup> And Bickle—who went on to found the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City, Missouri—acknowledged that, during this time, he made “many mistakes.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet Bickle and others associated with the Kansas City Prophets went on to become leaders in what is now known as NAR. And in the 1990s, a number of independent charismatic churches started to form into networks under similar apostles. By 2001, such a significant number of churches accepted or approved apostles that Wagner felt confident marking it as the beginning of the “Second Apostolic Age.”<sup>18</sup>

During these early years of the movement, Wagner coined the name “New Apostolic Reformation.”<sup>19</sup> This name took hold and is now used widely as a general term for the

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<sup>13</sup> Bill Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle: A History of the Vineyard* (Cape Town, South Africa: Vineyard International Publishing, 1999), Kindle edition, chapter 12.

<sup>14</sup> Gruen, *Documentation of the Aberrant Practices and Teachings of Kansas City Fellowship (Grace Ministries)* (Shawnee, KS: Full Faith Church of Love, 1990); available online from Banner Ministries, accessed June 29, 2014, <http://www.banner.org.uk/kcp/Abberent%20Practises.pdf>. A report circulated on the Internet that Gruen later retracted his document, yet Gruen denied this report. See Gruen, *Thoughts and Ponderings*, blog post for February 2, 2008; accessed May 5, 2014, <http://apollos.wordpress.com/2008/02/02/ernie-gruen/>.

<sup>15</sup> Jackson, *Quest for the Radical Middle*, chapter 13. During the controversy surrounding Gruen’s report, Wimber announced that the Kansas City Fellowship was going to become part of the Association of Vineyard Churches and come under Wimber’s oversight. Bickle’s church withdrew from the association in 1996. Jackson, *Quest for the Radical Middle*, chapter 19.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Mike Bickle, *Growing in the Prophetic: A Practical, Biblical Guide to Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Gifts*, rev. ed. (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2008), 10; available online at [MikeBickle.org](http://mikebickle.org/books), <http://mikebickle.org/books>.

<sup>18</sup> Wagner, *Changing Church*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church—A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2010), 213.

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movement examined in this book. However, while this designation suggests a largely new development, Wagner and many other NAR leaders freely admit that their key teachings are similar to those that defined the Latter Rain movement and had largely been repudiated. They think that the problem with the Latter Rain movement was not its key teachings, but rather denominational leaders who rejected those teachings out of a desire to protect the *status quo*; that is, the problem was linked to the leaders' doctrine of democratic church government.<sup>20</sup> Wagner expresses warm regard for the leaders of the Latter Rain movement. He writes: "Let's also take off our hats to the Christian leaders of 50 years ago! They were true pioneers who began to shape the new wineskins that we are blessed with today in the Body of Christ."<sup>21</sup>

Not all NAR leaders link themselves to the Latter Rain movement. Bickle, for example, distances himself from Latter Rain teachings in a statement on the IHOP website that appears under the heading "The Latter Rain."

We affirm that the Church will experience the greatest outpouring of the Spirit in history before Jesus returns (Joel 2:28–32). This outpouring will result in a great ingathering of souls and a renewing of the Church so that believers will walk in godliness as declared in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1–7:28). We affirm the presence of the fivefold ministry for the equipping of the saints (Eph. 4:11–13).

We deny the distinctive doctrines that go beyond Scripture that are often associated with the Latter Rain theology that was popularized in the 1950s.

Explanation: Some have wrongly identified our ministry today with the false teachings that were popularized by some in the Latter Rain movement. At no time in the past did we have any relationship with this movement.<sup>22</sup>

Understandably, website visitors reading this statement will be confused, since IHOP does appear to embrace key Latter Rain teachings, including the restoration of the offices of apostle and prophet.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Wagner, *Changing Church*, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Wagner, *Apostles Today*, 14.

IHOP International House of Prayer

<sup>22</sup> Ernest Gruen and Mike Bickle, "Affirmations and Denials: Ernie Gruen and Mike Bickle's Joint Statement from 1993," May 16, 1993; available online from International House of Prayer, accessed June 18, 2014, <http://www.ihopkc.org/about/affirmations-and-denials>.

IHOP International House of Prayer

<sup>23</sup> That Bickle's belief is "consistent with the restorationist thesis that began in the Latter Rain" has been noted by other researchers. See Jackson, *Quest for the Radical Middle*, chapter 11.

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## The Future of NAR

The short life of the Latter Rain movement raises the question: Will NAR also fizzle out or will it last?

It appears that it will last, in spite of continuing opposition from Pentecostal denominations. NAR already has outdistanced the Latter Rain movement, and it shows no signs of decline. Whereas the Latter Rain revival lasted only a few years, NAR has been around for more than thirty years—since the 1980s, when the office of prophet began to be restored. NAR teachings have gained enough momentum for an entire generation of young people to be raised in churches that promote them. For these people, NAR teachings are at the heart of Christianity.

NAR has gained so much momentum that its community now has its own Bible version, The Passion Translation, produced by the apostle Brian Simmons of Stairway Ministries (Wichita, Kansas).<sup>24</sup> Simmons claims that Christ visited him and commissioned him personally to make this new translation of the Bible, which has been endorsed by leading apostles and prophets and received enthusiastically by their followers.<sup>25</sup> Now they can support NAR teachings by pointing to chapter and verse, further strengthening the impression that NAR enjoys explicit biblical support.

Other signs that NAR will be an enduring presence in global Christianity include the massive size of the movement and its growing political influence. In chapter 2 we examine these two indicators.

### Summary

NAR has led a reformation among churches worldwide by restoring the governing offices of apostle and prophet. NAR is not the first movement to attempt the restoration of apostles and prophets. But unlike previous and short-lived movements, NAR has proved to be remarkably enduring and influential, as our next chapter will show.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The Passion Translation is published by 5 Fold Media, [www.5foldmedia.com](http://www.5foldmedia.com).

<sup>25</sup> Brian Simmons, "Song of Solomon, Part 1," from *Passion for Jesus Conference*, YouTube video, 51:29, posted by "HealingWaters," February 19, 2012; accessed June 18, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8pmNZnlzIA>.

<sup>26</sup> Geivett, R. D., & Pivec, H. (2014). *A New Apostolic Reformation?: A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (pp. 1–8). Lexham Press.