



THE SECOND APOSTOLIC AGE

WHILE CINDY JACOBS and other NAR leaders were doing a prayer tour of the White House on the eve of the insurrection, the planners of the Stop the Steal campaign were holding a pump-up rally in Freedom Plaza just a few blocks away. This event was the largest pro-Trump gathering in Washington, DC, on January 5, setting the stage for Trump's infamous rally on the Ellipse the next morning and the riot that would ensue. The Freedom Plaza event was officially titled the Rally to Revival, a conspicuous attempt to cater to Christian Trump supporters.

This rally, like many pro-Trump events building toward the Capitol Riot, was part prayer meeting, part wild-eyed airing of conspiracy theories, and part campaign speechifying. On that cold and sometimes rainy afternoon, praise bands led the crowd in evangelical-style worship; pastors took the stage to exhort the raucous audience. Ali Alexander and other orchestrators of January 6 pushed election lies and Trump slogans, and name-brand Trump backers—like conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, and convicted felon Roger Stone—encouraged the seething crowd to not back down the next day.

Among the dozens of speakers who took the stage over the course of the seven-hour rally was a California pastor of a suburban evangelical church called Harvest Rock Church. In his brief remarks, this pastor told the story of his church's legal fight against California governor Gavin Newsom's 2020 COVID-19 restrictions, a fight he took all the way to the US Supreme Court. This pastor fervently declared that America was on the verge of being taken over by communism in the form of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. He told the crowd:

How many of you know that this is the most important week in America's history? . . .

I believe this week we are going to throw Jezebel out and Jehu is going to rise up, and we're going to rule and reign through President Trump and under the lordship of Jesus Christ, because I'm telling you the consequences are severe if Biden [or] Harris becomes president . . .

We are here to change history. I believe we are going to shift this nation and this election that's been stolen from Donald Trump and from the United States of America. This is why it's so important that we gather tomorrow and pray and show up and just take the stand to show the world that this is the most egregious fraud—the most scandalous [thing]—that has happened in U.S. history. . . .

We are going to take a stand until justice prevails because the foundation of God's throne is justice and righteousness. And we're going to say yes to justice this week, and we are going to see President Trump be our president for the next four years. . . .¹

On the surface, this scene is a textbook example of white Christian nationalism. This pastor's short speech conflates the advance of the kingdom of God with the interests of Christians in the United States: "We [Christians] are going to rule and reign through President Trump and under the lordship of Jesus Christ." Threaded through the speech are Bible references to bolster a sense of right-wing biblical patriotism, affirming the righteousness of Donald Trump and his allies, the "justice" of overturning a democratic election because it's God's will, all against the backdrop of the looming threats of evil and communism.

The few news sources that took any notice of this particular pastor, by and large, wrote it up that way: right-wing, Christian nationalist, pro-Trump pastor says extreme things about God and Trump. But this pastor was not a white nativist Christian nationalist. His name is Ché Ahn, and he is a Korean American pastor of a multiethnic megachurch in Pasadena, California, who immigrated to the United States as a child.

Nor was this speech merely a rehearsal of generic, conservative Christian-nationalist talking points. Ché Ahn is a globally recognizable charismatic apostle and among the most visible and vocal proponents alive today of the NAR. And while it is unlikely that most of the people in that January crowd had ever heard of Ché Ahn before, he is one of the most respected and revered charismatic Christian leaders in the world.

In the previous chapters, I introduced the NAR as having an ideological three-legged stool, and we saw how Wagner's framework of strategic-level spiritual warfare was the first of those legs. In this chapter, we'll look at the stool's second leg: apostolic and prophetic governance. We can understand this through three lenses on Ché Ahn's life: through his fascinating forty-year journey through the heart of some of the most dramatic and controversial developments in global evangelical Christianity, through his close friendship with and entanglement in the vision of C. Peter Wagner, and through the many forces that brought him to that stage on the day before the storming of the Capitol.

But first let's consider a question that has structured the entire trajectory of Ché Ahn's career: how do you govern Independent Charismatic churches? This question might seem mundane and tangential relative to the drama of the Capitol Riot. But in their revolutionary approach to Independent Charismatic church governance, Ché Ahn and his mentor Peter Wagner set up—in a roundabout way—a powerful contributing factor to the Capitol Riot.

How to Govern Charismatic Churches

To be charismatic is to seek fulfillment of two deep and driving desires. The first desire is mostly individual: charismatics want to feel supernatural power flowing through them. This personal desire usually gets discussed under the rubric of the biblical “spiritual gifts.” Charismatics want to be filled with the Holy Spirit on a deep, existential level so that they can participate in a world of miracles, ongoing revelations, and a personal sense of closeness to God.

The second desire is more communal and global: charismatics want to be part of an extraordinary work of God in the world. This is usually framed in terms of seeking “revival”: a fresh, unpredictable, collective outpouring of God's Spirit in such a way that thousands or millions of people are rejuvenated in their faith. Many Christians in many traditions hope for revival and talk about it in different ways. But I have never encountered any section of Christianity so singularly preoccupied with revival as Independent Charismatics. They pray for revival, prophesy about revival, strategize for revival, study revival history, and hanker for a bracing new work of God.

The steadfast pursuit of these two desires is what gives charismaticism its remarkable energy and even gravitational pull. For many Christians, the promise of having Holy Ghost power flow through you and seeing the extraordinary outpouring of God's energy into the world is irresistible. But these two entwined charismatic desires also create a great deal of instability. If everyone in a religious community is seeking to be filled with power—if everyone thinks they can hear directly from God and quest after revival—then charismatic churches tend to have a “too many cooks in the kitchen” problem. How do you keep a community of charismatics all rowing, or praying, in the same direction? This is the question that has structured Ché Ahn's life and the spur for the revolution he would help trailblaze.

Conventionally, there are three answers to the challenge of governing and channeling the energy of charismaticism. Option 1 is *denominations*. Denominations are bureaucratic and broadly democratic organizations that carry traditions and hold geographically dispersed churches in coalition. Denominations offer churches administrative and executive oversight—training and ordaining pastors, auditing budgets, and uniting disparate churches in a cooperative vision. As we've already seen, many

charismatics of various stripes, especially Pentecostals and Catholic charismatics, fit quite comfortably within denominations, and the denominational policies and leadership hierarchies manage to keep all the charismatic energy in bounds. This blending of charismatic spirituality and denominational governance is what defines the third quadrant in our model.

But for more hardline or institutionally suspicious charismatics, this curbing and hemming in of the *charismata* by human institutions is misbegotten and invalid. After all, shouldn't the Holy Spirit guide the church, unfettered and uncircumscribed by human bureaucracies? Peter Wagner and his cohort came to view denominations with contempt. They saw them as nitpicking, managerial structures that always keep a lid on revival, squelching the volatile and assertive work of the Holy Spirit.

