

**A Response to Byron Klaus’ “The New Apostolic Reformation:
Understanding Its Origins and
Critiquing Its Influence on Global Pentecostalism”**

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Thank you, Prof. Byron, for the opportunity to engage with this timely topic. While the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) emerged from Pentecostal and Charismatic streams and has exerted considerable global influence, its understanding of apostolic authority, church governance and cultural engagement, does not faithfully reflect the theological convictions of classical Pentecostalism. Nonetheless, its theological ideas and ministry practices have influenced churches worldwide, including churches in Asia.

The NAR has contributed to renewed missiological engagement through its emphasis on church planting and evangelising unreached peoples, advanced a vision of transformation-oriented discipleship that encourages Christian engagement with society, fostered intentional leadership formation, and renewed attention to spiritual warfare, prayer, and intercession.¹ Collectively, these emphases reflect an effort to recover apostolic urgency, spiritual vitality, and missional boldness.

The critical question, however, is whether these emphases remain grounded in sound theology and accountable ecclesial structures—a question that Prof. Byron examines through careful historical and biblical analysis. In response, I offer several observations that complement his analysis in light of three pertinent issues that churches and pastors, especially in Asia, experience.

(1) Governance and Accountability

In June 2025, a Hong Kong celebrity founded a church and was subsequently ordained as an “apostle” by the Isaac Apostolic International Center in Taiwan. While his evangelistic impact is not in question, his rapid recognition as an “apostle” raised legitimate

¹ Kelebogile T. Resane, “The New Apostolic Reformation: The Critical Reflections of the Ecclesiology of Charles Peter Wagner,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72, no. 3 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i3.3240>.

questions about the basis for conferring apostolic status and sparked wider discussion in Hong Kong concerning the influence of NAR-associated apostolic–prophetic frameworks.² Likewise, in February 2026, Bong Tumaque, pastor of a City Harvest branch church in the Philippines, was invited to receive apostolic ordination by a minister claiming apostolic authority. The invitation promised access to an apostolic network, ministry opportunities, church growth, and signs and wonders, but made no mention of accountability, character, or ecclesial responsibility. Bong declined because it conflicted with his convictions regarding ecclesial authority and accountability.³ Such cases have raised concerns among churches in Asia, where apostolic titles are sometimes conferred without credible pastoral leadership, ecclesial accountability, or a proven record of ministry.⁴ Without these, claims to apostolic authority are theologically ungrounded.

One of the most pressing concerns is the NAR’s shift from the historic church’s diverse authority structures to models centred on individual leaders. Although NAR proponents describe their leaders as “interdependent” rather than “Lone Rangers” disconnected from the body of Christ,⁵ the movement often functions as a vertical hierarchy with limited accountability and oversight.⁶ Irvin Chetty argues that the NAR exhibits characteristics of movements that “crystallize around a single figure” claiming unique divine

² “神經刀.自在道 (四十二) 新使徒運動與異端：從高皓正按立使徒說起,” Life Seeks Understanding, July 6, 2025, accessed July 13, 2026, <https://www.patreon.com/posts/133398545>; “香港使徒教會高皓正使徒 領受美國使徒 Demontae 的先知性祝福,” posted June 17, 2025, by 以撒國際使徒中心 Isaac International Apostolic Center, accessed July 13, 2026, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugSl_hUYuPA.

³ Interview with Bong Tumaque on July 13, 2026.

⁴ Byron Klaus, “The New Apostolic Reformation: Understanding Its Origins and Critiquing Its Influence on Global Pentecostalism,” paper presented at Asia Pentecostal Summit, July 22–26, 2026, 17–18. Prof. Byron emphatically reminds us, apostolic ministry is marked by pioneering mission, church planting, suffering for the gospel, and the long-term nurturing of Christian communities (1 Cor. 4:15–17; 2 Cor. 11:23–28).

⁵ Christopher Ross, “The New Apostolic Reformation: an Analysis and Critique” (Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2005), 47.

