

The Truth About The New Apostolic Reformation

They make an odd couple—Christian conservatives and secular media. Yet they’ve locked arms in charging that the New Apostolic Reformation is a shadowy cult seeking to control the outcome of the 2012 U.S. presidential elections. Here’s my answer to their claim.

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) has recently become a topic of discussion in the political media. I noticed some mention of it in connection with Sarah Palin’s run for vice president, but I considered it relatively insignificant. Then more talk of NAR surfaced around Michele Bachmann, but it soared to a new level when Texas Gov. Rick Perry entered the race for the Republican nomination for president in August.

On Aug. 24, NPR aired a story (and published it elsewhere) titled “The Evangelicals Engaged in Spiritual Warfare,” naming me as NAR’s architect and tying Perry and other politicians to NAR in a negative light. Since then, I’ve been observing how the media has sought to taint Christian political candidates with false notions about the movement.

The best I can discern, NAR has become a tool in the hands of certain liberal opponents of the conservative candidates designed to discredit them on the

basis of their friendship with Christian leaders supposedly affiliated with NAR. To bolster this attempt, they accuse NAR of teaching false doctrine and paste on it the label of “cult.”

For example, Forgotten Word Ministries posted an article by conservative Christian writer Marsha West questioning Perry’s

prayer assembly in Houston on Aug. 6 that was titled: "Texas Governor's Upcoming Leadership Event Includes Cult Members." Al-Jazeera News picked up on the theme and posted an article on NAR under the title "America's Own Taliban," calling me the "intellectual godfather" of the movement. When I read that, I felt I had to bring some clarification to what NAR is, what its goals are and how the goals are being implemented.

What Is NAR?

NAR is definitely not a cult. Those who affiliate with it believe the Apostles' Creed and all the standard classic statements of Christian doctrine. NAR embraces the largest non-Catholic segment of global Christianity—the fastest-growing segment, and the only segment of Christianity currently growing faster than the world population and faster than Islam. Christianity is booming now in the "Global South," which includes sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and large parts of Asia. Most of the new churches in the Global South (including many denominational ones) would comfortably fit the NAR template.

NAR represents the most radical change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation. This is not a doctrinal change. We adhere to the major tenets of the Reformation: the authority of Scripture, justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers. But the quality of church life, the governance of the church, the worship, the theology of prayer, the missional goals, the optimistic vision for the future and other features constitute quite a change from traditional Protestantism.

NAR is not an organization. No one can join or carry a card. It has no leader. I have been called the "founder," but this is not the case. One reason I might be seen as an "intellectual godfather" is that I might have been the first to observe the movement, give a name to it and describe its characteristics. When this began to come together through my

research in 1993, I was professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., where I taught for 30 years.

NAR has no official statements of theology or ecclesiology, although a large number of us do happen to agree upon many somewhat radical conclusions. Most of us have long track records of service within traditional Christianity, and we have needed to go through paradigm shifts to get where we are now. Keep in mind that one of the effects of every paradigm shift is opposition. One reason for the opposition to some of the more radical ideas of NAR is that certain people have decided not to change, and they are upset with those who have.

The roots of 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 simply a professor who observed that these movements included the fastest-growing churches in their respective regions and that they had numerous common characteristics.

Because I was going to write about this phenomenal move of the Holy Spirit, I knew I had to give it a name. In 1994, I tested "New Apostolic Reformation." I chose "Reformation" because the movement matched the Protestant Reformation in world impact; "Apostolic" because, of all the changes, the most radical one was "apostolic governance" (I'll explain this shortly); and "New" because several churches and denominations already carried the name "apostolic" but did not fit the NAR pattern.

Concerns About NAR

✖ If the critics are using openness to NAR as a slur against the conservative political candidates, they obviously need to verbalize what could be wrong with NAR in the first place. To suppose that NAR is a "cult" or that it teaches "heresy"

can be attributed only to sloppy or immature journalism.

All too often *heresy* has come to mean only that the person disagrees with me and with my friends. The purpose of using the word is to project guilt by association on the politician. It attempts to implant a question: Who would vote for a heretic?

But there is little evidence presented that the issue in question incorporates the doctrinal unorthodoxy of a true heresy. Instead, key words are usually dropped that describe legitimate areas of disagreement among Christian theologians.

From the media pieces about NAR that I have collected, I've picked out some key words I will discuss now in order to clarify my position. I say "my position" because others in NAR might not agree with me, and they are not compelled to do so.

