

Bent Christiansen | 5.09.2026

Strange Fire: The Many Masters of Spiritual Gifts

A History of Spiritual Gifts after the Apostles

Spiritual Gifts: A Four-Stage “Devolution”

Stage	Church Era	Label	In a Picture	What Gifts Serve
Authorized	Apostolic	N/A	“The fire God ordains”	Edification of the Body under apostolic Word
1	Early church	Institutionalization	“The fire warms the Building”	Apostolic succession, sacramental authority, church legitimacy
2	Medieval / Reformation bridge	Vindication	“The fire shows who I am”	The holy person: saint, mystic, visionary, reformer
3	19th century / Pentecostal	Self-Elevation	“I am the fire”	Elite spirituality; badge of Spirit-baptism and the deeper life; superior power
4	Latter Rain / New Apostolic	Weaponization	“The fire burns the Body — and everything else”	Apostolic network authority; divine right to exert dominion

01

“The Fire Warms the Building, not
the Body”

Institutionalization: The Early Church

PART 01 - Institutionalization: The Early Church

The Evidentiary Benchmark Begins to Shift:

- **Apostolic**: Public, observable, compels response
- **Celsus (*The True Word*; 178 AD)**: Christians “miracles” are actually sorcery / “street magic” (γοητεία)
- **Origen (*Contra Celsum*)**: only “traces” of miracles left; moral transformation provides the miracle



Caesarea Maritima, where Origen wrote
Contra Celsus, c. 248

PART 01 - Institutionalization: The Early Church

Who Speaks for God after the Apostles?

Group	How They Saw Themselves	What Spirit-Claim Validated
Catholic-Episcopal	Apostolic successors	Episcopal authority - “the throne of the apostles” (<i>sedes apostolica</i>)
Montanist	Appointed channels of the “New Prophecy”	The Paraclete speaking afresh in the church
Gnostic	The chosen few with “deeper” revelation	“Pneumatic” status and hidden apostolic knowledge
Rigorists	Purists and spiritual gatekeepers	Exclusive claim to the <i>ecclesia pura</i>

PART 01 - Institutionalization: The Early Church



A portrait mosaic of Chrysostom from the Hagia Sophia, where he preached, likely 9th–11th century.

Chrysostom (386–397 AD): The Negative Proof

"This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place."

— *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 29.1

PART 01 - Institutionalization: The Early Church

Irenaeus: Strange Fire In The Bishop's Office

"Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters... who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain charism of truth [*charisma veritatis certum*]."

— *Against Heresies* 4.26.2



Nag Hammadi Codex II, 4th century. The end of the Apocryphon of John and the opening of the Gospel of Thomas. These are the gnostic texts Irenaeus described in *Against Heresies* (c. 180 AD).

PART 01 - Institutionalization: The Early Church

Montanism: The Three-Exit Trap

The Option	The Definition	The Institutional Cost
Exit One Authoritative Prophecy	Infallible, inerrant, and <u>canonical-level</u> divine speech	Demolishes Montanism – but also episcopal visions and martyr revelations
Exit Two "Soft" Prophecy	Fallible <u>impressions</u> , dreams, ambiguous spiritual speech	Leaves a permanent opening for claiming "The Spirit said..."
Exit Three Total Cessation	Reject the continuance of revelatory gifts entirely	Surrenders credentials used against Gnosticism

PART 01 - Institutionalization: The Early Church

Augustine (c. 390-426)

- **Early logic** (*De vera religione*; 390-391 AD) argues signs ceased “to prevent the soul from growing cold by habit”
- **Late Augustine** (*City of God* 22; 413-426 AD) catalogues contemporary miracles, but they are now *per sacramenta*—absorbed into the institution's liturgical self-certification

"Nam etiam nunc fiunt miracula in eius nomine, sive **per sacramenta eius...**"

(Miracles are wrought... **through His sacraments**)



Hippo Regius, ruins of Carthage. The site where Augustine preached against the Donatists for 35 years.

