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The Apostles Who Don't Do Anything

Scripture: Acts 1:22

Code: B131118

It is not new, it is not apostolic, and it is not a reformation. – John MacArthur on the New Apostolic Reformation

What should we think of self-styled apostles who meet none of the biblical standards for apostleship? They make much of the gift of prophecy but lack the prophetic ability to identify charlatans and phonies in their own midst. They can't perform apostolic-quality miracles and healings, and their message sounds nothing like what the original apostles preached. The truth is that they don't do anything that would qualify as "apostolic" by any biblical standard.

Who are these apostles?

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is a movement pioneered by C. Peter Wagner. This is what charismatic and continuationist doctrine looks like when taken to its logical conclusion. The NAR claims that not only the gifts, but also the *office* of apostleship still continues today. And as apostles, they pretend to speak for God and wield His divine authority—but it is all merely a pretense.

What is the rationale behind this movement? According to Wagner, God's people can only ever return to pure Christianity, as seen in the early church, if they "recognize, accept, receive, and minister in all the spiritual gifts, including the gift of apostle." [1](David Cannistraci *Apostles and the Emerging Apostolic Movement* (Ventura, CA: Renew Books, 1996), p. 12.).

Why do we suggest their apostleship is a sham? According to the New Testament, an apostle had to be:

- A physical eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:7–8).
- Appointed by the Lord (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2; 10:41; Galatians 1:1).
- Able to authenticate his apostleship with miraculous signs (Matthew 10:1; Acts 2:43; 5:12; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3–4).

Undaunted by those biblical requirements, Wagner's own apostleship was confirmed under somewhat different circumstances. In 1995 two women prophesied that he had received an apostolic anointing. A second prophecy was given in Dallas in 1998 during a bizarre ceremony that Wagner now considers his ordination. [2](John MacArthur, *Strange Fire* [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013], p. 86–87)

But the "proof" of Wagner's apostleship came in 2001, in the form of an apostolic decree that God supposedly gave him to pronounce the end of mad cow disease in Europe. [3](C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians* [Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2010], p. 243) Never mind that nearly ten years later, doctors and veterinarians were still diagnosing the disease in

people and animals throughout Europe.

Wagner is unperturbed by those failures and shortcomings. Instead, he sees his ordination as the dawning of a new apostolic age. In the foreword of Ted Haggard's *The Life-Giving Church*, Wagner wrote:

The New Apostolic Reformation is an extraordinary work of God that began at the close of the twentieth century and continues on. It is, to a significant extent, changing the shape of the Protestant world. [4](Ted Haggard, *The Life-Giving Church* [Ventura CA: Regal Books, 2001], p. 14).

Wagner even goes so far as to describe this era as “The Second Apostolic Age.” His “studies indicate that it began around the year 2001,” although he doesn’t bother to explain or define what those studies were. [5](C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today* [Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2006], p. 6).

In this new age of apostles, several apostolic networks have been established. Wagner’s is called the [International Coalition of Apostles](#) (ICA). Its website contains a [global map](#) to help locate the apostles in your part of the world. According to the network, there are more than 150 apostles in the U.S. alone.

ICA claims the NAR is “heralding the most radical change in the way church is done since the Protestant Reformation.” On the [same webpage](#) Wagner defines an apostle as a

Christian leader who is gifted, taught, and commissioned by God with the authority to establish the foundational government of the Church within an assigned sphere of ministry by hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches and by setting things in order accordingly for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

But who determines when God has commissioned someone? How does one become an apostle?

Actually, it’s not too different from joining a country club. According to the [ICA website](#), the aspiring apostle must be nominated by two existing apostles who can show that he meets the ICA’s criteria. There are some fees, too.

The [pricing table](#) for apostleship is curious. The ICA charges an annual \$450 fee to be an apostle. However, Native Americans receive a \$100 discount. There’s also a couple’s rate of \$650, just in case your wife also happens to be an apostle. And you want to stay on top of your dues, because failure to renew your membership on time results in a “deactivated” apostleship—it’s not clear if that includes the deactivation of any spiritual gifts as well. All is not lost, however—a deactivated apostle can be *reactivated* for an extra \$50.

Put simply, becoming an apostle with the ICA is only slightly more difficult (and expensive) than purchasing a season pass to Disneyland.

That’s a staggeringly low bar for apostolic authority—particularly when that authority includes speaking on behalf of Almighty God. People believe in Wagner’s apostleship simply because he had the temerity *to claim it*. But you won’t find delusions of grandeur and audacious whimsy in the list of biblical requirements for apostles.

What is truly frightening is that Wagner is not an anomaly. The charismatic movement is overrun with modern apostles like Wagner. Some of its most influential leaders have claimed similar apostolic authority for themselves, dismissing the biblical standards and usurping authority the Lord exclusively bestowed on the founders of the church. Just a simple reading of the book of Acts is enough to illustrate how impotent and unfit these modern apostles are, and how their fanciful assertions have perverted and distorted the office of apostle beyond recognition.

And they are impotent. As we'll see next time, these modern apostles fall far short of the ministries of the New Testament apostles. Forget signs and wonders—these guys aren't even capable of basic discernment.

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