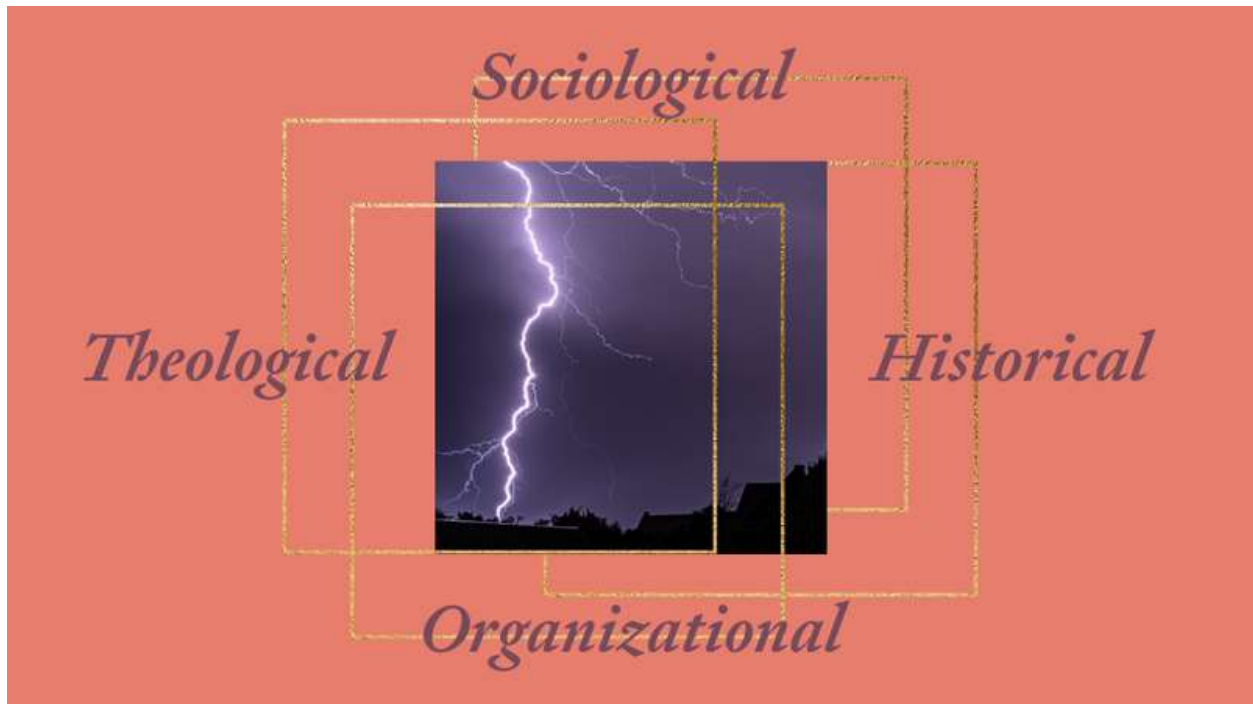


# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

## The Framing of a Movement: Defining the New Apostolic Reformation

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Imagine a religious movement that has no formal organization, no official leaders, and no confessional statement, yet its churches are among the most influential and fastest growing in the world. Now imagine that some of this movement's most prominent representatives—perhaps because of its unorthodox beliefs and controversial practices—deny its very existence. How do you identify such a movement? How do you warn orthodox churches of its influence among their own members or leaders? Welcome to the New Apostolic Reformation.

As we seek in this essay to define the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) and the extent of its influence, we must first emphasize that the movement isn't a denomination or federation or even a parachurch organization. You will never drive by a sign that reads, *New Apostolic Reformational Church of Snoqualmie Falls*. This invisibility is a large part of its threat. But in this essay, we will not focus on critique but definition. It is vital to define this movement because it is a theologically troubling system of functional norms, beliefs, and leadership networks that over the past few decades has made significant inroads into many evangelical churches in the United States and abroad. We

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hope that defining the movement's characteristic features will help both church leaders and members to recognize the threat and guard against it.

