

What is the New Apostolic Reformation?

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In 1999, an international group of apostles gathered in Singapore in what was to be a historic meeting. For it was at this meeting that the International Coalition of Apostles (ICA) was formed. According to its website, the goal of ICA is to ‘advance the Kingdom of God more rapidly and effectively’ by combining the resources of the global apostolic leadership. In the words of the presiding Apostle John P. Kelly, the purpose of ICA is ‘to connect each member’s wisdom and resources in order to function more strategically, each combining efforts globally, and effectively accelerate the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth’.

The first Annual Meeting of ICA was held near Dallas, Texas a year after its founding in 2000. In that year, John Kelly invited C. Peter Wagner to be the presiding Apostle. In 2009, after serving for nine years, Wagner claimed that the Lord directed him to ask John Kelly to assume again the role of presiding Apostle. At its Annual Conference in 2013, John Kelly changed the name of the Coalition to the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (ICAL). According to its statement issued in 2013, ‘The new name allows more leaders worldwide to embrace the apostolic movement’. ICAL has established National Coalitions in 45 countries throughout the world including Australia, Croatia, El Salvador, Zimbabwe, Spain and the Dominican Republic. Singapore, where the Coalition was born, is a member, and Rev. Naomi Dowdy is the Ambassadorial Apostle for Singapore.

I began with ICAL because it is the most visible arm of an international movement called the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), which has generated serious controversies. In fact, the controversies surrounding this movement have prompted Peter Wagner, its most esteemed spokesperson, to publish an article in *CharismaNews* entitled, ‘The New Apostolic Reformation is Not a Cult’.

In this talk, we will examine and evaluate this movement – its origins, distinctive features, teachings and influence. We will especially assess the claims made by its most prominent leaders as well as their doctrines and practices. In this talk, I want to show you why I think the NAR has ventured beyond the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy, and why some of its teachings are not only erroneous but also dangerous. I begin by tracing the origins of the NAR and by examining its background. Then I shall provide a broad sketch of its basic emphases and doctrines and highlight some of its significant leaders. And finally, I shall examine – albeit very briefly – the NAR’s reach and the influence in America and globally.

ORIGIN AND BACKGROUND

Let me begin with a brief sketch of the origins of the NAR. What is the genesis of this movement? What were the antecedent developments that influenced and shaped the NAR? Let's begin with the name itself. In 1994, C. Peter Wagner coined the name 'New Apostolic Reformation' to give the new movement an identity. In his book entitled, *Churchquake!* Wagner recounts how he arrived at 'New Apostolic Reformation' after experimenting with other possible names. Wagner provides the rationale for settling with this name for the movement thus: The movement is *apostolic* because its leaders are restoring the apostolic office that the church has lost. It is a *reformation* because, like the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation, this new work of God will revolutionise the church. And finally, as Wagner puts it, the 'adjective "new" is ... intended to distinguish what is happening today from ... older movements, which might be seen as "old" apostolic movements.'

Although Wagner calls it a new move of God, the NAR is in fact not new at all. Many of its emphases, teachings and practices can be traced to a development that took place in American Pentecostalism in the 1940s. Known as the New Order of Latter Rain (NOLR), this development provided the NAR the inspiration for its vision as well as its theology. One of the most prominent figures in the Latter Rain movement is William Branham, whose ministry was often accompanied by signs and wonders and strange manifestations. Branham claimed that his ministry was entirely directed by a personal angel who taught him the Word of God and who revealed to him divine secrets. According to Branham, his personal angel was the same messenger that was sent to the Laodicean church in the Book of Revelation. This angel revealed to Branham that he was the Elijah who must come before Christ could return.

Branham rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. He taught that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three distinct persons but three manifestations of the one God. Branham therefore has revived the ancient heresy called modalism that was condemned in the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. But despite his many heretical teachings, the NAR leaders hailed Branham as one of the most powerful prophets of our time. For example, in his book *Growing in the Prophetic*, Mike Bickle affirms that Branham was the true prophet of God. Commenting on the ministry of Branham, Bill Johnson of Bethel Church says that 'there are few men that have ever lived, and perhaps no one that has ever lived that carried the anointing and the power that this particular man had'.

