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## **Prophets, Demons, and Witch Hunts**

### **American Spiritual Warfare as Scapegoat Ideology**

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#### **Abstract**

The New Apostolic Reformation – a right-wing Christian organization whose leaders are privy to revelations from God and keenly interested in partisan politics – is part of a long tradition of anti-subversive movements in the United States. The NAR aggressively blames perceived national problems on hidden enemies, and theories of scapegoating therefore form a useful lens through which to view this movement. The NAR has close connections to political elites, who benefit from the demonization of their opponents. Spiritual warfare, a continuous martial struggle with Satan and his legions, is the central feature of this movement’s scapegoat ideology, which taps into a deep current of American political culture. The NAR is part of what Richard Hofstadter terms the “modern paranoid style,” as it asserts that American government is quietly controlled by the conspiratorial evil enemy.

Keywords: New Apostolic Reformation, spiritual warfare, scapegoat, politics, prophets, apostles

#### **Introduction**

There is a rude tradition of religiously tinged anti-subversion in the United States, which identifies deviance with the demonic, and which denounces the mortal dangers to the nation posed by Satan and his legions (Morone; Sine; Barkun 2013). The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), to the benefit of right-wing politicians, points to problems and blames internal enemies: witches and secular humanists; communists and abortionists; homosexuals and feminists; Islam and other “false religions”; and the Democratic Party. My aim here is to

contribute to a comparative sociology of scapegoating (see e.g. Ellis), by analyzing the dynamics of the NAR. Scapegoaters thrive when religious and political norms are conflated, for example, when political leaders justify using the devil's tools in the fight against the devil (Poole: 236; see also Rogin). In the United States most notably, there are clear incentives for politicians to present their policies as consistent with religious principles (Utter and Storey: 2-5; see also Norris), and to pledge "to destroy evil people, and eliminate wicked institutions and practices" (Lipset: 63; see also Rogin; DeLuca and Buell; Donner).

The national myth of American exceptionalism asserts the moral and spiritual superiority of the United States, which result from its favored position in the eyes of the Almighty. The other side of this coin, however, is the logical implication that some do not deserve divine grace (Madsen: 15-16; Lipset: 293). Indeed, a particularly Manichean view of good and evil has been present in the rhetoric of exceptionalism from the start (MacDonald), and American politics is often staged as a series of "morality plays, as battles between God and the Devil, so that compromise is unthinkable" (Lipset: 63; see also Poole: 131; and Fuller: 4). In short, not only is there an American tendency to "deal with political issues in Christian imagery, [but also] to color them with the dark symbology of a certain side of Christian tradition" (Hofstadter 1965: xxxv). Only most recently, President George W. Bush often referred to Osama Bin Laden as "the Evil One," and asserted that the Global War on Terror was "a conflict between good and evil . . . Either you're with us or you're against us" (quoted in McAdams: 212).

The New Apostolic Reformation is a fast expanding, loose confederation of non-denominational, independent churches. C. Peter Wagner, who taught at Fuller Theological Seminary for thirty years, put a name to the movement in 1994; since then he has presided as a tolerant patriarch, ignoring the inflammatory prophecies of his higher-ranking followers. As Wagner (2011) himself noted, the NAR first received national attention (and some bad press) in 2008, when Sarah Palin was the Republican vice-presidential nominee, and again in 2011, when Rick Perry was a candidate for President, as both had close connections with leading figures in the movement.

The NAR is a loose "apostolic network" of hundreds of churches and organizations led by those calling themselves Apostles and Prophets, who share a similar but not always identical theology. Rooted in Pentecostal and Charismatic beliefs, the NAR according to Wagner (1988: 13-20) is "post-denominational," transcending these first two movements of the Holy Spirit in a "Third Wave" that will unite the two. It is no fringe sect, but a rapidly growing set of organizations, by some accounts whose growth is increasing faster than most Protestant denominations (Tabachnick 2008a). Wagner asserts it is "the fastest growing segment, [and] the only segment of Christianity currently growing faster than the world population and faster than Islam" (2011). It is made up of politically engaged believers, with active communication networks, eager to battle evil. Hard numbers are difficult to find, but Doner (loc. 2067) and Pivec (see also Tabachnick 2009) assert there are as many as three million NAR congregants in the United States alone.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most famous NAR