## FRAMING THE MOVEMENT

When searching for dark matter in the universe, scientists must observe its effects on regular matter; dark matter cannot be observed directly. Similarly, to define a movement as informal and flexible as the NAR, we need to observe it from different perspectives, which we will call "frames." Think of these frames like the basic character traits that make up a person's core identity. A teacher or congregation may display one or another of these traits without necessarily being associated with the NAR, but displaying all these traits together identifies one as NAR whether the label is ever used.

After extensive research and personal experiences, we identified four overarching frames that best define the NAR movement: these frames are theological, sociological, historical, and organizational. The NAR displays a unique character within each of these frames, which together provide clear definition and substance to an elusive movement. After we identify the movement by viewing it through each of these frames, we will consider a few of the implications of NAR beliefs and practices for those of us committed to the health and the growth of orthodox Christianity.

## FRAMING THE MOVEMENT THEOLOGICALLY

Coherent theological systems are like the vintage video game *Tetris*. Convictions and concepts interlock with one another like uniquely shaped blocks to form an internally consistent theological account of who God is and how we make sense of his purposes in the world. A theological system can be self-consistent, and even appeal to the Bible, without being true. The belief system of the NAR is indeed internally consistent. Perhaps the hardest part of understanding the NAR's theology is that it devalues theology and theological thinking. According to C. Peter Wagner, who was in many ways the godfather of the NAR, the leaders within the movement "have little or no desire to traverse many of the traditional pathways laid down by professional academic theologians."<sup>1</sup> Wagner continues, "I have never offered a course in systematic theology simply because there would be virtually no demand for it among our in-service, apostolically oriented student body." But despite such claims to not enjoy video games, Wagner and other NAR adherents are playing *Tetris* all the same. Like everyone else, they are trying to make the pieces fit.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004), 145.

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To begin comprehending the movement's core beliefs, we must familiarize ourselves with its overarching biblical story, as it might be strange for many Christians. The story has the same characters and general plot yet differs in very important ways from confessional orthodoxy. Lights, please!

## GOD'S PLAN A AND THE FALL

The NAR holds that before creating the world and forming Adam, God determined that to create truly free and self-determining creatures, he would not be able to fully know the future for himself. Though God would remain in a sense sovereign over his creation, he would have to choose to limit his ability to know the decisions and actions of human beings. When God created Adam and Eve in his image, he gave them authority to take dominion and reign over his creation ([Gen. 1:28](#)). But unforeseen to God, Adam and Eve fell into sin. Because of their disobedience, the gift of earthly dominion given to Adam and Eve was surrendered entirely to Satan. Satan became the ruler of this world, along with all the evil powers aligned with him, while God continued to reign in heaven.

## GOD'S DETOUR, PLAN B

They believe that God now needed a new plan to restore creation to his original purpose and to reclaim for humanity the authority and dominion lost to Satan. God determined to partner with humanity to implement his new will for the earth. He listened to the pleas of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Israel, changing his mind and relenting. Wagner appeals to Exodus 32, stating,

*As we know, Moses then interceded on behalf of his people and said, "Don't be so angry. Reconsider your decision to bring this disaster on your people" (verse 12, GOD'S WORD). The outcome? "So the Lord reconsidered his threat to destroy his people" (verse 14, GOD'S WORD). It would be difficult to understand this dialogue and the emotions involved if God already knew exactly what He would do ahead of time. It would seem as if God was playing games with Moses. But it makes perfect sense if we assume that God had an open mind.<sup>2</sup>*

Ultimately, God decided to send his Son to reclaim the authority lost to Satan and invade his earthly kingdom. (When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he showed Jesus all the earthly authority previously taken from Adam and Eve.) After his resurrection, Jesus broke Satan's power and reclaimed God's authority to restore humanity's calling to

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<sup>2</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion!: How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2008), 89.

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dominion, opening the free possibility for human beings, if willing, to reclaim our lost dominion from the powers of darkness.

## JESUS AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

When Jesus walked on the earth, he did so as a man who in some sense set aside his divinity to model to humanity how to engage in spiritual warfare through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, for example, he taught them to bring God's will to the earth to fulfill the Great Commission. Evangelism is the means to remove the hindrances dissuading people from believing in the power of Jesus—power that is also available to his disciples. Christians are to make other disciples by preaching this gospel of the kingdom and to seek the full restoration of God's dominion on the earth through the display of signs and wonders and the establishment and exercise of apostolic authority over all of life.

