

# NAR Overview by Holly Pivec

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## OVERVIEW

A heterodox movement in Protestant Christianity known as the “New Apostolic Reformation 1” (NAR) — also known as the “apostolic-prophetic movement” — gained vast influence among Pentecostal and charismatic churches worldwide, beginning in the late 1990s. The people who are part of this burgeoning movement follow present-day apostles and prophets who claim to govern the church and give new divine revelation that is needed to set up God’s kingdom on earth.

## NAR CHURCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Many people will not recognize this movement by its formal name — the “New Apostolic Reformation” — including even many of the movement’s participants. The lack of name recognition can be explained, in large part, because the movement is not governed by one official denomination or organization.

Rather, the New Apostolic Reformation is made up of hundreds of churches and organizations that are led by apostles and prophets who share a distinct theology. Many of these churches and organizations have joined “apostolic networks.” These apostolic networks are made up of, in some cases, hundreds of churches and organizations that submit to the leadership of a single apostle, such as Harvest International Ministry—a network of over 12,000 churches and organizations under NAR apostle Ché Ahn.

Despite its lack of name recognition, the movement’s growth is staggering. The NAR movement is responsible for much of the explosive church growth occurring in Africa, Asia and Latin America. 2 Leaders of many of the world’s biggest churches promote present-day apostles and prophets, including David Yonggi Cho (Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea with one million people), E.A. Adeboye (Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria with five million people), Sunday Adelaja (Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations in Ukraine with 20,000 people), and César Castellanos (International Charismatic Mission in Columbia with 60,000 people).

Though the NAR movement has seen the most growth in the Global South 3, it has also gained considerable influence in the West. In Australia, the NAR movement has taken over an entire denomination, the Assemblies of God in Australia. 4 In the United States, approximately three million people attend NAR churches — that is, churches that overtly embrace NAR teachings. 5

Influential NAR churches in the United States include Bethel Church in Redding, California (pastored by apostle Bill Johnson), Harvest Rock Church in Pasadena, California (pastored by apostle Ché Ahn), and MorningStar Fellowship Church in Charlotte, North Carolina (pastored by apostle/prophet Rick Joyner). In fact, NAR churches can be found across the United States, in virtually every large city and small town.

Beyond those churches that have overtly embraced NAR teachings, a large number of independent charismatic churches in the United States promote NAR beliefs and engage in NAR practices, in varying degrees. One notable example is New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado — a megachurch founded by the former president of the National Association of Evangelicals, Ted Haggard. During Haggard’s leadership of New Life Church, he sat as an apostle on the International Coalition of Apostles and worked closely with NAR apostle C. Peter Wagner to co-found the World Prayer Center at New Life Church — which has served as a hub for NAR-style spiritual warfare practices. Today, under new leadership, NAR teachings continue to be promoted, though primarily through smaller classes and small group studies.

In addition to churches, a number of influential “evangelical” organizations based in the United States are also run by NAR leaders. These include the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri (NAR teacher Mike Bickle);

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Healing Rooms Ministries in Spokane Washington (apostle Cal Pierce); and Aglow International in Edmonds, Washington (apostle Jane Hansen Hoyt). They also include TheCall, which has drawn hundreds of thousands of people to prayer and fasting rallies in large cities throughout the United States (prophet Lou Engle).

### THE NAR AND THE MEDIA

The NAR movement has its own global television network, founded in 1995, called GOD TV — which broadcasts NAR teachings in more than 200 nations. <sup>6</sup> In addition to GOD TV, Trinity Broadcasting Network — the world’s largest religious television network — regularly features the teachings of NAR apostles and prophets.

Charisma Media — a Pentecostal-charismatic publishing empire based in the United States — has played a major role in popularizing the teachings of the NAR movement through its book publishing arm, Charisma House, and its flagship magazine, Charisma. <sup>7</sup>

Apostles and prophets have also utilized the Internet to promote NAR teachings. Before widespread use of the Internet, people had to travel far, and at great financial cost, to attend NAR revivals. Today, they can participate online. For example, in addition to the thousands of people who attended U.S. prophet Todd Bentley’s healing revival in Lakeland, Florida, in 2008, many more watched online. <sup>8</sup>

One NAR organization that has a large online following is the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City, Missouri. Thousands of people watch IHOP conferences online and the sessions of prayer and worship that are broadcast live — 24 hours a day, seven days a week — from the IHOP “Prayer Room” at the Kansas City, Missouri, headquarters. And another NAR organization, the Elijah List, serves as an online clearinghouse for the NAR movement, daily e-mailing prophecies and teachings from NAR leaders to more than 135,000 subscribers. <sup>9</sup>

### THE NAR AND POLITICS

Though NAR teachings have had the most influence in Pentecostal and charismatic churches, the reach of the NAR movement extends beyond those churches and into politics. For example, in the United States, NAR prophets — such as Cindy Jacobs, Rick Joyner, and Lou Engle — have joined forces with political leaders to promote conservative causes, such as laws opposing abortion and homosexual marriage.

One notable example of this partnership is “The Response” — a highly publicized rally held at Reliant Stadium in Houston, Texas, on August 6, 2011. Though this event was organized by NAR leaders including Lou Engle and Mike Bickle, it was depicted by the major media as representing a broadly “evangelical” voice. The organizers also claimed the event was non-political, yet it had a clear agenda to support Texas Governor Rick Perry’s bid for the U.S. presidency. <sup>10</sup>

And, in Uganda, NAR leaders have wielded significant influence in the government, including the promotion of a controversial bill that would provide stronger sanctions against homosexuality. <sup>11</sup> Thus, critics of the NAR movement include not only traditional Christians, but also secular liberals, who fear that NAR leaders are seeking to set up theocracies in Uganda, the United States, and other nations.

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## TEACHINGS

### RESTORATION OF APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

The distinctive teaching of the New Apostolic Reformation is that God has restored the governmental offices of apostle and prophet to the church.

According to NAR leaders, when the church was birthed in the first century A.D., God intended for it to be always governed by living apostles and prophets. Yet, the continuation of these two offices has not been accepted by the vast majority of Christians following the earliest years of the church's establishment. Today, in place of living apostles and prophets, most Protestant churches are governed by pastors, elders, and denominational executives.

But NAR leaders teach that God began restoring the office of prophet to the church in the 1980s and the office of apostle in the 1990s. C. Peter Wagner — one of the movement's most influential U.S. apostles — teaches that 2001 A.D. marked the beginning of the "Second Apostolic Age," when the proper church government — headed by living apostles and prophets — was finally restored. <sup>12</sup>

Now that the church is under the leadership of living apostles and prophets, it can complete its primary task — the Great Commission, which has been redefined by NAR leaders as a commission to take dominion, or sociopolitical control, of the earth. <sup>13</sup>

### FIVEFOLD MINISTRY

The term "fivefold ministry," as it is used by NAR leaders, refers to the teaching that Christ has given five, ongoing, formal offices to govern the church those are, the offices of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. The primary passage of Scripture that is used to support this teaching is Ephesians 4:11-13, which says:

<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (NIV translation)

According to the NAR interpretation of this passage, the word "until" in verse 13 indicates that all five offices must continue governing the church until the church attains to the goals stated in that verse — those goals being unity and maturity. It is believed that these goals have not yet been attained. Thus, all five offices — including the offices of apostle and prophet — are still needed.

It should be noted that "unity" in verse 13 is seen by NAR leaders as an "apostolic unity" of Christians that can be attained only as they submit to the leadership of NAR apostles. <sup>14</sup> And "maturity" is seen as a type of miracle-working ability that can be attained only by those people who will have received the entire body of new revelation given by the NAR apostles and prophets. That is to say, as a result of having received the new revelation, these people will have "matured" or developed the extraordinary miraculous powers needed to subdue the earth. <sup>15</sup>

It also should be noted that not all people who use the term "fivefold ministry" today are referring to the NAR belief that there are five, ongoing, formal offices that govern the church. This term is also sometimes used by people who are not part of the NAR movement — especially by some Pentecostals — to refer to their belief that there are five primary types of "ministries" or "spiritual giftings" that Christ has given to edify the church. But in this traditional Pentecostal understanding, those who perform these ministries or possess these spiritual gifts are not seen as

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governing the church. Rather they are seen as merely contributing their ministries or giftedness to strengthen the church.

### APOSTLES

The primary role of apostles, as taught in the NAR movement, is to govern the church. They are seen by many NAR leaders as filling the highest office in church government above prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Thus, they are often referred to as the movement's "generals."

Like prophets in the NAR movement, apostles can give new divine revelation. But their distinct task is the implementation of the new revelation given by NAR apostles and prophets. 16 Thus, they receive new revelation, determine its proper application in the church, and instruct their followers on how to properly respond to the new revelation.

### PROPHETS

The primary role of prophets, as taught in the NAR movement, is to receive new divine revelation. 17 Thus, prophets are seen by many NAR leaders as filling the second highest office in church government second only to the apostles.

Though prophets are often viewed as second in authority to apostles, it should be noted that some prominent NAR leaders, such as prophet Bill Hamon, see prophets and apostles as equal partners. 18 This difference aside, most NAR leaders, including Hamon, teach either explicitly or through implication that apostles and prophets together fill the two highest offices in church government. 19 The reason for their greater authority is because these two offices alone receive and implement new divine revelation. Pastors, teachers and evangelists — in contrast — do not generally receive new revelation, according to NAR leaders. Thus, their roles are limited to teaching the new revelation that has been received by the NAR apostles and prophets and the older revelation contained in the Bible. 20

NAR prophets are not expected to be 100 percent accurate in their predictions. Thus, they still can be considered legitimate prophets even when they make errors. 21 Critics of the NAR movement believe this toleration of false prophecies is in direct contradiction to the Bible's teaching that a key sign of a false prophet is giving erroneous, or false, predictions (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). Some NAR prophets who have made highly publicized, erroneous predictions — yet still are considered true prophets — include Kim Clement and Rick Joyner. 22

Yet, the majority of prophecies given by NAR prophets today are not specific predictions. Rather, most of their predictions are worded so vaguely that it would be difficult to determine whether or not they were ever fulfilled. Critics of the NAR movement view this practice — of giving vague, non-specific prophecies — as a tactic designed to cover up failed prophecies.

### GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

The "Gospel of the Kingdom" is the NAR teaching that God, through Christ's death and resurrection, has made the way for Christians to take dominion of the earth. This is a redefined gospel in contrast to the gospel of salvation from sin that, historically, has been taught by evangelicals.

Many NAR apostles and prophets teach that there are two gospels being taught by Christians today — those being, the "gospel of salvation" and the "gospel of the kingdom." The "gospel of salvation" primarily addresses the good news that God, through Christ's death and resurrection, has provided a means of salvation from sin. But this is an

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incomplete gospel, according to NAR leaders. They teach that the “gospel of the kingdom” is a more complete gospel, which not only addresses God’s provision for salvation from sin, but also His provision for taking dominion. 23

### **DOMINIONISM/ KINGDOM NOW**

NAR apostles and prophets teach that it is the task of the church — under the leadership of apostles and prophets — to take dominion of the earth. 24

According to NAR teaching, God originally gave humanity dominion of the earth a dominion that was lost at the Fall. Since that time, God has been seeking a people to reclaim that lost dominion. Christ’s death on the cross and victory over Satan made the task of retaking dominion possible.

Thus, NAR apostles and prophets claim that it is now God’s desire for the church — under the leadership of apostles and prophets — to take dominion of the earth in preparation for His return. This task will be accomplished with the help of miraculous powers wielded by the NAR apostles and prophets and their followers. This NAR teaching — which emphasizes the importance of supernatural powers for subduing the earth — is a distinct variety of dominionism known as the “Kingdom Now” teaching. 25

NAR leaders claim that the Lord’s Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4, provides biblical support for NAR teachings on dominionism. Regarding this prayer, apostle C. Peter Wagner writes:

Jesus taught us to pray that God’s Kingdom would come and His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. To that end, in these present times the urgent mandate of God to the Church is to actively engage in transforming society. 26

Yet, it should be emphasized that, when NAR leaders talk about “transforming society,” as Wagner does here, they are not speaking merely of efforts to positively influence culture. Rather, they are speaking of efforts to take control of the earth’s societal institutions — that is, dominionism. This becomes more obvious when one understands another major NAR teaching known as the “Seven Mountain Mandate.”

But when their dominionist teachings have been exposed by the media or other critics of the NAR movement, NAR leaders often attempt to downplay those teachings. For example, following “The Response” political rally in Houston, Texas, some major media organizations exposed the dominionist views of the event’s organizers. In response, Wagner wrote an article published by Charisma magazine, titled “The Truth About the New Apostolic Reformation.” In the article, he attempted to portray the dominionist goals of the NAR movement as goals merely to positively “influence” culture, not control it. 27 But Wagner’s article was misleading since dominionism — in the form of sociopolitical control — is taught boldly in the literature of the NAR movement, including Wagner’s own books. 28

In fact, NAR leaders claim that taking dominion of nations has always been the task of the church and is, in fact, the true meaning of the Great Commission. That is to say, they view the Great Commission as a commission to make disciples of entire nations, not just individuals living within those nations (as has been the traditional evangelical understanding of the Great Commission). 29

Yet, not all NAR leaders admit to promoting dominionism. Some NAR leaders, such as Mike Bickle of the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri, directly deny that they are promoting dominionism or, what he calls, “Dominion Theology.” 30 But despite his denial, Bickle’s teachings are in line with “Kingdom Now” dominionism, including his teaching that the end-time church will cleanse the earth of evil. According to Bickle, this feat will be accomplished by end-time Christians — under the leadership of apostles and prophets — who will say “prophetic” prayers that will release the Great Tribulation judgments on the kingdom of the Antichrist. 31

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Also, it should be noted that NAR leaders use differing terminology to describe dominionist goals that are very similar. For example, some prominent apostles, such as Wagner, state that the church has been tasked with building God's kingdom on earth now. Other NAR leaders, such as prophet Bill Hamon, attempt to make a distinction between the "restoration" of the earth to pre-Fall conditions (which he believes is the task of the church now) and setting up God's earthly kingdom (which he believes will only be completed fully after Christ returns).<sup>32</sup> But Hamon is not clear as to the exact difference between restoring the earth and setting up God's kingdom. In both scenarios, the followers of apostles and prophets are urged to seek sociopolitical control. Thus, it seems that the distinction is artificial and misleading.

### SEVEN MOUNTAIN MANDATE

Many NAR apostles and prophets claim that God has revealed a new strategy for taking dominion of the nations — a strategy they call the "Seven Mountain Mandate."<sup>33</sup> According to this revelation, the way to take dominion is by taking control of the seven most influential societal institutions — called "mountains" — which are identified as government, media, family, business/finance, education, church/religion, and arts/entertainment.

Speaking of this teaching, U.S. prophet Johnny Enlow writes:

I've shared that the mountains were the infrastructural columns of our societies that it's the Lord's plan to raise His people up to take every social, economic, and political structure of our nations.<sup>34</sup>

Enlow identifies government as the most important institution "because it can establish laws and decrees that affect and control every other mountain."<sup>35</sup> Thus, he believes God is in the process of raising up apostles to "possess" this critical mountain.<sup>36</sup>

Some of the well-known promoters of the Seven Mountain Mandate in the United States include C. Peter Wagner, Lance Wallnau, Johnny Enlow and Os Hillman. Yet, it bears repeating that, when confronted with NAR dominionist teachings, these same NAR leaders deny that the Seven Mountain Mandate is about controlling society.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, their writings have made it abundantly clear that, at least for many NAR leaders, the Seven Mountain Mandate is, indeed, about controlling society.<sup>38</sup>

### STRATEGIC-LEVEL SPIRITUAL WARFARE

"Strategic-level spiritual warfare" is an NAR strategy for spiritual warfare. It involves the attempt to cast out powerful evil spirits — called "territorial spirits" — that are believed to rule over geographical regions of the earth and societal institutions. The strategy is based on the NAR belief that territorial spirits must be cast out before the "Gospel of the Kingdom" can go forth successfully and the church can take dominion.

The attempt to cast out territorial spirits is known as "strategic-level spiritual warfare" because it is seen by NAR leaders as more strategic than other types of spiritual warfare practiced by more traditional evangelicals. These more traditional types of spiritual warfare emphasize prayer, knowledge of Scripture, and resisting temptation — and occasionally attempting to cast out demons from individuals. But they do not include attempting to cast out high-ranking demons that exert influence over millions of people. Yet, NAR leaders claim they find support for strategic-level spiritual warfare in the Bible, such as in the Book of Daniel, which shows that specific evil spirits exerted control over the kingdoms of Persia and Greece (Dan 10:13, 20).<sup>39</sup>

A number of NAR practices are associated with strategic-level spiritual warfare. These include the following:

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### Spiritual Mapping

Spiritual mapping is the practice of conducting research into the history of a specific city or nation to discover the identity of the territorial spirit that rules over that particular geographical region of the earth. Once the identity of the territorial spirit is determined, then other practices of strategic-level spiritual warfare are used to cast it out. To help discover the identity of a territorial spirit, NAR leaders will seek to determine the major sins committed in a specific city or nation. For example, does a city have an unusual number of strip clubs and adult bookstores? If so, then they may decide that the territorial spirit ruling in that region is a spirit of lust. Or do the majority of people living in a certain nation practice witchcraft? If so, then they may decide that a territorial spirit of witchcraft is ruling there.

Many NAR leaders, such as apostle C. Peter Wagner, believe it is important to discover the specific name of a territorial spirit in order to cast it out. Sometimes only the functional name of a territorial spirit may be discerned, such as “spirit of lust” or “spirit of greed.” But other times the proper name may be discerned. One example is when two major NAR organizations in the United States — the Reformation Prayer Network led by prophet Cindy Jacobs and the Heartland Apostolic Prayer Network led by apostle John Benefiel — determined that the identity of the territorial spirit ruling over the United States was the pagan goddess Columbia. So, in the fall of 2011, these two organizations teamed up for a 40-day NAR campaign, called “DC40,” to wage strategic-level spiritual warfare against the spirit Columbia. 40

Though spiritual mapping is a popular practice in the NAR movement, it is also sometimes practiced by other people outside this movement. These people do not believe that the purpose of spiritual mapping is to identify territorial spirits. Rather, they believe the purpose is to create spiritual profiles of cities or regions. These profiles are then used as guides to help people pray intelligently and specifically for the needs of the people living in those regions. 41

### Warfare Prayer and Warfare Worship

Warfare prayer and warfare worship are NAR practices in which prayer and musical worship are viewed as spiritual weapons, and they are employed to combat territorial spirits and call down judgment on unbelievers. Seeing prayer and worship as aggressive weapons is an innovation of the NAR movement. In contrast, more traditional evangelicals have viewed their acts of prayer and worship as directed primarily toward God.

An influential NAR organization that engages in warfare prayer and warfare worship is the International House of Prayer (IHOP), founded by Mike Bickle, in Kansas City, Missouri. 42 IHOP has popularized the idea of “24/7 prayer rooms” that have popped up in cities throughout the United States and the world. In the prayer room at the IHOP base in Kansas City, “intercessory missionaries” have engaged in non-stop, around-the-clock prayer and musical worship every day since its doors opened in 1999. Bickle teaches that such prayer rooms will play a pivotal role in the end time, when the prayer and worship coming from these rooms will release God’s end-time judgments — killing millions of unbelievers. 43

### Prayerwalking

Prayerwalking is the NAR practice of forming a team of people to walk through a neighborhood or city and engage in warfare prayer against the territorial spirit ruling over that particular geographical region.

NAR leaders also organize more extensive prayerwalks that involve traveling through an entire country or even a continent. These extended prayerwalks are sometimes called “prayer journeys” or “prayer expeditions.” For example, during the A.D. 2000 Movement, the United Prayer Track — led by C. Peter Wagner — sent 250 “prayer

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teams” on prayer journeys through the countries of the 10/40 Window (the region of the world situated between the latitudes of 10 degrees and 40 degrees north, encompassing North Africa, the Middle East and sections of Asia to Japan). 44

Yet, it should be noted that prayerwalking has become a popular practice, even among churches that are not part of the NAR movement. Thus, not all churches that practice prayerwalking are seeking to cast out territorial spirits. Rather, some churches may view prayerwalks simply as actions designed to help them better focus their prayers for their neighborhood or city.

