

**The New Apostolic Reformation:
Understanding Its Origins and Critiquing Its
Influence on Global Pentecostalism**

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AN ATTEMPT AT SOME BOUNDARIES

The emergence of what has come to be called the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is a present reality that functions more as a movement than as an official organization. There is no official list of leaders or churches. Nevertheless, Global Pentecostalism, in particular, cannot ignore the growing influence of the NAR. Like the Berean church in Acts 17:10-12, believers must remain open to the messages of those who demonstrate evident spiritual leadership gifts, while also measuring the trustworthiness of those messages through diligent study of Scripture.

Gordon Fee sharpens this issue of leadership and credibility when he observes that the Pastoral Epistles focus critically on the presence of leaders within the church whose teachings threaten the unfolding vision of the church's role.¹ I believe the guarantee of Pentecost rests in the miraculous and redemptive ministry of Jesus authoritatively recorded in the Gospels and continued today through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the present tense, Jesus continues to do the same things we see Him doing in the Gospels.² However, at the intersection of interpreting the authoritative biblical text and contemporary declarations of new revelation concerning the continuing work of the Holy Spirit today, we encounter the influential movement known as the New Apostolic Reformation.

While scholars and church leaders describe the NAR in a variety of ways, R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec offer a particularly helpful description:

The core NAR teaching, we believe, is that there are prophets and apostles today who exercise extraordinary authority in the lives of others and in the governance of the church. Their rationale for exercising such governing authority is that they are needed to unite Christians under their leadership and provide the church with new truths for the church to become a miracle-working army and thereby advance God's Kingdom on earth.³

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 8.

² Ray S. Anderson, *Ministry on the Fireline* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 21–40.

³ R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *God's Super-Apostles: Encountering the Worldwide Prophets and Apostles Movement* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 125.

Frank Bartleman, a noted observer of Azusa Street, wisely summarized the discernment needed amid the resulting volatility we continue to experience today. His voice from a century ago still exhorts us:

We may not even hold a doctrine, or seek an experience, except in Christ. Many are willing to seek power from every battery they can lay their hands on, to perform miracles, draw the attention and adoration of the people to themselves thus robbing Christ of his glory and making a fair showing in the flesh. ... A true Pentecost will produce a mighty conviction for sin, a turning to God. False manifestations produce only excitement and wonder. Any work that exalts the Holy Ghost or the “gifts” above Jesus will finally land up in fanaticism. ... Whatever causes us to exalt and love Jesus is well and safe, the reverse will ruin all. The Holy Ghost is a great light, but focused on Jesus always, for His revealing.⁴

Bartleman’s observation may be from another era, but it succinctly describes Pentecostalism’s historic Achilles heel: deference to displays of spiritual power without a corresponding biblical critique.

THE STREAMS OF INFLUENCE THAT HAVE SHAPED THE NAR

Historic streams of spirituality coalesced around key flashpoints that created significant moments in the development of NAR. A longing for supernatural miracles and power reminiscent of the Book of Acts reflects a “restorationist” impulse that spans centuries of church history. Restorationist rhetoric has often drawn upon biblical terms such as the “former and latter rain.” In this framework, the “former rain” refers to the signs and wonders described in Acts, while the “latter rain” points to their restoration through a final outpouring of Holy Spirit power near the close of history. Early Pentecostals favored this imagery; thus, it became a natural and

⁴ Frank Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: privately published, 1925), 84. See also William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), 54–55. Menzies quotes Bartleman and other Azusa participants and observers to provide insight into the volatility of the Azusa outpouring and attempts to wisely guide religious enthusiasm and “new revelation.” See also Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006).

understandable language to use in preaching and interpretation of the Spirit's work of renewal in congregational life.⁵

A Classical Pentecostal Contribution: The Latter Rain Movement

A specific flashpoint to consider is the Latter Rain Movement, which began in 1948 in Saskatchewan, Canada. This movement emerged at a unique moment when several key leaders of early Pentecostalism had recently passed away, including Aimee Semple McPherson, Charles Price, and Smith Wigglesworth. Post-World War II anxieties, especially surrounding the threat of nuclear power, added fuel to the Pentecostal movement's Last Days rhetoric. At the same time, a healing movement reminiscent of leaders such as William Branham, Oral Roberts, T. L. Osborn, and others emerged with the miraculous in plain view. Pentecostalism's DNA carried a deep longing for a "fresh touch." Into this moment came several key themes that NAR proponents would develop half a century later.⁶

One of the most influential of the specific themes that emerge from the Canadian prairies was the concept of "manifest sons of God"—the belief that God was instituting a spiritually elite cadre of Spirit-empowered leaders for the "last days." According to this view, these leaders possessed divine authority to impart all spiritual gifts to prepared believers. This spiritually elite group would stand at the top of a newly ordered theocratic chain of command and demonstrate special spiritual power to subdue and ultimately conquer the earth in the End Times. It affirmed

⁵ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3. See a more expansive discussion of the imagery of the latter rain among Pentecostals throughout the twentieth century in Vinson Synan, *In the Latter Days* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1984). See also Vinson Synan, *An Eyewitness Remembers the Century of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2010).

⁶ R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation: A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 108–13. This section of the book is entitled, "Revealing New Truths," and offers a chronological explanation of how key doctrines of the NAR have been spiritually "authorized."

that God directly vested key “charismatic” leaders with special authority; therefore, they did not need accountability because the inspiration came directly from God.⁷

The Charismatic Movement’s Contribution:

The Shepherding Movement

Another flashpoint emerged in the late 1950s with the Charismatic Awakening among mainline Protestants and Catholics, a movement many term the Second Wave of the Holy Spirit in the twentieth century. Its influence reached ecclesial power centres globally, including the Vatican. A tributary flowing from the “mainstream” of the Charismatic Movement, and one with implications for understanding the NAR, was the Shepherding Movement. The leadership of this movement, also called the discipling or covenanting movement, believed the Charismatic Renewal was in danger of losing its moorings because it lacked adequate grounding in the requirements of faith. To remedy this challenge, the leadership of the Shepherding Movement posited that power came directly from the Holy Spirit and that power allowed/called leaders to “define strict lines of authority for charismatic prayer groups.”⁸ Individuals in these prayer groups were required to submit totally and unflinchingly to the authority of the special elders or shepherds of these local communities.⁹ Most notable among the leadership of the Shepherding

⁷ John Weaver, *The New Apostolic Reformation: History of a Modern Charismatic Movement* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2016), 28–34. Weaver is an independent researcher who is critical of what he calls the modern charismatic movement. His research is thorough with significant detail. His historiographical assumptions lead to a generally negative view of the movement. He also reflects a set of scholars whose thoroughness seems to lead to the creation of new interpretive frameworks that move from the descriptive to postulating conspiracy theories with geopolitical implications. That path of discussion is not the purview of this paper. A sturdy study of the Latter Rain movement is Richard M. Riss, *Latter Rain: The Latter Rain Movement of 1948 and the Mid-Twentieth Century Evangelical Awakening* (Honeycomb Visual Productions, 1987). See also Richard M. Riss, “Latter Rain,” in *Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (New York: Routledge, 2006), 285–87.