## THE CHURCH OF JESUS

The church was established at Pentecost, fully empowered through the Holy Spirit and Jesus' breaking into Satan's kingdom. The Lord instituted in the church the fivefold ministry of evangelist, pastor, teacher, prophet, and apostle to fulfill the Great Commission. Once Christians have reclaimed for Christ all the authority given to Satan by bringing all things under his rule—including taking dominion over society—Christ will finally return.

## THE NEED FOR A NEW REFORMATION

In describing the overarching challenge facing the church, NAR proponent Bill Hamon states,

*Jesus took away all the power of the devil and delivered it to the Church. But the devil refuses to acknowledge that he is defeated or to relinquish his dominion of this world to the Church. He has maintained his position and restrained the Church by keeping it blinded to its rightful position. He continually seeks to convince the Church that God's Word doesn't really mean what it says, that the Church cannot do all that Christ Jesus says we can do, and that we don't really have what God's Word declares we have.<sup>3</sup>*

Among proponents of the movement, there is a general acknowledgment that the church has failed to fulfill the Great Commission and reclaim dominion from Satan for the past two thousand years. Why has the church failed in reclaiming dominion of the earth?

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Hamon, *The Eternal Church: A Prophetic Look at the Church—Her History, Restoration, and Destiny* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2003), 142.

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Largely because the church stopped believing in miracles and in the roles of prophets and apostles. In this way, Satan has successfully kept the “church bound and restricted by doctrines of devils and man-made creeds.”<sup>4</sup> For Jesus to finally and fully reign, the church must reclaim the lost authority given to it after the resurrection of Jesus. The twenty-first-century church must be restored to its first-century state. For this to happen, God had to inspire a restoration movement: a New Apostolic Reformation.

## OPEN THEISM

Open theism is a theology that teaches that the future is “open” in the sense that God does not know exactly what will happen because he has not decided it. He is not omniscient, omnipotent, or unchangeable in any traditional sense. Rather, he is working alongside his free creatures through history to try to influence his intended outcomes. Much good work has been done to challenge open theism’s radical reinterpretation of classical theism (the traditional Christian doctrine of God). The importance of open theism for this essay is simply that it is a defining theological conviction of the NAR. We noted earlier that the movement affirms a drastic limitation of God’s foreknowledge or determination of the future because of the freewill decisions of moral creatures. This assumption that God’s sovereignty and human freedom are in fundamental opposition is a key underlying presupposition of open theism.

Recent research has only begun to demonstrate the extensive impact of openness theology on C. Peter Wagner and evangelicalism. Openness theology gained traction after the 1994 publication of Clark Pinnock’s *The Openness of God*. Wagner first published his support of openness theology in 2001 and continued to affirm it in his writings until his passing in 2016. According to Wagner, openness theology is one of the “most important theological insight[s] this side of the Reformation.” In a letter to open theist John Sanders, Wagner states, “I wanted to let you know that you have strong support among the crowd that I run with.”<sup>5</sup>

Wagner states that “open[ness] theology has come just at the beginning of the Second Apostolic Age, and apostolic people, particularly prophets and intercessors, for the most part welcome it with open arms.” He then states, “They have been assuming and acting upon the principles of open theology, though many have not yet verbalized those theological assumptions.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hamon, *The Eternal Church*, 142.

<sup>5</sup> C. Peter Wagner, “Clark Pinnock,” September 4, 2001, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 16, Folder 13, Fuller Theological Seminary.

<sup>6</sup> Wagner, *Dominion!*, 7.

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Proponents of the NAR such as Harold Eberly, Dutch Sheets, and many others publicly or functionally embrace open theism. This deep commitment to open theism, and the account of the Bible's story and the church's mission it enables, provides the theological frame for the NAR movement.

## Framing the Movement Historically

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The next frame will define the movement from a historical perspective. More specifically, we will observe the distinctive way the NAR perceives church history—or perhaps better, the way it revises church history especially since the Protestant Reformation. Remember how we said that from the NAR's point of view, one of the main issues faced by the church is that it has lost its belief in miraculous signs and wonders as well as the fivefold ministry of the church? Church history is best understood in two phases. The first phase, beginning with the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, signifies God's restoration of the lost doctrines (the laying of hands, healing, tongues, and prophecy), in which, at each dispensation, Christ restored a teaching and its practice back to the church.