### Identificational Repentance

Identificational repentance is the NAR practice of repenting of corporate sins that are believed to have “polluted the land.” That is to say, NAR leaders believe that corporate sins such as slavery, genocide or abortion have given territorial spirits “entry points” by which they have gained control of cities and nations.

So, in order for a territorial spirit to be cast out of a region, the corporate sin that gave the evil spirit entry must first be confessed. Then reconciliation must occur between the offending party and the offended party. Such times of confession and reconciliation occur during solemn NAR assemblies, attended by representatives of both parties. For example, NAR leaders determined that the atrocities committed against Native Americans by the United States government had given territorial spirits an entry to rule over the United States. So, during an assembly in 2007, known as TheCall Nashville, Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas — representing the people of the United States — apologized to Native American leaders in attendance, who accepted the apology on behalf of Native Americans. 45

### THE GREAT END-TIME TRANSFER OF WEALTH

Many leaders in the NAR movement teach that, before Christ returns, God will transfer control of the world’s wealth from the hands of the wicked to the hands of the NAR apostles. The purpose of this wealth transfer is so that the church will have the financial resources it will need to establish God’s earthly kingdom. This teaching is often referred to “the great end-time transfer of wealth.”

### THE GREAT END-TIME HARVEST

NAR leaders also teach that, prior to Christ’s return, a worldwide revival will occur in which an unprecedented number of people will convert to belief in Christ. They teach that these conversions will be the greatest spiritual harvest of souls in church history and will occur largely as the result of people seeing miracles performed by NAR apostles, prophets and their followers. NAR leader Mike Bickle — of the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri — estimates that one to two billion people will convert to Christ during this time. 46 This NAR teaching is often referred to as the “Great End-Time Harvest.”

### SUPERNATURAL POWERS

NAR leaders teach that they and their followers will develop vast supernatural powers and will perform miracles that will surpass those performed by the biblical apostles and prophets 47 and even those performed by Jesus during his earthly ministry. 48 These miracles will include amazing feats such as healing every single person inside hospitals and mental institutions simply by laying their hands on the buildings and having command of the laws of nature, including gravity. 49

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### MANIFEST SONS OF GOD

One of most radical teachings in the NAR movement is known as the “Manifest Sons of God.”<sup>50</sup> According to this teaching, the people who continue to receive the new revelation given by NAR apostles and prophets will gain more and more supernatural powers until they eventually become “manifest” or unveiled as “sons of God.” These manifested sons of God will overcome sickness and death and execute God’s judgments on earth.<sup>51</sup>

NAR leaders claim that this teaching is taught in the Bible in Romans 8:19, which reads:

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. (King James Version translation)

The Manifest Sons of God teaching was originally promoted by leaders of the post-World War II Latter Rain movement, such as William Branham and George Warnock. More contemporary promoters of this teaching include U.S. prophets Paul Cain, Rick Joyner and Bill Hamon.

Hamon, for example, teaches that the manifested sons of God will be patterned after the original son of God, Jesus Christ. He also teaches that the worldwide church will be a type of corporate Christ, which will be the “full expression of Christ Jesus as Jesus is the full expression of His heavenly Father.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, the Manifest Son of God teaching is denounced by its critics as heretical since it appears to deify human beings.

A related teaching — promoted by Hamon — is that the rapture of believers will occur only when NAR followers receive the last piece of new revelation given by NAR apostles and prophets — instantaneously giving them immortal bodies with superhuman powers.<sup>53</sup> Thus, Hamon appears to be teaching that the rapture is not something God does for Christians, but is something they accomplish for themselves as they gain more and more secret knowledge revealed by the NAR apostles and prophets.

### SCRIPTURES MISUSED TO SUPPORT NAR TEACHINGS

#### EPHESIANS 4:11-13

The primary Scripture passage used to support the perpetuation of the offices of apostle and prophet is Ephesians 4:11-13.

In contrast to NAR leaders, more traditional evangelicals have generally understood this passage in one of two ways — neither of which supports the NAR belief in the present-day offices of apostle and prophet.

The first major way this passage has been understood is to be referring to the first-century apostles and prophets who, like those mentioned in Ephesians 2:20, played a foundational and temporary role in the history of the church. Thus, according to this understanding of the passage, it does not teach the perpetuation of apostles and prophets.

The second way this passage has been understood is that it does teach that God will continue to give apostles and prophets — along with evangelists, pastors, and teachers — for the building up of the church. However, the apostles and prophets who continue to be given do not hold formal offices or have the same level of authority as the original Twelve and Paul. Rather, present-day apostles can be compared to missionaries and church planters, not to people who rule the church. And present-day prophets are those who share words of edification and encouragement for individuals or local churches, but do not give revelation that is binding on the universal church.

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Those who hold to the second understanding of Ephesians 4:11-13 recognize the fact that there were different types of apostles in the first-century church. The word “apostle” had a somewhat flexible range of meaning, much as the English word “messenger” does today. The word “messenger” can refer to a person who is sent by another person, by an institution, or by God. In a similar way, some apostles in the early church were sent directly by Christ, such as the Twelve and Paul. Others were sent by churches. Those apostles sent by churches did not have the same level of authority as those sent directly by Christ. Thus, it is this less authoritative type of apostle that God continues to give to the church today, according to this interpretation of Ephesians 4:11-13.

### **EPHESIANS 2:20**

Another verse that is cited often by NAR leaders to support the present-day offices of apostle and prophet is Ephesians 2:20. But most traditional interpreters believe the apostles and prophets mentioned in this verse were those who played a historical role in the founding of the first-century church.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 12:28**

NAR leaders also point to 1 Corinthians 12:28 to support the present-day offices of apostle and prophet. But — while this verse does identify apostles and prophets as playing an important role in the church — it says nothing about them holding formal offices or governing the church.

### **MATTHEW 6:9-13 AND LUKE 11:2-4**

One of the main passages used to support the NAR claim that the church is tasked with taking dominion is the Lord’s Prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. Yet, this prayer simply expresses a desire that God’s kingdom be established; it says nothing about how or when it will be established. So, it cannot properly be used to support NAR teaching.

### **ACTS 3:21**

Another verse used to support NAR dominionism is Acts 3:21. NAR leaders claim that it teaches that Christ will not return to earth until the church has restored the earth to its original design before the Fall. Yet the traditional understanding of this verse is that God the Father will send Christ to restore “all things” not that the church will accomplish the restoration.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 15:24-25**

Yet another passage NAR leaders use to support their teachings on dominionism is 1 Corinthians 15:24-25. They claim this passage teaches that Christ, through the church, will reign and defeat His enemies before His Second Coming. 54 But this passage does not say that these feats will be accomplished through the church. Rather, it teaches that Christ Himself — after His Second Coming (see verse 23) — will reign and defeat his enemies.

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### HISTORY OF THE NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION

Though it is called the New Apostolic Reformation, the movement's teachings are not new, but are actually very old. Throughout church history, groups on the fringes of Christianity have attempted to restore the offices of apostle and/or prophet, including the Montanists (second century), the Irvingites (1830s), and the Apostolic Church (early 1900s).

More recently, the restoration of the offices of apostle and prophet was taught by the leaders of the Latter Rain Revival movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s (also called the "New Order of the Latter Rain"). The Latter Rain Revival, which started in Canada, quickly spread to the United States, Europe, and throughout the world. Influential Latter Rain leaders included George Warnock, Franklin Hall and William Branham.

But the popularity of the Latter Rain Revival was short-lived. On September 13, 1949, the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States — the largest Pentecostal denomination — passed a resolution that denounced Latter Rain teachings as unscriptural. Soon afterward, the revival died out. Nevertheless, Latter Rain teachings never completely disappeared and later resurfaced under a new name — that is, the New Apostolic Reformation.

The official birth of the New Apostolic Reformation is often said to have taken place May 21-23, 1996, at Fuller Theological Seminary's "National Symposium on the Post-Denominational Church." This event convened by NAR apostle and former Fuller professor C. Peter Wagner drew approximately 500 church leaders, church growth experts and denominational leaders. It first introduced the idea of present-day apostles and prophets to the larger evangelical world.

At the close of the symposium, the panelists are said to have agreed that those two offices continue today. 55

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Holly Pivec Holly Pivec operates a blog, called "Spirit of Error" ([www.spiritoferror.org](http://www.spiritoferror.org)), that critiques the teachings of present-day apostles and prophets in the New Apostolic Reformation movement.

Holly is an experienced journalist and researcher, having served as a newspaper reporter, a contributing writer to the Christian Research Journal, and as the University Editor at Biola University for nearly 10 years as well as the managing editor of the award-winning Biola Magazine. She has more than 200 published articles, many related to the New Apostolic Reformation, church trends and theological issues.

Holly has been researching the NAR movement for over a decade. She has a master's degree in Christian apologetics from Biola University.

She recently co-authored the book *A New Apostolic Reformation?: A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (Paperback) [ Kindle]

## Additional Reading and Resources

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Below are addition readings and resources regarding various NAR practices

### Destiny Cards

<http://pulpitandpen.org/2017/12/11/charismatics-now-using-christian-tarot-cards/>

Called “Destiny Reading Cards,” charismatics – some associated with Bethel Church in Redding, California – are engaging in what is essentially tarot card reading. You can see the clip below, and then we’ll explain.

They call it a “reading” and refer to the program as “Christalignment.” They don’t do “predictions,” but they will help empower your destiny rather than control it. Using what is essentially tarot cards, they do a “reading” about relations, jobs and issues to help people “make better decisions in the future.”

The tarot is a pack of playing cards made originally in the 1400s in Italy and France, which are meant to help a psychic “divine” truth either about the future or a present situation (some assume the name is taken from the Taro river in Italy). Explicitly occultic tarots include a 78 card pack (as opposed to all the other kinds of tarot, which are implicitly occultic). The charismatics at Bethel Church and elsewhere have commandeered this satanic practice and seek to help people gain insight into their life from these “readings.” Here’s another clip, below.

Bethel tarot card readers, Jenny and Ken Hodge, posing with Todd White.

Mind, Body and Spirit” is a group put together by fans (left) of Bethel Redding, and includes various partners, including the parents of Bethel missionary, Ben Fitzgerald. Students from Bethel Church in Redding were helping with their “readings.”