The same is true for most Independent Charismatics, who are, by definition, nondenominational: they gravitate to and congregate around diffuse churches and ministries—nondenominational megachurches, televangelist ministries, itinerant evangelists and prophets—where they can partake of supernatural spiritual gifts and where the fires of revival can burn unchecked. So for occupants of the fourth quadrant, Option 1 is out from the start.

Option 2 is what I call the *charismatic pastoral dictatorship*. This model of church governance elevates a single person—a man or a woman but usually a man—as the iconic pastor. In this model, the charismatic pastor has near autocratic power, and the rest of the community wraps itself around that person's giftedness and insight. You can find churches like this in nearly every branch of Christianity as charismatic pastors certainly have no monopoly on Christian-leadership narcissism. But it's an especially acute phenomenon among Independent Charismatics, where institutional constraints are few.

The charismatic pastoral dictatorship can be a very effective model if a community is seeking fast growth. Depending on how gifted the pastor in question is, they can make things feel quite extraordinary for a good while; a blossoming megachurch can quickly ramp up and even grow exponentially. It can feel a lot like revival. But the pastoral dictatorship rarely ends well because there's a finite cap on how expansive and extraordinary a single-person-dependent church or ministry can become. Pastors who are invested with that amount of power tend to flame out or become despotic. Autocratic expectations breed autocrats.

Option 3 for an Independent Charismatic church is to adopt a more boring *congregation-based democratic model* of governance. As with all democracies, this is a give-and-take, and there are different systems for working this out. A congregation can elect a representative board to keep the pastor's power in check, or the pastor can be directly regulated and directly removed by congregational vote. This can be much more sustainable than the charismatic pastoral autocracy, but democracy is also tedious and contentious. Democracy depends on balancing competing power sources and half-measure compromises.

Very few charismatic communities can maintain that sense of revival momentum amid banal congregational budget meetings and slow-moving consensus building.

C. Peter Wagner, Ché Ahn, and their whole NAR circle offered a new solution to this troublesome question of church governance. What would distinguish them and set them on a revolutionary path is their embrace of option 4, what I call the *spiritual oligarchy* model: a style of church governance that Peter Wagner championed and Ché Ahn would perfect. Wagner believed that the twenty-first century had inaugurated a Second Apostolic Age, a new era akin to the era of the early church, in which the apostles and prophets reigned supreme. Now let's return to Ché Ahn's journey to see how this idea would play out.

From Korea to Pasadena

In his short speech on January 5, Ché Ahn points directly to his family's immigrant experience as a motivating force for his Trump support. He succinctly tells the story of how his father, B. Young Ahn, a pastor in Pyongyang, was arrested and imprisoned by communist forces in 1950. Only after American forces entered North Korea during the Korean War was Ché's father freed and able to flee to South Korea. There his father met his mother, they had baby Ché and his brother, and then the family emigrated to the United States, with Ché arriving in 1960 at the age of four.

B. Young Ahn was the first Korean Southern Baptist pastor in North America. The experience of persecution and communism in Korea haunted the young immigrant family. As Ché put it to me in an interview, "The horrors of communism [were] in my parents' DNA, and, of course, I grew up with that. . . . We have relatives and family members who are stuck in North Korea and who were sent to prison camps and concentration camps."²

Growing up in suburban Maryland, Ché Ahn, like many pastors' kids, went through a rebellious phase, becoming addicted to drugs at the age of fifteen. He began experimenting with Zen Buddhism and questioning his own religious identity. Then one night at a party when he was seventeen, he desperately asked his parents' God to reveal himself. "The presence of God came all over me. I didn't know what was happening at that time," Ché told one interviewer. "The Holy Spirit came over me. And I began to weep uncontrollably."³ He cried intermittently for three days, basking in the love of God.

Ché attended the University of Maryland and got involved in a local Independent Charismatic church named Covenant Life Church, whose leadership had all converted or become charismatic through the Jesus People movement. It was there that Ché Ahn met and married his wife, Sue, and began raising their family. As we saw in the previous chapter, this Independent Charismatic sector, even in the early 1980s,

was dynamic and experimental and exciting. Ché became an apprentice pastor at Covenant Life, and other church leaders recognized that he was “extremely gifted,” if also a bit unformed.⁴

Even as Ché joined Covenant Life Church, that community was in the midst of a great experiment. The leadership was very influenced by the ideas of the 1950s Latter Rain revival, and they were one of the first groups in the United States to actually try out this apostolic governance model. Under the leadership of Ché Ahn’s mentor, Larry Tomczak, the church proposed that they form an apostolic association of churches with Larry serving as the apostolic leader. So it was in 1982 that Covenant Life Church created an apostolic umbrella organization called People of Destiny International (PDI).

It was also in that transitional moment in 1982 that Ché, in his late twenties, awakened to a new sense of calling from God. He had a dream in which a Black man came to him and said, “Come to Los Angeles; there’s going to be a great revival.” As he awoke from the dream, Ché concluded that God was calling him to move to California.

It took two years, but Ché finally convinced the leadership at People of Destiny to allow him to start a new church under their apostolic auspices in Southern California. In 1984, Ché moved to Pasadena to set up a new PDI franchise on the West Coast. He persuaded a friend from Maryland, another PDI member named Lou Engle, to make the cross-country move with him and help seek revival and pioneer the new church. At the time, Engle was aimlessly mowing lawns, experimenting with the gift of prophecy, and leading Bible studies for People of Destiny.⁵ Engle and Ahn would become fast friends and, eventually, global celebrities in Independent Charismaticism.

Wagner, Wimber, and “the Eighties from Hades”

As he was in the process of moving to California, Ché’s father prevailed on him to not merely follow the Independent Charismatic convention of gaining ministry training on the job but to actually get an accredited ministry degree. So Ché enrolled at Fuller Seminary, and the first person he looked up was Professor C. Peter Wagner, whom he’d heard of and knew to be a conventional evangelical who was an ally to charismatics and Pentecostals. Peter and Doris Wagner were happy to meet this eager, charismatic young seminarian, and Peter counseled Ché on what Fuller courses to take and which “liberal” professors he should avoid. Thus began one of the most important relationships of Ché’s life. He would eventually come to call Peter Wagner his spiritual father and spend most of the rest of his life enacting the NAR program that Wagner had yet to formulate.

Ché Ahn arrived at Fuller Seminary while the seminary was still in the throes of the MC510 controversy. He enrolled in Peter Wagner and John Wimber’s standing-room-only course, and buoyed by

his own Holy Spirit dreams, Ché saw the seeds of revival in Wagner and Wimber and the buzz they were causing at Fuller. He was immediately impressed with both men and came to see them both as mentors. After finishing his basic master's in divinity (a standard pastor's degree), he enrolled in a doctorate in ministry (an advanced pastor's degree) program at Fuller to spend more time around Wagner and other faculty mentors.

