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UTILIZING A REFORMED SANCTIFICATION FRAMEWORK
TO ASSESS AND EVALUATE C. PETER WAGNER'S
DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

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UTILIZING A REFORMED SANCTIFICATION FRAMEWORK
TO ASSESS AND EVALUATE C. PETER WAGNER'S
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For the glory of God, from whom all blessings flow. I am but a sinner who has been shown grace, enabled to live a life pleasing to the Lord. My hope is in Christ, my Redeemer, whom I will one day see in glory.

Praise be to God for his kindness.

Ephesians 2:1–10

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PREFACE

The early twentieth-century hymn “He Will Hold Me Fast” expresses the remarkable truth of Psalm 139 that Christ upholds us with his right hand.¹ The hymn offers the security of knowing the justifying work of our Lord, who has provided our righteousness and white robes. We sing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs to one another (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16) and equip the saints for ministry and building up the church so that none are tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4:12, 14). As we grow in maturity, we look to Christ, our hope of glory (Titus 2:13).

My heart swells with joy and hope, seeing the evidence of Christ’s holding me fast. The truth of Psalm 139 is a treasure and salve to my soul. The hymn I now cherish and often sing to my soul offers hope of knowing God personally and growing in holiness by the grace of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. I praise God for the work he has done in my heart and in my family, friends, and colleagues.

I am indebted to the people who encouraged, supported, challenged, and exhorted me throughout this program. God placed all of you in my life to sanctify and bless me. I thank my extraordinary husband for his patience and gentleness. Evan, my love, thank you for nurturing my affection for theology. I love you with an enduring love that comes from our Father and Lord. Completing the degree with you by my side has been the most rewarding time. I see the man the Lord has made you to be. I cherish your

¹ Ada R. Habershon and Robert Harkness, “He Will Hold Me Fast,” in *Alexander’s Gospel Songs*, ed. Charles M. Alexander (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1908), 2. The original hymn was written by Ada R. Habershon and Robert Harkness in 1907 in reference to Ps 139:9–10. Matt Merker added to the hymn in 2013, in response to the enduring truth of Jude 20–25. Merker reduced the original four stanzas into two and added a third stanza with some modifications to the original words. Matt Merker, Ada R. Habershon, and Robert Harkness, “He Will Hold Me Fast,” Getty Music, 2022, <https://store.gettymusic.com/us/song/he-will-hold-me-fast/>. For more information about the original 1907 hymn or to see the sheet music, text, and audio files, see Ada Habershon and Robert Harkness, “He Will Hold Me Fast,” Hymnology Archive, 1827, <https://www.hymnologyarchive.com/holy-holy-holy>.

love, and I am blessed to love you and to be loved by you. My dearest friend, Rachel, thank you for engaging in our many loving “discussions” and allowing me to challenge you while you, in turn, challenged me. You helped me learn and develop my theological convictions. I would not have learned temperance and “gentle” love without you. You are my kindred spirit whom the Lord faithfully brought to brighten my life. I must also thank Emily, whose meekness and humility as well as joyfulness and silliness are treasures that evoke joy in others. Thank you for seeing the best in me and for crying and celebrating with me. Your focus and desire to glorify the Lord spurred our cohort to finish well.

I would not have my eyes opened to the truth without Bruce and Jodi Ware, whose gentleness, mentorship, and continued prayers shaped my understanding of our sovereign God. I am eternally grateful for your counsel grounded in Scripture and the profound riches of Christ. Rather than saying I needed more faith for healing, you said some of the most impactful words—“God gave you this body to glorify himself.” I learned that love is gentle and given freely and that joy is found in worship, especially from balconies. Thank you for your friendship filled with laughter and your continued prayers. I must also thank Steve LeBlanc for his gentle-ish rebuke, stopping me in my tracks. You sent Evan and me on a theological journey—desiring to know the truth of God’s love and the righteousness of Christ—just four short years ago. You are a dear brother with whom we shed tears of joy when our family’s eyes were opened.

Thank you to my parents, Bill and Marge Reed, and brother, David Reed, for listening, encouraging, challenging, and supporting Evan and me as we grow and learn. The growth you see in us is a fraction of what we see in you. Thank you to David and Karen Pietsch, Bob and Judy Wheeler, and Kevin and Michelle Steele for lending me your ears and lifting me up. I cherish our talks and time together. I look forward to more.

I must thank my advisor, John David Trentham, for his investment in me. You see in me what I do not see; your confidence in me inspires me to reach higher and love more. You demonstrate truth and love in charity while unequivocally holding to Christ. I

strive to see the world as you do. Thank you also for teaching me new words. I am grateful to my second reader, Timothy Paul Jones, for his continuous grace and encouragement. I gained confidence in my writing and learning through your guidance. You taught me to strive for excellence. Thank you to Dean Clark for your encouragement throughout the program. You are an excellent mentor and friend. To the 2020 “COVID Cohort,” thank you for the virtual and in-person laughs, hugs, and encouragement. I praise the Lord for the life-long friends he brought amid the 2019–2022 pandemic.

I must thank the professors at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who helped form my theological foundation: Robert Plummer for a love of Greek, Thomas Schreiner for an understanding of sovereignty, Brian Vickers for personal investment and commitment to upholding Christ, and Stephen Wellum for illuminating the biblical-theological thread. Thank you to R. Albert Mohler Jr. for your leadership and spending precious time with us, encouraging us to continue our journey to the glory of Christ.

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I pray this work honors those who have gone before me, teaching the “enduring power of God’s preserving grace.”² I desire to glorify the Lord, teaching others to glorify him and enjoy him forever. May this work be a humble offering.

Becca Pietsch

Knoxville, Tennessee

December 2022

² Matt Merker, “He Will Hold Me Fast Song Story,” Getty Music, 2022, <https://store.gettymusic.com/us/song/he-will-hold-me-fast/>.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth-century hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty,” written by Reginald Heber in 1826, contains the line “Only Thou art holy,” expressing holiness as a trait possessed by God *alone*:

Holy, Holy, Holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinfulness thy glory may not see,
Only Thou art Holy; there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in Power, in Love, and Purity.

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth, and sky, and sea.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and Mighty!
God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity!¹

Scripture establishes the redemptive and orthodox vision of God’s holiness, describing God as the “Most High,” beyond reproach, majestic, sovereign, and eternal.²

¹ Reginald Heber, “#100. Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty,” in *Trinity Hymnal* (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission, 1990). The third and fourth stanzas of Heber’s original handwritten four-stanza hymn are noted here (emphasis added). Heber drew upon Isa 6:1–7 and Rev 4:4–11 as scriptural inspiration for the hymn. In discussing the origin of the text, analyzing the text, and reflecting on the tune of the hymn, Chris Fenner of Hymnology Archive says, “A manuscript copy of Heber’s *Hymns* is held in the British Library (Add MS 25704).” On the inside of “the front cover of the manuscript book, it says, ‘The original copies of Bishop Heber’s hymns in his own hand-writing, sent to his friend H.H. Milman.’ Milman donated the manuscript to the British Library in 1864.” Hymnology Archive, “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty with NICAEA,” Last modified June 2, 2021, <https://www.hymnologyarchive.com/holy-holy-holy>. Literary scholar Madeleine Forell Marshall observes, “The hymn is rather more a worship formula than instruction in devotional response familiar from the hymns of Watts and Wesley and Newton.” Moreover, the hymn “marks a fresh attempt to *express* praise. Rather than explaining why we should, telling us how we should, or provoking us to praise, Heber looks for words that seem to capture and articulate the act itself.” Madeleine Forell Marshall, *Common Hymnsense* (Chicago: GIA, 1995), 104.

² God is called “Lord, the Most High,” “God Most High,” and “the Most High” throughout the canon of Scripture. The designation of “Most High” signifies God’s majesty, power, and holiness—he who is to be worshiped above all other gods and idols. Isaiah 46:9–11 expresses the magnificence of God, who says to

remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,” calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

The term “holy” signifies “to be set apart” or “to be separated” from; therefore, God is named “the Holy One” “because He exists in Himself and nothing can be compared to Him.”³ God is distinguished from his creation by his “infinite perfection” and “exalted above all His creatures in grand sublimity and in ineffable majesty.”⁴

The redemptive vision of the holiness of God undergirds the Reformed doctrine of sanctification. Theologians have placed considerable attention on articulating and attesting to the doctrine of sanctification from Scripture. Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley declare,

Holiness is the lifeblood of Christianity. When holiness declines, believers are left anemic and weak. Without holiness, professing Christians are no better than corpses. With holiness comes spiritual vitality, warmth, energy, and God-pleasing activity. For this reason, the Scriptures place an absolute premium on the holiness of God’s people.⁵

Similarly, twentieth-century scholar C. Peter Wagner placed importance on sanctification. Though many may know Wagner as a scholar of church growth, his theological and convictional axioms concerning the doctrine of sanctification are lesser known. Wagner believed liturgy such as the hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy” emphasized God’s “indisputable holiness” while diminishing the Christian’s personal holiness. In departing from the theological conclusions of the Protestant Reformation, which holds that “while believers should constantly strive to be more and more holy, none will actually achieve

All scriptural references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

³ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012), 26. Considering the holiness of God, Exodus 15:11 asks, “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” The psalms extol God, praising his righteousness: “O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD, with your faithfulness all around you?” (Ps 89:8).

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 56. Acts 17:24–25 declares the metaphysical distinction between God and his creation, proclaiming, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”

⁵ Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, *Spirit and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 625.

holiness in this life because only God is holy,” Wagner concludes that Christians can “actually be holy and live holy lives, just as God is holy.”⁶ Wagner reasons that “since God is the *only* being who truly is holy, you and I could never be holy unless we became God.” For Wagner, 1 Peter 1:15 illuminated that “you and I can actually be holy simply because the Bible says that we can be. God would never ask us to do something that was impossible for us.”⁷

Wagner asserts that a number of the “theological conclusions” of the Protestant Reformers John Calvin and Martin Luther in the sixteenth century could be “questionable” and should not be regarded as “absolute” theological doctrine. One such area of their “weakness,” according to Wagner, was the “Reformed doctrine of sanctification,” which was “corrected” through the theological efforts of John Wesley’s doctrine of holiness.⁸ After surrendering Reformed sanctification, Wagner was “glad to be free from” the “ongoing struggle toward sanctification without clear victory in sight.” Upon embracing Wesleyan holiness, he denied that humanity has a “sinful nature, continuing both before and after salvation.”⁹ He believed Satan causes people to sin, not their sinful nature. Wagner concluded that “that if I can go for one day without sinning, then I can go another day and any number of days. I can live a holy life! I know that I

⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004), 173.

⁷ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 173. Wagner’s view of personal holiness (sanctification) changed over the course of his theological career. Wagner states that the Reformed view of sanctification, displayed in the hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty,” ascribes holiness solely to God and leaves no room for Christians to be able to attain holiness in this life. Later in his life, Wagner changes his professed paradigm of sanctification from the Reformed view to a view that allows Christians to possess personal holiness. His appropriation of 1 Pet 1:15 places emphasis on the personal call to holiness: “but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.”

⁸ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 169. Research shared with Evan Phillip Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism on C. Peter Wagner’s Philosophy of Discipleship” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 128.

⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and Change Your Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 102.

must keep praying and staying filled with the Holy Spirit because at any time sin can invade my life.”¹⁰

Thesis

This thesis demonstrates that the outworking of C. Peter Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship is incongruent with an articulated Reformed doctrine of sanctification and paradigm of discipleship and sanctification. This thesis introduces and employs an articulated paradigm of discipleship, *Virtuous Christian Discipleship* (VCD), to access and evaluate Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification.¹¹ VCD endeavors to strengthen the church’s commitment to the practice of a biblical model of discipleship. Moreover, this thesis introduces the term *commissional catechetical confessionalism* (CCC) to further articulate a redemptive and confessional doctrine of sanctification for a biblical perspective on human learning, growth, and development in light of the *imago Dei*.

This research utilizes John David Trentham’s Inverse Consistency Protocol (ICP) as a methodological paradigm to define, reflect on, evaluate, and assess Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship. Chapter 1 introduces the need for the research. The following two chapters follow the first step of ICP, which identifies and asserts the normative biblical priorities of a Reformed biblical-theological system (chap. 2) and the doctrine of sanctification from a Reformed paradigm (chap. 3). Chapters 4 and 5 follow the second step of ICP, which summarizes with precision and intellectual honesty the writings of Wagner (1952–2016) concerning his articulation of the doctrine of sanctification. Chapter 6 follows the third step of ICP, which provides a critical and charitable reflection of Wagner’s theology, axioms, and praxes by expounding the conclusions of this research and articulating the implications of Wagnerian theology on discipleship praxes and

¹⁰ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 111.

¹¹ The terms ICP, VCD, CCC are developed and explained in subsequent chapters. VCD are presented in chap. 3 as an element of the articulated Reformed discipleship paradigm. CCC is presented in chap. 6 as a confessional means to the end of fulfilling the Great Commission.

ethics. Lastly, this study's appropriative dimension in the final step of ICP determines that understanding Wagner's longings that led to his definition of disciple and philosophy of discipleship helps us become more aware of how we are affected by the same longings, whether pragmatic or consumeristic tendencies, and how those are very relevant in our own context.

Research Significance

This thesis informs and impacts ministry leaders, practitioners, and scholars of biblical models of discipleship. A biblical model of discipleship should be characterized by a "pedagogical ethic" of "*communicating (God's truth) so that the body of Christ abides together in the love of Christ.*"¹² Educational ministry leaders must emphasize that Christ's disciples are marked by "literally following the Master by learning and living." Catechizing and instructing "not just in the basics of biblical teaching, but in *everything* Jesus commanded for our doctrine and life" becomes the focus of ministry and discipleship.¹³ Biblical discipleship enables disciples to live by the "daily bread" of Christ through spiritual disciplines while growing in spiritual maturity. In participation with the confessional teaching of ministry leaders, the progressive sanctification of believers by the Holy Spirit integrates redemptive wisdom that "promotes life-learning into life-application."¹⁴

Practitioners have articulated conceptual models of sanctification; however, a biblical manifestation model of discipleship offers a practical model of sanctification through catechesis and a manifestation ethic of "*communicating (God's truth) so that*

¹² John David Trentham, "Mere *Didaskalia*: The Vocational Calling and Mission of Christian Teaching Ministry," *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 2 (2021): 220.

¹³ Michael S. Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 138.

¹⁴ Trentham, "Mere *Didaskalia*," 222.

the body of Christ bears fruit for the kingdom of Christ.”¹⁵ A manifestational model of discipleship occurs through an “interpersonal ministry” of “discipleship, friendship, family, small group,” and mentorship that “happens and thrives” in “knowing and being known.”¹⁶ Applying spiritual disciplines learned in fellowship occurs as the Holy Spirit patterns the new life after Christ unto maturity.

Scholars must seek the redemptive flourishing of the body of Christ by establishing discipleship methods in the overarching biblical-theological metanarrative of Scripture. A redemptive and confessional doctrine of sanctification, steeped in the Reformed tradition, provides the foundation for scholars to construct a biblical perspective of human learning, growth, and development in light of the *imago Dei*.

Wagner was one of the most influential Christian theologians and scholars of the late twentieth century; his published works and methodologies concerning the doctrine of sanctification have likely influenced the discipleship methods and practices within evangelical churches.¹⁷ Much of Wagner’s early works concentrate on church growth, for which he is most well-known. Wagner incorporated his experiences from his church growth research into his doctrinal beliefs, which then comprised the content of his books addressing theological issues such as spiritual gifts, prayer, spiritual warfare, and prosperity.¹⁸ Wagner carried his definitions of disciple and discipleship from church

¹⁵ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 221.

¹⁶ David Powlison, “Calvinism and Contemporary Christian Counseling,” in *The Practical Calvinist: An Introduction to the Presbyterian and Reformed Heritage*, ed. Peter A. Lillback, Mentor General Theological Issues (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003), 500.

¹⁷ Much of the discipleship practices in modern evangelical churches have adopted Wagnerian doctrine of sanctification and discipleship philosophies. Wagner’s doctrinal emphases of sanctification and discipleship philosophies have infiltrated evangelical churches in a subliminal way, becoming incorporated into the discipleship models of the church. Matt Graham, “Reclaiming Lost Ground: The Case for and Practice of Revitalising Dying Churches,” *Churchman* 129, no. 3 (2015): 202; Elmer Towns, “Effective Evangelism View,” in *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views*, ed. Gary L. McIntosh, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 43; Thomas Spratling Rainer, “An Assessment of C. Peter Wagner’s Contributions to the Theology of Church Growth” (PhD diss, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988), 2.

¹⁸ Wagner incorporates Pentecostal sanctification in his published works beginning in the 1980s. Prophecy, the miraculous spiritual gifts, signs and wonders, sinlessness, and spiritual warfare

growth into his later experiences, appropriating new theological convictions of the doctrine of sanctification to correspond with his experience.

Wagner regarded pragmatism as a means to accomplish the ends of church growth. His missiological praxes were grounded in the contention that the evangelistic ends justified the means. His strategic planning and pragmatic measures emphasized making disciples and furthering church growth.¹⁹ Believing pragmatism was a positive attribute and effective means, Wagner termed his pragmatic perspective of church growth as “consecrated pragmatism,” citing biblical instances in both the Old and New Testaments.²⁰ He read Scripture with a “phenomenological hermeneutic” that “gives greater weight to sociological observations,”²¹ as he believed that theology must be interpreted and “can be revised in light of what is learned through experience.”²²

Research Necessity

Without a thoroughgoing doctrinally informed biblical doctrine of sanctification, discipleship is diminished to the detriment of the individual and the church. The spiritual health and care of those being disciplined are damaged, with potentially catastrophic consequences. An over-emphasis on experience supplants the scriptural truth of sanctification, consigning the biblical demand to disciple others and

became common phenomenological theological topics. Some of the more influential books include C. Peter Wagner, *The Great Transfer of Wealth: Financial Release for Advancing God’s Kingdom* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2015); Wagner, ed., *Breaking Strongholds in Your City: How to Use Spiritual Mapping to Make Your Prayers More Strategic, Effective, and Targeted*, Prayer Warrior Series (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993).

¹⁹ R. Vivian Pietsch, “The Influence of John Dewey’s Pragmatism on the Church Growth Movement,” *International Review of Mission* 111, no. 1 (2022): 138–68.

²⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1987), 30. Wagner adopted the term “consecrated pragmatism” from Donald McGavran, who is noted as first coining the term in a lecture at an address given at Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission in 1970. The lecture is quoted in C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 71.

²¹ Rainer, “Assessment of Wagner’s Contributions,” 85.

²² Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth*, 38. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 6.

grow in spiritual maturity to an optional or interpretable activity. Spiritual maturity becomes quantifiable in the growth of Bible study groups, church size, or ministry adherents. Those most sanctified are able to obey the command to be holy and operate in spiritual anointing.

A central aspect of sanctification is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in every believer for spiritual growth unto maturity (Eph 4:13; Col 1:28; Heb 6:1). A Reformed sanctification framework will aid in understanding the Spirit's power and believers' responsibility to mature in faith and practice. Through the power of the Spirit, believers are made progressively holier into the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:28; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), and yet believers must flee from the devil and resist temptation, mortifying sin (1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; Jas 4:7).²³ The power to resist temptation, kill sinful desires, and obey the Lord emanates from believers' union with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Statement of the Research Problem

Much research exists detailing Wagner's prolific writings on church growth, evangelism, and missions.²⁴ Wagner contributed substantially to the theology of the New

²³ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 37. Ferguson specifies the role of the Holy Spirit as the *paraklētos*, the comforter, the Spirit of God who lives in believers and is the "authoritative witness-bearing" Spirit of Christ.

²⁴ Thom S. Rainer published his dissertation on Wagner's involvement in the Church Growth movement, and he co-wrote several books with Wagner on church growth. See Rainer, "Assessment of Wagner's Contributions"; Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: B&H, 1993); Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 1996); Elmer L. Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth: How Any Plateaued Church Can Grow* (Nashville: B&H, 1998). Wagner has been the subject of articles and dissertations regarding his convictions concerning church growth, spiritual warfare, and spiritual gifts. See Arie Van Brenk, "C. Peter Wagner: A Critical Analysis of His Work" (DMin project, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1994); Shawn Leroy Buice, "A Critical Examination of the Use of Selected New Testament Passages in the Writings of Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter Wagner" (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996); Phillip Escott, "Church Growth Theories and the Salvation Army in the United Kingdom: An Examination of the Theories of Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner in Relation to Salvation Army Experience and Practice (1982–1991)" (PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 1996); Larry S. McDonald, "An Evaluation of C. Peter Wagner's Teaching on the Gift of the Evangelist" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Orlando, FL, November 19–20, 1998); McDonald, "Rethinking the Gift of the Evangelist: Reflections on C. Peter Wagner's Teaching," *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 10, no. 3 (1999): 15–28; Erwin van der Meer, "The Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare Theology of C. Peter Wagner and Its Implications for Christian Mission in Malawi"

Apostolic Reformation, which profoundly influences evangelical Christianity today.²⁵ A deep gap exists in the academic literature concerning Wagner’s theological convictions and confidences relating to his doctrine of sanctification. Moreover, previous research has not studied the impact of the Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification on his discipleship methods. This research fulfills the needed systemization of Wagner’s published and unpublished convictions of the doctrine of sanctification.²⁶ Ultimately, this research assesses and evaluates Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification and methods of discipleship, which has heretofore never been done.

Background to the Research Problem

Charles Peter Wagner (1930–2016), more commonly known as C. Peter Wagner, spent a lifetime in ministry emphasizing evangelism and discipleship. His prolific writings on church growth, missions, evangelism, and the faith cover areas such

(ThD thesis, University of South Africa, 2008); Petri Laitinen, “Spiritual Gifts According to C. Peter Wagner” (ThD diss., Åbo Akademi University, 2014); Jon Bialecki, “The Third Wave and the Third World: C. Peter Wagner, John Wimber, and the Pedagogy of Global Renewal in the Late Twentieth Century,” *Pneuma* 37, no. 2 (2015): 177–200. Most recently, publications exploring the theological convictions of Wagner have focused on the Dominion theology, the offices of prophets and apostles, and spiritual warfare. See R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014).

²⁵ Brian Allen DeVries, “Witnessing with the Holy Spirit: Pneumatology and Missiology in Evangelistic Theory” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007); Geivett and Pivec, *A New Apostolic Reformation?*; Kelebogile Resane, “The New Apostolic Reformation: The Critical Reflections of the Ecclesiology of Charles Peter Wagner,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72, no. 3 (August 2016): 1–11; Robert A. Stagmer, “The Effect of Introducing a Ministry of Miracles, Signs, and Wonders in Seven 21st Century Churches” (DMin project, United Theological Seminary, 2015); Van Brenk, “C. Peter Wagner”; C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 21. Wagner asserts that he provided a name to the NAR “renewal movement” that “to a significant extent,” it is “changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world.” Wagner notes that this movement occurred “particularly in the 1990s.” C. Peter Wagner, “New Apostolic Reformation,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 930. For additional information on Wagner’s influence on and contribution to the NAR movement, see C. Peter Wagner, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” in *The New Apostolic Churches: Rediscovering the New Testament Model of Leadership and Why It Is God’s Desire for the Church Today*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998); C. Peter Wagner, *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999).

²⁶ Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 7.

as prayer, holiness, spiritual warfare, discipleship, and the Second Apostolic Age.²⁷ Wagner is a noted scholar, having earned several degrees in theology and missiology: Bachelor of Science from Rutgers University (1952), Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary (1955), Master of Theology from Princeton Theological Seminary (1962), Master of Arts in Missiology from Fuller Theological Seminary (1968), and Doctor of Philosophy in Social Ethics from the University of Southern California (1977).²⁸ Accompanying his academic career, Wagner established several institutions and foundations: Emmaus Postgraduate Bible Institute, Global Harvest Ministries, and the Wagner Leadership Institute (WLI).²⁹ Wagner delineates three periods of his ministry: Bolivian jungle missionary (1956–1971), professor at Fuller Seminary (1971–2001), and leader of the New Apostolic Reformation movement (1999–2016).³⁰

Holiness is a central tenant of the Christian faith, which articulates that holiness is wrought in the heart and life of every Christian by the Holy Spirit. Just as

²⁷ Some of Wagner’s most influential books include *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (1979); *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (1981); *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!* (1988); *Understanding Church Growth* (1990); *Praying through the 100 Gateway Cities of the 10/40 Window* (1995); *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998); *The New Apostolic Churches: Rediscovering the New Testament Model of Leadership and Why It Is God’s Desire for the Church Today* (1998); *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It* (1999); *Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church into the Future* (2004); *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (2008); *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (2010); *Discover Your Spiritual Gifts* (2012); and *Territorial Spirits Practical Strategies for How to Crush the Enemy through Spiritual Warfare* (2012).

²⁸ McGee Gary B., and B. A. Pavia. “Wagner, Charles Peter,” in Burgess and van der Maas, *New International Dictionary*, 1181. Pietsch notes that “Fuller changed the BD program to an MDiv program in the 1960s; Wagner’s BD was retroactively renamed an MDiv after this change.” Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 11.

²⁹ The Wagner Leadership Institute is now Wagner University. The institution was founded in 1998 by Wagner, who “was inspired by a prophetic word to create Wagner Leadership Institute (WLI).” The institution changed its name in 2017, and “WLI became Wagner University (WU).” Wagner University “focuses on equipping in-service leaders with a revelatory style of teaching and learning, which incorporates impartation, activation, and hands-on practical application in ministry.” Wagner University, “About Us,” 2021, <https://wagner.university/about-us/>.

³⁰ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 54, 213. Wagner was a missionary in Latin America for sixteen years, spending time in Bolivia, Argentina, and the Andes. When discussing his missionary career in his memoir, Wagner simplifies the era, stating that he was a jungle missionary in Bolivia. Wagner published many articles and wrote for church magazines during his years as a missionary, both in English and Spanish.

ministers, scholars, and theologians before him, Wagner emphasized the fundamental role of holiness and obedience in his professed Christian faith and discipleship praxes.³¹ He was a passionate missionary in Latin America who underscored the essential role of personal evangelism in making disciples,³² a notable church growth scholar who deliberated over the means and methods of discipleship,³³ and an influential theologian who stirred the affections of Christians toward holiness.³⁴

Being entirely convinced of his theological conclusion concerning the doctrine of sanctification, Wagner asserts that a wholly new movement of God was emerging from

³¹ Wagner considered the question “What is theology?” to be the wrong question when determining how to define and understand theology. Wagner deemed the question “What does it mean to do theology?” the proper question as it emphasizes the “more functional dimension” of theology. The “long descriptions of all that contemporary theology” make “doing theology much too complicated.” Wagner then clarifies, “Here is what I think theology really amounts to: a human attempt to explain God’s Word and God’s works in a reasonable and systematic way.” Wagner, *Changing Church*, 145–46.

³² Wagner was a missionary in Latin America upon his graduation from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1956 until 1971. The sixteen years during which Wagner served as a missionary were spent in Bolivia, Argentina, and the Andes. Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 54. Wagner wrote extensively during his time as a missionary on the role of evangelism in making disciples. C. Peter Wagner, “A New Challenge: Theological Education in Latin America,” *Christianity Today* 7, no. 12 (1963): 593–94; Wagner, “Today’s Missions in the Latin American Social Revolution,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1965): 19–27; Wagner, *Latin American Theology: Radical or Evangelical?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

³³ Thom Rainer explores the influential role Wagner had in the Church Growth movement, impacting how the church engaged in evangelism and discipleship. Rainer, “Assessment of Wagner’s Contributions.” Wagner’s works concerning church growth discuss the pragmatic means the church must employ to achieve the ends of church growth. Wagner considered the philosophy of “consecrated pragmatism” essential to achieving the growth blessed by God. See C. Peter Wagner, “Fierce Pragmatism in Missions—Carnal or Consecrated?,” *Christianity Today* 17, no. 5 (1972): 245–49; Wagner, “Concepts of Evangelism Have Changed over the Years,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1974): 41–46; Wagner, “Missions: The International Ministry of the Church,” *Century Three: An Evangelical Design* (1975): 1–19; Wagner, “Is World Evangelism Manageable?,” *World Evangelization: A Publication of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization* 15 (1979): 1, 11–12; Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*; Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth*.

³⁴ Wagner’s published works concerning his appropriation of Christian holiness develop synergistically with his convictional changes and theological paradigm shifts. Wagner begins his theological journey with a professed classical Reformed understanding of the doctrine of sanctification. C. Peter Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On* (Glendale, CA: Regal, 1974); Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: A Ripe City and God’s Harvester,” *Eternity* (August 1967): 13–15. Wagner’s paradigm transforms to an appropriated Pentecostal holiness, which emphasizes the second blessing of the Holy Spirit. C. Peter Wagner, *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1973); Wagner, “Spiritual Gifts, Evangelism and Church Growth,” *Global Church Growth* (January–February 1984): 341–43. The “paradigm shift” to an appropriated Wesleyan holiness provided an understanding of sanctification and purity required for spiritual warfare. C. Peter Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (Colorado Springs: Wagner Institute for Practical Ministry, 1998); Wagner, “Lecture Notes on Spiritual Warfare,” 1993, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 7, Folder 1, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA; Wagner, *Changing Church*; Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*.

this theological conviction. He acknowledges, “The churches on the cutting edges of what God is doing here in the new millennium will be churches that teach and practice bona fide holiness,” which is the “springboard from which” modern “apostles are leading” churches “into the twenty-first century.”³⁵

Introduction to the New Apostolic Reformation Movement

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement is a renewal movement that started in the 1990s. Recognizing a transition in the theological distinctives of neo-charismatic churches, Wagner formally provided a name for the network in 1998 to describe what he called “new wineskins,” as he believed the NAR significantly changed Protestant Christianity in fundamental ways.³⁶ These churches place a “strong focus on outreach” and a “recognition of present-day apostolic ministries,” which “appear to be producing at least as radical a change as those of the Protestant Reformation.”³⁷ While

³⁵ Wagner terms the newly perceived movement of God as the New Apostolic Reformation. Concerning his conviction and appropriation of Wesleyan holiness, he emphasized,

In the eighteenth century, John Wesley was used by God to bring some very important new emphases into the Body of Christ. He did not question the three foundational doctrines listed above, but he did question some of the other rigid theological conclusions of the Reformers. Part of the fresh air Wesley brought to Christianity was his view that Christians could actually be holy and live holy lives, just as God is holy. Reformed theology taught that while believers should constantly strive to be more and more holy, none will actually achieve holiness in this life because only God is holy.

Wagner continues, “I do feel that holiness is a part of the springboard from which apostles are leading us into the twenty-first century. I am convinced that the churches on the cutting edges of what God is doing here in the new millennium will be churches that teach and practice bona fide holiness. I expand on this greatly in my book *Radical Holiness for Radical Living*, which I recommend to all who desire to be counted as pacesetters in the Church.” C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000), 13–14.

³⁶ Wagner, “New Apostolic Reformation,” 930. Wagner wrote extensively on the New Apostolic Reformation and the post-denominational churches of “independent charismatics” within the “loosely structured apostolic networks,” noting that in “virtually every region of the world these new apostolic churches constitute one of the fastest growing segments of Christianity.” For additional writings of Wagner on the New Apostolic Reformation, see Wagner, *Churchquake!*; Wagner, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 13–25; Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*; Wagner, *Changing Church*; Wagner, *Apostles Today* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2006); Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 2013; Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*.

³⁷ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 213. In his seminal work *Apostles and Prophets*, Wagner defined the New Apostolic Reformation as an extraordinary work of God at the close of the twentieth century which is, to a significant extent, changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world. For almost 500 years Christian churches have largely functioned within traditional denominational structures of one kind or another.

the NAR encompasses many theological convictions, this thesis addresses only those relevant to the doctrine of sanctification.³⁸

Research Assumptions

This research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic; access to the C. Peter Wagner archives at the Fuller Theological Seminary library was restricted. Therefore, the research relied on the assumption that the materials were written or owned by Wagner and that the documentation provided by the archivist was accurate in the provision of materials from the archive collections: (1) 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016; (2) 0182: MC510 Signs and Wonders Collection; and (3) 0136: Fuller Theological Seminary School of Theology Deans' Files, 1944–.³⁹

The classic Reformed doctrine of sanctification is viewed as most reflective of Scripture in this research. It is recognized that the Reformed doctrine of sanctification is not directly reflective of Scripture, though it is derived from Scripture; it is also recognized that the Reformed doctrine of sanctification is historically contingent and historically contextual.

Particularly in the 1990s, but with roots going back for almost a century, new forms and operational procedures are now emerging in areas such as local church government, interchurch relationships, financing, evangelism, missions, prayer, leadership selection and training, the role of supernatural power, worship and other important aspects of church life. Some of these changes are being seen within denominations themselves, but for the most part they are taking the form of loosely structured apostolic networks. In virtually every region of the world, these new apostolic churches constitute the fastest growing segment of Christianity. (Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 21)

³⁸ For an extensive treatment of the theological convictions and distinctives of the New Apostolic Reformation, see Wagner, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 13–25; Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*; Wagner, “New Apostolic Reformation,” 930; Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2008); Harold R. Eberle, *Systematic Theology for the New Apostolic Reformation: An Exposition in Father-Son Theology* (Yakima, WA: Worldcast, 2015).

³⁹ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic that continued into 2022, the Fuller Theological Seminary Library and Archives were unavailable for in-person research; therefore, I assessed the contents of the Wagner and MC510 archive collections via electronic scans.

Theological Assumptions

This research includes theological assumptions that originate from evangelical theology. All Scripture is infallible, inerrant, God-breathed, and profitable for teaching (2 Tim 3:16, 17). Sanctification occurs because of and through the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in whom believers are united with the Holy Spirit, the “fulness of grace in Christ,” who is given “by the Father to the Son and from the Son—and Father—to” believers; sanctification is a definitive state and also a progressive process of glorification (1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 3:18; Heb 10:10).⁴⁰ God’s purposes for humanity, specifically for holiness, can be reasonably determined from Scripture, from the implications of humanity’s creation in the image of God, and through common grace.⁴¹

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin’s Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), comm. on John 1:14 (1:48); Joey R. Newton, “Calvin and the Spirit of Sonship,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 10, no. 2 (2018): 96. Calvin and Newton express the truth of sanctification in the work of the Spirit of Christ in the inseparable operations of the Father, Son, and Spirit, wherein “the triune work is one (inseparable operations) with specific works terminating on the divine persons.” Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, “Responses Rejoinder to Review of *Kingdom through Covenant*,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 76, no. 2 (2014): 451. Calvin expresses the inseparable operations of the Trinity, articulating, “To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 1.13.18, Logos Bible Software. Continuing, Calvin contends, “For the mind of each human being is naturally inclined to contemplate God first, then the wisdom coming forth from him, and lastly the power whereby he executes the decrees of his plan. For this reason, the Son is said to come forth from the Father alone; the Spirit, from the Father and the Son at the same time.” Moreover, the believer, in sharing in the Son’s fullness, is loved by the Father, for “that love with which, embracing the Son, he embraces us also in him, leads him to communicate all his benefits to us by his hand.” Calvin, *Commentary on John*, comm. on John 3:35 (1:140–41). The Father and the Son give the Spirit to believers, “in order to bind them to Himself, to grant participation in the Son’s communion with the Father, and to communicate every spiritual blessing through Him to His own.” Newton, “Calvin and the Spirit of Sonship,” 96. An analogous notion is conveyed in Calvin’s comments on Gal 3:27 vis-à-vis believers’ union with Christ: “made one with the Son of God; so as to remove all doubt, that what belongs to him is communicated to us.” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin’s Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), comm. on Gal 3:27 (pp. 110–11).

⁴¹ Social science and secular sources can be carefully engaged and appropriated regarding the foundation of a thoroughgoing biblical conception of the divine image and common grace. See John David Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1): Approaching and Qualifying Models of Human Development,” *Christian Educational Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 458–75; Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Engaging and Appropriating Models of Human Development,” *Christian Educational Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 476–94.

Research Purpose

Academic research has been undertaken pertaining to Wagner's philosophy of pragmatism within his church growth principles and missiological practices,⁴² Wagner's doctrine of pneumatology concerning spiritual gifts and spiritual warfare (principally within Asia and Africa),⁴³ and Wagner's phenomenological hermeneutic when reading Scripture and applying it to church growth.⁴⁴ The proposed void in the research literature is predicated upon the notion that no previous studies have been published to date researching Wagner's theological convictions regarding the doctrine of sanctification. Furthermore, research has not explored the impact of Wagner's methods of discipleship.

The purpose of this text-based study is to assess and evaluate Wagner's doctrine of sanctification and philosophy of discipleship in order to determine what, if any, elements can be appropriated into Christian discipleship ministry. This research fulfills a needed systemization of Wagner's published and unpublished convictions concerning the doctrine of sanctification and discipleship. This study examines the complete works of Wagner, both published books and articles, as well as unpublished manuscripts, personal communications, and notes.⁴⁵ This work engages in scholarly analysis of Wagner's doctrine of sanctification utilizing the Inverse Consistency Protocol hermeneutical framework, which provides contextual evidence to the epistemology of

⁴² McDonald, "An Evaluation of C. Peter Wagner's"; McDonald, "Rethinking the Gift of the Evangelist"; Jason Allen Mackey, "The Light Overcomes the Darkness: Cosmic Conflict in the Fourth Gospel" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

⁴³ Van der Meer, "Spiritual Warfare Theology of Wagner"; Landon Coleman, "Principalities and Powers: A Historical and Biblical Study with Strategic Application in North American Churches" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010); Robert Pocheck, "Toward an Ecclesiocentric Model of Spiritual Gift Identification" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011); Laitinen, "Spiritual Gifts According to Wagner."

⁴⁴ Rainer, "Assessment of Wagner's Contributions"; James A. Beverley, "New Apostolic Reformation: What to Make of the Booming Legacy of Peter Wagner," *Faith Today* 39, no. 3 (May 2021): 178–200; Bialecki, "The Third Wave and the Third World"; Bialecki, "Apostolic Networks in the Third Wave of the Spirit," *Pneuma* 38, nos. 1–2 (2016): 23–32.

⁴⁵ Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 7.

Wagner's praxes and methodologies, enabling the Christian community to evaluate the degree of appropriation or adoption of his work charitably and critically.⁴⁶

Research Questions

To assess and evaluate C. Peter Wagner's doctrine of sanctification and philosophy of discipleship, this study answers the following research questions:

1. How does an articulated Reformed model of sanctification inform a reading of C. Peter Wagner's doctrine of sanctification?
2. How can Wagner's doctrine of sanctification be assessed charitably and critically from a Reformed theological perspective?
3. How is Wagner's distinctive model of sanctification revealed in the discipleship strategies of ministries influenced by the NAR?
4. How may an assessment and evaluation of Wagner's doctrine of sanctification inform a redemptive appropriation of discipleship strategies and methods?

Research Methodology

This study employs a thematic document analysis methodology to systematically document Wagner's writings in relation to his doctrine of sanctification.⁴⁷

Primary and secondary documents provide background information on Wagner's theological positions and affirmations as well as insight into the influences of his philosophy of discipleship.⁴⁸ The documents consulted also provide a means of

⁴⁶ Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1)," 458–75; Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2)," 476–94.

⁴⁷ Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40. Bowen defines document analysis as "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (27).

⁴⁸ Primary sources include Wagner's books published in English and journal articles published in English and Spanish. Fuller Theological Seminary holds Wagner's archival collection; see Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016; Collection 0182: MC510 Signs and Wonders Collection; Collection 0136: Fuller Theological Seminary School of Theology Deans' Files, 1944–. Primary works include published and unpublished documents, notes, and correspondences in the archival collections. Wagner often provides the names of people who and titles of works that influenced him. The sources he cites as influential in shaping his theological convictions relating to the doctrine of sanctification and discipleship are consulted as secondary sources.

systematizing Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification and philosophy of discipleship. An analysis of Wagner’s completed works is now possible as his published works concluded upon his death in 2016. His personal collection of writings is available at the Fuller Theological Seminary archives. This work consults Wagner’s writings comprehensively, covering the scope of his entire career, in order to discern and clarify how his view of the doctrine of sanctification impacted his philosophy of discipleship.

Wagner strove to ensure that he accurately understood and represented the works and views of others. He communicated personally with each person he cited, desiring to certify the accuracy of his understanding and portrayal of their works.⁴⁹ John David Trentham asserts that “reading for receptivity” to accurately understand a person’s work honors the author, our neighbor, and fellow image-bearer.⁵⁰ Trentham maintains that “one may not righteously presume to evaluate an observation or claim, either charitably or critically, without having first genuinely sought to understand what is put forth by the means of thorough reading.”⁵¹ The same respect and conviction of the *imago Dei* in Wagner undergirds the requisite careful and accurate representation of his ideas, accomplished through interacting directly with his published and unpublished writings.

⁴⁹ In a letter to John Sanders, Wagner states, “It is my custom to submit the draft of the chapter or chapters in which individuals were named or quoted. . . . I am doing this to make sure that what I say about you is accurate. I am not expecting you necessarily to agree with the conclusions I draw from what I say about you, recognizing that some parts of this book will provoke a bit of controversy.” For more information, see C. Peter Wagner, “John Sanders,” 1–2, 2004, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 16, Folder 13, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

⁵⁰ Alan Jacobs contends that honoring the author is to show faithfulness in that one “attends to the life or work of another lovingly and with constancy.” Such attentiveness “is doing justice” to who the author is, the “being made in the image of God”—“an imperfect image defaced by sin but (one hopes) in the process of being restored.” Jacobs continues his argument considering *perichoresis*: “To become deified” or “to imitate Christ,” which necessitates that we “learn to practice with our neighbors the perichoretic movements” that do “proper honor not only to our neighbors but also to us.” As we imitate Christ in “this dance of faithfulness,” we “may offer loving and constant attention to” our neighbors, “but in return we receive from them the gift of otherness” that “achieves its fullest flowering only within the life of the Church, but it can (indeed must) be practiced anywhere and with anyone.” Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001), 63–64.

⁵¹ Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2),” 490–91.

When necessary, secondary sources are utilized while retaining fidelity to Wagner using sources he cited or referenced.⁵²

In his preface to his book *The Holy Spirit*, Sinclair Ferguson writes,

The person and work of the Holy Spirit continue to be an area of controversy among Christians. In this respect, some readers, perhaps many, will believe that they themselves see light where I do not. It is a remarkable fact of recent church history that convictions which were controversial in my student days in the 1960s and 70s have now become so broadly adopted that it is the mainstream views of those days which are now regarded as controversial. That notwithstanding, I have tried to keep in mind both the apostolic injunction to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and my own [convictions] to maintain a spirit of brotherhood to all the Lord's people. My hope and prayer is that the opinions expressed in areas of controversy touched on in this [work] will not prejudice fellow-Christians against the whole.⁵³

I pray that I honor those cited in this research by allowing their respective ideas to speak for themselves.

Delimitations of the Research

A comprehensive review of all doctrines of sanctification is outside the scope of this study. Likewise, this study does not attempt a thorough review of Reformed sanctification. Furthermore, this study does not profess to have an in-depth treatment of all Scripture pertaining to sanctification.

As little previous work has been completed to define and evaluate Wagner's doctrine of sanctification, this study is limited in texts to study and evaluate. This study interacts substantially with Wagner's doctrine of sanctification, the assessment and evaluation informed by a Reformed sanctification framework, and theological assertions of various theologians.

⁵² Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 14.

⁵³ Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 13.

Limitations of Generalization of Findings

As this research aims to identify what of Wagner's doctrine of sanctification can inform the practice of Christian discipleship ministry, any proposed appropriation must adequately represent the discipleship of all denominations. However, the implications of the proposed discipleship practices are directed toward evangelical churches, primarily conservative Protestant denominations. Furthermore, it is not presumed that the theological assumptions and suggested implications of this study can be shared by every evangelical Christian.

Terms and Definitions

Inverse Consistency Protocol. The Inverse Consistency Protocol (ICP), developed by John David Trentham, is a "hermeneutical framework according to which Christian scholars and educators may profitably interact with theories and models that emerge from the secular social sciences."⁵⁴ ICP consists of four interpretive steps: (1) envision redemptive maturity, (2) read for receptivity, (3) employ reflective discernment, and (4) identify appropriate outlets. According to Trentham, each step annotates "a process of reading the social sciences theologically, to guide the practical task of appropriation."⁵⁵

Classical Reformed sanctification. Classical Reformed sanctification places emphasis on the sovereignty of God, who in his kindness extended grace to those whom he chose and called to be holy "before the foundation of the world." The grace of God justifies sinners through the work of Christ on the cross and sanctifies them through the Holy Spirit, renewing their nature, providing holiness and righteousness.⁵⁶ Reformed

⁵⁴ Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1)," 459.

⁵⁵ Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2)," 488. The Inverse Consistency Protocol necessitates a Reformed perspective when interacting with the "natural law." The conclusions asserted by humankind, apart from the special revelation in Christ, are erroneous, though aspects of such conclusions contain valid principles (see sec. "Common Principles").

⁵⁶ The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines sanctification as "the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die

sanctification consists of two aspects: definitive sanctification, where God in his sovereignty positionally sanctifies sinners, and progressive sanctification, where the Holy Spirit, with believers' participation, progressively conforms Christians to the image of Christ unto glorification.

Filling of the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit in Christians “exhibits an increasingly wise lifestyle, including grateful worship and God-honoring relationships.”⁵⁷ Moreover, the act of filling occurs by the sovereign choice of God when believers “need to give a defense (Acts 4:8) or speak God’s word (4:31), when they encounter spiritual opposition (13:9)” or “need the Holy Spirit to empower them for a particular task or challenge in ministry.”⁵⁸ The filling of the Spirit is in addition to the indwelling the Spirit, which “is necessary for a life of obedience from the heart” (Ezek 36:27). It is “a powerful, energetic indwelling that effectively produces life and obedience” in those who are “in union with Christ.”⁵⁹ The anthropomorphic language of indwelling describes “the inner man, what the Bible calls the heart, the center of human thoughts, emotions, and choices, and the source of human activity.”⁶⁰ Those who are “indwelt by the Holy Spirit must separate themselves from sin and pursue practical holiness (2 Cor 6:14–7:1). The redeemed are not their own, and so must live for the glory of God.” As a result of the Spirit, it is “the Lord who produces all holy thoughts and desires in our souls.”⁶¹

Open theism. Open theism, also known as openness theology, was propagated by the 1994 publication *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional*

unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1996), Question 35.

⁵⁷ Andreas J. Köstenberger, “What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit? A Biblical Investigation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 2 (June 1997): 239.

⁵⁸ Köstenberger, “What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit?,” 238.

⁵⁹ Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 3:746.

⁶⁰ Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 3:747, 749.

⁶¹ Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 3:750–51.

Understanding of God. Openness scholars define open theism as, “God, in grace, grants humans significant freedom to cooperate with or work against God’s will for their lives, and he enters into dynamic, give-and-take relationships with us.”⁶² Bruce Ware, systematic theologian and opponent of openness theology, summarizes, “In his desire to accomplish his purposes, God always faces the stubborn reality that humans may successfully resist his will. They may use their freedom in ways that God disapproves of and that greatly harm themselves and others whom he loves.”⁶³

Research Competencies

This thesis seeks to encourage discernment and critical analysis of discipleship practices, with the intention of practice created from a scripturally informed doctrine of sanctification.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the discipleship practices of many churches are overwhelmingly informed by the phenomenological doctrine of sanctification of Wagner. This study requires theological perception and fidelity to ensure faithfulness to the overarching redemptive-historical biblical-theological system, revealed character of God, and progressively unfolding story of redemption.⁶⁵ Without this theological conviction,

⁶² Clark H. Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 7.

⁶³ Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 143.

⁶⁴ This research was conducted as a follow-up to that of my husband, Evan Phillip Pietsch, to further his research regarding Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship. Both studies relied on the same pool of resources in Wagner’s primary and secondary works. For this reason, any instances of similar wording and use of direct citing of Wagner’s material are circumstantial. At no time and in no way was any part of either work a collaborative effort or co-written—each thesis was entirely and independently authored. The conclusions of this study and the research conducted by Evan Phillip Pietsch are entirely and solely that of the respective researcher. Any potentialities in similar citations are footnoted for clarity and transparency.

⁶⁵ Wesleyan holiness and Pentecostalism are theological systems that warrant careful investigation; however, those who hold to these systems are fellow image-bearers. Theological dispositions and ideas must be separated from the person holding the theological idea; an idea must be evaluated on its merit. First, I do not believe Wesleyan Holiness and Pentecostalism adequately provide an overarching biblical-theological narrative nor supply a redemptive-historical biblical hermeneutic. I affirm a classical Reformed theological perspective concerning the doctrine of sanctification. Merits of Wesleyan holiness and Pentecostalism are outside the scope of this thesis and research. Second, after spending two decades in the New Apostolic Reformation movement, I no longer adhere to the theological system of the movement, nor do I believe that it is substantiated through biblical evidence. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 10.

discernment, and continual assessment with realignment to Scripture, misguided and incongruous conclusions may be developed about the doctrine of sanctification and discipleship practices. Damaging implications and uncritical adoption of scripturally uninformed doctrine may be drawn from an inaccurate study.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL SYSTEM OF THE CLASSICAL REFORMED TRADITION

The eighteenth-century Reformed hymn writer Augustus Toplady penned the hymn “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me” as a reminder of the Lord’s sovereignty in salvation, expressing that justification and sanctification only come from Christ—he paid the price for and cleanses sinners from their sins:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure;
Save from wrath and make me pure.¹

Similarly, the apostle Paul speaks of the great mystery of Christ *for* us and Christ *in* us—his righteousness is “imputed to us,” removing our guilt and condemnation; his righteousness is “imparted for us,” cleansing our corruption and liberating us from slavery to sin (Gal 2:20; Col 1:27).² A biblical understanding of sanctification enables one to begin to comprehend the glorious truth of God’s grace that saves from the guilt of sin and its power.

This chapter engages in the first step of the Inverse Consistency Protocol, envision redemptive maturity. John David Trentham stipulates that a “thoroughgoing confessional-doctrinal vision and imagination for human development unto

¹ Augustus Montague Toplady, “#499. Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me,” in *Trinity Hymnal* (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission, 1961).

² Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 234. All Bible references are from the ESV unless specifically noted otherwise.

Christlikeness” must be developed.³ The Reformed confessional convictions addressed in this chapter are *delimiting* concerning what is “scripturally permissible” (Col 2:8), are *regulative* regarding the envisioned “personal development” (Heb 5:12–14), and are imaginative as to “how the pursuit of biblical maturity may manifest itself in the Christian life and in the body of Christ” (Matt 5:13–16).⁴ The sufficiency of Scripture within the biblical-theological system of the classical Reformed tradition undergirds the assessment of the Reformed view of sanctification.⁵

Few doctrines have received as much discussion and consideration throughout the centuries as the doctrine of sanctification. Theologians have discoursed and debated hotly regarding the definition, favored biblical support, and effect(s) of sanctification.⁶ One’s view of sanctification impacts the way in which one lives one’s life. The answer to questions of the role of sin in the life of believers and if sinless perfection is attainable in this life depends on one’s view of theology proper, anthropology, soteriology, Christology, pneumatology, and many other doctrines.⁷ The doctrine of sanctification is a

³ John David Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Engaging and Appropriating Models of Human Development,” *Christian Educational Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 488.

⁴ Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2),” 489.

⁵ This thesis recognizes the historical contingency and contextuality of the Reformed doctrine of sanctification; it also recognizes that the doctrine of sanctification as expressed through Puritans is further historically contextualized.

⁶ See Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Five Views on Sanctification, Counterpoints* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Donald Alexander, ed., *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988). Both books discuss the Reformed, Wesleyan, and Pentecostal positions, providing an array of perspectives on the spiritual formation and maturation of a Christian.

⁷ The positions one holds regarding theological anthropology and hamartiology (the doctrines of humanity and sin) impact the positions one holds regarding soteriology and Christology (the doctrines of salvation and God the Son). Should one view humanity as inherently good or only partially affected by sin, then the atonement of Christ on the cross would be viewed differently than if one viewed humanity as inherently evil and enslaved to sin. The latter view requires a substitutionary sacrifice and payment for sin, which only God the Son can provide to both atone for the sins of humanity and appease the wrath of God. Such a view is held in the penal substitutionary theory of atonement, which builds upon the satisfaction theory of the atonement associated with the eleventh-century theologian Anselm. The former view, when it maintains humanity’s goodness, does not require substitutionary sacrifice; rather, those who hold such a view maintain the life and death of Christ to be a moral example or to better the lives of humanity. Such a view is held in the moral influence theory. Moreover, when the sin of humanity and wrath of God are removed, one can focus too much on the price paid by Christ to defeat the power of sin and evil or paid as a ransom to Satan. Such a view is held in the *Christus victor* and ransom theories. Some may hold to the view that humanity’s sin requires payment to take away the wrath of God, yet Christ took only a

subordinate category of the doctrine of salvation, which describes God’s grace and its relation to humanity’s sin, justification, holiness, and union with Christ.⁸ The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a superordinate category to the doctrine of salvation, and the doctrines of the Holy Spirit and salvation are the foundation of Christian theology. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is central to the biblical-theological system in the metanarrative of Scripture. The doctrine encompasses salvation, which “describes the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ as it is applied concretely to God’s people through the transforming and empowering work of the Holy Spirit.”⁹

Contextual Background

The spectrum of orthodoxy contains varying theological positions concerning the doctrine of sanctification. This chapter addresses the Reformed view of sanctification, as Wagner expresses the profound impact it had on him during the first few decades of his ministry.¹⁰ Wagner asserts that his professors at Fuller Theological Seminary taught and “generally accepted the views of Luther and Calvin—especially Calvin—as their

punishment rather than *the total* punishment. Such a view is held in the governmental theory. For an excellent treatment of the various theories of atonement throughout church history, see Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior*, Five Solas Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).

⁸ The doctrine of sanctification relates to and depends on the doctrine of salvation. Sanctification only occurs in conjunction with salvation, and the fruits of salvation occur through sanctification. The sanctification and justification of believers are directly related to believers’ union with Christ. The intertwined elements of the aforementioned doctrines are discussed in detail later in the chapter.

⁹ Fred Sanders, “The Holy Spirit and Salvation,” in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018). Theology begins with salvation, which leads believers to ask questions about their relationship to God and who God is. Theological thinking, according to Scripture, moves from thinking of God to the salvific work of Christ and then to the application of salvation by the work of the Holy Spirit. In salvation, believers begin to think about regeneration, conversion, union with Christ, adoption, justification, sanctification, and glorification. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the “pathway” to our eschatological *telos* in Christ, “obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet 1:9).

¹⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004), 151. Wagner asserts that he was “taught Reformed theology, i.e., Calvinism, as if it were the correct systematization of biblical truth.” Those “who disagreed would be considered either unintelligent or uninformed” (169). He continues, stating he was taught “not only the Reformed doctrine of sanctification, but also how to soundly refute what they considered the flawed ideas underlying Wesleyan holiness” (172). Wesleyan holiness will be addressed in chaps. 3 and 4.

theological bedrock.”¹¹ Wagner contends that the “school was intentionally indoctrinating” students “with Reformed theology.”¹² He proclaims that he “will not forget” his “frustration over these issues during my first year in seminary.” His “frustration” developed as he was “not entirely happy with the answers” the “theology professors were proposing in class” while “attempting to explain classical theism.”¹³ Wagner’s underlying frustration came from being “given no theological alternatives” through which to filter his experiences. He reflects that he “learned enough to pass the exams, but” what he “learned did not always seem to line up very well with reality.” Wagner reveals that his “escape from this theological frustration was simply to ignore the questions. If I couldn’t come to reasonable answers in three years of seminary, I concluded that I probably never would.”¹⁴

Wagner writes in his 1998 publication *Radical Holiness* that “a major obstacle or stumbling block preventing many believers from living a daily life of holiness according to the plan of God has been the pervasiveness of the Reformed doctrine of holiness or sanctification.”¹⁵ Reflecting upon his view of sanctification near the end of his life in his 2010 autobiography, Wagner proclaims, “I am now convinced that Luther’s and Calvin’s view of holiness, commonly known by the technical term ‘Reformed doctrine of sanctification,’ was one of their areas of weakness” due to believers’ inability

¹¹ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 169.

¹² C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God’s Call to Transform the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 83.

¹³ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 83.

¹⁴ Wagner reveals that his frustration “ended in the late 1990s, when I first heard about open theism. I began reading Greg Boyd, Clark Pinnock and John Sanders, probably the three highest-profile advocates of open theism. It felt like I was being theologically born again. I finally had a biblical and theological paradigm that made sense of what I had been thinking and what I had been doing all along.” Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 84.

¹⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (Colorado Springs: Wagner Institute for Practical Ministry, 1998), 11. Wagner’s “shift” from his professed Reformed sanctification to an appropriated Wesleyan holiness is discussed in later chapters of this thesis.

to obtain personal holiness.¹⁶ When considering John Wesley’s theological conviction and “dissatisfaction with the Reformed doctrine of sanctification,” Wagner asserts that Wesley’s “study of the Bible convinced him, not only that believers could attain personal holiness, but also that God expected them to do that very thing.”¹⁷

This chapter addresses the Reformed view of sanctification in light of what Wagner would have learned in his time at Fuller Theological Seminary. When presenting the Reformed view of sanctification, I rely upon the theologians and scholars Wagner cites in his works or whose materials were required in the BD program at Fuller.¹⁸ Moreover, I utilize the theologians who shaped the Reformed view of sanctification throughout church history, as they had a profound influence on the theologians of Wagner’s day and, therefore, are of import to understanding Wagner’s professed view of Reformed sanctification.¹⁹

¹⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 271–72. Wagner recounts his “paradigm shift” from the Reformed view he “was taught” to the Wesleyan view of sanctification. In his words, after becoming “involved in spiritual warfare, I found that the Reformed view of sanctification that I held would not be sufficient. So I shifted to John Wesley’s view that we could and should live lives of purity and holiness, thereby shutting many doors through which Satan’s demonic forces could enter and thwart our effectiveness.” Spiritual warfare became a distinct and influential element of Wagner’s theological understanding of sanctification later in his life.

¹⁷ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 171.

¹⁸ Wagner states, “The two seminaries I went to, Fuller and Princeton, both identified themselves as Reformed seminaries. While I was in Princeton, I was taught that the doctrinal paradigm of the Presbyterian Church is molded by the Westminster Confession of Faith.” His studies consisted of the “standard belief of the churches that have come down to us from John Calvin, John Knox and Abraham Kuyper.” C. Peter Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 40.

¹⁹ Sinclair Ferguson discusses the extraordinary contribution of the “biblical exposition recovered for the church at the time of the Reformation,” which is

particularly associated with the work of John Calvin, but was later developed by such seventeenth-century Puritans as John Owen and Thomas Goodwin (in England), and Thomas Hooker and John Cotton (in New England). Many later Christians have owed a special debt to the Reformed theological tradition. They include preachers like George Whitefield, C. H. Spurgeon and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones; and theologians such as Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, Abraham Kuyper and B. B. Warfield; as well as such influential twentieth-century Christian leaders as J. Gresham Machen and Francis Schaeffer. (Sinclair B. Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” in Alexander, *Christian Spirituality*, 47)

Reformed Definition of Sanctification

The Bible employs several meanings for the term “sanctify”: (1) to make holy, set apart, dedicate for special use (Exod 28:1; Lev 20:22; Acts 13:2; 2 Tim 2:21); (2) an action free from sin, as in how believers are to greet one another with a “holy kiss” (1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26; 1 Pet 5:14); (3) character, as in the perfect holiness of God or glorified saints or the partial holiness of believers (Matt 27:52; Rom 1:7; Phil 4:21; Eph 1:1; Col 1:2).²⁰

Question 75 of the Westminster Larger Catechism asks, “What is sanctification?” The answer defines “sanctification” as follows:

Sanctification is a work of God’s grace, whereby they whom God hath, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of his Spirit (Eph. 1:4, 1 Cor. 6:11, 2 Thess. 2:13) applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, (Rom. 6:4–6) renewed in their whole man after the image of God; (Eph. 4:23–24) having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, (Acts 11:18, 1 John 3:9) and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, (Jude 20, Heb. 6:11–12, Eph. 3:16–19, Col. 1:10–11) as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise unto newness of life. (Rom. 6:4,6,14, Gal. 5:24)²¹

The definition provided by the Westminster divines expresses the decisive act of God to provide grace to a chosen people, whom he called to be holy “before the foundation of the world.” Sanctification involves both a definitive aspect—which occurs “with conversion or baptism into Christ,” wherein God consecrates believers as his holy people, set apart as those who are irreversibly in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, who

²⁰ Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 257–58.

²¹ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: With Scripture Proofs* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1996), Question 75. Logos Bible Software. Wagner does not specify if he read the Westminster catechisms during his time at Fuller; however, he recounts when he did review the catechism a few years later while pursuing his ThM at Princeton Seminary in 1961:

Princeton Seminary was affiliated with the Presbyterian Church USA, which had as its doctrinal foundation [sic] the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The seminary had a standing endowment fund that enabled them to offer a stipend of \$120 to students who agreed to memorize the catechism. That was a huge sum of money to furloughed missionaries at the time, so I signed up. The first thing I discovered is that the Westminster Shorter Catechism isn’t very short! It is quite long! But I succeeded in memorizing it, and I passed the test. The only catechism question I still remember is the first one, which I consider excellent. “Q: What is the chief end of man? A: The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 57)

“delivers us as justified sinners from the pollution of sin” and “renews our entire nature according to the image of God”—and a progressive aspect—which occurs through “our responsible participation” as we are enabled “to live lives that are pleasing to Him” as we die to sin and are conformed more into the image of Christ.²²

Reformed Meaning of Sanctification

While there is more to the doctrine of sanctification than a simple definition, there is certainly not less. Sinclair Ferguson summarizes sanctification by highlighting two central features of holiness: (1) believers’ sanctification or holiness is “Jesus Christ himself” (Cor 1:30), and (2) “sanctification is accomplished” in believers’ union with Christ (Heb 2:10–12).²³ The doctrine of sanctification is grounded in Christ, without whom no human can see God. The Westminster Confession of Faith expresses the eternal truth of the perfect atonement that Christ the Mediator accomplished on behalf of sinners:

The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; (Rom. 5:19, Heb. 9:14, 16, Heb. 10:14, Eph. 5:2, Rom. 3:25–26) and

²² David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 13. Peterson argues that *definitive* sanctification does not receive its deserved attention or treatment as most modern-day scholars focus on *progressive* sanctification. Peterson argues, “Sanctification is a state in which believers find themselves because of the work of Christ and the operation of his Spirit in their lives,” and it “is also a state to which they must strive” (14). Anthony A. Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” in Gundry, *Five Views on Sanctification*, 61. The two aspects of sanctification are discussed further in the following sections. The Reformed perspective of sanctification, as explicated by John Frame, holds two, sometimes three, stages or aspects of sanctification: (1) definitive sanctification, (2) progressive sanctification, and (3) final sanctification (at death). As the third stage involves the glorification of believers, some consider this stage to be part of glorification and not sanctification. John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 222–24. For a classic Reformed perspective, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958), 534. More contemporary descriptions are presented by Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 925–931; Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998); Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” 47–62; Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” 72–77.

²³ Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” 48. Believers’ union with Christ is an essential element of sanctification. For a small treatment of believers’ union with Christ, see Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*; John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Hanford, CA: Den Dulk Christian Foundation, 2000); Augustine of Hippo, *Augustine of Hippo, Selected Writings*, ed. John Farina and Mary T. Clark, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1984); Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Atonement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board, 1867); Michael Horton, ed., *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him. (Dan. 9:24, 26, Col. 1:19–20, Eph. 1:11, 14, John 17:2, Heb. 9:12, 15)²⁴

The central features highlighted by Ferguson are discussed further in the treatment of the Reformed view of sanctification.

Reformed Definition of Holiness

As a central axiom of sanctification, holiness must be defined. The Bible depicts holiness with multiple usages, all of which find their essence grounded in the holiness of God. In describing the holiness of God, David Peterson asserts, “First and foremost, holiness in Scripture is a description of God and his character. God is regularly identified as ‘the Holy One’” or “‘the Holy One of Israel.’” God is described “more completely as ‘the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy’ (Is. 57:15)” and who “dwells in ‘the high and holy place’” and “also with ‘those who are contrite and humble in spirit.’”²⁵ Those whom God has called are separated and sanctified in and for holiness, an act performed *by* God on behalf of sinful humans. J. I. Packer defines the personal holiness of the believer as encompassing devotion in “living a life of service to God” and assimilation in “imitating, conforming to, and becoming like the God one serves.”²⁶ Calvin yearned for all people to live with personal piety, which he considered the “soul of life” and the requirement for the knowledge of God.²⁷

²⁴ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Edinburgh ed. (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), 8.5, Logos Bible Software.

²⁵ Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 16. Peterson provides scriptural proof for the description of God “as ‘the Holy One’ (e.g. Jb. 6:10; Is. 40:25; 43:15; Ezk. 39:7; Ho. 11:9; Hab. 1:12; 3:3)” and “‘the Holy One of Israel’ (e.g. 2 Ki. 19:22; Is. 1:4; 43:3; Je. 50:29; 51:5).”

²⁶ J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God*, 2nd ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 18. Packer continues, “For Christians, this means taking God’s moral law as our rule and God’s incarnate Son as our model.” Understanding holiness as a pattern for humanity after the holiness of God fosters the ability to recognize the moral law as the rule for holiness and Christ as our model. Christ enables believers to uphold the moral law, and through service to God, believers are conformed more into the image of Christ.

²⁷ Joel R. Beeke, ed., *The Soul of Life: The Piety of John Calvin*, Profiles in Reformed Spirituality (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 57. “Piety” is also translated as “godliness” in Calvin’s *Institutes*. Piety, which Calvin termed *pietas* in the *Institutes*, is “reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces” and “acts of service to God.” John Calvin,

Several meanings and various usages of holiness in both the Old Testament and New Testament must be expounded upon to form a more complete biblical conception of sanctification. I first address holiness through the themes of divine holiness, religious holiness, and moral-ethical holiness found in the Old Testament. Then, I discuss holiness in the New Testament, demonstrating the continuity of holiness between the two Testaments. The requirements have not changed; however, the New Testament depicts the holiness of Christ conferred to believers.

Divine Holiness in the Old Testament

Divine holiness is defined as God’s “unapproachableness,” seen in his “holiness as majestic purity or ethical sublimity.” He is eternally and “absolutely distinct from the creature” and anything unclean (Ps 5:4; Hab 1:13).²⁸ God’s purity is demonstrated in his moral perfection (Deut 32:4; 2 Sam 22:31; 92:15) and his righteous judgment of evil and sin (Isa 20:27–28; Ps 21:9; Lam 2:3). God is “as holy as he is just and righteous”; he is concerned for “the vindication of the honour” and “as much concerned for the glory of his holiness” as “that of his justice.”²⁹ Isaiah 6:1–3 depicts the holiness of God through the praises sung by angels and the flowing robe of God that fills the temple. There is “none holy like the Lord” (1 Sam 2:2); he is in his “holy temple” (Zeph 3:4); his “throne is heaven” (Ps 11:4); he “reigns over the nations” from his holy

Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 1.2.1, Logos Bible Software. Calvin expounded upon the definition of piety as well as expanded his use of the term in later editions of the *Institutes*. He developed the theme of piety, buttressing the theological depth of the term and purpose. The definition of piety was also amended over the various editions. The 1536 edition mentions piety approximately 23 times, whereas the final French version discusses piety approximately 161 times. With the addition of the developed theme of piety, Calvin more fully provided a clear representation of God as one who desires obedience and reverence. Piety is later defined as “acts of service to God.” Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen, vol. 3 (New Haven, CT: Philip H. Nicklin and Hezekiah Howe, 1816), 4.29.26, Logos Bible Software. John Allen translated the last French edition of the *Institutes*, printed in 1560.

²⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 531.

²⁹ James Nichols, trans., *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689: Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate, St. Giles in the Fields, and in Southwark by Seventy-Five Ministers of the Gospel in or near London*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 423.

throne (Ps 47:8).³⁰ The holiness of God is evidenced in that as he is “infinitely wise[,] He cannot err, and because He is infinitely righteous[,] He will not do wrong.”³¹ There is no darkness or shadow in God’s perfect understanding, “no spot in his will.” God loves truth and goodness; he hates falsehood and evil.³²

Religious Holiness in the Old Testament

Religious holiness concerns divine ownership, being set apart for or belonging to the Lord. The Old Testament depicts religious holiness as rest, setting people and objects apart as belonging to the Lord, and worship. The Sabbath is sanctified as God “blessed the seventh day and made it holy,” resting from his work of creation (Gen 2:3).

Stephen Charnock expresses the purpose of the Sabbath in his proclamation that the

first institution of the Sabbath, the solemn day for worship, was to contemplate the glory of God in his stupendous works of creation, and render him a homage for them (Rev. 4:11): “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive honor, glory, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” No worship can be returned without a glorifying of God; and we cannot actually glorify him, without direct aims at the promoting his honor.³³

The people of the Lord, consecrated in a particular covenantal relationship with God, were to rest from their work in a pattern modeled after creation (Exod 19:14; Ezek 20:20). God called Aaron and his sons to be consecrated (Exod 28:1–4); required the tabernacle, altar, and ritual objects to be set apart for worship (Lev 8:10–11); and

³⁰ Many other biblical passages depict the majesty and holiness of God. For a discussion on the holiness of God, see Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Arthur Pink Anthology* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005); John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ, Explained, Confirmed, and Vindicated* (London: R. Boulter, 1677); Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012); Kelly M. Kapic, ed., *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014); Michael Allen, *Sanctification, New Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017); Peterson, *Possessed by God*.

³¹ Pink, *The Arthur Pink Anthology*, chap. 35.

³² Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 194, Logos Bible Software.

³³ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, vol. 1 (n.p.: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 240, Logos Bible Software.

provided worship ritual prescriptions. The people were consecrated to God, purposed to be “the first-fruits of his increase.” Separated from other nations as the firstfruits, “*Israel was holiness to God,*” meaning that “the glory of God shone only among them.”³⁴

Moral-Ethical Holiness in the Old Testament

Moral-ethical holiness concerns being set apart from sin in the holiness of ethical uprightness and moral purity. As the Lord is morally and ethically holy, impurity cannot be in his presence. The moral-ethical holiness of God stands in contrast with humanity’s sinful state, which establishes the impure nature of humanity. As sinners become aware of God’s holiness and the impure motives of their sinful hearts (what Rudolf Otto calls the “creature-consciousness”), it prompts a “disvaluation of the self” and the “feeling of absolute profaneness” (Isa 6:5).³⁵ The grace of the Holy Spirit prompts sorrow over sin and urges sinners to desire holiness not innate to themselves; God in his divine holiness cannot abide with sin or impurity. God separates those whom the Holy Spirit sanctifies from the immoral and unethical. God calls those whom he sanctifies to be holy and separates them from the world (Lev 19:2).

Moral-ethical holiness builds upon religious holiness, expressing the purpose of belonging to the Lord in his separating or removing his people from the world for himself (Exod 19:4–6; Lev 20:7, 27; Ps 4:3; see table 1). The holiness of the people of God is often described “primarily in ethical terms” in the Psalms, concerning “doing righteousness, speaking the truth, acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God (Ps. 15:1–2; Mic. 6:8).”³⁶ The Lord separates and sanctifies his people, for they

³⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, trans. John Owen, Calvin’s Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 72, Logos Bible Software.

³⁵ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, Galaxy Book GB14 (New York: Oxford University, 1958), 50–51.

³⁶ Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” 62–63.

belong to him; they should shun that which displeases him (Deut 14:2). The Decalogue is in view with the holiness to which God calls the people.³⁷ The Decalogue was given to the people of Israel as a means of exposing the chasm between their sinful state and the holiness to which God called them.

New Testament Holiness

The divine holiness of God remains unchanged throughout the Bible; God is absolutely separate from sin and requires perfect holiness of all who enter his presence. He continues to sanctify objects and people who belong to him for purposes of religious holiness, consecrating them in his divine ownership. Just as in the Old Testament, ethical holiness builds upon religious holiness in the New Testament; not only does God “set apart,” “dedicate” or “claim for himself,” he purifies sinners, cleansing the stain of sin.³⁸ The ethical holiness possessed by those whom God separates for himself denotes the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit in creating a people who not only can approach but are welcomed into the presence of the Lord (Matt 5:48; 2 Thess 2:13; see table 1).

Separation from sin must be paired with consecration and purity. Those whom God has claimed for himself are consecrated and to be marked with a life pleasing to him (Rom 8:8). Separation from sin in Christians is enacted by abstaining from that which would defile, such as sexual immorality (Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3) or needless argumentation with fellow believers (Rom 12:18). Separation from sin is required to “see the Lord”

³⁷ Luther included the Decalogue (i.e., the Ten Commandments) in his catechisms as he believed it is central to the Christian life. When speaking of the catechism, Martin Luther states, “The Decalogue, that is, the Ten Commandments of God, are a looking-glass, and a brief sum of all virtues and doctrines, both how we ought to behave towards God and also towards our neighbour; that is, towards all mankind. There never was at any time written a more excellent, complete, nor compendious book of virtues.” Martin Luther, *The Familiar Discourses of Dr. Martin Luther*, ed. Joseph Kerby, trans. Henry Bell (London: Sussex Press, 1818), 155, Logos Bible Software. The Decalogue provides rules for relationships: the first four laws relate to humanity’s interactions with God, while the final six relate to interactions with others. The second set of commandments undergird laws seen across cultures and across time.

³⁸ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 650. The ethical holiness of God is what separates humanity from God both ontologically and morally. God requires ethical holiness of humanity, yet such holiness is only provided through Jesus Christ.

(Heb 12:14). The cornerstone of holiness in the New Testament is the cross and resurrection of Christ. The religious and moral-ethical requirements are fulfilled in Jesus; sinners are made clean and holy through his sacrifice.

A thorough understanding of sanctification necessitates a biblical understanding of God and humanity. In the next section, I review sanctification through the redemptive-historical biblical-theological system of Reformed theology to provide a representation of what Wagner was likely taught and later rejected as “indoctrination” and “weakness” as it did not align with his experience.

Table 1. Holiness in the Old and New Testaments

Divine Holiness	Religious Holiness	Moral-Ethical Holiness	Ethical Holiness by Power of the Holy Spirit
God is as holy as he is just and righteous.	Divine ownership; set apart for and belonging to God.	Builds upon religious holiness. God separates and sanctifies his people, who shun that which displeases him.	Cornerstone of holiness is the cross and resurrection of Christ. Religious and moral-ethical requirements fulfilled in Christ.
God is eternally distinct from creatures as the Creator.	Sabbath was to contemplate the glory of God and render him homage.	Creature-consciousness prompts a disvaluation of the self and feeling of absolute profaneness.	The Holy Spirit creates a people who can approach and are welcomed into the presence of God.
God possesses moral purity and perfection.	God’s people are separated from other nations.	Set apart in holiness of ethical uprightness and moral purity.	God claims a people for himself to be consecrated and marked with a life pleasing to him.
God is ethical sublimity.	God’s people are consecrated to God, as the firstfruits.	The Decalogue was given as a means of showing sin and a lack of holiness.	God sets apart, dedicates, and claims for himself; he purifies and cleanses.

Redemptive-Historical Metanarrative and Reformed Theology

The redemptive-historical metanarrative in the biblical-theological system of Reformed theology provides the necessary framework for understanding sanctification. Classical Reformed theology, also called Augustinian theology after Augustine of Hippo (354–430) or Calvinism after John Calvin (1509–1564), formed the basis of historical Christianity throughout church history.³⁹ Augustine built upon the foundation set by the apostle Paul regarding the doctrines of God and humanity.⁴⁰ The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation built upon Augustine’s theological treatises and doctrinal summations, viewing the Scriptures through a redemptive-historical biblical-theological system.⁴¹ Sanctification must be understood as part of redemptive history and believers’ union with Christ.

³⁹ Horton (*The Christian Faith*, 174n65) provides the following supplementary sources on the councils throughout church history: Robert D. Preus, “The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church through Luther,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 357–84; John H. Gerstner, “The View of the Bible Held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines,” in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 385–412; John A. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); G. W. Bromiley, “The Church Fathers and Holy Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John A. Woodbridge (UK: InterVarsity Press, 1983).

