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THE IMPACT OF OPEN THEISM ON C. PETER WAGNER'S
PHILOSOPHY OF DISCIPLESHIP

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THE IMPACT OF OPEN THEISM ON C. PETER WAGNER'S
PHILOSOPHY OF DISCIPLESHIP

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For the glory of God

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLE AND FIGURES.....	IX
PREFACE.....	X
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Preface to Open Theism.....	4
Thesis.....	5
Statement of Research Problem.....	6
Purpose of Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	7
Research Methodology.....	8
Research Assumptions.....	9
Research Disclosure.....	10
Research Limitations.....	11
Background to the Research Problem.....	11
Introduction to C. Peter Wagner.....	11
Introduction to Open Theism.....	13
Philosophy of Discipleship.....	17
2. EXCURSUS: IN THE SHADOWS OF THE TWO TOWERS—THE INFLUENCE OF THE THEOLOGICAL CROSSROADS ON C. PETER WAGNER.....	22
The Cultural Landscape before Wagner: Early Twentieth-Century American Protestantism (1900–1929).....	23
Advancement of Modern Sciences and Philosophies.....	24
The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy.....	28

The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch.....	31
Early Pentecostalism Movement: Wagner’s First Wave.....	33
The Cultural Landscape during Wagner’s Formational Years (1930–1952).....	35
Charles Peter Wagner	36
Culture: The Great Reversal (1940s–1950).....	36
Neo-evangelicalism and the Establishment of Fuller Theological Seminary	39
Latter Rain Movement.....	40
Wagner Enters Evangelicalism.....	41
Wagner’s Pre-seminarian Education	42
Wagner’s Road to Los Angeles	44
Evaluation of Wagner’s Foundation of Theological Formation	46
Professed Christian Conversion.....	46
Vocational Missionary Calling	47
Evangelical, Not Reformed	48
Evaluative Summary	48
The Journey Begins.....	49
3. EARLY THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATIONS BEFORE AFFIRMING OPEN THEISM (1952–1982).....	50
The Journey’s Legend.....	51
A Mind Open to Theological Creativity: The Fuller Era (1952–1955)	52
Contextual Background	53
Theological Mile Markers	53
Theological Dispositions	57
Philosophy of Discipleship Summary	76
Theological Dispositions Summary.....	78
A Journey Begins: The Field Missionary Era (1956–1965)	78
Contextual Background	79

Theological Mile Markers	80
Theological Dispositions	81
Philosophy of Discipleship Summary	84
Theological Dispositions Summary.....	86
Radical Theological Reconstruction: The Transformational Era (1966–1971).....	86
Contextual Background to the Era.....	87
Theological Mile Markers	89
Theological Dispositions	94
Discipleship Philosophy Summary.....	101
Theological Dispositions Summary.....	105
Return of the Intercessor: A Church Growth Era (1972–1981).....	106
Contextual Background	106
Theological Mile Markers	107
Theological Dispositions	109
Discipleship Philosophy Summary.....	121
Theological Dispositions Summary.....	124
4. LATER THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATIONS BEFORE AFFIRMING OPEN THEISM (1982–2000).....	125
Return of the Prophet: The Signs and Wonders Era (1982–1990)	125
Contextual Background	125
Theological Mile Markers	127
Theological Dispositions	137
Discipleship Philosophy Summary.....	149
Theological Dispositions Summary.....	152
Return of the Apostle: The Third Wave Era (1991–2000)	152
Contextual Background	152
Theological Mile Markers	154

Theological Dispositions	158
Discipleship Philosophy Summary	166
Theological Dispositions Summary	168
5. FINAL THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATIONS AFTER AFFIRMING OPEN THEISM (2001–2016)	169
History Belongs to the Intercessors: The New Apostolic Reformation Era (2001–2016)	170
Contextual Background	170
Theological Mile Markers	172
Theological Dispositions	180
Discipleship Philosophy Summary	196
Theological Dispositions Summary	205
At Journey’s End: The Final Biblical-Theological Narrative of C. Peter Wagner	205
The Biblical-Theological Narrative of C. Peter Wagner	206
Theological Dispositions Summary	210
6. THERE AND BACK AGAIN: THE CONCLUSIONS	211
Research Questions	211
Research Question 1 Conclusion	211
Research Question 2 Conclusion	212
Research Question 3 Conclusion	213
Research Question 4 Conclusion	213
Contribution to Literature	214
Proposed Terms and Definitions	214
Introductory Systemization of Wagner’s Theological Dispositions	218
Further Research Needed	218
Text-Based Research	219
Mixed-Methods Research	221

General Research Topics	222
Conclusion of the Research.....	223
Virtuous Christian Knowing.....	223
Virtuous Christian Knowing and Wagnerianism.....	224
Application of Research.....	227
Application to Scholars and Theologians	227
Application to Pastors.....	228
Application to Individual Christians.....	229
Philosophy of Discipleship Evaluation	230
Summary Evaluation of Wagnerianism on Discipleship	233
Discipleship Is an Ontological Contingency Rather than an Eternal Divine Decree	234
God Does Not Know Who His Disciples Will Be.....	236
God Does Not Know When One Will Become a Disciple.....	236
God Does Not Know How One Will Become a Disciple.....	237
Devaluation of Theological Maturity	237
God Is Not the Sole Agent in the Enactment of His Will.....	241
Concluding Remarks.....	245
Epilogue	247
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	248

LIST OF TABLE AND FIGURES

Table	Page
1. Wagner’s Theological Dispositions (1952–1955).....	78
2. Wagner’s Theological Dispositions (1956–1965).....	86
3. Wagner’s Theological Dispositions (1966–1971).....	105
4. Wagner’s Theological Dispositions (1972–1981).....	124
5. Wagner’s Theological Dispositions (1982–1990).....	152
6. Wagner’s Theological Dispositions (1991–2000).....	168
7. Wagner’s Theological Dispositions (2001–2016).....	205
8. Wagner’s Theological Dispositions (1955–2016).....	210
9. Theological implications of Wagnerian discipleship and classic theism	245
 Figure	
1. Corresponding categories to Virtuous Christian Knowing	224
2. Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship	225

PREFACE

Bilbo Baggins, having ended his adventure in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Rings* and while reflecting upon his journey, asks, "Don't adventures ever have an end? I suppose not. Someone else always has to carry on the story." Perhaps this work concludes my adventure. I trust that sojourners who are more worthy than I am will carry the story forward. My temporal joining of the fellowship, which the Lord had long since gathered, is only a footprint in the path of time. May the next generation continue the adventure onward toward the Celestial City and to the glory of the Lord. I thank Christ for his redemption and for his providing me with the means, opportunity, and desire to complete this work for his glory. I am indebted to everyone who has challenged, encouraged, and supported me throughout this journey.

First, I wish to thank my precious wife, Vivian. Thank you for your love, prayers, support, and sacrifice, as well as participating in endless hours of theological discussions with me. Without your belief in me, I would not be who I am today. There is no other companion with whom I would want to have traveled.

I wish to thank my dearest friend Steve LeBlanc for piercing my heart with the gospel of Christ and helping me climb onto the shoulders of the giants who have long gone before me. While reflecting on what Bilbo had taught him, Frodo Baggins said that "there was only one Road; that it was like a great river: its springs were at every doorstep and every path was its tributary." As Bilbo told Frodo, "It's a dangerous business" going out of your door. "You step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no telling where you might be swept off to." Steve, without you, that road might never have been found, and my feet might not have been kept.

I am thankful to Bruce and Jodi Ware for their friendship and mentorship. Bruce, thank you for teaching me the profound riches found in Scripture and teaching me how to rest in our sovereign Lord. I am forever indebted to you for investing in me and demonstrating grace and truth. I thank my advisor, Timothy Paul Jones, for his guidance, spiritual mentorship, and personal investment in me; this journey wouldn't have been realized without his encouragement and feedback. Timothy, thank you for demonstrating excellence and truth. I also wish to thank my second advisor, John David Trentham. Thank you for instructing me and demonstrating charity and truth while unequivocally upholding the truth of Christ. I also thank Dean C. Clark for his endless encouragement, counsel, and mentorship. Dean, without your companionship, I would not have succeeded in walking each step of the journey. Your continual prayers and encouragement allowed me to press onward even after I wanted to turn back.

Thank you to the many professors and faculty at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Thank you, Albert Mohler, for your leadership and sitting with us, listening to our story, and encouraging us to continue the journey. Thank you to the men who helped build my theological foundation: Justin A. Irving, Robert L. Plummer, Thomas R. Schreiner, Brian J. Vickers, and Stephen J. Wellum.

To those reading this work, thank you. Firstly, while this dissertation does provide a theological systemization of the New Apostolic Reformation, made possible through the works of C. Peter Wagner and my research, this dissertation cannot provide a comprehensive presentation or an evaluation of the movement. For an excursus on the NAR movement, I direct readers to R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec's publications—*Counterfeit Kingdom* (2022), *A New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (2018), and *God's Super-Apostles: Encountering the Worldwide Prophets and Apostles Movement* (2018).

Secondly, while this dissertation engages in theological topics relating to Arminianism and Calvinism, the conclusions of this research are not dependent upon held

convictions concerning such topics, nor do the findings of this research have dependencies on one's view of the gifts of the Spirit. The spectrum of orthodoxy is far broader than a reductionistic perspective on the primacy of such topics.

Thirdly, while this dissertation provides a critical evaluation of C. Peter Wagner and the impact of his theological conclusions, he was created in the image of God and is, therefore, deserving of charity and respect. While I am critical of Wagner's conclusions, I must acknowledge his devout commitment to his convictions; may we all embrace our convictions with the same fervor as Wagner.

Lastly, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Doris Wagner for her willingness to meet with Vivian and me. Though Peter's theological convictions and conclusions differ from ours, we have come to appreciate Peter as a fellow image bearer of God and greatly respect his commitment to following his convictions. No part of this work reflects our continued research with Doris, and no conclusions have changed; truly, the conclusions have strengthened. Lord willing, we will continue to learn more about Wagner and share more as part of a critical theological biography on C. Peter Wagner in the future. We are ever grateful for our newfound friendship and affection for Doris Wagner.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On the pages of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Bilbo Baggins, amidst the mystical splendor of Rivendell, penned the final page of *There and Back Again*, detailing the majestic happenings of his great adventure. In his nephew Frodo's hands, Bilbo's life's work shaped a new generation of experiences. When an author finishes his book after writing the words "The End," readers have the privilege of engaging the story in its full context. Characters only known on early pages develop as each page turns. Such was the life of C. Peter Wagner; his name may be well known, but lesser known are his life chapters as a complete story.

The name C. Peter Wagner once invoked instant recognition in the twentieth century. Today, most Christians have likely been impacted, to varying degrees, by Wagner's work. Those a part of the millennial generation would probably know Wagner as a foundational leader of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement, the fastest-growing Christian segment as of 2010.¹ Perhaps, those somewhat older would be familiar with Wagner as a theologian contributing to the charismatic "Third Wave" movement.² Perhaps others would know Wagner as a professor and researcher at Fuller

¹ Citing researcher David Barrett's findings, Wagner states that the neocharismatic Christian segment is the fastest-growing Christian segment. In 2010, there were 614 million professed adherents. C. Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and Change Your Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 86.

² 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. Wagner states,

The term third wave is used to designate a movement that is similar to the Pentecostal movement (first wave) and charismatic movement (second wave) but has what its constituents perceive as some fairly important differences. It is composed largely evangelical Christians who, while applauding and supporting the work of the Holy Spirit in 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

Theological Seminary, working alongside Donald McGavran and specializing in methodological church growth strategies.³ Fewer still are those who might know Wagner as a South American missionary. Far lesser known is Wagner as the scholar who affirmed open theism, a distant journey from his once-held theological convictions found in his appropriation of classical Reformed theology.⁴ Regardless of one's opinions of Wagner's methods or conclusions, one must charitably acknowledge Wagner's broad experience, impact, and extensive published works.

Wagner's philosophy of discipleship is ever-present over fifty years after his work within the Church Growth movement and over twenty years after he first codified the NAR movement's theological and methodological distinctives. The year 2001 definitively marked the theological trajectory that would characterize the remaining years of Wagner's life. Some may know 2001 as the year Wagner believed was the ushering in of the Second Apostolic Age.⁵ The significant theological implications of a Second Apostolic Age notwithstanding, a lesser-known and equally significant event occurred in

the sick, casting out demons, receiving prophecies, and participating in other charismatic-type manifestations without distributing the current philosophy of ministry governing their congregations.

Wagner continues,

The third wave became prominent around 1980, with the term itself being coined in 1983 by Peter Wagner. In recent years it has become clear that the third wave should be viewed as part of a broader category, "neocharismatic," that includes the vast numbers of independent and indigenous churches and groups worldwide that cannot be classified as either Pentecostal or charismatic. These are Christian bodies with pentecostal-like experiences that have no traditional pentecostal or charismatic denominational connections.

³ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, rev. and ed. C. Peter Wagner, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), vii–xviii.

⁴ Open theism, also known as openness theology, was popularized in the 1994 publication *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, by theologians Clark H. Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger. In defining open theism, openness scholars assert that "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." Clark H. Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 7.

⁵ Wagner states, "If I were asked to fix a date for the beginning of the Second Apostolic Age, I would say it was 2001. This is when a critical mass of the Body of Christ began to agree that the foundation of the church is, indeed, apostles and prophets and that they should be openly recognized as such in our churches today." C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 218.

the very same year; Wagner first publicized his support of openness theology in *Destiny of a Nation: How Prophets and Intercessors Can Mold History*.⁶ Furthermore, in private correspondence to open theism proponent Clark Pinnock, Wagner states that the “openness of God is the fourth most important theological insight this side of the Reformation (the other three being Wesley’s view of holiness, Wm. Carey’s Enquiry, and the Pentecostal view of the person and work of the Holy Spirit).”⁷

Throughout Wagner’s career, his discipleship praxes influenced the Church Growth movement, Third Wave movement, and New Apostolic Reformation movement. Therefore, since the openness of God was such a significant theological revelation to Wagner and his discipleship praxes, and the publication of his support occurred in the very same year as the declared instillment of the Second Apostolic Age, one must wonder whether Wagner’s theological convictions concerning the doctrine of God impacted his philosophy of discipleship. Moreover, in Wagner’s 2008 publication *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*, he states that the “biblical and theological paradigm” of open theism “made sense of” what he “had been thinking” and what he “had been doing all along.”⁸ In the same work, Wagner states that “open theology has come just at the beginning of the Second Apostolic Age, and apostolic people,

⁶ C. Peter 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.

⁷ In September 2001, in a personal correspondence to Clark Pinnock, Wagner states, I just read *Most Moved Mover* and, because openness theology is such a controversial issue at the moment, I wanted to let you know that you have strong support among the crowd that I run with. I think that the openness of God is the fourth most important theological insight this side of the Reformation (the other three being Wesley’s view of holiness, Wm. Carey’s Enquiry, and the Pentecostal view of the person and work of the Holy Spirit). To expand on this a bit, here is a copy of my lead chapter to *Destiny of a Nation*, which Wagner Publications is releasing in a few weeks. This is the first time I have gone into print supporting openness.

Furthermore, Wagner states, “I am ordering 30 copies from Baker to give to the members of ACPE. I did the same with Greg Boyd’s God of the Possible.” 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.

⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2008), 84; C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God’s Call to Transform the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 84.

particularly prophets and intercessors, for the most part welcome it with open arms.” He then states, “They have been assuming and acting upon the principles of open theology, though many have not yet verbalized those theological assumptions.”⁹ Christian leaders and those seeking to adopt Wagner’s methods should examine the theological framework through which he developed such methods since his early theological affirmations concerning the doctrine of God, according to Wagner, did not differ from his affirmations later in life; the openness paradigm provided context to what he believed he had been doing “all along.”¹⁰

Preface to Open Theism

Wagner’s affirmation of open theism is an underlying theme throughout this work. Though later sections of this work devote attention to establishing the core tenets of open theism and articulating Wagner’s affirmation of the theological system, a preface to open theism is warranted to aid the reader by introducing the concept. Open theism proponent Clark Pinnock articulates the core precepts of open theism in the 1994 publication, *The Openness of God*, by stating the following:

God rules in such a way as to uphold the created structures and, because he gives liberty to his creatures, is happy to accept the future as open, not closed, and a relationship with the world that is dynamic, not static. We believe that the Bible presents an open view of God as living and active, involved in history, relating to us and changing in relation to us. We see the universe as a context in which there are real choices, alternatives and surprises. God's openness means that God is open to the changing realities of history, that God cares about us and lets what we do impact him.¹¹

⁹ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 7; Wagner, “Wagner Response to Marguerite Duerr (Re: Dominion),” 4–5, June 15, 2006, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 14, Folder 6, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

¹⁰ Though Wagner affirmed that openness theology provided a theological system compatible with what he had “thought” and “done” all along, he did not profess to be an open theist until 2001. Indications of an affinity to openness theology before 2001 are merely an alignment with the theological paradigm of open theism.

¹¹ Clark H. Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in Clark H. Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 104.

Pinnock's primary assumption is that humans co-labor with God to determine the history of the human experience because the full extent of the future is not yet known to God.¹²

Thesis

This dissertation demonstrates that Wagner's philosophy of discipleship emerged from a theological basis established in open theism, affirming God's limited foreknowledge and omnipotence while denying his immutability. Moreover, an underlying consequentialist ethic drove Wagner's understanding and praxes of the Great Commission. Wagner's telos sought to create disciples by any means necessary so that God could instill his will upon the earth. This research introduces three new terms to articulate Wagner's theological convictions and praxes: *divine interventional mutability*, *cooperationism*, and *commissional pragmatic consequentialism*. The present chapter introduces the need for the research. Chapter 2 serves as an excursus on the history and culture of American evangelicalism (1900–1930) and the early developmental years (1930–1952) of C. Peter Wagner. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 articulate Wagner's primary theological dispositions concerning the doctrine of God throughout his career (1952–2016). Chapter 6 provides the research conclusions and articulates the implications of Wagnerian theology on discipleship praxes and ethics.

Wagner's early theological writings demonstrated minimal parity with open theism, though some functional similarities existed. His early philosophy of discipleship emphasized individual means by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit through theological education. As Wagner progressed through life and no longer held to the traditional primary tenants of American fundamentalism, his theological writings aligned

¹² In *The Openness of God*, Pinnock et al. assert that varying catalysts influenced open theism proponents to become persuaded by an open view of God. Such convictional reasonings include a perceived incongruency between Scriptural depictions of the nature of God, the relationship between humans petitioning to God and his divine knowledge, and a response to philosophical criticism. See Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 8. The function of prayer will become a prominent influence on Wagner's adoption of open theism. This research will frequently discuss Wagner's belief in prayer, its efficacy, and its relationship with open theism.

with open theism. Wagner's theological basis evolved into a pragmatic means of discipleship, affirming God's dependency upon the prayers of humanity. In 2001, Wagner formally adopted open theism and articulated a revised means of discipleship through Dominion theology, marginalizing theological education and doctrine. In conclusion, within the context of Wagner's scriptural narrative, his philosophy of discipleship manifests as a means to implement the will of God on earth. An abundance of disciples means the greater instillment of God's will; therefore, Christ can return once all things have come under his authority. Wagner continuously changed his discipleship praxes throughout his career by measuring the phenomenological success of his discipleship methods. In the end, Wagner's means of discipleship manifested from the contextual narrative of open theism all along.

Statement of Research Problem

In Thomas Rainer's 1988 doctoral dissertation concerning Wagner's impact on the Church Growth movement, Rainer states, "Because of the significance of the contributions of Wagner to the theology of church growth, and because of his stature in missiology and evangelism in general, a study of Wagner's work in this area is in order."¹³ While this dissertation does not directly further Rainer's previous research, it does build upon the methodology to systematize Wagner's works in a specific theological context—theology proper. Because of the significance of Wagner's contributions to the underlying theology of the NAR and its prevalent influence on contemporary evangelical Christianity, which emphasizes his philosophy of discipleship, a study of Wagner's theological shift concerning the doctrine of God is in order. A comprehensive study of these insights is now possible, for Wagner's published works concluded with his passing in 2016. According to Rainer, Wagner added "theological insights" with each "successive

¹³ 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), 3.

writing.”¹⁴ In the same way, this work examines Wagner’s publicly available life’s work to determine how a progressive adoption of an openness theological paradigm impacted his discipleship philosophy.

Purpose of Study

The proposed void in the research literature is predicated upon the premise that no previous studies have been published to date researching Wagner’s progression toward open theism as a result of his convictional change regarding the doctrine of God. Furthermore, research has not explored the impact of Wagner’s discipleship philosophy as a result of his affirmation of open theism. This research fulfills a needed indexing and systemization of Wagner’s statements regarding his published and unpublished convictions concerning the doctrine of God. Lastly, this research provides contextual evidence concerning the epistemology of Wagner’s praxes and methodologies, which enables the Christian community to critically evaluate the degree of appropriation or adoption of his work.¹⁵

Research Questions

This dissertation investigates the following research questions to determine how a progressive adoption of an openness theological paradigm impacted C. Peter Wagner’s discipleship philosophy.

1. What were C. Peter Wagner’s theological affirmations concerning the doctrine of God before explicitly affirming open theism?

¹⁴ Rainer, “Wagner’s Contributions to the Theology of Church Growth,” 3.

¹⁵ Open theism proponent Vaughn Baker published *Evangelism and the Openness of God: The Implications of Relational Theism for Evangelism and Mission* in which he acknowledges Wagner’s affirmation of open theism. Though Baker’s work briefly cites Wagner’s affirmation of the openness of God, Baker places academic focus on the integration of open theism and evangelism as it relates to the Renewal Theology. See Baker’s work for a perspective on open theism and evangelism: Vaughn Willard Baker, *Evangelism and the Openness of God: The Implications of Relational Theism for Evangelism and Missions* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), sec. “Open Theology and a Sample of Current Evangelistic Trends.” This research was shared with Rebecca Vivian Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework to Assess and Evaluate C. Peter Wagner’s Doctrine of Sanctification” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 9.

2. What were C. Peter Wagner’s theological affirmations concerning the doctrine of God after explicitly affirming open theism?
3. What was C. Peter Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship before explicitly affirming open theism?
4. What philosophy of discipleship emerged after C. Peter Wagner affirmed open theism?

Research Methodology

This text-based study utilizes a thematic document analysis methodology to systematically document the writings of Wagner concerning the doctrine of God.¹⁶

Chapter 2 serves as an excursus on the history and culture of American evangelicalism (1900–1930) and the early developmental years (1930–1952) of C. Peter Wagner.

Chapter 3 examines Wagner’s formal theological foundations, theological dispositions, and theological affirmations before he publicly affirmed open theism (1956–2000).

Chapter 4 examines Wagner’s theological dispositions and affirmations after he affirmed open theism until the time of his passing (2001 to 2016). Chapter 5 examines the implications of open theism on Wagner’s praxes and methodologies concerning his philosophy of discipleship. Lastly, chapter 6 summarizes the research purpose and application while addressing its limitations and suggestions for further research on the subject.

In his own words, Wagner devoted his life to the pursuit of academic honesty; it was customary for Wagner to ensure that he accurately represented the views of those he wrote about.¹⁷ John David Trentham states that “one may not righteously presume to evaluate an observation or claim, either charitably or critically, without having first

¹⁶ Glenn A. Bowen, “Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method,” *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 32.