Yet even as he was flourishing in seminary, the People of Destiny outpost church that Ché Ahn and Lou Engle had moved across the country to establish was struggling. To be sure, in just a few years they had gathered around five hundred members for the new congregation, a perfectly respectable, mid-to-large church—by no means a failure. But Ahn and Engle didn't want a middling suburban church; they had come to California chasing something extraordinary. They wanted the revival that had been promised.

Even as Ché was entering Wagner's orbit, things were shifting back home at People of Destiny headquarters. The apostolic network effort was foundering and the leadership team was pivoting away from the charismatic, ex-hippie, Jesus People culture that Ahn and Engle knew toward becoming a very prominent network of Calvinist churches. A power struggle emerged between Ahn's mentor Larry Tomczak and the People of Destiny cofounder, C. J. Mahaney. Mahaney took over as primary leader of the network in 1991 and began guiding it in a more Calvinist and less freewheeling charismatic direction. Eventually, they would change the name of the network from People of Destiny to Sovereign Grace Ministries, and shortly thereafter, Tomczak was forced out.

As these changes occurred, this nondenominational community of churches slipped into the very “pastoral dictatorship” model I've mentioned. By the 2010s, Sovereign Grace Ministries would gain its own infamy as scandal after scandal broke in local DC and Maryland news about child abuse cover-ups, authoritarian leadership patterns, and Mahaney's megalomania.⁶

Amid these changes in the umbrella organization and the mediocrity of their own Pasadena church, Ché Ahn and Lou Engle were deeply frustrated. As Engle would later put it, their dreams had become nightmares. In 1993, Cindy Jacobs approached her friend Ché Ahn with a prophecy: 1993 will be the hardest year of your life, and you'll have to leave the church you founded, but you'll stay until 1994. So began the inglorious end of Ahn's People of Destiny career. His California revival endeavor had run aground, and he was dispiritedly leaving the church he'd founded with such high hopes. Ché was aimless and depressed.

The decade of relatively fruitless work in Southern California had taken its toll on Ahn and Engle. They would later joke about how they had experienced “the eighties from Hades.” Then, in 1994—right on cue, per Cindy Jacobs's message—revival arrived: in Toronto, Ontario, of all places.

Revival, Toronto-Style

Depending on your religious background and what you were doing in the mid-1990s, the phrase *Toronto Blessing* may mean absolutely nothing. Or it may conjure images of people rolling on the ground laughing in spiritual rapture. It started at a Vineyard church, one in John Wimber's by-then-burgeoning quasi-denomination. John and Carol Arnott, the pastors of the Toronto Airport Vineyard, invited a little-known Vineyard pastor from St. Louis, Randy Clark, to preach in January 1994. What happened next was one of the most remarkable religious phenomena of the late twentieth century.

Clark was not the most animated or humorous preacher, but by the end of the first meeting, the majority of people present in the church were ecstatically laughing and rolling on the ground. This exuberant experience would come to be called *holy laughter*, and it was the signature spiritual expression of the revival that came to be called the *Toronto Blessing*. Over the next two years, hundreds of thousands of charismatics from all over the world would flock to the Toronto Airport Vineyard to see and experience the extraordinary outpouring firsthand.

The Toronto experience was, for those who embraced it, an encounter of joyous liberation and catharsis. They believed that the Holy Spirit was unleashing these new rapturous manifestations, which not only included holy laughter but also what people described as being “drunk in the Spirit,” jumping up and down (“pogo-ing”), and occasionally even barking like dogs, roaring like lions, or squawking like chickens. In Toronto, the revival-driven charismatic energy was off the chain. Randy Clark and the Arnotts became charismatic heroes at the heart of the new outpouring. But the practices of the Toronto Blessing—the holy laughter and other manifestations—also rapidly spread to thousands of other North American churches as charismatic pilgrims brought testimonies and infectious excitement back with them.

Stuck in their malaise, Ché Ahn and Lou Engle heard about what had happened in Toronto. A few weeks after the revival began, they attended a conference at the Anaheim Vineyard, John Wimber's flagship church in Southern California, and the holy laughter began to break out there too. The two heavy-hearted pastors sat in the auditorium and watched as the elated laughter swept through the crowd like a wave. Here is Ché Ahn's telling of the story: “Lou poked me with his elbow and excitedly yelled, ‘It's coming towards us! It's coming towards us!’ I remember saying, ‘Well, I'm not going to laugh.’ But when the Holy Spirit hit our section, I felt myself getting inebriated. I could not stop laughing. It lasted at least twenty minutes. Everything was funny—even though no one was saying anything funny. It was a wonderful, refreshing experience that seemed to invigorate every part of my being. I didn't even notice until later that my depression was gone! I was excited about ministry again.”⁷

This was the revival and personal renewal that Lou and Ché had been waiting for, what they'd moved cross-country to find. A few months later, they would travel to Toronto to drink from the revival's source.

Inspired by their new Toronto Blessing experience and eager to not see the revival pass them by, Ché Ahn and Lou Engle determined to start a new church of their own in April 1994. They named the new church Harvest Rock. Ché Ahn had taken classes with John Wimber at Fuller and respected him deeply. Now it seemed like the Vineyard was the place to be—the upstart charismatic denomination where revival had emerged—so Ahn and Engle chose to affiliate Harvest Rock Church with the Vineyard. Just a few months after its birth, Harvest Rock Church was renamed the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Greater Pasadena.

Along the way, as they entered the Vineyard movement, Ahn and Engle met and befriended the Arnotts, Randy Clark, and other figures at the center of the Toronto phenomenon. They invited the Arnotts and other Toronto leaders to come to their newly founded church in Pasadena. When the same experiences broke out there, their embryonic little church became known for a time as “the Toronto of Southern California.”⁸ They began meeting in a local auditorium, holding euphoric nightly revival meetings. From their perspective, the prophesied and long-awaited revival in Los Angeles had arrived, and now they were at the center of it.

The Spiritual Oligarchy

If my earlier claim is correct—that charismatics yearn to both be filled personally with Holy Spirit power and to be part of something extraordinary—then we can begin to understand why the Toronto Blessing exercised such magnetism and uplift for people like Ché Ahn and Lou Engle. But just like Wimber's Signs and Wonders class at Fuller, the energy and eccentricities of the Toronto spectacle also attracted unwanted attention.

John Wimber wanted the Vineyard to span the gap between mainstream evangelical sensibilities and Pentecostal spirituality. Yet the Toronto Blessing threatened to tip that balance, linking the Vineyard movement with people being inebriated with the Holy Spirit, barking like dogs, and rolling ecstatically on the floor. The remarkable verve and vitality of revival were counterpoised against the institutional and governance needs of the Vineyard.

