

HUNGRY FOR POWER : THE NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION AND ITS LINKS TO AMERICA'S POLITICAL RIGHT

Election fever is beginning to break out in America. With a presidential election just under a year away, political hopefuls, especially of Republican stripe, are jockeying to get the party's nomination. Nothing unusual in that. What is new this time round is the remarkable prominence a group of hyper-charismatic leaders have assumed in the whole contest. Called "the most important Christian movement in America you have never heard of", the 'New Apostolic Reformation' (NAR) has assumed a role in politics that would have been unheard of even 10 years ago. Rick Perry, Mike Huckabee, Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, Michele Bachman, all household names in America and heavy-weights on the political right, have connections with this movement. So what is the NAR? Who are its leaders? What are they trying to do on the right of American politics?

The project lives on

If you had thought the movements that brought the Toronto Blessing/Pensacola Revival with its wild hysterical laughing, 'slaying in the Spirit', writhing on the floor, animal noises, and comatose carpet-bound participants had vanished away, think again. If you believed the grandiose claims of an end-time revival ushered in by miracle-working apostles and prophets had faded and died, take another look. If you had concluded the promise of a Joel's Army peopled by immortal, judgement-wielding soldiers exercising power over churches and nations was the stuff of dreams, we have news for you. These ideas and hopes are all alive and well, incubated amongst the rank and file of the NAR by a self-appointed group of modern-day apostles and prophets. Even the ambitious hope for world dominion, led by these new specially appointed apostles and prophets, has survived the various prophetic failures of the last decades and remains an integral part of this movement's manifesto. So before we look further at this, we need to delve a little deeper into church history from the last sixty years or so.

Many of the NAR's 'dominionist' teachings owe their origin to the so-called Latter Rain teaching of the 1950s. This teaching looked forward to a 'latter rain' when God's blessing would be mediated through miracle-working apostles and prophets. Associated with this movement was William Branham who had uncanny accuracy in discerning details about people's lives, including their illnesses and personal afflictions. Strange lights would appear over him when ministering and he claimed the help of an angel in his ministry. It smacked of the occult. But if the haloes around him were bizarre, his teachings were even more so. He denied the doctrine of the Trinity and had some negative teachings about women. When he died in a road accident, his followers kept a vigil in the expectation of his resurrection. The movement spawned 'singing in tongues' and generated a considerable following. It was eventually declared to be heretical by the leadership of the Assemblies of God. It came back within the fold through the preaching of Paul Cain, an erstwhile assistant of Branham, who returned from a self-imposed exile to establish himself for a while among the ranks of the Vineyard Movement. Even if his influence has declined following exposure of homosexual activity and a drinking problem, the teachings he re-introduced live on. Going by names like 'manifest sons' or 'Joel's Army', among others, this end-time generation was

expected imminently. So the hopes of the church assuming immense power, with God's 'manifest presence' buoying them up, have not evaporated. Instead they are all found alive and well in the NAR.

The names are too many to give an exhaustive run-down. C. Peter Wagner tops many people's list as the main apostle. With links that go back to the Fuller Seminary and the late John Wimber, his Global Harvest Ministry, based in Colorado Springs, articulates the vision as clearly as any. Other names include Cindy Jacobs, Dutch Sheets, Chuck Pierce, Rick Joyner, Todd Bentley, John Arnott, and Mike Bickle, whose International House of Prayer (IHOP), grew out of the labours of the Kansas City Prophets of the 1990s. Movements that had, in the eyes of many, been discredited through their outlandish practices and claims, their unbiblical teachings and leadership structures, as well as acts of immorality among some key leaders, lived on. Their desire for power remained intact. Their belief of possessing future power lay undisturbed. Though consigned to the dustbin of ecclesiastical history by many observers, they have now emerged as a group with considerable political muscle.

Whereas all they ever believed remains as a given, they have opened up a new front in the shape of the Seven Mountains mandate. The term apparently originated with Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ and Loren Cunningham of YWAM, but has been given a new twist by Lance Wallnau who cast the original vision in a fresh direction by describing the seven mountains as the peaks that the church was called upon to possess. What are these seven mountains? The list runs like this

- Church
- Family
- Government
- Business
- Education
- Media
- Entertainment

According to Wallnau, the church is mandated to take possession of these different spheres of life and to occupy them until Christ returns. So instead of a movement solely or largely taken up with signs and wonders as the chief weapon to subdue the nations, there has more recently been a shift to subtlety and a more covert political operation to work hand-in-hand with the miracles and healings.

