

New Apostolic Reformation: Apostolic Ministry for Today

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Abstract *This article analyzes the idea of Peter Wagner, the main representative of the New Apostolic Reformation, that apostles should and must govern local church congregations. The support for this claim is based primarily on Ephesians 2:20 where Paul said that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” The question then is, whether people with the gift of apostolic ministry represent that foundation or the foundation is the apostolic teaching itself. Closely connected with this is the question whether the apostolic ministry/office continues today or not. The first part of the article analyzes the reasons for the occurrence of this idea in Wagner’s theology and the ultimate goals of the NAR movement. In the second part, it analyzes the biblical understanding of the apostolic ministry which is common for NAR theologians, and finally, compares these ideas with traditional ideas about apostolic ministry in Christianity. The author argues that while apostolic ministry in the Body of Christ continues even today and should be recognized as an office, the authority of apostles should be influential and spiritual, not governmental and hierarchical.*

Introduction

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is a relatively new movement in Christianity that likes to attach to its name the title of “The Third Wave of the Spirit.” Just by examining the etymology of these two titles we can gain a better understanding of its emphasis: it is a movement that advocates the claim that it was initiated by the Spirit, is something New that God is doing, is Apostolic (apostles are prominent figures), and is a Reformation. The goal is to shape and reshape Christian practice, beliefs and traditions. As a person who is open to new things that the Spirit is doing to reform his Church, I am challenged, personally and

theologically, by this research, because if God is doing something new, I believe I should follow that. Yet, we are called not to believe every spirit, but to test whether the spirits are from God or not (1 Jn 4:1).

The focus of this paper will be the examination of the role, significance and teaching about apostles which the NAR promotes, especially the NAR's idea that apostles should govern local congregations. My primary source for this will be the writings of Peter Wagner, the main representative of this movement.

This paper will be divided into three main sections. In the first section, I will explore the beginning and the ultimate goal of the NAR's teachings and activities. Secondly, I will present the NAR's biblical understanding of the roles of the apostles and discuss the implementation of the apostolic ministry according to their teachings. Finally, in the last section, I will compare the NAR's theology with other theological ideas about an apostolic ministry.

THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF THE NAR MOVEMENT

Peter Wagner and his Spiritual Transformation

To understand the NAR we have to explore the work and theology of Peter Wagner. He is not the founder of the movement, but through his work and influence, he became the main representative, spokesman and promoter of the NAR. Today, his books, seminars and ideas are key sources for understanding the theology, work and influence of the NAR. In this section, therefore, I will focus on Wagner's spiritual development and growth which will provide reasons for and motives behind his theology.

Wagner's theology is "a posteriori theology."¹ For the first sixteen years of their ministry, he and his wife, Doris, were missionaries in Bolivia (1956-1971) where he planted one church and was involved in academic works as the director of a Bible Institute, combining mission administration with seminary teaching. Looking back on this work, Wagner observes that "although our years of service left some positive residue, it is embarrassing to look back and realize how little our investments of time, money, and energy actually produced" (Wagner, 8). His first shift in theology and ministry came through his missiology professor, Donald McGavran, who challenged him to measure the effectiveness of his missionary work, not through faithfulness, but through success in terms of multiplying

¹ Personally, I do not have anything against "a posteriori theology" per se. After all, we have all been shaped by our experiences and observations. Such theology becomes a problem when we try to "reconcile" what the Bible says with our experiences by any means.

Christian churches in numbers and in sizes. Confronted with such an idea, Wagner's response was very profound and significant for his future work. He said, "If God wants the lost sheep found, let's do what it takes to find them and bring them into the fold... If numbers of lost souls saved and brought into life-giving churches increased, I was ready for all of the above and more" (Wagner, 8). His burning desire to reach the lost gave birth to the "what it takes" and "ready for all" attitude which would mark his theology in the coming years.

