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## Joel's/Elijah's Army or the Joshua Generation

### The Military Rhetoric of Third Wave Neo-Pentecostalism

The reception of biblical texts of violence such as the Joshua narratives within neo-Pentecostal circles has been largely ignored. This paper suggests that the prevailing historic premillennialism within such circles results in a form of “this-is-that” hermeneutics in which biblical prophecy is seen as being fulfilled in the present. The violent language contained in biblical texts is reinterpreted as spiritual warfare against demonic forces. However, the way in which such demonic forces are perceived as affecting society renders this interpretation as a narrative politics which calls for political action and informs the worldview of the Religious Right.

**A**LTHOUGH there has been considerable scholarly interest in Christian fundamentalism from the perspective of biblical scholarship, political science, and sociology of religion, very little attention has been devoted to the

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way in which prophetic texts are received in fundamentalist, charismatic contexts and how the reception of these texts shapes the behaviour of its constituents.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I shall explore how particular prophetic texts are read in congregations aligned with the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) and how such readings have informed political action within such communities. I deliberately quote at length from NAR leaders as their writings, although widely available, do not pretend to engage with scholarship and, as such, are not generally known by biblical scholars. I suggest that the particular form of millenarianism espoused by the NAR predisposes members to believe that biblical prophecy is being fulfilled in their midst and that this belief system itself creates a narrative politics.

### Joel's Army

The interchangeable terminology, “Joel’s army,” “Elijah’s army,” “the Joshua generation,” or “the New Breed” is to be found in writings associated with church networks linked in some way to the missiologist, C. Peter Wagner. He was Professor of Church Growth in the School of World Mission (now School of Intercultural Studies) at Fuller Theological Seminary from 1971 until his retirement in 2001. These networks, known broadly as NAR, will be described in more detail below. The concept behind the terms can be traced back to the teachings of the “Latter Rain Movement”—a Pentecostal movement which began in 1948 in Saskatchewan, Canada. This movement rejected the dispensationalist eschatology of much of the mainstream Pentecostal denominations and emphasised the restoration of the church prior to the return of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Central to this restoration were spiritual gifts, the re-

<sup>1</sup> See in particular James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1977); *Escaping from Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1984); and the five volumes produced by The Fundamentalism Project: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); idem, *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming The Sciences, The Family, and Education* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993); idem, *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993); idem, *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); and idem, *Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Dispensationalist eschatology follows the teachings of John Nelson Darby (1800–82), which were popularised in the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Darby taught that the church will be raptured before the Great Tribulation which precedes Christ’s *Parousia*. On this view the church has no part to play in events immediately preceding Christ’s return. Cyrus Scofield (1843–1921) was an ordained Congregationalist minister who was mentored by a dispensa-

emergence of apostles and prophets, and the doctrine of “the manifest sons of God.” This doctrine forms the basis for the contemporary terminology found in the title of this chapter. The Latter Rain Movement taught that, prior to Christ’s return, a group of elite Christians (identified with “the overcomers” of Rev 2–3, the 144,000 of Rev 7 and 14, and the “male child” of Rev 12) would emerge with extraordinary thaumaturgical prowess and would become “gods” by being perfected and entering into bodily resurrection ahead of time.<sup>3</sup> This movement spawned a number of healing evangelists, including A.A. Allen and William Branham. Paul Cain, a leading figure in the NAR and the person who coined the terms “Joel’s army” and “the New Breed,” was associated with Branham.

In this paper I shall argue that the reception of particular biblical texts within the NAR suggests that this movement combines the Latter Rain notion of “manifest sons of God” with military rhetoric in such a way that a symbolic universe is constructed in which warfare is the norm.

## The New Apostolic Reformation

The sociology of New Religious Movements has paid little attention to the burgeoning, at least in the United States, charismatic conglomeration consisting of the religious movement known as Word of Faith, “which emphasizes the power of the born again believer in Jesus Christ to call things into existence, including the believer’s own physical and mental health and, most important, the believer’s financial prosperity,”<sup>4</sup> and the broader charismatic wing of the movement known as the New Apostolic Reformation. This term was coined by C. Peter Wagner in his book, *The New Apostolic Churches*.<sup>5</sup> It is a generic term to encompass a range of movements across the globe, not all charismatic but with a purported overall membership in the United States

tionalist pastor. He published the *Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909 and revised it in 1917. This is a study Bible whose combination of annotation of biblical texts and cross-references serves to promote dispensationalist teaching.

<sup>3</sup> For further details see B.J. Oropeza, *A Time To Laugh: The Holy Laughter Phenomenon Examined* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 58–65 and Lloyd K. Pieteresen, *The Polemic of the Pastorals: A Sociological Examination of the Development of Pauline Christianity*, JSNTSup 264 (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 65.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Posner, *God’s Profits: Faith, Fraud, and the Republican Crusade for Values Voters* (Sausalito: PoliPointPress, 2008), 2.