The success of the efforts to scale the Government mountain can be gauged from the astonishing connections that are now being made with prominent political players on the American right. The attraction has been mutual. In a way perhaps less comprehensible to us in the UK, the NAR is an attractive proposition to vote-hungry politicians, offering large numbers of supporters plus a considerable potential network of loyal election workers. For while we have been sleeping, the NAR has steadily been growing in numbers, wealth and power. Coupled to the fact that it boasts a lot of young people on its books, the attraction of the NAR to the political right becomes only too comprehensible. In return, the access to politicians of undoubted clout is immensely attractive to the NAR as they seek to advance a covert agenda of dominion which works behind headline issues on which most Christians would agree, like anti-abortion and anti-homosexual practice.

So here are some of the key events in this marriage of right-wing politics and extreme charismaticism. On June 5th 2009 in an event at the Rock Church, Lou Engle laid hands on Mike Huckabee, a serious contender for the Republican nomination, and also prayed for Newt Gingrich, a senior politician on the right. Who is Lou Engle? He leads a ministry called 'The Call' and is closely affiliated with the IHOP in Kansas. Then Governor Rick Perry, Governor of Texas and erstwhile Republican presidential front-runner, was visited in his office on September 28th 2009 by Tom Schlueter and Bob Long, two Texan pastors both with links to NAR¹. It had previously been prophesied that Texas was 'The Prophet State' which had been anointed by God to bring the United States into revival and godly government. Moreover, it was prophesied that Governor Perry was going to play a special part in all this. At their meeting, the Governor asked the men to pray for him, which they duly did and prophesied furthermore that Perry would have a leadership role beyond Texas.

But there was more to come. May Day 2010 was another significant date in the public affirmation of these links. Meeting on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC, Janet Porter, a shock radio presenter, organised a Prayer Event which mingled together NAR supporters and right-wing politicians. As well as having the involvement of NAR luminaries such as Cindy Jacobs and Chuck Pierce, it also had five congressmen on its organising committee. 'Crying to God for a nation in distress' duly took place and further cemented this links between influential political figures and NAR personnel.

The list goes on. A conference at Liberty University on April 8-9th this year brought together political big-hitters like Newt Gingrich and Michele Bachmann alongside significant NAR personalities Rick Joyner, Lou Engle and Cindy Jacobs.² Then a special prayer event, 'The Response', was convened by Rick Perry at The Reliant Stadium in Houston on August 6th this year. It was endorsed by some of the NAR's 'A' list prophets such as Cindy Jacobs, Mick Bickle, Che Ahn and C. Peter Wagner. The event itself was fronted by card-carrying NAR man Doug Stringer while Mike Bickle and Alice Patterson had on-stage parts to play. What was also interesting was the alignment of more conservative organisations with NAR people in staging this event. They included contributions from more conservative figures from the Christian Right such as James Dobson. While the role of pro-family organisations in American politics spans many years, what was new on this occasion was their willingness to join forces with the NAR in staging events. So now we find serious politicians lining up with men and women who have sponsored some of the oddest and most destructive teachings in the church of the last sixty years plus some of the conservative pro-life, pro-family organisations, all now making common cause. Far from wandering in the wastelands on the remote fringes of American evangelical life, the apostles of Latter Rain teaching are alive and well, and have achieved unrivalled access to big political figures. Quite remarkable.

Some caveats

Before we conclude that Joel's Army is about to storm the White House and fan out across America and the rest of the world, there are some important caveats to mention.

Firstly, politicians may be glad of your help when they are running for office. Their interest in you might cool when they are actually in office. The apostles and prophets, bent on conquering the seven mountains, may find their climbing rope is unceremoniously cut after their political 'friends' have successfully reached the summit. Far from enjoying the exhilarating heights, they may have to be satisfied with more minor bag carrying roles down

at Base Camp. Whereas Elisha knew what was in Hazael's heart and how he would kill his master, the Syrian king, (2 Kings 8:11-13) today's self-styled prophets have no such divine insight into the hearts of political rulers. Just as the signs and wonders have not catapulted them into national prominence, neither will their political friendships achieve the same objective either.