¹⁷ In a letter to John Sanders, Wagner stated, “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.

genuinely sought to understand what is put forth by the means of thorough reading.”¹⁸ To honor Wagner’s work as a fellow image-bearer of God and continue his customary practice, this dissertation endeavors to accurately represent Wagner’s ideas by directly interacting with his published and unpublished writings. When necessary, secondary sources are utilized while retaining fidelity to the secondary sources that Wagner cited or referenced.¹⁹ To borrow from Wagner’s words, “No man, however great, can be understood properly outside of the historical context in which he lived and labored.”²⁰

The purpose of this study is not to provide an affirmation nor a defense concerning the merits of open theism but to document, catalog, systematize, and evaluate the works of Wagner. Bruce Ware, in his preface to his theological response to open theism, states,

May God be pleased. May he receive all the glory. In the end, this is all that matters. Where I am here wrong, may God be merciful, may I humbly stand corrected, and may any harm done to the church be rectified. But where the argumentation of this book is right, where it reflects God’s own Word and truth, may God be pleased to bring bold and gracious reform. With Jesus, I affirm that only in knowing the truth can we truly be set free. O God, sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth.²¹

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

Research Assumptions

The research for this dissertation occurred during the 2020–2022 COVID-19 pandemic. The Fuller Theological Seminary library was primarily inaccessible due to

¹⁸ John David Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Engaging and Appropriating Models of Human Development,” *Christian Educational Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 490.

¹⁹ Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, holds C. Peter Wagner’s archive (Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016). This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 18.

²⁰ C. Peter Wagner, “An Introduction to the Marian Theology of Thomas Aquinas” (ThM thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1962), 1, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 35, Folder 2. Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

²¹ Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 11.

regulated travel restrictions. As a result, the research relied on remote assistance from Fuller research staff.²² This dissertation assumes that the research provided was from the Fuller Seminary Archives collections and that the artifacts were written or owned by C. Peter Wagner.²³

Research Disclosure

Open theism is a theological system that warrants careful investigation; however, those who hold to open theism are fellow image-bearers. Theological dispositions and ideas must be separated from the person holding those views; ideas must be evaluated on their own merits. I do not believe that open theism provides an adequate overarching biblical-theological narrative or a redemptive-historical biblical hermeneutic. I affirm a classical and confessional Reformed theological perspective concerning the doctrine of God. The merits of open theism are outside the scope of this dissertation. In addition, it must be disclosed that I am Garrett Fellow and Graduate Teaching Assistant for Bruce Ware’s Systematic Theology courses at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and adjunct instructor for Boyce College. Lastly, after spending two decades in the New Apostolic Reformation movement and teaching the distinctives of its theological system, I no longer adhere to the theological system of the movement or believe that it is substantiated through biblical evidence.²⁴

²² Special thanks to Fuller Theological Seminary’s Library team Alyson Thomas (Archives and Special Collections Librarian) and Esther Park (Archives and Special Collections Assistant) for the countless hours they spent scanning resources from the archives. This research would not have been possible without their efforts.

²³ This research employed the following Archives and Special Collections from Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA: (1) Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, and (2) Collection 0182: MC510 Signs and Wonders Collection.

²⁴ Researcher’s note: Rebecca Vivian Pietsch is my spouse and author of “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework to Assess and Evaluate C. Peter Wagner’s Doctrine of Sanctification.” During the research phase of this project, we had shared volumes of Wagner’s works, papers, and digital archives. While research for this dissertation concluded before Rebecca began her research phase, her dissertation begins where this dissertation concluded. Each dissertation was entirely authored independently. Any similarities in the citation of the literature base or where her dissertation cites mine are footnoted for clarity and transparency. No part of this dissertation or her dissertation is shared authorship in any capacity.

Research Limitations

This research limits the scope of study from 1952 to 2016, with the addition of *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life: Wisdom for Thriving in Life*, which Doris Wagner published in 2021 as a partially completed manuscript (C. Peter Wagner passed away in 2016 before seeing its completion). Further research on Wagner's unpublished works not available in the Fuller archives is warranted.²⁵ Lastly, much of this research utilizes retrospective reflections and musings that Wagner often stated years after an event. This research acknowledges that his nostalgia might have introduced unintentional or biased details or other happenings lost to time.

Background to the Research Problem

Introduction to C. Peter Wagner

Charles Peter Wagner (1930–2016), more commonly known as C. Peter Wagner, influenced much of the evangelical community through his discipleship efforts.²⁶ As an academic scholar, Wagner achieved many earned degrees: Bachelor of Science from Rutgers University (1952), Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary (1955),²⁷ Master of Theology from Princeton Theological Seminary (1962),

²⁵ Dave Collins, Programs Director for Wagner University (formerly known as the Wagner Leadership Institute), was contacted in February 2021. Collins was willing to assist; however, Wagner University directed me to the archives at Fuller Theological Seminary and Wagner's previously published works. Therefore, research for this project is limited to published works and the Fuller archives.

²⁶ Those who knew Wagner personally often referred to Peter as "Pete." Some archival documents from Fuller Seminary and other correspondences will refer to Peter as referenced.

²⁷ Though Wagner would ultimately receive a Master of Divinity (MDiv) from Fuller Theological Seminary, he earned a Bachelor of Divinity (BD) degree upon his graduation in 1955. According to Alyson Thomas, Archives and Special Collections Librarian at Fuller Theological Seminary, Fuller changed the BD program to an MDiv program in the 1960s; Wagner's BD was retroactively renamed an MDiv after this change. Wagner's freshman course catalog states,

Fuller Theological Seminary offers the Bachelor of Divinity degree for men, the conferring of which must be preceded by the attainment of a standard bachelor's degree on the collegiate level. The Bachelor of Divinity degree is conferred upon the completion of the standard three-year theological curriculum at this institution, or upon completion of at least one year of residence work (in the Senior year) at the Seminary with sufficient transferable credit from some other standard theological seminary or seminaries. (Fuller Theological Seminary, *Bulletin of Fuller Theological Seminary: Catalogue Number Six: 1952–1953* [Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1952], 15, <https://cdm16677.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16677coll15/id/151/rec/7>)

Master of Arts in Missiology from Fuller Theological Seminary (1968), and a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Ethics from the University of Southern California (1977).²⁸

According to Wagner, his career consisted of three periods: Bolivian field missionary (1956–1971), professor at Fuller Seminary (1971–2001), and a leader within the New Apostolic Reformation movement (1998–2016).²⁹ In Wagner’s later years, he received his ordination from Glory of Zion International as a member of Freedom Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Wagner spent the remaining years in north Texas until his passing in 2016.³⁰

Throughout Wagner’s lifetime, his theological convictions evolved from a professed appropriation of a classical theistic paradigm of the doctrine of God to a non-classical open theistic paradigm of the doctrine of God.³¹ Wagner led missionary discipleship institutions, training local pastors and ministers in Bolivia and Argentina as a missionary trained in classical theism. As a professor at Fuller Seminary, Wagner’s theological convictions began to shift as a result of power evangelism; he affirmed many

²⁸ G. B. McGee and B. A. Pavia, “Wagner, Charles Peter,” in Burgess and van der Maas, *New International Dictionary*, 1181. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification,” 10.

²⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 54.

³⁰ Peter C. Wagner, “Author Questionnaire for Baker Publishing Group for C. Peter Wagner,” 2, May 10, 2007, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 14, Folder 6, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. On Wagner’s eightieth birthday, he transitioned his office of Apostle with Global Harvest Ministries to Chuck Pierce of Glory of Zion in Denton, Texas. Wagner writes, “This is Peter Wagner with a very important and exciting message. On my 80th birthday, August 15, 2010, I officially turned GHM over to Chuck Pierce of Denton, Texas. Instead of continuing GHM, Chuck organized Global Spheres, Inc. (GSI), a new wineskin for apostolic alignment which will carry Doris and me into the future.” See C. Peter Wagner, “Global Harvest Ministries,” Global Harvest Ministries (GHM), 2010, <http://www.globalharvest.org>. In 2012, Pierce and Wagner disbanded GHM and formed Global Spheres, Inc., which is associated with Glory of Zion. Pierce describes GSI as follows:

GSI is an apostolic network of individuals who have relationship with Chuck Pierce or Doris Wagner, and are aligned in a Kingdom expression of their call and giftings. As such, membership is by invitation-only. If you are interested in the Sphere, we encourage you to visit the website for Chuck Pierce’s ministry, Glory of Zion International, for information on how to connect and align there, and begin forming the relationships that comprise the Global Spheres, Inc. network. (Chuck D. Pierce, “Global Spheres Inc.,” Global Spheres, Inc., 2016, <https://globalspheres.org>)

For more information regarding Wagner’s transition to Pierce, see Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 282.

³¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 140.

distinctives of the Charismatic Renewal movement, which emphasized aspects of pneumatology, such as signs and wonders. Wagner progressively began affirming the openness of God during the last decade of his tenure (the late 1990s) at Fuller Seminary.³² In November 2001, Wagner edited *Destiny of a Nation: How Prophets and Intercessors Can Mold History*, which includes his first public affirmation of open theism.³³ Wagner explicitly affirmed and promoted openness theology as a NAR movement leader. Wagner states, “Paradigm shifts can become challenging. They involve a change of mind that causes a person to see, interpret and understand certain phenomena in a new and different way.”³⁴ Wagner experienced a change in his theological suppositions regarding the doctrine of God, which resulted in an evolution of his philosophy of discipleship.

Introduction to Open Theism

To properly research how openness theology influenced Wagner, by necessity, one must have a general awareness of how openness theology became a formal theological system called open theism since it realized its formation during Wagner’s lifetime. Openness theology was the theological antecedent to open theism (1980–

³² Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 84.

³³ C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Destiny of a Nation: How Prophets and Intercessors Can Mold History* (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2001). Wagner wrote the introductory chapter, “History Belongs to the Intercessors.” Prior to the publication of *Destiny of a Nation*, Wagner announces his authorial intentions in private correspondence to his prayer partnership network:

In our last meeting of the Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders (ACPE), the prophets had quite a lively interchange on some remarkable ways that prophecy and intercession actually (in our interpretation) determined the outcome of the last presidential election. Among other things, the suggestion came forth (from Bill Hamon) that this be captured in a book. So that got my juices going, and right now I’m beginning to work on the possibility of putting together what I am calling *Prophecy & Intercession: How Prophets and Intercessors Can Mold a Nation’s History*. Here are the people whom I will need as contributors: Cindy Jacobs, Bart Pierce, Chuck Pierce, Bill Hamon, Hector Torres, Dutch Sheets, and Beth Alves. (C. Peter Wagner, “Wagner Prayer Partners,” 2, Global Harvest Ministries, March 23, 2001, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 31, Folder 5, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA)

³⁴ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 151.

1994).³⁵ Scholars identify the emergence of open theism as having begun in 1994 with the publication of *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, coauthored by Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger.³⁶ Throughout this work, openness and the openness of God are synonymous terms defining the acceptance of theological concepts and conclusions that limit or reduce God’s absolute immutability or sovereignty. Openness, open theism, and open theistic are interchangeable terms defining open theism after the general 1994 codification. This dissertation only describes openness theology and open theism as they were presented during Wagner’s lifetime; only works directly cited or referenced by Wagner are used as primary or secondary sources.

Open theism is a theological system affirming that God's limitation of divine foreknowledge and divine volition creates an epistemological openness of future events contingent upon human intervention. Though open theism has many common convictions, theological nuances exist between its proponents; however, such nuances are insignificant with respect to Wagner’s affirmation.³⁷ Basinger claims the following five issues are of importance to open theism:³⁸

1. God not only created this world *ex nihilo* but also can (and at times does) intervene unilaterally in earthly affairs.
2. God chose to create human beings with incompatibilistic (libertarian) freedom—freedom over which he cannot exercise total control.

³⁵ Dennis W. Jowers, “Open Theism: Its Nature, History, and Limitations,” *Journal of Modern Ministry* 2, no. 2 (2005): 184–85. Jower’s article provides an extensive history regarding the early formational years before 1994 (cf. sec. “III. The History of Open Theism”).

³⁶ Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory*, 31. Open theism was defined before Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God* (1994); however, it did not receive as much prominence. Ware states, “Although less noticed, the contemporary open theism movement dates earlier to the publication of Richard Rice, *The Openness of God* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1980); reprinted as *God’s Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1985)” (31n1).

³⁷ Alan R. Rhoda, “Generic Open Theism and Some Varieties Thereof,” *Religious Studies* 44, no. 2 (June 2008): 225–34.

³⁸ For more information on the theological distinctives of the open theism movement, see Jowers, “Open Theism,” sec. “II. What Is Open Theism?”

3. God so values human freedom, the moral integrity of free creatures, and a world in which such integrity is possible that he does not normally override such freedom, even if he sees that it is producing undesirable results.
4. God always desires our highest good, both individually and corporately, and thus is affected by what happens in our lives.
5. God does not possess exhaustive knowledge of exactly how we will utilize our freedom, although he may at times be able to predict with great accuracy the choices we will freely make.³⁹

Proponents of open theism differentiate its core distinctives from that of classical theism. Though it is outside the scope of this dissertation, classical theism is a necessary systematic contrast to open theism as it provides insight into open theism's distinctives relevant to Wagner's affirmation. Classical theism affirms Reformed doctrines "established during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century."⁴⁰ The Reformation brought forth five classical attributes, thereby establishing the Reformed doctrine of God.⁴¹ Wagner defines the attributes of classical theism as follows:

1. *Omnipotence*: God is all-powerful and has sovereignty over all things.

³⁹ Throughout C. Peter Wagner's writings, he cites scholars Gregory Boyd, Clark Pinnock, and John Sanders, who explicitly affirm open theism. Open theism's theological system will therefore be defined using these scholars' cited works. Though these three scholars collectively affirm open theistic ideas, there exist theological nuances between them. Gregory Boyd holds to bivalentist-omniscience, which affirms that God has unrestricted divine foreknowledge of future events. Pinnock and Sanders hold to limited-foreknowledge, which affirms that God does not and cannot know future events. While these variants are academically significant for further research, they are insignificant concerning Wagner's affirmation of the openness of God. For more information regarding the variants of open theism, see David Basinger, "Practical Implications," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 156.

⁴⁰ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 137. Although Wagner argues that the doctrines of classic theism were established during the Protestant Reformation, the works of Christian antiquity proclaim such classical attributes of God long before the Reformation. The classical doctrine of God can be seen in the work of Athanasius (AD 293–373), *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (On the Incarnation of God) in the fourth century; Athanasius and Penelope Lawson, *On the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998). Moreover, according to Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley, Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430) "organized God's attributes in three categories: (1) eternity, immortality, incorruptibility, and immutability; (2) wisdom, life, power, and beauty; and (3) blessedness, righteousness, goodness, and spirituality" Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology: Revelation and God*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 539. Beeke and Smalley further state that the early Christian church articulated the omnipotence of God as reigning and having dominion over all things. Beeke and Smalley, *Revelation and God*, 1061. See footnote 13 in *Revelation and God* for a more comprehensive list of historical Christian works that discuss the classical attributes of God (e.g., Athanasius' *Against the Heathen* and Augustine's *Enchiridion*) Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 1061n13.

⁴¹ Proponents of classical theism affirm attributes of God that extend beyond the five defined by Wagner. Such definitional attributes include simplicity, actuality, necessity, aseity, eternity, transcendence, immanence, infinity, and sovereignty.

2. *Omnipresence*: God is present everywhere and at all times.
3. *Omniscience*: God knows everything—past, present, and future.
4. *Impassibility*: Nothing ever happens to God; he takes the initiative in all things.⁴²
5. *Immutability*: God never changes, including changing his mind.⁴³

Open theism on omnipotence. In contrast to classical theism, Pinnock states, “God’s power is the power of love and a power that gives us life and sustains us. It is not an omnicausality that excludes the autonomy of creatures. God governs with power but also with respect for the God-given freedom of creatures. Despite having the power to control everything, God voluntarily limits the exercise of that power.”⁴⁴

Open theism on omnipresence. In contrast to classical theism, Sanders states, Presence has to do with relationship. The distance between those in the relationship decreases as they freely share themselves. Becoming close means being available and vulnerable. The relationship may backfire. One may be taken advantage of and hurt. In this regard it is not surprising that the divine presence is affected by human action.⁴⁵

Open theism on omniscience. In contrast to classical theism, Rice states, “God’s knowledge of the world is also dynamic rather than static. Instead of perceiving

⁴² Wagner’s definition of impassibility differs from classical theism’s definition of the doctrine. Matthew Barrett, defining the classical attribute of impassibility, states that God is impassible in that God “is without passions” Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 113. God cannot be affected or acted upon by anything other than himself. Barrett concludes,

Our God is, by nature, incapable of suffering, and he is insusceptible to emotional fluctuation. Rather, we worship a God who is in complete control of who he is and what he does. Never is there any action by God that is out of line with his unchanging character. Instead of being divided by different emotional states or overcome by sudden, unexpected moods, moods that reveal just how vulnerable and dependent he is on what we do, the God of the Bible is a God who never becomes anxious, lonely, or compulsive. He is never at odds with himself, divided over conflicting expressions of his perfections (Matthew Barrett, *None Greater*, 113-114).

⁴³ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 138.

⁴⁴ Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 95.

⁴⁵ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 79.

the entire course of human existence in one timeless moment, God comes to know events as they take place. He learns something from what transpires.”⁴⁶

Open theism on impassibility. In contrast to classical theism, Pinnock states, “God made a world with suffering in it and he would be less than God if he ignored it.”⁴⁷ Pinnock continues, “It is astonishing, when you think about it, that impassibility could have become orthodox belief in the early centuries. Here perhaps more than anywhere else we find the bankruptcy of conventional theology. Divine suffering lies at the heart of the Christian faith.”⁴⁸

Open theism on immutability. In contrast to classical theism, Sanders states that the “faithfulness of God has customarily been discussed as a category of divine immutability. This would not be so bad if the personal aspects of God’s relationship to us had been kept in mind. Too often, however, immutability has been defined apart from what we know of God in history,” and in so doing, it “has been seen to imply that God is absolutely unchangeable in every respect.”⁴⁹

Philosophy of Discipleship

Before assessing Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship, I must establish a definitional foundation as to the meaning and means of discipleship for this dissertation. This research will rely upon the work of John David Trentham’s “*Mere Didaskalia: The Vocational Calling and Mission of Christian Teaching Ministry*” (2021) and Michael

⁴⁶ Richard Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 16.

⁴⁷ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 89.

⁴⁸ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 89.

⁴⁹ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 186.

Horton's *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples* (2012) to define discipleship.⁵⁰

The Gospel of Matthew provides the biblical mandate to create 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).⁵¹ This passage provides the mandate—“make disciples”—and the means of discipleship—baptism and teaching. However, the definition of a disciple is further warranted. Concerning the function of discipleship, Trentham states, “Discipleship is a Christian’s ongoing, ever-deepening, response to the gospel: the Christian way of life in response to the truth (John 14:6).”⁵² According to Trentham, “Christian teaching ministry is absolutely essential to the task of making disciples! It equips disciples through doctrine, *unto* discipleship.”⁵³ For Trentham, discipleship is the impartation of “redemptive wisdom.” Trentham states, “Wisdom is the telltale mark of maturity in Christian learning, precisely because wisdom promotes life-learning into life-application. Wisdom entails both discernment (Heb. 5:14) and patterns of living that accord with that discernment (James 3:13–18).”⁵⁴ Through the use of historic Christian doctrine, Trentham asserts that discipleship relies upon such wisdom to guide disciples into a life of learning.

⁵⁰ See John David Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*: The Vocational Calling and Mission of Christian Teaching Ministry,” *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 2 (2021): 212–28; Michael S. Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

⁵¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from *English Standard Version*. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 79.

⁵² Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 225.

⁵³ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 226.

⁵⁴ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 226.

Much like the importance of defining discipleship, how one defines a disciple will impact the interpretation of the Great Commission. Although μαθητεύω can mean “to cause one to be a pupil,”⁵⁵ this dissertation supplies a more comprehensive meaning, employing Michael Horton’s model and means of discipleship. Horton states, “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.”⁵⁶ Horton continues,

Jesus does call us to discipleship, not just to “making a decision.” However, before we can serve, we must be served by our Savior (Matt. 26:28). We must sit, listen, and learn from the Master who calls, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29).⁵⁷

According to Horton, a genuine disciple of Christ is one who submits to “Jesus’s teaching concerning himself.”⁵⁸ A disciple, therefore, “means bringing people into the sphere of the church’s ministry of preaching and sacrament. It involves being instructed not just in the basics of biblical teaching, but in everything Jesus commanded for our doctrine and life.”⁵⁹ Making disciples “depends on the gospel, as it is delivered through Word, sacrament, and discipline. The Great Commission is a specific mandate, with manifold effects and consequent responsibilities.”⁶⁰ According to Horton, for discipleship to occur, the following four areas must be emphasized equally: drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship.

⁵⁵ Concerning the Greek word μαθητεύω, the emphasis for discipleship is on teaching or “to cause one to be a pupil.” See Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 609.

⁵⁶ Michael S. Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God’s Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 138. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 80.

⁵⁷ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 141.

⁵⁸ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 139.

⁵⁹ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 138.

⁶⁰ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 141.

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.⁶¹

The outworking of discipleship is not to change, transform, or make it into the kingdom of God. Instead, “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.”⁶²

The drama of Scripture is the overarching biblical-theological metanarrative of Christ, which Horton defines as “God’s mission as Alpha and Omega, Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and Consummator.”⁶³ Similarly, Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum state that the biblical-theological story of the redemption of God, through Christ, is the progressive unfolding of “creation, fall, redemption, and new creation.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ 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)

⁶² Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 146. Horton discusses the implications of discipleship by 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.

⁶³ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 142. For a more comprehensive reading of the divine drama, see Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

⁶⁴ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 792.

Theological doctrines originate and are produced from Scripture's drama.

Horton defines doctrines as the “authoritative interpretations and implications” of Scripture. Horton continues,

We discern the attributes of its central actor as God acts in creation, judgment, promise, deliverance, and consummation of his kingdom. We come to know God in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We come to understand who we are as well, both our creation in the image of God and the tragedy of original sin. Yet we also hear God's gospel, led by the shadows of the law to Jesus Christ as our prophet, priest, and king. His incarnation, active obedience, curse-bearing death, and curse-destroying resurrection, as well as his ascension and return in glory, gather increasing clarity and fullness as the story unfolds. We discover the meaning of Christ's kingdom and church, its ministry, offices, and government. And we look forward to the future fulfillment of God's promises for the new world.⁶⁵

Doctrines provoke one's doxology, wonder, and praise.⁶⁶ Horton continues by stating that doxology is the internalization of the external gospel of Christ. When this gospel is internalized, it produces and “gives shape to a concrete form of living,” which, according to Horton, is discipleship.⁶⁷ Horton concludes “that an obsession with discipleship,” apart from drama, doctrine, and doxology, “will generate a kind of mindless and eventually heartless moralism that confuses activism with the fruit of the Spirit.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 145–46.

⁶⁶ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 142.

⁶⁷ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 142.

⁶⁸ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 144.

CHAPTER 2

EXCURSUS: IN THE SHADOWS OF THE TWO TOWERS—THE INFLUENCE OF THE THEOLOGICAL CROSSROADS ON C. PETER WAGNER

In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo Baggins sang the following song with solemn awareness of the dangers and challenges awaiting him on his journey:

Home is behind, the world ahead,
And there are many paths to tread
Through shadows to the edge of night,
Until the stars are all alight.