⁸ Weaver, *The New Apostolic Reformation*, 42.

⁹ Michael W. Cuneo, *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 122–23.

Movement were the “Fort Lauderdale Five”—Ern Baxter, Charles Simpson, Bob Mumford, Derek Prince, and Don Basham—who emerge as a somewhat infallible leadership presidium.¹⁰

The British version of this season certainly forms a part of the overall picture, though arguably it remains less “storied” than the American chapter. Allan Anderson notes that British Pentecostalism has deep connection to movements that are centred in that region, such as Keswickism, Darbyism, Irvingism, and the Welsh Revival to name a few.¹¹ William Kay offers a very thorough view through the British lens, including the British Apostolic Network and the British Restorationist Movement.¹²

The dismissal of the *oppressive ecclesial structures* celebrated by both the Latter Rain Movement and the Shepherding Movement, created greater potential for volatility among those who welcomed the *new revelations of the Holy Spirit*, these movements offered as pathways toward a *Spirit-led modern day reform movement*. This arena, free from institutional constraints, provided a wide-open field for new structures to emerge in place of those historically viewed as resistant to the free flow of the Spirit.

Among the notable principles of the Shepherding Movement that continue to have implications for the current NAR, is the idea of “covering.” The movement defined “covering” as the necessity for every member of the group to live under the protection and direction of someone placed in authority over them. Members needed to have important decisions—and sometimes even less significant ones—covered or approved by a group leader, elder, or pastor.

¹⁰ S. David Moore, *The Shepherding Movement* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), is one of the most instructive resources on the Shepherding movement. For a more negative view of the excesses of the movement, see Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).

¹¹ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23–33, 91–96.

¹² William K. Kay, *Apostolic Networks in Britain: New Ways of Being Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 20, 197.

The covering from “above,” mediated by a leader, protected those below, who were viewed as weaker, more vulnerable, and subject to demonic influence and poor decision-making.¹³

The Third Wave’s Contribution:

The Globalizing Influence of Wagner and Kraft

Another flashpoint central to understanding the NAR emerged during the rise of the Third Wave, particularly through the global implications that developed at Fuller Seminary in the 1980s. The most visible of the players during this period were C. Peter Wagner and Charles H. Kraft (and tangentially, John Wimber, who developed the Vineyard Movement, and David Watson, who played an instrumental role in the renewal movement within the Church of England). Wagner and Kraft served as noted missiologists at the Fuller School of World Mission. Interestingly, they both come from cessationist backgrounds, but their missionary experiences exposed them to the miraculous moving of the Spirit.¹⁴

At Fuller Seminary, both Wagner and Kraft encountered Majority World students and veteran missionary students who struggled to find answers to the critical questions surrounding the apparent lack of spiritual power in dealing with the challenges facing Christian witness, particularly in the Global South. Within this milieu, both Wagner and Kraft underwent major paradigm shifts in their understanding of spiritual power. They become unabashed proponents of what was then termed “power encounter.” They increasingly acknowledged the role of the Holy

¹³ Michael Moriarty, *The New Charismatics: A Concerned Voice Responds to Dangerous New Trends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 76–78. The most direct view of the Shepherding Movement, including the emphasis on “covering,” is the magazine *New Wine*, published from 1969–1986 by Charles Simpson Ministries.

¹⁴ For historical insight into the missionary experiences of Peter Wagner and Charles Kraft, see C. Peter Wagner, *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1973), which discusses his missionary experiences in Bolivia between 1956–1971 as an integration point for the entire book. From Charles Kraft’s experiences in Nigeria, see Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity with Power* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1989), 1–9; and Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 3–12.

Spirit and the necessity of the miraculous.¹⁵ One of the key academic contributions that shaped the changing perspective by both Wagner and Kraft came from a paper written by their Fuller Seminary faculty colleague, Paul Hiebert. In 1980, Hiebert published a paper entitled “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” in which he honestly chronicled his own missionary experience in India and his admittedly secular perspective on the miraculous.¹⁶ Using his training as an anthropologist, Hiebert reveals the flaw of Western-influenced Christianity that has dismissed the supernaturalist worldviews that predominate in what is known today as the Majority World. Hiebert’s article became foundational to Wagner’s growing interest in spiritual warfare, an interest that developed exponentially throughout the remainder of his career. Ironically, Hiebert ultimately left Fuller, in part, due to his disagreement with the emphasis on the miraculous that had become quite visible in the School of World Mission at Fuller.¹⁷

The exponential growth of the NARs influence during the final decades of the twentieth century marks the period in which Wagner arguably emerges as the catalytic leader who globalized the ever-developing concepts now identified as the NAR. However, Kraft’s anthropological training most likely provided the conceptual framework that enabled both men to shift from their cessationist beginnings. Kraft’s anthropological perspective was shaped by the structural functionalism of Émile Durkheim.¹⁸ Kraft’s usage of Durkheim reveals itself

¹⁵ A summation of this new language and perspective is summarized in Kevin Springer, ed., *Power Encounters among Christians in the Western World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

¹⁶ Paul G. Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” *Missiology: An International Review* 10, no. 1 (January 1982): 35–47.

¹⁷ Lewis B. Smedes, ed., *Ministry and the Miraculous: A Case Study at Fuller Theological Seminary* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1987). This publication chronicles the emergence at Fuller Seminary of the emphasis on Signs and Wonders and the ensuing controversy. This movement at Fuller coincides with the emergence of the Vineyard Movement and John Wimber. Two years later, Hiebert participated in another critique of this season as seen in James R. Coggins and Paul G. Hiebert, *Wonders and the Word: An Examination of John Wimber and the Vineyard Movement* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1989). Hiebert left the faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary and joined the faculty at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1990.