⁴⁰ Augustine wrote extensively on sin, its effects, and the grace of God offered through Christ. Augustine contrasted the world marred by sin with the righteous life of a Christian through Christ’s justification and sanctification. He wrote several works systematizing biblical doctrine, such as original sin and total depravity. Some of the most popular and comprehensive works include Augustine of Hippo, “The Confessions,” trans. J. G. Pilkington, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, vol. 1, *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin, with a Sketch of His Life and Work*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1886); Augustine, “A Treatise on the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, vol. 5, *Saint Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Peter Holmes (New York: Christian Literature, 1887); Augustine, *Saint Augustine: The Happy Life and Answer to Skeptics and Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil and Soliloquies*, ed. Ludwig Schopp, trans. Robert P. Russell, Denis J. Kavanagh, and Thomas F. Gilligan, *Fathers of the Church* 5 (New York: CIMA, 1948); Augustine, *The City of God, Books 1–7*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Demetrius B. Zema and Gerald G. Walsh, *Fathers of the Church* 8 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2008); Augustine, *The City of God, Books 8–16*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Grace Monahan and Gerald G. Walsh, *Fathers of the Church* 14 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2008); Augustine, *The City of God, Books 17–22*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Daniel J. Honan and Gerald G. Walsh, *Fathers of the Church* 24 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2008).

⁴¹ The theology of Augustine deeply impacted Calvin’s conviction of the centrality of Scripture. Calvin depended on and cited the church fathers as the foundation of his theological arguments, often quoting lengthy sections from diverse works. For a deeper understanding of the impact of Augustine and the early church fathers on Calvin, see Anthony N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 27, Logos Bible Software.

The redemptive-historical metanarrative is best understood utilizing the biblical-theological framework of the progressive revelation of God revealed through covenants.⁴² A covenant is an agreement or contract between two parties, where “one person assigns a stipulated work to another person with the promise of a reward upon the condition of the performance of that work.”⁴³ Any covenant into which God enters with humanity is founded solely upon his grace; humanity is morally obligated to obey God, as he is the Creator. The holiness of God informs and undergirds God’s covenants.

Reformed theology, also called covenantal theology, maintains three central covenants: (1) the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) made between the God and Christ before the world began, (2) the covenant of creation (*foederus naturae*) between God and Adam before his fall into sin, and (3) the covenant of grace (*foederus gratiae*) made between God and humanity after the fall to redeem those God chose in Christ.⁴⁴

The *pactum salutis* is seen as the foundation for all covenants.⁴⁵ God establishes a covenant relationship with his image-bearers in the covenant of creation.⁴⁶ His “rule is

⁴² Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 76. Although Gentry and Wellum argue for progressive covenantalism in their treatment of the redemptive-historical framework, the framework is not unique to them or their theological system. The redemptive-historical framework is utilized in Reformed theology as a means of understanding the biblical-theological overarching metanarrative of Scripture.

⁴³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner, 1871), 360.

⁴⁴ Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 78. Horton references “federal theology” as another name for covenant theology, drawing from the “emphasis in solidarity in a representative head.” Horton underscores the significance of the federal language, stating, “Scripture calls us to see ourselves not simply as individuals but those who are wither ‘in Adam’ or ‘in Christ.’” For additional treatments of covenant theology and the three distinct covenants, see Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:117–22, 354–70; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 211–18, 260–88.

⁴⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 194. Some Reformed theologians and scholars name only the latter two covenants of Reformed theology—the covenant of works and the covenant of grace—as the covenant of redemption logically precedes them as the eternal plan and decree of God. Neither of the two latter covenants could be made or accomplished without the eternal plan for salvation through the sending of the Son by the Father.

⁴⁶ Covenantal theology often terms the covenant of creation as the covenant of works. Horton provides clarification, noting that the “covenant made initially between God and his viceroy has been variously labeled the covenant of creation, nature, law, and works.” The covenant of works is sometimes termed the covenant of creation to avoid misunderstandings of “works”—some misunderstand works to

extended in his people *and* to the creation,” who know how to “love our triune God and our neighbor.” The entrance of sin brought death, separation from the holy God, and an inability for humanity to fulfill its calling. The covenant of grace establishes redemption linked to a promised seed (Gen 3:15), who will reveal “how his image bearers ought to live *and* how *he* will establish his saving reign / kingdom and restore creation through a promised, obedient Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷ The overarching biblical-theological system presents the covenants of redemptive history through four main “plot structures”: creation, fall, redemption, new creation. The covenant of redemption must be explored before examining the plot structures to gain a perspective of the biblical-theological framework and system of Scripture.

Covenant of Redemption

The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks to the covenant of redemption, stating,

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, (Isa. 42:1, 1 Pet. 1:19–20, John 3:16, 1 Tim. 2:5) the Prophet, (Acts 3:22) Priest, (Heb. 5:5–6) and King (Ps. 2:6, Luke 1:33) the Head and Saviour of His Church, (Eph. 5:23) the Heir of all things, (Heb. 1:2) and Judge of the world: (Acts 17:31) unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, (John 17:6, Ps. 22:30, Isa. 53:10) and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. (1 Tim. 2:6, Isa. 55:4–5, 1 Cor. 1:30)⁴⁸

In the covenant of redemption, the Father freely “elects to save a people in the Son as their mediator to be brought to saving faith through the Spirit.” God’s choosing to save some out of condemned humanity displays his justice as well as his mercy, as “all of God’s ways in both creation and salvation flow out of the very nature and identity of

mean that God made a covenant with Adam, requiring Adam to do “works” in order to earn or keep his eternal life. Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 83.

⁴⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 34–35.

⁴⁸ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 8.1.

God.”⁴⁹ The covenant of redemption reflects the union with Christ possessed by those whom God foreknew and predestined from before the foundation of the world (Rom 8:29–30; Eph 1:11–13; 1 Pet 1:5).⁵⁰ Those whom God foreknew are cleansed *in* Christ and *by* Christ through justification and sanctification. The continued measure of holiness afforded *through* the Spirit of Christ conforms the believers to Christ unto glory. Glorified believers enjoy the presence of God forever in the new heavens and new earth.

Calvin exhorts those who trust in Christ to consider themselves as belonging to Christ and value their election and predestination through Christ in the covenant of redemption. Calvin urges believers to know that

Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election. For since it is into his body the Father has destined those to be engrafted whom he has willed from eternity to be his own, that he may hold as sons all whom he acknowledges to be among his members, we have a sufficiently clear and firm testimony that we have been inscribed in the book of life [cf. Rev. 21:27] if we are in communion with Christ.⁵¹

Christ is their mediator and also their federal head. Romans 5:12–21 provides the foundation for God’s relationship and interaction with humanity, both in Adam and in Christ—“both in their fall and in their redemption.”⁵² Believers’ union with Christ is examined further in the “Redemption” structure covered below.

⁴⁹ Michael Reeves, “The Holy Trinity,” in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 210.

⁵⁰ J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 129–41.

⁵¹ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 3.24.5, Logos Bible Software.

⁵² Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:362. Hodge describes the promises made to the Redeemer: The promises of the Father to the Son conditioned on the accomplishment of that work, were, (1.) That He would prepare Him a body, fit up a tabernacle for Him, formed as was the body of Adam by the immediate agency of God, uncontaminated and without spot or blemish. (2.) That He would give the Spirit to Him without measure, that his whole human nature should be replenished with grace and strength, and so adorned with the beauty of holiness that He should be altogether lovely. (3.) That He would be ever at his right hand to support and comfort Him in the darkest hours of his conflict with the powers of darkness, and that He would ultimately bruise Satan under his feet. (4.) That He would deliver Him from the power of death, and exalt Him to his own right hand in heaven; and that all power in heaven and earth should be committed to Him. (5.) That He, as the Theanthropos and head of the Church, should have the Holy Spirit to send to whom He willed, to renew their hearts, to satisfy and comfort them, and to qualify them for his service and kingdom. (6.) That all given to Him by the Father should come to Him, and be kept by Him, so that none of them should be lost. (7.) That

The covenant of redemption represents an agreement between the Godhead before the foundation of time; however, the subsequent covenants enacted by God differ as they involve God's creation. The second covenant, the covenant of creation, enacted by God differs in several ways: (1) the covenant is between God and Adam, and (2) the covenant is conditional. The third covenant, the covenant of grace, decreed by God, differs still: (1) the covenant is between God and all of humanity, and (2) the covenant is unconditional and unilateral (see table 2).⁵³ The Westminster Confession of Faith confesses,

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant. (Isa. 40:13–17, Job 9:32–33, 1 Sam. 2:25, Ps. 113:5–6, Ps. 100:2–3, Job 22:2–3, Job 35:7–8, Luke 17:10, Acts 17:24–25)⁵⁴

The Confession describes the need for covenant as God's "voluntary condescension" to humanity. The chasm between God and humanity is so great that God chooses to engage with humanity through covenants. The following sections examine God's interaction with humanity through the four plot structures of the metanarrative of Scripture—creation, fall, redemption, new creation (see tables 3–6).

a multitude whom no man can number should thus be made partakers of his redemption, and that ultimately the kingdom of the Messiah should embrace all the nations of the earth. (8.) That through Christ, in Him, and in his ransomed Church, there should be made the highest manifestation of the divine perfections to all orders of holy intelligences throughout eternity. The Son of God was thus to see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

⁵³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:193.

⁵⁴ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 7.1.

Table 2. Covenants in Reformed (covenantal) theology

Covenant	Agreement	Westminster Confession of Faith	Confessional Understanding
Covenant of redemption <i>pactum salutis</i>	<i>Unconditional;</i> between God and Christ before the world began.	Those whom God foreknew and predestined, cleansed <i>in</i> Christ and <i>by</i> Christ through justification and sanctification.	Holiness afforded <i>through</i> the Spirit of Christ conforms believers to Christ unto glory.
Covenant of creation <i>foederus naturae</i>	<i>Conditional;</i> between God and Adam before his fall into sin.	God bound Adam and his posterity to personal and perpetual obedience to a covenant; promised life upon fulfilling, threatened death upon breach, and endued power and ability to keep.	Forms the basis for biblical anthropology and Adam’s representative role in all remaining covenants.
Covenant of grace <i>foederus gratiae</i>	<i>Unconditional and unilateral;</i> between God and humanity after the fall to redeem those chosen in Christ.	Distance between Creator and creature denies ability for humanity to enjoy God as their blessed reward, except by way of covenant.	God chooses to engage with humanity through covenants as God’s voluntary condescension to humanity.

Creation

Biblical anthropology—the doctrine of the origin of humanity—must be formed with a proper representation of humanity and its relationship to God. The redemptive-historical metanarrative must begin with the covenant of creation “for understanding the Bible’s storyline and how the covenants relate to each other.”⁵⁵ The covenant of creation is foundational for all of the covenants throughout redemptive

⁵⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 672.

history as the subsequent covenants “unpack Adam’s representative role in the world.”⁵⁶

The Westminster Confession of Faith proclaims,

God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity, to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it. (Gen. 1:26–27, Gen. 2:17, Rom. 2:14–15, Rom. 10:5, Rom. 5:12, 19, Gal. 3:10,12, Eccl. 7:29, Job 28:28)⁵⁷

Image of God. Scripture teaches that humanity—Adam as the original—was created in the image of God, the *imago Dei*. This protological image is the “apex of God’s creation” (Ps 8:3–6).⁵⁸ God’s majesty is reflected in humanity, who was made in his image and after his likeness (Gen 1:26, 27; 5:1). The classical Reformed view of the image of God distinguishes between two senses of image: (1) the “restricted” sense, possessing true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), and (2) the “comprehensive” sense, a spiritual being, made rational, moral, immortal, and linked with dominion over the rest of creation.⁵⁹ The original humans, Adam and Eve, were created in the complete image of God, with both senses undamaged.

Viceroy of God. The covenant relationship with God into which Adam was created fashions Adam as God’s viceroy over creation; he does not need to merit favor as he stands in right relationship with God. The “original righteousness” in which Adam was created encompassed “true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.”⁶⁰ As God’s

⁵⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 672.

⁵⁷ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 19.1.

⁵⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 220. The psalm is a meditation upon Gen 1:26–28, wherein humanity is described as created in the divine image. The *imago Dei* is what separates humanity from all other creatures. It is in the *imago Dei* that humanity rules with dominion over all of the earth. Gen 26–30 affirms the uniqueness of humanity, which is made in the image of God as male and female and blessed by God, who declares that humanity should “be fruitful and multiply” and “have dominion over” creation.

⁵⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 129–30.

⁶⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1938), 204.

viceroys, Adam is the first created human in the *imago Dei* and acts as humanity's natural and federal head.⁶¹ Adam "became a living creature" (Gen 2:7) with "an embodied soul and an animated body."⁶² In his innocent state in the garden of Eden, Adam is pure, knowing no guilt. He enjoys a relationship with God and possesses righteousness with which he is able to obey God. Francis Turretin observes that Adam "must be viewed under a double relation"—first, "he had the power to perform the prescribed duty" within the covenant, thus "there arose the obligation of fulfilling it"; second, "Adam in a certain manner included the whole human race, which was to spring from him, both as the root and the seminal principle from whom the whole human race was to descend (Acts 17:26)."⁶³ Therefore, the covenant of creation must be understood as pertaining to Adam and "all his posterity in him."

Dominion over creation. Created in the image of God and acting as God's viceroy on earth, Adam is commanded to have dominion over the earth, to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28). Michael Horton conveys how the *imago Dei* is tied to the dominion mandate from God, stating that the "image of God is to be sought in the commission that God gave to humanity in Adam. *In short, the significance of the imago Dei is the moral likeness of human beings to their Creator and the covenantal commission with which*

⁶¹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:197. All of the blessings and curses pronounced by God to Adam were "said to him in his representative capacity." The promise of life and dominion was for him and his progeny. Although Adam was subject to physical and spiritual death, the promise of redemption was also provided—to him and his posterity. Adam is a type of the one who fulfill the promise of new life. The representative head of Christ is discussed in subsequent sections.

⁶² Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 42. Gregg Allison writes regarding the creation of humanity as embodied souls, "Human beings are created holistically, so that in this earthly existence, soul and body are an inseparable unity. Indeed, being made in the image of God entails the embodiment of the image bearers. Human embodiment, then, is according to divine design." Gregg R. Allison, "Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 5. Moreover, Allison argues that Adam became an "embodied human being made alive by God himself" through the "divine breathing" of "the breath of life" into his nostrils. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 42.

⁶³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1:576.

Adam was entrusted.”⁶⁴ The *imago Dei* is associated with the covenant of creation as an axiom of dominion—to glorify God and enjoy him forever (see table 3). Adam’s original righteousness is intertwined with the dominion that he is commanded to execute. As the “king of lower creation” with the duty and privilege of ruling over all of the earth, Adam’s dominion is a representation of God’s glory that would “magnify the almighty Creator and Lord of the universe, Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:4–9.”⁶⁵

Table 3. Creation plot structure in the redemptive-historical metanarrative

Plot Structure	Image of God	Implication of Action	Covenantal Application
Creation	Adam created in the moral likeness and image of God, the <i>imago Dei</i> , as the crowning jewel of creation.	Adam is God’s viceroy over creation, standing in right relationship with God and possessing true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.	Adam is <i>covenantally commissioned</i> to have dominion over the earth, be fruitful, and multiply.

The Fall

The nature of humanity is expressed in the ontological distinction between the eternal God and his creation. The first qualitative division lies “on the ontological register” between God and creation; the ontic of creation contains righteousness and moral uprightness. The second qualitative distinction lies “on the ethical-covenantal register” between the grace of God and the sin of creation that occurred upon Adam’s disobedience. The ontic of creation changes to contain “sin, evil, ‘the flesh’” in every

⁶⁴ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 397.

⁶⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1938), 183.

area (“the mind as well as the body, thought as well as passions, spirit as well as matter”), and all of creation must be redeemed from sin and death.⁶⁶

Temptation. Created with righteousness and holiness originating inherent to the *imago Dei*, Adam possessed moral free will—the ability to choose that which he desired most. Such intrinsic righteousness allowed Adam to know what would glorify God and to choose that which was contrary to God. The authority chain of the created order placed Adam below God and above animals. In the body of a serpent, Satan tempts Eve in an attempt to upend the authority chain of God’s creation by presenting her with the forbidden fruit, which would make her “like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). Although Eve knew the command of God, which Adam conveyed as was told to him by God, she “made the judgment based on what her stomach, her eyes, and her mind told her.” Rather than follow the command given by God, Eve chose the serpent’s words, and “ultimately, she followed her own judgment. She thought she could reason by herself, autonomously, without a higher authority.”⁶⁷ The sin of Eve’s disobedience began in her heart, in her thoughts rather than in the action of eating the fruit. John Frame reveals how Eve’s sin enticed Adam:

She thought she could make the right decision by herself, disregarding God’s word. Then, committed to Satan’s position, she took on herself Satan’s role of tempter and led her husband astray. Adam, then, was also faced with two contradictory words: the word of God that Scripture says infects us all. Adam was our representative, so that when he sinned, we all sinned (Rom. 5:12).⁶⁸

Two deaths. After Adam’s sin of willful disobedience in a “lack of conformity to the law of God,” he incurred the penalty of death (both spiritually and physically), separating Adam from God and humanity from each other. Speaking of the first death

⁶⁶ Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 162.

⁶⁷ Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 104–5.

⁶⁸ Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 105.

(i.e., spiritual death), Augustine observes that when God declared in Genesis 2:17, “For in the day that you eat of” the fruit “you shall surely die,” it “should be understood as meaning, ‘In the day ye desert me in disobedience, I will desert you in justice,’ yet assuredly in this death the other deaths also were threatened, which were its inevitable consequence.”⁶⁹ The separation from God also brought physical death and decay to humanity and all of creation.

Adam’s desertion of God wrought death in guilt, shame, and impurity in “act, habit, attitude, outlook, disposition, motivation, and mode of existence” (Gen 3:6–13).⁷⁰ The sin of Adam affected all creation. This original sin, rather than being the first sin, is the inherent corrupt nature of humanity, into which each person is born (Ps 51:5). Romans 3:23 and 5:12 declare that all of humanity inherited Adam’s sin and the resultant death under his federal headship.⁷¹ The guilt of Adam’s sin is imputed, or legally charged, to his progeny—all of humanity is considered by God as guilty of sin and deserving the same punishment as Adam (Rom 5:12–21). Sin and death now have dominion over humanity.

⁶⁹ Augustine of Hippo, “The City of God,” trans. Marcus Dods, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, vol. 2, *St. Augustin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 251, Logos Bible Software. Augustine argues that the first death comes when God forsakes the soul, of which God “is its life.” The second death occurs when the soul forsakes the body to death and decay, where the body returns dust to dust.

⁷⁰ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 82. Augustine defined sin as pride, which leads to the open disobedience of God. Augustine of Hippo, “The Enchiridion,” trans. J. F. Shaw, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, vol. 3, *St. Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 273, Logos Bible Software. Martin Luther defines sin as believing God to be “inept, deceptive, and untrustworthy” and denying “God through such unbelief, erecting one’s own mind as an idol in the heart against God, as if one knew better than God.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Spirituality*, ed. Philip D. W. Krey, Bernard McGinn, and Peter D. S. Krey, trans. Peter D. S. Krey and Philip D. W. Krey, *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 75, Logos Bible Software.

⁷¹ Horton expresses, “‘Original sin’ is the term that the Western church has employed to refer to our collective human guilt and corruption. No doctrine is more crucial to our anthropology and soteriology, and yet no doctrine has been more relentlessly criticized ever since it was articulated.” Horton continues, “Repeated attempts to dismiss the doctrine of original sin as a peculiarity of Calvin or Luther, Augustine or Paul fail to take seriously the fact that the same assumptions are articulated in the Psalms (Pss 51:5, 10; 143:2), the prophets (Isa 64:6; Jer 17:9) and in the Gospels (Jn 1:13; 3:6; 5:42; 6:44; 8:34; 15:4–5) and catholic epistles (Jas 3:2; 1 Jn 1:8, 10; 5:12).” Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 423–24.

Depravity of sin. The classical understanding of the dual senses of the image of God accounts for Augustine’s argument of how original sin affected humanity.⁷² Sin corrupted the restricted sense of the image of God, causing the loss of true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Humanity lost the “rational power to determine his course in the direction of the highest good, in harmony with the original moral constitution of his nature.”⁷³ However, the entire image was not lost. Sin’s corruption marred the comprehensive senses of humanity’s rational and moral abilities, with death’s reigning in now-mortal bodies (Rom 5:12; 6:23).⁷⁴ Humanity remains responsible moral free agents as the “constitutional faculties” of “reason, conscience, and the freedom of choice” remain.⁷⁵

Augustine appeals to Scripture as evidence of the total depravity of all humanity (Rom 8:7–8; Cor 15:21–22; Matt 9:12–13).⁷⁶ The fall destroyed humanity’s

⁷² Augustine’s view of sin prior to the 390s encompassed only voluntary and deliberate sins. He states, “But in fact sin is so much a voluntary evil that it is not sin at all unless it is voluntary.” He continues, “If it is not by the exercise of the will that we do wrong, no one at all is to be censured or warned.” He concludes, “Therefore, it is by the will that sin is committed.” Augustine of Hippo, *Of True Religion*, trans. J. H. S Burleigh, Gateway (South Bend, IN: Henry Regnery, 1959), 14.27, Logos Bible Software.

Malcom E. Alflatt discusses the development of Augustine’s understanding of the depravity of sin in humanity. Alflatt explains that “*between 391 and 393*,” Augustine’s “change, indeed, was drastic” and likely due to Augustine’s debate with Fortunatus in 392. Alflatt states that “at least as early as the third book of *De libero arbitrio*, which was completed in 395,” Augustine argues that “sin ceased to be that which must be freely walled, and *became that which man’s unaided will alone cannot avoid*.” Malcolm E. Alflatt, “The Development of the Idea of Involuntary Sin in St. Augustine,” *Revue d’Etudes Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 20, nos. 1–2 (1974): 116 (italics original). For more information on the debate with Fortunatus, see Augustine of Hippo, *The Manichean Debate*, trans. Roland Teske, ed. Boniface Ramsey, vol. 19 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, pt. 1, Books (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2006).

In *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine determines that sin must include involuntary and inadvertent sins. He states, “All that a man does wrongfully in ignorance, and all that he cannot do rightly through what he wishes, are called sins because they have their origin in the first sin of the will when it was free. These are its deserved consequences.” Continuing, Augustine argues, “So we apply the word ‘sin’ not only to that which is properly called sin, that is, what is committed knowingly and with free will, but also to all that follows as the necessary punishment of that first sin.” Augustine of Hippo, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 3.19.54, Logos Bible Software.

⁷³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1938), 248.

⁷⁴ Augustine of Hippo, “On the Trinity,” in Farina and Clark, *Augustine of Hippo, Selected Writings*, 14.8.11.

⁷⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1938), 248.

⁷⁶ Total depravity, also known as total inability, refers to the sinful state of humanity and the effect sin has on the will. Total depravity does not imply (1) the *thorough* depravity of humanity, where

moral ability to choose good, leaving the will forever resolved toward evil and against God. Humanity is spiritually dead, not just merely inclined toward evil; human beings are lovers of evil, haters of God, and they possess an irresistible bias toward evil. Romans 1:28–32 describes the noetic effects of sin on humankind’s thinking, reasoning, and knowledge.⁷⁷ The apostle John’s words constitute the biblical teaching of the noetic effects of the fall, recognizing that all humanity is stained with sin. In 1 John 1:8, the apostle admonishes people to identify the reality of their sinful state: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Sinful humans are incapable of the holiness required to seek God; they cannot stand in his presence or save themselves (Ps 5:6; 14:1–3; 53:1–3; Jer 5:16; Rom 3:19, 23).⁷⁸ Consequently, humanity stands justly condemned under the wrath of God (see table 4).

humanity is as sinful as can be, (2) that unregenerate people do not possess the ability to distinguish right from wrong, (3) that unregenerate people will engage in every sin imaginable, or (4) that unregenerate people cannot perform good acts that benefit and help others. Through common grace, God “restrains sin in unregenerate people to a certain extent.” Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1994), 150. Hoekema differentiates total depravity (his preferred term is pervasive depravity) from complete depravity: “*Pervasive depravity*, then, means that (1) the corruption of original sin extends to every aspect of human nature: to one’s reason and will as well as to one’s appetites and impulses; and (2) there is not present in man by nature love to God as the motivating principle of his life.”

⁷⁷ Inspired by the Augustinian view of man, Calvin concludes that the knowledge one holds of oneself must identify the depravity in one’s soul, which one must necessarily acknowledge in order to understand that “true greatness, wisdom, truth, righteousness, and purity lie in God” alone. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition*, trans. Elsie Anne McKee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 1.1.1, Logos Bible Software. However, one cannot recognize or comprehend the state of depravity in which the soul lies without gazing upon the right and perfect standard of God, which displays all innate wisdom as foolishness. Recognizing the noetic effects of sin on the hearts and minds of man, Calvin is convinced that the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, who alone provides the authority of Scripture, offers the only way one can come to a saving knowledge of God. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 Edition*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 1.D, Logos Bible Software. Calvin calls the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit the *testimonium Spiritus sancti internum*. Calvin appeals to John 5:39 (“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me”) in order to demonstrate the ultimate purpose of Scripture. Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 1.7.1, Logos Bible Software.

⁷⁸ The Protestant Reformation cries of *sola gratia* and *sola fide* encompassed and emphasized the two realities of God’s holiness and humanity’s sinfulness; the grace of God alone that provides the faith that is alone necessary for salvation. Without a proper understanding of both, either God or humanity will be unjustly elevated or lowered and their natures misconstrued; a misconstrued understanding of humanity’s sinfulness produces a higher thinking of humanity and a lower understanding of God than Scripture teaches.

Bondage to sin. During the Protestant Reformation, the Reformers relied on the established work of Augustine when discussing sin and its effects on the will. The Reformers understood and emphasized the concept of humanity’s moral inability to draw near to God. Luther believed the will to be in bondage to sin (John 8:36; Rom 6:16–18); the *imago Dei* wholly corrupted by sin left fallen humanity incapable of doing any good, principally the good required by God for salvation. As sinners under the federal headship of Adam, “having lost our liberty, we are compelled to serve sin; that is, we will sin and wickedness; we speak sin and wickedness; we act sin and wickedness.”⁷⁹ The fallen nature is blind to the things of God pertaining to life and salvation; it “neither sees what it sees, nor hears what it hears—much less understands or seeks after these things.”⁸⁰ In perceiving the effects of the fall on the *imago Dei*, Calvin concurred with Luther and Augustine that fallen humanity is born with an irresistible proclivity toward sin, and only divine grace can cure the depravity. The root of sin is unbelief and pride, while the root of righteousness is faith.⁸¹ The “natural gifts were corrupted in man through sin,” and “his supernatural gifts were stripped from him” until he “recovers them through the grace of regeneration.”⁸²

⁷⁹ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will; To the Venerable Mister Erasmus of Rotterdam, 1525*, trans. Edward Thomas Vaughan (London: T. Hamilton, 1823), 126, Logos Bible Software.

⁸⁰ Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 120. Luther is referencing the words of the Lord in Isa 6:9–10. Luther continues, averring that the “human heart, is so trodden under foot of Satan, that, except it be miraculously raised up by the Spirit of God, it cannot of itself either see or hear those things which strike upon the very eyes and ears, so manifestly as to be palpable to the hand: such is the misery and blindness of the human race.”

⁸¹ Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, 34.

⁸² Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 2.2.12, Logos Bible Software. The supernatural gifts include “faith, love of God, charity toward neighbor, zeal for holiness and for righteousness.”

Table 4. Fall plot structure in the redemptive-historical metanarrative

Plot Structure	Image of God	Implication of Action	Covenantal Application
Fall	Adam’s sin of willful disobedience incurred the penalty of death, spiritually and physically, which passed to his progeny.	Sin corrupted the image of God, causing the loss of true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness and separating Adam from God and humanity from each other.	Wholly corrupted by sin, humanity is incapable of doing any good required for salvation. Under the federal headship of Adam, humanity serves sin and wickedness.

Redemption

In breaking the covenant of creation, Adam brought the promised sin and death into the world and to his progeny (Gen 2:16–17). Through the curse, all humanity knows God; Romans 2:15 attests that the “law is written on their hearts” and their “conscience also bears witness.” Yet sin and unrighteousness suppress the knowledge, leaving humanity spiritually dead.⁸³ Humanity cannot provide the necessary righteousness or salvation in this spiritually dead state. Genesis 3:15 reveals light in the darkness of sin in the form of a promise made by God: salvation from the curse of sin and death through promised seed, “the last Adam” (Gen 3:15; Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:45–49). Those whom God chose in and gave to Christ in the covenant of redemption will receive effectual grace through salvation in Christ.⁸⁴

⁸³ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 1138.

⁸⁴ Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 73. The promise of salvation in the covenant of grace “moves from promise to fulfillment in Christ through the biblical covenants. There is continuity between the promises God makes and the fulfillment he brings” (emphasis original). The progressive revelation of God is revealed as “the covenants unfold from Adam to Christ,” and “we discover how God’s initial promise in Genesis 3:15 is accomplished with greater clarity and detail. The simple way to grasp this is to say that the Old Testament is the story of God’s promise and the New Testament is God’s fulfillment of all he has promised” (46). An examination of the covenants from Adam to Christ is outside the scope of this study; however, it is necessary to mention the promise-fulfillment nature of the covenants all fulfilled in Christ as part of the overarching redemptive-historical metanarrative.

The effectual grace of God is necessary to liberate the sinful hearts of humanity and give faith in Christ, the last Adam (Rom 5:10; Eph 2:1–5). When reflecting on the will of man and the grace of God, Augustine cites Romans 9:23 as he remarks that those whom God “liberated from” spiritual death “by grace are not called vessels of their own merits but ‘vessels of mercy.’”⁸⁵ The Westminster Confession of Faith discusses the grace of God, stating,

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, (Gal. 3:21, Rom. 8:3, Rom. 3:20–21, Gen. 3:15, Isa. 42:6) commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, (Mark 16:15–16, John 3:16, Rom. 10:6–9, Gal. 3:11) and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe. (Ezek. 36:26–27, John 6:44–45)⁸⁶

The covenant of grace freely offers humanity the necessary salvation from death and sin. Along with Augustine, Luther and Calvin proclaim the free, unmerited grace available through the atonement of Christ and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Through the covenant of grace, God offers humanity the free gift of saving grace that breathes life back into the spiritually dead “vessels of mercy” for his glory (see table 5).

Redemption from sin. The free, unmerited grace of God is offered to humanity through the gospel of Christ (Eph 1:3–14; 2:1–10). Jesus Christ is the promised seed, the one who would redeem humanity from sin and death, restore a right relationship between God and humanity, and make all things new (Gen 3:15; Rom 5:17; 1 Cor 15:45; 2 Tim 1:10; Heb 2:14; Rev 1:18; 20:14).⁸⁷ Although the grace of God offers redemption in the covenant of grace, humanity remains under God’s just condemnation for sin.

⁸⁵ Augustine of Hippo, “A Treatise on Nature and Grace, against Pelagius,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, vol. 5, *Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Peter Holmes, Robert Ernest Wallis, and Benjamin B. Warfield (New York: Christian Literature, 1887), 123, Logos Bible Software.

⁸⁶ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 7.1.

⁸⁷ Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, 334.

Atonement is necessary to appease the wrath of God and pay the wages of sin—death (Rom 6:23). Scripture attests that it was the will of God to send his Son as the atoning sacrifice; it was the “good pleasure” of God to crush him (Isa 53:10; Luke 2:14; Col 1:19, 20). Louis Berkhof captures the glorious truth of the substitutionary death of Christ, attesting,

This good pleasure of God should not be regarded as some arbitrary choice of God. It is more in harmony with Scripture to say that the good pleasure of God to save sinners by a substitutionary atonement was founded in the love and justice of God. It was the love of God that offered sinners a way of escape, John 3:16. And it was the justice of God which required that the demands of the law should be met, “that He might be just, and the justified of him which believeth in Jesus,” Rom. 3:26; cf. vss. 24, 25.⁸⁸

Through his substitutionary death on the cross, Christ took the place of sinners, humbly and freely offering himself as an atoning sacrifice to pay the penalty for sin (passive obedience).⁸⁹ The necessity of righteousness that separates humanity from the holiness of God is achieved through the gospel of Christ; the required moral-ethical holiness in the covenant of creation is met by Christ, who lived a perfect, sinless life in full obedience to the moral law (active obedience).⁹⁰

In humility, placing himself under the requirements of the covenant of creation, Christ died for those given to him by the Father from eternity past in the covenant of redemption. Through the atonement, the promises to those in Christ “provide

⁸⁸ Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, 212.

⁸⁹ Christ, the sinless one, became sin out of love for those the Father gave him in the covenant of redemption; his sacrifice appeased the wrath of God, meeting the righteous justice of God (Titus 2:14; 1 Thess 1:10; Gal 3:13). The theological term “penal substitutionary atonement” is used to describe the work of Christ on the cross as both payment for the punishment of death and the perfect substitutionary sacrifice in the place of sinners. Those whom the Father gave the Son in the covenant of redemption are justified by the work of Christ on the cross (Gal 1:4; Col 1:13; Acts 26:18; Rom 6:14).

⁹⁰ The moral law continues to bind all of humanity to the righteousness required in the covenant of creation. The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks to the binding nature of the moral law on humanity:

The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; (Rom. 13:8, 9, Eph. 6:2, 1 John 2:3–4, 7–8) and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. (James 2:10, 11) Neither doth Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation. (Matt. 5:17–19, James 2:8, Rom. 3:31) (Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 19.5)

an unshakable foundation on which the blessings of the covenant of grace rest.”⁹¹ When speaking of the atoning work of Christ, theologians discuss the double imputation of the cross—the sin of humanity is imputed to Christ as he provided the once for all sacrifice, and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to sinners (see table 5).⁹² The imputation of Christ’s righteousness is “an implication” of believers’ union with Christ, which is the divinely ethical basis of the unilateral application of the atonement. The blood of Christ justifies sinners, supplying the purifying washing that leaves them “white as snow,” without condemnation, and blameless in God’s sight (Isa 1:8; Ezek 36:33; Rom 3:25; 5:9; Eph 1:7; Heb 10:19; 12:24; 1 John 1:9).

Double grace. Calvin speaks of a double grace given in believers’ union with Christ: “By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ’s blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and second, that sanctified by Christ’s spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.”⁹³ Justification by faith in the work of Christ provides the forgiveness of sin and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness; therefore, no one can boast of justifying or saving works. Sinners are simultaneously justified and sanctified, both found righteous and purified. “These benefits,” Calvin avers, “are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond, so that those whom he illumines by his wisdom, he redeems; those whom he redeems, he justifies; those whom he justifies, he sanctifies.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 29.

⁹² Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 968. The Bible specifies three imputations: (1) the imputation of Adam’s sin to all humanity, (2) the imputation of humanity’s sin to Christ, and (3) the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers.

⁹³ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 3.11.1, Logos Bible Software.

⁹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 3.16.1, Logos Bible Software. Luther, in reflecting on the justification of sinners by faith, insists that believers are *simul justus et peccator*, simultaneously saint and sinner. Believers are justified before being fully sanctified and righteous. Though believers, having been imputed with Christ’s righteousness, are justified before God and sanctified, sin still reigns on the earth and in the entire person. The entire spirit-body union of believers is simultaneously fallen yet redeemed; they are simultaneously sinners and justified saints, awaiting the holistic glorification in which the resurrected *spirit-body unities*, being fully conformed to the image of Christ. Though regenerate and possessing

Calling. Scripture speaks of a general calling to repentance offered to all humanity through the gospel. Although the gospel call goes out to “many,” Matthew 22:14 states, “few are chosen” (i.e., those whom the Father called in the covenant of redemption) to have their eyes opened to see and ears opened to hear the effectual call of the Holy Spirit (Rom 1:6–7; 1 Cor 1:9; 2 Pet 1:10).⁹⁵ Romans 8:29–30 reveals that the effectual call is presented to those whom God foreknew and predestined to “be conformed to the image of” Christ. The called are also justified and glorified in Christ as his possession, covenant people, and holy saints.⁹⁶ First Thessalonians 5:24 reveals the effectual power of God to justify and glorify those he has called, declaring, “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” Justification and glorification are offered to all who heed the effectual call, repenting of sin and trusting in Christ.

The Westminster Confession of Faith conveys the special work of the Holy Spirit in the effectual call through regeneration (opening sinners’ eyes and providing them a new heart), which provides the “sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of” their “sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God.”⁹⁷ As those who receive regeneration become aware of their filthy state, “the apprehension of His mercy in Christ” produces godly sorrow and grief over sin. The heart hates sin, desiring to turn from sin to God and “purposing and endeavouring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments” (Deut 30; Jer 31; Ezek 36).

outward righteousness, believers are being sanctified and conformed inwardly unto the image of Christ. For additional information, see Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: Lectures on Galatians, 1535: Chap. 1-4*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1963); R. C. Sproul, *Justified by Faith Alone* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

⁹⁵ Murray, *Redemption*, 88. Murray reminds believers that their calling is an “act of God’s grace and power, just as regeneration, justification, and adoption are” (89).

⁹⁶ Brannon Ellis, “Covenantal Union and Communion: Union with Christ as the Covenant of Grace,” in Kopic, *Sanctification*, 88.

⁹⁷ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 15.2. The Confession provides proof texts regarding the new heart as “penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God”: Isa 30:22; Jer 31:18–19; Pss 51:4; 119:128; Ezek 18:30–31; 36:31; Joel 2:12–13, 15; Amos 5:15; 2 Cor 7:11. The proof texts offered for “purposing and endeavouring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments” are 2 Kgs 23:25; Ps 119:6, 59, 106; Luke 1:6.

Justification and adoption. Justification provides the remedy for the need of sinners: “a new legal status.” With the wrath of God satisfied and righteousness provided, justified sinners stand before God under grace, without condemnation. The “second great need” of sinners is met by adoption, which provides them a new family. While sinners are born spiritually dead children of the devil, Christ provides authority for justified believers to become sons and daughters of God (John 1:12; Rom 8:14–17; Gal 3:23–26; 4:28, 31; 1 Pet 3:6; 1 John 3:1–2).⁹⁸ The Westminster Confession of Faith explicates the importance of adoption:

All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption, (Eph. 1:5, Gal. 4:4–5) by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, (Rom. 8:17, John 1:12) have His name put upon them, (Jer. 14:9, 2 Cor. 6:18, Rev. 3:12) receive the spirit of adoption, (Rom. 8:15) have access to the throne of grace with boldness, (Eph. 3:12, Rom. 5:2) are enabled to cry, Abba, Father, (Gal. 4:6) are pitied, (Ps. 103:13) protected, (Prov. 14:26) provided for, (Matt. 6:30,32, 1 Pet. 5:7) and chastened by Him as by a Father: (Heb. 12:6) yet never cast off, (Lam. 3:31) but sealed to the day of redemption; (Eph. 4:30) and inherit the promises, (Heb. 6:12) as heirs of everlasting salvation. (1 Pet. 1:3–4, Heb. 1:14)⁹⁹

Through the covenant of redemption, those whom God gave to Christ he also adopted. As sons and daughters, believers become partakers of grace “by generation and by adoption.”¹⁰⁰ The regeneration wrought by the Holy Spirit “renews” hearts “after” God’s “image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness,” then believers are adopted into the family of God (1 John 3:1). The blessings of Christ, the firstborn (John 1:12), are extended to those whom God gave the right to call him “Father.” Through the inheritance

⁹⁸ Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 205–6. The apostle John says in his first epistle, “Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. . . . By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:8, 10). All humanity is born spiritually dead, children of the devil; only the effectual grace of God can bring spiritual rebirth, and with it a new heart, new eyes, and new ears.

⁹⁹ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 12.1.

¹⁰⁰ Murray, *Redemption*, 133.

of Christ, believers are conferred authority to approach God in worship and prayer boldly.

Restored image. The justification offered by Christ restores the image of God in the adopted sons and daughters; it is “stamped” on “again” through the “new man, which” is “assumed” at “conversion.”¹⁰¹ The restored image in the “new man” is “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24). The “new man,” being sanctified and continually conformed to the image of Christ, is continuously progressing in holiness, even though believers remain burdened by sin until the new creation in the restoration structure.

People’s separating themselves from sin by simply living a moral or ethical life—without being made pure—results only in a life of good works. However, believers’ sanctification resulting in the ethical and moral holiness required of those who serve the Lord must be performed by the Holy Spirit, after which the good works are sanctified and done to the glory of the Lord. Moreover, as God has redeemed his people from sin, Sinclair Ferguson notes, “*therefore*, they are to be conformed to his patterns (Ex. 20:1–2).”¹⁰² Augustine declares that the holy life to which believers are called must be lived in a manner that preaches Christ through confession of and conformity to the gospel of Christ. To preach Christ is “not only to say what things are to be believed concerning Christ, but also what things are to be observed by him who approaches unto the frame of the body of Christ,” “not only that which pertains unto the faith, but that also which pertains unto the life of believers.”¹⁰³ Believers must live a holy life in a manner that preaches Christ and glorifies the Lord (see table 5).

¹⁰¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (London: Tyndale House, 1964), 119.

¹⁰² Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 140, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁰³ Augustine of Hippo, “Of Faith and Works [*De fide et operibus*],” in *Seventeen Short Treatises of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, Translated, with Notes and Indices* (Oxford: John Henry

Through both word and deed, Christians must offer praise to God for what he has done in their hearts through Christ. The sanctification that occurs in the new creation through the power of the Holy Spirit leads to increased holiness in believers' lives. The continued work of the Holy Spirit prepares believers for eternity, those who are "beholding the glory of the Lord" and "are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18) until the new creation.

Table 5. Restoration plot structure in the redemptive-historical metanarrative

Plot Structure	Image of God	Implication of Action	Covenantal Application
Restoration	God promises salvation from the curse of sin and death through the promised seed, the last Adam. Those whom God chose <i>in</i> and gave <i>to</i> Christ in the covenant of redemption receive effectual grace through salvation in Christ.	God offers free, unmerited grace through Christ's atoning sacrifice, his penal substitutionary death on the cross that paid the penalty for sin. The moral-ethical holiness in the covenant of creation is met by Christ, who lived a perfect, sinless life in full obedience to the law.	Justification in the covenant of grace restored the image of God in adopted sons and daughters, being sanctified and conformed to the image of Christ and progressing in holiness, though remaining burdened by sin until the new creation.

New Creation

The consummation of the new creation will restore redeemed humanity to the right relationship with God first enjoyed in the garden of Eden. Humanity is reconciled to

Parker, 1847), 49, Logos Bible Software. Augustine expounds on that which is to be believed about Christ, that one must confess "not only Whose Son He is, from Whom according to His Godhead, from Whom according to the flesh He was begotten, what things He suffered and wherefore; what is the power of His Resurrection, what the gift of the Spirit which He promised and gave to believers." Furthermore, believers must recognize what is required of the lives of the "kind of members, unto whom to be a Head," Christ "seeks, informs, loves, sets free, and leads safely unto everlasting life and honour. When these things are said, at times more shortly and concisely, at times more largely and more fully, Christ is preached."

God and creation. The effects of sin are reversed, enabling humanity to relate perfectly to God and each other.¹⁰⁴ The Westminster Confession of Faith expresses the restoration of humanity in the new creation by asserting that the “will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to do good alone in the state of glory only. (Eph. 4:13, Heb. 12:23, 1 John 3:2, Jude 24).”¹⁰⁵ The gospel, received by faith alone, provides reconciliation with “God’s redeeming actions past, present or future.”¹⁰⁶ The redemption and reconciliation of sinners attained by faith brings justification and sanctification; faith is the instrument through which redeemed sinners live with the assured hope of restoration and the eschatological hope of glorification (Rom 8:20–25). The glorification in the new creation promises the new heavens and new earth, liberated from the corruption and consequences of sin, where righteousness and a complete image of God in humanity flourish (see table 6).¹⁰⁷

Restoration of the image of God. The corruption of the *imago Dei* in Adam is restored in Christ through his death and resurrection. The restoration of the image is consummated in the new creation when Christ restores all of creation. Calvin reflects on the eschatological significance of the restoration of “God’s image” that “we obtain through Christ, who also is called the Second Adam for the reason that he restores us to true and complete integrity.”¹⁰⁸ The work of the Holy Spirit in conforming believers ethically to Christ restores the image of God, transforming them into God’s very image

¹⁰⁴ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 75–82. Hoekema discusses humanity’s threefold relationship, which he argues can be found in Genesis 1:26–28: (1) “*To be a human being is to be directed toward God*”; (2) “*To be a human being is to be directed toward one’s fellowmen*”; (3) “*To be a human being is to rule over nature*.” As God created humanity in his image, the threefold relationship reflects God’s being. Hoekema concludes that the “proper functioning of the image of God is to be channeled through these three relationships: to God, to the neighbor, and to nature” (81–82).

¹⁰⁵ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 9.5.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Lints, “Living by Faith—Alone? Reformed Responses to Antinomianism,” in Kopic, *Sanctification*, 36.

¹⁰⁷ Murray, *Redemption*, 179.

¹⁰⁸ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 1.15.4, Logos Bible Software.

with “true piety, righteousness, purity, and intelligence.” The restoration of the image bestows upon the saints a perfect desire and disposition to worship God rightly and wholly (Deut 30:6; Ezek 11:19; Eph 1:13–14). Believers’ conformity to Christ is consummated in the resurrection and glorification of Christ (2 Co 3:18). John Murray expounds upon the conformity that “embraces the transformation of the body of our humiliation to the likeness of the body of Christ’s glory (Phil. 3:21) and must therefore be conceived of as conformity to the image of the incarnate Son as glorified by his exaltation.”¹⁰⁹

Re-created in the image of Christ. Christ is the archetypal pattern of God as the true Son and image of the Father; the Spirit conforms and re-creates humans into the ectype of Christ (Rom 8:29–30).¹¹⁰ In the consummation of the new heavens and new earth, glorified believers are created anew, having been conformed to the perfect image of Christ (1 Cor 15:45, 49). As the firstborn from the dead, Christ connects the *imago Dei* to the divine glory of God; thusly, all glorified believers who receive imperishable glorified bodies are re-created in the glory of Christ. All that the first Adam lost is restored and fulfilled in Christ, the last Adam. The covenantal relationship Adam was to have with God is restored and fulfilled in Christ at the consummation of the new heavens and new earth.

As the Spirit conforms or re-creates believers into the ethical glory of the Son (2 Cor 3:7–18; 4:4–6), the saints are “putting on Christ” as Paul commands (Rom 13:14; 1 Cor 15:53; 2 Cor 5:2–5; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:25; Col 3:10).¹¹¹ In the new glorified image, faith turns to sight that beholds God face to face; things hoped for are realized in joy, and

¹⁰⁹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans Classic Biblical Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 319.

¹¹⁰ Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 23.

¹¹¹ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 403.

love consummates that love that was first placed in the new heart. Perfect love beholds the Father with joy. Faith, hope, and love are transformed to sight, joy, and love in Christ's work of consummation.¹¹²

The framework of the redemptive-historical metanarrative within the biblical-theological system provides the means for a Reformed understanding of the purpose of sanctification in the life of the believer, while the power of the Spirit enables the function of sanctification. Union with Christ, found in justification and sanctification through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross, establishes the pattern of sanctification in the lives of believers (see table 6).¹¹³ The relationship of the law and the gospel, evidenced in the plot structure of redemption, demonstrates the tension between the sinful flesh and the sanctified spirit in sanctified sinners. The Spirit's consecrating work in the redeemed hearts of sanctified sinners cultivates holiness, conforming the believers into the image of Christ unto glory.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:609.

¹¹³ Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 226.

¹¹⁴ Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 84.

Table 6. The four plot structures in the redemptive-historical metanarrative

Plot Structure	Image of God	Implication of Action	Covenantal Application
Creation	Adam created in the moral likeness and image of God, the <i>imago Dei</i> , as the crowning jewel of creation.	Adam is God's viceroy over creation, standing in right relationship with God and possessing true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.	Adam is <i>covenantally commissioned</i> to have dominion over the earth, be fruitful, and multiply.
Fall	Adam's sin of willful disobedience incurred the penalty of death, spiritually and physically, which passed to his progeny.	Sin corrupted the image of God, causing the loss of true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness and separating Adam from God and humanity from each other.	Wholly corrupted by sin, humanity is incapable of doing any good required for salvation. Under the federal headship of Adam, humanity serves sin and wickedness.
Restoration	God promises salvation from the curse of sin and death through the promised seed, the last Adam. Those whom God chose <i>in</i> and gave <i>to</i> Christ in the covenant of redemption receive effectual grace through salvation in Christ.	God offers free, unmerited grace through Christ's atoning sacrifice, his penal substitutionary death on the cross that paid the penalty for sin. The moral-ethical holiness in the covenant of creation is met by Christ, who lived a perfect, sinless life in full obedience to the law.	Justification in the covenant of grace restored the image of God in adopted sons and daughters, being sanctified and conformed to the image of Christ and progressing in holiness, though remaining burdened by sin until the new creation.
New Creation	The consummation of the new creation will restore redeemed humanity to the right relationship with God and reconcile humanity to God and creation.	The <i>imago Dei</i> corrupted in Adam is restored in Christ through his death and resurrection. The effects of sin are reversed, enabling humanity to relate perfectly to God and each other.	The will of humankind is made perfectly and immutably free to do good alone in the state of glory. Faith, hope, and love are transformed to sight, joy, and love as the saints behold God face to face in Christ's work of consummation.

CHAPTER 3

THE CLASSICAL REFORMED MODEL OF SANCTIFICATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

The doctrine of sanctification from the classical Reformed tradition has roots in the writings of theologians throughout church history, from Augustine to the Reformers, from the Puritans to the present day. The Puritan prayer “A Cry For Deliverance” in *The Valley of Vision* expresses Christians’ desire to be free from sin and filled with righteousness:

Deliver me from the invasion as well as
the dominion of sin.
Grant me to walk as Christ walked,
to live in the newness of his life,
the life of love, the life of faith,
the life of holiness.¹

Transformed hearts experience profoundly different yearnings to live in holiness. The Puritan prayer captures the longings of the regenerated hearts of believers. The Holy Spirit transforms the desires and deeds of Christians, conforming them to the glory of Christ.

This chapter continues to engage in the first step of the Inverse Consistency Protocol (envision redemptive maturity) through the presentation of the Reformed doctrine of sanctification. The redemptive-historical biblical-theological system presented in the previous chapter undergirds the “thoroughgoing confessional-doctrinal vision and

¹ Arthur Bennett, ed., “A Cry For Deliverance,” in *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 168. Banner of Truth offers the collection of Puritan prayers at no cost; see Banner of Truth, “Devotionals: The Valley of Vision,” accessed June 8, 2022, <https://banneroftruth.org/us/devotional-series/the-valley-of-vision-devotional/>.

imagination for human development unto Christlikeness.”² This chapter contains four sections. The first section briefly summarizes the function of sanctification defined through a Reformed contextual paradigm. The second section addresses the outworking of sanctification and how the doctrine of sanctification delineated in the biblical-theological system of the classical Reformed tradition provides a necessary overarching biblical vision for Christian maturity. The third section introduces the *Virtuous Christian Discipleship* (VCD) framework, which utilizes catechetical instruction grounded in the gospel of Christ. The fourth section expounds upon the goal of VCD ministry—to learn, grow, and live righteously in wisdom and love.

The Reformed view of sanctification emphasizes the function of sanctification and its relationship to believers’ union with Christ as it correlates with the outworking of sanctification in believers’ lives. The plot structures discussed in the previous chapter shape the axioms and praxes in the methodological outworking of sanctification in believers and the body of Christ. The church’s concern for sanctification must include theory and practice; learning doctrine occurs passively in listening to sermons from the pulpit and actively through catechesis and discipleship. Emanating from the Reformed biblical-theological system, VCD establishes the necessity of a transformed mind and heart for biblical discipleship; the framework utilizes catechesis, which promotes holiness in the heart, preparing believers’ hands for faithful ministry. VCD renders a model for virtuous teaching and learning that encourages redemptive learning and flourishing.

The Function of Sanctification

Sanctification is the application of the redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross. The Holy Spirit, the agent of sanctification in believers, illuminates the truth of

² John David Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Engaging and Appropriating Models of Human Development,” *Christian Educational Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 488.

“Christ, foretold, described, explained, and expected.”³ The “revelation and application of the truth” by the Spirit is a “very precise experience in the twin realms of knowing and obeying the truth of God.” Applying the truth through the Word that sanctifies also keeps those it sanctifies as God’s holy people (John 17:17). Theologian D. A. Carson elucidates, “No-one can be ‘sanctified’ or set apart for the Lord’s use without learning to think God’s thoughts after him, without learning to live in conformity with the ‘word’ he has graciously given,” that is, “his self-disclosure in Christ.”⁴

Calvin treats regeneration and sanctification as a mutually inclusive work, where “God is said to purge his church of all sin” and “promises” the “grace of deliverance, and fulfills it in his elect [Eph. 5:26–27].”⁵ The “sway of sin is abolished in” believers as “the Spirit dispenses a power whereby they may gain the upper hand and become victors in the struggle.” As the “old man” was crucified with Christ (Rom 6:6) and believers have been set free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2), the “new man” is patterned after and in continual conformity to Christ.

The gospel of Christ provides the pattern of sanctification in believers’ hearts and lives. Christ is a mold that gives “the new life its appropriate shape or pattern.”⁶ In his book *Possessed by God*, David Peterson submits that “Paul is thinking about the gospel of Christ as” the mold for the Christian life, for “at the heart of this is Christ himself, who is the pattern for Christian living (*cf* Col 2:6).”⁷ The transfer of the elect from slaves of sin to slaves of righteousness through the gospel of Christ results in a state

³ Alec Motyer, “The Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture,” *Churchman* 78, no. 2 (1964): 92.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 566.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 3.3.11, Logos Bible Software.

⁶ F. W. Beare, “On the Interpretation of Romans VI. 17,” *New Testament Studies* 5, no. 3 (April 1959): 210.

⁷ David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 102.

of holiness, which is the “fruit” of submission to God with the “end goal” of eternal life (Rom 6:19, 22).⁸

Union with Christ

Reformed seventeenth-century theologians discussed justification as a “threefold union with Christ”:

1. “Immanent union” denotes the election of believers in union with Christ “from all eternity, before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).”
2. “Transient union” denotes union with Christ “in time past, in His mediatorial death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–11).”
3. “Applicatory union” denotes the “experience of union with Christ in the present time (Eph. 2:5–6).”⁹

Puritan Peter Bulkeley employs the threefold pattern in his discussion on justification, noting that “actual justification,” first, is “as purposed and determined in the mind and will of God” from eternity past, second, is “impetrated and obtained for us by the obedience of Christ,” and, third, is “actually applied unto us.”¹⁰ The application of justification via union with Christ is often referred to as the “mystical” union with Christ (see table 7).

Mystical union with Christ. Calvin speaks of this mystical union of Christ, echoing Luther’s conception of the “marvelous exchange,” remarking that “Godly souls” have “a witness of our growth into one body with Christ such that whatever is his may be called ours.” Calvin continues,

This is the wonderful exchange which, out of his measureless benevolence, he has made with us; that, becoming Son of man with us, he has made us sons of God with him; that, by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; that, by taking on our mortality, he has conferred his immortality upon us; that, accepting

⁸ Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 102.

⁹ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 482.

¹⁰ Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant* (London: Tho[mas] Parker, 1674), 358.

our weakness, he has strengthened us by his power; that, receiving our poverty unto himself, he has transferred his wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself (which oppressed us), he has clothed us with his righteousness.¹¹

The mystical union with Christ consists of two elements: (1) inheritance in Christ and (2) resemblance to Christ. Inheritance is understood as “We in Christ,” as believers are adopted into God’s family and share in Christ’s “election, flesh, life of obedience, atoning death, resurrection, justification, holiness, and glorification.” Resemblance is understood as the family of “Christ in us” through “regeneration and sanctification, ‘the hope of glory.’”¹²

The mystical union with Christ is evident in Ephesians 1, where Paul features adoption and inheritance as the blessings gifted to believers. Paul exhorts believers to live in a manner that reflects their adopted identity and inheritance in Christ (see table 7). The “adopted identity in Christ, sealed by the Spirit, leads to living ‘for the praise of his glory’ (1:12)” and provides the basis for the “ethical exhortations” in the rest of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: “the call to unity (4:13); to prayer (6:18); to speaking and living the truth in Christ (4:15, 21, 25; 6:14); to living in ‘love’ rather than in anger, malice, and bitterness (4:21–5:1).”¹³

Benefits of union with Christ. The threefold union with Christ is manifest in how God claims believers through the mystical union of Christ and sets them apart for his good purposes in Christ. The effectual call and regeneration bestowed through the gospel of Christ unite believers to Christ in his death and resurrection, defeating sin and its dominion (1 Cor 1:9; Rom 6:2–6, 14; 1 John 3:9; 5:4, 18). Sanctification entails “dying to sin in Christ and with Christ, who also died to sin” (Rom 6:10), and being raised to “new

¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 4.17.2, Logos Bible Software.

¹² Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 139.

¹³ J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 20.

life because we arose with Christ and share his resurrection life with Him” (Col 3:1).¹⁴ Christ provides and is the sanctification of believers. The Holy Spirit offers life in the dominion of grace, as the “essence of his Divine nature” is “infused into” believers.¹⁵ This new life in Christ possesses the free gift of “the prevailing character of holiness,” enabling the heart to delight in the law of the Lord (1 Cor 2:14, 15; Rom 7:22).¹⁶

The gifts of repentance and faith, freely given by God to those he chose in Christ before time, compose the means of believers’ union with Christ. By faith, one believes in Christ and receives him into the heart; by faith, one is counted righteous and lives under the law of grace; by faith, one puts the flesh to death through the enablement of the Holy Spirit; by faith, one bears spiritual fruit of obedience and pleases God. The Westminster Confession of Faith articulates believers’ union with Christ as fellowship with Christ and the body:

All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His grace, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: (1 John 1:3, Eph. 3:16–19, John 1:16, Eph. 2:5–6, Phil. 3:10, Rom. 6:5–6, 2 Tim. 2:12) and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, (Eph. 4:15–16, 1 Cor. 12:7, 1 Cor. 3:21–23, Col. 2:19) and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. (1 Thess. 5:11,14, Rom. 1:11–12,14, 1 John 3:16–18, Gal. 6:10)¹⁷

A result of union with Christ is found in believers’ belonging to the universal church, the body of Christ. The good works that faith produces through union with Christ strengthen the body, with believers’ encouraging and edifying one another. Service to and for the

¹⁴ Anthony A. Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 64.

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Hezekiah Howe, 1816), 3.6.6, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁶ John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 142; J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God*, 2nd ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 85.

¹⁷ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), 26.1.

church emanates from the joy found in believers' union with Christ, who is their "hope of glory" and "the source" of their "endless delight" (Col 1:27).¹⁸

Christ provides mediation for believers before the righteous and holy God. The mediating presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit confirms believers' salvation and justification. His mediation "continues to fulfill the terms of the covenant in" the lives of believers and the church.¹⁹ He sustains the relationship of believers to God. His Spirit makes us partakers of Christ by communicating through the Word that which is Christ's, thereby continually sanctifying us into the image of Christ.²⁰

Sanctification and the Law

The Old Testament presents the call to be holy and separated from sin, sanctified unto God; similarly, the New Testament calls believers to be separated from sin and holy as God is holy. The call presented in the Old and New Testaments are represented in the law. Paul reiterates in Galatians 3:10 that everything contained in the law must be perfectly obeyed, for "cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them" (Deut 27:26; Jer 11:3; Ezek 18:4).²¹

Two types of covenants exist in relation to the law: law and promise. The covenant of law inscribed the law upon the hearts of humanity; all know "God's righteous decrees" but suppress them in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18, 32). The required perfect holiness and obedience of the law can never be met by sinful humanity, whom the law justly condemns. The promise in the new covenant of grace unveiled what was veiled in the covenant of law. The old covenant law distinguishes three types of law: (1) the

¹⁸ Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 226.

¹⁹ Richard Lints, "Living by Faith—Alone? Reformed Responses to Antinomianism," in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 47.

²⁰ Henri Blocher, "Sanctification by Faith?," in Kapic, *Sanctification*, 62.

²¹ Hoekema, "The Reformed Perspective," 85.

moral law, (2) the civil law, and (3) the ceremonial law.²² The new covenant recognizes the civil law and ceremonial law fulfilled in Christ. The requirements for separation and holiness, worship ceremonies, and festivals have been satisfied by Christ and applied to believers (see table 7). The moral law, represented by the two tables of the Ten Commandments, is inscribed on the hearts of humanity by virtue of the *imago Dei*. Although unbelievers are unable and unwilling to obey the moral law, as Paul argues in Romans, believers are able and willing to obey the precepts of the law through a new heart and the power of the Holy Spirit (Deut 30; Jer 31; Ezek 36).²³ The new covenant summarizes the two tables of the law in the great commandments: love God and love neighbor. The law encapsulated in the two great commandments endures in the new covenant, offering grace where condemnation once lay.

Uses of the law. Calvin identifies three uses of the law: (1) it acts as a mirror exposing sin and terrifying sinners, thereby constraining them to seek the grace of Christ; (2) it restrains depravity and evil in society through threats of judgment; and (3) it exhorts and teaches believers to obey God and walk in the good works prepared for them.²⁴ The

²² Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 2:145.

²³ Walter Marshall, *The Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification* (New York: Southwick & Peluse, 1811), 134. In examining the holiness conferred to believers through Christ, Marshall is careful to provide the explication in Direction VIII that “the holiness aimed at consisteth in conformity to the whole moral law, to which we are naturally obliged, if there had never been any gospel, or any such duty as believing in Christ for salvation.” Marshall continues, observing that some do not hold to the same “*necessary part*” of holiness in “salvation that is received by faith in Christ.” Marshall contends that the gladful obedience to the moral law, the *complete* moral law, is required of believers. However, “some” contend that “when they are taught by the scriptures, that we are saved by faith, through faith, Without works, do begin to disregard all obedience to the law, as not at all necessary to salvation, and do account themselves obliged to it only in point of gratitude; if it be wholly neglected, they doubt not but free grace will save them harmless.” Moreover, those of whom Marshall speaks “account it a part of the liberty from the bondage of the law, purchased by the blood of Christ, to make no conscience of breaking the law in their conversation” (136).

²⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 2.7.6–13, Logos Bible Software; John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 97. Calvin’s threefold use of the law is compelling, yet it is not the only Reformed perspective on this issue. Gentry and Wellum assert that “the law anticipates a greater righteousness to come,” as anticipated by the prophets, “when God will so transform the entire community that God’s new covenant people will become covenant keepers and not breakers (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–27).” The moral demand is “greater in restoring us to what we were created to be in the first place *and* in calling us to live now as God’s new creation people.” Peter J. Gentry

law informs sinners of what is required for them to “be right with” God, while the gospel reveals how sinners can be saved from the just wrath of God (see table 7).

Promise is the foundation of the covenant of grace, the “unilateral divine promise to send a Messiah,” established with Christ’s righteousness.²⁵ The grace offered through the gospel of the Messiah supplies the necessary obedience and holiness to obey the law. Believers’ justification in Christ provides the desire to obey the law, loving God and neighbor. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, believers are sanctified and able to obey the command to love God with all one’s heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Anthony Hoekema denotes the importance of the relationship between sanctification and the law, stating, “Since the law mirrors God, living in obedience to God’s law is living as image-bearers of God. The law, therefore, is one of the most important means whereby God sanctifies us.”²⁶ Some may suppose that Christians saved by grace no longer have the requirement of holiness stipulated by the law; however, Calvin’s “third and principal” use of the law demonstrates that Christians must keep all of God’s commandments with gratitude and thanksgiving.²⁷ The Psalms discuss the magnificence of God’s precepts, which are a delight to believers’ hearts (Pss 1; 19; 119). Through the love of Christ provided by God, believers are able and willing to love God, keep his precepts, and grow in holiness unto God.

and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 794–95.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones argues that the function of the law is “God showing us sin as it is, really bringing it out to the light, and then dealing with it.” The law was “designed to define sin and to bring it home to us by imputation. But nowhere is sin so brought home to us as at the Cross of Christ and by the blood of Christ. Before we are forgiven we must realize something of the enormity of sin, and it is at the Cross that we do so.” Lloyd-Jones continues, noting it is, therefore, the cross that “condemns us before it sets us free. This is why it is an ‘offence’ to the natural man. The Cross makes us see ourselves as worms, as miserable guilty sinners. And when a man really sees himself face to face with God and God’s holy law, he realizes what he truly is.” David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 167.

²⁵ Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 115.

²⁶ Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” 88.

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 2.7.12, Logos Bible Software.

Table 7. Sanctification and the law

Old Covenant	New Covenant	Uses of the Law in the New Covenant	Actual Union with Christ in the New Covenant	Mystical Union with Christ in the New Covenant
<i>Moral law:</i> Perfect holiness and obedience to the law required.	<i>Moral law:</i> Love God and love neighbor as yourself.	<i>Exhort and teach</i> believers to obey God and walk in the good works prepared for them.	<i>Immanent union</i> is purposed and determined in the mind and will of God from eternity past.	<i>Marvelous Exchange:</i> Christ conferred his immortality to sinners; took the weight of sin upon himself, clothing sinners with his righteousness.
<i>Civil law:</i> Be holy and separated from sin.	<i>Civil law:</i> Fulfilled in Christ.	<i>Restrain</i> depravity and evil in society through threats of judgment.	<i>Transient union</i> is impetrated and obtained for us by the obedience of Christ.	<i>Inheritance</i> in Christ: adoption by sharing in his election, flesh, life of obedience, atoning death, resurrection, justification, holiness, and glorification.
<i>Ceremonial law:</i> Worship ceremonies and festivals.	<i>Ceremonial law:</i> Fulfilled in Christ.	Act as a <i>mirror</i> exposing sin and constraining sinners to seek the grace of Christ.	<i>Applicatory union</i> is actually applied unto us.	<i>Resemblance</i> is Christ in us through regeneration and sanctification, the hope of glory.

The Outworking of Sanctification

William Perkins provides a definition of sanctification that captures the essence of the power of Christ in the believer. Sanctification is that “by which a Christian in his mind, in his will, and in his affections is freed from the bondage and tyranny of sin and satan and is by little and little enabled through the Spirit of Christ to desire and

approve that which is good and walk in it.”²⁸ Perkins continues, remarking that the Spirit of Christ enlightens the mind of the sinner with “spiritual knowledge” and “spiritual wisdom” through the “true knowledge of God’s Word.” In renewing the will, the believer is able to “will and choose that which is good and acceptable” and “refuse that which is evil.” Such a reorienting of the will inclines the affections toward “zeal for God’s glory,” “fear of God,” “detestation of sin,” and “joy of heart.”²⁹

Two Aspects of Sanctification

Scripture discusses sanctification as consisting of two aspects: definitive and progressive. Although these terms are not explicitly attested in Scripture, the concepts they represent are thoroughly discussed by the biblical authors. The death and resurrection of Christ broke the yoke of sin and death, rendering it powerless over believers; however, believers must actively work through the Spirit to put sin to death. The victory over sin and the holiness imparted to believers through union with Christ enables righteous living and turning from evil.

Definitive sanctification. The first type of sanctification establishes the forensic sanctification of believers alongside the forensic justification.³⁰ The double grace

²⁸ William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins*, vol. 1 (London: John Legatt, 1626), 370–71.

²⁹ Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins*, 1:84–85; see also Paul R. Schaefer Jr., *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011), 72.

³⁰ Peterson designates sanctification as “being appropriated by God and dedicated to him by the saving work of his Son.” Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 40. Peterson then examines 1 Corinthians 1:30, which illuminates

how God has made Jesus the wisdom that leads to eternal salvation (cf. 1:18–25). We cannot know God better or experience a deeper spirituality by seeking wisdom for ourselves. Against such misunderstandings at Corinth, Paul insists that Christ crucified has become the wisdom of God for us, historically and objectively. He is the embodiment of God’s wise plan for us. More precisely, he is the ultimate expression of God’s wisdom in the sense that he became ‘righteousness, sanctification and redemption’ for us. (42)

Justification is then designated as “not so much an ethical term here as it is forensic, and highlights the believer’s undeserved stance of right standing before God” (42). Moreover, Peterson clarifies, “Between the forensic imagery of justification and the concept of deliverance from slavery, Paul places the metaphor of sanctification. He uses the noun *hagiasmos*, meaning ‘holiness’ or ‘sanctification,’ which clearly derives

of justification and sanctification extended to believers flow from the righteousness of Christ imputed to believers through the completed work of Christ on the cross.³¹ The redemption accomplished and applied brings believers into right standing before God, wherein they have all debts paid and all sins forgiven in Christ.³² Definitive sanctification refers to “a definitive consecration to God in the present” that results in a right positional standing before God that individuals receive upon salvation.³³

The sanctifying work of Christ performs two cleaning works—one internally in the cleansing of the heart so that the conscience no longer condemns sinners and one externally in the purification of believers so that they may worship God rightly (Heb 9:13–14). God “infuses into the heart a disposition suited to God,” wherein believers are cleansed by the blood of Christ.³⁴ Hebrews 10:10–18 expounds upon this meaning of cleansing as a “new relationship of heart-obedience,” establishing sanctification “in a *covenantal* sense” through “the blood of the covenant” (Heb 10:29).³⁵ Through the covenant of Christ’s blood, believers can draw near to God, knowing that their sins have been forgiven through Christ’s high-priestly ministry (Heb 4:16; 7:10, 19; 8:6; 9:9; 10:1–4, 14–23; 12:22–24).

Believers’ conversion and union with Christ offer a new status of belonging to God, enabling them to live a holy life in worship to God. Following the heart change provided by the Holy Spirit, believers experience an attitude change—a willing and eager

from the verb *hagiazein* (‘to sanctify, make holy, consecrate’). It is sometimes argued that this noun, by its form and usage, emphasizes ‘the moral element’ (43). The context of sanctification is “about belonging to God and being given a holy status. The focus is on God’s saving activity, not on our response” (44).

³¹ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 3.11.1, Logos Bible Software.

³² Blocher, “Sanctification by Faith?,” 48–49.

³³ Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 36.

³⁴ Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 565.

³⁵ Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 35.

desire to please God and to maintain a holy life now concerns believers (see table 8). The new life of believers flows from their new status. Their cleansing from sin provided in definitive sanctification does not provide absolute perfection or sinlessness; sanctified believers “are *genuinely* new, though not yet *totally* new.”³⁶ Through death and resurrection with Christ, the “new man” is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who then continues sanctifying believers until the return of Christ with the new heavens and new earth in the new creation.

Progressive sanctification. Though believers are cleansed and sanctified definitively, sin remains a present struggle. James expresses the continuation of sin in believers when he discloses, “We all stumble in many ways” (Jas 3:2). The declaration that believers will struggle with and sometimes fall into sin may be startling, but believers can rest in the truth that sins have been forgiven for those who are in Christ. A distinct passage in the New Testament regarding the continuance of sin among believers is 1 John 1:8: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” The apostle emphasizes that to say that believers have no sin is to be deceived about the truth of sanctification. As sin remains in those who are in Christ, believers must be sanctified through a continual process.

Throughout believers’ lives, the indwelling Holy Spirit works in their hearts to progressively sanctify them, who are “being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18). Progressive sanctification includes a positive and a negative aspect: “the putting to death of sinful practices and the growth of the new self.”³⁷ The apostle Paul considers progressive sanctification when proclaiming that believers must “by the Spirit put to death the misdeeds of the body” and not “live

³⁶ Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” 74. The sanctification provided at the time of salvation cannot be separated from the act of justification. The particular holiness of newly sanctified believers is not a subsequent event or “second blessing” of the Holy Spirit.

³⁷ Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” 75.

according to the sinful nature” (Rom 8:13). Through the power of Christ that broke the power of sin and death, believers can vigorously act to put to death sin through the power of the Holy Spirit (see table 8).

The *telos* or *terminus ad quem* of the Christian life is the eschatological glory and restoration of the image of God that was lost or corrupted in the fall.³⁸ As adopted sons and daughters of God who have been chosen before the foundation of the world, believers have confidence in the assurance of salvation in which “all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ” are given (Eph 1:3, 4). The Holy Spirit provides the seal of the promised “eternal inheritance” in union with Christ (Eph 1:13, 14).³⁹ Through union with Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, believers are transformed, becoming like Christ in absorbing “the gospel word. Each step in this character-change” or “conformity of character” is “a new degree of glory, that is, of God’s self-display in our human lives.”⁴⁰

Although new creations in Christ, believers retain indwelling sin that is opposed to the holiness of God. Yet through the Spirit’s enablement, hope in Christ purifies believers (1 John 3:3). Christians’ new nature enables them to resist sin, and the power of the Spirit conforms their new hearts after the image of Christ. Through this re-creation of believers, indwelling sin is put to death. Seventeenth-century theologian Walter Marshall implores believers to “trust on Christ” for “holiness”; if “ever God and Christ give you salvation, holiness will be one part of it.”⁴¹

³⁸ Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 565. The *telos* (Greek), or *terminus ad quem* (Latin), is the end or goal to which one strives. The *telos* as well as the time of fulfillment is denoted in this phrase, emphasizing that it is not merely the “what” of our eschatological glory but also the “when.”

³⁹ Murray, *Redemption*, 164–65.

⁴⁰ Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 157.

⁴¹ Marshall, *The Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, 139. Marshall continues, arguing that “none do or can trust on Christ for true salvation, except they, trust on him for holiness.” As “neither do they heartily desire true salvation, if they do not desire to be made holy and righteous in their hearts and lives.” For “if Christ wash you not from the filth of your sins, ‘you have no part with him,’ John 13:8.”

Two Selves

The old self in Adam and the new self in Christ are elements germane to classic Reformed theology. Hoekema observes that the terms “old self” and “new self” are only found in the Pauline writings; the “term *old self* is found in Romans 6:6; Colossians 3:9; and Ephesians 4:22. The term *new self* is found in Colossians 3:10 (where Gk. *neos* is used for ‘new’) and Ephesians 4:24 (where Gk. *kainos* is used for ‘new’).”⁴² The contrast between the old self with a sinful nature and the new self becomes evident in the new creation of sinners into saints (see table 8). The sin nature reigns in sinners who stand condemned under the law; the unregenerate remain guilty and unrighteous under the federal headship of Adam (Rom 5:12). A new nature reigns in the hearts of regenerates believer, who stands righteous under the law of grace (John 1:17; Rom 6:14). “Those who are in Christ are genuinely new, though not yet totally new.”⁴³ Although sin and death no longer reign in believers, sin is a continued presence in their lives that must be continuously fought and put to death.

The gospel of Christ offers grace to sinners through faith and repentance, thereby justifying, sanctifying, and uniting to Christ those who believe. In the sanctification applied by the death and resurrection of Christ, believers, in union with Christ have died to sin, once for all, but the lives they live they live to God (Rom 6:10). Sanctification does not rid believers of sin entirely, nor does it incrementally decrease sin unto perfect holiness. Sin is an ever-present reality in sinners, commingled with faith until believers are glorified in the new creation. Although sin is still present, believers

⁴² Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” 78. Related to the use of “old self,” Hoekema states that in “Greek the expression is *palaios anthrōpos* (rendered ‘old man’ in the KJV and the ASV but in the newer versions often as ‘old nature’ [RSV, NEB] or ‘old self’ [RSV, JB, NASB, NIV]). Since the word *anthrōpos* means ‘human being’ and not ‘male human being,’ the rendering ‘old self’ is to be preferred to ‘old man.’” In reference to “new self,” Hoekema states, “Here again, whereas the older versions (KJV, ASV) have ‘new man,’ the newer versions have ‘new nature’ (RSV, NEB) or ‘new self’ (JB, NASB, NIV)” (78n16).

⁴³ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1994), 112; see also Stephen Charnock, *The Doctrine of Regeneration* (1840; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); Arthur Walkington Pink, *Regeneration, or the New Birth* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005).

serve the law of grace rather than the law of sin, which no longer “exercises its judicial function over [them].”⁴⁴ Addressing the question of the relevance of the law to believers’ lives, the apostle Paul asks the Romans, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom 6:1). Rather than delineating blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience as would apply to those under the law of sin, the law functions as a source of wisdom to believers under grace. Obedience reaps satisfaction, while disobedience garners dissatisfaction.⁴⁵ The law no longer condemns or punishes sin, nor does it justify those who follow it.

