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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ECCLESIAL POLITIES: EXAMINING UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF THE NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION MOVEMENT

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There is a new understanding within the evangelical tradition of the apostolic role as a concept for deploying effective leadership. The so-called New Apostolic Reformation movement ('NAR') establishes an alternative approach within today's Christianity, or to be more precise the Pentecostal-charismatic context, one that is noticeably different from the traditional leadership models in Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, or the Evangelical traditions. The NAR model argues that churches need effective leadership models which are theologically grounded in the doctrine of the office of apostle, as described in the New Testament. The traditional Christian church polities are being challenged by this new model which contrasts the denominational landscape with a radical reconstruction. The current fierce debate on the apostolic role shows that there are very different views and opinions; the main areas and elements of distinction are therefore critically examined by using the traditional dominant church polities as lenses through which to view central elements of the NAR doctrine and to illuminate areas of unity and diversity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, Pentecostal and charismatic Christians are organised into thousands of local churches, official and unofficial networks, ministries, congregations, public corporations, associations, or other organisational forms. Each of these various forms require sound leadership models and management systems. Deploying and practising good leadership concepts has always been a crucial issue for organisations, whether they are business enterprises or Christian churches, for profit or for non-profit entities, secular or ecclesiastical organisations. In a paper produced by the global business consultancy

Deloitte, London, U.K., the authors emphasise that effective leadership remains the most important “issue facing organisations around the world, with 86% of respondents to the survey rating it ‘urgent’ or ‘important’.”¹

This article argues that adherents of the New Apostolic Reformation (‘NAR’) movement propose the apostolic organisational leadership model as an alternative approach to that of the established church polities. Its fundamental concept is the understanding that the office of apostleship which has fallen into disuse, is being restored in the church today. Charles Peter Wagner (1930–2016) was the movement’s acknowledged founder and scholarly father. He offers the following definition of the office of apostle: “An apostle is a Christian leader, gifted, taught, commissioned, and sent by God with the authority to establish the foundational government of the church within an assigned sphere of ministry by hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches and by setting things in order accordingly for the growth and maturity of the church and for the extension of the kingdom of God.”² I assert that this apostolic model is a genuine church governance concept within the Pentecostal–charismatic tradition, which is distinct from the traditional structures, leadership mechanisms and hierarchies of the Presbyterian system, the Episcopal polity and the Congregational form. However, very little has so far been said in the theological literature about the understanding of the NAR church government.

The current fierce debate on the apostolic role shows that Christians appear to entertain very different views and opinions. Some theologians claim that the biblical evidence seems to strongly suggest a narrow concept of apostleship relating only to the first century apostolic era. According to Ferguson, there was no continuation of the office of apostles within the church. He stresses that, “In the nature of the case, the apostles had an unrepeatable ministry. With their passing, no one else could give the testimony that they could. Their witness to the life, teachings, and resurrections of Jesus made them the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). In the reversed imagery of the apostles as laying the foundation, they equally belong to the beginning of the church, for such a task is chronologically limited.”³ Likewise, Bavinck argues, “The apostolic foundation of the church and its government does not mean a continuing apostolate.”⁴ Both reject the idea of a continuation of apostleship, as proposed by the NAR scholar Peter Wagner and are adherents of the theological teaching of *cessationism*. It is the idea that, “All the miraculous gifts and ministries died out with the first generation apostles and when the Scripture was completed.”⁵ This refers to gifts of the Holy Spirit like speaking in tongues and also includes the ministry roles like apostles and prophets. American pastor John

¹ Adam Canwell et al., “Global Human Capital Trends 2014: Engaging the 21st-Century Workforce,” in *Deloitte The Millennial Survey 2014* (New York, 2014), 8.

² C.P. Wagner, *Apostles Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2006), 27.

³ Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 306.

⁴ Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 326.

⁵ Benjamin G. McNair Scott, *Apostles Today: Making Sense of Contemporary Charismatic Apostolates: A Historical and Theological Approach* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014), 174.

MacArthur is arguably the most renowned theologian for cessationism today.⁶ MacArthur bluntly criticises the NAR doctrine: "It is high time to expose the New Apostolic Reformation for what it really is: a fraud. It is difficult to overstate the admixture of blatant arrogance and biblical ignorance that pervades the New Apostolic Reformation."⁷ Because of this existing unity and diversity concerning the New Apostolic Reformation's doctrine, the main areas and elements of distinction are therefore critically examined in this article.

An analysis is conducted in this article by employing a comparison of different 'lenses'; the above mentioned dominant three church polities are used as lenses through which the New Apostolic Reformation doctrine will be viewed. This comparative lens approach is a tool to discover whether or not the NAR leadership model meets the expectations raised by the central proposition of this article.⁸ It means that the traditional approaches are used as a framework for understanding the NAR model, in order to change the way it is viewed – just as looking through a pair of glasses changes the way somebody sees an object. Contrasting the core leadership principles will illustrate how the church polities differ.

