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SPECIAL REPORT

APOSTOLIC REFORMATION A NEW MOVE OR AN OLD DECEPTION?

By Albert James Dager

A recent phenomenon described as a “move of God,” termed “Apostolic Reformation,” is implementing a plan for world evangelization through the efforts of Global Harvest Ministries (GHM) under the direction of C. Peter Wagner. It has taken a few years for this move to get into high gear, but it is now impacting a large number of churches.

Apostolic Reformation posits that God is restoring the offices of apostles and prophets, and that C. Peter Wagner, in particular, is the apostle God is using to implement that restoration. Says Wagner:

Back in the 1990s we began hearing the Holy Spirit speaking about restoring apostles and prophets as the foundation of the church as God originally designed (see Eph. 2:20). As I have explained in my book, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (Regal Books), I gradually came to the realization that God had given me the gift of apostle, and that certain spheres of the body of Christ were recognizing that I had the office of apostle as well. Consequently, developing apostolic leadership in today’s church has now become an important function of GHM.¹

C. Peter Wagner was at one time mentor as well as disciple of the late John Wimber, who took over the Vineyard Christian Fellowship and developed it into an international church denomination. The Vineyard’s focus under Wimber was an emphasis upon what he believed were true signs and wonders. By integrating psychology with inner healing, the laying on of hands, and a peculiar form of mysticism which resulted in many bizarre manifestations, Wimber’s movement left the objective reality of God’s Word to turn to charismania. Wagner championed Wimber’s philosophy and has never repented of doing so.

Wimber also believed in the restoration of the offices of apostles and prophets and considered himself to be a latter-day apostle to all the churches. Now Wagner is promoting himself as the “Presiding Apostle” over an organization called International Coalition of Apostles (ICA).² Wagner lists this and other avenues through which the Apostolic Reformation is taking shape:

- International Coalition of Apostles (ICA). I am the Presiding Apostle over this organization with John Kelly, Chuck Pierce, and Doris [Wagner] as my leadership team. At present, 229 apostles are members, and we meet every December in Dallas.
- New Apostolic Roundtable (NAR). I convene this accountability group of under 25 apostles once a year in Colorado Springs.
- Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders (ACPE). A select group of prophets who feel the need to build personal relationships with peer-level prophets meets together once a year (sometimes more) in Colorado Springs.
- Apostolic Council for Educational Accountability (ACEA). The ACEA provides a creative alternative to accreditation for schools designed to serve the New Apostolic Reformation. Currently some 40 schools have ACEA membership.
- Apostolic Roundtable for Deliverance Ministers (ARDM). Many deliverance ministers feel a need for meeting regularly with peers to keep up with this rapidly-developing field. I convene this group of under 25 every year in Colorado Springs.

In addition to these apostolic groups, John Kelly, Chuck Pierce, and I do a series of one-day ICA Leadership Seminars across the country in order to introduce Christian leaders to the trends in apostolic leadership.³

This “move of God,” according to Wagner, requires millions of dollars in the development of facilities for offices, classrooms and a conference center where apostles and prophets can be trained.

Some of the apostles promoted by Wagner:

- Ché Ahn
Harvest Rock Church
Pasadena, California
- Bob Beckett
The Dwelling Place Family Church
Hemet, California
- Rice Broocks
Morningstar International
Brentwood, Tennessee
- Naomi Dowdy
Trinity Christian Center
Singapore
- John Eckhardt
Crusaders Church/IMPACT
Urbana, Illinois
- Michael Fletcher
Manna Church
Fayetteville, North Carolina
- Bill Hamon
Christian International
Santa Rosa Beach, Florida⁴

WHAT IS APOSTOLIC REFORMATION?

During the 1990’s, Wagner felt he perceived a new worldwide reformation taking place among churches. Because of his thirty plus years as a “professor of church growth,” as well as some sixteen years as a missionary to Bolivia and a specialist in world missions, Wagner became aware of church growth in third-world countries such as Africa, China and Latin America. He saw this growth as being the result of non-traditional leadership.