Calvin emphasizes the twofold nature of repentance that results in holiness: first, the “mortification of the flesh” through “renunciation of our own nature,” which is an active work to “put off ourselves, and to depart from the native bias of our minds”; second, the “vivification of the spirit” through designating “the renovation by” the Spirit’s “fruits, righteousness, judgment, and mercy.”⁴⁶ The disposition of righteousness, judgment, and mercy is imbued when the Holy Spirit “tinctured our souls with his holiness, and given them such new thoughts and affections, that they may be justly considered as new.” As new creations in Christ, believers must continue to “put on Christ” and “put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Rom 3:14; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). In the new self, through Christ, believers are commanded to “present” their “bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is” their “spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). The presence of the Spirit of Christ in believers enables them to live a life that is pleasing to God.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Lints, “Living by Faith—Alone?,” 48.

⁴⁵ Lints, “Living by Faith—Alone?,” 49.

⁴⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 3.3.8, Logos Bible Software.

⁴⁷ Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 59.

Mortification of Sin

Believers, having put on the mind of Christ and the new self, must work with the synergistic power of the Holy Spirit to mortify indwelling sin to the end of conforming to the glorification of Christ. Calvin describes the essential task of the mortification of sin, underscoring that “the very word mortification reminds us how difficult it is to forget our former nature; for it implies that we cannot be formed to the fear of God, and learn the rudiments of piety, without being violently slain and annihilated by the sword of the Spirit.”⁴⁸ The apostle Paul establishes in Galatians 5:24–25 that believers are to live by the Spirit according to the new self, as the old self and its passions have been crucified with Christ.

As believers keep in step with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit bears the fruit of holiness in believers’ lives.⁴⁹ Walking in holiness requires believers to “not just to resist” sin “but to attack it and seek to do it to death—in other words, to mortify it, in the biblical sense of that word (see Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5).”⁵⁰ Such mortification includes “the disciplines of self-humbling, self-examination, setting oneself against all sins in one’s spiritual system.” John Owen explains the three ways that the Spirit mortifies sin in believers: (1) he causes “our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh”; (2) he grants “*a real physical efficiency* on the root and habit of sin, for the weakening, destroying, and taking it away”; and (3) he “brings the cross of Christ into the heart of a sinner by faith, and gives us communion with Christ in his death, and fellowship in his sufferings.”⁵¹ The old self—the flesh—and its desires were put to death

⁴⁸ Calvin, *Institutes* (1816), 1:3.3.8, Logos Bible Software.

⁴⁹ Marshall, *The Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, 211–12.

⁵⁰ Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 99–100. Packer continues, “setting oneself against all sins in one’s spiritual system as a preliminary to muscling in on any one of them, avoiding situations that stoke sin’s boiler, watching lest you become sin’s victim before you are aware of its approach, and praying to the Lord Jesus Christ specifically to apply the killing power of His cross to the particular vicious craving on which one is making one’s counterattack.”

⁵¹ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 6, *Temptation and Sin*, ed. William H. Goold (London: Banner of Truth, 1966), 3.2.

on the cross; the new heart is produced in believers by the Spirit through communion with Christ in his resurrection (Rom 6:3–11). As new creations, believers possess freedom in Christ. Sins that once entangled and enticed them no longer hold them. Through the power of the Spirit, believers kill sin, turning to Christ and the life he offers.

The command to war against indwelling sin is fundamental to the personal holiness of believers in the Reformed doctrine of sanctification. Christians’ struggle with sin will continue until death, or Christ’s return, at which time believers’ glorification and holiness will be complete (see table 8). Through progressive sanctification, believers are changed “from one degree of glory to another” in conforming to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29–30; 2 Cor 3:18).

Table 8. Outworking of sanctification

Two Aspects	Two Selves	Mortification of Sin
<i>Definitive sanctification</i> establishes the <i>forensic</i> justification and sanctification of believers that flows from the imputed righteousness of Christ.	<i>Old</i> self in <i>Adam</i> with a sinful nature; unregenerate sinners, condemned under the law.	The old self and its desires were put to death on the cross; the new heart is produced in believers by the Spirit through communion with Christ in his resurrection.
<i>Progressive sanctification</i> sanctifies believers <i>throughout</i> their lives by the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.	<i>New</i> self in <i>Christ</i> is a new creation; regenerate believers, simultaneously sinners and saints.	The new self puts on the mind of Christ and works with the Holy Spirit to mortify indwelling sin to the <i>telos</i> of conforming to the glorification of Christ.

Making Disciples and Discipleship

God has ordained doctrinal teaching in the ministerial context of the gathered church as the means by which the Great Commission is accomplished. The words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew provide the biblical mandate for discipleship, which

delivers the command to make disciples (μαθητεύω): “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19–20).⁵² The mandate to “make disciples” and the means of discipleship through baptism, teaching, and obeying are clear in Jesus’s words; however, the mandate necessitates the definition of a disciple (see table 9).

Disciple. The definition of disciple impacts the understanding of discipleship and the Great Commission. The Reformed concept of μαθητεύω has the basic meaning of “[directing] one’s mind to something” and “learning skills under instruction.”⁵³ The instruction of discipleship is the fear of the Lord and learning to glorify him. Michael Horton defines discipleship through a Reformed covenantal perspective, affirming, “Jesus teaches us what it means to be a disciple in his kingdom, emphasizing that it is a matter of literally following the Master by learning and living.”⁵⁴ Genuine disciples of Christ submit to “Jesus’s teaching concerning himself” and teach others to observe all that Jesus commanded them (Matt 28:20).⁵⁵

Disciple-making. Disciple-making through Christian teaching ministry “is the Spirit’s provision for equipping disciples with discernment unto wisdom, together in

⁵² Research shared with Evan Phillip Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism on C. Peter Wagner’s Philosophy of Discipleship” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 18.

⁵³ Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, “Μανθάνω, Καταμανθάνω, Μαθητής, Συμμαθητής, Μαθήτρια, Μαθητεύω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittle, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 4:391–92, Logos Bible Software. Rengstorf asserts, “μανθάνω occurs in the LXX and other Gk. transl. of the OT some 55 times” (4:400). One such occurrence is in Prov 22:25, where “we find μάθάνω for ηἴξ” with a meaning of “to accustom oneself to.” Moreover, the “objects of μανθάνω are instructive. In Dt. the obj. is always the fear of God (4:10: ὅπως μάθωσιν φοβεῖσθαι με, cf. 14:23; 17:19; 31:12f.) as the goal which God Himself set” (4:401).

⁵⁴ Michael S. Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God’s Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 138.

⁵⁵ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 139. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 19.

redemptive familial community.”⁵⁶ The Reformed conviction of disciple-making must involve instruction “not just in the basics of biblical teaching, but in everything Jesus commanded for our doctrine and life.”⁵⁷ Ligon Duncan explains that the method of disciple-making must follow Jesus’s commands of “baptizing” and “teaching” believers to “observe everything that Jesus has commanded.” Duncan warns that discipleship must not involve “teaching them a very simple three-point gospel outline” or “teaching someone to merely ascent to all the doctrinal truths that Jesus taught.”⁵⁸

Strengthening Duncan’s argument, Horton argues that the following four areas must be emphasized equally in catechizing and discipleship: drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship.⁵⁹ The drama of Scripture seen in the biblical-theological system of Christ tells the story of “God’s mission as Alpha and Omega, Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and Consummator.”⁶⁰ Theological doctrines originate from and are constructed as the “authoritative interpretations and implications” of Scripture’s drama. Doctrines elicit doxology in “wonder and praise” as the internalization of the external

⁵⁶ John David Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*: The Vocational Calling and Mission of Christian Teaching Ministry,” *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 2 (2021): 218.

⁵⁷ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 138.

⁵⁸ J. Ligon Duncan III, “Faithful Preaching: Making Known the Whole Counsel of God,” *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* 5, no. 1 (2018): 22. Michael Horton warns that believers will not biblically mature without proper discipleship through the drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship:

Without the story, the doctrine is abstract. Without the doctrine, the story lacks meaning and significance for us. Yet if we are not led by the drama and the doctrine to mourn and dance, have we really been swept into it—experientially, not just as truth but as good news? Failing to grab our hearts, the doctrine fails to animate our hands and feet. Yet if we concentrate everything on the doxology by itself, we end up trying to work ourselves into a state of perpetual praise without knowing exactly who we’re praising or why. And an obsession with discipleship, apart from these other aspects, will generate a kind of mindless and eventually heartless moralism that confuses activism with the fruit of the Spirit. (Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 146)

⁵⁹ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 143. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 80.

⁶⁰ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 142. Horton provides a fulsome treatment of the divine drama in his book *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

gospel of Christ, which produces and “gives shape to a concrete form of living.”⁶¹ Horton clarifies that such areas of focus are not sequential stages:

This pattern of drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship is not actually followed in stages. It’s not as if the first few years of our Christian life are spent only on getting the basic plot of Scripture down and the next decade is spent on the doctrine, and only then do we get around to worship and discipleship. Instead of stages, these are facets of every moment in our pilgrimage. Nevertheless, there is a certain logical order here.⁶²

Growth and maturity in discipleship. In discussing the practices of Martin Bucer and Reformers after him, Martin York advises that the “rigorous ministerial work of ‘teaching of Christ, the dispensation of his sacraments, and the administration of his discipline’ could not be accomplished merely at public gatherings, but required intense, personal visiting, catechizing, and discipleship.”⁶³ Discipleship by teaching doctrine in the catechetical framework delivers instruction through the “systematic arrangement of truth” for the spiritual nourishment and growth of the church.⁶⁴ J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett helpfully define catechesis, which “derives from a New Testament word for teaching—the Greek verb *κατηχέω*. The primary definitions of this term are ‘to share a communication that one receives’ and ‘to teach, instruct.’”⁶⁵ Discipleship through catechesis is seen in the form of living in “those who are chosen, redeemed, called, justified, and being sanctified and who will be glorified in Christ.”⁶⁶ We are to live out

⁶¹ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 143.

⁶² Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 144.

⁶³ Barry J. York, “The Shepherd’s Seminary,” *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* 5, no. 1 (2018): 5.

⁶⁴ Tom J. Nettles, ed., *Teaching Truth, Training Hearts: The Study of Catechisms in Baptist Life*, Calvary Press Baptist Heritage Series (Amityville, NY: Calvary, 1998), 15.

⁶⁵ J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 27.

⁶⁶ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 143. Horton continues discussing the implications of discipleship, stating,

We are not sent out into the world to change it, to transform it, to make it into the kingdom of God. Rather, we are sent into the world as God’s chosen, redeemed, called, justified, renewed people who know that the world’s condition is far worse than our neighbors think and God’s future for it far more

our calling to make disciples through our relationships with those within the church and without. Catechesis centered in union with Christ forms our hearts, minds, and affections through discipleship (see table 9).

Discipleship through catechesis recognizes that doctrine deeply shapes prayer and that “the rule of faith as Scripture’s own intrinsic sum and scope is constitutive of and normative for both the church’s faith and worship.”⁶⁷ By distinguishing the role of Scripture and prayer, the church aspires to develop discipleship by growing in redemptive wisdom through “a practical knowledge lived out in concrete agency shaped by desire.” Such wisdom “seeks to shape human life, not just inform the intellect,” so that “the whole person is engaged.”⁶⁸ Wisdom enables Christian maturity, for “wisdom emerges as the divinely ordained order that permeates God’s world.” God “embedded wisdom in his creation, so only through wisdom can one discern how to live successfully in” the “moral order” of “his world.” (hear my son, 24, 151).⁶⁹ Wisdom includes the exercise of discernment (Heb 5:14) and conduct that accords with discernment (Jas 3:13-18). The “vocational-missional mandate of Christian teaching ministry is thus to compel believers to ‘understand and know’ God, so that the body of Christ may practice God’s ‘steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth’ (Jer. 9:23-24).”⁷⁰

glorious than they (or we) can imagine. Our good works may appear on the surface as no different from those of our non-Christian neighbors and co-workers. We may work alongside unbelievers in caring for a terminally ill child, marching for the rights of an oppressed minority or the unborn, paying our taxes, and helping disaster victims. Yet our way of being in the world—the basic motivations of our hearts—are formed by the drama, doctrine, and doxology that come from being united to Christ by the Spirit. Like our sanctification, the transforming effect of our lives on others will be something they notice more than we do.

⁶⁷ Brannon Ellis, “Covenantal Union and Communion: Union with Christ as the Covenant of Grace,” in Kopic, *Sanctification*, 83.

⁶⁸ J. de Waal Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom: Recovering the Formative Agency of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 19.

⁶⁹ Daniel J. Estes, *Hear, My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). Trentham proposes that wisdom “promotes life-learning into life-application” established in “God’s redemptive plan that operates by faith” (1 Tim 1:4). Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 222.

⁷⁰ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 223.

Table 9. Disciple-making and discipleship

Disciple	Disciple-Making	Discipleship	Maturity through Discipleship	Growing in Grace through Catechesis
To direct one's mind to something and learning skills under instruction.	<i>Following</i> the Master, <i>learning</i> and <i>living</i> in submission to his teaching about himself, <i>teaching</i> others to observe all he commanded.	<i>Doctrinal teaching</i> in the ministerial context of the gathered church: drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship.	Teaching <i>Christ</i> , the <i>sacraments</i> , and <i>discipline</i> at public gatherings; required by intense, personal visiting, catechizing, and discipleship.	Teaching <i>doctrine</i> in the catechetical framework, delivering <i>instruction</i> through systematic arrangement of truth, recognizing that doctrine deeply shapes prayer.

Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare is a state of being derived from believers' union with Christ. Christians wage war against principalities with the discernment provided by the Spirit. Puritan minister Roger Drake counseled that the believer must employ wisdom to "discern between the natural and the spiritual conflict" within oneself; such wisdom lies in "siding with the spirit against the flesh."⁷¹ Drake continues his counsel, warning the Christian must "*entertain no parley with thy enemy.—This cost all mankind dear at first. (Gen. 3:1–4.) It is disloyal, looks like a confederacy, and is very dangerous.*" Continuing, Drake advises, "He in a manner gives up his cause that will plead it with the devil. The best answer to Satan's suit is, a round and churlish denial. (Zech. 3:2; Matt. 4:10; Jude 9.) Parleying is a kind of faint denial, and draws on this impudent suitor."⁷²

⁷¹ James Nichols, trans., *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689: Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate, St. Giles in the Fields, and in Southwark by Seventy-Five Ministers of the Gospel in or near London*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 290.

⁷² Nichols, *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689*, 1:291.

Spiritual warfare requires courage and strength from believers, who find strength in union with Christ (Eph 1:19–20).⁷³ Believers must rely on Christ’s strength, continuing to put sin to death by “putting off” the old self and “putting on” the new (Eph 4:23). Christians do not need a continuous filling of the Spirit in preparation for confronting the demonic powers. Through sanctification, believers’ attitude is “being made new” by “renewing of the mind” (Col 3:10).⁷⁴ They must fight against sin daily through repentance—“a continual fighting against and struggling against the assaults of man’s own flesh, against the motions of the Devil, and enticements of the world.”⁷⁵ Clothed with the armor of Christ’s power, Christians can withstand all of the forces of the flesh, the Devil, and the world (see table 10). The battle for which believers must be clothed is not against flesh and blood but against the “power of the prince of the air” and his army of powerful, invisible evil spirits who rule over the unregenerate world (Eph 2:2; Mark 5:9; Rev 12:9).

Warfare with the armor of God. Paul commands believers to “put on” the whole armor of God, beginning with putting on the character of Christ (Rom 13:12–14), who is the perfect image of God (Col 1:15). The putting on of Christ and the armor of God prepares believers to “withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm” (Eph 6:13). According to Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley, “The church walks in ‘the armour of light’ when it obeys this injunction: ‘Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 13:12, 14), clothed with Christ as our armor in justification and sanctification, we are able to overcome all the forces of hell (Eph. 6:13).”⁷⁶

⁷³ The “whole armor of God” in Eph 6:10–20 that protects believers in warfare is the same armor listed of the Divine Warrior in Isa 59:15–20.

⁷⁴ Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” 81.

⁷⁵ James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity: Being the Sum and Substance of the Christian Religion* (London: Robinson, 1702), 397, <https://archive.org/details/bodyofdivinityor00ussh/page/n11/mode/2up>.

⁷⁶ Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *Man and Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 1151.

When discussing the spiritual warfare of the believer, J. C. Ryle identifies “two of the principal parts of the Christian minister’s business. We must not expect him to cast out evil spirits, but we may fairly expect him to ‘resist the devil and all his works,’ and to keep up a constant warfare against the prince of this world.” Ryle further specifies, “We must not expect him to work miraculous cures, but we may expect him to take a special interest in all sick people, to visit them, sympathize with them, and help them, if needful, as far as he can.”⁷⁷

Warfare from union with Christ. Sanctification is entwined with spiritual warfare, in which indwelling sin and temptation are fought. Jesus’s victory over temptation and his casting out of demons were manifestations of his “incipient, though decisive, defeat of Satan” and the demonic forces. The “binding of the strong man” is an expression of “accomplishing the latter-day defeat of Satan that Adam should have accomplished in the first garden.”⁷⁸ Through his death and resurrection, Christ secured both the victory over sin and the defeat of Satan. Moreover, believers share in this victory through union with Christ.

Christians engage in spiritual warfare by waiting on the Lord, putting on Christ, resisting sin and the Devil, and crying out to the Lord in prayer. When believers cry out to the Lord, he sends “ministering spirits” to engage in spiritual warfare and “serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation” (Heb 1:14). The forces of darkness not only fight believers; they also engage the angelic forces, “fighting against and for us (Dan. 10:13, 21; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7).”⁷⁹ Rather than engaging in direct contact

⁷⁷ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 291.

⁷⁸ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 419–20.

⁷⁹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 255.

with evil spiritual forces, believers have confidence in their union with Christ and God’s eternal sovereign plan. They rest in God’s eternal love, knowing that “if God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31).⁸⁰

Spiritual Gifts

The Holy Spirit alone can confess Jesus Christ is Lord (1 Cor 2:10–16; 12:3); he reveals wisdom and provides the “ability to grasp spiritual truths” (1 Cor 12:14).⁸¹ The gifts Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 12–14 are “spiritual” manifestations of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:1, 7; 14:1, 14) given to believers explicitly via union with Christ to edify the church and build up one another in love (1 Cor 13).⁸² The image of God contains the “exalted gifts” with which all humanity interacts with the world.⁸³ As part of the perverted image, sinful humanity uses gifts in perverse ways. The Holy Spirit enables redeemed believers “to use these gifts in a God-glorifying way.”⁸⁴

The restoration of the *imago Dei* is directly tied to the building of the church and the pouring out of the Spirit (see table 10). The perverted image of the unredeemed is held by sin, temptation, a desire for independence, and a craving for the phenomenological manifestations over the inward transformation of the Holy Spirit. The

⁸⁰ Jude discusses the dangers of direct confrontation with evil spiritual forces and believers’ proper handling of spiritual contact. Andrew Mbuvi notes that Jude 8 and 9 contrasts those who “blasphemed angels” in their “extreme arrogance” with the “extreme humility of” Michael the archangel, who did not dare to rebuke the devil directly. Mbuvi continues, stating, “By deferring to God’s justice, Michael avoided placing himself as judge over Satan, which would put him in the place of God (even though he is God’s spokesperson) and resulting in blasphemy.” Andrew M. Mbuvi, *Jude and 2 Peter*, New Covenant Commentary (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 45. Believers should be weary of anyone who speaks to and pronounces judgment over the devil and satanic spiritual beings. See also Robert W. Harvey and Philip H. Towner, *2 Peter and Jude*, IVP New Testament Commentary 18 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

⁸¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 27–29.

⁸² Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 207, Logos Bible Software.

⁸³ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:325.

⁸⁴ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1994), 86.

redemption found in Christ builds love, freedom from sin, and a body of believers who work collectively and constructively, obeying God's commands.⁸⁵ Believers receive the gift of salvation as well as gifts to build the church; the gifts are used to "equip the people of God and to enable them to set on display the glory of God, the fullness of Christ, in the temple of God (Eph. 4:12, 16). Christ thus adorns his bride, his body."⁸⁶ The outward manifestations of the gifts demonstrate God's design for humanity to glorify himself. The gifts, which are derived from the power of the Holy Spirit, signify the means by which God edifies the church; the gifts must not be elevated as a special anointing or perceived as in need of activation.

Pentecost

Pentecost was an event in redemptive history tied to the ascension of Christ and the descension of the Holy Spirit upon the redeemed that attests to the "triumph and enthronement of Christ."⁸⁷ The building of the church's foundation occurred once in redemptive history, signifying the exclusivity of Pentecost and a perspective into the historical context of the messianic promise and expectation.⁸⁸ The historical narrative of Acts 2 is not a prescription for what all New Testament believers are to expect.⁸⁹ Walter

⁸⁵ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 259.

⁸⁶ Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 208. Ferguson remarks, "Paul underlines this by the way in which he cites Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:7–8," that Christ "'led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.' The outpouring of these gifts of the Spirit marks the downfall of Christ's enemies and the beginning of the building of the church (Mt. 16:18)" (207).

⁸⁷ The "Spirit and fire baptism is to be nothing less than the culmination of the Messiah's ministry; it will serve to stamp that ministry as a whole, just as, in comparison, water baptism was an index for John's entire ministry (Luke 20:4; Acts 10:37)." Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "A Cessationist View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 32–33.

⁸⁸ Acts intends to document "a *completed* history, a unique epoch in the history of redemption—the once-for-all, *apostolic* spread of the gospel 'to the ends of the earth.'" Gaffin, "A Cessationist View," 37–38.

⁸⁹ An essential hermeneutical principle of understanding biblical texts is the distinction between what "is" and what "ought to be." The separation and understanding of the two is fundamental in interpreting and understanding spiritual gifts. (1) What "is" (or descriptive texts) provides a description of what happened in redemptive history and is meant to serve the church with application for living life to the glory of God. (2) What "ought to be" (or prescriptive texts) provides commands and explicit teachings that

Kaiser argues, “The purpose of God should be determined from the *didactic* parts of Scripture, which inform and command us on what is to be appropriated, rather than from the historical parts [such as the book of Acts], which merely *describe* what happened to others.”⁹⁰

Baptism of the Spirit

The Reformed doctrine of sanctification considers that the baptism of the Spirit occurs at conversion, where believers, according to Paul, are “baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor 12:13).⁹¹ Paul furthers the discussion of one Spirit baptism, citing, “There

detail what the redeemed should do. Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 2nd ed., 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 187–88. Beale confers with Gaffin (“A Cessationist View,”), noting that theology is both descriptive and prescriptive. The “development of a theology” is descriptive, while the prescriptive biblical text “manifests an imperative for God’s people to follow and obey.” Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 5. See also John M. Frame, “In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism: Reflections on *Sola Scriptura* and History in Theological Method,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 59, no. 2 (1997): 280.

⁹⁰ Walter C. Kaiser, “The Baptism in the Holy Spirit as the Promise of the Father: A Reformed Perspective,” in *Perspectives on Spirit Baptism: Five Views*, ed. Chad Brand (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 15. The tongues of fire described in Acts 2 depict the speaking of human languages; the people gathered from a multitude of regions with different languages, and all heard the apostles speaking in “his own native language” (2:6, 8). The baptism of fire evident in speaking in tongues occurs four times in Acts, each in a different geographical area and with different people (8:17; 10:44–48 // 11:15–18; 19:1–7). Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 37. The narrative of Acts describes the occurrences of tongues to demonstrate the “fulfillment of God’s great covenant promises” to both the Jews *and* the Gentiles, as seen in Jesus’s words, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are and Why They Matter* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), 134–35.

⁹¹ Many within the Wesleyan holiness, Pentecostal, and Brethren traditions believe that the baptism of the Spirit is a primary issue that effects salvation. The baptism is often seen as a second work of grace by the Spirit in believers that accompanies speaking in tongues of ecstatic utterances as the evidence of salvation. Not all within these traditions deem speaking in tongues as evidence of salvation; rather, the baptism is a deeper relationship with God, a development of believers’ prayer language, or evidence of the Spirit’s anointing on believers’ lives. For more information on the baptism of the Spirit in Pentecostal and Holiness theology, see Asbury Theological Seminary, “From the Archives: Arthur Greene: Pioneering Pentecostal Evangelist,” *Asbury Journal* 71, no. 2 (2016): 156–66; J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Chad Brand, ed., *Perspectives on Spirit Baptism: Five Views* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004); Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*; William K. Kay, *Pentecostalism*, SCM Core Text (London: SCM, 2009); Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark, 2008); J. W. Ward, “Pentecostal Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Martin Davie et al., 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016); Edith Waldvogel Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993).

is one body and one Spirit,” as well as “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:4–5). In the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist discusses the baptism of the Spirit, stating that he (i.e., John) baptizes “with water for repentance,” but Jesus “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (3:11). John’s words are fulfilled in Christ on the day of Pentecost.

Table 10. Reformed spiritual warfare and spiritual gifts

Spiritual Warfare	Warfare from Armor of God	Warfare from Union with Christ	Spiritual Gifts
Christians employ wisdom to <i>discern</i> between the natural and the spiritual conflict within themselves, <i>siding</i> with the spirit <i>against</i> the flesh.	Putting on Christ and armor of God enables believers to <i>withstand</i> the evil one, stand firm, <i>walk</i> in justification and sanctification, and <i>overcome</i> all of the forces of hell.	Union with Christ provides believers <i>strength</i> to fight sin and temptation; <i>waiting on</i> the Lord, <i>putting on</i> Christ, <i>resisting</i> sin and the Devil, and <i>crying out</i> to the Lord in prayer.	The Holy Spirit reveals <i>wisdom</i> , illuminates spiritual <i>truths</i> , and provides gifts to believers to <i>edify</i> the church and build up one another in <i>love</i> .

Virtuous Christian Discipleship

Discipleship encompasses the transformation of the mind and heart, progressively conforming believers to the image of Christ. Virtuous discipleship seeks to engender holiness in believers’ hearts and prepare their hands for faithful ministry. As believers grow in sanctification, the redeemed affections set on pleasing God and the virtues of Christ become more evident. *Virtuous Christian Discipleship* (VCD) is a proposed discipleship model that extends John David Trentham’s virtuous framework—*Mere Didaskalia* (MD), *Virtuous Christian Knowing* (VCK), *Virtuous Christian Teaching*

(VCT)—with a historical catechetical framework, thereby adding a new element to the virtuous framework (see table 11).⁹²

Table 11. Virtuous Christian Discipleship



Virtuous Christian Discipleship is rooted in the double grace of justification and sanctification, recognizing the call for Christians to be holy as God is holy (1 Pet 1:15). The instructional methods of VCD are grounded in the gospel of Christ, drawing from the ontological vocational identity of Christian teachers (Rom 1:16; 8:29–30). Christian teaching ministry bases believers in Scripture and discipleship that come from union with Christ (1 Cor 1:4–9). The catechetical road of discipleship parallels the journey of Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress*.⁹³ Christian meets Evangelist and others who instruct and mentor him through doctrine and catechesis; Christian learns to engage in critical reflection of his own worldview through applying Scripture to his journey.

The following two sections discuss the framework of Virtuous Christian Discipleship. The first section establishes the foundations of VCD, demonstrated in catechesis, *Mere Didaskalia*, Virtuous Christian Knowing, and Virtuous Christian Teaching. The second section confers the goal of virtuous disciple-making in VCD. Discipleship encompasses believers’ whole being, imparting wisdom to know God and live in redemptive flourishing.

⁹² Trentham, “*Mere Didaskalia*,” 213; John David Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Virtuous Christian Learning” (handout, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021). Used with permission.

⁹³ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2006).

Establishing the Foundation of Virtuous Christian Discipleship

The underlying foundational concept of VCD builds upon excellence, which itself is a Christian virtue. Excellence is perfectly embodied by and describes God; by its very nature, it denotes that which is excellent and worthy of praise. VCD affirms historic principles found in the early church fathers, Protestant Reformers, and more contemporary theologians who insist that believers must “declare” the “virtues or excellencies” of God “not only by our tongue, but also by our whole life.”⁹⁴ Discipleship is a work of the Holy Spirit in believers’ hearts in an “ongoing, ever-deepening response to the gospel: the Christian way of life in response to the truth (John 14:6).”⁹⁵ The pursuit

⁹⁴ Augustine articulates the power of God, displayed in the Holy Spirit, as virtue in John 16:13. He further remarks that it “is of this virtue that we are to believe, that the evangelist says, ‘Virtue went out of Him, and healed them all’” (Luke 6:19). Augustine of Hippo, “Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John,” trans. John Gibb and James Innes, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, vol. 7, St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature, 1888), Tractate 99.7, Logos Bible Software. Calvin reasons that 1 Pet 2:9 calls believers to proclaim the praises, or virtues, of God for he has called believers “out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Modern Bible versions translate “praises” as “excellencies”; therefore, when Calvin states that “by *praises*, or virtues,” modern readers can understand his statement as conveying that “the believer is to proclaim the excellencies of God.” The 1855 translation of Calvin’s *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* translates 1 Pet 2:9 as “shew forth the praises”; the ESV translates the verse as “proclaim the excellencies.” See John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen, Calvin’s Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), comm. on 1 Pet 2:9 (pp. 21–155).

Augustine argues that the virtues of “works of mercy, affections of charity, sanctity of piety, incorruptness of chastity, [and] modesty of sobriety” listed in 1 John 4:12–16 are “always to be kept.” The “Lord Jesus Christ, once beginning to dwell in our inner man, (*i.e.* in the mind through faith),” uses “these invisible virtues” in sanctification. Augustine continues, “These virtues which cannot be seen with eyes, and yet when they are named are praised—and they would not be praised except they were loved, not loved except they were seen; and if not loved except seen, they are seen with another eye, that is, with the inward beholding of the heart.” Augustine of Hippo, “Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John,” trans. Joseph H. Myers and H. Browne, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, vol. 7, St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature, 1888), Homily 8.1, Logos Bible Software.

Jonathan Edwards contends that God communicated “virtue and holiness to” humanity in the *imago Dei*, whereby humanity “partakes of God’s own moral excellency, which is properly the beauty of the divine nature. And as God delights in his own beauty, he must necessarily delight in the creature’s holiness; which is a conformity to, and participation of it.” Humanity’s holiness consists “in love, which is the comprehension of all true virtue.” Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 442, Logos Bible Software.

In his discussion of God’s righteousness that endures forever expressed in 2 Cor 9:9, Charles Hodge argues that “righteousness means general excellence or virtue, as manifested in beneficence.” The virtue of God’s eternal righteousness is manifested in his goodness. Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1891), 222, Logos Bible Software.

A. W. Pink expresses that Jesus is “the Personification of all virtue and moral excellency.” Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005), chap. 10 (“Its Effectuation”), para. 14, Logos Bible Software.

⁹⁵ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 225.

of excellent training in obedience unto the moral character of the teacher becomes virtuous discipleship. Virtuous discipleship qualifies as “Christian” when it is the pursuit of excellent discipleship “according to a confessional identity and ethic that is prescribed by biblical truth and ultimately rooted in the gospel of Christ.”

Mere *Didaskalia*. Sanctification involves learning and knowing, both of which are immersed in the practice of catechesis and discipleship. Paul commands the church to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:12). The Christian faith may be fully encapsulated as one “unified exercise with two reciprocal movements”: (1) believing in God by trusting in the gospel and (2) following Christ in and by obedience to the gospel.⁹⁶ Thus, “only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.”⁹⁷ God ordained the church as the primary training instrument that “propels gospel trust toward gospel obedience, by equipping believers with gospel discernment through doctrine (*didaskalia*). It is the ecclesial fitness center for training hearing-and-doing disciples (James 1:22).”⁹⁸ The orthodox church trains every believer in unequivocal steadfastness to Christian doctrine so they “may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14).

Teaching Christian doctrine necessitates the foundation of the biblical-theological system to understand the metanarrative of Scripture rightly. To know God is to know him as he has revealed himself in his Word. Augustine expounds upon the importance of teaching to “not leave the path” of sound doctrine so as not to be misled by

⁹⁶ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 213.

⁹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 63.

⁹⁸ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 213. Trentham explains, Doctrine is the content (*didache*) and distillation (*didasko*) of confessional truth into formative instruction (*didaskalia*), communicated by a teacher (*didaskalos*) to a learner (*mathétés*), for the purpose of facilitating growth in redemptive discernment—in order that the learner may gain wisdom, and ultimately so that the learner may manifest wisdom in its purest form (1 Cor. 1:30). It is in this sense that Christian education in the church is the ministry of *didaskalia*. (217)

“every wind of doctrine.”⁹⁹ Trentham proposes that Christians’ *salvific* calling, their ontological identity, is “fundamentally a matter of ‘effectual’ calling—i.e., being called unto salvation in Christ, by the Spirit” (Rom 8:28; Phil 3:14; Heb 3:1; 1 Pet 5:10).¹⁰⁰ Moreover, believers’ *vocational* calling, the vocational ethic of the Christian teaching ministry mission, is intrinsically “related to a *salvific* sense of calling” (see appendix 1). Christian teaching ministry engages an ontological vocational calling and a phenomenological vocational mission, both of which apply corporately to the body of Christ.¹⁰¹ The ontological calling refers to what believers are called *to be*, namely, the “vocational identity” of those who are in Christ. The phenomenological mission refers to what believers are called *to do*, namely, the “vocational ethic” of what believers are driven toward as the *telos*, or ultimate end. To “be rightly motivated unto the vocational mission of Christ, one must be established and rooted in his or her vocational calling in Christ.”¹⁰²

Indicative-imperative balance. In the “indicative-imperative balance,”¹⁰³ the indicative of believers’ identity—a vocational calling to holiness and discipleship—*must*

⁹⁹ Augustine opines,

Anyone with an interpretation of the scriptures that differs from that of the writer is misled, but not because the scriptures are lying. If, as I began by saying, he is misled by an idea of the kind that builds up love, which is the end of the commandment, he is misled in the same way as a walker who leaves his path by mistake but reaches the destination to which the path leads by going through a field. But he must be put right and shown how it is more useful not to leave the path, in case the habit of deviating should force him to go astray or even adrift. (Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green, Oxford World’s Classics [Oxford: Oxford University, 2008], 27, Logos Bible Software)

¹⁰⁰ John David Trentham, “Toward a Theology of Christian Calling” (unpublished class notes for 45150, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall Semester 2021).

¹⁰¹ Trentham proposes an original definition of Christian teaching ministry in the context of “teaching according to its distinctive vocational calling and mission.” Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 212. Christian teaching ministry is defined and discussed at length later in this section.

¹⁰² Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 214.

¹⁰³ Daniel Doriani asserts that “theologians have given the inelegant label ‘the indicative and the imperative.’ The phrase notes the way in which the apostles move from what *is* to what, logically, *ought to be*.”

precede the imperative of believers’ practice—a vocational mission to pursue ministry and steward discipleship (see table 12). As believers receive and apply faith, their life “manifests the redemptive power of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰⁴ Herman Ridderbos notes the essential balance of indicative to imperative in believers’ sanctification in the redemptive-historical plan of God. The “indicative of redemption, the proclamation of the new state of life,” is “followed by the imperative: If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”¹⁰⁵ The righteousness of believers is given by the Spirit, which precedes the life of righteousness that believers are called to live out.¹⁰⁶

Table 12. The indicative-imperative balance applied to vocation¹⁰⁷

Vocational Balance	Vocational Dynamic	Vocational Emphasis	Vocational Focus
<i>Indicative</i>	Calling “to be”	<i>Ontological</i> (vocational identity)	“The essence” of Christian teaching ministry
<i>Imperative</i>	Calling “to do”	<i>Phenomenological</i> (vocational ethic)	“The mission” of Christian teaching ministry

Vocational identity. The local church is the context for the instruction of doctrine through the gathering of the saints in community worship and discipleship. Christian teaching ministry “exists as the means of propelling gospel belief into gospel discernment and wisdom, so that the church can live with gospel integrity and boldness.”¹⁰⁸ Christian teaching ministry is grounded in the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*;

¹⁰⁴ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 215.

¹⁰⁵ Herman N. Ridderbos, *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology* (Ontario: Paideia, 1982), 52.

¹⁰⁶ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 215.

¹⁰⁷ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 215.

¹⁰⁸ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 216.

Scripture alone provides the necessary truth to walk in the way of Christ unto maturity. The church, teachers, and students must commit to seeking God’s will in Scripture, which teaches wisdom and enables discernment. Doctrine encompasses the source of confessional truth found in Scripture, the commitment to express such truth with wisdom and discernment, and the deliberate teaching in a manner that fosters learning.¹⁰⁹ Charles Spurgeon expresses, “We must feed the flock of God. We must deal with eternal verities, and grapple with heart and conscience. We must, in fact, live to educate a race of saints, in whom the Lord Jesus shall be reflected as in a thousand mirrors.”¹¹⁰ Christian teaching ministry, then, “*is the intentional facilitation of redemptive learning in gathered church contexts, by the means of Scripture and doctrine, unto discipleship.*”¹¹¹

Vocational ethic. The *telos* of the vocational ethic is the stewardship of the CTM mission. God appoints teachers to lead churches with care; they are accountable and “will be judged with greater strictness” (Jas 3:1). Teachers must communicate “God’s truth with clarity, faithfulness and excellence, in order that the church is increasingly equipped and enriched” and that “they may walk in the way of righteousness” (Eph 1:18).¹¹² CTM utilizes the pattern of teaching defined by the Jesus in the Vine and the Branches allegory in John 15:1–9 (see table 13). The allegory of the Vine and the Branches demonstrates the *ethic* of CTM: *communicating God’s truth so that the body of Christ abides together in the love of Christ and bears fruit for the kingdom of Christ.*¹¹³ CTM is the vocational mission of the Great Commission ministry, teaching believers to observe all that Christ has commanded them (Matt 28:20;

¹⁰⁹ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 217.

¹¹⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 239, Logos Bible Software.

¹¹¹ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 218.

¹¹² Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 219.

¹¹³ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 220.

didaskalia) in the context of the local church. The imperative marks the vocational ethic of CTM in the structure and work of ministry teachers (*didaskalos*) as they fulfill the mission and make disciples. The vocational mission and vocational ethic are intertwined in CTM. There “are three ethical angles to the mission of Christian education: (1) the confessional ethic (‘Christian’), (2) the pedagogical ethic (‘teaching’), and (3) the manifestational ethic (‘ministry’).¹¹⁴

Table 13. Christian teaching ministry and the Vine and the Branches paradigm

Vocational Mission	Vocational Ethic	John 15
Christian	Confessional ethic: (communicating) <i>God’s truth</i>	“I am the true vine.” (v. 1)
Teaching	Pedagogical ethic: . . . <i>so that the body of Christ abides together in the love of Christ</i>	“Abide in me and I in you . . . Abide in my love.” (v. 4, 9)
Ministry	Manifestational ethic: . . . <i>so that the body of Christ bears fruit for the kingdom of Christ.</i>	“By this my father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” (v. 8)

The first ethical angle of CTM necessitates that Christian teachers within the church hold a confessional ethic to steadfastly communicate *God’s truth*, characterized by “godly knowledge, understanding, and wisdom” that is grounded and exhibited in the gospel of Christ (2 Cor 5:21). The confessional ethic forms the affirmational basis of all *didaskalia* communicated in the church and by Christian teachers. The Rule of Faith found in the confessional ethic must guide Christian teachers. The “faith” in the Rule of Faith is not the “subjective, individual experience but the faith of the church, received from apostolic preaching.” Rather, the Rule of Faith serves as a “Christological

¹¹⁴ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 219.

hermeneutical key for the interpretation of Scripture,” explaining “how the Scriptures are to be arranged, to render the portrait of the King.”¹¹⁵

The second ethical angle of CTM, the pedagogical ethic, is “*communicating* (God’s truth) *so that the body of Christ abides together in the love of Christ.*”¹¹⁶ Church teachers must facilitate learning through the organized provision of edifying curricula with faithful and effective communication that bonds the congregation together in the unifying ministry of Christ. The instruction must be designed to train all members of the church so that the body can “build itself up in love” (Eph 4:16), increase in spiritual maturity, and grow in righteousness “so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord” (Ps 102:18).¹¹⁷ Theological instruction must include, according to Horton, the “sacramental aspect of the Word—that is, its role as a means of grace.” Teaching and preaching the gospel “not only calls people to faith in Christ; it is the means by which the Spirit creates faith in their hearts.” Horton warns that this

sacramental aspect of God’s Word is often marginalized by a purely pedagogical (instructional) concept. It is therefore not surprising that when the Word is reduced to its didactic function there arises a longing of the people to encounter God here and now through other means. However, by affirming its sacramental as well as the regulative (canonical) character, we can recognize the Word as God’s working *and* ruling, saving *and* teaching.¹¹⁸

The third angle of CTM, the manifestational ethic, is “*communicating* (God’s truth) *so that the body of Christ bears fruit for the kingdom of Christ.*”¹¹⁹ The *telos* of ministry must concern Christian discipleship that pursues and produces necessary fruit for the Christian life. “The call to discipleship” in the Great Commission “was and still is

¹¹⁵ Kathryn Greene-McCreight, “Rule of Faith,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 703.

¹¹⁶ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 221.

¹¹⁷ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 221.

¹¹⁸ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 754–55.

¹¹⁹ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 222.

a call to disciple making, a call to spreading the glory of Jesus Christ everywhere.”¹²⁰ The bearing of fruit in Christians occurs as a result of the “fiat declaration of justification,” whereby the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the elect to bring about faith in Christ through the gospel “both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). Jesus’s words in John 15:3—“You are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you”—demonstrate the same call to bear fruit consistent with this forensic declaration.¹²¹ Christian teachers must heed this warning: “Failure to teach unto fruit-bearing is a failure to fulfill the mission of Christian teaching ministry.”¹²²

Virtuous Christian Knowing. Augustine warns that those who deviate from the path of doctrine may “go astray or even adrift” in the pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Therefore, “staying on the path” requires that believers be taught Christian doctrine “in order to grow and mature *through knowing*” excellently and “in a God-honoring manner.” The Virtuous Christian Knowing paradigm (VCK) “entails a personal commitment to Truth in which one (a) recognizes biblical priorities; (b) seeks biblical implications; and (c) engages in biblical commitments and applications” (see figure 1; appendix 2).¹²³

¹²⁰ Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 269.

¹²¹ Michael Horton, “‘Let the Earth Bring Forth . . .’: The Spirit and Human Agency in Sanctification,” in Kapic, *Sanctification*, 145–46.

¹²² Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 223.

¹²³ John David Trentham, “Christian Teaching” (unpublished class notes for 45400, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall Semester 2021), 5.

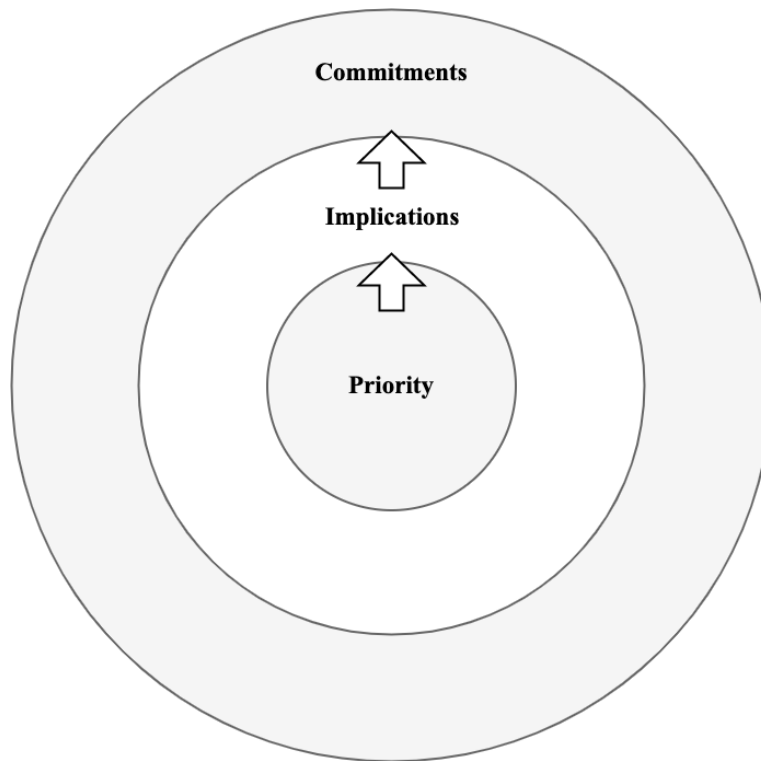


Figure 1. Virtuous Christian Knowing concentric circles

The concentric circles depict the directionality from the inside out of the growth and maturity in the pursuit of knowledge. Virtuous Christian knowing exemplifies redemptive anthropology in how God designed humanity to learn and grow. Redemptive learning in Christian faith development can be likened to the rings of a tree, which confirm the definitive growth of the tree. John Westerhoff expounds upon the analogy of a tree, remarking that “a tree acquires one ring at a time in a slow and gradual manner. We do not see that expansion, although we do see the results, and surely we are aware that you cannot skip rings, moving from a one-ring to a three-ring tree. The same is true of faith. We expand” in “faith . . . slowly and gradually (it cannot be rushed)” in “an orderly process over time.”¹²⁴

¹²⁴ John H. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2012), 114.

Belief always constitutes the core priority of redemptive learning. Discernment is developed from what is believed. The resulting commitments should always be consistent with what is believed and discerned. G. K. Chesterton wisely asserts, “Real development is not leaving things behind, as on a road, but drawing life from them as from a root.”¹²⁵ The root of redemptive virtuous knowing, found in the Reformed biblical-theological system, provides the root of life that develops the learning of discernment and the active living of faith.

VCK is grounded in Ezra 7:10: “For Ezra had set his *heart* to *study* the Law of the Lord, and to *do* it and to *teach* his statutes and rules in Israel.”¹²⁶ Like Ezra, those who engage in VCK accentuate the biblical priorities of “the Law of the Lord,” the implications “to *study*,” and the commitments “to *do* it and to *teach* his statutes and rules in Israel” (see table 14).

Table 14. A paradigm for biblical knowing

Priority	Implication	Commitment
<i>Life-defining truth:</i> Set in their hearts— <i>the law of the Lord</i>	<i>Life-informing framework:</i> Set in their hearts— <i>to study</i>	<i>Life-living practices:</i> Set in their hearts— <i>to do it and teach it</i>

The Christian worldview is essential to Christian education. Christian teachers must understand “that which is in accord with a Christian worldview is appropriate education, and that which is not in accord with these foundations is miseducation.”¹²⁷ The

¹²⁵ G. K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (Wilmington, DE: Franklin Classics, 2018).

¹²⁶ Trentham, “Christian Teaching,” 12. I have added emphasis to accentuate the priorities of Ezra’s setting the law of the Lord in his heart, the implications of his setting in his heart to study, and his commitments to set in his heart to do and teach the statutes and laws.

¹²⁷ Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective*, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 90.

categories for virtuous Christian knowing correspond to the categories for Christian personal character and identity—believers’ priority of the gospel as their “life-defining truth” (Rom 1:16), the implication of believers’ seeing through the Christian worldview in catechesis as the “life-informing framework” (Eph 1:18), and believers’ commitment of discipleship as living the “life-living practices” of wisdom (John 15:8; see appendix 3).¹²⁸

The tri-perspectival framework of VCK includes the priority of recognizing the importance of the confession of the gospel, the Christian worldview, and discipleship. The notion that knowledge is tri-perspectival comes from Frame (see figure 2), who proposes that human knowledge is comprised of the interdependence of the knowledge of God’s norms, our situation, and ourselves—“an application of God’s revealed norms for thought (normative) to the facts of God’s creation (situational) by a person qualified to make such applications (existential).”¹²⁹

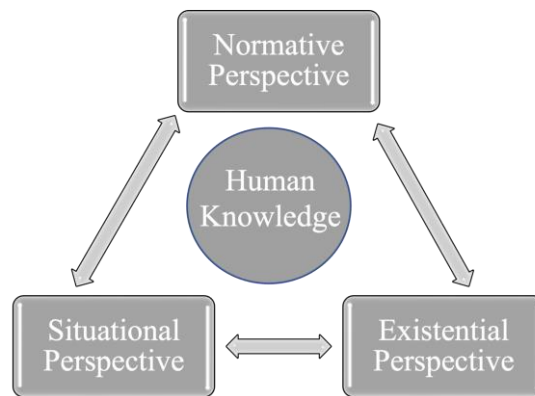


Figure 2. Frame’s tri-perspectival epistemology

¹²⁸ Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Learning,” 1.

¹²⁹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 311. See also Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 62–75.

Each object of knowledge—normative, situational, and existential—represents one of three perspectives on all human knowledge (see figure 1). Frame encapsulates the questions of “What can we know?” and “How should we seek and apply knowledge?” in his tri-perspectival epistemology.¹³⁰ We perceive that Scripture “is the word of God by its self-attestation (normative), by facts and evidences properly interpreted through Scripture (situational), and by the Spirit enabling us to evaluate truly the Bible’s claims and evidences (existential).”¹³¹

Frame explicates that “Scripture is the foremost tool in shaping thoughts,” clarifying that “Scripture remains primary, while embracing all the perspectives.”¹³² The process of knowing is inextricably tied to the triadic perspectives of knowledge in the law, world, and self. Knowledge of the law and self cannot be isolated from one another; both are essential for understanding each other. Christians “distinguish self and law by revelation.” The law exposes the inadequacies of the self to adhere to God’s moral law, and the study of the self reveals the norms and application of the law. As humanity is made in the image of God, the law is inscribed on our hearts; as Christians are continually renewed into the image of Christ, we increasingly reflect God’s righteousness and “become more and more a source of revelation—to ourselves and to others—of God’s law.”¹³³ Knowledge of the law and the world are also intertwined. God’s revelation forms the basis of Christianity and of all thought. Therefore, all knowledge “must be based on the facts” of God’s revelation, and interpretation must have its basis in “an adequate interpretation of our situation.”¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 74.

¹³¹ Te-Li Lau, “Knowing the Bible Is the Word of God despite Competing Claims,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 1011.

¹³² Erin Megan Shaw, “She Knows Truth: Toward a Redemptive Model of Women’s Epistemological Development” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 66.

¹³³ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 73.

¹³⁴ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 72.

The normative perspective concentrates on the God’s self-attesting authority expressed through the law. This is the “fundamental ‘presupposition’” of Christianity—it is “comprehensive, governing all areas of life, and any assertion that conflicts with it must be rejected as false.” The situational perspective concentrates on the law as revealed in Scripture and in creation. Christians examine knowledge about the world to propose a biblical understanding of it and to propose the application of Scripture to it. The existential perspective concentrates on the law as revealed in the hearts of human beings, who are made in God’s image. Christians learn the law better as they learn themselves better. Moreover, regeneration and sanctification—that is, obedience—are “essential to knowledge in the fullest sense and how these interact with law and situation to lead us into truth.”¹³⁵

Applying the perspectives to the Christian worldview, VCK identifies, “We understand the law” (normative) “by studying its relations to the world” (situational) “and the self—its ‘applications’” (existential).¹³⁶ *Knowing* is not “mere comprehension or awareness” of the normative decrees of God but necessitates it; *knowing* is not “mere reflection” of Scripture and creation but necessitates it; *knowing* is not “mere experience and application” of knowledge but necessitates it. Christians should “take seriously the questions and concerns raised by epistemologists. Exercising care over the formation of our minds is not a purely academic pursuit; it is also a spiritual one. God enjoins us in Scripture to pursue the intellectual virtues.” Scripture is unmistakably clear that Christians are to “superintend the life of the mind,” as Romans 12:3 commands: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” God cares both about *how* Christians think and *what* Christians think.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 75.

¹³⁶ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 89.

¹³⁷ W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*, Contours of Christian Philosophy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 18.

Virtuous Christian Teaching. Virtuous Christian Teaching (VCT) entails bipartite wisdom: (1) *sophia* (“speculative wisdom” to *know* that which is wise) and (2) *prudentia* (“applied wisdom” to *do* that which is wise). Christian teachers must facilitate learning that evokes the love of *knowing* that which is truly wise (*sophia*) so that they and those whom they teach may increasingly mature in the desire and ability to love *doing* that which is truly wise (*prudentia*).¹³⁸ VCT prompts VCK through virtuous habits of teaching biblical priorities, implications, and commitments. Learners must pursue virtuous knowing through virtuous habits of learning in Christian teaching and learning contexts where the church community is devoted to virtuous knowing. VCK is thus recognized in teaching and learning as comprised of “a series of corresponding categories, each with identifiable priorities and competencies” (see table 15).¹³⁹

Table 15. A paradigm for Virtuous Christian Teaching and Learning

Virtuous Christian Teaching	
<i>Sophia</i>	<i>Prudentia</i>
Knowing and confessing wisdom	Doing what is wise in community
Virtuous habits of learning	Virtuous habits of behaving

Christian teachers must recognize and communicate the truth contained in Scripture and ultimately revealed in the gospel of Christ. Such a commitment to the “biblically-founded presuppositions for learning and development” allows believers to learn the “sacred writings, which are able to make” believers “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). Such virtuous habits of teaching enable Christian

¹³⁸ Trentham, “Christian Teaching,” 36.

¹³⁹ Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Learning,” 2.

learners to believe and confess the truth (Phil 1:27). Instruction must provide opportunities for learning the implications of Scripture and its application to creation, for all “Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

Christian teachers must affirm the presuppositions of “the God of the Bible as metaphysically ultimate” and “revelation as the source and most basic component for knowledge and development.”¹⁴⁰ These premises form the basis of the doctrinal ministry of the church. Such presuppositions stand in contrast to the secularist and religious presuppositions. Secularist knowing presumes a temporal foundation for truth, and religious knowing presumes a supernatural foundation; however, Christian knowing assumes a biblical foundation to truth.¹⁴¹ Moreover, Christian teachers must clearly communicate the “relationship between faith and rationality.”¹⁴² The Rule of Faith identifies the twin cognitive and affective components of faith: faith and reason, or belief and experience, both contribute to believers’ sanctification and discipleship journey.

Through “metacognition, critical reflection, and contextualistic orientation for learning,” Christian learners engage in “wisdom-oriented modes of learning and living.” Such virtuous habits of learning by employing the Christian worldview empower growth in doctrinal discernment and wisdom (Heb 5:14). Learners must engage in doing through active involvement with the church community so that they “may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:15–17). Through reflecting on personal beliefs and values through wisdom and discernment, Christians become practiced in recognizing divergent beliefs and values. As the church is the God-given context for learning and doing through

¹⁴⁰ Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Learning,” 2.

¹⁴¹ John David Trentham, “On ‘Knowing’” (unpublished class notes for 45400, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall Semester 2021), 34.

¹⁴² Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Learning,” 2.

fellowship with the saints, Christians are able to gain insight into the social-environmental influences that affect personal learning and maturation (see table 16).

Table 16. Trentham’s virtuous paradigm for Virtuous Christian Discipleship

<i>Mere Didaskalia</i>	VCK	VCT
Ontological	Priorities	<i>Sophia</i>
	Implications	
Phenomenological	Commitments	<i>Prudentia</i>
Excellence		

Catechetical framework. The author of Hebrews exhorts Christians to “hold fast” to Christ, the “confession of our hope” (3:6; 4:14; 6:18; 10:13), and become mature in the faith (5:14). Believers learn Christ through the proclamation of Christ in catechesis (Col 1:28; 2 Cor 4:5; 1 Pet 2:9; 1 John 1:2–3, 5). Packer and Parrett propose a Christocentric framework that identifies five sources of catechesis, where Scripture alone provides the authoritative source “for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17; see appendix 5).¹⁴³ Augustine, in *The Enchiridion*, argues for a threefold catechetical fixture, asserting that “God is to be worshipped with faith, hope, and love”; the “three graces” detail “what we are to believe” in faith, “what we are to hope for,” and “what we are to love”¹⁴⁴ (see figure 3; table 17). Faith provides the means by which believers receive the gospel in trust. Faith is revealed to the mind and sealed upon the heart, whereby believers enjoy the benefits of relationship with God. Christians are

¹⁴³ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, chap. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Augustine of Hippo, “The Enchiridion,” trans. J. F. Shaw, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, vol. 3, *St. Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 238, Logos Bible Software.

liberated by the hope set before them for eternal life with God in Christ, ever praying to be sustained and delivered from temptation as well as looking to the hope of an excellent future restoration of heaven and earth. Love is the end of all of the commandments, for faith profits nothing without love; hope cannot exist in love's absence. The catechetical framework, evident in the three dimensions of VCK, is built upon redemptive anthropology; humanity engages in learning as believers, discerners, and doers of the Word. Building upon the concentric circles of VCK, catechesis moves from the core priorities on the inside to the commitments on the outside. The core (i.e., the truths of the Word our hearts believe and love) informs the implications (i.e., the Word discerned for life and godliness) and the commitments (i.e., the practice of loving one's neighbor as a doer of the Word).¹⁴⁵ If the core is infected with heresy, it will expand and appropriate itself out into all the other dimensions.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Anselm of Canterbury aptly writes the following about truth, hope, and love:

Lord, I am not trying to make my way to your height, for my understanding is in no way equal to that, but I do desire to understand a little of your truth which my heart already believes and loves.

I do not seek to understand so that I can believe, but I believe so that I may understand; and what is more, I believe that unless I do believe, I shall not understand. (George Appleton, ed., *The Oxford Book of Prayer* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 68)

The core of VCK entails the priority of the Truth of God, to which believers must hold fast in order to ensure that their doctrine does not slide out of orthodoxy, for any drop of heresy infects the core, which infiltrates the other dimensions of catechesis.

¹⁴⁶ Trentham, "Mere *Didaskalia*," 218.

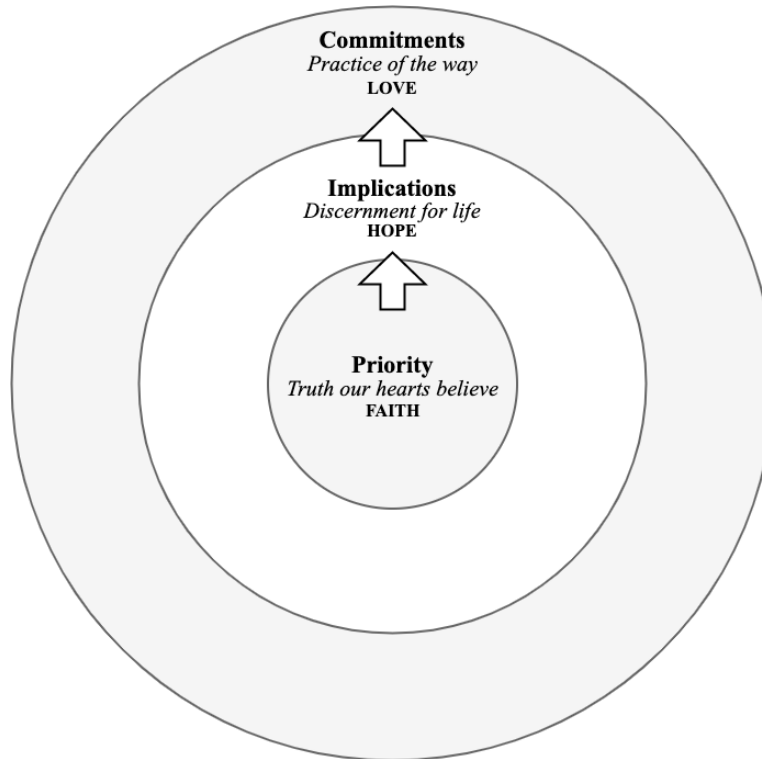


Figure 3. Commitment to Truth
in the VCK paradigm

The Christocentric catechetical framework instructs believers in righteousness and a Christ-centered living faith through the threefold fixture of faith, hope, and love. The whole focus of catechesis is to proclaim Christ through discipleship, ensuring “that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28). God has revealed himself in Scripture, which tells the story of God’s redemptive love through the grace of the gospel. The faith “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) begins with virtuous discipleship that grounds sound doctrine in the gospel. The gospel underscores the truth that Christians will never “grow weary of contemplating the truth, faithfulness, justice, and love of the Father and the obedient, self-humbling, self-sacrificing love of the Son,” either on earth or in heaven.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 83–85.

Table 17. Corresponding categories of catechesis

Priorities	Implications	Commitments
Faith	Hope	Love
Truth	Life	Way
Believing	Discerning	Doing

Catechesis provides a redemptive and confessional discipleship model used to instruct everything Jesus commanded for believers’ doctrine and life (see table 18). The faith development in catechesis occurs in a community of faith, which is “essentially a community interacting with a living tradition. The tradition we bear as a faith community is essentially and primarily a story of God’s mighty deeds and actions in history.”¹⁴⁸ The VCD model offers a redemptive and confessional framework of sanctification for discipleship through catechesis and fellowship built on the basis of a perspective of human learning, growth, and development in light of the *imago Dei*.

Table 18. The foundation of Virtuous Christian Discipleship framework

<i>Mere Didaskalia</i>	VCK	VCT	Catechesis
Ontological	Priorities	<i>Sophia</i>	Faith
	Implications		Hope
Phenomenological	Commitments	<i>Prudentia</i>	Love
Excellence			

¹⁴⁸ Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 88.

Virtuous Christian Discipleship Demonstrated in Mere *Didaskalia*

VCD further develops the three ethical angles of Christian teaching ministry (CTM) found in Mere *Didaskalia*: “(1) the confessional ethic (‘Christian’), (2) the pedagogical ethic (‘teaching’), and (3) the manifestational ethic (‘ministry’).” Church teachers must employ VCD to ensure growth and maturity by “*communicating God’s truth so that the body of Christ abides together in the love of Christ and bears fruit for the kingdom of Christ.*”¹⁴⁹ Christians believe in the gospel truth through the ontological calling and *trust* in God. Believers’ “alien righteousness” imputed in the indicative of redemption forms the basis of the belief and trust in the gospel.¹⁵⁰ First Peter 1:15 harkens to the ontological calling, requiring believers to be holy as God is holy, for he has called believers out of the darkness and into a new life in his marvelous light. The vocational identity of CTM is “*the intentional facilitation of redemptive learning in gathered church contexts, by the means of Scripture and doctrine, unto discipleship.*”¹⁵¹ The gathering of the saints generates redemptive flourishing through the doctrinal and confessional instruction of discipleship.

Christians follows Christ in obedience to the gospel through the phenomenological mission. Rooted and established in the imputed righteousness of the vocational identity, believers walk by the Spirit in righteousness unto redemptive learning and Christian maturity (see table 18).¹⁵² First Peter 2:9 calls believers to proclaim the virtues of God, declaring the excellencies of his name with word and deed. The epistemological foundation of faith in God and the truth found in him produces

¹⁴⁹ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 219.

¹⁵⁰ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. William R. Russell and Timothy F. Lull, 3rd ed (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 120, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁵¹ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 219.

¹⁵² Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 215.

knowledge. Three verbs—*learning*, *growing*, and *living*—encapsulate the commitment of every believer, especially those in the local church. Christian teachers must instruct believers to recognize the law of the Lord; the ability to love the law requires that it is seen and lived.

Virtuous Christian Discipleship Demonstrated in VCK and VCT

Virtuous Christian Knowing distinguishes that learning requires knowing to the “fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13); knowing requires “worshipful personal commitment” to the ultimate truth.¹⁵³ The priority of the ultimate reality of truth found in God alone provides the basis for believers’ sanctification; *knowing*, an aspect of sanctification, is dynamic and progressive (Phil 3:10; 1 Cor 13:12). Knowing is *virtuous* when necessarily centered in the implications of the gospel of Christ and “(1) honest, (2) humble, and (3) lived.” Virtuous knowing is *Christian* when pursuing the commitments of “excellent knowing according to a confessional identity and ethic that is prescribed by biblical truth and ultimately rooted in the gospel of Christ.”¹⁵⁴ Christians may engage in VCK as a means “to grow and mature through knowing in a God-honoring manner” (see table 18).

Personal and communal discipleship through the pursuit of commitments toward “personal responsibility for learning and maturing—within community” enables Christians to be *doers* of the Word (Jas 1:22). The church must hold each Christian accountable for personal learning and maturation while developing relationships that result from “mutual interdependence and reciprocity” with teachers and learners.¹⁵⁵ As virtuous teachers provoke learners to pursue active engagement in the learning process, both teachers and learners develop “a sense of personal responsibility for gaining,

¹⁵³ Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Learning,” 1.

¹⁵⁴ Trentham, “Christian Teaching,” 15.

¹⁵⁵ Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Learning,” 15.

maintaining, and progressing in ways of knowing” (see table 18). Through the testing and discernment, with constant practice in community, Christians gain a convictional commitment to the Christian worldview that is “maintained with critical awareness of personal contexts, ways of thinking, and challenges brought to bear by alternative worldviews.”¹⁵⁶

Virtuous Christian Discipleship Demonstrated in Catechesis

Catechesis provides a redemptive and confessional discipleship model used to instruct everything Jesus commanded for believers’ doctrine and life (see appendix 4). Conceptual models of sanctification have been articulated; however, the manifestational model of discipleship articulated in VCD offers a practical model of sanctification through catechesis and fellowship. Such a redemptive and confessional model is built on the basis of the perspective of human learning, growth, and development in light of the *imago Dei* discussed in chapter 2 and the first half of this chapter.

The Christian life “consists of a perpetual cycle of dramatic narrative, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship.” Believers engage in a continual pursuit of active involvement in the teaching and learning process. Through an active pursuit of personal development, especially in prayer, through the agency of the Spirit in faith, believers’ responses are reshaped, internalizing what has been heard and received “through the means of grace, so that” Christians, in the eternal hope of glory, are no longer ungrateful strangers to God’s “promises, but joyful heirs. Therefore, far from drawing” believers “away from the world, prayer is the link between the means of grace and” the “active love and service to” Christians “neighbor[s]” (see table 18).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Learning,” 15.

¹⁵⁷ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 786.

Triadic basis of love. Paul provides instruction in three matters of the hearts of those reconciled to God by faith: they will emanate *pure* love, *a good* conscience, and *a sincere* faith (1 Tim 1:5). The triadic basis of love demonstrates the characteristics of godly Christian teachers. Believers are to “wage the good warfare” from the triadic base of love, “holding faith and a good conscience” as those who possess the pure love of God (1 Tim 1:18–19). Paul expounds on the triadic basis of love, exhorting believers of their “shared discipleship to Christ” and instructing them with “three categories of attitude and action” that must guide their minds, hearts, and actions: (1) relationships, “involving respect for their teachers [and] mutual ministry among believers”; (2) piety, “which should be filled with joy and thanksgiving”; and (3) receptivity “to God’s revealed Word.” In all matters of life, “Christians are to respond to Christ’s grace not only by trusting him but also by following his example of ministry, godliness, and zeal.”¹⁵⁸

Love and faith through the gospel. The gospel “is the instrument by which God consecrates” the believer “to himself through Christ”; faith, then, “must be the means by which” the Christian receives “that word and enjoy its benefits.”¹⁵⁹ Faith can be defined as “a matter of trust that involves heart and mind, not only knowing God to be good but entrusting oneself and one’s good to God alone. Sanctification—the progressive transformation of the believer”—is “viewed as a reality dependent on God’s good doings, and so it” is “a matter of faith or trust.”¹⁶⁰ Catechesis is a framework for educating people unto discipleship that conforms to a biblical anthropology of believing, discerning, and

¹⁵⁸ Richard D. Phillips, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 238.

¹⁵⁹ Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 55.

¹⁶⁰ Michael Allen, “Sanctification, Perseverance, and Assurance,” in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 570–71. Calvin defines faith this way: “Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 3.2.7, Logos Bible Software. Calvin later notes a twofold emphasis in his definition: the Holy Spirit must make the “mind to be illumined” with the heart “also strengthened and supported by his power” (3.2.33).

doing (see table 19). Catechesis engages the mind and the heart, developing piety in the believer’s affections, actions, and words. Catechesis fosters humility in the pious heart of the believer, shaped by trust and faith in God. Calvin discusses the role of piety in the believer, which stems from the grace of the gospel as it forms the heart and mind: “Not only does piety beget reverence toward God, but the very sweetness and delightfulness of grace so fills a man who is cast down in himself with fear, and at the same time with admiration, that he depends upon God and humbly submits himself to his power.”¹⁶¹

Table 19. Corresponding categories of catechesis in VCD

Priorities	Implications	Commitments
Faith	Hope	Love
Truth	Life	Way
Believing	Discerning	Doing
Learning	Growing	Living
Apostle’s Creed	Lord’s Prayer	Decalogue

The Virtuous Christian Discipleship Model

The framework of VCD encapsulates each angle of CTM in Mere *Didaskalia*, which interweaves with the elements of the VCK tri-perspectival paradigm as it utilizes Frame’s epistemology, Augustine’s three graces in *The Enchiridion*, and Packer and Parrett’s one focus of a Christocentric faith. The goal of VCD ministry through catechesis must be *learning wisdom in faith and growing in wisdom with hope to live righteously in love* (see table 20). VCD examines the commands of God to pursue him faithfully and addresses the role of human responsibility in sanctification and discipleship. Knowledge must be thought of as a pilgrimage rather than a destination; knowing engenders growth

¹⁶¹ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 3.2.23, Logos Bible Software.

to live with wisdom through love in discipleship—it changes believers and brings them more into the likeness of Christ. Christian teachers should show believers the way of righteousness and teach them how to begin walking the journey unto Christian maturity.

The analogy of faithfulness and righteousness depicted in *Pilgrim's Progress* corresponds with the discipleship framework of VCD.¹⁶² Discipleship is communal; the body of believers is charged with training the saints in righteousness. Rather than learn from only one source of wisdom, Christian learns from multiple people, who share the truth and grace of the gospel with him along his journey to the Celestial City. Christian first hears of the gospel truth from Evangelist, who perceives and teaches the gospel as salvation and life-defining truth. Evangelist understands his role to stand firm on Scripture and teach the Word faithfully as he learns in faith, grows in hope, and lives righteously in love (see appendix 6). Moreover, he recognizes that only the gospel and love of God demonstrated through Christ can save sinners from the bondage of sin and despair.

Christians must be established and rooted in the ontological calling in Christ to fulfill the *telos* of the phenomenological mission—confessional discipleship unto holiness and spiritual maturity and evangelism.¹⁶³ VCD establishes a framework around *learning* wisdom in faith and *growing* in wisdom with hope, which together lead to *living* righteously in love. Without the priority of truth, there can be no central force upon which to build behaviors and methods.

¹⁶² Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

¹⁶³ Trentham, "Mere *Didaskalia*," 214.

Table 20. The framework of Virtuous Christian Discipleship

<i>Mere Didaskalia</i>	VCK	VCT	Catechesis	VCD
Ontological	Priorities	<i>Sophia</i>	Faith	Learning
	Implications		Hope	Growing
Phenomenological	Commitments	<i>Prudentia</i>	Love	Living
Excellence				

Goal of VCD

Learning wisdom in faith. VCD originates from believers’ union with Christ and “in the claim of the Triune God upon [Christians].”¹⁶⁴ Calvin considers the glorious gospel and believers’ union with Christ as given “by God’s generosity, to be grasped and possessed by” believers “in faith. By partaking of him,” believers “principally” receive “a double grace:” reconciliation through justification and new life in sanctification.¹⁶⁵

Believers’ union with Christ endows virtuous knowledge through the established theological basis of gospel-centered, doctrine-based teaching through the creeds and confessions. Believers receive the gospel by faith and are taught to think critically and Christologically, developing doctrinal convictions. Christian teachers employ virtuous teaching by communicating the life-defining presuppositions of the self-attesting authority of Scripture as the basis for learning and development in Christ, thereby engaging hearts and minds in conformity to Christ.

Through progressive sanctification, believers’ cognitive and affective development leads to a deepened faith in the covenantal relationship that Christians enjoy with God through union with Christ. Girded in the interrelatedness of belief, insight, and faithfulness, Christian teachers must hold fast to the faith once for all delivered to the

¹⁶⁴ Billings, *Union with Christ*, 9.

¹⁶⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 3.11.1, Logos Bible Software.

saints (Jude 3), which is preserved in the historic creeds and confessions. Instruction through wisdom-oriented modes of learning and living that seeks to employ “speculative wisdom” (*sophia*) to know what is wise are of utmost import for believers’ growth in spiritual discernment.¹⁶⁶ The true possession of wisdom comes from faith and the grace of the Lord, which hold steadfastly to the confessional ethic of *communicating God’s truth*, guided by the Rule of Faith (see table 19).¹⁶⁷ Virtuous teachers, engaging in VCD, must possess gentleness and meekness, discipling believers in the fear of the Lord while holding fast to confessions and biblical priorities of the “Law of the Lord” (Ezra 7:10) as the redemptive personal identity of every believer (Rom 1:16).¹⁶⁸

The redemptive paradigm teaches that Scripture is the supreme “source and most basic component for knowledge and development.”¹⁶⁹ Scripture must inform believers of its plot structures: (1) the creation of humanity in right relationship with God and the excellencies of God seen in the *imago Dei*; (2) the effects of sin in the fall that darkened the mind, corrupted the *imago Dei*, and placed humanity under the just condemnation of God; (3) the reconciliation brought to humanity through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ that began the restoration of the *imago Dei* and restored the right relationship with God through the imputed righteousness of Christ; and (4) the complete restoration and consummation of the new creation with the new heavens and new earth, where Christians will worship God with gladness for all eternity. Scripture must be seen not as “a dogmatic handbook” but as “a historical book full of dramatic interest. Familiarity with the history of revelation” enables instruction “to utilize all this

¹⁶⁶ Trentham, “On ‘Knowing,’” 43.

¹⁶⁷ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 221.

¹⁶⁸ Trentham, “Christian Teaching,” 5; Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Learning,” 1.

¹⁶⁹ Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Learning,” 2; Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 311.

dramatic interest.”¹⁷⁰ Christian teachers must provide virtuous instruction for the church through discipline and guidance in the drama and doctrines of Scripture. The creeds instruct the presuppositions that arise from Scripture. When equipped with the truth of God, humanity, and the world, believers are able to “call on him” whom they have believed.

Growing in wisdom with hope. Christian teachers espousing VCD must ground believers in the epistemological wisdom that emanates from their union with Christ and engenders growth in Christological cognition. Believers cleave to the hope delivered by the gospel and the life-informing framework of the Christian worldview. Virtuous knowing proceeds from a biblical understanding of the law written on believers’ hearts that stimulates critical reflection of other worldviews and life frameworks. Believers engage in virtuous knowing through the Lord’s Prayer as Christian teachers provide instruction that prompts virtuous learning of how to abide in the body of Christ in love. Christians learn to examine the world through Scripture and apply the Christian worldview with discernment. The hope of perfection and glorification spurs believers on as prayer fosters growth in faith and hope toward love. Believers learn the already-not yet reality of promises and blessings in this life through Christ and look with hope to the Day of the Lord where the perfect will be realized. The future life of glorifying God perfectly in eternity elicits in believers a desire to live a God-glorifying life now as they look to the future with certainty. Redemptive teaching aids in the progressive sanctification of believers and illuminates wisdom through the espousal of the truth of the gospel in the life of everlasting peace with God.

Christian teachers must teach believers how to learn—specifically, how to think critically and Christologically. Critical thinking is required to apply God’s Word to

¹⁷⁰ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 17.

the Christian life rightly; it is necessary to grow in Christian maturity. Discipleship is depicted throughout the New Testament as a journey of growth in wisdom, discernment, and grace. The author of Hebrews encourages readers to mature in Christ—to grow in the love and knowledge of Christ that facilitates redemptive learning. VCD enables Christian teachers to impart the Word of God in a framework that provides a hermeneutical model to apply truth to the Christian life. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Ps 111:10), in which love begets faithfulness born of meekness and gentleness. Wisdom is not only possessed but also acted upon, guided by the confessional truth of the gospel and the spiritual eyes of the new heart, leading to the fruit of discipleship (see table 19). Christian teachers should show love and mercy, instructing believers to glorify the Lord and have compassion for their neighbors.

Walking righteously in love. VCD appeals to a pursuit of excellent knowing according to the confessional identity and ethic that is prescribed by biblical truth and ultimately rooted in the gospel of Christ. Through the illumination of wisdom, believers have had their “powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:14). Virtuous Christian disciples must be hearers of the Word and “seek grace to do if [they are] to be fruitful.”¹⁷¹

VCD comprehends the essential distinction between law and gospel, the “different illocutionary stances that run throughout all of the Scriptures—everything in both Testaments that is in the form of either an *obligatory command* or a *saving promise* in Christ.”¹⁷² The two illocutionary stances either deliver stipulations of what is to be

¹⁷¹ Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Prophetic Parables of Matthew Thirteen* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005), 5.