Apostolic Governance. This is probably the most radical change. I take literally the apostle Paul's words that Jesus, at His ascension into heaven, "gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:11-12). Most of traditional Christianity accepts evangelists, pastors and teachers but not apostles and prophets.

I think all five are given to be active in churches today. In fact, Paul goes on to say, "And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers" (1 Cor. 12:28). This does not describe a hierarchy but a divine order. Apostles are first in that order.

I strongly object to journalists using the adjective "self-appointed" or "self-declared" when referring to apostles. No true apostle is self-appointed. They are first gifted by God for that ministry; then the gift and its fruit are recognized by peers and the person is "set in" or "commissioned" to the office of apostle by respected and qualified leaders.

The Office of Prophet. Prophets are prominent in the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Every apostle needs alignment with prophets, and every prophet needs apostolic alignment. One of the reasons both should be active in our churches today is that the Bible says, "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). And also: "Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper" (2 Chron. 20:20).

Dominionism. This refers to the desire that some of my friends and I have to follow Jesus and do what He wants. He taught us in the Lord's Prayer to pray for one thing that He wants: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

This means we do our best to see that what we know is characteristic of heaven works its way into our societies. Think of heaven: no injustice, no poverty, righteousness, peace, prosperity, no disease, love, no corruption, no crime, no misery, no racism—and I could go on. Wouldn't you like your city to display those characteristics?

But where does dominion come in? On the first page of the Bible, God told Adam and Eve to "fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea [etc.]" (Gen. 1:28). Adam, Eve and the entire human race were to take dominion over the rest of creation, but Satan entered the picture, succeeded in usurping Adam's dominion for himself and became what Jesus called "the ruler of this world" (see John 14:30).

Jesus brought the kingdom of God, and He expects His kingdom-minded people to take whatever action is needed to push back the long-standing kingdom of Satan and bring the peace and prosperity of His kingdom on earth. This is what we mean by *dominionism*.

A Theocracy. The usual meaning of theocracy is that a nation

is run by authorized representatives of the church or its functional religious equivalent. Everyone I know in NAR would absolutely reject this idea.

The way to achieve dominion is not to become “America’s Taliban,” but to have kingdom-minded people in every one of society’s “seven mountains”—Religion, Family, Education, Government, Media, Arts and Entertainment, and Business—so they can use their influence to create an environment in which the blessings and prosperity of the kingdom of God can permeate all areas of society.

Extra-Biblical Revelation. Some object to the notion that God communicates directly with us, supposing that everything God wanted to reveal He revealed in the Bible. This cannot be true, however, because there is nothing in the Bible that says it has 66 books. It actually took God a couple hundred years to reveal to the church which writings should be included in the Bible and which should not. That is extra-biblical revelation. Even so, Catholics and Protestants still disagree on the number of books.

Beyond that, I believe prayer is two-way: We speak to God and expect Him to speak with us. We can hear God’s voice. He also reveals new things to prophets, as we have seen. The one major rule governing any new revelation from God is that it can’t contradict what has already been written in the Bible. It may supplement it, however.

Supernatural Signs and Wonders. I have a hard time understanding why some include this in their list of heresies. Whenever Jesus sent out His disciples, He told them to heal the sick and cast out demons. Why we should expect that He has anything else in mind for us today is puzzling. True, this still pulls some traditionalists out of their comfort zones, but that just goes with the territory. One critic claimed that NAR has an excessive fixation on Satan and demonic spirits. This is purely a judgment call, and it may only mean that we

cast out more demons than they do. So what?

Relational Structures

Some of the authors I read expressed certain frustrations because they found it difficult to get their arms around NAR. They couldn't find a top leader or even a leadership team. There was no newsletter. NAR didn't have an annual meeting. There was no printed doctrinal statement or code of ethics. For them, this was very different from dealing with traditional denominations.

The reason behind this is, whereas denominations are legal structures, NAR is a relational structure. Everyone is related to or aligned with an apostle or apostles. This alignment is voluntary. There is no legal tie that binds it. Apostles are not in competition with each other, they are in cahoots. They do not seek the best for themselves but for those who choose to align with them. If the spotlight comes on them, they will accept it, but they do not seek it.

In the end, the mutual and overriding motivation of all those affiliated with NAR is: "Your [God's] kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!"

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