In 1951, George Warnock wrote a book that delineates the teachings of the Latter Rain Movement entitled, *The Feast of Tabernacles*. In this book, Warnock maintains that the main teaching of the Latter Rain movement has to do with what he calls the 'Ascension gifts' of Christ. By this he meant the so-called five-

fold ministry of Ephesians 4:11. Latter Rain teaches that in the last days God will restore the five-fold ministry, especially those of the apostle and the prophet. End-time apostles and prophets will be responsible for perfecting the church before Christ returns. The book emphasises that Christ will return until the apostles and the prophets have successfully created this elite church. Christ will not return for a weak church.

Warnock writes:

O the immensity of these words! And what is more, Christ is going to remain right where he is at God's right hand until there shall arise a group of overcomers who shall conquer all God's enemies ... And yet the majority of Christians are looking for a rapture any moment, when Christ is supposed to catch away a miserable, defeated, disease-ridden Church.

This leads us to one of the most heretical teachings of Latter Rain called 'the manifest sons of God'. According to Latter Rain, God will raise some Christians who will be distinguished from the rest because they will be perfect. They would attain everything that is promised to believers. And they will attain this spiritual blessing of perfection before the return of Christ. This new breed of Christians will belong to the elite 'Melchizedek' priesthood. They alone will be responsible for bringing about the *parousia*, the return of the Lord.

As we have seen, the Latter Rain movement came onto the scene in Pentecostal Christianity in America in the early 1940s. On September 13, 1949, the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the US passed a resolution that denounces the teachings of the Latter Rain:

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 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.

In the 1980s, however, the leaders of the NAR revived and incorporated some of these Latter Rain doctrines. For example, Bill Hamon, one of the most influential leaders of the NAR, brought the 'manifest sons of God' teaching into the movement with the strong approval of Peter Wagner. For Hamon, the end-time apostles and prophets of NAR are the 'manifest sons of God'. In his book, *Apostles, Prophets and the Coming Moves of God* Hamon writes:

The whole creation is waiting for the last generation Church. The earth and all creation are waiting for the manifestation of God's last-day apostles and prophets and fully restored Church. 'For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God' (Rom 8:19). When the Church is fully restored, then the saints will receive their final redemption, the immortalisation of the mortal bodies.

Besides these erroneous doctrines, NAR leaders also incorporated other Latter Rain teachings that inform movements like Joel's Army. The retrieval of these doctrines by the NAR is aided by another heretical movement in the 1980s associated with the Kansas City Prophets. Regrettably, we don't have time to look at this development this morning. I dealt with this group briefly last year in my course on neo-paganism and the Church. The similarities between the Latter Rain and NAR are striking. NAR seems to be reproducing almost every major emphasis and doctrine of the older heresy that was rightly condemned by the Assemblies of God.

DISTINCTIVE DOCTRINES

In the scope of this talk, it is quite impossible to examine the teachings and practices of the NAR movement in detail. To do this would require a series of three or four talks. In this talk, I can only sketch, in very broad brush-strokes, some of the most important claims of the 'new breed', the leaders of NAR. What are some of the distinctive features of the New Apostolic Reformation? What are its emphases and chief doctrines?

As the name of the movement suggests, the main emphasis of the NAR is that in the last days God will restore the office of the Apostle. In fact, the NAR maintains that God will restore the offices of both the prophet and the apostle. It is the responsibilities of the apostles and the prophets to lead the church into perfection. NAR leaders have a way of commandeering Church history to support their claims. People like Peter Wagner and Mike Bickle teach that since the inception of the Church, God had always intended it to be governed by prophets and apostles. However, as the history of the Church marches on, these offices have been eclipsed and set aside, replaced by pastors, elders and denominational executives. They claim that only when the offices of the prophets and the apostles are fully restored will the Church be ready for the challenges in the end-times.

The NAR prophet Bill Hamon asserts that 'God has ordained that the apostles and prophets will receive the revelations, creative ideas, and divine strategy for bringing transformation to this world as God has ordained from the foundation of the world'. The NAR teaches that these end-time prophets and apostles are as

authoritative and perhaps even more powerful than the foundational apostles that governed the Church in the Book of Acts.

If the first emphasis of the NAR is the restoration of the offices of the prophet and the apostle, the second is that in the last days God will raise up a special group of Christians. These elites are said to belong to the 'Melchizedek priesthood'. Only Christians living in the end-times and who recognise the leadership of God's end-time prophets and apostles can belong to this exclusive priesthood. Saints of previous generations do not qualify. This of course implies that even Peter, Paul and James do not qualify to be included in this special priesthood.

