

New Apostolic Reformation

An Evaluation from the Theological Perspective of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

History, Beliefs, Practices

Identity:

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is a network of churches, ministries and individuals promoting the belief that God will bring renewal and growth to the Church, as well as Christian dominion over society, through miraculous signs and wonders and the restoration of the New Testament offices of apostles and prophets.

Founder(s):

Charles Peter Wagner (1930 - 2016)

Statistics:

More than 3 million people in the United States attend NAR churches and millions of people worldwide may be influenced by the teachings of NAR apostles and prophets.¹ Well-known NAR churches include Bethel Church in Redding, California, the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri, Hillsong Church, based in Australia and Elevation Church, based in Charlotte, North Carolina. Some NAR churches have multiple locations and memberships that number in the thousands. Bethel, Hillsong and Elevation produce popular contemporary worship music used in many denominations.² C. Peter Wagner, the founder of the NAR, established the Wagner Leadership Institute (now Wagner University) in Pasadena, California in 1998. The unaccredited school offers courses in apostolic leadership, applied ministry, spiritual healing and spiritual warfare as it seeks to transform the “7 spheres of culture.” Over 2000 graduate and full-time undergraduate students are enrolled in the university.³

History

Peter Wagner was ordained as a Congregationalist minister in 1955. He served as a missionary in Bolivia and from 1971 to 2001 taught at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, in the Institute for Evangelism and Church Growth and the School of World Mission. In 1992, he received the prophetic message that God was calling him to a new work. Wagner gave the name New Apostolic Reformation to an existing charismatic movement, describing the NAR as “a new

¹ R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Publishing, 2022),

² Bob Smietana, “How Bethel and Hillsong Took Over Our Worship Sets,” *Christianity Today*, April 12, 2023 at [How Bethel and Hillsong Took Over Our Worship Sets..... | News & Reporting | Christianity Today](#)

³ Wagner University at [Home - Wagner University - Christian University](#).

wineskin to carry the Church into the twenty-first century.”⁴ Wagner called the new approach to church governance based on networks and apostolic leadership “the most radical change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation.”⁵ He believed the NAR developed out of the African Independent Church movement of 1900 as well as independent house churches in China and the charismatic movement in America in the 1970s. The NAR has also been linked to charismatic renewals such as the Latter Rain and the Toronto Blessing.⁶

As they work toward dominion over society, NAR leaders seek political involvement and influence and have been associated with Christian nationalism.⁷ For example, the day before the riots of January 6, 2021 at the Capitol in Washington, D. C., apostle Ché Ahn (who became the chancellor of Wagner University) declared at a rally that the election lost by President Trump had been “stolen.” The apostle predicted a rule and reign “through President Trump under the lordship of Jesus Christ.”⁸

Texts:

C. Peter Wagner has written more than 70 books, including *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (1979), *Spiritual Warfare Strategy* (1996), *Confronting the Queen of Heaven* (1998), *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (2000), *Dominion* (2008) and *Territorial Spirits* (2012). *The Passion Translation* (2017), a paraphrase of the New Testament by Brian Simmons, promotes NAR beliefs.⁹

Beliefs and Practices:

The statements of faith for NAR churches Bethel, Elevation and Hillsong reflect belief in the Triune God and salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. The Bethel statement notes that the Holy Spirit enables Christians to live holy lives and “minister super-naturally.”¹⁰ The Bible is believed to be the inspired Word of God, although Hillsong refers to Scripture only as “accurate,

⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets* (Minneapolis: Chosen, 2000), 114.

⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2004), 10.

⁶ The Latter Rain (the name is taken from Joel 2:23) was a charismatic movement in Canada in the 1950s. The Toronto Blessing was a charismatic revival that began at the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church in 1994.

⁷ Ellie Hardy, “The Right-Wing Christian Sect Plotting a Political Takeover, *The New Republic*, August 23, 2022, at [The Rising Influence of the New Apostolic Reformation | The New Republic](#).

⁸ Frederick Clarkson and André Gagné, “New Apostolic Reformation Faces Profound Rift Due to Trump Prophecies and ‘Spiritual Manipulation of the Prophetic Gift,’” *Religion Dispatches*, August 9, 2022 at [New Apostolic Reformation Faces Profound Rift Due to Trump Prophecies and ‘Spiritual Manipulation of the Prophetic Gift’ | Religion Dispatches](#).

