

SIX BIG PROBLEMS WITH THE NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION

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Overview

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) can be characterized as a postmillennial restorationist movement which seeks to restore the so-called lost office of apostle and prophet with the goal of establishing the kingdom of God upon the earth. Six broad values and beliefs of the movement are evaluated in the following order: postmillennialism, restorationism, manufactured continuationism, reconstructionism, experientialism and pragmatism. It is argued that postmillennialism is a weak biblical position and that NAR's brand ("dominionism") wrongly places the responsibility of the kingdom on Christians rather than God. It is argued under restorationism that the office of apostle was never lost to begin with. With manufactured continuationism, there is a forcing and a faking of spiritual gifts resulting in *charismania*. With reconstructionism, Christians are precariously pressured to directly engage in warfare against the forces of darkness to restore dominion lost from the Fall. With experientialism, experience is placed above the Word of God. And finally, with pragmatism, attempts are made to justify NAR by its rapid growth, but this is shown to be a weak argument. All six beliefs and practices are unbiblical and should be avoided along with the movement itself.

Rapid Growth of a "New Apostolic Reformation"

New Apostolic Reformation teaching (hereafter NAR) is wildly popular today. One academic estimated that 66 million have come into "*significant* contact" with NAR teaching in the United States.¹ It is said to be promoted by Trinity Broadcasting Network, Daystar Television, GOD TV, *Charisma* magazine, International House of Prayer (IHOP)² and Youth With A Mission (YWAM). Popular leaders are said to be Bill Johnson (Bethel Church, Redding, CA), Mike Bickle,³ Randy Clark, Todd Bentley, Bill Hamon and the late Fuller Seminary

¹ R Douglas Geivett, *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to the Worldwide Movement* (Wooster: Weaver Book Company, 2014), 12.

² Strong NAR teachers like Rick Joyner and Bill Johnson are featured at IHOP; see note 8.

³ See note 8.

professor C. Peter Wager. NAR is credited for the recent spread of Christianity throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America.⁴ It is one of the fastest growing groups within the church and will soon overtake the category of “protestants.”⁵ It is hoped from within to be a movement as radical as the Protestant Reformation itself.⁶

Characteristics and Practices

In-depth analysis of the movement can be found in writings online and in print.⁷ This short paper will evaluate the movement from a broad perspective to show that its underlying philosophical foundation lacks biblical support. It is important to note that NAR represents *a set of ideas of a movement*; since there is no single organization, not every belief is held by all involved. For example, Mike Bickle of IHOP formally denies dominionism, postmillennialism and the modern office of apostle and prophet, yet he embraces other aspects of NAR teaching.⁸

⁴ Geivett, *A New Apostolic Reformation*, 9.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ C Peter Wagner, ed., *The New Apostolic Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998), 6.

⁷ The most exhaustive academic book on the subject is R Douglas Geivett, *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to the Worldwide Movement* (Wooster: Weaver Book Company, 2014). See the bibliography for other resources.

⁸ Mike Bickle’s past involvement in NAR is seen in his participation in “The New Millennium Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders” in 1999. Bickle sat on the council under the leadership of C. Peter Wagner (the one who coined the phrase “New Apostolic Reformation”). Bill Hamon and other strong NAR advocates had seats as well. A report of the “prophetic” proceedings was submitted at the close of the council which read: “The Government of God [sic] kingdom will be established through the apostolic and prophetic authorities in cities and nations. ... We will see tremendous transfers of wealth into the Kingdom of God through the ministry of market apostles (those with apostolic anointing for business and other areas of society).” (See “Entering the New Millennium,” *The Elijah List*, December 18, 1999, http://www.elijahlist.com/words/display_word/257). There is no indication that Bickle was in disagreement with his council at that time. In that same year (1999), Bill Jackson devoted an entire chapter to Bickle in his book *The Quest for the Radical Middle: A History of the Vineyard*, chapter 11). Jackson affirmed that Bickle believed a “move of God will bring about a reformation in the church that will be integrally linked to the restoration of a mature apostolic and prophetic ministry” (loc. 2614-2615). Jackson confirmed that Bickle held to some or most of the Latter Rain doctrine. He stated Bickle believed “God was now going to restore the offices of apostle and prophet to lay the foundation for a new and glorious church (2523-2524). He added that Bickle’s belief was “consistent with the restorationist thesis that began in the Latter Rain.” (loc. 2615.) Bickle apparently approved of Jackson’s description of him, as he “read at least two drafts” of the manuscript and offered feedback (loc. 55).