¹⁸ See Émile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1895).

practically in that Kraft views culture with many parts that never fully integrate but rather remain in constant change. Worldview became the all-determining factor that influenced the potential for reevaluation, reinterpretation, and development of new behavior.¹⁹ Essentially, Kraft's cessationist upbringing collided with his anthropological training. His missionary experience in Nigeria revealed his upbringing's theological limitations while his anthropological training allowed him to affirm a worldview change that included the miraculous. This meeting of diverse and polar ideas subsequently morphed into a new understanding of his missionary efforts. He no longer viewed conversion as a conceptual adjustment, but as a "power encounter" capable of bringing genuine transformation into a person's life.²⁰

As an anthropologist, Kraft also showed deep interest in translation. He drew influence from the dynamic equivalence model usually associated with Eugene Nida and William Smalley.²¹ This model of translation affirmed that the translation process should focus on the surface linguistic forms through which meaning is conveyed to yield a translation as close to the original message as possible. Kraft applied this model to a variety of artifacts of NAR-related concepts, including spiritual mapping and an ecclesiology that necessitates a new order of apostles and prophets. His intent becomes clear as he pens the following statement: "As with theologizing, translation, revelation and all other products of Christianity, however, it is crucial that each new generation and culture experience the process of producing in its own cultural forms an appropriate church vehicle for the transmission of God's meanings."²² One can look at

¹⁹ Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 91–100.

²⁰ Charles H. Kraft, "Three Encounters in Christian Witness," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed., ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 445–50.

²¹ For further research into translation theory that influenced Kraft, see Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964); and William A. Smalley, *Translation as Mission* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1991).

²² Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 345.

Kraft's statement and largely agree; however, it is in the breadth of application of Kraft's assumptions that the theological challenges begin to emerge.

On the one hand, the journeys of both Wagner and Kraft brought them to where Pentecostals begin: the affirmation of the supernatural, a reliance on the Holy Spirit to elicit creativity in the continuing redemptive saga, and the belief that conversion certainly includes a radical overthrow of forces that challenge the authority of the risen Lord. Yet Wagner and Kraft continued their venture into the new territory of vibrant Spirit-empowered life with a hunger for the supernatural that underscores the paucity of their earlier upbringing. The anthropological perspectives that shaped Kraft's academic journey also provided an adaptable framework and license for the further development of foundational themes that now dominate the NAR.

INTEGRATING NAR'S HISTORICAL ROOTS WITH CRITICAL CATALYZERS

The global rise of the NAR has provided researchers with ample material for applying their theories and models to explain why this movement has become so influential in contemporary Christianity and, for our purposes in this paper, Global Pentecostalism. As the twenty-first century began, scholars like Donald E. Miller observed a "reformation" taking place within Western religious life. As an American mainline Protestant, Miller observed his own faith tradition becoming increasingly routinized and, subsequently, began studying emerging movements that demonstrated new vitality.²³ During this same period, Brad Christerson and Richard Flory offered an extensive analysis that frames a possible explanation for the global growth of the NAR. They framed their analysis of NAR through a religious economies model

²³ Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1–9. Miller's continued interest in this paradigmatic shift led him to research global Pentecostalism with Tetsunao Yamamori in *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

from sociology. This model suggests that scholars gain greater clarity in the study of world religions when they utilize a framework that explains religion as operating in a marketplace with competing religious firms vying for adherents. The success of these firms is contingent on four key factors: (1) aspects of their organizational structure, (2) their sales representatives, (3) their product, and (4) their marketing techniques. In ecclesial terms, these factors translate into a function of polity, leadership, religious beliefs, and evangelization strategies. Christerson and Flory conclude that a new form of Christianity now predominates—what they term Independent Network Charismatic Christianity. Its vibrancy derives from its decentralized networks, entrepreneurial leaders, supernatural practices, and innovative organizational models.²⁴

The last four decades have brought about striking religious and social change. Within this period of volatility, the NAR has offered a clear “narrative of the world” that has fit the moment. Its loose relational networks rely less on formal structure and more on events and social media that are fluid and easily globalized. Leadership centralizes around “charismatic” figures who personify the hopes of followers who vicariously experience spiritual vitality through association with those specially anointed by God for this moment of spiritual destiny in history. Participants enthusiastically communicate the spirituality of powerful personal transformation. Structures adapt quickly to both cultural and technological change because the DNA of the whole movement resists bureaucratization.

Social influencer Malcolm Gladwell recently revisited his classic work, *The Tipping Point*, on the phenomenon of social “epidemics.”²⁵ In *The Revenge of the Tipping Point*, Gladwell further develops three key points that help explain the phenomenon of NAR and its

²⁴ Brad Christerson and Richard Flory, *The Rise of Network Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 159–67.

²⁵ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000).

broad influence within Global Pentecostalism. First, Gladwell argues that social movements depend disproportionately on a small group of highly influential people. These leaders possess unique social gifts that enable them to spread ideas far more effectively than most people. Second, Gladwell argues that ideas do not spread unless they are “sticky”; that is, they must remain memorable, engaging, and capable of promoting action. Most significant for understanding the spread of NAR, however, is Gladwell’s belief in the power of context. Certain cultural moments arise when the “stars align” and the “fullness of time” arrives, allowing a few key influencers with just the right message to exert optimal influence.²⁶

AN OVERLY SIMPLISTIC SYNTHESIS

The Latter Rain and the Charismatic movements provided the manifest sons of God and the shepherding/covering emphasis that helped shape the understanding of a “special class” of leadership in the NAR. Key influencers, such as Wagner and Kraft, utilized their own spiritual awakening and anthropological training to provide a structural understanding for the supernaturalist worldview that lies at the core of the DNA of the NAR and its understanding of personal and social transformation. At the same time, a period of global social and religious upheaval created the context in which ideas and key influencers could present a sticky message fine-tuned to the cultural and spiritual moment. As a result, a tipping point of influence emerged that enabled the NAR to spread quickly and broadly.

Any attempt to explain NAR as merely an American religious export needs to consider the enduring character and attraction of the Christian faith. The increasingly globalized world in which we live reveals the true nature of Christianity as an essentially pluralistic and cross-

²⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Revenge of the Tipping Point* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2024), 7–9.

cultural faith capable of thriving in any culture.²⁷ When one considers the historical roots of the NAR, the growing dominance of Network Christianity, and Gladwell's social analysis of how social movements gain influence, it becomes increasingly evident that the key elements of the NAR amplify dynamics already present in Global Pentecostalism.

The fluidity in organizational structure that characterizes the NAR fits naturally with the character of Global Pentecostalism, which continues to grow most rapidly where vibrant personal evangelism operates through informal networks of like-minded people. This growth reflects the ongoing adaptation to local contexts, accompanied by an emphasis on relationships as the glue that holds these adaptive structures together.