Jenny and Ken Hodge are hosting an event, “Taking Jesus into Counter Cultures” on March 10. They have modeled the practice of “taking Jesus into counter cultures” by doing their Christianized tarot cards at events like porn expos.

You can see on their public Facebook page their closeness with Bethel Church in Redding. You can see on their December 7 post their advertising of Christalignment (the top video) at an upcoming event.

You can see another “reading” by the woman below.

This reading does not involve tarot cards, however, but different colored agates.

### Grave Sucking (soaking up the anointing of dead Christians)

Go to YouTube and type in Grave Sucking

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=3&v=LrHPTs8cLls](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=LrHPTs8cLls)

## Additional Reading and Resources

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Max Whittaker for BuzzFeed News; Lettering by Madelene Wikskaer / BuzzFeed News

### **Meet The "Young Saints" Of Bethel Who Go To College To Perform Miracles**

**How a school that calls itself "Christian Hogwarts" is upending a small city in California's Trump country.**

Posted on October 12, 2017, at 10:01 a.m.

Molly Hensley-Clancy

It's the first day of Prophecy Week at the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry. Or, as students here like to call the place, Christian Hogwarts.

The auditorium of the civic center in Redding, California, where first-year students have class, is so full of eager, neatly dressed young people that it's initially impossible to find a seat. The roomful of some 1,200 students hums with expectant energy: People talk in clusters, clutching their books to their chests and stealing eager glances at the stage. There are so many languages spoken here it's hard to keep track: English of all flavors, spoken with Australian and British and South African accents; Chinese; Korean; Portuguese. It's a strange medley for a place like Redding, an economically depressed rural outpost about 200 miles north of San Francisco, in the heart of Northern California's Trump country.

The students are waiting for today's lecturer, Kris Vallotton, one of the school's founders and a prophet so prolific he literally wrote the book on it — *Basic Training for the Prophetic Ministry*, a combined textbook and workbook used by Bethel students to learn how to hear, and speak, God's words. ("Name the five things that distinguish a false prophet from a true prophet." "What is the difference between a vision and a trance?")

The basic theological premise of the School of Supernatural Ministry is this: that the miracles of biblical times — the parted seas and burning bushes and water into wine — did not end in biblical times, and the miracle workers did not die out with Jesus's earliest disciples. In the modern day, prophets and healers don't just walk among us, they are us.

To Bethel students, learning, seeing, and performing these "signs and wonders" — be it prophesying about things to come or healing the incurable — aren't just quirks or side projects of Christianity. They are, in fact, its very center.

In the modern day, prophets and healers don't just walk among us, they are us.

So far, Bethel's first-years have been learning the stories of their predecessors, ancient Old Testament prophets like Daniel and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in preparation for today — the day they begin to become prophets themselves.

They have already begun, tentatively, to learn Bethel's other trade: faith healing. I'm sitting on the edge of the room, notebook in my lap, when a thin, sandy-haired young man comes up to me with a wide smile.

"Excuse me," he says, and tells me his name. "Would you mind if I prayed for healing?"

He's looking, pointedly, at my right knee, which is at the moment bound in a thick and very noticeable black brace. "Sure," I say, because there's not really another answer in this kind of situation.

Still smiling, he kneels in front of me and lays his hands on my knee, fingers on the gap in my brace where my kneecap is visible. He begins to softly intone a prayer: Lord, please bring healing to her knee. Complete and total healing, Father.

When he finishes, he stands up. "Thanks," he says. "I'm practicing. Do you ... do you want to test it out?"

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I'm racking my brain for an excuse not to when the girl next to me, a Bethel student who is coincidentally wearing a brace on her wrist, offers her arm up to him. "You can do me too," she says, and the kid lights up.

"Thanks," he says, sheepishly, and kneels again in front of her, fingers gently encircling her wrist.

The room erupts in applause: Kris Vallotton is walking onto the stage. He's a little portly, with salt-and-pepper hair, a graying beard, and an infectious energy. His preaching style toggles between genuinely funny jokes and sincere stories. "Welcome to Prophecy Week," he says, and the students roar.

The Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry is at the forefront of a burgeoning — and decidedly youthful — evangelical Christian revival. Some have called its movement the fastest-growing religious group in America — a loose network of churches, led by so-called apostles, who see supernatural gifts like prophecy and faith healing as the key to global conversion. While other religious movements struggle to retain members and draw in young people, Bethel attracts millennials in droves.

The school — which is unaccredited and does not confer degrees — sends students into Redding and across the globe armed with training in how to speak God's words, heal the sick, and use the supernatural to win souls. It has spawned imitators across the country and on nearly every continent.

But BSSM is also at the crux of a conflict brewing in the small, isolated city of Redding, population 90,000. On one side is the church that runs the school, Bethel Redding, which has more than 9,000 in its congregation — its own little city on a hill. On the other side is a group of longtime Redding residents, religious and nonreligious alike, who are afraid and even angry about the growing influence of this church in their city and their lives.

As it grows rapidly, Bethel has devoted itself to fixing the struggling city of Redding, which is one of California's poorest. It donates money to the police department. It buys out public buildings. It nurtures local businesses. It sends armies of students to clean the city's trash- and syringe-strewn riverbanks. To the church's leaders, Redding and Bethel are inextricable, and the city's rebirth is one of the church's most urgent missions.

But to some Redding residents, this is a threat. They see Bethel insinuating itself into every piece of Redding — politics, real estate, schools — and, in the process, altering the very fabric of their city. The church's opponents have begun to stage protests, pressure local officials, and badger the press to expose the church. Daily, on Facebook, they catalog the infiltration of Bethel into Redding: "Bethel-owned" businesses, Bethel-sponsored events.

In Redding, BSSM's students — some call them "Bethelbots" — are everywhere. For school assignments, students hang out in parking lots and grocery store aisles, asking strangers who use wheelchairs or crutches if they can pray for them to heal. On Thursday nights, the budding prophets gather to listen for God's voice, then set off on "treasure hunts" to prophesy for people who match the description God has given them — whole crews of students scouring the local megastore for a man in a yellow shirt one night, a woman with three children and a purple backpack the next. After Friday night church services, they flood the local pizza place with frenzied devotions they call "fire tunnels." They film themselves trying to raise the dead and post the footage on YouTube.

Redding residents' worries are as fundamental as the Constitution. Bethel, they say, is steadily eroding the separation of church and state — and doing it at the time their city is at its most vulnerable. There is strong evidence, they say, that Bethel is using its size and money to exert influence on their government, their neighbors, their children.

Many of Bethel's most outspoken critics are evangelical Christians who are deeply troubled by Bethel's theology. They're the kind of people who would normally mind their own business. But by now, Bethel and the School of

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Supernatural Ministry have grown so huge that they are inescapable. Bethel is everywhere: on the city council, behind the police department and the local charter school, waiting in the parking lot of the Walmart off of Route 44.

When the church's teachings spiral out of control, some of Bethel's sharpest critics say, they can become dangerous — even deadly.

Piece by piece, Bethel and the School of Supernatural Ministry are trying to redeem Redding. But Redding isn't so sure it wants to be saved.

Globally, Bethel Church is mostly known for its Christian worship music — songs that tend toward the bland and inoffensive, but are wildly popular. Justin Bieber once told *Cosmopolitan* that a Bethel track called “No Longer Slaves” (now at 34 million YouTube views) was in his iPod's top three most-played, along with Lil Wayne and Drake.

But in Redding, the School of Supernatural Ministry and its budding prophets and faith healers are the face of Bethel. They're also a blunt, public, and near-constant reminder of just how far out of the mainstream Bethel is — and of the school's own far-flung ambitions.

The school began 20 years ago as a tiny operation: 37 students, most of them local. It now has 2,400. It is the country's largest importer of foreign nondegree students — 889 active visas in the first half of 2017, according to ICE data, double that of the next-largest school. Because it's unaccredited, it's not eligible for federal financial aid: Students pay \$4,650 a year out of pocket. They can attend for anywhere between one and three years; most stay for one or two.

That still makes BSSM a cash cow for Bethel: It brings in around \$7 million, almost 20% of the church's revenue, according to figures in *The Rise of Network Christianity*, an academic book on Bethel and other similar churches.

BSSM wants to grow even further. Earlier this month, the city of Redding approved a massive expansion: 3,000 students and a brand-new \$96 million campus — one that, in modest Redding, would stick out like an Apple Store in a forest.

In a photograph from 2012 posted on Reddit, Kris Vallotton and Bethel Church's spiritual leader, Bill Johnson, stand in front of a group of neatly dressed young people who are kneeling before them, arms outstretched and palms raised. In Johnson and Vallotton's hands are swords, their long, gleaming metal blades resting on the students' shoulders. It's graduation at Bethel, and its students are being knighted.

More simply: Miracles are a really good way to convert people.

This is the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry's real goal: creating spiritual warriors, young people who will go out into the world armed with just the kind of supernatural gifts that Bethel believes will bring people into the Kingdom of God.

“Jesus is bringing the Kingdom, and he's doing it through signs and wonders,” says Dann Farrelly, BSSM's dean. “They're the things that make people go, ‘Huh, there's something about you, about this.’ Jesus even said: You don't have to believe in me, you believe in the signs I'm doing.”

More simply: Miracles are a really good way to convert people.

BSSM is built on the idea that we are all “naturally supernatural”: We all have the potential to heal the sick and to hear God's vision for the future. It's ours because it's Jesus's, says Farrelly: Jesus does the work, and humans act as

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conduits. The school's job is to foster the supernatural gifts of signs and wonders — to teach people to hear God's voice and turn it into prophecy.

Dozens of imitation supernatural schools — some of which borrow Bethel's philosophy, others its lectures and materials — have now spread globally. The idea of "church planting" is not a new one to evangelicalism. But Bethel has created its own version: supernatural school planting. A BSSM map shows Bethel-inspired and Bethel-connected schools dotting the globe, with schools that use a version of BSSM's curriculum popping up across the country, and in Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Ireland, Hong Kong, and New Zealand.

"It's something that we've kind of coined," said Janelle Fite, who heads school-planting at Bethel. "None of us would have thought that our little school in Redding would have grown to the size it did. We never would have imagined."

