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< A Leading Figure In The New Apostolic Reformation

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Heard on Fresh Air from WHYY

October 3, 2011 - TERRY GROSS, host: This is FRESH AIR. I'm Terry Gross. In August, Texas Governor Rick Perry held a prayer rally called The Response. Several of that rally's organizers and speakers are part of an emerging movement of charismatic Christians called the New Apostolic Reformation, or the NAR. After the rally, Rachel Tabachnick joined us on FRESH AIR to discuss the NAR, which she has reported on for the website Talk2Action.

She said that as part of the NAR's belief in dominionism, they want to take control of the institutions of society and government. She also talked about their belief in demons and their practice of spiritual warfare against demons.

After our interview with Tabachnick, we got in touch with C. Peter Wagner. He's one of the leaders of the New Apostolic Reformation. He named the movement and has written books about it. Leaders in this movement are considered apostles and prophets, gifted by God for the role.

Wagner is the former presiding apostle of the International Coalition of Apostles. He recently retired as president of Global Harvest Ministries. For 30 years he was a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Missions. We're pleased that he accepted our invitation to describe the NAR and its mission in his own words.

Dr. Wagner, welcome to FRESH AIR. The New Apostolic Reformation is very large, but few people outside it know about it. And few people outside it know of you. However, there is a video of you giving a speech, and the video went viral. So I thought we'd start with that, because for a lot of people, this is the only thing they know about you.

And in this video, you're talking about the emperor of Japan having sex with a sun goddess and how that harmed Japan. So I'm going to play this short video excerpt, and then we'll talk about it. So this is my guest, C. Peter Wagner.

(SOUNDBITE OF VIDEO)

Dr. C. PETER WAGNER: Japan, as a nation, is one of the nations of the world which has consciously, openly invited national demonization. The sun goddess visits him in person and has sexual intercourse

with the emperor. It's a very, very powerful thing. So the emperor becomes one flesh with the sun goddess, and that's an invitation for the sun goddess to continue to demonize the whole nation.

Since the night that that - that the present emperor slept with the sun goddess, the stock market in Japan has gone down. It's never come up since.

GROSS: So that was my guest, C. Peter Wagner. Would you explain what you meant in the excerpt that we just heard?

WAGNER: All right. Now, first of all, let me say that the occasion that I'm speaking about there is a very, very important occasion for the nation of Japan. And I also want to put a disclaimer in here that not everyone in the NAR would say what I have said. I'm speaking for myself and a fairly substantial group of people, with whom I closely associate.

Now, our premise is that the ruler over the nation, the chief ruler over the nation of Japan, is the sun goddess. And the sun goddess takes many adaptations, but in this case the sun goddess is very much a part of the Shinto religion in Japan. The name of the sun goddess is Amaterasu-omikam in their language. Japan is called Nippon, that means the rising sun, the land of the rising sun. Their flag has the sun.

And so the worship of the sun and then the person of the sun goddess is very strong in Japan, Japanese traditional history. Japan is much more controlled by Shinto than it is by Buddhism.

And so what happens is that after World War II, the emperor, Hirohito, when he signed a surrender with MacArthur, agreed that the government and the religion, including the Shinto religion, would be separate. And the emperor declared that he was no longer a god. That was Emperor Hirohito.

And that this actually opened a spiritual atmosphere of Japan for what are called the seven wonderful years of the growth of the Christian church in Japan. But then gradually, forces came into being that reunited the government with the Shinto religion.

So then when the emperor died, and a new emperor came in, we entered the period of what's called the Daijosai ceremony. And the Daijosai ceremony is a part of Shinto tradition in which when the emperor comes into power, the new emperor, they build a building in which the only piece of furniture is a couch.

And in the Daijosai ceremony, the emperor goes into that building and presumably has sex with the sun goddess. The sun goddess visits the emperor - and I don't know how that works between a spirit and a human, but I know it's the case, because many, many people have spirits of what deliverance ministers call the succubus and incubus, in which there are sexual relationships between spiritual beings and humans.

But she comes down, and she and the emperor have some sort of relationship, whether it's a physical relationship like we humans are used to or whether it's something near that or whatever it might be, it

doesn't make any difference, because the net result, as the Bible says, is that when a man and a woman have sex, they become one flesh.