*The sixteenth century Reformers had reestablished God as a Father whom we all could approach directly without the aid of a priest. The Wesleyans had refocused attention on the Son in highlighting our need to be more Christlike in our daily living. The Pentecostals recovered the immediate presence and availability of the Holy Spirit in the lives and ministries of all believers. So with a more complete understanding of the practical outworking of the Trinity in place, God was then poised to move the Body of Christ to new levels.<sup>7</sup>*

Once these were restored, the second phase of church history began, in which God restored to the church the fivefold ministry (the offices of evangelist, pastor, teacher, prophet, and apostle, discussed below).

This second and final phase was inaugurated between the 1950s and the 1990s. For proponents of this movement, the overarching historical narrative of the church reached its climax in the 1990s when the prophetic-apostolic movement (that is, the New Apostolic Reformation) reached maturity. According to Hamon,

*Apostles and prophets needed to be restored so that all five of the ministries that Christ said would operate in the Church could fulfill the purpose for which they were originally given and commissioned (see [Eph. 4:11–16](#)). Their main purpose is to equip the saints for their*

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<sup>7</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000), 15.



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*day of manifestation. All saints, believers in Jesus Christ, are called to do His works and to demonstrate the gospel of the Kingdom of God.*<sup>8</sup>

Let's zoom in on this key period of recent church history to explain how God restored these lost doctrines to the church, as told through the historical account of Bill Hamon. Hamon and Wagner "worked together in propagating the Apostolic Movement like Martin Luther and John Calvin worked together in propagating the Protestant Movement."<sup>9</sup> Like Luther, Hamon was the visionary behind the restoration of apostles that began what he called the "Prophetic-Apostolic Movement." Like Calvin, Wagner popularized the movement's theology into the broader church by writing the theological designations for the different types of apostles and their various functions in what he termed the "New Apostolic Reformation."

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## THE GREAT RESTORATION: FROM THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION TO THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

The apostle Paul and other first-century apostles and prophets taught the early church how to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission mandate and reclaim the authority lost by Adam and Eve by using supernatural signs and wonders through the fivefold ministry of the church. As time passed, the essential teachings of the first-century apostles and prophets were forgotten, and the church saw its darkest days during the Middle Ages. To return to his original purpose for humanity, God began to work to renew the church's memory of its power and use of gifts, restore lost biblical truth, and overturn long accepted false beliefs to enable Christians to fulfill the Great Commission once again. Through the faithful actions of Christians, God began his "Great Restoration" movement in Europe with the Protestant Reformation, in which he restored to the church the doctrine of repentance from dead works, and Martin Luther awakened the church from its "lethargy." God made his final move in Europe when he restored the lost doctrine of faith toward God and the proper understanding of sanctification with John Wesley's Holiness movement in the 1700s that renewed revivalist missions and divine healing. God released the church's full restoration in the 1900s in America with a rapid acceleration of the final restoration phase through the American Pentecostal movement with William J. Seymour's Azusa Street Revival in 1906. There, God restored to the church the doctrine of baptism of the Spirit and the proper understanding of the manifested gifts in a direct, personal experience of God through speaking in tongues, divine healing, and prophecy. The Pentecostal revivalism of Charles Finney, the Holiness movement, and Azusa Street signified the "early rain" or the "beginning of the end of the 'age of the mortal

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<sup>8</sup> Hamon, *The Eternal Church*, 264.

<sup>9</sup> Hamon, *The Eternal Church*, 280.

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Church.”<sup>10</sup> God restored to the church the doctrine of laying on of hands along with healing and prophecy through the “Latter rain” movement of the 1940s, during which the Pentecostal movement gained considerable popularity in evangelical churches.

In the centuries between the Reformation and the mid-twentieth century, the church recovered these central biblical teachings and practices. But the second half of the twentieth century was necessary for the recovery of the essential fivefold biblical ministry.