¹⁷² Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 137. Horton provides additional information, stating, “See the apology to the Augsburg Confession (1531), art. 4. Article 5 of the Formula of Concord adds, ‘We believe, teach, and confess that the distinction between the law and the gospel is to be maintained in the church with great diligence’ (F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau, eds. and trans., *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1921])” (137n18).

done or tell the historical narrative of God’s redemptive salvation to be believed. Christian teachers must understand that the law “functions differently, depending on the covenant in which it is operative.” The function of the law today must be taught for believers to know the application of the law in the new covenant. As teachers instruct believers to obey the commandments and glorify God, believers increasingly grow “in the motivation and capacity to love doing what is truly wise (prudencia),” walking in the Way with a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.¹⁷³

VCD proceeds with the manifestation of love from acquiring wisdom rooted in the cognition of Christ. Learning within the collective church community empowers the application of wisdom and enables continuous development and application of wisdom to live righteously. Expositing John 15:1–9, John Chrysostom expresses the impossibility of abiding in Christ without good works; those who bear the fruit of righteousness evident in works are pruned, rendering them more fruitful.¹⁷⁴ Pruning through discipleship is necessary for maturation; continuing to abide in the Vine requires obedience and love. Believers’ maturation is demonstrated by their evaluating and employing the Christian worldview in obedience to the commandments of loving God and neighbor. Christians learn the virtuous habits of employing gospel-centered, doctrinally founded convictions that shepherd interpreting knowledge about the world through Scripture and applying the convictions to walk in the way of righteousness (see table 21). Loving God and neighbor builds and edifies the church. Community fosters love and obedience required for growth.

¹⁷³ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 226.

¹⁷⁴ John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Gospel of St. John*, vol. 2, Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1848), Homily 78, Logos Bible Software.

Table 21. Virtuous Christian Discipleship through catechesis

Learn Wisdom in <i>Faith</i>	Grow in Wisdom with <i>Hope</i>	Walk Righteously in <i>Love</i>
Believers receive the gospel <i>by faith</i> and enjoy the benefits of a relationship with God.	Believers are <i>liberated by the hope</i> of eternal life and enjoy a right relationship with God.	Believers <i>walk in the way of life</i> , emanating pure love, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

Discipleship in VCD

VCD renders a model for teaching and virtuous learning that aids in redemptive learning and flourishing. Christian teachers must facilitate the learning of excellence by providing the framework for studying the law and living out the truth. Excellence is needed to learn the truth of Scripture and understand the essential call to make disciples. Without a foundation of biblical epistemology, a proper understanding of Scripture is impossible, and believers will not know how to make disciples. Christian teachers in the church must understand virtuous teaching and learning to facilitate the pursuit of knowledge of God and self through worship and honor. Teachers must be learners, always growing and living in the pursuit of facilitating such growth in others. Ephesians 4:13 is central to the implications for understanding; the unity of the church is conditioned upon the knowledge of Christ leading to Spiritual maturity. It is not less than facilitating the bride’s (the church’s) preparation for the Bridegroom (Christ). Therefore, it is vital to ensure that virtuous knowing is a part of discipleship in educational ministry.

Command to make disciples. Jesus’s command in the Great Commission is to “make disciples” by teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded them (Matt 28:19–20). Making disciples necessitates sharing the good news through evangelism, as “*evangelism introduces converts into the people of God, and so brings glory to God.*”

Yet, the church must take care to recognize that evangelism is not an end in itself.¹⁷⁵ The “ultimate purpose” of the Great Commission is to “*bear fruit to God.*” Making disciples entails teaching people to abide in Christ and bear fruit (see table 20). The church must contend for the faith through virtuous teaching and training rather than overaccentuating growth. Without an emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s empowerment and redemptive flourishing, the church mistakes human action as ultimate rather than dwelling in God’s sovereign work in believers and church community.

Believers, united with Christ in his death and resurrection, abide in Christ and bear fruit through active obedience to the commands of God. The Parable of the Sower explicates what believers “must seek grace to do” in order to be fruitful (Luke 8:11–15). First, the “Word must be received” with “an unprejudiced mind” and “in an honest and good heart.” Second, believers must “keep it,” “understanding the Word received.” Third, believers must “hold it fast” in “perseverance” to “bear fruit with patience.”¹⁷⁶ God is glorified when Christians abide in Christ and bear fruit, proving to be Christ’s disciples. The chief end of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Believers are trained in righteousness and prepared for every good work through discipleship (Col 1:10; 2 Pet 1:3; 2 Tim 3:17).

The goal of virtuous disciple-making in VCD is not simply to impart knowledge to believers but to actively lead them on a journey of knowing God and his truth. Christian teachers must do more than simply help believers understand the truth; believers must learn to *embody* the truth (see table 22).¹⁷⁷ If Christian teachers do not lead believers beyond comprehension, then believers will not truly know the truth or how to walk in righteousness, nor will they abide in Christ. Discipleship encompasses the whole

¹⁷⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 315.

¹⁷⁶ Pink, *The Prophetic Parables of Matthew Thirteen*, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Learning,” 1.

person—heart, head, and hands. Upon believing the gospel of Christ for salvation, new disciples must enter the fellowship of the fold unto discipleship to employ their heart, head, and hands for the glory of God. Believers learn the creeds and confessions with the heart, believing and cherishing the truth; they grow in virtuous knowing through the Lord’s Prayer with the head, increasing in spiritual maturity and wisdom of Christ; they live righteously by loving God and neighbor with hands, walking in community and applying wisdom to the hope of future glory.

Engaging the heart to learn. Through the new covenant, believers must “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22). The plumb line of the gospel provides a standard of what is to be believed, loved, and held fast in the heart.¹⁷⁸ God is unchanging and eternal; he provided the totality of his revelation in Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14, 18; Col 1:15; 2:9; Heb 1:1–3). Doctrine teaches the importance of Christ and him crucified along with all that Christians ought to know about God, humanity, and the world. Virtuous habits within the church community of reciting the creeds and confessions develop belief and conviction in believers’ hearts for the life-defining priority of the truth in the gospel. The creeds instruct believers in Christian doctrine, where they learn the plot structures of the biblical-theological system, which Horton calls the drama of Scripture.¹⁷⁹ Familiarity with the drama of Scripture propagates knowledge of doctrine and convictions, thereby training believers in righteousness (see table 20).

Christian teachers ought not to stress the emotionality of knowing God but should bear “witness to the indispensability of the doctrinal groundwork” of the drama of Scripture and the truth contained therein.¹⁸⁰ Horton sagely counsels, “People do not

¹⁷⁸ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 89.

¹⁷⁹ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 15.

¹⁸⁰ Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 17.

collect their beliefs one at a time, stacking one on top of another. Rather, there is a certain limitation in the beliefs a particular person is likely to hold given the plausibility of the paradigm (or drama) that he or she currently assumes to be true.”¹⁸¹ Comprehension of the profundity of the gospel through the scriptural metanarrative allows believers to pose epistemological questions to which the creeds and confessions provide answers.

Confidence in the creeds and confessions educates and edifies Christian learners, who engage in active involvement with the church community to grow spiritually mature as they learn to glorify God.

Learning the confessional truths develops convictions that are deepened through discipleship. Augustine articulates that faith begins “where the pure and perfect in heart know that unspeakable beauty, the full vision of which is supreme happiness.”¹⁸² The creeds are conceptual primers for theology, teaching the truth of Scripture so that Christians might hear the Word.¹⁸³ Romans 10:14 asks, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?” The answer, Augustine declares, is the creeds. The creeds share the gospel truth, the salvation and grace found therein, which frees believers from the weight of sin and shines light on the “things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14). Through instruction in and recitation of the creeds, believers receive the meat of Christian doctrine, “solid food,” to learn unto maturity (Heb 5:14). Abiding in Christ necessitates faith and trust, which stem from belief in the truth. The church’s doctrinally focused education feeds believers solid food, facilitating growth and spiritual maturation.

Cultivating the mind to grow. After clinging to the truth, believers must “hold unswervingly to the hope” that they “profess, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23). The espousal of virtuous knowing through the fellowship of community prayer

¹⁸¹ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 15.

¹⁸² Augustine, “The Enchiridion,” 238.

¹⁸³ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 87.

endues an illumination of wisdom, engendering growth in the cognition of Christ. Praying in community cultivates discernment and reflection in believers' mind of the life-informing implication of the Christian worldview framework. Public and private prayer forms the basis of growth in wisdom and discernment. The church community recognizes that it "exists only in complete and total dependence on the Lord." Prayer embodies the "vitally important" appreciation "to call out to the Lord for all things," as "conversions, Christian growth, discipleship, and worship all depend on God himself." Prayer is "one of God's chosen means for accomplishing his purposes and thus prayer will characterize" the lives of the believers in church fellowship, "corporately and as individuals."¹⁸⁴

The gathered church community offers redemptive learning, growing, and fellowship (see table 20). Making disciples in the Great Commission concerns the teaching of believers, who engage in redemptive flourishing through the active pursuit and application of wisdom. Rather than evangelizing to "make disciples" through decisions, merely gaining cognitive ascent to the truth, discipleship necessitates Christ's proper application of biblical wisdom through the exercise of the spiritual senses to "know how to choose between good and evil"¹⁸⁵ Believers bear fruit through prayer and service among and in concert with the redeemed.¹⁸⁶ Discipleship is a shared grace, and the unremarkable identity of the sower in the Parable of the Sower prioritizes the disciple's training in wisdom and righteousness rather than the teacher (Matt 13:1–9, 18–23; Mark 4:1–9, 26–29; Luke 8:4–8). The church consists of many "sowers," some formal and some informal, who all have doctrinal and confessional knowledge in keeping with the requirements of teachers in Scripture. Believers demonstrate faithfulness through

¹⁸⁴ Carl R. Trueman, *Grace Alone: Salvation as a Gift of God, What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters*, Five Solas Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 241–42.

¹⁸⁵ Charles Spurgeon, *Hebrews*, ed. Elliot Ritzema and Jessi Strong, Spurgeon Commentary Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), 137, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁸⁶ Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 88.

living out active obedience to God’s commands of loving God and neighbor. The community of believers must engage in corporate worship to praise God and remember God’s faithfulness.

Augustine conveyed that mature believers petition the Lord for temporal aid in bread, forgiveness, and deliverance, yet they also consider the eternal “blessings that are to be enjoyed for ever; which are indeed begun in this world,” and “to be looked for” as “a possession for evermore.” The eternal life “where we hope to live for ever, the hallowing of God’s name, and His kingdom, and His will in our spirit and body, shall be brought to perfection, and shall endure to everlasting.”¹⁸⁷ Believers recognize that the hope with which they look to the future perceives that the Lord “will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart” (1 Cor 4:5), where all will praise God.¹⁸⁸

Serving with hands to love. Faithful community is imperative for spiritual growth; therefore, believers must “consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,” determined to “encourage one another—all the more as you see the Day” of hope “approaching” (Heb 10:24–25). Walking in righteousness through obedience to the commandments affords engagement and employment of the life-living application of love-informed virtuous practices. Convictional discernment employed and applied to loving God and neighbors engages believers’ hands in virtuous knowing and living.¹⁸⁹ The effectuation of wisdom to live righteously must ground the phenomenological experience of believers in discipleship ministry. Christians’

¹⁸⁷ Augustine, “The Enchiridion,” 274.

¹⁸⁸ Augustine, “The Enchiridion,” 276.

¹⁸⁹ John David Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Virtuous Christian Learning [+ A Taxonomy of Pedagogical Virtues]” (handout, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 1. Used with permission.

responsibility to bear fruit in cooperation with the efficient aid of the Holy Spirit comprises the way of the righteous.

Augustine pronounces, “All the commandments of God, then, are embraced in love,” for, as Paul articulates, “the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5). “Thus the end of every commandment is charity, that is, every commandment has love for its aim.”¹⁹⁰ The commandments can surely be followed with religious zealotry; however, true piety arises from love grounded in faith. In such love can the commandments be honored and kept: loving God and abiding in him to love neighbor. The love with which believers follow the gospel of Christ in faith is the same love that enables humble and virtuous living, for “we love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Family worship. The Puritans considered family worship essential “to reform” the “families, engaging” in “conscientious care to set before” each member “and to maintain the worship of God in them; and to walk in” their “houses with perfect hearts” (Ps 101:2), “educating, instructing, and charging” the “children and households to keep the ways of the Lord.”¹⁹¹ Parents ought to instruct children in the way of the righteous. Children must learn that God should be worshiped by “daily reading and instruction from His Word. Through questions, answers, and instructions, parents and children are to daily interact with each other about sacred truth.”¹⁹² Parents are called to “contribute to an early seasoning the tender years of” of their children by sowing the seed of faith.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Augustine, “The Enchiridion,” 275.

¹⁹¹ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 80.

¹⁹² Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 867.

¹⁹³ Westminster Assembly, “To the Christian Reader, Especially Heads of Families,” in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3.

Teachers. The qualifications for ministerial teachers in the church, both lay and pastoral, have been well established and discussed at length in other works. Biblical teachers, who teach confessional Christianity to the church, must “toil, struggling with all” the “energy that” Christ “powerfully works within” them (Col 1:29).¹⁹⁴ Christian teachers must uphold the standards of ethics and behaviors, leaving “behind former ways of sin” and embracing “a new life of practical godliness and service to the Lord.”¹⁹⁵

Calvin believes that the structure of church government must address its missionary activity, both within the church and without. First, pastors are considered called “to proclaim God’s Word, to instruct, admonish, exhort and censure, both in public and private, to administer the sacraments and to enjoin brotherly corrections along with the elders and colleagues.” Second, teachers are to train the faithful “in true doctrine” through instruction in theology by lectures and biblical studies “in order that the purity of the gospel may not be corrupted either by ignorance or by evil opinions.” Third, elders are to oversee the life of all, admonishing and correcting as needed.¹⁹⁶ Implementing Calvin’s concepts, discipleship in the church necessarily involves pastors, teachers, and elders—all of whom are responsible for overseeing the church’s faith development and spiritual growth (1 Tim 3:2). Christian teachers must hold fast to the profundity of the faith “so that [they] may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). Spiritually mature men should teach others (2 Tim 2:2), and mature women should likewise “teach what is good” (Titus 2:3).¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel and the End of Time*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 119.

¹⁹⁵ Phillips, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 67.

¹⁹⁶ Robert Kolb, “The Church,” in Barrett, *Reformation Theology*, 596.

¹⁹⁷ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 48.

Table 22. Discipleship in Virtuous Christian Discipleship

Command to Make Disciples	Engaging the Heart to Learn	Cultivating the Mind to Grow	Serving with Hands to Live
The ultimate purpose is to bear fruit to God.	The gospel is the standard of what is to be believed, loved, and held fast.	Community fellowship engenders wisdom and growth in Christ.	Walking in righteousness and obedience engages virtuous practices.

CHAPTER 4

C. PETER WAGNER'S DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION AND PHILOSOPHY OF DISCIPLESHIP (1952–1981)

Reading for Receptivity

Chapters 2–3 form the first step of John David Trentham's Inverse Consistency Protocol: identify and assert the normative biblical priorities that pertain to the Reformed biblical-theological system and doctrine of sanctification through a "thoroughgoing confessional-doctrinal vision and imagination" for maturation toward spiritual formation and Christlikeness.¹ The second step of ICP is to read for receptivity, where readers seek to "carefully understand the proposed model on its own terms."² Virtuous thinking requires reading well, which necessitates reading for the author's intent rather than with one's own views. Reading well "is the prerequisite for carefully applying discernment and reflective judgment."³ Augustine reminds Christians of the command to love neighbors, as they are made in the image of God. Believers must remember that

all men are to be loved equally.
But since you cannot do good to all,
you are to pay special regard to those who,
by the accidents of time, or place, or circumstance,
are brought into closer connection with you. . . .

¹ John David Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1): Approaching and Qualifying Models of Human Development," *Christian Educational Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 458–75; Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Engaging and Appropriating Models of Human Development," *Christian Educational Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 476–94.

² Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2)," 490–91.

³ Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2)," 491.

Likewise we ought to love another man
better than our own body, because all
things are to be loved in reference to God.⁴

Augustine aptly addresses the imperative that a thoroughgoing confessional-doctrinal vision and imagination informs the reading of Scripture; the assertion of biblical priorities infuses the discernment that others' works are inherently worth reading well:

Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought. If, on the other hand, a man draws a meaning from them that may be used for the building up of love, even though he does not happen upon the precise meaning which the author whom he reads intended to express in that place, his error is not pernicious, and he is wholly clear from the charge of deception. For there is involved in deception the intention to say what is false; and we find plenty of people who intend to deceive, but nobody who wishes to be deceived.

This chapter seeks to provide “a deep and thorough understanding of” C. Peter Wagner’s “proposed paradigm, with intellectual honesty and precision.”⁵ The recounting of Wagner’s theological pilgrimage is delineated into periods that chronologically summarize the era.⁶ The present chapter examines Wagner’s theological dispositions from 1952 to 1981, while the following chapter contains Wagner’s theological dispositions from 1982 to 2016.⁷

Wagner often denotes “paradigm shifts” as noteworthy events, usually representing a substantial change in theological convictions.⁸ Although the present

⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 18, 28, Logos Bible Software.

⁵ Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2),” 490.

⁶ For a comprehensive reading of Wagner’s theological convictions and life, see his autobiography *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010). The contents of this chapter were developed following the structure of Evan Phillip Pietsch, and while the content is material unique to me, it is largely redundant with the work of Pietsch. Evan Phillip Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism on C. Peter Wagner’s Philosophy of Discipleship” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022).

⁷ Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 24.

⁸ Wagner defines a “paradigm” as “a mental grid through which certain information is processed while it is being absorbed” to depict a theological change that “unshackles [the believer] from rationalistic/scientific ways of thinking and allows them to understand the reality of the modus operandi of the invisible world.” C. Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and*

examination encompasses the entirety of Wagner’s theological career, some sections include more summaries of topics pertaining to Wagner’s theological convictions, while other sections focus with more specificity on areas that concern Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification and philosophy of discipleship.⁹ The sections represent chronological periods encapsulating Wagner’s theological thematic convictions of the era. Each era (or section), after the first one, is further analyzed in three subsections:¹⁰

1. **Theological Dispositions:** As this research aims to evaluate and assess Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification, I examine his praxes, methodologies, and axioms as presented in his writings. In addition, I explore in greater detail each necessary theological disposition regarding the category of sanctification and the accompanying convictions.
2. **Discipleship Philosophy Summary:** After examining Wagner’s theological dispositions, I present a brief encapsulation of his philosophy of discipleship.
3. **Theological Dispositions Summary:** At the end of each era (or section), I present a table that summarizes Wagner’s theological dispositions during that era. The table is not meant to be exhaustive, as it lists the theological categories relevant to this research. The tables display content based on this research.¹¹

Entering into the 1950s

Wagner’s time as an undergraduate student at Rutgers must be briefly examined as it occurred prior to his attending Fuller Theological Seminary in 1952. Wagner recalls his conversion to Christianity when he was a sophomore at Rutgers

Change Your Life (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 7. See C. Peter Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy: Confronting Spiritual Powers* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1996), 49. Wagner credits Charles H. Kraft’s publication *Christianity with Power* for the term. See Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity with Power: Experiencing the Supernatural* (London: HarperCollins, 1990). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 23.

⁹ The contents of this chapter were developed following that of Pietsch. For a more comprehensive understanding of Wagner’s theological convictions, see Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism.”

¹⁰ The delineation of years in each era throughout this chapter follows the demarcation utilized by Pietsch. The last two eras, however, deviate from the structure of Pietsch’s eras. See Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” chaps. 2–4.

¹¹ The contents of the tables were developed from the findings of Pietsch; the material unique to me is found in the bottom section of the table, titled “Research Contribution.” See Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” chaps. 2–4.

University College of Agriculture.¹² While at Rutgers, Wagner began dating his future wife, Doris; he “began to realize” he “would have to get saved some day” if he wanted to marry Doris.¹³ Wagner’s affection for Doris is noted as persuasion for his desire to convert to Christianity. When Wagner professed to Doris his desire “to become a Christian,” he “was saved” and “called to be a missionary on the same day, just as the apostle Paul was.”¹⁴

Reading through the Fuller Era (1952–1955)

The years Wagner spent at Fuller Theological Seminary pursuing his theological education left an indelible impression on him and impacted his theological convictions throughout his decades-long ministry. Wagner’s years at seminary are discussed in several books, as both the professors and education were influential.¹⁵ This

¹² Bell Friends Church, “Interview with Pete Wagner,” *Bellringer* (December 1967): 6. His conversion occurred in 1949, at the age of 19. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 27.

¹³ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 28. When discussing his time at Rutgers, Wagner refers to himself a “drunkard” and possibly the “heaviest drinker in the fraternity. I haven’t counted how many mornings I could not remember who had put me into my bed the night before.” Wagner’s drinking was a “yellow flag” for Doris, who “only one week before” meeting Wagner “went to a nearby Bible camp where she had accepted Christ as her personal Savior and was born again.” In Wagner’s words, he describes how he decided to become saved, stating,

I began to realize that if I were going to be successful in my pursuit of this woman, I would have to get saved some day. She had said, “I’m a born-again Christian, and I will only marry someone who also is born again.” By then I began to understand what this would imply. Among other things, I suspected that when I was born again, I could no longer enjoy being a drunkard, so I postponed it as long as I could. (29)

¹⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Praying with Power: How to Pray Effectively and Hear Clearly from God* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2008), 63. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 27. Wagner recounts his conversion to Christianity thus:

We were together in her living room one night when I told Doris that I was ready to become a Christian and asked her to help me. She said she would, but there was one more thing. She told me that she had promised God that she would be a missionary to Africa. My only question was, “Do they have cows over there in Africa?” When she assured me that they did, I told her that I would like to be a missionary too. So I accepted Christ and dedicated my life to be a missionary the same night there in that farmhouse. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 28–29)

¹⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 11. Wagner pays “special tribute” to Edward Carnell for opening his “mind to theological creativity unfettered by classical systems of dogmatics” and helping him shift “from the two-channel theory to recognizing Jesus’ full human nature.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 24.

section examines Wagner's theological education and convictions as a seminary student at Fuller in order to glean context into his theological foundation.

Although Wagner officially began his ministry career in 1956, it is necessary to understand the theological education that Wagner received, as it establishes the context for his theology and the trajectory of his theological convictions throughout his ministry. This section explores the beginning of Wagner's theological career as his biblical-theological system was being shaped before his missionary career commenced following his graduation from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1955.¹⁶

Theological Dispositions

The Fuller archives do not possess any of Wagner's work from his time as a seminary student; therefore, Wagner's retrospective reflections of the era are utilized. New Brunswick Bible Church provided the foundational biblical and theological education for Wagner as his local church during his undergraduate years at Rutgers. Wagner describes the church as "fundamentalist." By virtue of the fundamentalist perspective, the congregation consisted of "separatists," who "tended to follow more legalistic lines in issues of personal behavior, as well as keeping a distance between the church and the world."¹⁷ The separatist and fundamental perspectives seemed to greatly influence Wagner's theology in Fuller and as a missionary.¹⁸

¹⁶ Wagner was associated with the South American Indian Mission (SAIM) in Bolivia from 1956 to 1961 and the Bolivian Indian Mission (BIM) in Bolivia from 1962 to 1971. Bell Friends Church, "Interview with Pete Wagner." Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 24.

¹⁷ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 37. Wagner states as a church of fundamentalists and separatists, New Brunswick Bible Church "taught that true Bible believers should not allow themselves to be associated at all with denominations or even local churches that were open enough to include liberals. They believed in guilt by association." New Brunswick Bible Church was affiliated with the Independent Fundamental Churches of America [IFCA]" (118).

¹⁸ The first few articles Wagner authored in the latter half of the 1950s concern his separationist axioms and fundamentalist theological convictions. See C. Peter Wagner, "You Can't Be a Christian And . . .," *Eternity* (July 1956): 25–26, 37; Wagner, "Bibliolatry: Part I," *Eternity* (October 1958): 10–11, 47; Wagner, "Bibliolatry: Part II," *Eternity* (November 1958): 14–16.

Incarnation-theology. Wagner describes “incarnation-theology theory” as “the view of the relationship between Christ’s two natures” that supposes the “only nature that Jesus used between His birth and His death here on earth was His human nature.”¹⁹ Wagner recounts that he experienced a “paradigm shift” from the majority view of the “two-channel theory” to incarnation-theology during his time at Fuller.²⁰

The incarnation-theology Wagner learned at Fuller becomes an important theological concept that Wagner maintains throughout his ministry. Wagner expresses that the “theological creativity” of his professor Edward Carnell to “occasionally color outside of standard theological lines” resounded with him. Carnell proposed that “while Jesus was on Earth, He voluntarily gave up the use of (not the possession of) His divine attributes. Consequently, everything Jesus did on Earth, including His signs and wonders, He did through His human nature, empowered by the Holy Spirit.”²¹ Wagner concluded,

This made good sense to me. Since I was a recent convert at the time, I had never been programmed with any conflicting ideas, so it was easy to accept Carnell’s teaching. What I didn’t fully realize was that probably 95 percent of evangelical theologians were teaching that Jesus, during His life on Earth, constantly switched back and forth between His divine and human natures.”²²

Although Wagner’s incarnation-theology becomes a “point of serious contention” and Christological concern for his ordination committee in, he continued to hold the view throughout his theological career.²³

¹⁹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 22, 24. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 27.

²⁰ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 23; Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 268. For Wagner’s discussion of the “two-channel theory,” see *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God’s Call to Transform the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 28.

²¹ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 143; Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 268. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 28.

²² Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 269. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 29.

²³ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 37–38. In *Changing Church*, Wagner notes he was told he needed to spend “20 hours in a seminary library reading up on Christology.” Wagner, *Changing Church*, 144. Wagner wrote a magazine article on the subject. See C. Peter Wagner, “Did Jesus Really Know?” *Evangelical Christian* (March 1959): 109–12, 142. He later devotes a chapter to

Epistemology. Wagner recounts his entrance into Fuller as “a farmer and a fresh graduate of agricultural school.” He found himself “entering an ethereal theological world on the very bottom step of the ladder” and “rather overwhelmed.” During his first semester, Wagner enrolled in a required “course in epistemology taught by Carl F. H. Henry.”²⁴ Wagner later shares that the overwhelmed feeling he experienced led to a frustration with the subject of epistemology, as what he “learned did not always seem to line up very well with reality,” and that he never was “able to make even a vague connection between the content of that course and anything” he had done in life.²⁵ Diverging from Henry’s teaching, Wagner classifies epistemology as “a branch of philosophy that tries to figure out how we think.”²⁶

Wagner cites Henry and Carnell as influential authorities in his seminary education, particularly concerning epistemology. Henry pronounces that “the supreme authority in doctrine and morals is the Living God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, acknowledged as Lord by the Holy Spirit, whose special inspiration makes the scriptural writings the epistemic source of trustworthy knowledge of God and his will and word for

the subject in *How to Have a Healing Ministry in Any Church*. See C. Peter Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry in Any Church: A Comprehensive Guide* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1988), 113–32 (“Passing the Power”). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 29.

²⁴ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 35. Wagner discusses the course in epistemology, stating, “I found myself rather overwhelmed when, during my first semester at Fuller, I was required to sign up for a course in epistemology taught by Carl F. H. Henry.” He confesses, “I finally became aware that epistemology is a branch of philosophy that tries to figure out how we think. My initial response was, ‘Who cares?’” Wagner elucidates, “Epistemology as an entry-level required course for training to do Christian ministry,” yet “try as I might, I have never been able to make even a vague connection between the content of that course and anything I have done in the rest of my life so far.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 32.

²⁵ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 86–87. Evan Phillip Pietsch notes Wagner’s “difficulties comprehending the subject of epistemology.” Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 42. Pietsch (31n33) states, “According to Esther Park with the Fuller Theological Seminary archives, there are no surviving records of the courses taken by Wagner during his time as a BD student. However, access to the course catalogs—Bulletins—were made available. According to the 1953–1954 Bulletin, Carl F. H. Henry taught ‘416. Systematic Theology. The Problem of Religious Knowledge.’” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 32.

²⁶ Henry defines “theological epistemology” as follows: “St. Paul and John Calvin are the bases. This epistemology is founded on faith—an existential response given to the Word of God by a man enlightened by the Holy Spirit.” Carl F. H. Henry, “Syllabus for Systematic Theology 11” (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1948), 22. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 33.

man.”²⁷ Moreover, epistemology is composed of “propositional statements that unlike private revelation and individual sensitivity contain and constitute universally sharable knowledge.”²⁸ Holding to the supremacy of Christ, Henry recognizes that “general revelation is the background for sin and man is in moral revolt against God. Man is a sinner because he is implicated in a moral order. General revelation should never be opposed to special revelation but general leads to special.”²⁹ The high view of Scripture taught by Henry and Carnell explicates that while truth is available to both Christians and non-Christians through general revelation, only Christians have the appropriate knowledge through special revelation to understand the material world correctly.³⁰

Biblical-theological system. Before Fuller, Wagner did not have a cohesive biblical-theological system. Wagner learned the biblical-theological system of biblical theism while in seminary at Fuller. Henry required *The Drift of Western Thought* in his Systematic Theology class.³¹ The book discusses the effect of epistemology and revelation on the knowledge of God. According to Henry, biblical theism recognizes that “man is a lost sinner; whoever does not understand that, misunderstands the Christian declaration of God’s special saving revelation.”³²

²⁷ Carl F. H. Henry, *Architect of Evangelicalism: Essential Essays of Carl F. H. Henry*, Best of Christianity Today (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 65, Logos Bible Software.

²⁸ Henry, *Architect of Evangelicalism*, 65, 268.

²⁹ Carl F. H. Henry, “Notes on the Doctrine of God: Systematic Theology” (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1949), sec. “The Doctrine of God.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 34.

³⁰ Henry, *Architect of Evangelicalism*, 101–2; Edward John Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 88. Pietsch asserts that “Wagner affirmed that truth can be found in general revelation and applied to the Christian life just as truth from special revelation can be.” Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 34. See C. Peter Wagner, “The Origin of Life: A Christian View,” *Eternity* (September 1957): 12–13, 42–44.

³¹ Carl F. H. Henry, “Syllabus for Systematic Theology: The Problem of Religious Knowledge, Revelation and Inspiration” (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1954). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 35.

³² Carl F. H. Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 79.

Moreover, the biblical-theological system that encompasses biblical “revelation requires a personal, sovereign, holy, gracious God who, as Creator and Lord, guides the destinies of men and nations by His control of history. That is, Biblical revelation is not a species of divine disclosure for which a parallel can be found appended to almost any sort of God-concept; it requires the Biblical God.”³³ Henry addresses the issue of philosophy and its emphasis on divorcing God from the epistemological “path of knowledge.” Henry comments, “It is no idle observation, often made in the course of theology and philosophy, that the concepts of God and revelation stand or fall together.”³⁴

Epistemology determines the understanding of God and the biblical narrative.³⁵ When describing what he learned at Fuller regarding the biblical narrative, Wagner claims he was taught “Reformed theology,” with which “our professors” were “intentionally indoctrinating us.” Wagner recounts his attempts “to figure out the final, definitive answers” to “questions about God” and “why God would create a world that He already knew would end up a disaster.”³⁶ Wagner was “not entirely happy with the answers” his “theological professors were proposing in class”; they gave “no theological alternatives” to “classical theism,” which taught

that God was sovereign, that He was infinite, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, that He was unchangeable, and that He was just. We learned about predestination, foreknowledge, irresistible grace and limited atonement. . . . we were

³³ Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought*, 84n10.

³⁴ Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought*, 133. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 36.

³⁵ Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought*, 133. Henry declares, “God is that eternal supernatural Being, three persons in one essence, who is self-revealed as the sovereign moral creator of all things by an act of free volition.” Henry distinguishes the orthodox trinitarianism from Neo-Supernaturalist theology that permeated the era, which “views God as triune personal activity, without clearly rising above the concessions of a modalistic view; it insists upon the ontological, moral, and epistemological transcendence of God, developed at times with a non-Biblical radicalism.” Wagner, similar to Neo-Supernaturalist theology, diminishes the significance of trinitarian theology. The diminishment of doctrinal concepts forms a major theological construct of the New Apostolic Reformation. For a more thorough treatment of Wagner’s trinitarian theology and ecumenicism, see Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 36.

³⁶ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 83.

told that there were attempts other than Calvinism to answer those tough questions, such as Pelagianism and Arminianism, but they were considered at worst heretical or at best foolish and unsophisticated.”³⁷

Wagner contends, “We learned enough to pass the exams, but our frustration was that what we learned did not always seem to line up very well with reality.”³⁸

Wagner carried his emphasis on experience with him into his time as a missionary in Bolivia. He elucidates, “My escape from this theological frustration was simply to ignore the questions. If I couldn’t come to reasonable answers in three years of seminary, I concluded that I probably never would. I did ministry on the assumption that what I was doing really mattered, but I couldn’t explain the theology behind my actions very well.”³⁹

Sovereignty of God. Wagner indicates that his “frustrations ended in the late 1990s when” he “first heard about open theism.”⁴⁰ Open theism provided “a biblical and

³⁷ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 83–84. Wagner’s stated frustration at not being presented with a theological alternative in his theology courses references the seeming binary choice he perceived between the theological systems of Calvinism and Arminianism. In 2004, in defense of his affirmation of open theism, Wagner states, “I am not attempting to argue that” open theism “is a theological absolute and that others should agree with me. I am simply suggesting that open theology is a deduction based on biblical evidence concerning the nature of God, and that it is at least as reasonable as the deductions expressed in classical Calvinism or Arminianism for that matter.” Wagner, *Changing Church*, 154. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 38.

³⁸ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 83. The frustration that Wagner professes to have had in seminary was not resolved by the time he graduated in 1955. Wagner cites that he was “not entirely happy with the answers that [his] theological professors were proposing in class.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 38.

³⁹ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 84. Wagner states, “My frustrations ended in the late 1990s, when I first heard about open theism.” See Pietsch’s research for a thoroughgoing examination of Wagner’s affirmation of open theism “all along” throughout his theological career and its resultant impact on his theological convictions. Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism.”

⁴⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2008), 80. Wagner declares, “When I began to read what John Sanders said” in the 2001 *Christianity Today* article, “Does God Know Your Next Move?,” it “reminded me exactly of the frustration that I felt as a seminary student.” See also Christopher A. Hall, “Does God Know Your Next Move?” *Christianity Today*, May 21, 2001. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 31, 38.

Wagner publicly affirms open theism after it is a codified system in the mid-1990s. Looking back at his theological convictions, Wagner asserts, “I believe what is known as ‘open theism’ provides us with the most biblical and most helpful theological framework for doing our part in seeing ‘Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’” Wagner, *Dominion!*, 76. See Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” chap. 5.

theological paradigm that made sense of what I had been thinking and what I had been doing all along.”⁴¹

Divine partnership through human cooperation. Wagner learned the function of prayer in Fuller through the classic theism paradigm. He reflects that he learned “the most important function of prayer was to change me and mold me. God never changes. He is sovereign and He will do what He intends to do whether I pray or not.”⁴² Later in his theological career, Wagner affirms the cooperation between human prayer and God’s decisions; God’s interaction with humanity changes based on prayer. Wagner suggests, “Our prayers can have a direct influence on what God does or does not do.”⁴³

Biblical interpretation. After Wagner’s conversion to Christianity, Wagner and Doris attended New Brunswick Bible Church while Wagner completed his studies at Rutgers. Wagner was introduced to dispensationalism through New Brunswick Bible Church and began to read the Bible and C. I. Scofield’s notes, which “as far as” Wagner “was concerned, they were to be taken at face value.”⁴⁴ He “had nothing else to compare

⁴¹ Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 84. In chap. 5, Pietsch examines Wagner’s frustrations with classic theism, Wagner’s published affirmation of open theism, and Wagner’s affirmation of the limitation of God’s sovereignty and his ability to change—through the conceptual framework of the divine interventional mutability of God. Although Wagner’s affirmation of open theism indicates that he had been operating “all along” out of this “theological alternative,” Wagner did not previously affirm any other view of God’s sovereignty during his theological career. Wagner, *Dominion!*, 79.

⁴² C. Peter Wagner, *Churches That Pray: How Prayer Can Help Revitalize Your Church and Break Down the Walls between Your Church and Your Community* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993), 42. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 48.

⁴³ Wagner recommends Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*, which states, “We are working with God to determine the future. Certain things will happen in history if we pray rightly.” Moreover, Wagner praises *And God Changed His Mind* by Brother Andrew, which states, “God’s plans for us are not chiseled in concrete. Only His character and nature are unchanging; His decisions are not!” Wagner, *Churches That Pray*, 44; Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988); Brother Andrew, *And God Changed His Mind* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 1990). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 130.

Wagner’s 1959 article, “Did Jesus Really Know?,” examines cooperation between humanity and God in prayer. Wagner, “Did Jesus Really Know?,” 109–12, 142. See chap. 5 of Evan Phillip Pietsch’s thesis for his treatment of divine partnership through human cooperation and his proposed definition of cooperationism. Cooperationism is “the theological assertion that humanity cooperates and partners with God to determine future events.” Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 198.

⁴⁴ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 195.

them to, and they helped” him “understand Bible passages that otherwise would have made little sense.” Wagner shares that though he “learned a huge amount from the Bible,” he was a bit frustrated because” he “had no understanding of how all the parts of the Bible fit together as a whole.”⁴⁵ Through the guidance of “a Plymouth Brethren family who began to mentor” him, Wagner received a copy of *Dispensational Truth* by Clarence Larkin. After reading the book, Wagner proclaims that “everything finally came together!”⁴⁶ Reflecting upon his theological genesis, Wagner asserts “that this process had programmed me with one particular framework of biblical interpretation.” Wagner continues, “I found myself a thoroughgoing dispensationalist! To all intents and purposes, the tenets of dispensationalism reflected to me the true Word of God.”⁴⁷

Wagner recollects that at Rutgers he “had discovered that” he was an evangelical, which led him to look for evangelical schools and churches after graduating from Rutgers.⁴⁸ After settling on Fuller and moving across the country, Wagner and Doris found a home at Bell Friends Church, even though it was a Quaker church and they had “never heard of a Friends Church before.” Wagner stayed at Bell Friends Church throughout his academic schooling at Fuller.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Wagner continues, recounting his inability to “figure out how Genesis, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Daniel, Ezekiel, Luke, Romans and Revelation were all part of a bigger picture.” Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 195. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 42.

⁴⁶ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 195. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 42.

⁴⁷ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 196. Wagner notes that “not everyone else in the body of Christ agreed with” the dispensational “framework of biblical interpretation.” However, the “church I finally joined, New Brunswick Bible Church, did follow Scofield and Larkin. I enrolled in Fuller Seminary, and my English Bible professor, Wilbur M. Smith, agreed as well. The mission board under which I first went to Bolivia, South America Indian Mission, fit the same mold.”

⁴⁸ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 33. Wagner chose Fuller, as it was

composed of some of the most highly regarded evangelical scholars in the nation, but those who were not afraid to think outside of the box. This greatly disturbed many fundamentalist leaders across the country, but it seemed very attractive to me, even though I didn’t know exactly what they were quarreling about. There was something inside me that made the possibility of new wineskins more appealing than the old wineskins.

⁴⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 35. Wagner continues, “We soon discovered that it was another name for Quakers. Using virtually the only theological savvy we had at

Reformed sanctification. Wagner details that he learned at Fuller that “Luther and Calvin” constituted the “theological bedrock” of Reformed sanctification.⁵⁰ The main tenet of Reformed theology, total depravity, explained that “as a consequence of Adam’s disobedience in the Garden of Eden, human nature became permanently sinful. Individuals, of course, can be saved by God’s grace, and their sins can be forgiven; nevertheless, their sinful human nature will persist until they die.” Wagner emphasizes that he was taught that Christians’ “life here on Earth will never be free from sin. As believers mature, they should grow in holiness and become more Christlike, but genuine personal holiness, or freedom from sin, will always remain beyond reach.”⁵¹ He continues, “If I lived a good Christian life, I could expect to see some progress in my sanctification as I matured in Christ, but I could never be holy because only God is holy.” Wagner, therefore, reasons that if only God is holy, then “no human being could be holy, in the sense of not committing sin.” Moreover, Wagner asserts, “Reformed theology,

the time, we determined that it was a thoroughly evangelical church. So long as it wasn’t liberal, we didn’t care much” that “water baptism or Communion were not part of their tradition.” Wagner maintained a relationship with Bell Friends Church through his missionary career.

⁵⁰ Wagner insists that “it is no surprise that [his professors] taught that the Reformed doctrine of sanctification was the most biblical and the most correct view of holiness.” Wagner, *Changing Church*, 169. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 47. Wagner asserts, “Fuller Seminary identified itself as teaching ‘Reformed Theology.’ This is theology that goes back to John Calvin of Geneva.” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 115. Wagner continues, “My Fuller professors relied, more than anyone else, on renowned Princeton Seminary professor Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield” (125).

⁵¹ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 169–70. Wagner proposes, “The Calvinistic tenet of total depravity is why confession of sin has gained such a prominent, some would say exaggerated, place in the lives of Lutherans, Presbyterians, Reformed and the like” (170). Wagner ruminates on his profession of a Reformed sanctification paradigm, which seemingly disquieted him from an early age. “I tried to follow the examples of more mature Christians. I paid attention to my pastor’s sermons on Sunday, I read the Bible for the first time, and I determined to do what the Bible said. Whenever I had the choice between right and wrong, I made my best effort to choose the right.” Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 101.

Wagner reflects that despite his efforts to live a “reasonably godly life,” he observed “fellow Christians who were obviously living a more godly life” and “suspected that I would never reach the level of spiritual exploits that characterized their lives.” Wagner saw himself as

a spiritual tabula rasa. Whatever I heard and read from Christian leaders, I tended to believe. Since I had no religious background, I had no reason to question what I was learning. In fact, I naively thought that just about all Christians would believe the same things, so what I was hearing must be right and agreeable to all. Among other things, I learned that the Bible says that no matter how we behave, we can never be free from sin. This puzzled me, but only a little bit. No big deal! (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 101)

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 48.

rooted in the teachings of such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and others, has developed an unsurpassed doctrine of the holiness of God.”⁵²

At the beginning of his theological career, Wagner defined sanctification through his appropriation of the Reformed doctrine of sanctification.⁵³ In the 1990s, Wagner would no longer hold to Reformed sanctification, as he found applicable value in “Wesleyan holiness.”⁵⁴ Wagner’s “paradigm shift” to Wesleyan holiness is discussed further in forthcoming eras, yet it must be noted here that Wagner affirmed and was taught a Reformed paradigm of the doctrine of sanctification. Wagner would later state, “I believe that God is holy, but I also believe that you and I can also be holy,” for being holy “is not an unattainable dream, it can be a present-day reality in your life and mine.”⁵⁵

⁵² C. Peter Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs: Wagner Institute for Practical Ministry, 1998), 11; Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living*, rev. ed (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2002), 11–12. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 46.

⁵³ C. Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 137. Wagner declares that the Reformed doctrine of sanctification emerged from Calvinism, which he describes as the “theology that was established during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century” and named after one of the influential Reformers, John Calvin. Wagner asserts that Calvinism was distilled into five points, which became known through the acronym TULIP. Wagner defines the five points as follows: (1) total depravity: every human being since Adam is intrinsically sinful; (2) unconditional election: God has chosen from the foundation of the world those whom he will save; (3) limited atonement: Christ died only for those whom God elected for salvation; (4) irresistible grace: those whom God has elected will be saved no matter what; and (5) perseverance of the saints: once saved, always saved. Although TULIP contains five points, Wagner interacts with the first point, total depravity, when discussing the Reformed doctrine of sanctification. Therefore, only total depravity is discussed in this context. Wagner, *Changing Church*, 152.

⁵⁴ Wagner posits, “John Wesley was one of the first to exhibit his dissatisfaction with the Reformed doctrine of sanctification. His study of the Bible convinced him, not only that believers could attain personal holiness, but also that God expected them to do that very thing. Personally, it took me quite a while to admit that there was any validity in Wesley’s view.” Wagner cites a “major reason” he resisted Wesley’s view of holiness was his “seminary professors had taught me, not only the Reformed doctrine of sanctification, but also how to soundly refute what they considered the flawed ideas underlying Wesleyan holiness.”

Wagner states he “turned the corner in the early 1990s when I became active in helping to move the Body of Christ into a mode of aggressive, strategic-level spiritual warfare. One of my first mentors in this paradigm shift was Cindy Jacobs of Generals of Intercession.” Wagner, *Changing Church*, 171–72. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 47.

⁵⁵ Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 12; Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (2002), 13. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 47.

Cessation of miraculous gifts. In his undergraduate studies at Rutgers, Wagner adhered to the cessationist perspective as a “fundamentalist evangelical.” His time at Fuller further convinced him that cessationism was biblically correct, as he learned that “cessationism reflected sound Christian doctrine.”⁵⁶ Wagner recalls that his professors used “Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield” as “the theologian” to promote that “after the apostolic age, particularly when the canon of Scripture was finally agreed upon, the miraculous acts characteristic of Jesus and the apostles ceased.”⁵⁷ Reflecting on his professors’ teaching, Wagner reveals “the reason we read about Jesus and the apostles healing the sick was that medical science had not yet been developed, so miracles were more useful then than they are now.”⁵⁸

While Wagner privately held positive convictions regarding speaking in tongues from the mid-1960s forward, his public affirmation of Pentecostal and charismatic convictions occurred concurrently with his published affirmation of open theism.⁵⁹ Wagner’s affirmation of the continuation of the miraculous gifts accompanies a

⁵⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer: What the Bible Says about Spiritual Warfare* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2009), 52. Wagner was taught and believed in his early ministry that the miraculous gifts, “such as healing, miracles, tongues, prophecy and others, ceased after the first century or two and were no longer in effect today.”

⁵⁷ C. Peter Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 8. Wagner relates, “When I studied at Fuller Seminary in the ‘50s, I was assigned Benjamin Warfield’s *Counterfeit Miracles*. I believed, when I read it, that the sign gifts had terminated and that anything that looked like them today must therefore be counterfeit.” C. Peter Wagner, “The Power of God and Your Power,” *Christian Life* (July 1983): 40. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 45.

⁵⁸ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 80. Wagner reflects, “My seminary professors had relegated Pentecostals and charismatics to what they called ‘the lunatic fringe,’ and I was just a new Christian so I believed whatever they told me. I had no intention of ever speaking in tongues.” Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 59–60. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 45.

⁵⁹ Wagner recollects his private experiment with tongues in 1966, at which time he began to believe in tongues and “lived for many years as a closet tongues-speaker. You would think I had committed a secret sin! All I did was experiment, and my experiment happened to work!” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 117. Wagner reflects that his “inclination” was “to color outside the lines at times. I usually gravitated toward new wine, and therefore sought new wineskins. Some even considered me a maverick.” Although Wagner identified himself among the “strong evangelicals,” he recalls that “Fuller Seminary had molded” him “more into what” was “being called at the time ‘neo-evangelicals.’” Wagner discusses the resistance he encountered from the “more traditional fundamentalist evangelicals” regarding his “pushing boundaries that would sometimes provoke animated discussions.” The “mission office was more phlegmatic than I am. Above all, they wanted to stay in the good graces of its

conviction of the gifts through the filling of the Spirit. He insists, “Cessation is now an endangered doctrine. Social transformation will not occur through human designs, but through the operational power of the Holy Spirit among believers in general.”⁶⁰

Gift of prophecy. Wagner reflects that he “was taught that the ‘prophecy’ referred to in the New Testament was a synonym for preaching. I learned that the word meant both ‘foretelling’ and ‘forthtelling.’” Prophecy is not expected “in the present age” since the “New Testament canon had been closed and in it God had said just about all he wanted to say to the human race. Our task was to study the Scriptures and apply what we find there to contemporary life situations.”⁶¹ Wagner states that he “accepted this teaching and went to the mission field to serve the Lord.”⁶²

Temporal dualism. Wagner’s professed theological propositions of evil and Satan diverge from what he learned in the Systematic Theology course with Henry, which taught that Satan is a “created being” and “the leader of all the fallen angels.”⁶³ Moreover, Satan is “not omnipresent” and “not an infinite being,” yet he is “free to

financial supporters, most of whom were fundamentalist evangelicals. This was a reason why, at one point in time, I had written and sent to Florida no fewer than 14 articles that our mission director would not allow me to submit for publication.” The neo-evangelical perspective held by Wagner eventually led him to seek another mission board through which he would return to Bolivia, the Bolivian Indian Mission (BIM). The notion that Wagner is a “maverick” continues to be an identifier throughout the eras of his theological career; it is evidenced in Wagner’s seeking “new wineskins” in the various renewal and charismatic movements, such as Pentecostalism, the Charismatic Renewal movement, the Third Wave movement, and the New Apostolic Reformation movement (55). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 65.

⁶⁰ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 7. Many other aspects of Wagner’s convictions coincide with his shift away from cessationism. His convictional view of the role and gift of prophecy would later change. Both convictions become essential foundations to the various movements with which Wagner is associated throughout his theological career. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 65.

⁶¹ C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1988), 105–6. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 49.

⁶² Wagner, *Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 106. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 49.

⁶³ Henry, “Notes on the Doctrine of God,” sec. “Angels.” For a more fulsome examination of Wagner’s professed theological propositions of evil and Satan, see Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 41–42.

interfere with the affairs of men.” Henry is careful to distinguish that although Satan “can frustrate divine purpose,” God has “divinely appointed limits” to within which Satan’s “frustrations” are “overruled for God’s glory.” Wagner’s theological propositions of evil and Satan’s power in the present world become a paramount aspect of his biblical-theological system.⁶⁴ Wagner’s frustration with classic theism and Reformed theology revolved around the presence of evil in the world and God’s power. Wagner avows a “temporal dualistic spiritual cosmos” in the 1990s, emphasizing spiritual warfare.⁶⁵

The kingdom of God. Wagner perceived the kingdom of God as a “future promise” with the “church age in which we now live is a sort of parenthesis between the earthly manifestations of the kingdom, which occurred at the time of Jesus’ first coming and which will occur again at His second coming.”⁶⁶ While at Fuller, Wagner learned “biblical theology of the kingdom of God” from George Ladd. Wagner recollects, “What I most remember” is Ladd’s “irreverent questioning of the pretribulation rapture, considered evangelical iconoclasm by many in those days.”⁶⁷ Wagner “shifts” to the conviction that “the kingdom of God is present as well as” a “future promise” in the early

⁶⁴ Although a temporal dualism is a theological conviction of Wagner from the late 1960s, Wagner’s theological propositions concerning evil and Satan’s power in the present world become a paramount aspect of his biblical-theological system. For Wagner’s early affirmations of temporal dualism, see C. Peter Wagner, “Thieves of Mission,” *World Vision* (April 1967): 18–19, 24; Wagner, *Latin American Theology: Radical or Evangelical?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970). See also Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 72.

⁶⁵ Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 50–51. The emphasis of spiritual warfare with temporal dualism becomes an essential component of Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship and professed doctrine of sanctification, which are examined in forthcoming eras.

⁶⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1988), 41. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 44.

⁶⁷ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!*, 96. Wagner states that he was “so fascinated by dispensationalism and the Scofield Bible at the time that I wasn’t hearing what [Ladd] was saying.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 44.

1970s during his professorship at Fuller. The shift in conviction is essential for Wagner's later affirmation of cooperationism evident in Dominion theology and prayer.⁶⁸

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

Wagner does not explicitly state his discipleship philosophy; however, he began his missionary career as an evangelical agricultural missionary.⁶⁹ The theological basis of his eschatological beliefs formed at New Brunswick Bible Church. In looking back upon his professed "futurist view of eschatology" in dispensationalism during this era, Wagner describes the "the urgent call for evangelism and world missions." The "role of believers in the world" was first "and foremost" to

preach the gospel to as many people as possible, to save as many souls as possible and to do this quickly, because no one knows when Jesus might come and rapture the church. It could be today, and woe to those who are left behind! As far as society is concerned, we wait. We have faith. We have hope. Someday Jesus will come and bring righteousness to earth, all in God's sovereign timing.⁷⁰

Wagner's time at Fuller proved to be a foundational time in which Wagner learned of Reformed sanctification, which encompasses discipleship, in the classic theism paradigm. The theological convictions of Fuller can be gleaned from the writings of Henry and Carnell. Henry articulates, "Evangelical theology points to the sinfulness of man as the decisive factor in his relationship with God."⁷¹ Christian discipleship must

⁶⁸ Pietsch, "Impact of Open Theism." In chap. 5, Pietsch examines Wagner's affirmation of the kingdom of God as present and future, positing the framework of cooperationism, which is evident in humanity's cooperation with God through prayer to save the lost and fulfill the Great Commission.

⁶⁹ Wagner utilizes agricultural language when attempting to explain theological concepts, such as the Parable of the Sower. Wagner employs the agricultural concept of reaping the harvest to describe the Great Commission. Wagner offers the following explanation: "One of the shortcomings of contemporary Christianity is to look at the parables as quaint preindustrial stories and therefore interpret them quite superficially. Christ used a great deal of agricultural terminology to communicate with His disciples because they were products of a rural culture." C. Peter Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 40. Additional nomenclature provided by Wagner includes "vision of the fruit" and the "harvest principle." C. Peter Wagner, "The Harvest Principal," *Church Growth* (Summer 1991): 14.

⁷⁰ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 197. Continuing, Wagner states, "The unprecedented surge of the missionary movement during the twentieth century and the explosive growth of world Christianity was significantly fueled by futurists."

⁷¹ Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought*, 98. Henry notes that Neo-Supernaturalism revised original righteousness, deeming it the "possession of every man. For while man is held to be discontinuous

start with the rectifying of the broken relationship between sinners and God. Between “first act of sanctification [in] regeneration” and “the last act [of] confirmation in righteousness by the resurrection of the body” is in progressive work of the Spirit that engenders growth in “grace by worship, the Word, the sacraments, self-denial, and a general life of charity.”⁷² It is the progressive growth in knowledge that the Lord uses to communicate with his people; Carnell insists that “even the apostles had to grow in knowledge.”⁷³

Though Wagner’s published works during this era do not emphasize educational methodologies and praxes, Wagner retrospectively asserts that his educational philosophy upon graduation from Fuller encompassed “traditional methods of teaching pre-service students theological and biblical theories.”⁷⁴

with God in behavior and act, he is held to be continuous in his ideals.” Moreover, the revision of sin is defined as how “each man creatively corrupts the divine ideal” (143). Continuing his discussion of the ramifications of the Neo-Supernaturalist revisions, Henry remarks,

On the level of moral idealism, God’s love and man’s are not different, but rather God’s thoughts are our thoughts, even if His ways are not our ways, because of the inevitability of sin. The goodness of God is continuous with man’s “original righteousness” but not with man’s behavior. Man’s conscience is continuous with divine goodness; conscience as pure contemplation prior to action is the “memory of original perfection.” (144)

⁷² Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, 73. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 50.

⁷³ Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, 53. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 51.

⁷⁴ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 269. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 51.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 23. Wagner's theological dispositions (1952–1955)

Systematic Theology	Beginning of Era	End of Era
<i>Doctrine of God</i>		
<i>Knowledge of God</i>	Undefined	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Omnipotence</i>	Undefined	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Spiritual Cosmos</i>	Undefined	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Prayer</i>	Undefined	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Doctrine of Scripture</i>		
<i>Revelation</i>	Undefined	Frustrated by Epistemology
<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>	Undefined	Undefined
<i>Theological doctrine</i>	Undefined	Emphasis of Doctrine
<i>Doctrine of Church</i>		
<i>Church and Society</i>	Separatist	Separatist
<i>Great Commission</i>	Undefined	Individual Discipleship
<i>Doctrine of Holy Spirit</i>		
<i>Pneumatology</i>	Cessationism	Cessationism
<i>Sanctification</i>	Undefined	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification
<i>Doctrine of Christ</i>		
<i>Christology</i>	Undefined	Incarnation-Theology
<i>Gospel</i>	Undefined	Salvation of Individuals
<i>Doctrine of Last Things</i>		
<i>Kingdom of God</i>	Future Promise and Reality	Future Promise and Reality
<i>Eschatology</i>	Dispensationalism	Dispensationalism
Research Contribution		
<i>Philosophy of Discipleship</i>		
<i>Disciple</i>	Undefined	Undefined
<i>Equipping of Disciples</i>	Undefined	Undefined
<i>Educational Framework</i>	Traditional Bible Institute	Traditional Bible Institute

Reading through the Field Missionary Era (1956–1965)

This section (or era) deviates from Wagner's biographical segmentation of eras to explore Wagner axioms and praxes before his theological system transitioned in 1966.

This research examines Wagner’s work from 1956 to 1965, which divides Wagner’s delineated eras:⁷⁵ 1956–1961 as the “Jungle Missionaries” era and 1961–1971 as the “The McCullough era.”⁷⁶

Theological Dispositions

Wagner’s published articles during the early years of this era focus on fundamentalist evangelical Christian concerns; however, as the era progresses, Wagner increasingly writes about missionary problems and strategy in Latin America.

Incarnation-theology. Wagner continued to espouse the beliefs of the incarnation that he embraced in the previous era. Wagner professes, “The secret of [Jesus’s] obedience” while on earth was that he “could have used the attributes of His divine nature” at “any given time,” but “at no time did He *choose* to do so. He realized that had He used them, in that instant the pact of obedience to the Father would have been broken.” Wagner articulates his understanding of Jesus’s ability to sin in his temptation, stating, “Jesus could have made the bread, but not without rending the veil of obedience. Thanks be to God that He resisted the siren call of material things and waited patiently

⁷⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 24–54. Wagner demarks 1961 to 1971 as “The McCullough Era.” During the 1960s, Wagner was a field missionary in South America. Wagner credits Joseph McCullough, a neo-evangelical, as instrumental in his decision to continue as a missionary in the Bolivian mountains, affiliated with BIM. For more background concerning McCullough, see Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, chap. 4 (“The McCullough Era”). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 52.

⁷⁶ Immediately upon graduating from Fuller, Wagner began his vocational ministry career in 1956 with the SAIM as an “agricultural missionary in eastern Bolivia.” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 55–56. After five years with SAIM, Wagner resigned, believing he was “not a good fit” with the “more traditional fundamentalist evangelicals.” In 1961, Wagner joined the BIM, which was for those who held a “neo-evangelical point of view,” due to theological convictional differences with SAIM. Bell Friends Church, “Interview with Pete Wagner,” 6. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 52.

Wagner was a “faith missionary” with the support of families at the Bell Friends Church. Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 42–43. The support Wagner received was unofficially affiliated with the Quaker denomination, as the “denomination wouldn’t allow us to be supported as an official project of the church.” Although Wagner was supported by the Quaker congregation, he was not ordained in the Quaker denomination. Rather, he was ordained by New Brunswick Bible Church, which was associated with the IFCA. As a faith missionary, Wagner depended upon the giving of the church members. Wagner retrospectively describes his missionary years as having the “demonic spirit of poverty,” which greatly impeded gospel advancement. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 52–53.

for the Father to supply the need. The bond of obedience came through the strenuous trial intact, and continued ‘unto the death the cross.’”

Wagner reasons, “Possessing the Spirit without measure (John 3:34), our Lord never acted independently. Time after time He attempted to impress this truth on His followers: ‘Verily verily I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He seeth the Father do.’”⁷⁷ With consideration of Jesus’s dependence upon the Father, Wagner claims, “That’s why Jesus was so careful to give all the credit for His power of judgment to the Father (John 5:22, 27). That’s also why He says, after describing the power of giving and taking His own life, ‘This commandment have I received from my Father’ (John 10: 18).”⁷⁸ For Wagner, it was evident that Jesus “seems to have gone out of His way to teach His disciples that all of His wondrous words and works were performed through a perfect human nature, perfectly submitted to the will of God.” Consequently, with the power of the Spirit, Christians can be obedient to the Father.

Epistemology. Wagner first introduces his epistemological priorities in his 1957 article “The Origin of Life: A Christian View.”⁷⁹ Wagner asserts that “everything the Bible teaches is true,” but “the Bible doesn’t contain all truth.”⁸⁰ Wagner continues, “The more Christians purpose to search for truth *wherever* it may be found, the more effective will be our total Christian witness to the world of our day.” Wagner postulates if it is possible for Christians “to accept the data of both science and the Bible without fear of contradiction,” insisting that Christians can “accept” science if it does “not violate a

⁷⁷ Wagner, “Did Jesus Really Know?,” 112.

⁷⁸ Wagner, “Did Jesus Really Know?,” 142.

⁷⁹ Wagner’s writings later in his career concerning his observation of epistemology include *7 Power Principles That I Didn’t Learn in Seminary* (2000); *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (2010); *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God’s Call to Transform the World* (2011). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 55.

⁸⁰ Wagner, “The Origin of Life,” 44. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 55.

clear teaching of the Word of God.”⁸¹ Wagner contends that “the well-prepared Christian always knows where to draw the line.”⁸²

Phenomenological interpretation. Throughout Wagner’s life, his theological convictions fall in line with the evidence he sees, and his pneumatology develops in response to the phenomena he and others experience.⁸³ Wagner articulates the interpretive lens through which he categorizes his observations of the world and the Bible in his 1957 article “The Origin of Life: A Christian View.”⁸⁴ He places great emphasis on observable facts and phenomenological manifestations, which one can measure through science, over the interpretation of such occurrences, which is merely human observation and explanation.⁸⁵ Viewing the world through the paradigm of the integration of science and Scripture, Wagner asks, “Can a Christian who accepts the plenary inspiration of the Bible believe in evolution?” He answers, “Why not?” and provides a stipulation that

⁸¹ Wagner, “The Origin of Life,” 42. Wagner continues, “If the scientists, highly trained in their various professions, tell us that the fossil records and other data give us strong evidences that within the phyla the higher and more complex forms of life have evolved over millions of years from the more simple, why not take their word for it? There’s nothing in the Bible that contradicts it.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 56.

⁸² Wagner, “The Origin of Life,” 42. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 56.

⁸³ In his memoir, Wagner observes the tension that has seemingly always existed between theology and missiology and how he resolves the tension through considering the “underlying values” of the “respective schools”:

What is the relationship between theology and experience? Between the exegetical and the phenomenological? Between philosophy and social science? Between the ought and the is? Between library research and field research? Between systematic theology and contextualized theology? Between orthodoxy and orthopraxy? Between static theology and dynamic theology? Between concern for the ethical and concern for the pragmatic? Between Western worldviews and Third World worldviews? (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 167)

⁸⁴ Wagner, “The Origin of Life,” 12–13, 42–44.

⁸⁵ The first time Wagner used the word “phenomenology” to describe the visible work of the Holy Spirit was in 1981 with *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*. He used “manifestation” in earlier publications, beginning in 1971 with *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* and also in 1973 with *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming*. See C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*; Wagner, *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1973).

one's understanding of evolution must not "violate any clear teaching of the Word of God."

Wagner contends that Christians must ask, "On the side of science, where does the actual known data stop and human interpretation begin?"⁸⁶ The key to answering this question, Wagner clarifies, lies in the tension between science and Scripture—the two can and should stand together to offer the best interpretation of what one sees. Providing insight into his decision-making and convictional stances, Wagner explicates that science offers evidence for phenomenological occurrences, which must be considered,

for each set of observations that scientists make there are many possible theories of interpretation. Certain ones, however, at once stand out as being better able to explain the given data. In many cases one theory stands far above any other in explaining certain phenomena. If so, scientists choose that theory to hold until a better one comes along.⁸⁷

Wagner contends that the task of Christians is to "find out what God is telling us in His inspired book."⁸⁸ Similar to scientists, Christians should hold to an explanation or interpretation of phenomenological occurrences "until a better one comes along." In doing so, Wagner is careful to specify that Christians are "dealing with interpretation, not inspiration." Interpretations of the data must come under subjection of and not contradict Scripture. For Wagner, it is "undoubtedly the Christian's first job to interpret the Word of God soundly, and then to honor it, live by it, and, if need be, to die for it. But at the same time a Christian must not be afraid to face truth or claims to truth wherever they are found." As truth is evidenced and objectively measured in science, a tension can and must be held where "Christians purpose to search for truth wherever it may be found," making the "Christian witness to the world of our day" all "the more effective." This

⁸⁶ Wagner, "The Origin of Life," 12.

⁸⁷ Wagner, "The Origin of Life," 13.

⁸⁸ Wagner, "The Origin of Life," 13.

notion underscores Wagner's belief that the effectiveness of Christians is found in the evidence or outworking of faith.

Presuppositions impact the interpretation of truth. In his article "Through a Glass Darkly" (1962), Wagner describes sanctification as a journey for every Christian to grow in "humility," which is "like a coin, is two-sided. One side is personal humility and the other ideological humility. One side is inscribed, 'I am crucified with Christ,' and the other, 'Perhaps I am wrong.' One side involves sanctification of the heart, the other of the mind. At the same time both are interdependent. Together they produce the humble man."⁸⁹

Wagner proposes that presuppositions impact believers' reading and understanding of the Bible. He defines theology as "certain ideas about God" that "we form" primarily "before we have read much of the Bible." Hermeneutics is defined as the formation of "certain ideas about how we should interpret the things we read in" the Bible. Wagner then contends that theology and hermeneutics are intertwined in "an upward spiral that should never stop during the Christian experience. It will only end in heaven where we no longer 'see through a glass, darkly,' but 'face to face.'"⁹⁰ Wagner declares that just as sin impacts presuppositions, sin also impacts believers' holiness: the "residue of sin in our natures keeps us just as much from reaching doctrinal perfection as it does from personal perfection."⁹¹ Wagner continues, "Only with the Lord in glory will

⁸⁹ C. Peter Wagner, "Through a Glass Darkly," *Eternity* (January 1962): 10. Wagner continues, citing that the propagation of presuppositions occurs as "we all look at it through different lenses. It's as if you and I were looking at the same building, you through rose-colored glasses and I through the wrong end of a telescope. It would be the same building, but we'd describe it differently." Moreover, our "doctrines and beliefs stand in constant need of self-scrutiny and constructive criticism in the light of the word of God. But the first step is not so much examination of the content of the doctrines as it is an insight into the subjective factors that undergird them" (11).

⁹⁰ Wagner, "Through a Glass Darkly," 10. For Wagner, the "upward spiral begins with the more theology and hermeneutics we have mastered, the better we can understand the Bible; and the more we understand the Bible, the better we can develop our theology and hermeneutics" (11).

⁹¹ Wagner, "Through a Glass Darkly," 12. Wagner states that the "apostle Paul confessed that he had not reached his goal of perfection, and that he didn't expect to get there until he went to heaven. That's why he wrote, 'For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face.'"

sin and our other imperfections finally be removed. Only then will the Holy Spirit be able infallibly to control our lives. In the meantime just as we attempt to live humbly, so also should we attempt to think humbly.”

In his 1962 article “Are You Riding a Hobby Horse?” Wagner explicates that Christians can hold a spiritual hobbyhorse, a “certain doctrine or practice which, in an abnormal way, captures the attention of the proponent.”⁹² The spiritual hobbyhorse “does not edify the church as a whole,” is “not a theological insight,” and “is by definition marginal to historic Christianity.” Spiritual hobbyhorses are considered “a closed case corroborated by indisputable biblical and rational proofs” that “grow from an over-emphasis of an otherwise legitimate teaching. They involve making a cardinal issue of a secondary point, often giving it the status of a test for orthodoxy.”⁹³ In answering the question of where Christians must “draw the line,” Wagner insists that the church is “the criterion we are seeking against which we can judge our doctrines.”⁹⁴

Levels of truth. In “Bibliolatry: Part I” (1958), Wagner defends the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture, declaring that the Bible “is the word of God” and “the only rule of faith and practice.”⁹⁵ Wagner expounds, adding that not “every part

⁹² C. Peter Wagner, “Are You Riding a Hobby Horse?,” *Eternity* (July 1962): 9.

⁹³ Wagner, “Are You Riding A Hobby Horse?,” 10.

⁹⁴ Wagner, “Are You Riding A Hobby Horse?,” 10. Wagner defines the church as “the universal fellowship of regenerate men who have entered into the mystical body of Christ by faith in His atonement.” Wagner declares,

The Christian church has a God-given spiritual authority. To be sure, it is not an infallible authority, but nevertheless it cannot be slighted by Christians who are earnestly seeking truth. In fact, the church might well be the criterion we are seeking against which we can judge our doctrines. If a doctrine has held a central part in the church throughout its history or a significant portion of it, we can feel relatively safe. But if the doctrine is something new or if it has never fared well with the great Christian divines, it is open to suspicion.

Wagner continues,

Although the church does not possess infallibility, it does provide us with a very useful standard against which we can test our beliefs. It will probably prove to be our best safeguard against spiritual hobby-horses. It is no accident that the cults, which always have an affinity for hobby horses, usually exhibit a mini appreciation for the history of the church and the development of classical Christian doctrine.

⁹⁵ Wagner, “Bibliolatry: Part I,” 11.

of the Bible” is “to be used for doctrine.” He clarifies this statement by explaining that there are “no *levels of inspiration* in the Bible, but there are *levels of truth*.”⁹⁶ In “Bibliolatry: Part II” (1958), Wagner offers eight “*levels of truth*” in Scripture—historical truth, poetical truth, phenomenal truth, symbolical truth, proverbial truth, cultural truth, spiritual truth, and theological truth—that aid Christians in understanding the “implications” and “function” of the different “parts of Scripture.”⁹⁷

Utilizing 2 Timothy 3:16, Wagner posits that Christians are to interpret Scripture from the different levels of truth, depending on the “function” of the part of Scripture. “*Phenomenal truth*” consists of that which is “literally true from the point of view of the observer,” even though it may not be “scientifically accurate.”⁹⁸ Wagner explicates that although allegories and other phenomenological language in the Bible are helpful “in such a way that all men in all ages can understand it,” they comprise the “non-theological portions of Scripture” and should never be used “to form any Christian doctrine or practice.” “*Spiritual truth*” comprises the instruction in righteousness, where “interpreting” Scripture “from the Christian point of view” is “profitable to us in the perfection of our own spiritual lives” and is “directly valuable to our spiritual lives.”

Sanctification. Wagner asserts that “Christians must continually remind themselves that they are sinners and stand in daily need of God’s grace. The only sure norm is the law of love.”⁹⁹ Wagner discusses the role of sanctification and spiritual gifts in the next era as he begins to place great emphasis on the role of spiritual gifts in the church.

⁹⁶ Wagner, “Bibliolatry: Part I,” 47.

⁹⁷ Wagner, “Bibliolatry: Part II,” 47.

⁹⁸ Wagner, “Bibliolatry: Part II,” 15.

⁹⁹ C. Peter Wagner, “The Anatomy of a Lie,” *Eternity* (May 1964): 35.

Miraculous works. According to Wagner, in the fulfillment of the Great Commission, miraculous works are performed by disciples who have the same power that was in Jesus.¹⁰⁰ In his discussion of the incarnation and Jesus's miraculous works, Wagner asserts that Jesus "seems to have gone out of His way to teach His disciples that all of His wondrous words and works were performed through a perfect human nature, perfectly submitted to the will of God."¹⁰¹ As Jesus lived in submission to God, he imparted the framework for his disciples: obey the will of God and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit for "wondrous words and works."

Satan's kingdom. Wagner argues that the "Church universal merits our confidence because it is the only group in the world that has made a decisive invasion of Satan's kingdom of sin. And sin, remember, is the root of our trouble in the first place."¹⁰² Wagner affirms that the kingdom of Satan is on earth, as Satan is the ruler of the age. In later eras, Wagner affirms a different paradigm of the kingdom of Satan, sin, and the church.¹⁰³

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

As a missionary in Bolivia, Wagner takes every opportunity to teach the Bible through evangelistic classes in "an evening Bible School" and private training. Wagner

¹⁰⁰ The assertion that Jesus's disciples could perform the same miracles, signs, and wonders as Jesus seemingly undergirds Wagner's assertion that Jesus performed all the signs and wonders in obedience, "submitted to the will of God." Wagner, "Did Jesus Really Know?," 142. Pietsch examines Wagner's contention that humanity cooperates with God through prayer. Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism."

¹⁰¹ Wagner, "Did Jesus Really Know?," 142.

¹⁰² Wagner, "Through a Glass Darkly," 16.

¹⁰³ See Wagner, *Dominion!* Wagner devotes the book to the breakthrough of the kingdom of God through social action to destroy the kingdom of Satan. Wagner writes in the front book leaf, "The 'greater works' Jesus promised His followers are actually coming into view. In tandem with this growing awareness, voices of church leaders are rising with a clear mandate: Social transformation is the current overriding objective for the people of God." Wagner continues, "Never before has there been such an opportunity. It is time for the Church to rise up and take Kingdom action." For further treatment of Wagner's Dominion theology, see Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 106, 173.

believes the classes could aid those with “faith in the Lord” to grow spiritually and also to “be used of the Lord to reach many non-Christians in the village.”¹⁰⁴ Wagner reflects that his private sessions were “well worth it to help a babe in Christ growing so rapidly.”¹⁰⁵ Through his evangelistic teaching in the evening Bible school, some of the people who participated applied to formally study at the Bible Institute. Wagner and his mission board, BIM, believe in program evangelism, whereby discipleship occurs through the effort to “teach and encourage the average church member” to learn the Scriptures and “take a part in” disciple-making through “Scripture distribution.”¹⁰⁶

The Holy Spirit works both for and in the lives of believers, transforming them and leading them in truth. Wagner writes in “You Can’t Be a Christian And . . .” (1956) that on the journey of sanctification, it “is the duty of each Christian to allow the Holy Spirit to guide his own conscience and, above all, whether weak or strong, to *obey it!*”¹⁰⁷ In his 1962 article “Implement Your Call,” Wagner asserts that “a daily renewing of the power of the Holy Spirit” is necessary to fulfill God’s will and call on one’s life.¹⁰⁸ Wagner contends, “God will guide, but probably not through some supernatural vision

¹⁰⁴ C. Peter Wagner and Doris Wagner, “Bible Institute in Bolivia,” *Amazon Valley Indian* 52, no. 5 (1956): 1. Wagner was a teacher in the Bible Institute, a Bible college available for men wishing to be trained as pastors and missionaries. The institute taught seminary-level Bible classes, and many of the students lived on the grounds, as the school provided the only theological education in the region. There were many non-students in attendance, and Wagner encouraged “the townsfolk to attend.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 54n107.

¹⁰⁵ C. Peter Wagner, “Army Officer Steps Out for the Lord in Santiago,” *Amazon Valley Indian* 52, no. 6 (1956): 2. Wagner provided “spiritual attention” to a recently stationed major in the Bolivian Army who indicated interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the Word of God. Wagner believed that there are many evangelistic and educational opportunities in the evening school and institute, yet he discloses that he must keep “a wary eye upon” the military to gauge the “reaction to the mission work” as “a real enemy of the Gospel . . . could make things very difficult” (1).

¹⁰⁶ A missionary newsletter from 1963 highlights the importance of Bible institutes, “whose purpose is to strengthen in general the entire distribution programme of the Bible Societies” through classes “open to all missionaries, pastors, members of our churches etc.” Pete Wagner and Doris Wagner, eds., “Cochabamba Chit Chat,” *Cochabamba Missionary Fellowship* 6 (September 1963): 1.

¹⁰⁷ Wagner, “You Can’t Be a Christian And . . .,” 27.

¹⁰⁸ C. Peter Wagner, “Implement Your Call,” *HIS* (May 1962): 29.

such as He gave Paul.”¹⁰⁹ Wagner shares the advice of modeling spiritual preparation after “Enoch and ‘walk with God.’ Learn to spend time alone with Him. Don’t neglect your church life . . . but at the same time concentrate on attaining spiritual independence.”¹¹⁰ The independence of every spiritually prepared Christian necessitates learning “to trust God for all your needs, and be a good steward when He supplies. Chances are He’ll give you difficult financial trials during these days of training. Accept them joyfully. Your Christian experience will deepen as you learn to live by faith.”

¹⁰⁹ Wagner, “Implement Your Call,” 28.