Global Pentecostalism is arguably most vibrant within societies with hierarchal social structures. In these contexts, people commonly accept the idea that spiritual authority resides in key figures, and they readily defer to authoritative figures who "speak for God." Much of the Majority World allows for greater power-distance differential than the West and, therefore, more readily accommodates vesting fewer people with authority.

The supernaturalistic worldview of the Majority World fits naturally with both Global Pentecostalism and the priorities of Network Christianity. Vibrant engagement with the supernatural aligns with Majority World cosmologies. People often view spiritual experiences that touch the whole person as legitimate, so they welcome and cherish the spontaneous spiritual expressions that accompany these encounters with the supernatural. Communities view deliverance from spiritual powers that formally ruled a person's life as necessary, making a broad range of powerful transformative encounters a part of everyday ministry. Followers

²⁷ Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 190–200.

welcome large gatherings that highlight supernatural phenomenon because the social dynamic of these group experiences integrate with the powerful spiritual encounters that ensue.

Majority World Pentecostalism exists in regions where the economic priorities of the West compete with historically traditional cultures. As these differing perspectives encounter one another, people aspire betterment through the acquisition of material goods. In the swirl of these contending interests, the transformational rhetoric of the NAR is welcome because it affirms significant change in both personal and material realms. It creates hope for things like national renewal, economic uplift, and spiritual destiny. When the layers of powerful spiritual manifestations and charismatic leadership are added to the equation, the result is a movement with significant influence and a relatively easy pathway for recruiting adherents.²⁸

KEY AREAS OF CRITIQUE OF THE NAR FOR GLOBAL PENTECOSTALISM

Evaluating Contemporary Apostolic Authority through Church History and Biblical Hermeneutics

The influence of the NAR globally requires more than casual acknowledgment. The present moment is witnessing unprecedented growth in Christianity, most notably in the Majority World.²⁹ Much like Christianity in the first century, this current growth faces both external threats and internal challenges that impede its sustained development. The Pastoral Epistles provide a case study pertinent to this contemporary moment. These three Epistles focus on the internal challenge posed by false teachers. The issue is not merely that these individuals

²⁸ David Cannistraci, *Apostles and the Emerging Apostolic Movement: A Biblical Look at Apostleship and How God Is Using It to Bless the Church Today* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1996). This is a strong early example of the comprehensive vision that later became known as the NAR. Viewing this volume thirty years after publication offers perspective on the historical antecedents planted then and how they have developed today.

²⁹ Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *Introducing Spirit-Empowered Christianity* (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2023). This excellent resource understands and documents Spirit-empowered Christianity in the context of the larger framework Global Christianity.

communicate strange or erroneous doctrine; rather, their teaching is “false” because it does not align with apostolic teaching. Both Galatians 1:6 and 2 Corinthians 11:1–4 make observations similar to those that emerge in 1 Timothy 1:3 and 6:3. The teaching addressed in these letters does not align with that which the Apostles delivered. Although this period occurred early in the Church’s history, the deviation required correction because it departed from what constituted the agreed-upon core of the gospel at that time.³⁰

Our reference to historical antecedents in the emergence of the NAR clearly identifies a critical issue concerning the nature of apostolic leadership. In question is the NARs understanding of the legitimacy and authority of contemporary apostles and the validity of their communication. Pentecostal church historian Vinson Synan frames this contemporary issue by referencing previous eras and movements that addressed restorationist impulses and questions of apostolic succession. He notes the Catholic Church’s view that Peter holds a unique place among the apostles and that his successors, the popes, receive a generation-to-generation transmission of magisterial, teaching, and pastoral authority.³¹ Other movements of particular interest to Pentecostal history include the nineteenth-century restorationist movements associated with figures such as Edward Irving, whose efforts to restore the charismata culminated in the Catholic Apostolic Church and its attempts to restore both the charismatic gifts and the fivefold ministry gifts, including apostleship. Alexander Dowie’s Zion experiment provides another example of an attempt to build communities in which people could live within life structures framed by restorationist priorities under the leadership of an apostolic leader.³²

³⁰ John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 42–44; see also Roger E. Olson, *Counterfeit Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 24–28.

³¹ Vinson Synan, “Apostolic Practice,” in *And He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Edgar Lee (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2005), 16–19.

³² Edith L. Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism*, vol. 1 (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), 31–34.

Jonathan Black reminds us that Pentecostals today hold differing views regarding the need for or existence of apostles. The term “Apostolic” now connotes several unique qualities. In North America, it is often associated with Oneness Pentecostalism. The term also functions as an honorific designation, as seen in the Church of God in Christ, the largest Pentecostal denomination in North America, where the presiding bishop serves as the Chief Apostle. The term denotes a particular understanding of ecclesial structure. In Great Britain, Pentecostal groups such as the Elim Church, the Apostolic Church, and the Assemblies of God of Great Britain all maintain that the gift of apostleship continues in the Church. However, they see no need to ordain individuals as apostles. They affirm that it is reasonable to believe the gift of apostle has always existed within the church and continues to the present day, while also maintaining a distinction between ministry gifts and the governing offices of the church.³³

William Menzies succinctly posits that when considering the restoration of New Testament type apostles to the modern church, one must look first at the matter of religious authority.³⁴ The Unique Apostle is Jesus himself, whom Hebrews 3:1 identifies as “the apostle and high priest of our profession.” His mission to save the world was singular in nature. In this sense, Jesus stands alone as unique.³⁵ Along with his own categories, Synan cites J. Rodman Williams, who utilizes two distinct classifications. The first category is the “Apostles plus Paul,” who possessed *special authority* because they served as eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus; therefore, they received unique authority to frame the authoritative teaching concerning His life and ministry. Synan expands Williams’s designation to include writers of books

³³ Jonathan Black, *40 Questions About Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2024), 279–284.

³⁴ William W. Menzies, “Apostolic in Power,” in *And He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Edgar Lee (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2005), 44.