Behind Bethel's rise is the enormous talent and ambition of the church's magnetizing leaders, Bill Johnson and Kris Vallotton, who cofounded BSSM in 1998. Depending on who you ask, Vallotton and Johnson are geniuses, false prophets, or both. What's undeniable is that with Vallotton at his side, Johnson, a fifth-generation pastor, has transformed a small, unremarkable local church into what Christianity Today called "a hub of a global revival movement."

Johnson has become one of the most high-profile apostles in a loosely connected and ever-multiplying group known as Independent Network Charismatics, or INC Christians, said Brad Christerson, a professor of sociology at Biola University and coauthor of *The Rise of Network Christianity*. Christerson calls INC Christianity, which is also known as New Apostolic Christianity, the country's fastest-growing religious movement — and Bethel, he says, "is at the center."

INC churches have no formal structure or governing body, something that allows them to grow and take risks in a way that many other churches, bound by formal rules and structures, can't. But that also means that INC churches have little accountability for their finances or their beliefs. Apostles often experiment wildly, and they encourage their members to do the same.

INC Christians don't care about planting churches, or even growing their congregations as large as possible, the way Joel Osteen did with his 52,000-person megachurch, says Christerson. Their sole mandate is to spread their apostles' beliefs — in Bethel's case, sharing testimonies and experiences of the supernatural by any means necessary.

There's the worship services broadcast worldwide through Bethel TV, a subscription service that, for as little as \$8 a month (and up to \$250 for a "season pass"), streams Sunday sermons and testimonies of healings and miracles. It Skypes hundreds of people into its healing sessions. Its conferences, with names like Kingdom Culture, Open Heavens, and Young Saints, draw attendances in the thousands.

Vallotton and Johnson have each built their own brands, too, with sleek websites, dozens of supernaturally focused books between them, and gigs speaking at revival churches worldwide. The Bethel Church bookstore is filled almost wall-to-wall with Johnson and Vallotton's tomes, bright paperbacks with titles like *The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind* and *Intentional Parenting: Kingdom Perspective on Raising Revivalists*.

And then there is the gem of the operation: Bethel Music, whose dozens of Christian artists have made albums that sit at the top of iTunes charts and regularly bring in millions of viewers. Bethel Music's young musicians, some tattooed, all of them beautiful, sing songs that border on the hypnotic, their eyes half-closed, their bodies swaying until they are seized by moments of intense, doubled-over passion.

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At Bethel's core is a deep, intense focus on young people. The church is highly internet-savvy, with a network of Instagram and Facebook accounts — each with hundreds of thousands of followers — that post high-quality, heavily-produced clips of songs, conferences, testimonials, and images of faith and revival. Laughing college kids fill the church's Instagram stories daily, and its services are often led by young people barely out of their teenage years.

All evangelical churches are focused on bringing in young people. The difference is that Bethel is actually successful.

Bethel students who grow up as charismatic or Pentecostal Christians find Bethel through services and conferences that are streamed into their own churches. Others tag along with friends to Young Saints, where they fall in love with Bethel's energy and youth in settings that feel more like rock concerts, full of euphoric praise music and pulsing lights. And many more find Bethel simply by clicking the red button on a YouTube video.

For those who have spent their lives in mainstream Christianity, where miracles are generally confined to biblical times, Bethel's theology can be deeply alluring. It offers a kind of certainty — an absolute proof of God's existence — that many of their previous churches never did.

For Eddie Hsu, a former Bethel student from Brazil, signs and wonders were the thing that brought his faith to life.

“As a young kid growing up in the church, one of the things that marked my life was this question of, That stuff that happened in the Bible, why doesn't it happen anymore?” says Hsu. “I was raised with the idea that God was so holy, but he didn't actually do anything.”

Hsu was a Catholic in name only until he had a personal encounter with God, a joy-filled moment where he felt Jesus's presence so strongly that it seemed undeniable. Hsu began to listen to Jesus Culture, a Bethel youth revivalist group, and was so drawn to it that on a visit to California he went to a Jesus Culture conference in Redding, four hours' drive from the tourist attractions of the Bay Area.

Since then, Hsu says he has seen many miracles that have sealed his faith. He has seen people healed in front of him; he was himself healed of a shoulder injury — he'd only hurt it bowling, and it was small, but it was deeply meaningful all the same. A prophet once told a friend of Hsu's, plucked out of a group of 800 people, what her grandmother's name was, what her childhood address had been.

“It made her really feel like, Wow, God knows me,” Hsu says.

Hsu made the final decision to come to the School of Supernatural Ministry, he says, because of a prophetic dream that he still remembers vividly. He dreamed of a ladder with angels on the rungs, much like Jacob's dream from Genesis of a ladder to heaven. In the Bible, the morning after his dream, Jacob sets a stone on a pillar and pours oil over it. He calls this place Bethel.

Mike Clark is a “born-again, Bible-believing Christian,” a pastor at a Baptist-linked church in Aurora, Colorado, who has become an outspoken critic of Bethel Church. Years earlier, he began to see friends drift toward a type of Christianity that was “experiential,” oriented around signs and wonders — “wandering into myth,” as Clark puts it. Bethel, he says, was almost always behind the shift.

Clark has seen its leaders' propensity for wild experimentation carry them into “crazy” places — farther and farther away from Jesus's teachings, he says. He and a group of other pastors have begun to catalog what they view as Bethel's problematic theology on a Facebook page called “Bethel Church and Christianity,” which has more than 4,500 followers. They mostly traffic in the words of Bethel's own leaders: stories of angels appearing and “balls of electricity” throwing people into the air, coupled with Scripture passages that they say contradict Bethel teachings.

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“Here’s the danger,” Clark says. “Miracles are a reflection of Jesus. When people chase after signs and wonders, they’re trading the Light himself, Jesus, for a reflection of the light.”

Clark is astonished, he says, at how far and how quickly Bethel’s teachings have spread. “There are people all over the world who are espousing this stuff from Bethel, and they don’t even have ties to Bethel,” he says. “It’s this little infection that trickles out from Bethel Music and Jesus Culture conferences. That’s where it all starts.”

Students who have left BSSM — and, sometimes, the Christian faith — tend to use similar words to describe the school: words like bullshit or party trick.

Bethel's savvy social media presence allows the church to reach tens of thousands of young people. Stefan, who spent three years at Bethel before eventually leaving evangelicalism, felt for his first few weeks at Bethel like he was really seeing miracles: healings and prophecies that felt like they had come directly from God. Eventually, that changed.

Stefan looks back at his time at BSSM and sees an array of “psychological mind games” — healing via placebo, prophecy through confirmation bias. He’s done some reading lately, he says, on how magicians convince crowds that they are seeing magic and not magic tricks; how believing that you are going to recover from an illness or that your injured limb has been healed can, sometimes, be enough to accomplish healing.

“I think, for me, Bethel was the beginning of realizing, like, this is all bullshit,” says Chris, who went to Bethel in the mid-2000s and asked that his last name not be used because he still has close friends in the church. “When you do it, you convince yourself that this is all really real. But it’s cold reading, that’s what it is. You just dress it up in Jesus.”

Chris was a good prophet, his teachers told him. While he was studying at Bethel, he once had a vision from The Song of Deborah as he prayed over a woman whose name he did not know. As he told her this, she cried out in surprise: Her name was Deborah.

“What I see now is, those are random thoughts,” Chris says. “Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, your prophecies are horrible misses. But you don’t remember them being a terrible flop — you remember the one time it worked.”

At BSSM, Chris said, the focus was on testimonies of success — retelling to a group of fellow students the stories of the one “holy shit” moment when their prophecy had worked. No one talked about the times they had failed.

There’s a YouTube video, viewed more than 175,000 times, of a street preacher’s bizarre encounter with young churchgoers in Bethel’s parking lot. One woman is loopy, laughing and stumbling, twitching as though she’s been jolted with electricity. “We are all loved perfectly no matter what theology we believe,” she tells the preacher.

Listening to her, the preacher is visibly upset. “I’m desperately worried about both of you,” he says to the woman and her friend. She giggles.

The preacher gives her a scenario: She finds a man who has been stabbed in the back and has just five minutes left to live. He tells her he’s worried about the way he’s lived his life and where he’ll go after he dies. What would the woman do with those five minutes? There is, in most of Christianity, just one answer: She should tell him the gospel of Jesus, ask him to repent, and save his soul.

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The woman flings her arms out and laughs. “I would say, ‘God, heal him right now!’” she cries giddily. “And the sword would fall off, and then they’d be fine, and then we’d hug.”

I see Bethel students’ education in practice one Friday night in Redding, at a church service where a group of third-years warms up the crowd by taking turns prophesying, passing the microphone from one nervous hand to another. They are all young, in their twenties and thirties, and attractive — a woman in heels, a man in flannel and tight-fitting jeans. Almost all of them have foreign accents.

Bethel’s main sanctuary, a beautiful building overlooking the mountains and valleys of Redding, is being used for a youth conference tonight, so we’re in a smaller space tucked away on a side road. The crowd here skews young, and almost entirely white, but really it’s diverse in age and class — older men in camo baseball caps and tank tops, young women in tiny skirts.

The first prophecy comes courtesy of a young white man who asks the crowd if anyone here has had a dream about a phone call with Bill Johnson, Bethel’s leader. A man in the front says he had a dream about Eric Johnson, Bill’s son, and a few people exclaim, “Wow!” But the prophet seems to think this isn’t quite right. He hunts around in the crowd for any Bill-phone dreams, and only when he doesn’t find any does he return to the man who dreamed of Eric. Eric, the prophet says, has been on a “journey of fatherhood,” and he wonders if this man, too, is “searching around for father figures.” If he is, the man says, he should turn to God the Father, a revelation that prompts murmurs of approval.

The only woman in the group, a young Australian, is called to prophesy for a man wearing a red-and-black T-shirt. She asks if he is a musician. He says, to gasps, that he is.

“And do you play the guitar? I’m seeing a guitar.”

“A little,” the man replies.

Buoyed, she launches into a prophecy about the man’s music career, and how it’s about to “take off.” He’s going to find unimaginable success soon. “You’re going to be put above kings and queens,” she says, to oohs from the crowd.

He also says he saw a hippopotamus.

Another student interrupts her. He says he’s seen the image of a Ferrari logo tattooed on the man’s head. “It means this is all going to come really fast for you,” he says, and the crowd applauds. “Get ready, it’s coming.”