<sup>5</sup> C. Peter Wagner, ed., *The New Apostolic Churches* (Ventura: Regal, 1998).

alone of several million,<sup>6</sup> which for Wagner displays the following characteristics:

1. New name (not prepared to stick with any previous denominational labels).
2. New authority structure based on the recognition of the New Testament office of apostle which Wagner describes as: “the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to assume and exercise general leadership over a number of churches with an extraordinary authority in spiritual matters that is spontaneously recognized and appreciated by those churches.”<sup>7</sup>
3. New leadership training based in the local churches and with an emphasis on gift and character rather than intellectual ability.
4. New ministry focus which is vision driven and focuses on the future.
5. New worship style based on contemporary music and using worship bands rather than choirs which encourage every person in the congregation to become an active participant.
6. New prayer forms in which members pray aloud and ex tempore at the same time, engage in prayer walks, praise marches, etc.
7. New financing in which generous giving is expected and tithing is taught.
8. New outreach based on planting new churches and reaching out to the poor and marginalised in the neighbourhood.
9. New power orientation with active emphasis on healing, exorcism, and prophecy.<sup>8</sup>

For the purpose of this article I am focusing on those groups within the NAR that would also be described as “third wave neo-Pentecostals” using terminology also coined by Wagner. This grouping is of some political interest as, for example, all four of the churches that Sarah Palin has attended over the last thirty years belong to it.<sup>9</sup> For Wagner the first wave was the birth

<sup>6</sup> Colonel Vaughn Doner, *Christian Jihad: Neo-Fundamentalists and the Polarization of America* (Samizdat Creative, 2012), 169. Susan Harding estimates that there are ten to fifteen million, largely charismatic, Christians in America who are predisposed to read texts in the ways proposed here. This is in addition to the ten to fifteen million dispensationalists she estimates are in America (“Imagining the Last Days: The Politics of Apocalyptic Language,” in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*, ed. Marty and Appleby, 57–78).

<sup>7</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Churchquake!: How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking Up the Church as We Know It* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1999), 105.

<sup>8</sup> Wagner, ed., *New Apostolic Churches*, 18–25.

<sup>9</sup> Doner, *Christian Jihad*, 170.

of the Pentecostal movement at the turn of the twentieth century and the second wave was the Charismatic Renewal which affected all the mainstream denominations, both Protestant and Catholic, beginning in the sixties. The third wave represents a new openness amongst evangelicals to embrace the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. These groups are thus charismatic with a particular emphasis on thaumaturgy. Although neo-Pentecostals have been the subject of studies in the sociology of religion,<sup>10</sup> the recent alliance of Word of Faith and charismatic NAR groups has been practically ignored.

The rhetoric of the NAR suggests that this current phenomenon should be studied sociologically as a form of millennialism.<sup>11</sup> For the position of those holding to “Joshua generation” theology since *Roe vs. Wade*, the landmark US Supreme Court decision legalising abortion (1973), is that Satan has been trying to wipe out the current generation through abortion in the same way as a generation was destroyed when both Moses and Jesus were born. Those born in this period will form the last generation before Christ returns and their dedication and thaumaturgical prowess will result in massive revival beforehand. This, therefore, constitutes a form of what Harding calls “historic premillennialism.” According to Harding, “in historic premillennial scenarios, the present is the very last moment of human history ... a highly combustible moment in which all as-yet unfulfilled Bible prophecies are being fulfilled.”<sup>12</sup> Millennial studies have moved from the margins of the study of religion to one of the central areas of research. The Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University arguably pioneered this trend; although now defunct, it charted both the build up to Y2K and the anticlimax following.<sup>13</sup> In more recent years there have been two meetings of the

<sup>10</sup> See especially, Stephen Hunt, Malcolm Hamilton, and Tony Walter, eds., *Charismatic Christianity: Sociological Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Wessinger defines millennialism as “belief in an imminent transition to a collective salvation, in which the faithful will experience well-being, and the unpleasant limitations of the human condition will be eliminated. The collective salvation is often considered to be earthly, but it can also be heavenly. The collective salvation will be accomplished either by a divine or superhuman agent alone, or with the assistance of humans working according to the divine or superhuman will and plan.” In “Millennialism in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Harding, “Imagining the Last Days,” 57.

<sup>13</sup> Prior to 2000 there was widespread concern about digital data where years were stored in two-digit rather than four-digit format. It was feared that computers would be unable to distinguish between 1900 and 2000, resulting in incorrect calculations and some embedded systems failures causing utilities and other crucial infrastructure potentially to fail.

“Hope-Manchester Colloquium on Millennialism,” resulting in the collection of papers, *Expecting the End*.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* was published in 2011. Nevertheless, the former work has no reference to NAR and the latter, in its 745 pages, devotes just one paragraph to Third Wave neo-Pentecostalism (pages 57–58) in its chapter on progressive (postmillennial) millennialism. Instead both volumes include a chapter on premillennial Christian dispensationalism in the United States focusing on the phenomenal success of the Left Behind series.<sup>15</sup> As Darryl Jones notes:

In 2003, Donald Paul Hodel, president of the Christian ministry Focus on the Family and a former member of Ronald Reagan’s cabinet, wrote: “The fact is, without the hard work and votes of millions of Christians, there would be no Republican majority in both Houses of Congress, no Bush presidencies, few Republican governors, and a small handful of state houses in Republican hands.” Thirty-nine percent of Americans describe themselves as having been “born again”; one third of registered American voters are white evangelical Protestants.<sup>16</sup>

However, as many commentators have pointed out, the irony of this situation is that the cultural success of this form of evangelicalism undermines premillennialism’s insistence that the end will be marked by increasing cultural opposition. The devastating responses of critics of Left Behind provide a way out of this dilemma.