Like Frodo, Wagner found himself at a crucial crossroads where American evangelicalism intersected with the transformation of the American culture. Wagner's arrival at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1952 marked a significant turning point in his life. Fuller represented the thematic crossroads of two influential towers of theological transformation in American evangelicalism during the mid-twentieth-century—New York and Los Angeles. Moreover, Wagner arrived at Fuller at a time when the institution became the confluence of the rivers of turbulent movements: modernism, fundamentalism, Pentecostalism, evangelicalism, and the social gospel movement of Latin and South America. Wagner would emerge amid the shadows of the two theological towers, and he would enter American evangelicalism in the turbulent confluence of the theological headwaters at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Early twentieth-century cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict states, "No man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes. He sees it edited by a definite set of customs and institutions and ways of thinking." Benedict continues, "The life history of the

individual is first and foremost an accommodation to the patterns and standards traditionally handed down in his community.”¹

Wagner was shaped by the American culture in which he emerged and with which he engaged. Properly understanding Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship requires understanding early twentieth-century American Christianity so that anachronism is rightly avoided and charity maintained. This chapter serves as an excursus on the history and culture of American evangelicalism as C. Peter Wagner enters its turbulent waters and how he was shaped and carried by the currents of the streams of theological divides.

The Cultural Landscape before Wagner: Early Twentieth-Century American Protestantism (1900–1929)

As one enters C. Peter Wagner’s formational years, the contextual background of evangelicalism becomes a different landscape than Christendom twenty years into the new millennium. Early twentieth-century America’s theological and cultural landscape significantly shaped Wagner’s theological convictions, forming the theological basis for how Wagner practiced his faith throughout his life and career. According to Wagner, his theological foundation was influenced by Fuller Theological Seminary’s “neo-evangelical” approach to American Christianity.² Wagner’s assertion of his theological beginnings as a “neo-evangelical” significantly influenced his forthcoming paradigm

¹ Benedict further states,

From the moment of his birth the customs into which he is born shape his experience and behaviour. By the time he can talk, he is the little creature of his culture, and by the time he is grown and able to take part in its activities, its habits are his habits, its beliefs his beliefs, its impossibilities his impossibilities. Every child that is born into his group will share them with him, and no child born into one on the opposite side of the globe can ever achieve the thousandth part. There is no social problem it is more incumbent upon us to understand than this of the role of custom. Until we are intelligent as to its laws and varieties, the main complicating facts of human life must remain unintelligible. (Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005], 2–3)

² C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 55.

shifts.³ Though the term is likely no longer readily familiar to contemporary readers, a survey of the cultural landscape is a necessary foundation for understanding the theological pressures under which Wagner emerged as a new Christian during a time when America was undergoing a significant theological change. To be more precise, New York and southern California would emerge as significant locations for diverse and conflicting Christian ideologies—Wagner would develop theologically in both cities.

Advancement of Modern Sciences and Philosophies

One cannot survey early twentieth-century American Protestantism without discussing the modern sciences' impact on American Christianity. At the dawn of the twentieth century in America, the established position of Christianity in the nation's culture faced a challenge from new philosophical and theological ideas that called into question long-held beliefs and cultural conventions. Before the twentieth century, according to John A. D'Elia, Christianity enjoyed primary dominance in American culture, life, and spiritual practices.⁴ The turn of the century brought about significant advancements in philosophy, sciences, and critical social movements that significantly impacted American culture. However, these new ideas also caused a substantial divide in American Christianity. Historian Mark Noll describes the early twentieth century as the “last years” of American Protestantism, for Protestants would soon lose the unity shared at the turn of the century.⁵ The Christian institutions of America grappled with the

³ Harold Ockenga advanced the term “new evangelism,” which evolved into “neo-evangelical.” The term will be discussed and defined in a subsequent section. Neo-evangelical describes a proposed reorientation of historical evangelicalism during the mid-twentieth century, emphasizing the importance of evangelism, societal engagement, and academic scholarship. For more information, see George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 3.

⁴ John A. D'Elia, *A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America* (New York: Oxford, 2008), xiii.

⁵ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), chap. 11.

relationship between the theological tenets of historical Christianity and the modern advances in scientific discoveries and philosophical advances amidst the social and economic climate of the nation. Though there were many scientific advancements during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, two primary issues emerged as the source of theological consternation and divide—higher criticism of biblical interpretation and evolutionary theory. As an emerging writer, Wagner would soon engage in these topics in the future.⁶

Higher criticism and liberal theology. The early twentieth-century study of the Bible was divided into two branches of study—lower and higher criticism. Lower criticism is known as textual criticism, and higher criticism is known as introduction. Concerning the former, early twentieth-century theologian Canon Dyson Hague states, “Lower Criticism was employed to designate the study of the text of the Scripture, and included the investigation of the manuscripts, and the different readings in the various versions and codices and manuscripts in order that we may be sure we have the original words as they were written by the Divinely inspired writers.”⁷ In contrast, higher criticism was “the study of the historic origins, the dates, and authorship of the various books of the Bible.”⁸ During the late 1800s, Fredrich Schleiermacher’s philosophy of higher criticism, made popular in his 1809–1810 publication *General Hermeneutics*, gained momentum.⁹ Schleiermacher, through his emphasis on individual experience and feeling while reading biblical texts, led to a new Christian philosophy called theological

⁶ C. Peter Wagner, “You Can’t Be a Christian And . . .,” *Eternity* (July 1956): 25–26, 37; Wagner, “The Origin of Life: A Christian View,” *Eternity* (September 1957): 12–13, 42–44; Wagner, “Bibliolatry: Part I,” *Eternity* (October 1958): 10–11, 47; Wagner, “Bibliolatry: Part II,” *Eternity* (November 1958): 14–16; Wagner, “Through a Glass Darkly,” *Eternity* (January 1962): 9–12, 16.

⁷ Canon Dyson Hague, “The History of the Higher Criticism,” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. Reuben Archer Torrey (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917), 9.

⁸ Hague, “The History of the Higher Criticism,” 10.

⁹ Thomas S. Kidd, *America’s Religious History: Faith, Politics, and the Shaping of a Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 173.

liberalism.¹⁰ The higher criticism hermeneutic of theological liberalism opposed the historic Protestant belief that the Bible was divinely inspired and without error; instead, it read the Bible as a classic work of literature.

Evolutionary theory. Charles Darwin's (1809–1882) publication *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and later publication *The Descent of Man* (1871) popularized the naturalistic theory of evolution. Darwin proposed that living creatures, including humans, have evolved by natural processes from lower forms of life.¹¹ Protestants in the late nineteenth century had a semblance of unity in rejecting Darwin's transmutation hypothesis and his theory of evolution.¹² However, this all began to change as the new century began. Protestants became fiercely divided over reconciling popular scientific developments with their historic Christian faith. Historian D'Elia states that the "challenge to the biblical account of the origins of human life acted as a breaking point between Christians who interpreted the Bible literally and those who accepted only modern scientific explanations for natural phenomena."¹³ Following his time at Fuller, Wagner would soon engage with evolution and Christian thought.¹⁴

¹⁰ Kidd, *America's Religious History*, 173.

¹¹ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1859); Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871).

¹² Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 179.

¹³ D'Elia, *A Place at the Table*, xiv.

¹⁴ Wagner's description of the strong stance against Darwinism demonstrates the veracity with which fundamentalists disagreed and the cultural climate of Rutgers University. While reflecting on his background in evolutionary thought, Wagner states,

Converted as a science major in a secular university, I was soon told by a campus Christian leader that if I were going to be a Christian I couldn't believe in evolution. The Bible teaches against it I was told. I put up a weak protest, wondering how so many of my learned professors could be wrong, but I soon accepted what he said. From then on that proposition was among the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. I mentally turned on my professors. Those who leaned toward evolution were spirits of Antichrist, trying to overthrow my faith. I proceeded to pull myself into my ready-made religious shell, and muttered, "Blasphemy," whenever Darwin's name was mentioned. I actually was afraid to listen to my teachers with an open mind, for to me, if they happened to be right the whole Christian faith would topple. But I later found that when one begins to examine the evidences for the so-called truth that the Bible teaches against evolution, the problem is at once much more complex than it first appears. (Wagner, "You Can't Be a Christian And . . ." 12)

Philosophical pragmatism. Following the acceptance of evolutionary theory in academics, a new philosophical system of thought developed. Rebecca Vivian Pietsch states, “Pragmatism emerged as the first American philosophical school of thought, endeavoring to provide a practical understanding of reality.”¹⁵ John Dewey (1859–1952), a professor at Columbia University, played a significant role in promoting pragmatism, which profoundly impacted scientific and academic institutions in New York and the rest of the United States. Dewey lived during a transformational shift in American attitudes toward societal, cultural, and scientific philosophies. Before the twentieth century, philosophers and scholars sought truth through various eternal means; *idealism* sought truth through eternal concepts, while *realism* sought truth through universal natural laws.¹⁶ Following the American Civil War, some scholars were critical of the notion of universal truths.¹⁷ The early twentieth-century human quest for knowledge continued to advance through discoveries in medicine and industry brought through science.¹⁸ The systemizing of experimentation through Charles Sanders Peirce’s (1839–1914) *scientific method* enabled societal advancements.¹⁹ Describing this philosophical change, Michael Anthony and Warren Benson state,

Pragmatism was critical of the older system of philosophy, which, claimed the pragmatists, made the mistake of looking for ultimates, absolutes, and eternal essences. The pragmatists emphasized empirical science, the changing world and its

¹⁵ R. Vivian Pietsch, “The Influence of John Dewey’s Pragmatism on the Church Growth Movement,” *International Review of Mission* 111, no. 1 (2022): 141.

¹⁶ Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 42, 51.

¹⁷ Trevor J. Barnes, “American Pragmatism: Towards a Geographical Introduction,” *Geoforum* 39, no. 4 (July 2008): 1543. Though the origins of pragmatism are outside the scope of this article, the history of pragmatism and its association with the American Civil War is a worthwhile topic of study. Both Union and Confederate adherents believed their respective ideals were the truth. When one views pragmatism as a response to the atrocities of the war, one can better appreciate the motivations behind the rise of pragmatism. Regardless of the origins, Christians must adhere to a Christian epistemology and the eternal truth found in the Bible.

¹⁸ Anthony and Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education*, 343.

¹⁹ Gert Biesta and Nicholas C. Burbules, *Pragmatism and Educational Research* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), chap. 1, sec. 2.

problems, and nature as the all-inclusive reality beyond which their faith in science would now allow them to go.²⁰

Truth, according to pragmatism, is simply “what works.”²¹ Peirce, the founder of *pragmatic* philosophy, heavily influenced Dewey.²² Regarding pragmatism, Dewey “stressed the significance of the experimental method of modern science as a model for human problem solving and the acquisition of knowledge.”²³ In the years to come, Wagner and his mentor, Donald McGavran, would be considerably influenced by Dewey and his philosophy of pragmatism.²⁴

The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy

As science challenged Protestant beliefs, two “self-declared opposite” theological views arose: *fundamentalism* and *modernism*.²⁵ According to Mark Noll, the *modernists* were Protestants “who believed that Christian faith had to adjust self-consciously to the norms defining modern culture.”²⁶ Those who held to the modernist perspective of American Christianity believed that God spoke as much through “human ethical consciousness” as he did through the revelation of the Scriptures.²⁷ Modernist Congregationalist pastor Theodore Munger (1830–1910) believed that the Christian faith

²⁰ Anthony and Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education*, 67.

²¹ George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 69.

²² Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Idealism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), 43.

²³ Biesta and Burbules, *Pragmatism and Educational Research*, chap. 1, sec. 2.

²⁴ Pietsch, “The Influence of John Dewey’s Pragmatism,” 144; C. Peter Wagner, “Fierce Pragmatism in Missions: Carnal or Consecrated?,” *Christianity Today* (December 1972): 13–14, 17–18.

²⁵ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 342.

²⁶ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 343.

²⁷ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 343.

and the laws of nature could be unified into a solitary truth.²⁸ The modernist movement gained prominence in New England higher education institutions such as Union Seminary (New York) and Princeton Seminary (New Jersey) following the departure of J. Gresham Machen in 1929.²⁹

While the modernists had a seemingly unified conviction, the *fundamentalists* were far more diverse in providing theological responses to science and Christianity.³⁰ The term *fundamentalist* did not come into use until 1920 when Curtis Lee Laws coined *fundamentalism* to “do battle royal for the Fundamentals.”³¹ In 1908, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (Biola University) was created under the convictions established in Lyman and Milton Stewart’s twelve-volume publication *The Fundamentals*, which sought to uphold the basics of historically orthodox Christianity.³² Before 1920, the *fundamentalist* movement received general acceptance in the evangelical communities. The movement included a spectrum of evangelical beliefs, which had diverse views concerning the millennium, theistic evolution, and other non-essentials of the faith. Thomas S. Kidd states that the fundamentalists emphasized a shared concern for “orthodoxy theology” and a “proper stance toward modern science” and that they never

²⁸ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 343.

²⁹ In all of his publications and writings, Wagner seemingly only mentioned J. Gresham Machen only once; in 1956, he called Machen “the greatest defender of the evangelical faith in the first half of our century.” Wagner, “You Can’t Be a Christian And . . .,” 26.

³⁰ Ned Stonehouse states that the definition of *fundamentalism* is difficult to determine due to the ambiguity of any specific history of the term. Stonehouse credits *The Fundamentals* (1910) as the likely origin of the moniker. The fundamentalists stressed God’s sovereignty, the supernaturalism of salvation, Christ’s incarnation, the deity of Christ, and Christ’s second coming. See Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Willow Grove, PA: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2017), 289.

³¹ Curtis Lee Laws, “Convention Side Lights,” *Watchman Examiner*, May 20, 1920, 652; Thomas S. Kidd, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford, 2019), 173.

³² According to Stonehouse, *The Fundamentals* dealt with “higher criticism and the Bible, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the deity of Christ, the Virgin Birth of Christ, Sin and Salvation, evolution, and ‘isms,’ evangelism and missions, and related subjects.” B. B. Warfield, who was a required read for Wagner during his time as a student at Fuller Seminary, contributed to *The Fundamentals*. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 289.

attempted to divide over non-essentials.³³ However, the theological tensions “symbolically” culminated in 1925 after the Scopes “monkey” trial.³⁴ After the trial, fundamentalism became more polarized; militant conservatives began to separate from denominations and educational institutions.³⁵ Historic Christian institutions, such as Princeton, became thriving centers for liberal theology and the modern sciences, while newly established Bible colleges, such as Biola, were often characterized by “narrow” fundamentalist curricula.³⁶

Though fundamentalism shared the desire to preserve the Christian faith from modernistic secularism, its adherents disagreed on what form the response should take.³⁷ There existed two opposing ends of the theological spectrum during that time. On one end, J. Gresham Machen ardently upheld the traditional Westminster Confession of Faith and adhered to Calvinism. Conversely, some individuals were uncomfortable subscribing to creeds and instead embraced a new theological system known as dispensational premillennialism.³⁸ The Plymouth Brethren movement of John Nelson Darby (1800–

³³ Kidd, *Baptists in America*, 192.

³⁴ Kidd, *America’s Religious History*, 178. American fundamentalism was brought to the forefront of America’s attention in 1925 due to the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee. This trial is often called the “monkey” trial. The Tennessee House of Representatives passed a bill that outlawed the teaching of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. The ACLU partnered with John Scopes, a high school teacher who admitted to teaching evolutionary theory. William Jennings Bryan, an anti-evolutionist, presented for the prosecution against Scopes. Clarence Darrow defended Scopes. Though Scopes was being sued, the real issue was the role of evolution and intelligent design in America’s educational institutions. As a result of the trial, the divide between American fundamentalism and secularism intensified. For more information, see Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes’s Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic, 2006).

³⁵ D’Elia, *A Place at the Table*, xiv.

³⁶ D’Elia, *A Place at the Table*, xiv.

³⁷ George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 5.

³⁸ Though Machen joined the fundamentalist movement, he did so to join the collective voice against the modernist movement. Machen’s convictions of Calvinism, dismissal of dispensational theology, and rejection of chiliasm “disqualified him from being classified precisely as a fundamentalist.” After leaving Princeton, Machen would go on to establish Westminster Theological Seminary in Glenside, Pennsylvania. See Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 290; Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 345. In his books and writings, Wagner never seemingly mentions Machen. However, he does talk about Princeton Seminary and its association with liberal theology during the 1950s. See Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 33.

1892) and the publication of *The Scofield Reference Bible* by Congregationalist minister C. I. Scofield in 1909 were instrumental in the rise of dispensationalism in America.³⁹ Darby's teachings on dispensationalism caused further divisions between the fundamentalist movement and Protestantism, as it promoted the idea that Christians should not associate with the institutional church.⁴⁰ According to Noll, these intense internal debates among the fundamentalists "eroded the influence of Protestantism in American life."⁴¹

The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch

Amid the fundamentalist controversy, another theological movement was beginning to receive attention. One of the theological streams of thought in early twentieth-century America originated in New York with the teachings of Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918), a pastor from Rochester who brought theological credence and vitality to the *social gospel* movement.⁴² In 1917, Rauschenbusch published *A Theology of the Social Gospel* as a systematized theology of a social gospel, in which he believed that the principles of Christianity must be applied to social problems. In the opening of this work, he states, "If theology stops growing or is unable to adjust itself to its modern environment and to meet its present tasks, it will die. Many now regard it as dead. The social gospel needs a theology to make it effective; but theology needs the social gospel to vitalize it."⁴³ For Rauschenbusch, the "social gospel is a permanent addition" to the faith and "constitutes a stage in the development of the Christian

³⁹ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 344.

⁴⁰ Ernest Robert Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (London: University of Chicago, 2008), 38; D'Elia, *A Place at the Table*, xxv.

⁴¹ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 352.

⁴² Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll, eds., *A Documentary History of Religion in America*, vol. 2, *Since 1877* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 109.

⁴³ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 1.

religion.”⁴⁴ The social gospel deemphasized personal salvation, as God’s plan “primarily consists in saving and reforming human society.”⁴⁵ For Rauschenbusch, historic Christianity placed too heavy of an emphasis on personal salvation, whereas he favored emphasizing the salvation of societies.⁴⁶ Though Rauschenbusch’s social gospel has nuanced theological distinctives, a few are notable as they seemingly reappear with many affinities with Wagner’s later theological distinctives as part of the neo-charismatic movement of the New Apostolic Reformation.⁴⁷

In contrast to the mainline Protestantism of his era, Rauschenbusch understood sin as a societal malfeasance against God rather than an individual responsibility; he states that “the social gospel seeks to bring men under repentance for their collective sins and to create a more sensitive and more modern conscience.”⁴⁸ Rauschenbusch’s social gospel gained prominence in the United States during the late 1800s and continued to

⁴⁴ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 1.

⁴⁵ G. Brillenburg Wurth, “Theological Climate in America,” *Christianity Today* 1, no. 10 (1957): 12.

⁴⁶ Rauschenbusch states,

The social gospel is the old message of salvation, but enlarged and intensified. The individualistic gospel has taught us to see the sinfulness of every human heart and has inspired us with faith in the willingness and power of God to save every soul that comes to him. But it has not given us an adequate understanding of the sinfulness of the social order and its share in the sins of all individuals within it. It has not evoked faith in the will and power of God to redeem the permanent institutions of human society from their inherited guilt of oppression and extortion. Both our sense of sin and our faith in salvation have fallen short of the realities under its teaching. The social gospel seeks to bring men under repentance for their collective sins and to create a more sensitive and more modern conscience. It calls on us for the faith of the old prophets who believed in the salvation of nations. (Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 5)

⁴⁷ As this dissertation has demonstrated, Wagner devalued metaphysics and held that theology must align with experience. Rauschenbusch has a seemingly similar axiom and praxes. Jaroslav Pelikan states,

As Rauschenbusch recognized, “doctrinal theology is in less direct contact with facts than other theological studies,” because church doctrine “perpetuates an esoteric stream of tradition.” Yet he had to argue that within this stream of tradition, whether “esoteric” or not, the social gospel could claim a proper place, indeed, could help to explain and justify traditional doctrines. That did not apply to “some of the more speculative doctrines,” such as “the metaphysical problems involved in the trinitarian and christological doctrines”; on these “the social gospel has no contribution to make,” or at any rate a relatively small one, but “the sections of theology which ought to express it effectively” were the doctrines of sin and of redemption. (Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 5, *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (Since 1700)* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991], 317)

⁴⁸ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 5.

persist until the Great Depression of 1929, which invoked a cultural response from Christianity to the social climate left in the wake of the economic collapse.

Rauschenbusch, according to Wagner, “attempted to bring the cultural mandate back to one of the front burners of the missionary movement alongside the evangelistic mandate.”⁴⁹ Wagner elaborates by stating,

Rauschenbusch himself advocated that the evangelistic mandate should be kept primary, but he wasn’t able to stem the liberal tide. His social-gospel followers alienated themselves from evangelicals by (1) attributing the root of social evil in the United States to capitalism and (2) removing the evangelistic mandate from their agenda.⁵⁰

Commenting on Rauschenbusch, Wagner states in a 1966 article,

At the turn of the century, the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch and others who advocated the social gospel set forth salvation through the utopian hope of ushering in the Kingdom of God by man’s efforts. This radical departure from biblical truth caused a very strong reaction among conservatives, a reaction that largely remained for many years, even after the decline of the social gospel in the 1930s.⁵¹

In the years to come, Wagner would interact heavily with the social gospel movement as it became intertwined with the liberation theology movement of Latin America; he would also integrate primary aspects of Rauschenbusch’s social gospel with his own dominion theology.⁵²

Early Pentecostalism Movement: Wagner’s First Wave

Like the social gospel movement, another theological movement was emerging at the turn of the century apart from the fundamentalist movement. As America entered

⁴⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God’s Call to Transform the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 51.

⁵⁰ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 51.

⁵¹ C. Peter Wagner, “Evangelism and Social Action in Latin America,” *Christianity Today* 10, no. 7 (1966): 338.

⁵² C. Peter Wagner, *Latin American Theology: Radical or Evangelical?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

the twentieth century, Los Angeles emerged as the center of American Pentecostalism.⁵³ The early American Pentecostalism movement, distinct from traditional American Protestantism, emphasized a belief in a direct, personal experience of God through baptism in the Holy Spirit, divine healing, prophecy, and the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Though Pentecostalism had emerged from the revivalism of Charles Finney and the Holiness movements, it received widespread recognition and attention due to the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906. William J. Seymour sat under the distinctive teachings of Pentecostalism from Charles Fox Parham (1873–1929) and pastored the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles.⁵⁴ Those who attended Seymour’s services began to report individual experiences of speaking in tongues. Within a short time, people across the world traveled to Los Angeles to learn of and experience the happenings in Los Angeles. Though Seymour’s Azusa Street Mission eventually lost the attention of onlookers and regular attendees, the happenings in 1906 established Los Angeles as the center of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century.

Wagner would later call the early Pentecostal movement in Los Angeles the “first wave” of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ Wagner will use the terminology of

⁵³ William K. Kay, *Pentecostalism* (London: SCM, 2009), 314.

