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Grave soaking. Christian necromancy among the disciples of the New Apostolic Reformation

Abstract. The rise of the Second Apostolic Age brought about the emergence of numerous opportunities which enable the miracle-oriented individuals to connect to the spirit realm. The so-called power portals are believed to be highly influential, especially within the neo-Charismatic communities. The disciples of Peter C. Wagner, an American missionary who restored the apostolic model of leadership, appear to perceive graves as the wondrous channels between a human being and the supernatural. For the last few years, the students of Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (BSSM) from Redding in California have been practicing necromancy in the form of magical contagion, also known as grave soaking, grave sucking or mantle grabbing, which consists in soaking up the spiritual power of the deceased. The principal objective is to analyze whether the above-mentioned ritual, performed by the convinced Christians, is somehow related to magical behavior. Moreover, this particular research focuses on the proper understanding of how the law of contagion has been implemented into the activities undertaken by Bethel's students. The first part of the article emphasizes the main characteristics of the New Apostolic Reformation. The second part concentrates on the concepts such as the divine anointing and impartation, whereas the third one applies to a specific case of necromancy.

Keywords: New Apostolic Reformation, grave soaking, necromancy, law of contagion, Pentecostalism, Third Wave of the Holy Spirit, Bethel Church

1. Introduction

The American religious landscape has changed enormously in recent years. The major shift concerns the decline of denominational Christianity in favor of independent evangelism. According to Richard Flory and Brad Christerson (2017, p. 5), this particular trend has been most visible, especially when it comes to Protestants and Anglicans. As for Protestants, they started following independent preachers. Flory and Christerson also mention that: “the fastest-growing group of Christians in America from 1970 to 2010 attended either Pentecostal or Charismatic congregations. The fastest-growing subcategories of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians were neo-Charismatics (defined as those affiliated with a Charismatic congregation that is not connected with a denomination) and Apostolic (defined as affiliates of congregations that emphasize *living apostles, prophets and other Charismatic officials*)” (Flory & Christerson 2017, p. 5).

This paper concentrates on the practices implemented by the followers of the *New Apostolic Reformation (NAR)*, who have been gathered around Bethel Church in Redding (California). To be more precise, it highlights the activities taken by the students of *Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (BSSM)*. At the beginning, it is worth mentioning what the New Apostolic Reformation is and who bears responsibility for the above-stated shift. Therefore, in the first place, the main characteristics of the movement will be discussed. Secondly, the issues such as the divine *anointing* and *impartation* will be presented. Finally, a specific example of a ritual performed by the students of BSSM, that is, *grave soaking*, will be studied within the context of necromancy. The principal objective is to analyze whether the above-mentioned ritual is somehow related to magical behavior. Moreover, this particular research will also refer to the so-called *law of contagion* and its frequent usage by the convinced Christians from Bethel. It can be assumed that although the students of BSSM worship Jesus, in practice they promote tendencies that from a religious point of view, have little in common with the faith they identify with.

2. The New Apostolic Reformation

As discussed by Rodney Stark and Roger Finke (2005, p. 9), in countries where religious affiliation is not imposed, religious organizations tend to compete for the members. This particular competition could be compared to the marketplace where specific firms, selling specific products, fight for target

customers. According to the authors: “religious economies are like commercial economies in that they consist of a market made up of a set of current and potential customers and a set of firms seeking to serve that market. The fate of these firms will depend upon (1) aspects of their organizational structures, (2) their sales representatives, (3) their product, and (4) their marketing techniques” (Finke, 2005, p. 9). In other words, a particular religious group has the potential to become successful only if the leaders invest in the appropriate clergy as well as the effective evangelization techniques. The product itself should also be unique. The so-called religious entrepreneurs tend to search for various attractive solutions such as, for example, the supernatural phenomena. Flory and Christerson (2017, p. 8) note that the approach mentioned above has been implemented by neo-Charismatics (“third wave” Charismatics), that is, the believers engaged in the independent Charismatic churches as well as ministries established after 1970.

