

A NEW ANTICHRIST: THE NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION AND THE PERVERSION
OF THE WORD OF GOD

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to analyze the cross-denominational movement known as the New Apostolic Reformation. The research demonstrates that the NAR is fundamentally characterized by dominion theology and its restoration of the offices of apostles and prophets. The movement teaches that the church's goal on earth is to take dominion from Satan through the strategy of the "Seven Mountain Mandate," a strategy aimed at influencing business, education, government, family, the arts, science, and the church. Self-proclaimed apostles and prophets claim to lead the church by direct revelation. They position themselves as mediators between the church and God, superseding Scripture.

This paper contends that the NAR perverts the Word of God by limiting God's sovereignty, shifting Christ's role from savior to societal transformer, confusing the kingdom of God with the kingdom of this world, and establishing an ecclesiastical hierarchy. The NAR's emphasis on direct revelation, miracles, and political transformation fosters dangerous practices that undermine the gospel and harm believers.

INTRODUCTION

On December 14th, 2019, a two-year-old girl, Olive Heiligenthal, died in her sleep. Her parents, members of Bethel Church in Redding, California, asserted that Jesus had surely conquered death and, with that hope, admonished their church and all believers to pray that their two-year-old would come alive again. On December 18th, Pastor Bill Johnson spoke in a video to encourage those praying to continue the fight. He said, “Not everyone dies in God’s timing.”¹ Despite the church’s constant prayer efforts over the next few days, Olive was not resurrected. On December 20th, the family, disappointed with the result, began making memorial plans.²

In June of 2020, a prophetess led a group of apostles to re-enact a scene from *The Lord of the Rings* movies. She claimed to have received a vision for this prophetic ritual. This group of diverse and prominent apostles and prophets wrapped their hands around a staff and shouted, “You shall not pass!” In doing so, they claimed that they had cast the demon of racism out of their area.³

Tenessa Audette was elected to the Redding City Council in the fall of 2022. Three out of the five city council members were regular attenders of Bethel Church in Redding, California. After serving less than a year on the city council, she was elected mayor of Redding in a three-

¹ “Resurrection Prayer for Olive Heiligenthal | Bethel,” December 20, 2019.

² “Resurrection Prayer for Olive Heiligenthal | Bethel.”

³ *American Gospel: Spirit and Fire*, “Bethel Redding: The Prophets,” Directed by Brandon Kimber, November 25, 2025.

to-two majority decision, ignoring the over 20,000 people who voted for someone else. All three votes for Tenessa came from fellow Bethel Church members.⁴

On September 10th, 2025, Charlie Kirk, an unabashed Christian nationalist, was assassinated in Utah while on his American Comeback Tour. Many well-known people reached out to express their support for Charlie and his family, including President Donald Trump, who was a close friend of his.⁵ A year earlier, Charlie had campaigned with Lance Wallnau, a self-proclaimed apostle, who claimed that God's appointed servant in the election was Donald Trump.⁶

Because the NAR movement desires to transform and convert society into the Christian image, it does not take much digging to find a news story that is associated with the New Apostolic Reformation. The NAR's transformational ideology finds a fitting framework in H. Richard Niebuhr's five ways that Christ interacts with culture, and the final way is Christ as the transformer of culture. He defines the conversionist, also called the transformationalist position, "[The conversionists] understand... that human nature is fallen or perverted, and that this perversion not only appears in culture but is transmitted by it... Christ is seen as the converter of man in his culture and society, not apart from these, for there is no turning of men from self and idols to God save in society."⁷ The NAR movement, however, takes the transformationalist

⁴ Annelise Pierce, "'It's the Bethel Juggernaut At Work': Dacquist Offers Scathing Critique As Redding's New Mayor Is Chosen," *Shasta Scout*, 7 December 2023.

⁵ Jenna Amatulli et al., "Charlie Kirk, Trump Ally and Rightwing Activist, Shot Dead at Utah University," *The Guardian*, 11 September 2025.

⁶ Tim Dickinson, "Christian Nationalists Team Up on Illicit Push to Get Churches to Campaign for Trump," *Rolling Stone*, 17 January 2024.

⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Brothers, 1956), 39.

position a step further. The NAR believes that the church's role in society is to take dominion, as they are commanded by God, and usher in the millennial reign of Christ.

In recent years, the NAR has gained more prominence and influence in society. The chief leaders of the NAR are, as the name implies, self-proclaimed apostles. These apostles partner with various prophets to communicate God's prophetic word to their followers. Because NAR apostles and prophets claim to speak the very Word of God, they supersede Scripture and elevate themselves, and ultimately pervert the Word of God that they claim to preach.

The New Apostolic Reformation movement has perverted the Word of God through their dominion theology and leadership structure of apostles and prophets. This paper begins by examining the teachings of leading figures such as Bill Johnson and C. P. Wagner. It then analyzes their dominion theology, their strategy for advancing the millennial reign, and their structure of modern apostles and prophets. Based on this analysis, the paper will demonstrate how the movement distorts Scripture and will offer a Lutheran response grounded in Scripture.

LITERATURE AND SOURCE REVIEW

In this first section, I will provide a brief overview of the topics covered in the books and describe the intended uses for each main source, including some primary and some secondary sources. It would be impractical to review every article, video, and source consulted. I will focus on the books *Dominion! Your Role in Bringing Heaven to Earth* and *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church*, both by C. P. Wagner. I will also review *When Heaven Invades Earth: A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles*, and *Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate*, both by Bill Johnson. Finally, I will review *Apostles: Encountering the Worldwide Prophets and Apostles Movement* and *Reckless Christianity*, both by Holly Pivic and R. Douglas Geivett. Finally, I will provide a review of the documentary series *American Gospel: Spirit and Fire*, with a focus on the episodes centered on Bethel Church.

Dominion! Your Role In Bringing Heaven to Earth

In the book, *Dominion! Your Role in Bringing Heaven to Earth*, C. P. Wagner outlines the plan, as the title suggests, for bringing heaven to earth by ushering in the millennial reign of Christ. Wagner describes the second apostolic age in which the world is currently living and explains the significance of the new apostolic age for the plan of salvation. He outlines the plan for God's church in the world and discusses it first in terms of God's sovereignty. Wagner believes that open theism is the true representation of God because the Bible often speaks about God changing his mind. He asks this question: "Isn't God sovereign enough to limit his sovereignty if he wants

to?”⁸ Wagner answers in the affirmative. All his beliefs stem from the basis that God has limited his sovereignty and has given the command to his church to transform society.

Wagner is clear and open about his dominion theology. He claims that the evangelistic mandate is secondary to his cultural mandate.⁹ This belief stems from his dominion theology, which will be covered in depth in a later section. To summarize, Wagner believes that Jesus Christ, through the Great Commission, gave the church the authority to reclaim dominion from Satan. The church’s task is to transform society and establish its dominion, preparing the world for Christ’s millennial reign. After establishing dominion theology, Wagner outlines the key aspects of the church’s plan to reclaim dominion from Satan, including the Seven Mountain Mandate and the Great Transfer of Wealth.

Dominion! is as close to a dogmatic or systematic book of the NAR as one can find. This book is recommended for anyone seeking a general understanding of what the NAR teaches, particularly its dominion theology and its overall strategy for achieving dominion in society.

Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church

Apostles and Prophets is Wagner’s expansion on the identity of the apostle, the apostle’s role in the church, and the relationship between the apostle and the prophet. He views apostles and prophets as the foundation of the church, people who are looked up to and lead the church in its mission to transform the world for Christ. Wagner’s qualifications for apostleship noticeably lack any scriptural references. He bases his qualifications of apostles on his observations of

⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *DOMINION!: Your Role in Bringing Heaven to Earth* (Destiny Image, 2022), 81.

⁹ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 60.

modern apostles rather than on biblical apostles. His basis for the link between the prophet and the apostle is found in a similar fashion. It is challenging to justify these assertions from a Christian who, outside of occasional and flippant quotes from 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 2:20, bases all his beliefs on contemporary observations. Wagner claims that the ecclesiastical structure of apostles and prophets is the way that God mandates that the church be run. Wagner also discusses prophets and their relationship to apostles. He encourages apostles and prophets to connect with one another to form a strong relationship that benefits the entire body of Christ. This relationship will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper.

This book offers an in-depth examination of the NAR's perspective on the role of apostles and prophets in the church. *Apostles and Prophets* is a valuable book for understanding the roles of apostles and prophets. This book also fills in many of the gaps of what it means to be an apostle or a prophet operating in the church. In *Dominion!*, Wagner assumes that everyone is familiar with the concept of an apostle and their role; in *Apostles and Prophets*, he elaborates on their roles within the church.

When Heaven Invades Earth: A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles

Johnson has a threefold purpose for writing this book: first, for the believer to embrace their identity as a citizen in the kingdom, second, to exercise the believer's authority as a child of God, and third, to experience the believer's inheritance (miracles becoming their normal Christian life).¹⁰ He encourages the believer to pray heaven down and to take their place in God's

¹⁰ Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth: A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles* (Destiny Image, 2013), Back Cover.

kingdom. Johnson's book reads like a manual for believers who want to learn how to perform miracles and transform society.

This book describes the average Christian's role in the NAR and how they can advance within the movement. Johnson describes what faith is, how to pray for God's kingdom, and how to release God's kingdom on the world—a NAR synonym for performing miracles. This book is similar to *Dominion!* in that it provides a general overview of NAR teaching, but it takes a more individualized approach, encouraging believers to embrace their identity and do their work in their lives while supporting those who are leaders in the movement.

Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate

Invading Babylon is less of a unified book and more of a curated selection of writings from Bill Johnson and Lance Wallnau. It features six different prominent NAR figures who share their strategies for transforming society using the seven–mountain mandate. It features strategies and encouragements from Bill Johnson, Lance Wallnau, Alan Vincent, Ché Ahn, Patricia King, and C. Peter Wagner. The seven–mountain mandate is a strategy through which the NAR attempts to influence and take dominion in society. Each author has a slightly different perspective on how the seven–mountain mandate will be implemented. The seven–mountain mandate will be covered in greater detail later. Each article builds on the previous one to reflect the NAR view on taking over the seven mountains in order to implement the church's will in society. The end goal is to display the goodness of God, to influence people's behavior, and to “disciple a nation.”¹¹

¹¹ Bill Johnson and Lance Wallnau, *Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate* (Destiny Image, 2013), 157.

This book explores the seven–mountain mandate through multiple voices. It is a useful resource because it provides a comprehensive understanding of what the entire movement thinks about the seven–mountain mandate, rather than just one person’s perspective.

**Reckless Christianity: The Destructive New Teachings and Practices of Bill Johnson,
Bethel Church, and the Global Movement of Apostles and Prophets**

This is the first book on this list that is critical of the NAR. Geivett and Pivec provide a critical analysis of Bethel Church, as well as an examination of the teachings of the NAR. Bethel Church is viewed as a representative of the broader NAR movement. *Reckless Christianity* examines many of the abuses that have occurred within Bethel Church. Geivett and Pivec assess the scriptural legitimacy of the claims made by apostle Bill Johnson and prophet Kris Vallotton, as well as a few others associated with Bethel and the NAR. They warn against the dangers that come to those involved with the NAR. Geivett and Pivec expose the recklessness of the teachings in the NAR and the abuses committed by leaders of Bethel Church. The authors’ primary concern is for the people who have been hurt by the movement.

The book operates on several levels: as a theological critique of the teachings at Bethel Church, a record of the abuses and departures from the Christian faith within the NAR movement, and, finally, a warning against the recklessness of Bethel Church. It also warns of the dangers that come to those involved with the NAR. This book is a worthwhile read for anyone who desires to hear from those who are not active leaders in the NAR.

God's Super-Apostles: Encountering the Worldwide Prophets and Apostles Movement

God's Super-Apostles examines the relationship between the apostles and prophets within the NAR movement. The book follows this outline: the NAR teaching of an apostle or prophet, the biblical teaching of an apostle or prophet, a comparison between the NAR and the biblical teaching, and an evaluation of that teaching. Geivett and Pivec specifically analyze the teaching of apostles and prophets and provide a biblical rebuttal to the NAR's basis for apostles and prophets. They also address topics such as strategic-level biblical warfare, apostolic unity, and miracle-working.

This book is useful for anyone who wants a summary of what the NAR teaches about a role or doctrine, without having to synthesize the information from a variety of books. Each chapter and section is nicely contained as a unit. At the end of the book, Geivett and Pivec offer encouragement and advice to those in specific roles who are fighting against the influence of the NAR in their homes and congregations. They also encourage pastors to warn against the influence of the NAR in their churches.

American Gospel: Spirit and Fire

American Gospel is a documentary series comprising three seasons, each covering different topics. The third season, "*Spirit and Fire*," focuses on the NAR movement and churches associated with it. At the time of writing, only four episodes that focus on Bethel Church are available. Each episode is approximately an hour and fifteen minutes long and focuses on a different aspect of the church in Redding. The docuseries offers a comprehensive overview of Bethel Church, featuring interviews with individuals closely affiliated with it, including members, graduates of the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, those who have left Bethel,

and community members. These episodes delve deeply into the theology and teachings of the church. Each episode is also decidedly critical, but the directors and writers seek to understand the teachings of the NAR rather than bash it.

The series speaks about prophets and apostles, as well as dominion theology. It also often discusses faith, grace, and prayer, comparing each of these concepts to the traditional Christian understanding of the terms. This is the most accessible and informative source on this list because it is available online for a small fee.

WHAT IS THE NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION?

What is the New Apostolic Reformation? The NAR is a movement within many churches that originated in charismatic circles. Now its influence is spreading into the American government, Christian music and arts, and even various traditionally Protestant churches, among other spheres in society. It is characterized primarily by its adherence to dominion theology, as well as its belief in the restored offices of apostle and prophet. To truly understand the NAR requires a discussion of recent key figures who have shaped the movement, a tracing of the movement's history as seen through its key figures, an analysis of dominionism and its mission, and an examination of the relationship between apostles and prophets.

Brief Survey of Key Figures

Because the NAR is a movement within charismatic circles, not a denomination, there are no standardized NAR creeds. However, there are influential individuals who have written important books—some of which were included in the literature review section—or are leaders of significant churches that identify with the movement. Two of the most prominent figures in the NAR are C. Peter Wagner and Bill Johnson, the latter of whom works closely with Kris Vallotton, another prominent figure. For the purposes of this paper, they will serve as representatives for the whole movement.

C. Peter Wagner is one of the main trailblazers of the NAR movement. He was one of the most influential apostles in the United States, but rejects the claim that he started the movement;

he simply claims that he was the first person to give a name to the NAR, although he is usually regarded as the founder of the movement. He is regarded as a prominent figure within the movement, largely due to his numerous books on the subject and his role as a leader in the Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders, established in 1999.¹² He served in Bolivia from 1956 to 1971, an experience that would shape many of his opinions later in life. Eventually, he became a professor of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, where he served until he retired in 2001. From 1993 to 2011, he served as the director of Global Harvest Ministries (GHM).¹³ He wrote many influential books for the NAR, including *Dominion! Your Role in Bringing Heaven to Earth*, and *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church*.

Since Wagner's death in 2016, Bill Johnson has become one of the most prominent leaders of the NAR. Johnson is a pastor at Bethel Church in Redding, California. Bill is a fifth-generation pastor¹⁴ who claims that he received the raw power of God one night, at 3 a.m., after meeting with a prophet he knew.¹⁵ Soon after this experience, he took over as pastor of Bethel Redding in 1996, following his father's tenure. He accepted the call with one nonnegotiable condition: his focus would be the pursuit of revival, which was in his mind inseparable from the pursuit of miracles, signs, and wonders. He has called Bethel Church the great experiment, an experiment to create a model for miraculous ministry that can be duplicated throughout the

¹² Holly Pivec and R. Douglas Geivett, *God's Super-Apostles: Encountering the Worldwide Prophets and Apostles Movement* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), 45.

¹³ Kelebogile Thomas Resane, "The New Apostolic Reformation: The Critical Reflections of the Ecclesiology of Charles Peter Wagner," *HTS Theol. Stud.* 72.3 (2016), 1-2.

¹⁴ "About – Bill Johnson Ministries.

¹⁵ Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 127-28.

world.¹⁶ Under Johnson's care, Bethel Church withdrew from the Assemblies of God in 2006. Since then, it has experienced exponential growth. As of 2023, 11,000 people consider Bethel their home church.¹⁷ Bethel Church has opened the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (BSSM), where students can pay to learn how to perform miracles and prophesy. Bill Johnson has utilized this platform to sell numerous books, including *When Heaven Invades Earth: A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles* and *Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate*.

In his ministry, Johnson works closely with Kris Vallotton, a senior leader at Bethel. Vallotton is a self-proclaimed prophet; he is regarded by many as a leader and a powerful prophetic voice in the world. Vallotton often advises government officials and influential businesses to help transform society. He is also an author who has published numerous books, often exploring themes such as transforming society and spiritual warfare.¹⁸

A Brief History of the New Apostolic Reformation

According to C. P. Wagner, the theology of the New Apostolic Reformation is rooted in the 16th-century Reformation led by Martin Luther. The foundational belief the NAR borrows is the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Wagner says, "The core theology of the Reformation is not what is currently being changed; rather, it continues to provide the theological bedrock upon

¹⁶ Holly Pivec and R. Douglas Geivett, *Reckless Christianity: The Destructive New Teachings and Practices of Bill Johnson, Bethel Church, and the Global Movement of Apostles and Prophets*, (Cascade Books, 2023), 2-3.

¹⁷ Geivett, *Reckless Christianity*, 5.

¹⁸ "About | Kris Vallotton."

which the NAR is built...Martin Luther taught the priesthood of all believers... Every believer can and should approach God and communicate with Him.”¹⁹ ²⁰

Wagner also claims that classical Pentecostalism is another fundamental influence on the NAR. He looks back on the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 as the beginning of bringing the work of the Holy Spirit into its proper place in the church. Here, the church began to experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit and a revitalization of spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues. After this event, the church began to expect the supernatural and spiritual gifts for all true believers.²¹

Where Pentecostalism and NAR truly diverged was in the prayer movement of the 1970s. Certain members of some churches began to recognize the office of intercessor. Wagner emphasizes that this was not simply a Pentecostal idea, but a cross-denominational movement. He says, “Anyone can go into churches virtually across the denominational spectrum and be introduced to So-and-So with the words, ‘She is one of our intercessors.’”²² The NAR believes that ordinary believers require spiritually gifted intercessors to fully access God’s word. This idea has its roots in Pentecostal prayer intercession, but the NAR takes it further; apostles and prophets now serve as those intercessors, claiming to receive direct revelation from God and deliver it to average believers.

¹⁹ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 22-23.