Bickle, has distanced himself from NAR beliefs in recent years. His website formally rejects NAR teaching like dominionism, post-millennialism and the modern office of apostle and prophet (cf. “What Is IHOPKC’s Stance On the New Apostolic Reformation?,” International House of Prayer, accessed July 8, 2018). Yet he continues to feature strong NAR teachers on his stage (e.g., Rick Joyner, Bill Johnson) and promotes their teaching in his bookstores (e.g., Bill Hamon, C. Peter Wagner). For example, Rick Joyner is a repeated speaker at IHOP who said “The apostolic ministry that opened the church age will be raised up at the end to complete it. The

In general, this movement can be characterized by six big ideas: postmillennialism, reconstructionism, manufactured continuationism, restorationism, experientialism and pragmatism. These are explained as follows: (1) Postmillennialism: Christ's kingdom is being established upon the earth; NAR's version says the church must not wait for Christ's second coming but has a responsibility to aggressively appropriate God's kingdom upon the earth before he returns. (2) Restorationism: the *offices* (not gift) of apostle and prophet were lost in the early church and must be restored. (3) Manufactured continuationism: all New Testament "sign gifts" are in operation today (this stands in contrast to cessationism which argues these gifts have ceased). The NAR variety can be described as *charismania*, which will be explained later. (4) Reconstructionism: power and wealth must be taken from the world and given to the church. This is accomplished through spiritual warfare methodologies and by infiltrating key areas of culture. (5) Experientialism: manifestations of the Holy Spirit take priority and provide confirmation of the movement's validity. (6) Pragmatism: whatever brings greater numerical results is thought to have been validated by God; NARs numerical success is thought to vouch for its credibility. There are big problems with each of these six areas.

Problems with (Man-Centered) Postmillennialism

There are three competing eschatological views: premillennialism says Christ will return *before* setting up a literal kingdom on earth; amillennialism says *the rule of Christ inside peoples' hearts* is what is meant by the kingdom; and postmillennialism says Christ will establish a kind of rulership on the earth *over time* through increasing success of the gospel. NAR aligns itself with postmillennialism, which historically has been the least supported of the three eschatological views. It especially lost support after WWII when people became convinced the

Lord is restoring the apostolic authority to the church, and soon this will become a major emphasis" (Joyner, *Mobilizing the Army of God*, 215). Joyner's belief in Kingdom Now theology is evidenced by his statement: "Those who live in the reality and power of His kingdom *now* will preach the message of the kingdom. We do not wait for the millennium for Jesus to reign over us. His kingdom is already '*at hand*.'" (Joyner, *A Prophetic Vision for the 21st Century*, 163, emphasis his.)

world was not becoming a better place. There is sufficient biblical and historical evidence to reject it.

Historically, the early church held to premillennialism. Premillennialism is supported by the writings of Clement of Rome (c. 1st century), Ignatius (d. c. 110), Justin Martyr (c. 100-c. 165), Irenaeus (c. 125-c.202), Lactantius (c.240-c.320), the Didache (c. 120-150), Ephraem of Syria (c. 306-373) and even the early Augustine.⁹ We would expect earlier Christians, especially the Apostolic Fathers who knew the NT apostles personally and could get clarification, would be able to shed light on the proper biblical eschatological view. In this case, historic premillennialism wins to the peril of amillennialism and postmillennialism.¹⁰

There is much biblical support for premillennialism. When the disciples asked Jesus at the end of his ministry, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) they most certainly were thinking of a *physical* kingdom like all Jews of their day. Jesus did not rebuke them like other times (cf. Matt. 15:16,17; Mk. 8:17,18; 16:14; Lk. 24:25; Rev. 3:19) only to clarify that the kingdom was merely *spiritual* (amillennialism). Neither did Christ rebuke them and say the church replaces Israel and *its increase over time* would be the fulfillment of the OT promises (postmillennialism). Instead, Jesus simply answered, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.” (Acts 1:7). There is no indication that their expectation of a physical kingdom was wrong.

Of course, the disciples, like all Jews, were expecting a physical kingdom, in physical land because of the many promises given to them in the OT. God promised Abraham land and David a throne. Since “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29) it is proper to assume the promises of physical land and kingdom are yet to be fulfilled. Indeed, this was the expectation at the close of the OT (Isa. 9:6-7; Mal. 3:1) and this expectation continued through

⁹ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 567–571.

¹⁰ Historic premillennialism differs from dispensational premillennialism in that it is post-tribulational. However, there is some pre-tribulational support from these early writers as well (cf. Ephraem of Syria).

the time of Christ. It is true that Christ *does* rule today in the hearts of believers and this is a type of “kingdom” (Luke 17:21; cf., Rom. 14:17; Col. 1:27). Nevertheless, Bible students have good reason to believe that Christ will return physically and establish a real, physical kingdom in Jerusalem where he will rule the nations (see esp. Mic. 4:7; Zec. 14:8-9; Mat. 19:28). Peter, Paul and John all retain this OT expectation throughout their writings—Peter in Acts 3:19-21, 24-25 and 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Paul in 1 Cor. 15:23-26 and Rom. 11:25-26; and John in Rev. 20:1-6.

Premillennialism is arguably the most biblically defensible position.