## RESTORING THE FIVEFOLD MINISTRY: THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

When Christ commissioned his first disciples, he gave to them the office of apostle. Following his resurrection, he “divided” his ministry by giving to the church additional offices: evangelist, pastor, teacher, and prophet—thus creating the fivefold ministry of Christ. As the years passed, the foundation of the church, having been built on apostles and prophets ([Eph. 2:20](#)), was lost. According to Hamon, restoring Christ’s fivefold ministry is necessary “to perfect and equip the saints until they are conformed to the image of Christ (see [Rom. 8:29](#)) and activated into their Christ-given ministry and doing the works that Jesus did.”<sup>11</sup> For the last five hundred years, the church has been rediscovering the lost teachings of the apostles and prophets. By the 1950s, these doctrines, the power gifts of the Spirit, had been restored. “The Holy Spirit was commissioned to clarify, amplify, manifest, restore, and reposition one of the fivefold ascension gift ministries during each of the last five decades of the 20th century.”<sup>12</sup>

During the 1950s, the office of evangelist was restored, evidenced by renewed emphasis on crusades and evangelistic ministries. During the 1960s, the office of pastor was emphasized, followed by the office of teacher during the 1970s. Throughout the 1950s to the '70s, Christianity saw an abundance of ministries being created to teach the restored doctrines through radio, television, and revival ministries. Among these offices, two were destined to rise above the rest and claim dominion over the others: the age of the apostles and prophets had come. In 1988, the prophets were restored to the church, and in 1998 apostles were restored; the Second Apostolic Age had begun. According to Hamon, all the “previous movements” of reformation throughout church history “prepared the way for the full restoration” to the fivefold ministry led by prophets and apostles. Now that

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<sup>10</sup> Hamon, *The Eternal Church*, 239.

<sup>11</sup> Hamon, *The Eternal Church*, 299.

<sup>12</sup> Hamon, *The Eternal Church*, 264.



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the Second Apostolic Age has come, Christ calls his restored end-times church to prepare for his coming.<sup>13</sup>

## FRAMING THE MOVEMENT SOCIOLOGICALLY

Those within the NAR often refer to the movement as sociological rather than theological. This distinction emphasizes the culture of the movement through describing its manifestations of the Holy Spirit and revivalism and, at the same time, diminishes theology in its descriptions. Such a claim is not unfounded as C. Peter Wagner, who was a PhD-trained anthropologist, understood and documented the movement's impact from a sociological and cultural perspective. For the sociological frame, we will emphasize a few elements in which the movement can be understood within the context of culture and will primarily use Wagner as a source.

## THE THREE "WAVES" OF EVANGELICAL ACCEPTANCE

Like Hamon, Wagner understood the 1900s as God's restoration movement. As a trained anthropologist, Wagner observed the broader evangelical acceptance of restored doctrines like the spiritual gifts and later the fivefold offices. In his work, Wagner divided the century into his own distinct eras or "waves," each signifying a perceived movement of God within evangelicalism, culminating with a demonstratable general acceptance of the restoration of the apostolic office and signs and wonders. We should understand Wagner's waves as significant periods of receptivity to the beliefs and practices of the NAR within the broader evangelical world rather than an era of doctrinal rediscovery like Hamon. Wagner's waves emphasize the encompassing of the restored doctrines in the Pentecostal and charismatic movements as they lead to the culmination of evangelical acceptance and usher in the Second Apostolic Age of the NAR. While the charismatic movement was distinct from the Pentecostal movement in disagreeing with the second blessing, or baptism of the Holy Spirit, the NAR should be understood as incorporating elements from both movements.<sup>14</sup>

Wagner taught that the first wave began in the early American Pentecostal movement in the Azusa Street revival of 1906, when God restored the manifested gifts of the Holy Spirit. The American evangelical church did not widely embrace the movement then, and it mostly went silent for the next fifty years. The second wave of much broader receptivity

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<sup>13</sup> Hamon, *The Eternal Church*, 265.

<sup>14</sup> C. Peter Wagner, "Third Wave," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 1141; Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 15; C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1988), 16.

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came more than a half-century later, in the 1960s and 1970s, with the charismatic renewal of miraculous gifts with the Jesus Revolution or Jesus People. The movement's teaching and practices began to take root within many established denominations. Wagner's third wave came in the 1980s as a direct development out of the Jesus Movement. Many mainstream evangelical churches began to embrace "the power of the Holy Spirit in healing the sick, casting out demons, receiving prophecies, and participating in other charismatic-type manifestations" within the NAR without identifying as part of the Pentecostal movement.