II. AN ANALYSIS OF THE APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP MODEL

This article proposes the central argument that the apostolic organisational leadership model embodies an alternative approach to the established church polities of the Presbyterian system, the Episcopal concept, and the Congregational form. The NAR movement suggests the necessity of effective leadership models being grounded in the doctrine of the authority of today's apostles. Its fundamental concept is the belief that the defunct governmental office of New Testament polity, namely the office of apostleship, as described in the New Testament, is being reassigned.

There is still a great need to explain the doctrine of the apostolic model. In fact, many Christians have only a very vague idea of the New Apostolic Reformation. Laitinen states that, "Although Wagner is a remarkable missiologist and Christian leader in the United States, he has not been studied by many systematic theologians."⁹ It is considered that the type of lens style comparison used in this article, helps to illuminate such vague ideas and to challenge the stability of the New Apostolic Reformation leadership model, which does not yet seem to be sufficiently understood.

Hence, the focus is on those core elements of the New Apostolic Reformation doctrine that are related to leadership aspects. The examination of the NAR belief system is limited to five key elements, which I consider to be important: the understanding of the apostolic office, aspects of the relational leadership model, dominion theology, the controversy of accountability, and finally the question of authority in individuals.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2013), 89.

⁸ Robert P. Yagelski, *Writing: Ten Core Concepts* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2014), 207.

⁹ Petri Laitinen, "Spiritual Gifts According to C. Peter Wagner" (PhD Dissertation, Åbo Akademi University, 2014), 20.

Examining the Apostolic Office in the NAR Movement

In this first section, the understanding of the Apostolic Office concept, as per the NAR movement's definition, is scrutinised in greater depth by using the lens of the 'Papal Office' as it is applied by the Roman Catholic Church which is used as one illustration for Episcopal polity.¹⁰ The papacy leadership model is a central element of its church polity which is used to understand the concept of the apostolic office within the NAR belief system more clearly, by contrasting these two dimensions.¹¹ Thereby, the question of whether these two traditions, the Roman Catholic belief system and the NAR understanding, are talking about the same thing or two different approaches, is examined.

According to Roman Catholic tradition, the history of the papal office as leader of the global church spans from New Testament times to the present day. A literal connection to the early, post-biblical apostles is maintained through direct apostolic succession; it is argued that authority has continued to exist because it has been passed on, without interruption, through the laying on of hands.¹² This succession can be traced all the way from the current office holders back to the founding apostles themselves and thus, according to the Roman Catholic tradition, the apostolic line is considered to be authentic and alive. The apostolic office is handed over as an institutionalised office within the denomination.¹³

A new leader, the pope as the head of the Roman Catholic Church, is elected by bishops and consequently elevated to this office of authority qua appointment. The doctrinal argument for this is that Jesus said to Peter in Matthew 16:18 (NIV), "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church." The Roman Catholic Church's understanding is that it was clearly assumed that Peter was the spokesman for the first apostles and had a vital leadership role.¹⁴ Peter's presence in Rome is historically confirmed and in the third century, both Tertullian, a prolific early Christian writer, and Hippolytus, a bishop of Rome, regarded Peter as the primary person among the bishops of Rome.¹⁵ "Ubi Petrus Ibi Ecclesia," "Where Peter is, there is the Church", is the famous quote from Ambrose of Milan, an Italian bishop who was an influential ecclesiastical church leader in the 4th century.¹⁶ The Catechism of the Catholic Church states in paragraph 882,

¹⁰ It should be noted that the Roman Catholic Church does not understand itself to be a denomination; see e.g. M. Maxwell, *Biblical Truth or Church Tradition* (Fort Oglethorpe: Teach Services Publishing, 2015), 100.

¹¹ Frank J. Coppa, *Politics and the Papacy in the Modern World* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 13.

¹² Thomas Rausch, *The Roots of the Catholic Tradition* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), 136.

¹³ Thomas P. Rausch, *Towards a Truly Catholic Church: An Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 211.

¹⁴ Jean-Louis Leuba and Harold Knight, *New Testament Pattern: An Exegetical Enquiry into the Catholic and Protestant Dualism* (Cambridge: James Clarke Company Limited, 2002), 65.

¹⁵ David L. Eastman, *The Many Deaths of Peter and Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 189.

¹⁶ Todd D. Baker, *Exodus from Rome: A Biblical and Historical Critique of Roman Catholicism*, vol. 1 (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2014), 36.

The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful. For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.¹⁷

The principal leadership mechanism is the understanding of papacy and an authority which is passed on as an institutionalised office of the church. Catholic scholars have commented on this directive and the Catholic Church instituted other supportive offices – as the pope is only one person – such as the papal chancellor and papal representatives, who have different tasks.¹⁸ This statement makes an important claim and points to the papacy's essential centrality in relation to the unity of the Roman Catholic Church.

