



September 4, 2024

# MESSENGER

## QUOTE FOR TODAY

"Heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise." "  
Jeremiah 17:14

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## More Sexual Abuse in Churches

It was more than twenty years ago that the *Boston Globe* published a startling expose of sexual abuse by Catholic priests that was being covered up by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. This was dramatized in a number of films, and we Protestants took the opportunity to point fingers at the shortcomings of Catholic teachings, such as the emphasis on celibacy for priests, monks and nuns. Hypocrites!

But a few years later the tables were turned when the Southern Baptist Convention was accused of a systematic coverup of sexual abuse by pastors and other leaders in its churches. Turns out the Catholics didn't have a monopoly on these kinds of scandals, and the Southern Baptist denominational leaders were just as bad at their attempted coverup strategy.<sup>1</sup> Catholic friends tried not to gloat.

In both these cases, isolated human failures were multiplied and intensified by a **lack of accountability**.

Well, it should be no surprise that the most recent wave of sexual abuse scandals have occurred in *megachurches* that are built on the teaching known as the **Five-Fold Ministry**.<sup>2</sup> Let me explain. The *Latter Rain movement* began in the late nineteenth century as an extreme form of Pentecostalism, which taught that the outpouring of spiritual gifts marked the beginning of end-time events that would climax in the Second Coming of Christ. After World War II key leaders began to proclaim that there had been a **restoration** of first century gifts to prepare the way for his Coming. This is where the Five-Fold Ministry comes in.

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# September 4, 2024

(Continued from other side)

This teaching is based on the misinterpretation of one verse in the Bible:

*He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.*  
(Ephesians 4:11)

You can count them --- *five* categories of Christian leaders. Christian scholars have generally taught that the existence of apostles and prophets was provided by God just for the earliest years, while the church was being planted as a continuing force on earth. After that, these two roles were no longer needed, and the church has been governed by “evangelists, pastors and teachers,” as well as other types of leaders that emerged (priests, bishops, deacons, elders, etc.). The Five-Fold Ministry groups say that the Lord has restored the apostle and prophet offices in these “latter days” to prepare the church for Christ’s return. ***They are in charge; they’re accountable only to God . . . and to each other, sort of.***

This is their problem. As scandals have surfaced, megachurch leaders, who consider themselves apostles, have no superior authorities to call them out. Ultimately (sometimes years later!) the abuse may be exposed by a victim and the issue is magnified by secular media. Then the megachurch kingdom may come crashing down. Early alarm and accountability would be much fairer to everyone involved --- and much more honoring to God.

Our church is more in touch with the Five-Fold Movement than you may think. Fuller Seminary Professor C. Peter Wagner, between 1976 and his death in 2011, emerged as the founder and organizer of the *New Apostolic Reformation* (NAR) fellowship, a major association of churches led by “Apostles.”<sup>3</sup> Che Ahn, the Pastor of Pasadena’s Harvest Rock Church, is a primary leader in that organization, as well as the Chancellor of Wagner University, an on-line training school for developing young “apostles and prophets.”<sup>4</sup> Evangelist Lou Engle emerged from Harvest Rock to become a respected shaper of the public image of the NAR. I’ve personally encountered all of these people and have witnessed negative fruits of their ministries.

But we at ABC are not immune to similar problems. That’s why we always have to be on our guard; that’s why we can’t ever be too sure of our own motives; that’s why we need to hold each other accountable. ABC, like all other churches --- Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist and NAR --- is a **human institution prone to human failure**. One on-line influencer who is himself aligned with the NAR movement, commented on the latest emerging scandal: **“God’s church is not being shaken; man’s church is.”**<sup>5</sup>

Pastor George Van Alstine

<sup>1</sup> A report found that, since 1998, 380 clergy, lay leaders and volunteers had faced allegations of sexual misconduct, leaving behind over 700 victims. Denominational leaders often “solved” these problems by recommending offenders for positions in other areas.

<sup>2</sup> In roughly chronological order: Todd Bentley of Fresh Fire Ministries (2008), Brian Houston of Hillsong Church (covering up for his father Frank) (2014), Carl Lentz of Hillsong Church (2020), Mike Bickle of International House of Prayer KC (2023), Robert Morris of Gateway Church (June 2024), Chris Reed of MorningStar Ministries (August 2024).

<sup>3</sup> This is a pretty comprehensive overview of the history of the NAR: <https://tottministries.org/the-new-apostolic-reformation-an-examination-of-the-five-fold-ministries-part-1/> (Don’t miss the fact that there is a Part 2 video.)

<sup>4</sup> The “University’s” mailing address is on the fourth floor of an office building on Colorado Blvd., Pasadena: <https://wagner.university/>

<sup>5</sup> Joshua Simone, *Torn Curtain* podcast – Aug. 30, 2024.