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<sup>1</sup> By necessity I have used several online sources for information about the NAR, but those that offer hard numbers should perhaps be taken with a grain of salt – certainly they cannot be easily verified. The quotations from Right Wing Watch, however, are based on video transcriptions.

churches include Bethel Church in Redding, California (Pastor Bill Johnson), Harvest Rock Church in Pasadena (Apostle Ché Ahn), and MorningStar Fellowship Church in Charlotte, North Carolina (Prophet Rick Joyner). Internationally, some of the world's biggest churches revere the NAR's Apostles and Prophets: for example, David Yonggi Cho of Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea, with a million congregants, and E. A. Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria, with five million congregants, and several others with congregations in the hundreds of thousands. In addition to such churches, the NAR is linked to a number of influential evangelical organizations. The International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri, was founded by Mike Bickle, one of the pioneers of the movement (Tabachnick 2014); the Call is run by Apostle Lou Engle, who is in the inner circle of the NAR (B. Berkowitz), and often organizes prayer meetings with political leaders. Churches affiliated with the NAR broadcast television shows in more than 200 nations through Trinity Broadcasting Network, the world's largest Christian television system, which regularly promotes the teachings of the NAR (Pivec; Woo).

The NAR preaches Dominionism, which interprets Genesis 1:28 as mandating Christian rule over the earth. While there are a variety of Dominion theologies, they generally have three beliefs in common (Clarkson). Dominionists are Christian nationalists: they argue the United States was originally and should again be a Christian nation. Further, they believe in the supremacy of Christianity, and denounce other religions as well as Christian sects. Finally, they endorse a theocratic vision: the Constitution is divinely inspired and God's word should be the foundation of American law. Perhaps more so than other Dominionists, however, the NAR preaches that enemies must be overcome to achieve these goals. Dark forces intent on secularizing the nation, NAR leaders argue, recruit young people to Satan through false religions and, through their control over government, block properly Christian social policies.

Christianity, for the NAR and other American anti-subversive movements, is not only the one true religion, but also a demonological theory of everything, providing a unifying framework for and ultimate explanation of all harmful conspiracies. This link between religion and scapegoating has an old history in the United States. The Puritans, for instance, found terrible enemies to define themselves as God's Elect. They "constructed their 'us' against a vivid series of immoral 'them': heretics, Indians, [and] witches" (Morone: 33). Tituba – a woman, a slave, an American Indian, perhaps half African – was a total outsider in Puritan society. Beaten until she confessed, she was blamed as the dark one through whom witchcraft entered Salem village (Breslaw). Fifty years after the Salem witch trials, New York put to death 30 slaves and 4 poor whites, blamed for mysterious fires and a dark-hued conspiracy to foment slave rebellion and hand over New York to Catholic powers (Hoffer). In the United States' first political-party convention, delegates of the Anti-Masonic Party in 1831 pledged a crusade against Masonry, which they decried as the anti-Christian spawn of Jews and atheists (Davis: 16, 73). In the late nineteenth century, the Populists began the American political tradition of identifying Jews as pulling the strings of international finance (Hofstadter 1955: 78). In the 1930s, Father Coughlin, in words that would be cheered today by many Dominionists (and perhaps the Ku Klux Klan) called for "a re-awakened America – an America that stands 100 percent for Americanism – an America that still stands by the traditions of our forefathers – traditions of liberty, traditions

of Godliness, traditions upon which we must establish a sane Christian nationalism” (quoted in Shenton: 180). For sixteen terms (1921-1953), John Rankin (R-MS) led a considerable contingent of Congressional Jew-baiters, quoting the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” and Henry Ford’s “The International Jew” on the House floor (Stone: 137). During the Cold War it was common for Christians to demonize communists as minions of the Antichrist (Fuller; Wilcox and Robinson: loc. 901).