The paradox of late-twentieth-century dispensationalism is, as in the nineteenth century, that its adherents embrace apocalyptic pessimism at precisely their moment of greatest cultural power, because the credibility of their hopes depends upon despair; but the irony of the critics responding to this trend is that their representation of the movement as marginal is reaffirming the cultural dichotomies that had been obscured by the

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth G.C. Newport and Crawford Gribben, eds., *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Darryl Jones, “The Liberal Antichrist—*Left Behind* in America,” in *Expecting the End*, ed. Newport and Gribben, 97–112; Glenn W. Shuck, “Christian Dispensationalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. Wessinger, 515–28. Left Behind is a series of sixteen novels written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins concerning events immediately preceding and following the Rapture (an event in which those who are Christians at the time are removed from earth to reign with Christ in heaven).

<sup>16</sup> Jones, “Liberal Antichrist,” 101, citing John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation: Why America is Different* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 187.

crossover success of *Left Behind*. In dismissing the significance of the dispensational movement, critics are both confirming its worst fears and fostering its optimal social conditions.<sup>17</sup>

Gribben's ironic understanding above is disputed by Harding. She argues that there has been a heterodox shift in the mainstream dispensationalist position pioneered by the New Christian Right and Jerry Falwell in particular.<sup>18</sup> Orthodox dispensationalism is inherently a futuristic premillennialism in which the end of history is divided "into two distinct periods: the present, or the Last Days, in which Bible prophecies are *not* being fulfilled, and the future, the Great Tribulation, in which they *are* fulfilled."<sup>19</sup> In this scheme Christians, by definition, cannot enact Bible prophecies in the present. Prophecies await fulfilment after the Rapture of Christians from the earth. So, in the present, all Christians can do is live holy lives and convert as many as possible. There is no call to political engagement. However, Harding argues, Falwell, LaHaye and others, transformed this position by advocating the possibility of a pre-Tribulation tribulation (not, of course, prophesied in Scripture as this would fundamentally undermine the dispensationalist view) in which Christians would be judged and in which America and American values could be destroyed.<sup>20</sup> As this is not prophesied it is not inevitable and so Christians could avert this judgment by defending Christian values and morality. This move created a space for Christian political action in the present. So Falwell and others introduced an element of historic premillennialism into their fundamentally futuristic worldview.

<sup>17</sup> Crawford Gribben, "After *Left Behind*—The Paradox of Evangelical Pessimism," in *Expecting the End*, ed. Newport and Gribben, 116–17. On the other hand, the case for the success of dispensationalism actually being dependent on its inherent belief in its own marginalisation and commitment to social and cultural differentiation is made by a number of scholars. See, for example, James Barr, *Fundamentalism*; idem, *Escaping from Fundamentalism*; and especially Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000) provides a detailed ethnography of narrative politics in Jerry Falwell's constituency.

<sup>19</sup> Harding, "Imagining the Last Days," 58. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>20</sup> This is not to be confused with the notion of a pre-Tribulation Rapture which is standard dispensationalist doctrine (see note 2 above). The Rapture, according to dispensationalists, means that Christians will not face the Great Tribulation. The novelty of Falwell's position is that he advocates the possibility of real trials before the Great Tribulation which will affect Christians.



Following the success of the *Left Behind* series, one of the authors, Jerry B. Jenkins, has also published his own novel, *Soon: The Beginning of the End* (2003) which imagines a world prior to the Rapture in which the heroes are evangelicals who form an underground militia known as “the Watchmen.” These evangelical warriors are prepared to take lives to preserve their own. Jenkins thus moves from “apocalyptic as exodus (*Left Behind*) to apocalyptic as battle (*Soon*).”<sup>21</sup> Although of course fiction, Jenkins’s depiction of Christian military action prior to the Rapture is indicative of the historic premillennial turn in dispensationalism documented by Harding. This focus on battle terminology suggests an even broader alliance within the right-wing politics of the United States in which both futurist premillennial dispensationalists and historic premillennial Third Wave neo-Pentecostals unite behind an agenda which is fundamentally inimical to abortion, homosexuality, feminism, Darwinian evolution, and gun control legislation. The historic premillennialist turn suggests increasing political engagement. As Harding states: “historic premillennialists are not necessarily violent, but they invariably *enact* their apocalyptic stories in some way or another. Thus, it is relatively easy to see their stories as ‘political’ in the sense of producing a people who act out the history their peculiar apocalyptic posits.”<sup>22</sup> NAR itself, as stated above, advocates a clear form of historic premillennialism and this is particularly noticeable in its espousal of “spiritual warfare.”

## Spiritual Warfare

The NAR holds to the idea that society should be transformed in seven major areas: Religion, Family, Education, Government, Media, Arts, and Business. On August 16, 2005, the Kenyan evangelist, Thomas Muthee, well known to NAR leaders, preached on this theme at Sarah Palin’s church, the Wasilla Assembly of God, and publicly prayed for her, asking God to protect her from “every form of witchcraft.”<sup>23</sup> Spiritual warfare forms a prominent motif in NAR thinking. This is the idea that society can be transformed by driving out demonic strongholds that hold society captive in these seven areas. These areas are described as “mountains” by the movement, deliberately echoing the gospel language of faith which can move mountains. One of the biggest

<sup>21</sup> Gribben, “After Left Behind,” 127.