⁹ The Berean Call Staff, “A New Apostolic Reformation Bible: The Passion Translation,” *The Berean Call*, June 17, 2013 at [A New Apostolic Reformation Bible: The Passion Translation | thebereancall.org](#). Brian Simmons, an apostle of Stairway Ministries, is the sole author/translator. As an example of the way in which the paraphrase promotes charismatic beliefs, Galatians 6:6 in *The Passion Translation* is “And those who are taught the Word will receive an impartation from their teacher; a transference of anointing takes place between them.” Geivett and Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom*, 126-127.

¹⁰ Statement of Faith, Bethel Church, Redding, California, at [Beliefs | Bethel](#).

authoritative and applicable to our everyday lives.”¹¹ Teachings and practices within the movement show that NAR beliefs go beyond these fundamental statements of faith.

The Five-Fold Ministry

NAR leaders believe that churches should be governed according to the five-fold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11-12). Peter Wagner believed that churches have been organized in reverse order, as if pastors, teachers and evangelists were the foundation.¹² Of the five offices, Wagner wrote that “only two are specifically designated as the foundation of the Church, namely apostles and prophets. ‘The household of God [has] been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone’ (Eph. 2:19-20).”¹³ Referring to NAR apostles, Wagner said, “God has made us the foundation of the Church (see Eph. 2:20).”¹⁴

According to NAR teachings, apostles today have the same authority as first-century apostles to govern churches, receive revelations and perform signs and wonders. Peter Wagner said that “God will not entrust genuine apostolic authority to individuals who have not already attained extraordinary character. There is no such thing as an average apostle.”¹⁵ Apostles are to raise up new apostles within the network. Within the NAR, new prophetic and apostolic revelations are declared apart from Scripture and it is believed that even a true prophet of God can make mistakes. Some NAR prophets apologize for unfulfilled prophecies, while others believe that the test of fulfilled prophecies (Deuteronomy 18:20-22) does not apply to New Testament prophets.¹⁶

The Seven Mountains Mandate

Wagner said that it is God’s will for Christians to take dominion over society in order to promote “the values and the blessings and the prosperity of the kingdom of God for everyone.”¹⁷ This belief that the Church must transform society and culture is called the Seven Mountains Mandate. The seven mountains, or “spheres of influence,” are education, religion, family, business, government, arts and entertainment.¹⁸ Wagner wrote that “the Church is and will continue to be an essential part of the kingdom of God. But I believe that God wants to move His kingdom through the warp and woof of society in general. Our prayer, ‘Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matt. 6:11), is proof enough of this assumption. The transformation of

¹¹ Beliefs, Hillsong Church at [What We Believe | Church \(hillsong.com\)](https://www.hillsong.com/what-we-believe).

¹² Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 9.

¹³ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 75.

¹⁴ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 105.

¹⁵ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 28.

¹⁶ Geivett and Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom*, 57-58.

¹⁷ C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion: Your Role in Bringing Heaven to Earth* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2022), 5.

¹⁸ Elle Hardy, “The Right-Wing Christian Sect Plotting a Political Takeover,” *The New Republic*, August 23, 2022, at [The Rising Influence of the New Apostolic Reformation | The New Republic](https://www.newrepublic.com/article/religion/the-right-wing-christian-sect-plotting-a-political-takeover).

society for Christ, and nothing less, must be our goal.”¹⁹ Wagner believed in “open theism,” the idea that God decides to leave some things open and dependent on human choice. In this view, God’s “Plan A” was for Adam and Eve to have dominion, but that failed, leading to “Plan B,” the NAR mandate to take dominion over society.

End Times

The NAR teaches that before Jesus returns on the Last Day, the Church will increase in glory and experience a great revival, brought about by signs and wonders, with entire nations converting to Christianity. NAR apostles anticipate a billion-soul harvest right before His return that will allow the worldwide Church and its apostles “to take control of the earth and to set up God’s physical kingdom or, in NAR lingo, ‘bring heaven to earth.’”²⁰ This teaching is referred to as “Victorious Eschatology.”²¹ Wagner held a partial preterist view, believing that none of the signs Jesus foretold (Matthew 24:36 to 25:46) will precede His return because those prophecies are believed to have been fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.²²

Charismatic Teachings and Spiritual Warfare

Peter Wagner said that charismatic revivals of the 1970s “essentially brought the Third Person of the Trinity from relative obscurity into the mainstream of Church life ... So with a more complete understanding of the practical outworking of the Trinity in place, God was then poised to move the Body of Christ to new levels.”²³ Spiritual mapping and prayer walks are used to identify demonic strongholds in a given city or region of the world. NAR prophet Ana Mendez claimed to have seen in a vision a demon called the Queen of Heaven in an ice castle on Mount Everest. Mendez went to Everest with 26 intercessors to pray against the demon.²⁴ Wagner wrote about this demon in his 1998 book *Confronting the Queen of Heaven*.