⁵⁴ William J. Seymour, a son of a former slave, enrolled in Parham’s Bible school in Houston, Texas. However, due to his race and laws restricting his race, he was not allowed to participate in the classes with his peers. Instead, Seymour was allowed to sit outside the classroom, where he was exposed to and influenced by Parham’s teachings. Kay, *Pentecostalism*, 57.

⁵⁵ Concerning early twentieth-century Pentecostalism, Wagner states,

In my view, it was quite prophetic that God chose to pour out His Holy Spirit on a group of worshippers in Topeka, Kansas, precisely on the New Year’s Eve that transitioned us from the nineteenth century to the twentieth. The modern Pentecostal Movement was born then and it received a greater spark a few years later in the famous Azusa Street Revival. This first step out onto the springboard in the twentieth century—and toward the twenty-first century—essentially brought the Third Person of the Trinity from relative obscurity into the mainstream of Church life. The sixteenth century Reformers had reestablished God as a Father whom we all could approach directly without the aid of a priest. The Wesleyans had refocused attention on the Son in highlighting our need to be more Christlike in our daily living. The Pentecostals recovered the immediate presence and availability of the Holy Spirit in the lives and ministries of all believers. So with a more complete understanding of the practical outworking of the Trinity in place, God was then poised to move the Body of Christ to new levels. (C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000], 15)

“waves” to describe chronological events in the twentieth century as he perceived God working toward the later culmination of the new apostolic era.⁵⁶ Wagner understood that the primary distinction of the Pentecostal movement was a “powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit in the realm of the miraculous that most other Christians at the time found highly unusual.”⁵⁷ At the turn of the century, the prominent theological position concerning “the sign gifts such as tongues, healing, miracles, and discernment of spirits” held that the gifts “were needed only until the New Testament canon had been established.”⁵⁸

The Cultural Landscape during Wagner’s Formational Years (1930–1952)

The story of Charles Peter Wagner begins in New York amidst the intricate cultural landscape of American Protestantism. The diverse theological culture significantly impacted Wagner, shaping his beliefs and values. This section of the narrative chronicles Wagner’s life from birth until he completed his studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and embarked on his career as a vocational missionary to South America.

⁵⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1988), 16. Wagner will call the “second wave” as having occurred in the mid-twentieth century as part of the charismatic revival movement. In 1988, he will term the “third wave” as having begun and ushering in the Second Apostolic Age of the New Apostolic Reformation.

⁵⁷ Wagner continues, “Prominent among the miraculous works were what have been called baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, healing the sick, and casting out demons. It also brought with it an openness and freedom to public worship which at times involved a rather high noise level, praying with upraised hands, emotional demonstrations, falling on the floor, and even some dancing in the Spirit.” Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 16.

⁵⁸ 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): 16.

Charles Peter Wagner

Charles Peter Wagner was born to C. Graham Wagner (New York) and Mary Lewis (Massachusetts) in Manhattan, New York, on August 15, 1930.⁵⁹ Wagner entered the world during this tumultuous period in American history—when Christianity was grappling to establish its position in a society that was beginning to feel the economic impact of the Great Depression and was in the thick of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. Despite the tumultuous state of American Christianity, the Wagner family likely paid little attention to or were probably unaware of the controversy happening across the river in Princeton, New Jersey, as they did not practice Christianity.⁶⁰

Christianity was non-existent for Wagner during his formational years. Wagner states that he “never read the Bible or thought about religion” until his conversion to Christianity; due to his family’s passivity toward Christianity, he did not own a Bible until he left for college.⁶¹ Throughout Wagner’s early childhood, his family frequently relocated throughout New York and New Jersey; all the while, the American fundamentalist controversy was developing.

Culture: The Great Reversal (1940s–1950)

By the mid-1900s, historically orthodox Christianity was significantly replaced by modernist theologies and liberal ideologies within academic institutions; Christians were being relegated to a fractioning coalition of local and independent churches.

According to Melvin Tinker, before the 1940s, “evangelicals seemed to be less concerned

⁵⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 9, 21; Department of Commerce, “Population Schedule-Sixteenth Census of the United States,” Plainfield, NJ, April 10, 1940.

⁶⁰ Wagner states that “religion had been excluded” from his family life. According to Wagner, his family did not attend church, did not pray, and “avoided talking about Jesus or God.” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 27–28.

⁶¹ Wagner states, “We never referred to the Bible, but she had me memorize some sound extra-biblical proverbs, such as, ‘Waste not, want not is a maxim I will teach. Let your conscience be your guide and practice what you preach. Do not let your chances like the sunbeams pass you by, for you never miss the water ’til the well runs dry.’ I still recite this mentally on a regular basis.” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 13, 28.

with social issues, in a marked contrast to their evangelical forebears.”⁶² Evangelicals withdrew from social progress because of “the fundamentalist-liberal controversy, pre-millennialism together with the overwhelming complexity of modern industrial society for which Evangelicals seemed ill-equipped.”⁶³

The Great Reversal, a term coined by American historian Timothy Smith, describes the Protestantism’s shift away from social issues that were once prioritized by previous generations and toward a more individualistic approach to faith.⁶⁴ David Moberg says it “separated fundamentalists from modernists and split Christian groups that emphasized evangelism from those that stressed social concern.”⁶⁵ Wagner acknowledged that he grew up during the Great Reversal.⁶⁶

During the 1940s, the underlying position of the liberal modernist movement was a social gospel, which affirmed that “non-Christians were not lost and in need of salvation.”⁶⁷ Like with previous decades, fundamentalists of the 1940s held to a traditional interpretation of Christianity and based “its authority upon the inerrant and infallible authority of its Christ and His book, given not by the will of man, but spoken from God by men moved by His spirit,” which motivated their affirmation of evangelical missions.⁶⁸ Many fundamentalists recognized their lack of unity’s negative impact on

⁶² Melvin Tinker, “Reversal or Betrayal? Evangelicals and Socio-Political Involvement in the Twentieth Century,” *The Churchman* 113, no. 3 (1999): 256.

⁶³ Tinker, “Reversal or Betrayal?,” 260.

⁶⁴ David O. Moberg, “Do the Properly Pious Really Care?,” *Christianity Today* 24, no. 16 (1980): 24.

⁶⁵ Moberg, “Do the Properly Pious Really Care?,” 25.

⁶⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1981), 2.

⁶⁷ R. Alton James, “Turbulent and Transitional: The Story of Missions in the Twentieth Century,” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie C. Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 249.

⁶⁸ W. T. McConnell, “Christ and Christianity,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 82, no. 326 (1925): 145.

evangelism and missions and sought to rediscover their social conscience through missions. Fundamentalism led to the creation of new Bible institutions that again began to emphasize evangelism.⁶⁹ George Marsden states that in 1947, “fundamentalism seemed a cultural and intellectual wasteland.”⁷⁰ Marsden elaborates, “If evangelism was to be effective in restoring the nation, reaching the people who led America and not just those on the fringes, fundamentalist-evangelicalism would have to regain influence in the mainstream Protestant denominations.”⁷¹ The American stage was set for Fuller Theological Seminary to try and forge a middle ground and reclaim Christian scholarship, which was seemingly lost after the Scopes trial.

Following World War II’s economic and cultural impact, Christianity experienced substantial growth through global missions and evangelism by missionaries from Westernized countries.⁷² Though the gospel spread through missions, it did so amid the ongoing theological controversy between theological modernism and fundamentalism.⁷³

⁶⁹ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 50.

⁷⁰ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 13.

⁷¹ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 94.

⁷² Carl F. H. Henry, Wagner’s systematic theology professor, comments on the era by stating, “A new interest in Satanology is found in Europe today because the two world wars have destroyed the doctrine of the inherent goodness of man.” Carl F. H. Henry, “Syllabus for Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of God” (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1949), 50. Such a comment provides context concerning the drive for evangelistic missions during the era. This research was shared with Rebecca Vivian Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework to Assess and Evaluate C. Peter Wagner’s Doctrine of Sanctification” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 138.

⁷³ Wagner asserts, “During the hundred years between the time the modern missionary movement began with William Carey at the threshold of the last century and the beginnings of our own century, the term ‘mission’ meant saving souls, winning converts, persuading people to become Christians and responsible members of His church.” Wagner credits William Ernest Hocking’s 1932 work *Re-Thinking Missions: A Laymen’s Inquiry after One Hundred Years* as being an influential publication that promoted “social ministry” over direct evangelism during the early nineteenth century. C. Peter Wagner, “Lausanne’s Consultation on World Evangelism: A Personal Assessment” (Association of Church Mission Committee Annual Meeting, Claremont, CA, 1980), 2–3.

Neo-evangelicalism and the Establishment of Fuller Theological Seminary

This chapter began with Wagner's having asserted that he was molded as a "neo-evangelical" during his time at Fuller Theological Seminary. Wagner contrasts neo-evangelicalism with "traditional fundamentalist" evangelicalism.⁷⁴ As the United States recovered from the aftermath of World War II, churches in American Protestantism existed along the overarching theological spectrum somewhere between theological liberalism and fundamentalism. Many churches had little tolerance for gray and tended to gravitate heavily to the ends of the spectrum. Rauschenbusch's social gospel fulfilled the need for social impact; however, for the fundamentalists, it lacked the orthodox fundamentals of the historic faith. As the 1940s drew to a close, American Christianity's theological landscape was set for a middle ground between fundamentalism and theological liberalism.

Fuller Theological Seminary opened its doors to Bible students in the fall of 1947 to regain the seemingly lost theological bastion after Machen's departure from Princeton and the emergence of modernist theological ideologies in the historic academic institutions.⁷⁵ Though Fuller sought to return Christian scholarship to academia, it sought to be a "New School" of theological education, which purposefully did not hold to the confessional Calvinistic thought from Machen's "Old School" ideology at Princeton.⁷⁶ The Fuller faculty and its students were interdenominational evangelicals that combined a Methodist emphasis on revivalism with a broader interpretation of Calvinism and social reform.⁷⁷ Fuller, particularly Carl Henry and Edward Carnell, sought to establish a "neo-

⁷⁴ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 55.

⁷⁵ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 53.

⁷⁶ For information on Fuller's establishment, see Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, chap. 8.

⁷⁷ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 119.

evangelical” movement within fundamentalism.⁷⁸ Wagner would associate himself with Fuller’s neo-evangelical movement upon his upcoming graduation from Fuller.⁷⁹ Fuller’s neo-evangelicalism, by the mid-1940s, helped to bring Pentecostalism into unity with evangelicalism through the formation of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942.⁸⁰

Latter Rain Movement

In the 1940s, a theological revitalization movement called the Latter Rain, which had its roots in the Azusa Street movement and the Pentecostalism of the early 1920s, “believed their movement was a revival movement which was to precede Christ’s return.”⁸¹ For Wagner, the Latter Rain pioneered the NAR’s apostolic leadership.⁸² Wagner credits the criticism of the Assemblies of God in 1949 as causing the movement not to become popularized.⁸³ Wagner believed the apostolic movement resurfaced during the 1990s as part of the emerging New Apostolic Reformation. Wagner’s first presumed mention of the Latter Rain movement appears in his 2004 publication *Changing Church*; his previous articles and books are seemingly devoid of mention.⁸⁴ While reflecting on the Latter Rain, Wagner states that after American Christianity largely rejected the

⁷⁸ Fuller’s “neo-evangelical” movement was no longer a “unified movement” after the death of Edward Carnell and the departure of Carl Henry from the institution in 1960s. For more information, see Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 259–60.

⁷⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 55–56.

⁸⁰ Jesse M. Payne, *Carl F. H. Henry on the Holy Spirit*, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 42–43.

⁸¹ Thomas D. Ice, “The Calvinist Heritage of Dispensationalism,” *Interdisciplinary Journal on Biblical Authority* 1, no. 2 (2020): 129.

⁸² Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 215.

⁸³ C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004), 30; Assemblies of God, “Minutes of the Twenty-Third General Council of the Assemblies of God” (Seattle, WA, 1949), 26.

⁸⁴ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 12.

movement due to its distinctive restoration of prophets and apostles, “the Holy Spirit initiated a sequence of innovations” to reintroduce the roles into the modern church.⁸⁵

Wagner Enters Evangelicalism

Wagner graduated from Suffield High School (Suffield, Connecticut) in 1948.⁸⁶ In 1949, Wagner began his agricultural studies at Rutgers University (New Brunswick, New Jersey).⁸⁷ Wagner entered evangelicalism during the theological and philosophical controversy within Christianity and amidst the shadows of Princeton, the epicenter of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. Wagner began professing Christianity during his second year as a science student at Rutgers in 1950.⁸⁸ During his sophomore year, his life as an agricultural science student radically changed when he met Doris Mueller, who would eventually become his wife.⁸⁹ Wagner credits his gaining the affection of Doris as a motivating factor for him to consider Christianity.⁹⁰ During their

⁸⁵ Wagner states,

As this early attempt at restoring the office of apostle began to lose momentum, the Holy Spirit initiated a sequence of innovations that have led us to where we are today. The first occurred in the 1970s, when the gift and office of intercessor began to be recognized by the Body of Christ; the second was in the 1980s, with the recognition of the gift and office of prophet; and the third was in the 1990s, with the gift and office of apostle. As would be expected, each one produced its share of discussion, debate and fine-tuning until, by the end of the century, a growing number of people were becoming comfortable with all three. This opened the door for a critical mass to develop by 2001, the year I have chosen to use as the beginning of the Second Apostolic Age. (Wagner, *Changing Church*, 12)

⁸⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 16.

⁸⁷ Researcher’s note: The library and archives at Rutgers University were contacted for this research; however, the institution provided no response or guidance concerning Wagner’s time as a student.

⁸⁸ Bell Friends Church, “Interview with Pete Wagner,” *Bellringer* (December 1967): 6; Wagner, “Through a Glass Darkly,” 11.

⁸⁹ Wagner, “Through a Glass Darkly,” 11.

⁹⁰ Wagner states,

One thing that I did not know, nor could have understood, was that one week before she walked into that barn where I was milking, she had received Jesus Christ as her Savior. As we saw each other through the months, she let me know of her Christian faith and even got me reading the Bible. I didn’t have anything particularly against Christianity, but neither did I think it had much to offer a party boy like me. Things changed when I asked her to marry me. She calmly said, “I can’t because I promised God I would marry only a Christian.” That was enough for me, so I replied, “Fine, I’ll be one. Show me how.” But that wasn’t all. “I also promised God I would be a missionary,” she said. I needed a brief explanation as to what a “missionary” was, but she explained it to me and I agreed to that as well. So we knelt together in the front room of her parents’ farmhouse in upstate New York

first date at a county fair, Doris asked Peter to read a popular devotional called *The Upper Room*.⁹¹ Though their affection for each other had grown, Doris would only marry a Christian; to this end, Wagner decided to commit himself to Christianity. Immediately upon Wagner's profession of faith, he "was saved" and "called to be a missionary on the same day, just as the apostle Paul was."⁹² Following Wagner's conversion at Rutgers, he determined he must receive training to be a missionary.⁹³ Wagner would continue at Rutgers, and in 1952, he would graduate from Rutgers College of Agriculture with a Bachelor of Science.

Wagner's Pre-seminarian Education

It is worthwhile to briefly return to Wagner's sophomore year at Rutgers to explore the influences on his pre-seminarian theological education. According to Wagner, his introduction to theological education was through the mentorship of a Plymouth Brethren family.⁹⁴ Through this mentorship, he was introduced to *Dispensational Truth*

and I gave my life to Jesus Christ and dedicated myself to foreign missionary service at the same time. (C. Peter Wagner, "C. Peter Wagner, Donald McGavran Professor of Church Growth," *Theology News and Notes* [December 1989]: 8)

This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 133.

⁹¹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 28. Though Wagner does not seemingly mention the devotional pamphlet again throughout his writings, *The Upper Room* appears to be among Wagner's first introductions to Christian writings other than the Bible. *The Upper Room* was a bi-monthly publication of devotional readings. A 1950 edition describes the publication as being "approved and recommended by the Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church of Canada" and the "Board of Evangelism of the Methodist Church." J. Manning Potts, ed., *The Upper Room: Daily Devotions for Family and Individual Use* 16, no. 1 (March–April 1950).

⁹² C. Peter Wagner, *Praying with Power: How to Pray Effectively and Hear Clearly from God* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2008), 63.

⁹³ According to Wagner,

There were very few believers of the born-again kind; churches were small, pastors were struggling and we were such new Christians that we lacked good role models as well as specific instructions as to how to become missionaries. We had become aware, however, that we would need ministerial training in order to be prepared for the job. That meant that after Rutgers, we should plan to go to Bible school and seminary. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 32)

⁹⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and Change Your Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 195.

by Clarence Larkin.⁹⁵ Wagner does not connect his Plymouth Brethren mentorship with his association with the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at Rutgers; however, there is strong evidence that Wagner’s discussion of both events is the same. In Wagner’s 1992 book *Prayer Shield*, he states that his “early Christian training came through InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.”⁹⁶ In another account, Wagner states that the InterVarsity members led him to New Brunswick Bible Church; this is likely the same Plymouth Brethren mentorship.⁹⁷

Wagner recalls that he received his “first spiritual food in a dispensational-minded group of believers.”⁹⁸ Throughout Wagner’s writings, he does not elaborate further on his time with the Plymouth Brethren family. Wagner’s introduction to dispensational theology and *The Scofield Reference Bible* aligns with the beliefs of the Plymouth Brethren movement, which originated from John Nelson Darby, the acknowledged founder of dispensational theology.⁹⁹ One theological distinctive of the Plymouth Brethren movement is its denouncement of historic creeds.¹⁰⁰ Though Wagner

⁹⁵ Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth: On God’s Plan and Purpose in the Ages* (Philadelphia: Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, 1950).

⁹⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Prayer Shield: How to Intercede for Pastors, Christian Leaders, and Others on the Spiritual Frontlines*, Prayer Warrior Series (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1992), 96.

⁹⁷ Wagner states,

When I was in St. Johnsville, I naturally attended the Lutheran Church with Doris and her family, but I knew nothing of churches in New Brunswick, where Rutgers was located. At college, I was actually the only believer whom I knew! That lasted until I took a class in public speaking, and for my class speech, I decided to tell the other students how I had been converted to Christianity. After the class, one of the students told me that he was also a believer and that he knew others like us. That is how I discovered InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. It was only a small group of 13, but they helped ground me in the things of the Lord. One member was Doug Smith who introduced me to his family in nearby Princeton, all of whom were believers. The Smith family helped me to begin attending church and learn what the Christian life was all about. Doug and his wife, Audrey, have been friends ever since. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 29–30)

⁹⁸ Wagner, “Through a Glass Darkly,” 11.

⁹⁹ J. N. Celand, “Plymouth Brethren,” in *The Essential Lexham Dictionary of Church History*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022), para. 4; Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 195. For a historical perspective on the Plymouth Brethren movement, see Thomas Croskery, “Review of The Plymouth Brethren,” *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review* 1, no. 1 (1872): 48–77.

¹⁰⁰ Celand, “Plymouth Brethren,” para. 5.

does not credit their distinctives as having impacted his devaluing of creeds, it is of note that Wagner does not emphasize creeds throughout his life. Wagner seldom wrote of the Plymouth Brethren throughout his works; however, he does state that the biography of Jim Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty*, was one of the few biographies he held in high esteem.¹⁰¹ Elliot died in 1956; however, according to Kidd, Elliot was the “best-known” evangelical missionary of the post-World War II era.¹⁰² Elliot served with the Plymouth Brethren’s Christian Missions in Many Lands organization in Ecuador. It is unknown if Elliot’s vocational missionary career in Latin America influenced Wagner; nevertheless, Wagner briefly mentions Elliot in an early article in the early 1960s following his graduation from Fuller.¹⁰³

Wagner’s theological conviction in 1950 demonstrates the heavy influence of dispensational theology and the fundamentalist movement of which he was a part.¹⁰⁴ While reflecting on his time with the Plymouth Brethren, he states that when he graduated from Rutgers, he was convinced that “the Bible taught the pre-tribulation rapture of the Church,” and his “ideological pride in the doctrine had developed to the point where” he “believed that anyone who denied such a clear biblical teaching was either dishonest, ignorant, or unfaithful to the Word of God.”¹⁰⁵

Wagner’s Road to Los Angeles

Following Wagner’s Christian conversion, he attended New Brunswick Bible Church until he graduated from Rutgers.¹⁰⁶ Wagner does not elaborate much on his time

¹⁰¹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 10; Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958).

¹⁰² Kidd, *America’s Religious History*, 196.

¹⁰³ C. Peter Wagner, “Implement Your Call,” *HIS* (May 1962): 27.

¹⁰⁴ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 37.

¹⁰⁵ Wagner, “Through a Glass Darkly,” 11.

¹⁰⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 37.

at the church, though he describes the congregation as part of the fundamentalist separatist movement and as holding to dispensational theology.¹⁰⁷ Not much is known about this congregation, as Wagner seemingly does not mention the congregation in his other writings. Following Wagner's graduation at Fuller, his ordination process with the New Brunswick Bible Church would likely cause consternation as the church's leaders almost did not approve his ordination due to Wagner's position on Christology.¹⁰⁸ Wagner's decision to attend Fuller Theological Seminary underscores the continuing effects of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. Concerning this era, Wagner states, "By then we had discovered that we were evangelicals, and not liberals."¹⁰⁹ In reflecting on how he chose Fuller, he states,

New Brunswick Theological Seminary was located adjacent to the Rutgers campus, but it was geared for Reformed Church clergy. Princeton Theological Seminary was just down the road, but it was geared for Presbyterian clergy. Both were liberal. As we inquired, several evangelical schools in different parts of the country began to surface, but suddenly one seemed to rise up head and shoulders above the others, namely, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.¹¹⁰

Wagner was seemingly intrigued by the controversy surrounding Fuller's formation. Though Wagner "didn't know exactly what" the fundamentalists and evangelicals "were quarreling about," he found a shared virtue with the professors, "who were not afraid to think outside of the box."¹¹¹ Wagner's statement that "there was something inside me that made the possibility of new wineskins more appealing than the old wineskins" is a driving theme throughout Wagner's life and sets the stage for his theological transformations in the years to come.

¹⁰⁷ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 195–96.

¹⁰⁸ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 38.

¹⁰⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 33.

¹¹⁰ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 33.

¹¹¹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 33.

Evaluation of Wagner's Foundation of Theological Formation

C. Peter Wagner, as Benedict supposes all humanity does, understood his world through the “definite set of customs and institutions and ways of thinking.”¹¹² More simply put, Wagner was a product of his time, culture, and society. Ecclesiastes 1:9 states, “There is nothing new under the sun.” Benedict’s assertion that “no man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes” is the appropriate presupposition for understanding Wagner as he began his studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1952.

Professed Christian Conversion

Before Wagner became a Christian in 1950, he seemingly did not have exposure to a biblical-theological foundation. His introduction to Christianity likely caused him to view Christianity as a system of belief that defined a strict set of behavioral and moral standards, which were counter-cultural to his youthful mind. Like many young adults, Wagner’s college years were defined by socializing, alcohol, and questionable ethics.¹¹³ Wagner’s lifestyle following conversion was radical. His early fundamentalist instruction on its convictions concerning a Christian’s lifestyle and behavior played well to Wagner’s strength of self-discipline.¹¹⁴ It was this self-determination and pragmatism that fueled a reformed lifestyle for Wagner.¹¹⁵ Seemingly absent from Wagner’s various accounts of conversion is the profound weight of sin against God or any mention of sin; such would be an expected norm in classic theism.