<sup>22</sup> Harding, “Imagining the Last Days,” 57. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>23</sup> Video clip available from <http://www.talk2action.org/story/2009/11/25/153354/21>.

demonic strongholds, holding power over religion, is identified as Mary, the Queen of Heaven, the demonic power to whom “duped” Catholics pray.

Wagner associate Ana Mendez, a former voodoo priestess, actually led a mapping expedition, dubbed by Ted Haggard “Operation Ice Castle,” up Everest to do war with the Queen of Heaven. While their base camp at 18,000 feet was “totally destroyed by demonic forces,” Mendez claims her team’s prayer wreaked havoc on demonic agents and power bases within Catholicism. The evidence? The next week an earthquake destroyed the basilica at Assisi, Italy, and Mother Teresa died.<sup>24</sup>

The language of battle thus permeates NAR readings of scripture and features significantly in the rhetoric of Joel’s or Elijah’s army and the Joshua generation. One of the key NAR leaders, John Crowder, combines these three images in his writing and sermons:

Of course, one could write an entire book on the Elijah anointing, and many have been written. But here we are only looking at a few significant elements, to begin to grasp how vast this transition and restoration will come about for the church and the earth itself. Our goal is to catch a glimpse of the new mystics who will walk in a corporate Elijah power anointing before the Lord’s return. Jesus confirmed that “indeed Elijah is coming first and will restore all things” (Matt. 17:11). As we noted, John the Baptist walked in this Elijah spirit, and in John, we see the ultimate purpose of this mantle, which is to turn hearts to God. ... And so, the power, miracles, judgment, and prophecy are all given to capture hearts, and turn them back to the Father. In the coming days, we will see the Father’s heart impacting nations. The Elijah anointing turns a nation back to God in a day, like it did on Mt. Carmel (see 1 Kings 18). “Can a country be born in a day or a nation brought forth in a moment?” (Isa. 66:8). This is about to happen. Even Joel prophesied that the Lord is releasing an army that will take nations in a day.<sup>25</sup>

Again, we are reaffirmed of God’s intent to restore Mosaic signs and wonders in the last days through the writings of the prophet Micah ... (Micah 7:15-17). What will these people

<sup>24</sup> Doner, *Christian Jihad*, 182–83.

<sup>25</sup> John Crowder, *Miracle Workers, Reformers, and The New Mystics* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2006), 186.

look like who actually do this stuff? Many of these guys will be absolute freaks. And I hope I am hanging out with them. By appearance, they may be no different than your next door neighbor. But the ultimate focus of this last generation will resemble that of Moses far less than it does Joshua. While Moses's work was that of deliverance and of a pastoral administrator—guiding, organizing, and teaching the nation as it plodded slowly through the desert—the Joshua generation will be different. Its eyes will be set not on escaping Egypt, but on conquering the Promised Land. They will not be escapists; they will be spiritual conquerors. They will not be on the defense; they will be on the offense—and the gates of hell will not be able to hold up against them.<sup>26</sup>

“The Lord thunders at the head of His army; His forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey His command” (Joel 2:11). That which is coming borders on fantasy, so let us first cultivate our own hearts, that we do not disqualify ourselves from this army through unbelief. Understand that this army will be mighty, and in fact, will operate in the Spirit of Might (Isa 11:2). This army is fearful and will strike dread in the nations. Joel compares them to locusts, devouring gardens and turning them into wastelands. A fire goes before them and behind them. The earth shakes and the sky trembles before them. But this is not a wicked army, as some have thought. We want to be among those radical, militant believers who will hate sin. The power of this army will not be in military or political strength—but it is a spiritual army whose weapons are love and righteousness, prayer and fasting, demonstrating God's power through miracles, signs, and wonders. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.... We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4–5). “When this army comes, it is large and it's mighty. It's so mighty that there's never been anything like it before ... they won't be able to kill this army,” says respected

<sup>26</sup> Crowder, *Miracle Workers*, 256–57.

author and prophetic teacher Jack Deere. Not only does Joel say this army is invincible. The Lord Himself will take the lives of those who oppose them. “Those in this army will have the kind of anointing.... His kind of power ... anyone who wants to harm them must die,” said John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard movement. The Lord Himself will be our shield, and we never need to defend ourselves. Joel 3 says that God will gather all nations and wake up the *men of war*—destroying wickedness with a *roar from Zion*. Many have prophesied this great outpouring at the end of the age. Many have seen this emerging army in the Spirit. The Latter Rain revivalists of the '40s and '50s thought they were already walking in this last day army—and in fact, they were tasting its beginnings.<sup>27</sup>

These three quotes from Crowder summarise the rhetoric of charismatic adherents of the NAR with reference to Elijah, the Joshua generation, and Joel's army. This generation, the last before the *Parousia* according to these charismatics, will demonstrate extraordinary signs and wonders and, although it is repeatedly claimed that their power is neither military nor political, nevertheless they will kill (technically the Lord will kill) those who oppose them. There are several additional points to note concerning Crowder's rhetoric. First, by speaking of “new” mystics, he aligns the current movement with the mystical tradition of Christianity. Indeed the book contains sections on such figures as the Desert Fathers, Augustine, Anselm, Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Avila. But the current movement brings something “new” to this mystical tradition: namely, the ability to turn nations back to God “in a day.” Second, unlike previous “mystics,” the movement will not be characterised by withdrawal from society but by engagement with it—not “escapists” but “spiritual conquerors.” Third, it is possible to be disqualified through unbelief. It is thus not inevitable that all believers will form part of these “new mystics.” Because this vision “borders on fantasy,” failure to believe it is a real possibility. This is a powerful rhetorical move that serves a legitimating function within the movement—no one wants to be accused of unbelief.<sup>28</sup> Crowder's own social context is illuminating. He was brought up in a Pen-

<sup>27</sup> Crowder, *Miracle Workers*, 258–59, emphasis in the original.