Peter C. Wagner, an extremely active and at the same time connected with the Charismatic environment – preacher, presented a specific term, namely the *New Apostolic Reformation* (NAR), for the purpose of restoring and popularizing the office of apostle which in his view had been underestimated. The movement is also recognized as *The Second Apostolic Age*. According to Wagner: “It is a *reformation* because we are currently witnessing the most radical change in the way of *doing church* since the Protestant Reformation. It is *apostolic* because the recognition of the gift and office of apostle is the most radical of a whole list of changes from the old wineskin. And it is *new* to distinguish it from several older traditional church groups that have incorporated the term *apostolic* into their official name” (Wagner, 2006, pp. 7–8). Because the New Apostolic Reformation follows the Charismatic pattern, its advocates and practitioners are commonly known as the *NARismatics*. Wagner (Wagner, 2006, p. 6) claims that The Second Apostolic Age began in 2001 and has been developing ever since. Furthermore, he clarifies the denominational and the “apostolic” model of leadership, emphasizing that the former’s locus of authority is usually found in groups, whereas that of the latter’s – in individuals. Particular denominations involve, for instance, deacon boards that could be easily compared to full-time employees. The New Apostolic Reformation, however, grants the pastor of the local church the status of the leader. When it comes to the translocal level, the apostle is perceived as the one who won the trust of the pastors and other leaders (Wagner, 2006, p. 18). Besides, the apostle is also regarded as a highly influential person who should be able to perform miracles with the aid of the Holy Spirit. It can therefore be concluded that, in general, Waganer’s major shift concerned the change from administrative bureaucracy to independence. The details of his reformation will be discussed further in this article.

With reference to Wagner's reformation, Flory and Christerson (2017, p. 2) coined the term *Independent Network Charismatic (INC) Christianity*, which directly applies to the previously mentioned independent leaders and their ministries. According to the authors, INC Christianity comprises networks of dynamic individual leaders as opposed to those gathered around specific congregations. In addition, these unaffiliated evangelists are constantly reshaping modern Christianity due to their wandering lifestyle and the large-scale activities they undertake. Flory and Christerson (2017, p. 11) also note that INC Christianity does not focus on promoting movements or organizations but instead appreciates the potential the media have, since they serve as valuable channels through which divine messages can be spread around the world. Conferences and seminars are also believed to be the key elements of this new approach to preaching. What seems to be interesting is the fact that the unaffiliated evangelists frequently cooperate, combining their efforts for common projects. However, they are distinctive in their beliefs as well as methods. Referring to the theory of the marketplace, these religious entrepreneurs, who tend to move from conference to conference and from ministry school to ministry school, provide their followers with special offers such as "words from the Lord" (prophecies), physical healing, and deliverance from evil spirits. It appears to be obvious that the more "signs and wonders" a particular leader can produce, the more powerful he or she is claimed to be.

When it comes to "signs and wonders," it is worth reflecting upon the role of John Wimber and his enormous contribution to the development of contemporary neo-Charismatic Christianity. As discussed by Flory and Christerson (2017, p. 20), Wimber and Wagner were mutually dependent to a great extent. In other words, they shared their ideas and learned from each other. Wimber, a former Quaker, converted to Christianity in his late twenties. In 1974, he started working at Fuller Theological Seminary with the intention of creating the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth which was later supervised by Wagner. That was the moment when their cooperation strengthened. According to Flory and Christerson (2017, p. 20), Wimber's involvement at Fuller enabled him to experiment with the Holy Spirit's gifts and expose the students to numerous manifestations of the supernatural. Furthermore, Wimber's confidence in his effectiveness encouraged him to start a congregation where he could perform miracles and at the same time avoid criticism from other pastors, since his experimental approach to the Holy Spirit, as well as the theological chaos he introduced, were openly called into question. Wimber's ambitious project was brought to life in the form of Anaheim Vineyard – the church which perfectly reflected his innovative vision. However, Flory and Christerson (2017, p. 21) emphasize