¹¹² Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, 2–3.

¹¹³ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 27.

¹¹⁴ Wagner, *Prayer Shield*, 96.

¹¹⁵ As an example of Wagner’s pragmatism toward prayer, he states that Doris advised him to “ask God to show” him if he should stop playing poker. He recalls, “I thought this was a novel idea, so I tried it. The next day I was dealt a hand, and every one of my cards was totally blank! I instantly realized that this God I was following was pretty insistent and pretty powerful. So I folded my cards, and that was the last time I played poker. From then on prayer was real to me.” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 29.

Vocational Missionary Calling

Unsurprisingly, Wagner had an intense and profound gravitation toward missions and evangelism as he graduated from Rutgers. Though not much is known about his specific InterVarsity group, it can be rightly assumed that InterVarsity instilled in him their emphasis on personal holiness, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the importance of global mission outreach through strategic evangelism.¹¹⁶ During Wagner's senior year at Rutgers, he attended the Urbana Missions Convention held at the University of Illinois campus in Urbana-Champaign, sponsored by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.¹¹⁷ The conference theme was "By All Means—Proclaim Christ."¹¹⁸ Much of this conference was devoted to topics pertaining to spiritual warfare and the overcoming of Satanic machinations. David S. Adeney, a former missionary to China, "set the tone" for the conference, speaking against communism, stating, "When the enemy of souls realized that some of his defenses were breaking down and that some of [sic] forms of idolatry were being broken off, he launched a counterattack" to "gain control of the hearts of men and women."¹¹⁹ This conference seemingly had a profound impact on Wagner. Though Wagner does not refer to this conference again in his writings, the theme of the conference resonates with his pragmatic and strategic approach to evangelism and spiritual warfare seen throughout Wagner's career.

¹¹⁶ Charlotte K. Bates, "InterVarsity Christian Fellowship," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. Warren S. Benson, Daryl Eldridge, and Julie Gorman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 374.

¹¹⁷ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 42.

¹¹⁸ InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, "Urbana 51," InterVarsity Urbana, 2023, 51, <https://urbana.org/past-urbanas/urbana-51>.

¹¹⁹ Amber R. Thomas, "Postwar American Evangelicals and World Religions: A Case Study of InterVarsity's Urbana Student Missionary Conventions," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40, no. 3 (2016): 234.

Evangelical, Not Reformed

Wagner establishes that the classical theist upon which he eventually adopted open theism was thoroughly Reformed. In the years to come, Wagner would identify his Fuller professors as “Calvinists by theological orientation”; however, he never adopted the theological system.¹²⁰ Wagner maintains that Fuller was known as a “Reformed Seminary,” which, according to Wagner, means that it held “to the theology that was established during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.”¹²¹ Marsden asserts that Fuller was established to reform fundamentalism, which meant “not sharing all the traits of the most militant fundamentalism.”¹²² As Marsden states,

There was no clear line between fundamentalists and evangelicals during the period between 1947 and 1957. The emerging evangelicals were in an in-between state, repudiating some of the distinctives of fundamentalism, especially dispensationalism, . . . and yet eager to preserve what they considered the essence of fundamentalism, its commitments to the essentials of historic Christianity in firm opposition to secularism and theological liberalism.¹²³

Though Wagner associates his theological education as reformed, the association is reductionistic—evangelical better describes the theological tradition in which he developed as Fuller purposefully disassociated with the classical Reformed tradition.

Evaluative Summary

C. Peter Wagner’s introduction to Christianity was an instant immersion into theology. He did not have years of education and knowledge through church discipleship. The Christianity he emerged into was a seemingly pragmatic response from cognitive reasoning established through scientific training. As he came into Christianity, he did so amid a culture war and a fight for the theological prominence of various Christian

¹²⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 79.

¹²¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 138.

¹²² Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, xii.

¹²³ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, xii.

movements. In the years to come, as Wagner moves away from fundamentalism, a distinct foundation begins to emerge. Likely frustrated at the infighting between denominations and professed theological absolutes of the movements, he soon emphasized non-denominationalism and unity of missions. Wagner's theological non-conformity was possible due to his limited background in tradition and fostered by Fuller's "reforming" criticism toward fundamentalism. Wagner took the theme of the 1951 InterVarsity conference with him throughout his career—missions "by all means." In the end, Wagner was a product of responding to living in the shadow of Princeton Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary.

The Journey Begins

This excursus establishes the overarching history and culture of American evangelicalism as C. Peter Wagner enters Fuller Seminary, providing context for how he was shaped and influenced by the theological divisions that would unfold in the years to come. The following three chapters will examine his writings as his career progresses.

CHAPTER 3

EARLY THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATIONS BEFORE AFFIRMING OPEN THEISM (1952–1982)

Frodo Baggins, having just begun his adventure in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and gazing upon the journey before him, whispered the following:

The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow if I can,
Pursuing it with weary feet,
Until it joins some larger way,
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.¹

Wagner, like Frodo, journeyed down a road toward a destination that was seemingly quite different from where he began. Though Wagner did not leave the comforts of the Shire as did Frodo, he did leave the comforts that originate from a Reformed paradigm concerning the sovereignty of God—a paradigm grounded in a long history of orthodox Christianity. As Wagner traversed his long road leading away from the Reformed tradition he had learned, his journey led him ever closer to a biblical-theological system encapsulating an epistemological openness concerning future contingencies; this was the road that Wagner had been traveling “all along”—the road toward an affirmation of open theism. In order to assess his journey fulsomely, one must go back to the beginning of Wagner’s story and travel the road that he walked.

This chapter begins down the road in Wagner’s journey toward affirming open theism from the years 1955 to 1981. The chapter examines four eras: the Fuller era

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, vol. 1, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 82.

(1952–1955), the field missionary era (1956–1965), the transformational era (1966–1971), and the Church Growth era (1972–1981). However, before embarking on the journey, I must detail the structure of this dissertation’s presentation as a legend to the journey.

The Journey’s Legend

This dissertation’s detailing of Wagner’s theological journey is divided into chronological periods encapsulating Wagner’s thematic theological convictions of the era. Each subsequent era is further analyzed in four sections with a summative table to follow:

1. **Contextual Background:** Though this dissertation aims not to provide a biographical summary or analysis of Wagner’s life, it is necessary to provide readers with enough contextual background concerning the historical significance of the era so that Wagner’s theological dispositions are placed in context.²
2. **Theological Mile Markers:** Wagner frequently uses “paradigm shifts” to describe a significant event, usually signifying a profound change in his theological convictions. Similarly, this research terms a significant theological event as a “theological mile marker,” which aids readers along the journey; this analysis may or may not be aligned with or signified by Wagner’s designation of a “paradigm shift.”³
3. **Theological Dispositions:** As this research aims to analyze the evolution of Wagner’s theological convictions concerning the superordinate theological concepts relating to the doctrine of God and his discipleship philosophy, each necessary superordinate and subordinate theme is explored in greater detail.
4. **Discipleship Philosophy Summary:** A brief summation of Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship is presented. While Wagner’s praxes, methodologies, and axioms are

² For a more comprehensive reading of the life of Wagner, see his autobiography: C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010).

³ In describing a “paradigm,” Wagner states, “A paradigm, in the way I am going to use the word in this book, is a mental grid through which certain information is processed while it is being absorbed.” C. Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and Change Your Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 7. The context of Wagner’s use of a “paradigm shift” is in relation to a theological change for believers, which “unshackles them from rationalistic/scientific ways of thinking and allows them to understand the reality of the modus operandi of the invisible world.” See C. Peter Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy: Confronting Spiritual Powers* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011). Wagner credits Charles H. Kraft’s publication *Christianity with Power* for the term. See Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1989).

discussed in his writings and other researchers' contributions, this section provides a brief encapsulation to aid readers.

5. **Theological Dispositions Summary:** A table summarizing Wagner's held theological dispositions at the beginning and end of each thematic era is displayed at the end of each chronological period. The table is not comprehensive; however, theological categories relevant to this research are succinctly listed. Though some of the listings are provided by Wagner's accounts, many of them are based on this research.

A Mind Open to Theological Creativity: The Fuller Era (1952–1955)

In 1971, Wagner published *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, which signified the formal closing of Wagner's vocational ministry career, a sixteen-year career he began shortly after his graduation from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1955. While reflecting upon his time at Fuller, Wagner credits his theology professor Edward Carnell with opening his "mind to theological creativity unfettered by classical systems of dogmatics."⁴ This section explores, to the best ability after nearly seventy years, Wagner's time as a seminary student at Fuller to glean context into this statement.

⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 11.

Wagner does not frequently cite Carnell; only a few references to Carnell appear in throughout Wagner's work. Wagner does not elaborate further cornering theological creativity mentioned in his 1971 introduction. The reference is to Carnell's influence on Wagner's conviction concerning the nature of Christ. He states that he had shifted "from the two-channel theory to recognizing Jesus' full human nature."

My first understanding of the two natures of Christ was that He would regularly switch between using His human nature and using His divine nature. My Fuller theology professor, Edward John Carnell, convinced me that, based on Philippians 2, we can be sure that, while He was on earth, before the cross, Jesus used only His human nature. I explained in chapter 2 how this caused problems in my ordination examination. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets and Theologians*, 268–69)

See the following works referencing Carnell: Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* (1975), 11; C. Peter Wagner and Doris M. Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life: Wisdom for Thriving in Life* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2021), 97–98; C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004), 143–44; Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 23–25; Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 37–39, 268.

According to Wagner, Carnell profoundly influenced his theological reasoning. Wagner reflects upon Carnell in his last published work. Wagner encourages his readers to not "minister with gifts you do not have." He utilizes Carnell as an example of someone who ministered "outside his gift." Wagner states,

The negative example is Edward John Carnell, who died in 1967 at the age of 48. Edward John Carnell was possibly the most respected theologian of his time. He taught me in my theology classes at Fuller Theological Seminary as I was studying for my Master's in Theology in the 1950s. Every student voted him the #1 teacher. He taught with no notes! Then he was appointed president of the Seminary. The next day he walked into class with notes. About ten years later he committed suicide. It is my opinion that he attempted to minister outside his gift mix. (Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 97–98)

Contextual Background

The preceding chapter sets the cultural context as Wagner enrolls in Fuller Theological Seminary. While Wagner portrays his career as commencing in 1956, the prologue in the previous chapter's excursus furnishes the foundation for Wagner's theology and sets the course toward his adoption of open theism.⁵ The following section begins during Wagner's early years as his biblical-theological system was being shaped before he embarked on a missionary career following his graduation from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1955.⁶

Theological Mile Markers

Wagner's time at Fuller Seminary becomes the trailhead of the journey. For this reason, this research must use Wagner's retrospective musings on the era. Fuller does not have on preservation the works of Wagner during his time as a seminary student.

Incarnation-theology. The "incarnation-theology theory," according to Wagner, "is the view of the relationship between Christ's two natures."⁷ During his time at Fuller, he experienced a "paradigm shift" from "two-channel theory," which Wagner states was the majority view at the time.⁸ Concerning incarnation-theology and his

This research was shared with Rebecca Vivian Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework to Assess and Evaluate C. Peter Wagner's Doctrine of Sanctification" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 134.

⁵ Fuller Theological Seminary's Wagner archive contains a small assortment of articles written by Wagner before 1950; however, these articles are not theological in nature and were penned before Wagner professed Christianity. Therefore, such writings were consulted but not germane to this research.

⁶ Wagner began his mission career in February 1956 and served the South American Indian Mission in Bolivia. During Wagner's time at Fuller, he was not affiliated with a denomination and registered as an "Independent." Bell Friends Church, "Interview with Pete Wagner," *Bellringer* (December 1967): 6, 8; Fuller Theological Seminary, "Cross and Shield 1955," ed. Bob Bunn (Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 1955), 28, <https://cdm16677.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16677coll3/id/2728/rec/6>. This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 135.

⁷ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 22.

⁸ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 23. This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 136. Wagner discusses the "two-channel theory" in the greatest detail in *On Earth as it is in Heaven*:

paradigm shift, Wagner states, “I had adopted this theological conclusion: The only nature that Jesus used between His birth and His death here on earth was His human nature.”⁹

Wagner’s incarnation-theology, established at Fuller, becomes a theological mile marker and a theological concept he discusses throughout his career. While reflecting on this paradigm shift, Wagner states, “Incarnation theology is not only right but also very important for each one of us who wants to end up serving God in the most productive and fulfilling way possible.”¹⁰ It is necessary to discuss the theological concept in greater detail.

As mentioned previously, Wagner credits Carnell with opening his “mind to theological creativity unfettered by classical systems of dogmatics.” Wagner’s 1971 publication *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* does not elaborate on this theological creativity; however, Wagner’s published works explore this statement more fulsomely over thirty years later. The theological creativity Wagner references is “incarnation theology,” to which Carnell introduced him.¹¹ According to Wagner, Carnell “displayed a bit of theological creativity.” Wagner states,

Unlike many of his colleagues, he was not reluctant to occasionally color outside of standard theological lines. He happened to do this when I was taking the Christology segment of his systematic theology course. In it he taught us standard orthodox theology that Jesus had a fully divine nature as well as a fully human

This is by far the most common explanation among those who accept the orthodox belief that Jesus was both divine and human. It suggests that during Jesus’ earthly ministry, He constantly switched back and forth. Some things He did as God (changing the water into wine, for example) and other things He did as a human (getting hungry and thirsty, for example). This two-channel theory sounds plausible at first, but it doesn’t hold up under closer scrutiny. Mark 13:32 is a case in point. The two-channel theory would say that what Jesus really meant was, “Humanly speaking, I don’t know when the end will come.” Of course, as God, He really did know. What is the problem? It’s very simple. If Jesus were speaking humanly, how did He know that the angels were also ignorant of the date? There is no human way to know how angels think. Would it seem reasonable that Jesus switched channels right in the middle of a sentence? Probably not. (C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God’s Call to Transform the World* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012], 107)

⁹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 24.

¹⁰ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 22.

¹¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 23.

nature. Then Carnell postulated that on the basis of Philippians 2, we could well conclude 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.¹²

Concluding, Wagner states,

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.

For Wagner, Christ agreed to "totally suspend the use (not the possession) of His divine attributes so that the only nature Jesus was using on earth was His human nature."¹³ As Wagner graduates Fuller, his incarnation-theology becomes a Christological concern for those presiding over his controversial ordination process.¹⁴ While reflecting on this paradigm shift, Wagner calls this transition "shifting from the two-channel theory to recognizing Jesus' full human nature."¹⁵

¹² Wagner, *Changing Church*, 143. This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 136.

¹³ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 128. This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 136.

¹⁴ The controversy concerning Wagner's ordination with New Brunswick Bible Church centered around "the matter of the relationship between the two natures of Christ." In reflecting upon his ordination process, Wagner states,

We all agreed that the Son, unlike the Father and the Holy Spirit, had two natures, a full divine nature and a full human nature. The standard view, held unanimously by those on my committee, was that Jesus switched back and forth, sometimes operating through His divine nature (e.g., stilling the storm or raising Lazarus) and sometimes through His human nature (e.g., getting hungry or weeping). My view, which I had learned from my theology professor, Edward John Carnell, was that during His incarnation, Jesus operated solely through His human nature and that His miracles were not done by His power but by the power of the Holy Spirit working through Him. This became a point of serious contention, and I cited Philippians 2, a major passage on Christ's incarnation.

Wagner concludes that he finally received ordination after he agreed "to spend a minimum of six hours in the Princeton Theological Seminary library, reading up on the subject of Christology." Though Wagner studied Christology in the Princeton library, he continued to hold his beliefs. Wager calls his position "incarnation Christology." Wagner expands on this topic in "Did Jesus Really Know?," *Evangelical Christian* 55, no. 3 (March 1959): 108–112, 142. He further expands on this topic in *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1988). Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 37–38. This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 137.

¹⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 268.

Dismissal of classic theism. Wagner’s affirmation of open theism is predicated upon the notion that the dismissal of an alternate position must occur. The following “Theological Dispositions” section discusses Wagner’s view concerning the doctrine of God in further detail; however, it is first necessary to establish Wagner’s dismissal of classic theism as a theological mile marker.¹⁶ Wagner does not disclose whether a paradigm shift had occurred at Fuller as he did not seem to describe his views of God’s sovereignty retrospectively before entering Fuller in the 1950s. Furthermore, it is imperative to note that Wagner did not assert a formal theological alternative to his dismissal of classic theology until open theism was a codified system. Wagner states that he “ignored” the topic since he was not provided with a “theological alternative.”

While reflecting on his seminary era, Wagner states, “I am familiar with classic theism” because “that is what I learned and tried to believe when I took my graduate theological training.”¹⁷ He concludes,

When I finished my studies and went to Bolivia as a field missionary, I escaped from this theological frustration simply by ignoring the questions. If I could not find reasonable answers in three years of seminary, I concluded that I probably never would find them. I did ministry on the assumption that what I was doing really mattered, but I could not explain the theology behind my actions very well.¹⁸

¹⁶ Wagner calls “classic theism” a contrasting view to his held view of “open theism.” C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2008), 79.

¹⁷ While describing his theological concerns at Fuller, he further states, I have not forgotten my frustration over these issues during my first year in seminary. I lived in a house with about twenty other students, and I lost count of the number of nights we drank coffee together and stayed up until 2:00 A.M. with the sole purpose of trying to figure out the final, definitive answers to these questions about God—mainly because we were not entirely happy with the answers our theological professors proposed in class. Our professors attempted to explain classical theism to us and we learned enough to pass the exams, but we were frustrated that what we learned did not always seem to line up very well with reality. Now that I look back, I see that our underlying problem was that no theological alternatives were presented to us. We were taught God was sovereign, 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. The school intention-ally indoctrinated us with “Reformed Theology,” dating back largely to John Calvin, one of the famous European reformers of the sixteenth century. Yes, we were told there were attempts other than Calvinism to answer those tough questions, attempts such as Pelagianism and Arminianism, but they were considered at best foolish and unsophisticated and at worst heretical. (Wagner, *Dominion!*, 79)

¹⁸ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 79–80.

Wagner's developmental years as a young seminary student of theology caused him considerable consternation as the classical and Reformed paradigm of the doctrine of God, espoused by Fuller's faculty, did not align with his constructed paradigm. Wagner summarizes his thematic consternation of classic theism 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."¹⁹ Wagner states that these "frustrations ended in the late 1990s when [he] first heard about open theism."²⁰

Theological Dispositions

This section summarizes Wagner's professed educational basis and the instructional content from Fuller Theological Seminary's professors as these concepts influenced Wagner's theological disposition, regardless of any perceived or professed discontinuity. The importance of establishing that Wagner was taught Reformed theology is not necessary as Wagner recounts such theological propositions. However, it is necessary to assess the theological foundation that troubled Wagner so profoundly.²¹ This section examines lectures from Carl F. H. Henry, Edward J. Carnell, and other sources that would have been required for Wagner during his time at Fuller Theological Seminary in the 1950s.²² Moreover, this survey establishes the Reformed position concerning the

¹⁹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 142.

²⁰ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 80. Wagner continues describing what caused frustrations for him and some of his classmates. In 2011, while reflecting on the 2001 *Christianity Today* article "Does God Know Your Next Move?," Wagner states, "When I began to read what John Sanders said, it reminded me exactly of the frustration that I felt as a seminary student." Citing Sanders, Wagner writes, "While in Bible college I read what my theology textbooks said about the nature of God. According to these books, God could not change in any way, could not be affected by us in any respect, and never responded to us. I was shocked!" Wagner continues, "That is the same thing that kept my friends and me up until 2:00 AM so many nights" (84, citing John Sanders, "Does God Know Your Next Move?" *Christianity Today*, May 21, 2001, 40). See Christopher A. Hall, "Does God Know Your Next Move?" *Christianity Today*, May 21, 2001. See chap. 4 of this research for further discussion concerning Wagner's affirmation of open theism.

²¹ According to Wagner, he felt that Fuller was "intentionally indoctrinating us with Reformed theology." Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 83. This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 140, 161.

²² Wagner states that "God used" Edward J. Carnell to "influence" his life to an "unusual degree." Wagner continues, saying that Carnell

omnipotence of God, teachings that would have influenced Wagner's theological foundation.

Epistemology. During Wagner's first semester at Fuller, he enrolled in a "course in epistemology taught by Henry."²³ Though Wagner passed the course, he states that he found difficulties comprehending the subject of epistemology. Wagner later writes that he never was "able to make even a vague connection between the content of that

taught systematic theology when I was in Fuller Theological Seminary in the fifties. The book I most recall is "*A Case for Orthodox Theology*," which, in those days, helped many of us locked into a "fighting fund" perspective to broaden our horizons. I read the book several times, and with each reading God seemed to grow bigger and the prospects of dedicating my life to him grew more exciting.

Wagner graduated Fuller Theological Seminary in 1955, and Carnell's book was published in 1959. C. Peter Wagner, "My Choice of Books," *Leadership* 3, no. 2 (1982): 92.

²³ In discussing the course concerning epistemology, Wagner states,

As a farmer and a fresh graduate of agricultural school, I was entering an ethereal theological world on the very bottom step of the ladder. 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. For beginners, I didn't even know how to spell the word! Henry's first few lectures might as well have been in Japanese as far as I was concerned. Although it took me several weeks to comprehend it, 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?" However, I knew very well that the registrar would care and that if I were going to graduate, I would need to pass the course. By the grace of God, one of the students in our dormitory happened to be a fresh graduate in philosophy from Stanford, and he stayed up night after night tutoring a group of us who otherwise might have melted down.

Wagner continues, "Epistemology as an entry-level required course for training to do Christian ministry is a case in point. I passed the course (with my only Fuller 'C'!), but 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." Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 35–36. This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 213.

course and anything” he had done in life.²⁴ Wagner, differing from Henry, defines epistemology as “a branch of philosophy that tries to figure out how we think.”²⁵

One must briefly turn the pages of Wagner’s story to when he affirms open theism in order to assess his epistemology rightly during his seminary era; doing so provides the necessary contrast and supplies a bookend to the eras before he affirms the

²⁴ 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,” which describes the course as follows

The views of the sources and object of religious knowledge held by the competing contemporary schools of religious epistemology, and related problems. Special study is devoted to the theories of contemporary naturalists, and of the empirical, idealistic, and neo-supernaturalistic theologians, and their significance for faith is appraised. Revelation and Inspiration. The evangelical view of special divine revelation and of inspiration. The relationship of the Spirit and the Scripture. The significance of prophecy and miracle. Major. Dr. Henry. (Fuller Theological Seminary, *Bulletin of Fuller Theological Seminary: Catalogue Number Seven: 1953–1954* [Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1953], 35, <https://cdm16677.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16677coll15/id/148/rec/10>)

In the following school year, Fuller seemingly renamed 415 to 416. While it is not definitive, research strongly supports that this was Henry’s “epistemology” course as described by Wagner, and Wagner was required to take this course during his time at Fuller. While Fuller no longer has access to the Fall 1953 course syllabus, the following semester’s course was made available.