⁶ Ross, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 81–90.

authority, creating an inherent risk of cultic tendencies.⁷ When leaders are regarded as “specially appointed” by God without clear accountability, the movement becomes vulnerable to manipulation, control, and abuse.⁸

The NAR also reconfigures ecclesial authority around trans-local apostles by concentrating authority in charismatic leaders.⁹ In doing so, it diminishes the historic roles of pastors, elders, and bishops in the church’s governance and mission.¹⁰ It also encourages believers to look beyond their own pastors and elders for guidance, prophetic direction, or “anointing,” thereby undermining local church leadership and fostering dependency on charismatic personalities.

Such a model reflects a deficient *Christological* understanding of leadership, standing in contrast to Christ’s ministry of servanthood¹¹ and the New Testament understanding of apostolic ministry. Gordon Fee argues that in 2 Corinthians 10–13, Paul confronts the “super-apostles” by exposing a fundamental divergence between his own understanding and that of the Corinthians concerning Christ and apostleship. As Fee observes, “[the Corinthians] ‘knowledge,’ to the degree that it minimizes or deflects from a proper understanding of the cross, is defective.”¹² Accordingly, authentic apostolic ministry is defined not by status, authority, or triumph, but by the crucified Christ. Arthur Boers similarly notes that Paul’s apostleship “was not building empires or power bases,” but was marked by “weakness, foolishness, suffering, and the cross.”¹³ Likewise, Mark Allen Adams and Harold Godfrey conclude that “the governing authority in the New Testament churches was exercised

⁷ Irvin G. Chetty, “The New Apostolic Reformation and Christian Zionism,” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 27, no. 2 (2014): 297–312, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24799454>.

⁸ Ross, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 87.

⁹ Ross, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 50.

¹⁰ R. Douglas Geivett & Holly Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (Weaver Book Co, 2014), 43–44.

¹¹ Klaus, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 23.

¹² Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Baker Academic, 2011), 340–366.

¹³ Arthur Boers, *Servants and Fools: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Abingdon Press, 2015), 151, Kindle.

primarily collegially, not autocratically,” a pattern they argue departs from the theology and sociology of C. Peter Wagner.¹⁴ Together, these perspectives suggest that the NAR’s concentration of authority in self-designated apostles departs from Christ’s model of leadership, shaped by self-giving, cruciform love and expressed through collegial leadership in the New Testament.

The NAR also reflects a deficient *pneumatological* view of leadership. Frank Macchia argues that Paul counters the Corinthians’ hero worship of preferred apostles by reminding them that they are God’s field (1 Cor. 3:9). By the Spirit, believers are joined to Christ and belong to him alone; consequently, apostles are merely “servants in the field on Christ’s behalf.”¹⁵ Macchia further argues that Paul’s body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12 presents the church as a Spirit-filled community marked by mutual dependence, where diverse spiritual gifts are given for the edification of the whole body rather than the elevation of individual leaders.¹⁶ Though the Corinthians tended to glorify those they considered spiritually gifted, Paul presents love—not spiritual giftedness—as the supreme virtue. Paul envisions a Spirit-filled community in which authority is exercised corporately under shared governance,¹⁷ with “accountability among leaders” grounded “within a framework of mutual submission,”¹⁸ as members are called to be “vessels of Christ to each other, submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ (Eph. 5:21).”¹⁹ As such, Macchia observes, “The apostles who are sent to proclaim partake in a *koinōnia* of sending with the whole church, for the whole church is

¹⁴ Mark Allen Adams and Godfrey Harold, “Polity of the New Apostolic Movement Considering Biblical and Historical Precedents in the Christian Church,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.221>.

¹⁵ Frank D. Macchia, *The Spirit-Baptized Church: A Dogmatic Inquiry* (T&T Clark, 2021), 197–198, Kindle.

¹⁶ Macchia, *The Spirit-Baptized Church*, 202–203.

¹⁷ Klaus, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 19–20. Vondey argues that synodality provides a corrective to hierarchical models of apostolic authority by emphasizing the communal discernment of spiritual gifts, mutual accountability, and shared responsibility in the church’s governance and mission.

¹⁸ Klaus, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 19.