And so the emperor, from that point on, becomes one flesh with the sun goddess, and then gives the sun goddess permission to continue ruling Japan throughout his reign.

GROSS: Do you think that the tsunami or the nuclear meltdown in Japan is also connected to this ceremony, or as you describe it, to the fact that the emperor had sexual intercourse with the sun goddess?

WAGNER: Yeah, well, that happened many, many years ago, and that created a spiritual atmosphere over Japan, which was an atmosphere ruled by the powers of darkness. The sun goddess is not a very nice lady. The sun goddess is a power of darkness, which is headed up by the kingdom of Satan.

And so the sun goddess wants natural disasters to come to Japan. Sometimes the hand of God, which is more powerful, will prevent them. And when he decides to prevent them and when he doesn't is far beyond anything that we can predict. But in this case, God could have prevented that tsunami and the destruction, but he didn't. He just took his hand off and allowed these natural forces to work. And one of the background pieces of information is Japan is under control of the sun goddess.

GROSS: So a couple - a couple of things I think I'm picking up here is, one, that you take literally this ceremonial aspect of this ceremony inducting a new - or whatever the word is...

WAGNER: New emperor.

GROSS: A new emperor and also that you believe that the figure that is perceived as a goddess in the Shinto religion is actually sent there by the Satan of the Christian faith to delude people? Do I get that right?

WAGNER: That's our premise.

GROSS: Now, Chuck Pierce, who's your successor at Global Harvest Ministries, has said: Now is the time to declare that old religious structures in Japan will fall and many will experience the freedom and reality of our lord and savior Jesus Christ. So is your larger goal here to get Japan to turn away not only from the Shinto faith, but also from Buddhism and follow Jesus Christ?

WAGNER: Yes, it is. We believe that through the Christian faith, the blessings of heaven will come down upon whatever people accepts that. Now, that doesn't mean every Japanese has to become a Christian. But that means that the Christian faith - we're looking for the Christian faith to grow in Japan to a point where it has some influence on society, which right now it doesn't.

GROSS: Okay. So we talked about that video as one thing that has put you in the news - and my guest is C. Peter Wagner - and the other thing that has brought you into the news was Rick Perry's prayer rally, The Response, that was held in August. And you and your wife Doris had endorsed the prayer rally and

then seemed to maybe withdraw your endorsement. So just clarify this for us: Did you endorse it? Did you withdraw your endorsement? Go ahead.

WAGNER: Yeah. We endorsed it. We never withdrew our endorsement.

GROSS: Okay.

WAGNER: We were present in the audience. We didn't have any platform position, but we were there through the whole thing.

GROSS: Okay. And Texas Monthly reported that eight members of the rally's leadership team are affiliated with the New Apostolic Reformation, including Alice Patterson, Don Finto, Mike Bickle, Doug Stringer, Lou Engle. Alice Patterson, who is an apostle in the movement, and she was onstage with Rick Perry when he spoke, and she helped mobilize supporters for the rally - she said that the Democratic Party is a demon structure. And she figured that out while listening to Chuck Pierce speak. And Chuck Pierce is the person who replaced you after you retired as president of Global Harvest Ministries.

Anyway, so Rick Perry was sharing the - she was next to Rick Perry when he spoke at his rally. Is Rick Perry's connection to the apostles an indication that he approves of your work, or is your endorsement of him an indication that you endorse him as well as a presidential candidate?

WAGNER: Now, that's a very, very good question, Terry. I know Alice well. But when Doris and I got - we didn't know about the prayer rally. We didn't know about the - who would be on the stage at The Response and - but we were there. And I was very surprised that so many of the platform participants would fit under the New Apostolic Reformation template. The names you named would be very correct.

This was a surprise to me. And then - to get to Alice's book - I read Alice's book, and I think her general thrust is fine. I personally would not endorse each one of her statements and especially the statement about the Democratic Party being demonized, any more than the Republican Party is. I mean, the - I believe there's a lot of demonic control over Congress in general that needs to be dispersed. And how she got that from Chuck Pierce, I don't know, because Chuck is also a very good friend of mine, and a lot of times Chuck, because he's a prophet, he speaks in language that different people interpret differently.

So yes, I've seen her quote in some of the writings on the NAR, but I would not endorse that statement.