Secondly, at the time of writing, Rick Perry has suffered some possibly terminal set-backs to his presidential campaign. After lacklustre performances in televised debates, the NAR's preferred candidate suffered an embarrassing lapse of memory in his latest debate when trying to recall the name of the third of the three departments he had vowed to axe when in office. The name eluded him as he thrashed around to the obvious delight of his political foes. An effort to retrieve his credibility and live his disastrous moment down on the David Letterman show with a self-deprecating 'Aw Shucks' performance has not restrained the tide of public support for him from ebbing away. Political pundits are writing his obituary as a presidential hopeful and unless the NAR's links with some of the other candidates are equally close, the mountain of government would appear to be a frustratingly elusive peak for our dominionist friends. So their dreams of gaining serious power may remain simply that – dreams.

What sort of conquest?

Mandated though they feel they are by God to indulge in these more covert methods of achieving power, the ambition of the NAR would appear to have no support from Scripture. We are certainly mandated to pray for people in power.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour...

1 Timothy 2:1-3

We are to pray for conditions conducive to the spread of the gospel and for the well-being of the Lord's people. That is certainly a need prayer in days where we see secularism attempting to stifle the freedom of Christians to live in line with their conscience in the workplace. Likewise Christians may individually pursue occupations which bring them into the realm of politics or bring them into contact with policy-makers. Doubtless much good can be achieved there, although the temptations to compromise are obvious as well. The church can make her voice heard regarding ethical situations of the day and promote good laws and speak down bad laws. But is it the place of the church to be seeking political and economic power? Does the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28 give a green light to church leaders to cultivate a power-seeking mentality among their followers? The Lord Jesus Christ was close to some of the mountains of government power during His ministry. But His message was not of a kingdom on earth but a spiritual kingdom of redeemed people who would be His disciples. When questioned by Pilate prior to His death He said,

My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here.

John 18:36

Of course the realm of government has its part to play in maintaining stable order in society. But the Lord's people follow their Master. Their mission is to do with His kingdom mandate which is expressed thus;

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you... Matthew 28:19-20

We look in vain in His commandments to find a mandate to take over Government by covert operations. We find no mandate to secretly infiltrate different sectors of society as a prelude to some great end-time revival and church mastery over the nations. But we find plenty of instruction about going out and preaching the gospel.

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

Mark 16:15

Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.

Luke 9:60

And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.

Mark 13:10

While, even with the Fall, man has a special place and privilege over God's created world, those who are the Lord's people are especially and distinctively to preach the gospel. That is their mandate. The gospel is the Lord's great spiritual weapon whose influence will be felt on all the seven mountains that the dominionists are seeking to conquer. But it seems the work has been too slow and unrewarding for those in the NAR. Conquest through signs and wonders and control of government, the media and everything else has offered a seemingly better way to satisfy their hunger for power.

It is the gospel preached in the power of the Holy Spirit that is God's weapon for conquest. It is individuals transformed by the vital power of the Holy Spirit who will influence commerce, the world of entertainment, family life and education. It is the gospel's effect on culture that will most powerfully bring about lasting changes in abortion law and the teaching of science. In our secular age, where Christians are increasingly marginalized, we of course do what we can to preserve the teaching of creation somewhere in the science curriculum at school and ensure evolution does not enjoy a comfortable home run. Christians advocate something better for our children than society's current norms for relationships, and seek to promulgate more godly teaching in this area. But we are not to indulge in over-inflated ideas about the church gaining power and influence through political manoeuvring, nor are we to rely on politicians to build the kingdom of God. The Bible sets out no such blueprint and encourages the church to adopt no such policy.

Here in the UK?

But here is a question we need to ask ourselves on this side of the Atlantic. Is there such a process happening in the UK? Is there a dominionist strategy to infiltrate Government and occupy it with 'sleepers' ready to take the land when the prophetic moment comes? It is perhaps more difficult to see it at the moment. The NAR is not an established presence in the UK although it does boast a few random individuals on its books. Unlike their American counterparts, the churches in the UK are not sufficiently well resourced to attempt too much mountaineering. The Christian Institute offers a much more sober and realistic voice. It campaigns more overtly for ethical issues but has none of the grandiose aims of the NAR.