According to NAR leaders, ordinary Christians are miserable and defeated. But saints who belong to this new priesthood, the 'new breed', the 'manifest sons of God', will be overcomers. NAR leaders have therefore introduced a class distinction among Christians. Earl Paulk, one of the leaders who have developed this teaching, could even say that these elite Christians 'will bring forth life as they become the "incarnate Word" on planet Earth'.

The third distinctive teaching of the NAR is Dominionism. According to the NAR, the New Testament actually presents two gospels. There is the 'gospel of salvation', and there is the 'gospel of the kingdom'. The church has emphasised the 'gospel of salvation', which has to do with the good news of Christ's death and resurrection for the salvation of fallen humankind. But the church has neglected the second gospel, 'gospel of the kingdom'. This second gospel has to do with the church exercising dominion on the earth. Peter Wagner writes:

Jesus taught us to pray that God's Kingdom would come and His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. To that end, in these present times the urgent mandate of God to the Church is to actively engage in transforming society.

Now, when NAR leaders speak about exercising dominion or transforming society, they are not simply saying that Christians must influence society. They are teaching that Christians must take control of society's institutions. In other words, the NAR envisions a form of theocracy. The militancy of NAR has led Paul Rosenberg of Al Jazeera to call the NAR 'America's own Taliban'.

In connection to the theme of dominionism, NAR leaders talk about the Seven Mountains Mandate. In his book entitled *The Seven Mountains Prophecy*, US Prophet Johnny Enlow provides a clear summary of what this mandate is all about: 'I've shared that the mountains were the infrastructural columns of our societies – that it's the Lord's plan to raise His people up to take every social, economic, and political structure of our nations'.

What are these seven mountains, these seats of power? They are society's most influential institutions: government, media, family, business, education, church/religion, and the arts. According to Enlow, among all the mountains, government is the most important 'because it can establish laws and decrees that affect and control every other mountain'. He maintains that God is raising apostles to 'possess' this all-important mountain. Again, it is important to note that the NAR leaders are not content with only influencing society. The Seven Mountain Mandate is about taking control.

In order for the Church to exercise dominion over the seven mountains, she must engage in spiritual warfare. Not just any spiritual warfare, but strategic-level spiritual warfare. This is another important NAR teaching. NAR leaders believe that powerful demons are in control over territories and over societal institutions. In order for the Church to exercise control over these areas and bring in a new world order, these territorial demons must be identified and defeated.

Strategic-level spiritual warfare is about fighting these territorial spirits by spiritual mapping, prayer-walking, warfare prayer and warfare worship. Although NAR leaders maintain that every believer is involved in this warfare, it is left to the apostles to battle the most powerful demons. These demons would recognise the rank and authority of the apostles. As Apostle Héctor Torres puts it: 'Although every believer has rank to cast out devils [from individuals], apostles walk and minister in the highest rank. Evil spirits and angels recognise this rank'.

Finally, NAR leaders believe that in the end times, there will be a massive transfer of wealth from the wicked to the Church. Naturally, the apostles will be in control of this wealth. This teaching can be traced to the early 1990s, and was probably introduced by Peter Wagner. In his 2006 book *Apostles Today*, Wagner writes: 'I am convinced that without access to wealth, we will see very little social transformation over the years'. The NAR has been organising an annual conference called the Kingdom Economic Yearly Summit (KEYS). NAR leaders even claim that this conference is the spiritual counterpart to the World Economic Forum.

We may wish to revisit many of these claims and teachings in the course of our discussion. But I would like to say at this juncture that none of these claims could find support from Scripture, at least, not in the way the Church has understood Scripture. As we shall see, NAR leaders are very fond of twisting and distorting Scripture with their idiosyncratic interpretation to give the impression that the word of God supports their claims. Peter Wagner even said that although the new prophecies and revelations do not contradict Scripture, they might supplement or add to the Scriptural revelation.

PROMINENT NAR LEADERS

I would like now to do a very quick survey of the most prominent NAR leaders. I think it is important that we know who they are and what are their specific ministries are because some of their books are found in our bookstores. In fact, I know of Churches and Christian leaders in Singapore that are promoting this literature. Now, there are many NAR leaders, so it is impossible to review all of them or even most of them, given our time constraints. What I propose to do is to highlight some of the main personalities. I will not be discussing them in any order or importance. And I can only offer the briefest outline about them.