¹⁹ Macchia, *The Spirit-Baptized Church*, 202.

apostolic. Apostolic continuity in the church as mediated through scripture and supervised by church oversight involves all believers.”²⁰

The NAR’s emphasis on power, authority, dominion, success, and titles reflects a deeper problem: ambition, pride, and the pursuit of recognition—the “shadow side of charismatic leadership” described by Roger Heuser and Byron D. Klaus.²¹ Such an emphasis points to deficient spiritual formation and a departure from early Pentecostal spirituality. Early Pentecostals understood Spirit baptism not only as empowerment for ministry but also as the Spirit’s sanctifying work, producing holiness and self-giving love. One writer of *The Apostolic Faith*, insisted, “The Pentecostal power, when you sum it all up, is just more of God’s love. If it does not bring more love, it is simply counterfeit.”²² As Macchia observes, although later Pentecostals did not always maintain this conviction, it can be recovered.²³ The challenge for Pentecostals today is to recover the early Pentecostal conviction that the Spirit’s empowering work is inseparable from holiness and rooted in divine love.

Perhaps a more faithful understanding of contemporary apostolic ministry is illustrated by Zhang Rongliang, the founder of the Fengcheng house church network in China.²⁴ Although his ministry has grown to an estimated ten million believers and is widely recognised for its power ministry and apostolic character, Zhang has never been formally ordained as an apostle. Since beginning his ministry in 1971, he has spent more than twenty years in prison, exemplifying faithful witness through suffering rather than status. Moreover, leadership within the network is not vested solely upon him, but shared with seven senior

²⁰ Frank D Macchia, *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Cascade Books, 2023), 362, Kindle.

²¹ Roger Heuser and Byron D. Klaus, “Charismatic Leadership Theory: A Shadow Side Confessed,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 20, no. 1 (1998): 161–174, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157007498X00126>.

²² *The Apostolic Faith* (Los Angeles) 2, no. 13 (May 1908): 3.

²³ Frank D. Macchia, *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Word and Spirit: Pentecostal Investigations in Theology and History Book 2 (Cascade Books, 2023), 303, Kindle.

²⁴ “House-Church Leader Arrested,” *Christianity Today*, February 2005, accessed July 19, 2026, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2005/01/house-church-leader-arrested/>.

elders who provide accountability and oversight. Zhang's authority rests not on title or self-designation, but on faithful witness for Christ, proven ministry, and communal accountability.²⁵

In light of these considerations, apostolic authority is not conferred by title or personal charisma, but discerned through Christlike character, faithful ministry, communal accountability, and the Spirit's work in the whole body of Christ. Detached from these foundations, claims to apostolic authority risk weakening rather than strengthening the church. From a Pentecostal perspective, the appropriate response is not a cessationist rejection of contemporary apostolic ministry, but a retrieval of a Christ-centred, Spirit-empowered understanding of apostolic leadership grounded in holy love.

(2) Engagement with Culture

Prof. Byron argues that influential Christian thinkers such as Abraham Kuyper have long maintained that Christians are called to exercise faithful witness across every sphere of society.²⁶ The NAR's Seven Mountain Mandate advocates "direct ecclesial control over"²⁷ the major spheres of society. In contrast, in City Harvest Church, Senior Pastor Kong Hee teaches a form of the "cultural mandate" that is grounded in Jesus' call for believers to be "salt and light," emphasising marketplace evangelism and discipleship, encouraging believers to bear faithful witness to Christ within society, rather than to exercise institutional dominion. The key distinction, therefore, is not whether Christians should engage culture, but how such

²⁵ Interview with Brother Xu on July 19, 2026. Brother Xu is a close disciple of Zhang Rongliang. His wife has served alongside Zhang since 1985.

²⁶ Klaus, "The New Apostolic Reformation," 26.