Nonetheless, the debate over eschatological views is intramural; all three views are within the realm of orthodoxy. Evangelical giants like B. B. Warfield and Charles Hodge held to postmillennialism. What is different with the NAR variety is that it is a radical, man-centered type called “dominionism.” This is the belief that “the kingdom of God must be established by peoples’ hard work and commitment, not by Christ who returns.”¹¹ With dominionism, “the church has a *responsibility* to Christianize the world before Christ’s coming.”¹² This is accomplished through spiritual mapping, prayer walking, and other spiritual warfare practices (see appendix 1). This anthropocentric emphasis on man finds no basis in Scripture where the growth effort of the kingdom is theocentric or God-centered. The plain, normal reading of OT passages like Dan. 2:44 (“God of heaven will set up a kingdom”) and Isa. 9:7 (“the zeal of the Lord will perform this”) would be that it is *God* who will bring about His kingdom. If it were up to man, it would certainly fail. Thank the Lord, it is not up to us!

Problems with Restorationism

NAR believes that the office of apostle was lost and in need of being restored. However, this is not true. It ceased because *the NT apostles* did not appoint successors for themselves. The *only* place we see apostles choosing a replacement is Acts 1:12-26, when Peter stood up and

¹¹ Petri Laitinen, “Spiritual Gifts According to C. Peter Wagner” (diss., Abo Akademi University, 2014), https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/100059/laitinen_petri.pdf, 112.

¹² Ibid. 224, emphasis mine.

proposed a replacement apostle for Judas. It is debatable whether this event was from the Lord since the one they chose is never heard from again. Nonetheless, apparently *there were only two* among them who met the qualifications of having physically accompanied Peter and the other ten “beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us...” (Acts 1:21-22). It is significant that only *two* were qualified despite over *five hundred* seeing the risen Jesus (1 Cor. 15:6).

The NT is simply not concerned with appointing apostles. What we do find is much attention given to the selection and qualifications of elders/bishops (same office) and deacons (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). The reason for the shift from apostle to elder/bishops is that there was no more need for this office once the church had been established. Writing from Rome in AD 60, Paul describes the church as “having been built (past tense) on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). He was most likely thinking of the Old Testament prophets and Twelve who were the initial bearers of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-8). Whatever he meant, the office of apostle (and prophet) was not an office that Paul told his protégés Timothy and Titus to be concerned about (the epistles of 1 Timothy and Titus were written just after Ephesians in AD 63-66).

Neither do we find the office of apostle in early church history. The phrase “the apostles” is used over two hundred times throughout the writings of the Apostolic Fathers.¹³ Yet it always *looks back* to the apostles of the NT era. Nobody reading the early church fathers in their day would find this phrase confusing because the office of apostle did not exist anymore—“the apostles” always referred to the Twelve plus Paul. It would appear that Timothy and Titus faithfully carried out the desires of their mentor, Paul, and established bishop/elders and deacons instead. In short, the claim that the office of apostle was lost in the early church and is in need of being restored has no biblical or historical basis.

¹³ Search conducted by querying “the apostles” in Logos Bible Software using Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), vii.

Problems with Manufactured Continuationism

Continuationism is the belief that all charismatic or “sign gifts” are still in operation today (particularly those mentioned in 1 Cor. 12). This stands in contrast to cessationism which says some or all these gifts have ceased. There is an intramural debate today among Christians as to which view is correct. This is typically seen as a “secondary issue” and there are fine biblical scholars who defend either view. However, what we are seeing today with NAR is *manufactured* continuationism which some have called *charismania*. This kind of charismania is unbiblical.

Spiritual Gifts should not have to be Taught

The Holy Spirit is a person like God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit has a mind (Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 2:11), emotions (He can be grieved; Eph. 4:30) and will (Heb. 2:4; Acts 13:2). The Bible says that at the point of regeneration the Holy Spirit exercises His will in determining which spiritual gift(s) a believer gets (1 Cor. 12:11; cf. Heb. 2:4). It is not up to believers which gift(s) they receive. Paul apparently could impart spiritual gifts as an apostle (Rom. 1:11) but the gift which was imparted was not chosen by Paul but rather the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11; Rom. 12:6).

“Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (1 Cor. 12:30). It is a rhetorical question with the answer, “No!” Yet what we are seeing today with the NAR movement are people being taught how to use the charismatic gifts, as though anybody can have them if they simply learn how to use them. For example, at a “Firestarters” class at Bethel Church in Redding, people are taught how to heal the sick and prophesy. A past attendee reported what happened. Four students who had never prophesied were told to stand on the platform “to be ‘activated’ into the prophetic gift.”¹⁴ They were then told to prophesy in front of the class. After expressing hesitation, the teacher said, “If you don’t know what to say, just start

¹⁴ Holly Pivec, “The Problem with Bethel Redding’s Firestarters ‘Prophetic Activation’ Class, Part 1,” Spirit of Error, June 27, 2017, <http://www.spiritoferror.org/2017/06/the-problem-with-the-firestarters-prophetic-activation-class-at-bethel-redding/6727>.

talking and you'll get there.”¹⁵ There are many such stories. Catrina writes, “We ladies had a morning of being taught how to prophesy. We were told to tell ourselves, ‘I’m going to start prophesying, even if I have to start in the flesh.’”¹⁶

Spiritual Gifts Should Not Have to be “Warmed Up”