The first prominent NAR leader is Mike Bickle who purportedly holds the office of the prophet. Bickle has long been associated with the Kansas City Prophets and he is a keen follower of one of the most celebrated prophets in the 1980s and 1990s, namely, Bob Jones. Bickle used to compile Jones' prophecies and conduct countless interviews with the prophet. In my seminar on neopaganism and the Church which I conducted last year at SAC, I discussed Jones' prophecies in detail. I also reported that Jones was embroiled in a sex scandal and that John Wimber of Vineyard issued a public statement against him. Time does not allow me to discuss Jones here. But Bickle, who is the founder of the International House of Prayer (IHOP), is obviously very influenced by Jones. IHOP has established a branch here in Singapore.

On IHOP's website, Bickle issued a number of affirmations and denials that are purposed to distance the organisation from the teachings of William Branham and the Latter Rain. But upon closer inspection one discovers that IHOP upholds and teaches the exact same doctrines of Latter Rain. The only difference is that the language is now changed. Latter Rain heresies are given a new garb, and disguised to make them look respectable. This desire to look respectable and mainstream is also seen in a particular strategy that IHOP has adopted. Thus, they have invited well-known evangelicals such as Dallas Willard and Josh McDowell to speak at their meetings – more on this later.

But the agenda of this NAR prophet is nothing less than to change Christianity in one generation. Bickle testified that while he was in Egypt, God spoke to him by an 'internal audible voice'. This is what Bickle claims that God said to him:

Suddenly the Lord gave me this sentence: 'I am going to change the understanding and expression of Christianity in the whole earth in one generation.'

This is the genesis of Bickle's heterodox notion of the 'bridal identity', the perfected church that the end-time prophets and apostles will bring about. This erroneous ecclesiology or doctrine of the church in turn shaped Bickle's erroneous eschatology, his understanding of the last things. Bickle teaches that

Jesus cannot return until the church has achieved her bridal identity, her perfected state: 'He is not coming any day. He is not coming until the people of God globally are crying out in intercession with a bridal identity under the anointing of the Spirit'.

A number of NAR leaders occupy both the offices of the prophet and the apostle. Peter Wagner does not enjoy this high standing. He is only an apostle. But Wagner is the chief apostle, the first among equals, the 'pope' of NAR. However, he is not a prophet. Unlike Wagner, Bill Hamon, the second NAR leader that we will discuss, who is an apostle and a prophet. On the website of Christian International Ministries Network, Bill Hamon, its founder, is described as exercising the prophetic ministry for 60 years. It claims that Hamon has prophesied to more than 50,000 people and that he has trained more than 250,000 in the prophetic ministry. The website also says that he is a bishop, who has episcopal authority over 3,000 ministries and churches in five continents. Christian International Ministries has a branch in Singapore, headed by David Enoch who was ordained as Prophetic-Apostle by Bill Hamon himself.

One of the most prominent doctrines associated with Bill Hamon that most NAR leaders share is called 'manifest sons of God', which we have already alluded to earlier. Hamon believes that in the last days, the followers of the end-time prophets and apostles will receive in this life all the benefits of immortality. In effect, they will be like Jesus after his resurrection. In fact, Hamon teaches that they will be an extension of the incarnation of Christ on earth.

Bill Hamon articulated this doctrine of the immortalisation of the manifest sons of God most clearly and succinctly in his book *The Day of the Saints*. He writes:

A greater measure of revelation, faith and overcoming grace is being released in the Church. The mortal Church is in transition and preparation for becoming the immortal Church. The resurrection-translation of the saints that brings about the redemption of their bodies into indestructible bodies will take place so that God can fulfil his greater purpose for and through the Church. There is a last-day ministry designed for the overcoming Church to accomplish in the heavenlies and on earth that will require the saints to have their bodies redeemed.

Rick Joyner, another NAR prophet, believes that every manifest son of God will enjoy what he calls 'Divine Health'. In fact, NAR leaders like Joyner believe that the elderly who become the manifest sons of God will experience a halt in the aging process. They will also literally grow physically younger. And, of course, these manifest sons will have the power to heal every disease. Joyner writes:

There will be no plague, disease, or physical condition, including lost limbs, AIDS, poison gas, or radiation, which will resist the healing and miracle gifts working in the saints during this time.