After discovering concepts of technical church growth under McGavran's mentorship, his second shift came around 1980 when he discovered the spiritual dimension of church growth, namely the role of the supernatural. Wagner, as an anti-charismatic, began to research Pentecostal churches and their theology, and also invited his friend, John Wimber, to come to Fuller Seminary to join him in teaching the course called "Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth." Wagner was deeply impressed by the fact that church growth in the Book of Acts was generally connected with supernatural manifestations (like healing the sick and casting out demons) that prepared the way for the Word of God to be preached. Around 1987, Wagner began to question the role of prayer in the world's evangelization which finally led him to the teaching about territorial spirits, spiritual warfare, spiritual mapping and identificational repentance. His last shift occurred around 1993 when he began to notice different movements, not particularly associated with one another, having these same characteristics. These new churches had a new authority structure which was different from that of traditional Christianity, namely a relational instead of a bureaucratic authority. This new model of a relational authority in a church was implemented in two ways. On the local level, a church was run by the pastor and on the trans-local level, a number of churches were under the authority of an apostle (Wagner, 3). Precisely in these movements, Wagner found the last and key missing piece of the puzzle in his search for the answer for effective church growth which had been neglected for centuries— a new church structure with apostles at the head. He saw their church structure as the main reason for their rapid growth.

The Foundation and the Root of the NAR

Wagner's desire for church growth led him to the conclusion that in order for the church to grow it needed to have a good technical understanding of church growth. The supernatural element is very important; spiritual warfare is crucial, but all that will produce nothing if the church's structure is out of place, and for him, the God-given church structure is a church led by apostles.

Wagner traced the genealogy of the NAR to four major sources: the African Independent Churches - a movement which began around 1900 and was charac-

terized by the placing of an incredible amount of authority in individuals in the body of Christ; the Chinese House Churches movement, which began around 1976, where certain people were rising up who had authority over literally millions of Christians; the Latin America Churches, where around 1980 in urban areas, the largest churches were led by very strong leaders (Wagner, 3); and, finally, the Latter Rain movement,² which occurred around the 1940's, that Wagner sees as formative only for churches in the USA (Wagner, 10). All these movements eventually led to the phenomenon of the New Apostolic Reformation where the church in general is recognizing, and will recognize in the future, the need for apostles, who, with their huge amounts of authority, are the final missing element for the church's victory.³

The recognition of apostolic ministry is the key point for Wagner's interpretation of church history. He is not so much interested in the restoration or the return of the church to the 1st century model, but he emphasizes the need for a 21st-century church that is based on all biblical principles. Therefore, the key word for describing his view of history is completion. Whatever God has been doing thus far, he was doing it for the sake of completing and preparing the church for the advancement of the Kingdom and apostles are the final link in that chain of events. The Protestant Reformation established the authority of the Scripture, justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers. The Wesleyan movement then introduced the demand for a personal and a corporate holiness. The Pentecostal movement, after that, emphasized the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. The office of intercessor was restored in the 1970's, and the office of the prophet was restored in the 1980's. Finally, in the 1990's, the global church began to recognize the gift and office of an apostle (Wagner, 5). Therefore, Wagner declared in 2001 that the church had entered into the Second apostolic age.

It is important for us to grasp and to understand the wider picture of the NAR, its motives and the reasons behind its teachings, and not just the content of it.

² The Latter Rain movement preceded the Charismatic movement (Neo-Pentecostal movement) which occurred in the 1960's. This movement emphasized the following: laying on of hands and prophecy for the purpose of imparting, identifying, bestowing or confirming gifts; a teaching that the church is built on the foundation of present-day apostles and prophets; the extreme teaching regarding the confession of sin to man and deliverance, as practiced, which claims prerogatives to human agency which belongs only to Christ; teaching concerning the impartation of the gift of languages as special equipment for missionary service; the practice of imparting or imposing personal leadings by the means of the gift of utterance (Bay, Martinez).

³ These are not the only changes that Wagner noticed in these movements. New forms and operational procedures in local church government are just one aspect. New interchurch relationships, new ways of financing, power evangelism, missions, prayer, leadership selection and training, the role of supernatural power, worship and other important aspects of church life are some of the new aspects, but for this paper, primary attention will be given to the role of the apostles in the NAR.

Wagner observed the fastest growing churches all over the world and came to the conclusion that these churches had grown so fast because they practiced the God-given church structure. The final piece in this picture is to understand the ultimate goal of the NAR's teachings and practices. After we understand this, it will be very clear why the NAR insists so heavily on the importance of the apostolic ministry.