Given this political and cultural context, Aho argues that the New Apostolic Reformation is “analogous to . . . the anti-Illuminatis, anti-Masons, [and] anti-Catholic Know Nothings” (557). Yet there is an importance difference. The NAR represents what Richard Hofstadter (1965: 24) referred to as the modern paranoid style in American politics. While previous movements exhorted followers to man the ramparts to protect the nation, the modern paranoid style insists the United States “has been largely taken away from them and their kind.” Hofstadter’s prominent example was the John Birch Society under President Eisenhower, with its portrayal of the Executive Branch and the State Department as nests of communist sympathizers. Similarly, some conspiracy-minded members of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress signed an open letter warning of the Muslim Brotherhood’s “deep penetration” of national security agencies under the Obama administration (Seitz-Wald; Tashman 2015, 2013). Such a focus on the internal enemy is often accompanied by aggressive rhetoric, usually featuring accusations of un-American activity and treasonous allegiance to foreign powers. It is tempting to consign such views to the far edge of the political spectrum. Mulloy warns us, however, not to under emphasize the degree to which the “extremist style is practiced by the mainstream, [and] the degree to which extremists might also express mainstream values” (28-29). Indeed, in the 1970s and 1980s, Christian groups such as the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition offered nearly identical conspiracy theories as those purveyed by far-right extremist groups – the difference is mainly that the latter take the violent rhetoric more seriously (Sine: 165; Lind; Barkun: 1996).

The NAR, despite its often martial language and unconventional views, enjoys close connections with right-wing political leaders, who benefit from the demonization of their opponents. The leaders of the NAR exhort their followers to engage in spiritual warfare, which posits a struggle with Satan and his legions, and is the central feature of the NAR’s scapegoat ideology, which taps into a deep current of American political culture. Because the NAR aggressively blames perceived national problems on hidden enemies, social-psychological research on scapegoating provides an enlightening perspective on the movement.

### **Scapegoat Ideology and American Exceptionalism**

Scapegoating is often rather loosely defined (Murji: 398). Here I use the term to mean the plausible blaming of an out-group for harming the values and institutions of larger society (see Hogg and Abrams: 70; Staub 1989: 16-17). While scapegoats are usually weak and vulnerable, their tormentors perceive them as able and willing to do real harm (Glick 2002: 42; 2005: 244-61). There are three main streams of theorizing on scapegoating. The classic approach sees it as a projection of frustration or unwanted feelings onto others; more recent theories emphasize the crucial role of scapegoat ideology; lastly, scapegoating has often been seen as an elite-driven diversionary tactic. From a psychodynamic perspective, we

project our perceived negative traits or misconduct onto others, and thereby relieve ourselves of guilt and shame. Our shortcomings are difficult and painful to confront in ourselves but are easily seen in other people (Szasz). By condemning others for exhibiting a negative trait, we can thereby deny it in ourselves; it is projection as a defense mechanism, to ameliorate psychic discomfort (Freud). A similar dynamic may result from external causes, as according to the frustration-aggression model (L. Berkowitz). According to this interpretation, it is difficult to eliminate or even identify the causes of harmful social events or conditions and the frustration they cause is displaced by way of aggression towards scapegoats. As Allport (348-53) points out, an important question is left unanswered by these classic formulations of scapegoat theory: which groups are most likely to be targeted? A famous 1940 paper, for example, argues that when low cotton prices led to economic difficulties for poor southern whites, they lashed out violently at the subordinate black population (see Hepworth and West). However, the silence of such models regarding white supremacist ideology might give the impression that the victims' racial identities were somehow irrelevant (Hogg and Abrams: 32). The rational-choice perspective offers a straightforward prediction regarding which groups will be targeted: those whose economic costs to society outweigh their economic benefits (see, e.g., Fisman and Miguel; Miguel: 1153-72). Witch-hunting during desperate economic times in Tanzania, by this interpretation, is a result of "the brutal laws of home economics" which make targets of elderly women because they often produce fewer resources than they consume and are therefore economically costly for the group. This perspective is less helpful, however, in understanding those witch-hunts where thousands of adult men are killed (see, e.g., Kohnert). For that matter, Fisman and Miguel admit that their rational-choice explanation does not fit very well even in other regions of Tanzania, despite similarly difficult economic situations, where witchcraft killings of elderly women are much less common. Reasonably, if unenthusiastically, they conclude that this is "a strong hint that cultural beliefs do matter a lot" (141).