²⁰ On the one hand, the NAR claims that each person can approach God. On the other hand, they also insist that each person needs intercessors, namely, the apostles and prophets, who receive direct revelation from God. While they claim to teach the priesthood of all believers, the NAR effectively undermines the doctrine by creating this two-tiered system of apostles and prophets different than other Christians, making “ordinary” Christians depend on apostles and prophets for teaching and consolidating power similar to the Roman Catholic Church during the time of the reformation and into today.

²¹ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 23.

²² Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 24.

In the 1980s, Wagner notes that the gift and office of prophet was beginning to be affirmed by the church. He makes a point of noting that he believed the church has always had a prophet, but these prophets were not widespread because many people believed the office of prophet had ceased to function after the first century. Despite the absence of an apostle or prophet for millennia, there was a great increase in churches recognizing and affirming the office of prophet in the late 1900s. In the 1990s, Wagner saw the beginning of the recognition of the gift and office of apostle. This recognition and restoration of the office of apostle culminated in the formation of the International Coalition of Apostles (ICA), comprising hundreds of members who recognized one another as legitimate apostles, with the same authority over the church as Peter, Paul, and John.²³

Since its break from classical Pentecostalism, the NAR movement has continued to grow steadily. According to Wagner, he predicted in 2008 that the percentage of Christians who identify with the NAR in the non-Catholic population will be 50% by 2025.²⁴

Dominion Theology

One of the key teachings of the NAR is dominion theology. Essentially, dominion theology is the belief that control of the world has shifted hands throughout history, and it is the church's role to reclaim dominion from Satan, to transform the world, and to usher in heaven on earth.

Dominion theology is based on open theism, as Wagner puts it, "God decided ahead of time that certain things would happen no matter what, He also decided to leave some other things

²³ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 24.

²⁴ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 22.

open and depending on the choices that human beings would make.”²⁵ The NAR believes that God has commanded certain things to happen always and that human beings have a choice in other things. Bill Johnson describes it this way: “My approach is that God doesn’t control everything; he is in charge of everything.”²⁶ The NAR teaches that God is so sovereign that He has limited His sovereignty to maintain His integrity. This allows the NAR to absolve God of responsibility for evil because He was not in control of Adam and Eve, or Hitler, or whatever other evil may be present, but He oversaw the universe as this happened. The NAR believes that God has created a system in which people live, and people have control and free will to do as they please.

Open theism also allows the NAR to portray the transformation of society as something that people can truly achieve rather than something that God will do for them. This belief allows NAR leaders to teach that God is in a genuine relationship with his people, enabling Him to interact with them in real time. There is, in their minds, real give-and-take in the relationship. What people do really affects the world, rather than everything being predetermined. This would explain passages in which God grieved over evil or appeared to change his mind, as in the flood and in Hezekiah’s extra fifteen years of life. Because God has an open mind, prayer is effective, and the actions of people can indeed change the course of history.

In their open theist framework, NAR leaders see God as the original ruler of the world who delegated his authority to Adam in Genesis 1:28: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the

²⁵ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 81.

²⁶ “The Sovereignty of God - Bill Johnson,” 2021.

birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (NIV).²⁷ Through this original commission, God has given people the command to take dominion over the whole earth.

Johnson sees the obvious reason why Adam needed to take dominion over the earth:

In Genesis chapter 1, we discover it’s not a perfect universe. Satan had rebelled and had been cast out of heaven, and with him, a portion of the fallen angels took dominion of the earth. It’s obvious why the rest of the planet needed to be subdued—It was under the influence of darkness (See Gen. 1:2). God could have destroyed the devil and his host with a word, but instead He chose to defeat darkness through His delegated authority—those made in His image who were lovers of God by choice.²⁸

God gave dominion to Adam and Eve with the express purpose of defeating Satan and his followers and taking their place as rulers in the world.

Because God had given the keys of dominion to Adam and Eve, Satan had to seize dominion from them. When Adam and Eve gave in to sin, they relinquished their authority to rule and ceded God’s dominion to Satan. Satan, through the fall into sin, became the ruler of the kingdom of the world. “[God’s] Plan A was clearly that they would have dominion, but because of Adam’s bad choice, God decided to go to Plan B. He didn’t create Adam specifically for Plan B, which is where he ended up.”²⁹ God, after the fall into sin, reverted to his backup plan, which was recorded in Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

In the dominionist view, mankind lost dominion over the world which is described in Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Jesus, through his death and resurrection, takes dominion back from Satan. As Bill Johnson puts it, “Jesus defeated the devil

²⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations will be taken from the NIV.

²⁸ Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 31.

²⁹ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 82.

with his sinless life, defeated him in His death by paying for our sins with His blood, and again, in the resurrection, rising triumphant with the keys of death and hell.”³⁰ Through his work on earth, Christ reclaimed the ability to take dominion over the world for the church. He did not necessarily take dominion over Satan.

The authority to rule—in NAR terms, the keys of the kingdom—was reclaimed by Jesus, and he gives this authority back to humanity. Johnson explains, “In other words, [Jesus said] I got it all back, now go and use it to reclaim mankind.”³¹ Wagner adds, “The main purpose of Jesus dying on the cross was not so that you can go to heaven. The main purpose of His death was so that His kingdom can be established in you, so that as a result, you can exercise kingdom authority on earth and reconcile the world back unto Him.”³² Jesus gives his authority back to the people of this world, allowing them to reclaim the kingdom that God originally intended for humanity in the Garden of Eden.

The appeal of dominion theology lies in its teaching on the relevance and influence of Christianity for real change. Rather than waiting for Christ’s return, dominion theology offers a sense of purpose to take control of and exercise Christian influence in society. However, open theism and dominionism lead their proponents to endorse various teachings and practices that depart from the historic Christian faith, including their teaching of the kingdom of heaven, the nature of prayer, the role of faith, and the concept of miracles.

³⁰ Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 33.

³¹ Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 33.

³² Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 68.

The Great Commission and the Ministry of the Keys

To properly understand dominion theology and the church's role in the world, it is essential to devote some time to the NAR interpretation of Matthew 28:18–19 and its relation to Matthew 16:19. Both Bill Johnson and C. P. Wagner believe that in the Great Commission, Jesus gives the authority that he won from Satan back to the whole Christian church. They both believe that Matthew 28:18–19 fulfills the promise Jesus made to give the disciples the keys of the kingdom in Matthew 16:19. This connection is crucial to their theology because it establishes the church's authority to take dominion. Wagner is pointed in his interpretation of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. He specifically teaches that τὰ ἔθνη is “ethnic groups.” He sees these words referring to all social units, rather than the traditional understanding of “all nations.” Their teaching represents a significant departure from the historic Christian understanding of the Great Commission.

The NAR believes that if enough social units are won to Christ within each group, they will be able to serve as the catalyst for change within the nation. The goal is to disciple an entire nation; to achieve this, one is not required to disciple the entire nation, but only a significant enough portion of it to transform it.³³

Another aspect of the NAR interpretation of Matthew 16:19 redefines binding and loosing, also known as the ministry of the keys. The NAR understands this differently than traditional Christianity. The church now has the authority to bind or forbid the works of Satan, such as poverty, fear, and sickness, and loose or permit God's blessings, such as wealth, peace of mind, and health.³⁴ When binding and loosing, the NAR asks God to intervene from his heavenly

³³ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 73.

³⁴ Geivett, *Reckless Christianity*, 131.

kingdom, which contains all these blessings, to come down to earth and bind up with whatever negative aspect that Satan has worked in the world.

The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of Earth

God's kingdom is heaven, and mankind's kingdom is Earth. They are separate. God created the earth and stepped away to live in heaven. In the NAR point of view, God's heavenly kingdom contains all good things, such as health and wealth, and the earth contains bad things, such as sickness and poverty. Bill Johnson believes that heaven is the model for the earth. In a section of *When Heaven Invades Earth* titled, "Your Will Be Done on Earth as It Is in Heaven," he explains:

This is the primary focus of all prayer—if it exists in heaven, it is to be loosed on earth. It's the praying Christian who looses heaven's expression here...Faith grabs hold of that reality... Everything that happens here is supposed to be a shadow of heaven; in turn, every revelation that God gives us of heaven is to equip us with a prayer focus... If it is not free to exist in heaven, it must be bound here.³⁵

The NAR teaches that heaven is the model for earth and that Christians must pray heaven down to earth to reach the final goal of the church, which is to take dominion in society and usher in Christ's millennial reign.

To access heaven, a Christian must have enough faith. Faith is no longer mere trust in God, but the power to access His kingdom and loose God's kingdom onto someone or something. Johnson writes, "Heaven is moved by faith. Faith is the currency of heaven."³⁶

Through faith and faithful prayer, the Christian who has enough faith can bring down the reality

³⁵ Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 66-67.

³⁶ Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 52.

of heaven to earth. A Christian may pray for a person with an illness, and if there is enough faith, the illness may be cured. The NAR views Christ's instruction in the Lord's Prayer as a command to pray heaven down. In their minds, God only listens to people who have enough faith or have the Holy Spirit living within them.

Territorial Spirits and Spiritual Warfare

To take control of the kingdom of earth and bind Satan completely, the NAR engages in spiritual warfare, attempting to occupy spiritual gates. There are three spiritual gates that Christians occupy: gates that influence people's thinking, gates where demons are venerated and worshipped, and gates in individuals possessed by major demonic principalities.³⁷ All three of these gates are occupied by territorial spirits. These entities are not traditional demons in the same sense that a Christian may think of biblical demons. These spirits are powerful, high-ranking, ruling demons that exert influence within specific spheres of the world. Territorial spirits govern a specific geographical area, cultural sphere, or group of people.