Not only does the Holy Spirit decide which gift(s) people get but the Bible says the exercising of the gift(s) is done by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is “one and the same Spirit [who] works all these things...” (1 Cor. 12:7-11). This means that people should not have to “warm up” or “drum up” a gift or try to induce power through some means of their flesh. True workings of the Spirit start and end by the Holy Spirit. What we see today in NAR meetings is not the picture we see in the NT of the Holy Spirit’s work but what Chuck Smith called *charismania*: “Charismania is an endeavor in the flesh to simulate charisma. It is any effort to do the work of the Spirit in the energies or abilities of the flesh - the old, selfish nature of a person. It is a spiritual hype that substitutes perspiration for inspiration.”¹⁷

Evidence Healings being Faked

Miracles in the Bible were always immediate, successful and permanent.¹⁸ One might also add that they were verifiable (Acts 3:8-10). In contrast, when the healings of so-called miracle workers are examined today, they fall short of the NT description. Oral Roberts claimed to have raised people from the dead. When pressed to give reporters examples, he mentioned one girl who, turns out, had merely fainted in a church service.¹⁹ Vineyard claims that “hundreds of people [are] healed every month.”²⁰ However, when pressed, John Wimber gave an example of one woman who was eighty-percent healed of a condition and others who “slowly recovered”

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “Leaving the Nar Church: Catrina's Story,” Pirate Christian Media, April 6, 2017, <http://piratechristian.squarespace.com/berean-examiner/2017/4/leaving-the-nar-church-catrinass-story>.

¹⁷ Chuck Smith, *Charisma Vs. Charismania* (Costa Mesa, CA: Word for Today, 1983), 10.

¹⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Signs and Wonders* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1988), 28, 29.

¹⁹ Ibid., 71.

²⁰ John Wimber in Ibid., 120.

over time.²¹ Benny Hinn claimed to have performed seventy-six miracles at a crusade in Portland. However, when asked to supply the names for an HBO television special, just five names were provided. Each case was followed for one year with the following results: (1) a grandmother with seven broken vertebrae later said pain merely lessened; (2) a man hurt in logging accident thought he was healed but afterward could not even dress himself because of pain; (3) a lady with mild hearing loss later made a normal recovery; (4) a girl suffering from shortness of breath continued to suffer; (5) a girl thought she was healed from cancer but died nine months later.²²

There are examples of miracle workers outright faking miracles. W. V. Grant was caught telling healthy people to sit in wheelchairs and wait until he told them to stand.²³ Perhaps the most embarrassing was in 1986 when Peter Popoff was caught using a wireless earpiece to dupe his audience into thinking he had the power of God to heal. It turned out his wife was reading the details of the prayer cards to her husband over a radio transmission.²⁴ A man with a wireless scanner recorded Popoff's wife transmitting the data to him in real-time and revealed the scam on the Johnny Carson Show.

Alternate Explanations for “Healings”

Dr. William A. Nolen, Chief of Surgery at a hospital in Minnesota believes that the miracle workers he observed were using the power of suggestion to affect peoples' bodies to bring about real healings.²⁵ This is called psychosomatic healing and is known to be a real phenomenon. The mind can affect the body to induce healing. People may simply get better by believing in their treatment. The mind can have such an influence on the body that one man

²¹ Ibid.

²² Joe Nickell, “Benny Hinn: Healer or Hypnotist?,” The Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, accessed July 8, 2018, https://www.csicop.org/si/show/benny_hinn_healer_or_hypnotist.

²³ Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, 64.

²⁴ Robert A. Steiner, “Exposing the Faith-healers,” The Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, accessed July 8, 2018, https://www.csicop.org/si/show/exposing_the_faith-healers.

²⁵ Abell in Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, 20.

“laughed himself well of cancer.”²⁶ A woman’s mind can convince her body that she is pregnant. This is called “false pregnancy” and it produces the same symptoms as a real-pregnancy (minus the baby). Because of the psychosomatic effect, pharmaceutical companies must factor in the “placebo” when evaluating the effectiveness of their medications. Nonetheless, psychosomatic healings do not qualify for biblical miracles.

Others believe faith healers are using hypnosis to convince people they are healed on stage in front of the crowd. Mark Haville is a former faith-healer who confessed,

I learned gradually to do what all these speakers like Copeland, Cerullo, Benny Hinn and others do. They manipulate audiences and individuals simply by the power of suggestion... The techniques are no different to those used by any practicing hypnotist... the people in these meetings are already coming with high expectancy... They are psychological techniques – nothing else.²⁷

Evidence Biblical Healings were Rare

Contrary to popular opinion today, there is a good case for arguing the miracles we read about in the book of Acts became rarer over time. The ability to heal seemed to wane toward the end of Paul’s life. In the early New Testament period (AD 33-60) we see frequent descriptions of healings, even raising the dead. However, in writings from the later period (AD 60-67) we no longer hear of healings, there is no mention of raising the dead, no exorcisms, and tongues are not even mentioned.²⁸ “There is a marked contrast in the use of sign gifts between earlier and later periods in the New Testament.”²⁹ What was done freely and frequently in Acts had slowed or ceased completely (at least it is not mentioned). Paul, who previously could heal a whole island (Acts 28:9) could not even heal Timothy from a simple stomach problem (1 Tim. 5:23).³⁰ Earlier Paul raised the dead, but later he could not even raise Trophimus from a sick bed (2 Tim.