Peter Glick (2002, 2005) offers a causal model that links social conditions to scapegoating via the mediating factor of ideology. From this perspective, ideological commitment, not psychodynamic projection, is the central mediator of scapegoating (2005: 255). Natural disasters, for example, instead of directly causing scapegoating movements, as per the frustration-aggression model, first prompt popular attempts at explanations. In a process of social causation (Tajfel: 156), such large-scale and complex problems often lead to scapegoating because of the simple, culturally plausible explanations and solutions scapegoaters offer (Glick 2002). As it is often difficult to find the causes much less the solutions for social problems, we cut cognitive corners and employ stereotypes that show ourselves and our group in a good light, and assign a large share of blame to the out-group. Over time, even a weak and oppressed out-group may in this way come to be perceived as quite powerful. Because scapegoat ideologies employ well-worn cultural stereotypes, they give a sheen of believability to what would otherwise seem ludicrous legends of out-group subversion (Beck: loc. 2922).

According to Glick's ideological model, the scapegoat is "viewed as having the power and intent to cause widespread harm" (2005: 253). Whether or not the scapegoat is plausibly malevolent is determined by the cultural context. Women in fourteenth century Europe, for

example, were not credible scapegoats until there existed an accepted narrative of women in league with the Devil (Jensen: 147), i.e., the official incorporation of witch beliefs into Christian theology. Crucially, however, this new doctrine was useful to a Church seeking “to maintain its dominant role in society” (Szasz: 7). Persecuting witches and other perceived heretics strengthened the Church’s political power by posing as the protectors of society (Harris: 238; see also Frankfurter: 32-33). Church elites and nobles benefited from a scapegoat ideology that cast women as prone to Satanic pacts, and this exemplifies the more widespread political dynamics whereby social elites, for their own purposes, and drawing on common cultural “traditions and mythologies,” construct an “image of overwhelming threat” (Gagnon: 130). The rational-choice approach assumes that scapegoaters – those with the torches and clubs – are clear-eyed calculators of societal costs and benefits. It seems rather more likely, however, that those acting rationally to further their interests are the political and religious entrepreneurs in the shadows who benefit from campaigns against internal enemies (King and Mixon). The aim, as H. L. Mencken phrased it, is to “keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins” (quoted in Mueller and Stewart: 190). Whether or not they intend to create diversions, elites certainly harness the power of scapegoat ideologies for their own purposes. In order to gain support for their counter-subversive programs, elites often prime the masses with images and tales that associate the crisis at hand with the Enemy (Beck: loc. 2922). At this point, the increasing group solidarity and increased self-esteem that results from identifying a common enemy “can be appropriated and manipulated by political elites” (Bloom: 90-93; see also Allport: 110; Kateb: 209-10).

### **Spiritual Warfare and the New Apostolic Reformation**

Using what Hofstadter called the “dark symbology” of a certain current of the Christian tradition, the NAR is an example of modern paranoid politics. The John Birch Society asserted President Eisenhower to be “a dedicated, conscious agent of the communist conspiracy” (quoted in Hofstadter 1965: 28), and the NAR has claimed President Obama is a treasonous Muslim (Mantyla 2010c). Just as the Anti-Masons and Anti-Illuminatisists insisted that the nation was controlled by secret societies, the NAR asserts that demons inhabit not only the Democratic Party but also large swathes of the federal government. The Know Nothings were convinced that the Pope was scheming to control the United States, and NAR Apostles Joyner and Sheets argue that radical Islam and communism are essentially the same thing, an evil tag-team that poses an existential threat to the United States. For this genus of political conspiracists, however, the stakes are even greater than that: “the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values” (Hofstadter 1965: 29). According to Apostles Joyner and Sheets, for example, it was

prophesied that when communism began to collapse, many of the former elements of communism would merge with radical Islamic forces to become a greater danger to world peace than communism had been. This has now come to pass. Not only Western civilization, but civilization itself is facing the greatest threat ever to its existence.

The leaders of various NAR organizations declare their aim to create a worldwide, unified church of warriors that will defeat Satan and his legions in the imminent End Times.

The NAR teaches that the government is “literally being held captive by people hand-picked by Satan,” and it is therefore incumbent upon Christians to “seize those high places” in order to bring about the return of Jesus Christ (Mantyla 2011a). The rhetoric is often explicitly martial. According to Apostle Lou Engle (quoted in Sanchez), “we’re headed to an Elijah/Jezebel showdown on the Earth, not just in America but all over the globe, and the main warriors will be the prophets of Baal versus the prophets of God, and there will be no middle ground . . .” Similarly, Apostle Rick Joyner describes a

divine militancy coming upon the people of God . . . we must understand that God is a military God. The title that He uses ten times more than any other in Scripture is “the Lord of hosts,” or “Lord of armies.” There is a martial aspect to His character that we must understand and embrace for the times and the job to which we are now coming (2005).