that Wimber's greatest achievement, when it comes to the neo-Charismatic environment, was his co-teaching with Wagner. The class called "Signs, Wonders and Church Growth" welcomed more than 800 students who had the opportunity to witness prophecies and the practice of divine healing. Moreover, Wimber's authority was gradually growing as a result of the conferences he would hold worldwide. People craved for supernatural phenomena, and Wimber was the one who launched the "product" on the religious market. In other words, he turned out to be a successful religious entrepreneur. In 1994, the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church (TAVC) organized the event widely recognized as *Toronto Blessing*. John and Carol Arnott, TAVC main leaders, invited Randy Clark – a Charismatic evangelist – to preach during the revival meetings. Flory and Christerson note that: "Clark had been influenced by Rodney Howard-Brown, a South African preacher, whose ministries were known for various manifestations of the Holy Spirit, such as *holy laughter*, *falling in the Spirit*, shaking, and crying. During Clark's time at TAVC those same manifestations appeared among those attending the revival meetings. The church began to hold meetings six nights a week for an entire year as people continued to experience physical manifestations such as rolling on the ground, crying, laughing, and sometimes making animal-like noises" (Flory & Christerson, 2017, pp. 23–24). Wimber, responsible for the Vineyard movement, advised against extreme practices taking place at TAVC; however, the Arnotts refused to obey. In consequence, they were disaffiliated from the Vineyard. Wimber's death in 1997 provoked a discussion among the most controversial Charismatic leaders, and its main topic concerned the question of whether or not the affiliation to a specific movement was necessary. To be more precise, some of the leaders who had had ties with Wimber decided to start working independently. It was no longer a movement they wanted to represent. Conversely, they recognized the potential of a unique product, and therefore, a great number of the unaffiliated evangelists emerged on the religious market, changing at the same time the American religious landscape. Instead of representing a specific group, they began to represent themselves on a large scale. The rise of INC Christianity became a reality.

On the basis of what has been stated above, it can be assumed that Wimber's contribution to the development of the New Apostolic Reformation seems to be indisputable, although Wimber himself represented the movement, not the network. First of all, it was Wimber who healed Wagner during one of the class sessions at Fuller. That particular event influenced Wagner's involvement in promoting the so-called *power evangelism*. Wagner understood that the more supernatural phenomena a preacher can evoke, the more successful he or she becomes. Moreover, Wimber's wandering lifestyle, as well as his increasing

popularity, encouraged Wagner to reflect upon the idea of restoring the office of apostle. Flory and Christerson (2017, p. 28) explain that not only Wimber but also Cindy Jacobs had a considerable impact on Wagner's later ideas, especially when it comes to the question of spiritual warfare because she drew his attention to the importance of praying for cities and nations. As a result, Wagner focused on the concept of *territorial spirits* that, in his view, attack a particular group of people in a specific area, preventing them from embracing Christianity. The issue of *strategic-level spiritual warfare* (SLSW) has been raised publicly. Nevertheless, Wimber could not agree with the new approach and, in consequence, ended his long-term cooperation with Wagner. These two influential evangelists permanently separated. Flory and Christerson (2017, p. 30) note that in 1998, after the breakup, Wagner established the *Wagner Leadership Institute* (WLI), whose main purpose has been to train future leaders in accordance with the apostolic model of leadership. His institute is believed to be the largest training center responsible for promoting the INC teachings. Wagner's vision aims at finding the kingdom of God on earth. For this particular reason, those influential leaders (apostles) are expected to sacrifice themselves to participate and supervise the *Seven Mountains Culture*. In other words, they are expected to penetrate specific areas of social life such as religion, education, family, media, business, arts and entertainment, where the apostolic work should be done with the utmost care.

Concluding this section, it may be argued that both Wimber and Wagner shaped the contemporary American religious landscape, which had previously been mostly bureaucracy-oriented. Wimber's openness to signs and wonders inspired Wagner, who at the same time noticed the potential of *power evangelism*. The shift from local pastors to translocal apostles has led to the emergence of numerous spiritual ministries within the neo-Charismatic environment. For decades, highly influential leaders have been drawing the attention of those in need for supernatural phenomena. What appears to be worth mentioning is that Wagner's apostles are not confined to one location. Conversely, work across the globe putting the founder's plan into practice.

