

Dispelling the Myths About the New Apostolic Reformation

The warnings are dire indeed. “The world’s fastest growing sect of Christianity is not Christian at all. And chances are very high that your child and church are getting infected.”

Yes, this ministry website tells us, “The New Apostolic Reformation movement and the Jesus Culture worship band boasts of 369 million adherents.”

What, exactly is this New Apostolic Reformation (abbreviated NAR)?

According to the website, “The New Apostolic Reformation worships God drunk in the spirit and they teach scant amounts of truth. Christians do not need to be aware of each and every false teacher on the planet. But the New Apostolic Reformation is the most influential aberrant movement the church has ever seen.”

And so, the website urges, buy this one-hour DVD and you will find out how terrible this “influential aberrant” movement is.

Seriously? This alleged “sect” boasts 369 million adherents? Where did this figure come from? And why is it that most of these 369 million adherents (who think they are Christian but are not) have likely never heard of NAR?

I was doing my radio show last year when, during a break, my producer and I heard an ad playing for this DVD. We were absolutely shocked. What in the world were they talking about? What is this massive, dangerous “NAR”?

During the 2016 presidential campaign, I had seen articles on radical-left websites accusing political leaders like Ted Cruz of being part of “NAR.” By this the critics meant an alleged

Christian dominionist movement that wanted to take over America. But that, apparently, was quite different than this new description of NAR, since most of its supposed followers are not dominionist.

So I continued to wonder, "What is this so-called NAR?" I was familiar with the term New Apostolic Reformation, coined by Peter Wagner (more on this below), but it hardly resembled this ominous new "NAR."

To make matters more interesting, last year, some colleagues began sending me links to articles and videos attacking me as one of the leaders of NAR. Worse still, the websites claimed, I denied being part of it. How nefarious and dishonest of me! (To this moment, when I tell the truth about "NAR," I'm called a liar. It would be very funny it wasn't very sad.)

I began to ask other colleagues about NAR (or, in full, the New Apostolic Reformation). Almost to a person, they responded, "What is NAR?" Yet they, too, were alleged leaders in this so-called world movement! How is it they never heard of it either? (According to the critics, all of us are lying about our involvement in NAR because we're embarrassed by it. Honestly, these critics could make better use of their time writing a novel about the Illuminati.)

So where is all the confusion and misinformation coming from? Why are these critics making such outlandish charges? As best I can see, this is the progression.

First, Dr. Peter Wagner coined the term the New Apostolic Reformation to describe what he saw as a growing church trend. He wrote in 2011, "The roots of the NAR go back to the beginning of the African Independent Church Movement in 1900, the Chinese House Church Movement beginning in 1976, the U.S. Independent Charismatic Movement beginning in the 1970s and the Latin American Grassroots Church Movement beginning around the same time. I was neither the founder nor a member of any

of these movements, I was simply a professor who observed that they were the fastest growing churches in their respective regions and that they had a number of common characteristics.”

So, you can see what a broad description this is, and again, it was Dr. Wagner’s personal way of categorizing a worldwide, century-old, multi-faceted church growth movement. And many of the church groups he described did not use the term “apostles” for their leaders today.

Second, Dr. Wagner himself led something called the New Apostolic Reformation, and it was in that specific context I was familiar with the term. This was the “NAR” I knew about. It had distinct teachings on apostolic ministry, some of which I agreed with and some of which I rejected. I was never part of the organization, which also had specific membership requirements and annual meetings.

To this day, when I bring up NAR to colleagues, either they have no idea what I’m referring to, or else they say, “That was Peter Wagner’s organization.”

I was having dinner recently with a well-known charismatic leader and asked him, “What’s the first thing that comes to mind when you think of NAR?”

He responded immediately with, “It was a good attempt by Peter Wagner, but I strongly differed with him on a number of key points, which is why I never joined it.” (For the record, he was quite shocked when I told him that, according to the critics, he was also a major NAR leader!)

So, in this leader’s mind, the New Apostolic Reformation spoke of something very specific, and that’s how almost all of us who traveled in these same circles understood it. That’s why we’re scratching our heads today trying to understand how this term came to be used to describe this alleged worldwide, demonic movement. How in the world did this happen?

It appears that some of this can be traced back to Prof. Doug Geivett and Holly Pivec, who wrote the book *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement*. In this book, they included charismatic leaders who believe in fivefold ministry today (as I have, for decades) and grouped them together as part of NAR. The book also painted a very negative picture, although I believe that the authors were sincere in their writing and sought to do solid research.

In the end, we are left with a totally ambiguous picture of what NAR actually is, making it all the more dangerous in the minds of the conspiratorial critics, who inevitably believe the worst. (Just look at Holly's website where she tells you how to identify a NAR church and tell me if it's clear to you. Even after a two-hour dialogue with Doug and Holly, I'm still not certain as to how they identify NAR leaders or churches.)