Fellow Dominionists sometimes have qualms about such language. McDurmon, for example, wants to “maintain a stark distinction” between the beliefs of the New Apostolic Reformation and “traditional Dominion Theology.”

Yes, we would properly recriminalize sodomy, adultery, and abortion, but in a decentralized world like we want, you could leave easily if you didn’t like that . . . [But the NAR wants] to grab the seats of power and install a temporary totalitarianism for your own good which they think will usher in the messiah.

Apostles Joyner and Sheets (2007) do not go out of their way to discourage such interpretations. “Totalitarianism is terrible,” they write, “but lawlessness is even worse.” The coming kingdom of God, apparently, will be characterized by a firm hand indeed.

At first it may seem like totalitarianism, as the Lord will destroy the antichrist spirit now dominating the world . . . [T]he kingdom will move from a point of necessary control while people are learning truth, integrity, honor, and how to make decisions . . .

Its conservative Christian critics argue that the NAR strays far from orthodox Christianity (see Steincamp; DeWaay 2007; Osborne). Certainly, there are clear differences with traditional Protestantism. First, regardless of its influence on domestic politics, Dominionism remains outside the religious mainstream. The same can be said of extra-biblical revelation: NAR leaders frequently prophesy and claim communications and revelations from God. A third theological difference is the importance of supernatural signs and wonders, which include, *inter alia*, prophecies and demonic deliverance (Wagner 2011). More specifically, a common accusation in conservative Christian circles is that the NAR has adopted the Latter Rain doctrines that spread among certain Pentecostal groups in the 1940s (DeWaay 2007, 2008; Steincamp; Holvast: 40, 164-65). This revival movement saw the Church as having deteriorated from “former rain” times (in particular as a result of the rise of Roman Catholicism), and was quite critical of denominational divisions, calling instead for autonomous, relational congregations (Chryssides: 244). While there are doctrinal differences, both the Latter Rain movement and the NAR share some important teachings, which largely differentiate them from Protestants in general and Pentecostals in particular:

First, the Church must be transformed, because the return of Jesus is prevented by a defeatist, bureaucratic Christianity; second, it will be the nearly omnipotent members of the new, true church, not God, that will defeat Satan during the End Times; third, most Christians remain unenlightened and in need of truth accessible only by church elites (DeWaay 2007; 2008). The most controversial similarity, however, is the teaching of the Fivefold Ministry, which in practice means the restoration of the church offices of Apostle and Prophet. In 1949, this led the Assemblies of God General Council to formally denounce the Latter Rain movement as heretical (Chryssides: 244), and the NAR was similarly criticized by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God for the “problematic teaching that present-day offices of apostles and prophets should govern church ministry at all levels . . . which can soon become dictatorial, presumptuous, and carnal” (2000). Peter Wagner, however, seems unperturbed by the theological links to the Latter Rain movement, which he believes was declared heretical only because it “threatened the status quo” (2004: 30). Wagner himself asserts that he speaks with “the apostolic authority that I have been given by God as an ambassador for the Kingdom of God” (2008).

The structures of the NAR are fluid and opaque. Wagner is a bit disingenuous when he insists that it “is not an organization. No one can join or carry a card. It has no leader” (2011). The NAR is made up of many connected organizations, some of which grant membership based on specific criteria and require payment of dues.<sup>2</sup> The smallest and apparently most exclusive of such groups is the New Apostolic Roundtable, an international leadership team of twenty-five members (Steincamp). A larger organization is the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (formerly known as the International Coalition of Apostles), with 500 or more members, which holds an annual meeting and several regional summits. There seem to be many such NAR groups, some with overlapping leaderships, and some that seem to be personal fiefdoms of one Apostle or another. According to Jan-Aage Torp, one of Wagner’s former students who is currently the leader of the European Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, Peter Wagner in 2010 stepped down from a formal leadership role in many of the most important NAR groups. The leadership of Global Harvest – the legal parent entity of many NAR organizations (Tabachnick 2015) – passed to Chuck Pierce (who renamed it “Global Spheres”); the Wagner Leadership Institute is now headed by Che Ahn; the Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders went to Cindy Jacobs; and the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders went to John P. Kelly.