³⁵ Vinson Synan, “Apostolic Practice,” in *And He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Edgar Lee (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2005), 14–15; J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 165–67.

contained in the New Testament canon, such as Mark, Luke, James, and Jude. He posits that the clear intent of this select body of apostles was to establish the parameters by which subsequent generations would evaluate all faith, belief, and practice. They never intended to pass this special role on to future generations. Their unique gifting neither established a basis for apostolic succession nor anticipated restoration in future eras. The revelation entrusted to this unique first-century group stands alone and must be safeguarded.³⁶

James Hernando provides further insight into the uniqueness of this original “college of apostles,” or *dominical* apostles, as distinguished from the *ecclesiastical* apostles sent out by the church. These dominical apostles were unique and irreplaceable in that they fulfilled a function central to redemptive history. They served as the foundational apostles of the Church (Eph. 2:20; 3:5) and functioned as authoritative bearers and transmitters of the teachings of Jesus (Matt. 10:1–7; Acts 1:2–8). Their teaching became the standard and foundation by which the Early Church recognized the New Testament canon. Consequently, their authority to determine the creedal norms of Christianity remained unrivaled and beyond challenge.³⁷ However, even Paul acknowledges that his authority was not absolute. He readily affirms that he remained accountable and subject to the very gospel he preached. In Galatians 1:8–9, Paul states, “If we” [the original college of apostles] or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.” Even this original group of apostles, despite their unique role in redemptive history, remained accountable to the gospel and to the ecclesial community to which they belonged.³⁸

³⁶ William W. Menzies, “Apostolic in Doctrine,” in *And He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Edgar Lee (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2005), 38.

³⁷ James Hernando, “Paul and the Scope of Apostolic Authority” in *And He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Edgar Lee (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2005), 98.

³⁸ Hernando, “Paul and the Scope of Apostolic Authority,” 99. Juxtaposed against Hernando’s reading of New Testament texts about apostleship is Wagner’s apologetic for the uniqueness of the apostle and the special

The second category utilized by Williams and Menzies is that of apostles of *special calling*. For example, Acts 14:14 identifies both Paul and Barnabas as apostles. In Galatians 1:18–19, Paul refers to James, the half-brother of Jesus, as an apostle, though Acts 15 does not list James among the apostles. Romans 16 describes Andronicus and Junias as “outstanding apostles.” First Thessalonians 1:1 also places Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy within the same designation. The term used in these situations is *apostellō*, meaning “I send.”

Interestingly, the assignment given to the sent one often involved a pioneering role, as seen, for example, in Titus’s ministry on Crete. One could argue that these apostles of *special calling* provide a more useful framework for understanding the continuing nature of *apostolic function*. What emerges is a heuristic that describes what, why, and how apostolic ministry continues today. This proclamation of the gospel was to focus on those with little access to the gospel and on places where active opposition to the gospel existed. It was to be accompanied by signs and wonders that verified the gospel (Heb. 2:3–4).³⁹ Additionally, apostolic ministry regularly involved suffering because of its focus on people and regions hostile to the gospel.⁴⁰

status accorded apostolic leadership in the NAR world. See C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2000), 24–40.

³⁹ Alan R. Johnson, *Apostolic Function in 21st Century Missions* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 79–81. Johnson is a veteran missionary who has served decades among unreached people groups in Thailand and offers some of the most clarifying descriptions of apostolic ministry using Paul’s apostolic ministry as a heuristic. For an official denominational statement on apostleship, see also General Council of the Assemblies of God, “Modern-Day Apostles and Prophets,” accessed May 30, 2026, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Modern-Day-Apostles>

⁴⁰ James Shelton, “A Pendulum Swing between Prosperity and Suffering,” in *Spirit-Empowered Christianity in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Vinson Synan (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2011), 365–73.

**A Response to the Contemporary Apostle's Authority to Arbitrarily
Establish Foundational Governance of the Church
Without Accountability Except to God**

In the opening statement for the International Coalition of Apostles in May 2006, Peter Wagner, the Chief Apostle, offered the following official definition of an apostle today:

An apostle is a Christian leader, gifted, taught, commissioned and sent by God with the authority to establish the foundational governance of the Church within the assigned sphere and/or spheres of ministry by hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches and by setting in order accordingly for the expansion of the Kingdom of God.⁴¹

This definition provides opportunity to critique another dimension of the NARs understanding of a contemporary apostle, namely the focus on their authority in ecclesial structures to which they are “called” to establish.

The person in church history who most significantly contributed to the idea of structural/organizational authority accompanying an understanding of the role of apostle is Ignatius of Antioch. The third bishop of Antioch, Ignatius died as a martyr in Rome in AD 108. As the original 12 apostles and Paul passed away, Ignatius zealously sought to establish a continuing source of authority within the Church and posits that in the role of bishop. So, the original intent of Paul to have a plurality of gifted leaders working together in community gradually morphed into a more hierarchical structure. Bishops emerged as a distinct group that served as a visible replacement for the original apostles. He affirmed that the bishop represented the visible presence of Christ in the Church. In the natural process of a movement's development, he sought to solidify the continued effectiveness of the Church and ensure its ongoing viability. Loyalty to a bishop, in his view, would yield unity among believers. Yet when one examines this well-

⁴¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2006), 27.

intended structural adjustment advocated by Ignatius, it becomes apparent that the centralization of authority in the office of bishop can, over time, yield a positional role accompanied by increasing levels of influence and power.⁴²

To integrate the historically situated and well-intended contribution of Ignatius into what Paul envisioned in his letters to developing faith communities may appear to provide a helpful apologetic for the NARs understanding of apostolic leadership. However, it represents a distracting departure from Paul's clear intent. For Paul, leadership roles are not matters of positional power but of Holy Spirit-initiated giftedness. The spheres of influence that accompany these roles are not positions to be coveted but roles empowered by the Spirit to cultivate a church constituency that is growing in maturity. The central question for those in leadership is not who must respond to their direction, but whom they are leading toward full maturity in the life of Christ.

Over the centuries, a variety of ecclesial structures have emerged from diverse cultural contexts. Some are more hierarchical, while others adopt a flatter structure. Nevertheless, Paul's emphasis on accountability among leaders, as reflected in the plurality of gifted leaders identified in Ephesians 4, remains a critical nexus. Craig Keener notes that the central emphasis of Ephesians 4:11–16 is the existence of a plurality of spiritually gifted leaders whose corporate task is to mobilize the body of Christ who are all called to be ministers. Those individuals called to ministry are to exercise that ministry wherever they find themselves serving. When such ministry functions within a framework of mutual submission as a core value, the Church flourishes and remains resistant to “every wind of doctrine.”⁴³

⁴² Justo Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 70-80.