²⁷ Klaus, "The New Apostolic Reformation," 26.

engagement is conceived: as faithful presence and gospel witness, or as the pursuit of cultural transformation through institutional dominion.²⁸

As the Seven Mountain teaching has gained influence among Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Asia, this distinction has often become blurred, resulting in what Prof. Byron describes as a “besmirching of the gospel of Jesus Christ through triumphalist attempts to conquer the Seven Mountains.”²⁹ The NAR’s rhetoric of “victory,” “dominion,”³⁰ and “aggressive social transformation”³¹ reflects an eschatological vision that risks reshaping the church’s mission as the pursuit of pre-Parousia societal dominion. As Prof. Byron observes, the movement has “jettisoned” the classical Pentecostal premillennial perspective in favour of an eschatology of conquest that anticipates a globally Christianised order before Christ’s return.³² When triumph becomes the controlling expectation, a theology of the cross risks being eclipsed by a theology of conquest.

In the Philippines, a founder of a megachurch with significant “political leverage and ambitions” received support from ministers associated with NAR networks during his presidential campaigns. Although presidential bids were ultimately unsuccessful, the church has remained actively engaged in the political sphere, with its members continuing to participate in the legislative processes. This has prompted concerns among some evangelical and Pentecostal leaders regarding religious nationalism and the proper relationship between the church and political power.³³ The issue here, is not whether Christians should engage in the public square, but how such engagement is to be ordered. At what point does faithful

²⁸ Kong Hee, *Cultural Mandate I* (The Ink Room, 2015); Kong Hee, *Cultural Mandate II* (The Ink Room, 2015).

²⁹ Klaus, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 29.

³⁰ Klaus, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 24.

³¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion!: How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Chosen Books, 2008), 61.

³² Klaus, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 27.

³³ Jayeel Serrano Cornelio, “Jesus is Lord: The Indigenization of Megachurch Christianity in the Philippines,” in *Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia : Negotiating Class, Consumption and the Nation*, ed. Terence Chong (ISEAS, 2018), 127-143.

witness give way to political entanglement? Where is the line between mission and the pursuit of power? As Prof. Byron cautions, “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.”³⁴

The New Testament itself records that the disciples initially expected Jesus to restore a political kingdom (cf. Acts 1:6), only to discover that His kingdom advances by a different logic—through witness, humility, and the transforming work of the Spirit, rather than through the mechanisms of political control. I appreciate Prof. Byron’s observation that, in Colossians 2:15, the apostle Paul employs the imagery of a Roman triumph only to redefine true triumph through the cross, presenting the crucified Christ—not worldly conquest—as the pattern for the church’s ministry and understanding of power. In addressing social issues, Craig Keener notes that Paul did not advocate the “immediate overthrow of existing structures,” but instead called Christians to live within those structures in a manner radically different from the surrounding culture, practicing mutual submission and equality—the very principles that ultimately challenged the moral legitimacy of institutions such as slavery.³⁵

For Pentecostals, Spirit-baptism must be grounded in divine love rather than in triumphalist displays of power. As Macchia argued, “Spirit baptism as an experience of empowerment is not just renewed energy to do things for God. It is rather the power of self-transcending, self-giving love.”³⁶ The kingdom of God is already present through the Spirit, though not yet consummated. Therefore, the church is called not to establish dominion but to bear faithful, Spirit-empowered witness, “liv[ing] the life of the future in the present,”³⁷ while

³⁴ Klaus, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 30.

³⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Baker Academic, 1992), 238, Kindle.

³⁶ Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Zondervan, 2006), 263.

³⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Baker Academic, 1994), 183, Kindle.

awaiting Christ's return. The Holy Spirit's primary strategy for changing society is not domination, but the formation of Christlike communities.

(3) Engagement with Religious Others

NAR teaching on spiritual warfare has also, in some instances, moved into highly speculative and theologically questionable territory. Practices such as “spiritual mapping,” territorial identification of demonic powers, and burning of Catholic saint statues often extend beyond clear biblical warrant.³⁸ At times, adherents have portrayed other religions not merely as competing religious worldviews but as a “demonic religious system that needed to be dismantled” in order for Christians to evangelise effectively.³⁹ While this language is not uniform across all proponents, it reflects a strand within the movement's spiritual-warfare paradigm that can shape how other religions are perceived. For instance, a prominent preacher often associated with NAR networks, warned in a conference held in Singapore that “Muslims are taking over the south of Spain” and that the church must “push back a new modern Muslim movement.”⁴⁰ Such remarks were widely regarded as insensitive within Singapore's multireligious context, and he was subsequently barred from returning.