The Ultimate Goal of the NAR

“Merely surviving” does not exist in the NAR's dictionary for a church, nor does a “let us hold somehow to the end” attitude. On the contrary, the NAR calls for fully equipped churches with all the elements that are necessary, ready for a victorious march in defeating Satan and his demons, establishing the Kingdom in its fullness and exercising God given dominion on the Earth. These three elements represent the ultimate goal of the NAR.

Based on Genesis 1, God gave Adam and Eve the authority or dominion over all the earth, which means, according to NAR theologians, that they possessed the “power to rule which forces a territory to recognize and subject itself to an authority or a government” (Pierce). By disobeying God, they lost their authority and Satan became the ruler over all human kingdoms. However, Jesus came and took the authority from Satan's hand and gave it back to humanity who is now able to live to the fullness of its divine destiny. The destiny of humanity is vividly seen in the interpretation of the following three Bible passages:

- Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” The NAR understands this passage in a way that Jesus did not come to save “those” who were lost (meaning people), but “that” which was lost. “That” represents humanity's dominion over creation, which was lost in the Garden of Eden.
- Matthew 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” According to the NAR's interpretation, Jesus did not say that we make disciples out of the individuals in all the nations, but our goal is to make whole nations to be Jesus' collective disciples and to observe his commandments.
- Matthew 6:9-10, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” “If we take this literally,” Wagner says, “our goal must be nothing less than the transformation of society. The principles and the values of the kingdom must be reflected in human societies to the highest degree possible” (Wagner, 11).

Wagner is careful to point out that Jesus' Kingdom is not contained inside the

church, but it exists wherever men and women acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and King, and, just as individuals are changed and made new because of Christ's reign, transformation should occur in their society as well. Accordingly, all the attributes of heaven, based on Jesus' prayer, should be reflected and established on the earth. Therefore, Christians are involved in the spiritual battle against Satan and the destruction of his works (sickness, sins, demon possession, hunger, injustice...), spreading Christ's rule and His dominion. This should result in a visible and ever-growing social transformation which will eventually lead to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.⁴ In other words, the goal of the NAR is to overthrow Satan's government over societies with another kind of government – the Kingdom of God. Wagner claims that this kind of government will never come into place without the apostles as the key element.

THE NAR'S BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE APOSTLES

According to Wagner, the second apostolic age began in 2001 (Wagner, 1) when, after 1800 years of neglecting the apostolic ministry, apostles all over the world began to be recognized and set in place to govern the church. That means that we are now living in the time when finally something is happening, finally it is possible to transform our societies and impact these earthly kingdoms like never before. Also, it is possible to establish the new kind of government because we have the apostles who operate in the spheres of their authority.

The NAR's Biblical Understanding of the Apostolic Ministry

Wagner defines an apostle as a "Christian leader gifted, taught, commissioned, and sent by God with the authority to establish the foundational government of a church within an assigned sphere of a ministry by hearing what the Spirit is saying to the church and by setting things in order accordingly for the growth and maturity of the church" (Wagner, 13). This is a person who is called and gifted by God with this spiritual gift, has an assigned sphere of ministry, possesses an extraordinary character, is recognized by the people who submit to his authority

⁴ Wagner rejects the idea of premillennialism because it portrays the church which is focused on self-preservation in the world which would get worse and worse, without any attempt to achieve social transformation. The role of the church, according to this view, is to evangelize and save people as much as possible for the rapture. Otherwise, the church will passively expect the Kingdom coming with Christ's return without any attempt to usher this world into the Kingdom. According to Wagner, the fullness of the Kingdom will come by our efforts in establishing it all over the earth, so that when Christ comes, his Kingdom will already be set in place.

and leadership, and is inspired by the Spirit with the revelation or the vision of what God is doing (Wagner, 2). Although this definition contains many elements which describe Wagner's idea of apostolic ministry, the real issue occurs when we compare this definition with Wagner's understanding of the church and the relationship of apostleship with other leadership gifts.