So within months of Ché Ahn and Lou Engle joining the Vineyard movement *because* of the Toronto Blessing, John Wimber decided to amputate the Toronto revival from the Vineyard churches. It wasn't a hostile separation per se, but Wimber made it clear that the churches insisting on continuing to propagate Toronto-style manifestations needed to disaffiliate from the Vineyard. Jack Hayford, Peter Wagner, and

others tried to intervene and see if there was some way to prevent this fissure, but Wimber was adamant.⁹ After only nine months of existing as a Vineyard church, Ahn and Engle joined the other Toronto outcasts. Their church became an independent Harvest Rock Church once more.

It is no coincidence that around this same time Peter Wagner began working on the postdenominational church theory that morphed into the NAR. Independent Charismatic church governance was stuck in the mud. Many charismatics, Wagner included, had revered Wimber and seen the Vineyard as the leading edge of a new, balanced movement of charismatic churches. But from the hardliner perspective, Wimber missed his moment when he closed off the Toronto Blessing churches. Charismatic people are ambitious and eager Christians, believers who want revival and fireworks and power, but charismatic associations and denominations are more cautious and institutionally wary of the bedlam that can ensue. The NAR was an idea ready-made for that moment.

With his NAR proposal, Wagner was saying: what if we could govern churches through a *spiritual oligarchy* made up of apostles and prophets? An oligarchy is a form of government that features a select caste or echelon of elites who develop power-sharing agreements to split up their domain. An oligarchy, unlike an autocracy or a dictatorship, is not built around a single person, nor is it bound up in bureaucratic processes. And it does not democratically or systematically draw authority from the consent of the governed. Oligarchies are more flexible than dictatorships. The dictatorship rises or falls with the singular leader, but in an oligarchy, the group of oligarchs can support each other, and the oligarch caste can grow or contract as needed.

Wagner was suggesting a *spiritual* oligarchy, one in which the newly commissioned apostles and prophets take over huge chunks of the Independent Charismatic landscape. He built on the foundation of Latter Rain ideas about the rebirth of the apostolic and prophetic roles (fivefold ministries) that had been kicking around for decades. Wagner was interested not only in the concept of new apostles and new prophets but also in finding a way to have it all hang together organizationally. Remember, Peter Wagner was not a scholarly theologian. He was a social scientist who dabbled in Christian theology. So while his NAR ideas have a theological dimension, and Wagner found his rationale in his interpretation of the Bible, the schema of the NAR is also organizational and pragmatic.

When powerful oligarchs compete directly, it can degenerate into civil war. So central to Wagner's NAR concept is the principle that apostles do not publicly fight with other apostles. In Wagner's mind, if you could just get the apostles and prophets—these supernaturally ordained oligarchs—to work together noncompetitively, they could unite in seeking revival and also take over the whole landscape of churches, and the whole system would be stable and cooperative. Indeed, at a sociological level, this is what all those seemingly obscure and low-profile institutions that Wagner built after he retired from

Fuller were about. Wagner was trying to create relationships and power-sharing agreements among the most talented leaders of the Independent Charismatic world so that they wouldn't fight with each other over which church belongs to whom. Instead, they would work as partners. Wagner was building an ideology and an infrastructure for this charismatic spiritual oligarchy.

Let me be clear that *spiritual oligarchy* is my phrase, not Wagner's. But Wagner was very explicit in his rejection of the other church governance models: he argued that democracy and denominations (options 1 and 3) moved too slowly to perpetuate the required revival. He said, "One of the biggest changes from traditional churches to the New Apostolic Reformation is the amount of spiritual authority delegated by the Holy Spirit to individuals."¹⁰ He also strongly rejected the idea that apostles were "autocratic, self-centered, [or] egotistical."¹¹ For Wagner, the authority of the apostles, including his own, was rooted, yes, in their charismatic gifting but also in their willingness to come together as God's chosen elites to work in concert.

And through all the building of the NAR, all the theologizing of apostles and prophets, all the selection of new spiritual oligarchs, there next to Peter Wagner, through thick and thin, were Ché Ahn and Lou Engle. In Wagner's theory, apostles are network-building entrepreneurs, but they usually need the guidance of prophets to know God's will. So just as Apostle Peter Wagner had his prophet advisers (Cindy Jacobs and Chuck Pierce), likewise Apostle Ché Ahn invited Engle to be his right-hand prophet. Engle would become a core member of Cindy Jacobs's ACPE.

When Wagner founded the Wagner Leadership Institute in 1998, Ché Ahn joined the faculty, and when WLI created regional franchises around the world, Ché Ahn became chancellor of the Pasadena campus and later the South Korea one as well. When Wagner took on leadership of the ICA, he appointed Ché Ahn to his apostolic council of advisers. When Wagner created his EVAT group of personal mentees, there, of course, was Ché Ahn. And as the fledgling apostles around Wagner started trying to actually implement this oligarchic model of doing church, Ché Ahn was at the front of the pack.

The Call DC and Charismatic Revival Fury

Part of what put Ché Ahn and Lou Engle on the map in the broader Independent Charismatic world was a spectacle: a mass event titled The Call DC. Arguably, Ché Ahn, Lou Engle, and their NAR cohort helped *create* the very mass-gathering, prayer-and-warfare styles that were on display on January 6. You see, twenty years before the Capitol Riot—during the presidential election that ultimately elevated (via US Supreme Court decision) George W. Bush—Lou Engle received a prophetic vision that he was supposed to lead a massive gathering of young people for a day of prayer and fasting on the National

Mall in Washington, DC. This event would counter what Engle and Ahn viewed as a creeping cultural tendency toward apostasy, particularly through the liberalizing US courts and the toleration of abortion. This gathering would make Ché Ahn and Lou Engle international celebrities in the charismatic world.

True to their typical division of roles, Ché Ahn agreed to be the president and “apostolic architect” who would oversee the logistics of The Call DC, while Lou Engle provided the prophetic vision and direction.¹² What came together in September 2000 was a pivotal and impressive event, with, according to various estimates, between 300,000 and half a million teenagers and twentysomethings fervently worshipping Jesus on the National Mall with the Capitol Building silhouetted behind the stage. Ché Ahn, Lou Engle, and other Independent Charismatic leaders preached extensively to the crowds that day, interspersed with furious and fervent sets of worship songs. Michael W. Smith, one of the best-known Christian music artists in the world at the time, helped to lead worship. Dutch Sheets, James Goll, Cindy Jacobs, Larry Tomczak, and others exhorted and prophesied over the crowds.

If you watch videos of The Call DC now, the event eerily foreshadows the demeanor of January 6. People are worshipping and weeping and blowing shofars, with the Capitol Building behind them. There is apocalyptic preaching about the fate of America. Engle had asked that all participants fast from food to prepare their hearts for the day, so there’s even a bedraggled, on-edge, desperate quality to the massive crowd.