GROSS: So I can't presume to speak for Rick Perry or know what he believes or know his relationship to the New Apostolic Reformation, but how do you interpret it, that the rally was organized in part by people affiliated with the New Apostolic Reformation and that, you know, several of them were represented on stage with him, including standing next to him when he spoke? How do you interpret that in terms of what Rick Perry's connection is with the New Apostolic Reformation?

WAGNER: Now, I can - I don't know Rick Perry personally, so I can only surmise, because that question kept running through my mind as well. My suspicion is that when Rick Perry arrived at The Response, he

had never heard of the New Apostolic Reformation. The only thing is that he is a governor that believes in prayer. And so not only will he call large prayer rallies like The Response, but he will also, from time to time, have people pray for him personally.

And one of the people who has prayed for Rick personally has been Alice Patterson, and so they bonded to the extent that when Rick said, well, let's have a prayer rally - Alice, would you mind organizing it, and she said yes - that was with no previous knowledge that there was any such thing as a New Apostolic Reformation on his part.

GROSS: But at the same time, Alice Patterson is one the people who - her mission is to bring the views of the New Apostolic Reformation into government. Correct me if I'm wrong on that.

WAGNER: That's right. No, you're right.

GROSS: So it's interesting that she should be praying with Rick Perry.

WAGNER: It's very interesting. And what it shows is that Rick Perry is a political figure that strongly believes in prayer, perhaps - well, you can't say more strongly than others, but as strong as some.

GROSS: Strongly believes in prayer and is also connecting himself with somebody who wants to bring the views of the New Apostolic Reformation into government. And he is a government leader who wants to run for president.

WAGNER: That's very true. But I wish somebody would ask Rick Perry how much he knew about what you just said before he invited Alice to help organize it.

GROSS: So in this respect, in terms of making inroads into government, would Rick Perry's prayer rally from August be considered by people in the New Apostolic Reformation as something of a victory?

WAGNER: Yes. A governor of a state sees and articulates, verbalizes, that the nation is in such dire straits that we need to do things differently, one of which we need to make more direct contact with heaven through prayer, and he called the prayer rally. And so we - yes, we would see that as a significant step forward.

GROSS: My guest is C. Peter Wagner, one of the leading apostles in the New Apostolic Reformation, or NAR. One correction, in the interview I referred to an article about the participation of the NAR in the Rick Perry prayer rally. I attributed the article to the wrong publication. It was actually in the Texas Observer. More with Dr. Wagner after a break. This is FRESH AIR.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

GROSS: My guest is C. Peter Wagner, a leading apostle in the New Apostolic Reformation, or NAR, a Christian movement that wants dominion over politics, business, education and the arts. Some people

interpret that as theocracy, but Wagner says the NAR just wants to work within our democracy to bring the kingdom of heaven to government and society.

The word demon figures prominently into the New Apostolic Reformation. Demons figure prominently in your religious views. You and other people in the New Apostolic Reformation have described demons as if they are alive and functioning in America and in other countries around the world. So do you believe that there are actually, like, living demons, like Satan's representatives who are functioning in America now?

WAGNER: Absolutely. As a matter of fact, in Oklahoma City there is a annual meeting of a professional society called the International Society of Deliverance Ministers, which my wife and I founded many years ago. This is a society of a large number, a couple hundred, Christian ministers who are in the ministry of deliverance.

Their seven-day-a-week occupation is casting demons out of people. And they have professional expertise in this and they happen to meeting - be meeting right now. My wife is one of them. She's written a whole book called "How to Cast Out Demons." And I don't do that much; once in a while, when I get in a corner, I might. But that's been her ministry. And so I've been very, very close to that for years. We've been married for 60 years.

GROSS: Do you believe that there are people in American politics who are possessed by demons?

WAGNER: We don't like the word - to use the word possessed because that means they don't have any power of their own. We like to use the word afflicted or, technical term, demonized. But there are people who - yes, who are directly affected by demons, not only in politics, but also in the arts, in the media and religion, in the Christian church, and...

GROSS: How can you tell? How can you tell? Like, when somebody's been afflicted by a demon, how - how can you tell?

WAGNER: You can - sometimes they know. Sometimes the demon has identified itself to the person. Sometimes you can tell by manifestations of superhuman, un-human behavior. Sometimes you can tell by skilled deliverance ministers.