Wagner saw a pattern emerge when he noticed that these different movements had a number of things in common, even though they were not associated with one another.

"That's when it first became clear to me that we had something to look into," recalls Wagner. "When we did, the most important characteristic that we found in these new churches was that they had a new authority structure which was different than that of traditional Christianity. That played itself out on the local level, with the pastor being the leader of the church instead of an employee, and on the translocal level, with the authority of the apostle over a number of churches."⁵

What struck Wagner was that, particularly in Latin America, his major field of missions, large churches were operating in urban areas under the leadership of people who had had no contact with Western missionaries or mission-initiated institutions. Yet, says Wagner, "they had churches of several thousand people and were leading them with a degree of authority that most of us were not used to."⁶ This led Wagner to believe that a new reformation was taking place which was reshaping the face of Christianity.

"Every time Jesus began building His Church in a new way throughout history, He provided new wineskins. The growth of the Church through the ages is, in part, a story of new wineskins," says Wagner. "These new wineskins appear to be at least as radical as those of the Protestant Reformation almost five hundred years ago."

Initially, in trying to describe what was occurring, he used the term, "Post-denominational Churches," which was eventually rejected because of strong protests from denominational friends and the fact that many of these new churches have remained within their denominations. The name he then settled on was the New Apostolic Reformation.

"The New Apostolic Reformation is an extraordinary work of God at the close of the twentieth century that is, to a significant extent, changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world," Wagner explains. "For almost five hundred years, Christian churches have largely functioned within traditional denominational structures of one kind or another.

"Particularly in the 1990s, but having roots going back for almost a century, new forms and operational

procedures are now emerging in areas such as local church government, interchurch relationships, financing, evangelism, missions, prayer, leadership selection and training, the role of supernatural power, worship and other important aspects of church life.

"Some of these changes are being seen within denominations themselves, but for the most part they are taking the form of loosely structured apostolic networks. In virtually every region of the world, these new apostolic churches constitute the fastest growing segment of Christianity."⁷

Wagner believes that what he calls "new wineskins" are needed to contain the "new truths" being revealed by the new breed of apostles and prophets. He says that new wineskins have always been needed for all the new movements throughout the history of the churches:

Every time Jesus began building His Church in a new way throughout history, He provided new wineskins. While He was still on earth, He said that such a thing would be necessary... (Matt. 9:17). The growth of the Church throughout the ages is, in part, a story of new wineskins.⁸

He gives examples of how Jesus has built His "Church" over the centuries:

How do these biblical principles unfold in real life? For 2,000 years, the Church of Jesus Christ has grown and spread into every continent. Jesus said, "I will build My church," and He has been doing it. As we review those 2,000 years, however, it is quite obvious that Jesus does not always build His Church in the same ways. He did it one way in the Roman Empire before Constantine; another way after Constantine; another way in the Middle Ages; another way following the Reformation; another way during the era of European colonization; and yet another way post-World War II, just to name a few.⁹

According to Wagner, the new wine-skin by which Jesus will continue to build His "Church" is the Apostolic Reformation. But the basic premise upon which he builds his case is faulty.

In the first place, the new wine of which Jesus spoke was not a method for building His body of called out saints. It was the New Covenant which could not be contained by the Mosaic Law. The Old Covenant under Moses' Law was the old wineskin. That's the extent of Jesus' refer-

ence to new wineskins. To suggest that He meant anything else, such as the movements Wagner presents as evidence for his case is naïve at best, and/or intellectually dishonest.

Are we to believe that the Holy Roman Empire under Constantine was a new wineskin for the building up of the Body of Christ? On the contrary, it was a disaster to the purity of the Gospel. How can a true apostle think otherwise?

Wagner also believes that the apostles and prophets of his reformation will bring new truths to the Body of Christ:

God has been speaking to me, both in my spirit and through other prophets, during the last five years about accepting increased responsibility to train and oversee those called to prophetic and apostolic ministry. Apostles and prophets must have their fingers accurately on the pulse of what God is doing and they must be able to righteously demonstrate His power and plan. Christian International Network of Churches was birthed from this desire to not only see ministers trained and activated, but also to provide a place of accountability and oversight.