3. Transferable Anointing

With reference to what has been stated above, it is essential to note that INC Christianity relies on competitive as well as unique selling points such as: "(1) experiences of the miraculous, (2) opportunities for individuals' direct participation in these miraculous experiences, and (3) the promise of social transformation" (Flory & Christerson, 2017, p. 84). When it comes to superna-

tural phenomena, the opportunity to experience them is tantamount to direct participation, since they are interconnected. Divine healing encounters with demonic forces and prophecies are believed to attract the greatest attention, especially among needy people. It may well be the case that the sense of empowerment plays a decisive role in choosing the most appropriate ministry. Moreover, it should also be mentioned that Wagner's training centers promote experimentation within the context of successful evangelism, and that is why the advocates of the apostolic model of leadership tend to be active participants instead of being passive listeners. When preaching, they encourage the attendees to interact and at the same time to demonstrate their openness to the workings of the Holy Spirit. Since the main purpose of this study is to provide a better insight into the specific practices introduced by the individuals who represent Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (BSSM), the concepts such as the anointing and impartation will be discussed thoroughly.

Thomas J. Csordas (1994, p. 45) recognizes the so-called *performative repertoire of Charismatic healing* which can be further divided into separate categories with regard to how a particular act contributes to the whole process. The category of *empowerment* appears to be of the highest significance for this paper. The author (1994, p. 46) explains that it comprises the acts which concern the transfer of the divine power. Therefore, the aforementioned anointing, as well as impartation, perfectly fit into this classification. With respect to the anointing, the author notes that it usually applies to a physical sensation, for example, trembling, heaviness or heat and proves the working of the supernatural. Furthermore, the anointing tends to manifest itself as the feeling of empathy, compassion, or sympathy, indicating at the same time whether or not a person responds to the divine activity. Csordas (1994, p. 49) emphasizes that "for Charismatic healers, experience of an anointing is taken as a sign that a healing is occurring or is about to occur. This sign may be evident only to the healer as a sense of image, but in some circumstances may also be evident to a patient."

As reported by Candy Gunther Brown (2011, pp. 8–10), healing practices have been experiencing a renaissance in Europe and North America. What also seems to be noteworthy is that the neo-Charismatic perception of a disease corresponds to the one typical of many African, Asian, and Latin American cultures. These particular communities believe in a mutual dependence between good health and a good relationship with the spiritual world. Brown (2011, pp. 8–10) comments on the direct intervention of the supernatural, claiming that "the Holy Spirit's anointing, or the oil-like spread of divine power and love, is caught rather than taught, and it can be imparted or transferred to others – through the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, close

physical proximity, objects like prayer clothes, or even contact with modern communications media.” Close physical proximity plays a central role in this study, since the aforementioned religious practices the students of *BSSM* are engaged in, such as transferring the divine power, are based mainly on the touch. Brown (2011, p. 9) refers to the divine power also within the context of the frequently used metaphors whose aim is to visualize the workings of the Holy Spirit. She discusses the concept of electrical waves which can be compared to an effective portal enabling the believers to come into contact with the supernatural. The author emphasizes that the anointing or, in other words, love energy should be associated mainly with the idea of sharing, and for the neo-Charismatic communities, the process of the divine transfer together with the expected benefits, seem to be even more important than passive faith, especially that faith is not perceived as the only factor when it comes to receiving healing.