An elderly man who’s asked if the year 1942 means anything to him (it doesn’t, but 1941 does) is given a vision of himself with God, bearded and sitting in a throne. “And both of you are holding a giant soda pop, a red soda pop,” the prophet says: a sign that “God is fun.” He also says he saw a hippopotamus.

After the music and a few sermons, we get to the main event, a piped-in sermon and prophecy from the conference down the road. The speaker is a celebrity in the world of Bethelites, a man named Shawn Bolz who has come to us straight out of Hollywood, where he once met Mel Gibson. He is, I recognize immediately, a different kind of prophet than Bethel’s third-years. For one, the miracles he describes are nothing that can be explained by mere coincidence. He tells the story of a young girl he was praying for who confessed that she was a cutter. As he “said words” over her, telling her she was loved by God, she held up her arms and her scars disappeared. So did the scars of all of the other cutters in the auditorium.

Bolz ends by prophesying in a way that feels, fundamentally, like Not Bullshit, teetering on the edge of something even I can believe. His prophecies are the kind of thing that Bethel students aspire to. He says he has had a testimony

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for someone named Judah who is “somehow related to Judges,” and a boy pops up, beaming, in the crowd — his name is Judah, and he lives on Judges Road. Bolz knows that Judah has an “older brother, Bryan, Ryan, something like that.” Ryan’s right, Judah says.

Bolz asks if there is a girl named Luna in the audience, and of course, there is. He tells her he’s had a vision of a Boston terrier — the same kind of dog Luna says her sister is adopting next month. Then Bolz asks her if the names “Alfredo and Antonio” mean anything to her.

“Those are my baby cousins’ names, they’re twins!” Luna cries, giddily, a look of awe on her face. Then she starts to talk again, and it sounds like she is trying to qualify her answer.

“Well, it’s not—” she starts.

But the crowd of young people has erupted in a roar of amazement at Bolz’s prophecy. Luna’s voice is drowned out.

Paul Davis has lived in Redding most of his life. Gentle and soft-spoken, he says he has nothing against Bethel’s students — he thinks they’re “really sweet kids” — but he’s troubled, deeply, by the church’s theology. An evangelical Christian, Davis says BSSM students are caught up in the “extrabiblical,” a focus on proving God’s existence through the supernatural rather than through faith. He spends a lot of time worrying about the salvation of the sweet Bethel kids he interacts with daily, and about the strange, twisted path he thinks they’re leading others on.

But Davis says it’s hard to argue with one basic fact: “Bethel is great for the economy. They bring in millions of dollars, and they do a lot of good for the community.”

As a Christian who loves his city, Davis is torn, he says. On the one hand, “I’m really concerned about our spiritual welfare.” But the other side is this: “Redding has two industries,” he says. “There’s meth and marijuana. And then there’s Bethel.”

If you’ve lived in Redding long enough, you might remember a time when it was the perfect little city. It sits nestled at the foot of snow-peaked mountains, surrounded by Douglas fir trees and rivers and the glassy, clear blue waters of Lake Shasta. Four hours away from wild, liberal San Francisco, Redding once had a familiar story: good blue-collar jobs, safe and friendly neighborhoods, families who passed their time boating and fishing and hunting.

Redding is different now. It has a high unemployment rate and a crime rate that’s almost twice the rest of California’s. Homelessness keeps climbing. So does drug use: marijuana, grown in the idyllic countryside surrounding the city, but meth too, and increasingly devastatingly, heroin, which is “exploding” across the county. Shasta County hospitals see three times the number of overdoses than the rest of the state averages.

Now residents swap stories of people found shooting up in the streets, cars broken into with cinderblocks in fits of desperation, and stores robbed, repeatedly, in broad daylight. In a Facebook group called “Redding Crime 2.0,” more than 27,000 members track down one another’s stolen cars, complain about homeless encampments, and post photos of shady characters caught dealing drugs in parking lots.

“Most of the startups and small businesses have been from our graduates.”

In a troubled city caught in a downward spiral, there is one bright spot: Bethel. The church has brought droves of eager young people, many of them educated, to Redding. They all need a place to stay, food to eat, coffee to drink. And after graduating, many of Bethel’s students have done something remarkable: They’ve stayed in Redding. They’ve opened trendy coffee shops, bakeries, and ethnic restaurants, even tech companies. They have begun to raise families here.

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“People tell us all the time, ‘You have saved the economy of this city, and you guys have brought an international flavor to a city that used to be monochromatic,’” Farrelly says. “Most of the startups and small businesses have been from our graduates. There are so many people that have come to town for us.”

The city budget in Redding has long been tight. For years, the city-owned Redding Civic Auditorium was crumbling, its interior in disrepair, its funding and future always in question. It seemed inevitable that the Civic would, eventually, be forced to close down.

In 2011, though, the Civic found an unlikely savior: Bethel. The church created a nonprofit and used it to lease the Civic. On weekends, the center hosted the same concerts and events it always had. During the week, the Civic became the home of the School of Supernatural Ministry and its more than 1,000 first-year students from all around the globe.

The Civic was, for Bethel, a first step — a toe in the waters. Since then, the church has become increasingly intertwined with the city. Last year, a local nurse and Bethel elder, Julie Winter, ran for city council and won, buoyed by far more in political contributions than her opponents. Their latest campaign is perhaps the biggest: With the local police department’s future in jeopardy, the church offered a \$500,000 donation to the city to save the jobs of four officers. Residents bristled. The city accepted.

But Bethel needs something from the city, too. It has ambitious plans for expansion in Redding, plans that center around the School of Supernatural Ministry: Its beautiful new 171,000-square-foot campus and megachurch, it says, will have parking for 1,800, a “worship center” that seats more than 2,600, and classrooms for 3,000 students.

As controversy brewed in Redding over the massive expansion, an editorial in the Record Searchlight, the local newspaper, put it this way: “If Shasta County had a startup company that had grown from a tiny seed blown over the pass from Weaverville to become a global player, what would we say when it wanted to expand? What if it had become a major local employer, created some of the most popular music and other media in its industry and brought literally thousands of educated, interesting people from around the world to Redding?”

“We do,” the editorial board wrote. “It just so happens to be a church.”

“We’re heading towards a place where a religious entity is in control, and is monetarily benefiting from the city government.”

To Anita Brady, who has lived her entire life in Redding, that is the exactly the problem: As Bethel steadily erodes a boundary between itself and the city, it moves closer to violating the separation of church and state, she says. “We’re heading towards a place where a religious entity is in control, and is monetarily benefiting from the city government,” Brady says. “That’s what scares me.”

As evidence, she points to the Civic; to Winter’s place on the city council; to the hordes of Bethel students who volunteer across Redding, saving the city money. And then there is the \$500,000 donation to the city police department: “They did that with one thing in mind, to curry favor,” Brady says.

And, Brady points out, they got just that: After months of debate, BSSM’s \$96 million expansion was unanimously approved in September by the city planning commission. In comment after comment on news stories and on Facebook, residents responded angrily to the news. “Bethel has Redding in its back pocket,” one wrote.

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A longtime public school teacher, Brady was infuriated by a Bethel advertisement for a seminar called “Kingdom in the Classroom,” which marketed itself to public and private school teachers alike. “The presence of God in your classroom is not illegal!” the ad read. “Regardless of where you teach — public or private, religious or secular — God wants to come to your school with His presence, His peace and His strategies.”

That turned out to be just the beginning, Brady says. In August, a group linked to Bethel opened a taxpayer-funded public charter school, Tree of Life, on the campus of an elementary school that was shuttered because of declining enrollment. Tree of Life’s leaders say the school is secular, a legal requirement to receive public money. But its principal told the Redding Record Searchlight that the school would use pieces of a Bethel’s “Kingdom in the Classroom” curriculum.

A job posting on a Bethel website, which sought to hire teachers, said the “school has a Kingdom culture and all Bethel-connected Board of Directors and principal,” the Record Searchlight reported. The principal said the word “Kingdom” referred to a “culture of love,” not religion.

Brady’s fears about a growing Bethel takeover in Redding are not unfounded. At the very theological roots of Bethel and other churches like it is the “seven mountains mandate,” a belief that Christ will only return to Earth when true believers bring God into seven spheres: religion, family, education, government, media, arts, and business.

Most INC churches organize themselves around the seven mountains mandate, says Christerson, the author of *The Rise of Network Christianity*. But thanks to Redding, Bethel offers a unique test case.

“They’re so big, and Redding is so small, that they can actually do it,” Christerson says.

Julie Winter first got involved with the city by orchestrating Bethel’s plan to take over the Civic. Though she ran on a secular campaign of economic revitalization and curbing homelessness and drug addiction, she says she is deeply influenced by her faith. She recuses herself from voting on Bethel-related matters, but when it comes to Redding, she says her vision is closely aligned with the church’s.

“The fact that we have the balls to say, ‘We can manage the Civic,’ I’ve never really seen that modeled anywhere else,” Winter says of Bethel. “The angst was really high when it happened, but now if you talked to anyone involved with the city, they’re thrilled.”

At the center of many residents’ concerns is the deep, strange otherness of Bethel.

Just before the election, which Winter won handily, a half dozen of her large campaign signs were vandalized with the word “BETHEL!” spray-painted in huge orange letters. Another 15 were tagged with “Bethel” bumper stickers.

At the center of many residents’ concerns is the deep, strange otherness of Bethel. On Facebook they trade the same videos over and over again to prove it. There’s the one of Bethelites doing something called “grave sucking,” or praying, prostrate, on the grave of a famous Christian. There are the frenzied “fire tunnels” where giddy church members form aisles and lay their hands on people in the middle, shaking, staggering, and screaming as they are filled with the Holy Spirit. And then there are videos of Bethel’s “glory clouds,” where gold glitter begins to drift from the church sanctuary ceiling seemingly out of nowhere mid-sermon, which have been viewed more than a million times on YouTube.

For many white, working-class Shasta County residents — just 19% of whom have bachelor’s degrees, compared to 33% nationwide — Bethel students and churchgoers are strange for another reason too: They represent a foreign elite. In a letter to the editor of the Record Searchlight, a woman named Marilyn Lee said what many in Redding had

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been thinking: that the stream of foreigners, money, and young, educated tech talent coming to Bethel could leave Redding unrecognizable.