<sup>28</sup> On the role of legitimation in maintaining particular religious worldviews see especially Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 29–51.

tecostal environment but rebelled and turned to alcohol and drugs.<sup>29</sup> By his own admission he encountered the spiritual realm while on an acid trip. This experience so frightened him that he turned immediately to God. He now promotes the notion of “ecstatic believers” as indicative of this final generation of new mystics.<sup>30</sup>

## Biblical Interpretation

NAR reception of biblical texts is typical of historic premillennialism. It operates a form of “this-is-that” hermeneutics based on an understanding of Peter’s speech in Acts 2 where Peter applies the text of Joel 2:28-32 to the events of Pentecost. This form of reading involves a two-way process in which contemporary events are read back into biblical texts and biblical texts are read “prophetically” to announce imminent events. So, for example, references to an army, which is clearly an army of locusts in Joel 2:1-27, are reinterpreted as God’s end-time army of Christians waging war on everything opposed to God.

Jesus is not the butler of the churches. He is the Lord of armies, strong and mighty in battle. Jesus in His role of Commander in Chief of God’s armies is ferocious, terrible, awesome, making Genghis Khan look like a little boy playing soldier.<sup>31</sup>

Commenting on Joel 2:9, Robert Thompson states:

When the Lord returns the saints that accompany Him will fan out through the earth. They will judge each person and situation they encounter. Evil will flee from before them because of the fire of God that accompanies them. Sinners will scream in terror and seek to hide. But the Spirit of God will enable them to locate each person and either spare that person or slay him just as Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the Spirit.<sup>32</sup>

Similar language can be found with reference to Elijah:

<sup>29</sup> For an account of Crowder’s conversion story see [http://www.thenewmystics.com/Articles/1000041072/Home\\_Page\\_of/About\\_Us/John\\_and\\_Lily/Johns\\_Story.aspx](http://www.thenewmystics.com/Articles/1000041072/Home_Page_of/About_Us/John_and_Lily/Johns_Story.aspx).

<sup>30</sup> For a critique of the notion of ecstatic believers see Lloyd K. Pietersen, “Ecstatic Phenomena for an Ecstatic Culture?”, in *The Mark of the Spirit? A Charismatic Critique of the Toronto Blessing*, ed. idem (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), 7–32.

<sup>31</sup> Robert B. Thompson, *Joel’s Army* (Kindle Edition: Trumpet Ministries, 2011), Kindle Locations 76–77.

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, *Joel’s Army*, Kindle Locations 176–79.

The drought called for by Elijah in First Kings 17 was because of the shedding of innocent blood in Israel. Babies and young children were being offered in sacrifice to the false god Molech (although Baal was the leading spirit behind it). Sooner or later, God always avenges innocent blood, either through spiritual reformation or, that failing, through judgment. There is a climate crisis in America today, not a physical crisis due to ozone depletion and air pollution, but a crisis in our spiritual climate. We suffer from pollution far greater than that of water or air: the moral and spiritual pollution of the shedding of innocent blood. Because of the shed blood of 44 million innocent unborns, we as a nation have offended God, who is the Avenger of blood.<sup>33</sup>

Abortion is clearly a major target. Goll and Engle go on to challenge the reader to become one of the end-time Elijahs who will face down the spirit of Baal on the Mount Carmels in the USA (p. 37). With reference to the Nazirite vow of Numbers 6, the authors state that God requires the extreme response of contemporary Nazirites to challenge the church out of its complacency and cultural captivity.<sup>34</sup> They encourage particularly young people to take up this call and enlist in Joel's army. Malachi 4:5-6 is interpreted as the spirit of Elijah before Christ's Second Coming which will ignite a transgenerational awakening between parents and children. The key to this is martyrdom, which the authors see as a flash point for church growth. The tragic deaths at Columbine are interpreted as martyrdom.

Columbine was an earthquake in the spirit, and its aftershocks are still being felt nationwide, particularly in the Church and especially among young people. Satan overplayed his hand at Columbine.... When martyrs like Cassie Bernall and Rachel Scott, knowing they were about to die, looked their killers in the eye and said, "Yes, I believe in God," something shook loose in the nation and the stirrings of revival began. Columbine was the catalyst, the flash point that ignited the "Elijah Revolution"

<sup>33</sup> James W. Goll and Lou Engle, *The Call of the Elijah Revolution* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2008), 31.