According to pastor Randy Clark (2006), healing is more contagious than disease and therefore, it should be spread among the congregation. He introduces the notion of impartation with the purpose of communicating that the anointing is available to everyone because the divine power turns out to be transferable. Rodney W. Francis also alludes to Clark’s teachings by saying that: “When I speak of impartation I mean the ability to give unto others that which God has given to us [...] either sovereignly, or through other anointed vessels (messengers) of God [...] There is an invisible flowing of spiritual ability from one to the other. That invisible flowing goes from the spirit and heart of the impartor through the arms and hands into the spirit and heart of the one having hands laid on them” (Internet source: *The Gospel Faith Messenger*). The category of empowerment presented by Csordas (1994, p. 45) comprises the act of laying on of hands which is directly connected with the ministry of impartation due to the fact that, as mentioned before, the touch plays a vital role in the process of transferring the spiritual gifts. The author notes that laying on of hands should be interpreted in the light of two separate dimensions, namely, as a gesture and as a fully elaborated technique of the body (Csordas, 1994, p. 51). The former includes a gesture of intimacy, protection and control, whereas the latter applies to “a hand, or two, on top of the head; a hand on the forehead, sometimes touching with the fingertips only and sometimes such that a supplicant’s face is virtually covered by the healer’s palm; a single hand on the shoulder; a hand on the chest and one on the back, or on the forehead and behind the head [...]; or a hand laid directly over an afflicted body part” (Csordas, 1994, p. 51). The author also refers to the harmful effects the touch may evoke, taking the performative force of the act into consideration. In his view, the supplicant’s direct interaction with the healer results in a sudden

release of large amounts of energy which in consequence affects the supplicant's contents of memory. What appears to be interesting is the fact that the Christian concept of energy has a lot in common with the one characteristic of New Age, especially when it comes to healing. Moreover, Csordas (1994, p. 55) admits that in Christian communities, the touch symbolizes solidarity in terms of shared values.

To summarize, the anointing understood as the divine power can be transferred, and the process of sharing the spiritual gifts is known as impartation. Lying on of hands, which is one of the performative acts related to Charismatic healing, enables the healer to channel the energy to the supplicant. However, this particular practice can only occur provided "the source" of the divine power is still alive. What happens in the situation when the healer dies and, therefore, is no longer able to touch the supplicant deliberately? Is it possible for the supplicant to receive the anointing from the deceased? Are graves the wondrous portals between a living person and the dead body? The following section will broaden the discussion on the question of impartation as well as the conditions in which it becomes feasible.

4. Grave soaking

Wagner's apostolic model of leadership, which has been promoted for decades, attracts a lot of contemporary, widely influential leaders such as Bill Johnson who has been associated mainly with the famous Bethel Church in Redding (California). The foundation of his ministries was considerably shaped by Wimber whose teachings on the supernatural had drawn Johnson's attention. In 1994, Johnson and his wife, Beni, visited the Toronto Airport Vineyard that has been best known for the aforementioned Toronto Blessing. The working of the Holy Spirit, witnessed by Johnson, enhanced his confidence in power evangelism as well as its positive outcomes. It should be mentioned that divine healings, prophecies from God and deliverances from evil spirits have been the hallmarks of Johnson's ministries for a number of years. In 1996, Johnson was appointed pastor of Bethel. However, he expressed no interest in working under the denominational structure. As a result, he disaffiliated from the Assemblies of God in favor of the model provided by Wagner. On top of that, Johnson also became involved in teaching at the Wagner Leadership Institute (WLI) where he could pass his knowledge to prospective apostles.

Since this study focuses on a specific ritual that was performed by the members of Bethel, an additional question should be clarified. According to Flory and Christerson (2017, p. 36), one of Johnson's major achievements

and, at the same time, another turning point in his career was the establishment of the previously mentioned Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (BSSM). Its emergence transformed Bethel from an isolated community to a rapidly growing representative of the INC Christianity. As discussed by the authors: “Classes include practical courses on how to pray for healing, how to deliver someone from a demonic presence, and how to receive prophetic words directly from God. BSSM students regularly go out into the Redding community and practice these techniques in shopping centers, parks, and other public places” (2017, p. 36). Although Johnson’s dedication to on-site work has decreased, Bethel has been flourishing because of its intensive cooperation with other influential leaders who form part of the apostolic network. What appears to be interesting with reference to the American religious landscape is the division Flory and Christerson (2017) suggested within the context of the apostolic networks. More specifically, they introduced two distinctive categories where the major determinant was the relationship between the key figures within the system, namely, *vertical apostolic networks* and *horizontal apostolic networks*. The former is typically hierarchical with the head apostle on top, whereas the latter neither relies on formal ties to particular members nor promotes authority. With respect to Bethel Church, it has been recognized as the one representing the horizontal type.