By way of contrast, the New Apostolic Reformation movement argues that the office of apostle in today's contemporary Christianity is a supernatural and sovereign appointment by God. It is a governmental office which is granted by Jesus Christ himself to an individual person through an ascension gift released by the Holy Spirit. The NAR scholar Wagner emphasises the gift of apostleship, arguing, "It obviously would be very difficult to understand the gift of apostle through the framework of the situational view. No one would have expected Peter or Paul or John to wake up some days without the gift of apostle...Both then and now, the gift of apostle, once given by God, becomes a special attribute of the individual."¹⁹ According to Wagner's teaching, it is impossible for any congregation or its authorised representatives to organise an election process for selecting a new apostle and to reach a result by following a defined set of rules. Instead, it is Jesus Christ who assigns and allocates the gift of apostleship, outside of any denominational obligation or tradition.²⁰ This point is the beginning of a longer-term recognition process which starts with the person herself, followed at some stage by a confirmation by the local congregation and later, by other peer leaders and translocal ministries. The confirmation process is, however, not a clearly defined process but an evolution which can even take several years. Whilst the pope's authority is given qua institutionalised office, the NAR apostle grows through being acknowledged by the people around him, through recognition of a godly authority and through the supernatural anointing from the Holy Spirit, which equips and enables the individual for the office of apostle.

In the NAR belief system, there is no defined institutionalised process for an apostolic succession.²¹ Whilst the Roman Catholic Church teaches that the office has been passed by literal apostolic succession during the centuries since New Testament times, the NAR instead teaches an apostolic succession of the function and continuation of the original calling of apostleship from New Testament times until today, through the

¹⁷ http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P2A.HTM / Accessed on 8th May 2019.

¹⁸ Timothy P. Broglio, "The Pastoral Dimension of the Office of Papal Representatives," *The Jurist: Studies in Church Law and Ministry* 75, no. 2 (2015): 297-311.

¹⁹ Peter C. Wagner, *Apostles Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Publishing Group, 2006), 56.

²⁰ McNair Scott, *Apostles Today: Making Sense of Contemporary Charismatic Apostolates: A Historical and Theological Approach*, 23.

²¹ Daniel Juster, *Apostolic Ministry and Authority* (Raleigh, N.C.: Lulu.com, 2017), 55.

apostolic anointing of the Holy Spirit as a gift.²² In this sense, it is an apostolic succession which is transmitted across successive generations in the history of the church, but is impossible for any human to predict whom God will appoint next and thus is independent of any denomination, firm process or long tradition.

Comparing the Relational Model of the NAR Movement

In the following section, the New Apostolic Reformation movement's relational model is examined by contrasting it with the question of the pope's legitimate power in the Roman Catholic Church tradition, which is again used as a lens for comparison. The head of the Roman Catholic Church enjoys his authority by virtue of the legal position to which he was elected.²³ The pope is not only the head of the denomination and equipped with papal infallibility, but also the monarch of a state. He is the supreme teacher of the Roman Catholic Church and cannot err when he teaches on matters of faith or morals. The proceedings of the first Vatican Council (1869–70) define the conditions under which a pope may be said to have spoken *ex cathedra* (i.e. from his position as the highest teacher of his denomination).²⁴ Since 1929, the pope has also been leader of the Vatican City microstate, a city–state enclaved within Rome itself. As with many former monarchies in which the legislative, executive and judicial authority of government resides in the crown, the office of pope comprises all three expressions. The pope is elected by following clearly defined legal procedures and is granted the powers of his office, both spiritually, as the head of a denomination and earthly, as the leader of a state, as a consequence of the application of such procedures. In contrast, the NAR scholar Peter Wagner refers to the works of Max Weber in order to demonstrate how the inner mechanism of the apostleship model works.²⁵ He states, “I am using the term ‘charismatic’ here, not in the theological sense, but in the sociological sense. Max Weber, the German sociologist regarded by many as the father of modern sociology, defines the term charisma.”²⁶ As Weber pioneered a path towards understanding how authority is legitimated as a belief system, Wagner uses his works, especially his idea of the routinization of charisma, to explain charismatic authority describing the phenomenon of new apostolic leaders arising whom Christians are willing to follow.²⁷ The three types of legitimate rule which are proposed by Weber, are

²² Timothy K Williams, *The Spiritual Gifts (Part 1): The Ascension Gifts of Christ and the Functional Gifts of God* (Maitland: Xulon Press, 2003), 326.

²³ Klaus Schatz, John A. Otto, and Linda M. Maloney, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 155.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Max Weber, a German sociologist and philosopher, had a profound influence with his ideas on social theories that are used to study and interpret social phenomena, proposing a theory of authority that included three types. See Max Weber, “The Three Types of Legitimate Rule,” *Berkeley Publications in Society and Institutions* 4 (1958).

²⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1999), 114.

²⁷ This is also common among other Pentecostal scholars; see e.g. M. M. Poloma and J. C. Green, *The Assemblies of God: godly Love and the Revitalization of American Pentecostalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 46.

discussed briefly in the following, together with how Peter Wagner applies them to the New Apostolic Reformation doctrine.