My wife has a five-page questionnaire that she has people fill out before she ministers to them. So she asks the kind of questions that a medical doctor would ask to find out, to diagnose an illness. So she actually does diagnostic work on people to discover not only if they had demons, but what those demons might be.

GROSS: I don't know if you're comfortable naming names, but is there anybody - are there any people in American government today that you would single out as having been afflicted with a demon?

WAGNER: No. I wouldn't want to do that.

GROSS: You wouldn't want to do that. Let me ask you this, and I know you don't want to name names, but if somebody, say, in Congress was a homosexual and was out about that, would that necessarily mean that they were demonized?

WAGNER: I don't think so. It might. Or it might not. And there's plenty of heterosexuals that are demonized, I mean persistent adulterers...

GROSS: I ask that only because I know that you're very opposed to homosexuality. And I think - would it be fair to say that you see homosexuality as a satanic expression?

WAGNER: Well, I don't think - let me put it a different way. I think - I do not think homosexuality is the - is the will of God. I don't think it's God's plan A.

GROSS: Okay. So are there demons in other religions? Like, you made it clear, for instance, that in Japan what you would ideally like to see, what you pray for is that the Shinto religion and Buddhism kind of give way to Christian views that coincide with the New Apostolic Reformation. So does that mean that those religions are, like, not right, or are they demonic?

WAGNER: Well, it means they're not part of the kingdom of heaven. It means they're part of the kingdom of darkness. An apostle, a friend of mine in Nepal, once told me that every Christian believer in Nepal that he knows of has been delivered from demons, that their former Hindu religion had implanted or the demons had gained access and that in order to become Christian believers, the demons had to be cast out. Of course, we have many examples in the Bible of the same thing.

GROSS: Now, my impression is that some people in the New Apostolic Reformation, correct me if I'm wrong, feel that the growth of Islam in the United States is dangerous and that mosques are demonic or that demons dwell within?

WAGNER: Well, first of all, I wouldn't want to give the impression that the NAR denies the plurality of religion. We honor each religion in a society like our American society.

However, we feel that - believe in Jesus, and Jesus has told us to go and preach the kingdom of God, and part of that is the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. And people who do not believe in Jesus Christ are not candidates for the kingdom of heaven. So our desire is that everybody be a candidate.

So therefore we would like Muslims to become Christians, but in the meantime, if they're here in America, we don't oppose them. I'm sorry that some radicals speak up strongly against having a mosque in their neighborhood, and I don't think that's patriotism. I think America needs to make room for liberty.

GROSS: C. Peter Wagner is a leading apostle in the New Apostolic Reformation. He'll be back in the second half of the show. I'm Terry Gross, and this is FRESH AIR.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. I'm Terry Gross, back with C. Peter Wagner, one of the leading apostles in the New Apostolic Reformation, or NAR. Apostles and prophets from this movement played a prominent part in Rick Perry's August prayer rally.

After I talked about that on FRESH AIR with Rachel Tabachnick, who has reported on the NAR, we invited Dr. Wagner to talk about this movement. He's the person who named it and became the convening apostle of the International Coalition of Apostles. They believe there are living prophets and apostles among us. I asked him to explain what it means to be an apostle.

WAGNER: The Bible teaches that apostles - related to prophets and also teachers - should form the basis of the government of the church. Now, up till now, recently, most churches in America functioned on a democratic system, so that the authority in the churches and the authority in the denominations resided in groups of people.

And, of course, that's what we're used to politically in America, so that fits in very well with our culture. But in terms of the role of the apostle, 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. And the two key words are authority and individuals, and individuals as contrasted to groups. So now, apostles have been raised up by God who have a tremendous authority in the churches of the New Apostolic Reformation. And I think this is the most radical difference between the old and the new.

GROSS: So as an apostle, do you have special insight, special powers?

WAGNER: God has chosen certain people from the church to have the gift of prophecy. And it says in the Old Testament, in the book of Amos, that God does nothing unless he first reveals his secrets to his servants, the prophets.

So that's a very key role. It hasn't been recognized by the church very much up until the New Apostolic Reformation, but we recognize the role of prophet. And God speaks to them, and so those of us who are apostles are closely related to - not every prophet, but to certain prophets. And so we get a lot of our guidance from God through them.