According to the 415 course syllabus provided by Fuller Theological Seminary’s archives, the following texts were required reading for a student in this course: “The Problem of Religious Knowledge” by Douglas Clyde Macintosh, “Revelation and Inspiration” or “The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible” by B. B. Warfield, “The Protestant Dilemma” (chap. 2) and “The Drift of Western Thought” (chap. 3) by Carl F. Henry. Additionally, a notable text from the syllabus notes the doctrine of God: “SUGGESTED READING: Introductory section—up to treatment of the Doctrine of God—in a standard theology text of your denominational preference.” Should Wagner’s student records become available, more research could be performed on what Wagner was taught concerning the doctrine of God. If Wagner did take 414 or 415, then the section on the doctrine of God was only suggested and not a required task.

Furthermore, Henry also taught a previous course called “257. Theology – Religious Epistemology,” and this syllabus was provided by Fuller archives; dates were unavailable as to when Henry previously taught the course. This syllabus does provide insight into Henry’s interaction with epistemology. The book list is the same as the 416 course syllabus, with the following exceptions: “Analogy” by Joseph Butler, “Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion” by David Hume, and “Apologetics” and “Christian-Theistic Evidences” by Cornelius Van Til. Students were required to write a term paper concerning “The Religious Epistemology of Karl Barth.” Unfortunately, the archives do not appear to have Wager’s paper from this course.

Along with the required texts, Henry’s lectures included the following topics: the principles of knowledge, extreme monistic realism in religion, the mystical theory of religious knowledge, critical evaluation of religious mysticism, monistic idealism in religion, religious psychologism, psychiatric interpretations of religion, philosophical antecedents of humanism, theological antecedents of humanism, humanism, idealism, critical monistic realism in religion, religious perception, empirical theology, normative theology, metaphysical theology, dualistic realism in religion, argumentative theism, religious agnosticism, religious value-judgments, existence-judgments based on value-judgments, critical rationalism, religious pragmatism, reactionary irrationalism, Anselm, Aquinas, Butler, Hume, religious apriorism, and religious epistemology. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing as Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 137.

²⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 36. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing as Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 136.

openness of God. Shortly before publicly affirming the openness of God in 2001, Wagner writes in *Seven Power Principles That I Didn't Learn in Seminary* (2000), "Sources of information about the invisible world are not limited to the Bible."²⁶ Wagner makes the statement in the context that he "didn't learn" that truth could be found outside the Bible during his time "in Seminary." Moreover, Wagner's claim that "history belongs to the intercessors" directly builds upon his paradigm shift concerning the notion that truth is found outside the Bible.

Both Henry and Carnell taught that knowledge of God exists outside the Bible. Henry states that epistemology—"the science of knowledge"—answers the question of how humanity knows God through divine revelation.²⁷ Moreover, Henry distinguishes 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."²⁸ Through natural revelation, humanity knows God and thus is condemned. Carnell further clarifies that a sinner and a Christian will have different judgments of truth; however, each can see

²⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Seven Power Principles That I Didn't Learn in Seminary* (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2000), 11. Wagner later republished this work as *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), which includes an excerpt affirming open theism (see pp. 82–86). Both editions include the following quote concerning epistemology:

Arriving at this conclusion was a major revision of what I was taught about epistemology in seminary. I firmly continue to believe that the Bible is our principal and only inerrant source of information about the supernatural. What the Bible teaches cannot be contradicted. But the Bible is not our only source. For one thing, while God spoke through the Bible, He also speaks today and He frequently gives us new information. Even the dark side of the invisible world can provide us some valuable information as well if we are careful to filter it through lenses of sanctified discernment. (p. 11 [2000])

The 2005 edition has the same content with modified wording; however, Wagner adds, "But the Bible is not our only source of valid information" (p. 10 [2005]).

²⁷ Carl F. H. Henry, *God Who Stands and Stays*, vol. 5, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 9, 357.

²⁸ Carl F. H. Henry, "Notes on the Doctrine of God: Systematic Theology" (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1949), sec. "The Doctrine of God." This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 138.

aspects of truth. Only the Christian, however, has the appropriate knowledge of God to offer a correct judgment.²⁹

In 1988, while reflecting on his time at Fuller, Wagner states that “in seminary,” he was “taught that God’s general revelation was available to all humans through creation, but that His special revelation was confined to Holy Scripture.”³⁰

Wagner continues,

God may have spoken directly to apostles and prophets, but they wrote down what He said, and when the canon of the Old Testament and the New Testament was agreed upon, no further direct revelation was necessary. After all, Hebrews 1:1,2 says, “God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.” God has said what has needed to be said. If we read and apply Scripture, we have no need for any further revelation from God.³¹

In his later work, Wagner would state that he still holds “a high view of biblical inerrancy” but also realizes “that God has things to tell us that are not in the Bible.”³²

Biblical-theological system. Henry required students to read from his 1951 publication *The Drift of Western Thought*, which discusses how epistemology and revelation impact one’s convictions concerning one’s knowledge of God.³³ In this work,

²⁹ Carnell offers the following example as to Christians and non-Christians observing the material world and offering judgments on its interpretation.

The parts of the judgment must be consistent with themselves and consistent with the things signified. Suppose an office window has been broken. One employee may conjecture that the damage was caused by a passing vehicle, another that it was caused by an explosion. Neither entertains material truth, for the window is too high for a passing vehicle, and the damage too slight for an explosion. But plausibility is restored when an eyewitness says that a flying bird broke the glass. And a discovery of the dead bird soon converts the hypothesis to material truth. (Edward John Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959], 88)

³⁰ 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), 63–64.

³¹ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 64.

³² Wagner states that he does “not hear directly from God too frequently.” He continues to offer an account of God’s giving him specific words. Concerning these words, Wagner states, “As I wrote these words, I had a sense that I was writing a form of divine revelation. It was a very important word from God at a crucial time in my life and ministry.” Wagner, *Churches That Pray*, 65–66.

³³ Carl F. H. Henry, “Syllabus for Systematic Theology: The Problem of Religious Knowledge, Revelation and Inspiration” (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1954).

Henry establishes the biblical-theological system required for a proper understanding of the knowledge of God. Henry states that “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 Furthermore, Henry states that “one of the great emphases of contemporary theology” during the 1950s “is that the Christian doctrine of God” ought to be “constructed apart from its special emphasis upon” the “path of knowledge”—epistemology. For Henry, epistemology establishes one’s view of God and the biblical narrative.³⁵ God provided the biblical-theological system to humanity through special

³⁴ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 133. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 139.

³⁵ Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought*, 133. Henry continues, “For evangelical Protestantism, 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 contrasts the orthodox convictions with the growing Neo-Supernaturalism theology of the era that “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.” While Wagner did not outwardly profess Neo-Supernaturalistic theology, he will reduce the importance of trinitarian theology, which becomes a significant theological construct of the ecumenical emphasis of the New Apostolic Reformation. Wagner, *Changing Church*, 159–60. Wagner does not affirm modalism; he merely reduces the importance of the Trinity as a doctrine that should be crucial for orthodoxy. Wagner writes,

Should our view of the persons of God be a part of our absolutes theological category or a part of our deductions category? For example, all Christians are presented in the Bible with the many scriptural references to God as Father, to Jesus the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian Christians in the West (Roman Catholics and Protestants) have fit these Scriptures together and used the term “Trinity” and the phrase “three Persons in one essence” to describe God’s self-revelation. These theological terms and phrases are nowhere found in the Bible, but to Western Christians they suitably describe the biblical evidence. On the other hand, the Eastern Orthodox churches, appealing to the same biblical evidence, are also Trinitarians, yet they have chosen to avoid the language of “Persons.” They prefer to say that the one true God has always existed as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. In doing this the Eastern churches convey their theological deductions using language that is somewhat less restrictive.

Wagner continues,

Oneness Christians, for their part, have come to different conclusions from the same Scriptures. If I am not mistaken, most apostolic leaders today would agree that while Trinitarian theology might be a strong conviction to the majority of us, it might not be regarded as an absolute on which we would gauge our ability to support each other and work together in advancing God’s kingdom. We seem to be somewhat more at ease with differences in our views of the Persons of the Godhead today than we might have been back in 1917, or perhaps in the earliest stages of the Church when some of these theological issues were still being debated and were in flux. While the majority of us still hold strong personal convictions on the Trinity, we are lightening our doctrinal load when it comes to choosing with whom we relate.

Wagner’s conviction regarding the importance of the specificity of the doctrine of the Trinity nearly cost him his tenure exam at Fuller Theological Seminary. Wagner eventually passed the exam after a second attempt. Wagner writes,

After I had taught in seminary for a time, my career reached the point when I would be considered for faculty tenure. Part of the process was to be examined theologically by professional theologians from the School of Theology, even though my specialty was missiology in the School of World

revelation. “That there is a universal and continuing divine revelation is a fundamental Biblical insistence. In view of this revelation, human history is history conditioned inescapably by a relationship to God.”³⁶ Henry continues, “Hebrew-Christian revelation interprets man’s relationship in terms of man’s spiritual rebellion; and conveys as the essence of religion, the special revelation and redemption of God consequent upon the sinful revolt of man.”³⁷

The doctrine of God. “I will not forget my frustration” concerning “my first year in seminary,” Wagner recounts when reflecting on his preliminary time at Fuller

Missions. During the examination, one theologian asked, “What do you think of systematic theology?” I replied, “Well, as a starter I do not think that we should refer to ‘systematic theology’ in the singular as if there were only one valid systematic theology. The Bible is absolute, but theologies are merely human attempts to systematize the way we interpret what the Bible teaches. Particularly in cross-cultural situations, different systematic theologies (plural) would be expected to emerge in different cultures.”

This was like setting off a firecracker in a funeral parlor! It was not the answer that the theologians expected. As they cross-examined me, they asked for examples of how theology could possibly vary from culture to culture. In their minds, theology was close to absolute. That, as I see it now, was a mind-set produced and nurtured by the corporate spirit of religion.

So I brought up the doctrine of the Trinity. I reiterated that I considered myself a solid Trinitarian, but then I said, “My passion is to see multitudes of unsaved people come to Jesus Christ. Some of the most resistant peoples of the whole world are Muslims and Jews. It is a recognized fact that top-level, conscientious, educated, good-hearted Muslim and Jewish leaders sincerely believe that we Christians are tritheists. They claim that they believe in only one God, but that Christians believe in three Gods: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We know that we are just as monotheistic as Muslims and Jews, but they can’t see it. It would really be nice if our professional systematic theologians could somehow reword our doctrine of the Trinity, and thus speed up the fulfillment of the Great Commission.” (Wagner, *Changing Church*, 160)

This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 140.

³⁶ Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought*, 77.

³⁷ Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought*. Henry stresses the spiritual condition of humanity because of the fall:

Modern philosophies and theologies have deadened such emphasis as man’s sin and God’s wrath; they have tended to reduce the disturbing discontinuity between the holy Lord and rebellious creators to a minor squabble or a wrangle without implications for all humanity. That is why it is particularly necessary not to observe what Biblical theology so clearly states of man: that he is a lost sinner, in a state of rebellion against God, doomed by his obedience to continual separation from the Lord of history, and unable from his side to satisfy the demands of infinite righteousness.

Henry concludes,

The special revelation of God’s redemptive mercy, the promise of divine redemption to be fulfilled in the sending of God’s only-begotten Son, the free promise the unobligated Lord, could not be known in advance, for the only proper expectation on the part of the sinner, is the necessity for the complete satisfaction of divine righteousness. That such satisfaction is provided in the gift of God’s Son, by the Saviour, is the “good tidings” at the very heart of the Biblical message. (81)

Theological Seminary.³⁸ Wagner continues, “[I was] taught that God was sovereign, that He was infinite, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, that He was unchangeable, and that He was just.” Wagner’s professed frustration resulted from his inability to reconcile the Reformed theology taught by his professors with his own experience. Wagner states, “The school was intentionally indoctrinating [me] with Reformed theology.” He concludes, “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.” Wagner’s frustrations wouldn’t end until “the late 1990s,” when he “first heard about open theism.”³⁹

In Henry’s introductory lectures on “The Doctrine of God,” he emphasizes the Reformed position concerning God and instructs students to “learn the Westminster

³⁸ Wagner states,

If I may be personal for a moment, I will not forget my frustration over these issues during my first year in seminary. I lived in a house with about 20 other students, and I’ve lost count of the number of nights that we would drink coffee together and stay up until 2:00 AM with the sole purpose of trying to figure out the final, definitive answers to these questions about God, mainly because we were not entirely happy with the answers that our theological professors were proposing in class. Our professors were attempting to explain classical theism to us. 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.

Our underlying problem, now that I look back, was that we had been given no theological alternatives. We were 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. The school was intentionally indoctrinating us with Reformed theology, dating back largely to John Calvin, one of the famous European reformers of the sixteenth century. Yes, we were 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.

When I finished my studies and went to Bolivia as a field missionary, 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. (Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 83–84)

This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 140, 161.

³⁹ Wagner states, “My frustrations 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. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 141.

catechism definition of God.”⁴⁰ In his lecture notes, Henry states, “The way a Christian looks at time has implications in his view of God and history.”⁴¹ Henry’s statement is insightful as Wagner would proclaim in 2001 that “history belongs to the intercessors.”⁴² For Henry, “the Christian concept” of time “is that time is real but it is not ultimately real; God is ultimately real and is sovereign, both over time and space.”⁴³ Concerning God’s sovereignty, Henry states, “It is God’s certainty about the future that makes man’s faith certain. This is important!”⁴⁴

The omnipotence of God. Reflecting on his studies at Fuller concerning the sovereignty and omnipotence of God, Wagner states, “Did I learn about the power of God during the years that I studied at these seminaries? Yes, I certainly did. I learned, for example, that one of the attributes of God is omnipotence, meaning that He is all-

⁴⁰ Henry, “Notes on the Doctrine of God: Systematic Theology,” sec. “Divine Essences and Attributes.” It is not known if Wagner read the Westminster catechisms during his time at Fuller; however, Wagner did review the catechism a few years later in 1961. Wagner states,

Princeton Seminary was affiliated with the Presbyterian Church USA, which had as its doctrinal foundation 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).

Texts by B. B. Warfield were required in Henry’s Systematic Theology. Although not an explicitly required text, Warfield’s 1932 publication *Studies in Theology* emphasizes the Westminster Shorter Catechism, with which Wagner was required to be familiar. Question 7 of the catechism asks, “What are the decrees of God?” The answer states, “The decrees of God are His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.” See Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 9:207.

⁴¹ Henry, “Notes on the Doctrine of God: Systematic Theology,” sec. “Divine Essences and Attributes.”

⁴² Wagner, “Destiny of a Nation,” 9.

⁴³ Henry, “Syllabus for Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of God,” sec. “The Omniscience of God.”

⁴⁴ Henry, “Notes on the Doctrine of God: Systematic Theology,” sec. “The Omniscience of God.”

powerful and there is nothing He is incapable of doing.”⁴⁵ Wagner continues, “I later discovered that there were many other clearly biblical aspects of the power of God that were never so much as mentioned in class.” Wagner employs John 14:12 as an example of the “biblical aspects of the power of God” in the demonstration of signs and wonders. He concludes by asserting, “If a passage like this ever did come up, my teachers promptly explained it away by saying that the ‘greater’ miracle was not raising the dead or casting out demons, but rather seeing souls saved.”⁴⁶ Further discussion concerning Wagner’s professed cessationist position during his early missiological career is discussed in a forthcoming section, which summarizes his theological shift toward a non-cessationist position.

Henry devoted many of his lectures to the omnipotence of God. Henry states that the decretive will of God “is God’s secret” will (what *God* does), while the preceptive will of God contains God’s commands (what *man* does).⁴⁷ Henry continues, “The secret will is partially disclosed to man but only partially so. Acts of God’s secret will are creation, redemption, election, consummation—partially revealed but we cannot predict or know entirely the matter of election, for instance.” Concerning the power of God, Henry affirms that “God has power over his power, he is powerful without having to show it.” Henry then states, “God’s omnipotence preserves man’s freedom, but creaturely independence is not lost in God’s omnipotence. By this, God preserves the freedom of man to rebel against him.”

Henry states that “God self-limits himself and it does not diminish his glory or power. By this self-limitation God does not act contrary to logic or morality.”⁴⁸ Though

⁴⁵ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles* (2005), 7.

⁴⁶ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles* (2005), 7–8.

⁴⁷ Henry, “Notes on the Doctrine of God: Systematic Theology,” sec. “The Will of God.”

⁴⁸ Henry, “Notes on the Doctrine of God: Systematic Theology,” sec. “The Power of God.”

Henry's statement appears to use much of the modern language regarding the now systematized theological view of open theism, here, Henry is simply stating that "God's will governs his power."⁴⁹ Henry concludes by affirming that God is "omnipotent in that he is sovereign over all creation. God's omnipotence leads to the power of the cross of Christ."

The nature of Satan. Wagner's theological propositions of Satan and evil will soon become an essential aspect of his openness theology. Wagner would later profess to affirming a temporal dualistic spiritual cosmos when he emphasizes spiritual warfare in the 1990s. For this reason, attention is given to Wagner's formative teachings on Satan from Henry. Henry states that Satan "is presented as a personality, not a force and as the leader of all the fallen angels."⁵⁰ Henry continues, explaining that though Satan is "ubiquitous," because he is a "created being," Satan is "not omnipresent." Henry stresses that creation is "not dualistic because Satan is a created being"; nevertheless, Satan and the "evil angels are free to interfere with the affairs of men," though "they are bound." Lastly, in answering "objections to the doctrine of Satan" (namely, that Satanology posits a "creature who can frustrate divine purpose"), Henry concedes that the "frustration" of God's purposes only occurs within "divinely appointed limits and is overruled for God's glory."

During Wagner's time at Fuller, courses on the theology of Augustine, Calvin, and Luther were optional. It is not known whether Wagner elected to take one of these courses; however, the theology of these historic theologians was a permeating influence on Wagner's professors.⁵¹ Moreover, these theologians established the Reformed

⁴⁹ Henry, "Notes on the Doctrine of God: Systematic Theology."

⁵⁰ Henry, "Notes on the Doctrine of God: Systematic Theology," sec. "Angels."

⁵¹ The Theology of John Calvin (444), The Theology of Martin Luther (445), The Apologetics of Augustine (643). The middle "4" course number signifies an optional course during Wagner's BD degree plan. Fuller Theological Seminary, *Bulletin of Fuller Theological Seminary: Catalogue Number Six*:

evangelical perspective concerning the ontology and influence of Satan in the creation narrative.

Dispensationalism. The evangelical community at Rutgers University introduced Wagner to dispensational theologies, which formed his “spiritual suppositions”—the pre-tribulational rapture and a pre-millennial hermeneutical interpretation of eschatological events.⁵² As he read the Bible, Wagner grew frustrated because he “had no understanding of how all the parts of the Bible fit together as a whole.” He “was at a loss to figure out how Genesis, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Daniel, Ezekiel, Luke, Romans and Revelation were all part of a bigger picture.”⁵³ Upon reading *Dispensational Truth* by Clarence Larkin as well as C. I. Scofield’s notes, Wagner proclaimed that “everything finally came together!” According to Wagner, “The whole Bible fit together” and explained “how all of history from ‘eternity past’ to ‘eternity future’ fit into what the Bible taught.”

While attending Fuller, Wagner was first exposed to varying dispensational positions that differed from his own. Though he was introduced to a post-tribulational perspective of dispensationalism, he graduated from Fuller while still affirming a pre-tribulational position. Wagner says that his “ideological pride in the doctrine had developed to the point where [he] believed that anyone who denied such a clear biblical teaching was either dishonest, ignorant, or unfaithful to the Word of God.”⁵⁴ For Wagner,

1952–1953 (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1952), 33, 35, <https://cdm16677.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16677coll15/id/151/rec/7>. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 148.

⁵² C. Peter Wagner, *Acts of the Holy Spirit* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), chap. 3, “The Promise of the Father,” para. 3. Logos Bible Software; Wagner, *Changing Church*, 96; Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 196.

⁵³ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 195. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 142.

⁵⁴ Wagner continues, “It never occurred to me that a post-tribulationist might be just as good a Christian as I, but looking at the Bible through a different set of presuppositions.” C. Peter Wagner, “Through a Glass Darkly,” *Eternity* (January 1962): 11. For additional information, see Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 83.

Christians were called to be separate and distinct from the world; for this reason, he called himself a “separatist.”⁵⁵ Wagner’s eschatological beliefs in dispensationalism caused him to affirm that God designed “society to go from bad to worse before Jesus” returned.⁵⁶ Wagner’s eschatological perspective will later become a catalyst for his affirmation of dominion theology and open theism.⁵⁷

Carnell, Wagner’s systematic theology professor, states, “Dispensationalism was formulated by one of the nineteenth-century separatist movements, the Plymouth Brethren. Hitherto, all Christians had believed that the church fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament and that the future of saved Jews falls within the general life of the church.”⁵⁸ Carnell, opposing dispensational theology, states, “While dispensationalism sincerely tries to honor the distinctives of Christianity, in practice, it often honors the distinctives of Judaism.” He concludes,

Dispensationalism is anxious to have the church raptured in order that an earthly Semitic kingdom might be founded. But this anxiety is fathered by a capital theological error. Unless the future of saved Jews falls within the general life of the church, we replace the spirit of the gospel with the spirit of Old Testament Judaism.⁵⁹

The kingdom of God. Wagner’s held that dispensational theology affirmed that the kingdom of God was a future promise. In describing the effects of his dispensational teaching, he states,

A further aspect of dispensational teaching was that the kingdom of God is seen as future. 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

⁵⁵ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 41.

⁵⁶ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 94.

⁵⁷ See Wagner, *Dominion!*

⁵⁸ Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, 117.

⁵⁹ Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, 64.

coming and which will occur again at His second coming. For me, the kingdom was not present here and now, but rather something we hoped for in the future.⁶⁰

While reflecting upon his early theological foundation at Fuller, Wagner summarizes by stating,

It is so clear to me now that the kingdom of God is present as well as future that I wonder how I missed it for so long. When I took my theological studies at Fuller Seminary back in the early '50s, George Ladd was one of my professors. He was well on his way, even then, to becoming one of the nation's experts on the biblical theology of the kingdom of God. But I was so fascinated by dispensationalism and the Scofield Bible at that time that I wasn't hearing what he was saying. I am now embarrassed to admit that what I most remember about George Ladd was his irreverent questioning of the pretribulation rapture, considered evangelical iconoclasm by many in those days.⁶¹

Wagner will continue to hold that the kingdom of God is a future promise until the early 1970s, when he joins Fuller's seminary faculty.

Cessationism. While a student at Fuller, Wagner considered himself an “anti-Pentecostal” cessationist.⁶² Wagner frequently discusses cessationism alongside dispensationalism when reflecting on his formational years at Fuller. Wagner states that his professors at Fuller taught him that “cessationism reflected sound Christian doctrine.”⁶³ Wagner cites “Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield” as “the theologian” whom his professors used to promote the notion 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.”⁶⁴ Wagner states, “When I studied at Fuller Seminary in the '50s, I was assigned Benjamin Warfield's *Counterfeit Miracles*. I believed, when I read

⁶⁰ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 41. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 149.

⁶¹ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 96. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 149.

⁶² Wagner, *Seven Power Principles* (2000), 43.

⁶³ C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer: What the Bible Says about Spiritual Warfare* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2009), 52.