These territorial spirits can even exist within churches. The NAR believes that territorial spirits inhabit churches and church bodies that are not working with them toward their goal of transforming society. The NAR believes that the territorial spirits at work in the church are manifestations of the antichrist. Johnson describes the spirit of the antichrist at work in the church:

The spirit of the antichrist is at work today, attempting to influence believers to reject everything that has to do with the Holy Spirit's anointing. This rejection takes on many religious forms, but basically it boils down to this: we reject what we can't control. That spirit has worked to reduce the gospel to a mere intellectual message, rather than a

³⁷ Johnson, *Invading Babylon*, 81-95.

supernatural God encounter... It is the antichrist spirit that has given rise to religious spirits. A religious spirit is a demonic presence that works to get us to substitute being led by our intellect instead of the Spirit of God... Anything that will take the place of dependence upon the Holy Spirit and His empowering work can be traced back to this spirit of opposition.³⁸

Johnson essentially says that the churches that have reduced the gospel to a message rather than an encounter with the Holy Spirit are under the influence of the spirit of the antichrist. For the NAR, that includes any Christian who opposes their beliefs.

There are also names for the spirits that rule over the seven mountains: Apollyon controls the media, Jezebel controls the arts, and Lucifer himself controls the government, because the government is such a critical territory.³⁹ The NAR combats these demons, both great and small, using three levels of spiritual warfare: ground-level spiritual warfare, occult-level spiritual warfare, and strategic-level spiritual warfare.⁴⁰ Ground-level spiritual warfare is the individual casting out of demons. Occult-level spiritual warfare is the confrontation of organizations that deal with the occult, such as Freemasonry, Wicca, and Santería, among others. Neither ground-level nor occult-level is as important or prominent in the NAR as strategic-level spiritual warfare.

Strategic-level spiritual warfare refers to the NAR's attempt to combat the territorial spirits that are active in a particular area. Strategic-level spiritual warfare is based on the belief that territorial spirits keep people, geographic regions, or cultural spheres in bondage. Because the demons keep the good things in bondage, the work of transforming the world cannot begin until they are cast out. Strategic-level spiritual warfare can take various forms, such as anointing

³⁸ Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 90.

³⁹ Geivett, *God's Super-Apostles*, 88.

⁴⁰ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 127.

specific sites with oil, burying the leftover elements of the Lord's Supper, driving stakes into the ground around their towns, and even carving the words "Jesus lives" on the side of a mountain. Each of these practices attempts to combat an area the NAR has identified as having a territorial spirit.⁴¹

Wagner identifies five ways to combat territorial spirits: spiritual mapping, prayer, identificational repentance, prophetic acts such as prayer walking, and reconciliation.⁴² The process by which the NAR discovers a territorial spirit is called spiritual mapping. Through this process, the NAR identifies the specific spirit that is present in the area. To combat the territorial spirit, they must know exactly what they are up against; otherwise, they will be unable to combat it properly. Spiritual mapping seeks information about the city or region's history. Some questions that spiritual mapping may include: Why was the city originally settled? What religions did the early settlers practice? What religions dominated the city?⁴³

Spiritual mappers also seek to survey the current area. They identify sites of occult activity, idolatry, or immorality. These sites may include New Age bookstores, buildings used for non-Christian religions, or establishments such as bars and strip clubs. If a pattern is discovered, then the mappers decide that a territorial spirit associated with that pattern controls a city. When a territorial spirit is identified by name, it is confronted.⁴⁴

One way to confront a territorial spirit is through prayer. Wagner makes a distinction between the typical prayer of a believer and one that is used for spiritual warfare: "It is not

⁴¹ Geivett, *God's Super-Apostles*, 80.

⁴² Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 132-134.

⁴³ Geivett, *God's Super-Apostles*, 85.

⁴⁴ Geivett, *God's Super-Apostles*, 85.

pastoral prayer in this case; it is apostolic prayer. It is not a pious, religious prayer; it is a prophetic prayer. It is not defensive prayer; it is offensive prayer.”⁴⁵ The NAR encourages many people to pray constantly and aggressively against the specific territorial spirit. Prayer is the foundation for spiritual warfare. It is the first necessary step from which all other forms of spiritual warfare follow. Without prayer, the rest of spiritual warfare will not be effective.

The next step of engaging in spiritual warfare is identificational repentance. Identificational repentance is repenting for social sins that the city, people, or society has committed. These sins may be present or past sins, and so they may not have been committed by the people confessing them. Wagner claims, “Since such sins of the past and present pollute the land, they must be remitted if the land is to be properly cleansed.”⁴⁶

Another way Wagner encourages engagement in combat against the territorial spirits is through prayer walking and prophetic acts. Prayer walking is the practice of sending groups of people to a physical location where they desire change. It includes sending a team to a specific neighborhood, a building, or even the highest point of the region. When the group decides on a location, they issue specific commands to the territorial spirits, instructing them to leave and cease their ungodly activity. Wagner (and the NAR) claim that on-site prayer is more effective than long-distance prayer.⁴⁷ The NAR claims that the original prayer walk is recorded in Joshua 6, when the Israelites marched around the city of Jericho. Prayer walking has become a popular practice, even in traditional churches that are not aware of the NAR version of it.⁴⁸ Prayer

⁴⁵ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 132.

⁴⁶ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 133.

⁴⁷ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 133.

⁴⁸ Geivett, *God's Super-Apostles*, 86.

walking is one form of a prophetic act. Prophetic acts are often symbolic actions that establish a foothold in the area. Prophetic acts include things like anointing, carving Jesus' name into a stone, or even building an altar to the true God.

The final way to engage in spiritual warfare is reconciliation. This reconciliation is not between individuals, but between entire social groups for the sins of the past. These sins include war, racism, prejudice, unfair trade, border disputes, or anything else that may divide social groups. Wagner teaches that through hate, demonic spirits harbor prejudice and take control of society. To truly rid themselves of the territorial spirit, social groups must reconcile.⁴⁹

Through spiritual warfare, the NAR actively combats the territorial spirits identified in cities, regions, or atop the seven mountains. The NAR views spiritual warfare as a means of fulfilling humanity's original goal and the church's current mission of taking dominion from Satan.

The Seven Mountain Mandate

The Seven Mountain Mandate, also known as the Seven Spheres of Influence, is a strategy through which the NAR plans to exert influence in society. The Seven Mountain Mandate is not a doctrine, but rather a strategy for infiltrating the spheres of influence that control people's thinking. This is also one of three categories of gates the NAR has identified that Christians must take control of and occupy. In the first of those three gates, the leaders of the NAR have identified seven spheres that have profound influence on society: business, education, the church,

⁴⁹ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 131.

family, arts and entertainment, science and medicine, and government.⁵⁰ These seven mountains are generally agreed upon by the NAR; however, some may refer to them by different names.

For example, “business” is sometimes called “commerce”.

At the top of each mountain is a leader known as a “mountain king”. Lance Wallanu supplies a working definition:

Simply stated, a mountain king is someone with a significant sphere of influence. Every 7M (seven mountain) king has a position in a high place and influences their own sphere directly and other spheres indirectly. Kings do not have to be virtuous, but they do have to be competent, or they won’t last long because all kings know other kings who would like to take their thrones...High places, the spheres of influence where kings position themselves, are the specific target and habitation of darkness. In fact, the apostle Paul revealed to the Ephesians that much of their wrestling was not with rulers made of flesh and blood, but rather against “spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12 NKJV).⁵¹

The kings of the mountains are often not Christian, and someone who helps to influence society for God’s kingdom does not necessarily have to be Christian; they just must be under the influence of an apostle or a prophet and able to influence many people toward a Christian morality.

There are two ways the NAR believes it can assume the position of mountain king: to pray for those who already hold the position so that they will be converted to the NAR’s way of thinking and exert a Christian influence on society, and to take these positions for themselves.⁵² The first way is to pray for “God’s kingdom to come.” As Bill Johnson puts it, “When we pray for His Kingdom to come, we are asking Him to superimpose the rules, order, and benefits of His

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Invading Babylon*, 28.

⁵¹ Johnson, *Invading Babylon*, 58.

⁵² Johnson, *Invading Babylon*, 87.

world over this one until this one looks like His.”⁵³ This strategy is not the only way the NAR attempts to lay claim to the seven mountains. The second way the NAR attempts to exert influence in society is by infiltrating and covertly positioning its members in positions of power within the seven mountains. The NAR’s prominence in Christian music, specifically in the music of Bethel and Hillsong, its large number of books, and its growing number of members in high-ranking government positions are among the most prominent evidence of this strategy. The next paragraphs will provide examples of how the NAR infiltrates and positions its teachings to influence society through music and the government.

Bill Johnson does not hide the fact that he desires to export Bethel teachings and practices through their music. Bethel Music furthers the cause of the NAR by exposing the listeners to their theology. Although their music is evangelical and Christian, they have introduced secondary theological ideas into many of their lyrics.⁵⁴ An example of their dominionist theology is reflected in Bethel Music’s popular song, “Reign Above It All.” Already in the first verse, dominion theology is apparent: “The reign of darkness now has ended; In the kingdom of light; Forever under Your dominion; You’re the King of my life.”⁵⁵ Although it is not explicit, these lyrics take on a new meaning in the context of dominion theology. Bethel Music subliminally influences the Christian community to become more accustomed to or to embrace the NAR dominionist teaching. Through this music, they believe they are influencing both the church and the music mountain. The NAR’s goal is to influence various Christian denominations through their music rather than just supplying music to their own churches.