GROSS: One of the beliefs that unifies people in the New Apostolic Reformation is a belief in dominion, that God gave humans, through Adam and Eve, the responsibility of dominion. God gave man, quote, "dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." So since you see it as your responsibility of dominion, you've described - or people of the New Apostolic Reformation have described this as taking dominion over the, quote, "seven mountains."

So this means taking over dominion over business, government, media, arts and entertainment, education, family and religion. How are we to interpret that? What does that mean, taking dominion over these seven areas?

WAGNER: Yeah. Well, that's a fair description of where we're coming from, Terry. In terms of taking dominion, we don't - we wouldn't want to - we use the word dominion, but we wouldn't want to say that we have dominion as if we're the owners or we're the rulers of, let's say, the arts and entertainment mountain.

What we strive to do, and our goal is to have people in the arts and entertainment mountain who are committed to the kingdom of God. So therefore, we use the adjective they're kingdom-minded believers, and we - our goal is to try to have as many kingdom-minded believers in positions of influence in the arts and entertainment mountain as possible. And the reason for that is to help bring the blessings of heaven to all those in the arts and entertainment mountain.

GROSS: Is it also to eventually try to convert all of those in the arts and entertainment mountain? Because it seems like one of the ultimate goals is bringing people to Christ.

WAGNER: Well, that would be true, to convert not all, because we don't believe that we're ever going to convert everybody, but open the doors for as many people in the arts and entertainment mountain as possible to form a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Yes, that would be part of what we feel is our mission.

GROSS: Now, how does this translate into government?

WAGNER: Same way. Now - and one of the things that I've been curious about is that dominion has been interpreted as if it were implanting a theocracy - say, if we talk about the government mountain - so that the church controls the government as it does in many Islamic countries and as Constantine did with the Christian church. We think that's all a mistake. We believe in working with any - with whatever political system there is. In America, it's democracy and working with administrative, judicial and legislative branches of the government the way they are, but to have as many kingdom-minded people in influence in each one of these branches of government as possible so that the blessings of the kingdom will come.

So we would like to see the blessings of heaven characterize our society. We would like to see a city characterized by justice and peace and righteousness and equality and prosperity and health and honesty, and almost everybody agrees with us. These are the values of heaven. We don't want racism. We don't want poverty or divorce or corruption or child abuse or crime. That is our...

GROSS: Or homosexuality, right? Just to interject that. Just...

WAGNER: Oh - I didn't put that in my list.

GROSS: No? Because my impression is it would be on a lot of people's lists who share many of your beliefs. Mm-hmm.

WAGNER: It would be, but that's an issue that I - yeah. It would be, granted, be the top of some people's list. I just think there are more important things right now.

GROSS: Mm-hmm. You think that the prophets in the New Apostolic Reformation get word directly from God, and the apostles follow the prophets. So are there prophets in the movement that believe things that you say you don't believe, such as that there shouldn't be mosques built in the United States, that Islam is kind of inherently bad or that homosexuality is an expression of demons? And if so...

WAGNER: Now when we do...

GROSS: Yeah - uh-huh.

WAGNER: The Bible says that we know in part, and we prophesize in part. And it also says the prophecy must be judged. So it means that we do not take every prophecy that's given at face value. It has to be - it has to be judged by others and confirmed by others in order to be legitimate. So therefore, when some prophets make a statement that is not judged, the rest of the apostolic prophetic movement should not be implicated by what an individual prophet says, because some prophecies go wrong.

GROSS: Mm-hmm.

WAGNER: Some prophets themselves admit, you know, I missed that one. I said the wrong thing. So they must not all be taken at literal face value at first.

GROSS: So, if I may just change subjects a little bit. You co-founded the World Prayer Center in Colorado Springs with Ted Haggard, who later confessed that he'd had sex with men and used drugs. I mean, he was kind of forced out of the closet on that one. What was your reaction when you found out that your friend and partner in this project was actually having sexual relationships with men, which is not something that you approve of? You don't apparently disapprove of it to the extent of calling it demonic, the way some other people in the New Apostolic Reformation do, but you certainly disapprove. How did that affect you?