Just as Samuel and Elijah headed schools of the prophets scattered throughout Israel, so I believe God continues the work of "fathering" and schooling His people into ministry through similar means. God uses individuals, their messages and their ministries to help propagate new truth. The same principle seems to be at work in His desire to restore and establish the offices of all fivefold ministries within the Church.¹⁰

Wagner often speaks about new truths emanating from the apostles and prophets of his reformation. By "new truths," Wagner is not speaking about new understanding of God's truth. By pointing to the various movements in history as valid manifestations of Jesus building His "Church," he is endorsing the "new truths" of those movements, which "truths" often contradict Scripture. The subjective nature of these "new truths" has been evident of late in the weird signs-and-wonders movement.

While we're on the subject of this "apostle" misunderstanding God's Word, he falls into the same error as that of the Latter-Rain proponents who believe that the "school of prophets" was some sort of training center. In reality, a "school" is an association. There is no evidence in

Scripture of any "school" in the sense of academia regarding God's prophets. God chooses His apostles and prophets and endows them with the gifts they need to serve Him in those capacities.

Wagner sees evolving out of his new reformation apostles and prophets who represent a new form of spiritual authority. He believes this apostolic reformation is beginning to take hold in the West as well, and will result in tremendous church growth and revival.

"The biggest difference between New Apostolic Christianity and traditional Christianity is the amount of spiritual authority delegated by the Holy Spirit to individuals," Wagner emphasizes. "In traditional Christianity, authority resided in groups such as church councils, sessions, congregations, and general assemblies. New Apostolic Christianity sees God entrusting the government of the church to individuals."

Within New Apostolic Christianity, Wagner sees this governmental authority being exercised in the local church by the pastor and on a translocal level by apostles who operate with a relational authority rather than a hierarchical, bureaucratic one that had typically been exercised through denominational structures.

"The other important thing with regards to this authority is that allegiance or relationship with the apostle is voluntary," adds Wagner.

"There is nothing that holds the pastor or the church related to the apostle in the apostolic network except the perception that the apostle is adding value to their life and ministry."¹¹

Along with this new authority, Wagner perceives that the new contemporary form of worship is a commonality among these fast-growing churches. Financial solvency is also a plus, according to Wagner, because the leadership of these churches expect their people to be faithful in their tithes and offerings.

A NEW THING?

While Wagner says that the Apostolic Reformation is a new phenomenon that will bring spiritual reformation to the churches, in reality it is a rehash of the Latter Rain Movement of the mid-twentieth century. It is Pentecostalism gone amok, led by such notorious men as Franklin Hall, William Branham, and, lately, Paul Cain, recently exposed as a homosexual by some in his own ranks.

What Wagner is promoting is an apostolic concept inherited from the Latter Rain Movement primarily among charismatic churches and Pentecostal denominations. (For an in-depth study of this move see my book, *Vengeance is Ours: The Church in Dominion*.)

The impact of this movement in North America has been observed in the "Toronto Blessing," the "Pensacola Revival" (AKA "Brownsville Revival") and other similar charismatic foolishness. The unscriptural nature of these movements is a clue to their ungodliness.

FELLOW TRAVELERS

One is known by the company one keeps. Not that we don't all have family members, friends, and associates that are not true believers. Nor do all true believers agree on every point of Scripture. But those whom we promote and with whom we engage in ministry reveal much about what we think. A true apostle would not associate his ministry with someone whose theology and/or methodology is unscriptural.

As we look at a few of the "apostles" with whom Wagner claims to be in association, we can judge whether he is legitimately an apostle himself.

Che Ahn, Harvest Rock Church, Pasadena California

Harvest Rock Church bills itself as a "multi-ethnic, spirit-filled Christian congregation," and sponsors "apostolic conferences." Speakers scheduled for the July, 2005 apostolic conference are Jill Austin, Paul Keith Davis, Lou Engle, James Goll, and Chuck Pierce.