While restorationist churches in their heyday were expectant of exercising power over the nations, such rhetoric has been toned down in recent times. The 'Toronto Blessing' temporarily generated hopes of revival, leading to the church being given prominence and

power, but these hopes spectacularly failed. Yet a few things do catch the eye. Philippa Stroud has made a fair attempt at climbing the mountain of Government. She is presently Special Adviser to Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan-Smith. This is no minor position and must be ample testimony to her competence and ability. We would hope that she can achieve much good in that office. But she is also the wife of Newfrontiers leader David Stroud of whom more in a moment.

Back in 1990, Newfrontiers admitted Paul Cain, torch-bearer for 'Latter Rain' teaching, into its midst and exposed its people to his strange doctrines and even stranger mediumistic abilities. He prophesied that Newfrontiers would 'change the expression of Christianity around the world'. We may now be twenty-one years on with little evidence that this has been fulfilled. But the promise has never been repudiated or disowned by the Newfrontiers leadership as the ramblings of a false teacher and false prophet. The 2008 Newday young people's meeting organised by Newfrontiers had seminars about leadership and living lives that change the expression of Christianity. The idea may yet live on. How deeply has it affected the leaders of this restorationist grouping? How much are they still cherishing the hope of wielding significant power?

Remember, we can never underestimate the magnetic power of false doctrine. We may dismiss such a prophecy as palpably false. But the leaders of Newfrontiers believe in these things. Their operations are conceived on a long-term strategic basis. Are they covertly scaling one of the seven mountains? While not officially part of the NAR, are they nevertheless aligning themselves with its vision and methods? We mentioned David Stroud a moment back. He is the leader of a flagship church plant, Christchurch in Central London and sits at the high table of the Newfrontiers command structure, holding the position of leader of the Newfrontiers UK Team. Where that places him in the line of succession whenever current apostle Terry Virgo retires can only be a matter of speculation but 'high up' would be an accurate assessment. Newfrontiers is worth monitoring closely for any hint that NAR-type aspirations are stirring in its soul.

Returning to Philippa Stroud, she herself has links with one of the more bizarre ministries that one could cite, namely that of Jackie Pullinger and her work in Hong Kong which sees drug addicts delivered from their addiction by speaking in tongues. By all accounts it achieves remarkable results but one is hard pressed to recognise this as authentic evangelism or Christian ministry. But those connections are not to the fore in her life in the Westminster village and her operations there look a little more 'covert'. At least they were until the last election. She stood as a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the Conservative Party in the May 2010 election in the Liberal-Democrat held marginal seat of Sutton and Cheam on the outskirts of London. In the end she was narrowly defeated.

If she was a Newfrontiers insider the 'covert' operation backfired spectacularly when *The Observer*, on the Sunday before the election, ran a piece exposing her past efforts to cast demons out of people tempted with homosexual thoughts and practices. This had taken place when she was a member of a Newfrontiers church in Bedford and the article carried stories of some of the young people who were at the receiving end of this ministry. The playing of the 'homosexuality card' was a predictable ploy by the British left-wing press to produce howls of outrage among the politically correct of Islington. As such it showed some of the usual spiteful antipathy we have come to expect towards those who profess to be Christians. This expose was clearly aimed at derailing her Parliamentary career and, as events on Election Day were to show, it might well have succeeded. Sadly the reports by

aggrieved people that Mrs Stroud and others had tried to cast demons out of them were only too credible, however well intentioned these efforts might well have been. Such actions were utterly consistent with the 'charismatic worldview' that she held then and presumably still does.