²⁶ Ibid., 80.

²⁷ Mark Haville and Peter Glover, “Ex-Faith Healer Mark Haville Explains the Tricks of the Fake Faith Healing Trade,” The Word on The Word of Faith, May 26, 2009, <https://thewordonthewordoffaithinfoblog.com/2009/05/26/ex-faith-healer/>.

²⁸ Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, 136.

²⁹ Ibid., 136.

³⁰ Ibid., 137.

4:20). Neither could he heal Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:26). Hebrews, written AD 68-69, implies that the sign gifts were past events which confirmed the Gospel (Heb. 2:4). All of these arguments convince some that the supernatural gifts ceased altogether. Even if one believes they are still in operation today, a good dose of skepticism should be in order.

Evidence Revelation being Faked

It is easy for somebody to *claim* to be speaking on behalf of God. Because it is so easy, God put a standard in place in the OT. God said that a false prophet is identified by less than one-hundred percent accuracy: “if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him” (Dt. 18:22). Such a false prophet was to be put to death (Dt. 18:20). The hallmark of true revelation is that it is inspired (from God), infallible (cannot be broken) and inerrant (without error). The Bible says that revelation does not originate “from the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:19)—this speaks of inspiration. Jesus said of the OT Scriptures that not one jot or tittle would fail to come to pass because it was incapable of being broken (Mt. 5:18)—this in infallibility. And God cannot err either intentionally (an absolute moral law-giver cannot deceive) or unintentionally (because He is omniscient). Therefore, since God cannot err or deceive, His Word cannot have error—this speaks of inerrancy. Inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy stand or fall together. All special revelation must have these three characteristics if it is genuine.

NAR teaches there is an abundance of new revelation available today: “There are going to be those in the end time generation who will have Daniel-types of revelatory experiences.”³¹ However, these “revelatory experiences” are said to be a different type of revelation: a revelation that can err and fail from people whose accuracy is said to increase over time (the “best” of the

³¹ Kirk Bennett in Keith Gibson, *Wandering Stars: Contending for the Faith with the New Apostles and Prophets* (Birmingham, Alabama: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2011), loc. 2303-2306.

NAR prophets are said to only be sixty-six percent accurate).³² Despite this, they claim that this revelation is on par with the OT prophets and NT apostles.³³

Because this is not genuine revelation, there are many examples of NAR prophesies that have failed. For example, Rick Joyner and Bob Jones prophesied in 1997 that California would soon be destroyed by earthquakes and nuclear bombs.³⁴ People even sold houses and left jobs (there was harm done). Kim Clement claimed a word from the Lord in 2007 that Osama Bin Laden would be captured in 35 days (he was not).³⁵ In March 2007, Catherine Brown issued a prophetic word that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine; the Great Recession started in December of the same year.³⁶ Many prophesies are so vague they are unfalsifiable.

The “word of knowledge” is related in practice to prophetic revelation. There is reason to be cautious about this too. If the supernatural gift of “word of knowledge” were so abundant today among those who claim to “move in that area,” why does God speak multitudes of things throughout the week but not reveal critically important information? For example, why did God not tell Joyce Meyer, who frequently claims to “hear from the Lord,” anything about her personal bodyguard having an affair while plotting to strangle his entire family to death?³⁷ Why did God withhold the knowledge from C. Peter Wagner that his NAR World Prayer Center co-founder Ted Haggard was using drugs and having sex with male prostitutes? The “word of

³² Ibid., loc. 5843-5844.

³³ Rick Joyner proposes four levels of inspiration for modern prophecy, ranging from the lowest called *impressions* to the highest called *trances* in *The Final Quest* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1996), 8-11. The higher the level, the more certain he says it is that a word is coming from God in an uncorrupted form. He followed this list by saying his book is the highest certainty of revelation: “The visions contained in this book all began with a dream. Some of it came under a very intense sense of the presence of the Lord, but the overwhelming majority was received in some level of a trance.” (*The Final Quest*, 11). Choo Thomas in her bestselling book *Heaven Is so Real!* writes, “Every word in this book is true. The words of Jesus have been transcribed exactly as He said them to me... and I have endeavored to be faithful to every word and experience.” (Choo Thomas, *Heaven Is so Real!* [Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2006], 153.)

³⁴ Gibson, *Wandering Stars*, loc. 6068-6070.

³⁵ Ibid., loc. 5967-5975.

³⁶ Ibid., loc. 6083-6085.

³⁷ Audrey Barrick, “Joyce Meyer's Ex-Bodyguard Convicted of Murder,” *The Christian Post*, May 7, 2011, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/joyce-meyers-ex-bodyguard-convicted-of-murder-50138/>.

knowledge” is either hopelessly unpractical or, more likely, these people are not really exercising the gift that is being described in the Bible. There is also the issue of conflicting “words from the Lord.” In Lizzy’s words, “I had believed to have heard from the Lord that I was going to meet my future husband at this church.” Leaders from her church confirmed her “prophetic word.” But after sharing it with her prospective husband (whom she barely knew) he replied that “he believed God was telling him to pursue another young lady, that God told him to marry someone else...”³⁸ She reports that this experience is common.