Bethel Church in Redding, California, provides examples of NAR charismatic practices. Students at a Sunday morning class were encouraged to “get drunk” on the Holy Spirit. This “was followed by hysterical laughter, much staggering about, and a few people falling to the ground.”²⁵ Bethel operates a School of Supernatural Ministry to teach students to bring the Kingdom of God to their “sphere of influence.”²⁶ Bethel at one time engaged in a practice called

¹⁹ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 54.

²⁰ Geivett and Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom*, 101-102, 107.

²¹ Frederick Clarkson and André Gagné, “Christian Right Denialism is More Dangerous Than Ever: A Reporter’s Guide to the New Apostolic Reformation, *Religion Dispatches*, September 7, 2022, at [Christian Right Denialism is More Dangerous Than Ever: A Reporter’s Guide to the New Apostolic Reformation | Religion Dispatches](#).

²² Wanger, *Dominion*, 61-62. According to preterism, most or all biblical prophecies have already been fulfilled.

²³ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 15.

²⁴ Rick Pidcock, “The New Apostolic Reformation Drove the January 6 Riots, So Why Was It Overlooked by the House Select Committee? *Baptist News Global*, January 10, 2023 at [The New Apostolic Reformation drove the January 6 riots, so why was it overlooked by the House Select Committee? – Baptist News Global](#)

²⁵ Geivett and Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom*, 33-34.

²⁶ Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry at [BSSM – Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry](#).

“grave soaking” or “grave sucking,” in which individuals lie across the graves of well-known evangelists in an effort to receive spiritual power.²⁷

Worship

Songs by Bethel Music, Jesus Culture, Hillsong Music, Forerunner Music and Elevation Worship may sometimes reflect NAR teachings. For example, the Bethel song “This Is a Move” refers to miracles, healing, mountains being moved, strongholds loosed and bodies still being raised.²⁸ Senior Leader Bill Johnson at Bethel in Redding told his musicians to think about what they want the church to look like in five years and what beliefs they want Christians to hold and write songs using that theology “so that people could ‘sing [their] way into it.’”²⁹

A Lutheran Response

While the faith statements of some NAR churches may present fundamental Christian beliefs, many NAR teachings and practices contradict Holy Scripture in serious, even dangerous ways.

The Five-Fold Ministry

The apostles sent by Christ were not self-appointed but were called by the Savior to be eyewitnesses to His resurrection. They were to proclaim repentance and forgiveness in His name (Acts 1:21-22, Luke 24:47). The offices of apostle and prophet (and perhaps evangelist) “belong only to the first generation of the Church, though their message is preserved in Holy Scripture.”³⁰ Of prophets who falsely claim His authority, the Lord says, “Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them” (Jeremiah 23:32).

The Seven Mountains Mandate

The suggestion of open theism, that God must rely on a human “Plan B,” denies His all-knowing majesty (John 21:17, 1 John 3:20). The command at creation for human beings to “have dominion” (Genesis 1:28) was given to all people, not just Christians. Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36) and He did not tell His followers to establish an earthly kingdom in His name. The Lutheran Confessions state: “Now inasmuch as the power of the church or of the bishops bestows eternal benefits and is used and exercised only through the office of preaching, it does not interfere at all with public order and secular authority. For secular authority deals with

²⁷ Geivett and Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom*, 6-7. This practice proved to be bad for public relations and was discontinued.

²⁸ Geivett and Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom*, 145, lyrics at [lyrics This is a move - Search \(bing.com\)](https://www.bing.com/search?q=lyrics+This+is+a+move). Concerning resurrections, in 2019, Bethel members prayed that a little girl who had died would be restored to life. The child was not raised to life and her memorial service was planned six days later.

²⁹ Geivett and Pivec, *Counterfeit Kingdom*, 147.