WAGNER: I don't think I've still recovered. His - just by a matter of history, a few years before that happened, my wife Doris and I left the World Prayer Center, turned it back to Ted and went on a different route here in Colorado Springs. So we were not closely associated. But when his homosexuality was revealed, it was a devastating blow to me, because not only was he pastor of this influential church, he was president of the National Association of Evangelicals. And he was a representative of all of us, and we all had a great deal of confidence in him. But one of the things that mitigated that was that several years before that, when we were still walking closely together, Cindy - God told Cindy Jacobs that he was - as a prophet, that he was living a homosexual life. And so...

GROSS: And so because Cindy Jacobs is a prophet, God told her this.

WAGNER: Yeah. And so we were together in a social occasion at my house, and she took Ted and his wife Gail, along with another friend we've mentioned, Chuck Pierce, in another room of the house and confronted him with it. And of course, he totally denied it, but she knew. She knew from God that he was

living a double life at that time. So - and she told us so, you know, I already knew it prophetically, but it still was a huge blow.

GROSS: So what's the lesson there, that your friend and associate betrayed you in not being honest, or that he lives in a world that's so - is so repressive of homosexuality that he had to deny that part of himself?

WAGNER: I really don't know how to analyze that, Terry. That's a little beyond my ability.

GROSS: Mm-hmm. Okay. But you still feel shaken by the whole experience.

WAGNER: I still do. I mean, it's - when you mention it, it kind of shakes me again.

GROSS: Now, do you feel shaken because you were betrayed by somebody you were close to, or do you feel shaken because you'd been that close to somebody who was gay?

WAGNER: No, it wasn't the second. It was the first.

GROSS: It was the first. OK.

WAGNER: Betrayed by somebody who was close to me...

GROSS: Yeah.

WAGNER: ...and not only close to me, but an influential figure in the whole evangelical movement.

GROSS: Right.

WAGNER: That's - I mean, if he was exposed for adultery and heterosexuality, I would have had the same feeling.

GROSS: My guest is C. Peter Wagner, one of the leading apostles in The New Apostolic Reformation, or NAR, which is trying to expand its influence in government, business, education and the arts. More with Dr. Wagner after a break. This is FRESH AIR.

(BREAK)

GROSS: My guest is C. Peter Wagner, a leading apostle in The New Apostolic Reformation, a Christian movement that wants dominion over politics, business, education and the arts. Some people interpret that as theocracy. Wagner says the NAR just wants to work within our democracy to bring the kingdom of heaven to government and society. Several apostles and prophets helped organize or appeared on stage at Rick Perry's August prayer rally.

On October 3rd, there's going to be a rally in Washington, D.C., and this is being organized - and, again, correct me if I'm wrong - by John Benefiel, who's the head of the Heartland Apostolic Reformation Network and Cindy Jacobs, who is a prophet and president of the missionary training group Generals International. And this is supposed to - it's called 40 Days of Light Over Washington. And the website says, "The purpose of this siege is to change the atmosphere over the city of Washington, D.C. through our worship, preparing the way for our legislators to function on a different playing field as we release 40 days of light over the city."

And the picture for this rally is of the Capitol with a cross on top of it, like an illuminated cross. So how much do you know about this rally?

WAGNER: Well, I must say that both John Benefiel and Cindy Jacobs are very close to me. They're both aligned apostolically with me. So I am part of what they do, and they're part of what I do. I have not been part of the development of these 40 Days Over D.C., but because I'm so close to Cindy and John, I have given my tacit affirmation to what they're doing, and I still do that. I happen to know the artist who drew that picture, and I'm not sure that that might not be interpreted as a theocracy.

GROSS: Yeah. Well, you know, it would be easy to see it that way, because you've got...

WAGNER: I know it.

GROSS: ...this image of a cross kind of imposed on our nation's Capitol building.

WAGNER: I really - I think that was probably a mistake.

GROSS: Mm-hmm.

WAGNER: I think that the message that the artist intended to convey was that the kingdom-minded people would have a lot of influence in the Capitol, but I don't believe our Capitol ever wants a cross on top of it, because that would be a sign of a theocracy.

GROSS: Okay. You know, you mentioned that you're close to John Benefiel, one of the organizers of this rally. Something he said that was very controversial, he called the Statue of Liberty a demonic idol. Do you agree with that?

WAGNER: I - let me say that I don't have enough information to disagree with it. I know it was given to the nation by - as a gift from the Freemasons of France. And there might be some demonic power that he and his friends discern in that statue, but I don't want to - I really don't want to make a strong commitment one way or another to that one.