The rhetoric that surrounded The Call DC had many of the same political and Manichean spiritual warfare markers that stoked January 6. Before the event, Engle gave an interview to Cindy Jacob’s *Generals of Intercession* newsletter. “I just feel like there’s a holy violence in the air,” he said. “Even now, to start the year [2000], there are a couple thousand kids in California fasting, seizing the Kingdom through prayer.”¹³ In case you didn’t catch it, that is a subtle invocation of Matthew 11:12, “The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take [or, in some translations ‘seize’] it by force.”

In fact, one of the prayers offered from the stage during The Call DC was, “Lord, we turn our hearts to the Capitol building. . . . Lord, would your fire just flood through the Capitol, your fire of revival just flood through the Capitol building.”¹⁴ After the event, Engle opined, “I believe The Call DC was part of a shift in the heavens and that God has thrown a window open. . . . We have entered a season of time in a massive [spiritual] war. It’s Pearl Harbor. It’s Nazirites [the biblical sect of ascetic adherents to strict Judaism that included John the Baptist] or Nazism. We are in a war, and if we don’t win, we lose everything.”¹⁵

If I had to boil the spiritual genre of the Capitol Riot down to one phrase, I would call it charismatic revival fury. It was a potent mix: charismatic supernaturalism, the craving for revival, and militant fury at an American culture gone morally and spiritually awry. While there are many forebodings of this

charismatic revival fury energy in American Christian history, The Call DC is the first place I've found where you see this charismatic revival fury operating openly, publicly, and politically: there on the National Mall, at the height of an American presidential election.

After the hugely successful first event, The Call became a roadshow, with Engle leading similar gatherings in other major US cities, guiding hundreds of thousands of charismatic evangelicals to fast and petition and pray for America. After a couple of years at the apostolic helm, Ché turned the whole thing over to Lou, and The Call became Engle's signature prophetic platform, further saturating the charismatic evangelical atmosphere with NAR spiritual warfare and revival practices.

Apostolic Networks Gone Global

The notion of worldwide, dispersed networks of churches and ministries, superintended by an elite caste of apostles and prophets: for those new to these ideas, it might all sound infeasible or just strange. But this model of doing church has exploded in growth since Wagner started writing about it in the 1990s. Whether it was through prophecy or his own expertise in church growth, Wagner was among the first major Christian leaders, and certainly the preeminent scholar, to recognize and embrace this burgeoning trend. Today you have thousands of churches in the United States and hundreds of thousands around the globe embracing this fivefold or apostolic-and-prophetic governance model.

Ché Ahn is a perfect case study of how an apostle-to-be goes about forging a network of aligned churches and ministries. Having sat under Wagner's tutelage at Fuller for a decade and grappling with his own disappointment at the crack up in the Vineyard over the Toronto Blessing, Ché Ahn jumped on board with Wagner's NAR program from the get-go.

In 1995, Cindy Jacobs gave Ché Ahn another prophetic word: "You're not to join another network; I have called you to be an apostle. You will be like Abraham, a father of many. And you'll have churches on every single continent."¹⁶ After that, Harvest Rock Church began calling itself a "new apostolic church," and, in October 1996, less than a year after taking Harvest Rock Church out of the Vineyard, Ahn created Harvest International Ministry (HIM), his own apostolic network. It started with fourteen churches, most of them local to California and having connected with Ché Ahn through the Toronto-style revival meetings in Pasadena. The Call DC gave Ché Ahn and Lou Engle's careers rocket fuel, and it gave them charismatic-celebrity spiritual capital to spend as they set out to build a global apostolic network.

By 2004, HIM was up to 120 churches, most of them in the United States or South Korea. By 2008, there were 8,000 churches and ministries, spread over six continents, under Ahn's apostolic leadership.

By 2015, it was 20,000 ministries all over the world. And today, Ché Ahn's HIM has over 25,000 churches and ministries in more than 65 countries. Just to put these numbers in context, today the Vineyard Association of Churches has around 2,500 churches globally. Ahn's apostolic network is now more than ten times the size of the denomination he was cast out of.

Here's the crazy thing: most American evangelicals are familiar with the Vineyard, but few evangelicals outside of the fourth quadrant have even heard of Harvest International Ministry. HIM is probably the largest apostolic network governed by an American apostle, and it might well be the largest apostolic network in the world, but because it doesn't fit most people's categories, it operates off the books of official evangelicalism.

And Ahn's network is just one global apostolic network. There are thousands more being led by apostles like Ché Ahn, other Peter Wagner acolytes, and other fivefold leaders around the world. This apostolic network model—which was virtually unknown thirty years ago, when Peter Wagner started fiddling around with some NAR ideas—has become a covert but massive force within global Christianity.

So the question you might rightfully ask is: Why? Why do churches voluntarily join up to sit under Ché Ahn's or someone else's apostleship? What's in it for them?

I believe this apostolic network model of organizing churches has taken off in the Independent Charismatic world for at least three reasons. First, apostolic and prophetic governance is *charismatic*. It is facilitated through supernaturally gifted leaders, not bureaucrats or administrators. It's a personality-and-spiritual-gifting driven form of leadership. Apostles and prophets don't go around saying, "So after much deliberation, many meetings, and a long budgeting process, here's what we came up with." They say, "I prayed about it, and God revealed to me that we should move forward with this budget." In everything they do, the apostles and prophets point to a divine hand that is inspiring and leading them.

Second, apostolic and prophetic governance is *cooperative*. It's outward-facing. Apostles aren't fighting with each other or bickering over individual congregations. Instead, each apostle is focused on building out their own network. Networks can expand either through apostles and others starting new churches or by existing churches joining up with an apostolic network, sometimes through ditching their denominational ties. In fact, churches can belong to multiple apostolic networks. That happens fairly frequently, with churches or ministries claiming alignment with multiple apostles. The model is multiplicative.

Third, and maybe most importantly, apostolic and prophetic governance *feels extraordinary to everyone involved*. With prophets like Cindy Jacobs or Lou Engle saying, "Thus saith the Lord," people feel like God is speaking directly to them. You have apostles casting grand visions, making apostolic decrees, and building massive, globe-spanning revival networks. At the congregational level, pastors and

church members don't feel like they are merely a generic, autonomous, local nondenominational church. No, they are part of an ambitious, expansive revival network! And sometimes their apostle or one of their apostle's friends or a prophet will even come speak at their church. This underlying experience—being a part of a global movement in which apostles and prophets are hearing words from God—hits all the charismatic dopamine-release triggers. Put simply, the apostolic and prophetic governance model scratches where charismatic churches and ministries itch.

HIM has many of the trappings of a denomination. It offers pastor-training conferences, leadership mentoring, equipping and funding for new church plants, and oversight to congregations. It trains and sends missionaries around the world. It has its own university. But what makes HIM and other apostolic networks distinct from denominations is that the heart of the network is not a democratic decision-making process or bureaucratic bylaws or committees. At the center of HIM is one man, Ché Ahn, who identifies and understands himself as an apostle, commissioned directly by Jesus, in partnership with other apostles.