02

“The Fire Shows Who I Am”

*Vindication: The Medieval Period and
Reformation Bridge*

PART 02 - Vindication: Medieval and Reformation

Gregory (540–604 AD) and the Vindication Turn:

“These miracles were necessary at the beginning of the Church...For the beginning of the Church may be compared to the planting of a young tree, which is to be tended and watered until it has taken deep root in the ground.”

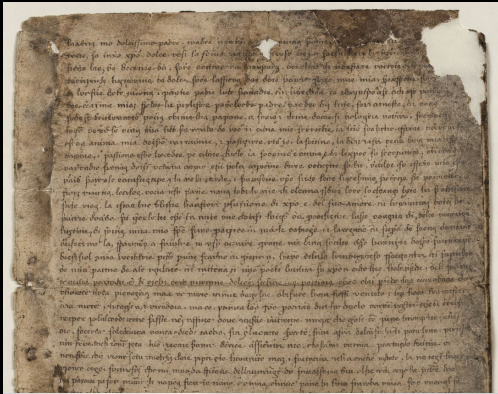
— Gregory the Great, *Homily 29 on the Gospels* — Mark 16:14–20

No longer: “This message is true.”
Now: “This person is holy.”



Piranesi – *Veduta di Campo Vaccino*, late 18th century

PART 02 - Vindication: Medieval and Reformation



The Vision as (Non-Ordained) Authorization:

Hildegard of Bingen — Pope Eugene III approved her visions at Trier in 1147/48; wrote publicly to popes, bishops, abbots, and rulers.

Catherine of Siena — Admonished Gregory XI to leave Avignon and return to Rome.

Marguerite Porete — author of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*; burned in Paris in 1310



The institution fanned the fires it could manage. It quenched the fire it could not.

PART 02 - Vindication: Medieval and Reformation

The Reformation: Partial Recovery

Luther — Every Spirit-claim must be judged by the apostolic Word.

Calvin — Signs confirmed gospel; the foundation is laid (but pastorate still embedded in civil order)

Müntzer — Spirit-dreams as revolutionary authorization; theocracy

Menno Simons — Closest recovery: gathered believers, body emphasis, no bishop, no saint-cult, no magistrate

Bottom line:

Gifts begin to be liberated because the Body is being liberated



Witmarsum monument to the "hidden church" where Menno Simons' followers met, away from Catholic and Magisterial persecutors.

03

“I Am the Fire”

Self-Elevation: The Nineteenth Century and the Making of Modern Pentecostalism

PART 03 - Self-Elevation: The 19th Century Onward

The New Master

Where We Are	What Gifts Validated
Early Church	The holy power: office, succession, sacrament, legitimacy
Medieval Church	The holy person: saint, mystic, visionary
19th Century / Early Pentecostalism	The empowered person: Spirit-baptism, anointed capacity, kingdom achievement



The Apostolic Faith Mission on Azusa Street, Los Angeles, 1907

**The fire becomes identity.
“I am the fire.”**

PART 03 - Self-Elevation: The 19th Century Onward

STEP 1: Wesley And Fletcher

Spirit and gifting drift toward experience—and then Pentecost

“I feel no sin, but all love... I have as clear an inward witness, that I am fully renewed, as that I am justified.”

— John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*

“He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.”

“Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”

“So capital is this promise... to raise the rare plant of Christian perfection...”

— John Fletcher, *On Christian Perfection*



"I felt my heart strangely warmed":
Aldersgate Street, London, shortly before WWI, where
John Wesley experienced his "perfect love"

PART 03 - Self-Elevation: The 19th Century Onward

STEP 2: Palmer and Finney

Claimability and Technique

“As it has been purchased for you, it is already yours. If you do not now receive it, the delay will not be on the part of God, but wholly with yourself.”