The first major shift from traditional Christianity comes in the interpretation of Ephesians 2:20 where Paul writes that the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." The NAR takes this statement literally and says that apostles are the foundation and, along with the prophets, should govern a local church.⁵ Furthermore, the primacy of an apostle in the government of the church is verified by 1 Corinthians 12:28 where Paul writes, "first apostles."⁶

The second major shift, and the most radical difference between the New Apostolic Movement and traditional Christianity, is seen in the amount of authority that the Holy Spirit is perceived to delegate to individuals as opposed to groups such as boards or committees or presbyteries (Wagner, 5). Wagner does not say that such group decisions were wrong in the past (consistories, church boards, synods...), but that now the Holy Spirit has shifted his authority from the group to the individual and, of course, these individuals are the apostles. In a way, apostles have now replaced such group decisions because they possess all wisdom, guidance and understanding which are necessary for leading.

The third major shift from traditional Christianity is insisting that individuals with the apostolic gift should be recognized and affirmed in the apostolic office. Wagner, in this matter, points out several things. First, he understands the five-fold ministry from Ephesians 4:11 as continually present in the life of the church "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13). Since we are not there yet, apostles are still needed. Secondly, he points out that the majority of other traditional denominations based on Ephesians 4:11 have chosen to recognize the office of evangelists, pastors, teachers, but not to recognize the office of apostles and prophets. Third, he claims that the same principles that are valid for the public ordination of pastors in their offices are valid for the apostles. Every gift of the five-fold ministry is given to a person by God's grace, but, through the fruit of the gift, the outward evidence of the office is conferred

⁵ Wagner makes a distinction between cornerstone and foundation describing Jesus as a cornerstone, but apostles as a foundation.

⁶ According to Wagner, the issue is not so much in recognizing the position of apostles and prophets as a hierarchical leadership structure, but as a divine order. Without them, the church cannot expect to be everything that God originally designed it to be.

on the person by the people who publicly recognize and accept their ministry. Wagner argues that if we are doing this with pastors, teachers and evangelists, why can we not do this with prophets and apostles?

Different kinds of Apostles in the NAR

Wagner has very imaginatively and creatively invented extra-biblical terms for the division of the apostles. This is a very complicated and long list of titles, so I will very briefly elaborate on this. The major premise behind his division is the teaching that every apostle has his own assigned sphere and authority that is only applicable for his specific sphere. Outside of that sphere, the apostle is “powerless” and as ordinary as any other believer. The foundation for this is found in the apostle Paul who, according to Wagner, was a “limited apostle.” By “limited,” he means that Paul was not an apostle over the whole church everywhere, but had his own assigned sphere and, outside of it, he could not function as an apostle.⁷ In 1 Cor 9:2 and 2 Cor 10:13-16, Wagner claims Paul presents himself in this way. Wagner, in general, recognizes at least three kinds of apostolic spheres: ecclesiastical, functional and territorial, but inside of these three categories of spheres there are three major categories of apostles. Each of these categories is divided into several subcategories. The three major categories of apostles are: vertical, horizontal and market place apostles.⁸

Vertical apostles are apostles that lead networks of churches, ministries or individuals who look to these apostles for spiritual “covering.” They are divided into four subcategories: a) Ecclesiastical apostles: their sphere includes a number of churches and pastors are accountable to them; b) Apostolic team members: most apostles have their team which includes people with many different gifts; c) Functional apostles: they practice the apostolic authority over individuals or groups who operate within a certain type of specialized ministry; and d) Congregational apostles: leaders (or pastors) of churches that have grown into mega churches.

Horizontal apostles do not have churches, ministries or individuals under them because they primarily serve their peer-level leaders, helping them to con-

⁷ “Paul was not an apostle of Jerusalem or of Rome or of Alexandria. These were not his assigned apostolic spheres. But Corinth certainly was, as was Philippi and Ephesus and Lystra and Crete and other places” (Wagner, 4).

⁸ Special categories are the hyphenated apostles – these are the apostles who have been given other gifts (and even offices) alongside their gift and office of apostle (apostle – teacher; apostle – prophet, etc.).

nect with each other for different purposes.⁹ Again, four subcategories: a) Covering apostles have the ability to call together peer-level Christian leaders who minister in a defined field and possess the abilities to form relational organizations for specific purposes as God directs; b) Ambassadorial apostles have the ability to catalyze and nurture apostolic movements on a national, regional, or international scale; c) Mobilizing apostles spend a lot of time on the road like ambassadorial apostles, but their focus is on a specific cause or project; and d) Territorial apostles have their own apostolic spheres primarily defined by a certain geographic territory.