<sup>34</sup> Goll and Engle suggest that young people today with a passionate zeal for God fulfil essentially the same role as the ancient Nazirites, whom they describe as having "a burning zeal for God and a consuming jealousy for the glory and reputation of His holy name." *Elijah Revolution*, 106.

that is now sweeping the land. A new boldness has returned to the Church and many believers are now rising up to say, “We will not be cowed anymore. No matter how long it takes, no matter the cost, we will stand for Christ and for the turning of our nation back to God.”<sup>35</sup>

Fundamentalists have always been suspicious of biblical scholarship and we see in the extended quotes above the lack of engagement with such scholarship at almost every level. Indeed, biblical scholarship is irrelevant to the believer caught up in the firm belief that they are one of Joel’s army. As Johnson notes with reference to the reception of Gen 19 in the Anglican Communion:

Multiple scholarly interventions ... since the mid-twentieth century have not ... soothed the ferocity of the debates around “homosexuality” in the Anglican Communion, which only intensified in the wake of the 2003 election in the Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA) of Gene Robinson.... This intensification ... bears witness to the insufficiency of modern biblical scholarship to mitigate the power of Sodom and Gomorrah in the religious imagination. Contextualizing and historicizing the fate of those ancient cities cannot by itself deconstruct the categorical meaning of sodomy and what this act implies concerning divine punishment.<sup>36</sup>

No amount of scholarly contextualising of the passages in Joel, 1 Kings, and Joshua will prove effective in countering the powerful imaginary constructions evoked by the rhetoric employed by these authors. For the literature reads like written versions of sermons and serves simply to reinforce the messages given orally in mega-churches and/or major conventions regularly held by NAR, which attract thousands regularly. As Robert Thompson, the author of a pamphlet on Joel’s Army, states:

One can “prove” from the text that the second chapter of Joel is speaking only of locusts and the Song of Solomon is referring to the amorous adventures of Solomon. But the saints know

<sup>35</sup> Goll and Engle, *Elijah Revolution*, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Jay Emerson Johnson, “Sodomy and Gendered Love: Reading Genesis 19 in the Anglican Communion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 414–15.

better. They can't "prove" their position from the texts (and yet they can!). They just know better!<sup>37</sup>

What we are contending with here is a combination of the power of charismatic authority, which is well documented in the literature on New Religious Movements,<sup>38</sup> and the use of sacred texts in a way which renders their meaning obvious to the ordinary believer in the congregation.<sup>39</sup> Esoteric language such as "earthquake in the spirit" is well understood by the initiated. The hearer of a sermon on "Joel's Army," or the viewer of a recorded broadcast of such a sermon, or the reader of that sermon subsequently expanded into book form, all "just know" that Joel 2 refers to God's end-time army. They all "just know" that a trumpet is being blown in Zion (which equals the church) by prophetic NAR leaders calling the saints to war, which will cause non-believers to tremble because the return of Jesus is imminent (Joel 2:1). This army will consist of a great multitude greater than anything that has ever gone before (2:2), which has the ability to execute signs and wonders of devastating effect (2:3). These warriors will no longer retreat in the face of secular culture but instead they will charge headlong into battle with the enemy, defeating all before them and conquering every area of society (2:4–9). They are able to do this because they have been well trained (after all they have attended the various conferences organised by NAR to this effect) and so are able to keep their discipline in the heat of battle (2:7–8). This army will consist of all ages (2:16–17). Before this army emerges as the full manifestation of the end-time sons of God there is a time for God's people to prepare through repentance (2:12–14).

## Military Rhetoric

Favourite texts of the NAR involve power encounters such as the conquest narratives in Joshua, Elijah on Mount Carmel, the Elijah-Elisha cycle, Jesus's exorcisms in the Synoptic Gospels, the thaumaturgical prowess of Peter and Paul as displayed in Acts, and, of course, the rhetoric of violent victory of Revelation. Whilst writers are at pains to point out that the rhetoric of battle

<sup>37</sup> Thompson, *Joel's Army*, Kindle Locations 29–31.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Catherine Wessinger, "Charismatic Leaders in New Religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, ed. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 80–96.

<sup>39</sup> The author has first-hand experience of how texts are rendered through previous personal involvement in a NAR community for twenty years. See Pietersen, *The Polemic of the Pastorals*, 62–96.



is to do with “spiritual” warfare, the language of militarisation has come to define the movement. The engagement of NAR figures such as Sarah Palin with mainstream politics in the States suggests that actual violence is unlikely. Historic premillennialism has resorted to violence in situations where its advocates are marginalised (for example, the Anabaptist experiment at Münster in 1534 and the Branch Davidians at Waco in 1993). This is not the current experience of NAR in the West. However, in some areas of the world the NAR is already implicated in political campaigns advocating violence against those who do not support its version of morality. This can be seen in the appearance of Lou Engle (a key NAR leader) at a rally in Uganda shortly after their anti-homosexuality bill had been proposed.

Various people got on the stage [at his rally] and promoted the anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda, which is a very draconian bill that would allow for executions for certain offenses, and would also allow for people who don't report homosexual history to be jailed.... The apostles have had a long history in Uganda, and some of them have had close relationships with both political and religious leaders there. In fact, an apostle in Uganda takes credit for promoting the anti-homosexuality bill and was recognized by the parliament in Uganda when the bill was introduced.<sup>40</sup>

Within America any actual violence is likely to be indirectly fostered by the NAR. For example, Engle organised a rally in November 2011 “to fight the demonic spirit of Islam.”<sup>41</sup> This latest anti-Islamic rhetoric occurs in the context of “the war on terror” and, as such, is potentially explosive. As Colonel Vaughn Doner, one of the main architects of the New Christian Right in the States and co-founder of Christian Right group “The Christian Voice,” states:

Talking with several of my colleagues, I realized that the main difference between “our people” and “their people” (Islamic fundamentalists) was that ours (with the notable exception of bombing abortion clinics and assassinating doctors) had not (yet) resorted to violence.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> “The Evangelicals Engaged in Spiritual Warfare,” NPR, August 19, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/08/24/139781021/the-evangelicals-engaged-in-spiritual-warfare>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Doner, *Christian Jihad*, 23.