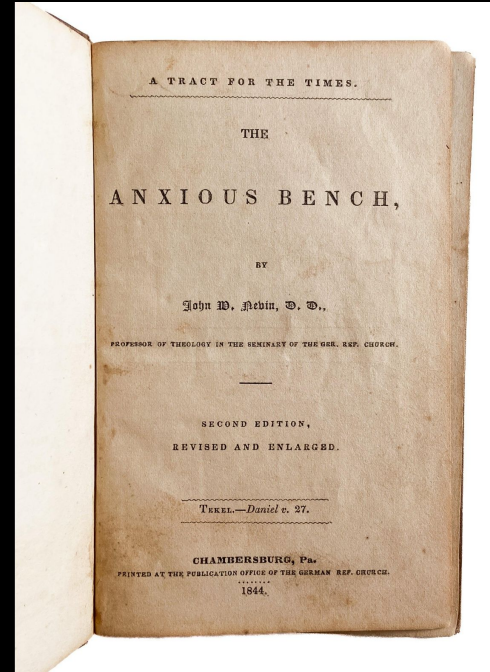
— Phoebe Palmer (1807–1874), *Faith and Its Effects*, Letter VII

“Prevailing prayer is that which secures an answer.”

“**The very manner in which God answered [Paul] shows that it was not in faith.**”

— Charles Finney (1792–1875), *Power from on High*, “Prevailing Prayer”;
Finney, *The Prayer of Faith*

Sovereign distribution becomes a spiritual technique.



Williamson Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (1843).
He called the practice "quackery" and a
"theological fabrication."

PART 03 - Self-Elevation: The 19th Century Onward

STEP 3: “Pentecostalizing” Vocabulary

By the 1890s there are:

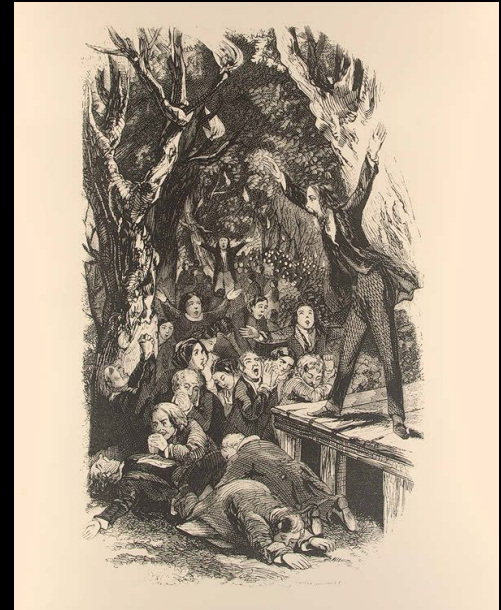
Pentecostal pulpits, Pentecostal testimonies,
Pentecostal camp meetings, Pentecostal hymns.

"Let us all go into the upper room and abide there until tongues
of fire flame from our heads."

— Daniel Steele (1875), *Love Enthroned: Essays on Evangelical Perfection*

“Holiness” grows to include power, healing, prophecy

**Pressure now builds: Since Spirit-baptism is the
experience, what is the evidence?**



Lossing-Barrett, *Lorenzo Dow and the Jerking Exercise* (1856). A Methodist revival scene depicting the “jerks” and “falling” exercises. There was also “dancing”, “rolling” and “barking”.

PART 03 - Self-Elevation: The 19th Century Onward

STEP 4: Supplying the Evidence

Parham and Topeka, 1900-1901

"I laid my hands upon her and prayed. I had scarcely completed three dozen sentences when a glory fell upon her, a halo seemed to surround her head and face, and she began speaking the Chinese language and was unable to speak English."

Spirit-baptism needed evidence.

Tongues became the exhibit.



Cleaned up image of Agnes Ozman's "Chinese" writing, published in the *Topeka Daily Capital*, January 6, 1901. A Chinese man consulted the same week responded: "No understand. Takee to Jap."