Market place apostles are apostles in workplaces who have the ability to set things in order and to equip the saints for the work of the ministry there. A working place, therefore, becomes not only a ministry, but a place where the church government should be established (Simpson). Such apostles would be raised in different areas of a society: religion, family, education, government, media, arts, business, etc. The result of such activity would be a social transformation and a transfer of wealth from Gentiles to God's people.

Apostles and the City

Perhaps the greatest challenge the NAR presents is in the area of the traditional idea of church government and organization. Traditionally, a church was governed and spiritually built up through the ministry of pastors/preachers/teachers/elders and occasionally evangelists. For the past 500 years, denominations were the major organizational modus of protestant churches. Since apostles (together with the prophets), according to Wagner, are primarily responsible for building up a church, this premise changes the traditional role of a pastor.

In Wagner's words, the apostles of a city are "Christian leaders who have made commitments to a city and to whom the Holy Spirit has given an anointing of extraordinary authorities in spiritual matters over other Christian leaders in the same city." In this way, apostles provide a spiritual government to pastors and churches in a particular city, which enables them to do more effective work and a better job (Wagner, 3). For the pastors in a city, it means that they voluntarily enter into the structure which is based, not on bureaucracy or legal rules, but on

⁹ Wagner explains the role of horizontal apostles: "Their anointing is in bringing together peers of one kind or another to accomplish certain purposes better than they could separately. Biblical example is James who convened the Council of Jerusalem in order to deal with the issue of whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised and become "Jews" in order to be saved. Those who showed up at the Jerusalem Council were all vertical apostles and likely could not have successfully called the council and issued apostolic decree" (Wagner, 2).

personal relationships. In this way, pastors become a part of an apostolic network and function under apostles just as church staff members would ordinarily function under their senior pastor. According to Wagner, this is a design that will work (Wagner, 4).

In the past 500 years, most protestant churches were organized in denominations, and the basis for their relationship was agreement around some particular teaching. According to the NAR, denominations are the old wineskins which need to be replaced with an apostolic network. In practice, this means that all churches in a particular city are encouraged to understand that, although they are meeting in many different congregations, they are actually one city church. New interdenominational alliances are also encouraged in which local pastors will create sincere and supportive relationships with other pastors in the city; and finally, city churches are invited to voluntarily join into an apostolic network, to submit to the leadership of apostles, and in this way form a truly biblical church government. Again, the idea behind all that is not the desire of particular apostles for ruling, but the desire for the advancement of the Kingdom and that as many people as possible could be saved. Wagner very openly ascribes the ineffectiveness in spreading the Gospel to the model of denominations which prevented churches in cities to territorially unite in their efforts of evangelism and social transformation, and also neglected and ignored the apostolic ministry as the key element in a church government.

Comparison of the NAR's Theology with Other Theological Ideas about Apostolic Ministry

In discussing apostolic ministry, we are faced with two problems. The first problem is that the "Twelve" were unique, and looking on them as a model for today's apostolic ministry presents a problem because we have nothing that could be equivalent to them and their God-given position as founders of the Church and authors of the apostolic teaching.¹⁰ The second problem is that the Bible does not specifically say whether the ministry and the authority of the Twelve was conferred on the others and, if yes, how or in what way.¹¹ Because of that, we are

¹⁰ Among those who argue for the continuation of apostolic office like Wagner, those who argue for continuation of apostolic ministry (Fee, Williams), or those who argue that apostolic ministry ceased in the 1st century (Grudem), all agree that the ministry of the Twelve as the founders of apostolic teaching was unique and unrepeatable today.

¹¹ Williams rejects the idea of succession and restoration of apostleship. He says: "Succession is out of the question not only because these apostles appointed no successors but also because of the unique and unrepeatable character of their apostleship. Restoration is likewise impossible because these apostles fulfilled their role, and continue their ministry through the apostolic writings of

faced with various understandings of the apostolic ministry.¹² Also, the elaborate structure of the many kinds of apostles is foreign to both scripture and church history.