We have arrived at a critical time in American history where we have to choose what kind of America we want to live in: a free, peaceful America where all worldviews, no matter how crazy, are free to join the banquet table of public discourse, or an America where the poles of thought are so far apart and radical that fear, demonization, and even violence are used to force everyone into the dominant worldview. The rise of neo-fundamentalists in current politics and presidential campaigns, with the accompanying rancor, are proof positive that the time we have to make this decision is growing short.<sup>43</sup>

It would appear that organisations with some links to the NAR may already be engaged in paramilitary training. The organisation, ALERT (Air Land Emergency Resource Team), is a Christian emergency response training regime linked to Bill Gothard, the founder of the Institute in Basic Life Principles (IBLP). Whilst Sarah Palin was Mayor of Wasilla the city declared itself a “City of Character” in accordance with the teachings of the International Association of Character Cities (IACC). IACC is the secular version of IBLP and so there are clear connections between Bill Gothard and NAR relationally if not institutionally.<sup>44</sup> The ALERT “program overview” brochure contains the following:

ALERT provides a quality alternative to young men considering military service, as it imports the best features of the U.S. military. As such, ALERT should not be confused with church camp or recreational outdoor programs.

Training in Godly character is organized into clusters, the chief cluster encompassing the area of Compliance. The principle of authority is taught with a view to differentiating between obedience, submission, honor, and loyalty.

Within the context of compliance training, recruits master the elements of basic obedience (*rote compliance motivated by consequences*). Moving on to the second level, submission is learned in light of phileo (brotherly love) and mutual trust. The third and highest level of compliance, honor, is imbued with the agape (God’s love) understanding that we die to self as we strive for the success of a God-appointed authority.

<sup>43</sup> Doner, *Christian Jihad*, 24.

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Posner, “Sarah Palin, Faith-Based Mayor,” *Salon*, September 18, 2008, [http://www.salon.com/2008/09/18/palin\\_iacc/](http://www.salon.com/2008/09/18/palin_iacc/).

The Basic Training environment is very effective in revealing resistant attitudes and rebellion in young men. Responsiveness is ALERT's byword, and as an ALERT Responder, a good employee, or a faithful son, the recruit must demonstrate the qualities of dependability, diligence, and thoroughness. Meaningful projects allow men to develop these qualities along with punctuality and accountability, to achieve a mature level of responsiveness.

Similar qualities are clustered around Persistence (endurance, determination, patience), Confidence (boldness, initiative, decisiveness), and Readiness (vigilance and attentiveness).<sup>45</sup>

By its own admission ALERT is organised along military lines with leaders given military-style titles. Furthermore, children are also being trained "to do battle" as demonstrated powerfully in the 2006 documentary film, *Jesus Camp*.<sup>46</sup> In this film a child explicitly states: "we are being trained to train others to be God's army" and another talks of "being warriors" who are "not afraid to die in battle."<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the link to militarisation can be seen in the writings of Rick Joyner, a recognised prophet within NAR:

"There are many soldiers, but not many warriors," a Special Forces officer once told me. There are many professional soldiers who may take their jobs very seriously and be very good at what they do, but when you meet a warrior, you know the difference. Church leadership is about to be transferred from the hands of professionals, to the hands of true warriors, which the soldiers of the cross will all soon become....

As this warrior generation emerges, it will impact and bring transformation to the body of Christ, which will be so profound, that *churches will start being thought of more as military bases than congregations*. Serious training and the sending out of spiritual forces for unprecedented strategic initiatives will become the order of the day....

<sup>45</sup> "Alert Program Overview," 6–7, my emphasis, <http://www.alertacademy.com/alert/pdf/ALERT-Program-Overview.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Directed by Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady (Loki Films and A & E Indie Films, 2006). The significant presence of Lou Engle in the film highlights the connection of this training camp for children with NAR.

<sup>47</sup> At 1:11:45–1:12:05.

There is a new breed of Christians that are going to emerge who are more militant than the world has seen since the first century. They are warriors/fighters who will live with the resolve not to surrender a single acre of ground to the enemies of the cross. The emerging generation is about to change forever the impression that Christians are wimps, fearful and cowering before the intimidating forces of this world. Because of this present impression of the nature of Christians, the first wave will create shock waves of both fear and wonder in the present powers that be. This will begin to awaken the rest of Christianity to its true nature and destiny, just as Gideon's breakthrough caused the rest of Israel to arise and take the spoil.<sup>48</sup>

Joyner does go on to state that this army will not be like the world's armies in that it heals and restores in conquering but nevertheless the use of extreme military language in the quotation above is striking. What Joyner really means becomes explicit in a message posted the very next day:

As stated, as the church begins to take on this resolve, they will start to be thought of more as military bases, and they will begin to take on the characteristics of military bases for training, equipping, and deploying effective spiritual forces. In time, the church will actually be organized more as a military force with an army, navy, air force, etc. These, too, will all learn to function together in harmony, protecting one another and helping each other exploit opportunities. Like these, we will begin to organize more around function and purpose, than the doctrinal emphases that now often characterize movements and groups within the church.<sup>49</sup>