According to Weber, *legal authority* is founded on a set of rules which are applied both administratively and judicially, according to basic principles. The executors of these rules are selected according to defined legal procedures and their superiors are also subject to the same rules. Broadly, the rules regulate their powers, distinguish their private lives from official tasks and require written justification in the form of documentation.²⁸

Traditional authority, as Weber points out, is based on a set of rules according to which authority is legitimised because it 'has always existed' and thus a long tradition of actual practice can be demonstrated. People in authority often acquire that authority simply by inheriting it. Officials are either personal adherents or loyal personal associates. Their authority is usually similar to that of those who have power over them, but simply of a lesser extent, and they are also often chosen due to inheritance.²⁹

Charismatic authority, as Weber states, is based on the charisma of the leading figure, who demonstrates that they possess leadership qualities due to magical powers, a very special appeal, spirit, fortitude, or boldness. An adherent respects this person's predestined right to lead due to their unique qualities and charisma, not because of any long-lasting traditions or legal requirements. Officials are those who have voluntarily demonstrated their devotion to the leading person, including those who may possess their own charisma.³⁰

Wagner notes that his understanding of today's apostles has strong similarities to Weber's third concept, that of charismatic authority.³¹ Other Christians or ministries respect a person's authority to lead apostolically because of a unique quality and charisma, instead of any long-lasting tradition or legal powers. The apostles carry an anointing on their lives which increasingly gives them a godly authority. In this context, Wagner stresses the important basic necessity of every apostle having an exemplary character.³² They must meet the requirements for being a 'blameless' leader, as defined in the New Testament in 1 Tim. 3:2. Wagner argues, "Apostles are apostles not because they are perfect, but because they have met God's standards of holiness and humility."³³ And he adds, "Apostles who continue to see the blessings and anointing of God on their ministry have learned how to humble themselves. Yes, it takes time, but it gets easier with maturity."³⁴ He considers that being an apostle is especially and primarily a matter of exhibiting an exemplary character, above any other single quality. Wagner argues that, "According to Max Weber, there is a clear distinction between

²⁸ Reinhard Bendix and Guenther Roth, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 294.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 295.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Publishing Group, 2000).

³² McNair Scott, *Apostles Today: Making Sense of Contemporary Charismatic Apostolates: A Historical and Theological Approach*, 70.

³³ Wagner, *Apostles Today*, 39.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

legal–rational leadership in which the position confers the power and charismatic leadership in which the person has been entrusted with the power.”³⁵ In the Roman Catholic Church, this level of legal power is complemented by an outstanding tradition in which traditional authority as a set of rules, is legitimised because it ‘has always existed’. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, very few other Christian denominations can look back on so many centuries of tradition. It appears that the pope enjoys authority which is especially legitimised by the Roman Catholic Church’s belief system, through a set of rules that is applied administratively and judicially.³⁶ Instead, according to Wagner, an apostle moves within a voluntary network of relationships, with the reputation and recognition only growing slowly over time, as more and more peers and churches acknowledge that the gifts of an apostle are at work. According to Wagner, apostles have a spiritual gifting and special job, combined with exemplary characters. An apostolic ministry is defined by central tasks, such as receiving revelation, transmitting a vision, pioneering, establishing a functioning polity, discipling, sending off, and activating God’s blessings in others, as well as aligning generations and equipping Christians in local churches.³⁷ Therefore, it has to be pointed out that, “Charisma must become routineised into standardised procedures and structures if the group is to persist beyond the life of the figure who triggered it.”³⁸ I assume that sociological realities suggest that apostolic networks will eventually lead to some form of institutionalisation.³⁹ Relational leadership is an approach which values leadership as a process where the question of purpose is at the core of a relational model: “Relationships are at the forefront of this type of leadership.”⁴⁰ Therefore, it has to be considered that relational bonds will develop and change over time between an apostle and followers based on the notion of their social exchange; strictly voluntary relationships may be influenced by formal aspects like contractual questions between pastors and congregations.⁴¹ An apostle moves within a completely voluntary network, and since this role does not have any institutionalised authority and thereby, Wagner expects an apostle to have an extraordinary character and a very humble attitude, pointing out, “there is no doubt that holiness of character generates authority.”⁴² The position of an apostle may remain informal but is nevertheless a position that has an impact on formal positions.

³⁵ Wagner, *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It*, 118.

³⁶ Norman Tanner, *New Short History of the Catholic Church* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 1.

³⁷ Wagner, *Apostles Today*, 28.

³⁸ Paul Gifford, *Religious Authority*, ed. John Hinnells, *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 409.

³⁹ Margaret M. Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 207.

⁴⁰ Paige Haber, *Progressive Leadership: Models and Perspectives for Effective Leadership*, ed. Kathryn A. Agard, vol. 1, *Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations: A Reference Handbook* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2010), 316.

⁴¹ Craig Johnson and Michael Hackman, *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*, 7 ed. (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2018), 98.

⁴² Wagner, *Apostles Today*, 24.