The epitome of the NAR's understanding is that an apostolic ministry is an office that includes governance (not just influence or spiritual authority) and, more or less, a residential abiding in the specific area of ministry (city, region or continent) with the intention that every local church becomes a part of the ministry. Therefore, we have the idea of an apostle as an office, governmental and predominantly a static (but not in all cases) ministry.

Edmiston begins his article by stressing the two common opinions about apostolic ministry: the apostolic ministry ended with the death of John the apostle, or it ended at the formation of the New Testament church. Either view maintains that in place of living apostles, today we have the writings of apostles in the NT; or apostles exist today, but they are called missionaries. Edmiston argues against such division and he puts the Twelve, that is, "the Founders of the Faith," in a special category. They are unique and none of these apostles exist today. However, there is a second category he calls "the Founders of the Churches" and here he puts people like Paul and Silas, Martin Luther, John Wesley and George Fox, who dynamically moved around in a specific territory and established churches. He sees those who followed such great men as apostles with the main purpose of stabilizing the work and growth of a church in God's grace. Here he includes Titus, Silas, Timothy and Apollos. Finally, the last category is of those who think apostolically, but they are confined to a local church or under the authority of a more senior apostle (Edmiston). For him, apostles do exist today both as a gift and as an office.

Some theologians accept the idea that "apostle" can be a ministry, but not an office. Reinhold Ulonska accepts an apostolic ministry but not an office, explaining that the title of apostle implies a level of glory and authority which true apostles would never claim for themselves. In the same way, Felipe Ferrez claims that the apostolic office has ceased, but the gift of an apostle remains as a continuing gift to the church (Wagner, 5).

the New Testament. Any idea of perpetuating or restoring apostleship as an official office is totally foreign to the New Testament and to Christ's intention for His church" (Williams, Volume Three, 167).

¹² In the New Testament, the word "apostle" is used in the narrow and broader sense. In the narrow sense this word relates to the Twelve and Paul, and in the broader sense, to many other disciples. Disagreement arises when we consider that other apostles in the broader sense continued the foundational ministry of the Twelve, that is, that their ministries were the foundation for the forming and functioning of the local churches. That is Wagner's position.

An alternative to Wagner's claim that apostles should govern local churches based on Eph 2:20 is the traditional view that the foundation is Christ and apostles lay down that foundation every time they preached Christ. Hence, the apostles were not the basis on which the foundation was laid, but were the builders of it (Let us Reason, 2). Therefore, we have two opposing views: the foundation as a person with an apostolic gift/office, or the foundation as the apostolic teaching of Christ which is established every time ministers preach Christ.

Contrary to Wagner's view of apostolic ministry as predominantly static and connected with an assigned sphere, Atkerson, in his article, argues that constant moving characterized many of the other first apostles. Their travels were motivated by evangelism, organization and strengthening of the newly established churches. Occasional training stops were made in strategic locations, but then the circuit continued. Hence, when an apostle trained and appointed elders, he moved on and then it was on the elders to build up the church (Atkerson).

Atkerson observes that twentieth century apostles who plant churches "will naturally have the influential authority of elders over the church they begin," but concludes that "a modern apostle is really no higher in 'rank' than any elder." Furthermore, Hawkes, in his doctoral dissertation, points out that no New Testament letter is addressed to an apostle, which would be the case if apostles ruled over cities (135) and observes that Paul never appointed apostles to govern local churches, rather bishops or elders (141). For Hawkes, today's apostles can exercise authority over spiritual matters and have spiritual leadership, but he rejects Wagner's idea that the primary function of apostles is to govern churches. It is also questionable whether in Eph 4:11 and 1 Cor 12:28 Paul established a hierarchical rank of ministries with apostles and prophets on the top, or that the phrase "He gave some to be..." is speaking of diversity of the gifts in the Body and not a hierarchy.