Referring to the principal objective of this research, one of the rituals performed by the students of BSSM should be discussed thoroughly. As mentioned before, the participants of BSSM tend to go out and put their newly acquired skills into practice among the local community. It turns out that the willingness to impart or receive the divine anointing has been extended to the area of close interaction between the living and the dead. The ritual of grave soaking, also known as grave sucking or mantle grabbing, has been advertised by prominent leaders who have been physically connected with Bethel, such as Ben Fitzgerald and Benny Hinn. The former took a group of BSSM students to England with the intention of visiting Smith Wigglesworth’s (a British Pentecostal healing evangelist) grave and, in consequence, soaking up his divine anointing, whereas the latter openly confessed that he had received empowerment while interacting with the tomb of Aimee Semple McPherson (a Canadian Pentecostal healing evangelist). In both cases, the concept of impartation appears to play a central role. Owing to that fact that no official definition of grave soaking exists, it is necessary, for the purposes of this study, to at least indicate its main characteristics. First of all, Fitzgerald’s comment on his visit to Wigglesworth’s grave should be taken into consideration: “Here we are at Smith Wigglesworth’s grave in Bradford [...]. The thing that we felt was, like the raising of the dead power and the gift of faith came on us [...].

Some students were leaning on the back of the grave, and they felt the grace and the faith just rest on them [...]. When you're coming to a place where the Holy Spirit was on that person, He still exists there. He still keeps the heritage of that person's life [...]. We are just gonna pray right now in Jesus' name, so we release, we release [...] we just release over the camera right now, we just release the anointing of God that's in this place" (Internet source: Raideragent, 2011, YouTube). Fitzgerald, a former pastor at Bethel in Redding who is currently the Director of *Awakening Europe* (a ministry focused on hosting large festivals of faith), strongly believes in the idea of *spiritual impartation* or, in other words, *recovering spiritual inheritance*. While in Bradford, he encouraged his followers to release the divine anointing by means of the camera, suggesting at the same time that electronic devices might have the potential to serve as the previously-discussed power portals. Although Fitzgerald's encounter took place in 2011, grave soaking had been promoted much earlier by the world-famous televangelist – Benny Hinn. In 1991 during a sermon, he revealed his interest in establishing contact with the supernatural at the cemetery: "One of the strangest experiences I had a few years ago was visiting Aimee's tomb in California [...]. Friday, I am gonna go and visit Kathryn Kuhlman's tomb [...]. I'll never forget when I saw Aimee's tomb. It's incredibly dramatic [...]. I felt a terrific anointing when I was there. I trembled when I visited Aimee's tomb. I was shaking all over [...]. I was trembling under the power of God. *Dear God*, I said, *I feel the anointing*. I began to weep" (Internet source: Timothy Peters, 2013, YouTube).

The above-mentioned stories can be regarded as representative examples of what Eugene Subbotsky (2010, pp. 5–6) terms *magical causality*, or in other words, *counterphysical supernatural causation*. According to the author, magical reality is based on different types of causal effects, among which the nonphysical influence of certain objects or events on other objects or events through contagion seems to be crucial for this research. Subbotsky (2010, p. 7) differentiates between *magical thinking* and *magical beliefs*. The former applies to the domain of imagination only, whereas the latter – to the real physical world. More specifically, magical thinking happens whenever an individual is aware of the supernatural and all the possible workings of particular spiritual bodies, but at the same time, he or she realizes that the actions of these entities are confined merely to the world of imagination. As for magical beliefs, an individual is convinced that the spirits have the potential to affect the reality and that their power may evoke unique phenomena. Furthermore, Subbotsky (2010, p. 7) refers to what he calls *magical behavior*, claiming that it is "a kind of behavior that asserts magical thinking and/or magical beliefs. Examples of magical behavior that asserts magical thinking include playing

games of pretend with magical characters or events, drawing magical objects, and telling magical stories. Examples of magical behavior that asserts magical beliefs include chanting a magic spell [...] in the hope that the spell would work, carrying out magical rituals with the aim of affecting natural objects or people, wearing a lucky charm, or praying to God.” When it comes to the ritual of soaking up the anointing from the deceased, it can be stated that it undoubtedly represents the consequence of the performer’s magical beliefs. In this particular case, the specific action is taken with the conviction that the accumulated power resting on the healer who died can be easily recovered (imparted).