⁴³ Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today*, repackaged ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 128–30. Keener's explanation in this reference also highlights the Ephesians 4:11ff text but he

The concept of synodality provides a helpful contemporary model of what the earliest church structures and understanding of leadership intended. Interestingly, this concept is a current topic of discussion within Catholicism and was championed recently by the late Pope Francis. Wolfgang Vondey undertakes one of the most exhaustive studies of the Catholic understanding and teaching on synodality in his efforts to integrate this theological concept for Pentecostal understanding. His work is particularly instructive in providing a corrective to the blurring of attributes and qualities of leadership roles that can open the door to exploitative authoritarianism.⁴⁴

Vondey's use of the concept of synodality is particularly important when critiquing the NARs understanding that certain gifts, such as apostleship, should receive hierarchical priority in church governance. A key focal point is balancing the charisms (gifts of the Spirit) and their connection to how the manifestation of a charism builds up the church while promoting unity and charity. Additionally, the individual exercising a charism should demonstrate spiritual and moral maturity and remain responsive to pastoral leadership, that is, accountable to a larger group. Rather than focusing on the authority of an anointed apostle or leader, synodality emphasizes that every baptized person has a role in the Church's mission. While the concept certainly relates to a variety of ecclesial structures, its primary focus is the process of collaboration, dialogue, shared discernment, and communal responsibility. Together, these synergistic functions provide the accountability necessary for effective leadership over the long term.⁴⁵

does not view the listing of the “5-fold leadership giftings” as hierarchal in their order. In other words, Keener finds no evidence that apostles are to be prioritized or viewed as of greater value over other gifts listed in this passage.

⁴⁴ Wolfgang Vondey, “Synodality and Charisma: A Pentecostal Perspective on Hierarchical and Spiritual Gifts in the Life and Mission of the Church,” *Theological Studies* 85, no. 3 (2024): 464–69.

⁴⁵ Vondey, “Synodality and Charisma,” 464–69.

Most critical for our purposes is what occurs when specially appointed leaders operate without accountability structures. Such situations open the door to the kind of misappropriation of biblical terms and language that permeates the NAR. That is, we fail to recognize the historical uniqueness of the apostles and forge ahead with slightly skewed versions of apostleship that, to the uninformed person, simply sound correct. If we long for the revitalization of our church and the renewing power of the Spirit that resides within our Pentecostal DNA, then we stand only a short step away from becoming uncritically open to these new revelations.

Phrases such as “God is doing a new thing” and “Bible times are here again” are expressions that Pentecostals readily understand and have often heralded. Yet the vibrant movement of God’s Spirit is not intended to be novel, cool, or trendy. Rather, it follows a sovereign trajectory against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. The role of the Spirit is not to provide a continual stream of the new and novel, but to bring an enduring exegesis of the fullest implications of Jesus, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily and in whom we see the clearest revelation of who God is.⁴⁶

A Response to the Minimization of a Focus on Character Quality and Deference to Uncritiqued Authority in the Contemporary Version of Apostleship

New Testament scholar James Hernando offers several cogent observations for those who herald the return of apostles. He observes that Paul, using his own ministry as an example, describes the qualities of a true apostle in his summary statement in 2 Corinthians 12:12. This summary builds upon the preceding chapters, which provide a fuller description of apostleship.

⁴⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 121–25.

These qualities include a jealous care for the church (11:2), a true knowledge of Jesus and His gospel (11:6), sacrificial self-support so as not to burden the church, the absence of self-serving motives or heavy-handed discipline, a willingness to suffer and endure affliction for the cause of Christ, and a ministry accompanied by the miraculous.⁴⁷

Hernando notes that it is understandable that the “super apostles” would want to tout their miracles and wondrous works. However, his observations reveal what is missing from such a limited understanding of apostleship. Hernando’s words deserve careful consideration:

A lesson for those who want to see the return of ‘true’ apostolic ministry, with its attendant signs and wonders, in the church should be obvious. Supernatural manifestations are integral to, but are not the definitive mark of, New Testament apostolic ministry. Signs and wonders must be judged as to their true source of origin. One key way of judging is to discern the character and ministry of those through whom such signs and wonders appear. They must minister in the moral and spiritual character of the Crucified One.⁴⁸

Emphasis on the power or authority dimension of apostolic ministry to the exclusion of Paul’s continuous focus on the moral and spiritual character of leadership, can easily cast shadows on the integrity of the gospel.

My colleague Roger Heuser and I addressed another iteration of this issue forty years ago in the wake of several significant leadership failures in our nation. Drawing on Max Weber’s understanding of charismatic leadership, we posited that Pentecostals have historically admired spiritually influential leaders. The leader who had heard from God and forged ahead with

⁴⁷ Hernando, “Paul and the Scope of Apostolic Authority” in *And He Gave Apostles*, 94-113. See Keener, *Gift and Giver*, 128-130. Keener provides further generalizations of the apostle. He sees a greater diversity in apostles’ ministries than some scholars. However, he posits that the common traits of apostles include breaking new ground in previously unreached regions; exercising authority over ministries that were a function of their own ministry role, not the church’s institutional structure. Signs and wonders in their ministries, coupled with suffering, were assumed to be parallel in the apostles’ experience.

⁴⁸ James Hernando, “*Imitatio Christi* and the Character of Apostolic Ministry,” in *And He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Edgar Lee (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2005), 84-85.

pioneering forcefulness and missional focus often garnered deep respect. Such individuals attracted followers who vicariously experienced the victories and spiritual successes of that season of ministry. We also noted that this dynamic could become the seedbed for moral compromise, as we had just seen at the time of the article's writing.⁴⁹

The triumph of effective Spirit-empowered leadership is heady stuff, and the dangers confronting leaders daily are insidious and powerful. This volatility increases when leaders fail to establish relationships and structures of accountability and instead rely upon the uncritiqued mantle of imputed spiritual authority. The absence of accountability, and the resulting ministry that remains uncritiqued, becomes easy prey for the integration of cultural priorities and contemporary trends that results in a skewed spiritual understanding of authority and its influence.

For example, the conversation Jesus has with His disciples in Mark 10:35–45 demonstrates their blindness to the cultural influences that hindered their understanding of effective leadership. They occupied the lower levels of a peasant culture that longed for freedom and relief from the oppression of an invader. In this passage, their discussion reveals that they had fully integrated their understanding of effective leadership from at least two observable models: (1) the Romans, with their reliance upon military force, and (2) the religious leaders of their day, whose primary motivation centred on maintaining religious power.

Jesus counters the disciples' tunnel vision with a clear directive that these models should not be their prime influencers. The statement He makes concerning His mission and its implications for their subsequent leadership clearly escapes them. They have little understanding of what He is saying because they have patterned their perspective of effective leadership after

⁴⁹ Byron D. Klaus and Roger Heuser, "Charismatic Leadership Theory: A Shadow Side Confessed," *Pneuma*, 20 no. 1 (1998): 161-174. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157007498X00126>

the world around them. As a result, those cultural assumptions create an insularity that prevents them from fully grasping Jesus' message of servanthood to a divine mission.