Joyner is one of the most influential apostle-prophets in the NAR, who prophesies over the nations. He gives yearly prophecies that allegedly map out God's plans for America and the world on his MorningStar Ministries' TV Broadcasts. Although Joyner repeatedly emphasises – as do all NAR leaders – that his teachings are based on Scripture and that he never teaches a new doctrine, in practice we see the exact opposite. Together with the other NAR leaders, Joyner teaches that God will raise prophets and apostles in the end time to perfect the church, and that there will be a great 'spiritual civil war' in the church. These doctrines have no scriptural support whatsoever.

One of the most disturbing aspects of Joyner's teachings is his doctrine of inspiration. Joyner teaches that there are four levels of inspiration: impressions, sense of divine presence, open visions and trances. Joyner teaches that the inspiration of the Biblical authors like Jeremiah and Paul belong to the second level, namely, the sense of God's presence and illumination. But Joyner goes on to claim that the inspiration of the end-time prophets usually falls in the last and highest category, namely, trances. In fact, Joyner claims that his book, *The Final Quest* was written while he was in a trance. This means that Joyner's book and the prophetic utterances of the end-time prophets are more authoritative than Scripture itself!

Finally, and very briefly, we want to turn our attention to another prominent NAR leader, the prophet and pastor of Bethel Church, Bill Johnson. Johnson's ministry and books are quite popular among those who move in these circles. In fact, Bethel Church, Redding, has attracted Christians – even Christian leaders – from many countries who are looking for an anointing or a miracle. This has prompted some commentators to say that Bethel church is the NAR version of Lourdes.

Johnson is very open about incorporating occult and New Age practices in his church, believing that practices like consulting spirit guides, spirit portals and grave sucking are gifts that God has given to the church. Like many NAR leaders, Johnson is responsible for numerous erroneous teachings like the claim that in the incarnation Jesus was just a man, that Jesus was born again, and many more. Johnson also teaches that it is apostolic leadership – and by that he means the leadership of the end time prophets and apostles – that will unite the church, not doctrine or truths.

I do not have the time to discuss other NAR leaders like Cindy Jacobs, Che Ann, Choo Thomas, Todd Bentley, Heidi Baker, Lou Engle, Francis Frangipane and even Peter Wagner. But we will encounter all of them in one way or another when we discuss specific topics.

INFLUENCE AND REACH

The question that I would like to turn to now is: How influential is the NAR? What is its reach? Is the NAR simply a fringe movement within perhaps the more extreme sector of charismatic Christianity? If this is the case, we should not worry too much about it. Or is the NAR's influence much wider?

The NAR is not a fringe movement. It is worldwide in scope and it boasts of millions of participants. In fact, according to the Atlas of Global Christianity published in 2009, the NAR is responsible for the phenomenal growth of Christianity in the Global South. It is especially influential among Independent or Post-denominational churches, which have about 369 million members. Some even predict that Christians influenced in one way or another by the NAR will outnumber traditional Protestants. In the United States, NAR churches can be found in almost every city and town. And in Singapore, a few churches and Christian organisations have embraced NAR teachings like Dominionism and the Seven Mountains. Furthermore, NAR teachings are also infiltrating mainline churches that are neither Pentecostal nor charismatic.

The NAR exploits to the fullest the media and the internet to spread their doctrines and influence. Let's begin with the media. There are several big-players in Christian media that supports the NAR by publishing articles and prophecies written by its apostles and the prophecies of its prophets. This includes the large book publishing company called Charisma House. One of the most important NAR *communiqué* is the popular magazine *Charisma*, that has a wide readership. *Charisma* also has a digital magazine that ranks among the top five digital magazines. Another major magazine that promotes the NAR is *Ministries Today*. In 2004, the magazine held a conference in Florida to explore the 'Five-Fold Ministry'. Among the members of the consultation were NAR leaders, including Peter Wagner.

The NAR has its own publishing arm, *Destiny Image Publishers*, which was founded by Don Nori after God allegedly told him to set up a company that would 'publish the prophets'. *Destiny Image* has published numerous works by NAR prophets and apostles including books by Bill Johnson, Bill Hamon, Jonathan Welton, Ché Ann and James Goll.