## THE GREAT COMMISSION

The NAR emphasizes that fulfilling the Great Commission to "go and make disciples of all nations" is accomplished by using whatever means necessary and available to the greatest fruitfulness. Christ's command in the Great Commission is founded on his example of obedience to the Father in conquering Satan through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Christian's ultimate goal is to go to the ends of the earth to retake the dominion that Adam surrendered to Satan in the garden by the same power of the Holy Spirit. The ultimate task of making disciples by whatever means necessary is accomplished by enacting the will of God through retaking dominion in every sphere of influence (discussed below) so that all things can be restored to Christ and usher in his second advent.

The movement's theological commitment to open theism leads to a dualism in which God's sovereignty over human affairs (and Satan's schemes) is limited. The fulfillment of the Great Commission depends partly on God and partly on us—and victory is not guaranteed. The fivefold ministry of intercessors, prophets, and apostles, therefore, are the way in which the contingency of Christ's redemptive work is accomplished. The restoration of a fivefold ministry transformed churches that were a part of the movement in the early 2000s. Worship began to emphasize "becom[ing] intimate with the Father" and the Holy Spirit "drawing us as *participants* into an experience with God."<sup>15</sup> The experience of worship and warfare were seen as intertwined; the intimacy enjoyed through worship prepares the heart for warfare.

Apart from the fundamental means of exercising the fivefold ministry, the NAR's methods for fulfilling the Great Commission are purposefully pragmatic (or consequentialist).

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<sup>15</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 29 (italics added); C. Peter Wagner, *Churchquake: How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 164–65.

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## DOMINIONISM

Proponents of the NAR take spiritual warfare very seriously — and very literally. To bring about God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, God’s people must upset the present evil spiritual ecosystem and wage strategic warfare to retake authority from Satan. The church must be “kingdom-minded” and “kingdom-motivated” to reform society by taking dominion in seven spheres of cultural influence: religion, family, government, business, education, media, and arts and entertainment.<sup>16</sup> In NAR circles, this dominionism is often called the “seven-mountain mandate.”<sup>17</sup> Each mountain is overseen by NAR-aligned apostles who lead the charge of the strategic march upon the towering proverbial peaks. These apostles are not on any official NAR committee or board, but they have sat on governing bodies of apostolic coalitions, charismatic associations of churches, and even US presidential advisory councils.<sup>18</sup>

No longer were evangelism and church planting the ultimate goal in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The clarion call now blasted the urgency of preaching the gospel to spread the “colonization” of God’s kingdom to make Earth “a colony of heaven.”<sup>19</sup> Like climbing Denali, spiritual warriors gather, train, and march into Satan’s territory armed for battle. Warriors with the spiritual gift of intercessory prayer are the key to successful mountain warfare, since intercessory prayer is the ministry that unlocks the power of partnering with God in bringing his will to pass.

## DISCIPLESHIP AND SPIRITUAL GIFTS

For the NAR, a Christian disciple can be broadly defined as one who claims to have a personal relationship with Jesus and becomes a member of a church that is faithful to preach the gospel of the kingdom. A responsible disciple learns what particular spiritual gifts they possess and uses them to build God’s kingdom. Discipleship within the movement contains two separate parts: church membership and evangelism. Discipleship is not a regular growth in holiness that is never complete in this life, but a

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<sup>16</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 266.

<sup>17</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God’s Call to Transform the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 183; C. Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Life and Change Your Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 185.

<sup>18</sup> C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Destiny of a Nation: How Prophets and Intercessors Can Mold History* (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2001), chap. “History Belongs to the Intercessors”; C. Peter Wagner, “Wagner Prayer Partners,” 2, Global Harvest Ministries, March 23, 2001, Collection 0180: C. Peter Wagner Collection 1930–2016, Box 31, Folder 5, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

<sup>19</sup> Wagner, *Dominion!*, 70.

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process of “perfecting” in “holy living” and “an ethical change” in behavior.<sup>20</sup> The movement tends to equate Christian maturity with the knowledge and use of spiritual gifts to create more disciples, thus fulfilling the Great Commission. The number of spiritual gifts is debated among NAR leaders, but a typical spiritual gifts test offers a list of fifteen to thirty to help identify one’s top gifts. These range widely: from healing, teaching, prophecy, tongues, and apostleship, to discernment, administration, missions, and hospitality, to intercession, deliverance, leading worship—even martyrdom.