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire makes a more secularized observation about this phenomenon for aspiring leaders while collaborating with poverty-stricken Brazilians. Freire presents the following poignant observation: "If to be is to be like, then to be is to be like the oppressor."⁵⁰ When one compares this insight with the language of victory, dominion, and powerful transformation that often dominates NAR discourse, the words of Jesus, "not so with you," all too often become drowned out by an atmosphere of triumphalism. Likewise, the Pauline assumption that suffering would accompany apostleship is absent from NAR rhetoric (see 1 Cor. 4:9–13).⁵¹

A Response to the "Supernatural Origin" of the Seven Mountain Mandate

One of the most visible markers of the NAR is its teaching on the Seven Mountain Mandate. While the development of this aspect of the NAR follows several different storylines, its theological premise is that the church has devoted too much attention on the quantitative focus of evangelism while neglecting the qualitative focus of transforming nations.⁵² The DNA of this focus rests decidedly on the belief that social transformation will occur only when apostles exercise their God-given authority and assume leadership over key segments of society

⁵⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), 33. Freire does apply Marxist categories to the realities of how power can exploit and how power can shape those born into poverty. He points out that unless people can make some existential leaps they will always live at the mercy of those forms of power they have observed or under which they have lived. This is an apt description of the disciples and their conversation with Jesus in Mark 10:35-45

⁵¹ Craig S. Keener, *Suffering: Its Meaning for the Spirit-Filled Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2025), 11–27. The chapter entitled, "Apostles and Suffering," is a magnificent reflection on what NAR apostles seem to want to avoid. For examples of organizational identification of the dangers of misplaced spiritual authority see also General Council of the Assemblies of God, "The Misuse of Spiritual Leadership," accessed May 30, 2026, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Misuse-of-Spiritual-Leadership>

⁵² Weaver, *The New Apostolic Reformation*, 96-99

on behalf of the Kingdom of God.⁵³ To understand this contemporary expression of advancing God’s Kingdom rule in a broad cultural sense, one should examine these current “revelations” in light of similar efforts throughout Christian history.⁵⁴

Arguably, the most pertinent historical example with implications for the NARs understanding of the Seven Mountain Mandate is the work of Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper’s understanding of Christ’s lordship over all of creation finds concise expression in his oft-cited statement: “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”⁵⁵ His most notable contribution to the discussion of gospel and culture is his concept of “sphere sovereignty.” Kuyper posited that God created multiple spheres of human life, including family, church, state, business, science, art, and education. Each sphere remains accountable to God, and the gospel should shape each sphere according to its God-given purpose.⁵⁶

The assumptions of Kuyper and the NAR are remarkably interesting to juxtapose. First, Kuyper’s discussion of sphere sovereignty casts a dampening effect on the “revelatory” nature of the Seven Mountain Mandate. Serious Christian thinkers throughout history have reflected carefully and thoroughly on how the gospel interacts with culture. The spheres, or mountains,

⁵³ C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World!* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2008), 148.

⁵⁴ Among historic examples one could look at St Augustine’s classic work, Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson, ed. G. R. Evans (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), which exemplifies an ambitious effort to bring the gospel into dialogue with the surrounding culture’s domination. A more recent example is the classic work by H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975), which has influenced thinking for the last 50+ years. Niebuhr’s matrix for how the Church has variously framed Jesus’ interaction with culture is among the most instructive frameworks to consider.

⁵⁵ Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

⁵⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *Sphere Sovereignty* (West Linn, OR: Monergism Books, 2024). This short excerpt reprint of Kuyper’s work highlights the importance of Kuyper’s understanding of sphere sovereignty.

simply provide practical terminology for describing the ways human beings have shaped their lives for sense-making and sustainability.⁵⁷

Interestingly, both Kuyper and the NAR reject a retreat from culture and instead advocate engagement with it. Kuyper views such engagement as patient, humble, and rooted in God's sovereignty, whereas the NAR is much more aggressive in its belief that there should be direct ecclesial control over culture. This difference becomes evident in the NARs apostolic governance strategy, which prioritizes the authority of individual leaders and their influence over members' political, economic, and family decisions as a visible example of Christ transforming culture.⁵⁸ Additionally, the NAR often expresses skepticism toward approaches to cultural engagement that emphasize patience, humility, and confidence in God's sovereignty. Instead, it favors a "breakthrough" spirituality characterized by triumphalism and an expectation of supernatural solutions.

While Kuyper may be an interesting dialogue partner for the NAR, another worthy historical artifact against which to compare the NARs understanding of gospel and culture is nineteenth-century post-millennialism. With the decidedly pre-millennial views of classical Pentecostalism, the NAR has jettisoned that eschatological perspective in favor of views that fit its new focus on conquest that has been "revealed" to its leaders. Nineteenth-century post-millennialists affirmed that the Holy Spirit would empower the Church and that society would

⁵⁷ Contemporary social science, such as sociology of religion and social movement theory, clearly reveal that the revelatory claims of those who espouse the Seven Mountain Mandate have not "revealed" anything new. The categories of the Seven Mountain Mandate and the language of social science is interestingly similar. See classic works like Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) or Edward Burnett Taylor, *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization* (London: Macmillan, 1881); report, 2023. I have cited resources from previous centuries to demonstrate the long-standing frameworks for understanding human construction of culture.

⁵⁸ Wagner, *Apostles Today*. See pages 104-117 for Wagner's perspective on Apostles in the Workplace and pages 120-138 for Wagner's discussion of Apostles for Social Transformation.

subsequently undergo gradual transformation. The hope was that a globally Christianized order would emerge, and Christ would return after a millennial period of flourishing.⁵⁹

The NAR believes that a Spirit-empowered new apostolic/prophetic network is emerging to advance that end-time effort. The Seven Mountain Mandate provides a tangible vision in which Christian social order and Christ's return are linked to the Church achieving global dominion under the leadership of a new order of apostles who stand at the helm of this divinely inspired initiative. The accompanying discussion of elaborate schemes of spiritual warfare, spiritual mapping, and similar practices functions as a set of strategic tools that will triumphantly yield Christian dominion over the "cultural mountains."⁶⁰

Pentecostals should note Daniel Isgrigg's careful work on the history of Pentecostal views on eschatology, which proves particularly instructive as he chronicles a late nineteenth-century move away from the predominance of post-millennialism toward a pre-millennial stance. This shift resulted in several critical developments. First, it reversed the order of the millennium and Christ's return. Post-millennialists believed that Christ's Kingdom would be established on earth and then Christ would return. Pre-millennialism held that, given the state of world affairs, Christ could come at any moment because only His return could bring equilibrium to a chaotic world. A noticeable result of this "great reversal" was a move from social engagement to

⁵⁹ For a thorough study of nineteenth century post-millennialism, see Kim Riddlebarger, "Princeton and the Millennium: American Post-Millennialism" (unpublished Ph.D. essay, revised 2021), accessed May 30, 2026, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f7f81cd67b88d47b94051ed/t/60f711afa5bb770798284be3/1626804655755/Princeton+and+the+Millennium+2021+Revision.pdf>. Riddlebarger examines the Princeton theologians who served as the principal intellectual architects of American post-millennialism.