While such statements do not represent all Christian approaches to interfaith engagement, they illustrate how a conflict-oriented framework can undermine both the church's witness and social cohesion, particularly in Asia's multireligious societies. When entire religions are framed primarily as demonic systems to be confronted, Christians may come to view people of other faiths as spiritual adversaries rather than neighbours and dialogue partners.⁴¹ Such rhetoric risks eroding trust, heightening tensions, and diminishing

³⁸ Resane, “The New Apostolic Reformation.”

³⁹ Goh, “State and Social Christianity,” 207.

⁴⁰ Zhaki Abdullah, “Police Ask US Preacher to Return for Interview,” April 5, 2018, accessed July 15, 2026, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/police-ask-us-preacher-to-return-for-interview>.

⁴¹ Ivan Satyavrata, “The Voice of Truth in the Christian Encounter with World Religions,” in *Voices Loud & Clear*, eds. Kong Hee, Bryon D. Klaus & Douglas Petersen (Regnum Books International, 2024), 59.

the credibility of the gospel. Ultimately, a triumphalist understanding of apostolic authority naturally produces triumphalist engagement with other religions.

For Pentecostals, a more constructive approach is to embrace a “world-embracing, multilayered” pneumatology that affirms the Spirit’s work throughout creation, society, culture, and among other religions,⁴² while engaging people of other faiths with humility, respect, and kindness, yet steadfastly upholding the uniqueness of Christ.⁴³ Spiritual warfare, rightly understood, is not directed against people, but waged through prayer, truth, and Christlike love. As Amos Yong wrote, “The evidence of the Spirit [who enables prayers] is not just glossolalic utterance but the fruits of the Spirit, especially love, and their concrete manifestation in benevolent actions.”⁴⁴ Only then can the church bear witness in a manner that is not only bold, but also faithful to the Spirit of Christ.

CONCLUSION

At its best, the NAR has recovered missional urgency, renewed expectancy for the Spirit’s active work, and encouraged bold cultural engagement. Yet its theological grounding and ministerial practices raise significant concerns. The appropriate response is therefore neither wholesale rejection nor uncritical acceptance, but the retrieval of a Christ-centred, Spirit-empowered vision of apostolic ministry.

Apostolic authority must be discerned not by titles, charisma, or claims to spiritual power, but by conformity to the crucified Christ and the Spirit’s work through the whole body of Christ. Cultural engagement must be shaped not by conquest or institutional dominion, but

Dr. Ivan Satyavrata underscored the urgency of addressing religious plurality from a social standpoint, noting that the rise of multiculturalism and religious plurality increases the potential for communal conflict.

⁴² Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Does The Spirit Blow Where It Wills?: Pentecostals and the Struggle of Discerning the Holy Spirit Among Religions,” in *Pentecostal Voices Across Continents*, eds. Kong Hee, Bryon D. Klaus & Douglas Petersen (Regnum Books International, 2026), 10.

⁴³ Kong Hee, “Singapore: The Antioch of Asia?,” in *Voices Loud & Clear*, eds. Kong Hee, Bryon D. Klaus & Douglas Petersen (Regnum Books International, 2024), 188.

⁴⁴ Amos Yong, *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace* (Baylor University Press, 2012), 81.

by the formation of Spirit-filled, Christlike communities. Engagement with people of other faiths must be marked not by a triumphalist posture, but by the concrete manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit in Christlike love.

In the final analysis, the difference is this: the NAR risks separating power from holy love, whereas Pentecostals understand the Spirit's power as perfected by holy love. The Holy Spirit empowers the church for witness, yet He does not create spiritual elites. Rather, He forms a cruciform community through whom the risen Christ continues His mission. Only such a Spirit-formed community can bear faithful witness to Christ in the world.