## FRAMING THE MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONALLY

The last frame will describe the movement organizationally. The structure of the movement largely builds upon the sociological frame, showing how the restoration of the offices of apostle and prophet led to what Wagner noted as the Second Apostolic Age and Hamon called the Prophetic-Apostolic Movement. The NAR does not have a formal organizational structure but is made of independent coalitions or apostolic networks. We must think of the NAR’s organization as the way the churches “do ministry” based on their beliefs.

## THE FIVEFOLD MINISTRY IN MORE DETAIL

We’ve seen how God’s limited sovereignty over creation and loss of dominion of this world to Satan led to God enlisting humanity to participate in spiritual warfare against Satan and his allies who are frustrating God’s original plan. This partnership of God and humanity in dominionism is accomplished through the full outworking of the fivefold ministry of the church, which must be thought of as practical theology. Appealing to [Ephesians 2:20](#), apostles and pastors are the focus of the fivefold ministry because they are the “new custodians of a dynamic theology” as the foundation of the church.<sup>21</sup> The five gifts or offices are tightly interconnected, and though they draw on biblical language, they differ substantially from the way these gifts and roles are taught in Christian orthodoxy.

Intercessors are specially gifted people who have the power and authority to influence bringing God’s will to pass through prayer. The principle of intercessory prayer is that “much of what finally happens will depend upon the intercessory prayers of the saints.”<sup>22</sup> Strategic-level spiritual warfare is a call of intercessors, the generals of God’s army who are essential for advancing the kingdom of God and overcoming the kingdom of darkness. Spiritual warfare requires that intercessors bind the god of this age to

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<sup>20</sup> Wagner, “Glossary of Church Growth Terms,” 288.

<sup>21</sup> Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 63.

<sup>22</sup> Hamon, *The Eternal Church*, 282.

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temporarily dispel or break through the ranks of the forces of darkness and open a kind of spiritual connection—often called a “portal”—between heaven and earth, through which God can get past Satan’s defenses to reveal his will to humanity. Along with Cindy Jacobs and Lance Wallnau, Wagner called for churches to institute prayer movements, ministries, and conferences, and raise up prayer leaders to pray for cities and nations.<sup>23</sup>

Intercessors and intercessory prayer for the NAR differs from orthodoxy, so pastors and teachers must be aware of the subtle differences. While Wagner affirmed that the priesthood of believers includes all who call on the name of Jesus Christ, the Bible’s call of every Christian to intercede is supplanted by the restoration of an office of one who can intercede by divine appointment. Intercession comes from the believer’s union with Christ and forms the heart to Christlikeness. The believer’s responses are reshaped, internalizing what has been heard and received through the means of grace.

The church is to be guided and governed by prophets and apostles ([Eph. 4:12–15](#)). Prophets are people with the anointing of God to hear his voice and guide the church. God has empowered those with the gift of prophecy (that is, those who hold the office of prophet) to hear his revealed will “more accurately” once the intercessors have opened heavenly portals by binding demonic powers.<sup>24</sup> The (in)accuracy of fallible prophets is protected by safeguards that enable the church to “know” if the prophetic word was from God: (1) the gift of prophecy must be recognized, (2) the prophecy cannot contradict Scripture, and (3) the prophecy must be confirmed by agreement from others.<sup>25</sup>

NAR prophets function in an exclusive role, regardless of whether the office is recognized as being used or providing prophecy in a manner that displaces the teaching of Scripture. Moreover, the harm in prophecy in the NAR is the consequence of binding the conscience of the hearer to the extrabiblical knowledge spoken rather than to the word of God, where Scripture can be gravely misinterpreted and misapplied. The prophetic gift of the New Testament church was temporary, serving as the foundation of the church. This gift was not a new revelation, but it served to authenticate the authority of Scripture. Rather than rely on fresh revelations, orthodox churches rely on the Holy Spirit to illuminate the expounded word of God. God’s words rightly applied to hearers’ lives provide true hope and build up strong faith.