As far as the question of imparting by means of graves is concerned, the foundations of the law of contagion should be discussed, since they may account for the origin of such ideas. Paul Rozin and Carol Nemeroff (2002, p. 206) explain that the law of contagion relies primarily on the physical contact between two objects, where one of them is the source, whereas the other – the target. As a result, the so-called *essence* is transferred, providing the recipient with new qualities. Noteworthy is also the fact that the contact between the source and target may be either direct or indirect, that is, through what Rozin and Nemeroff (2002, p. 206) call *vehicle*. Bearing in mind the nature of grave soaking, it may be assumed that the selected tomb serves as the aforementioned vehicle while the deceased plays the role of the source from whom the essence (the anointing) is transferred to the target. In this study, the target may be associated with the student of BSSM. The ritual promoted by Fitzgerald appears to correspond to what Brown (2011) says about the rule of close physical proximity and the usage of “third objects” when imparting the divine power. Rozin and Nemeroff (2002, p. 206) highlight the permanent nature of the essence by saying that: “once in contact, always in contact.” In respect of grave soaking, the permanence may apply to the divine anointing, which from a practical perspective would mean that “once anointed, always anointed.”

The practice of soaking up the essence when touching the tomb should be considered in the broader sense, bearing in mind that this particular ritual, although performed by the convinced Christians, involves the attempts to interact with the deceased in a way that is usually associated with magic. In other words, it can be stated that the students of BSSM have been performing *necromancy*. The study by Andrej Kapcár (2015) focuses on the derivation of the already mentioned expression, searching for its roots in the pre-classical Greek word *nekromanteía*, that is, *nekrós* (dead, corpse) and *manteía* (divination). As discussed by Daniel Ogden (2001), the so-called *tomb attendance*, also known as *tomb visits*, was already popular in ancient times. It seems to

be worth mentioning that the practice of grave soaking, which relates to the interaction between the dead healer and the recipient, bears a resemblance to the ancient “hero cult.” In both cases, the visits to the graves are connected with the recipient’s genuine admiration as well as respect for the entombed individual. According to Ogden: “when necromancy takes place, the living and the dead, individuals from different realms and of different conditions, meet and communicate [...]. In spatial terms, surface world and *underworld* merge in necromancy, with the result that one can speak with equal validity of the living descending into the underworld and the dead rising up out of it to meet the living” (Ogden, 2001, p. 251). Richard Kieckhefer (2014, p. 152) notes that in medieval times necromancy was associated mainly with demonic magic, whereas the necromancers, what may seem interesting, were those who had been previously ordained to lower orders or those who had been climbing the career ladder toward the priesthood. Referring to Ben Fitzgerald and the students of BSSM, the pattern appears to be similar, with Fitzgerald performing as the spiritual coach. Furthermore, Kieckhefer (2014, p. 158) emphasizes that medieval necromancers strongly believed in the workings of the supernatural such as, for instance, imparting unique powers to the recipients who had expressed their willingness to receive them. The author also concentrates on the purposes of this magical ritual, claiming that the opportunity to affect one’s mind and, in consequence, their actions played a major role. Subbotsky (2010) introduces the concept of *mind-over-mind* magic to differentiate between physical and mental reality. Precisely speaking, a spiritual coach who performs necromancy influences participants’ minds to a considerable extent. As a result, their perception of the supernatural phenomena changes. With reference to Fitzgerald and his students, it can be assumed that the ritual of grave soaking has a deeper meaning. As stated before, it primarily aims at imparting the divine power (recovering spiritual inheritance), but apart from what constitutes the main objective, there also seems to be a hidden agenda. Once the ritual has been performed, the recipient becomes aware of their extraordinary abilities. In other words, the target recognizes their potential to shape the reality by means of the essence. In addition, the coach tends to reinforce their beliefs, and the feeling of being unique can be treated as the aftermath of the transfer (impartation).