¹¹⁰ Wagner, “Implement Your Call,” 27.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 24. Wagner's theological dispositions (1956–1965)

Systematic Theology	Beginning of Era	End of Era
<i>Doctrine of God</i>		
<i>Knowledge of God</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Omnipotence</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Spiritual Cosmos</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Prayer</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Doctrine of Scripture</i>		
<i>Revelation</i>	Frustrated by Epistemology	Frustrated by Epistemology
<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>	Undefined	Phenomenological
<i>Theological doctrine</i>	Emphasis of Doctrine	Emphasis of Doctrine
<i>Doctrine of Church</i>		
<i>Church and Society</i>	Separatist	Separatist
<i>Great Commission</i>	Individual Discipleship	Individual Discipleship
<i>Doctrine of Holy Spirit</i>		
<i>Pneumatology</i>	Cessationism	Cessationism
<i>Sanctification</i>	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification
<i>Doctrine of Christ</i>		
<i>Christology</i>	Incarnation-Theology	Incarnation-Theology
<i>Gospel</i>	Salvation of Individuals	Salvation of Individuals
<i>Doctrine of Last Things</i>		
<i>Kingdom of God</i>	Future Promise and Reality	Future Promise and Reality
<i>Eschatology</i>	Dispensationalism	Dispensationalism
Research Contribution		
<i>Philosophy of Discipleship</i>		
<i>Disciple</i>	Undefined	Undefined
<i>Equipping of Disciples</i>	Undefined	Teach Scripture for Scripture Distribution
<i>Educational Framework</i>	Traditional Bible Institute	Traditional Bible Institute

Reading through the Transformational Era (1966–1971)

Although Wagner’s delineated eras do not divide 1966–1971 as a separate era, Wagner’s publications during this timeframe expose significant theological transitions such that 1966–1971 becomes a subdivided and transformative era meriting examination. Evan Pietsch remarks, “Wagner’s professed theological system began to undergo substantial changes from 1966 to 1971, changes that seemingly formed the basis for the remainder of Wagner’s theological career. Wagner retrospectively remarks that this section of time immensely impacted ‘shifts’ in his theology.”¹¹¹ This era divides the latter part of Wagner’s biographical period in the McCollough era (1961–1971)¹¹² and extends into the opening of the McGavran era (1971–1982).¹¹³ Although this research segregates Wagner’s eras, the segmentation closely aligns with Wagner’s professed theological “paradigm shifts.”

Theological Dispositions

Wagner continues to serve with the BIM, which Wagner describes as for those who held a “neo-evangelical point of view.”¹¹⁴ Wagner continues to consider himself a “maverick” throughout this era of his theological career. Wagner experienced a change in

¹¹¹ Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 49. Wagner speaks of his “paradigm shifts” in his memoir; see Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 87. Wagner retrospectively states that his missiological paradigm shift toward church growth occurred after he read *Bridges of God*, in which McGavran proposed “some of the most radical and innovative theories of missiology imaginable,” such as “using scientific principles for missionary evangelism.” Wagner was intrigued by the pragmatic proposition of a “new philosophy of missions that kept records of production, used graphs to discern trends, and analyzed factors contributing both to successful evangelism and unsuccessful evangelism.” The intrigue of the new methodological missions and evangelism strategy led to Wagner’s seeking ways of measuring the phenomenological occurrences to increase church growth. Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 62. After his “paradigm shift” to Wesleyan holiness, Wagner declared that Fuller Theological Seminary was “intentionally indoctrinating us with Reformed theology.” Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 86–87. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 31, 38.

¹¹² See Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 54–78 (chap. 4 “The McCollough Era (1961–1971)”); Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” chap. 2.

¹¹³ See Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 79–112 (chap. 5 “The McGavran Era (1971–1982)”); Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” chap. 2.

¹¹⁴ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 55. During Wagner’s tenure with the BIM, the organization changed its name to Andes Evangelical Mission (AEM) as “the processes of urbanization and modernization began reshaping the nation until the name ‘Indian’ was no longer politically correct” (72–73).

theological disposition toward the gift and use of tongues, living “for many years as a closet tongues-speaker” while in the Andes Evangelical Mission (AEM).¹¹⁵

Epistemology. Wagner engages the epistemological priorities of divine knowledge, which contrasts with human knowledge. A “worldly philosopher does not usually like to admit the existence of mysteries which he never could discover by his own efforts at contemplation.” Citing 1 Corinthians 2:7, Wagner attests believers discern that “we give expression to divine wisdom in the form of a mystery,” for “God’s revelation is prior to all human wisdom.”¹¹⁶ Therefore, when “the believer submits to the authority of divine revelation, the Holy Spirit takes it upon Himself to provide the illumination necessary to understand it.”

Wagner then “employs epistemological priorities of human knowledge when distinguishing Christian growth.”¹¹⁷ He differentiates three categories of knowledge, the “natural man,” the “carnal Christian,” and the “spiritual Christian,” with the spiritual Christian as the only one who can “find the *sophia* of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁸ Wagner maintains, “This *sophia* comes not through further academic training or even through more doctrinal teaching, but rather through deeper sanctification, a closer walk with Jesus

¹¹⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 117.

¹¹⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World: A Study Guide on First Corinthians with Questions for Discussion Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 44–45. Such a determination compels believers to confess their “finitude” and imparts “a measure of intellectual humility.” Wagner cites 1 Corinthians 2:13 as his proof-text: “We impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 71.

¹¹⁷ Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 71.

¹¹⁸ Wagner explicates the three categories of wisdom, stating, “The ‘natural man’ (1 Corinthians 2:14, KJV) would not be able to receive the special wisdom of the Spirit of God since he has not acquired that spiritual wave length which only the new birth produces.” The “carnal Christian is little better as far as his understanding of spiritual truth is concerned. A carnal Christian must be fed with ‘milk’ and not with ‘solid food’ (1 Corinthians 3:2), so therefore he will not find the *sophia* of the Holy Spirit that he could have if he were a spiritual Christian.” Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 45. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 72.

Christ.”¹¹⁹ Wagner does not clarify the means of growth in “deeper sanctification” for the “carnal” Christian.

Biblical-theological system. Wagner affirms that in “classic evangelical theology, man is seen as a slave to sin, with the hope of deliverance coming only from payment of a price. By paying that price, Christ became the Redeemer of mankind, specifically those who have faith in His finished work on the cross.” Departing from the Reformed perspective, Wagner professes that “this message of redemption” is “available in potential for all mankind,” but “practically speaking it is applied only to those who respond to the message.”¹²⁰

Reformed sanctification. In *Stop the World, I Want to Get On* (1974), Wagner defines sanctification as “growth in grace, Christian maturity, [a] walk with the Lord” or a “close walk with Jesus Christ,” which “determines how effectively a Christian uses spiritual gifts.”¹²¹

Biblical interpretation. In his 1967 article “Those Contemporary Corinthians: How Do You Handle Church-Splitters?” Wagner explores the application of “true wisdom to life” in 1 Corinthians. He affirms that “there is a part played by the believer (2:6–9) and a part played by the Holy Spirit (2:10–13). The believer must recognize that true wisdom begins with God’s revelation, never with human efforts to arrive at the truth (2:9).”¹²² Wagner discusses truth in Scripture in an examination of 1 Corinthians 15. He posits that Christians are not “called to defend Christianity with the power of human

¹¹⁹ Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 45.

¹²⁰ Wagner, “Thieves of Mission,” 19. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 69.

¹²¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On* (Glendale, CA: Regal, 1974), 32; Wagner, *Our Corinthian Contemporaries*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 98.

¹²² C. Peter Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: How Do You Handle Church-Splitters?,” *Eternity* (September 1967): 30–31.

reason, a danger which eventually destroys all intellectual humility.” Ensuring that “ideas” are “framed as opinions” rather than “convictions” fosters “an honest mutual understanding on debatable points” and prevents Christians from becoming “cultic.”¹²³

Phenomenological theology. During his missionary furlough in 1968, Wagner experienced a “paradigm shift” that impacted his theological convictions. Wagner notes the importance of church growth he learned from Donald McGavran, who taught that

in order to research the growth of the churches in any given area, you have to ask four questions: (1) Why does the blessing of God rest where it does? (2) Churches are not equal. Why are some churches more blessed than others at certain times? (3) Can any pattern of divine blessing be discerned? (4) If so, what are the common characteristics of those churches?¹²⁴

In contemplation of McGavran’s teaching, Wagner expresses, “Much to my consternation, I honestly had to conclude that the blessing of God was resting most strongly on the Pentecostal churches that I had been preaching against!”¹²⁵

Wagner acknowledged that he employed a phenomenological hermeneutic when reading Scripture that “gives greater weight to sociological observations.”¹²⁶

Theology, then, is to be interpreted and “can be revised in light of what is learned through

¹²³ Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: How Do You Handle Church-Splitters?,” 30.

¹²⁴ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 81. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 74.

¹²⁵ Wagner continues,

I decided to fly over the Andes to Chile and take a firsthand look at the highly publicized Pentecostal Movement there. To my surprise, the miraculous gifts that Warfield declared had ceased were actually in full operation among Chilean Pentecostal churches. I interviewed the leaders, and they went on to convince me of the integrity of their underlying theology. From that moment on, I was no longer anti-Pentecostal.

After I returned to America and began teaching at Fuller, my first book was *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming*. In it I showed that the Pentecostal Movement was the fastest growing Christian movement in the world and that it was not growing because of programmed evangelism but because of power evangelism. (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 82)

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 74.

¹²⁶ Thomas Spratling Rainer, “An Assessment of C. Peter Wagner’s Contributions to the Theology of Church Growth” (PhD diss, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988), 85.

experience.”¹²⁷ The “outworkings of Wagner’s pragmatism led him to conclude that when he observed speaking in tongues, he” could accept it as biblically accurate.¹²⁸ He “saw no reason to reject the experience on phenomenological grounds” as “deception, emotion, hypnosis, or some other false expression. He then examined the Scriptures with the belief that the experience of tongues was real, and the phenomenon became a part of his theology.”¹²⁹ The “phenomenological hermeneutic employed by Wagner when reading the Scriptures led to” a pragmatic approach that “he employed in missions and all areas of church life.”¹³⁰

Spiritual gifts. Wagner begins to discuss the “relationship between one’s sanctification and the fruit of the Spirit in his life” and maintains that “there is no relation whatsoever between sanctification and the possession of spiritual gifts.”¹³¹ Moreover, Wagner declares, “Sanctification will make the difference as to how effectively a Christian uses his gift, but it does not relate to which gifts he might have. Here was the

¹²⁷ C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1987), 38.

¹²⁸ R. Vivian Pietsch, “The Influence of John Dewey’s Pragmatism on the Church Growth Movement,” *International Review of Mission* 111, no. 1 (2022): 138–68.

¹²⁹ Rainer, “Assessment of Wagner’s Contributions,” 86–87.

¹³⁰ Pietsch, “Influence of John Dewey’s Pragmatism,” 166. Wagner’s pragmatism “is evident in his article, ‘Fierce Pragmatism in Missions—Carnal or Consecrated?’ as well as his 1981 book, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*” (160). See also C. Peter Wagner, “Fierce Pragmatism in Missions—Carnal or Consecrated?,” *Christianity Today* 17, no. 5 (1972): 245–49; Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*. Moreover, as I identify in my article, Wagner viewed pragmatism

as a means to achieve ends of church growth. Wagner grounded his missiological practices in the assertion that the evangelistic ends justified the means. His strategic planning and pragmatic measures focused on making disciples and furthering church growth. Believing pragmatism to be a positive attribute and effective means, Wagner stated, “telling me that I am pragmatic is like telling a polar bear that it’s white!” (Pietsch, “Influence of John Dewey’s Pragmatism,” 160, quoting Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 63)

Evan Pietsch argues that the philosophical system of pragmatism was not employed by Wagner in evangelism and church growth, as Wagner, contends Pietsch, was a commissionary pragmatic consequentialist, adhering to the philosophical system of consequentialism. See Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” chap. 5.

¹³¹ C. Peter Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: Excommunication Is Scriptural,” *Eternity* (October 1967): 25.

Corinthians' main error. They gauged a person's sanctification by his speaking in tongues, not by the love he expressed in his practical life."

Wagner conscientiously dissociates spiritual gifts from natural talents, "abilities which every member of the human race possesses to one degree or another." Natural talents are used in everyday life as a great benefit to society; however, spiritual gifts are used to benefit the world and further the kingdom of God. Spiritual gifts are unique "supernatural endowments which God himself gives to a person when he becomes a Christian and thus enters as a functioning member of the body of Christ."¹³² Spiritual gifts are to be used by Christians for the good of and alongside the body of Christ. Wagner states that the New Testament includes twenty gifts of the Spirit: "apostleship, prophecy, teaching, evangelism, pastor, ministry, administration, wisdom, knowledge, faith, exhortation, miracles, healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, discerning of spirits, giving, mercy, celibacy, and martyrdom."¹³³

Wagner discusses spiritual gifts as an essential part of growing in the Christian faith and living out one's faith, reasoning, "God wants us to have a thorough knowledge of spiritual gifts, particularly if we are engaged in developing these gifts."¹³⁴ The knowledge of gifts includes the "theory, or better yet the theology, of spiritual gifts" and "a personal knowledge of what spiritual gifts we ourselves have." Believers who "have given adequate attention to spiritual gifts can locate theirs somewhere in the list we have made." "Some may have one gift, some may have more than one."

¹³² Ralph R. Covell and C. Peter Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1971), 25–26.

¹³³ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 27. Five biblical passages provided the key to Wagner's list of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12; 7:7; 13:3; Rom 12; Eph 4). Wagner records nineteen spiritual gifts in *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*. The first four gifts are noted as follows: "1. Apostles (missionaries, cross-cultural use of other gifts). 2. Prophets (receive direct communication from God). 3. Teachers (communicating, including preaching and writing). 4. Evangelists (unusual power in soul winning and establishing churches)." Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 94. Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 124.

¹³⁴ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 27.

Continuation of miraculous gifts. Wagner wrote “a series of nine monthly articles on First Corinthians in *Eternity* magazine in 1967 and 1968.”¹³⁵ In the articles, Wagner purposefully did not discuss the “controversial spiritual gifts such as tongues or healings or miracles or the office of apostle or the rest were not to be used today.”¹³⁶ Wagner had noticed the growth of the churches in Latin America. The churches that were “getting the job done more than anyone else” in Latin America “were Pentecostal and charismatic.”¹³⁷ Although Wagner’s mission board affirmed and strictly enforced the cessation of the sign or prophetic gifts (often called *charismata*), Wagner conducted an “experiment with tongues,” and “before” he “knew it, he “was praying in tongues.”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 116. Wagner wrote several articles regarding 1 Corinthians. See Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: A Ripe City and God’s Harvester,” *Eternity* (August 1967): 13–15; Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: How Do You Handle Church-Splitters?,” *Eternity* (September 1967): 29–31; Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: Excommunication Is Scriptural,” 24–26; Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: Paul as a Marriage Counselor,” *Eternity* (November 1967): 28–32; Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: Have You Discovered Your Spiritual Gift?,” *Eternity* (February 1968): 26–27, 29; Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: The Necessity of Easter,” *Eternity* (April 1968): 15–17; Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: What about Tongues Speaking?,” *Eternity* (March 1968): 23–26; Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: Wine and Women,” *Eternity* (January 1968): 19–21. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 60.

¹³⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 116. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 65.

¹³⁷ Wagner emphasizes that his experimentation with tongues was a result of observed growth with other missionary institutions. He shares,

I was interested in getting the job done, fulfilling the Great Commission through missions and evangelism. As the years went by in Latin America, I couldn’t help but notice that the churches and missions that seemed to be getting the job done more than anyone else were the Pentecostals and charismatics—those people who spoke in tongues. I kept quiet about this, and just tucked it away in the back of my mind.

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 66.

¹³⁸ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 116. Wagner explains,

The apostle Paul was my biblical role model. I could not imagine that he was on “the lunatic fringe.” And it seemed like speaking in tongues was a normal part of Paul’s life. If Paul could speak in tongues, apparently whenever he wanted to, how about other people like me?

I got down on my knees in a prayer position and much to my surprise I began saying words that had absolutely no meaning for me, but words that kept flowing naturally from my mouth. I was speaking in tongues! I continued for several minutes before I decided to stop. I had discovered personally what Paul was writing about! (Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 59–60)

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 66.

Wagner relates, “I lived for many years as a closet tongues-speaker”; “All I did was experiment, and my experiment happened to work!”¹³⁹

Shifting cessationist convictions. Wagner entered the mission field “a convinced cessationist.”¹⁴⁰ His cessationist convictions began to change in the late 1960s¹⁴¹ after he was “completely healed by the prayers of the ‘Methodist missionary to India, E. Stanley Jones.’”¹⁴² Wagner discloses that he was wary of Jones, as his seminary professors taught that Jones “was a liberal”; therefore, Wagner “wanted no association with him.”¹⁴³ Wagner’s apprehension of Jones was lowered when he learned that Jones “couldn’t be a liberal” because he had “preached a gospel message, given an invitation and prayed for people to be saved.”¹⁴⁴ He discloses that he was more open to Jones’s “preaching, coming from a Methodist,” as it “had allowed me to bypass some of my anti-Pentecostal biases and had imparted to me a degree of faith in God’s power to heal today.”¹⁴⁵ Wagner asserts that after his healing, his cessationist convictions “began to shift a little more!”¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 117. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 65.

¹⁴⁰ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 118. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 66.

¹⁴¹ Wagner does not provide a specific year when this meeting occurred. Many of Wagner’s references to this event refer to the “mid-1960s,” “about the same time” that he became associated with McGavran. Wagner, *Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 22. See Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 118–19; Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!*, 43–45. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 66.

¹⁴² Wagner was surprised by his experience with Jones, noting, “For the first time, a crack began to appear in my previous theories.” Wagner, *Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 22–23. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 66.

¹⁴³ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!*, 43. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 67.

¹⁴⁴ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!*, 43. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 67.

¹⁴⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 119. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 67.

¹⁴⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 119; see also Wagner, ed., *Signs and Wonders Today: New Expanded Edition with Study Questions and Applications* (Altamonte

Pragmatic fulfillment of the Great Commission. Wagner describes his “paradigm shift toward pragmatic evangelism” while enrolled in Fuller in the late 1960s. Wagner was “first introduced” to the “Church Growth Movement” by Donald McGavran.¹⁴⁷ McGavran’s church growth principles “sparked a paradigm shift [in Wagner] toward pragmatic evangelism” from “passive evangelism.”¹⁴⁸ In his 1969 article “Mission Executives and Strategy Plan,” Wagner argues, “Going, preaching, baptizing, teaching, and scores of other good missionary activities are all subservient and means toward the end of making disciples.”¹⁴⁹ Therefore, “making disciples” is “what the Great Commission is all about.” Wagner continues, citing that understanding the difference between the means and the end goal of making disciples “is extremely important in setting missionary goals.” Further, Wagner posits that

disciples can be counted by missionaries as readily as profit can be counted by businessmen, votes by politicians, or successful operations by surgeons. Each human profession has its own means of gauging success in the number of men and women who become faithful followers of Christ as a result of the particular type of missionary work they do. Some will reject this criterion of missionary success as being too pragmatic too objective, too simplistic, too carnal.¹⁵⁰

However, Wagner warns that those who disagree with his interpretation of the fulfillment of the Great Commission in such ways “risk disharmony with the angels in heaven. The

Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987), 42–43. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 67.

¹⁴⁷ Wagner pays special gratitude to Donald McGavran, as one who “caused a radical reconstruction of his entire outlook on missions and missiology.” Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 11. Wagner recalls, “When I was first introduced to the Church Growth Movement by Donald McGavran back in 1967, I was an active field missionary. Ever since then, I have been interested in researching the outcomes of different approaches to evangelism in terms of the growth of the churches involved in the programs.” Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth*, 133. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 62.

¹⁴⁸ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 67. Wagner shares that his “most life-changing educational experience” was learning “to focus our attention, not on our evangelistic efforts per se, but on the measurable results that our efforts actually produce. Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth*, chap. 5; Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 269; see also Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth*, chap. 5. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 63.

¹⁴⁹ C. Peter Wagner, “Mission Executives and Strategy Planning,” *Church Growth Bulletin* 6, no. 2 (1969): 21.

¹⁵⁰ Wagner, “Mission Executives and Strategy Planning,” 21.

Bible tells us that the angels of God rejoice over even one sinner that repents. If one causes joy, two causes a double measure, and immediately we're dealing with numbers. The primary goal of missionary work is to make multitudes of disciples for our Lord."¹⁵¹

Wagner continues his discussion of the Great Commission in his 1970 publication *Latin American Theology: Radical or Evangelical?*, citing that "the Great Commission provides "the evident burden of the New Testament"; it is "not for the *death* of the church, but rather for the *growth* of the church." Wagner criticizes the "radical left" Latin American churches that emphasize the Christian's need to die to oneself for the benefit of the world. Wagner emphasizes disciple-making over dying to self, stating,

Christ went on to the cross in order to purchase His bride, His "pearl of great price." and He never hints that He also would want His bride to go to the cross. His commandment to His church was to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom so that the Kingdom could multiply throughout the world like the mustard tree or like the leaven that penetrates the whole mass. Neither the mustard seed nor the leaven is described as dying, but rather as multiplying.¹⁵²

The church, Wagner argues, goes "into the world" with "its principal responsibility" to "preach the Gospel," for "God desires that multitudes be reconciled to Himself. He is 'not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance' (2 Pet. 3:9). In order to bring this about, God has chosen as His instrument a body of Christians preaching the Gospel, referred to in today's theological terminology as the kerygma."¹⁵³ Wagner contends that the "church is in the world, then, for the *primary* (but not exclusive) purpose of announcing the kerygma"; however, "even the announcement of the kerygma is only a means to another end."

Wagner declares that when new disciples come out of the world through the persuasion of those who are already disciples of Christ, and into the church, they enjoy the Christian fellowship called koinonia. In

¹⁵¹ Wagner, "Mission Executives and Strategy Planning," 22.

¹⁵² Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 44.

¹⁵³ Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 105.

this intimate fellowship of the “household of God” they “come together” (1 Cor. 11:17) to be “perfected” and “edified” (Eph. 4:12). But koinonia should never be an end in itself either.¹⁵⁴

For Wagner, the kerygma and koinonia serve an intertwined purpose: “to prepare believers to take their places in the centrifugal movement of kerygma.”

Temporal dualism. In discussing the “radical left” churches in Latin America in *Latin American Theology*, Wagner notes that most of the charismatic and Pentecostal churches believe that God is “acting wherever in the world action is being taken to change society in the direction of a greater measure of what is considered to be liberty and justice. The devil is represented as that force which seeks to perpetuate the oppressive status quo.”¹⁵⁵ In his analysis of this theology, Wagner dictates, “The church’s task in this situation is first to discern the difference through sociological studies, and then to join ‘God’s side.’ No wonder this produces ‘fear and trembling.’”

Wagner then contrasts the “Kingdom of God, or the age to come,” as having “invaded today’s world in a real but anticipatory way. Christ’s death on the cross sealed the doom of Satan (Heb. 2:14), but he is still permitted great power in his world (1 Pet. 5:8).”¹⁵⁶ However, “the power of God manifested in this present age is manifested through the instrumentality of the true body of Christ, the church. This distinction between the two kingdoms is extremely important in today’s tension with secular theology.”

¹⁵⁴ Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 105.

¹⁵⁵ Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 31. Wagner later affirms the theological position of Dominionism, where the Christian is tasked with bringing the kingdom of God to the world by breaking through the devil’s kingdom.

¹⁵⁶ Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 104. Wagner asserts his position on the two kingdoms: “Since Satan” is the “God of this age,” in “a sense this world can be considered the kingdom of the devil, as Jesus Himself calls it in Luke 11:18. This is why Satan could offer it all to Christ at His temptation (Matt. 4:8–9). Christ rejected the temptation, but did not deny the validity of the offer.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 72.

In affirming his theological position, Wagner comments, “While the Scriptures teach us that God is sovereign, they also teach that this sovereignty will not be manifested in its fullness throughout the world until [Christ’s] second coming (*parousia*).”¹⁵⁷ In contrast to the “radical left,” Wagner observes, “To postulate that the mission of the church is somehow to bring the world under the sovereignty of God through social action and previous to the *parousia* is well-intentioned, but as ill-directed as Peter’s attempt to protect our Lord by cutting off the ear of His adversary.”¹⁵⁸ Although Wagner’s professed convictions of the two kingdoms undergo change throughout the eras, his convictions coincide with his eschatological views.

Kingdom of God. Upon joining the faculty of “the Fuller School of World Mission faculty in 1971,” Wagner began to question his dispensational convictions. Wagner states that his convictions concerning the kingdom of God changed upon studying George Ladd’s eschatological theology. Wager later affirms an eschatological theology that regards this age “between Jesus’s two comings” as engaged in a war between the “kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God.”¹⁵⁹ Wagner confides, “Where God’s will is being done on earth as it is in heaven, there you will find the kingdom of God.” Wagner’s years at Fuller were marked by Wagner “harboring a few doubts as to whether dispensationalism might really be as air-tight an explanation of God’s plan for the human race as C. I. Scofield and Clarence Larkin supposed it was.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 36. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 73.

¹⁵⁸ Wagner’s professed “paradigm shift” from dispensationalism to the post-millennial theological position brings him closer to the theology he here calls “well-intentioned, but as ill-directed.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 73.

¹⁵⁹ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!*, 97–100. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 64.

¹⁶⁰ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 199. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 65.

Theological education. Wagner describes his “paradigm shift from traditional theological education to equipping the saints” upon meeting Ralph Winter at Fuller during his enrollment in the late 1960s.¹⁶¹ Winter had designed and developed “a radical innovation in ministerial training called Theological Education by Extension (TEE).” TEE intended to serve pastors who “needed training” but “could not attend” the “traditional residential schools.” Retrospectively commenting on TEE, Wagner expresses the value of TEE and taking the curriculum “out to the students, holding classes in regional centers and adjusting the schedules to the needs of the students.”¹⁶²

Wagner affirms TEE in *The Protestant Movement in Bolivia* (1970), advocating that the uneducated “lay-leaders” who are serving in the church as lower-class pastors “need to receive first-class accredited training” that can be “accommodated to their levels of previous secular training.”¹⁶³ Wagner elucidates this notion further in *An Extension Primer* (1971), stating, “The task of the seminary is not to make leaders”; instead, “the calling of the seminary is to train the leaders that God has already made.”¹⁶⁴ Believing seminary training must be available to all, Wagner explains that no “possible alteration of the structure of the institution should be discounted” in the extension seminary.¹⁶⁵

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

In his 1967 article “Thieves of Mission,” Wagner emphasizes the role of training in the church, which he contends is “the assembly of individuals who have been

¹⁶¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 67. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 64.

¹⁶² Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 45. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 64.

¹⁶³ Wagner, *The Protestant Movement in Bolivia*, 213.

¹⁶⁴ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 7.

¹⁶⁵ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 30.

called out of the world, then bound together through regeneration by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶⁶ According to Wagner, in the church, “Christians are fed and grow spiritually,” then “in obedience to the Great Commission they move out into the world with the message of redemption which will rescue others from the world and in turn bring them into the fellowship of the church.” Wagner opposes the new missiological trend he sees in the mid-1960s that, he believes, “holds that Christ has redeemed the whole world, not only potentially but in fact.” It “involves all of mankind and is especially operative through history and the changing social structures.”

In “Reshaping Missions” (1967), the follow-up article to “Thieves of Mission,” Wagner continues his argument that “Christian social action must follow evangelism. This is an imperative,” for “both are necessary in a well rounded missionary effort.”¹⁶⁷ Engaging in “social action does not relieve us of the responsibility of preaching the gospel to every creature. It is a matter of priority: winning souls always comes first because the eternal destiny, not the temporal well-being of man.”¹⁶⁸

The most concise and clear definition and description of disciple-making and discipleship provided by Wagner come in his 1969 article “How the U+C+E has Grown.” Wagner discusses the command to fulfill the Great Commission, stating,

The fulfillment of the Great Commission involves much more than tract distribution, sermons in the open air, house-to-house visitation, and even “decisions for Christ.” God has commanded us to “make disciples” (Mt. 28:19). The more

¹⁶⁶ Wagner, “Thieves of Mission,” 19. According to Wagner, “the objective” in this trend is “not be to convert people to Christianity (this is ‘proselytism’) but to help people in their immediate need and thus to proclaim the lordship of Christ over the world.” Wagner ardently argues, “Social action is an essential function of the church, but it cannot take the place of soul winning and church expansion,” as the “ultimate objective” must be “the winning of souls for Jesus Christ.” (24). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 68.

¹⁶⁷ C. Peter Wagner, “Reshaping Missions,” *World Vision* (May 1967): 14–15. Wagner contends that “Christian social action should not be thought of as providing the entering wedge for the gospel.” However, Wagner clarifies that a “born-again believer who does not feel a burden for the social well-being of his neighbour comes under the judgment of Scripture.”

¹⁶⁸ Wagner, “Reshaping Missions,” 14. Wagner calls upon James, remarking, “Following the statement, ‘If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?’ James says, ‘Faith, if it hath not works, is dead’” (15).

disciples we make, the more completely we are fulfilling the Great Commission. The commandment itself includes a tangible way of measuring the success: “baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” In other words, the goal of our missionary effort is to increase the number of responsible members of the Body of Christ.¹⁶⁹

Wagner provides details on disciple-making, stating, “Preaching is a *presoteric* (before salvation) activity, baptizing is a *consoteric* (with salvation) activity, and teaching is a *postsoteric* (after salvation) activity. All are involved in the cyclic process of making disciples.”¹⁷⁰

Wagner clarifies the meaning of a disciple in *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, distinguishing between two “extreme” definitions. He expresses, “The overly-broad definition of disciple includes all those who might raise their hands in an evangelistic campaign, sign decision cards, or graduate from a confirmation class and take their first communion. None of these are accurate descriptions of disciple.”¹⁷¹ Then, Wagner remarks, “On the other extreme, two common definitions make the term disciple narrower than the New Testament does. The first is to equate disciples with the twelve.” A “more frequent overly narrow definition of disciple makes him a person who has reached a somewhat advanced form of the Christian life,” where “the ‘victorious life’ is stressed.” According to this definition, argues Wagner, “becoming a disciple is set forth as a challenge to Christians who attain a certain degree of victory or sanctification.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ C. Peter Wagner, “How the U+C+E Has Grown,” *Andean Outlook* 59, no. 1 (1969). In this editorial article, Wagner asserts that although missionaries work toward “directly accomplishing the goal of ‘making disciples’ through evangelism, church planting and Bible teaching,” others “have jobs that are no less important even though they may get less glory. A missionary children’s school staff, for example, relieves parents of the direct responsibility (and often frustration) of educating their own children, freeing them to be more effective in making disciples.”

¹⁷⁰ Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 22.

¹⁷¹ Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 22.

¹⁷² Wagner then discusses an “artificial distinction between evangelism and making disciples” that states that “evangelism is just getting people saved, but this does not fulfill the Great Commission which says, ‘make disciples.’ This means bringing the believers into the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Wagner disagrees with the distinction made, commenting, “This statement seems to imply that young, newborn Christians are not yet disciples; only those who have the ‘fullness of Christ’ qualify.” Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 23.

Wagner declares that there is “confusion of the teacher-disciple relationship of Paul and Timothy” due to the “more technical use of disciple in the New Testament.” Wagner cites three top “biblical scholars” who “are in agreement that *mathetes* does not describe a particularly advanced stage of Christian maturity but rather a basic relationship to Christ.”¹⁷³ Wagner blames “faulty exegesis” for the “confusion concerning this narrow definition” of disciple in the more technical use.¹⁷⁴ He continues,

Passages such as Luke 14 set forth certain conditions for discipleship, such as leaving father and mother, denying one’s own life, bearing his cross, and forsaking all he has (vv. 26-27. 33). It must be recognized, however, that these words were spoken to the multitude of interested people who were considering *becoming* disciples (v. 25).

After describing what a disciple is not, Wagner explains that “disciples and Christians are synonymous,” as “implied in Acts 11:26.” Therefore, a “disciple is a person who has been born again by the Spirit of God. He has confessed with his mouth the Lord Jesus and believed in his heart that God has raised Him from the dead (Ro 10:9). He is a new creature in Christ Jesus.”¹⁷⁵ Wagner restates that the “life of a disciple is characterized by continuing ‘steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers’ (Ac 2:42). In Antioch the disciples were called Christians, and we will find today that the most helpful definition will make the same equation.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Wagner cites three scholars who adhere to the more technical definition of disciple, stating, Pierson Parker says, “Disciple” is the most frequent and general term for believers in Christ (1962:S.V.). J. D. Douglas says, “The most common use of *mathetes* was in denoting the adherents of Jesus . . . , believers, those who confess Jesus as the Christ” (1962:312). Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary* adds, “The usage is from the very first characterized by the fact that, apart from a few exceptions, *mathetes* denotes the men who have attached themselves to Jesus as their Master” (1967:1V:44). (Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 23)

¹⁷⁴ Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 24.

¹⁷⁵ Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 23–24.

¹⁷⁶ Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 24.

Wagner underscores the importance of education in shaping disciples in the body of Christ in *An Extension Seminary Primer*. Wagner distinguishes Christian education from theological education, noting that Christian education “involves the edification of the entire body of Christ, the training of every Christian,” whereas “theological education is more specialized, referring primarily to the training of the leadership of the Church.”¹⁷⁷ Both categories of education involve training; however, theological training is necessarily concerned with “preparing those whom God has called to this ministry,” that is, those who will oversee the edification of the body through Christian education.

Wagner explains that TEE signified “a radical paradigm shift” in his discipleship philosophy. The philosophy of theological training by extension is based on New Testament teaching from Jesus and the disciples, for it is “God, and not man,” who “sovereignly distributes gifts of the ministry to the members of the body of Christ ‘as it hath pleased Him,’” as “is clear from I Corinthians 12.” Furthermore, extension seminary training is “person-centered,” for it focuses on asking “whom?” rather than “how?”¹⁷⁸

Wagner argues that

more important than higher and higher academic requirements should be spiritual and cultural standards. A man of God who is fully accepted by his peers as a leader, who has spiritual gifts which equip him for his task, and who leads his church forward in winning people to Christ and planting new churches, is the man who should be studying in our institutions regardless of his previous academic opportunities.¹⁷⁹

Such a person-centered philosophy allows “many who” would have “not been eligible for our seminaries, and therefore have been excluded from the possibility of ordination.” Seminary training must place “more emphasis” on “spiritual gifts” rather

¹⁷⁷ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 29.

¹⁷⁸ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 6.

¹⁷⁹ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 5.

than “academic attainment.”¹⁸⁰ Valuing highly the spiritual equipping of Christians in the knowledge and practice of spiritual gifts, Wagner warns, “Ignorance of spiritual gifts is a dangerous sin of omission for anyone involved in theological education.” He draws a direct parallel between a “deep hunger for more teaching concerning spiritual gifts” and spiritual success, as evidenced by how “the charismatic movement is enjoying so much success on a pandenominational level.”¹⁸¹

Wagner views evaluation as a critical aspect of theological education: “If we merely impart content to our students and do not take the time to know them, to understand them, and to live with them to the degree that we are able to evaluate them, we are not fully educating them.”¹⁸² An essential way of evaluating disciples is through discipleship. Wagner defines discipleship in *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* as “nothing more than a recycling phase of disciple-making. The function of the church involves bringing disciples together in fellowship for worship, mutual exhortation, and spiritual edification.”¹⁸³ Wagner clarifies that these “things are all good, and they glorify God. Disciples should spend much time worshipping God”; however, “this worship must never be in isolation from evangelistic outreach.” Corporate worship “should only be a meaningful pause in the continuous process of recycling evangelistic efforts.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 4.

¹⁸¹ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 26.

¹⁸² Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 39. Wagner discusses the “strange, but highly successful, method of ‘training in the streets’” based on “the apprenticeship system to train the ministry” employed by the Pentecostal churches in Chile. The training includes “seven rungs on the ladder up to the pastorate. Anyone can start, in fact all are expected to try the first rung. Any of the six rungs may break, sending the candidate back to the ranks.” The seven rungs of the ladder include (1) street preaching, (2) Sunday School class, (3) “preacher,” (4) new preaching point, (5) Christian worker, (6) pastor-deacon, and (7) pastor. The training provides real-life training and immediate feedback for evaluation of performance. Wagner argues that the extension theological education can benefit churches and leaders like the Chilean Pentecostals, as there is the “susceptibility” to “the entrance of some heresy” in these churches due to the “appalling lack of theological and even biblical content” in the “sermons preached” (66–68).

¹⁸³ Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 168.

¹⁸⁴ Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 169.

Church fellowship is designed to “understand what spiritual gifts are all about.”¹⁸⁵ Spiritual maturity is the development of one’s spiritual gifts. Wagner connects spiritual maturity with spiritual gifts. He argues, “Possessing a spiritual gift and recognizing it is only the first step. From there on, a Christian is responsible for developing it.” Wagner asserts that disciples are to heed Paul’s instruction to Timothy to “stir up the gift of God which is in thee” (2 Tim 1:6).¹⁸⁶ Wagner’s 1971 publication *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, states that the “mature Christian” will have “discovered” what spiritual gifts the Lord has bestowed.¹⁸⁷

Wagner declares, “Inward sanctification is seen outwardly by the fruit of the Spirit appearing in the life of the believer.”¹⁸⁸ Wagner differentiates spiritual fruit from spiritual gifts, declaring that “only certain members of the body of Christ are expected to have a particular gift, such as the gift of pastor for example, all members of the body are expected to have the fruit.” Wagner supposes that “there is a close relationship between a person’s sanctification and the spiritual fruit characteristic of his life.”¹⁸⁹ As a Christian grows in faith, spiritual fruit develops; “spiritual fruit is a *sine qua non* for an effective use of spiritual gifts.” Discipleship is the effective use of spiritual gifts. The ultimate purpose of discipleship is for believers to mature in their knowledge of their gifts in order to know the “will of God” and be effective “members” of a church body.

¹⁸⁵ Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 68.

¹⁸⁶ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 29. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 76.

¹⁸⁷ Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 92–93. Wagner writes, “God would not leave you in the dark about spiritual gifts,” citing 1 Corinthians 12:1. “You have a gift, and it is a shame if you are not using it. Some day, as the parable of the talents shows, God will hold you responsible for the gifts He has given you.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 76.

¹⁸⁸ Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 73.

¹⁸⁹ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 26. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 75.

Wagner argues in *An Extension Seminary* that a disciple is one who has met his or her spiritual need through reconciliation, being “purchased by Jesus Christ and called by God the Father.”¹⁹⁰ Wagner underscores the imperative commands of the church as described in 1 John 1—that disciples are exhorted to “have fellowship one with another . . . to love one another, to submit one to another, to help one another, to exhort one another, and to confess our sins one to another.” In emphasizing the commands of the church, Wagner stresses that the “corporate body[’s]” imagining the “entire life” of a disciple consists of an “intimate relationship with” others “who have made a decision for Christ.”

¹⁹⁰ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 18.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 25. Wagner's theological dispositions (1966–1971)

Systematic Theology	Beginning of Era	End of Era
<i>Doctrine of God</i>		
<i>Knowledge of God</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Omnipotence</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Spiritual Cosmos</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Temporal Spiritual Dualism
<i>Prayer</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Divine Interventional Mutability
<i>Doctrine of Scripture</i>		
<i>Revelation</i>	Frustrated by Epistemology	Frustrated by Epistemology
<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>	Phenomenological	Phenomenological
<i>Theological doctrine</i>	Emphasis of Doctrine	Emphasis of Doctrine
<i>Doctrine of Church</i>		
<i>Church and Society</i>	Separatist	Church Growth
<i>Great Commission</i>	Individual Discipleship	Church Growth
<i>Doctrine of Holy Spirit</i>		
<i>Pneumatology</i>	Cessationism	Open Cessationism
<i>Sanctification</i>	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification
<i>Doctrine of Christ</i>		
<i>Christology</i>	Incarnation-Theology	Incarnation-Theology
<i>Gospel</i>	Salvation of Individuals	Salvation of Individuals
<i>Doctrine of Last Things</i>		
<i>Kingdom of God</i>	Future Promise and Reality	Future Promise and Reality
<i>Eschatology</i>	Dispensationalism	Dispensationalism
Research Contribution		
<i>Philosophy of Discipleship</i>		
<i>Disciple</i>	Undefined	Decision for Christ with Church Membership
<i>Equipping of Disciples</i>	Teach Scripture for Scripture Distribution	Spiritual Gifts
<i>Disciple</i>	Undefined	Decision for Christ with Church Membership

Reading through the Church Growth Era (1972–1981)

Although the church growth era ends in 1981, Wagner delineates 1971–1982 as the “McGavran Era.”¹⁹¹ This era marks the beginning of Wagner’s career as a professor at Fuller, in which Wagner “came to understand how the gospel and all of its ramifications needed to be adapted, or contextualized, according to the culture into which it was being introduced,” which was the North American church culture.¹⁹² Wagner committed to “contextualize” McGavran’s church growth praxes and axioms for the “American religious culture” after hearing a call from God.¹⁹³

Theological Dispositions

Wagner distinguishes the decade of the 1970s as the start of the “phenomenon” that is “functioning in the Body of Christ today” through the “sequence of innovations” brought by the Holy Spirit to establish “the new apostolic age” in which “the gift and office of intercessor” was a central tenet.¹⁹⁴ Wagner’s passion for evangelism combined his Church Growth axioms and methodologies, contributing extensively to the modern church culture.¹⁹⁵ Church Growth methodologies converged with New Apostolic theological convictions, introducing pragmatic structures to church life.

¹⁹¹ The following chapter demarcates 1972 as the beginning of the Fuller era to allow for a clean delineation of eras. To see the eras per Wagner’s retrospective analysis, see Wagner’s memoir *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 79. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 78.

¹⁹² Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 89. In preparation for his professorship at Fuller, Wagner states, “My year of studying at the School of World Mission, beginning in 1967, helped me initiate my change from a simple field missionary to a professional missiologist. Not only had I absorbed Church Growth from McGavran and TEE from Winter, but I had also begun to understand how anthropology intersects with the missionary vocation from Alan Tippett.” Wagner’s education laid the foundation for his ability to contextualize the praxes and axioms of church growth to North American churches.

¹⁹³ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 90. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 78–79.

¹⁹⁴ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 12, 46; see also Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 80.

¹⁹⁵ Although the Church Growth Movement is a principal area in Wagner’s theological convictions and methodologies, this research is concerned simply with discipleship in the CGM. Examination of the movement and the Homogenous Unit Principle are not within the bounds of this research; therefore, additional research may explore the movement in a more exhaustive fashion. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 80.

Church growth and pragmatism. Wagner reflects upon the negative reaction toward his attempts to “change the paradigms” of missiologists and missionaries with church growth principles. Wagner reflects, “Most missionaries were so bound to the theology that God was sovereign and that He would show them everything they needed to do that many of them felt like efforts to plan strategy were essentially ungodly. I was criticized for attempting to apply sociology to spiritual things.”¹⁹⁶

Following McGavran, Wagner avouched “fierce pragmatism” in “mission strategy”; McGavran would “ruthlessly haul” a strategy “before the bar of missiological judgment, asking the stinging question: has it produced?”¹⁹⁷ Through “fierce pragmatism,” McGavran and Wagner chose only methods that produced measurable results, thereby demonstrating that “pragmatism can be consecrated,” for “only a pragmatism that is Spirit-directed and Spirit-filled can be considered as a characteristic of Christian work.”

Homogenous Unit Principle and cultural discipleship. Wagner adopted the Homogenous Unit Principle (HUP) from McGavran, arguing that the “ethical justification for homogeneous churches exists in social-psychological, theological, and

¹⁹⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 103. Wagner indicates in his memoir that

one of the reasons behind much of the opposition to strategy planning was the pervasive aversion to measuring tangible results on the part of many church and missionary leaders. I can’t think of any more comfortable profession than that of missionaries and evangelists who can get away with the simple and pious-sounding phrase, “We leave the results up to God.” Think of this: It levels the playing field so much that it becomes impossible and even unspiritual to attempt to distinguish between excellent missionaries on the one hand and mediocre missionaries on the other. Some say, “Judge me on who I am, not what I do.” With this mindset, donors are encouraged to support missionaries simply because they faithfully serve God, since “numbers are not important.” Missionaries who raise the most funds are not necessarily the most efficient missionaries in accomplishing their task, but most frequently the ones who have magnetic personalities and who can tell the most tear-jerking stories with precision timing. (103)

Wagner acknowledged that one of the most remarkable “breakthroughs in missiological theory was that production should be accurately measured.” The traditional missiological principle specified

if souls are not saved and churches have not been multiplied, it only means that God’s timing has not yet arrived. McGavran would speak out against such nonsense every time he had the opportunity. He would make disturbing statements such as, “If our methods are not producing desired results, stop making excuses and discard the ineffective methods. Substitute methods that will work! Now!” (104)

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 80–81.

¹⁹⁷ Wagner, “Fierce Pragmatism in Missions,” 245.

biblical sources.”¹⁹⁸ The HUP correlates with Paul’s illustration of the body of Christ made up of intracommunicated homogeneous units within a heterogeneous interconnection of congregations.¹⁹⁹ Wagner’s transition to the emphasis on evangelizing homogeneous units rather than individually evangelizing and disciplining signifies his desire to focus on the transformation of society.²⁰⁰ The intracommunication of the church body fosters conversion as a result of evangelism. Wagner states,

When a person puts his or her trust in God through Jesus Christ, accepting him as Savior and Lord, and becomes incorporated into the fellowship of the church, conversion has taken place. When interpreted from the framework of the social sciences, evangelism is membership recruiting for the church, and conversion is the prospective member’s decision to join and commit himself or herself to the principles of the group or church.²⁰¹

In defense of the HUP for evangelism and discipleship, Wagner asserts that “homogeneous-unit churches” should “not be seen only as temporary expedients for the initial phases of evangelization,” as these churches “contribute to better self-understanding among members of diverse groups in a pluralistic society and thus enable them to lay the foundations of liberation upon which the reconciliation of equals can be built without paternalism or coercion.”²⁰² Moreover, Wagner argues that homogeneous-unit churches “should also be seen as ongoing institutions that please God and contribute

¹⁹⁸ Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 2. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 81.

¹⁹⁹ Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 155. Wagner contends that arguments in favor of the unity of the universal body of Christ must be seen in the context of this controversy. Paul believed that Gentiles could be Christians in the Gentile way, while Jews could and should be followers of the Messiah in the Jewish way. Though he frequently asserted that God’s people are all one in Christ, he was no more arguing for assimilation or forced integration than an ethnic theologian of liberation would argue for it today. (128)

²⁰⁰ Wagner remarks on the importance of “the social psychology of conversion in a group with high people-consciousness or group identity.” Any “individual action is frequently regarded as social treachery, and no individual is permitted to think independently of the group.” A cohesive “group decision, which is more than merely the sum of many individual decisions, is required in all important matters.” Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 21. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 80–81.

²⁰¹ Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 18. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 81.

²⁰² C. Peter Wagner, “How Ethical Is the Homogeneous Unit Principle?,” *Occasional Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (1978): 12.

to” discipleship in “the fulfillment of the commandment to ‘love your neighbor as your self.’ Because love builds brotherhood among people, love advocates homogeneous-unit churches.”²⁰³ Wagner’s axiom of evangelism seen in the HUP is evident in his shift from individual discipleship to a cultural discipleship paradigm.²⁰⁴

Biblical-theological system. In his 1973 article “Disneyland at Bangkok?”

Wagner asserts that Christians must have a “sensitivity to such essential components of salvation doctrine as the depravity of the heart of man, the need for personal regeneration by the Spirit, and the eschatological realities of eternal life and eternal damnation.”²⁰⁵

Wagner writes of the effects of sin in *Stop the World, I Want to Get On* (1974), stating, “God told Adam that the day he sinned he would die (Genesis 2:17). Adam sinned, and that day he died.” As a result of Adam’s sin, “the whole human race is described as lost in sin, and the Bible develops the story of how God took the initiative to save mankind from sin and death.”²⁰⁶ Wagner analyzes the events of the fall and illuminates that “Adam’s sin caused a third problem that some miss”—“materially he lost the Garden of Eden. Sin produced the possibility of poverty, exploitation, war, dehumanization, social injustice, slavery, pollution, and any other social problem of yesterday or today.” Wagner notes that the “final solution to man’s social and material problems” is “eschatological,

²⁰³ Wagner, “How Ethical Is the Homogeneous Unit Principle?,” 18.

²⁰⁴ Wagner’s axiom of evangelism seen in the HUP is discussed and examined in existing academic research. See Graham Houghton, “Caste and the Protestant Church: A Historical Perspective,” *Transformation* 2, no. 2 (April 1985): 30–33; Wayne McClintock, “Sociological Critique of the Homogeneous Unit Principle,” *International Review of Mission* 77, no. 305 (1988): 107–16; Walther A. Olsen, “The Homogeneous Unit Principle Revisited: Part On,” *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 8, no. 2 (1997): 3–18; Olsen, “The Homogeneous Unit Principle Revisited Part Two: A Biblical Validation,” *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 8, no. 3 (1997): 3–31; Skip Bell, “What Is Wrong with the Homogeneous Unit Principle? The HUP in the 21st Century Church,” *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 14, no. 3 (2003): 3–17; Mark Pickett, “Caste-Sensitive Church Planting: Revisiting the Homogeneous Unit Principle,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 32, no. 3 (2015): 177–87.

²⁰⁵ C. Peter Wagner, “Disneyland at Bangkok?,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1973): 131.

²⁰⁶ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 16.

meaning at the end of human history as we know it.”²⁰⁷ Therefore, Wagner clarifies, “God by His grace allows and encourages partial solutions to the problems and He urges man to do the best he can in living the most human life possible.” Wagner terms this “aspect of man’s responsibility” the “cultural mandate.”

Expressing the solution to the physical problem, Wagner states, “Jesus set the example” for how “to relieve physical suffering. He healed the lepers and gave sight to the blind. His disciples had power to heal and to cast out demons, and they used it. We are to do likewise as the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us.”²⁰⁸ Christians are to “do likewise” and assuage the suffering of the world. In addition, Wagner argues that the “worst consequence of Adam’s sin was spiritual death, the separation of man from God”; hence, Christians must care for the world’s spiritual needs by preaching the gospel. Wagner states, “God will save many of those people lost in the fourth world, but He will do it only through men and women who preach to them the gospel of Jesus Christ.”²⁰⁹ Wagner terms this “aspect of man’s responsibility” the “evangelistic mandate.”²¹⁰ The

²⁰⁷ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 18. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 85.

²⁰⁸ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 19.

²⁰⁹ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 20. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 85.

²¹⁰ Wagner continues to discuss the essential actions of Christians, stating,

God wants us to do what we can to improve man’s material, social, and physical condition. This is not optional; it is required of all those who wish to obey God. But let’s be realistic. All that we do under the cultural mandate is penultimate, not ultimate. It is stopgap, not total.

On the other hand, God offers here and now a total solution to man’s spiritual lostness. As a matter of fact, whereas material, social, and physical problems will be totally solved only in the life to come, spiritual problems can be totally solved only in this life. Once a man dies, his spiritual destiny has been sealed forever (Heb. 9:27). This is an ultimate, not a penultimate issue. In other words, if you goof on the cultural mandate, it is too bad, but salvation from material, social, and physical lostness will come in the future if the ultimate problem is cared for. But if you goof on the evangelistic mandate, you’ve blown it forever as far as that person is concerned. He will never have fellowship with God, and therefore he will never enjoy any of the blessings of the New Jerusalem. (Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 26)

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 85.

evangelistic mandate is effective through Jesus, who brought “reconciliation to God” by having “died on the cross.”²¹¹

Phenomenological theology. In *Church Growth: State of the Art* (1986), Wagner reflects on this era, stating, “I reexamined biblical evidence and found that New Testament church growth generally followed homogeneous unit lines.” However, since “I used a phenomenologically-informed hermeneutical methodology, my conclusions were unacceptable to the traditionalists.”²¹²

Wagner asserts that the “Church Growth Movement desires simultaneously to be faithful to the Word of God and consistent with the best findings of contemporary social and behavioral sciences.” Applying a phenomenological lens, Wagner contends

that hermeneutically one who seeks to understand the Bible must distinguish broadly between descriptive and normative passages of Scripture. Not everything that the text describes does it command. Consequently, when we look at the sociological dynamics of the spread of early Christianity from the biblical text illuminated by social-scientific data, we try not to claim more from it than is hermeneutically permissible.²¹³

Wagner argues that Christians should not “use the Bible as if the whole truth were only found in the past. The Spirit of truth, who will come to guide us into all the truth (cf. John 16:13), will teach us how to avoid a repetitive concept of tradition of the early Christians and to expect something new, something great to happen.”²¹⁴

Diminishing doctrine. Systematic theology and the Reformation became topics of perturbation for Wagner throughout this era and the remainder of his theological

²¹¹ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 20. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 93.

²¹² C. Peter Wagner, “The Church Growth Movement after Thirty Years,” in *Church Growth: State of the Art*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 34. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 93–94.

²¹³ C. Peter Wagner, “Comments on: The Social Status of Early Christianity,” *Gospel in Context* 2, no. 1 (1979): 25.

²¹⁴ Wagner, “Comments On,” 25.

career.²¹⁵ In *What Are We Missing?* (1978), Wagner declares that churches with a heavier emphasis on theology and doctrine “recognize the obvious fact that Pentecostal churches are growing a good deal more rapidly” and become “even more frustrated” by the “underbrush” of trying to “put what is happening in theological terms.”²¹⁶ Wagner contends that rather than “saying, ‘What can we do to clear the underbrush in our churches so that the Holy Spirit can work?’” the theologically heavy, non-Pentecostal churches “often begin to rationalize their own fruitless activities theologically.”²¹⁷ Moreover, Wagner’s research led him to “five major reasons why Pentecostal churches are growing there at an unprecedented rate. Significantly, not one of the five is based on Pentecostal *doctrine*.”²¹⁸

In his 1977 article “The Pathology of Church Growth,” Wagner argues that one of the “church diseases” for which he has found a cure is “koinonitis.” Koinonitis is when koinonia, “Christian fellowship,” is “overdone,” resulting in “fellowship inflammation: too much of a good thing.”²¹⁹ Wagner continues, “Koinonitis starts with a heavy

²¹⁵ Wagner reduced the emphasis on doctrine and systematic theology as a principal authority in the New Apostolic Reformation. Wagner expresses,

Apostolic leaders are not theological illiterates. Nevertheless, they have little or no desire to traverse many of the traditional pathways laid down by professional academic theologians. A cursory glance at the titles of the articles in scholarly theological journals would be enough to keep most visionary, activist apostolic leaders at arm’s length. Their evaluation of the theological articles wouldn’t be based on whether they are right or wrong nearly as much as whether they are relevant to any conceivable aspect of practical ministry.

I do not include any required courses in the Wagner Leadership Institute curriculum. For example, I have never offered a course in systematic theology simply because there would be virtually no demand for it among our in-service, apostolically oriented student body. This, I well know, would strike the traditional theological education establishment as unthinkable. How could we possibly award diplomas to students who had not subjected themselves to the discipline of scholarly theology? In old-wineskin schools, systematic theology is not optional; it is required for graduation. (Wagner, *Changing Church*, 145)

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 90.

²¹⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *What Are We Missing?* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1978), 31.

²¹⁷ Wagner, *What Are We Missing?*, 32.

²¹⁸ Wagner clarifies, “By this, I mean to imply that any Protestant church, without deviating from its own doctrinal distinctive, could follow the lead of the Pentecostals and perhaps increase its effectiveness.” Wagner, “Why Does Revival Come Only to Some?,” 3–6.

²¹⁹ C. Peter Wagner, “The Pathology of Church Growth,” *Theology, News and Notes* (October 1977): 6.

emphasis on love and relationships in the body of Christ” and “carries with it a high degree of piety, opening what might be called a ‘sanctification gap.’ The behavior patterns of the spiritually elite within the church are so distinct from those of new Christians (if there are any) that the newcomers feel out of place.” In his 1979 article “Is Your Church Too Cozy?” Wagner explains that “Reformed churches, by their background have a higher group consciousness than others,” which manifests in “more of a tendency toward koinonitis than” in less theologically heavy churches.²²⁰

Wagner writes of the need for a “moratorium” on “counter-productive missionaries and missionary work,” the former of which should “go home.”²²¹ Wagner identifies two types of missionaries who should go home. The first type is the “cultural chauvinists,” who identify “Christianity with their own culture.” They “have a creator complex, striving to make others over in their own image.”²²² Often, these missionaries possess “the idea that literacy is next to godliness” and, therefore, “print vernacular translations of the Bible and other Christian literature” into an “oral tradition” culture.²²³ The second type of missionary who should be “reeducated” or go home is the “theological imperialists,” who “feel that the theological and ethical categories they

²²⁰ C. Peter Wagner, “Is Your Church Too Cozy?,” *Eternity* (May 1979): 20.

²²¹ C. Peter Wagner, “Missionary, Go Home!,” *Moody Monthly* (March 1975): 61.

²²² Wagner, “Missionary, Go Home!,” 62. Wagner states that the cultural chauvinists “go out not only to evangelize but also to civilize. They esteem as spiritual only the national believers most like the Christians at home.”

²²³ C. Peter Wagner, “Color the Moratorium Gray,” *The Other Side* (November–December 1975): 50. Wagner states,

A further, more subtle form of cultural chauvinism is the idea that literacy is next to godliness. The compulsion of some missionaries to print vernacular translations of the Bible and other Christian literature has recently been questioned by educational psychologist Ted Ward and missionary anthropologist Charles Kraft. They suggest that rather than introducing the print medium into an oral tradition, it might be more effective at the beginning to “jump right over the Guttenburg [sic] era” and go directly to audio media such as cassette tapes. This is still a radical suggestion to many missionaries who are bound to their own cultural forms. But after all, the Bible says that “faith cometh by hearing” and not necessarily by reading.

learned in Bible school or seminary constitute the only biblical theology.”²²⁴ Wagner states that the lack of the “contextualization of theology” in “ethical and theological imperialism” is leading to a “new generation of third world Christian leaders” who are “no longer satisfied with translations of Calvin, Barth, Tillich, and Henry. They are looking for new styles of handling Christian truth.”²²⁵

Looking to the 1980s, Wagner writes in the 1979 article “The Decade Ahead” that “new knowledge” will lead to more effective missionary strategies than historic evangelical missions due to “the widening recognition of the inadequacy of traditional western theology.”²²⁶ The “more holistic concept of mission will be developed which stresses the importance and interrelationship of both the evangelistic and cultural mandates without confusing the two.” In the 1980 article “The Homogenous Unit Principal [sic] as a Missiological Tool,” Wagner dissociates his church growth praxes and axioms from a particular theological tradition, professing that the new knowledge fits “into virtually any systematic theological tradition.”²²⁷ The church growth strategies have “intentionally been kept as atheological as possible” to ensure they are “evangelical.”

²²⁴ Wagner, “Missionary, Go Home!,” 62. Wagner understands that theological imperialism may be “a strong term, but intentionally so.” He believes that “a strong challenge to this kind of parochial thinking is coming across loud and clear from many sources. The ‘contextualization of theology’ is now a heavy missionary issue worldwide, and it will be coming too fast for many evangelicals.”

²²⁵ Wagner, “Color the Moratorium Gray,” 51. Wagner continues, “A theology of the atonement, for example, which does not stress power over evil spirits makes little sense to Christians in Irian Jaya. And a social ethic that does not start with the exploitation of oppressed peoples will not be acceptable to Latin American thinkers. The issue of monogamy as the only acceptable Christian marriage patten is high on the agendas for African ethicists.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 91.

²²⁶ C. Peter Wagner, “The Decade Ahead,” *World Vision* 23, no. 2 (1979): 8. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 91.

²²⁷ Wagner avers, “The idea that Western systematic theology is valid for all peoples can no longer be maintained. Each people group needs the freedom to follow the leading of The Holy Spirit and contextualize biblical theology in its own way. Each non-Western people group, from within, needs to decide which elements of Western or any other theology are relevant and which need revision.” Wagner asserts that “the HUP argues strenuously for Christian Liberty. It welcomes the advent of Black theology and Asian theology and Latin American theology and African theology.” C. Peter Wagner, “The Homogeneous Unit Principal as a Missiological Tool,” *Church Growth Bulletin* 2, no. 17 (1980): 19. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 91–92.

Therefore, “church growth cannot be labeled as Reformed or Wesleyan or Lutheran or Calvinistic or Pietistic or Pelagian or Arminian.”²²⁸

Continuation of the miraculous gifts. Examining the instruction on spiritual gifts in seminary, Wagner expresses, “Many Christian leaders seemed to be spooked by reports of miraculous healings and prophecies.” Upon questioning the gifts, Wagner recalls being told to “read a book by Benjamin Warfield which argued that many of the biblical gifts were phased out after the church got rolling.”²²⁹

Wagner’s research into the Pentecostal church growth in Latin America culminates in *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming* in 1973, which Wagner writes as an apologetic for the continuation of the miraculous gifts, particularly tongues, prophecy, healing, and the powerful encounters of the kingdom of God in demonic deliverance.²³⁰ Wagner traces the Pentecostal church in Latin America to Methodist revivals in the early 1900s that were “teaching the doctrines of raising of hands, the baptism of fire, miracles of faith healing, visions, the gift of tongues, prophecies,” and “falling down under the power of the Holy Spirit.”²³¹

Continuation of spiritual gifts. In the 1977 publication *Our Corinthian Contemporaries*, Wagner asks, “Are spiritual gifts for today?” He then answers,

Some Bible teachers (perhaps in reaction against excesses in Pentecostalism or the charismatic movement) have argued that all, or at least some, of the New Testament spiritual gifts were given to the church only for use during the Apostolic Age, and

²²⁸ Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, 83. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 91.

²²⁹ Wagner states, “I now realize that many in the 1950s were still debating whether Pentecostals were true Christians. I recall reading a book on false cults which contained chapters on Christian Science, Mormonism, Pentecostalism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and so forth.” Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 70.

²³⁰ Wagner, *Look Out!*

²³¹ Wagner, *Look Out!*, 17–18.

that they were not intended to continue after this. The footnote in a well-known study Bible, for example, says, “Tongues and the sign gifts are to cease. . . .”²³²

Addressing the “conclusion” that “gifts are to cease,” Wagner states,

I have not been able to find adequate Biblical or historical evidence which would warrant such a conclusion. I don’t deny that the Bible contains some culture-bound truth (such as the matter of women wearing veils as we saw in the last chapter), but spiritual gifts in the church do not fall into that category. As a matter of fact, if a church does not possess and use spiritual gifts, it is sure to wither and die.²³³

Wagner supports his conclusion that the gifts continue in *Your Church Can Grow*, stating, “God’s will is clear. The same Holy Spirit who filled the believers and set them preaching the gospel on Pentecost is here and available today.”²³⁴

Wagner devotes a chapter in *Stop the World, I Want to Get On* (1974) to defining the “doctrine of spiritual gifts” in order to allow Christians to “know exactly where each one of us fits in” and how the gifts should be used.²³⁵ Wagner propounds that there are “three kinds of faith mentioned in the New Testament”: (1) *saving faith*, citing Ephesians 2:8; (2) *faith a fruit of the Spirit*, citing Galatians 5:22; and (3) *the gift of faith*, citing 1 Corinthians 12:9 and 1 Corinthians 13:2.²³⁶

Wagner believes that the doctrine of spiritual gifts is a vital element of theological education. In his 1974 article “Seminaries Ought to Be Asking Who as Well

²³² Wagner, *Our Corinthian Contemporaries*, 87. Wagner previously published this work under the title *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*. See Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 87–88. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 76.

²³³ Wagner, *Our Corinthian Contemporaries*, 88. Wagner provides the same answer to the question in the seventh installment of articles concerning the 1 Corinthian church. See Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: What about Tongues Speaking?,” 26. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 76.

²³⁴ Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 170.

²³⁵ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, chap. “Every Christian Is NOT a Missionary.”

²³⁶ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 36. Wagner elucidates, *Faith as fruit of the Spirit*. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith. . . .” (Gal. 5:22). Every Christian’s life should be characterized by a constant attitude of faith, produced by the presence of the Holy Spirit. This kind of faith is what I call a role, something expected of every Christian. In that sense it is different from a gift. The gift of faith (1 Cor. 12:9). As in the case of other gifts, some Christians have a special ability to exercise faith that other Christians don’t have. In one place it is described as “faith . . . to remove mountains” (1 Cor. 13:2). George Mueller of Bristol is a well-known model of someone with this gift.

as How,” Wagner professes that “God has given us spiritual potential in our churches sufficient to turn America upside down for Christ,” and it requires “a reshuffling of priorities in theological education.” Wagner discusses the need to train with spiritual gifts through TEE in this era. He states, “The recent awakening of Christian consciousness on the biblical doctrine of spiritual gifts has prepared many for new ideas on this score.”²³⁷

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

Wagner continues his commitment to the Great Commission in this era, expressing, “Our task is to preach Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit in such a way that multitudes of men and women will commit their lives to Jesus as Lord, and serve Him faithfully in the fellowship of the church.”²³⁸ Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship underwent a significant change during the McGavran era, with this commitment in mind.²³⁹ The most notable publication discussing the change in Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship is *Stop the World, I Want to Get On* (1974) in which Wagner seeks to transform how church leaders understand evangelism and discipleship.²⁴⁰ Wagner explains that some “have confused ‘making disciples’ with ‘discipleship.’ *Making disciples* is the right goal of evangelism and missions according to the Great

²³⁷ C. Peter Wagner, “Seminaries Ought to Be Asking Who as Well as How,” *Theological Education* (Summer 1974): 270. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 89.

²³⁸ C. Peter Wagner, “Our Half of the Inning?,” *Theology, News, and Notes* (1973): 5. Wagner writes “Our Half of the Inning?” as a review of Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

²³⁹ Wagner states, “During what I am calling ‘The McGavran Era,’ five of these paradigm shifts stand out in my mind as worthy of mention: (1) employing strategy for church growth, (2) pragmatism and the use of numbers, (3) making disciples as the definition of evangelism, (4) third world missions, and (5) the people approach to world evangelization, or the ‘homogeneous unit principle.’” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 102.

²⁴⁰ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 106. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 95.

Commission. Once disciples are made, they then begin the lifetime road of *discipleship*.²⁴¹ A disciple is one “whose name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”²⁴²

Wagner’s bifurcation of making a disciple and discipleship is seen in his detachment of discipleship and sanctification. Wagner asserts,

Helping people along the road is another important Christian ministry, an essential function of the body, but one step past the goal of the Great Commission. Even the participle “teaching” in the Great Commission itself does not refer to the details of the road of discipleship, as some might think. The thing taught in that verse is “to observe,” not “all things I have commanded you.” Part of becoming a disciple is to be disposed to obey Jesus. The details come later as the new disciple travels down the road of discipleship.²⁴³

Wagner does not elaborate on or provide “the details” of sanctification in the Christian life. Wagner’s most explicit definition of sanctification is personal “growth in grace, Christian maturity, [a] walk with the Lord, or whatever you might call it.”²⁴⁴ In his 1979 article “What Good Is the Church Growth Movement?” Wagner states that healthy churches engage in “worship, prayer, study of God’s Word, fellowship, caring, confession of sin, purity of thought, soundness of doctrine, social concern—these and many other Christian qualities are signs of good health in churches.”²⁴⁵

Throughout the era, Wagner contends that effective discipleship should provide demonstrable and measurable results. In *Your Church Can Grow* (1976), Wagner

²⁴¹ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 79. Wagner continues,

What does a disciple look like? How can you tell one when you see him? Acts 2 gives us a helpful indication. On the day of Pentecost three thousand disciples were made. The reason we know they were disciples and not just people who made “decisions” is that when Luke looked back in preparation for writing the book of Acts, they were “continuing steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellow-ship and breaking of bread and prayers” (Acts 2:42). Out-siders can recognize disciples because “they have love one for another” (John 13:35). (79–80)

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 123.

²⁴² Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 79. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 95.

²⁴³ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 80. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 123.

²⁴⁴ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 32.

²⁴⁵ C. Peter Wagner, “What Good Is the Church Growth Movement?,” *Vineliflife* 1, no. 1 (1979): 43.

contends that “the cross was never an end in itself. It was the means toward another end. Jesus died as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He was sacrificed to pay the price of human sins, and He was eminently successful in doing so.” Therefore, the sacrificial “blood of Jesus Christ has been sufficient to cleanse us from all sin (see 1 John 1:7). People who repent of their sins and believe in the power of Jesus’ blood to forgive their sins are saved. They become ‘new creatures in Christ’ (see 2 Cor. 5:17)” and are “called ‘disciples.’ Disciples are added to the church of Jesus Christ.”²⁴⁶ Wagner continues,

So, whether one likes to think of Jesus as “success-oriented” or not, His stated goal of making disciples was a tremendous success for at least 30 years after he planted the first church and went to heaven. Any missionary or evangelist I know would like to be able to report success in similar terms. Not only did Jesus die on the cross for church growth and command church growth, but He also set an example for church growth through His ministry.²⁴⁷

In his commitment to disciple-making, Wagner states that missions “must keep the fourth world as their objective.”²⁴⁸ Moreover, the “intermediate objectives” evident in the “good things that missionaries and churchmen do can be very useful in accomplishing the ultimate objective of making disciples.”²⁴⁹ The church must do “all possible to transmit the vision for the lost to the emerging church. From the very beginning, teach the new-born babes in Christ that part of their commitment to the Lord is to use their gifts

²⁴⁶ Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 165.

²⁴⁷ Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 169.

²⁴⁸ C. Peter Wagner, “The Danger of a Truncated Missionary Goal,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1973): 95. Wagner elucidates the missiological term “fourth world,” stating, “The ‘fourth world’ embraces all those peoples who, regardless of where they may be located geographically, have yet to come to Christ. In that sense, the fourth world is the top-priority objective of missions.” C. Peter Wagner, “Mission and Church in Four Worlds,” in *Church/Mission Tensions Today*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 217.

²⁴⁹ Wagner elucidates,

Some common intermediate missionary objectives include a larger number of workers, an increased budget, more activity in sending and receiving churches, excellence in ministerial training, spiritual revival, culturally-relevant liturgy and music, translation of the Scriptures, distribution of certain quantities of Christian literature, wide dissemination of the gospel message through the mass media, the manifestation of social concern, and so on. (Wagner, “The Danger of a Truncated Missionary Goal,” 94–95)

in the effective fulfillment of the great commission.”²⁵⁰ Wagner contends, “Pentecost was no flash in the pan”; missional disciple-making was foundational to the New Testament church.²⁵¹ “Jesus had taught church growth principles well enough so that” the “Jerusalem church” knew “they shouldn’t separate evangelism and follow-up. While they nurture new believers and built their faith, they simultaneously kept evangelizing. The result was that new believers joined the church every day.”²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Wagner, “The Danger of a Truncated Missionary Goal,” 99.

²⁵¹ Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 166.

²⁵² Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 167.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 26. Wagner's theological dispositions (1972–1981)

Systematic Theology	Beginning of Era	End of Era
<i>Doctrine of God</i>		
<i>Knowledge of God</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Omnipotence</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Divine Volitional Limitation
<i>Spiritual Cosmos</i>	Temporal Spiritual Dualism	Temporal Spiritual Dualism
<i>Prayer</i>	Divine Interventional Mutability	Divine Interventional Mutability
<i>Doctrine of Scripture</i>		
<i>Revelation</i>	Frustrated by Epistemology	Frustrated by Epistemology
<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>	Phenomenological	Phenomenological
<i>Theological doctrine</i>	Emphasis of Doctrine	Deemphasis of Doctrine
<i>Doctrine of Church</i>		
<i>Church and Society</i>	Church Growth	Church Growth
<i>Great Commission</i>	Church Growth	Church Growth
<i>Doctrine of Holy Spirit</i>		
<i>Pneumatology</i>	Open Cessationism	Open Cessationism
<i>Sanctification</i>	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification
<i>Doctrine of Christ</i>		
<i>Christology</i>	Incarnation-Theology	Incarnation-Theology
<i>Gospel</i>	Salvation of Individuals	Salvation of Individuals
<i>Doctrine of Last Things</i>		
<i>Kingdom of God</i>	Future Promise and Reality	Future Promise and Reality
<i>Eschatology</i>	Dispensationalism	Dispensationalism
Research Contribution		
<i>Philosophy of Discipleship</i>		
<i>Disciple</i>	Decision for Christ with Church Membership	New Creature in Christ with Church Membership
<i>Equipping of Disciples</i>	Spiritual Gifts	Spiritual Gifts
<i>Educational Framework</i>	Theological Education by Extension	In-Service and Pre-Service Education

CHAPTER 5

C. PETER WAGNER’S DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION AND PHILOSOPHY OF DISCIPLESHIP (1982–2016)

John Calvin, echoing Augustine, charges Christians to understand rightly the “object of the teaching of the law: to join man by holiness of life to his God, and, as Moses elsewhere says, to make him cleave to God [cf. Deut. 11:22 or 30:20].”

[For] our soul should be entirely
filled with the love of God.
From this will flow directly
the love of neighbor.

This is what the apostle shows
when he writes that “the aim of the
law is love from a pure conscience
and a faith unfeigned” [1 Tim. 1:5 p.].¹

As Calvin urges, this chapter continues the “reading for receptivity” of Wagner’s theological dispositions from 1982 to 2016, resuming from the previous chapter’s end in 1981. The “detailing of Wagner’s theological convictions is divided into chronological periods encapsulating Wagner’s theological convictions of the era. Each subsequent era is further” examined.²

Reading through the Wimber Era (1982–1990)

The 1980s were considerably significant in developing and reinforcing Wagner’s theology. The “experimental course” at Fuller—MC510: Signs, Wonders, and

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 2.8.51, Logos Bible Software.

² Evan Phillip Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism on C. Peter Wagner’s Philosophy of Discipleship” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 23.

Church Growth—occurred in the former half of this era and proved influential in Wagner’s later theological convictions.³ Extant academic literature has been written on this course and its consequent effects on Christianity.

Theological Dispositions

Wagner reflects on this era, “During the early 1980s, I was trying to work my way through the transition from a cessationist to an advocate and spokesperson of the Third Wave, primarily under the influence of John Wimber.”⁴ Wagner’s partnership with Wimber enabled Wagner to engage in the “experimentation” of signs and wonders, which was “a radical departure” from “anything that had ever happened in the history of Fuller Seminary.”⁵ As a result of MC510, Wagner firmly and vocally embraced supernatural signs and wonders.

Wagner designates the commencement of the “Third Wave” movement in the 1980s; a movement that he named and was an important leader.⁶ Wagner states that “the term *third wave*” is meant to describe a third move of the Spirit, “similar to the

³ For more information on the course, see the “MC510 Signs and Wonders Collection” at Fuller Theological Seminary. Fuller Seminary Archives and Special Collections, Collection 0182: MC510 Signs and Wonders Collection, sec. “Abstract,” 2019, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, <https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/findingaids/156/>. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 98–99.

⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 122. Wagner reports on the three waves of the Holy Spirit as follows:

Among the many things that God is doing in the world today is using His people as instruments for power evangelism. I happen to believe that through it the Holy Spirit is saying something extremely important to the churches. Many who have an ear to hear are learning to participate in this work of the Spirit through the first wave of the Pentecostal movement and through the second wave of the charismatic movement Others are responding to the call of the Spirit through the third wave.

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 99–100.

⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 125. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 99.

⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1988), 108. In *Changing Church*, Wagner reflects on the Third Wave movement, recalling that he was considered a leader due to his involvement with MC510, he led a “charismatically-oriented adult Sunday School class in Lake Avenue Congregational Church,” and he was “a chief spokesperson” for the movement. C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004), 43. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 99.

Pentecostal movement (first wave) and charismatic movement (second wave)” but with “some fairly important differences. It is composed largely of evangelical Christians who,” although similar to

the first two waves, have chosen not to be identified with either. The desire of those in the third wave is to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in healing the sick, casting out demons, receiving prophecies, and participating in other charismatic-type manifestations without disturbing the current philosophy of ministry governing their congregations.⁷

Incarnation-theology. In the 1983 article “The Power of God and Your Power,” Wagner writes extensively on incarnation-theology. He concludes that “Jesus was unequal with God not because He gave up His divinity, but because He took on humanity,” giving him two natures.⁸ Jesus “agreed to become obedient to the Father for the duration of the incarnation.” Wagner underscores this point: “Understanding the nature of Jesus’ obedience to the Father is crucial to understanding how the power which operated through Jesus also can operate through us today.” This assertion forms the basis for Wagner’s affirmation of Christians’ performing supernatural signs and wonders.⁹ Just as Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit when he acted out of his humanity without using any of his deity, Christians can also rely on the Holy Spirit to perform signs and wonders.

⁷ Wagner designates five distinctives of Third Wave churches. C. Peter Wagner, “Third Wave,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 1141. For a fuller treatment of Wagner’s distinctives concerning Third Wave churches, see Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” chap. 3.