Jill Austin is part of the "prophetic team" at Metro Christian Fellowship (formerly Kansas City Fellowship, whence sprang the Kansas City prophets). She conducts "Master Potter" conferences at which "holy laughter" is promoted.

Paul Keith Davis is an associate of Kansas City "prophet" Bob Jones, and founder of White Dove Ministries. White Dove Ministries spreads the Latter Rain doctrine of apostolic and prophetic revival with an emphasis on youth.

Lou Engle is founder of Elijah Revolution, a call to take America and the world for Jesus. His group "rumbled in the heavenlies for justice!" with the "Reverse the Decree of '73 Conference," a call to reverse *Roe v. Wade* in January, 2005.

Speakers and worship leaders were charismatics and Latter Rain proponents: Lou Engle, Dutch Sheets, Che Ahn, Bishop Harry Jackson, Cindy Jacobs, Bonnie Chavda, Patricia King, Kirk Bennett, Jason Upton, Jay Swallow, Dr. Negiel Bigpond, Will Ford, Kevin Kleint, Laura Woodley, and Rick Joyner.

James Goll is head of Encounters Network and has written books on "prophetic" ministry. He promotes so-called "contemplative prayer and worship" designed to bring God into one's presence, as if that were possible. Contemplative prayer and worship is rooted in Roman Catholic mysticism and has wormed its way into non-Catholic churches primarily through the charismatic movement.

Chuck Pierce is the apostle of Glory of Zion International Ministries. He promotes deliverance and spiritual warfare.

Bob Beckett, The Dwelling Place Family Church, Hemet, California

Bob Beckett has taught the local church's role in prayer and community transformation as part of Peter Wagner's World Missions Class and his Spiritual Issues in Church Growth classes at Fuller Seminary. He believes that the "Church" is gifted to "conquer" through spiritual warfare and deliverance.

Rice Brooks, Morningstar International, Brentwood, Tennessee

Morning Star International calls itself "a worldwide family of churches and ministries whose vision is to reach 'Every Nation in Our Generation.'" Rice Brooks collaborates with Bob Weiner, a proponent of the Latter Rain, Manifested Sons of God heresy which they spread on college campuses.

Naomi Dowdy, Trinity Christian Center, Singapore

Naomi Dowdy is a global leader for apostolic strategies and Founder-President of Global Leadership Network and Global Business Network Partners. She is also said to be Apostle/Senior Pastor of Trinity Christian Center, and is highly sought after by Christian leaders around the world for her counsel and wisdom. (So now we have female apostles, as if female pastors were not unscriptural enough for these people.)

Interestingly, Wagner says church offices are reserved for men. So why is he compromising here?

**John Eckhardt, Crusaders Church/
IMPACT, Urbana, Illinois**

John Eckhardt founded the IMPACT Network (International Ministries of Prophetic and Apostolic Churches Together) in 1995. It has grown to include over 400 churches and ministries in 25 nations. IMPACT Network is a vehicle for global apostolic reformation. As an "apostle" himself, Eckhardt is ordaining apostles and prophets around the world to facilitate the current "reformation." He also conducts "apostolic breakthrough" conferences in many nations.

**Bill Hamon, Christian International,
Santa Rosa Beach, Florida**

Bill Hamon is a classic Manifested Sons of God apostle whose doctrine centers on the belief that before Jesus can return to the earth (if He returns at all), certain overcomers in the "Church" will become immortal through submission to the new apostles and prophets for the Last Days. (See my book, Vengeance is Ours: The Church in Dominion for an in-depth analysis of dominion theology, including the Latter rain, Manifested Sons of God heresy.) This is based on the belief that Jesus first returns "in" His "Church," not in His flesh.

AN APOSTLE? REALLY?

So Wagner thinks himself an apostle. And an apostle of apostles at that!