God has endowed apostles with strategic thinking and leadership to implement God’s will for the local and global church, a will that was revealed to the prophets. Apostolic

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<sup>23</sup> C. Peter Wagner, foreword to Cindy Jacobs, *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy: A Training Manual for Militant Intercession* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 11–12.

<sup>24</sup> Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 29.

<sup>25</sup> Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 107.



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leadership “spheres of authority” in churches include “vertical apostles,” who serve as leaders within their apostolic network, and “horizontal apostles,” who work with apostles from other apostolic networks.<sup>26</sup> Pastors and teachers are often joined in role and differentiated from the office of prophet in the way God’s word is validated. Pastors and teachers “research and expound the *logos*,” the written word of God, and prophets “bring the *rhema*,” the extrabiblical voice of God. The office of apostle is further distinguished as synthesizing the written and direct personal revelations into casting a vision of a prophetic direction for the church.<sup>27</sup> The office of apostle is not exclusive, with apostles having additional gifts or offices within the fivefold ministry. Wagner called these “hyphenated apostles” such as “apostolic-apostles,” “prophetic-apostles,” “evangelistic-apostles,” “pastoral-apostles,” and “teacher-apostles.”<sup>28</sup> The office of apostle is central to dominion theology and the organizational character of the NAR, which needs deeper discussion.

## APOSTOLIC CHURCH AUTHORITY

Apart from the theological framework of the movement, the most significant demonstrable aspect of the movement is the apostolic leadership of its churches. Concerning the new apostolic structure of the church, Wagner states,

*In traditional denominations, the locus of authority is ordinarily found in groups, not in individuals. That is why we are accustomed to hearing about deacon boards, boards of trustees, presbyteries, general assemblies, and so on. In the New Apostolic Reformation, however, trust has shifted from groups to individuals. On the local church level, the pastor now functions as the leader of the church instead of as an employee of the church.*<sup>29</sup>

Though much has been written on the new apostolic structure of churches, for this frame, we will focus on why the offices of apostles and prophets are necessary for the church structure. As a reminder, according to the movement’s biblical narrative, God has limited his knowledge of the future and requires the cooperation of humanity to enact his will on the earth; however, God cannot send his will to the earth unless the church provides an atmosphere for this to occur.

How does God deliver his will to the church? It goes like this: Intercessors pray that the forces and powers of Satan are bound. In so doing, Satan’s power of darkness is broken

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<sup>26</sup> Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 63.

<sup>27</sup> Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 63.

<sup>28</sup> Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 52; Bill Hamon, *Apostles, Prophets and the Coming Moves of God* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1997), 227.

<sup>29</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today: Biblical Government for Biblical Power* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2006), 23 (italics original).



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through and a portal of heaven is opened for the potentiality of sending God's will. Next, God delivers his desires through prophecies and words of knowledge to the prophets. Prophets do not have the authority to implement God's will, so then the word is given to the apostles. Apostles then cast the vision and set the direction of the church so that it stays in alignment with God. It is their responsibility to ensure the church creates an atmosphere so that it stays within God's will. Because the primary emphasis of its theology is to ensure that believers have been equipped to demonstrate the powers of the kingdom as Jesus did, teachers equip the church through expounding the movement's teachings. The evangelists grow the church by any means necessary so that more dominion can be reclaimed for the kingdom of God and church members can, in turn, create more disciples.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we have provided four frames to help fellow Christians and church leaders contextualize and define a movement that has shaped American evangelicalism for many decades and yet has no formal confession or structure. Our desire is not to call out specific churches but rather to provide a means to identify and evaluate the New Apostolic Reformation's origins, its teachings, and its ongoing influence. For the NAR, until the church has reclaimed the dominion of God's creation, it will continue to equip its members to do the works that Jesus did so that God will be able to reclaim the dominion of creation and Christ can come again. Orthodox Christians use many of the same words, but we often mean something very different by them. Rather than adopting practices without discernment, we must engage in wise examination that asks questions aimed at discerning what notion of flourishing is implicit in the practices and beliefs of teachings we sit under.

May we seek to faithfully rehearse the gospel drama to have it form and inform our beliefs and practices. Let us pray for those caught in the NAR and ask that God would open their hearts and eyes to his truth to recognize and turn away from these wayward teachings.



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