⁶⁴ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles* (2005), 8.

it, that the sign gifts had terminated and that anything that looked like them today must therefore be counterfeit.”⁶⁵ Concerning cessationism, B. B. Warfield, in *Counterfeit Miracles* (1918), 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.⁶⁶

Concerning what Fuller had taught him, Wagner states,

Did I learn about the power of God? Yes, I certainly did. I learned that one of the attributes of God was omnipotence, meaning that He was all-powerful and that there was nothing He was incapable of doing. I learned that He had power to save the lost and to transform us into new creatures in Christ Jesus. I learned that He gives us power to overcome sin and to live holy lives. I learned that He was King of kings and Lord of lords. But, having said this, I was taught nothing about God’s power for miracles in the church and in the world today!⁶⁷

In his last published work (2021), while reflecting on his time at Fuller, Wagner states, “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.”⁶⁸ Once Wagner affirmed open theism, he would later state, “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.”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ C. Peter Wagner, “The Power of God and Your Power,” *Christian Life* 45, no. 3 (July 1983): 1. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 146.

⁶⁶ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918), 5–6.

⁶⁷ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles* (2000), 9.

⁶⁸ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 59–60. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 146.

⁶⁹ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 7.

In his 2011 publication *Spiritual Warfare Strategy: Confronting Spiritual Powers*, while reflecting upon his time at Fuller, Wagner states that he “believed that cessationism reflected sound Christian doctrine” and that he “was taught three things related to the matter of hearing directly from God.” First, Wagner was taught that “when the New Testament speaks of the gift of ‘prophecy,’ it means doctrinally sound biblical preaching.” Second, Wagner was taught that

There is no such thing as “present day revelatory activity of God.” This meant that God’s complete revelation to humans is contained in the 66 books of the Bible. Anything purporting to be the word of God not found in the Scriptures is labeled “extrabiblical revelation,” and must therefore be rejected as an authentic and trustworthy source of spiritual knowledge.

Third, Wagner was taught that it was “considered unacceptable to say such things as ‘I am doing such-and-such because God told me to.’ God does not speak to us directly apart from Scripture, and polite Christians do not claim that He does.”⁷⁰

Reformed sanctification. While at Fuller, Wagner affirmed a “Reformed sanctification” paradigm, which his professors taught. In 1998, while reflecting on his time at Fuller, Wagner states that he was “indoctrinated with Reformed theology” while at Fuller Seminary during his “formative years.”⁷¹ Wagner asserts that his professors taught that even though he should “strive for holiness,” he would “never make it.” 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. Reformed theology, 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.”⁷² In the

⁷⁰ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 52.

⁷¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs: Wagner Institute for Practical Ministry, 1998), 11.

⁷² Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 11; Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living*, rev. ed (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2002), 11–12. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 144.

1990s, Wagner would reject the Reformed doctrine of sanctification while favoring “Wesleyan holiness.”⁷³ While Wagner’s “paradigm shift” to Wesleyan Holiness is discussed further in forthcoming sections, it is significant to note that he both affirmed and was taught a Reformed paradigm concerning 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.” According to Wagner, being holy “is not an unattainable dream, it can be a present-day reality in your life and mine.”⁷⁴

An additional subordinate element of Reformed sanctification, which Wagner will soon frequently discuss, is the Reformed perspective concerning “total depravity.” Wagner asserts that while at Fuller, he was taught that “Luther and Calvin” were the institution’s “theological bedrock.”⁷⁵ Wagner explains Fuller’s teaching on “the depravity of humans” as follows: “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 continues,

They can be confident that, if they believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, they will assuredly go to heaven when they die. But their life here on Earth will never be free

⁷³ Wagner continues,

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, which is reflected today by Methodists, Nazarenes, Wesleyans, Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), Pentecostal Holiness, Salvation Army and many other denominations. A major reason was that my 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.

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)

This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 145.

⁷⁴ Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 12; Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (2002), 13. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 146.

⁷⁵ Continuing, Wagner states that “it is no surprise that they taught that the Reformed doctrine of sanctification was the most biblical and the most correct view of holiness.” Wagner, *Changing Church*, 169. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 143.

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.⁷⁶

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.”⁷⁷

Divine partnership through human cooperation. While reflecting upon his theological basis concerning prayer while a seminary student, Wagner states, “I was taught in seminary that 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.”⁷⁸ The remainder of Wagner’s reflection is discussed further in subsequent sections as Wagner will later affirm that human prayers change God’s decisions and

⁷⁶ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 169–70.

⁷⁷ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 170. In *This Changes Everything*, Wagner further reflects upon his early belief in a Reformed sanctification paradigm that seemingly caused him some level of consternation from an early age:

When I was saved at age 19, it was one of those abrupt, 180-degree life changes. I had been living a lifestyle of habitual sin, which, I’m glad to say, ended immediately. Granted, it took a few months to clean up some of the more deeply embedded patterns of thinking and acting (such as my barnyard language), but I accomplished my goal over time and began living a reasonably godly life. 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.

I soon recognized that there were fellow Christians who were obviously living a more godly life than I. I read biographies of Praying Hyde, George Mueller, Hudson Taylor, and the like, and I suspected that I would never reach the level of spiritual exploits that characterized their lives and others like them. To be honest, for some reason, deep down, I never really had much desire to achieve the five-star spirituality of such heroes of the faith. Nevertheless, I definitely wanted to establish an ongoing lifestyle of acceptable Christian conduct, which, by and large, I think I did.

At the time, I was 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)

⁷⁸ Wagner, *Churches That Pray*, 42. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 147.

interaction with humanity. For example, Wagner states, “Our prayers can have a direct influence on what God does or does not do.”⁷⁹

Gift of prophecy. In Wagner’s 1988 publication *The Third Wave of the Spirit*, he reflects on his time at Fuller and the theological instruction concerning biblical prophecy. Wagner states, “When I went to seminary back in the fifties I 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.’” Wagner continues,

However, while there was some significant foretelling of the future recorded in the Bible, we were not to expect that in the present age. 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. This was my first understanding of prophecy today.⁸⁰

Wagner concludes, “I accepted this teaching and went to the mission field to serve the Lord.”⁸¹

Purpose of prayer. In Wagner’s 2005 publication, *Seven Power Principles I Learned After Seminary*, Wagner reflects upon his time at Fuller and on what he was taught concerning prayer.

What was I taught about prayer in seminary? Frankly, I can’t remember much about it. I know that the two seminaries I studied in did not offer specific courses in prayer

⁷⁹ Wagner continues,

No one has said it better than Richard Foster in his classic, *Celebration of Discipline*. “We are working with God to determine the future. Certain things will happen in history if we pray rightly.” One of the books on prayer I currently recommend to my students at Fuller Seminary has a provocative title: *And God Changed His Mind*. It is written by Brother Andrew, who says, “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)

See Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988); Brother Andrew, *And God Changed His Mind* (Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen, 1990). Wagner writes “Did Jesus Really Know” in 1959, discussing the human and divine cooperation through prayer.

⁸⁰ 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. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 147.

⁸¹ Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 106. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 147.

while I was there. I was instructed on how to preach, baptize, counsel and serve communion, but I recall no lessons on how to pray or even on how to lead a prayer meeting. There was an assumption that prayer, indeed, was important for the Christian life, but it also was assumed that everyone knew how to pray well enough. Learning how to pray, in the minds of the seminary faculty, would somehow take care of itself.⁸²

Philosophy of Discipleship Summary

Though Wagner did not reveal his philosophy of discipleship during his time at Fuller, he entered the mission field as an evangelical missionary upon graduation.

Fuller's theological position concerning its philosophy of discipleship is revealed in the writings of Carl Henry, who states, "Evangelical theology points to the sinfulness of man as the decisive factor in his relationship with God."⁸³ Christian discipleship begins with the righting of a relationship with God. For Edward Carnell, discipleship is a progressive work of sanctification through the sovereign work of the Spirit. Carnell states, "The first act of sanctification is regeneration, while the last act is confirmation in righteousness by the resurrection of the body. Between these two extraordinary acts a Christian grows in grace by worship, the Word, the sacraments, self-denial, and a general life of charity."⁸⁴ Carnell concludes, "The emphasis is on the creative work of the Spirit; we grow in grace by letting Christ come to maturity in us." Carnell describes the unfolding of the divine Scripture as a "progressive act."⁸⁵ The Lord communicates with his people through the

⁸² Wagner continues,

I am just guessing, but one reason why prayer did not have a higher place in the seminary curriculum could well have been because my professors, by and large, were Calvinists by theological orientation. Calvinism takes a very high view of the sovereignty of God and stresses predestination. Calvinism, in other words, presumes that God has known since before He even created the world who we were and what was going to happen in our lives, and even if we would end up in heaven or hell. Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned After Seminary*, 78–79.

⁸³ Henry, *The Drift of Western Thought*, 98.

⁸⁴ Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, 73. This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 150.

⁸⁵ Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, 73.

progressive revealing of knowledge and individual growth of such knowledge; Carnell asserts that “even the apostles had to grow in knowledge.”⁸⁶

In 1955, Wagner immediately embarked upon a sixteen-year vocational ministry career in Bolivia following his graduation from Fuller. Though Wagner does not seemingly reflect upon his educational methodologies and praxes as a seminary student, this research presumes that he held to the educational philosophy that he immediately demonstrated following his graduation; these praxes are discussed in following section covering the field missionary era. While reflecting on his early educational philosophy, Wagner calls his praxes “traditional methods of teaching pre-service students theological and biblical theories.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, 53. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 151.

⁸⁷ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 269. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 151.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 1. 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

A Journey Begins: The Field Missionary Era (1956–1965)

The following section's segmentation for Wagner's field missionary era departs from Wagner's biographical segmentation; the revised era segments Wagner's career before his theological system encountered a significant transition beginning in 1966. This section explores Wagner's work from 1956 to 1965, which bifurcates

Wagner's professed eras: the jungle missionary era (1956–1961) and the McCullough era (1961–1971).⁸⁸

Contextual Background

Immediately following Wagner's graduation from Fuller, he began his vocational ministry career in the winter of 1956.⁸⁹ Wagner partnered with the South America Indian Mission as he embarked on his missionary career in Bolivia, which he would continue until he began his professorship at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1971.⁹⁰ As Wagner began his vocational missionary career, he identified as a "faith missionary" affiliated with a Quaker denominational congregation, Bell Friends Church.⁹¹ During this era, Wagner continued his educational pursuits and earned a Master

⁸⁸ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 24–54. This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 152.

⁸⁹ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 135. This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 152.

⁹⁰ Bell Friends Church, "Interview with Pete Wagner," 6. This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 152.

⁹¹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 42–43. Wagner's Quaker denomination would not officially support Wagner; "faith missionaries" were indirectly supported by fellow church members. In Wagner's reflective description of this era, he states that the gospel advancement would have been more effective if he had not allowed the "demonic spirit of poverty" to thwart God's providence. Wagner states,

We certainly believed God and believed that we were where God wanted us to be; but from today's perspective, I would now be inclined to confess that we probably did fall short of the godly faith for finances that we otherwise might have had.

Christian leaders such as Kenneth Hagin and Oral Roberts had just begun to surface when Doris and I went to Bolivia. Because I had identified with the cessationist evangelical camp at the time, everything I heard about them was negative. My professors had relegated them and their colleagues to the lunatic fringe of pseudo-theologians. Later in the book I will explain some of the positive influences that I believe the Word of Faith movement has contributed, but at this point I simply want to say that our "faith missions" circles might have benefited greatly if they had been listening more closely to the message of biblical prosperity that Hagin, Roberts and others were preaching. Instead we unwittingly allowed ourselves to be dominated by an evil spirit of poverty; and as a result, I am convinced that we actually forfeited a good bit of the potential that we had for spreading the gospel in those days.

A 1971 announcement in *Christianity Today* regarding Wagner's professorship at Fuller stated, "The Reverend C. Peter Wagner, a Quaker, has been named associate professor of Latin American studies at Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission and executive director of Fuller's Evangelistic Association. He has been active in Bolivian interdenominational activities for fifteen years." "They Say," *Christianity Today* 15, no. 16 (1971): 44.

of Theology from Princeton in 1962 while on furlough from overseas missions.⁹² Though Wagner began his academic writing career and published only a few journal articles in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he would not publish his first book until 1966.⁹³ During this era, Wagner began his professional career in “theological education” as he emphasized theological training at the Eastern Bolivia Bible Institute (1956) and the George Allan Theological Seminary (1962).⁹⁴

Theological Mile Markers

Divine partnership through human cooperation. Wagner does not devote much attention to prayer in his early theological writings; however, his functional convictions can be determined by his reflection on his time as a seminary student. In Wagner’s 2010 publication, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, he contends that the assertion that the prayers of people could not influence God caused him and his classmates at Fuller severe consternation.⁹⁵ As a young student, Wagner seemingly concluded that the phenomenological evidence substantiates the functional assertion that the actions of humanity influence God’s operation within creation. Though Wagner’s Fuller professors taught that God was immutable, he concluded that his experiences taught him another theology and that it did not align with the concepts instilled by Fuller’s faculty.⁹⁶

⁹² Wagner wrote his thesis on “The Marian Theology of Thomas Aquinas.” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 56–57; Bell Friends Church, “Interview with Pete Wagner,” 6. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 153.

⁹³ Much of the work consulted was made possible through the analysis of unpublished academic manuscripts.

⁹⁴ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 58–59. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 154.

⁹⁵ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 88–89.

⁹⁶ Researcher’s note: Fuller archives provided Wagner’s 1959 article, “Did Jesus Really Know?” This article included a paragraph called, “Prayer of Action.” It is the conclusion of this research that the article was most likely not written by Wagner as the style is seemingly different than his writing of the era. If Wagner did write the paragraph, it would further substantiate his early theological convictions concerning prayer. Under the section, “Prayer of Action,” the article says,

Let us then turn to the positive side of the picture, and think of the possibility of unceasing prayer. If prayer is “the soul’s appeal to God,” as it has been defined, is it not only honest and sincere to sustain

Theological Dispositions

Reformed sanctification. Wagner states that Princeton Theological Seminary, like Fuller Theological Seminary, taught him a “Reformed doctrine of holiness.”⁹⁷

Doctrine of God. Much of Wagner’s writing during his jungle missionary years were more theological than his later years, yet his papers, articles, and essays do not devote considerable attention to the topic of the doctrine of God; such topics are often only passively implied or implicitly discussed.⁹⁸ The most attention Wagner grants to the doctrine of God is found in “You Can’t Be a Christian And . . .” (1956).⁹⁹ Wagner states, “God never changes”; therefore, humanity can place their trust in God as he “is able to perform all His promises.”¹⁰⁰ Wagner continues, explaining that because God “knows something” that humanity does not, humanity can believe God. It is therefore possible for

that appeal beyond its verbal form in the trend, quality, and aim of one’s total activity? The Apostle James has a touch of powerful satire in the first chapter of his epistle, with regard to this. He says “act on the word, instead of merely listening to it and deluding yourselves, for whoever listens and does nothing, is like a man who glances at his natural face in the mirror. He glances at himself, goes off, and at once forgets what he was like.” It would do no violence to the Apostle’s idea to substitute the word “pray” for the word “listens.” He who “prays and does nothing” is just like that; he “forgets what manner of man he is.” He is careless as to whether his life is all of a piece, in deed as well as in word, in the sight of God. What can God think of our sincerity, if we permit the world to dictate to us forgetfulness of the very desires we have formulated in speech to Him? With what strength of purpose do we commend our petitions, if we allow ourselves to be absorbed in a petty self-interest which must often defeat God’s attempts to answer us. Many petitions that are offered can only be answered by human cooperation. (Wagner, “Did Jesus Really Know?,” 110)

⁹⁷ Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 11.

⁹⁸ Wagner did not explicitly discuss the omnipotence of God during this era. Implicit references can be seen in “Army Evangelism” (1956), where Wagner praises God for sending a new Christian to Wagner’s community, and because of the new convert’s shared testimony, many were converted through the providence of God. C. Peter Wagner, “Army Evangelism,” *Amazon Valley Indian* 51, no. 10 (1956). Similarly, in “Bible Institute in Bolivia” (1956), Wagner acknowledges God’s providence in providing “a remarkable way for the opening” of a Bible Institute in Bolivia, which, Wagner states, the Lord would use “to reach many non-Christians.” Wagner acknowledges God’s providence in prayer, asking that God would providentially “call out many new” students to his Bolivian Eastern Bible Institute so that they may be trained. C. Peter Wagner and Doris Wagner, “Bible Institute in Bolivia,” *Amazon Valley Indian* 52, no. 5 (1956). This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 161.

⁹⁹ C. Peter Wagner, “You Can’t Be a Christian And . . .,” *Eternity* (July 1956): 25–26, 37. The context of the article is a focus on Christian liberty and Christian conscience rather than theology proper.

¹⁰⁰ Wagner, “You Can’t Be a Christian And . . .,” 25.

humanity to have “no doubt” of God’s ability to fulfill his promises due to his “sovereign authority” and “divine wisdom and power.”¹⁰¹

Epistemology. “The Origin of Life: A Christian View” (1957) introduces Wagner’s early epistemological priorities, though Wagner provides the necessary contextual background of the article in later writings.¹⁰² For Wagner, the interpretation of observations bifurcates Christians and naturalists; by using the Word of God, Christians can interpret facts rightly and correct any evident contradictions. In “The Origin of Life,” Wagner states that “everything the Bible teaches is true”; however, “the Bible doesn’t contain all truth.”¹⁰³ 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.” In the article, Wagner posits the question, “Is it possible to accept the data of both science and the Bible without fear of contradiction?”¹⁰⁴ Wagner asserts that indeed, Christians can accept science, provided that the science does “not violate a clear teaching of the Word of God.” Furthermore, Wagner states that “the well-prepared Christian always knows where to draw the line.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Wagner continues to describe the nature of a Christian’s faith in God. In contrast to Reformed theology, Wagner does not describe faith as a gift from God. Rather, Wagner describes faith as humanity’s act of believing in God’s knowledge and “acting upon” what God tells. “Faith is trusting a person because we know him and know that he will not fail us.” Humanity can trust the truthfulness of God; however, “faith does not preclude inquiries” of doubt. Wagner, “You Can’t Be a Christian And . . . ,” 25.

¹⁰² Wagner’s later writings concerning his perception regarding epistemology are as follows: 7 *Power Principles That I Didn’t Learn in Seminary* (2000), *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians* (2010), and *On Earth as It Is in Heaven* (2011). This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 155.

¹⁰³ C. Peter Wagner, “The Origin of Life: A Christian View,” *Eternity* (September 1957): 44. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 155.

¹⁰⁴ Wagner, “The Origin of Life,” 42. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 155.

¹⁰⁵ In the article, Wagner asserts that Christians can believe in the threshold theory of evolution. Defining threshold evolution, he states that “by studying both science and the Bible we find that hundreds of millions of years ago God created seven kinds of life, and that from these humble beginnings there developed by an evolutionary process the many thousands of species that populate the world today.” In concluding the article, Wagner asks, “Why is it then that so many Christians have been content to believe what they hear on this subject? Why is it that, when pressed for reasons, so many Christians say,

The naturalist, according to Wagner, states that all facts are observed when making an interpretation. Wagner continues, stating that the Word of God must be included in the observation of facts in order for one to have all of the facts necessary for a proper observation.¹⁰⁶ Wagner emphasizes the interpretation of the observed “facts” over the establishment of the facts. Interpretation of the events is derived from man’s mind and is subject to reinterpretation; therefore, it must be held more loosely. For Wagner, if observations do not contradict the Bible, then one can accept an observation, provided that the observation is supplied by “highly trained” professionals using “strong evidences” in their argumentation. Similarly, Wagner affirms such a notion in “Human Artificial Semination” (1959), stating, “Christians should guard against making premature judgments” concerning science; “high-level, objective discussion on the matter should be stimulated to help avoid the type of untimely scientific pronouncements that have so often resulted in embarrassment to Christianity.”¹⁰⁷ Further, Wagner explains, “To form dogmatic opinions without the benefit of open-minded, scholarly discussion and without the discipline of careful, analytical thought is an all-too-appealing temptation to the preacher or professor.”¹⁰⁸

‘The Bible doesn’t teach it,’ and quickly attempt to change the subject.” Concluding his challenge, Wagner posits, “Might it be that” Christians “are afraid to believe otherwise, and therefore keep away from the evidences?” Wagner, “The Origin of Life,” 12. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 156.

¹⁰⁶ Wagner affirms the plenary inspiration of Scripture. The Bible deserves consideration as a source of true evidence because it describes itself to be true. For this reason, naturalists should consider such pieces of evidence. Wagner, “The Origin of Life,” 43.

¹⁰⁷ Wagner penned “Human Artificial Insemination” under the pseudonym Lewis Graham Underwood. It is unknown as to why Wagner published this piece under a pseudonym. It is my educated guess that Wagner chose to write on the topic under a pseudonym due to his close relationship with Latin American Catholicism and the controversial topic contemporary to its writing. Lewis Graham Underwood [C. Peter Wagner], “Human Artificial Insemination,” *Gordon Review* (Summer 1959): 64.

¹⁰⁸ Underwood [Wagner], “Human Artificial Insemination,” 59.

Philosophy of Discipleship Summary

Wagner's early writings do not emphasize explicit discipleship principles; however, his praxes can be retrospectively discerned by reflecting on his later works. In *This Changes Everything*, while reflecting on this era, Wagner states that he taught discipleship and ministerial training through "theological education." Continuing, he states,

After I learned Spanish, I was assigned to direct a Bible school for training future ministers. I naturally wanted the very best for the Bolivians who were to pastor the churches that we missionaries were planting in their nation. What was the best? Why, the theological education that I had received in seminary, of course! I had carefully preserved the class notes I took in all my seminary courses, so I built a three-year curriculum for the Eastern Bible Institute (*Instituto Bíblico del Oriente*) around those courses. My class preparation consisted mainly of translating my notes into Spanish, hopefully simplifying things enough so that the students, who had never so much as been to high school, could understand them.¹⁰⁹

For Wagner, theological doctrine was essential to discipleship and growth. While reflecting on his theological paradigm, Wagner states,

Courses in systematic theology were central. Since it seemed important for future ministers and missionaries to know how theologians had arrived at their conclusions, courses in the history of dogma were required. Biblical courses were focused on exegesis, so learning Greek and Hebrew would be essential. Different ways of interpreting the Bible were covered under hermeneutics. Church history was essential. In order to pass their courses, students were forced to write scholarly research papers with copious footnotes. The few ministry-oriented courses were taught in the department of practical theology.¹¹⁰

Similarly, Wagner reflects on his time at Princeton in *This Changes Everything*, where he states that his teaching of theology was "mono-cultural":

¹⁰⁹ Wagner continues,

When I tried to apply the only ministerial training paradigm I knew to aspiring Bolivian pastors, the results were not far from a disaster. Very few of the students ever ended up in vocational pastoral ministry, and the school eventually disbanded. Before it did, I had transferred from the rural setting of eastern Bolivia to the influential city of Cochabamba, this time assigned to the Emmaus Bible Institute, which had become one of the most respected ministerial training schools in the nation. The curriculum? The same old paradigm of theological education! In fact, I was so deeply programmed with that paradigm that I went one step further. In order to make the school more like Fuller, I changed the name from Emmaus Bible Institute to George Allan Theological Seminary, named after the founder of our mission! (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 42–43)

¹¹⁰ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 43.