“Kris Vallotton said in an interview that the church’s vision for Redding was for it to become like Paris,” Lee wrote. “Excuse me, but that certainly isn’t my vision. I would be willing to make a guess that that is not the vision of the majority of the people living here. My vision is to keep it as it is.”

When I ask about Bethel, most Redding residents who are opposed to the church return to the same story from nearly a decade ago, in 2008. A group that included Bethel students were drinking at the top of a cliff on the banks of the broad Sacramento River. When one man fell to the bottom of the 200-foot cliff, news reports say, the students didn’t call the police. Instead, they tried to climb down so that they could faith-heal him. They never found him, and for six hours, he lay bleeding and unconscious in the dark at the foot of the cliff. He survived, but was paralyzed. (The students were found to be not at fault in a suit.)

Nearly everyone in the Facebook group, it seems — and many outside of it — has their own private version of this story.

For one local man, himself an evangelical Christian, it was a time that a BSSM student he had trusted to babysit his children called while he was at dinner with his wife to say the Antichrist was in their home and also that the sitter’s own closet was filled with demons that needed to be exorcised.

There’s a story about Bethel students swarming an elderly woman in a wheelchair in a parking lot and encouraging her to walk; massages, dental appointments, and shopping trips interrupted by Bethel students’ “treasure hunts.” The biggest local tourist attraction, the Sundial Bridge, was briefly “ruined,” residents complained, by students looking to practice their prophesy on the banks of the Sacramento River. (They are no longer allowed to prophesy to tourists around the bridge.)

Donna Zibull has lived in Redding for more than 40 years, working as a housekeeper and hospital cleaner until a back injury forced her to retire on disability. But she hadn’t thought much about Bethel until 2014, when the church barged into one of the worst days of her life.

Zibull’s 15-year-old grandson, Orian, was walking home from a friend’s house on a cold January afternoon when he had an asthma attack in the street a few blocks from his home. It was Bethel churchgoers, Zibull says, who found him and ran to his side. As he gasped for breath, they began to pray for healing, letting long minutes tick by without calling 911. One woman even ran back into her friend’s house, Zibull says, to get a copy of her Bible.

Eventually, someone in the group called an ambulance, and Orian was taken to the hospital, some 15 minutes after his attack began, Zibull says. For days, as he lay in the ICU of Shasta Regional Medical Center with irreparable brain damage, Bethel church members and leaders came to the hospital, asking to pray over Zibull’s grandson. They gave her daughter a piece of prophetic art, a drawing they said had been made by a Bethel child.

“They were giving these prophecies about how he was going to be raised from the dead.”

“They started praying, talking in tongues,” Zibull says. “They were going to blow a shofar. They were giving these prophecies about how he was going to be raised from the dead.”

Bethelites promised Zibull’s daughter, over and over again, that God could bring her son back to life. They said there was going to be a miracle. “They gave my daughter false hope,” Zibull says. Orian died four days later.

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Since Orian's death, Zibull has devoted herself to learning about Bethel, researching the church's teachings and its growing involvement in Redding's government.

One thing was acutely painful: Bethel's annual Medical Healing Conference, which took place in May. The conference was initially set to be cohosted by the Shasta Regional Medical Center — the hospital where Orian died. Zibull was "shocked" and outraged when she heard about the conference, she says. Online, she began to plan a protest with the other members of the Citizens Concerned About Bethel Church Facebook group.

That protest never panned out, but Zibull still has her sign. It reads: "You can't raise the dead."

On the plane to the United States, about to start his first year at Bethel, Stefan struck up a conversation with the man next to him, a science professor at Stanford. Stefan told the professor that he was coming to Redding from Austria because he wanted to witness miracles. Eventually, he wanted to perform them himself: to learn how to prophesy, and especially, how to heal.

Stefan and the professor argued for a while about the existence of the supernatural. Neither of them changed their minds in the slightest. But as their flight ended, Stefan says the professor gave him a business card.

"I don't believe in this stuff," the professor told him. "But if you ever see a limb grow out, videotape it and send the recording to me, and then I will."

This is why Bethel is obsessed with healing. It offers that kind of transformative power: the chance to have God's existence proven to you, right in front of your eyes — laid out so definitively and convincingly that even an atheist professor couldn't help but become a true believer. (The professor is still, apparently, waiting.)

This is how it worked, for many, in biblical times, Dann Farrelly tells me: People became followers of Jesus because they saw healing and miracles with their own eyes.

Bethel has offered tens of thousands of people a chance to be healed at its massive conferences and on mission trips across the globe. And hundreds of people make the pilgrimage to their Healing Rooms in Redding every week. Many, I am told, practice Bethel's brand of Christianity, but others are mainstream Christians, dipping their toes in the waters of more radical faith. Others, like me, are not religious at all.

On a Saturday morning, I sit in the lobby of the Healing Rooms, clipboard in my lap and a pen in my hand. On my right knee is the big, ugly black brace, one that I've been sporting for six weeks, since a soccer injury left me with two completely torn ligaments. I'm here to have my knee healed — or at least that's what I write on the Healing Room intake form I've been given, which asks me to list my "Physical Prayer Needs."

I have a lot of physical prayer needs: At the moment, I can't ride a stationary bike, go down stairs, or even bend my knee at a right angle. I write those down. The form also asks whether I'm "born again" and if I've been "baptized in the Holy Spirit." I check "no" for both.

After an introductory class on the "Biblical foundations of Healing," we're led into the main sanctuary, a kind of holding room which is already buzzing with people. Concentric circles of chairs, some of them draped with colorful blankets and pillows, have been set up around a large group of easels where people are painting prophetic art on giant canvases: a pair of hands touching each other, a tree shedding blue leaves. A praise band of beautiful young people wearing flannel plays up on the stage, crooning hypnotic, repetitive strains of viral Bethel Music songs. In the corner, in front of a cross draped with sequined gold cloth, a woman lies prostrate and unmoving, her forehead pressed to the carpet. She does not move the entire time I'm in the sanctuary.

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In the back of the room, a row of people with telemarketer-style headphones and laptops are conducting healing sessions via Skype. A pair of large screens in front of us remind us that only Bethel's ministry team are allowed to heal.

I settle in the corner, waiting for my number to be called, and watch as a trio of prophetic dancers, barefoot and carrying colorful scarves, gather around a woman near me who looks very much like she has just emerged from a brutal chemotherapy treatment. They ask if they can dance for her. She begins to cry, clutching her husband's hand, as they twirl around her.

After a while, a woman interrupts the praise band to tell us that there is a "healing pool" forming in front of the stage. "It's a pool where the impossible is possible, where oil and water mix, and here there's going to be real healing," she says. As dozens of people come up to the pool, collapsing to their knees or raising their hands in the air, the woman's voice becomes a hypnotic chant: "Oil and water mix here, outside in the world they don't, but in here they dooooo. Oil and water mix here..."

The ailing woman and her husband make their way to the pool and begin to dance with each other, swaying slowly.

Later, we're herded into another, smaller room, one where intense healing is going to take place. We wait our turn and watch Bethel's healers do their work, stationed in pairs in front of people clutching their intake forms.

The woman next to me, who looks about my age, has a squirming little boy on her lap. I peek at her form, which lists just two ailments, scrawled in all-caps: PARASITES and HEARTBREAK.

Finally it's my turn. "So, you're not saved, and you're not born again, right?" one of my healers asks, scrutinizing my form.

I explain clumsily that I was "raised Catholic," which is only barely true. With my utter lack of faith made clear, the prayers focus not just on my knee, but on my own relationship to God, asking him to "help me on my journey towards faith."

I can tell I'm a tough case, because a third healer comes over to us, and then a fourth. Soon I'm surrounded by people praying for me, one woman's hand on my shoulder, another on her knees in front of me, and the force of their expectation — desperation, almost — is palpable. Unrelentingly, every few minutes, they ask me how I'm feeling, whether I'm better.

I try to deflect some of their questions, but it never works. When one healer asks me what I feel, I tell her I feel "your energy and prayers." She jumps back, "But what about your knee?"

"Well, it's a really serious injury," I try. "So I think it might take some time."

The woman seems almost offended. "Time?" she says. "Jesus doesn't need time! Jesus can heal you right away."

We start praying again, and I start feeling a little desperate, like I'll never get out of here. The next time they ask me how my knee feels, almost automatically, without thinking, I lie.

"I think it's more flexible now," I say. I move it back and forth, and I can see my healers' eyes light up. "I think it's getting better. Thank you."

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“Thank you, Father!” one of them cries out, taking my hand. We’re both, I think, relieved, though maybe for different reasons. “Thank you for beginning this journey to healing.”

It’s finally over, and my healers ask me to give them my intake form. When I take the paper off of the clipboard, I notice there’s a back side, too, meant to be filled out by Bethel staff: a checklist labeled “Miracles Performed.” It includes healed shoulders and knees, zapped tumors, cured cancer, and limb-straightening, as well as soul-saving. At the very bottom of the list is the very miracle that the Stanford professor told Stefan would convert him: “Limb regrown.”

I hand the form over, wondering if they’re going to check me off as a Miracle Performed. As I leave the room, I think I see one of my healers do just that.

Ministry students during a worship service at the Civic Auditorium in Redding, California, September 14, 2017. A week later, when I’m back in New York, I pull myself up onto my physical therapist’s table, facedown. The excruciating process of recovering from my injury has, so far, involved forcing my locked-up knee to bend slightly farther at every appointment, a process that always makes me cry out in pain, and sometimes leaves me with tears in my eyes.

“All right, let’s see how you’re doing,” she says. Before I left for Redding, I had told her where I was headed and why, and as I lie there on the table, she jokes, “Maybe you’re healed! This could be our last day.”

I squeeze my eyes shut and feel her bending my knee back. “Wow,” she tells me. “You’re doing really well. You’ve got much more flexibility, actually. I’d say at least 20 degrees.”

I had a lot of downtime in Redding, and I spent most of it doing physical therapy — several hours a day of excruciatingly painful work, lying on the hotel room floor and using a strap to force my knee to bend farther and farther. But still. I turn around to my physical therapist, and she and I exchange a look: just a split second. ●

### CORRECTION

October 12, 2017, at 10:01 p.m.

A Bethel nonprofit leases the Civic Center from the city of Redding. In one instance, a previous version of of this story said the nonprofit bought the Civic.