Of course, this does not prove these supernatural gifts have ceased. But it does show there are people today who think they have the “word of knowledge” and/or the ability to receive divine revelation but really do not. God has commanded each Christian to “test all things; hold fast what is good.” (1 Thess. 5:21). In other words, *God commands skepticism*. He has told us there would be “many deceivers” (2 John 1:7). Christians have a God-given duty to remain skeptical of anybody who claims to have the ability to receive revelation from God, especially when such revelation is said to be on par with OT prophets and NT apostles. How many things should be tested? The Bible says *all* things. Only what passes the biblical doctrine test should be held onto. Not everyone who claims to have a spiritual message should be implicitly trusted, not even angels (Gal. 1:8). “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God...” (1 Jn. 4:1). Everything must be compared to the Word of God (Acts 17:11).

Problems with Reconstructionism

The idea behind reconstructionism is power and wealth must be redistributed. It must be taken from the world and given to the church. Christians are to radically oust the devil from spiritual strongholds through a variety of spiritual warfare activities. Christians are encouraged to conduct prayer walks throughout neighborhoods to cast out territorial spirits from cities so that the gospel can advance. In prayer rooms that operate around the clock, Christians must battle the

³⁸ “Leaving the Nar Church: Lizzy’s Story (Part 1),” Pirate Christian Media, accessed July 8, 2018, <https://bereanresearch.org/leaving-nar-church-lizzys-story-part-1/>.

demons of sickness and poverty. Every Christian has an obligation to participate in warfare prayer, to do battle with the enemy, to release judgments against demonic forces. Through the “Seven-Mountain Mandate” Christians must cast territorial spirits from the realms of government, media, family, business, education, church, and the arts.³⁹ This activity is the means through which power and wealth is redistributed to the church and the dominion lost at the Fall is restored. Ultimately, reconstructionism reduces to man-centered postmillennialism, which has been addressed above.

The Bible does indeed describe the Christian embroiled in a spiritual war (Ephesians 6:12, 13). There is no issue here. The issue is with the idea that Christians, even *new* ones, have a responsibility to directly engage the forces of darkness to advance God’s kingdom. This idea is not biblical and is precariously dangerous. Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, says that even Michael the archangel avoided direct battle with the devil by appealing to the Lord. He “dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” (Jude 9). Peter knew first-hand what it was like to overestimate one’s own strength and to be sifted as wheat by the devil (Luke 22:31-34). He later described the devil as a “roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Paul writes about the “schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:10-18, ESV) and our need for *defensively* standing firm under attack. Three times “stand” is used (Eph. 6:10, 13, 14) and once “withstand” is used (v. 13). To use Paul’s text as the basis for arguing Christians have an obligation to look for ways to engage the enemy is eisegesis (imposing one’s belief upon the text).

Problems with Experientialism

NAR can also be characterized by experientialism. Experientialism is putting experience over the written Word of God. People are dazzled with what they believe are wonderful and glorious works of God during worship services. Doctrine and theology are considered boring and outdated—they are the “old wineskins” of the past. Jesus is thought to be doing a new work

³⁹ Geivett, *A New Apostolic Reformation*, loc. 3138-3140.

in these last days; he is pouring “new wine into new wineskins.”⁴⁰ There are many stories of visitations by angels, visions of Jesus, people passing into the Third Heaven, out-of-body experiences, people falling into dreams, visions and trances.⁴¹

Pirate Christian Radio has documented fifty-two stories of people who have left NAR over charismania and deception.⁴² Meanie writes, “There was so much supernatural stuff happening, people claiming to be healed, gemstones appearing on the floor, feathers floating from the ceiling, pink clouds, mist and smells such as lemon floating through the air. I wasn’t sure what was making this all happen, but it was mesmerizing.”⁴³ There is much talk in Southern California (where I live) of gold dust falling from the ceiling (called “glory clouds”) at Bethel Church in Redding. This is supposed to be evidence of God’s supernatural activity.

However, experience is a lousy test for truth according to the Bible and this is especially so if we are in the last days. The Bible says spiritual deception will actually *increase* in the last days. When asked about the end times Jesus said, “Take heed that no one deceives you... many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.” (Matt. 24:4, 11). Paul indicates that the end times will be characterized by “deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). He echoed this same thought elsewhere when he said that “the coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception...” (2 Thess. 2:9,10). John writes about a beast in the last days who “performs great signs” and “deceives those who dwell on the earth” with great miracles (Rev. 13:13,14). Jesus had this to say about sign-seekers: “A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign” (Mt. 16:4). Why? Because people can be easily deceived by them.

⁴⁰ C Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today* (Bloomington, MN: Baker Book House, 2012), 139.

⁴¹ Geivett, loc. 3580-3582.

⁴² “Leaving the Nar Church (Search Results),” Pirate Christian Media, accessed July 8, 2018, <http://www.piratechristian.com/berean-examiner/?tag=Leaving+the+NAR+Church>.