The Apostles and Prophets of the NAR are deeply involved in partisan politics. Indeed, the political aims of the NAR and other Dominionists are remarkably consistent with those of the secular right-wing. Both demand a return to pure laissez-faire capitalism, and the drastic curtailment of

welfare programs, food stamps, and unemployment insurance . . . Social Security, . . . Medicare, and public education: all of these are to be

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the “Membership” page of the website of the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders at <http://www.icaleaders.com/membership>.

immediately placed on the chopping block or gradually “starved” of tax monies . . . (Aho; see also Wilcox and Robinson: loc. 3361).<sup>3</sup>

Politicians on the right of the political spectrum, not surprisingly, are often friendly. Not only are NAR adherents highly motivated voters, but NAR groups also enjoy close links to the grassroots, such as prayer networks and databases of voter information (Wilder). Apostle Mary Glazier (quoted in Tabachnick 2008b; see also McGinniss: 196-200), for example, who was a spiritual mentor to former Governor Sarah Palin, prescribed spiritual warfare against “liberal candidates” running for office in Alaska.<sup>4</sup> Apostle Lou Engle often presides over prayer-cum-politics meetings with a number of powerful conservative Republican politicians, such as former Senator (R-SC) and current president of the Heritage Foundation Jim DeMint and (Engle’s ex-roommate) former Senator and current Governor Sam Brownback (R-KS), as well as former Congressional representatives and candidates for President Rick Santorum (R-PA) and Michele Bachmann (R-MN). Former Speaker of the House and 2012 Presidential candidate Newt Gingrich appointed Apostle Dutch Sheets to join his campaign’s Faith Leaders Coalition as a National Co-Chair (B. Berkowitz 2010; Tashman 2012a). President Obama, as one might expect, is not in the good graces of the Apostles. The 2008 financial crisis, Apostle Rick Joyner reports, was a “plot by George Soros and some cabal inside the Council on Foreign Relations . . . [T]he [financial] collapse itself was intentionally triggered in order to help Barack Obama win the election” (quoted in Mantyla 2011b). More broadly, Apostle Jacobs says (Wilder) that the Democratic Party is a “Jezebel,” a term that Frangipane defines: “When we speak of Jezebel, we are identifying the source in our society of obsessive sensuality, unbridled witchcraft, and hatred for male authority” (124). Apparently referring to abortion, Apostle Alice Patterson, who is a close associate of former Texas Governor Rick Perry, writes that there is a “demonic structure behind the Democratic Party . . . a spirit of death that demands child sacrifice” (152). Similarly, Apostle Dutch Sheets calls abortion a “blood sacrifice that empowers demons” (quoted in Doner: loc. 2454), perhaps referring to “the demonic spiritual entity Lilith,” who, according to Greenwood and Wagner, is “the night monster, [the] night hag . . . one of the principal forces behind death and abortion” (197).

As this movement so assiduously seeks to identify the hidden sources of evil in modern American society, theories of scapegoating are useful lens through which to view the NAR. The classic approach portrays scapegoating as a cathartic psychological projection onto others; more recent theories emphasize the mediating factor of scapegoat ideology; often scapegoating is linked to political elites, in large part because of its power to unify a community. While I focus on the latter two streams of theorizing, the notion of

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<sup>3</sup> “How is it possible that the political agenda of the religious right looks so much like that of the secular right, when the leaders of the religious right contend their views come directly from the Bible? There are two possible responses. Either the secular right as been divinely inspired all along and no one noticed, or the religious right has allowed their agenda for social change to be determined by right-wing political ideology instead of Scripture” (Sine: 115).

<sup>4</sup> Prophet Glazier reports with some satisfaction that in 1995 her spiritual-warfare group turned its prayerful energies towards a local woman whom they suspected of witchcraft. As a result, this woman’s “incense altar caught on fire, her car engine blew up, she went blind in her left eye, and she was diagnosed with cancer” (quoted in Doner: loc. 2564).

psychological projection is relevant. As Richard Hofstadter points out, modern American paranoid movements are often dedicated to fighting an “enemy [that] is on many counts the projection of the self” (1965: 85). Indeed, from a psychodynamic perspective, it seems that American anti-subversives may project negative traits or feelings onto their perceived enemies. Just as nineteenth-century conspiracy theorists apparently dealt with uncomfortable sexual urges by telling titillating tales of orgies in Catholic nunneries, for example, there is a long list of contemporary religious leaders who have vehemently denounced “deviant” sexualities in public yet practiced them in private (Barber).<sup>5</sup>