⁸ C. Peter Wagner, “The Power of God and Your Power,” *Christian Life* (July 1983): 41. Wagner explains why Jesus is called the second Adam:

The Bible calls Jesus the “second Adam” (see I Corinthians 15:45–47), What does this mean? It implies for one thing that the Jesus who walked on earth was created from scratch, as was Adam, and not from a previous human being. It is well known that Joseph was not Jesus’ physical father. That means that Jesus had no genetic relationship to Joseph. But there is no need to suppose that Jesus had a genetic relationship to Mary, either. In other words, God used Mary’s womb as an incubator for an embryo which came neither from Joseph’s sperm nor Mary’s egg. Jesus was a new Adam. (42)

⁹ Wagner, “The Power of God and Your Power,” 42. Wagner publishes a similar article in 1984, titled “God Empowered Jesus Christ as He Empowers us with the Same Holy Spirit: The ‘Two Natures’ of Christ Finally Understood,” stressing his convictions of the contemporary signs and wonders ministry of Christians. See C. Peter Wagner, “God Empowered Jesus Christ as He Empowers Us with the Same Holy Spirit: The ‘Two Natures’ of Christ Finally Understood,” *Charis Life* (1984): 3–8. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 110.

Jesus made a “covenant of obedience” with “the Father,” agreeing “voluntarily to suspend the use of his divine attributes while He was on earth; He agreed to obey the Father entirely.” Moreover, “There was a real possibility that Jesus could have sinned by violating the covenant.” If Jesus “had done so, the plan of salvation would have been finished and Satan would have been victorious.” Wagner shares the implications of his incarnation-theology: “Because none of the healings, miracles or deliverances that Jesus performed was done in His own power, He could tell His followers, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do because I go to My Father’ (John 14:12).”¹⁰

Biblical-theological system. Wagner’s biblical-theological system is well communicated during the era of the 1980s. Wagner contends in “God Wants Growth” (1989) God desires “church growth.”¹¹ Wagner maintains that “God created the human race to have fellowship with Himself,” which was broken when Adam and Eve sinned. According to Wagner, God is doing “whatever is necessary to restore the fellowship of alienated human beings with Himself.”¹² Wagner asserts the Bible explains, “God’s best plans for the human race” are “frustrated by human sin, rebellion and ineptitude.”

¹⁰ Wagner, “The Power of God and Your Power,” 44. Wagner further explicates the implications of Jesus’s humanity, stating,

[Jesus] learned obedience through the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). The more we meditate on this, the more we are able to see how closely Jesus identified with our finite human condition. When Jesus cast out demons, He entered directly into cosmic battle with the forces of the enemy. But the power He used to cast them out was not His own. (44)

Wagner articulates that Christians today have the same power of Jesus, affirming,

Those who have a strong healing ministry do what they discern the Father to be doing, just as Jesus did. The power that worked in Jesus for His miraculous ministry not only is related to the power available to us today; it is exactly the same. As we relate to God in prayer, faith and obedience we have abundant resources to go forth in Jesus’ name to preach everywhere “with signs following” as did the early disciples (Mark 16:20). (46)

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 111.

¹¹ C. Peter Wagner, “God Wants Growth,” *Pentecostal Minister* (Spring 1989): 6. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 111.

¹² Wagner, “God Wants Growth,” 7. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 111.

However, “the culmination of God’s plan of salvation” was realized in “sending” Jesus “to die on the cross” and pay “the price of eternal redemption for the entire human race.”¹³

Wagner grounds the evangelistic mandate and cultural mandate in Genesis. He contends, “The cultural mandate, which some refer to as Christian social responsibility, goes as far back as the Garden of Eden. After God created Adam and Eve, He said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over’ all ‘the earth’ (Gen. 1:21).”¹⁴ Humanity, “made in the image of God,” is “held accountable for the well-being of God’s creation. In the New Testament we are told that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:39).” After fellowship between God and Adam broke, God “immediately began seeking Adam. The evangelistic mandate involves seeking and finding lost men and women, alienated from God by sin.”¹⁵ In *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!* (1988), Wagner expresses that while both “sickness and lostness will be with us until Jesus comes,” he (i.e., Wagner) will continue to seek to fulfill the evangelistic and cultural mandates.¹⁶ Wagner stresses that “all” who are a part of the Third Wave “are convinced that the power of God

¹³ Wagner, “God Wants Growth,” 6–8. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 111.

¹⁴ C. Peter Wagner, “On the Cutting Edge of Mission Strategy,” *Missions Tomorrow* (Spring–Summer 1989): 12.

¹⁵ Wagner, “On the Cutting Edge of Mission Strategy,” 12.

¹⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1988), 111. See also Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 51–52. Wagner retrospectively states that in the early part of this era, he “was intentionally neglecting the cultural mandate to transform society” due to his understanding of the evangelistic mandate as “primary.” His “paradigm shift” began upon his reading John Dawson’s *Taking Our Cities for God*, which “firmly placed the cultural mandate on the agenda of charismatically inclined evangelicals” by “expanding the plan of action from winning individuals to taking whole social units.” Wagner continues, “Taking action aimed at social transformation is no longer the exclusive domain of Social Gospel liberals. Those of us on the conservative end of the spectrum have now readjusted our priorities as well.” C Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2008), 50, 53–54.

described in the Gospels and Acts is in effect as God's kingdom is manifested around the world today."¹⁷

Phenomenological theology. Wagner argues that in classic theological interpretive frameworks, such as "Calvinism and Arminianism or covenant theology and dispensationalism," scholars "have usually agreed on a theological methodology which adopts philosophy as a cognate discipline"; however, the Church Growth movement determines "social science as a cognate discipline and emerges with a phenomenological methodology." Wagner explains the sociological aspect of church growth, citing Robert J. Schreiter: "While theology is by no means unilaterally determined by historical circumstances, we are coming to realize how great a role environmental influences do indeed play in how our theologies develop."¹⁸ Wagner declares that many "have decided to reject the simple phenomenological 'is' observation" in favor of "an 'ought' proposition derived from their understanding of Scripture."¹⁹

Levels of faith. Wagner supposes that "Christians are capable of functioning on four different levels of faith. Moving from one level to another brings us in touch with different degrees of God's power mediated through the Holy Spirit."²⁰ The first two levels of faith are what Wagner asserts he was taught through most of his "Christian experience": "*saving faith*" and "*sanctifying faith*." The additional levels of faith in which Wagner believes every Christian could function are "*possibility-thinking faith*" and

¹⁷ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!*, 19.

¹⁸ C. Peter Wagner, "The Church Growth Movement after Thirty Years," in *Church Growth: State of the Art*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 33; see also Robert J. Schreiter, "Culture, Society and Contextual Theologies," *Missiology: An International Review* 12, no. 3 (1984): 262. Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 114.

¹⁹ Wagner, "The Church Growth Movement after Thirty Years," 33–34." Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 113.

²⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1986), 32.

“fourth-dimension faith.”²¹ Wagner describes possibility-thinking faith as “Hebrews 11:1 faith,” where Christians set “bold goals” and “enjoy a measure of God’s power released through them to accomplish things otherwise impossible.” Wagner designates fourth-dimension faith as Christians who “expect and experience the power of God working through them in healing the sick and casting out of demons on a regular basis.”²² Wagner understands that he and those in the “third wave” believe that “ministry in the miraculous is a part of everyday Christian lifestyle.”²³ Spiritual warfare requires the Pentecostal “supernatural world view,” as only the fourth level of faith supplies the “spiritual power which can combat and defeat the activities of Satan head on.”²⁴

Supernatural signs and wonders. The previous eras saw the beginning of Wagner’s “shift” toward an acceptance of the supernatural works of the Spirit. This era contains his “completed” affirmation of continuationism and his “paradigm shift” away from cessationism.²⁵ Wagner depicts a night during the MC510 course when he received supernatural healing, stating, “By the time the course was over, I was no longer a spectator; I was a participant. And I have been a participant ever since.”²⁶ In the 1982 article “Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth,” Wagner venerates Pentecostalism, proposing, “Probably the greatest contribution that Pentecostalism has made to Christianity in general is restoring the reality of the miracle power of the New

²¹ Wagner was persuaded of the four levels of faith through the book *The Fourth Dimension* by Pentecostal pastor, Paul Yonggi Cho, in which Cho declares that Christians can operate with faith that “releases the power of God for supernatural signs and wonders.” Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, 33, 36, 38; see David (Paul) Yonggi Cho, *The Fourth Dimension: The Key to Putting Your Faith to Work for a Successful Life* (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1979).

²² Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, 33.

²³ Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, 36.

²⁴ Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, 36, 38.

²⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 118.

²⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 130. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 100.

Testament.”²⁷ Wagner professes that church growth brought about his understanding of Pentecostal theology, stating, “no matter where I look around the globe, I find that Pentecostal churches are leading the way in rates of increase.”²⁸ He discerns “one of the major purposes, if not the major one, of signs and wonders in the New Testament was to attract the attention of unbelievers and to draw them to Jesus Christ and to the kingdom of God.”²⁹

In *Church Growth* (1986), Wagner recalls the beginning of signs and wonders in church growth, stating, “Substantial strides have been made in the integration of evangelical theological constructs with social sciences”; a “modern engine for completing the task of world evangelization has fairly well been assembled. But fuel is needed to make it run. The fuel, as I see it, is the power of the Holy Spirit of which we read in the New Testament.”³⁰ Wagner’s affirmation of signs and wonders in evangelism leads him to endorse power encounters, which occur as a result of the spiritual dualism perceived between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God. Power encounters enable Christians to heal the sick, combat Satan’s evil plans, and implement the will of God.³¹ In

²⁷ C. Peter Wagner, “Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth,” *Pentecostal Minister* (Summer 1982): 7. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 101.

²⁸ Wagner believes in the continuation of the supernatural gifts, yet does not identify as a Pentecostal or Charismatic. Wagner, “Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth,” 4. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 101.

²⁹ Wagner asserts, “Pentecostals believe in miracle power,” and “soul-winning power”; they “are possibility thinkers—their faith level is high.” Wagner, “Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth,” 7. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 101.

³⁰ Wagner, “The Church Growth Movement after Thirty Years,” 36. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 102.

³¹ C. Peter Wagner, “Power Encounter in Christian Mission,” *Trinity World Forum* (Spring 1986): 3. In his 1986 article “Some Missiological Reasons for Considering the Issue of the Miraculous Works of the Holy Spirit at Fuller Seminary,” Wagner quotes Timothy Warner at the Trinity School of World Mission and Evangelism as explaining

that power and the power encounter is a crucial factor in today’s mission. As he [i.e., Warner] looks out on the unreached peoples he observes that “In many parts of the world . . . people are much more power-conscious than they are truth-conscious. We may preach a very logical and convincing message by Western standards, but our hearers remain unimpressed. Let them see Christian power displayed in relation to the spirit world in which they live with great fear, however, and they will ‘hear’ the message more clearly than our words alone could ever make it.” (C. Peter Wagner, “Some Missiological Reasons for Considering the Issue of the Miraculous Works of the Holy Spirit at Fuller

his 1989 article “God Wants Growth,” Wagner asserts that “the power of the Holy Spirit” operates “in church growth.” He grounds his assertion in Acts 1:8, which he contends is “the up-front outline for the whole book of Acts. It clearly says that when the disciples received the power Jesus promised, they would be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem, Judea and the uttermost parts of the earth.” Wagner concludes, “I believe what God had in mind in Acts was to show us the model He expects Christians to follow throughout the ages until Jesus returns.”

Power evangelism. Wagner reflects on power evangelism, stating, “I turned one of the most significant corners of my thinking when John Wimber came” with “signs and wonders.” Wagner reveals that what he observed from Wimber’s teaching “drove me back to the Scriptures and to the conclusion that spiritual power was the principal key to effective and sustained evangelism.”³²

In *Church Growth: State of the Art* (1986), Wagner explains that his experiences with Wimber pressed him to set “personal research goals for the decade of the eighties,” one of which was to “discover just how supernatural signs and wonders have related to the growth of the church in the past and how they are likely to influence the church in the future.”³³ Wagner concludes, “Power evangelism reflects the New Testament pattern used by Jesus when he sent out his twelve disciples for the first time.”

Seminary,” Fuller Theological Seminary Provost’s Commission on the Miraculous Works of the Holy Spirit, 1986, 5, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 33, Folder 4, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA)

³² Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 271. In *Church Growth: State of the Art*, which Wagner edited, John Wimber summarizes power evangelism, “While program evangelism is, to a limited degree, effectual, power evangelism has always been, and still is, the best means of church growth. In order to see God’s church multiply as it is doing in the rest of the world, the Western church must become involved in power evangelism. We must allow the Holy Spirit to empower us and lead us to those who are in need of him.” John Wimber, “Signs and Wonders in the Growth of the Church,” in Wagner, *Church Growth: State of the Art*, 224. Wimber accentuates the significance of power evangelism, stating, “When we encounter the lost, we must have power—the ability to see into men’s hearts and know their sin and their need, the ability to heal those who are ill, the ability to free those who have been bound by Satan” (224). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 104.

³³ Wagner, “The Church Growth Movement after Thirty Years,” 37. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 103.

Wagner posits that the disciples were “commanded” to “preach the message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Then [Christ] also commanded them to do the deeds: ‘Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.’”³⁴

Spiritual warfare. Wagner declares in *Engaging the Enemy: How to Fight and Defeat Territorial Spirits* (1991), “In 1970 we saw the first seeds of what is developing now into the greatest prayer movement in living memory. In 1980 a contemporary renewal of the prophetic ministry began.”³⁵ Wagner continues, “Now in 1990 spiritual warfare is moving to the forefront” of the Holy Spirit’s work in the church.

Wagner’s perspective of the power and influence of Satan in previous eras was that Satan is “merely a nuisance in our efforts at spreading the gospel.” In this era, Wagner encounters “Cindy Jacobs and others” who “awakened” him “to the reality of literal spiritual warfare. Far from being a mere nuisance, Satan is a formidable enemy who must and will be defeated in the several theaters of spiritual warfare.”³⁶ Wagner articulates that spiritual warfare is a continual task. Even though “Jesus defeated the enemy on the cross,” we “now live in an age of spiritual warfare until Jesus comes again and Satan’s defeat is total.”³⁷ Christians must remain vigilant and active as “Satan schemes to draw as many away from Christ as he possibly can.”

Wagner dedicates much of *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!* (1988) to Satan’s nature. Wagner proclaims that “God is the King of

³⁴ Wagner, “The Church Growth Movement after Thirty Years,” 37. Wagner asserts, “God’s central purpose is to seek and save the lost, and at times he does it with unusually great manifestations of power,” such as “dead people are literally being raised in the world today.” Wagner, *Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 112. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 104.

³⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Engaging the Enemy: How to Fight and Defeat Territorial Spirits* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1991), 3.

³⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 271. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 106.

³⁷ Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, 38.

kings and the Lord of lords. Satan is a usurper. He has taken what is not his own.”³⁸

Wagner continues,

When we realize that Satan has usurped so much control, it serves to dramatize all the more the significance of Jesus’ coming to earth, because Jesus brought with Him a new kingdom. This was nothing less than an invasion of hostile territory and a clash of mighty powers. Jesus’ kingdom has engaged Satan’s kingdom in battle. I see now that every healing of Jesus was an act of war, an embarrassment to Satan. Every demon cast out was an insult to Satan.³⁹

Therefore, Wagner determines that “Jesus came to earth” that ““He might destroy the works of the devil’ (1 John 3:8).”⁴⁰ Wagner’s paradigm shift into spiritual warfare led him to affirm “victorious eschatology,” which reasons that “whole previously unreached people groups could break Satan’s stranglehold and receive messengers of the gospel or the good news.”⁴¹ This notion “planted some doubts in” his “mind as to whether the world was supposed to get worse and worse in preparation for the rapture.”

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

In his 1982 article “Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism,” Wagner presents evangelism as “seeing people, by the power of the Holy Spirit, come to two simultaneous commitments: commitment to Christ and commitment to the body of Christ.” Christian “discipleship is faulty unless an individual has established bonds of relationship with other flesh and blood Christian people.” Therefore, “true evangelism results in church growth.”⁴² In the 1989 article “On the Cutting Edge of Mission Strategy,” Wagner reiterates the role of discipleship and the making of disciples that he

³⁸ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!*, 95.

³⁹ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!*, 95–96.

⁴⁰ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!*, 96.

⁴¹ C. Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and Change Your Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 199. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 106.

⁴² C. Peter Wagner, “Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism,” *Notebook for American Festival of Evangelism* (1982): 2.

discussed in previous eras, positing, “Empirically, a disciple is one who is known by the fruit. When true regeneration takes place, visible fruit inevitably follows.” Wagner furthers his definition, stating, “In order to be counted as a disciple, a person should be committed not only to Jesus Christ, but also to the body of Christ.”⁴³ Wagner argues that one of the “legitimate fruits of regeneration, one which is an excellent indicator is responsible church membership.”

In *On the Crest of the Wave* (1983), Wagner emphasizes “the greatest error in contemporary missionary strategy is the confusion of means and end in the understanding of the Great Commission.”⁴⁴ Wagner asserts the “Lord of the Great Commission” is “interested in *disciples*, not simply *decisions*.”⁴⁵ Wagner argues that effective the fulfillment of the Great Commission is to “make disciples” through evangelism; “it brings men and women into the kingdom of God, it moves them darkness to light, it liberates them from the power of Satan and enfolds them in the loving power of God.”⁴⁶ Wagner expresses the importance of understanding evangelism as “preaching the gospel is the preaching of the Kingdom of God.”⁴⁷

Wagner employs the “Engle Scale” for the “spiritual decision process” of disciple-making and discipleship, both of which Wagner summarizes in evangelism. The scale contains four phases of evangelism: (1) proclamation, (2) persuasion, (3) follow up, and (4) cultivation. The first two phases represent conviction (before regeneration), and the last two phases represent sanctification (after regeneration). Wagner avers that the

⁴³ Wagner, “On the Cutting Edge of Mission Strategy,” 13.

⁴⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave: Becoming a World Christian* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1983), 109. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 122.

⁴⁵ Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave*, 109.

⁴⁶ Wagner, “Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism,” 1. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 122.

⁴⁷ Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave*, 40. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 124.

Engle Scale of Discipleship encompasses intertwining spiritual gifts and evangelism, stating, “It is clear that one of the most important spiritual exercises for any church member is to discover, develop, and use their spiritual gifts. This is the true starting point for equipping a local church for evangelism.”⁴⁸

Wagner’s “paradigm shift” to discipling the nations came upon realizing that McGavran’s “radical idea” of “people movements to Christ” was “more effective” than Wagner’s previous paradigm “that each individual needed to make a commitment to Christ in order to be saved.”⁴⁹ The Church Growth praxes of the HUP helped solidify Wagner’s paradigm shift from “mono-cultural theology” to “cross-cultural theology.”⁵⁰

Wagner considers prayer an essential part of being a disciple. In the 1989 article “The Power of Corporate Prayer,” Wagner defines corporate prayer as “calling God’s people to unite with each other specifically for prayer at a certain time and place.”⁵¹ The “essence of prayer” is “a personal relationship with the Father”; therefore, “prayer must accompany any attempt we make at invoking divine power.” Wagner urges, “Nothing could be more foolish than attempting to break the power of territorial spirits if the time and the place and the methodology turn out to be human ideas rather than God’s.”⁵² Wagner demonstrates the need for prayer with spiritual warfare, citing, “Even Jesus found that this power by itself did not always bring people to faith. Many of his

⁴⁸ Wagner, “Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism,” 3. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 124.

⁴⁹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 67–68. See John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God: How to Break Spiritual Strongholds* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1989).

⁵⁰ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 68. Wagner describes his paradigm shift as learning that McGavran was right “to take Jesus’ words literally” to “aim for discipling whole nations” (176). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 107.

⁵¹ C. Peter Wagner, “The Power of Corporate Prayer,” *Ministries Today* (September–October 1989): 28. Wagner cites the “Prayer Breakthrough in Anaheim” in 1989 that “drew thousands to pray against the demonic powers that have been oppressing the Los Angeles area.”

⁵² C. Peter Wagner, “Territorial Spirits,” *Ministries Today* (November–December 1989): 47.

mighty works were done in Chorazin and Bethsaida, but the cities did not repent (see Mt. 11:20-24). Power certainly is important, but its importance must not be overestimated.”

Wagner writes in *Wrestling in the Dark* (1990) that he recognizes “that we ought to be training our students for the spiritual battle as we never have before. As we move into the ’90s, we must do so as warriors on the offensive.”⁵³ Wagner cites Matthew 11 for support: the “‘kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it’ (Matt. 11:12, NIV).” Wagner references Matthew 16:18—that “Jesus is building His Church and the gates of hell themselves are not powerful enough to stop its forward movement.” Training Christians in the church must acknowledge that if “the real battle for the advancement of the kingdom of God is spiritual, we need to learn as much as we can about the rules of the war, the battle plans, the nature of our enemy, the resources at our disposal and the best tactics for employing them.”⁵⁴

⁵³ C. Peter Wagner, introduction to *Wrestling with Dark Angels: Toward a Deeper Understanding of the Supernatural Forces in Spiritual Warfare*, ed. C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoyer (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 11.

⁵⁴ Wagner, introduction to *Wrestling with Dark Angels*, 10. Wagner continues, asserting that the necessity of the training is founded upon the truth of how “Jesus and the apostles describe our ministry as warfare. ‘We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wicked-ness in the heavenly places’ (Eph. 6:12, NKJV).”

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 27. Wagner's theological dispositions (1982–1990)

Systematic Theology	Beginning of Era	End of Era
<i>Doctrine of God</i>		
<i>Knowledge of God</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Omnipotence</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Spiritual Cosmos</i>	Temporal Spiritual Dualism	Limited Spiritual Dualism
<i>Prayer</i>	Divine Interventional Mutability	Divine Interventional Mutability
<i>Doctrine of Scripture</i>		
<i>Revelation</i>	Frustrated by Epistemology	Extrabiblical and Personal
<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>	Phenomenological	Phenomenological
Systematic Theology	Beginning of Era	End of Era
<i>Doctrine of Scripture</i>		
<i>Theological doctrine</i>	Emphasis of Doctrine	Deemphasis of Doctrine
<i>Doctrine of Church</i>		
<i>Church and Society</i>	Church Growth	Dominionism
<i>Great Commission</i>	Church Growth	Discipleship of Nations
<i>Doctrine of Holy Spirit</i>		
<i>Pneumatology</i>	Open Cessationism	Restorationism
<i>Sanctification</i>	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification
<i>Doctrine of Christ</i>		
<i>Christology</i>	Incarnation-Theology	Incarnation-Theology
<i>Gospel</i>	Salvation of Individuals	Salvation of Nations
<i>Doctrine of Last Things</i>		
<i>Kingdom of God</i>	Future Promise and Reality	Present Reality
<i>Eschatology</i>	Dispensationalism	Frustrated by Dispensationalism
Research Contribution		
<i>Philosophy of Discipleship</i>		
<i>Disciple</i>	New Creature in Christ with Church Membership	Regeneration and Responsible Church Member
<i>Equipping of Disciples</i>	Spiritual Gifts	Spiritual Gifts, Warfare, Signs and Wonders
<i>Educational Framework</i>	In-Service and Pre-Service Education	In-Service and Pre-Service Education

Reading through the Third Wave Era (1991–1998)

This era marks Wagner’s transition from the Third Wave movement to the emerging New Apostolic Reformation movement. The praxes of Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification became fundamental elements of the theological and methodological distinctives of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement, which he codified in 1998;⁵⁵ this new evangelical movement delineated a new theological course for Protestant Christianity, which Wagner identifies as the “Second Apostolic Age.”⁵⁶

Theological Dispositions

The radical changes in Wagner’s held convictions seen in the previous eras are present in this era; however, Wagner now focuses on church leadership, which shifts his concentration from pastoral leadership to apostolic leadership—that is, apostles, prophets,

⁵⁵ In his 1998 publication *The New Apostolic Churches*, Wagner describes the genesis of the New Apostolic Reformation, stating, “The name I have settled on for the movement is the New Apostolic Reformation, and individual churches being designated as new apostolic churches.” He explains, “The new apostolic churches, better than any I have previously studied, combine, on the highest level, solid *technical* principles of church growth with solid *spiritual* principles of church growth.” Wagner describes why he chose the name: “I use ‘reformation’ because, as I have said, these new wineskins appear to be at least as radical as those of the Protestant Reformation almost 500 years ago. ‘Apostolic’ connotes a strong focus on outreach plus a recognition of present-day apostolic ministries. ‘New’ adds a contemporary spin to the name.” C. Peter Wagner, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” in *The New Apostolic Churches: Rediscovering the New Testament Model of Leadership and Why It Is God’s Desire for the Church Today*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998), 14, 18–19. Wagner often used the language of new wineskins when discussing the paradigm of the NAR. The phrase “new wineskins” references Matthew 9:17, where Jesus refers to John the Baptist as the “old wineskin” in the old covenant while referring to the new covenant as the “new wineskin.” C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2006), 173. In the same way new wine requires a new vessel, the new form of church found in the NAR requires a new post-denominational paradigm in addition to the traditional church denominations. The new paradigm of the NAR includes radical “paradigm shifts” in ministry focus that include “apostolic power principles.” These shifts brought radical change in the emphasis of the supernatural components to ministry. Worship, prayer, and spiritual warfare lay at the heart of the power paradigm shift. C. Peter Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 40.

⁵⁶ Wagner distinguishes between the New Apostolic Reformation and the “Second Apostolic Age,” which was inaugurated in 2001. In a letter to the editor of *Changing Church*, Wagner clarifies the two phrases,

The New Apostolic Reformation is the process of change in the Church which I have traced back to around 1900. I believe it will continue into the future for a sustained period of time. The Second Apostolic Age is a historical season, not a process. As a result of what God has been doing through the New Apostolic Reformation, we, since 2001, now find ourselves in the Second Apostolic Age. (C. Peter Wagner, “Unpublished Manuscript: Chapter 1 Rewrites,” February 9, 2004, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 13, Folder 4, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA)

The new era of the Second Apostolic Age was the “most radical change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation.” Wagner, *Changing Church*, 10. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 145.

and intercessors.⁵⁷ Wagner cites apostolic leadership as “*the most radical change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation!*”⁵⁸ Wagner started to ruminate on “the apostolic movement in 1993” as he began to consider that “apostles and prophets did not finish their task after the first century or two of the Christian movement; rather their ministry has never ceased throughout the whole history of the church.”

Wagner published *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* in 1998, detailing the change in his theological convictions, namely, his affirmation of Wesleyan holiness in pursuing and living in inward as well as outward holiness and obedience.⁵⁹ Wagner credits the “holiness movement of the late 1800s and the Pentecostal movement of the early 1900s” for laying the “foundations for personal righteousness on one hand and ministry with supernatural signs and wonders on the other.”⁶⁰ Recognizing a transition in the theological distinctives of neo-charismatic churches toward incorporating prophets and apostles, Wagner provides the name “New Apostolic Reformation” in 1998 for the network to describe what he calls “new wineskins,” as he believes the NAR has significantly changed Protestant Christianity in fundamental ways.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Wagner identifies each decade with a new movement of the Holy Spirit in a Christian’s faith: 1950s Latter Rain movement, 1960s healing evangelism, 1970s intercessors, 1980s prophets, and 1990s apostles. Within each decade, Wagner emphasizes the novel revelation of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the central focus of holiness. C. Peter Wagner, “Unpublished Manuscript: Second Apostolic Age - Are You Ready for Radical Change?,” n.d., Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 16, Folder 4, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 145.

⁵⁸ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 205. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 125.

⁵⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (Colorado Springs: Wagner Institute for Practical Ministry, 1998). This book marks the first published work within which Wagner details his theological convictions concerning personal holiness, the call to and ability for obedience, and sanctification of the believer. Although Wagner affirms Wesleyan holiness, he denies sinless perfection. He states, “Christians may live a lifestyle separated from sin, but that does not mean that they cannot or never do sin.” Wagner explains that to believe Christians can be perfect in this life is “confusing *perfection* with *holiness*. We can be holy, but we cannot be perfect” (33). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 127–28.

⁶⁰ Wagner, *Engaging the Enemy*, 4.

⁶¹ C. Peter Wagner, “New Apostolic Reformation,” in Burgess and van der Maas, *New International Dictionary*, 930. Wagner wrote extensively on the New Apostolic Reformation and the post-denominational churches of “independent charismatics” within the “loosely structured apostolic networks.”

Wagner identifies that “the gift of prophecy and the office of apostle are reemerging” as “spiritual warfare is moving to the forefront.”⁶² Wagner proposes that the necessity for holiness and aggressive spiritual warfare against the onslaught of demonic powers requires apostolic leadership in the church. Wagner’s supposition that this era will see “a dramatic outward manifestation of supernatural power” is derived from his partnerships with Cindy Jacobs and Chuck Pierce, who define Wagner’s theological dispositions.

Epistemology. Wagner dedicates a chapter to evaluating epistemology (entitled “How Do We Know What We Know? Evaluating Epistemology”) in his 1996 publication *Confronting the Powers*. Wagner confesses, “We can learn valuable information from the totally reliable written Word of God, from the spoken or rhema word of God and from accurately analyzing and interpreting the works of God.”⁶³ Wagner’s 1992 article “Our Weapons of Spiritual Warfare” describes three different weapons of warfare: (1) “Jesus’ name,” for when “Jesus invites us to use His name, He

For additional writings of Wagner on the New Apostolic Reformation, see C. Peter Wagner, *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999); Wagner, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 13–25; Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000); Wagner, *Changing Church*; Wagner, *Apostles Today*; Wagner, *This Changes Everything*; Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 144.

⁶² Wagner, *Engaging the Enemy*, 4. Wagner states,

Through recent decades God has been moving His people, step by step, through phases of preparation, setting the agenda for the current decade. As I analyze the trends, I believe that in 1950 God began to ripen the greatest spiritual harvest in all of Christian history and He put evangelism at home and in the world high on our agendas. In 1960 God began speaking to us about compassion for the poor, the oppressed, the homeless and the destitute. Social responsibility was added to the agenda. In 1970 we saw the first seeds of what is developing now into the greatest prayer movement in living memory. In 1980 a contemporary renewal of the prophetic ministry began and, while this is not so widely recognized as yet, the gift of prophecy and the office of prophet are reemerging. Now in 1990 spiritual warfare is moving to the forefront.

To go further back in the historical context, the holiness movement of the late 1800s and the Pentecostal movement of the early 1900s laid foundations for personal righteousness on one hand and ministry with supernatural signs and wonders on the other. Both of these have continued to play major roles in preparing the church for the 1990s. I believe we will see increasing emphasis on both holiness and power ministries in the years to come. (3–4)

⁶³ C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Powers: How the New Testament Church Experienced the Power of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare*, Prayer Warrior Series (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996), 64. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 136.

transfers divine authority”; (2) the “blood of Jesus,” as “Satan cannot stand his ground against the blood of Jesus”; and (3) “fasting,” as “some forms of spiritual warfare require fasting as a prerequisite for victory.”⁶⁴

Wagner declares that “when Scripture itself does *not* provide us with divinely revealed glimpses of reality, the validity of any extrabiblical claim to reality must obviously be confirmed or rejected on the basis of criteria other than biblical exegesis.”⁶⁵ The “criteria for evaluating this material should not be limited to the five senses or to what we have come to regard as scientific laws.” Wagner maintains that “some parts of reality are primarily *spiritually* discerned, and therefore do not lend themselves to *scientific* analysis.”⁶⁶

Biblical-theological system. In *Confronting the Powers* (1996), Wagner states, “Jesus said to His disciples, ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven’ (v. 19). This means that the disciples themselves would be the primary agents to move the kingdom of God through these formidable gates of the enemy.”⁶⁷ Wagner elucidates that the “keys” are the “power to unlock and penetrate the gates of hell” through “binding and loosing.” Wagner acknowledges that although Christians have the power to bind and

⁶⁴ C. Peter Wagner, “Our Weapons of Spiritual Warfare,” *Asian Report* 26, no. 5 (1992): 3–4.

⁶⁵ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 66. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 136.

⁶⁶ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 67. Continuing, Wagner asserts “that spiritual insight, which receives information directly from the spirit world, is not an exclusive faculty of those who have been born again. Spiritual discernment certainly constitutes at least some dimension of the image of God.” Therefore, knowledge can be gained “from careful observation and analysis of the works of God in the world, and from representatives of the world of darkness whether in human or spiritual form, although they must always be approached and evaluated as hostile witnesses,” 70–71. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 137.

⁶⁷ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 154. Wagner continues, “It is not something God would choose to do sovereignly, although He could if He wished, but rather a task that would directly involve the initiative of the disciples. The resources for the task would be provided by God, but the use of the resources would be up to the discretion of the disciples.” Wagner further clarifies, “Binding and loosing are directly related to the advance of God’s kingdom through the outreach of Jesus’ disciples, whether they be first-century disciples or twentieth-century disciples. We must not underestimate the magnitude of the authority Jesus delegates and entrusts to His disciples through binding and loosing.” Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 154–55. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 134.

loose, “even when it is the will of God that a certain territorial spirit be bound, efforts to do so might not succeed.”⁶⁸ Wagner’s beliefs of binding and loosing are grounded in his affirmation of “a *limited* dualism, because Satan and his forces of evil are not yet all under Jesus’ feet as they will be sometime in the future.”

Wesleyan holiness. While reflecting on his paradigm shift to Wesleyan holiness in *Changing Church* (2004), Wagner asserts that Cindy Jacobs “put the fear of God into” him when she informed him of the role of holiness and “the full armor of God” in spiritual warfare.⁶⁹ According to Wagner, Jacobs “went on to add words to this effect: ‘Even after we put on the full armor of God, if we do not have under that armor a pure heart, we will have holes in our armor!’ This was enough.” Wagner declares that he felt he had “two choices: (1) Keep away from spiritual warfare because, without a pure heart, I would have holes in my armor and therefore be vulnerable to the fiery darts of Satan; or (2) change my view of sanctification to Wesleyan holiness, which could point me in the direction of attaining a pure heart.”⁷⁰ Wagner elucidates that holiness is born of a pure heart; moreover, a pure heart is “the essence of prayer,” which is illustrated in the use of the Lord’s Prayer as instructed by Jesus

⁶⁸ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 156. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 134.

⁶⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 172. Wagner states the change occurred in “the early 1990s when I became active in helping to move the Body of Christ into a mode of aggressive, strategic-level spiritual warfare. One of my first mentors in this paradigm shift was Cindy Jacobs of Generals of Intercession.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 47.

⁷⁰ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 172. Wagner details his “paradigm shift” from his professed Reformed doctrine of sanctification to Wesleyan holiness as it allowed him to attain and maintain personal holiness and a pure heart. Wagner emphasizes that both holiness and a “pure heart” are required for Christian ministry, which he viewed as centering around spiritual warfare. Wagner discusses his interactions with Cindy Jacobs and her influence on his understanding of personal holiness and spiritual warfare in his memoir *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 151–65. Cindy Jacobs is the founder of Generals of Intercession, now known as Generals International, an organization focusing on renewal, restoration, and reformation in prayer, intercession, and spiritual warfare. For more information on Cindy Jacobs or Generals International, see Generals International, “About General International,” accessed June 6, 2022, <https://www.generals.org/about-generals>.

to pray daily: “Forgive us our sins” (Matt. 6:12, TLB). (The more common words “debts” or “trespasses” are obsolete and they mask today’s real meaning of this prayer.) Because all Christians sin from time to time, we need to make sure the slate is clean daily if we expect our prayers to be answered. Peter reminds us, “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Pet. 3:12). Repentance and confession of sin are essential for good praying. So is not sinning in the future, and that is why Jesus has us pray, “Lead us not into temptation” (Matt. 6:13, NIV). These contribute greatly to purifying the heart. But it seems that of all the sins we need to deal with to pray well, one stands out over the others: *forgiveness*.⁷¹

Wagner recalls in *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians* (2010) that he “found that the Reformed view of sanctification” would “not be sufficient” in spiritual warfare. Wagner states that Wesleyan holiness is the key to the Christian faith, empowering every believer to function in their giftings and enabling them to live a daily life of “purity and holiness.”⁷² Moreover, Wagner’s “paradigm shift” from his professed classical Reformed theology to an affirmation of Wesleyan holiness shut “many doors through which Satan’s demonic forces could enter and thwart our effectiveness” in spiritual warfare.⁷³

In *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), Wagner defines holiness as “to love Jesus and do what He wants” as one is “set apart *to* God and *from* the world,” living

⁷¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Churches That Pray: How Prayer Can Help Revitalize Your Church and Break Down the Walls between Your Church and Your Community* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993), 50–51.

⁷² Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 272. Wagner “knew” he “needed to make the second choice and to explore the biblical and theological validity of the kind of sanctification that could end up with a pure heart.” Wagner, *Changing Church*, 172–73. Wagner expresses,

I just went back to the Scriptures to study as much as I could about having a pure heart. A starting point became 1 Peter 1:15: “As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.”

When I began to think back, I realized that those who espouse the Reformed doctrine of sanctification tend to stress the first part of that text, namely, the holiness of God. Since no one disputes the holiness of God, it is safe ground. In fact, dealing with God’s holiness is much easier than dealing with personal holiness. (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 106)

Wagner details the theological “paradigm shifts” of his convictions concerning personal holiness, discipleship, and sanctification in his memoir as well as in *Changing Church*. For details on Wagner’s appropriation of Wesleyan holiness and his affirmation of personal holiness and a pure heart, see Wagner, *Changing Church*, 172. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 127.

⁷³ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 272. Wagner also details his “paradigm shift” to Wesleyan holiness and its resulting ability to ensure success in spiritual warfare in *Changing Church*, chap. 10. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 127.

in obedience to God.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Wagner explicates that Christian holiness is “radical holiness”; if “you are filled with the Holy Spirit, the possibility emerges that you can actually live a holy life, free from sin, day after day.”⁷⁵ Wagner cites 1 John 3:6, asserting that “true believers no longer live a lifestyle that is characterized by sinning.” Wagner provides four steps to ensure a sin-free life: (1) “Be sure you are in a proper relationship to God”; (2) “Confess all known sins”; (3) “Seek healing for persistent sin patterns”; (4) “Allow others to read your spiritual barometer.”⁷⁶ Wagner asserts that “holiness is a part of the springboard from which apostles are leading us into the twenty-first century. I am convinced that the churches on the cutting edges of what God is doing here in the new millennium will be churches that teach and practice bona fide holiness.”⁷⁷

Supernatural signs and wonders. In *The Healthy Church* (1996), Wagner contends, “By the time Jesus left, His disciples had received the finest training any Christian worker could ask for,” but it “was not enough for the task ahead.”⁷⁸ Wagner advocates for churches to “highlight the person and work of the Holy Spirit” in a manner consistent with “Jesus’ attitude” toward “our need for the person and the ministry of the Holy Spirit on an ongoing basis. Nothing is wrong with featuring the third Person of the Trinity in our church life because Jesus told us it would be to our advantage to do so.”⁷⁹

⁷⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer: What the Bible Says about Spiritual Warfare* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2009), 112; Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 38.

⁷⁵ Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 29.

⁷⁶ Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 39–41.

⁷⁷ Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 34.

⁷⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *The Healthy Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996), 156.

⁷⁹ Wagner, *The Healthy Church*, 157.

Extrabiblical revelation. Wagner’s 1996 lecture notes entitled “Praying in the Church” affirm “extra-biblical revelation,” described as “the Lord spoke words to me.”⁸⁰ Wagner references *Your Spiritual Gifts* (1994) when describing the foundation for such revelation, asserting, “The gift of prophecy is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to receive and communicate an immediate message of God to His people through a divinely anointed utterance.”⁸¹

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

Wagner’s classification of a disciple and sanctification changed significantly in this era. Holiness and purity are essential for Christians to engage in spiritual warfare, which is a necessary action of discipleship. Wagner expresses, “It is so necessary for those who are called to engage in this spiritual warfare to be holy and sanctified, because He is a holy God,”⁸² for without “holiness and sanctification, without great sacrifice, and without a fervent prayer life, many will be so wounded. The evil spirit will answer, ‘Jesus I know, Paul I know, but who are you?’” Wagner reiterates, “Only the cleansed and sanctified will be victorious in battle. I’m not talking about the hyper-holy, super-gooders, but about those who know their God and who do great exploits (Dan. 11:32).”⁸³ Near the end of the 1990s, Wagner recognizes the validity of the roles of apostles and prophets; he urges churches to acknowledge this transition in church leadership to guide the church in holiness and power.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ C. Peter Wagner, “Lecture Notes: Praying in the Church,” 3, 1996, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 6, Folder 8, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 135.

⁸¹ Wagner, “Lecture Notes: Praying in the Church,” 3, referencing Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, upd. and exp. ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1994). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 82, 135.

⁸² Wagner, *Engaging the Enemy*, 119.

⁸³ Wagner, *Engaging the Enemy*, 101.

⁸⁴ Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 135–36.

Wagner calls for mature Christians to “stand in the gap” against “hard-core idolatry, both within the church and in the world.”⁸⁵ Wagner contends that God “has chosen to release” his “power as His people stand in the gap with powerful prayer and who go to the front lines with the full armor of God, not loving their lives to the death.” Wagner assures Christians that “we can see barriers fall and the harvest ripen.” Wagner continues, “We can be sure that we are acting according to God’s will because we are taking a stand against the sin that God hates the most.” Idolatry can be inward or outward, in one’s heart or in one’s behavior. Wagner declares that the wiles of Satan “should” fail to deceive Christians if they “are living lives of radical holiness, if” they “are fully committed to God, and if” they “are protected with a shield of intercessory prayer.”⁸⁶

In *Confronting the Powers* (1996), Wagner discusses engaging in “strategic-level spiritual warfare,” which encompasses the crucial functions of cleansing and purifying for holiness.⁸⁷ Wagner declares that Christians must “cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. This relates both to what we do and to what we think, implying a life of holiness.”⁸⁸ Wagner asserts, “Holiness is being so full of God that there is no room for anything else. It is an indispensable precondition for entering into effective strategic-level spiritual warfare.” Wagner continues, “Once we take the initiative to submit, draw near,

⁸⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Hard-Core Idolatry: Facing the Facts* (Colorado Springs: Wagner Institute for Practical Ministry, 1999), 32. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 174.

⁸⁶ Wagner, *Hard-Core Idolatry*, 9. Wagner continues, stating that Satan will move from “Plan A” to “Plan B” in his attacks against Christians. Wagner explains that Satan will try to deceive us into foggy thinking about the task of reaching the lost, and thereby reduce our effectiveness in reaching them for Christ. His Plan A is usually to try to enshroud us with a pervasive apathy toward the lost. If he succeeds here, not much more needs to be done because we are no longer a threat to him. But if Satan’s Plan A fails, and if we do maintain a burning passion for finding the lost sheep, his Plan B often comes into play. He tries to cloud our thinking so that we ignore or misunderstand certain vital aspects of the job God has sent us to do. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 133.

⁸⁷ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 232. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 156.

⁸⁸ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 232.

cleanse and purify,” then “God will draw near to you.” Wagner affirms that God “will respond by establishing the intimate relationship with Himself that we desire and that we need if we are going to take authority over the angels of darkness.”⁸⁹

As in previous eras, Wagner declares that the power in Jesus during the incarnation is available to Christians today. Wagner states, “Because not one of us is the Son of God, we cannot expect the same unobstructed relationship with the Father or the Holy Spirit without measure. *Practically*, we may not see divine power operating so regularly in our ministries, but *potentially*, the same there. Nothing less.”⁹⁰ In *Praying with Power* (1997), Wagner references Luke 11:22 to encourage Christians that the power of the Holy Spirit is in Christians.⁹¹ Wagner reasons, “Without the Holy Spirit, Jesus would not have commanded us to ‘overcome,’ but with the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, ‘the works that I do he will do also’ (John 14:12). This is why it is our duty to ‘bind the strongman.’ ‘Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven’ (Matt 16:19).”⁹² Concerning individual Christian growth, Wagner explains, “If demonic

⁸⁹ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 232. Wagner believes that “identificational repentance is an extremely vital ingredient in effective strategic-level spiritual warfare.” He uses the Old Testament as proof of his belief. Wagner argues that “the apostles, as biblical believers, must have been thoroughly familiar with David remitting the sins of Saul against the Gibeonites (see 2 Sam. 21), Nehemiah confessing the sins of his fathers (see Neh. 1:6) or that the iniquities caused by the sin of one generation can pass on through subsequent generations (see Exod. 20:5)” (79).

Wagner claims, “Our worldview implants in each of us a certain mental grid through which we process *all* information that comes our way” (76–77). It impacts the “viewpoints about how we receive information and form conclusions about issues that may be only *implicitly* rather than *explicitly* taught in the Bible” (75). Wagner posits that the “apostles apparently did not adhere so closely to their Bible that they refused to be open to the new things God desired to do through them” (80). Wagner continues, “Nothing in the Old Testament is a precedent. Paul did not find casting out demons with handkerchiefs in the Bible he carried, yet he did it by the power of the Holy Spirit (see 19:12). Although all this is true, the apostles would not have accepted anything that would have violated Old Testament principles, except what Jesus had specifically changed as a part of the new covenant” (81). Wagner concludes, “In summary, we do not find the apostles saying, ‘We will not do so-and-so because we do not find it in the Bible’” (81).

⁹⁰ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 135.

⁹¹ Wagner, *Praying with Power* (1997), 80. Wagner declares, “The armor of the strongman, though, can be taken away when ‘a stronger one than he comes upon him and overcomes him’ (Luke 11:22). The ‘stronger one’ is the Holy Spirit, the finger of God. Where is the Holy Spirit today? He is in us!” (82). Wagner explicates warfare prayer for “binding the strong man” occurs in four ways: (1) prayer marches in cities, (2) prayer walks in neighborhoods, (3) prayer pilgrimages to regions, and (4) prophetic prayer journeys.

⁹² Wagner, *Praying with Power* (1997), 83.

spirits are preventing an *individual* from being all that God wants the person to be,” the “best approach is to confront the spirits themselves as well as any strongholds that might be providing them legal right to molest the person.”⁹³

Wagner continues to stress the importance of the “sanctification gap” in this era. In *The Healthy Church* (1996), He claims that the gap in church members’ sanctification and maturity “presents a dilemma because piety and sanctification are normal results of the process of Christian growth and maturity. We are all to become more Christlike. The Christian lifestyle is not to be ‘conformed to this world,’ but ‘transformed’”; worldly “habits are supposed to drop out of a Christian’s life.”⁹⁴ Wagner argues, “We must continue to honor sanctification and encourage piety. The way to do this and also to help close the gap is to structure the fellowship patterns of the church in such a way that it can include Christians of all stages of maturity.” To help decrease the sanctification gap, Wagner recommends “that a church carefully examine the needs of the unchurched people around it, establish a philosophy of ministry that will meet those needs and plan to grow until it is large enough to conduct that sort of ministry adequately.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Wagner, *Praying with Power* (1997), 71.

⁹⁴ Wagner, *The Healthy Church*, 95.

⁹⁵ Wagner, *The Healthy Church*, 17.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 28. Wagner's theological dispositions (1991–1998)

Systematic Theology	Beginning of Era	End of Era
<i>Doctrine of God</i>		
<i>Knowledge of God</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Omnipotence</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Frustrated by Classic Theism
<i>Spiritual Cosmos</i>	Limited Spiritual Dualism	Limited Spiritual Dualism
<i>Prayer</i>	Divine Interventional Mutability	Divine Interventional Mutability
<i>Doctrine of Scripture</i>		
<i>Revelation</i>	Extrabiblical and Personal	Extrabiblical and Personal
<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>	Phenomenological	Phenomenological
<i>Theological doctrine</i>	Deemphasis of Doctrine	Deemphasis of Doctrine
<i>Doctrine of Church</i>		
<i>Church and Society</i>	Church Growth	Dominionism
<i>Great Commission</i>	Church Growth	Discipleship of Nations
<i>Doctrine of Holy Spirit</i>		
<i>Pneumatology</i>	Restorationism	Restorationism
<i>Sanctification</i>	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification
<i>Doctrine of Christ</i>		
<i>Christology</i>	Incarnation-Theology	Incarnation-Theology
<i>Gospel</i>	Salvation of Nations	Salvation of Nations
<i>Doctrine of Last Things</i>		
<i>Kingdom of God</i>	Present Reality	Present Reality
<i>Eschatology</i>	Frustrated by Dispensationalism	Frustrated by Dispensationalism
Research Contribution		
<i>Philosophy of Discipleship</i>		
<i>Disciple</i>	Regeneration and Responsible Church Member	Born Again, Cleansed, Purified, Holy
<i>Equipping of Disciples</i>	Spiritual Gifts, Warfare, Signs and Wonders	Spiritual Gifts, Warfare, Signs and Wonders
<i>Educational Framework</i>	In-Service and Pre-Service Education	Pre-Service Education, Seeker-Sensitive Ministry

Reading through the New Apostolic Reformation Era (1999–2016)

Wagner catalogs the progression of his theological convictions in *Changing Church* (2004), emphasizing the Second Apostolic Age and the “radical change to the Church” brought by the New Apostolic Reformation.⁹⁶ Wagner states that he wrote *Churchquake!* in 1999 as a foundational “textbook” concerning the “church government” and the offices of prophet and apostle in the modern “New Testament Church.”⁹⁷ In *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (2008), Wagner presents his developed “biblical and theological framework” of the New Apostolic Reformation and its theological distinctives.⁹⁸

Theological Dispositions

Toward the end of the 1990s, Wagner places greater importance on equipping for practical ministry over formal theology.⁹⁹ Wagner received a personal prophecy from the Lord, through Cindy Jacobs, to start Wagner Institute. Wager devoted the rest of his

⁹⁶ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 15. Wagner reflects on his theological development over the course of his life in his autobiography *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*. Wagner delineates decades of his life by what or who had the greatest impact and influence during that era.

Wagner expounds upon the “paradigm shifts drawn from” his “personal life and ministry” that led to and resulted in the New Apostolic Reformation in *This Changes Everything* (20013). Wagner goes on to state that “without changing your mind, there cannot be a paradigm shift,” which “is not so much an issue of the emotions, the will or the heart as it is of the mind.” Romans 12:2 provides the framework through which Wagner understands the categorical thinking of paradigms. “‘Renewing your mind’ is another way of describing what happens in a paradigm shift.” Wagner believes some “of the most important steps forward in our Christian service may well involve a willingness to undergo paradigm shifts.” Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 14.

⁹⁷ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 271. Pietsch notes, “Though Wagner’s works published after 2004 were seemingly recapitulations of his maturing theological system, *Changing Church* is Wagner’s update and follow-up to *Churchquake!* (1999).” Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 142.

⁹⁸ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 302. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 153.

⁹⁹ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 123. The emphasis of practical ministry led to Wagner’s changing convictions on the doctrine of God. Wagner publicly affirmed open theism in 2001 in the introductory chapter of *Destiny of a Nation*, which Wagner also edited. Wagner offers a offered a “biblical and theological paradigm that made sense of what I had been thinking and what I had been doing all along.” Wagner, “History Belongs to the Intercessors,” in *Destiny of a Nation: How Prophets and Intercessors Can Mold History*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2001), 7–16. Beginning in 2004, Wagner began to publish his avowal of open theism in his book *Changing Church*. For a fuller treatment of Wagner’s open theism, see Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism.”

life to equipping leaders within the NAR movement to become prophets, apostles, and intercessors through WLI and other formed apostolic networks.¹⁰⁰ This era emphasizes Wagner's biblical-theological system as the context of his doctrine of sanctification and discipleship. One of the foundational theological axioms that established the outworking of Wagner's convictions is the "necessary power" in the repeated "filling of the Holy Spirit" for the effectiveness of Christians' "Spirit-filled life."¹⁰¹

The New Apostolic Reformation movement. Wagner conferred the name "New Apostolic Reformation" to an existing community of "neo-charismatic" churches and organizations in 1998.¹⁰² Wagner classifies the NAR movement as an "independent Charismatic" movement that de-emphasizes doctrine and theology, consists of post-denominational "loosely structured apostolic networks," and affirms that the gifts and offices of apostles and prophets have returned to the ministry of the church.¹⁰³ The NAR

¹⁰⁰ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 246; Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 116. In the Wagner Leadership Institute, Wagner emphasizes a "lighter doctrinal load" in the Second Apostolic Age, where "in-service, apostolically oriented" leaders "have little or no desire to traverse many of the traditional pathways laid down by professional academic theologians" (145).

¹⁰¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy: Confronting Spiritual Powers* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011), 161.

¹⁰² Wagner's initial public declaration of a definition for the New Apostolic Reformation movement occurred in 1998, as "an extraordinary work of God at the close of the 20th century that is, to a significant extent, changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world." Wagner, "The New Apostolic Reformation," 18. This research will not present an exhaustive treatment of the New Apostolic Reformation or its theological distinctives. Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 144.

¹⁰³ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 11, 12, 44. A common misconception is that Wagner began the NAR movement; rather, he provided a name to what he determined as the beginning of a movement, popularizing the term in his 1998 publication *The New Apostolic Churches*. For more information, see Wagner, "The New Apostolic Reformation," 18–19. Wagner later expounds upon his definition of the New Apostolic Reformation in 2000, explaining,

The New Apostolic Reformation is an extraordinary work of God at the close of the twentieth century which is, to a significant extent, changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world. For almost 500 years Christian churches have largely functioned within traditional denominational structures of one kind or another. Particularly in the 1990s, but with roots going back for almost a century, new forms and operational procedures are now emerging in areas such as local church government, interchurch relationships, financing, evangelism, missions, prayer, leadership selection and training, the role of supernatural power, worship and other important aspects of church life. Some of these changes are being seen within denominations themselves, but for the most part they are taking the form of loosely structured apostolic networks. In virtually every region of the world, these new apostolic churches constitute the fastest growing segment of Christianity. (Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 21)

incorporated a multitude of movements from the previous century, offering new developments each decade and climaxing in 2001 in the Second Apostolic Age:¹⁰⁴ “1950s Latter Rain movement, 1960s healing evangelism, 1970s intercessors, 1980s prophets, and 1990s apostles.”¹⁰⁵

As a founding leader in the NAR movement, Wagner emphasizes the work of modern apostles and prophets in fostering personal holiness in the lives of believers, consistent with his appropriation of the Pentecostal and Wesleyan views.¹⁰⁶ In *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (2000), Wagner reasons “to postulate that apostles and prophets were needed for only a century or so is to sidestep the implications of the rest of the sentence that begins in Ephesians 4:11.” Wagner then cites Ephesians 4:13, proclaiming, “Very few, if any, Christian leaders I know would claim that the Body of Christ has reached the stage of perfection described here. And if this is the case, it would follow that there is still a need for apostles and prophets in the Church.” Wagner concludes, “This helps us greatly to understand why God would tell us that the Church’s foundation is ‘apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone’ (Eph. 2:20).”¹⁰⁷

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 144.

¹⁰⁴ Wagner, “Unpublished Manuscript: Chapter 1 Rewrites” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 145.

¹⁰⁵ Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 147, quoting Wagner, “Unpublished Manuscript: Second Apostolic Age.” This Second Apostolic Age was the “most radical change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation.” Wagner, *Changing Church*, 10.

¹⁰⁶ Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 9–11. Although Wagner did not consider himself a charismatic or Pentecostal at the time when he first affirmed signs and wonders, he later identified himself as holding to charismatic and Pentecostal methodologies for evangelism and sanctification. He affirmed power evangelism, healing evangelism, intercessory prayer, and spiritual warfare, which are all predicated upon Dominion theology. C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God’s Call to Transform the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 84. See also Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*; Wagner, “History Belongs to the Intercessors,” 7–16.

¹⁰⁷ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 8.

Open theism. Wagner’s affirmation of open theism indicates his theological convictions and praxes concerning God’s interaction with humanity and the prayers of humanity. Evan Pietsch encapsulates Wagner’s convictions vis-à-vis open theism, revealing,

Wagner concludes that “this line of thinking can end up forcing us to believe that what we do doesn’t matter very much. God has it all figured out ahead of time, and it will happen no matter what.” Wagner states that his appropriation of open theism “starts out with a clear biblical understanding that God is sovereign.” Wagner continues, “While God decided ahead of time that certain things would happen no matter what, He also decided to leave some other things open, dependent on the choices that human beings would make.” Wagner concludes that God limits his “own sovereignty” in order to “maintain His integrity.” God chooses to “prevent Himself from knowing ahead of time what choices we would make.” For Wagner, open theism theology affirms that “if we pray, God will do certain things that He wouldn’t do without our prayers.”¹⁰⁸

Wagner’s open theistic paradigm influences his epistemology and overarching theological system.

Epistemology. Wagner describes epistemology as “discernment” regarding the “reliability” of knowledge gained from God or “demonic” sources, with the ultimate end of victorious spiritual warfare: “If we are going to do warfare prayer and confront the powers of darkness in the invisible world, it is essential that we have accurate information about the nature and function of these powers.”¹⁰⁹ Wagner asserts that everyone can use discernment “without so much as giving thought to whether it is there, much less how it works.”¹¹⁰ In a cautionary message, Wagner deems it essential that Christians engage their “discernment system” when they are “going to do warfare prayer

¹⁰⁸ Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 147, quoting Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 84–85; Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 150.

¹⁰⁹ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 40. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 157.

¹¹⁰ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 39. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 157.

and confront the powers of darkness in the invisible world” because “it is essential that we have accurate information about the nature and function of these powers.”¹¹¹

Wagner posits one can deduce theological “narratives” through “extrabiblical revelations,” on the condition that the revelations and deductions “do not *contradict* biblical teaching.”¹¹² Although narratives can be drawn from revelation, Wagner sustains that “the strict laws of scientific proof” will not “answer” narratives “to the satisfaction of ‘scientific’ skeptics.” Wagner concludes, “We validate the authenticity of reported narratives on the basis of the credibility of those who observe them or experience them.”¹¹³

Biblical-theological system. In *This Changes Everything*, Wagner discusses his transition to a “victorious” eschatological paradigm from an “escapist” eschatological paradigm, which he describes as his former view of dispensationalism.¹¹⁴ The “victorious” paradigm “reveals that the kingdom of God will grow and advance until it fills the earth. The church will rise in unity, maturity, and glory before the return of Jesus.”¹¹⁵ Such a paradigm best accounts for the “dominion mandate, or the literal interpretation of the Great Commission that tells us to make disciples of whole nations. A

¹¹¹ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 40. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 156.

¹¹² Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 55. Wagner asserts, “If understanding the reality of this invisible world, in whatever amount of detail, is regarded by some as following an ‘animistic paradigm,’ informed Christians will share it. The demons themselves ‘believe—and tremble’ (James 2:19). If, however, an ‘animistic paradigm’ implies allegiance to forces of darkness or worship of the creature rather than the Creator, informed Christians should strenuously reject it. (55) Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 159.

¹¹³ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 57. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 158.

¹¹⁴ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 195. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 152.

¹¹⁵ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 200. While reflecting on his change to victorious eschatology, Wagner states, “I started understanding the Dominion Mandate” when “I read Harold Eberle and Martin Trench’s *Victorious Eschatology*.” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 274. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 152.

futurist eschatology that expects to escape from the world through a rapture of the church does not fit this viewpoint.”¹¹⁶

In his 2010 autobiography *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, Wagner details the “theological paradigm shifts” in which his theology transitioned by the “renewing of” his “mind” throughout his ministry. In his memoir, Wagner provides context and explanation for the fourteen “important” theological transitions—or “shifts”—that he made throughout his sixty-year ministry.¹¹⁷

Wagner dedicates *Dominion!* to his “victorious” paradigm of Dominion theology. He elucidates Dominionism in his thesis: “Our ultimate goal should be the fulfillment of God’s mandate for His people to retake the dominion over creation that Adam forfeited to Satan in the Garden of Eden. This means our marker must be nothing short of social transformation.”¹¹⁸ The biblical paradigm of Dominion theology provides an estimation of how the church ought to fulfill the dominion mandate. Wagner offers a

¹¹⁶ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 204. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 153.

¹¹⁷ Of the fourteen transitions, eight are relevant to Wagner’s paradigm of the doctrine of sanctification or his philosophy of discipleship and include “shifting from” (1) “human abilities to *spiritual* gifts”; (2) “theological education to *equipping* the saints”; (3) “passive evangelism to *pragmatic* evangelism”; (4) “programmed evangelism to *power* evangelism”; (5) “tolerating Satan to a declaration of *war*”; (6) “Reformed sanctification to *Wesleyan holiness*”; (7) “a church vision to a *Kingdom* vision”; and (8) “the extension of the church to the *reformation of society*.” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 268–73 (emphasis added). Wagner provides commentary within the context of the period of ministry as well as an evaluation of the “shift” for each theological transition. The theological transitions are listed chronologically, beginning in his years at Fuller Theological Seminary in the early 1950s and ending with his profession of Dominion theology in the mid-2000s.

The full list of fourteen transitions provided by Wagner includes the following: (1) “Shifting from the two-channel theory to recognizing Jesus’ *full* human nature”; (2) “Shifting from human abilities to *spiritual* gifts”; (3) “Shifting from theological education to *equipping* the saints”; (4) “Shifting from passive evangelism to *pragmatic* evangelism”; (5) “Shifting from monocultural theology to *cross-cultural* theology”; (6) “Shifting from programmed evangelism to *power* evangelism”; (7) “Shifting from tolerating Satan to a declaration of *war*”; (8) “Shifting from Reformed sanctification to *Wesleyan holiness*”; (9) “Shifting from denominational government to *apostolic* government”; (10) “Shifting from a church vision to a *Kingdom* vision”; (11) “Shifting from the extension of the church to the *reformation of society*”; (12) “Shifting from classical theism to *open theism*”; (13) “Shifting from ministry in the church to ministry in the *workplace*”; and (14) “Shifting from escapist eschatology to *victorious* eschatology” (emphasis added). Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” chap. 4.

¹¹⁸ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 160. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 154.

“biblical, theological and strategic foundation in order to help undergird the urgent mandate of God for the church to actively engage in transforming society.”¹¹⁹

Dominion theology starts with the foundational axiom that God originally intended for humanity to be fruitful, multiply, and take dominion over the earth, instituting “a government for the earth” (Gen 1:26, 28).¹²⁰ Wagner asserts that God gave Adam and Eve “full authority to take dominion in His name”; Satan wanted the dominion that Adam and Eve possessed.¹²¹ Christ’s temptation in Matthew 4:9 is cited by Wagner as evidence of Satan’s authority as the god of this age.¹²² Pietsch encapsulates Wagner’s Dominionism in that “of Satan should be viewed in the context of a “cosmic” war, and the church is “expected” to actively engage in and win the war.”¹²³

The “Gospel of the Kingdom” is evident to Wagner in the Gospel of Luke, “heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set liberty those who are oppressed” (4:18–19).¹²⁴ Emerging from the Homogenous Unit Principle (HUP) in his church growth theology, Wagner’s axioms concentrate on the salvation of nations.¹²⁵ The authority of Satan is instrumental in Wagner’s theological convictions regarding the Great Commission and the church’s

¹¹⁹ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 10.

¹²⁰ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 64. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 154.

¹²¹ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 65. Wagner asserts, God gave Adam the authority to give his authority over to Satan! This throws quite a different light on our usual understanding of the temptation and the fall.” For a fuller treatment of Dominionism, see Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” chap. 4.

¹²² Wagner, *Dominion!*, 67. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 165.

¹²³ Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 166, quoting Wagner, *Dominion!*, 118–20.

¹²⁴ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 70. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 167.

¹²⁵ Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 90. The Homogenous Unit Principle “utilized the principles of anthropology to adapt the environment to encourage ingroup movements of conversion” within nations and people groups rather than individual salvation. C. Peter Wagner, “The Homogeneous Unit Principal as a Missiological Tool,” *Church Growth Bulletin* 2, no. 17 (1980): 17. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 146.

fulfillment of it.¹²⁶ Wagner affirms, “Jesus commands us to move out in His authority to retake the nations Satan has under his dominion.”¹²⁷ Taking back authority from Satan and operating in the power of the Spirit undergird the dominion mandate; therefore, the gospel necessarily is a “ministry of reconciliation” seeking and saving “that which was lost.”¹²⁸

Phenomenological theology. Wagner expresses his epistemological priorities when he articulates that “ministry precedes and produces theology, not the reverse.”¹²⁹ Wagner defines theology as “a human attempt to explain God’s Word and God’s works in a reasonable and systematic way.”¹³⁰ Those who hold to “traditional” theology presuppose “that everything that God wanted to reveal to human beings is contained in the Bible.”¹³¹ Wagner predicted that theologians would “become relics of the past as the Second Apostolic Age progresses.”¹³²

¹²⁶ Wagner reasons that the Old Testament spoke of “supernatural spiritual beings” that “have dominion over geo-political spheres,” or nations. The dominion over the spheres in the New Testament transfers to Satan, who is “a powerful being” that “controls entire kingdoms.” The concentration of national salvation over individual salvation provides the necessary foundation for spiritual warfare. The dominion of Satan is taken back through spiritual warfare. The dominion mandate is comprised of the evangelistic mandate, which purposes to spread the gospel to all the nations of the earth, and the cultural mandate, which purposes to decrease physical suffering and “take dominion and transform society.” Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, 46.

¹²⁷ Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 122. Wagner continues, “No wonder we find ourselves in spiritual warfare when we seriously engage in world evangelization. We are threatening Satan at a very sensitive and emotional point.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 138.

¹²⁸ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 69. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 166.

¹²⁹ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 42. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 162.

¹³⁰ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 65. Wagner views theology as a circular paradigm: “ministry” provokes “theology[,] and the new theology” provokes “subsequent ministry.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 162.

¹³¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 63. Wagner states, “I know that theology can be dull and boring. A reason for this is that much traditional theology, brilliant scholarship that it might be, finds very little intersection with practical reality. I suspect that we are seeing a subtle paradigm shift in the attitudes of many Christian leaders toward theology.” Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 62. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 163.

¹³² Wagner believes theology and “theologians per se” in New Apostolic churches “will likely become relics of the past as the Second Apostolic Age progresses.” Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 63. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 163.

Pragmatism. Wagner writes extensively on pragmatism in *The Church in the Workplace* (2006), emphasizing “the end justifies the means. What else could possibly justify the means except the end?”¹³³ Wagner believes that to say, “The end doesn’t justify the means” is “largely irrelevant to most of our lives in the real world, because day in and day out we choose means that will best accomplish our ends.” Wagner contends that Christians must “do whatever works” to achieve social transformation.¹³⁴ Wagner continues his claims that pragmatism forms the best approach to fulfilling the Great Commission and living victoriously in dominion, stating, “We need to agree on a pragmatic approach to strategy if we expect to succeed. Our strategies of the past have been commendable, but few, if any, have led to sociologically verifiable transformation of a given city.”¹³⁵

For Wagner, the methods to accomplish transformation are means in themselves, changing and implementing new methods afresh for goal achievement.¹³⁶ An end is justified if it is determined that God blessed the means. “Methods that God blesses need to be adopted, and methods that God does not use to bring lost men and women to Himself need to be scrapped.”¹³⁷ Therefore, “mission strategy must include ‘learning our way into the future.’”¹³⁸

¹³³ C. Peter Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2006), 144–50. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 165.

¹³⁴ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 206. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 168.

¹³⁵ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 206–7. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 168.

¹³⁶ Wagner states that he employs “consecrated pragmatism” in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 61. For more information on Wagner’s employment of pragmatism, see Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, chap. 4 (“Consecrated Pragmatism”); R. Vivian Pietsch, “The Influence of John Dewey’s Pragmatism on the Church Growth Movement,” *International Review of Mission* 111, no. 1 (2022): 138–68. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 115.

¹³⁷ C. Peter Wagner, “Helps to Church Growth,” *Christian Life* (April 1976): 46.

¹³⁸ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 160; see also Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 146–47. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 169.

Relevancy reformation. Wagner commends the sixteenth-century Reformation theology in which “Martin Luther set in place the final authority of Scripture for faith and practice.” Luther “established the biblical principle of justification by faith, rather than salvation by good works. He taught the priesthood of all believers.”¹³⁹ Wagner continues, declaring that the “core theology of” the Reformation forms the “theological bedrock” of the NAR.¹⁴⁰ According to Wagner, the Second Apostolic Age concerns a reformation “not so much against corruption and apostasy” as in the first Reformation. It is “not so much a reformation of *faith* (the essential theological principles of the Reformation are intact), but a reformation of *practice*”; it is a reformation “against irrelevance.”¹⁴¹ For Wagner, a new paradigm is needed, with new methods to bring relevance to Christianity. In the new NAR paradigm, God “entrusts the body of Christ with revelation, supernatural power, and spiritual equipment” not

¹³⁹ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 27.

¹⁴⁰ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 24–25. Wagner also argues that we can trace the roots of the New Apostolic Reformation back as far as 1900, when the African Independent Church Movement was first launched. The Chinese House Church Movement beginning around 1975 and the Latin American Grassroots Church Movement emerging around 1980 were also parts of the same spiritual phenomenon on different continents. In the United States, the independent charismatic churches, dating back to around 1970, were the most immediate precursors of what is now called the New Apostolic Reformation. (24)

Wagner then cites the theological advancements in the last five hundred years that influenced the theology of the NAR:

A couple hundred years later, in the eighteenth century, John Wesley clarified biblical principles of personal holiness, which the Reformers had not emphasized in the same way. The nineteenth century then saw the blossoming of the Modern Missionary Movement, starting with William Carey going to India. He was driven by the controversial principle of “using means,” as he stated it, to reach the heathen. In the twentieth century, the renowned Azusa Street Revival of 1906 finally began to bring the person and work of the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, into His proper place. In fact, here in the United States the genealogy of the New Apostolic Reformation is traced through the independent charismatic churches, then back through classical Pentecostalism, and finally to the Azusa Street Revival. (25)

¹⁴¹ Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 37. Wagner believes the changes brought about by the Reformation in the sixteenth century occurred slowly due to how “culture changed gradually.” In the “accelerated rate of culture change we now see in our generation, it might be expected that changes in church life will also be more rapid, and, therefore, more radical” in the New Apostolic Reformation. Wagner included the irrelevant practices to be changed in a “list of nine salient characteristics of the New Apostolic Reformation.” The list of characteristics of the reformed practices include a new “name,” “authority structure,” “leadership training,” “ministry focus,” “worship style,” “prayer forms,” “financing,” “outreach,” and “power priorities.” Wagner, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” 18–25.

accessible in previous paradigms.¹⁴² Theological education has lost its relevancy; the new paradigm of prophetic ministry emphasizes praxes, implementing the revelation taught from the pulpit. Personal holiness gained through catechetical training in the knowledge of the Decalogue and the Great Commandment has been replaced by the personal holiness of spiritual warfare in the Great Commission.

Wagner's theological convictions in this era reflect his affirmation of Wesleyan holiness with Pentecostalism's emphasis on signs and wonders. Incorporating Pentecostal signs and wonders with the pragmatism of church growth provided a paradigm and means for Wagner's affirmation of Wesleyan holiness.¹⁴³ Wagner distinguishes Wesleyan holiness as one of the most influential theological paradigms in the last five hundred years.¹⁴⁴ In reflecting on the paradigm shifts of theological convictions, Wagner states,

My starting point is the Protestant Reformation in which the theological underpinnings were firmly established: the authority of Scripture, justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers. The Wesleyan movement then introduced the demand for personal and corporate holiness. The Pentecostal movement later profiled the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in a variety of power ministries.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 9.

¹⁴³ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 213. Wagner's appropriation of Wesleyan holiness integrated his phenomenological hermeneutic from his church growth methodologies and Pentecostal signs and wonders. Wagner believes that theology is to be interpreted and "can be revised in light of what is learned through experience." C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1987), 38.

¹⁴⁴ C. Peter Wagner, "Clark Pinnock," September 4, 2001, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 16, Folder 13, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. While Pentecostalism and Wesleyan holiness had a noted impact on Wagner, he credits the continual filling of "spiritual power" in the "signs and wonders" theology as "the principal key to effective and sustained" holiness, obedience, and evangelism. Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 271.

¹⁴⁵ Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 110–11. While the offices do not directly reflect Wagner's doctrine of sanctification, the progression of his theological convictions must be understood in the context of his delineation of decades. Wagner often differentiates the decades of his ministry, identifying them with influential events or people. Wagner notes that a new understanding of the offices that God was restoring accompanied each theological shift. "The office of intercessor was restored in the 1970s." Wesleyan holiness accompanied the "office of prophet" that was "restored in the 1980s." The culmination of Wagner's paradigm shift to Pentecostal signs and wonders demonstrated that the "final piece came into place in the 1990s with the recognition of the gift and office of apostle." In 1998, Wagner affirmed "the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the expression of the five-fold ministry gifts of the Spirit, as well as apostolic and prophetic ministry, women in ministry and renewal in the Holy Spirit." Wagner University, "About Us."

Wagner’s “shift” in his view of sanctification, centering on the “operation of the Holy Spirit” with continual fillings for holiness and obedience in believers’ lives, was initiated by his affirmation of the “Charismatic Renewal” movement, which emphasized signs and wonders.¹⁴⁶

Lighter doctrinal load. Theology became a “heavy doctrinal load” that Wagner advocated should be exchanged for a “lighter doctrinal load.” The lighter load carries fewer “essentials of our faith,” as “there is no overarching apostolic agency that dictates what must be in everyone’s absolute circle.”¹⁴⁷ As he experienced new phenomena, Wagner appropriated theological doctrines to correspond with the phenomenological manifestations he was experiencing. Wagner expresses that the “absolute circle” of the NAR movement does not emphasize doctrine in the same manner as traditional theology: “As we in the Body of Christ have led up to and now entered the Second Apostolic Age, there has been a steady, although not particularly rapid, movement toward a lighter view of doctrine.”¹⁴⁸

Pentecostalism. A core tenet of Wagner’s affirmation of the Pentecostal signs and wonders is that “God speaks directly to His people today” in “words of knowledge.”¹⁴⁹ Wagner encapsulates the importance of his paradigm shift to

¹⁴⁶ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 84. Wagner credits David (Paul) Yonggi Cho’s book *The Fourth Dimension* as a transformational point in his ministry, stating that the full gospel is “very important because it takes us beyond the three dimensions of the physical and material world into the fourth dimension of the power of the Holy Spirit.” For more information, see Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*.

¹⁴⁷ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 148. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 161.

¹⁴⁸ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 144–45. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 163.

¹⁴⁹ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 39; Wagner, “Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth,” 6. Wagner describes his transition to affirming the Pentecostal signs and wonders along with the work of the Holy Spirit, asserting that the “radical, although gradual, ‘paradigm shift’ which I experienced beginning around 1970.” As he “came to understand and experience the power of the Third Person of the Trinity, who began to come into His rightful place with the Pentecostal revival about one hundred years ago, my entire ministry soared to a new level which I could not have imagined previously” (32).

Pentecostalism by stating, “If the Lord tarries, Pentecostalism will undoubtedly go down in future history as the most significant religious phenomenon of the twentieth century.”¹⁵⁰ Pentecostals believe that prayer “requires the active, energetic participation of each person (as contrasted to liturgical prayers that require very little personal involvement).”¹⁵¹ Prayer “establishes an intimate contact with God” through “praying in tongues.” Such “intimacy with God” is displayed in supernatural signs and wonders, what Wagner calls the “power ministries” of the Holy Spirit. The manifestations “include healings, miracles, prophecy, tongues, deliverance, spiritual warfare and other ministry activities.”¹⁵² Wagner notes “outrageous meetings where demons are manifesting and people are being set free,” “drops of oil falling inside buildings, everybody’s Bible getting covered with drops of oil,” and other “supernatural phenomena” as regularly occurring as the Holy Spirit moves in Pentecostal services.¹⁵³

Holiness. Wagner identifies that holiness is available in life “without sin, one day at a time.” Citing the command to be holy in 1 Peter 1:15, Wagner proclaims, “I think we can presume that God would not require us to do something that is impossible for us to do, such as being holy in all—not some, not most—of our conduct.”¹⁵⁴ Wagner connects holiness and obedience, declaring that those who are holy will “love Jesus and

¹⁵⁰ Wagner, “Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth,” 5. In 2013, Wagner reports, “Fortunately, our present generation of believers now accepts Pentecostalism as a legitimate, and frequently envied, form of biblical Christianity.” Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 33.

¹⁵¹ Wagner, “Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth,” 6.

¹⁵² Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 10.

¹⁵³ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 10.