Conclusion

Wagner's argument that the Church needs a five-fold ministry until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect person is something that we need to consider. Truly, in every generation, the Church needs people with these gifts to build her up, and we do not have any biblical evidence¹³ that apostolic ministry has ceased. We do not have among

¹³ By "biblical evidence," I mean that the Bible does not explicitly say that apostolic ministry has ceased. However, many Christians share Wayne Grudem's viewpoint who writes: "The apostle, therefore, had the authority to write words which became words of Scripture. This fact in itself should suggest to us that there was something unique about the office of apostle, and that we would not

us the “Twelve,” but we do have people who continue apostolic ministries¹⁴ and offices,¹⁵ not to govern local churches as Wagner argues, but to plant new churches by establishing the foundation of the apostolic teaching and then surrendering these churches to the elders who will continue to build up the churches. Apostolic authority, therefore, should not be governmental or hierarchical, but spiritual and influential. In this way, the 21st century church needs to recognize and accept the ministries of people who truly have the gift to be apostles, who care for the overall health of the churches, and who are willing with their spiritual and influential authority to serve the body of Christ, not as lords over churches, but as servants. Could we truly imagine that in the 1st century every local church had one or several apostles who were in charge to govern the affairs of a church like Wagner suggests? I do not think so! Could this be more the “ideal” of a plurality of godly elders who are spiritual leaders and shepherds in each congregation?

Has the time come for the churches in the cities to tear down their denominational differences and unite and cooperate in the efforts to reach and evangelize their local communities? I do not know, but the idea of a “city church” certainly is a much closer model to the New Testament pattern than today’s situation where many churches in one city are mutually divided by their denominational differences, confessions and beliefs. Maybe the time has come for churches to find their identity not in denominational attachment, but in the identity which comes from the local attachment together with other churches in the city or the region. Such an approach could enhance the expression of the visible and not just the spiritual unity based on the prayer that Jesus prayed in John 17.

The NAR is spreading, whether we like it or not, and soon it will knock on our door as well.¹⁶ The question remains whether we will accept it or not. The

expect it to continue today, for no one today can add words to the Bible and have them be counted as God’s very words or as a part of Scripture” (Grudem, 906).

¹⁴ Grudem understands “he gave some to be...” from Eph 4:11 as a one-time event in the past and he argues that whether or not Christ would later give more people for each of these offices cannot be decided from this verse alone (911). Williams, on the other hand, understands “he gave some to be...” that is, the five-fold ministry, as continuing gifts and ongoing ministries that should be present in the life of the church today (Williams, Volume Three, 169-70).

¹⁵ I am arguing in accordance with Wagner that apostolic ministry should be acknowledged as an office simply because the other three offices from Eph 4:11 (pastor, teacher, and evangelist) are officially recognized in the Body of Christ. However, unlike Wagner, I do not believe that this office should include governmental authority or that apostolic ministry (whether recognized as a ministry or as an office) represents the foundational ministry for local churches.

¹⁶ As Jambrech observes, NAR churches are churches that have a passion for new methods of evangelization, worship, bible studies, and training of church leaders. Some of the NAR churches are among the biggest churches on all continents like Willow Creek Community Church from USA with more than 16,000 members and Deeper Life Bible Church from Nigeria with 85,000 members

task is to discern good from bad and the major challenge is to discover whether apostolic ministry continues or not. If yes, then we need to be careful to recognize it and give it a proper place in the life of the church.

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Sažetak Članak analizira ideju Petera Wagnera, glavnog predstavnika pokreta nove apostolske reformacije, da apostoli trebaju i moraju upravljati lokalnim crkvama. Potpora za tu tvrdnju se temelji primarno na Efežanima 2,20 gdje Pavao kaže da je crkva nazidana na temelju apostola i proroka. Dakle pitanje je da li ljudi s apostolskom službom predstavljaju taj temelj ili je temelj apostolska nauka? Usko povezano s time je i pitanje da li se apostolska služba/položaj nastavlja do danas ili ne? Članak u prvom dijelu analizira razloge nastajanja te ideje u Wagnerovoj teologiji i krajnje ciljeve NAR pokreta. U drugom djelu analizira se biblijsko razumijevanje apostolske službe koje je uobičajeno za sve teologe NAR-a, i konačno, te ideje se uspoređuju s tradicionalnim idejama o apostolskoj službi u kršćanstvu. Autor zastupa tezu da se apostolska služba u Tijelu Kristovu nastavlja i do danas, i kao takva treba biti priznata i kao službena funkcija; ali autoritet apostola bi trebao biti duhovni i utjecajni, a ne upravljački i hijerarhijski kao što Wagner tvrdi.