04 “The Fire Burns the Body — and Everything Else”

Weaponization: From Latter Rain to the New Apostolic Reformation

PART 04 - Weaponization: From Latter Rain to NAR

North Battleford, 1948

The Theological Reckoning

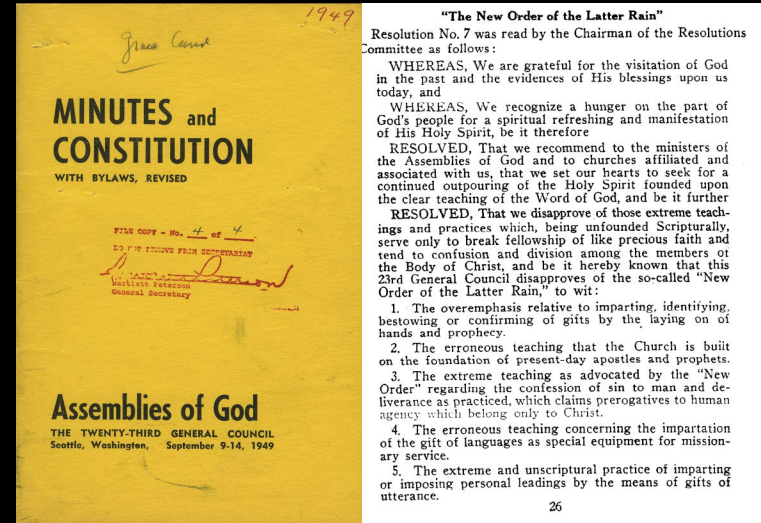
"The gift of the Spirit may be imparted by the [apostolically directed] laying on of hands of the presbytery."

— George Warnock, *The Feast of Tabernacles* (1951)

Classical Pentecostalism: How do I know I have received Spirit-baptism?

Latter Rain: Who can identify, impart, and direct my gift and calling?

Pentecostal Trilemma: Back to the Three-Exit Trap!



Resolution 7.2 — The New Order of the Latter Rain: AOG “disapproves” of “the erroneous teaching that the Church is built on the foundation of present-day apostles and prophets.”

PART 04 - Weaponization: From Latter Rain to NAR

Wagner And The “New Apostolic Reformation”

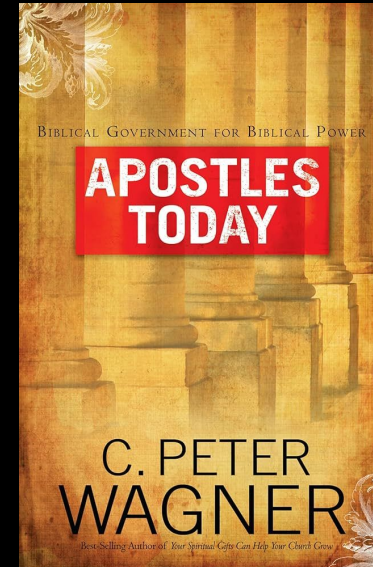
Latter Rain with “Network Effects”

"We are now living in the midst of one of the most epochal changes in the structure of the Church that has ever been recorded. I like to call it the 'Second Apostolic Age.'"

— C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today* (2006)

NAR is not a denomination. It's an **operating system** with strategic mutual support:

- Apostles govern
- Prophets direct
- Gifts are controlled
- Churches align under “covering”
- Territories are targeted
- Culture is the field of conquest



Wagner: denominational / traditional churches are “old wineskins” that resist the new work of the Spirit, in contrast to his apostolic networks

PART 04 - Weaponization: From Latter Rain to NAR

Apostolic
Reconstructionism:
The Necessary
Endgame

Seven Mountains Mandate

Official Categories — By Operational Priority

Government

Media / Entertainment

Education

Business / Economy

Religion

Family

Arts / Culture

Wallnau: "The Battle for the Mountain of Government" (Courage Tour, 2024)

NAR Actual Targets

In Order of Operational Urgency

Local, Word-Bound

Churches

Rival Hierarchies

Catholic Church, etc.

Secular Forces

Rule of Law, Institutions

The Endgame

Religion

+

Government

=

Unified
Authority