GROSS: So I want to get back to the idea of dominionism, of - that people in the New Apostolic Reformation see it as a major goal to take dominion over the, quote, "seven mountains," business, government, media, arts and entertainment, education, family and religion. Now, again, correct me if I'm

wrong, because, you know, you are part of this and you can help explain it. So if I make a mistake, you correct me. One of the tools, it's my understanding, is spiritual mapping.

I think one of the goals of the reformation, as I understand it, is instead of evangelizing one by one by one, one person by one person, to kind of evangelize a whole community, a whole neighborhood or a whole city, and that one of the ways of doing this is to find the demons that are preventing that from happening, expel those demons, and then you have, you know, an area that is ready to receive Christ. Is that kind of an accurate description?

WAGNER: That's a - yeah. That's a - I don't need to correct you.

GROSS: Okay. So how do you get rid of a demon? Like, we've talked about casting demons out of individuals. And also, you're trying to get demons out of cities, out of neighborhoods, demons that you think are holding people back from finding Christ. So how do you cast out a demon in a city?

WAGNER: When you talk about demons over cities, we're talking about what sometimes what we refer to as territorial spirits. And they're more high-ranking spirits than the hierarchy of darkness, and they're more powerful and they require different approaches. And it's not as easy as commanding them to leave in the name of Jesus. So sometimes there has to be repentance. Sometimes there has been bloodshed in that city that needs to be repented of. There has been idolatry in the city that has ruined the land. There's been immorality that needs to be repented of. And there are several social things that people really need to acknowledge that they're bad and repent of them and ask forgiveness, and that will open the way to some of it. But it's - we're now getting into a very complex thing that would take much longer than we have to explain. But let me just repeat what I said previously. There are certain individuals in our whole movement that have special gifts for doing that, and they're helping lead the way in weakening the power of the spirits.

We don't believe we can kill demons. Sometimes we don't believe we can completely get them away a city, but we can reduce their power. We can bind them, and then we can move strongly with the kingdom of God into the city.

GROSS: So while we're on the subject of demons, some of our listeners may remember - because there was a video of this that was pretty viral on the Internet, and this went viral during the 2008 presidential campaign when Sarah Palin was running for vice president. Before that, a Kenyan pastor, Thomas Muthee had - or is it Muthee?

WAGNER: Muthee.

GROSS: Muthee, thank you - had anointed Sarah Palin at the Wasilla Assembly of God, a Pentecostal church in Wasilla, while praying for Jesus to protect her from the spirit of witchcraft. Now, he is actually somebody - he's Kenyan, and he's somebody who had actually starred in the first Transformation film. And the Transformation films are films that are produced by people in the New Apostolic Reformation. So he's obviously connected to the movement, and this made him a star within the movement.

What does it mean to protect somebody in politics like Sarah Palin from the spirit of witchcraft?

WAGNER: Well, what Thomas was probably doing - and he and I are friends, also - what he was probably doing was speculating that there would be some people who practiced witchcraft and other forms of the occult who would try to take Sarah Palin down through certain rituals or curses or other techniques that witches have, and try to destroy her through those things. And I think Thomas was praying a shield of protection around Sarah so that she would not be affected by them.

GROSS: Is that, do you think, an appropriate and a beneficial ceremony to have for somebody who is in politics?

WAGNER: My personal opinion?

GROSS: Yes.

WAGNER: I don't think it should be public. I think it should be private.

GROSS: In other words, it should be done, but not in a public place.

WAGNER: But not in a public way.

GROSS: What's the difference between doing it in public and doing it in private?

WAGNER: Because if you do it in public, we get the kind of flack that you're reflecting.

GROSS: Mm-hmm.

WAGNER: And the kind of criticism, and there's no need to make that overt. We can just do that - probably could do that in her kitchen. We don't need a whole congregation to do it in.

GROSS: But - so you think it's useful and protective, but a mistake to do it in public.

WAGNER: I do. That's my opinion.

GROSS: My guest is C. Peter Wagner, one of the leading apostles in the New Apostolic Reformation, or NAR, which is trying to expand its influence in government, business, education and the arts. More after a break. This is FRESH AIR.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

GROSS: My guest is C. Peter Wagner, a leading apostle in the New Apostolic Reformation, a Christian movement that wants dominion over politics, business, education and the arts.