Of course nobody is denying the reality of demons. Neither, from a Christian viewpoint, is homosexual practice and temptation something that does not merit pastoral help and admonition. But whereas Daniel was ready to surrender up his high position in the Babylonian government for his spiritual convictions and even ready to surrender up his life when 'outed' by malicious rivals, Mrs Stroud instead issued an oblique statement which was widely noted by her critics to have failed to address the charges made. But the damage to her Parliamentary hopes was done. She enjoyed support at the time from David Cameron among others and lives on to be a Special Adviser which in itself is no small achievement. How little or how much her political allies know about her connections cannot be ascertained at this distance. But one cannot help but feel that full disclosure of personally-held Christian convictions is a more noble way, even if some of these views turn out to be flaky and, on more mature reflection, worthy of apology.

So does Mrs Stroud's candidacy indicate that perhaps the days of 'doing signs and wonders' and 'casting out demons' to bring in the kingdom have given way to a more steady effort to assault the peak of Government? It is perhaps too early to say. But it is worth watching developments in Newfrontiers in the meantime.

Some closing reflections

But there are some other matters that the rise of the NAR as a would-be-political power forces upon us for consideration.

Firstly, however wild and wacky a movement in the Christian church might appear to be, its potential to have lasting impact should never be underestimated. Customarily it is not thought good form, especially in the UK, to subject these fringe movements to critique. The reasons for this reticence are beyond our remit here. Suffice it to say that time and again history proves that these movements do not go away. Confident predictions that particular teachings and teachers would come to nothing prove sadly wide of the mark as, far from dwindling, they capture the hearts and minds of young people and grow in size vigorously. The mathematics are quite simple. Young people, particularly students, get caught up in these movements. These young people graduate into well-paid jobs. Their incomes fund these ministries handsomely so that they are able to achieve visibility. Well-resourced ministries, attached to the NAR, are able to recruit talented personnel who can achieve credibility with political leaders.

So we arrive at where we are today. False doctrine can inspire and mobilise people. Promised revivals have failed to materialise and still these movements keep going. The hoped-for signs and wonders have not brought spiritual breakthroughs on the streets and in the shopping malls but people have remained faithful to the guiding vision. Some of the leaders have sunk under well-attested accusations of immorality, yet the idea has lived on.

Weird phenomena, including people wailing like banshees as in a voodoo meeting, have not deterred people from believing that they were the Lord's elite squad.

(Here is a link to a video showing Rick Joyner of MorningStar Ministries)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwzbcMXpSQ>

What is more, its leaders are able to switch from Plan A to Plan B without having to explain why Plan A failed. Leaders with track records of failed prophecies can still count on the faithful cheering them on and dipping into their pockets to fund the next venture. So now, energies are diverted to painstakingly climbing the seven mountains. Joel's Army is going underground to fulfil the mandate these people feel they have received from God.

In any analysis then we should never forget the attractiveness of movements like the NAR. Headed by exciting personalities with a 'hot line to God', they tender to young people promises of spiritual power and influence. For many the lure is simply irresistible. We must never forget that. In an age when, in the West, revival has been denied us by the Lord and where many in the church have become frustrated by the rising tide of secularism and immorality, the NAR in America has offered what many professing Christians have been longing for. Imagined power and influence. The lesson in all this is that it is a vital part of a biblical ministry to assess movements such as the NAR, to rigorously and biblically critique them. Furthermore this is to be done in such a way as shows respect and does not ridicule either those who are part of it or those who are thinking of becoming part of it. There may be some very firm things that need to be said. The Lord Jesus Christ offered a trenchant critique of the religious movements of His day. Sadly many prefer to humour error and even where there is obvious deviation from biblical truth, there is a reluctance to point this out and challenge believers to think and assess more carefully.

The second thing to ponder is this. While for the most part these people have ended up looking foolish with their failed prophecies, is there any real spiritual power that they are able to access? Behind the hypnosis and hysteria, are there real occultic influences? Without being overly dramatic, it has to be conceded that some sinister goings-on have historically been resident in this movement. Some of its practitioners have exercised strange powers with a supernatural dimension, Branham and Cain being prime examples. While there are plenty of hucksters in the religious world, there have undeniably been some who have possessed abilities that could not be explained by natural causes. The Lord has warned us of the '*...coming of the lawless one...*' whose signs and wonders are '*...according to the working of Satan (2 Thessalonians 2:9).*' We might do well to monitor carefully the NAR for any more worrying forces at work than merely the works of the flesh and the lofty pretensions of men and women hungry for power.

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