To be sure, the HIM website lists a board of directors, an apostolic council of advisers to Ché Ahn, and regional apostolic teams. You might be forgiven for thinking its governance is similar to other nonprofits or denominations. But as Ché Ahn makes clear in his 2019 book *Modern-day Apostles*, those governance boards are appointed by Ahn himself and are made up of other apostles and prophets—his fellow oligarchs. They have little independent accountability or oversight.¹⁷ This is the practical outworking of Wagner's idea that, in the NAR, God is increasing the "amount of spiritual authority delegated by the Holy Spirit to individuals." The leaders of apostolic networks are not elevated by the grassroots or governed through some bylaw structure. No, "from the top down" is a good summary of how power and authority flow in Wagner's oligarchic model of apostolic networks.

The Most Loyal Disciple and Successor

One of Peter Wagner's repeated exhortations to his EVAT mentees was "I want you to go further and farther than I ever have." When we examine the life of Ché Ahn, we can see Wagner's hope become reality. Ché has taken the vision of the NAR, the revivalist networks of churches led by apostles and prophets, and he has implemented it to the nth degree. Yet through it all, Ché Ahn has stayed loyal to Wagner. Since Wagner's death in 2016, many people in his networks and even former EVAT members have subtly downplayed some of Wagner's ideas and signature phrasings, particularly as the "NAR" title

has become controversial. But Ché Ahn still boldly proclaims the vision of the NAR, and Ahn writes books that mirror, sometimes section by section, books that Peter Wagner wrote and concepts that he published. Ché Ahn is Peter Wagner's most loyal disciple, one who has far surpassed his mentor.

Indeed, to the degree that any one person is a successor to Peter Wagner, I would argue that it is Ché Ahn. In addition to creating HIM, the premier US-centered apostolic network in the world, Ché Ahn has been at the heart of the expansion of the platform for NAR ideas and frameworks. In truth, while popular, Peter Wagner was a disruptive figure who inspired great affection from those around him, but Wagner also always wanted to brand everything with his own signature concepts and phrases. Many Independent Charismatic leaders were already primed by the midcentury Latter Rain revival to be excited about apostolic and prophetic church leadership in the 1980s and 1990s, but not all of them attached themselves to Wagner's NAR brand. Some preferred to maintain their formal independence while utilizing similar apostolic and prophetic leadership paradigms.

In 2008, Ché Ahn created a collaborative group called Revival Alliance to bring together HIM and five of the most important non-NAR fivefold ministry networks. All of the six apostolic power-hitter couples in the alliance had had personally transformative experiences through the Toronto Blessing. They include:

- Ché and Sue Ahn
- Randy and Deanne Clark (Randy was the original preacher who instigated the Toronto Blessing and now leads the Global Awakening apostolic network.)
- John and Carol Arnott, the pastors of the then-Toronto Airport Vineyard Fellowship who now run the Catch the Fire network
- Bill and Beni Johnson, leaders of the charismatic empire that is Bethel Church in Redding, California, which includes Bethel Music—a leading evangelical worship-music brand with immense reach—and the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (Bethel and the Johnsons will feature significantly in [chapter 6](#).)¹⁸
- Heidi and Rolland Baker, whose international missions agency, Iris Global, is seen by many Independent Charismatics as an exemplary, miracle-driven missionary endeavor
- Georgian and Winnie Banov (Georgian leads Global Celebration, an apostolic missions agency, and Global Celebration School of Supernatural Ministry.)

I would not count the Revival Alliance partners, beyond the Ahns, as properly within Wagner's NAR as none of the others formally aligned with Wagner or sought his mentorship, preferring to develop their

own brands. Yet the alliance members are vital hubs for carrying and propagating the new way of doing church that Wagner articulated. In fact, Ahn and his Revival Alliance partners were some of the leaders who pushed Peter Wagner into the whole Lakeland Outpouring debacle in 2008 by vouching for the erratic evangelist Todd Bentley.

When Peter Wagner announced and began preparing for his retirement in 2010, he entrusted to Ché Ahn one of the crown jewels of the Wagner realm: Wagner Leadership Institute. This was somewhat fitting in that, among Wagner's EVAT members, Ahn was the only one who held a doctorate from an accredited and respected evangelical school (Fuller).

So in 2010, Ché Ahn became the international chancellor of WLI, with its thousands of students, scores of faculty, and dozens of extension campuses spread across the United States and around the world.¹⁹ In a surprising turn, Ché Ahn has gone from a man reluctant to even get a seminary degree to overseeing a global Christian-leadership training institution. Under Ahn's guidance, WLI would become Wagner University.

Accurate information about enrollment or student demographics at Wagner University is difficult to come by, but it continues to be a training academy of the NAR. The university carries on propagating Wagner's ideas, though now the courses are taught by a mix of old-school NAR leaders, up-and-coming young apostles and prophets from their networks, and Ahn's Revival Alliance colleagues.

Harvest Rock Church and the Supreme Court

So how did a Pasadena-based, Toronto-blessed global leader in the NAR—an apostle with tens of thousands of churches and ministries taking their cues from him, the international chancellor of Wagner University—end up on that stage on January 5, 2021, spiritually stumping for the election-denying Donald Trump? The answer to this question draws together everything we've already seen about Ché Ahn but adds in Harvest Rock Church's legal battles before the US Supreme Court.

In the spring of 2020, as the public health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic wrapped around the globe, states and localities urged everyone to lock down and stay home. Harvest Rock, like nearly all American churches, closed its doors briefly and moved to offering virtual services. A few months later, though, many Americans, and many Christians, resented what they perceived as government overreach into their private and communal lives. Ché Ahn and the leadership of Harvest Rock felt that, by July 2020, it was time to cautiously reopen the church to in-person worship. At the same time, California governor Gavin Newsom was instituting an even more severe COVID-19 lockdown order, barring in-person congregational gatherings. Fueled by their own charismatic sense of rightness and divine

sanction, Ahn and the Harvest Rock leadership chose to defy the governor's new order and sue Newsom to get the order reversed.

This combative step instigated a multi-month battle between Ché Ahn and the local Pasadena prosecutor. The prosecutor, seeking to enforce the governor's order, threatened Ché Ahn with jail time and said he would fine Harvest Rock members for every infraction, that is, every time they attended a worship service. Ché Ahn hired a high-power evangelical law firm to try to create a precedent for other COVID-ban-defying churches.

Through the summer and into the fall of 2020, Harvest Rock Church's case was meandering its way through the appeals process to ultimately end up before the US Supreme Court. Leading into that fall, the COVID-related cases that had come before the Supreme Court were generally decided in favor of the local authorities—mayors, governors, health boards—prioritizing the grave threat posed by the pandemic. Then on September 18, 2020, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the revered heroine of the liberal bloc of the Supreme Court, died.

