

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR)

The concept of contemporary apostolic ministry has raised concerns and resulted in considerable controversy, particularly in North America. Recently, R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec have provided a detailed critique of how apostolic and prophetic ministry operates in certain Charismatic Church circles. In their book *A New Apostolic Reformation?* they argue that we are witnessing the rise of a widespread new movement. Well-known figures they associate with the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) include Bill Johnson, Che Ahn, Cindy Jacobs, Lou Engle, Randy Clark and Yonggi Cho.

C. Peter Wagner

In the USA, increased interest in the idea of contemporary apostolic ministry came with the publication of C. Peter Wagner's book *Apostles Today*. Wagner regarded the ministry of apostles as a missing ingredient in the life of the Church. He saw their restoration as equivalent to a new Reformation and coined the term 'New Apostolic Reformation' in his book *ChurchQuake*. He believed that the recovery of apostolic ministry was the decisive magic bullet, essential to completing the Church's mission in the world. Over time, the term *New Apostolic Reformation* came to describe a loose subset mainly within Evangelical and Charismatic Christianity. While Wagner's teaching has influenced several New Charismatic Churches, it has also drawn people, such as Methodists and Episcopalians, from more established traditions.

Wagner promoted a very hierarchical view of the Ephesians 4 gifts where apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher are almost like titles (offices rather than roles). They represent a leadership structure that we have to adhere to be authentic church. Essentially, the NAR promotes a structure for governance. In this paradigm the ultimate authority lies with apostles. This view is what critics suggest is at the heart of the so-called NAR. Wagner's book *Apostles Today* is subtitled: *biblical government for biblical power*. The error here is, of course, the substitution of *government* for the biblical term *kingdom*. These are two very different concepts.

The Main Issue

Geivett and Pivec state that the NAR purports to be:

...restoring the lost office of apostle to the church – an office endowed with astonishing authority, miraculous powers and divine strategies for establishing God's Kingdom on earth. [and]

The biggest innovation of the New Apostolic Reformation is the belief that apostles, working together with prophets, must take over the governance of the church – taking the reins from pastors, elders and denominational leaders – so that God's end-time plans can be fulfilled...

They suggest that NAR churches view the global Church as an end-time army led by apostles and prophets. Apostles occupy the highest ranks and serve as 'God's generals' in the battle against Satan. Their authority is seen as crucial and the effectiveness of local church leaders is linked to their 'alignment' with these higher ministries.¹ Apostolic leaders in these settings are often seen as uniquely gifted by virtue of their 'apostolic anointing'. This results in the dominance of certain personalities who are likely to be placed on a pedestal. Authority tends to operate top-down, with leaders receiving vision from God, and the local church's role is to follow their direction.

Other Associated Features

Other common features they associate with the NAR include:

- The formation of apostolic and prophetic councils
- Christian Dominionism in its extreme form (taking over rather than serving)
- Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare (in its most Star Wars-like guise)
- Unity only through alignment with the apostles in a region
- The introduction of new revelation and novel teachings - a Gnostic vibe!

An Evaluation

Many of these teachings are circulating – and many in the Church chase novelty - but is this a widespread movement or simply a loose ragbag of books and conference addresses?

For the most part, there is insufficient information about how network leaders, local church leaders, or individuals who are labelled NAR carry out apostolic and prophetic ministry in practice. As Volker Kruger states:

... the academic literature does not yet contain any detailed case studies on the NAR movement's actual apostolic leadership practice.²

Randy Clark has refuted the main claim of the critics and has framed apostolic authority in quite modest terms:

I do not believe for a church to accomplish its mission it must have a prophet or be submitted to an apostle.

Clark also conducted a survey which largely supported the claim that major leaders hold moderate views on apostolic authority – but there are certainly those who are authoritarian in their approach. For the most part, the New Churches have failed to call out aberrant teachings and the practice of mutual accountability needs strengthening or there is considerable reputational risk to various movements.

More later!

¹ See Wagner, *Apostles Today*.

² Volker Kruger, 'An Examination of New Apostolic Reformation Terminology'. In *Spiritus 7.1* (2022), 90. <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1243&context=spiritus> accessed 02.02.2026.