When it comes to Bill Johnson, his attitude towards grave soaking, also known as mantle grabbing, should be briefly discussed. In a 2016 interview carried out by Michael Brown, Johnson vehemently denied the allegations, stating that the worshippers had neither talked to the dead nor looked for impartation. Moreover, he condemned such practices. However, in 2012 he wrote: “There are anointings, mantles, revelations, and mysteries that have lain

unclaimed, literally where they were left, because the generation that walked in them never passed them on. I believe it's possible for us to recover realms of anointing, realms of insight, realms of God that have been untended for decades simply by choosing to reclaim them and perpetuate them for future generations" (2012, pp. 30–31). On the one hand, Johnson opposes to the ritual whose main purpose is to grab the mantle from deceased revivalists but on the other hand, he encourages his followers to recover spiritual inheritance which, as he argues, lies unclaimed. On top of that, his wife Beni Johnson also decided to soak up the divine power, lying on C.S. Lewis's grave and hugging the tomb of Charles Finney.

Last but not least, it seems to be necessary to refer to the Bible, bearing in mind that the aforementioned necromancers are believed to be the convinced Christians. Their inspiration for grave soaking might have been found in the following text: "Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet" (2 Kings 13, 21). Theoretically, the story of Elisha appears to be sufficient proof, however, this particular verse mentions a dead person whereas Fitzgerald and his group were definitely alive. Furthermore, the Scripture clearly states that the Holy Spirit resides in every believer, not only in the chosen ones (Corinthians 6, 19–20).

5. Conclusions

What emerges from this research is that the New Apostolic Reformation changed the American religious landscape to a considerable extent. The apostolic model of leadership introduced by Wagner has transformed denominational Christianity into independent evangelism. The issues such as healing ministries, prophecies and deliverance have gained popularity worldwide. The disciples of NAR have been searching for supernatural phenomena in different areas of human life. Moreover, the problem of spiritual warfare has become one of the important topics among the neo-Charismatic communities. When it comes to the anointing and impartation, the analysis has shown that the divine power is believed to be transferable, and the process of channeling the energy by means of lying on of hands can only take place when the recipient is still alive.

As far as the practice of grave soaking is concerned, the research revealed that although the students of BSSM consider themselves Christians, the ritual they performed is rooted in practices that have little in common with the faith they identify with and what seems to be important, has been associated with

magic since ancient times. Tomb attendance was formerly connected with the “hero cult,” however in the light of the aforementioned discussion, it can be assumed that this ritual has survived remarkably well. Furthermore, since grave soaking involves the attempts to interact with the deceased, it can be understood as the epitome of contemporary Christian necromancy. It should also be noted that with regard to what Subbotsky (2010) observes, Fitzgerald can be perceived as the one who both displays magical behavior and uses the mind-over-mind strategy towards his disciples with the aim of strengthening his authority.

To summarize, it has been shown in this paper that the rapid development of the New Apostolic Reformation gave rise to the emergence of new religious tendencies among which grave soaking plays a significant role. This ritual demonstrates that the law of contagion, although associated with magic mostly, has the potential to be successfully implemented in both the curriculum of Bethel Church of Supernatural Ministry and the everyday lives of the disciples of NAR. The American openness to religious novelties as well as a high demand for intense spiritual experiences may account for why combining Christian beliefs and values with typically magical behavior has met with widespread approval. It is unquestionable that the significant shift which has occurred in American religiosity has influenced believers across the globe, also in Europe, where the so-called INC Christianity has been flourishing for years. Signs and wonders have become available for everyone, and this is due to a great number of actions taken by the anointed apostles.

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