

How to Have a Constructive Conversation About the New Apostolic Reformation

This past Saturday, Aug. 13, I had the pleasure of spending four hours in face-to-face dialogue with Doug Geivett and Holly Pivec, best known for their jointly authored books *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* and *God's Super-Apostles: Encountering the Worldwide Prophets and Apostles Movement*.

Our purpose was not to debate but rather to have a constructive discussion about what they would classify as "NAR." Where did we agree and where did we differ? (For the rest of the article, I'll drop the quotation marks around NAR so as not to be redundant. But whenever I say NAR, I mean, "What Geivett and Pivec describe as NAR.")

In my view, they have painted with too broad a brush, wrongly grouping together related but different movements, churches and individuals, labeling all of them NAR while using extreme examples to negatively color the whole.

In their view, they have been careful, judicious and fair in their citations, using the very language that NAR proponents would use and rightly describing a global movement that does, in fact, have a number of key unifying factors.

In my view, having worked on some level with a number of the leaders they critique, Geivett and Pivec are putting the worst construction on the words and ministry philosophies of these leaders.

In Geivett's and Pivec's view, they are quoting these leaders accurately and in context, and they can point to many examples of people who have been hurt by NAR leaders and churches.

Having said this, I believe in Geivett and Pivec's sincerity. I believe they want to be fair. I believe they truly desire to dialogue with those they are critiquing. And, most importantly, I agree with many of their critiques.

That's why, in preparation for our meeting, my prayer was that the Lord would be glorified and His people edified. And that's why we met together to have a discussion rather than a debate.

Hopefully, in the months to come, others will be able to benefit from our dialogue, which was videotaped with the goal of future release.

For now, I would propose that rather than continuing to debate the existence or scope of NAR (which has been a major point of contention for me), we focus on the actual issues.

When you say NAR, what do you mean? How do you define it, and what are your areas of concern (or agreement)?

If you say, "That's an NAR church," or, "He's a major leader in NAR," my response is, "Please tell me exactly what you mean by NAR." This is not to be argumentative but to gain understanding.

Perhaps we're talking about two different things?

Have you ever talked with an atheist who told you why he didn't believe in God, only to respond, "I don't believe in that God either!"

It could be the same thing when it comes to NAR.

For example, all NAR churches are charismatic, but not all charismatics are NAR, meaning NAR here as defined by Geivett and Pivec in their writings. Conversely, all NAR churches believe in present day apostolic and prophetic ministry, but not all churches which believe in present day apostolic and prophetic ministry are NAR.

Based on my understanding of the Word and of different ministry functions and giftings, I strongly believe in the continuance of apostolic and prophetic ministry. I also believe it's important for the overall health of the church to recognize these ministry functions, just as it's important to recognize the functions and giftings of evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

Each calling complements the other. Each calling plays a different role in equipping and edifying the body. And each calling presents a different aspect of the ministry of Jesus to His church.

At the same time, I reject "the governing offices of apostle and prophet" (this is how Doug and Holly described what, in their mind, is the most fundamental pillar of NAR).

But what, exactly, does this mean?

Do I believe that apostles (or prophets) can govern? Absolutely, just as evangelists, pastors and teachers can govern.

All of them can potentially lead churches or birth movements or serve as spiritual fathers in a region.

Do I believe in the office of apostle or prophet? No I don't, just as I don't believe in the office of evangelist, pastor or teacher.

But, to ask again, what exactly is the difference between ministry function and office?

For some believers, this is quibbling over words and splitting hairs. To others, these distinctions are important.

Either way, if we don't talk to each other and make efforts to understand each other, how can we help each other grow in the Lord? How can we pursue unity? How can we sharpen each other? How can we learn from each other? How can we correct each

other?

During the course of our dialogue, Pivec read numerous quotes to me from different NAR leaders, many of whom I knew personally and some of whom I have worked with.

To my knowledge, those I have worked with are fine Christians, true servant leaders, not authoritarian or heavy-handed, lovers of the Lord and lovers of the Word, sound in their fundamental theology.

At the same time, when asked if I agreed with the quotes Holly read, I responded consistently, "No, I don't agree with that position," or, "I would not put it like that," or, "Yes, I agree with your concerns."

Welcome to life in the church!

I have worked with hundreds of leaders over the years, some of whom I agree with on virtually every point, some of whom I agree with on many points and some of whom I agree with only on the most fundamental matters of the faith. (One leader said to me jokingly, "Sometimes I don't even agree with myself!")

Personally, I don't have the slightest problem when a colleague says to me, "Mike, I think you're wrong on this issue." And it wouldn't offend me in the least if, when questioned publicly about our differences, they said, "I disagree with Dr. Brown on this point for the following reasons."

Wonderful! Let's put the issues on the table and have a constructive conversation about them.

Who said we had to agree on every point to have unity? To the contrary, we are more likely to find true unity in the midst of our diversity. And I can say to you as a fellow leader, "I have the utmost respect for you and I honor you in the Lord, but I don't agree with this statement you made."

These disagreements may provide fodder for the destructive critics, but for the rest of the body of Christ, this is a sign of being healthy and mature.

That being said, the big question in the context of this article is: What, exactly, are the distinctive beliefs and practices of what Geivett and Pivec refer to as NAR, and are these beliefs and practices biblical and helpful or unbiblical and harmful?

To say it again, I believe in the importance of recognizing apostolic and prophetic ministry today while also sharing many of Geivett's and Pivec's concerns. (I hate to disappoint some of the critics, but based on Geivett's and Pivec's criteria, I am decidedly not NAR.)

And it is my hope that, in the days ahead, while helping to cultivate solid, mature, biblically based, Spirit-empowered fivefold ministry, I can help amplify areas of concern when it comes to contemporary apostles and prophets.

Let us talk, let us understand and let us grow! {eoa}

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