Furthermore, NAR authors have also tried to go mainstream by publishing their books with Evangelical Publishers like Thomas Nelson and Bethany House and by having their titles listed on Amazon and Barnes and Nobles. In addition, the NAR has also exerted its influence through TV. Christian Broadcasting networks like Trinity Broadcasting Network and Daystar have been promoting the apostles and prophets associated with the NAR. In addition, the NAR has also established its

own TV network, GOD TV, which is the fastest growing Christian network in the States. Through their broadcasts, NAR prophets and apostles are able to peddle their teachings and spread their prophetic utterances worldwide.

Some people ask me if I rely on the Internet to do my research for these talks on the NAR and the hyper-charismatics. Of course, I do! In fact, I rely quite heavily on the Internet for my research on the NAR! This is because NAR apostles and prophets have exploited the Internet to the fullest to advance their teachings, prophecies and practices. The Internet is also the place where publicity for NAR conferences and seminars can be found. The Identity Network is a clearing-house set up by the NAR that collates and emails fresh prophesies to members around the globe. The Elijah List does very much the same thing. In fact, the Elijah List has also started Prophetic TV, which is an internet television show that regularly features NAR leaders like Chuck Pierce, Graham Cooke and Patricia King.

The revivals conducted by Todd Bentley in Lakeland, Florida, are also streamed on the Internet and they have attracted more than a million views. Through the Internet, NAR leaders are able to reach many who may not have the time or the means to attend Bill Johnson's Church in Bethel or Todd Bentley's revival meetings in Lakeland. The Internet has brought the NAR into their homes.

One of the strategies of the NAR is to try to mainstream the movement. It is bad optics if the NAR is perceived as either a sectarian or fringe movement within American evangelicalism. Thus, in order to be recognised as mainstream, the NAR must have the support of recognised 'celebrities' in American evangelical Christianity. In the past number of years, the NAR has invited prominent evangelical speakers and authors like Dallas Willard and even Josh McDowell to speak at their meetings. For example, in 2013 IHOP organised a 70-hour global prayer summit that featured not only luminaries in the evangelical and Protestant churches like McDowell and Willard but also people like Loren Cunningham, Dick Eastman, and Steve Douglas. Evangelical organisations like Mission America Coalition, Prison Fellowship and Campus Crusade were also involved. Well-known pastors like Jack Hayford have also been invited to speak at NAR events and endorse books authored by NAR leaders.

One of the most significant strategies of the NAR that we must take very seriously is its attempt to influence children and the younger generation. Between 1975 and 1983, the revered prophet Bob Jones claimed to have received over one hundred revelations about the role that children and the younger generation will play in the end-times. In one of his prophecies, Jones declared that:

... this will be the end generation that is foreknown to inherit all things. Their children will attain a level of the Spirit that they themselves will not attain. Their children and grandchildren will possess the Spirit without measure for they are the best of all the

generations that have been upon the face of the earth. They will move in the supernatural as never before.

NAR prophets like Bill Hamon, Rick Joyner and Catherine Brown have declared that God is raising up a 'Samuel Generation', a group of anointed children that will lead God's end-time army into victory. NAR advocates like Becky Fischer have run successful camps for children called the Jesus Camp, which trained children how to fight the end-time spiritual battle. The Jesus Camp generated some controversy when children were made to dress in army fatigues complete with camouflages and hand-held mock weapons as if engaging in war. Kids in Ministry International is another organisation that describes itself as an 'apostolic, prophetic ministry focused on equipping and training a generation of boys and girls to walk in the supernatural power of God'. IHOP offers week long Signs and Wonders Camps for children aged between six to 12. These children are trained in prayer, spiritual warfare and spiritual authority.

Apart from the Jesus Camp and IHOP, Bill Johnson's Bethel Church in Redding, is also at the forefront of training children to operate in the supernatural. They have developed curriculum like Kids Carrying the Kingdom to train children from six to 11 to heal the sick and prophesy. In Bethel Church, children's classes have been described as 'practice rooms for the supernatural'. There, children as young as six are taught how to communicate with angels and take trips to heaven. They are also taught how to interpret each other's dreams and how to cast out demons. In fact, children are even taught how to raise the dead. In these sessions, some children will wrap themselves with tissue paper pretending to be dead while others will practise raising them from the dead. Critics have argued that such approaches are troubling because it is tantamount to indoctrination. Children and the young are exposed to an erroneous and even paganistic distortion of Christianity.