¹⁵⁴ Wagner, *Apostles Today*, 40. The supernatural power “entrusted to the body of Christ” empowers the personal holiness Wagner attributes in Wesley’s view. Wagner argues that the apostle Paul’s imperative to “put on” the whole armor of God (Eph 6:11) implies the holiness that originates from the imperative to “be holy” (1 Pet 1:15). In discussing the synergistic nature of the two imperatives, Wagner says, “Most of us try to practice this and we verbally clothe ourselves with truth, the helmet of salvation, the gospel of peace, the sword of the Spirit, and the rest. Teaching on the armor of God abounds.” Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 10.

do what he wants.”¹⁵⁵ Every believer is exhorted to attain personal holiness, which results in a life free of sin. Holiness and sanctification, evident in sinlessness, are prerequisites for spiritual warfare.¹⁵⁶ Wagner offers a pragmatic method for determining holiness with “five principles that will help equip” believers “for battle,” which include “confess all known sins” and “the higher God calls you to leadership, the higher your standards of holiness.”¹⁵⁷

Wagner retrospectively discusses his initial learning of holiness in *Revival! It Can Transform Your City!* (1999): “I was taught that I should strive to be holy and that I should advance in my progress toward that goal throughout my life. But I was also taught that I would never make it, since I could never be God.”¹⁵⁸ Wagner’s transition to Wesleyan holiness is in response to his reading of Scripture that it is “possible” “not only to yearn to be holy and to strive to be holy, but to succeed in being holy.” He continues, “I believe that the power of the Holy Spirit within us can move us through a whole day without sinning against God. And if this can happen for one day, it can and should happen day after day.”¹⁵⁹ In *Changing Church*, Wagner criticizes several “theological

¹⁵⁵ Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 129.

¹⁵⁶ Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 10. Wagner’s discussion of the need for personal holiness centers around “strategic-level spiritual warfare,” to which Wagner was introduced by “Cindy Jacobs, author of *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy*.” Cindy explained that the personal holiness of a pure heart, required for the armor of God, “carries only a one-day warranty, so working on this needs to be a constant and daily part of our lifestyle.” Wagner emphasized the daily need for personal holiness in both the church member and the apostolic leadership.

¹⁵⁷ Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 115. The full list of principles for warfare includes the following: (1) a “proper relationship to God”; (2) “confess all known sins”; (3) “seek healing for persistent patterns of sin”; (4) “allow others to read your spiritual barometer”; and (5) “the higher God calls you to leadership, the higher your standards of holiness.” Wagner also offers caution as “four dangers need to be avoided”: (1) “waiting until you are perfect before moving out” in ministry; (2) “regarding holiness as an end in itself,” such as the “bless me” syndrome; (3) “expecting ministry to self-generate from a holy life” without motivation and initiative; and (4) “relating effectiveness in ministry to compliance with certain outward indicators of holiness.”

¹⁵⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *Revival! It Can Transform Your City!* (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 1999), 61.

¹⁵⁹ Wagner, *Revival!*, 62. Wagner states his belief that believers can live without sin and yet must confess sin when prompted by the Holy Spirit. The ambiguity and apparent contradiction in his writings occur within the context of Wagner’s addressing believers’ call to holiness and their ability to be holy as God is holy (1 Pet 1:16), for God would not ask something of believers that is not possible. Wagner

conclusions” of the Protestant Reformers as “questionable” and not “absolutes.” Wagner contends that the Reformers’ “doctrine of sanctification” was “corrected” by John Wesley’s doctrine of holiness.¹⁶⁰

Wagner emphasizes pragmatic means by which believers can measure holiness. These means measure holiness by the absence of habitual sin or a lifestyle contrary to God’s commands and indicate the maturity of character. Wagner believes the continual confession and repentance of “an outward sin” or “sins of omission” is perceived as “a never-ending battle against the sin nature and carnality” that “can easily develop into a spiritual malady of hyper-repentance” and create an “ongoing struggle toward sanctification without clear victory in sight.”¹⁶¹ In addition to the active role of believers, the operational role of the Holy Spirit comprises a significant theme of sanctification for Wagner. The power of the Spirit through phenomenological manifestations demonstrates the sanctifying work of the Spirit through “visible, overt, public testimonies” similar to the Pentecostal signs and wonders.

In *On Earth as It Is in Heaven* (2012), Wagner reveals that the sequence of the “intercessors in the 1970s, prophets in the 1980s, and apostles in the 1990s” set the stage

does not definitively address this ambiguity but builds upon believers’ ability to live without sin. Wagner denies Wesleyan perfectionism, which holds that a state of sinlessness can be attained in this life. C. Peter Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2002), 43. Wagner declares his belief that “sinless perfection is unattainable in practice.” C. Peter Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World: A Study Guide on First Corinthians with Questions for Discussion Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971). Further developing his belief of the believer’s ability to live without sin, Wagner explains,

It is my strong feeling that no individual here on earth is, or will ever be, perfect in the sense of having no room for improvement in attitudes, behavior, or relationships. The Greek word *teleios*, frequently translated “perfect,” does not signify a flawless moral nature, but rather *maturity*. When Jesus says, “Therefore you shall be perfect [*teleios*], just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48), He means that we are to live up to everything that God wants us to be. I like the way The Message translates this verse: “Grow up. You’re kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created destiny. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.” (C. Peter Wagner, *Spheres of Authority: Apostles in Today’s Church* [Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2002], 38)

¹⁶⁰ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 169. Wagner states, “In the eighteenth century, John Wesley was used by God to bring some very important new emphases into the Body of Christ.” Wagner continues, “Part of the fresh air Wesley brought to Christianity was his view that Christians could actually be holy and live holy lives, just as God is holy.” Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 13–14.

¹⁶¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 102–3.

“for entering the Second Apostolic Age in 2001.”¹⁶² God speaks to the church through this “sequence” in the Second Apostolic Age. Wagner summarizes the sequence, stating that “for God’s purposes to be fully realized then, intercessors, prophets and apostles are all needed, and in that sequence.”¹⁶³

Apostles. Wagner articulates that NAR churches believe in the functional role of apostles in the leadership structure. Apostolic leaders guide and shape the present by sharing the “God-ordained reality” of the future, expressing how they see God moving in the church. Apostles replace pastors as the leader of the church, and apostolic elders perform the function of elders found in traditional churches. The “strategic design” foundation in which the church is being built is through apostles “empowered by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶⁴

Prophecy and prophets. In *7 Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, Wagner notes three characteristics of NAR leaders revolving around prophecy.¹⁶⁵ First, prophecy is a spiritual gift that all Christians should desire and develop, as “the more we concentrate on making it happen, the more it will happen.”¹⁶⁶ Second is the “acceptance

¹⁶² Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 27–29. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 135.

¹⁶³ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 29. Wagner believes intercessors “clear the pathway in the invisible world between heaven and earth” through binding and loosing oppositional “demonic powers.” Prophets are “the most strongly anointed by God to hear His voice” and communicate that message to the Body of Christ.” Lastly, Apostles “take the word of the Lord from prophets” to “judge and interpret the word; they strategize their procedures; and they assume leadership in implementing it.” Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 135–36.

¹⁶⁴ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 7.

¹⁶⁵ Wagner credits Jack Deere with helping people shift into the power paradigm of prophecy. Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 43. Jack Deere wrote two influential books used by the NAR; see Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit: Discovering How God Speaks and Heals Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God* (1996).

¹⁶⁶ Wagner distinguishes the spiritual gift of prophecy from the spiritual responsibility to “engage in two-way prayer and to hear directly from God.” Communicating with God “as if we were having a telephone conversation with him” is “God’s ‘Plan A.’” God desires “each believer to be in such intimate relationship to Him through the filling of the Holy Spirit that He can literally communicate to us what is in His heart.” Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 43.

of the office of prophet.”¹⁶⁷ Such acceptance denotes the that “Church has recognized the spiritual gift and has publicly authorized the person to use that gift for the benefit of the Body.” Prophets work closely with apostles, who guide the church’s vision. Third, “intelligent” leaders will listen “carefully to authentic prophecies” of the prophets.¹⁶⁸

The operational role of the Holy Spirit. Wagner articulates that effective NAR churches are “permeated by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit,” who is the most directly involved member of the Trinity in evangelism.¹⁶⁹ Wagner states that traditional Christian evangelism often included the cross as the “major compass point for moving ahead in active ministry.” However, he argues that “charisma,” focusing on the “active work” Holy Spirit, must be the “compelling guidance” for evangelistic ministry. The operational work of the Holy Spirit is a mark of NAR churches, which teach

on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They believe that all, not just some, of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are operating today just as they did in the Early Church. They frequently speak directly to the Holy Spirit and pray words to the effect, “Holy Spirit, we invite You to come and minister to us right now!” Numerous people are impacted so personally by the filling of the Holy Spirit that they look at the experience as a second blessing.¹⁷⁰

In *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, Wagner declares that the “filling of the Holy Spirit was not a once-in-a-lifetime event that would then qualify Peter as a ‘Spirit-filled’ believer for the rest of his life.”¹⁷¹ Therefore, Wagner reasons that the “filling of the Spirit is something

¹⁶⁷ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 45.

¹⁶⁸ Wagner denotes two types of prophecy, stating, “Enscripturated biblical revelation is known by the Greek word *logos*, while contemporary revelation through prophecy is known as *rhema*. Because they are both the word of God, we must not neglect either one.” He adds that “intelligent” leaders should not reject prophecy. Rather, the revelation delivered by prophets provides “valuable information, as long as we are careful to filter it through lenses of sanctified discernment, separating truth from falsehood.” Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 47.

¹⁶⁹ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 19. Wagner emphasizes the “immediate presence of the Third Person of the Trinity is more important than the immediate presence of the Second Person of the Trinity” in evangelism.

¹⁷⁰ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 24–25.

¹⁷¹ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 161.

that must frequently be repeated throughout the life of a committed believer, some say as often as every day.” Moreover, Wagner asserts, “If Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, needed the power of the Holy Spirit to confront the powers and cast out demons, so much more do we need the same power.”¹⁷²

Power ministries. Wagner explicates, “Acts 1:8 provides the outline for the whole book: ‘You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ The two components of this verse” provide the grounding for “power ministries and missiology, carrying the gospel cross-culturally.”¹⁷³ Wagner accentuates the high priority of “Power ministries” for effective discipleship and “gospel outreach.”¹⁷⁴ The ministry end justifies the means, whereby the church focuses on “winning souls and multiplying churches.”¹⁷⁵

Wagner asserts that “miracles and healings validated Jesus’ ministry,” exhibiting that his “ministry was more powerful *with* miraculous healings than it would have been *without* it.”¹⁷⁶ Wagner derives the need for the miraculous in evangelism from John 20:31, which states that the signs and miracles were written so the readers would believe Jesus is the Christ and have life in his name—miracles “pave the road to effective and fruitful evangelism.”¹⁷⁷ In *Churchquake!* (1999), Wagner contends that “the spiritual

¹⁷² Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 161.

¹⁷³ Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 14–15.

¹⁷⁴ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 10.

¹⁷⁵ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 17.

¹⁷⁶ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 55.

¹⁷⁷ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 55. Wagner states in *This Changes Everything* that

if we have the right goal and if we do make disciples, these disciples become part of what the Bible calls the “fruit” of our labors. “Fruit” is an agricultural term. Inbred in every farmer is what I like to call the vision of the fruit. Whatever strategy the farmer develops is aimed toward harvesting the greatest amount of fruit possible. Likewise, sound evangelistic strategy never loses the vision of the fruit. (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 58)

orientation of the unbelievers before they come to church” impacts the effectiveness of power encounters in church.¹⁷⁸ Wagner believes power ministries should be practiced inside and outside the church, with believers and unbelievers.¹⁷⁹

Deliverance ministry. Wagner asserts that the “ministry of deliverance was rare before the coming of Jesus, but common after.”¹⁸⁰ Casting out demons made up a significant portion of Jesus’s ministry, and Christians must not see the reality of demons as fantasy. Wagner’s “conclusions” regarding deliverance ministry “come from connecting the various pieces of the relevant biblical data, rather than from a systematic biblical explanation.” Wagner emphasizes the need for churches to offer targeted strategic-level deliverance to break demonic influence, oppression, and strongholds, stating, “We have little chance of seeing transformation” if “we do not concertedly and aggressively confront” the “demonic forces.”¹⁸¹ Wagner declares, “A chief obstacle preventing” the deliverance of demons “is a doctrine” that “Christians cannot have demons and that it is wrong to suppose that any bona fide Christians would ever need to have demons cast out of them.”¹⁸² Wagner stresses the importance of deliverance, noting

Some demons leave at conversion, some leave at baptism, some leave at a church altar call and some leave through a truth encounter. Some demons can be self-delivered, while others require a major-league power encounter before they will go.

¹⁷⁸ Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 180. Wagner continues,

If the orientation is secular, having little or no operative sensitivity to the supernatural forces of the invisible world, they would be more likely to find God in a seeker-driven church. However, if the unbelievers have had previous contact with the occult, believe in horoscopes, have dabbled in the New Age, have been into heavy metal music and, thereby, do have a sensitivity to the invisible world, the spiritual power of high worship and praise will likely make sense to them and they will perceive a power encounter. When they learn that God has more power than the “forces” or the “energy” or the “channeling” or the “spirits,” they will gratefully accept Jesus as their Lord and savior. This is more likely to happen in a charismatic than in a non-charismatic church.

¹⁷⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *The Book of Acts: A Commentary* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), 78–79.

¹⁸⁰ Wagner, *Hard-Core Idolatry*, 26.

¹⁸¹ Wagner, *Revival!*, 46.

¹⁸² Wagner, *Revival!*, 45.

The Body of Christ needs different deliverance ministers who are equipped to handle deliverance at different levels and in different situations.¹⁸³

Powerful prayer. Wagner considers a difference between everyday “routine” prayer and “powerful” prayer: everyday prayer is “routine,” “passive,” “reverent,” and “cerebral.” Powerful or “Effective and Fervent” prayer is “spontaneous,” aggressive,” “expressive,” and “emotional.”¹⁸⁴ Wagner takes effective and fervent prayer from James 5:16, citing that powerful prayers are more effective and can determine the course of future events. Such a paradigm for prayer is based on Wagner’s belief that God has

chosen to order His creation in such a way that many of His actions are contingent on the prayers of His people. It is as if God has a Plan A that He will implement if believers pray fervently and effectively. If they do not, He then has a Plan B that He will implement. God’s Plan A is obviously better than Plan B for all concerned. However, the choice, according to the design of our sovereign God, is ours, pure and simple.¹⁸⁵

Such powerful prayer “opens the door” for true intercessory prayer, like that described by Brother Andrew in *And God Changed His Mind*¹⁸⁶ and by Jack Hayford in *Prayer Is Invading the Impossible*.¹⁸⁷ Intercessory prayer, or “Apostolic prayer,” comes from recognizing the gift and office of intercessors, who “have been called by God to stand in the gap for the church and its ministry.” Intercessors use the authority of God to command a “strategic proclamation.” Wagner identifies NAR churches as offering “personal prayer partners” for pastors and “prayer rooms for sustained prayer” of

¹⁸³ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 74.

¹⁸⁴ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 85.

¹⁸⁵ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 81–82. Pietsch asserts that Wagner believes prayer influences God, resulting in divine partnership with humanity to realize ministry outcomes. Pietsch argues that Wagner’s view of prayer, which Pietsch terms cooperationism, is an outworking axiom of his priority of the divine interventional mutability of God. See Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” chap. 6.

¹⁸⁶ Brother Andrew, *And God Changed His Mind* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 1990).

¹⁸⁷ Jack W. Hayford, *Prayer Is Invading the Impossible* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1977).

individual and strategic intercession.¹⁸⁸ Wagner asserts that “prayer can be powerful,” and “one way to know when you reach a higher level of prayer” is “to see an increase in concrete, measurable answers to your prayers.”¹⁸⁹

Strategic-level spiritual warfare. Wagner comments that “the Holy Spirit revealed” power principles to him for the new church age.¹⁹⁰ The root of the principles is the expectation of power granted by Jesus in John 14:12: “whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” Wagner underscores the importance of the power principles and the significance of understanding the “modus operandi of angels and demons” in the world. Wagner asserts that strategic-level spiritual warfare wages war on “territorial spirits” and the “hierarchy of demonic principalities and powers” that Satan uses to keep people in darkness. Wagner states in *Warfare Prayer* (2009) that “God has delegated His power for the task of evangelism to human beings like you and me who are filled and activated by the Holy Spirit. One of the ways that we use this power is to engage the powers of darkness in spiritual warfare in order to push back the veils that they have placed over the minds of unbelievers.”¹⁹¹ Warfare in evangelism should be practiced inside and outside the church, to disciples and unbelievers.

In *Spiritual Warfare Strategy* (2011), Wagner presents that to “accelerate evangelism,” NAR churches engage in strategic-level spiritual warfare through spiritual mapping.¹⁹² Intercessors identify where “territorial spirits” are at work and push back

¹⁸⁸ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 87–90.

¹⁸⁹ C. Peter Wagner, “Prayer Can Be Powerful (or Otherwise),” in *Prayer Changes Things: Taking Your Life to the Next Prayer Level*, ed. Beni Johnson (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2012), chap. 9, sec. “Measuring the Power of Prayer,” para. 1.

¹⁹⁰ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 103.

¹⁹¹ Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 209 (Question 16).

¹⁹² Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 22. Spiritual warfare is divided into three categories: (1) *ground-level spiritual warfare*, where demons are cast out of individuals; (2) *occult-level spiritual*

with powerful, “targeted prayers.”¹⁹³ The prayers are often accompanied by “prophetic acts,” such as prayer walks, prayer vigils, and declarations that “have the power to shift things in the invisible world” in order to prepare “the way for” God “to move in the spiritual realm,” and do “things that He would not do otherwise.”¹⁹⁴

Worship. In *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* (2005), Wagner presents that the hearts of Christians are set for intimacy with God. Believers should engage in worship “to become intimate with the Father” rather than “worshiping in order to prepare for listening to a sermon.”¹⁹⁵ Wagner contends in *Churchquake!* (1999) that Christians are “consumers” in “new apostolic worship” who “know the difference between a choir *performing* for us as the audience, and a worship team drawing us as *participants* into an experience with God.”¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, worship ought to feel “as though the Holy Spirit, not the music director,” is “in control.”

For Wagner, worship and warfare are intertwined. In *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* (2005), Wagner quotes from Cindy Jacobs’s *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy* (1994) concerning warfare worship—the “warring against the works of Satan by worshiping the Lord.”¹⁹⁷ The intimacy enjoyed through worship prepares the heart for warfare. Intimacy with God gives Christians the ability to fight demonic foes. Moreover, Wagner argues that warfare worship is a command given throughout the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. He bases his assertion on

warfare, which confronts “organized forces of evil in areas such as witchcraft, satanism, voodoo, Eastern religions, Freemasonry, Santería, magic and New Age”; and (3) *strategic-level spiritual warfare*, which seeks to neutralize “territorial and other kinds of high-ranking spirits whose assignment from Satan” is to block the spread of the gospel.

¹⁹³ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 106.

¹⁹⁴ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 111–12.

¹⁹⁵ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 29.

¹⁹⁶ Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 164–65.

¹⁹⁷ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 26.

Matthew 21:12, that “when Jesus cleansed the Temple—a warfare act in itself—He quoted two Old Testament Scriptures, both relevant to warfare worship:” Isaiah 56:7 and Psalm 8:2. Wagner continues, “This early group of believers doing warfare worship in the Temple” were “biblical believers. However,” their “only Bible at the time was the Old Testament. It is safe to assume, therefore, that they were being guided in warfare worship by Old Testament teachings.”¹⁹⁸ Further, Wagner reasons that warfare worship is evident in the New Testament, as evident in Acts 16–24, where worship “once again, opened the way for God to accomplish His plan here on Earth.”

Christ was a contingency. Wagner’s open theistic paradigm entails the epistemological openness of God along with the contingent design of creation and redemption. In *This Changes Everything* (2013), Wagner identifies his beginning emphasis of the creation in his Dominion theology as “God’s stated purpose for creating Adam and Eve,” the “dominion mandate.”¹⁹⁹ The mandate signifies that “God made His whole creation for Adam and Eve, and He wanted to put them in charge of it.” Wagner specifies that God implemented “a contingent redemptive plan as a result of an unforeseen fall of humanity into sin.”²⁰⁰ God created Adam as a “free moral agent” with the ability “to make his own decision whether he would fully obey God.”²⁰¹ Therefore, “God was unpleasantly surprised with the way things turned out.”²⁰²

In his commentary *The Book of Acts* (2008), Wagner proposes,

As a result of the strongholds provided through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, Satan succeeded in usurping the dominion over creation that God had originally planned for Adam. Satan had become so powerful that in the temptation he could

¹⁹⁸ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*, 32.

¹⁹⁹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 176.

²⁰⁰ Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 208.

²⁰¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 143.

²⁰² Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 144.

offer Jesus the kingdoms of this world, claiming that “this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish” (Luke 4:6).²⁰³

Confident in God’s redemptive plan, Wagner contends that Jesus was sent to restore dominion to humanity. Wagner describes Jesus’s role in redemption, proposing,

Jesus announced His declaration of war. He said that from the days of John the Baptist, the kingdom of heaven comes with violence “and the violent take it by force” (Matt. 11:12). With this, Jesus was establishing the pattern of things to come. His people would be recruited, mobilized and empowered to move with force against Satan and on behalf of the kingdom of God. Jesus’ desire is that His people regain the dominion over creation originally intended for Adam.²⁰⁴

The contingency of God’s redemptive plan originates in his mutability, which “necessitates that humanity implements God’s will on earth.”²⁰⁵ Jesus’s return to earth requires that humanity reclaim dominion from Satan over all the earth.

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship must be understood as indelibly embedded in open theism, which impacts his eschatological paradigm of Dominionism, spiritual warfare, and the apostolic framework of the New Apostolic Reformation movement.²⁰⁶ The primary axiom of Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship is to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt 28:19); moreover, discipleship requires Christians to “become spiritual and social activists” in the dominion mandate: “Jesus paid the *price* (His blood) for the reconciliation of all things,” but “God gave us the *task* of making it happen here on earth.”²⁰⁷ Wagner interprets discipling in the Great Commission:

Negatively, a people is disciplined when the claim of polytheism, idolatry, fetishism or any other man-made religion on its corporate loyalty is eliminated. Positively, a

²⁰³ Wagner, *The Book of Acts*, 20.

²⁰⁴ Wagner, *The Book of Acts*, 21.

²⁰⁵ Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 209.

²⁰⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 245–56; Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 172.

²⁰⁷ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 73; Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 181. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 182.

people is disciplined when its individuals feel united around Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, believe themselves to be members of His Church, and realize that “our folk are Christians, our book is the Bible, and our house of worship is the church.”²⁰⁸

Wagner believes in the primacy of the Great Commission and focuses efforts on improving the church’s ability to reach the lost and oppressed. Wagner emphasizes the intertwined nature of believers’ sanctification and discipleship; personal holiness is required to make disciples in the kingdom of God and to retake spiritual and physical dominion.²⁰⁹

Wagner’s belief in “equipping the saints” converges with taking dominion.

Wagner summarizes his conviction, stating,

God wants His kingdom to come here on earth as it is in heaven. He is raising up an army of Kingdom-minded and Kingdom-motivated people whom He will empower to retake from Satan the dominion of the 7 mountains that mold our culture. And He will provide all the tools, the resources, the strategy and the wealth necessary for us to accomplish the task!²¹⁰

Wagner’s convictional change to equipping the saints superseded “evangelism and church planting” as “legitimate *ends*—or final goals—of the Great Commission.”²¹¹

Evangelism continues to incorporate making disciples and church membership; however, the means of spiritual warfare and power ministries contribute significantly more to the *telos* of the Great Commission.

In agreement with McGavran, Wagner endorses the four steps to fulfilling the Great Commission: “seeking, finding, folding and feeding.”²¹² The additional steps of feeding those folded into the flock concentrate on helping them discover their spiritual

²⁰⁸ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 72–73; see also McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, 14. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 170.

²⁰⁹ Wagner, *Warfare Prayer*, 122; Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 130.

²¹⁰ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 266. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 171.

²¹¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 175. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 171.

²¹² Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, ed. C. Peter Wagner, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 6.

gifts. Wagner provides five steps to discovering gifts, in which “emotionally mature people who accept themselves” will be “more able to discover gifts.”²¹³ Wagner contends that it is the “Christian’s responsibility is to discover just what his or her gift is, and then use it for the benefit of the body as a whole.” Members who do not know their gift are “not able to please the Lord as they should. They are like the timid man in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) who buried his talent when he should have been using it. When he met his lord, he was labeled a ‘wicked, lazy slave’ (Matt. 25:26).”²¹⁴

Continuing to affirm that the Great Commission is a “biblically centered imperative” that was given by Christ “to make disciples of all nations,” Wagner emphasizes that Christians are “spiritual” “activists until Satan’s dominion is ended” by discipling “a people” as a “whole social unit.”²¹⁵ Wagner declares that Jesus “never sent out His disciples to preach the gospel of the church, but rather the gospel of the Kingdom.”²¹⁶ The paradigm of the kingdom diverges from Wagner’s previous belief that “the kingdom of God” is “confined to the four walls of the local church.”²¹⁷

Wagner believes the furthering of kingdom of God necessitates prayer, spiritual warfare, and the discipleship of believers. He concludes that God is “waiting for

²¹³ C. Peter Wagner, “Lecture Notes: Spiritual Gifts and Church Growth,” 8, 1996, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 7, Folder 4, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. The five steps are as follows: (1) “explore the possibilities” by making a list of the gifts found throughout the Bible, and Wagner recommends looking through suggested “books and writings on spiritual gifts that should be helpful”; (2) “explore with as many as you can”; (3) “examine your feelings” through Scripture (Phil 2:13; Jer 20:9) with the understanding that “even” Jeremiah “would be unhappy not exercising his gifts”; (4) “evaluate your effectiveness,” which should be “easy”; and (5) “expect confirmation from the body” (8–15). Wagner provides two variations of spiritual gifts and the definitions for each gift. The first list of twenty-two gifts is provided in C. Peter Wagner, *Discover Your Spiritual Gifts* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 63. The second list of fifteen gifts Wagner cites from St. Paul Lutheran Church in Trenton, Michigan. See Wagner, “Lecture Notes: Spiritual Gifts and Church Growth,” 12–15.

²¹⁴ Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, 72–73.

²¹⁵ C. Peter Wagner, “Mission and Church in Four Worlds,” in *Church/Mission Tensions Today*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 227–28; Wagner, *Dominion!*, 72. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 170.

²¹⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 272. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 146.

²¹⁷ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 272. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 146.

us to do our part in bringing restoration to pass in real life. Meanwhile,” Jesus “is reigning through us until ‘He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet’ (1 Corinthians 11:24–25).”²¹⁸ Disciples, then, further the kingdom of God through “the power of the Holy Spirit,” as they “confront the powers of Satan, by confirming the gospel by signs and miracles and establishing churches according to the New Testament pattern and doctrine of the Apostles.”²¹⁹ Wagner devotes over three decades of his ministry to spiritual warfare, in which Christians engage through the power of the Holy Spirit. Wagner declares that Christians can have “unlimited power” just like Jesus, who told “us, as mere human beings, that we would do the same works He did and even greater works. The same Holy Spirit who did miracles through Jesus is available to do them through us today.”²²⁰

In *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, Wagner attests that his view of prayer changes when he “began flowing with the prayer movement in the 1990s” and “began to believe strongly that our prayers can actually influence what God will do next. They can change God’s mind.”²²¹ Through Dominion theology, Wagner

²¹⁸ Concerning Wagner’s theological change, he states,

I am reluctant to bring this up because for most of my career as a missiologist specializing in the Great Commission, I confess that I advocated the individualistic approach. I refused to interpret “all the nations” as social units, even though that would be the literal translation of *panta ta ethne*. I leaned toward Chuck Colson’s assumptions. I taught that the only way we could disciple the social units embraced by the term *ethne* (from which we get the English “ethnic groups”) would be to win enough souls to Christ within each ethnos, baptize them and get them into local churches. From that point we could assume they would provide the salt and light necessary for change. This is now especially embarrassing because my missiological mentor, Donald McGavran, always interpreted the Great Commission as a mandate to change the whole social unit. (Wagner, *Dominion!*, 72)

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 170.

²¹⁹ Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 158.

²²⁰ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 107.

²²¹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 273. Wagner asserts his “paradigm shift” from classic theism to open theism in *Dominion!*, stating, “I believe what is known as ‘open theism’ provides us with the most biblical and most helpful theological framework for doing our part in seeing ‘Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’” Wagner, *Dominion!*, 76. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 148.

describes the efficacy of prayer in bringing “Your Kingdom come” and “Your will be done” in the lives of believers and the evangelism of the world.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 29. Wagner’s theological dispositions (1999–2016)

Systematic Theology	Beginning of Era	End of Era
<i>Doctrine of God</i>		
<i>Knowledge of God</i>	Divine Volitional Limitation	Divine Volitional Limitation
<i>Omnipotence</i>	Divine Volitional Limitation	Divine Volitional Limitation
<i>Spiritual Cosmos</i>	Limited Spiritual Dualism	Limited Spiritual Dualism
<i>Prayer</i>	Divine Interventional Mutability	Divine Interventional Mutability
<i>Doctrine of Scripture</i>		
<i>Revelation</i>	Extrabiblical and Personal	Extrabiblical and Personal
<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>	Phenomenological	Phenomenological
<i>Theological doctrine</i>	Deemphasis of Doctrine	Deemphasis of Doctrine
<i>Doctrine of Church</i>		
<i>Church and Society</i>	Church Growth	Dominionism
<i>Great Commission</i>	Discipleship of Nations	Discipleship of Nations
<i>Doctrine of Holy Spirit</i>		
<i>Pneumatology</i>	Restorationism	Restorationism
<i>Sanctification</i>	Wesleyan Holiness	Wesleyan Holiness
<i>Doctrine of Christ</i>		
<i>Christology</i>	Incarnation-Theology	Incarnation-Theology
<i>Gospel</i>	Salvation of Nations	Salvation of Nations
<i>Doctrine of Last Things</i>		
<i>Kingdom of God</i>	Present Reality	Present Reality
<i>Eschatology</i>	Frustrated by Dispensationalism	Victorious Eschatology
Research Contribution		
<i>Philosophy of Discipleship</i>		
<i>Disciple</i>	Born Again, Cleansed, Purified, Holy	Kingdom Activists
<i>Equipping of Disciples</i>	Spiritual Gifts, Warfare, Signs and Wonders	Spiritual Gifts and Warfare to Reclaim Kingdom of God
<i>Educational Framework</i>	Pre-Service Education, Seeker-Sensitive Ministry	Apostolic Leadership, Seeker-Sensitive Ministry

Reading the Final Biblical-Theological Narrative of C. Peter Wagner

The section discusses Wagner’s “fourth career” after his time at Wagner Leadership Institute and Global Harvest Ministries, which established in the 1990s.²²² Although Wagner passed on 2016, he actively wrote until his death.²²³ Doris Wagner completed the final book in 2021: *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life: Wisdom for Thriving in Life*. Doris conveys that she is attempting to “fill in the blanks” of the unfinished portions of the book “as best” she can “directly from” Wagner’s “lecture notes and Power Point material” so that “at least the bare bones content” is provided in the book.²²⁴ This section interacts only with Wagner’s penned writing.²²⁵ Wagner’s final manuscript and teaching materials do not present any theological or convictional changes; however, a continuation and conclusion of his codified theological system in the new millennium are present.

Theological Dispositions

Biblical-theological system. Wagner continues to assert that the promises of God “will eventually come to pass, but obviously not yet. Satan, who is the god of this age, still has too much power because God’s Kingdom has not fully come here on

²²² Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 176. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 181.

²²³ Peter Wagner and Doris Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life: Wisdom for Thriving in Life* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2021), 14, 88. As a researcher’s note, I am deeply moved by the care Doris took to faithfully continue the work of Peter Wagner. I wish to express my deepest condolences to Doris. After reading and listening to Wagner for the last several years, I feel as if I know him and would have enjoyed talking with him. I wish to thank Doris for finishing the final book, which could not have been easy; the book and Doris’ honest rendering of her heart give a glimpse into the joy Wagner had for life. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 178–79.

²²⁴ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 91.

²²⁵ Wagner’s contribution concluded on p. 82, with Doris completing the remaining chapters. Doris states, “In the following numbered outline, everything in bold print is what I found. All other words are my (Doris’) observations, or what I think Peter would have said.” Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 83. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 179.

earth.”²²⁶ Wagner conveys that although the kingdom of God is not fully realized, through the dominion mandate, believers pray the Lord’s Prayer to bring the kingdom of God on earth and eradicate sickness or poverty.²²⁷

The indwelling presence of God. Wagner articulates the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as the most significant presence of the Lord in the life of Christians. Wagner asserts that “we live, day in and day out, in His indwelling presence. This provides us strength and nurture in our Christian walk. It is my strategic guideline.”²²⁸ Wagner differentiates believers from unbelievers, remarking that the presence of the Holy Spirit “only comes if and when you establish a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, in other words, being born twice.” Wagner expresses that the “indwelling presence of God will be there, but it is our responsibility to make sure we are living in it.” We “can forget God’s presence, we can deny God’s presence, we can neglect God’s presence, we can even violate God’s presence. But if we do so, we suffer the consequences.”²²⁹ Wagner cites Colossians 1:27 and Galatians 2:20 as proof texts.

The presence of God and practical holiness. Wagner classifies “two aspects” of holiness: positional and practicing. He defines positional holiness as “our status as a true child of God.”²³⁰ Wagner continues, “God gives you the new birth and God gives you positional holiness at the same time”; therefore, you “do not work on positional holiness if you are truly born again.” Practicing holiness “implies that, unlike positional

²²⁶ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 47. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 181.

²²⁷ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 47. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 181.

²²⁸ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 37.

²²⁹ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 38–39.

²³⁰ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 44. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 181.

holiness, we have to work on it. It does not come automatically.”²³¹ Wagner appeals to 1 Peter 1:15, articulating, “The words ‘*be holy*’ mean that it is up to us. It is our choice. And the Bible says that our holiness is displayed by our conduct.” Wagner reasons, “If we choose to live in the presence of God, I repeat, holiness becomes second nature.”²³² Wagner declares that Christians can “live a holy life without even trying.”²³³

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

In *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, Wagner states that he is in “phase IV, Afterglow,” in which God gave him “six specific assignments to keep before” him.²³⁴ Wagner states that through his apostolic ministries, God assigned him to “Informing” the body of Christ of the “things that the Spirit is saying to the churches” and “Imparting” the “positive spiritual characteristics to those who have chosen to follow” his “apostolic leadership.” The next four assignments specifically pertain to believers and apostolic leaders: (1) “Activating” believers’ ability to “discover and activate” their “spiritual gifts”; (2) “Empowering” believers “to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit” to “fulfill the destiny that God has for them in one or more of the Seven Mountains”; (3) “Equipping” leaders “to establish biblical alignment (equipping = *katartizo* = alignment) with apostles and prophets”; and (4) “Encouraging” believers by helping “to motivate and stimulate others to prosper in” the “purpose God has for them.”²³⁵ Wagner’s discipleship

²³¹ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 45. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 181.

²³² Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 46. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 181.

²³³ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 43. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 181.

²³⁴ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 18. Wagner states that “Afterglow” is “the most comfortable” phase of ministry.

²³⁵ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 25.

philosophy is seen in the four assignments as to how the church can assist believers and the body of Christ.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 30. Wagner’s theological dispositions (1955–2021)

Systematic Theology	1955	2021
<i>Doctrine of God</i>		
<i>Knowledge of God</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Divine Volitional Limitation
<i>Omnipotence</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Divine Volitional Limitation
<i>Spiritual Cosmos</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Limited Spiritual Dualism
<i>Prayer</i>	Frustrated by Classic Theism	Divine Interventional Mutability
<i>Doctrine of Scripture</i>		
<i>Revelation</i>	Frustrated by Epistemology	Extrabiblical and Personal
<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>	Undefined	Phenomenological
<i>Theological Doctrine</i>	Emphasis of Doctrine	Deemphasis of Doctrine
<i>Doctrine of Church</i>		
<i>Church and Society</i>	Separatist	Dominionism
<i>Great Commission</i>	Individual Discipleship	Discipleship of Nations
<i>Doctrine of Holy Spirit</i>		
<i>Pneumatology</i>	Cessationism	Restorationism
<i>Sanctification</i>	Frustrated by Reformed Sanctification	Wesleyan Holiness
<i>Doctrine of Christ</i>		
<i>Christology</i>	Incarnation-Theology	Incarnation-Theology
<i>Gospel</i>	Salvation of Individuals	Salvation of Nations
<i>Doctrine of Last Things</i>		
<i>Kingdom of God</i>	Future Promise and Reality	Present Reality
<i>Eschatology</i>	Dispensationalism	Victorious Eschatology
Research Contribution		
<i>Philosophy of Discipleship</i>		
<i>Disciple</i>	Kingdom Activists	Kingdom Activists
<i>Equipping of Disciples</i>	Spiritual Gifts and Warfare to Reclaim Kingdom of God	Spiritual Gifts and Warfare to Reclaim Kingdom of God
<i>Discipleship Framework</i>	Apostolic Leadership, Seeker-Sensitive Ministry	Apostolic Leadership

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF C. PETER WAGNER'S DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION AND PHILOSOPHY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Reflective Discernment of Wagner's Doctrine of Sanctification

Chapters 4–5 form the second step of Trentham's Inverse Consistency Protocol (ICP): read for receptivity, where the reader seeks to “carefully understand the proposed model on its own terms.”¹ The third step of ICP is to employ reflective discernment when interpreting social scientific paradigms through the lens of common grace, considering how the paradigms might “reflect and deflect redemptive insights.”²

For if faith must be pure and void of
all counterfeiting and feigning,
then these two things,
Christ and my works,
must be rightly discerned
and severed one from the other.³

Following the call of Luther to “rightly discern and sever” that which is not of Christ, reflective discernment of paradigms encompasses two sub-categories of reflection: (1) “Interpret the paradigm from a critically-reflective perspective” and (2) “Interpret the paradigm from a charitably-reflective perspective.” Virtuous thinking requires reflective discernment, from both a critical and charitable perspective, accounting for the innate faculties endowed in the *imago Dei* and common notions of general revelation.

¹ John David Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Engaging and Appropriating Models of Human Development,” *Christian Educational Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 487.

² Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2),” 491.

³ Martin Luther, “Sermon 15: The Sum of a Christian Life,” in *Sermons on the Most Interesting Doctrines of the Gospel* (London: James Duncan, 1830), 180.

Common notions allow Christians to recognize that genuine knowledge can be found in both biblical and extrabiblical sources. Although Scripture is not an exhaustive source of all knowledge, it provides the ultimate verification of all true knowledge about God and humanity.⁴ The Christian epistemology is fundamentally grounded in the presupposition that Scripture is normative; however, it is not a methodological source of knowledge on temporal phenomenological manifestations. Trentham describes the Reformed tradition as “associated with a ‘hermeneutic of caution,’” where “common grace is proposed as the source of potentially” “affirmable knowledge and insight from secular sources, while special revelation governs redemptive insight (i.e., biblical truth is normative).”⁵ The “rationality and perception of nonbelievers” is regarded “with an assumption of common grace, which legitimizes proposed insight on a qualified basis, upon due evaluative reflection.”

Trentham suggests that ICP calls for a “dual posture” when examining social science paradigms, such as C. Peter Wagner’s, stating,

⁴ Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2),” 480. Calvin discusses the concept of common notions, remarking,

Since then all nations, of themselves and without a monitor, are disposed to make laws for themselves, it is beyond all question evident that they have some notions of justice and rectitude, which the Greeks call preconceptions, *προληψεις*, and which are implanted by nature in the hearts of men. They have then a law, though they are without law: for though they have not a written law, they are yet by no means wholly destitute of the knowledge of what is right and just; as they could not otherwise distinguish between vice and virtue. (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen [Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010], comm. Rom 2:14–15 [pp. 96–97])

Common notions refer to innate faculties of the *imago Dei* evident in the principles of knowledge in all humanity on the basis of God’s “natural law,” namely “knowledge of God’s existence and moral awareness.” Moreover, humanity possesses the capacity to recognize principles and patterns in the world. Trentham articulates, “When a person (accurately, inaccurately, or with partial accuracy) perceives realities and trends related to human identity and development, he or she is manifesting their image-bearing capacity for observing and characterizing temporal phenomena.” Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2),” 478–79.

Fesko states, “Christians undoubtedly stand in antithesis to non-Christians, but not at every point of their existence. There is a place for common notions, not because we capitulate to sinful human autonomy, but because we rightly recognize that God has created all human beings in his image,” for “even in spite of sin and its noetic effects on human reason, we share common notions about God, the world, and even God’s law.” J. V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 100.

⁵ Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2),” 283.

Inverse realities call for a critical posture in which one will ask: “How, and to what extent, does the secular model diverge from normative biblical values and ideals for Christian maturity?” Patterns of consistency call for a charitable posture in which one will ask: “How, and to what extent, is the pattern of biblical Christian formation consistent with the pattern observed or proposed in the secular model?”

Engaging in ICP necessitates responsible charity; however, such engagement requires that Reformed convictions and epistemological priorities remain clear and firmly held. All of humanity possesses the capacity of discernment and reflective judgment as image-bearers of God; therefore, observations and propositions provided by social science research may be consistent with biblical truth.

Although social science research may be consistent with biblical truth, not all truth is or should be considered true truth, for only true truth is God’s truth. John Calvin wisely asserts, “All truth is from God; and consequently, if wicked men have said anything that is true and just, we ought not to reject it; for it has come from God.”⁶ The merit of what is considered God’s truth is rooted in God’s existence, not scientific observations or phenomenological manifestations. Scientific and phenomenological models can contain or reflect truth to some degree; however, the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of social scientific views “constitute anthropotelic human progress, but not Christotelic redemptive progress.”⁷

This chapter assesses and evaluates Wagner’s theological praxes and axioms related to his doctrine of sanctification and philosophy of discipleship by answering the research questions proposed in chapter 1. The framework of Reformed sanctification, presented in chapters 2 and the first half of chapter 3, and the Virtuous Christian Discipleship (VCD) model of discipleship, presented in the second half of chapter 3,

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin’s Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), comm. on Titus 1:12, (pp. 300–301). Augustine similarly exhorts that “every good and true Christian” should “understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master”; the Christian “recognizes and acknowledges the truth, even in” pagan “religious literature.” Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 37, Logos Bible Software.

⁷ Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2),” 484.

were utilized as the orthodox measure by which Wagner’s theological convictions were examined in chapters 4–5.

Research Questions

This research has sought to assess and evaluate C. Peter Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification and philosophy of discipleship by asking the following questions:

1. How does an articulated Reformed model of sanctification inform a reading of C. Peter Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification?
2. How can Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification be assessed charitably and critically from a Reformed theological perspective?
3. How is Wagner’s distinctive model of sanctification revealed in the discipleship strategies of ministries influenced by the NAR?
4. How may an assessment and evaluation of Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification inform a redemptive appropriation of discipleship strategies and methods?

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked, “How does an articulated Reformed model of sanctification inform a reading of C. Peter Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification?” Chapters 2–3 explored articulated a Reformed model of sanctification and model of discipleship. Michael Horton’s four areas of spiritual growth—drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship—must be emphasized equally in catechizing and discipleship.⁸ The Reformed model of sanctification presented the drama, doctrine, and doxology. The overarching metanarrative of the Reformed biblical-theological system informs the teaching of doctrine and worship of God in doxology. The Reformed model of discipleship established in VCD—for which the Reformed model of sanctification forms the theological base—utilizes the catechetical method of the early Christian church to grow the saints in spiritual maturity.

⁸ Michael S. Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God’s Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 143.

The dramatic narrative of Scripture, realized in the Reformed biblical-theological system, provides the metanarrative for understanding the God of the Bible, Christology, pneumatology, anthropology, and Christian discipleship in sanctification. Humanity, known as “Man the Storyteller, *homo narrans*,” create “narratives” in which they substitute their “own emotional and mental make-up for” what “they imagined” “lurked around and within them; narratives which, in short,” people utilized to come “to terms with everything which affected them.”⁹ *Homo narrans* also expresses “Man as narrator and tradition bearer who shapes the different basic forms of narration by expressing desires, dreams, and fears common to mankind.”¹⁰ Theologians and social scientists, such as sociologists and anthropologists, use narratives to explain the cosmos, God, the Holy Spirit, and the human condition.

The narratives of Christianity, found in the metanarrative of the Reformed biblical-theological system, rest on the eternal truths of the *ordo salutis*, *historia salutis*, and *pactum salutis*. The *ordo salutis*—God’s redemptive work demonstrated in the means and nature of individual conversion—must rest inside the *historia salutis*—God’s cosmic story of the redemption of humanity, evident in the progressive unfolding plan throughout the Scriptures manifest in the plot structures of creation, fall, redemption, new creation—with both firmly established in the *pactum salutis*—the eternal trinitarian decree that ordains the finite existence of humanity before time began.¹¹ The *ordo salutis*,

⁹ Kurt Ranke, “Problems of Categories in Folk Prose,” trans. Carl Lindahl, *Folklore Forum* 14, no. 1 (1981): 4–5.

¹⁰ Linda Dégh, *Folktales and Society: Story-Telling in a Hungarian Peasant Community*, exp. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1989), 377n2. Dégh discloses, “Recently in an address (Prague, 1966),” Karl Ranke “coined the term *homo narrans* to express the sum total of Man as narrator and tradition bearer who shapes the different basic forms of narration by expressing desires, dreams, and fears common to mankind (Ranke, 1967).” See Kurt Ranke, “Einfache Formen,” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 4, no. 1 (1967): 17–31.

¹¹ The *ordo salutis* model is affirmed by scholars of classic theism, even though the individual order of the *loci* is debated. Research shared with Evan Phillip Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism on C. Peter Wagner’s Philosophy of Discipleship” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 208–09.

historia salutis, and *pactum salutis* are intrinsically intertwined with discipleship. The essential ontology of a disciple rests within God's redemptive plan, with nothing outside his control. Therefore, Wagner's definition of the ontology of a disciple is not in agreement with the Reformed metanarrative or classic theism, as his affirmation of open theism perceives Christ as a contingency plan because "God's limitation of divine foreknowledge and divine volition creates an epistemological openness of future events contingent upon human intervention."¹²

Timothy Paul Jones and Michael S. Wilder provide insight into how Christians ought to engage in teaching doctrine; they define "the theologian's central task as the process of comprehending more deeply and articulating more clearly the truth that the Christian already believes."¹³ Jones and Wilder describe "the task as *quaerens intellegere fidem* ('seeking to understand faith')," which "portrays the descriptive process that seeks to comprehend the underlying structures of faith as well as examining how the structures shaped individuals' behaviors, perspectives, and ideals." The Christian faith necessitates "active and personal allegiance," with "assent to specific content that is rooted in God's consummate self-revelation of Jesus Christ"¹⁴ (see appendix 2). By emphasizing the content of the Christian faith, namely Scripture and Christian doctrine, discipleship and Christian faith development are the means of sanctification in the biblical perspective of the Reformed doctrine of sanctification.

Any model, such as Wagner's doctrine of sanctification, that does not account for what ought to be and was in eternity past substitutes an inadequate narrative with God

¹² Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 14. See also Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 488.

¹³ Timothy Paul Jones and Michael S. Wilder, "Faith Development and Christian Formation," in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James Riley Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 164.

¹⁴ Jones and Wilder, "Faith Development and Christian Formation," 191.

as a construct of the imagination rather than the God of the Bible.¹⁵ By solely looking at what “is” and not what “ought” to be, Wagner subverts philosophy, thereby ennobling the construct of the social science imagination as the governing narrative in his theology and doctrine of sanctification.¹⁶ Moreover, when biblical content is separated from faith, the result is “a relativistic recognition of transcendence devoid of any foundation beyond the fleeting experience of the individual. Such substitutes for authentic faith and doubt penultimate realities with ultimate value and, thus,” is inconsistent with the Reformed doctrine of sanctification.¹⁷

The Reformed model of sanctification lays the theological foundation for a biblical understanding of believers’ union with Christ. The covenant of redemption provides hope and assurance of believers’ union with Christ and the Father’s desire for Christians’ maturity. Calvin’s words echo this theological truth:

Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election. For since it is into his body the Father has destined those to be engrafted whom he has willed from eternity to be his own, that he may hold as sons all whom he acknowledges to be among his members, we have a sufficiently clear and firm testimony that we have been inscribed in the book of life [cf. Rev. 21:27] if we are in communion with Christ.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ranke discusses narratives as

forms expressive of certain psycho-intellectual attitudes and the concomitant creative powers of mankind. Let me repeat this once more: beneath all the various forms of our narrative material—each so immensely expressive in itself—there are forces of instinct as well as powers of the will at work, forces which originate of course in man himself. In our concern with the narrative material itself and its own laws of existence we only too readily overlook the human agent who has created it and given it its physiognomy and form. All form, however, breathes the spirit of man, its creator, and all variants arising from the formative process are but the representative particular expressions of this one essential content. (Ranke, “Einfache Formen,” 24–25)

¹⁶ In his 1984 address at his installation as the first incumbent of the Donald A. McGavran Chair of Church Growth in the Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission, Wagner declares that the “church growth theological methodology” is different than other theological methodologies as it “regards social science as the cognate discipline” rather than “philosophy as the cognate discipline to theology.” Wagner continues, stating that the “starting point” of “church growth often looks to the ‘is’ rather than to the ‘ought.’” Church growth, therefore, “emerges with a phenomenological methodology which may appear altogether too subjective to many traditional theologians.” Wagner, “Address Given on the Occasion,” 9–10.

¹⁷ Jones and Wilder, “Faith Development and Christian Formation,” 192.

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 3.24.5, Logos Bible Software.

Peter Bulkeley’s “threefold union with Christ” further assures believers and offers a firm foundation for discipleship: (1) the Father’s election of believers from eternity past, (2) believers’ death and resurrection with Christ, and (3) believers’ present union with Christ in which the Holy Spirit is conforming them into the image of Christ unto glorification.¹⁹ Believers’ union with Christ forms the essence of discipleship in “those who are chosen, redeemed, called, justified, and being sanctified and who will be glorified in Christ,” whose hearts and motivations “are formed by the drama, doctrine, and doxology that come from being united to Christ by the Spirit.”²⁰ Such a union leads to the praise of God, grabbing believers’ hearts and animating their hands and feet in worship.²¹

The VCD framework emphasizes the redemptive function of drama, doctrine, and doxology in discipleship to ensure growth and maturity by “*communicating God’s truth so that the body of Christ abides together in the love of Christ and bears fruit for the kingdom of Christ.*”²² VCD encapsulates believers’ cognition of Christ in (1) the *ontological calling* of union with Christ that establishes a federation with the source of

¹⁹ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 482. Bulkeley’s threefold union with Christ includes the following: (1) “Immanent union” denotes the election of believers in union with Christ “from all eternity, before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4)”; (2) “transient union” denotes union with Christ “in time past, in His mediatorial death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–11)”; and (3) “applicatory union” denotes the “experience of union with Christ in the present time (Eph. 2:5–6).”

²⁰ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 143. Horton continues discussing the implications of discipleship, stating,

We are not sent out into the world to change it, to transform it, to make it into the kingdom of God. Rather, we are sent into the world as God’s chosen, redeemed, called, justified, renewed people who know that the world’s condition is far worse than our neighbors think and God’s future for it far more glorious than they (or we) can imagine. Our good works may appear on the surface as no different from those of our non-Christian neighbors and co-workers. We may work alongside unbelievers in caring for a terminally ill child, marching for the rights of an oppressed minority or the unborn, paying our taxes, and helping disaster victims. Yet our way of being in the world—the basic motivations of our hearts—are formed by the drama, doctrine, and doxology that come from being united to Christ by the Spirit. Like our sanctification, the transforming effect of our lives on others will be something they notice more than we do.

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 20.

²¹ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 144.

²² John David Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*: The Vocational Calling and Mission of Christian Teaching Ministry,” *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 2 (2021): 220.

virtuous knowledge, (2) believers' *epistemological foundation* of virtuous knowledge in union with Christ that endues and illuminates wisdom, engendering growth, and (3) the *phenomenological application* of wisdom that enables continuous development and effectuation of wisdom to live righteously. Christians are to live out the calling to make disciples through relationships with those within the church and without. Believers' hearts, minds, and affections are formed through discipleship in catechesis via union with Christ.

The tri-perspectival VCD framework enables the fulfillment of the central command in the Great Commission—to “make disciples”; the supporting verbs of “baptizing,” “teaching,” and “obeying” provide the underpinning necessity to define a disciple rightly—one who submits to “Jesus’s teaching concerning himself” and teaches others to observe all that Christ has commanded them (Matt 28:20).²³ The Great Commission cannot be fulfilled—and disciples cannot be made—without the proper understanding of God, humanity, and the Christian life. VCD establishes a framework around *learning* wisdom in faith and *growing* in wisdom with hope, leading to *living* righteously in love. The essence of VCD is established in a biblical definition and development of discipleship.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, “How can Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification be assessed charitably and critically from a Reformed theological perspective?” Chapters 4–5 explored Wagner’s theological affirmations concerning the doctrine of sanctification and philosophy of discipleship, which were assessed and evaluated through the Reformed models articulated in answer to the previous research question. The evaluation of Wagner’s theological convictions examined Wagner’s entire theological career from

²³ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 139.

1950 to 2016, with his last manuscript published in 2021. The doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ, and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit form the basis of the doctrine of sanctification. Evan Pietsch's assessment of Wagner's doctrine of God is presented to enable a fulsome understanding of the theological underpinnings of Wagner's convictions related to the doctrine of sanctification. An examination of Wagner's doctrine of Christ and the Holy Spirit provides the necessary understanding of Wagner's theological praxes and axioms related to the doctrine of sanctification. Lastly, Wagner's doctrine of sanctification is assessed charitably and critically from a Reformed theological perspective.

Wagner's Doctrine of God

Pietsch articulates, "Wagner held to a functional openness paradigm of God 'all along' throughout his career as a seminary student, missionary, professor of Church Growth, Third Wave movement leader, and leader within the early New Apostolic Reformation movement."²⁴ The openness of God to which Wagner held necessitated that he "functionally dismissed the classic theism spectrum of the doctrine of God, which" finds affinity in the Reformed "paradigm of God's sovereignty." Wagner's conviction concerning the openness of God asserts "that God partners with humanity to determine future events." Pietsch establishes, "Wagner's functional openness theology is a constant theme throughout his career, which is evident through the thematic assertion that the prayers of Christians influence the sovereign decision of God to shape the future."²⁵

²⁴ Pietsch, "Impact of Open Theism," 181. Pietsch continues, "Before the codification and systemization of open theism in the early 1990s, Wagner's theological convictions concerning the doctrine of God shared functional parity with the primary pillars of open theism; however, his systemization and articulation were undefined." Moreover, "the formal systemization of openness theology in the early 1990s provided Wagner with a theological articulation of his affirmed conviction that God partners with humanity to determine future events."

²⁵ Pietsch, "Impact of Open Theism," 183.

Wagner's theological convictions concerning the doctrine of God remained constant throughout his life, although Wagner placed varied emphasis on God's power and knowledge during different periods of his life.²⁶ While a missionary in Bolivia and Argentina, Wagner affirmed a professed appropriation of classic theism; while at Fuller, he "affirmed many distinctives of the Charismatic Renewal movement, which emphasized aspects of pneumatology, such as signs and wonders."²⁷ During the late 1990s, he began professing the openness of God.²⁸ Wagner's first public affirmation of open theism occurred in the book he edited *Destiny of a Nation: How Prophets and Intercessors Can Mold History* (2001).²⁹ Wagner openly and explicitly affirmed open theism as a leader in the New Apostolic Reformation movement. Wagner's doctrine of God conflicts with classic theism and demonstrates relativistic theological convictions that do not display propositional assent to the doctrinal truths about God, thereby constituting idolatry (see appendix 7).³⁰

Wagner's Doctrine of Christ and the Holy Spirit

A consequence and implication of Wagner's openness theology is found in his Christology and pneumatology. Wagner determined that God "executed a contingent redemptive plan as a result of the unforeseen event of Adam's falling into sin."³¹ Christ's

²⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and Change Your Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 140. Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," chap. 6.

²⁷ Pietsch, "Impact of Open Theism," 12.

²⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God's Call to Transform the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 84. See also Pietsch, "Impact of Open Theism," 13.

²⁹ C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Destiny of a Nation: How Prophets and Intercessors Can Mold History* (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2001). Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 12–13.

³⁰ Jones and Wilder, "Faith Development and Christian Formation," 192. Wagner's praxes and axioms derived from his doctrine of God are discussed in subsequent sections as the doctrine of God comprises a foundational doctrine on which other doctrines rest.

³¹ Pietsch, "Impact of Open Theism," 208.

ransom for humanity, therefore, becomes an unanticipated contingent necessity rather than an element of an eternal plan to redeem humanity through Christ and make disciples.

Wagner's affirmation of incarnation-theology is a constant theme throughout his career. The incarnation-theology to which he held was in alignment with the functional kenotic Christology (FKC) paradigm, where the "only nature that Jesus used between His birth and His death here on earth was His human nature."³² Stephen Wellum articulates, "FKC advocates contend that the Son *never* uses his divine attributes; all of his 'divine' acts are done by the power of the Spirit, similar to but greater than previous Spirit-empowered men."³³ Wagner's FKC emphasizes the obedience of Jesus, as "understanding the nature of Jesus' obedience to the Father is crucial to understanding how the power which operated through Jesus also can operate through us today."³⁴ The conviction of FKC informs the axiom that just as Jesus acted out of his humanity without using his deity, Christians can also rely on the Holy Spirit to perform signs and wonders.

FKC follows Gerald Hawthorne's assertion that Jesus, in taking on a human nature, "willed to renounce the exercise of his divine powers, attributes, prerogatives, so that he might live fully within those limitations which inhere in being truly human."³⁵ While Jesus does not "give up" his divine attributes, they become "potential or latent," "present in Jesus in all their fullness, but no longer in exercise," so that Jesus chooses to live his life in complete obedience to the Father "within the bounds of human limitations."³⁶ Therefore, the supernatural knowledge and power in Jesus's miracles are "not by the use of his divine attributes, but by the power of the Spirit." Thus, Jesus "was

³² Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 22, 24.

³³ Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 381.

³⁴ C. Peter Wagner, "The Power of God and Your Power," *Christian Life* (July 1983): 42.

³⁵ Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1991), 208.

³⁶ Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power*, 212.

filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit to” perform signs and wonders in a manner similar to other Spirit-empowered people in biblical history and corresponding to the Spirit’s work in us. “Thus, Jesus Christ becomes an object lesson, the source of tremendous encouragement and hope for every believer who studies his life and aspires to emulate him” in a life characterized by dependence on the Spirit.³⁷

Wagner’s convictions concerning Jesus’s incarnation echo Hawthorne in the following statement: “There was a real possibility that Jesus could have sinned by violating the covenant he had made to obey the Father entirely throughout His time on Earth.” If Jesus had “used any of his deity,” then the “plan of salvation would have been finished and Satan would have been victorious.” The theological implication of Wagner’s FKC is evident in his statement that “because none of the healings, miracles or deliverances that Jesus performed was done in His own power, He could tell His followers, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do because I go to My Father’ (John 14:12).”³⁸ The implications of Wagner’s FKC axioms manifest functional praxes that suggest that believers can live the same life Christ lived, can have the same power Christ had through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and—therefore—can live sinlessly and perform miracles, signs, and wonders just as Christ did.

Wagner’s theological convictions become oriented to the evidence he sees throughout his life, and his pneumatology develops in response to the phenomena he and others experience.³⁹ Wagner contends that the power of the Holy Spirit, working through him just as through Christ, enables phenomenological manifestations with which Wagner

³⁷ Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power*, 219.

³⁸ Wagner, “The Power of God and Your Power,” 44. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 112.

³⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 167. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 114.

then examines the Scriptures in the belief that the manifestations are normative. His theology, then, is interpreted and “revised in light of what” he “learned through experience.”⁴⁰ Wagner confirms his “personal allegiance to a reality beyond” himself; however, that reality is not Jesus Christ of the Bible.⁴¹ Moreover, Wagner ascribes “ultimate value” to the penultimate reality of the Holy Spirit-enabled works of Jesus on earth, thereby constituting an unorthodox view of the trinitarian work of sanctification in the lives of believers. According to the Reformed tradition, Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification is incompatible with an orthodox doctrine of sanctification.

Wagner’s Christological axioms possess ambiguity such that they seemingly do not fundamentally address the dual nature of Christ on earth, particularly as described in Hebrews 1:3, which presents Christ as “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his [i.e., God’s] nature, and he [i.e., Christ] upholds the universe by the word of his power.” As Albert Mohler argues,

A Trinitarian Christology is of vital importance As this important divine figure, the Son is not only the active agent of creation, but he is also active in the preservation of creation. He sustains “all things by his powerful word.” If the Son ever ceased to will the universe to remain, then the universe would cease to exist. The power to create is also the power to preserve, the power to control, and the power to bring to an end. Hebrews tells us the Son possesses this kind of power.⁴²

Moreover, as described in Acts 2:22 and 10:38, Christ was anointed by God to perform miracles as the second Adam, living in the power of the Spirit. Wagner’s FKC seemingly does not address whether Christ was fundamentally human or exclusively human in nature during the incarnation. Donald Macleod contends that “even while he lived in a state of *kenosis*, the work of Christ could not be confined within the limits of the life he lived as a human being. This is the doctrine that came to be known as the *extra*

⁴⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1987), 38.

⁴¹ Jones and Wilder, “Faith Development and Christian Formation,” 192.

⁴² R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B&H, 2017), 11.

Calvinisticum (the *extra* pointing not to something additional but to something ‘outside’).”⁴³ Insisting on the *extra*, Calvin declares,

For even if the Word in his immeasurable essence united with the nature of man into one person, we do not imagine that he was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be borne in the virgin’s womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning!⁴⁴

By means of the *extra Calvinisticum*, the Reformed doctrine of sanctification deems the miracles, signs, and wonders of Christ during his incarnation as transcending his human nature. Although his divine nature was veiled from human eyes, Christ was still sustaining the universe by his almighty power; Christ’s redemptive activity, “although transcending his humanity, was still mediatorial.”⁴⁵

Wagner’s Devaluation of Theology

As discussed in the previous section, Wagner’s functional kenotic Christological convictions influenced his pneumatology, particularly his view of the Spirit’s work in the life of Christians. Wagner’s view of theology as “a human attempt to explain God’s word and God’s works” resulted in a low view of doctrine as man-made.⁴⁶ Wagner expresses the theological onion with layers, stating, “The core is absolutes; the first layer is interpretations; the next is deductions; and the outer layers, where human perspectives can run wild, are subjective opinions, personal preferences, feelings, cultural

⁴³ Donald Macleod, “The Work of Christ,” in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 361.

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* (2011), 2.13.4, Logos Bible Software. Not all Reformers shared the *extra Calvinisticum*.

⁴⁵ Macleod, “The Work of Christ,” 362.

⁴⁶ Wagner discusses theology as “an onion. You can pull layer after layer off an onion until finally you get down to the core. Theology also has many layers and a core. The further the layers of theology get from the core, the more the human dimension in doing theology comes into play.” C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004), 146. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 214.

norms and the like.”⁴⁷ Continuing, Wagner explicates that in a “typical apostolic church, to the apostolic movement in general, we will find that the total number of items included in the absolute circles of apostolic leaders will generally be considerably smaller than it was in the old wineskin,” that is, churches with a “heavy doctrinal load.”

Wagner articulates the need for a “lighter doctrinal load” that focuses less on theological and doctrinal correctness and more on a doctrinal load that is “relevant to any conceivable aspect of practical ministry.”⁴⁸ Wagner states that his view of “Christ’s natures” is “a relatively minor and debatable theological issue.”⁴⁹ Wagner’s devaluing of the theological necessity for Jesus to be both fully God and fully man, operating out of both natures during the incarnation, creates a lesser Jesus; the Jesus of Wagner’s theology died for humanity to “make atonement for *actual* sin, not *original* sin.”⁵⁰

Wagner epitomizes his consternation with Reformed theology by stating, “I knew down deep that I couldn’t have been a real Calvinist, but I kept it quiet because I still didn’t know what I really was.”⁵¹ Wagner’s statement regarding his convictions in the Reformed biblical-theological system encapsulate his devaluation of theology from the beginning of his theological career, even as a student at Fuller. Wagner’s portrayal of his consternation with the Reformed paradigm of sanctification and doctrine of God seemingly occurs as it did not align with his constructed paradigm.

Wagner’s devaluation of theology and doctrine developed from his dismissal of epistemology and his lack of a biblical-theological system rooted in God’s sovereignty, humanity’s sinfulness, and the Spirit-enabled Christian life. The absence of a

⁴⁷ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 147. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 160.

⁴⁸ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 145.

⁴⁹ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 144.

⁵⁰ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 103.

⁵¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 142. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 30–31.

biblical metanarrative led Wagner to determine that experience supplants theology, and theology is to be reinterpreted based on experience. The historic Christian doctrines and confessions relating to Christian maturity were replaced with a knowledge of one's spiritual gifts. The Christian life became using one's gifts to make disciples and further the kingdom of God.

The Reformed view of theology places doctrine as a primary concern for Christians, teaching the very words of God in his self-revelation to humanity in a systematized manner. With the systematic organization of theology, alongside the recognition of the salvific nature of special revelation illuminated by the Holy Spirit for repentance, understanding, and growth, the Reformed doctrine of sanctification emphasizes a framework of *learning* wisdom in faith and *growing* in wisdom with hope, leading to *living* righteously in love. The priority of truth found in Scripture provides the central force upon which Christians build behaviors and methods that lead to Christlikeness.

Wagner's Emphasis on the Great Commission

Wagner's convictions concerning God's need for humanity to partner with him in carrying out his will lead to Wagner's convictions concerning Jesus's obedience through his human nature alone. Wagner's definition of obedience is founded on Jesus's covenant to "obey the Father entirely throughout His time on Earth" through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁵² Jesus's command to take the gospel to the ends of the earth becomes the ultimate task of Christians in a dualistic cosmos, where the future is contingent on human intervention. The spiritual dualism that Wagner affirms necessitates human intercession as a contingency of Christ's redemptive work, which relies on human action to complete the reconciliation for which Christ died. Wagner's commissional pragmatic

⁵² Wagner, "The Power of God and Your Power," 41.

consequentialism becomes the driving force for the greatest end of fulfilling the Great Commission, with pragmatism's enlightening the means to accomplish the ultimate task.⁵³

Wagner's initial philosophy regarding the fulfillment of the Great Commission concerned individual salvation evident in making disciples through people movements; however, the shift in his priority of the gospel "from redeeming individuals to redeeming society" became the ultimate "end goal" through entire nations vis-à-vis discipleship.⁵⁴ Wagner valued the knowledge of spiritual gifts and equated Christian maturity with the use of the gifts. The gifts were used to create more disciples through the fulfillment of the Great Commission rather than to edify the church, grow in sanctification, and develop spiritual maturity. Wagner's discipleship praxes and axioms developed from his conviction in the ultimacy of making disciples through the Great Commission.

Wagner's Philosophy of Discipleship

The priorities, implications, and commitments of Wagner's philosophy of discipleship are examined by Evan Pietsch, who contends that

Wagner's affirmation concerning the doctrine of God, *divine interventional mutability*, establishes the basis and priority for Wagner's praxes and axioms. The implications of Wagner's metaphysical commitment to open theism as his overarching theological paradigm and the affirmation of God's purposeful consideration of humanity's prayers in the determination of his sovereign plans inform Wagner's framework of prayer and the cognitive understanding of the Great Commission. Throughout Wagner's life, his commitments and axioms were all recapitulations of his commitment to a *commissional pragmatic consequentialist*

⁵³ Evan Pietsch proposes the term "commissional pragmatic consequentialism," maintaining, "This research proposes the introduction of the term *commissional pragmatic consequentialism* or a *commissional pragmatic consequentialist* to rightly articulate the philosophical ethic undergirding Wagner's philosophy of discipleship. Commissional pragmatic consequentialism describes the justification of the use of pragmatism by whatever means necessary for the teleological commitment to accomplishing the Great Commission, which seeks the making of disciples to enact the will of God to take dominion of the earth, through cooperationism, so that all things can be restored to Christ and usher in the second advent. (Pietsch, "Impact of Open Theism," 185)

⁵⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2008), 71. Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 167.

ethic. The basis for each axiological and theological change is Wagner's earnest desire to be more effective at instilling the will of God on earth.⁵⁵

Wagner's conviction of God's divine interventional mutability, his interpretative framework of cooperationism, and his functional implementation of the Great Commission manifested a commissional pragmatic consequentialism; this conviction led Wagner to elevate the role of humanity by making human actions central to salvation, thereby supplanting and causing a reductionistic interpretation of the eternal decree of God, the work of Christ's atonement, and the function of the Holy Spirit in salvation and sanctification. Humanity's central role in salvation and sanctification dismisses the ontological calling in favor of the vocational ethic.

Wagner defines the "right goal of evangelism" as "making disciples." He continues, arguing that discipleship occurs once a disciple is made, yet Wagner does not specify the nature of discipleship. Wagner explicates the proper understanding of the Great Commission, stating,

Even the participle "teaching" in the Great Commission itself does not refer to the details of the road of discipleship, as some might think. The thing Jesus wants us to teach at that point in time is "to observe," not "all things I have commanded you." Part of becoming a disciple is to be disposed to obey Jesus as Lord. The details come later as the new disciple travels down the road of discipleship in the stage of Christian development that Donald McGavran calls "perfecting."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Pietsch, "Impact of Open Theism," 205. Pietsch writes,

This research proposes the introduction of the term *divine interventionist mutability* or *divine interventional mutability* to rightly articulate Wagner's conviction of God's mutability. Divine interventionist mutability describes the volitional act of God intervening in the ways that he does only after considering particular prayers of his people, which prayers he does not know prior to the believer praying but only learns at the initiation of the prayer itself.

This research proposes the introduction of the term *cooperationism* to rightly articulate Wagner's philosophy of discipleship. Cooperationism is defined as the theological assertion that humanity cooperates and partners with God to determine future events. Cooperationism manifests as the functional outworking of the theological conviction that God has 1) a limitation on divine foreknowledge and 2) divine interventional mutability. The nature of God's limitation of foreknowledge is not significant. The emphasized concept is God's limited foreknowledge of future events rather than the emphasis on the nature of God's foreknowledge as being volitional or ontological. (195-97)

⁵⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave*, 110. Discipling, or disciple-making, is "to be followed by perfecting, that is, by the whole complex process of growth in grace, ethical improvement, and the conversion of individuals in that first and succeeding generations." Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, ed. C. Peter Wagner, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 123; R. Vivian Pietsch, "The Influence of John Dewey's Pragmatism on the Church Growth Movement,"

Wagner's philosophy of discipleship produced a bifurcation between evangelism and church membership, de-emphasizing discipleship as a continual process in which the regeneration of a disciple occurs and emphasizing "perfecting" as the process of outward "holy living" and "an ethical change" in behavior.⁵⁷ Wagner's philosophy of discipleship utilized and taught a subjective phenomenological theology rather than the historic theological means of discipleship.

Wagner's conviction that a Christian's "ultimate goal" should be to fulfill the mandate to retake the dominion "Adam forfeited to Satan in the Garden of Eden" interprets the Great Commission through the paradigm of pragmatism: "I realize that the Bible tells us to 'make disciples of all the nations' (Matt. 28:19), but powerful first steps toward that goal would be to make disciples of the cities of a particular nation."⁵⁸ Moreover, Wagner's philosophy of discipleship separates unbelievers and believers not on biblical but anthropological grounds; the former are "secular," whereas the latter are "spiritual." Wagner's discipleship philosophy creates three approaches to church ministry that have become modern instillments in orthodox Christendom: seeker-driven, seeker-sensitive, and power-oriented.⁵⁹ Such a philosophy of discipleship supplies a new

International Review of Mission 111, no. 1 (2022): 138–68, 156n108; Donald A. McGavran, "How about That New Verb 'to Disciple'?" *Church Growth Bulletin* 15, no. 5 (1979): 266. McGavran expanded his original definition from *The Bridges of God* to provide three meanings or "stages of discipling and perfecting in the Western individualistic context": D-1, D-2, and D-3. Pietsch, "The Influence of John Dewey's Pragmatism," 156–57; McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 135–25.

Wagner defines perfecting as a "lifelong process of spiritual and ethical development in the lives of believers." C. Peter Wagner, "Donald A. McGavran: A Tribute to the Founder," in *Church Growth: State of the Art*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 18. Wagner refers to perfecting as that which will "bring about an ethical change" in behavior. Wagner, ed., "Glossary of Church Growth Terms," in *Church Growth: State of the Art*, 288. McGavran's initial definition of discipling includes the statement "Discipling is one thing, perfecting is another. This point gains importance because many a Christian leader confuses perfecting for discipling." McGavran continues, stating the "process of perfecting" includes all "that great effort of the churches in old-established 'Christian' civilizations, which deals with holy living and with social, racial and political justice." Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (London: World Dominion, 1955), 15–16. Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 123.

⁵⁷ Wagner, "Glossary of Church Growth Terms," 288.

⁵⁸ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 160. Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 156.

⁵⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999), 188–89.

meaning to becoming a disciple of Christ, a meaning that finds its origins in the pragmatic outworking of an understanding that dismisses the biblical-theological narrative.

Theology begins with salvation, which leads to believers' asking questions about their relationship to God and who God is. Theological thinking, according to Scripture, moves from thinking of God to thinking of the work of Christ and the application of salvation by the work of the Holy Spirit. In salvation, believers begin to think about regeneration, conversion, union with Christ, adoption, justification, sanctification, and glorification. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the "pathway" to our eschatological *telos* in Christ, "obtaining the outcome of [our] faith, the salvation of [our] souls" (1 Pet 1:9).⁶⁰ The "disciple's true knowledge of God begins with the gospel and progresses through a cognitive maturity found in historic Christian doctrines and phenomenological spiritual disciplines enabled by one's union in Christ."⁶¹

The Reformed paradigm of growth and maturity occurs through learning doctrine passively by listening to the sermons from the pulpit and actively through catechesis and discipleship. The continual pursuit of active involvement and engagement in the teaching and learning process fosters growth and maturity in disciples. The perpetual cycle of drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship informs the Reformed discipleship model. Horton stresses that Christians must have a proper understanding of the overarching unfolding of the drama of Scripture to form a biblical foundation for discipleship:

Without the story, the doctrine is abstract. Without the doctrine, the story lacks meaning and significance for us. Yet if we are not led by the drama and the doctrine to mourn and dance, have we really been swept into it—experientially, not just as truth but as good news? Failing to grab our hearts, the doctrine fails to animate our

⁶⁰ Fred Sanders, "The Holy Spirit and Salvation," in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018), 6. Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 208–09.

⁶¹ Pietsch, "Impact of Open Theism," 216 (table 9).

hands and feet. Yet if we concentrate everything on the doxology by itself, we end up trying to work ourselves into a state of perpetual praise without knowing exactly who we're praising or why.⁶²

Horton then warns that “an obsession with disciple-making, apart from” the other aspects of drama, doctrine, and doxology “will generate a kind of mindless and eventually heartless moralism that confuses activism with the fruit of the Spirit.”⁶³

Wagner's Definition of Disciple

Wagner views the ontological nature of a disciple as one who is made new by believing in Jesus Christ. He further clarifies, defining a disciple as a “Christian who follows Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, is growing in the grace and knowledge of him, and who is a responsible member of his body.”⁶⁴ The vocational ethic of discipleship is to make disciples “who declare that Christ is their Lord.”⁶⁵ The phenomenological mission of discipleship is to be “a responsible church member” who meets “together regularly for worship,” reads the Bible, and prays. The power provided to the “Christian” for the decision for Christ occurs through the work of another disciple; the power of the Holy Spirit flows through the conduit of the evangelist, who provides the breakthrough of the kingdom of God into the kingdom of Satan, thereby freeing the person being evangelized to make a decision for Christ. The new disciple must become a member of a church and

⁶² Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 143. Horton continues and provides the clarification that such areas of focus are not sequential stages:

This pattern of drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship is not actually followed in stages. It's not as if the first few years of our Christian life are spent only on getting the basic plot of Scripture down and the next decade is spent on the doctrine, and only then do we get around to worship and discipleship. Instead of stages, these are facets of every moment in our pilgrimage. Nevertheless, there is a certain logical order here. (144)

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 19, 204.

⁶³ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 146. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 19, 204.

⁶⁴ Wagner, “Glossary of Church Growth Terms,” 287–88.

⁶⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave: Becoming a World Christian* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1983), 111.

use the spiritual gifts endowed by the Holy Spirit to edify the church by making more disciples.