Analysing the Dominion Theology in the NAR Doctrine

In this next section, the notion of 'dominion theology' which is another cornerstone of the New Apostolic Reformation doctrine, is examined by employing a comparison. The *two kingdoms* doctrine of the German Lutheran church as one illustration for Presbyterian polity is used as a lens to examine the NAR movement's doctrinal perspective on legitimate interference in all matters of society in order to achieve transformation of cities and regions, and for the establishment of actively Christian values.

The Lutheran tradition's two kingdoms approach claims that the state and the church are two separate and autonomous realms; and therefore the state should not interfere with the church and the church should not interfere with the state.⁴³ According to this doctrine, God rules the worldly kingdom through secular government and its representatives by means of law, and the heavenly or spiritual kingdom through the gospel and grace which are preached and practised by the church. The two kingdoms doctrine is indeed the subject of an important discussion in contemporary theological thought. Whereas Martin Luther seemed to draw a firm line between spiritual and temporal governance, and stressed that the two realms should under no circumstances be confused or mixed, this has been interpreted over the centuries as if he had unravelled the secularisation of modern-day societies and given a completely free hand to the state authorities.⁴⁴ Both kingdoms are certainly distinct but at the same time, they are inextricably linked with each other. The two spheres are not rivals; they belong to one another. Luther's different spheres of authority are interdependent since the Bible cannot maintain societal peace and justice in and of itself, nor can civil government enact any human being's spiritual salvation. It is certainly justified to say that the German reformer fought strongly against society's secularisation in his day.⁴⁵ Although this understanding granted North American Lutherans, for example, a rigid separation of state and church in the United States, it also led to Lutheranism making only limited efforts to penetrate and remodel societies' social and political orders.⁴⁶ The weakness of Luther's doctrine on this point arguably became particularly evident more than four centuries later during Nazism.⁴⁷ When the German regime announced laws which were racially highly biased, and which also had a dramatic impact on the churches, several Lutheran theologians accepted that the regime had the authority, per divine mandate, to do so. The political developments in Nazi Germany caused some prominent Lutherans, such as the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to reconsider the traditional Lutheran view.⁴⁸ It seems as if theological interpretations might have

⁴³ Tim Chester, *Good News to the Poor: The Gospel through Social Involvement* (London: SPCK, 2012), 160.

⁴⁴ Per Frostin, *Luther's Two Kingdoms Doctrine: A Critical Study* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994).

⁴⁵ William Henry Lazareth, *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible, and Social Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 15-16.

⁴⁶ Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 6.

⁴⁷ Joel Oesch, *More Than a Pretty Face: Using Embodied Lutheran Theology to Evaluate Community-Building in Online Social Networks* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2017), 82.

⁴⁸ Michael P. DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 82.

allowed them to be led astray in the past by the politically opportune inclinations of the times, and to bend Martin Luther's two kingdoms belief system into a plea and alligation for secularisation.⁴⁹ I agree with Nygren who argues, "Where Luther drew a clear line between spiritual and temporal authority, and expressly emphasised that under no circumstances should these two realms be confused, this has been interpreted as if he had thereby opened the door to the secularisation of society and given a completely free hand to the State."⁵⁰ Luther rather anticipated that the secular realm would be governed by godly German princes who would listen to the church and accept its admonitions.⁵¹

By way of contrast, one of the central elements of the New Apostolic Reformation movement's belief system is the expectation that the global ecclesia is commissioned to bring the entire world increasingly under Christianity's positive influence and dominion, and to progressively apply godly principles in actual practice here on earth, before the rapture of the *bride* and the return of Jesus Christ.⁵² It is part of Wagner's eschatology that Christianity has a divine mandate via the Holy Spirit, to take dominion of God's creation during the end times. Wagner expects to see cities, regions and even nations transformed to such an extent that the kingdom of God's values will increasingly be supported in those spheres. Within this theological understanding, Wagner emphasises the role of apostleship and today's apostles' need to also take their places in the workplace in order to achieve this transformation and dominion.⁵³ Wagner argues that until now, many Christian minds might have been influenced by the two kingdoms doctrine, to distinguish between these two spheres, consciously or unconsciously: the sacred versus the secular, the clergy versus laity, the spiritual versus the worldly or the church versus the world. It is a pattern which tends to compartmentalise life and does not integrate and connect all its spheres. Work might fall into the belief system's secular category, while Christian ministry activities fall into the sacred category. Instead, Wagner emphasises that, "I want to focus on the first commonality, persevering leadership, in an attempt to show that territorial apostles are essential for successful, proactive social transformation....City transformation will rise or fall on persevering leadership....If this is true (and I believe it is), then a central question becomes, who are the God-appointed leaders or spiritual gatekeepers of the city?"⁵⁴ Wagner pledges to pursue a dominion theology. Transformation of cities and regions will be fostered and facilitated by regional apostles who accept their God-given authority.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Harold J. Berman, "Religious Foundations of Law in the West: An Historical Perspective," *Journal of Law and Religion* 1, no. 1 (1983): 3-43.

⁵⁰ <https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/931> / Anders Nygren, *Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms* Accessed on 31 May 2021.