³⁰ *Lutheran Study Bible*, note on Ephesians 4:11 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 2022.

matters altogether different from the gospel.”³¹ The Lutheran Confessions also comment that Jesus did not want His apostles to think “that they ought to usurp the governing authority from those who hold it (as in the Jewish dream of a messianic kingdom) but instead would understand that they ought to teach about the spiritual kingdom and not change the civil realm.”³² Jesus did not send His followers out to take dominion over earthly society. He sent them to make disciples of all nations, to baptize in the name of the Triune God and to teach all that He had commanded them (Matthew 28:18-20). The risen Savior, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, already has dominion over all things (Matthew 28:18, Ephesians 1:20-23, Hebrews 1:1-3).

End Times

Jesus did not promise His followers that they would be free from persecution or that they would set up a triumphant earthly kingdom before His return. They will be hated just as Jesus Himself was hated (John 15:18-19). Instead of increasing triumph over society, Jesus’ followers will experience trouble, as Jesus said: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Jesus warned that false christs and false prophets would come, even doing signs and wonders to lead people astray (Matthew 24:24). While we have no promise in Scripture of the NAR anticipated “billion-soul harvest,” we pray that through the proclamation of the Gospel, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, people from every nation will come to worship Jesus as Lord.

According to the preterist view held by Peter Wagner, most biblical prophecies have already been fulfilled, including prophecies concerning Jesus’ Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead and the day of judgment. Preterists believe that these three events were fulfilled when Jesus “came in judgment” against Jerusalem in 70 A.D., but Jesus foretells both the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15-28) and His Second Coming (Matthew 24:29-31) as separate events. Jesus will return in glory on the Last Day as Judge and King. We have His promise, “Surely I am coming soon” (Revelation 22:20).

Charismatic Teachings and Spiritual Warfare

The Lutheran Confessions reject the claims of those who imagine that they receive the Holy Spirit and His gifts apart from the Word of God. They are fanatics “who imagine that the Holy Spirit is not given through the Word but is given on account of certain preparations of their own, for example, if they sit idle and silent in dark places while waiting for illumination—as the “Enthusiasts” formerly and the Anabaptists now teach.”³³ In a report on the charismatic movement, the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations states: “[The Church] will also take seriously the admonition of the apostle to ‘test the spirits to see whether they are of God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world’ (1 John 4:1; 1 Corinthians 12:10).

³¹ Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII, *The Book of Concord*, 92.10-11.

³² Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XVIII, *The Book of Concord*, 232.7

³³ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII, *The Book of Concord*, 220.13.

The church should seek the Holy Spirit and His gifts where God has promised them, in the Word and sacraments.”³⁴

The apostle John writes, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Through His death and resurrection, Jesus conquered Satan and the powers of darkness (Hebrews 2:14-15, 1 Peter 3:21-22). Scripture warns us about our fallen foe, “But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” (Revelation 12:12). While we pray for fellow believers around the world, especially those who endure persecution, we are told to resist the temptations of the devil in our own lives: “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Peter 5:8-9). That is the spiritual warfare in which we, by the grace of God, are well-armed (Ephesians 6:10-18)

Worship

As Lutherans, we want our worship, including the liturgy and music, to reflect faithfully the teachings of Holy Scripture (Colossians 3:16-17). Even though worship practices may differ among churches, the apostle Paul writes, “God is not a God of confusion but of peace ... all things should be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:26, 40). The Lutheran Confessions state: “We believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the authority to alter such ceremonies according to its own situation, as may be most useful and edifying for the community of God. Of course, all frivolity and offense must be avoided, and special consideration must be given particularly to those who are weak in faith.”³⁵

Links and Websites

For additional information, see the following reports and evaluations by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, available at [Documents - Commission on Theology and Church Relations - The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod \(lcms.org\)](https://www.lcms.org/documents-and-resources/mission-and-outreach/commission-on-theology-and-church-relations/):

The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement (1977)

The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology (1972)

The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism (1989)

Christian Reconstructionism: An Evaluation from a Lutheran Perspective (2015)

³⁴ Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology*, (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) at [Lutheran Doctrine and Practice - Commission on Theology and Church Relations - The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod \(lcms.org\)](https://www.lcms.org/documents-and-resources/mission-and-outreach/commission-on-theology-and-church-relations/).

³⁵ Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article X, *The Book of Concord*, 515.4-5.