⁵³ Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 71.

⁵⁴ Geivett, *Reckless Christianity*, 187.

⁵⁵ “Reign Above It All (Live),” *Bethel Music*.

One of the most common and widely recognizable ways the NAR tries to influence society is through the government. During his first term, President Donald Trump's personal spiritual advisor was Paula White-Cain. While she was connected to him, NAR leaders, including Bill Johnson, gained access to the White House because Paula White-Cain is recognized as an apostle whose beliefs align with those of C. P. Wagner and Bethel Church.⁵⁶ She announced in 2019 that she would pass leadership of her church to her son and that she would function as the "oversight pastor." A few moments after her announcement, her son told her and everyone publicly, "You truly are an apostle, and the quicker that people realize that God has granted you favor and authority, and a unique favor and authority, the better off that they'll be."⁵⁷ As her son spoke, Paula nodded in agreement. Even though she does not claim the title of apostle, she views herself as one, and her church does too. Paula White-Cain is just one of the many people who preach and teach NAR doctrine and are closely associated with President Donald Trump. Others include Charlie Kirk, founder of Turning Point USA; Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House of Representatives; and Marjorie Taylor Greene, a prominent Congresswoman.

These examples are representative of the NAR's typical *modus operandi*, which is to covertly influence the seven mountains without notifying those who oversee those specific spheres of influence of their true intentions. They often hide behind false titles, use intentionally vague wording, or even mislead people to infiltrate whatever sphere of society they see fit.

When discussing the seven mountains, it is essential to note the prominence the NAR has placed on the business mountain. They emphasize it because of a prophecy known as the Great

⁵⁶ Geivett, *Reckless Christianity*, 26.

⁵⁷ Geivett, *Reckless Christianity*, 26.

Transfer of Wealth. They believe that when the territorial spirit of Mammon is cast out of the business mountain, there will be a great transfer of wealth to Christians from the unchristian world, so that Christians everywhere can increase their influence. Wagner views this as happening supernaturally, in a manner similar to how the Egyptians gave the Israelites wealth as they left Egypt during the Exodus, and naturally through business-minded Christians becoming prominent in commerce.⁵⁸ Because of this view, the NAR places great emphasis on wealth and prosperity to the point that it believes operating a successful business is a form of ministry, akin to that of apostles and prophets.

The Billion-Soul Harvest and Christ's Reign

When all the prominent territorial spirits are cast out, it will result in what the NAR refers to as the billion-soul harvest. This prophecy of a billion souls coming to Christ was originally preached by Bob Jones in 1975. Jones claimed that God resurrected him after Satan put him to death for preaching against homosexuality and abortion. He then prophesied that a vast number of people would come to Christ. Jones made this bold claim:

For they will be the faceless generation of men who will stand on a platform with thousands and multitudes and masses all about. And the news media—ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN—will be saying, “Ladies and gentlemen, we have no news tonight to report but good news. The whole world is going mad over Jesus. They’re falling on their face and saying Jesus is Lord.... There is no sports news tonight because all the football stadiums, and all the ballparks, and all the colosseums are filled to overflowing, with thousands gathering.” And they’re saying, “We have a resurrection over here, and then twisted, mangled bodies are being made straight.” And the news announcers are saying, “Ladies and gentlemen, we don’t know who these people are. They’re almost faceless. And they’re speaking great wisdom. And they’re speaking things that are bringing about resurrections and bringing about healings.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Johnson, *Invading Babylon*, 111-112.

⁵⁹ “*Paul Cain Stadium Christianity Prophecy*,” 2016.

Although Jones was the first person to make the claim about a billion souls coming to Christ, it has been advocated for, legitimized, and regarded as prophecy by many different NAR leaders.

Bill Johnson claims:

The exploits of the present and coming revival will surpass all the accomplishments of the Church in all history combined. Over 1 billion souls will be saved. Stadiums will be filled with people 24 hours a day for days on end, with miracles beyond number: healings, conversions, resurrections, and deliverances too many to count. No special speaker, no well-known miracle worker, just the Church being what God called her to be.”⁶⁰

Although the mass conversion of a billion souls is regarded by the NAR as imminent, some of the details change depending on which NAR leader is speaking about it. Some NAR leaders see it as an instantaneous mass conversion, while others see it as a gradual process, leading to a billion souls coming to faith.

Expression of the Spirit and Greater Works

Bill Johnson teaches that in the last days, God’s church will receive the full expression of spiritual gifts. He bases this on Acts 2:17–21. He says that the initial fulfillment of the prophecy found in Joel was in Acts 2. He says that all flesh was never touched by that first revival in Acts 2, but eventually it will happen when racial, economic, sexual, and age barriers are broken down. Only when these barriers have been done away with will the Holy Spirit be released on all the people of the earth. This can only happen through his people.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 210.

⁶¹ Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 212.

The NAR teaches that God's people, when they demonstrate sufficient faith and have made enough progress in society, will receive a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit that will help them further transform society. One of the marks that this special outpouring of the spirit is happening is the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in John 14:12, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." The sign is that the church will do works of greater quality than those of Jesus. Jesus is the example of what God's work is like on earth. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on certain individuals, but to fully express these gifts, the miracles the members of the church perform must be of higher quality than Jesus' miracles to impress God and honor his work on earth.⁶² These miracles also attest to the truth and worthiness of the church's message.⁶³

Apostles and Prophets

One of the spiritual gifts, and an important concept for understanding the NAR, is the restored offices of apostles and prophets. The apostles and prophets are seen as the foundation of the church, based on the NAR understanding of Ephesians 2:19–20: "You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." Basing their interpretation on these verses, the NAR believes that the ecclesiastical structure that God intended began with apostles and prophets. The apostles and prophets have not been

⁶² Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 213.

⁶³ Geivett, *Reckless Christianity*, 167.

recognized in previous ages, but now these offices have been restored to God's true church to lead God's people in taking dominion of this world. The next subsections will cover the individual roles and characteristics of apostles and prophets, as well as how these two offices work together within the NAR framework.

Apostles

C. P. Wagner defines an apostle as “a Christian leader gifted, taught, commissioned, and sent by God with the authority to establish the foundational government of the church within an assigned sphere of ministry by hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches and setting things in order accordingly for the expansion of the kingdom of God.”⁶⁴ The distinguishing mark that makes an apostle an apostle is their authority. They must direct or command the church in an authoritative way. This does not mean they are necessarily pastors or church leaders, but they must have some degree of authority to direct the church's mission. It is essential to recognize that apostolic authority is not necessarily conferred upon those who hold a hierarchical position or attain a position of influence. This authority is delegated to specific people by the Holy Spirit. After the Holy Spirit delegates authority to an apostle, their apostleship is recognized by other apostles and those surrounding the individual.⁶⁵

The NAR recognizes that apostles have an unusual authority that first comes from the Holy Spirit and is recognized by five distinct qualities, which Wagner notes. The five distinct qualities that set apostles apart from others: a spiritual gift, a calling, extraordinary character,

⁶⁴ Wagner, *DOMINION!*, 29.

⁶⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church*, (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2014), 27.

followers, and a vision.⁶⁶ The NAR believes these qualities are found in biblical apostles such as Paul. These qualities reinforce the authority the apostle has been given by the Holy Spirit.

The apostle must possess a spiritual gift, typically in line with the spiritual gifts described in 1 Corinthians 12, though this spiritual gift can sometimes be simply the authority conferred on them by the Holy Spirit. Wagner notes that these spiritual gifts are helpful in determining which sphere of influence the apostle will have. The apostle's spiritual gift must also include some form of leadership, which Wagner calls the gift of apostle.⁶⁷

The apostle's calling is to their specific form of ministry, meaning that each person's apostolic ministry is different. Wagner notes that recognizing their form of ministry comes with an increase in self-confidence, which is different than pride. This confidence comes from knowing that they are obeying God and that God is working with them as well as through them.⁶⁸

An apostle must have extraordinary character. The extraordinary character of an apostle is based on James 3:1, "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." The NAR teaches that these apostles must first be good moral Christians in the church before they can be recognized as apostles. Wagner notes that it is an open question whether baptism is a requirement.⁶⁹ Two things make the apostle a good Christian: they are blameless, and they are humble. Blamelessness encompasses everything listed in 1 Timothy 3 as qualifications for a called worker. Wagner makes the claim, "True apostles can stand before their followers and say without hesitation,

⁶⁶ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 26-33.

⁶⁷ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 27.

⁶⁸ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 28.

⁶⁹ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 29.

‘Imitate me!’”⁷⁰ Humility is an apostolic quality that is learned rather than inherent. Both qualities complement each other to create an extraordinary character that the apostle possesses.

The nature of the work an apostle does means they must have followers. They must be a leader in a group, and, more than that, a leader of leaders. Apostles must be recognized by others before they recognize themselves in this role. True NAR apostles are not self-appointed. The leadership role is given to a person, and apostles are recognized by other leaders as their leader; only after this can they be officially recognized as apostles.⁷¹

The final quality apostles must possess is vision. This is not simply a big-picture vision, although that is part of it, but primarily a prophetic revelation from God. This is because one of the major roles of an apostle is to tell the church what the Holy Spirit says to the churches. They must be able to present a concrete vision for what the church must do in its time and place. There are two ways to receive revelation. The first and primary way is to receive direct revelation from God. The second way is to receive a prophecy from a prophet. Both types of revelation may be vague, and the apostle must be able to interpret both kinds for the benefit of the church.⁷²

As stated before, apostles function in different ways. NAR apostles are all equal in authority, but they have different ministries. These ministries can be ecclesiastical, functional (limited to a specific time or role), or geographical. The way apostles operate within their ministries can be categorized into four distinct roles: vertical apostles, horizontal apostles, hyphenated apostles, and marketplace apostles.⁷³ This is not an exhaustive list, as no two apostles

⁷⁰ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 30.