Finally, NAR leaders are infiltrating the political arena in the United States, especially among conservative right-wing politicians and political groups, with their particular political agenda. NAR apostles exert their perceived spiritual authority, while NAR prophets prophesy about political events and outcomes. There are also attempts to influence voters through their massive prayer campaigns. For example, before the 2012 election in the States, the United States Reformation Prayer Network under the prophet Cindy Jacobs distributed a prayer guide that essentially opposed the California labour unions. The prophet Lou Engles 'prayed over' former House Speaker Newt Gingrich at the 2009 rally in Virginia called 'Rediscovering God in America'. Gingrich also appointed NAR apostle Dutch Sheets to sit on his Faith Leaders Coalition.

This infiltration into politics is of course in line with the NAR's Dominionist and Seven Mountains doctrines. In fact, prophet and apostle Rick Joyner prophesied that God will be raising up what he calls an 'elite Delta force', a 'spiritual special

force' made up of apostles and prophets that will be deployed throughout the world to advance God's earthly kingdom. In this vein, Rick Joyner is leading a politically active organisation called the Oak Initiative that was founded in 2009. The purpose of this organisation is to mobilise Christian leaders to work in every level of government. They believe that in so doing they are able to bring about a spiritual awakening in America. The organisation boasts that within months of its founding it has a presence in all fifty states in America and in more than fifty nations throughout the world.

NEO-PAGAN PRACTICES

Finally, let me say a few things about the practices that the NAR encourages. Apart from the dangerously erroneous doctrines, NAR leaders have also introduced practices that can be best described as 'neo-pagan'. Time does not permit us to discuss in detail the emergence of neo-paganism or esotericism in the West in this postmodern era. Suffice to say that secularism has not succeeded in making religions or religiosity obsolete although it has generated much dissatisfaction and distrust in organised and institutional religions like Christianity. What has emerged as a result is a new religiosity, one that is not defined by the strictures of traditional religion, but that is amorphous and centred on spiritual experiences instead of dogma. This new religiosity is manifested in different forms and known by different names: New Age, shamanism, esotericism, etc.

The leaders of the NAR have blended some of these elements into their teachings and practices. This has resulted in what the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder has called a 'bastard faith', the distorting miscegenation of Christianity and alien influences. Time does not permit us to examine all these elements – there are simply too many of them! I propose to bring only three to your attention.

The first manifestation of this syncretism is the obsessive fixation with angels that we find among many NAR leaders. The most prominent of them is the revivalist Todd Bentley, whose ministry has been repeatedly endorsed by Peter Wagner, despite the scandals. Bentley places so much emphasis on angels in his meetings that Christ and the Gospel are often eclipsed. Like his mentor, the disgraced prophet Bob Jones, Bentley claims that his entire teaching and ministry is inspired and guided by angels. Bentley mentioned one angel in particular, Emma, whom he described as 'beautiful and young – about 22 years old – but old at the same time'. Bentley claimed that in the middle of a service, he saw Emma gliding 'into the room, emitting brilliant light and colours.' Bill Johnson, Patricia King and Mike Bickle also put a lot of emphasis on angelic guidance in their ministry.

This pre-occupation with angels is antithetical to the testimony of the Bible. While the Bible portrays angels as God's messengers, it nowhere encourages

God's servants to cultivate conscious relationships with them. Furthermore, angels do their work mostly behind the scenes, and appear only rarely and only at very crucial points in salvation history. However, in the occult world, seers and mediums are often dependent on their spirit-guides to give them prescience and to guide them in their work. In some New Age circles, these spirit-guides are also called 'angels.' However, they are not angels at all. Rather, they are demonic beings that give these mediums their powers while enslaving them. The obsession of these NAR leaders with angels and their dependence on these spirit beings to guide them in their ministry is unbiblical. It is more akin to occult and pagan practices. Furthermore, it also makes them vulnerable to demonic deception and influence.

Another example of the influence of neo-paganism in the practices of some NAR leaders – perhaps the most bizarre – is 'grave-sucking'. NAR leaders believe that the anointing of the great servants of God in the past – men like Smith Wigglesworth and women like Kathryn Kuhlman – are still with them even though they are dead. The anointing is in their bones. So these charismatic leaders teach that if you wish to increase your anointing you should visit the graves of these deceased servants of God and 'suck up' their anointing. In his article entitled 'Recovering Our Spiritual Inheritance', Bill Johnson explains it like this:

There are anointings, mantles, revelations and mysteries that have lain unclaimed, literally where they were left, because the generations that walked in them never passed them on. I believe it's possible for us to recover realms of anointing, realms of insight, realms of God that has been untended for decades simply by choosing to reclaim them and perpetuate them for future generations.