The endless cycle of making disciples becomes the means of discipleship for Wagner; therefore, such means—the use of spiritual gifts, spiritual warfare, prayer, evangelism, and other methods of power ministry—become the *telos*. Wagner’s *telos* to make disciples precipitated a radical misunderstanding of the work of Christians in sanctification; his convictional understanding of “radical holiness” as the empowering work of Christians to live a life without sin enabled the furthering of God’s kingdom through prayer, the use of spiritual gifts, and spiritual warfare. Wagner’s phenomenological hermeneutic informed his praxes of “appropriating the dynamic of spiritual gifts” in “a new and exciting way,” thereby transforming the Holy Spirit “from a doctrine to an experience.”⁶⁶ In accord with Augustine’s warning, when Wagner “left the path” of sound doctrine, he was misled by “every wind of doctrine.”⁶⁷

Wagner distinguishes holiness as separate from the ontological nature of the disciple, who must “practice” holiness and live in “radical holiness,” evidenced by a life without sin.⁶⁸ The disciple, whom Wagner designates as one with indwelling sin, possesses the ability to achieve a life not riddled with sin by choosing to live in the presence of God. Wagner’s conviction that a pure heart and sin-free life are achieved by confessing sin when convicted by the Spirit would be evidenced thus: if the disciple does not feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit, then he or she can be assured of indwelling holiness rather than sin. Wagner’s conviction further emphasizes the ontological aspect of

⁶⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1979), 21.

⁶⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 27, Logos Bible Software.

⁶⁸ Peter Wagner and Doris Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life: Wisdom for Thriving in Life* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2021), 45.

the disciple in his later years, where “practicing” holiness becomes “second nature,” so a disciple can “live a holy life without even trying.”⁶⁹

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked, “How is Wagner’s distinctive model of sanctification revealed in the discipleship strategies of ministries influenced by the NAR?” Wagner’s distinctive model of sanctification are initially organized in *Confronting the Powers* (1996) and *Praying with Power* (1997), his systematized model appears in *The New Apostolic Churches* (1998) and *Churchquake!* (1999), and the model becomes codified in *Changing Church* (2004) and *Dominion!* (2008).⁷⁰ Ministries influenced by the NAR become evident through the praxes and axioms of Wagner’s model of sanctification, which incorporate ministries such as deliverance, spiritual warfare, spiritual gifts, prayer, and apostolic leadership into discipleship strategies.

Theological Education to Practical Ministry

According to Wagner, churches disciple its spiritual and secular members through “conferences, seminars and retreats rather than in classrooms of accredited institutions.” The “demands” for “alternate delivery systems” in “new apostolic churches, especially the large ones, are” leading to those churches’ “establishing their own in-house Bible schools.”⁷¹ The teaching methods and focus areas of such schools concentrate on the more practical, applicable, and pragmatic aspects of ministry. Rather than “head”

⁶⁹ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 43.

⁷⁰ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 15; Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 271.

⁷¹ C. Peter Wagner, “The New Apostolic Reformation,” in *The New Apostolic Churches: Rediscovering the New Testament Model of Leadership and Why It Is God’s Desire for the Church Today*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998), 21.

knowledge through theological education, the Bible schools teach “spirit-filled” training for effectiveness in ministry.⁷²

Wagner’s belief that “pragmatism” would “prevail” in the NAR movement found its fulfillment in leaders who have no “aversion to pragmatism,” even after approximately two decades since the ushering in of the movement. As Wagner envisaged and emphasized, in New Apostolic churches, “theologians” have been “replaced by entrepreneurs,” “Biblical exegetes” have been “replaced by cultural exegetes,” “distinguished scholars” have been “replaced by dynamic pastors,” “history of dogma” has been replaced with “history of revivals,” and “epistemology” has been replaced by “prophetic intercession.”⁷³ Leaders of “New Apostolic churches, such as Rick Warren” and “Bill Hamon,” incorporate Wagner’s pragmatic means of discipleship, over-emphasizing church growth by implementing entrepreneurial leadership practices through “Purpose-driven Church” principles.⁷⁴

Holy to Holiness

Holiness and a life without sin are central to the discipleship strategies of ministries influenced by the NAR. Its anthropological understanding of humanity coincides with its functional kenotic Christological understanding of the incarnation. Wagner’s dismissal of classic theism and Reformed sanctification led him to de-emphasize the power of sin and exaggerate the power of demonic spirits and strongholds.⁷⁵ His affirmation of Wesleyan holiness allowed him to uphold the ability of

⁷² Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 230–31.

⁷³ Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 235–36.

⁷⁴ Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 213.

⁷⁵ Wagner concludes, “The Calvinistic tenet of total depravity is why confession of sin has gained such a prominent, some would say exaggerated, place in the lives of Lutherans, Presbyterians, Reformed and the like.” Wagner, *Changing Church*, 170. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 47.

Christians to live a life without sin.⁷⁶ Wagner states, “I believe that God is holy, but I also believe that you and I can also be holy.” Wagner continues, citing that being holy “is not an unattainable dream[;] it can be a present-day reality in your life and mine.”⁷⁷ Wagner cites the Lord’s Prayer as the means by which Christians can gauge and maintain their holiness. Wagner elucidates that holiness is born of a pure heart; moreover, a pure heart is “the essence of prayer.”⁷⁸ Praying the Lord’s Prayer daily to confess sins allows Christians to “make sure the slate is clean daily” so as not to encumber prayer, warfare, and other power ministries. Christians who live sin-free lives possess a pure heart through practice, where holiness is “second nature” like breathing.⁷⁹

According to Wagner, as churches seek to disciple those within their walls, holiness and a pure heart become essential elements of the Christian life. The holiness of Christians, evident in their living sin-free lives, enables their obedience to God’s commands and ability to carry out God’s will. Such obedience occurs as the hearts of Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit, who grants believers the same power that Jesus had. This “same power” undergirds the praxes and axioms of healing ministries, deliverance ministries, power ministries, and discipleship strategies of churches. The

⁷⁶ Wagner describes Reformed holiness, declaring, “If I lived a good Christian life, I could expect to see some progress in my sanctification as I matured in Christ, but I could never be holy because only God is holy. Reformed theology . . . has developed an unsurpassed doctrine of the holiness of God.” C. Peter Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs: Wagner Institute for Practical Ministry, 1998), 11; Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2002), 11–12. In his affirmation of Wesleyan holiness, Wagner states,

John Wesley was one of the first to exhibit his dissatisfaction with the Reformed doctrine of sanctification. His study of the Bible convinced him, not only that believers could attain personal holiness, but also that God expected them to do that very thing. Personally, it took me quite a while to admit that there was any validity in Wesley’s view.

I turned the corner in the early 1990s when I became active in helping to move the Body of Christ into a mode of aggressive, strategic-level spiritual warfare. One of my first mentors in this paradigm shift was Cindy Jacobs of Generals of Intercession. (Wagner, *Changing Church*, 171–72)

Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 47.

⁷⁷ Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 12; Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (2002), 13. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 47.

⁷⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *Churches That Pray: How Prayer Can Help Revitalize Your Church and Break Down the Walls between Your Church and Your Community* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993), 50.

⁷⁹ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 43.

power ministries become essential in fulfilling the Great Commission and bringing the kingdom of God to earth. Christians seek phenomenological manifestations of the Holy Spirit through signs and wonders; hearing prophetic words from God; deliverance and exorcisms of demonic strongholds in people, cities, and nations; and raising the dead.⁸⁰

Warfield to Warfare

Wagner expresses frustration with the Reformed doctrine of sanctification he was taught at Fuller and Princeton. Throughout his life, Wagner expresses wariness for denying spiritual gifts in ministry. Fuller required Wagner to read Warfield's *Counterfeit Miracles*, which teaches that "after the apostolic age, particularly when the canon of Scripture was finally agreed upon, the miraculous acts characteristic of Jesus and the apostles ceased."⁸¹ For Wagner, the cessation of the miraculous gifts presupposes that God expands his kingdom by his sovereign decree, knowing from eternity past whom he chose to be his disciples, which he enacts through the means of the gospel of Christ.

⁸⁰ Bethel Church represents the axioms and praxes of Wagner's convictions regarding power ministries. Marisa Iati wrote an article in the *Washington Post* covering Bethel Church's attempts to perform the resurrection of a two-year-old girl in 2019. Iati reports the words of "communications director Aaron Tesauro," who states, "Bethel Church believes in the accounts of healing and physical resurrection found in the Bible (Matthew 10:8), and that the miracles they portray are possible today." Iati continues, remarking,

Bill Johnson, a senior leader of the church, said in a video that there was a biblical precedent for believing in resurrection. In addition to Jesus raising the dead, Johnson said that Jesus commanded his disciples to do the same. "The reason Jesus raised the dead is because not everyone dies in God's timing, and Jesus could tell," Johnson said. "And he would interrupt that funeral, he would interrupt that process that some would just call the sovereignty of God." (Marissa Iati, "After a Toddler's Death, a Church Has Tried for Days to Resurrect Her—with Prayer," *Washington Post*, December 19, 2009, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/12/19/after-toddlers-death-church-has-trie-d-days-resurrect-her-with-prayer/>)

⁸¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 8. Warfield states,

It was the characterizing peculiarity of specifically the Apostolic Church, and it belonged therefore exclusively to the Apostolic age—although no doubt this designation may be taken with some latitude. These gifts were not the possession of the primitive Christian as such; nor for that matter of the Apostolic Church or the Apostolic age for themselves; they were distinctively the authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it. (Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918], 5–6)

Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 44.

Conversely, Wagner's presuppositions of divine interventional mutability and cooperationism purport that God's willful limitation of his power and partnership with humanity enable the fulfillment of the Great Commission through a commissional pragmatic consequentialist ethic.

The discipleship strategies reliant on Wagner's commissional pragmatic consequentialist ethic deem social transformation a necessary reality for the kingdom of God to flourish and usher in the return of Jesus. Wagner identifies, "Social transformation will occur through human designs" for the fulfillment of the Great Commission rather than "through the operational power of the Holy Spirit among believers in general."⁸² Social transformation requires spiritual warfare, wherein Christians act as conduits of the power of God to confront the demonic powers and the kingdom of Satan.

An essential element of spiritual warfare is prayer. Ministries influenced by the NAR elevate "praying with power," evidenced in "*effective, fervent* prayer," which enables "hearing from the Lord."⁸³ The integral activity of hearing the will of the Lord through prayer centers around the "attitude" of "faith and obedience."⁸⁴ Faith and obedience are cultivated through holiness, "being so full of God that there is no room for anything else." The power of the Holy Spirit fills Christians through continual prayer. Discipleship cultivates believers' ability to hear God and learn to utilize the gift of prophecy, which, with the return of the offices of prophet and apostle, enables Christians to hear the will of the Lord and enact it through warfare. Prayer ministries emphasize confronting territorial spirits and powers of darkness as well as the naming of "spirits"

⁸² Wagner, *Dominion!*, 7. Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 45.

⁸³ C. Peter Wagner, "Praying with Power," *Ministries Today* (November–December 1989): 15, 17.

⁸⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Engaging the Enemy: How to Fight and Defeat Territorial Spirits* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1991), 8.

when delivering people from the clutches of Satan. Believers and unbelievers must be freed from spiritual oppression and possession. Demonization occurs in all people; therefore, deliverance ministries focus on exercising demonic spirits and removing the strongholds of the “spirit of poverty,” the “spirit of Jezebel,” or the “spirit of lust.”⁸⁵

Persuasion to Power

Wagner’s evangelistic praxes and axioms before he affirmed the theological convictions of the NAR concentrated on the necessity to persuade sinners of the need for Jesus. His evangelistic efforts concerned “winning souls” and adding disciples. While Wagner’s convictions of church growth and adding disciples remained an area of emphasis in the New Apostolic Reformation era, his praxes and axioms shifted to power evangelism and breakthroughs within nations of people groups. Building upon the foundation of the dominion mandate from Jesus in Dominion theology, with the conviction of a spiritually dualistic cosmos, Wagner determined that the kingdom of God needed to invade the kingdom of Satan in order to make disciples. Therefore, Wagner proposed that evangelistic efforts must bring the power of God through the signs and wonders that Jesus performed.

Wagner articulates that the “purpose of power evangelism is to glorify God through demonstrations of divine power. But if the power of the enemy is underestimated, the opposite can occur.”⁸⁶ Through power evangelism, the efforts of Christians occur through power encounters, which utilize prayer, spiritual exorcism or deliverance, and claiming authority in spiritual warfare. The power ministries confess

⁸⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Powers: How the New Testament Church Experienced the Power of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare*, Prayer Warrior Series (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996), 198; Wagner, *Praying with Power: How to Pray Effectively and Hear Clearly from God*, Prayer Warrior Series (Ventura, CA: Destiny Image, 1997), 85; Wagner, *Dominion!*, 19.

⁸⁶ C. Peter Wagner, “Territorial Spirits,” in *Wrestling with Dark Angels: Toward a Deeper Understanding of the Supernatural Forces in Spiritual Warfare*, ed. C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoyer (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 87.

that the “Holy Spirit is with us, and He offers unlimited power.”⁸⁷ The unlimited power offered to Christian disciples must be exercised in an effort to bring “social transformation” through power ministries, which teach believers how to recognize and utilize their spiritual gifts in power to establish the kingdom of God on earth. The power ministries teach through the use of spiritual gifts assessments, activation sessions, identificational repentance, prayer walks, and reconciliation of “racism, discrimination, unfair trade, border disputes, oppression and the like.”⁸⁸ Churches placing great emphasis on reconciliation utilize power ministries, the apostolic leadership of the prophets and apostles, and spiritual warfare to heal spiritual and temporal “wounds.”

Saving Souls to the Seven Mountain Mandate

Wagner considered the primary purpose of Jesus’s death to be the re-establishment of the kingdom of God, which enables humanity to “exercise kingdom authority on the earth (Luke 17:21) and reconcile the world back unto Him (2 Corinthians 5:19).”⁸⁹ Therefore, the gospel becomes a “ministry of reconciliation” to save “that which was lost,” namely, the dominion authority abdicated by Adam to Satan.⁹⁰ In the NAR movement, the Seven Mountain Mandate represents the necessary axiom of fulfilling the Great Commission, where Wagner’s belief in equipping the saints converges with taking dominion. Although evangelism consists of making disciples and church membership, the means of spiritual warfare and power ministries confer more to the purposeful *telos* of the Great Commission. Churches influenced by Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification and discipleship philosophy perceive equipping the saints as holding back spiritual forces to

⁸⁷ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 107.

⁸⁸ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 132.

⁸⁹ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 68. Wagner cites Joseph Mattera, *Ruling in the Gates: Preparing the Church to Transform Cities* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2003), 5. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 166.

⁹⁰ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 69. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 166.

“allow others to make disciples, thus creating greater opportunities to reclaim dominion on earth and usher in the kingdom of God.”⁹¹

Churches within apostolic networks employing Dominion theology teach and commission Christians “to infiltrate social structures at all levels and, once there, use their influence to inculcate biblical values throughout their society.”⁹² Jesus’s command to make disciples through the provision of spiritual training extends to the seven mountains of influence within society. Churches employ discipleship strategies to further the kingdom on earth and transform society, thereby living better lives in prosperity. Wagner asserts, “New apostolic leaders” consider the “fivefold ministry” of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph 4:11) central to the “primary task” that “is detailed in the next verse: ‘For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry’ (Eph. 4:12).”⁹³ The fivefold ministry, an integral axiom of apostolic leadership within NAR churches, establishes the means by which the congregation “becomes the primary incubator for ministers, both lay ministers and staff ministers.”

Research Question 4

Research question 4 asked, “How may an assessment and evaluation of Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification inform a redemptive appropriation of discipleship strategies and methods?” The assessment and evaluation of Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification led to conclusions based on the two premises that form the basis of Trentham’s ICP. The first premise asserts that the Reformed doctrine of sanctification and Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification “envision and prescribe aims for growth and

⁹¹ Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 174.

⁹² Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 198. Wagner describes that “apostles, whatever kind they might be, have the God-given authority to influence and take charge of a certain segment of society on behalf of the Kingdom of God.” He continues, “Even though they may not use the title, nuclear church apostles such as James Dobson and Donald Wildemon, as well as the Rick Warrens and the Bill Hybelses and the Joel Osteens,” are apostles who “have a positive influence on the family.” Wagner, *Dominion!*, 148.

⁹³ Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 210.

maturity that are consistent with their respective presuppositions” and are “inversely oriented.” The second premise asserts that the Reformed doctrine of sanctification and Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification “engage domains and patterns for growth and maturity that correspond with each other, albeit according to different trajectories” and potentially “consistent in pattern.”⁹⁴

The first premise is demonstrated in that the Reformed doctrine of sanctification is consistent with its presuppositions of the redemptive biblical-theological system and Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification is consistent with the presuppositions of Dominionism and commissional pragmatic consequentialism, yet the two paradigms are inversely oriented in their trajectories. Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification and discipleship diverges from the redemptive biblical-theological system, as the former emphasizes social action in spiritual dominion over the earth. Wagner’s Dominion theology embraces moralism by actively “taking back” the kingdom. Discipling and perfecting conform to the consequentialist ethic and the cooperationism in prayer and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship necessitates a conditionally ontological concept of discipleship, placed in the *historia salutis*. The phenomenological growth and pragmatic demonstrations of spiritual gifts, effective prayer, and manifestations of power are evident in Wagner’s axiom of spiritual maturity. Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification rests upon a different theological bedrock. His theology consists of a God who limits his power and knowledge to cooperate with humanity for the effectual manifestation of his will, a Jesus whose death paid for *actual* sin and not *original* sin, miraculous signs and wonders that were performed through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and a Spirit who provides Christians with unlimited power to make disciples and take back dominion of the earth in order to bring God’s kingdom to earth.

⁹⁴ Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2),” 483.

The second premise is evident in Wagner’s modification of his professed Reformed biblical-theological system in creating his doctrine of sanctification, established in God’s epistemological openness toward future contingencies and the metanarrative of Dominion theology. Wagner expressed considerable distress as a seminary student, as the Reformed biblical-theological system did not accord with his constructed paradigm based on his experiences. Wagner summarizes his disquietude concerning the Reformed paradigm declaring, “I knew down deep that I couldn’t have been a real Calvinist, but I kept it quiet because I still didn’t know what I really was.”⁹⁵ Wagner’s phenomenological hermeneutic and his contingent interpretation of spiritual maturity and discipleship led to a dismissal of the redemptive biblical-theological system in favor of a consequentialist ethic for fulfilling the Great Commission. Wagner’s conviction of a contingent plan of discipleship deems discipleship as unforeseen by God and dependent on the actions of humanity to enact the God’s will on earth. Moreover, Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship within the New Apostolic Reformation era and movement “relied on the contemporary revelation of God, given through the intercessors, prophets, and apostles, to mature the Christian body rather than on the study of historic doctrines” grounded in God’s special revelation in Scripture.⁹⁶ The ultimate end of making disciples, according to Wanger, is to take back dominion and further the kingdom of God on earth.

Implications for Discipleship

In assessing the implications of Wagner’s theological system—encapsulated in the term *Wagnerianism*—on discipleship, Evan Pietsch articulates that Wagnerianism asserts that discipleship is an ontological contingency rather than an eternal divine decree. This implication emphasizes God’s *divine interventional mutability*.

⁹⁵ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 142; see also Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 30, 206.

⁹⁶ Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 214–15.

According to Wagner, God has limited his foreknowledge. As mentioned previously, Wagner asserts that “God presumably chose not to know ahead of time what decision Adam would make. When Adam made the wrong choice, God was sorry that the human being He made would not follow His plans, so He needed to go to a Plan B for the human race.” The means to redeem humanity through Christ, according to Wagner’s assertion, reduces God’s redemption of humanity to a volitional contingency rather than a divine decree from eternity past. Therefore, the ontological nature of discipleship—the means to bring one into an effectual reality of the atonement of Christ and to mature into the likeness of Christ—is a necessary result of a contingent plan. Perhaps, one could call the Great Commission the “Great Contingency.”⁹⁷

Furthermore, in assessing Wagner’s discipleship philosophy utilizing the Reformed perspective, Pietsch declares, that the “power of God to create and sustain his disciples at the pleasure of his will does not align with Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship; therefore, in the end, Wagner’s discipleship merely shares definitional concepts of classic theism and establishes a new modality and ontological nature of discipleship.”⁹⁸

The Nature of a Disciple

The ontological nature of the disciple, according to Wagner, is one who is made through human cooperation with God and is “Kingdom-minded and Kingdom-motivated” to “retake from Satan the dominion of the 7 mountains that mold our culture”;⁹⁹ therefore, the disciple is one who is called by God and fellow humans, who operate in a contingent partnership, rather than one who is chosen and known by God from eternity past by his sovereign decree in the *pactum salutis*. The essence of the ontological calling and phenomenological mission of the disciple become interchanged;

⁹⁷ Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 217, quoting Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 144. Pietsch proposes

the introduction of the term *Wagnerian* or *Wagnerianism* to rightly encapsulate the metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological framework of Wagner’s theological system, which consists of the following concepts: (1) the affirmation of *divine interventional mutability* as a primary metaphysical foundation, (2) the functional outworking of *cooperationism* as an epistemological basis informed by *divine interventional mutability*, and (3) the underlying axiological ethic of *commissional pragmatic consequentialism* resultant from a *cooperationist* epistemological basis. (Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 190)

⁹⁸ Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 223.

⁹⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 266. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 171.

the ministerial priority of making disciples takes the place of discipleship. Wagner declares that Jesus “never sent out His disciples to preach the gospel of the church, but rather the gospel of the Kingdom.”¹⁰⁰ Wagner defines the disciple through the contingency of the Great Commission, which he declares is for Christians to “become spiritual and social activists until Satan’s dominion is ended,” for even “though Jesus came and changed history, He is waiting for us to do our part in bringing restoration to pass in real life.”

The Mission of a Disciple

The phenomenological mission of Wagner’s disciple is to cooperate with God in order to take dominion rather than to teach the church to obey the confessional doctrines and love one another in Christ. In summarizing the ministry of the disciple, Wagner asserts,

Jesus paid the *price* for reconciliation on the cross, but He is not in the business of *doing* the reconciliation. That is up to us, and for the most part we have been making progress over the last two thousand years. Jesus is waiting for us to finish. Look at what the Bible says, “[Jesus Christ] *whom heaven must receive until the times of the restoration of all things . . .*” (Acts 3:21). Right now Jesus is in Heaven at the right hand of the Father. How long will He be there? Until all things have been restored.¹⁰¹

Wagner’s summation of the *telos* of the phenomenological mission—“*doing* the reconciliation” through taking dominion, thereby bringing the kingdom of God and restoration to the earth—supplants the ontological calling of the disciple with the phenomenological mission. The implication of Wagner’s definition of a disciple denies the necessity for the ontological calling to provide the theological foundation of the phenomenological mission.

¹⁰⁰ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 272. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 146, 172.

¹⁰¹ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 48. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 182.

The church gathered around the Reformed doctrine of sanctification recognizes that evangelism is not an end in itself, for the “ultimate purpose” of the Great Commission is to “*bear fruit to God.*”¹⁰² Evangelism—through the phenomenological mission and rooted in the ontological calling—demands that teaching abide in Christ and bear fruit; therefore, the church must contend for the faith through catechetical doctrinal teaching and training rather than overdramatize numerical growth. Without an emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s empowerment and redemptive flourishing, the church errors in affirming the ultimacy of human action rather than dwelling in God’s sovereign work in the church community. Wagner’s disciple does not learn, grow, or live in wisdom and love. The presuppositional truth of Wagner’s gospel is incongruent with the redemptive biblical-theological system.

The Training of a Disciple

Wagner formed his initial discipleship praxes as a model of the theological training he received at Fuller. He translated his course notes into Spanish, which became his primary source of instruction. Much of Wagner’s initial pedagogy emphasized formal training through teaching the Bible and historical doctrines. Wagner determined that the theological convictions and discipleship praxes he learned from Fuller were limiting a more successful ministry, such as the phenomenological success he witnessed in the Pentecostal organizations in Bolivia. In the mid-1960s, Wagner began a fundamental shift toward the Pentecostal renewal movement he observed as a missionary. The shift set the foundation for his theological conviction and praxes for the remainder of his life.

Along with the shift in theology, Wagner experienced a shift in pedagogical focus regarding discipleship. Wagner’s initial focus on individual discipleship through doctrine and obedience in the Christian life gradually deemphasized individual

¹⁰² John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 315.

discipleship while emphasizing the discipleship of people movements and eventually entire nations. Similarly, the historic doctrines concerning Christian maturity were replaced with the knowledge of one's spiritual gifts. The emphasis on spiritual gifts became an effort to seek the signs and wonders in conjunction with evangelism, to provide activations of faith, and to grow the church.

Wagner's shift in his philosophy of discipleship then bifurcated evangelism and church membership, in which the cycle of making disciples becomes the *telos* of fulfilling the Great Commission.¹⁰³ Wagner placed the Great Commission as the ultimate emphasis of Christian discipleship, devoting his entire ministry and life to utilizing whatever means possible to fulfill the command to make disciples. Discipleship as the use of spiritual gifts to grow church membership and fulfill the Great Commission stands in opposition to the orthodox view of discipleship. A thorough understanding of the spiritual gifts dictates their use for the edification of the church in a God-glorifying manner. As believers grow in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness, the church cultivates love, freedom from sin, and a body of believers who work collectively and constructively; the church pursues equipping the saints and enabling them to live for the glory of God, in the fullness of Christ, and as the temple of God (Eph 4:12, 16).

Cooperation in Sanctification

This research has determined that Wagner's belief in cooperation between God and humanity for the fulfillment of the Great Commission does not align with the historic doctrines or theological teachings of Reformed sanctification. Wagner's affirmation of

¹⁰³ Wagner's philosophy of discipleship did not change throughout his theological career. Although he affirmed individual disciple-making and later discipling nations, Wagner's philosophy of discipleship consisted of the same definition of disciple and ultimate *telos* of fulfilling the Great Commission. Wagner's theological convictions and praxes concerning discipleship, holiness, and sanctification were seemingly solidified when the New Apostolic Reformation movement formally began in the late 1990s. Though his convictions experienced changes prior to the 1990s, minimal change occurred after the 1970s. The birth of the New Apostolic Reformation movement was the culmination of Wagner's prior "paradigm shifts" and the logical conclusion of his theological convictions concerning the doctrine of sanctification, which redefined Christian discipleship from that of Reformed sanctification and the redemptive biblical-theological system.

cooperationism in the believer's holiness incorrectly asserts equal effort and ability of the Holy Spirit and the disciple for the growth in holiness. Horton describes the synergistic nature of sanctification in the Reformed doctrine of sanctification, denoting,

On the one hand, there is a clear call to cooperate with the spirit in our sanctification. On the other hand, the asymmetry is just as apparent. No less than in regeneration and justification is sanctification attributed to God's gracious operation. There is no synergism in the sense of each partner contributed something toward the work of salvation. Rather, the work that we are called to do is in response to a gift, and even that response itself is a gift and remains so until we die.¹⁰⁴

Discipleship must affirm the sovereign work of God applied by the Holy Spirit in the disciple's sanctification; without recognizing the desire or ability to cooperate in sanctification, discipleship becomes the growth in the disciple's efforts rather than growth in grace afforded by God.

Wagner's conviction that the believer could not be "Spirit-filled" because the "filling of the Holy Spirit was not a once-in-a-lifetime event" precipitated the axiom that the "filling of the Spirit is something that must frequently be repeated throughout the life of a committed believer, some say as often as every day."¹⁰⁵ Wagner believed that praying the Lord's Prayer "every morning" ensured that believers could be "holy in all" their conduct" as they are "filled with the Holy Spirit"; however, Wagner stressed that believers "must keep praying and staying filled with the Holy Spirit because at any time sin can invade."¹⁰⁶ Churches influenced by the NAR employ Wagner's axioms and praxes of holiness and continual fillings of the Holy Spirit for living a holy life, "practicing" practical holiness, and engaging in power ministries.¹⁰⁷ Churches impart

¹⁰⁴ Michael Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit: God's Perfecting Presence in Creation, Redemption, and Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 216.

¹⁰⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy: Confronting Spiritual Powers* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011), 161.

¹⁰⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 110–11.

¹⁰⁷ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 43.

Wagner’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit and “practical” holiness through various ministries, which prioritize believers’ equal cooperation with the Holy Spirit to attain and engage in power ministries.

Phenomenological Manifestations in Discipleship

The phenomenological manifestations to which Wagner looked for evidence of disciple-making and spiritual growth misled him to conclude the necessity of such manifestations in ministry. The healings and other signs and wonders Wagner witnessed as a missionary, Church Growth scholar, Third Wave leader, and NAR leader led him to conclude that the manifestations were the *sine qua non* of disciple-making and discipleship. Correspondingly, power ministries, deliverance ministries, and healing ministries cite the necessity for phenomenological occurrences to demonstrate the power of the gospel in order to transform the lives of disciples and unbelievers. These ministries utilize spiritual gifts as the channel of the phenomenological as displays of power, citing that faith and obedience activate and cultivate believers’ holiness.

Contribution to Literature

This section reviews this research’s contribution to the current scholarship regarding “C. Peter Wagner, the Church Growth movement, the Third Wave movement, and the New Apostolic Reformation movement.”¹⁰⁸

Proposed Terms and Definitions

Wagnerian holiness. This research proposes the term *Wagnerian holiness* to articulate Wagner’s conviction of the call to holiness for the Christian disciple. Wagner’s phenomenological hermeneutic informed his praxes of “appropriating the dynamic of spiritual gifts” in “a new and exciting way,” thereby transforming the Holy Spirit “from a

¹⁰⁸ Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 190.

doctrine to an experience.”¹⁰⁹ Wagnerian holiness, encompassed in Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification, incorporates Wagner’s affirmation of Wesleyan holiness and Pentecostal signs and wonders. Holding to charismatic and Pentecostal methodologies for evangelism and sanctification, Wagner affirms power evangelism, healing evangelism, intercessory prayer, and spiritual warfare, which are all predicated upon Dominion theology.¹¹⁰

Wagner asserts that the life of a disciple must be marked by the experience of “radical holiness,” evidenced by a life without sin. Wagner distinguishes holiness as separate from the ontological nature of the disciple, as the disciple must “practice” holiness. The disciple, whom Wagner designates as one with indwelling sin, possesses the ability to achieve a life not riddled with sin by choosing to live in the presence of God.¹¹¹ Wagner’s conviction of achieving a pure heart and sin-free life is demonstrated through the phenomenological manifestation of no conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit; the lack of conviction assures the disciple of indwelling holiness rather than sin. Wagner’s conviction further emphasizes the ontological aspect of the disciple in his later years, where “practicing” holiness becomes “second nature” so that a disciple can “live a holy life without even trying” or “without thinking about it.”¹¹²

Commissional catechetical confessionalism. This research proposes the term *commissional catechetical confessionalism* to rightly articulate the confessional ethic undergirding the Reformed philosophy of discipleship. Commissional catechetical confessionalism describes the redemptive biblical-theological system as a counterpart to Wagner’s commissional pragmatic consequentialism and is articulated in the Reformed

¹⁰⁹ Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (1979), 21.

¹¹⁰ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 84.

¹¹¹ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 45.

¹¹² Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 43. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 181.

paradigm of Virtuous Christian Discipleship. Commissioned catechetical confessionalism deems the sovereign work of God through the Holy Spirit as the means necessary for the teleological commitment to accomplishing the Great Commission. Further, following the ontological nature of a disciple and, therefore, discipleship, by the eternal decree of God, the Great Commission is the means by which God sovereignly chooses to enact his will on earth to save those whom he foreknew and chose in eternity past.

The catechetical ministry of equipping the saints and building up the body of Christ must continue “until we all attain to the *unity of the faith* and of the *knowledge of the Son of God*, to *mature manhood*, to the *measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by *every wind of doctrine*” (Eph 4:13–14; emphasis added). Catechesis provides the foundational and fundamental elements of the Christian faith in alignment with the historic confessional traditions in instructional formats established in the inerrant Bible, which enable training, teaching, and equipping disciples with a cognitive and affectual understanding of the redemptive biblical-theological system. The confessional element of fulfilling the Great Commission necessitates that disciples in the local congregation can speak “*the truth in love*” so as “to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,” who equips and “*makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love*” (Eph 4:15–16; emphasis added).

Virtuous Christian Knowing, Wagnerianism, and Disciple

Utilizing Trentham’s Virtuous Christian Knowing (VCK) taxonomy, Evan Pietsch assesses Wagner’s priorities, implications, and commitments that produce his theological convictions, praxes, and axioms. Employing VCK through the classic theism paradigm, Pietsch articulates,

This research proposes that Wagner’s affirmation concerning the doctrine of God, *divine interventional mutability*, establishes the basis and priority for Wagner’s praxes and axioms. The implications of Wagner’s metaphysical commitment to

open theism as his overarching theological paradigm and the affirmation of God’s purposeful consideration of humanity’s prayers in the determination of his sovereign plans inform Wagner’s framework of prayer and the cognitive understanding of the Great Commission. Throughout Wagner’s life, his commitments and axioms were all recapitulations of his commitment to a *commissional pragmatic consequentialist* ethic. The basis for each axiological and theological change is Wagner’s earnest desire to be more effective at instilling the will of God on earth.¹¹³

An assessment and evaluation of Wagner’s doctrine of sanctification must follow Pietsch’s assertion and terms (see figure 4). Wagner’s priorities of open theism and the mutability of God, which create the contingency of Christ’s atonement, lead to the implications of cooperationism in prayer and the Great Commission as the means through which God conditionally partners with humanity to fulfill his will on earth. An additional implication is Wagner’s definition of the ontology of a disciple.

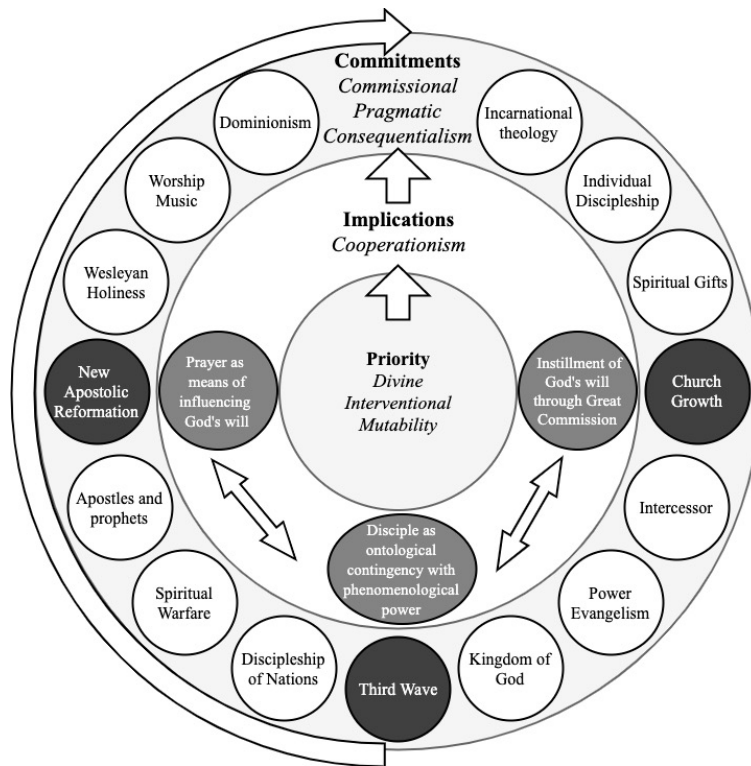


Figure 4. Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship

¹¹³ Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 207–8.

A visualization of Wagnerianism. The model (see figure 4) proposed by Pietsch summarizes Wagnerianism visually. The model, based on VCK, begins with the core and moves outward. The “central ring depicts a theological conviction of *divine interventional mutability* concerning the doctrine of God. Wagner’s core conviction of God asserts God’s volitional limitation of power in redeeming humanity and knowledge of the future.”¹¹⁴ Pietsch continues, noting, “The inner ring represents two primary implications that drove” Wagner’s “praxes and were influenced by a mutable paradigm of God: prayer and the Great Commission, which is articulated by the proposed term *cooperationism*,” which “revolve around the fundamental element of open theism, *divine interventional mutability*.” Pietsch describes the outward movement of the model thus:

The outer ring represents the commitments and praxes of Wagner that originated from a *commissional pragmatistic consequentialist* ethic. Moreover, the praxes approximate the chronological order of manifestation while each of Wagner’s primary movements—Church Growth, Third Wave, and New Apostolic Reformation—are listed in a darker circle. While moving in a clockwise direction, one can generally follow the evolution of Wagner’s praxes toward discipleship. The primary emphasis of such a depiction demonstrates that while Wagner unquestionably evolved throughout his career, the changes revolved around cooperational implications to his conviction of an openness paradigm of God; this change resembles an orbiting planet revolving around the sun.¹¹⁵

Disciple. This research adds a third element to the inner ring that depicts “Disciple” (see figure 4). Wagner viewed the ontological nature of a disciple as one who is made new by believing in Jesus Christ. He further clarifies, defining a disciple as a “Christian who follows Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, is growing in the grace and knowledge of him, and who is a responsible member of his body.”¹¹⁶ The arrows between the three implications of prayer, God’s will, and disciple depict the connection between them. A disciple is made by the cooperation of God and humanity due to the divine

¹¹⁴ Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 202–3.

¹¹⁵ Pietsch, “Impact of Open Theism,” 208–9.

¹¹⁶ Wagner, “Glossary of Church Growth Terms,” 287–88.

interventional mutability of God. The contingency of Christ's death for the atonement of sin occurs with Wagner's conviction of functional kenotic Christology, which deemed the atonement of Christ contingent and considered the death of Christ as payment for actual sin and not original sin.

The power provided to the "Christian" for the decision for Christ occurs through the work of another disciple; the power of the Holy Spirit flows through the conduit of the evangelist, who provides the breakthrough of the kingdom of God into the kingdom of Satan, thereby freeing the person being evangelized to make a decision for Christ. The new disciple must become a member of a church and use the spiritual gifts endowed by the Holy Spirit to edify the church by making more disciples. The endless cycle of making disciples becomes the means of discipleship for Wagner; therefore, such means—the use of spiritual gifts, spiritual warfare, prayer, evangelism, and other methods of power ministry—become the *telos*. Wagner's *telos* to make disciples precipitated a radical misunderstanding of the work of the Christian in sanctification; his convictional understanding of "radical holiness" as the empowering work of the Christian to live a life without sin enabled the furthering of God's kingdom through prayer, the use of spiritual gifts, and spiritual warfare.

Introductory Systemization of Wagner's Theological Dispositions

This research has provided a prefatory systematization of C. Peter Wagner's theological dispositions concerning the doctrine of sanctification. Wagner's doctrine of sanctification and convictions regarding holiness have not been examined prior to this research, which explored the impact of Wagner's discipleship philosophy as a result of his doctrine of sanctification. Lastly, this research has established contextual evidence of epistemology undergirding Wagner's praxes and methodologies, enabling evangelical

Christians to critically evaluate the degree of appropriation or adoption of his work.¹¹⁷ Lord willing, this introductory work is the prolegomenon to examining Wagner's work *in toto*. It is my hope that other research will continue the effort.

Appropriation of Research

The appropriative dimension of this study helps believers utilize discernment to become more aware of how it is that we are affected by the same longings that affected Wagner. Wagner may be oriented in a direction that is seemingly opposite of orthodox Christianity, but nonetheless, the framework in which he operates or develops is a guidepost—an insight or practice that we can draw upon to discern our own immersions. David Foster Wallace, in his famous commencement speech in 2005 at Kenyon College, emphasizes the need to be more aware of our immersions; the “important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about.”¹¹⁸ Wallace's emphasis rests on the truth that we are not aware of the water in which we are swimming.

Wagner may prompt believers to be more aware of how unorthodox priorities and practices have infiltrated their consciousness perhaps without their knowing. Whether they are the pragmatic or consumeristic tendencies that led Wagner in the direction that he went, these longings and tendencies are very relevant in the current Reformed context as well. James K. A. Smith reveals that “perhaps some of the habits and practices that we are regularly immersed in are actually thick formative practices” that “are meaning-laden, identity-forming practices that subtly shape us precisely because

¹¹⁷ Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 194; John David Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1): Approaching and Qualifying Models of Human Development,” *Christian Educational Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 458–75; Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2),” 476–94.

¹¹⁸ David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion about Living a Compassionate Life* (New York: Little, Brown, 2009), 8.

they grab hold of our love—they are automating our desire and action without our conscious recognition.”¹¹⁹

An understanding of immersions enables believers to erect guideposts that motivate what Smith calls “cultural exegesis.”¹²⁰ Rather than adopting practices without discernment, believers must engage in wise examination that asks questions aimed at “discerning the shape of the kingdom toward which cultural practices and institutions are aimed. If Christians read *through* such cultural practices” to “discern their teleological aim,” believers can ask, “What do these practices and institutions envision as the good life? What picture of human flourishing is implicit or ‘carried’ in the practices?”¹²¹ The answers to such questions form the guideposts of discipleship and worship.

Believers must take care to exegete their immersions and practices to ensure the *telos* is glorifying God. Being “regularly immersed in the drama of God in Christ reconciling the world to himself” is “the point of Christian worship—to invite us into that story over and over again, ‘characterizing’ us as we rehearse the gospel drama over and over.”¹²² Believers must be careful to be immersed in the liturgy of Christian worship that rehearses the gospel drama; veering from this drama forms the heart toward secular liturgies rather than that of Christian worship.

¹¹⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation, Cultural Liturgies*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 83.

¹²⁰ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 89. Continuing his discussion of immersions, Smith asserts, “We should be asking: What vision of human flourishing is implicit in this or that practice? What does the good life look like as embedded in cultural rituals? What sort of person will I become after being immersed in this or that cultural liturgy? This is a process that we can describe as cultural exegesis” (89–90), for if Christian educators seek to “form the whole person, to apprentice students to a love for the Good, the True, and the Beautiful as revealed to us in Christ, then *we* need to be reformed and *transformed*. Educational reform, you might say, begins with us” (160).

¹²¹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 89–90. Smith maintains, “The formation that results from immersion in secular liturgies is its own education of desire.” This is “precisely because so often the *telos* implicit in” secular “pedagogies is antithetical to the biblical vision of the kingdom of God. And yet, subtly and covertly, by being immersed in these secular liturgies, we are being trained to be a people who desire the earthly city in all sorts of guises” (94). Moreover, “the formation of my loves and desires can be happening ‘under the hood’ of consciousness. I might be learning to love a *telos* that I’m not even aware of and that nonetheless governs my life in unconscious ways.” James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 28.

¹²² Wallace, *This Is Water*, 38.

Application of Research

This section summarizes the application of the findings of this research for ministry leaders, practitioners, and scholars.

Application to Ministry Leaders

Theologians throughout church history have contended for the faith, strived for the truth, and labored to express the foundational biblical truths of Christianity for the glory of God. The Virtuous Christian Discipleship model proposes that spiritual development must occur through catechetical training in righteousness, where virtuous learning engenders patterns of growth and maturity reliant upon the local church body for wisdom and practicing holiness. The facilitation of learning for redemptive flourishing engages the disciple's heart, mind, and hands, promoting "mental and spiritual growth into the likeness of Christ."¹²³

The local church fellowship engages in discipleship, involving the teaching of the biblical drama, doctrine, and doxology unto the glory of God. The local church fulfills the Great Commission by providing theological instruction to mature the Christian body through the catechetical study of the historic doctrines and confessions. Virtuous teaching, centered in the gospel, provides opportunities for the practice and application of scriptural wisdom that is required for spiritual growth in holiness. The growth in spiritual fruit occurs when teachers plant and water seeds of scriptural wisdom in disciples for the ultimate glory of God. Ministry leaders must recognize that discipleship transpires through the transformation of "the basic motivations of" the heart and is "formed by the drama, doctrine, and doxology that come from being united to Christ by the Spirit."¹²⁴

¹²³ Lindsey Brook Wilkerson, "Evaluating High School Church Curricula via the Danielson Framework for Teaching: A Quantitative Approach" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 20.

¹²⁴ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 142. Research shared with Pietsch, "The Impact of Open Theism," 20.

Application to Practitioners

Church programs have historically sought to teach Scripture through rote memorization and practical application; however, when teaching scriptural wisdom devoid of the redemptive biblical-theological system of Reformed sanctification, discipleship efforts lack transformation. Practitioners of theology acknowledge and engage in virtuous discipleship when seeking the explanation, illustration, and application of wisdom to discipleship. The local gathered congregation ought to call disciples to submit to the Word, which results in transformation.¹²⁵

Fulfilling the Great Commission through missional catechetical confessionality ensures the making and training of disciples. Moreover, disciples learn the historic Christian creeds and confessions while learning to glorify and magnify the Lord rightly. There is a “dynamic relationship between love and knowledge, head and heart[;] the Scriptures paint a holistic picture of the human person.”¹²⁶ The inherent faculties endowed in the *imago Dei* enable believers to glorify God through the application of biblical wisdom and knowing excellently.¹²⁷ Humanity remains under the original mandate to glorify God through living lives that honor God and enjoy his creation. The dominion mandate is not to bring the kingdom of God to earth but to glorify God through Christ by the power of the Spirit in obedience to God and love for God and neighbor. Spiritual maturity entails growing in wisdom, in Christlikeness, and in concert with the fellowship of the local church. Discipleship encompasses following Jesus’s teachings, learning, and growing in wisdom to obey his commands in the love given by

¹²⁵ Jacob Allen McMillian, “Speech Act Theory and the Theological Convictions of Preaching” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), 7.

¹²⁶ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 10.

¹²⁷ John David Trentham, “Teaching & Learning Theory & Practice” (unpublished class notes for 95600, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Spring Semester 2022). Paul encourages believers in Phil 1:6–11 that their “love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent.” Through the restoration and renewing of Christ and the sanctification brought about by the Holy Spirit, believers are enabled to use virtuous wisdom to glorify God rightly. Research shared with Pietsch, “The Impact of Open Theism,” 201.

the Holy Spirit. The use of spiritual gifts edifies the church, enabling further learning and obedience to God's law.

Application to Scholars

The Reformed doctrine of sanctification and discipleship rests on the shoulders of the theological giants of church history, who possess a sureness in the confessional and doctrinal teachings of the church and hold onto the catechetical framework of the early church. The redemptive biblical-theological system deems disciples as chosen by God *in* and *for* Christ in eternity past through the *pactum salutis*. The Reformed doctrine of sanctification emphasizes the necessity to teach and disciple those for whom Jesus died; the reconciliation of Christ comes through the work of the Spirit in the hearts of humanity. The work of Christ is finished; the work of the Spirit sovereignly enables right living through believers' union with Christ.

Holiness must be understood as a synergistic process of believers' conforming to the likeness of Christ by the Holy Spirit rather than an equal cooperation between Christians and the Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables disciples to be made more into the image of Christ unto glorification and ultimately in the fully restored image of God. Without a foundational understanding of the theological axioms, praxes, or concepts of Wagnerian holiness, scholarship will continue to lend credence to Wagner's theology; the different gospel generated from a different God and leading to a different disciple produces a different holiness. This preliminary systemization of Wagnerian holiness and the proposed concept of a disciple within Wagnerianism should contribute to the existing dialogue concerning the influence or adoption of Wagner's theology within modern evangelicalism.

Further Research

This research has merely introduced the systemization and indexing of Wagner's theological convictions. More research is warranted to examine and evaluate

Wagner's theological, sociological, and anthropological convictions and ministry praxes. Moreover, numerous recommendations for further inquiry into the area of Wagnerian holiness and discipleship are apparent in light of the conclusions and implications associated with this research. The following list includes possible avenues of research that may serve to deepen, extend, or augment this research:

1. A study may be undertaken to explore the variance of discipleship axioms and praxes at multiple evangelical churches within other Christian traditions, such as the orthodox Wesleyan, Pentecostal, Southern Baptist, and Presbyterian traditions. Numerous specific variables could be assessed within contexts, such as geographical region, denominational affiliation, size of church population, and church discipleship philosophy.
2. A study may be undertaken to explore the comparative differentiations regarding Christian faith formation and discipleship axiom development among Christians attending confessional evangelical Christian churches and those attending non-confessional evangelical Christian churches.
3. A study may be undertaken to perform a cross-section analysis in which Christians representing various stages of catechetical discipleship are grouped within denominational contexts. This type of study would principally explore the process of maturation as it occurs during the catechetical experience and may identify the point(s) at which the most decisive changes occur regarding evangelical Christians' personal faith formation.
4. A study may be undertaken in which interviews are conducted with current vocational pastors from different denominational affiliations, in which they reflect on the impact of their theological formation experience as it relates to their preparation and effectiveness in undertaking a discipleship ministry. This study may be designed to distinguish sample groupings within church contexts according to longevity of ministry experience (e.g., < 5 years, 6–10 years, 11–20 years, 20+ years).
5. According to a biblically based model of virtuous discipleship (suggested), a study could be undertaken to refine and test a standardized interview protocol for evangelical pastoral respondents. This instrument could be designed to be conducive to assessing differing variables, such as church size, pastoral doctrinal convictions, and discipleship program sizes.
6. According to a biblically based model of virtuous discipleship (suggested) and findings from studies utilizing a standardized interview protocol for evangelical pastor respondents (suggested), a study may be undertaken to design and test a forced-response survey instrument, comparable to Lifeway's Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA), which elicits responses that identify participants' spiritual progress on their discipleship pathway. This instrument could be ideal for empirical studies and ongoing evaluations by catechetical or discipleship programs at evangelical churches that engage large sample groups, including large segments of church-attending populations.

7. A study may be undertaken to assess the extent to which evangelical churches either explicitly or implicitly adopt Wagner's definition of a disciple in discipleship practices. This type of study would primarily employ a survey instrument to assess qualitatively the underlying theological convictions regarding sanctification of church leaders and church members in evangelical churches. A subsequent interview of survey participants will supply the quantitative assessment of church leadership and church members through a forced-response survey instrument concerning Wagnerian theology and Wagner's definition of disciple.
8. A study may be undertaken to assess the impact of the affirmation of Wagnerian holiness on one's relationship with classic theism.

Conclusion

This research has sought to determine if Wagner's disciple paradigm's theological convictions, axioms, and praxes for the fulfillment of the Great Commission are consistent with or inversely oriented to the confessional Christian discipleship paradigm reflective of the Reformed tradition. Wagner's paradigm is inversely oriented to the confessional, biblical doctrine of sanctification, yet there is consistency in pattern as Wagner's view engages in "domains and patterns for growth and maturity that correspond with" his priorities, implications, and commitments, which are "according to different trajectories."¹²⁸

This research has found that Wagner's doctrine of sanctification bases spiritual formation and growth on doctrines of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and humanity that are inconsistent with the redemptive biblical-theology system, in which the biblical doctrine of sanctification becomes an essential element. Furthermore, Wagner's discipleship philosophy bifurcates discipleship and church fellowship, separating two indivisible ministries of the Holy Spirit and avenues of spiritual maturity. Wagner equates spiritual maturity with the knowledge and use of spiritual gifts rather than cognitive maturity in theology, doctrine, and biblical wisdom. Wagner's continuously evolving philosophy of discipleship engendered a devaluation of doctrine that subverted the biblical command to mature in wisdom and knowledge of the Lord, propagating a conviction of

¹²⁸ Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2)," 483.

cooperationism that utilized prayer and phenomenological manifestations of power to further the kingdom of God. Wagner adapted the redemptive biblical-theological system into a theological system that affirmed a different doctrine of God, doctrine of Christ, doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and doctrine of humanity; this research exhorts believers, pastors, and scholars to cautiously evaluate Wagner's axioms, immersions, and praxes, which are inextricable from his epistemological openness and metanarrative of Dominion theology. In so doing, Christians must also engage in cultural exegesis, examining their own axioms, immersions, and practices to ensure that the *telos* is glorifying God.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 28.

APPENDIX 1

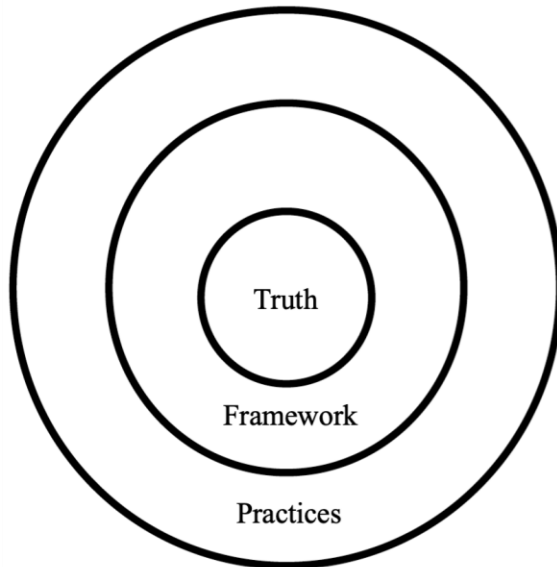
A TAXONOMY OF VIRTUES FOR CHRISTIAN
(TEACHING AND) LEARNING

<i>Learning entails . . .</i>	<i>Learning entails . . .</i>	<i>Learning entails . . .</i>
Category A: Priorities Biblically founded presuppositions for learning and development	Category B: Implications Metacognition, critical reflection, and contextualistic orientation <i>for learning</i>	Category C: Commitments Personal responsibility for learning and maturing—within community
A recognition of the God of the Bible as metaphysically ultimate and of revelation as the source and most basic component for knowledge and development	A preference for higher-level forms of critical insight and reflection	A pursuit of personal development that results from mutual interdependence and reciprocity in one’s relationships with authority figures and peers
	A prioritization of wisdom-oriented modes of learning and living	
A clear articulation of the relationship between faith and rationality	A reflective criterion of assessing one’s own beliefs and values as well as divergent beliefs and values	A sense of personal responsibility for gaining, maintaining, and progressing in ways of <i>knowing</i>
	A recognition of social-environmental influences on one’s learning and maturation	A pursuit of active involvement/engagement in the teaching and learning process
		A convictional commitment to one’s own worldview—maintained with critical awareness of personal contexts, ways of thinking, and challenges brought to bear by alternative worldviews—through

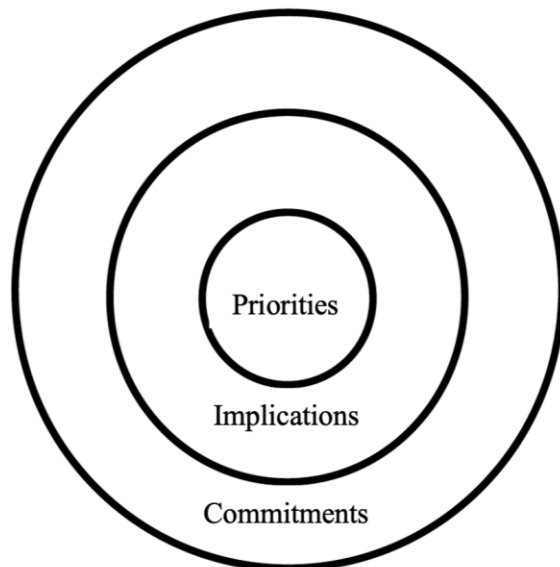
APPENDIX 2

CORRESPONDING CATEGORIES FOR VIRTUOUS
CHRISTIAN KNOWING AND CHRISTIAN
PERSONAL IDENTITY

Redemptive Personal Identity
[the Christian life of the soul]



Virtuous Christian Life
[the Christian life of the mind]



APPENDIX 3

ESTABLISHING THE HISTORIC VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

Christian Discipleship

In discussing the practices of Martin Bucer and Reformers after him, Martin York states that the “rigorous ministerial work of ‘teaching of Christ, the dispensation of his sacraments, and the administration of his discipline’ could not be accomplished merely at public gatherings, but required intense, personal visiting, catechizing, and discipleship.”¹ Like the Reformers, new believers and converts to Christianity throughout the first five centuries of the early church were grounded “in the rudiments” of the faith.² Christian instruction occurred through the “catechumenate,” with the purpose to “form people in the faith” and “communicate very clearly that conversion implies a commitment to discipleship and that discipleship is not for the few but for the many, not an option, but an expectation, not an addition to conversion but an essential feature of conversion.”³

Catechesis

The practice of catechesis ensured that those who came to Christianity from different backgrounds and opposing worldviews “were processed carefully, prayerfully, and intentionally, with thorough understanding at each stage.” The call to catechize

¹ Barry J. York, “The Shepherd’s Seminary,” *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* 5, no. 1 (2018): 5.

² J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 22.

³ Gerald L. Sittser, “The Catechumenate and the Rise of Christianity,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 6, no. 2 (2013): 181.

believers is to stand on the shoulders of the giants who went before us—to “stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it” (Jer 6:16). Puritan minister Richard Baxter believed that catechizing the church is a main role of the pastor. Catechizing entailed “proposing to” children and adults “familiar questions, in order to judge of their knowledge and dispositions, so as to be the more capable of giving them suitable instructions and admonitions.”⁴ In Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians, Hebrews, and John, it is evident that “Christians who are developing in a natural, healthy way—regenerate persons, that is, who are now indwelt, led, and energized in mind and heart by the Holy Spirit—will welcome this kind of ongoing instruction in which attention is focused on the self-revealed Triune God.”⁵

Catechumenate

J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett provide an excellent treatment on the “outline of a catechumen’s journey,” demonstrating the sacred nature of learning and living the Christian faith.⁶ The entry into the catechumenate occurred when an inquirer was interviewed for acceptance based on motive, lifestyle, and resolve. Not all inquirers were admitted; those who were accepted became catechumens, “hearers of the Word” who worshipped on the Lord’s Day and engaged in other fellowship occasions. The Lord’s Day liturgy consisted of two parts: (1) “a service of the Word”—hearing the Scriptures read and expounded while also joining in prayer and hymns; (2) “a service of the Table”—the Lord’s Supper, in which catechumens were not involved until they were baptized.⁷ The second phase of the catechetical journey was testimony of the

⁴ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor; A Discourse on the Pastoral Office*, ed. Samuel Palmer, 2nd ed. (London: S. Couchman, 1808), 75.

⁵ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 48.

⁶ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 54.

⁷ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 54.

catechumens' "faithfulness in hearing, doing, and prayer" and their consideration for baptism. Once approved, the catechumens transitioned into competentes.

The final phase of the catechumenate required extensive commitment from the competentes, who practiced and recited the Creed and the Lord's Prayer through daily instruction from the church leaders. The competentes were to guard the Creed against the regular catechumens and those outside the church in adherence to Jesus's teaching. The church believed the competentes would grasp the full significance of the faith as it was explained, step-by-step.⁸ The competentes were confirmed through baptism and the subsequent catechism on the spiritual nature of the Lord's Supper. Once baptized, the competentes became neophytes, who observed and partook in the Lord's Supper ceremony, prayer, and actions. The neophytes must then live out what they learned in their daily activities.

Three Dimensions of Catechesis

The journey of the catechumen through the catechumenate, although originating in the ancient church, has application for today. Three dimensions of the catechumenate, in particular, are necessary for modern-day catechesis.

The first dimension. The church must have a "deliberate concern for the spiritual readiness and ongoing development of those becoming Christians."⁹ Discipleship begins before acceptance into church membership; it must meet people at their level of knowledge and help them grow to know virtuously. An assessment of the condition of those on the discipleship journey allows leaders to have a realistic idea of the necessary nourishment, adjustments, and potential challenges that may occur.

⁸ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 55.

⁹ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 58.

The second dimension. The church must recognize the “holistic approach to instruction that is reflected in *how* and *where* catechesis occurred.”¹⁰ Hearts and minds must be engaged through the eyes and ears, hands and feet. The engagement of the whole person must be through the whole church. The Old and New Testaments speak of the parents’ and church leaders’ role in teaching and training the family and church body, respectively. Teaching doctrine must be through simply call and response, which engages little more than the ears and mouth. The heart and mind must be intimately involved for virtuous learning and knowing.

The third dimension. The church must cherish “the combination of sobriety and celebration that attended the journey of a catechumen toward full inclusion in the life of the church.”¹¹ The church must engage in the ancient ritual of the rite of passage into the body of Christ, not just into church membership. The careful and thorough process of the catechumenate immersed the church body and the catechumen in the journey of faith. The journey must continue beyond the welcome into the church body and guide believers on the communal and personal journey of sanctification.

¹⁰ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 58.

¹¹ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 58.

APPENDIX 4

PACKER AND PARRETT'S CATECHETICAL FRAMEWORK

Although some elements of J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett's framework were presented in chapter 3, a knowledge of the entire framework allows readers to understand fully how to create a Christocentric framework for catechetical ministry; therefore, this appendix offers the entire Christocentric framework.

Christocentric Framework

Packer and Parrett's Christocentric framework encompasses five founts, four fixtures, three facets, two fundamentals, and one focus.¹ The founts identify five sources of catechesis, with Scripture alone providing the authoritative source "for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17).

Five Founts

The founts interconnect in one progressive fount to teach the "fully inspired and fully authoritative Scriptures": (1) "*the Triune God*, who alone is God and has revealed himself to us"; (2) "*the Scriptures*, the faithful and trustworthy record of God's revelation"; (3) "*the Story*, which is unfolded in those Scriptures"; (4) "*the Gospel*, which is both apex and summary of the Story"; and (5) "*the Faith*, which includes the Gospel

¹ J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), chap. 4.

and its implications.”² The progressive fount begins with the triune God, for “from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom 11:36).

Four Fixtures

The four fixtures of catechism are (1) the Creed; (2) the Decalogue; (3) the Lord’s Prayer; and (4) the sacraments. The fourfold design of the fixtures is modeled after the ancient catechumenate and comprehensively addresses all areas of the Christian life. The Creed is a conceptual primer for theology, addressing the fundamental beliefs of Christianity. The Decalogue is a conceptual primer on ethics concerning the Christian life and behavior. The Lord’s Prayer is a conceptual primer for Christian worship. The Lord’s Prayer aids believers’ communion with God through prayer, and the sacraments aid believers’ communion with God through corporate worship.³

Augustine argues for a threefold fixture in *The Enchiridion*, asserting that “God is to be worshipped with faith, hope, and love”; the “three graces” detail “what we are to believe” in the Creed, “what we are to hope for” in the Lord’s Prayer, and “what we are to love” in the Decalogue.⁴ The Creed and the Lord’s Prayer typify the three graces; “faith believes, hope and love pray. But without faith the two last cannot exist, and therefore we may say that faith also prays.” The confession of faith in the Creed provides meat to believers, who grow in maturity and hope. The Lord’s Prayer embraces hope through love. Love is wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart, enabled by faith and affording hope (Rom 5:5; Gal 5:6). The Decalogue offers a double commandment of

² Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 78.

³ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 87.

⁴ Augustine of Hippo, “The Enchiridion,” trans. J. F. Shaw, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, vol. 3, *St. Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 238, Logos Bible Software.

love: to love God and neighbor. The ultimate aim is love that emanates “from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5).

Three Facets

Packer and Parrett discuss the three enduring facets of the faith taught through catechesis: (1) the Truth, (2) the Life, and (3) the Way.

The Truth refers to the self-revelation of God in the culmination of Scripture and in Jesus Christ. The Truth ought to be shared through gospel-centered, doctrine-based preaching, teaching, and living (Gal 2:5; Eph 1:13; 1 Tim 1:10). Christians believe, love, and hold fast to the Truth. The Christocentric recognition of the Truth is based in Jesus’s testimony to being the Truth (John 1:1, 14, 18; 14:6; 18:37; Col 1:15; 2:9; Heb 1:1–3). Although the Creed is a “temporal aid, the truth to which it testifies is enduring. The Triune God in whom we confess our faith is eternal and unchanging.”⁵

The Life found in an eternal relationship with God alone is offered by Jesus, who is the Life (John 3:16; 4:10; 5:21; 10:10; 11:25–36; 17:3; 20:31; 1 John 5:11–13). The Holy Spirit breathes the Life into every believer through the grace of God; the new creations in Christ, adopted by God, enjoy a right relationship with God through Jesus (John 1:12; 7:37–39; Rom 8:9). The life Christians receive through the gospel “is life abundant and eternal, granting a living relationship with the living God. This covenant relationship, which both sacraments express and celebrate, endures even when the need for ritual remembrance has passed and we no longer need to recite the Lord’s Prayer.”⁶

The Way denotes the conduct of life that believers are to have in “the way of the Lord,” “the way of the righteous,” and “the way of life.”⁷ The early Christians were

⁵ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 89.

⁶ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 89–90.

⁷ The three references to The Way are found throughout the Old and New Testaments. The “way of the Lord” is found in Gen 18:19; 2 Sam 22:22; 2 Kgs 21:22; Ps 18:21; Prov 10:29; Isa 40:3; Jer 5:4–5; Matt 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23; Acts 18:25. The “way of the righteous” is found in Ps 1:6;

known as followers of the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), the narrow path that leads to life (Matt 7:13–14). “Jesus incarnated the Way” through his life of perfect obedience and sacrificial death (Rom 5:19; Phil 2:8) and made a way for all Christians to have a right relationship with God (John 14:6–9), enabling them to love God and neighbor (Matt 22:37–39; Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:27; John 13:34). The Decalogue contains God’s instructions for the righteous conduct of believers. “That way will still be the way of love and righteousness even when the need for commandments is no more.”⁸

Two Fundamentals

The conduct of Christians delineated in the Way is affirmed throughout Scripture and the history of catechesis. *The Didache (or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)* begins with the following exhortation: “There are two Ways, one of Life and one of Death; but there is a great difference between the two Ways.”⁹ The Way of Life is to love God and love one’s neighbor; the way of death is “evil and full of curse.”¹⁰ Other couplings have distinguished the two deviating paths: the way of the righteous opposes the way of the wicked (Ps 1:6); the way that is hard leads to life, whereas the way that is easy leads to destruction (Matt 7:13–14); and “the Way vs. not-the-way.”¹¹ The Way that

Prov 4:18; 15:19; Isa 26:7. The “way of life” is found in Ps 16:18; Prov 6:23; 10:17; 15:24; Jer 21:8; Acts 2:28. Moreover, Scripture denotes The Way as “the way of the good” (Prov 2:20), “the way of wisdom” (Prov 4:11), “the way of holiness” (Isa 35:8), and “the way of God” (Luke 20:21). Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 90–91.

The way of believers is contrasted with the way of those who reject God. The two conflicting paths occur in pairings—the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked (Ps 1:6), the hard way that leads to life versus the easy way that leads to destruction (Matt 7:13–14).

⁸ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 90.

⁹ *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles [The Didache]* 1.1, trans. Philip Schaff, 2nd ed. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886), 162–64, Logos Bible Software. *The Didache* was written sometime in the late first or early second century.

¹⁰ *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 5.1 (pp. 180–81). Scripture speaks of this path throughout the Old and New Testaments as “the way of the good” (Prov 2:20), “the way of wisdom” (Prov 4:11), “the way of holiness” (Isa 35:8), and “the way of God” (Luke 20:21).

¹¹ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 90–91. The last coupling is from E. Stanley Jones, *The Way: 364 Adventures in Daily Living* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1946). Packer and Parrett assert, “The expression ‘not-the-way’ reminds us also of the title and thesis of Cornelius Plantinga Jr.’s *Not the*

leads to life—the path of the righteous—is a blessing from God that leads to everlasting life and peace. Jesus is the Way; through his perfect life and reconciling death, a “new and living way” to a vital relationship with God is created for believers (Heb 10:20).

Discerning the Way from “not-the-way” comes from meditating on Scripture, which “is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps 19:8), teaches “all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3), and “is profitable” for “training in righteousness, that” believers “might be competent, equipped for every good work” (Tim 3:16–17). Catechesis is the means by which Christians are discipled and trained to walk in the Way. Christian teachers and leaders model the conduct of living and provide instruction in the precepts of the Way.¹² The Way of the Lord is proclaimed as the way of love; to love is to walk in the Way of the Lord. The double commandment of love—the two great commandments to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:25–37)—summarizes the Decalogue as “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (see Eccl 12:13). As believers are taught how to walk in the Way, love for God and neighbor flows from and reinforces the Truth and the Life, which converge to enable Christians’ walking in the Way. The “goal of all catechetical ministry” is “as follows: *Taught by the Truth and liberated by the Life, we walk in the Way.*”¹³

Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).” Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 91n24.

¹² Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 91. Packer and Parrett contend that along with the Decalogue, “Christian catechesis in this facet has also regularly included instruction from the Sermon on the Mount as well as from a variety of other biblical texts. The biblical book of Proverbs and the letter of James both prominently feature wisdom for walking in God’s Way.”

¹³ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 91.

One Focus

The five founts, four fixtures, three facets, two fundamentals, and one focus of the Christocentric catechetical framework of unite to instruct believers in righteousness and a Christ-centered living faith. The whole focus of catechesis is to proclaim Christ, ensuring “that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28). Christian teachers and leaders must faithfully and fully proclaim Christ in order that those in catechesis might learn Christ. Catechesis imparts true knowledge of Christ, for “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and” believers “have been filled in him” (Col 2:9–10). Through the instruction of catechesis, believers learn “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:8) and experiencing his goodness; they ascertain how to walk in the way of Christ, emanating pure love, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Toward the goal knowing Christ truly, in accordance with “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14), Christian teachers and leaders must persevere, pressing ahead and encouraging believers to press on. “May we ever keep our eyes on the prize as we catechize.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 93.

APPENDIX 5

VIRTUOUS CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IN PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Christian's Journey through Catechetical Learning

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* portrays the journey of Christian as he seeks to follow the narrow way that leads to everlasting life in Christ. Bunyan offers the allegorical story of calling, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and ultimately glorification. *Pilgrim's Progress* chronicles Christian's travels, modeling how the employment of Virtuous Christian Discipleship enables believers to love God and neighbor.

Christian Learns the Truth

The storyline of Christian's journey to the Celestial City demonstrates the Lord's plan of discipling through community. After reading the book that tells of the coming destruction and hearing the warning call of Evangelist in the City of Destruction, Christian begins his journey toward the Celestial City. Help providentially aids Christian in the Slough of Despond, harkening to the called and predestined mentioned in Romans 8:29–30. As Christian drudges on his journey, the words of Evangelist ring in his ears, exhorting and encouraging him to press on and follow the narrow path; Christian desires to find rest in the Way, the Truth, and the Life, which he knows he will find at the wicket gate. As Christian enters the narrow gate, he is forgiven and justified when he receives Christ. The burden remains on Christian's back, as he does not yet comprehend the basis of his forgiveness. He must learn the theological doctrines essential to the gospel, developing his convictions and faithfulness. Christian still carries the guilt and shame of sin, even though he found forgiveness of his sins.

Christian Grows in Wisdom

As Christian continues on his journey of discipleship along the Way, he endures through the temptations of the world and learns to be faithful despite the fallenness of the world around him. At the Village of Morality, Evangelist admonishes Christian, providing the life-informing framework of the biblical worldview. Evangelist exhorts Christian to think with wisdom and discernment to recognize the perils of other paths. Evangelist imparts a warning of the temptations and trials of life, sin and its consequences, and the choice Christian must make to remain faithful to the gospel and the knowledge of the loving Creator through his life-informing framework. When Christian meets Interpreter, wisdom is illuminated, providing hope for the eternal future free from bondage and despair. Christian learns of the glorious grace in the new heart and the importance of interpreting knowledge of the world through the biblical framework. Christian finds himself liberated from the yoke of guilt and shame at the cross. The three Shining Ones provide Christian with new clothes and encouragement that his sins are forgiven. The truth and wisdom Christian experiences at the cross prepare him for the arduous path up Difficulty Hill and on to his destination.

Christian Walks in the Way

Christian's discipleship journey is fraught with trials; in his desire to walk the way of righteousness, he continually requires admonishment, encouragement, and exhortation. As he enters the Palace Beautiful, Christian meets Discretion, Prudence, Piety, and Charity, representing the virtues the Holy Spirit bestows upon believers. Christian is provided with the armor of God before he leaves; he learns that the armor affords protection through his union with Christ, yielding faithfulness and wisdom so that he may bear fruit. In the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Christian meets Faithful. Evangelist once again exhorts Christian, along with Faithful, to resist temptation and remember that he has the keys of faith, so no doubt or fear can overtake him. Christian and Faithful are encouraged to remain steadfast in their beliefs, even unto death. The

Lord is the Good Shepherd who calls his sheep to endure and persevere in love until the end.

After the martyrdom of Faithful in Vanity Fair, Christian again endeavors to walk along the narrow path, where he finds Hopeful, who uplifts him in his despair and his temptation to be unfaithful in Doubting Castle. Upon a providential reminder, Christian uses the keys of faith to unlock his and Hopeful's chains. Christian and Hopeful then come to the Delectable Mountains, where they meet four shepherds—Experience, Knowledge, Watchful, and Sincere—who kindle faith and hope for the eternal dwelling in the Celestial City. Christian and Hopeful receive instruction on how to obey the commandments in love and faithfulness on the journey ahead. Hopeful aids Christian with faith and hope in the Dark River as they cross into everlasting life. The glorification and perfection that await Christian in the Celestial City require hope and faith. The journey is fraught with dangers and trials, but Christian remains steadfast through the provision and protection of the Holy Spirit and the edification of the community of redeemed pilgrims. Together, the pilgrims traverse the narrow Way that leads to life everlasting.

APPENDIX 6

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN CALLING

Effectual Calling	Vocational Calling
On the basis of being called to Christ Christians are called to labor for Christ (1 Cor 15:58)
Christians are called to understand and know God, and boast in him rather than in any position or achievement (Jer 9:23–24)
Having received Christ we are to walk (and labor) in Christ (Col 2:6)
Having been saved by grace through faith we are his workmanship (Eph 2:10)
Having been set apart in the world we are sent into the world (John 17:18)
By the mercies of God we are to present our bodies to God (Rom 12:1–2)
Having been crucified with Christ we live (and labor) by faith (Gal 2:20)

APPENDIX 7

TAXONOMY OF PERSPECTIVES ON “FAITH”

<p>“FAITH” AS RELATIVISTIC RECOGNITION OF TRANSCENDENCE</p> <p>Propositional assent to specific truths about transcendent reality: NO</p> <p>Personal allegiance to reality beyond myself: YES</p>	<p>BIBLICAL FAITH PERSPECTIVE</p> <p>Propositional assent to specific truths about transcendent reality (gospel truths): YES</p> <p>Personal allegiance to reality beyond myself (Jesus Christ): YES</p>
<p>“FAITH” AS SELF-CONFIDENCE</p> <p>Propositional assent to specific truths about transcendent reality: NO</p> <p>Personal allegiance to reality beyond myself: NO</p>	<p>“FAITH” AS REDUCTIONISTIC ACCEPTANCE OF FACTS</p> <p>Propositional assent to specific truths about transcendent reality: YES</p> <p>Personal allegiance to reality beyond myself: NO</p>

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ABSTRACT

UTILIZING A REFORMED SANCTIFICATION FRAMEWORK TO ASSESS AND EVALUATE C. PETER WAGNER'S DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

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Through the utilization of John David Trentham's Inverse Consistency Protocol (ICP) as a methodological paradigm to define, reflect on, evaluate, and assess Wagner's philosophy of discipleship, this thesis demonstrates that C. Peter Wagner's philosophy of discipleship is incongruent with an articulated Reformed doctrine of sanctification and paradigm of discipleship and sanctification. This work (1) introduces and employs an articulated paradigm of discipleship, *Virtuous Christian Discipleship* (VCD), to assess and evaluate Wagner's doctrine of sanctification and (2) introduces the term *commissional catechetical confessionality* to further articulate a redemptive and confessional doctrine of sanctification for a biblical perspective on human learning, growth, and development in light of the *imago Dei*. VCD endeavors to strengthen the church's commitment to the practice of a biblical model of discipleship.

Chapter 1 introduces the need for research. The following two chapters follow the first step of ICP, which identifies and asserts the normative biblical priorities of a Reformed biblical-theological system (chap. 2) and the Reformed doctrine of sanctification (chap. 3). Chapters 4 and 5 follow the second step of ICP, which summarizes with precision and intellectual honesty the writings of Wagner (1952–2016) concerning his articulation of the doctrine of sanctification. Chapter 6 follows the third step of ICP, which provides a critical and charitable reflection of Wagner's theology,

axioms, and praxes by expounding the conclusions of this research and articulating the implications of Wagnerian theology on discipleship praxes and ethics. Lastly, this study's appropriative dimension determines that understanding Wagner's longings that led to his definition of disciple and philosophy of discipleship helps us become more aware of how we are affected by the same longings, whether pragmatic or consumeristic tendencies, and how those are very relevant in our own context.

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