When I knew that God had called me to serve on the foreign mission field, I wanted the best possible training, so, as I have mentioned before, I enrolled in a theological seminary. The theology I was taught was standard, mono-cultural, North Atlantic theology. Over three years, I absorbed that theology, enjoyed it, passed my exams and received my Master of Theology degree. I felt that I was properly educated to be a missionary.¹¹¹

Wagner continues,

Soon afterward, I arrived in Bolivia. My first assignment was to lead a Bible school. I quickly learned that, without a traditional faculty of specialists, I myself had to teach just about every course, including theology. For the first time I found myself in a cross-cultural situation. Bolivian culture was substantially different from American culture. Where did theology fit in? I hate to admit it now, but my mindset was that the theology I had learned in seminary was the real, authentic, orthodox theology for any culture in the world. I was a cross-cultural missionary who was programmed with a mono-cultural theology. So, what did I do? I translated my English notes from my theology classes into Spanish and taught the same material to my Bolivian students.¹¹²

Because scarce examples survive from Wagner during this period, the theological extractions are not as robust as they are in other eras. Nevertheless, the writings provide evidence of Wagner's theological convictions during their formational years.

¹¹¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 67.

¹¹² Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 67.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 2. 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

Radical Theological Reconstruction: The Transformational Era (1966–1971)

Though Wagner does not segment 1966–1971 as an isolated and independent era, Wagner's published works reveal this period to be theologically significant; therefore, 1966–1971 becomes a segmented and transformational era warranting analysis. Wagner's theological system began to experience significant changes during this time,

changes that would follow Wagner until the end of his journey. This research segments Wagner's historical and biographical era as the latter portion of the McCollough era (1961–1971)¹¹³ and as transitioning into the beginning of the McGavran era (1971–1982).¹¹⁴ However, such segmentation closely aligns with Wagner's professed theological "paradigm shifts."

Contextual Background to the Era

As this era emerged, Wagner continued serving as a Bolivian field missionary. While on furlough, Wagner attended the Fuller School of World Mission from 1967 to 1968 and earned a Master of Arts in Missiology.¹¹⁵ Wagner would later publish his thesis as *The Protestant Movement in Bolivia* (1970), which he states would be "source materials which will form the basis for a reevaluation of missionary strategy worldwide."¹¹⁶ This "reevaluation" would later become the Church Growth movement, with which Wagner would soon become associated.

¹¹³ See chap. 4, "The McCollough Era (1961–1971)," in Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 54–78.

¹¹⁴ See chap. 5, "The McGavran Era (1971–1982)," in Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 79–112.

¹¹⁵ Wagner describes himself as a "Christian Missiologist," which he explains as follows:

Missiology is the study of cross-cultural communication of the Christian faith. This discipline is intensely interested in the growth of the church among new peoples, those with cultures distinct from the cultures of the communities which originate the preaching of the gospel. Missiologists strive to develop a high degree of what might be called "people sensitivity." They recognize that people perceive reality from different frames of reference. Missiologists hold culture in high esteem, while recognizing that all cultures are susceptible to demonic or corruptive forces. They respect and try to understand the diversities of human life-styles. Using anthropology, linguistics, phenomenology, communications, and social psychology, missiology studies the spread of Christianity throughout twenty centuries. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 288)

This research was shared with Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework," 165.

¹¹⁶ Wagner continues, "Under the distinguished leadership of Dean Donald A. McGavran, the influence of the type of church growth thinking characteristic of the School of World Mission is growing to a rather astonishing degree in many geographical areas of the world and among missionaries of a wide range of theological persuasions." Ralph Winter served as Wagner's thesis "major" advisor. Wagner credits Winter in the preface to his thesis; he states, "The author wishes to express special appreciation to his major advisor, Dr. Ralph D. Winter, for his creative suggestions throughout all phases of this research." Similarly, Wagner credits McGavran "for the theoretical framework in which" the thesis "is cast." C. Peter Wagner, *The Protestant Movement in Bolivia* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1970), xvii–xix.

Wagner's 1971 publication *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* served as a "farewell note" to his vocational career as a field missionary.¹¹⁷ Wagner joined his mentors Donald McGavran¹¹⁸ and Ralph Winter¹¹⁹ in 1971 as an associate professor of Latin American studies at Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission and as Executive Director of Fuller's Evangelistic Association.¹²⁰ Wagner's "farewell" to vocational ministry and entrance into professional academia served as a vocational change, but it also reflected an underlying theological change. Wagner credits McGavran and Winter as profoundly impacting his theology during this era. This era formally begins Wagner's vocation as a prolific and published author following his first publication, *Defeat of the Bird God*, in 1967.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ In the preface of the publication, Wagner states, "In a sense, this volume is the farewell note to my sixteen years of residence in Bolivia as a missionary. It has been written as a result of many lessons learned from missionary colleagues. Bolivian evangelicals, and association with others who have thought through these problems much more profoundly than the present author." Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* (1975), 11.

¹¹⁸ In discussing McGavran, Wagner states, Donald A. McGavran, now recognized as perhaps the most influential missiologist of the twentieth century, had a new vision for missionary education which led to the founding of Fuller School of World Mission in 1965. While some European universities had chairs of missiology previous to that, missiology had not been a recognized field of academic pursuit in the United States. At that time, degrees offered in missiology, schools of mission, and full-time mission professors were hard to come by. Now Fuller offers two master's degrees and three doctorates in the field, guided by a faculty of nine full-time resident professors in the different branches of missiology. (C. Peter Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave: Becoming a World Christian* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 1983], 16–17)

¹¹⁹ Winter joined Fuller Theological Seminary in 1966, where he taught missiology until 1976. Wagner calls Winter "a Presbyterian missionary to Guatemala and later a professor at the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission." Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 45.

¹²⁰ In 1971, *Christianity Today* announced Wagner's transition to Fuller: "The Reverend C. Peter Wagner, a Quaker, has been named associate professor of Latin American studies at Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission and executive director of Fuller's Evangelistic Association." "They Say," 44.

¹²¹ While reflecting on this book, Wagner states, During my 1961–1962 furlough in Princeton Seminary, I decided to cut my literary teeth on missionary biographies. This was the first book I wrote, a biography of Bill Pencille, SAIM missionary to the Ayoré Indians. Because of Joseph McCullough's influence, Herron's biography (#1) was written second, but published first. As an unknown author, it took me awhile to get a contract for this one. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 287)

Theological Mile Markers

Personal evangelism to pragmatic evangelism. McGavran “first introduced” Wagner to the “Church Growth Movement.”¹²² According to Wagner, McGavran’s Church Growth methodologies and praxes “caused a radical reconstruction” of his (i.e., Wagner’s) “entire outlook on missions and missiology.”¹²³ McGavran’s Church Growth principles sparked in Wagner “a paradigm shift toward pragmatic evangelism”—principles that are further discussed in forthcoming sections.¹²⁴

In Wagner’s 1990 revision of McGavran’s *Understanding Church Growth*, McGavran reflects on a 1966 article written by Ralph Winter, which he calls a “bombshell” to his theological reasoning:

In 1965 searching for faculty for the School of World Mission at Fuller, I asked him to write an article for the Church Growth Bulletin. His “Gimmickitis” article was published in the January 1966 issue—and is still well worth reading. In it he stresses that the central task of missions must always be the multiplication of churches. I immediately saw that Winter belonged on the faculty of a School of World Mission that intended above everything else to look at the facts of world mission in the light of Christ’s mandate to disciple *panta ta ethne*—all the classes, tribes, castes, ethnic units, and economic groupings of the world—and to devise strategies for churching them as rapidly as possible.¹²⁵

¹²² Wagner states,

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. At that time I had just come through a year-long Evangelism in Depth effort which was held in Bolivia in 1965. (C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 1987], 133)

¹²³ Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* (1975), 11.

¹²⁴ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 67.

¹²⁵ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, rev. and ed. C. Peter Wagner, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 45. Citing Ralph D. Winter, “Gimmickitis,” *Church Growth Bulletin* (January 1966): 128, Wagner states, “I used to be an expert in the gadgets and the gimmicks—the various means and types of ministries common to most missions. Recently it has become steadily clearer to me that the most important activity of all is the implanting of churches. The care, feeding and reproduction of congregations is the central activity to which all the gimmicks and means must be bent.”

In a 1985 *Global Church Growth* interview with Wagner, he states,

My first brush with church growth was in the 50s when I read Dr. Donald McGavran’s book, *Bridges of God*. It was so different to anything I’d ever studied or read on missions that I dismissed it. I thought the author was out of his mind, a quack. I put the book away and didn’t pay any more attention to it or church growth thinking.

Then roughly 10 years later, I got notice from Fuller Seminary, my alma mater, that the author of *Bridges of God* was coming to the seminary as the founding dean of a new School of World Mission.

In 2010, while reflecting on this era, Wagner states that his theological dispensation concerning evangelism changed from “passive evangelism” to “pragmatic evangelism.”

Wagner states,

My most life-changing educational experience was completing my degree in missiology under Donald McGavran at the Fuller School of World Mission in the late 1960s. He taught me to focus our attention, not on our evangelistic efforts per se, but on the measurable results that our efforts actually produce. You can find this detailed in a section called “Shifting Paradigms” in chapter 5. My book *Strategies for Church Growth* explains this concept more fully.¹²⁶

Mono-cultural theology to cross-cultural theology. Wagner also describes McGavran’s Church Growth praxes, which became known as the Homogenous Unit Principle, as a catalyst enabling his (i.e., Wagner’s) paradigm shift from mono-cultural theology to “cross-cultural theology.”¹²⁷ Wagner describes McGavran’s “radical idea” of discipleship as “people movements to Christ” rather than his (i.e., Wagner’s) previously held convictions that “salvation was a personal thing and that each individual needed to make a commitment to Christ in order to be saved.”¹²⁸

I became concerned. Why would they choose a person who I considered so far off center to start a School of World Mission?

The only way to answer these questions was to check McGavran out personally. I came to the new School of World Mission on my furlough in 1967 and studied under McGavran to see what in the world was going on.

Well, the experience revolutionized my thinking and my approach to mission. I went on to become a strong disciple and a close friend of McGavran’s. And as it turned out, he asked me to stay on as a member of the faculty. I was director of my mission in Bolivia at the time and returned in 1968, 69 and 70 as a visiting lecturer for short terms of teaching. In 1971 I made the break and joined permanently. (Global Church Growth, “We’ve Only Just Begun: An Interview with C. Peter Wagner,” *Global Church Growth* 12, no. 1 [1985]: 7)

¹²⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 269; Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth*, chap. 5.

¹²⁷ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 68.

¹²⁸ Wagner continues,

Donald McGavran, the founding dean, had become known for his advocacy of the radical idea of people movements to Christ. Previously, missionaries had agreed that salvation was a personal thing and that each individual needed to make a commitment to Christ in order to be saved, even against the social tide. However, after years of field research in India, McGavran found that the majority of Indian Christians were coming to Christ, not through individual decisions, but through group decisions, when the leaders of a particular cultural group decided that the whole group would be Christian, which it then did. (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 67–68)

Theological education to equipping the saints. Winter introduced Wagner to his educational philosophy called Theological Education by Extension (TEE), which Wagner calls a “radical innovation in ministerial training.”¹²⁹ TEE signified “a radical paradigm shift” in Wagner’s discipleship philosophy. According to Wagner, Winter developed TEE to provide localized theological education that provides formalized ministerial training to local ministerial leaders who did not have the means to attend a residential program.¹³⁰ Wagner summarizes this transformation as his shifting “from traditional theological education to equipping the saints.”¹³¹

Questioning dispensationalism. As Wagner joins the faculty at Fuller, he reevaluates his dispensational convictions. Though Wagner does not give a specific occurrence of the transformational change, he states that when he “joined the Fuller School of World Mission faculty in 1971,” he “began to notice” discussions concerning the “kingdom of God” and how “ignorant on the subject” he was. After reading George Ladd’s books on eschatology, Wagner would soon no longer affirm that the kingdom of God “was on hold.” Instead, he would later affirm that humanity is “between Jesus’s two comings” and is, therefore, “involved in a war” between the “kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God.” Concerning his Kingdom Now perspective, Wagner states, “Where God’s will is being done on earth as it is in heaven, there you will find the kingdom of God.”¹³² Though Wagner’s eschatological change to Kingdom Now theology is not complete until the 1990s, this era reveals Wagner as “harboring a few doubts as to

¹²⁹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 45.

¹³⁰ Wagner continues,

I studied TEE under Winter while I was at Fuller in 1967 and 1968, including participating with him in a high-level consultation in Colombia where missionary educators from many Latin American countries gathered together. I soon found myself going through a radical paradigm shift. Taking training out to those who needed it rather than expecting them to come to you and your school made complete sense to me. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 80–81)

¹³¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 67.

¹³² Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 97–100.

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.”¹³³

Experimentation with tongues. Wagner wrote “a series of nine monthly articles on First Corinthians in *Eternity* magazine in 1967 and 1968.”¹³⁴ Wagner “avoided making a case” that “controversial spiritual gifts such as tongues or healings or miracles or the office of apostle or the rest were not to be used today.”¹³⁵ However, a year prior, in 1966, Wagner conducted an “experiment with tongues,” and “before” he knew it, he “was praying in tongues.”¹³⁶ While reflecting on the event, Wagner states, “I 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!”¹³⁷ Wagner states that his

¹³³ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 199.

¹³⁴ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 116. The following articles were written concerning 1 Corinthians: C. Peter Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: A Ripe City and God’s Harvester,” *Eternity* (August 1967): 13–15; Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: Excommunication Is Scriptural,” *Eternity* (October 1967): 24–26; Wagner, “Those Contemporary Corinthians: How Do You Handle Church-Splitters?,” *Eternity* (September 1967): 29–31; 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.

¹³⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 116.

¹³⁶ In describing the event, Wagner states,

One morning in 1966, I was alone in my study preparing a lesson I was going to teach the next day on 1 Corinthians 14. I had taught it many times before, so this was not strange territory. For some reason, my attention was attracted, probably for the first time, to verse 18: “I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all.” So I began to meditate. Paul by then had become my biblical role model. He mentioned speaking in tongues almost in passing. He seemed to treat it as a normal thing to do, no big deal. So I said to myself, If Paul could do it, why couldn’t I?

All of this made a lot of sense to me. So I decided to do an experiment. I got down on my knees and before I knew it I was praying in tongues. It was real easy. I didn’t understand a thing, but I knew that I wasn’t supposed to understand it. There were no bright lights or rushing mighty winds. I wondered how long it would last, and it lasted a long time. In fact, I eventually thought it was lasting too long, so I just decided to quit. I probably could have gone on forever if I’d chosen to. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 116)

¹³⁷ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 117. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 147.

experimentation with tongues resulted from observed growth with other missionary institutions that exceeded his expectations, which affirmed the cessation of charismata.¹³⁸

Unconvinced cessationist. During this era, Wagner called himself “a convinced cessationist.”¹³⁹ Wagner states that in the late 1960s,¹⁴⁰ after receiving prayer for a cyst by “Methodist missionary to India, E. Stanley Jones,” his (i.e., Wagner’s) wound was “completely healed.”¹⁴¹ For Wagner, “the preaching, coming from a

¹³⁸ Wagner states that his experimentation with tongues was a result of observed growth with other missionary institutions. He states,

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.

Wagner continues,

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?

Well, I was all alone that day. No one could see me or hear what I might be saying, so I decided to go for it. 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)

This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 147.

¹³⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 118.

¹⁴⁰ Wagner’s writings do not indicate a specific year when this meeting occurred. Many of his references to this event place the meeting as having occurred in the “mid-1960s.” In *The Third Wave of the Spirit* (1988), Wagner places this as having occurred “about the same time” that he began to study under Donald McGavran. For this reason, this research has placed this event after 1965. For more information, see Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 22; Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 118–19; Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 43–45.

¹⁴¹ Wagner summarizes his experience with Jones, “in the later sixties.” He continues,

I had an unforgettable experience. I attended a meeting to hear E. Stanley Jones, the famous Methodist missionary to India. It turned out to be an old-fashioned healing service, and I was miraculously healed of a runny sore on my neck which was scheduled for surgery the following week. For the first time, a crack began to appear in my previous theories.

About the same time, I began studying church growth under my mentor, Donald McGavran. He taught me to be relentless about discovering where churches were growing vigorously and why God was blessing them. No sooner did I develop “church growth eyes” than I began to be aware of the tremendous surge in the Pentecostal movement in Latin America, especially in Chile. So I traveled there from time to time and looked in on the Pentecostals. (Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 22–23)

Researcher’s note: In *Becoming a Prayer Warrior* (2003), Jones is credited as having said, “We align ourselves with the purpose and power of God, and He is able to do things through us that He could not do otherwise.” Elizabeth Alves and C. Peter Wagner, *Becoming a Prayer Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2003), sec. “The Kingdom Partnership of Prayer,” para. 2.

Methodist, 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.”¹⁴² Before Wagner perceived that he had been healed, he was cautious of Jones. Wagner states that he had been taught in seminary that Jones “was a liberal”; therefore, “he wanted no association with him.”¹⁴³ Wagner lowered his reservations once he heard that Jones “couldn’t be a liberal” because he had “preached a gospel message, given an invitation and prayed for people to be saved.” Wagner attended the prayer meeting after his “curiosity” had been “aroused.”¹⁴⁴ After this experience, Wagner’s paradigm concerning his affirmations of cessationism “began to shift a little more!”¹⁴⁵

Intercessory prayer. In 1971, concerning prayer, Wagner states that “the power of God will not be released except through prayerful intercession. The planting of new churches should be a collective prayer burden of the whole congregation. As the congregation unites in prayer, God will move the team out with spiritual power not otherwise available.”¹⁴⁶

Theological Dispositions

The omnipotence of God. Wagner emphasized the omnipotence of God more than any of the classical attributes of God. Though Wagner did not explicitly define omnipotence during the McCullough era, he emphasized the generalized thematic notion that God is sovereign over creation. Wagner’s 1970 publication *Latin American Theology: Radical or Evangelical?* contains the most explicit attention to the

¹⁴² Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 119.

¹⁴³ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 43.

¹⁴⁴ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 43.

¹⁴⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 119; C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Signs & Wonders Today: New Expanded Edition with Study Questions and Applications* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987), 42–43.

¹⁴⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 1st ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 193.

omnipotence of God.¹⁴⁷ Concerning “the Christian doctrine of the sovereignty of God,” Wagner states, “God is Creator and Lord of the world.”¹⁴⁸ Continuing his assertion of God’s omnipotence, Wagner reveals the synergistic nature of two of classic theism’s attributes—omnipotence and omniscience:

While God is omnipotent and omniscient, He has allowed Satan to become in some sense “the god of this age” and “the prince of the power of the air.” If God has determined that today’s world be a garden of justice and peace, but if it has not been so ever since the fall of Adam, His very omnipotence is called into question. If it is answered that God intends an earthly utopia, but only to the extent that it can be realized through the church, two observations can be made. First, we look in vain for this teaching in the New Testament. Nowhere is the church commanded to change society in such a specific way; but she is commanded to make disciples, reconcile men and women to Jesus Christ, and baptize those who accept the Son of God into the church.¹⁴⁹

Wagner’s theological convictions concerning God’s sovereign design of creation and Satan’s rule are further explored in forthcoming sections.

In 1967, Wagner published “The Thieves of Missions,” warning the evangelical community of the perceived dangers of a “new theology” of missions.¹⁵⁰ In the article, Wagner provides his affirmation of classic theology: “No one (except perhaps the Christian atheist) denies that God is the Creator of the world and that He is sovereign over His creation. The problem arises when we go on from there to define God’s actual

¹⁴⁷ *Latin American Theology* (1969 Spanish; 1970 English) represents the beginning of the theological mile-marker along Wagner’s journey to kingdom theology. According to Wagner, this journey culminates in his 2008 publication *Dominion! Latin American Theology* emphasized that the “primary mission under God was evangelism and church planting, while our social involvement should be relegated to a secondary, or inferior, undertaking.” Wagner then “apologized” for once holding to the position stated in his 1970 publication while promoting *Dominion!* (i.e., Kingdom Now) theology. Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 88.

¹⁴⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *Latin American Theology: Radical or Evangelical?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 31.

¹⁴⁹ Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 32–33.

¹⁵⁰ C. Peter Wagner, “Thieves of Mission,” *World Vision* (April 1967): 18–19, 24. Wagner republished the April 1967 *World Vision* article “Thieves of Missions” in the May edition of *World Vision* as well and the November–December 1967 edition of *Evangelical Presbyterian*. The “new theology” of missions, which Wagner described, was discussed at length in Carl F. H. Henry’s 1967 work “Frontiers of Modern Theology.”

lordship in the world of today in relation to the power of Satan.”¹⁵¹ In defining how a Christian should interact with the lordship of God, Wagner continues by stating, “Rather than to look for God in the world, the Christian is commanded to overcome the world, die to the things of the world, but at the same time preach the gospel so as to rescue individuals from the sphere.” Though the doctrine of salvation is outside the scope of this work, the discussion of Wagner’s interpretation of salvation provides evidence of the divine will of God. As Satan’s power is the operative power of the world, Wagner states, “The Bible teaches that missionaries, like Jesus, should go into the world not to become part of it but to win others out of it.” For Wagner, the power of Satan resulted from the fall of man; Wagner states,

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. Evangelical missionaries believe that they are bearers of this message of redemption, and that although it is available in potential for all mankind, practically speaking it is applied only to those who respond to the message.¹⁵²

Less explicit assertions concerning the omnipotence of God are present in other writings throughout the McCullough era. Wagner thematically wrote of God’s omnipotence in *Condor of the Jungle* (1966). Though the work was not a theological treatise, Wagner interlaces thematic references to his belief in God’s sovereignty in his biographical narrative of Wally Herron.¹⁵³ In describing the work, Wagner states that “the Lord can take a life placed at His disposal and bring forth results far beyond human understanding and expectation.”¹⁵⁴ Elsewhere in *Condor of the Jungle*, Wagner

¹⁵¹ Wagner, “Thieves of Mission,” 19.

¹⁵² Wagner, “Thieves of Mission,” 19.

¹⁵³ Wagner co-authored the 1966 biography to commemorate the life of missionary Wally Herron. According to Wagner, “Joe McCullough suggested that I undertake the task of writing his biography. I agreed provided he would be a coauthor, since his name was widely known and mine was not.” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 74.

¹⁵⁴ C. Peter Wagner and Joseph S. McCullough, *The Condor of the Jungle: Pioneer Pilot of the Andes* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1966), 6.

retrospectively recalls a situation in which God “permitted” a flood that would have caused catastrophic casualties if Wagner’s plans had been fulfilled; “God’s ways are above our ways.”¹⁵⁵ Wagner concludes *Condor of the Jungle* with the following assertion of God’s sovereignty:

God’s message through Wally, *Thou Knowest*, was true, and God in His divine plan and providence had called Wally, still at the controls, to higher service. All of this was in the divine will and no mistake had been made. Wally had finished his earthly course—triumphantly. There was laid up for him a crown of righteousness. Peace and quietness reigned in the lives of his co-laborers who would carry on. They could say, . . . *the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job 1:21).¹⁵⁶

Wagner continues acknowledging God’s omnipotence in his 1967 publication *Defeat of the Bird God*.¹⁵⁷ Wagner states, “Being omnipotent, He could have found some quick and efficient means of breaking her power [the Spiritual deity of Ayoré Indians] of over these, her dupes. But God works through a man with a message.”¹⁵⁸ Elsewhere in *Defeat of the Bird God*, