

Daniel Kolenda Exposes the NAR Conspiracy

Have you heard of the New Apostolic Reformation? Some people say it's a nefarious organization of heretical charismatics who are scheming to take over the entire world. The conspiracy theories surrounding the NAR range from mere speculations to full-blown Illuminati-type accusations. However, after talking with those accused of being a part of the NAR, I realized they had never even heard of the group and were shocked to find out they were among its "members." In fact, I now believe these theories point to nothing more than the discord between traditional evangelicals and charismatics that we've known about for years.

After hearing questions about the NAR come up multiple times from our listening audience, I took several months to research this subject to make certain I had the full picture. Then I decided to share what I discovered in a recent episode of my new podcast, Daniel Kolenda, Off the Record. During the podcast, I play audio recordings and published quotes from the accusers, addressing each of their accusations head-on. I will summarize my findings in this article, but for more detail, please listen to the podcast.

My quest began when I received a question from one of my podcast listeners named Max, all the way from Germany. He had heard rumors about the NAR in his congregation and was shocked to hear I had been named as one of its members.

Max wrote, "At some point, I read that Daniel Kolenda is a part of this movement and that he would believe [its teachings] himself. My first thought was, definitely not! After everything I've read and heard from you, I can't even imagine that you believe [like the NAR] even in part. But since statements from some of these 'members' find their way

into our congregation, I would be very interested in what is this New Apostolic Reformation all about, and what exactly are the goals of this organization/movement.”

Significant Trend or Concerning Movement?

Where did the term New Apostolic Reformation originate? C. Peter Wagner, a church growth expert and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, coined the phrase. Unfortunately, Wagner died in 2016, so we can't ask him to address the matter. However, he lived long enough to see the beginnings of the snowball effect he unintentionally started. He gave a public response, explaining the reasons he coined the terminology, in an article published on August 24, 2011, on Charisma News:

“The 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 as I saw them. When this began to come together through my research in 1993, I was professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, where I taught for 30 years.”

This means there is no organization, ministry or denomination called the NAR. Wagner simply coined a phrase to describe a real phenomenon he had seen happening all over the world for the past 50 years or so. He noticed the shift because, for most of church history, there were basically one or two main Christian denominations, but then thousands of nondenominational church movements began experiencing exponential growth. Some of these church movements grew so large they dwarfed the mainline denominations in some regions.

This isn't just a Pentecostal or charismatic movement; it's a significant trend that crosses over into all sectors of the church at large. This is why Wagner described it as

“independent,” and he was correct. Had he gone with the term “postdenominational” as a title for the movement rather than the “New Apostolic Reformation,” I doubt there would have been any backlash. Instead, critics have grabbed hold of his term and taken full advantage of Wagner’s innocent, albeit unfortunate, attempt to describe this type of church growth. I now believe the critics have done this as a way to push a nefarious agenda of their own.

The Wikipedia entry for the NAR is a great example. Here’s what this online outlet gives as a definition:

“The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is a movement which seeks to establish a fifth branch within Christendom, distinct from Catholicism, Protestantism (which includes Pentecostalism), Oriental Orthodoxy, and Eastern Orthodoxy. The movement largely consists of churches nominally or formerly associated with Pentecostal denominations and Charismatic movements but have diverged from traditional Pentecostal and Charismatic theology in that it advocates for the restoration of the lost offices of church governance, namely the offices of prophet and apostle.”

If we examine the source for this entry, we find only one citation for the definition of the NAR, and it points to one Charisma News article from 2011. When we compare the Wikipedia entry to the source itself, we realize it doesn’t support anything Wikipedia says other than the part about advocating for the restoration of the offices of apostles and prophets. The rest is completely unsubstantiated. I mention this because I find this typical, not only for this Wikipedia entry, but more generally for people who discuss the NAR. Much of what they say is pure and simple nonsense.

Doctrinal Issues or Dangerous Heresy?

The whole NAR question reminds me of a spectrum. On one end, we have some truth and a few facts, even if they’re mostly

misunderstood, and on the other end, we have extreme full-blown “Illuminati type” conspiracy theories. There in the middle, where most of the NAR criticism lands, we find pure speculation or exaggeration. Even when a critic raises a good point about a questionable doctrine or practice, when we uncover its root, it has nothing to do with something called the NAR. It’s just a doctrinal issue that needs to be addressed.

Those who talk about the NAR are almost always critics who never have a clue what they’re talking about. They usually use the term as a sort of catch-all, generic label to brand people they dislike as heretics. There may have been a handful of doctrinal issues typically associated with the NAR in the beginning, but that list has morphed into anything and everything the critics find distasteful in others’ theology.

One of the main doctrinal issues that can brand a person as belonging to the notorious NAR is a concept known as “dominion” or “kingdom now” theology. This is taught in various ways, but the common denominator is the idea that as Christians, we’re called to do more than just hang on until Jesus comes and rescues us from this God-forsaken world. No, we are called to be salt and light. We are here to make a real difference. Part of our assignment as the church is to influence society and culture through our gifts, our talents and our lives in general.

Most Christians would agree with what I’ve just stated. If that applies to you, you might be surprised to learn that this could cause the critics to call you an NAR heretic. How do I know? Because I’ve been branded this way. Yet as far as “dominion theology” goes, what I just described is what I believe and teach.

A more radical view of dominion theology is post-millennial eschatology, or the belief that Jesus will return to set up His kingdom after the millennium rather than before.

Essentially, this eschatological system sets forth the idea that the church will usher in the return of Christ by taking over in leadership. People like Charles Finney, John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, whom the Calvinists usually revere, all ascribed to a post-millennial eschatology. Have these evangelical heresy-hunters accused Jonathan Edwards of being a heretic, part of the NAR or someone who believed in dominion theology because of his post-millennialism?

Of course not. He's one of their heroes. Yet they call charismatics "NAR heretics" on the basis of less radical views on the same subject. How is that consistent? How is that fair?

Jealousy or Charismatic Cabal?

The second part of the whole NAR conspiracy is the charismatic connection. This part is pretty easy to understand because evangelical heresy-hunters have always disliked charismatics. Why? Much of it boils down to jealousy. The Bible tells us that even Jesus was delivered up by the Pharisees because of jealousy (see Matt. 27:18).

It's easy to understand why the critics are jealous. The largest spiritual movements in the world are charismatic. The most popular worship music is charismatic. Most of the large churches in the world are charismatic. There's energy and excitement and, more importantly, abundant evidence of fruit in the charismatic camp.

What's more, the charismatics expose the complete spiritual bankruptcy of these critics. If what the charismatics experience is indeed authentic, what does it say about their critics? Of course, it makes them look bad. It makes it look like they're missing out on something really important—and they are! But rather than repent and seek God, it's a lot easier just to attack charismatics, accuse them of heresy and claim everything they're doing is counterfeit Christianity. That way they can feel better about themselves and save face

in front of their friends without having to change the very attitudes and doctrines that keep them unfruitful, miserable and critical.

The NAR narrative was the devil's gift to the critics for their help in His divide-and-conquer plan. For years now, they have been painting the charismatic movement as heretical and unorthodox, but thanks to the NAR conspiracy theory, they can now make it seem diabolical and nefarious as well. They took over all of the leftist talking points, added a few of their own, made a few new guilt by association connections—and created a theory designed to divide. They created a picture of Christian leaders dedicated to taking over the world by any means possible and working in the shadows to accomplish their goal.

The truth is that there is no secret charismatic Illuminati. I'm sorry to disappoint anyone. I know the world would be a lot more interesting if there were things like Bigfoot and the Loch Ness monster, and if Elvis and Tupac were still alive, but these theories are simply untrue. I think a lot of these conspiracy theorists are bored out of their minds and longing for mental stimulation. There is no secret cabal of charismatic leaders behind the scenes, pulling strings, trying to take over the world. Wagner coined the term NAR, wrote about it in several books and preached on it. In his mind, that terminology was a good way of categorizing the largest, most diverse and most influential swath of Christendom the world has ever known, but that was Wagner's terminology. It was his category.

The people Wagner described would have identified as charismatics, Pentecostals, nondenominational or as part of one of countless independent church movements. They never agreed on terminology, joined an organization or signed a particular statement of faith. In fact, they didn't even realize the term existed.

I think these critics have vastly overestimated Wagner's influence. I spent my entire life in the charismatic world and rarely heard him mentioned. The charismatic world is massive. There are up to 700 million people who identify as charismatic, according to some sources, and few of us, relatively speaking, have any connection to Wagner. If I happen to believe something Wagner also believed, such as the relevance of the apostolic and prophetic offices, I promise there is no direct connection. I believed that way long before I heard Wagner's name. I didn't get my views from his or anyone else's book but from the Bible itself.

If we listen to these critics for long, we notice many seem to have great difficulty suspending their preconceived biases to evaluate in a fair and objective way. Maybe they're just irrational people. I don't know them personally, so I can't say. But they may tolerate irrationality on this particular issue because it confirms their bias.

Frankly, to dismiss our beliefs with this silly argument is lazy—the equivalent to a concession of defeat. When these heresy hunters talk about the NAR, we should interpret their words as though they're describing full-gospel, Bible-believing, Spirit-filled Christians. That's all we have in common. The people accused of being part of the NAR don't share a set of doctrines or beliefs beyond some basic ones, such as believing the gifts of the Spirit are for today—a belief held by hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

Do the NAR critics understand the difference between correlation and causation? Just because I believe apostles exist today and Wagner believed that apostles exist today doesn't mean one caused the other. This seems to be the central issue. Yes, millions of people believe apostles exist, probably more like hundreds of millions. We're called charismatics, not disciples of Wagner. We will continue to stand for the gifts of the Spirit and the full counsel of Scripture, no matter what Wikipedia—or anyone else—says we

believe.

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Daniel Kolenda is a missionary evangelist who has led more than 22 million people to Christ face to face through massive open-air evangelistic campaigns in some of the most dangerous, difficult and remote locations on earth. As the successor to world-renowned evangelist Reinhard Bonnke, Daniel is the president and CEO of Christ for All Nations—a ministry that has conducted some of the largest evangelistic events in history.

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