⁵¹ Scott H. Hendrix, "Loyalty, Piety, or Opportunism: German Princes and the Reformation," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 25, no. 2 (1994): 211.

⁵² Paul C. McGlasson, *No! A Theological Response to Christian Reconstructionism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 66.

⁵³ John Weaver, *The New Apostolic Reformation: History of a Modern Charismatic Movement* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2016), 145.

⁵⁴ Wagner, *Apostles Today*, 125.

⁵⁵ Wagner uses the terms regional and territorial apostles synonymously.

Criticizing the Accountability Dimension of the NAR Doctrine

In this section, another principle of Presbyterian church government is considered in order to criticise and challenge the NAR belief system regarding accountability of leadership. Presbyterian church government is a less hierarchical form of church governance; a concept that emerged mainly from the Protestant reformation in Europe in which reformers abolished the office of bishop and diminished the status of a single priest presiding over a congregation to that of an equal team member within the presbytery.

As Juster points out, “In classic Presbyterianism, the ultimate authority in human government in the Body is in the Presbytery,”⁵⁶ and not in the local church pastor or the general assembly meeting. Only a few decisions are made by single individuals and hardly any by the complete congregation voting. Most decisions about all aspects of a local congregation’s life are made by the session. These questions range from providing for worship, spiritual training and teaching for adherents in the congregation, through to organising the church’s property, building, insurances and managing the annual budget. If anything must be decided, then the decision is made by majority within the session, after an opportunity for discussion and discernment.

How the local congregation is set up and governed has a direct impact on the way that local churches address any conflict and can have profound consequences for whether or not conflicts are addressed successfully. For instance, in recent years, some local German Roman Catholic churches have been shaken by reports of abusive clergy.⁵⁷ Heresy and departures from a generally accepted doctrine, power struggles, or simple malicious gossip, also present challenges, not only in mainline churches but also in Pentecostal and charismatic congregations.⁵⁸

In view of this, the Presbyterian church polity constitutes a representative form of government which expresses the closeness of the local congregation and includes spiritual supervision and church governance by a group of selected elders. This creates accountability, provides well-defined checks and balances and minimises abuses of church authority.⁵⁹ “Because of the fact that each elder and pastor has an equal vote in the church’s governing assemblies (Session, Presbytery and General Assembly), the Presbyterian principle of a plurality and parity of elders helps to rein in domineering personalities and prevent the potential abuses of a one-man rule.”⁶⁰ Presbyterian church government provides accountability of the leadership team, and as such, it aims to

⁵⁶ Juster, *Apostolic Ministry and Authority*, 52.

⁵⁷ <https://www.dw.com/en/german-catholic-church-covered-up-cases-of-sexual-abuse-by-clergy/a-56958055/> Accessed on 24 May 2021.

⁵⁸ <https://nypost.com/2021/02/15/hillsong-founder-brian-houston-moving-away-from-current-role/> Accessed on 24 May 2021.

⁵⁹ <http://lakeopc.net/2016/the-advantages-of-presbyterian-church-government/> / Accessed on 31.12.2019. Paul E. Engle and Steven B. Cowan, *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 73.

⁶⁰ <http://lakeopc.net/2016/the-advantages-of-presbyterian-church-government/> Accessed on 17 May 2019.

protect local members from spiritually malignant persons, while guaranteeing that the pastor does not become the local ‘king’, whose word is final and definitive. In contrast, the question of accountability in the New Apostolic Reformation movement is a contentious, debatable subject. Cannistraci, in his early book, *Apostles and the Emerging Apostolic Movement*, addresses the question of apostolic accountability as follows,

What we observe in the New Testament is this principle of mutual accountability where the ‘generals’ become accountable to one another. This principle mandates that people become accountable to their top-level peers as well as to their ultimate head. It creates an effective relational network whereby authorities (especially in positions of headship) maintain openness, communication and teachability with one another. Within this arrangement, submission to one another is practiced and abuses are avoided.⁶¹

Cannistraci’s suggested structure is quite clear regarding the accountability of a local church leader: they are answerable to a pertinent apostle. But to whom are the apostles accountable in turn? With an apostle’s level of authority comes the demand for appropriate accountability. It is a crucial aspect of the NAR polity.

Wagner proceeds from Cannistraci’s standpoint and argues, “In my opinion, the peer-level accountability is the one level on which the future integrity of the New Apostolic Reformation will undoubtedly stand or fall.”⁶² Apostles who decide to join any apostolic network voluntarily, place themselves under the leadership of a specific, overseeing apostle and accept any accountability mechanism involved. Wagner refers to the biblical example of the epistles to Timothy and Titus, who were members of Paul’s apostolic team. Titus was under Paul’s accountability, who told him in Titus 1:5 (NIV), “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint[a] elders in every town, as I directed you.” According to Wagner, Titus was an apostle who oversaw the pastors and congregations in Crete.⁶³ However, this does not answer the underlying question: to whom is the supervising apostle accountable?