⁶⁰ The strategies of NAR receive their conceptual foundations through the scholarly work of Charles Kraft and the popularization of those strategic efforts by C. Peter Wagner. For example, I first responded to the concept of territorial spirits proposed by Wagner at the Academic Symposium on Power Evangelism held at Fuller Seminary in December 1988. Byron D. Klaus, "Territorial Spirits: A Response to Peter Wagner," in *Wrestling with Dark Angels: Toward a Deeper Understanding of the Supernatural Forces in Spiritual Warfare*, ed. C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoyer (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 92–99; see also Charles H. Kraft, *Defeating Dark Angels: Breaking Demonic Oppression in the Believer's Life* (Ventura, CA: Vine Books, 1992).

apocalyptic salvation. For most of the nineteenth century, evangelicals worked for the reversal of societal ills, but the emerging eschatological shifts created an urgent eschatology that focused missionary activity on the need to “work while it is day” (John 9:4).⁶¹

The NAR is living out a re-emphasis on nineteenth-century post-millennialism (whether its proponents acknowledge it or not). However, their desire to bring about global Christianization is no longer the gradual societal betterment envisaged by the nineteenth-century version of post-millennialism (many times called the Great Century). It is now a triumphalist model that sees a new God-ordained leadership elite providing the structures and strategies supposedly authored by God to bring His reign over the earth. It is a battle against both flesh and blood, principalities, and powers. The optimism reflected in post-millennial hymns such as “Onward Christian Soldiers” and “Joy to the World” no longer reflects a mission of serving the world. Rather, it promotes an image of conquest that seems adrift from the cruciform nature of the highest aspirations of historic Christianity. The result is, at minimum, a blurring of worldly power and God’s power, as well as the images of Empire and the Kingdom of God.⁶² At worst, it may result in a conflation of our understanding of the relationship between Jesus’ first and second comings. The result is a besmirching of the gospel of Jesus Christ through triumphalist attempts to conquer the Seven Mountains.⁶³

Sociologist James Davison Hunter notes that Christianity’s influence must consider the relationship between a leader and the context within which that leadership is being expressed.

⁶¹ Daniel Isgrigg, *Imagining the Future: A History of Pentecostal Eschatology* (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2021), 4–14.

⁶² David E. Fitch, *Reckoning with Power: Why the Church Fails When It's on the Wrong Side of Power* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2024). Fitch provides a notable discussion on the impact of the blurring of worldly power and God’s power. Offering both biblical and theological perspective, he presents current case studies to demonstrate what this blurring of powers can yield in church and society.

⁶³ Matthew Taylor, *The Violent take it by Force; The Christian Movement that is Threatening our Democracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2024). Taylor chronicles what can occur when NAR theology and strategy are applied, with the United States as a current case study.

The effort to conquer humanly devised spheres of influence all too often results in the loss of Christian virtues while attempting to “change the world.” Hunter posits that presence, rather than triumph, is the historic *modus operandi* of the Christian community. The ministry of Jesus provides the foundation for Hunter’s position. He notes that Jesus’ influence derived from His intimacy with God himself. He expressed His power humbly, rejecting status for personal gain. He demonstrated His power compassionately through serving the good of all people, not just the faith community. Furthermore, He illustrated His power in a non-coercive manner, using blessing rather than cursing or rejection as its primary expression. When Christian discipleship diminishes in the process of Christian influence in the world, the remaining residue of religion can be socially damaging, and we need not look far to find case studies that demonstrate that sad reality.⁶⁴

Colossians 2:15 offers a critique of the potential blurring of worldly power and Holy Spirit power that afflicts the NAR. The picture Paul draws in this passage employs the familiar Roman triumphal procession as an image. However, Paul does not rely on this human version of triumph and power to dominate the picture he paints. Rather, the passage’s explanation of “triumph” centres on the Cross, which counters a humanly devised understanding of power.

In Paul’s emphasis on the Cross, we see the rejection of all human images of power as sources for the ministry of the Church.⁶⁵ In the Cross and Resurrection, we see all human forms of power defeated and a clear demonstration of the inadequacy of human agency to bring about

⁶⁴ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). These generalizations come from two of his essays in the volume, “Rethinking Power,” 99-193 and “Toward a New City Commons,” 197-286. I am aware of the criticism of Hunter, much of which has merit. However, considering the transformation as conquest motif of the NAR, Hunter’s observations are a source of equilibrium for misguided attempts at representing Christ’s Kingdom in the public square.

⁶⁵ David Andrew Thomas, *Revelation 19 in Historical and Mythological Context* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 60–63. Though this book focuses on Revelation 19, the author provides an important perspective on Paul’s understanding of the Roman triumph, the imagery used in Colossians 2:15.

redemptive transformation. This is also the divine initiative envisioned in Zechariah 4:6: “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.” When we rely on humanly derived sources of power to attain an avowedly Spirit-driven mission, we threaten the gospel’s integrity and the Church’s credibility.⁶⁶

AN ALL TOO SHORT CONCLUSION

NAR represents a significant initiative that is global in scope and its motivations for spiritual renewal have certainly yielded the awakening of heretofore-plateaued Christian communities. It has also demonstrated its potential for skewing the fullest expression of Global Pentecostalism with its surprising dismissal of church history and thorough biblical interpretation. This has resulted in a misguided perspective of Spirit-led leadership, a muddled understanding of gospel and culture, and an increased blurring of worldly and spiritual powers that will blunt the life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Global Pentecostalism would do well to distance itself from any movement or theology that uncritically treats human initiative and Holy Spirit power as equals. The future strength of Global Pentecostalism lies not in the recovery of new apostles, new revelations, or new strategies for dominion, but in a renewed commitment to the historic gospel, the authority of Scripture, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁶ David Prior, *Jesus and Power* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 146–47.

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