So one of the things that you are expecting, and I don't know when, is the return of Jesus and the end times. Yes?

WAGNER: Correct.

GROSS: What are you expecting? Like, what do you think will happen?

WAGNER: Okay. Now, what I think will happen is that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all nations, that we will begin, as Jesus said to his disciples, begin making disciples of nations. We'll see the values of the kingdom of God spreading. I think the world is going to get better and better, not worse and worse. And I think that...

GROSS: So you don't believe in the Rapture and the tribulations.

WAGNER: I used to.

GROSS: But now?

WAGNER: But I don't - I don't see how it fits now into what God is showing us. That's a good question, incidentally. And so I don't - no, I don't believe in that. But what I believe is that I take very seriously, in the book of Acts, what Peter said. Peter said in a speech recorded in the book of Acts - and I've got my Bible. Let me just read that. It said that God may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before - we believe that means that God will send Jesus again - whom heaven must receive, where he is now.

And we believe that Jesus is at the right hand of God, the Father - whom heaven must receive until the times of the restoration of all things. And so what we believe is that God has sent us out to restore things to see his kingdom come, his will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. And then when that happens enough, Jesus will return, and he will return to a very strong world, reflecting the kingdom of God, and not to a miserable world like much of our world is today.

GROSS: Now, what is the role of Jews and Israel in heralding or preparing for the second coming?

WAGNER: Well, we take literally what the Bible says. We believe that Israel composes the people of God, and that they have fallen away at the moment, but that God has grafted the Gentiles into the same roots. So that's why we're very strong supporter of Israel, because we feel that Israel is the root of our faith. And so we support Israel strongly. We know that there's a - there's not really good religious freedom in Israel. We're very sorry about that.

But the Bible says that someday - and don't ask me how this is going to happen, because it seems impossible - that all of Israel will be saved, that they'll all believe in Jesus. So we just take that by faith, and none of our activities are geared toward that or anything else, but we just believe that that's going to happen. So before Jesus returns, Israel, as a social group, will acknowledge Jesus Christ as their messiah.

GROSS: So one of the reasons or the major reason that you support Israel is because you believe one day the Jews in Israel will basically convert to Christianity and accept Jesus as their savior.

WAGNER: Well, yeah, except they don't like - they don't like to use Christianity. They like to use Messianic Judaism.

GROSS: Right. And Messianic Judaism is a belief that Christ is the savior, but you maintain your Jewish identity while believing that.

WAGNER: Yeah.

GROSS: And, in fact, just to get back to the Rick Perry rally, the Rick Perry which got a lot of leadership support and organizational support from the New Apostolic Reformation-affiliated people, the rabbi who gave the benediction was a Messianic Jew.

WAGNER: Correct.

GROSS: Mm-hmm. So I guess that's the reason why.

WAGNER: Yeah. And we're very, very supportive of the Messianic Jewish movement, which actually is really growing very substantially. So - but the Jews don't like to be called Christians. They like to be called Messianic Jews.

GROSS: One thing about that, and this is something that confuses me. On the one hand, you say that you respect all religions, and that that's something our Constitution guarantees us. But at the same time, you want as many like-minded Christians as possible in positions in the arts, the media, the government, business, school. And also, you think Christianity is the only true faith. You'd like Jews in Israel to convert to Christianity. It just seems kind of contradictory to, you know, on the one hand, say you respect all religions, but to, on the other hand, say that you really want people to convert to yours.

WAGNER: Well, we - yes, we respect all religions, but we also respect the freedom of exercising our religion. And part of our religion is called evangelization. It's called presenting Jesus Christ to others and persuading them to become followers of Jesus Christ and walk into the kingdom of God. So - so we'd like to maintain our right in a plural - in religious pluralism of exercising our privilege of winning other people to Christianity.

GROSS: Well, I want to thank you very much for talking with us. I really appreciate it.

WAGNER: Well, thank you, Terry. And I really congratulate you for the good research that you've done.

GROSS: C. Peter Wagner is a leading apostle in the New Apostolic Reformation. You'll find the transcript of this interview and a link to my interview with Rachel Tabachnick, who has reported on the NAR, on our website, freshair.npr.org.

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