The NAR advocates have not yet offered any clear solution to the lack of accountability criticised by the NAR’s critics. It leaves room for abuse by the apostles’ leadership. This was an important factor which motivated Wagner to establish the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, an organisation intended to provide accountability between apostles, although there is no evidence to suggest that such a network can completely strict accountability. The idea for the ICAL emerged in Singapore in 1999 where several apostolic leaders were discussing how a collection of global apostolic leaders could advance the kingdom of God. Peter Wagner accepted the position of Presiding Apostle effective 2001. ICAL’s mission is “to connect apostles’ wisdom and resources in order that each member can function more strategically, combine their efforts globally, and effectively accelerate the advancement of the Kingdom of God into every sphere of society.”⁶⁴ Membership is voluntary, so members

⁶¹ David Cannistraci, *Apostles and the Emerging Apostolic Movement* (Ventura, Calif.: Renew Books, 1998), 151-152.

⁶² Wagner, *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It*, 122.

⁶³ Wagner, *Apostles Today*, 78.

⁶⁴ <https://www.icaleaders.com/about-ical/> / Accessed on 22 May 2019.

also have the option of detaching themselves from the network voluntarily. The apostolic peer-level network defines its goals as follows, “ICAL provides apostolic accountability. ICAL members are committed to maintaining the highest possible levels of integrity of personal character and operational methodology among its members. The ICAL Advisory Council gives oversight and enforces the code of biblical conduct required of each member to insure the standards of ICAL.”⁶⁵ A central challenge for the NAR’s apostolic leadership model is establishing effective accountability mechanisms, in order to avoid malfeasance and the abuse of power. As membership is voluntary, the most severe sanction is presumably expulsion which might attract some public attention and cause critical public debates.

Determining Authority in Individuals of the NAR Belief System

Finally, another conceptual pairing that is examined in the following section, is the aspect of authority in groups or in individuals. The Baptist tradition is used as one illustration for congregational polity and how this church polity’s traditions can speak to the NAR movement’s practice, is analysed. The congregational context acts as the lens through which the NAR doctrine is determined.

Congregational church government firmly recognises the authority of the local members to make the church’s decisions and is thus a form of democracy at a basic level.⁶⁶ The local congregation forms the platform for organising its members’ church lives through services, worship, house groups, Sunday school, youth groups, Christian scouting organisations such as Royal Rangers, finances, etc. A local church is often able to finance a full-time, ordained, senior pastor who was trained at a Baptist bible college, and sometimes the support of an additional, full-time, youth pastor. The highest authority for all the local church’s principal decisions, activities and doctrine, rests with the general assembly meeting of the congregation. It is this church forum which decides and votes on all local church matters, including appointing a full-time pastor, by following a defined vocational process and a simple or absolute majority decision.⁶⁷ This *democracy* is a system of leadership in which the members of the local congregation exercise authority and power by voting. This principal leadership mechanism is highly valued in the Baptist tradition.

In contrast to congregational doctrine, the New Apostolic Reformation movement argues that a culturally rather than a biblically directed development of democracy is a factor that can weaken denominational churches over time.⁶⁸ Wagner assumes that in traditional denominations, “The locus of corporate trust is not the pastor... There is a general mind-set that individuals are not worthy of a great deal of trust on any level.

⁶⁵ <https://www.icaleaders.com/about-ical/prospectus/> / Accessed on 22 May 2019.

⁶⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 55.

⁶⁷ George D. Parsons and Speed B. Leas, *Understanding Your Congregation as a System: The Manual* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994), 31.

⁶⁸ Wagner, *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It*, 89.

Groups, somehow or other, appear to be safer.”⁶⁹ The American Rick Warren, Senior Pastor of the evangelical Saddleback megachurch, expresses it in this way: “What do the words committees, elections, majority rule, boards, board members, parliamentary procedures, voting, and vote have in common? None of these words is found in the New Testament!”⁷⁰ Wagner stresses that apostles are first in the divine order for leadership of congregations, and argues, “In traditional denominations, the locus of authority is ordinarily found in groups, not in individuals. That is why we are accustomed to hearing about deacon boards, boards of trustees, presbyteries, general assemblies, and so on. In the New Apostolic Reformation, however, trust has shifted from groups to individuals.”⁷¹ His approach whereby power rests with apostolic leaders, results in a concept in which, at the local congregation level, a pastor now acts as the leader and the shepherd of the church rather than as a democratically elected employee of the congregation who is controlled by it. At the regional level, an apostle is a leading figure who has won the affection and trust of the local pastors and thus been granted authority by the network of church leaders and congregations. The local churches and their pastors willingly submit to the apostle’s spiritual authority. According to Wagner, this extraordinary authority comes from a special God-given anointing of the Holy Spirit on this particular leader, in which the spiritual gift of apostleship entails supernatural signs and wonders. Reference is made to the biblical report by the apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 12:12 (NIV), “I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles.” The performance of supernatural manifestations, such as physical healing, can be a visible confirmation of apostleship. This doctrinal thought model of apostolic leadership is based on voluntary relationships between congregations and non-obligatory networks of churches, with unsolicited associations and free alignments.