⁷¹ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 32.

⁷² Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 35.

⁷³ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 43-54.

are exactly alike, and they may serve in different ministries at various times in their lives. Each of these types of apostles is believed to have divinely assigned spheres of authority that are legitimate and recognized, but they should not overstep into spheres assigned to other apostles. These spheres of influence may be geographic, functional, or vocational.⁷⁴

A vertical apostle is someone who serves as a leader of other leaders within the church. Vertical apostles are the most common type of apostle. Because in a certain sense, every apostle is a vertical apostle, but not every apostle is exclusively a vertical apostle. Wagner notes that they are often leaders of churches or church networks. He also notes that their apostolic authority does not extend outside their sphere of influence.⁷⁵

Horizontal apostles have authority over other apostles, which distinguishes them from vertical apostles. The horizontal apostle functions by bringing apostles together and then giving the final decision or judgment at the meeting. The example given of a biblical horizontal apostle is James at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. Wagner claims that this is the apostolic role in which he functions.⁷⁶

Hyphenated apostles are individuals who function in the apostolic office while simultaneously operating as a leader in another ministry role. The term “hyphenated” refers to the dual nature of their calling—they are first and foremost identified by one role, but they also possess an apostolic authority. A clear example is a pastor-apostle. An apostle who holds the primary role of a pastor, leads a growing church, and is a well-respected leader in the church at large would have the secondary role of apostle as a leader in their sphere of influence. Other

⁷⁴ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 42.

⁷⁵ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 43.

⁷⁶ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 46.

pastors and leaders look to them for guidance, wisdom, and spiritual direction. In this capacity, they function apostolically within their sphere of influence, providing leadership to leaders and shaping the direction of multiple ministries or churches. They exercise apostolic authority while also leading and fulfilling their vocation in their spheres of influence.⁷⁷

The final category of apostles is marketplace apostles, who function exclusively outside the church. They may have a leadership role inside the church, but they are not apostles within it. Marketplace apostles are actively working to transform the world, attempting to carry God's will for the church on Earth. They may function in government, business, transportation, science, the arts, or any other sphere of influence, if they are leaders working to transform.⁷⁸

An apostle may fit into one or more of these four categories. They are the foundational leader of the church, often referred to as the generals of the NAR. They are strategizing, operating, and infiltrating spheres of influence occupied by territorial spirits and directing others to do the same. They work closely with prophets to interpret for the church what God wants the church to do.

Prophets

The other foundational leadership role of the NAR is the prophet. As with the apostles, prophets must govern the church. Typically, they hold official titles such as pastor or elder, but their authority extends beyond these titles. They have prophetic authority because they are God's mouthpieces for the church. God reveals his will to the church through NAR prophets in the

⁷⁷ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 53.

⁷⁸ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 55.

same way he did through the Old Testament prophets. When NAR prophets speak, they can boldly say, “Declares the Lord.”⁷⁹

To disobey a prophet would be to disobey God himself. Because God speaks through prophets, the prophet’s authority extends beyond the local church. Their authority extends over other pastors and elders. Pastors and elders of local churches practice what is known as “receiving a prophet.” Receiving a prophet means inviting a well-known individual who is recognized as a prophet of God into the church to prophesy the words of God to the congregation in the pastor’s place. This practice is based on Jesus’ words in Matthew 10:41, “Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward.”⁸⁰

Prophets not only prophesy to churches but to individuals as well. Prophesying in this case may not only include speaking the words of God, but also imparting spiritual gifts to a person, confirming an individual into one of the fivefold offices (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher), or revealing God’s personal will to a person in regard to a major life decision that is not spoken about in the Bible, such as moving or finding a new job. They may also perform mental and physical healing on a person.⁸¹

NAR prophets also practice prophesying to nations. This may include giving a prophecy to the nation as a whole or to a leader, predicting catastrophes such as natural disasters, famines, or violence, and even speaking into existence the plagues described in Revelation. Prophesying to nations also includes engaging in spiritual warfare. Prophets may identify high-ranking

⁷⁹ Geivett, *God’s Super-Apostles*, 43.

⁸⁰ Geivett, *God’s Super-Apostles*, 44.

⁸¹ Geivett, *God’s Super-Apostles*, 49.

demons within nations, enabling NAR members in those nations to combat them through spiritual warfare. They might personally confront groups or locations closely associated with territorial spirits, such as occult groups or Masonic temples.⁸²

The Relationship Between Apostles and Prophets

Apostles and prophets function together. C. P. Wagner compares the relationship between apostles and prophets to that of two draft horses. The two are hitched together, and when told to go, they pull forward and eventually win the competition. Therefore, the term that is often used to describe the relationship between apostles and prophets is “hitched together.”⁸³ The relationship between an apostle and a prophet takes one of two forms: either a casual relationship, which is temporary or limited in scope, or a structured relationship, characterized by regular meetings and an ongoing connection.⁸⁴ Wagner asserts that an apostle-prophet relationship functions in a five-step cycle: the prophet submits to the apostle, God speaks to the prophet, the prophet speaks to the apostle, the apostle judges, evaluates, strategizes, and executes, and finally the prophet resubmits to the apostle.⁸⁵

The first step in the process is submission. Wagner is quick to emphasize that the prophet’s submission to an apostle is similar to the way a wife submits to her husband. It is not that one is more important than the other; there are simply distinct roles. The prophet must

⁸² Geivett, *God’s Super-Apostles*, 49.

⁸³ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 89.

⁸⁴ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 90.

⁸⁵ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 92-104.

submit to the apostle out of reverence for God. The prophet must yield to an apostle in order to fulfill his role properly.⁸⁶

The second step in the cycle is that God speaks to the prophet. Here it is important to note that the gift of prophecy is different than the office of prophet. Previously, it was mentioned that apostles receive the words of God either directly or indirectly through prophets. The latter is more common than the former. In the NAR, some individuals possess the gift of prophecy but are not considered prophets.⁸⁷

As soon as the prophet receives a message from God, they must deliver that message to the apostle, this is the third step. When delivering that message, it is essential that the prophet exercises discernment regarding what is being said to them and what they are reporting to the apostle. This discernment can relate to either the message itself or the timing of its delivery to the apostle.⁸⁸

The fourth step in the process is the apostle's editing of the message they have received and acting upon it. The apostle must discern which portions of the prophet's message are worth acting upon or disregarding completely. The apostle must filter the words the prophet has given him and will choose to act on them as he sees fit. Wagner notes that it would be foolish to act on every word that prophets give him, but deciding which words are important enough to act on, and when, is the job of the apostle.⁸⁹ After the fourth step, the prophet resubmits to the apostle, and the cycle begins again.

⁸⁶ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 95.

⁸⁷ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 97.

⁸⁸ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 98-99.

⁸⁹ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 101-102.

Through this cycle, the words of God, conveyed through revelation to the prophet, are filtered by both the prophet and the apostle. While Wagner presents this interdependent relationship as a security, the process enables an apostle or prophet to control and manipulate the words of God. Because apostles and prophets are positioned as the gatekeepers of God's word, they effectively monopolize spiritual authority, meaning that only these chosen few are permitted to determine what messages the people receive from God. This structure is also problematic because the relationship also lacks accountability, as the apostles have unchecked authority over which prophetic words are acted on.

The Resulting False Practices

NAR dominion theology and the ecclesiastical structure of apostles and prophets create a systemic problem of false practice. Their distorted view of God's dealings with the world forces their own people to act dangerously. They look to signs and wonders as manifestations of God's power acting on earth. Members of the NAR often find themselves mixing religion and politics to a negative effect. Because the scope of the false practices is wide, the following sections will focus only on the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, the so-called manifestations of God that have occurred at NAR churches, and the resulting political activity of many NAR leaders and followers.

The Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry

Bill Johnson, Kris Vallotton, and Bethel Church operate the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry, also known as the BSSM. The BSSM's goal is "to equip you to walk in the gifts of the

Spirit, and release kingdom culture within your home and community.”⁹⁰ Students can pay to attend both online and in-person sessions to activate their spiritual gifts. These spiritual gifts manifest themselves in different ways, such as prophecy, miracles, leadership, and songwriting. Students at the BSSM are paying to receive or activate the Holy Spirit within them. This school is simply a form of simony, the practice of buying and selling spiritual gifts and church offices or positions. By charging students for the reception or activation of spiritual gifts, the BSSM monetizes what is freely given by God.

Some of the students at BSSM, seeking an extra measure of the Spirit, have practiced what is known as “grave soaking” or “mantle grabbing.” Grave soaking is a practice in which students lie on the grave of a deceased individual believed to possess a large measure of the Holy Spirit. Often, these individuals are regarded as miracle workers, prophets, or apostles. By lying on the grave, these students can absorb a portion of the Spirit from that deceased individual. This practice is based on 2 Kings 13:20–21, where a dead man touches Elisha’s bones and comes back to life.⁹¹ Although the practice has been officially denounced by church leadership, many teachers at BSSM, including Beni Johnson, the wife of Bill Johnson, encourage it.⁹²

⁹⁰ “BSSM Online – BSSM.”

⁹¹ Geivett, *Reckless Christianity*, 12.

⁹² Geivett, *Reckless Christianity*, 14.