The force of this rhetoric is to constitute NAR members as a militant warrior generation engaged in spiritual warfare against the demonic forces that currently hold the seven major areas of society noted above in their grip. Because the battle is perceived as being in the spiritual dimension it is impossible to provide empirical evidence to disconfirm the claims. Ongoing problems in these seven spheres would simply indicate that the war continues to be fought. Perceived results likewise can be interpreted as victories

<sup>48</sup> Rick Joyner, "The Warrior Nation—The New Church Leadership" (June 26, 2006), [http://www.elijahlist.com/words/display\\_word/4222](http://www.elijahlist.com/words/display_word/4222), my emphasis.

<sup>49</sup> Rick Joyner, "The Warrior Nation—The New Sound of the Church" (June 27, 2006), [http://www.elijahlist.com/words/display\\_word.html?ID=4224](http://www.elijahlist.com/words/display_word.html?ID=4224), my emphasis.

gained whilst the overall war remains to be won. On the other hand, the seven areas themselves are very much social, political and economic realities. Consequently, as Harding has demonstrated, this form of spiritual warfare goes hand in hand with political action on the ground. Whilst the rhetoric of violence remains focused on the spiritual dimension it is unlikely that actual violence will be advocated as stated above. Nevertheless, the very apocalyptic narratives that inform the movement have attracted the attention of certain authorities who have taken seriously the possibility that direct action could occur. Harding suggests this when she states:

Thus have Israeli Intelligence agents become avid observers and auditors of the various groups of dispensational Christians who occupy Jerusalem. Dispensational Christians know the Temple will be rebuilt during the Tribulation and that its reconstruction might begin before the Rapture. Because they know the Temple will be rebuilt, they also know that one of the most holy places in the Muslim faith, the Dome of the Rock, which now stands on the site of the old Temple, will be destroyed. They do not know when these events will occur, or how, only that they will occur, and some Christians in Jerusalem have come to understand that they may be implicated in God's plan to rebuild the Temple and in the destruction of the mosque that necessarily precedes it. So Israeli Intelligence listens, lest any of the dispensational Christians who are in Israel "realize" that God has chosen them to blow up the Dome of the Rock.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

We have seen that, for Harding, the historic premillennial turn in dispensationalism enabled dispensational Christians to engage in politics in ways previously unthinkable. In the case of NAR, we have a movement that thoroughly embraces historic premillennialism. Whereas for dispensationalists bible prophecy remains unfulfilled in the present and awaits fulfilment post-Rapture when Christians are no longer on earth, for historic premillennialists bible prophecy is being fulfilled in the present. This means that prophetic texts speak directly into the present situation. Furthermore, for historic premillennialists, the whole Bible is relevant for Christians today. In this way a

<sup>50</sup> Harding, "Imagining the Last Days," 74–75.

combination of typological readings and “this-is-that” hermeneutics enables contemporary Christians to see themselves as a Joshua generation conquering the promised land and ridding it of its giants, or as Elijah confronting the contemporary equivalent of the prophets of Baal, or as Joel’s army bringing the judgment of God. The rhetoric of “Joel’s army” or “the Joshua generation” or “the Elijah revolution” draws explicitly on biblical texts portraying acts of great destruction and/or violence. These texts are read as straightforwardly applying to contemporary society in which faithful believers are exhorted to be part of the army/generation/revolution in order to see the purposes of God fulfilled and the world “won for Jesus” prior to his return.

The documentary film *Jesus Camp* demonstrates the power of this rhetoric upon the NAR children and their leaders. At the moment the rhetoric is confined to church services and to symbolic action on the streets as documented in the film. Although the language of warfare is spiritualised, there is, nevertheless, a clear appeal to the military in terms of training for both children and young adults. It is not the purpose of this paper to speculate where this could lead and further fieldwork needs to be done to ascertain how the language of NAR leaders as documented in the books they produce and sermons they preach is actually received and acted upon by members. Nevertheless, these very publications provide evidence as to how certain Biblical texts are received by those with influence in the movement. At the very least the rhetoric aids the construction of a dualistic worldview, with society dominated by demonic strongholds, which calls for Christian warriors prepared to do battle with these demons. As Harding eloquently states, this discourse:

produces a point of view from which history is narrated. It constitutes those on behalf of whom history is directed (“we”) and those to whom history happens (“they”). Bible prophecy presents itself as a set of fixed doctrines or specific beliefs, but it is spoken as a complex, shifting, flexible, pervasive interpretive field, a wide range of narrative figures and frames, a living metanarrative that maps out history, geopolitics, current events, historical forces and trajectories, the telos of history, its agents, its benefactors, and its victims—all from “a biblical point of view.”<sup>51</sup>

Thus biblical texts received within this framework constitute a form of narrative politics. For Christians convinced that biblical prophecies are being

<sup>51</sup> Harding, “Imagining the Last Days,” 60–61.

fulfilled today perceive themselves as the subjects of history—history’s ultimate heroes whereas those responsible for the dominant discourses of power and politics in the present are destined to be the objects of God’s judgment in the very near future. NAR’s reading of these texts and proclamation of their meaning for society is itself a political act.