III. CONCLUSIONS

As there is little constructive research on NAR church governance, the core leadership practices were analysed applying a lens comparison strategy, using the dominant church polities as lenses through which Wagner’s concept was viewed. Contrasting the understanding of key leadership elements in this article has illustrated the differences between the NAR doctrine and the dominant church polities. Concerning the understanding of the apostolic office, I have shown in this article that the Roman Catholic doctrine is very different from the NAR belief system. Peter Wagner defines apostleship as a supernatural gift from God, which is related to the personal calling of an individual whom the Holy Spirit anoints as an apostolic leader, whilst the Roman Catholic Church’s tradition arguably defines their leader’s office as an institutionalised office, dependent on election by cardinals who themselves were elected to that office, papally appointed. It appears that the New Apostolic Reformation movement’s

⁶⁹ Ibid., 81.

⁷⁰ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 377.

⁷¹ Wagner, *Apostles Today*, 23.

terminology is incongruent with that of the Roman Catholic Church and their nomenclatures; thus, it is recognizably different in nature from the traditional structures, leadership mechanism and hierarchies of this particular polity.

The New Apostolic Reformation movement's relational model, as this article has highlighted, is unequivocally distinct from the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and its hierarchical system. In this church tradition, legal and traditional authority follow a pattern which is indeed different from the charismatic authority associated with the NAR's understanding of apostles with a godly anointing on their lives.

Moreover, by contrasting the classical tradition of a Presbyterial polity dimension and NAR understanding, this article has demonstrated that the core element of the New Apostolic Reformation movement, dominion theology, is noticeably different from the Lutheran church's tradition. The two kingdoms concept aims at a clear distinction between secular government and the spiritual kingdom, whilst the NAR concept claims to have a divine mandate through the might of the Holy Spirit, to recapture the dominion over God's earth, including having an impact upon secular government and other spheres.

Furthermore, in this article, a core leadership question about the NAR movement, the aspect of accountability, was contrasted with the Presbyterial system of church government, which has shown how these forms of church polity differ regarding this particular dimension. The Presbyterial church polity sends a strong message to the NAR leadership concept, because the NAR's teaching still lacks a clear and convincing answer regarding the challenging aspect of apostles' lack of accountability. It remains a contentious issue in the New Apostolic Reformation movement. With the considerable extent of an apostle's authority comes the demand that appropriate accountability mechanisms are defined.

Finally, the NAR movement's doctrine, that apostles are first in the divine order of congregational leadership, is significantly different from the tradition of congregational church government and actual democratic practices within Baptist church structures. At the beginning of this paper, it was pointed out that the article proposition is the central argument that the apostolic organisational leadership model represents an alternative approach to the established church polities.

Table 1: Unity and Diversity of The Apostolic Leadership Model

Church Governance	Illustration	Core Lenses
Episcopal	Roman Catholic Church	Papal Office; Hierarchical; Succession in Office; Elected by Bishops; Authority by Virtue of the Legal Position; Canon Law
Presbyterial	German Lutheran Church	Representative Authority; Presbyteries; Accountability of Leadership Team; Two Kingdoms: State and Church
Congregational	Baptist Churches	Democracy at Basic Level: Local Congregation Decides - Authority in Groups
Apostolic	New Apostolic Reformation	Sovereign Appointment by God; Ascension Gift; Recognition Process; Acknowledgement by Congregations; Charismatic Authority; Voluntary Relationships & Networks; Relational Leadership; Dominion Theology & Transformation; Spiritual Authority in Individual

It has been argued that this model is a genuine church governance concept because it is distinct from the traditional structures, leadership mechanisms and hierarchies of the dominant polities.

Contrasting these core leadership principles has demonstrated the differences between the church polities and indicated that the New Apostolic Reformation movement is establishing an alternative approach within today's Christianity. This leads to additional considerations for future research, namely the question of the apostolic model's applicability in actual, real-world practice. If Christians decide for themselves that the NAR leadership model is a valuable theological concept, then there are still many practical questions to be answered: for instance, the process of becoming an acknowledged apostle, prophet, etc. at the present time, the experience of working together in a five-fold ministry team, the relationship between the team, local congregations and other Christian ministries, the practice of accountability, the question of money and how the apostolic ministry is financed, the appreciation of ecumenical endeavours and the challenge of regional collaborations beyond different doctrines. Is the NAR leadership concept really genuine, suitable for practical use and operable? I argue that the academic literature does not yet contain many valuable, detailed case studies on the actual apostolic leadership practice. Helpful is research already done, for instance, by William Kay on several apostolic networks in Britain.⁷² It would be positive to undertake more case studies with the aim of testing the NAR model's suitability for

⁷² William Kay, *Apostolic Networks of Britain: New Ways of Being Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).
William Kay, "Apostolic Networks in Britain Revisited," *Pneuma* 38 (2016).

practice. I suggest qualitative and quantitative research methods which can collect evidence about the lived NAR experiences. This question will have to be critically examined in further theological debates.

About the Author

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