So less than two months before the 2020 presidential election, suddenly the decisive coalition of the Supreme Court was hanging in the balance. The NAR networks, in general, and Ahn and Engle, in particular, had long been vehement antiabortion activists, dedicated to seeing the Supreme Court reverse its *Roe v. Wade* decision. Now, on top of that general ambition to transform the high court, Ahn and Engle's own cofounded church was literally on the Supreme Court docket.

It just so happened that another major charismatic Christian gathering was slated to be held on the National Mall in late September 2020. While this event was not branded as The Call, it was an organizational and spiritual descendant of Ahn and Engle's original event. The Return boasted an even larger cast of charismatic Christian celebrities on the stage than the earlier events. Ché Ahn was there to offer a prayer before the live crowd of seventy-five thousand, and millions more watching the live stream, once again with the Capitol Building silhouetted behind him:

Father, we know everything rises and falls with leadership, and as leaders, as pastors, as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, we repent for our sins. . . .

I pray, Lord God, that we would see revival begin right here in the United States, this state that you have given us as an apostolic nation.

Have mercy upon us. Lord, I want to pray that you would overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Lord, I thank you with Ginsburg being, ah . . . who passed away. Lord, I believe that [Amy Coney] Barrett will be the judge that will help us to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. That we would see a moral reformation, we would see revival and transformation take place.

Lord, you've asked us to disciple nations as your leaders, we're to equip the saints for the work of ministry, help us to empower and encourage and be a great healer to the next generation of leaders.²⁰

Ché Ahn prayed this prayer at The Return on the morning of September 26, 2020. A few hours later and a few blocks away, Donald Trump spoke from the White House Rose Garden to formally nominate Amy Coney Barrett to replace Ginsburg. She would be confirmed to the high court mere days before the presidential election.

Amy Coney Barrett proved to be exactly the kind of Supreme Court justice that Ché Ahn hoped for. As soon as she joined the Court, COVID-ban decisions regarding houses of worship began swinging in the other direction, favoring religious freedom arguments over public health. In December, she helped issue a “shadow docket” (expedited) ruling in the Harvest Rock Church COVID-19 case, deciding in Ché Ahn's favor.²¹ Indeed, in early 2021, California governor Gavin Newsom was forced to pay \$1.35 million to cover Ché Ahn and Harvest Rock's legal fees over the matter. And less than two years later, Amy Coney Barrett would be the deciding vote on the coup de grâce: overturning *Roe v. Wade* and the court-mandated federal right to an abortion.

“Whatever We Bind on Earth”

All this brings us back to Ché Ahn's enigmatic speech delivered at the Rally for Revival on the eve of the Capitol Riot. To those unfamiliar with Independent Charismatic or NAR discourse, Ahn's speech might sound like a random or even unintelligible string of Bible references. To those in the know, his speech sounded coherent, logical, and pointed.

In his January 5 speech, Ahn narrates the story of his legal battle with Gavin Newsom, connecting it to his father's immigrant experience: “They want to arrest law-abiding citizens who simply want to worship Jesus? And I'm saying to myself: I'm not in Communist North Korea. I'm not in Communist China. I'm in the United States of America. How dare they try to arrest people who want to experience and worship God! This is our first constitutional right.”

He describes the Harvest Rock case coming before the Supreme Court and applies lessons from his choice to stand against the oppressive California government to the effort to protest the counting of electoral votes the next day:

So we appealed to the Supreme Court. . . . and they said it is our constitutional right to worship, you will not be arrested, you will not be fined. It set a precedent for the church and all of a sudden L[os] A[ngeles] County said, “Churches, OK, you can meet.”

Here’s the point: We have to stand in boldness. The righteous are bold as lions [Prov. 28:1]. We have to be courageous, and I want to say: pastors, you have to lead the way. We are to be the head and not the tail [Deut. 28:13]. Can I hear an Amen?

And so we are here to change history. . . .

But the most important part of Ché Ahn’s speech that day comes when he invokes Matthew 16 and Jesus’s instructions to the original apostles: “I want us to pray. I believe one will put a thousand to flight, two ten thousand [Deut. 32:30]. I believe that he’s given us ‘the keys of the kingdom,’ Matthew 16:19. Whatever we ‘bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ Would you join me in binding the spirit of Jezebel off of this election?”

This passage in Matthew 16 is a central locus for ecclesiology, or Christian reflection and theology about the church. Jesus, speaking to Peter and the other apostles, promises his authority will accompany them and they will have the “keys to the kingdom of heaven” so as to bind and loose in heaven and on earth. From Ché Ahn’s perspective, a demonic “spirit of Jezebel”—a major territorial spirit and frequent charismatic image for a malign power of chaos and debauchery—had taken over the country. With these words, he was using all of his spiritual warfare authority as an apostle to bind that spirit so that Trump could have another term.

I have interviewed Ché Ahn. I’ve read his books, and I’ve listened to hours of his preaching. I am convinced that Ché Ahn showed up on January 5 not to give a little speech nor stir up a crowd. He came to Washington, DC, that day as an apostle—the most devoted disciple of C. Peter Wagner, a general of spiritual warfare, an oligarch wielding immense spiritual authority—to decree and declare, to bind and to loose, and to spiritually push Donald Trump across the finish line.

It is tempting for many to write off Ché Ahn—along with other participants in the events of January 6—as a crackpot. But Ché Ahn is not a lunatic or an imbecile. He is an extremely sophisticated and influential leader, the sort of leader with whom tens of thousands of churches globally have aligned themselves. And on January 5, Ché Ahn was acting and speaking in a way that was perfectly consistent with the worldview of those followers.

Ahn believed that God had ordained Donald Trump to have another term. He believed that literal demons had hijacked the 2020 election, robbing Trump of his rightful win. And he believed that his presence and his words that day could change spiritual realities.

The next day, on the morning of January 6, Ché Ahn left his DC hotel room to attend Trump's notorious rally at the Ellipse. This time, Ahn wasn't leading the DC throng, but instead he was a part of it. As the rally ended and participants began marching across the Mall to the Capitol Building, by his own account, Ahn went back to his hotel room to use the bathroom. He decided to take a short nap and ended up sleeping through the riot. Then again, perhaps Ché Ahn felt that he'd already done his part.

Christian Supremacy

What are we to make of Ché Ahn? His is a remarkable American story: an immigrant child who came to the United States fleeing oppressive North Korean communism to become one of the most influential religious luminaries of our era. Objectively, Ché Ahn's life and ministry have influenced well into the millions of believers, both in the United States and globally. He has taken the ideas and the program of C. Peter Wagner and proven just how potent they can be.