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### Kingdom Now and Latter-Day Rain Movements

Resource: [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)

#### What is Kingdom Now teaching?

Answer: Kingdom Now theology is a theological belief within the Charismatic movement of Protestant Christianity, mainly in the United States. Kingdom Now proponents believe that God lost control over the world to Satan when Adam and Eve sinned. Since then, the theology goes, God has been trying to reestablish control over the world by seeking a special group of believers—known variously as "covenant people," "overcomers," or "Joel's army"—and that through these people, social institutions (including governments and laws) would be brought under God's authority. The belief is that, since believers are indwelt by the same Holy Spirit that indwelt Jesus, we have all authority in heaven and on the earth; we have the power to believe for and speak into existence things that are not, and thus we can bring about the Kingdom Age.

Among the most controversial tenets of the theology is the belief that secular or non-Christian society will never succeed. Hence, Kingdom Now opposes a separation of church and state. Other beliefs include the idea that, as the Body of Christ, we are Christ. In other words, we have His divine nature. Proponents of Kingdom Now teaching also don't believe in the rapture, which is explained away as a feeling of rapture or excitement when the Lord returns to receive the kingdom from our hands. In other words, everyone will be "caught up" emotionally when He returns. Also among the unbiblical beliefs is the idea that all prophecies regarding future Israel—both in the Old and New Testaments—actually apply to the church.

Kingdom Now theology sees the second coming of Jesus in two stages: first through the flesh of the believers (and in particular the flesh of today's apostles and prophets), and then in person to take over the kingdom handed to Him by those who have been victorious (the "overcomers"). Prior to the second coming, overcomers must purge the earth of all evil influences. Kingdom Now claims that Jesus cannot return until all His enemies have been put under the feet of the church (including death, presumably).

Although there are people who only partially hold to Kingdom Now teachings, they still share the beliefs outlined above, all of which are outside of mainstream Christianity and all of which deny Scripture. First, the idea that God has "lost control" of anything is ludicrous, especially coupled with the idea that He needs human beings to help Him regain that control. He is the sovereign Lord of the universe, complete and holy, perfect in all His attributes. He has complete control over all things—past, present and future—and nothing happens outside His command. Everything is proceeding according to His divine plan and purpose, and not one molecule is moving on its own accord. "For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?" (Isaiah 14:27). As for men having "the power to believe for and speak into existence things that are not," that power belongs to God alone, who doesn't take kindly to those who would attempt to usurp it from Him. "Remember this, and be a man; return it on your heart, O sinners. Remember former things from forever; for I am God, and no other is God, even none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from the past things which were not done, saying, 'My purpose shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my purpose from a far country. Yes, I have spoken, I will also cause it to come; I have formed; yes, I will do it" (Isaiah 46:8–11).

Kingdom Now's denial of the rapture of the church is also unbiblical. The explanation that the rapture is nothing more than the people of God being caught up in rapturous feelings ignores the fact that such an application of the term "caught up" is strictly an idiomatic expression peculiar to English, not Greek. "I was all 'caught up' in the movie (or other excitement)" is not the equivalent of *harpazo*, used to describe the catching up bodily into heaven in 1

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Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Corinthians 12:2-4; and Revelation 12:5. The word is also used in Acts 8:39, where Phillip is bodily "caught away" by the Spirit to another location.

As for our being Christ and having divine nature, we are not Christ, although we do partake of His divine nature at salvation with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:4). But Christ is the second Person of the Godhead, and no one becomes God. This is a lie from the father of lies, Satan, who first told it in the Garden of Eden when he tempted Eve with "you shall be as God" (Genesis 3:5).

The idea that the church has replaced Israel and that the fulfillment of the prophecies to Israel pertain to the church is known as Replacement theology, and it is unbiblical. The promises to Israel will be fulfilled in Israel, not in the church. God's blessings to Israel are eternal, and they are without recall.

Finally, the second coming of Christ will be when He, not men, defeats His enemies and puts all things under His feet. The description of the second coming in Revelation 19 is the description of a mighty warrior who comes to put all things to right, not of one who comes to an earth already cleaned up and ready for Him to rule. Verse 15 is clear: "And out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, so that with it He should strike the nations. And He will shepherd them with a rod of iron. And He treads the winepress of the wine of the anger and of the wrath of Almighty God." If the earth has been "purged of all evil influences," as the Kingdom Now-ers believe, why does Christ need a sharp sword to strike the nations, and why does the anger and wrath of God still exist against them?

Kingdom Now theology is another in a long line false, unbiblical, and misleading philosophies of men whose vain imaginations seek to humanize God and deify man. It is to be avoided.

### What is the Latter Rain Movement?

Answer: The Latter Rain Movement is an influence within Pentecostalism which teaches that the Lord is pouring out His Spirit again, as He did at Pentecost, and using believers to prepare the world for His Second Coming. The Latter Rain Movement is anti-dispensational and amillennial, and many leaders of the movement embrace aberrant teachings.

The term "latter rain" was first used early in the history of Pentecostalism, when David Wesley Myland wrote a book called Latter Rain Songs in 1907. Three years later, Myland wrote The Latter Rain Covenant, a defense of Pentecostalism in general.

The name comes from Joel 2:23, "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for He hath given you the former rain moderately, and He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month." Pentecostals interpreted the "rain" in this verse as an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The "latter rain" (the end-times outpouring) would be greater than the "former rain."

In 1948, a "revival" broke out in Saskatchewan, Canada, and the teachings of the Latter Rain movement were clarified. Those involved in the revival were convinced that they were on the verge of a new era, one in which the Holy Spirit would demonstrate His power in a greater way than the world had ever seen. Not even the age of the apostles, they said, had witnessed such a movement of the Holy Spirit.

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Latter Rain teaching is characterized by a highly typological hermeneutic. That is, the Bible is interpreted in a symbolic, extremely stylized manner. An emphasis is placed on extra-biblical revelation, such as personal prophecies, experiences, and directives straight from God. Latter Rain doctrine includes the following beliefs:

- the gifts of the Spirit, including tongues, are received through the laying on of hands
- Christians can be demonized and require deliverance
- God has restored all the offices of ministry to the Church, including apostle and prophet
- divine healing can be administered through the laying on of hands
- praise and worship will usher God into our presence
- women have a full and equal ministry role in the Church
- denominational lines will be destroyed, and the Church will unify in the last days
- the “latter rain” will bring God’s work to completion; the Church will be victorious over the world and usher in Christ’s kingdom

Many “apostles” in the Latter Rain Movement also teach the doctrine of “the manifest sons of God.” This is a heretical doctrine which says that the Church will give rise to a special group of “overcomers” who will receive spiritual bodies, becoming immortal.

It is important to note that the Assemblies of God deemed the Latter Rain Movement to contain heresy from the very beginning. On April 20, 1949, the Assemblies of God officially denounced Latter Rain teaching, nearly splitting the denomination in the process. Other established Pentecostal groups have passed similar resolutions.

Today, the term “latter rain” is rarely used, but the theology of Latter Rain continues to exert an influence. Most branches of the Charismatic Movement adhere to Latter Rain teaching. Modern movements such as the Brownsville/Pensacola Revival, the Toronto Blessing, and the “holy laughter” phenomenon are a direct result of Latter Rain theology.

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### What is the Third Wave Movement?

**Answer:** The Third Wave Movement is a [Pentecostal](#) or [Charismatic movement](#) that began in the 1980s. It is sometimes called the “Third Wave of the Holy Spirit” or the “Signs and Wonders Movement.” The name “Third Wave” was coined by C. Peter Wagner, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. He referred to the movement as the “Third Wave” because this was the third of three distinct Pentecostal/Charismatic movements in modern Christianity. The first wave was the original Pentecostal Movement that began in the early 1900s with the teachings of Charles Parham followed by the Azusa Street Revival. The second wave then came in the 1960s with the Charismatic movement. In the Charismatic movement, Pentecostal doctrines, teachings, and practices began to spread to non-Pentecostal churches and denominations. This wave brought increased popularity to the “Word of Faith” or “Name It and Claim It” false teachings that are still popular today.

Then, in the 1980s, another “movement of the Holy Spirit,” supposedly characterized by “signs and wonders,” began in the Vineyard Church with the teachings of John Wimber, Mike Bickle, C. Peter Wagner, Jack Deere, and others. Professor Wagner characterized this Third Wave as being “a new moving of the Holy Spirit among evangelicals who, for one reason or another, have chosen not to identify with either the Pentecostals or Charismatics.” Also known as the Neo-Charismatic Movement, this Third Wave of Pentecostal doctrine and excess became very popular and led to many aberrant teachings such as the Toronto Blessing and laughing in the Spirit.

In addition to highlighting some of the melodramatic practices of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, the Third Wave goes even further with its emphasis on the sensational, including claims of signs and wonders performed by “modern-day apostles and prophets.”

Key teachings of the Third Wave Movement include what is known as “power evangelism.” The basic premise of power evangelism is that the preaching of the gospel must be accompanied with signs and wonders in order for people to respond in faith. Proponents of this view have an unbalanced focus on miracles, speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy. They miss the fact that it is the gospel message itself that is the power of God to salvation ([Romans 1](#)). Third Wave proponents essentially deny the sufficiency of Scripture and believe that God is communicating directly through modern-day prophets and apostles. Therefore, they believe that God is giving new revelation today that undermines the sufficiency and authority of Scripture. The words of these “new apostles and prophets” become more important than the clear teaching of Scripture. As with all Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, personal experience plays a greater role for determining “truth” than does sound doctrine.

The Third Wave is yet another movement that is based on people’s experience rather than on sound doctrine. Proponents of the Third Wave Movement believed that it would bring forth end-time apostles and prophets to do greater miracles than were performed by Old Testament prophets or New Testament apostles. These “new apostles and prophets” were said to be greater than any prophet or apostle that had preceded them. This teaching has resulted in many false prophets coming out of Third Wave churches.

Since its beginning in the 1980s, the Third Wave Movement has sparked a large number of counterfeit revivals. As the movement evolved, unbiblical practices such as “laughing in the spirit” continued to get more and more bizarre. In recent years some Third Wave leaders and churches have begun to separate themselves from some of the more aberrant practices and are trying to move back to more traditional Charismatic practices.