Peter Glick (2002, 2005) emphasizes the role of ideology in explaining the dynamics of scapegoating movements. The NAR’s scapegoat ideology is a highly politicized form of spiritual warfare, i.e., a martial struggle with Satan and his legions. More specifically, the New Apostolic Reformation seeks to counter the satanic spirits now influencing American political leaders (Patterson: 152), who, according to Apostle Lou Engle “legalize systemic evil” (quoted in Mantyla: 2010b), most notably in the form of same-sex marriage, non-discrimination laws, women’s rights, abortion rights, etc. Such issues become invested with a profoundly religious meaning, one of the many battles of good against evil, as Apostle Lou Engle has shown with his prayer meetings organized by the Call and featuring political leaders (L. Berkowitz). In 2012, for example, then-Texas Governor Rick Perry asserted that the nation was in the midst of spiritual warfare, and needed those who “truly are Christian warriors, Christian soldiers” need to stand up to “activist courts” and “President Obama and his cronies” (Tashman 2012b). In this context, political rhetoric often gets quite bellicose. As Peter Wagner phrased it many years ago, God “is in the process of choosing an expanding corps of spiritual green berets . . . who will engage in the crucial high-level battles against the rulers of darkness” (1992: 58). The Southern Poverty Law Center, more recently, criticizes the International House of Prayer, an NAR organization, for its adherence to Joel’s Army, which is an “Armageddon-ready military force of young people with a divine mandate to physically impose Christian ‘dominion’ on non-believers.” Apparently, it is not unusual in this army for pastors to dress in camouflage and to be addressed as “commandant” or “commander” (Sanchez). In this context, politics is the continuation of war against Satan by other means.

Spiritual warfare is fought on several spatial fronts. The ground-level is the personal struggle with demons, and their exorcism. There has been a marked increase in exorcisms in the United States since the 1970s. Today there are at least five or six hundred non-Catholic exorcism ministries in the United States, and possibly two or three times that many (Cuneo: 209). These personal demons are scapegoats, blamed for problems related to alcohol, pornography, gambling, etc. It is a type of denial through projection, as per the classic interpretations of scapegoating: the demon within, for example, is the one fascinated by pornography. As does scapegoating more generally, the notion of demonic possession offers an attractive alternative to taking responsibility for difficulties in our lives (Wink: 63). The New Apostolic Reformation takes a similar view: people who are demon-possessed are not

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<sup>5</sup> More specifically, several experimental studies indicate that homophobia is often “more pronounced in individuals with an unacknowledged attraction to the same sex and who grew up with authoritarian parents who forbade such desires” (Weinstein et al.).

taking personal responsibility. The twist, however, is that according to Wagner and others being possessed by a demon turns the victim into a malevolent co-conspirator. Wagner (2006: 7) testifies, for example, that he is wealthy because he knew to seek deliverance from the demon of poverty. The classic American message is clear: If he can do it, then so can you. Similarly, if you are possessed by the demon of homosexuality, then it is your duty to submit to the ministering of your local church, and accept God's spiritual deliverance. If you would rather not attend your own exorcism, then that is on you. Indeed, conservative Christians in and out of the NAR have blamed homosexuals for a variety of problems, from tornados to autism, climate change to hurricanes, and most recently the economic collapse of 2008 (McMurry). Apostle Cindy Jacobs, perhaps most notably, blamed the reported mass death of birds in Arkansas, as well as tsunamis and earthquakes in Asia, on the repeal of the law barring gays and lesbians from serving openly in the military (Samuel).

Occult-level spiritual warfare is the battle with Satan's organized demonic cadres (Greenwood and Wagner: 179). Prophet Chuck Pierce offers a long but surely not complete list of demon-infested groups and practices:

psychic hotlines, spiritism, paganism, goddess worship, voodoo, fortune-telling, palmistry, demon worship, the use of spirit guides, and other New Age practices. The enemy's confederation also extends to those who practice any form of false religion – including Mormonism, Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hinduism, Eastern religions, Native religions, Christian Science, and Bahai – and to those embroiled in secret societies such as Freemasonry, Shriners, Oddfellows and the Elks (quoted in Mantyla 2010a).