Does it matter that Mike Bickle's IHOP KC put out a categorical statement differing with some of the alleged tenets of NAR? Not at all. That just proves their duplicity. (The IHOP KC website also gives a helpful history of some of Peter Wagner's writings on the subject.)

Another website claims to give "The Six Hallmarks of a NAR Church." But first, it explains that NAR is not a specific organization. Instead, the website states, "Supernatural Signs & Wonders; Dominionism; The Latter Rain Movement; Joel's Army; The 7 Mountain Mandate; Third Wave Revivalism; IHOP; Bill Johnson's Bethel Church, The Hillsong Media Empire, these are all a part of this shape-shifting movement in one way or another. It is gobbling up churches and deceiving millions who don't even know they've become a part of an apostate, end-times falling away."

So, if you enjoy Hillsong worship songs, you're part of NAR, and you are apostate. (Surprise!) If you believe God confirms His Word with signs, wonders and miracles, you're part of NAR, and you have fallen away. (Yes, surprise again!) If you

believe the church should make a positive impact on the culture through the gospel, you're part of NAR, even if you repudiate dominionism. (Sorry, but that's what the critics say!) And if your church hosts 24-7 prayer, you're NAR. (Holly's website lists this as a tell-tale sign.)

In short, what the critics have basically done is take whatever trends they differ with in the worldwide Pentecostal-charismatic movement, group them all together and put them under the heading of NAR—even though this is *not* what NAR has ever meant. So, they have taken a term that had a specific meaning for years, put their own definition on it, and then decided who is part of it, regardless of how the facts line up. It would be just as misleading and inaccurate as referring to all non-charismatics as part of Pastor John MacArthur's Strange Fire Movement (SFM).

You don't agree with Pastor MacArthur? Doesn't matter. You think Strange Fire went too far? Not an issue. If you're non-charismatic, you're part of SFM because I say you are. Yes, this is utterly ridiculous—but no more ridiculous than the critics' description of "NAR."

That's why I have raised my voice repeatedly in recent months to debunk the myth of NAR: What the critics describe simply doesn't exist. (For my most recent attempt to clarify this, watch this video. For my belief in fivefold ministry, go here.)

To give a specific example, the first of the alleged six hallmarks of a NAR church is this: "There are new apostles on the earth today, anointed by the laying of hands to represent and speak for God here on earth. These 'super apostles' are equal to the original apostles—the ones who witnessed Jesus' life, death and resurrection and were appointed by Christ Himself to the office. Since these new apostles are commissioned by God, their authority may not be questioned."

I work with plenty of leaders who believe in apostolic ministry today, but I don't know any of them who believe they "are equal to the original apostles" or who say "their authority may not be questioned." Not one. And if I met someone like that, I'd rebuke them to their face.

If anything, I've seen domineering pastors who claim they are appointed by God and cannot be questioned. But this description of alleged super apostles is utterly foreign to me and utterly foreign to my closest ministry colleagues. Yet all of us are allegedly part of NAR.

Recently, Dr. Joseph Mattera, who leads the organization once led by Peter Wagner, wrote two articles in which he strongly rejected some of the tenets of Wagner's NAR. (See [here](#) and [here](#); for our hour-long interview, go [here](#).) But this doesn't matter to the critics. They simply heap scorn on him for being part of NAR and denying it. Do these critics really care about the facts?

The truth be told, the reason I and others have taken time to clarify issues is out of love for the body of Christ as a whole. The critics are not my concern. Their attacks fuel my fire and encourage me all the more to stand for what is right. I simply feel bad for them personally and grieve over any confusion they cause in the Church.

But again, that's why I've taken time to try to clarify issues: I'm concerned about the unity of the Church, and I see the work of these critics as being divisive and destructive, more harmful than helpful.

As for those who think I want to look the other way and ignore abuses, may I remind you that my most recent book, *Playing with Holy Fire*, is devoted entirely to addressing abuses in our house—meaning, in the Pentecostal-charismatic Church? If you've read the book, you can attest that I pull no punches. You'll also know that I critique some aspects of contemporary

“apostolic ministry.”

My suggestion, then, for those who want to be constructive is this.

First, get rid of the extreme rhetoric (“not Christian”; “aberrant movement” and so on). You’re slandering your brothers and sisters.

Second, drop the general term NAR. It’s ambiguous at best and misleading at worst and should only be used with reference to the organization once led by Peter Wagner.

Third, don’t put widely disparate groups under the same heading. That only leads to confusion.

Fourth, identify the beliefs or practices you question, be sure you rightly understand them from an insider perspective, then respond to them based on Scripture and fruit. Fifth, recognize the wonderful things the Spirit is doing around the world today.

This way, rather than scaring people with false accusations of a conspiratorial, worldwide, demonic movement, you can engage in constructive, fruitful interaction. That way, you can build up more than tear down. Isn’t that the goal we all share?