⁴³ “Leaving the Nar Church: Melanie’s Story,” Pirate Christian Media, May 30, 2017, <http://piratechristian.squarespace.com/berean-examiner/2017/5/-leaving-the-nar-church-melanies-story>.

Evidence Supernatural Activity being Faked

There is good evidence that these so-called manifestations are simply fake. A veteran professional jeweler and gemologist of forty-four years was given three samples of gold dust from three different “glory cloud” events. When examined under his jeweler’s double microscope, two samples were found to be mylar (synthetic man-made plastic) and one was mica (fool’s gold). In short, “none has been gold.” He was also able to obtain samples of “gemstones” from “angels” appearing in services and concluded they were “synthetic man-made stones.”⁴⁴ On another occasion a geochemist from the University of Toronto did an investigation of “gold dust” and found “the specks did not contain any gold or platinum but were some type of plastic film.”⁴⁵ And yet a third study by the U.S. Geological Survey found it was “plastic film with no traces of gold, platinum or silver.”⁴⁶

But it gets worse. In 2008, Glenn Smith admitted to planting gemstones to “seed” people’s faith in the supernatural work.⁴⁷ Shortly after, J. Lee Grady, the former editor of *Charisma* magazine (a wide supporter of NAR teaching) admonished his followers with the following reality-check:

I know of a case where a man was caught planting fake jewels on the floor of a church. He told his friends he was ‘seeding the room’ to lift the people’s faith. I know of others who have been caught putting gold glitter on themselves in a restroom and then running back in a church service, only to claim that God was blessing them with this special favor. Where is the fear of God when Christians would actually fabricate a miracle?⁴⁸

⁴⁴ See comment 35 by Lillian Ching posted July 26, 2008 on “Gemstones Fraud – Glenn Smith Caught Redhanded!,” End Times Prophetic, Prophecy, Visions, Dreams, Revelation, Christian Blog, accessed Oct 15, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20111015064411/http://endtimespropheticwords.wordpress.com/2008/01/11/gemstones-fraud-glenn-smith-caught-redhanded/>.

⁴⁵ Andy Butcher, “Gold Dust Phenomenon Stirs up Questions Among Charismatics,” *Charisma News Service*, April 10, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20010410101417/http://www.charismanews.com/news.cgi?a=145&t=news.html>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Dennis Box, “Maple Valley Deputy Mayor Glenn Smith Admits to Planting Gemstones at Phoenix Religious Meeting,” *Maple Valley Reporter*, August 3, 2009, <https://www.maplevalleyreporter.com/news/maple-valley-deputy-mayor-glenn-smith-admits-to-planting-gemstones-at-phoenix-religious-meeting/>.

⁴⁸ J. Lee Grady, “Strange Fire in the House of the Lord,” *Charisma Magazine*, February 11, 2009, https://www.charismamag.com/~charisma/component/cm_videos/article/18-blogs/fire-in-my-bones/2942-strange-fire-in-the-house-of-the-lord?Itemid=171.

A few years later, NAR advocate Julia Loren wrote,

...my brothers and sisters are muddying the waters of worship by falsifying signs and wonders... I had one pastor tell me that a young man, who showed great promise and moved in great power, was recently discovered to have fabricated many of the signs and wonders, including gemstones and gold dust appearing.⁴⁹

This spiritual trickery should have disqualified the man from pastoral work (1 Tim. 3; Titus 2). Yet, remarkably, the senior pastor said he “wasn’t sure what to do with him.” It is not a matter of whether these tricksters love Jesus. Before one man was caught “kicking gemstones out of his shoes and tossing them into dark corners of the room” Loren was “quite taken by his sincerity and the love he had for Jesus.”⁵⁰ It would be very easy to fake the so called “glory clouds” as well. The clouds appear to be like those generated from fog machines in online videos.⁵¹ If pastors have been caught “seeding” peoples’ faith planting fake gemstones it is not unreasonable to think they are doing it with fog machines. Why then do sincere pastors commit and condone spiritual fraud? Loren thinks the reason is because “most are ambitious to build a great ministry reputation and expand their opportunities for itinerant ministry as well.”⁵²

Of course, a few forgeries do not prove every manifestation is false. However, considering the history of fraud and the weight of evidence in this paper, it is appropriate to cry, “Foul!”

The Wrong Emphasis

It is time to raise the alarm and warn people about putting their trust in “supernatural” experiences and putting it in Scripture where it belongs. NAR proponents seek to validate NAR teaching through experience, while the biblical mandate is to validate experience by Scripture. The Bible says it is a noble thing to check what people are teaching and compare it to the Word

⁴⁹ Julia C. Loren, *Supernatural Anointing: A Manual for Increasing Your Anointing*, Shifting Shadows Series (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2012), 140, 141.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 141.

⁵¹ Joshua Mills, “Here’s a much better video of the Glory Cloud that came upon the church last night in Pensacola, Florida,” Facebook, November 6, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/joshuamillsglory/videos/1733116320034201/>.

⁵² Loren, *Supernatural Anointing*, 141.