The NAR's theological and political bailiwick, however, is strategic-level spiritual warfare, which locates, identifies, and confronts demons who control a specific area or group of people (Lampman; Holvast). In practice, this translates to the desire to "bring down spiritual principalities and powers that rule over governments" (Wagner 1996: 21-22). Apostle Pierce offers some relevant details as he relates a divine revelation:

These were altars that had been built by the enemy and positioned strategically throughout the land. I saw how the sacrifices on these altars were empowering and keeping an atmosphere held captive by ruling hosts . . . There were 10 ruling centers already developed within the United States. Then He showed me the communication systems between these centers. I saw how one sacrifice empowered one dimension of an evil presence, and then that presence would communicate to another center as together they networked their plan of control (2012).

These enemy altars and ruling centers often seem staffed by demons of false religions. A few examples may suffice. Detroit, according to Apostles Sheets and Pierce is suffering various social and economic problems because the "spirit [i.e., demon] behind Islam" has taken up residence; the reason this demon came to live in that city is because a Detroit mayor once gave the keys of the city to Saddam Hussein. "It should come as no surprise," therefore, "that the greatest concentration of Muslims in America is located there" (2005: 70). Similarly, in Utah Satan has worked through the false prophets of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and this demonic activity "veil[s] this land's people with mind control" (402). The

Israeli Supreme Court building, on the micro level, apparently contains a portal directly to Satan himself (Doner: loc. 2270; Tabachnick, 2008b). Not to leave the Catholics out, Apostle Wagner preaches that they worship “a counterfeit Mary,” who is “the demonic principality who is most responsible under Satan for keeping unbelievers in spiritual darkness” (1998: 16). Pursuant to this interpretation, Wagner and his followers in 1997 undertook a “secret mission” in the Himalayas and confronted this demon in her mountain redoubt. Wagner reports that there were “several unmistakable signs” which confirmed that they successfully vanquished this Catholic demon: “an earthquake destroyed the basilica of Assisi” and “Mother Teresa died in India” (quoted in Tabachnick 2008a).

### **Conclusion**

It is perhaps a general rule that to the extent that voters equate Christian principles with politics, “they make themselves pliable to the Machiavellian designs of skillful manipulators” (Guinness: 379). Scapegoating movements attract career-minded politicians, who benefit when voters believe evil resides exclusively on the other end of the political spectrum. The NAR blames national problems, both real and perceived, on hidden malevolent enemies, and theories of scapegoating illuminate not only the role played by political elites, but the importance of scapegoat ideology. According to leaders of the NAR, natural disasters are the fault of gays and lesbians; political opponents engage in offensive sexual practices as a result of their alliance with dark forces; Apostles and Prophets win great victories over (imaginary) opponents; Jews are secretly bringing to power untrustworthy political leaders; and issues of public policy are a struggle between good and evil. Further, the NAR taps directly into the American tradition of a type of Protestant sectarianism that melds nationalism, Manicheism, and religious intolerance. It is also modern, in Hofstadter’s sense, as it rallies its supporters not to keep the Enemy out, but, rather more dangerously, to defeat the Enemy within in order to take back the country. This conspiratorial vision posits a President controlled by the mortal enemy of Christian America (then communism, now Islam) that controls secret societies (then the Communist Party, now the Muslim Brotherhood) which are in league with domestic traitors (always the liberals) – with the stakes nothing less than control over the entire planet.

The myth of America’s exceptional status – i.e., the special moral and spiritual stature that derives from a unique relationship with the Almighty – is not benign. It lends itself to a Manichean vision of religion and politics that nourishes anti-subversive morality plays in which compromise is unimaginable, and from which political elites benefit mightily. The central narrative in this mythical drama is the struggle to maintain the United States’ close relationship with the Almighty in the face of ungodly subversion from within. Satan’s demons, for example, use our neighbors and relatives as their puppets in their diabolical plans to bring low the United States. Such demonologies employ common cultural stereotypes, which make credible the fantastic tales of the horrors committed by the scapegoated group, depend on the strength of group identities and shared beliefs, and mediate between perceived crises (President Obama, same-sex marriage, hurricanes, etc.) and scapegoating movements.

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