When I interviewed him, I pointed out that many of his fellow evangelicals—indeed, many of his fellow Fuller Seminary alumni—believe that all this apostles-and-prophets business is heresy and that it is fundamentally unbiblical. He replied:

Every move has criticized the next move; so, you know, the Catholic church criticized Martin Luther in 1517 with his teaching on justification by grace through faith and *sola scriptura*. . . . But then Martin Luther criticized the Anabaptists; he thought they were heretics for believing in baptism after conversion. And the list goes on: [Church of England leaders] criticized John Wesley, and then John Wesley's Methodists criticized the Pentecostals. . . . So, throughout church history, we've had this. Just being criticized by other church leaders doesn't bother me. . . . That's just the same [pattern] as in 2,000 years of church history.²²

Ahn is not wrong about the sequence of Christian movements giving way to new ones. The stalwarts of the old paradigm do tend to chastise the leaders of the new. And it's true that in the past quarter century, these ideas of apostolic and prophetic governance, what I've called the spiritual oligarchy model, have become the organizing structure for a huge segment of the Independent Charismatic world, which itself encompassed more than 300 million people globally in 2020. Maybe Ché Ahn really does represent the next historic movement in global Christianity.

Yet what accompanied the progressing movements that Ahn name checks was a widening circle of inclusion in the leadership of the church. Lutherans wanted everyone to be able to interpret the Bible, not just the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Anabaptists wanted every believer to have the chance to choose faith. Methodists fought for more rights for lay preachers and lay leaders in the church. And Pentecostals not only brought women into leadership but believed anyone could be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Through these different iterations of Protestantism, we have witnessed an increasing enfranchisement of Christianity, a move toward inclusion that paralleled the expanding democratization in the modern world. What are the denominations if not a governance structure for churches rooted in democratic checks and balances and the just inclusion of more voices?

In contrast, while Ché Ahn speaks the language of democracy and justice and constitutional rights, his ultimate vision is a retrenchment from democracy in the church and society. The spiritual oligarchy, while it may have the vocabulary of populism and empowerment, is creating a new entrenched charismatic church celebrity elite. And when Ché Ahn declared on January 5 that “we are going to rule and reign through Donald Trump and under the lordship of Jesus Christ,” he was imagining a future in which Christians operate all the levers of power in America. He was hoping, as were many that day, for a miraculous intervention on behalf of Donald Trump, a divine coronation that would bring about the height of Christian privilege and power in the United States.

Many people today would call Ché Ahn a Christian nationalist, and there’s definitely truth in that. He clearly hopes to see the United States operating as a Christian nation. Yet that descriptor is not quite adequate to the task of explaining Ahn’s worldview. The set of movements and inclinations that get called Christian nationalism today is usually quite preoccupied with the boundaries and borders of modern nations. Christian nationalism is a vision committed to making a particular nation—the United States or Brazil or Hungary or Russia—a Christian one. But nationalism also tends to carry a certain xenophobic connotation; that is, Christian nationalistic fervor tends to include a wariness of outsiders, a preoccupation with Christianizing one’s own nation, even if that’s at the expense of caring about other nations.

In that sense, the term *Christian nationalism* doesn’t fittingly describe Ché Ahn or the NAR movement, which is very international and global in its orientation. Ché Ahn and many of the apostles and prophets and adherents of the movement can more helpfully be understood as *Christian supremacists*. A Christian supremacist, by my definition, occupies the most extreme end of the Christian nationalist spectrum. Survey data show that many Christian nationalists in the United States are muddled and sentimental in their aims: nostalgic for recovering an idealized past but also, perhaps surprisingly, frequently in favor of religious equality and the separation of church and state.²³

Christian supremacy is much more organized and ideological than Christian nationalism, and it's more comprehensive in scope too. Christian supremacists aren't just venting their feelings about the United States needing to be more Christian; they have a plan and a program. And they have a global vision that transcends parochial US concerns.

Christian supremacy emerges out of various strands of Christian theology, and it amounts to a theological habit of mind that parallels white supremacy in upholding one type of person as more trustworthy, fit to lead, and inherently virtuous than others. A Christian supremacist is someone who thinks that Christians should occupy authoritative and privileged positions in culture, politics, and other domains of public life. In other words, Christian supremacists believe that Christians—by dint of being Christians—are morally elevated above the rest of humanity and are empowered by God to govern civil society. Christian supremacists divide the world into stark binaries: the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of Satan, Christians versus the rest of demon-plagued humanity, those enlightened by the gospel versus those driven by base and carnal desires.

Certainly, not all evangelicals and not all charismatics are Christian supremacists. I would even say that not all apostles and prophets are Christian supremacists. Yet a sizable faction on the margins of those worlds is.

Christian supremacy is a movement whose ambition is a realignment of the global order. If you look at Ché Ahn's life, you'll find a huge segment of his calendar is filled with international travel, visiting the vast apostolic network he's setting up around the world. He wants to see those Christians in those countries empowered by the Holy Spirit take possession of the political, cultural, and social domains of their societies too. Christian supremacists may jubilantly declare Jesus is king over all creation, but as long as we're waiting for Jesus to return, they're keen to govern in his stead.

When Ché Ahn says, "We are to be the head and not the tail," this is charismatic-speak for *Christians should be supernaturally empowered by God to lead society*. When Ché Ahn says, "We are going to rule and reign through Donald Trump and under the lordship of Jesus Christ," he evokes a future in which Christians have coercive power to order society according to their agenda.

Since January 6, Ché Ahn's celebrity and clout have increased. Now, like many other frontline charismatic leaders who stood with Trump's effort to overthrow the election, Ché Ahn has become an inside player in the religious right. In fact, if you want to know which pastors have real juice with Christian voters, watch where politicians congregate and which leaders they seek out. Harvest Rock now occupies that tier of must-visit churches for ambitious Republican politicians on the hunt for supporters. Sarah Palin recorded a congratulatory video celebrating Ahn and Harvest Rock's victory over Gavin Newsom. Palin, along with Trump's former secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, joined Ché Ahn on stage at

Harvest Rock for a conference in July 2021, signaling their desire to be seen with him.²⁴ Senator Josh Hawley, another ambitious hardline Christian politician, recorded a long-form interview with Ahn at Harvest Rock that fall.²⁵ Kari Lake, the losing Arizona governor candidate in 2022, has given the keynote address at one of HIM's leadership conferences.²⁶

Ché Ahn is an accomplished, forward-thinking church leader, ushering in Wagner's Second Apostolic Age. If he has his druthers, the apostles and prophets' spiritual oligarchy will continue to expand, and one day all of America—indeed, all of the world—will submit to Christians, under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

But the NAR agenda goes far beyond apostolic declarations or imagined futures. Part of what Wagner and his cohort have constructed is a dedicated, charismatic program and plan for Christian supremacy, undergirded by prophecy. That program is called the Seven Mountain Mandate.