Interesting, since his discernment is, at best, around zero. How does a true apostle of God hobnob with wackos who call barking like a dog and cackling like a chicken a manifestation of the Holy Spirit? How does a true apostle of God endorse someone like John Wimber and brag that Wimber was his "mentor"? How does a true apostle of God give credibility to Latter Rain teachers?

Can such lack of discernment, as well as unequivocal endorsement of these people qualify such a person to be a true apostle of God? I say no. And if not, then the entire concept of his "Apostolic Reformation" is not merely in doubt, it must be refuted.

TRAINING OF APOSTLES?

There is an issue which requires addressing here. It is Wagner's statement that millions of dollars are needed for the development of facilities where apostles and prophets can be trained.

Where in Scripture do we find apostles and prophets being "trained"? One cannot be "trained" in the gifts of God. That is man's way of trying to control the gifts to further some religious belief system. In Wagner's case the belief system is the Latter Rain philosophy. True apostles may mentor one another, but they are largely independent and led by the Spirit of God. Most of what they say and do is rejected. They do not find the popularity that today's self-proclaimed apostles and prophets enjoy.

Another issue is Wagner's erroneous belief that what he perceived in third-world countries is somehow different from what he sees in the West. The form and function may appear different because of a lack of denominational oversight, but there really is no difference.

For example, Wagner says the pastor in the type of church he credits with having a different authority structure is "the leader of the church instead of employee." What's so different about churches in the West? Pastors are generally absolute leaders as well as employees. But pastors in those third-world churches are employees also. Most of them receive their living from the contributions of their constituents.

IS THERE A REFORMATION?

There is no Apostolic Restoration. Apostles and prophets have been operative throughout the centuries, but have been relegated to the realm of the unknown and unheralded. They may not have been called apostles and prophets, but they have operated in those capacities among small, humble gatherings of believers apart from the denominational structures. They were persecuted and martyred for standing against the heresies of Romanism, Calvinism, Anglicanism and other "Christian" authoritarian structures. They have stood against the heresies of the Latter Rain Movement that sought to usurp the positions of apostle and prophet for the benefit of a satanic deception. The true apostles and prophets have not touted themselves as such, but have worked in relative anonymity.

We must understand, however, that the role of apostle is not the same in all respects as that of the first-century apostles. Those apostles defined the faith, and

some gave us the Scriptures. Their revelations sealed the revelations of God as they pertain to the entire Body of Christ. The similarity between those apostles and subsequent apostles through the ages is the role of "being sent." That is, apostles are those sent under the anointing of the Holy Spirit to establish assemblies of believers and to oversee them to the point where they may appoint elders to serve the assemblies.

The role of apostle has been largely usurped by "missionaries" who are sent by denominational institutions to establish churches in accordance with those institutions' dictates. True apostles operate apart from religious structures whether denominational or, in the case of Wagner's "apostles," beholden to aberrant religious philosophies (such as the Latter Rain Movement).

If there is a restoration of apostles and prophets it is not through any of the churches or para-church organizations that operate in an unscriptural manner. More and more of the true believers are coming out of the religious institutions and are gathering in homes, their eyes being opened to the true pattern for the gathering of the saints. It is in this setting that apostles and prophets will increase, but not to their own profit, and not by their own promotion.

That's not to say that everyone meeting in homes is led by God, or that all house assemblies are of God. It is to say that the megachurch phenomenon is not the place where true believers can grow in wisdom, knowledge and understanding beyond the elementary truths of Scripture. Yet that is where C. Peter Wagner points for evidence that his newly-discovered, old Latter Rain authority structure is at work. ❖

NOTES

1. www.globalharvestministries.org/index.asp?action=about
 2. *Ibid.*
 3. *Ibid.*
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. ("New Apostolic Reformation," *Arise*, September, 2000)
 6. *Ibid.*
 7. *Ibid.*
 8. C. Peter Wagner, *The New Apostolic Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1998) pg. 15.
 9. *Ibid.*
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. "New Apostolic Reformation," *Op. Cit.*
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