In the same article, under the sub-title 'Where Do we Start?', Johnson writes:

We can begin by recovering secrets, mysteries, mantles, and realms of God that has been abandoned and ignored for decades, some of them for centuries. They just lie there waiting for someone in this generation to come along and claim them. What do you think the Lord has been doing in recent days, when he stirs people to write books about 're-digging the wells?' God is saying, 'There are things lying there, mysteries to be understood, inheritances that are untended, uncared for, unoccupied. But they're for the taking.'

Johnson's Bethel Church is known to organise expeditions for members to visit the graves of servants of God in their hope to claim of their anointing.

Proponents of this practice often appeal to 2 Kings 13:21 for biblical support. The passage reads: 'And as a man was being buried, behold a marauding band was

seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha, and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood to his feet'. This is a story of a miracle. A dead man came to life when he touched the bones of Elisha. That is all there is to it. The resuscitated man did not receive Elisha's mantle. He did not receive Elisha's anointing. He did not become a prophet or a worker of signs and wonders. To use this passage as the basis for the practice of 'grave-sucking' is a clear example of the kind of Scripture twisting that is common among NAR leaders.

'Grave sucking' is associated with the occult, and not with Christianity. It is quite a common practice among shamans. Shamans are known to meditate in the night at the graves of dead Shamans in order to get their powers. Together with the rise of the occult, Satanism and New Age, there is a corresponding resurgence of shamanism today. Some shamanic practices have seeped into the church unnoticed. There are some who are even talking about shamanic Christianity, and there are others who hold Jesus up as the Shaman *par excellence*.

Finally, there are NAR leaders who explicitly encourage the embrace of New Age practices in their writings. For example, in his 2006 book *Dreaming With God*, Johnson explicitly asserts that it is mistaken to think that New Age practices are from the devil. Rather, he says, they are 'the tools that God has given us for success in life and ministry'. In *The Physics of Heaven* (2012), Jonathan Welton – who claims to be a seer – argues that practices like 'spirit guide, trances, meditation, auras, power objects, clairvoyance, clairsaudience, and more ... actually belong to the Church...' The New Age movement have stolen them. Thus, he adds: "Every time a counterfeit shows up, take it as the Lord presenting you with an opportunity to reclaim ... God's stolen property'.

So, what these NAR leaders are effectively saying is that occult practices actually belong to the Church. Christians should practise trances, auras, clairvoyance and all the rest. But that which NAR leaders are urging Christians to do is exactly what the Bible prohibits and condemns. In Deuteronomy 18:9-14, we read:

"When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering,[a] anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God, for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do this.

Time does not permit me to discuss other practices associated with the NAR like angel orbs, gold dust, spirit portals, teleportation, etc. But I think I have given enough material for you to form a picture of what the NAR is about.

CONCLUSION

Let me bring this talk to a conclusion. The NAR is a movement that began in the States that seeks to reinstate the offices of the Apostles and the Prophets. It teaches that in the last days, God is raising a new breed of foundational apostles and prophets that will bring the church to perfection and prepare her for the return of the Lord. The teachings of the NAR, as we have seen, are not new. They are fundamentally taken from a heretical movement in the 1940s called the Latter Rain. The Assemblies of God has officially denounced this movement, even though it emerged from the soil of American Pentecostalism. The NAR has repackaged its teachings and emphases and ‘marketed’ it to mainstream churches. The reach and influence of the NAR should not be underestimated. It has coalitions in 45 countries, including Singapore.

The Church and her leaders must be aware of the teachings and practices of the NAR and the way in which they have subtly made their way into our churches. Some Christians are still obsessed with angels, gold dust or holy laughter. As church pastors and leaders, we should be vigilant. We should gently warn members of our congregation about these erroneous teachings and practices. And we must of course never promote them ourselves.

Whenever I speak on this issue, I tell my audience that this is not about charismatics versus non-charismatics. This is not about cessationism versus continuationism. This is about warning the Church of false teachings and practices. It is about preventing Christians from going astray. It is about loving and guiding our flock, the people whom God has entrusted to us. It is about fulfilling our responsibilities as custodians of the deposit of faith we have received from the Apostles.

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