Manifestations and Miracles

Bethel leaders teach that the church has entered an age of supernaturalism. The leadership also teaches that the church is to do even greater miracles than Jesus to transform the world.⁹³ In 2011, the so-called glory cloud of God appeared during a church service at Bethel Church. This glory cloud took the form of gold dust that fell from the ceiling. By many accounts, it fell from the ventilation system. Dann Farrelly, a lead pastor at Bethel, spoke about it, saying, “This is either the Lord, or like, an evil magician.”⁹⁴ He would later say that he thought God would show up more dramatically, with everyone on their faces before the Lord’s presence, but instead, people pulled out their phones to take pictures and selfies. These reactions stand in stark contrast to examples recorded in the Bible. In Isaiah 6:5, the prophet records his reaction to seeing the Lord’s glory: “‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.’” Since then, there have also been claims of angel feathers and winds whipping through the service, all of which are attributed to the presence of God being manifest among his church.⁹⁵

NAR leaders also promote their miraculous signs as evidence that they possess the Holy Spirit. This paper has already discussed Olive Heiligenthal, the two-year-old who died and was not resurrected. This is just one of the many failed miracles attempted by members of the NAR. Another example is that Bethel has claimed it is a “cancer-free zone.” Yet, Beni Johnson was

⁹³ Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*, 213.

⁹⁴ Geivett, *Reckless Christianity*, 162.

⁹⁵ Geivett, *Reckless Christianity*, 171.

diagnosed with cancer in 2017 and died in 2022 despite numerous healing efforts by the leadership at Bethel and declarations of binding the cancer and loosing health on her.^{96 97}

These manifestations and miracles are lackluster at best, fake at worst. The NAR places an emphasis on these miracles to validate its message. Apostles and prophets must perform miracles to demonstrate their authority. The ongoing displays of power are not intended to be occasional interactions with God, but rather reproducible manifestations of the Holy Spirit at work in the church. This contrast between the miracles and the teaching about ongoing power creates a fundamental problem: if the miracles and manifestations are not up to the standard the church claims they must be, then the church's teaching must be flawed or worse.

⁹⁶ Geivett, *Reckless Christianity*, 9.

⁹⁷ This may be a good opportunity to share a personal story. On January 14, 2024, I attended the evening service at Bethel Church. I was on a school trip, and some classmates and I had heard much about Bethel, so we thought we would stop in for an hour or so. On the surface, it seemed like a regular evangelical church service. About an hour in, several church leaders stood up to share a word of testimony, prophecy, or a healing miracle. One of the miracles that was performed was the loosening of childbirth on mothers who were struggling to have children, and another was the release of stillness for people who had a twitch in the face. These miracles were disappointing because there was no immediate healing, nor was there any visible accountability for the apostles and prophets performing the miracles. *Bethel Church Service | Joaquin Evans Sermon | Worship with David Funk, Sarah Sperber*, 2024. The words of testimony and prophecy began at 1:06:00

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION

Scripture provides a clear basis for evaluating and rejecting the central claims of the NAR. It shows that the NAR's teachings depart from the doctrine of the true Christian faith of which NAR leaders promote: spiritual warfare, territorial spirits, binding and loosing, the millennial reign of Christ, and many others. The most prominent of these false teachings is their dominion theology, as well as their belief in the restored offices of apostles and prophets. The three main problems with dominion theology are that it limits God's sovereignty, it makes Christ into a transformer of society rather than the savior of the world, and, in doing so, it also confuses the two kingdoms. They combine God's kingdom with the government and politics. Elections are no longer political events, but holy wars between God and the forces of Satan, involving NAR prophets claiming divine revelation about God's will for a nation. Loyalty to specific political figures or parties becomes equated with faithfulness to God.

Apostles and prophets exalt themselves above everyone, claiming that they possess the true words of God, effectively becoming enthusiasts, individuals who claim to have direct revelation from God. Rather than directing people to Scripture as the ultimate authority, apostles and prophets have elevated themselves as necessary mediators between man and God, forcing people to come to them for God's words rather than to the Bible.

A Response to Dominion Theology

The fundamental issue with dominionism is that it claims that God is not in control. Those who believe in dominion theology try to preserve God's integrity by placing limits on his interactions with the world. This is a sovereignty problem. Their belief system teaches a limited God who chooses not to operate within the world. The Bible clearly states the opposite: "'Am I only a God nearby,' declares the LORD, 'and not a God far away? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?'" declares the LORD. 'Do not I fill heaven and earth?' declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:23–24). In this passage, God reveals himself to be an infinite being who interacts with the world. Contrary to the NAR description of God, he has not retreated into heaven, only to respond when called upon by people with enough faith. God not only knows all things, he fills both heaven and earth with his presence, and He controls all things by his power. St. Paul wrote, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). The God who controls, guides, and preserves all things while also willingly interacting with his people is the God of the Bible, not the limited God of the NAR.

Another problem with the NAR's dominionism is that the primary work of Christ is not to be the Savior of the world but a transformer of society. Although they do not deny that Christ died to save human beings from their sins, they believe that the primary work of Christ was to restore the dominion that God had given to mankind in the Garden of Eden. Through Christ's death and resurrection, he took God's dominion for himself, and in the Great Commission, he delegated to the Church that same dominion.

The belief that Christ came to earth to transform society perverts the core teaching of God's grace. Christ is the Savior of the world, the once-for-all sacrifice to reconcile the world to himself. Jesus' work on earth was the undoing of the damage caused by sin and the

reconciliation of humanity with God. St Paul speaks about the purpose of Christ's work on earth, "When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Galatians 4:4–5). The primary work of Christ on earth was to serve as a mediator between mankind and God. By serving as a mediator, he reconciled mankind to God.

The NAR perverts the teaching of the two kingdoms. God's kingdom of the right hand; it deals with salvation, grace, and eternal life. God is the ruler of this kingdom, and this is the kingdom of God. God rules this kingdom in the hearts of his believers through the gospel. God's earthly kingdom, or the kingdom of the left hand, deals with justice, earthly order, and temporal well-being. Though God remains the ultimate authority, he rules this kingdom, not through his gospel but through secular authority, using the government as an instrument to preserve peace and justice. The Christian recognizes a distinction between the two kingdoms and has a calling to serve both.

The NAR perverts the two-kingdoms doctrine by its teaching that Christians must "transform" society's seven mountains of influence. According to NAR theology, Lucifer, not God, controls the government mountain, making political activity a spiritual battleground. This leads NAR members to mix politics with theology, confusing the distinction between God's kingdom and the earthly kingdom. Bill Johnson exemplified this when he encouraged Christians to vote for Donald Trump, saying, "[I have] never seen a president who loved prayer as much as Donald Trump.... His passion for godly counsel is also legendary... [He] should appeal to believers."⁹⁸ It is not a confusion of the two kingdoms to vote for a Christian candidate; however, because NAR apostles and prophets claim the same divine authority as Paul, Peter, and Isaiah,

⁹⁸ "Bethel Church Leader Backs Trump, Says the President 'Loves Prayer,'" November 2, 2020.

their political endorsements function as a divine command. When NAR leaders direct their followers to support specific candidates, their command becomes God's will for them to follow. NAR leaders bind consciences to support a particular person or party rather than leaving room for Christian freedom in political matters.

God's purpose for the civil government is to make it possible for mankind to live in peace and security. Paul encourages Timothy to pray especially for "kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Timothy 2:2). The government exists to protect people's lives, property, and reputations and to preserve order in the nation.

Because the government is instituted by God for the preservation of human life, believers are no strangers to it and often have played a role in it. The Bible teaches that it is permissible, for believers to participate in government, for example, Joseph rose to become the second-in-command of Egypt, who said, "It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" (Genesis 45:5). In Joseph's case, his rise to power was not accidental but planned by God that he would take that position in the government to save lives. This sentiment is echoed in Romans when Paul described the governing authorities, "For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Romans 13:4). Both Joseph's example and Paul's statement in Romans are far from calling believers to disengage from political life. Scripture presents government as a vocation in which God's people can serve and serve to God's glory.

The church's role in the world is very different from that of the government. The church is commanded to preach the gospel and to administer the means of grace. The government's role

is to uphold peace in the world. Both have been established by God, and both are to receive honor. The church of God is not to involve itself in secular or political affairs because the role of the church is to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments. The Augsburg Confession summarizes the relationship between the two authorities, God and government:

One should not mix or confuse the two authorities, the spiritual and the secular. For spiritual power has its command to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments. It should not invade an alien office. It should not set up and depose kings. It should not annul or disrupt secular law and obedience to political authority. It should not make or prescribe laws for the secular power concerning secular affairs.... In this way, our people distinguish the offices of the two authorities and powers and direct that both be honored as the highest gifts of God on earth. (AC XXVII, 12-17) ⁹⁹

The Augsburg Confession is clear that the church ought not be confused with secular authorities. The church ought to leave law, order, and public affairs to the secular government, which God has established. The role of the church is to preach the gospel, not to prescribe laws.

Even Christ taught that there was a separation between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of government when he said, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” (Luke 12:14). When Jesus speaks in this way, he recognizes that his role, at that time was not to overstep the secular governmental authority and become secular judge, his role was to preach the pure gospel and fulfill his role as the Messiah. He clearly distinguishes between his divine role in God’s kingdom and the earthly role of the government.

The NAR does recognize this difference; they may even speak as if there is a separation between church and state, but when they command their members to vote or align themselves with a particular political party, they confuse the two kingdoms. The confusion does not lie in political participation, which Scripture allows, but in the authority behind a political endorsement. Because the NAR apostle or prophet issues a political endorsement as God’s

⁹⁹ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 92.

representatives, it comes with divine authority, binding consciences to a particular person or ideology. This is where the two distinct kingdoms are confused into one.

The NAR also teaches that the role of the government is to influence people to help usher in Christ's reign. Christians must take over the government because it is under the rule of an evil territorial spirit. This belief turns political enemies into spiritual enemies and makes human beings into demons. In the NAR frame of mind, the people who are on the wrong side of the aisle are under the influence of demons and Satan. Those on the opposing political side are no longer to be seen as real people for whom Christ died, but as evil spirits who require conquering.

An illustration of how far this can go became tragically clear when Vance Luther Boelter, a man from Minnesota closely tied to the NAR, shot two Minnesota lawmakers who disagreed with his political views. Boelter himself described the event as going to war.¹⁰⁰ In his eyes, this war was not just a worldly and political disagreement; it was a spiritual war against people he believed were siding with evil spirits. By committing this act of violence, he believed he was carrying out God's will.

A Response to Apostles and Prophets

The NAR teaches that the foundation of the church is its apostles and prophets. The NAR claims that the apostles and prophets are God's representatives on earth. They claim to receive direct revelation and to teach with the same authority as Peter and Paul. They downplay the external Word of God recorded in the Bible, teaching their followers that God's word comes from

¹⁰⁰ Odette Yousef, "Questions Remain about the Minnesota Rampage. Anti-Abortion Extremism May Shed Light," *NPR*, 21 June 2025.

apostles and prophets through direct revelation. Therefore, the leaders of the NAR lack accountability because they can say whatever they want, as if whatever they say comes from God. The result is a leadership structure that forces people to either believe what they have to say or disobey God himself, even if what the apostles and prophets teach is contrary to the Bible.

NAR apostles and prophets have much in common with enthusiasts in Luther's day.

Luther wrote about them in the Smalcald Articles:

In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before. We say this to protect ourselves from the enthusiasts, that is, the "spirits," who boast that they have the Spirit apart from and before contact with the Word. On this basis, they judge, interpret, and twist the Scripture or oral Word according to their pleasure. Müntzer did this, and there are still many doing this today, who set themselves up as shrewd judges between the spirit and the letter without knowing what they say or teach. The papacy is also purely religious raving in that the pope boasts that "all laws are in the shrine of his heart" and that what he decides and commands in his churches is supposed to be Spirit and law, even when it is above or contrary to the Scriptures or the spoken Word.... In the same way, our enthusiasts also condemn the external Word, and yet they themselves do not keep silent. Instead, they fill the world with their chattering and scribbling—as if the Spirit could not come through the Scriptures or the spoken word of the apostles, but the Spirit must come through their own writings and words. Why do they not abstain from their preaching and writing until the Spirit himself comes into the people apart from and in advance of their writings? After all, they boast that the Spirit has come into them without the preaching of the Scriptures. (Art III 8:3-6) ¹⁰¹

Luther's problem is with enthusiasts, who claim to receive direct revelation from the Holy Spirit apart from the Bible. Luther's problem is not simply a theological error, but the collapse of the standard by which the teaching can be tested. When church leaders claim to speak directly from God, the Bible ceases to be the standard for proper Christian teaching.

¹⁰¹ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 321–322.

What Luther addressed about the enthusiasts in his day is exactly what the NAR teaches today. As Luther's enthusiasts boasted that they had the Spirit apart from the Word, the NAR apostles and prophets also claim to receive revelation from God apart from the Word. NAR leaders position themselves as the primary way in which people receive communication from God. By positioning themselves in this way, NAR apostles and prophets demote the Word of God as the standard of the Christian faith, and they make themselves the final authority.

NAR leaders also claim to be the foundation of the church as God originally intended it to be. They base this teaching on Ephesians 2:19–20: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” On the surface, Ephesians 2:20 seems to be a reasonable basis for the NAR teaching of apostles and prophets. However, the plain understanding of ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν is unclear.

To properly understand Ephesians 2:20, one must understand the role of τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν. One valid interpretation is to take the genitives as subjective. This interpretation would mean that θεμελίῳ is laid by the apostles and prophets. The subjective genitives allow the foundation to be Christ alone, emphasizing his work in building the church.¹⁰² Another interpretation of this verse treats the genitives as appositional. This means that the apostles and prophets are the foundation, not building it. This interpretation is considered the most likely.¹⁰³

Knowing that the apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church, one must consider in what sense they are the foundation. Melancthon’s thought in the Treatise on the

¹⁰² Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia, 2015), 311.

¹⁰³ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Word Books, 1990), 153.

Power and Primacy of the Pope, is helpful here: “Granted that it is said, ‘On this rock I will build my Church,’ certainly the church is not built upon the authority of a human being but upon the ministry of that confession Peter made, in which he proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. For this reason, Christ addresses him as a minister: ‘On this rock,’ that is, this ministry.”¹⁰⁴ Melancthon argues that the church is not built on an individual, but on the ministry that they have. This ministry is inseparable from Christ and the pure gospel. The same logic applies to Ephesians 2:20. When Paul calls the apostles and prophets the foundation of the church, he is not speaking of the individuals but of the ministries they served in.

Contrary to what the NAR teaches, when Paul speaks about the foundation of the church, he is referring to ministry and teaching, not prescribing a permanent governmental structure for his church. When addressing divisions within the Corinthian congregation, Paul rebukes and encourages the believers against aligning themselves with specific leaders, writing: “What I mean is this: One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’; still another, ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor 1:12–13). Through this rebuke, Paul directs the congregation away from allegiance to individual personalities and toward exclusive trust in Christ as the sole foundation of faith. This belief is further propagated in Acts, when Luke records that the fellowship of believers had after Pentecost. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, not to the apostles themselves. The early church had a clear understanding of the foundation of the church: Christ as their savior, exactly as he had been proclaimed to them through the apostle’s teaching.

¹⁰⁴ Kolb, *The Book of Concord*, 334.

A Final Admonition

One might wonder: what does this mean for the average Christian? The NAR is attempting to exert influence everywhere, though they try to be covert about it. Non-NAR Christians do not want to be associated with them in any way, nor do we want to give the impression that we support their teaching. What then is the best course of action? How do we distance ourselves from the NAR?

If you are a layperson, do not read books by Bill Johnson or C. P. Wagner, or anyone else associated with the NAR. Because the NAR's intention is to covertly infiltrate society, it may not be obvious who or where the resources come from. But a quick internet search will reveal if there is a connection with the NAR. Keywords or teachings that signal a NAR connection include apostles and prophets, releasing the kingdom of God, seven mountains, and territorial spirits. If a book or resource continues to use these themes, that is a likely signal of NAR influence. If you think you may be reading something that is NAR, chances are you are reading something that is NAR. Also note that the NAR isn't a denomination; rather, it is a movement spanning across denominations. As a practical rule, exercise caution when involving yourself in events that mix religion and politics, as these are likely NAR or NAR-adjacent.

If you are a pastor or church leader, teach your flock about the NAR and its dangers to faithful biblical teaching. Perhaps a midweek or Sunday morning Bible study would be an opportunity to teach about these dangers. There is a great advantage to knowing what your people are reading, guiding them to trustworthy Lutheran materials rather than vaguely religious resources. If they decide to read something you have not read, read it with them and answer their

questions. As a pastor or worship planner, plan worship without using Bethel, Hillsong, or any other NAR-associated music publishing company. The NAR actively tries to influence churches through its music. It is inadvisable to give people the impression that what the NAR teaches is okay or to unwittingly promote NAR doctrine and confuse those in worship.

As a spiritual leader, refrain from being political in the pulpit, classroom, and on social media. While Christians certainly have civic responsibilities and the Christian freedom to be politically active, we in no way want people to think that their political affiliation is un-Christian, on either side, or that faithfulness to Christ requires allegiance to a specific political party or candidate. Spiritual leaders will not want to confuse the Lutheran distinction between the two kingdoms, which the NAR is guilty of. Everything a pastor does teaches, and a pastor would never want to give the impression to his flock that voting one way or another is God's will or desire. These recommendations may change from situation to situation and from place to place. My personal encouragement is to use pastoral tact when dealing with any situation.

CONCLUSION

The New Apostolic Reformation is one of the most significant new movements facing the Christian church. Since it began to take shape in the 1990s, it has grown into a large movement crossing denominational lines. NAR teachings, particularly dominion theology and their restoration of the offices of apostles and prophets, stand in contrast to the historical Christian church and faithful biblical teaching. Despite their false teachings, the movement continues to grow in influence. Although they typically operate behind the scenes, they exert a significant influence on political leaders, churches, and people groups worldwide.

In this paper, we have seen how the NAR uses its dominion theology and restoration of apostles and prophets to distort the Word of God. The primary concern is for the people who are affected by these false teachings. At stake are real people who are being pulled away from the certainty of Scripture and toward trusting human beings rather than the Word of God. There are people being told that God is not in control by their dominion theology. Real people are being led to believe that the people on the other side of the political aisle are demonic spirits and that their church's goal is to transform the world. Real people put their hope in false miracles and supernatural encounters. Real people with real problems need a real gospel message, and the NAR does not provide one.

The stakes are high. The NAR is not simply a different expression of the same Christian faith. It is a departure from the pure gospel found in Scripture. When the NAR replaces grace with cultural transformation, when they replace Scripture with prophetic revelation, when they

closely mix the two kingdoms so that they appear as one, they have abandoned the true faith. The New Apostolic Reformation has truly perverted the Word of God.

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