(Acts 17:11). Despite claims to the contrary, the Bible puts a premium on knowledge of Scripture. The Bible is our source of spiritual growth: we are supposed to “desire the pure milk of the word [i.e., written revelation of the Bible], that you may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). Our lives are to be set apart by God’s written Word (John 17:17). Leaders are required to “rightly divide the Word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). They are to know the Word so well that they should be ready to “preach the word” any time (“in season and out of season,” 2 Tim. 4:2). The emphasis in the NT is not on miracles, emotions or experience but the Word of God.

Problems with Pragmatism

Pragmatism is the philosophy that whatever works is right. C. Peter Wagner is credited as one of the fathers of the NAR movement. He writes, “The theories I like best are, frankly, the ones that work.”⁵³ According to Wagner, numerical growth is a sign of God’s approval, especially in the areas of church growth and evangelism. Wagner points to statistics, viz., the rapid growth of NAR in Africa, Asia and Latin America, as evidence of its divine origin.⁵⁴ Whatever brings greater numerical results is thought to be validated by God. However, this does not follow. Whatever is biblical works, but not everything that works is biblical. Unethical business practices might make a business successful in man’s eyes, but it is a rotten foundation to God. Stealing bread might work for feeding the family but it is not right. Planting gemstones in a service might work for bringing a person to faith in Christ, but certainly the practice is not biblical. Appealing to the explosive growth of Islam is not good evidence that it is from God.

It is not biblical to ultimately judge the orthodoxy of a movement by how many people it reaches. Orthodoxy is judged by how faithful a person or movement is to *Scripture*. The preaching of the true gospel might not yield many converts (1 Cor. 1:22, 23) while the preaching of heresy reaches many (e.g., the rapid growth of the Christian cults). Jesus said the gate to

⁵³ Laitinen, 31, 32.

⁵⁴ Holly Pivec, “The New Apostolic Reformation: Influence and Teachings,” Apologetics Index, accessed July 8, 2018, <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/2977-new-apostolic-reformation-overview>.

destruction was broad, “and there are many who go in by it” (Matt. 7:13). But the gate to life is narrow, “and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:14). The implication is that the crowd can be wrong. Appealing to the crowd is not always the best test for truth; this is called *consensus gentium* and is an informal fallacy in logic.

Sadly, the picture the Bible paints of the church in the end days is that most people will turn away from the sound doctrine of Scripture. Paul’s biblical charge is: “Preach *the word*; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.” (2 Timothy 4:2,3) We seem to find ourselves in such a time.

Conclusion

Six broad values and beliefs of NAR have been evaluated in the following order: postmillennialism, restorationism, manufactured continuationism, reconstructionism, experientialism and pragmatism. All six areas of the movement are unbiblical and should be avoided.

Appendix 1 – Identifying NAR Theology

The following catchphrases can also be used to identify groups that have been impacted in some way by NAR theology: (1) Fivefold Ministry: The teaching that the five valid church offices are *apostles, prophets*, evangelists, pastors and teachers. (2) Kingdom Now and Dominionism: Control of the earth was lost at the Fall; the church must take dominion of it. (3) Seven Mountain Mandate: Territorial spirits must be cast out of the realms of government, media, family, business, education, church, and the arts.⁵⁵ (4) Prayer Walking: Walking through an area of a city with the purpose of praying against its territorial spirit(s). (5) Warfare Prayer: Continually operating prayer rooms are thought to release judgments against demonic forces. (6) Gospel of the Kingdom: The Gospel of Salvation teaches salvation from sin while the Gospel of the Kingdom teaches we need to take dominion. (7) Soaking: “Soaking in God’s presence” is accompanied by dreams, visions, trances, even visitations by angels and out-of-body experiences.⁵⁶ (8) End-Time Transfer of Wealth: The process of God transferring control of the world’s wealth to the ruling apostles of today.

⁵⁵ Geivett, *A New Apostolic Reformation*, loc. 3138-3140.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, loc. 3580-3582.

Appendix 2 – Links in the NAR Chain

Here is his list of “truths” that have been restored to date according to NAR teaching.⁵⁷

NAR is built on the foundation of these other movements, some of which are biblically suspect themselves.

Date	Movement	Description
1500	Protestant	Salvation by grace through faith
1600	Evangelical	Water baptism, separation of church and state
1700	Holiness	Sanctification, the church set apart from the world
1800	Faith Healing	Divine physical healing in the atonement
1900	Pentecostal	Holy Spirit baptism with unknown tongues
1950	Latter Rain	Prophetic presbytery, singing praises
1950	Deliverance Evangelism	Evangelist ministry, evangelism with miraculous healings
1960	Charismatic	Renewal of all restored truth to all past movement churches
1970	Faith	Faith confessions, prosperity, and victorious attitude and life
1980	Prophetic	Prophetic, activating gifts, warfare praise, prophets to nations
1990	Apostolic	Apostolic, miraculous, networking, great harvest
2007	Saints	Saints manifesting mightily, harvest reaped

⁵⁷ List from Ibid., loc. 2209-2233.

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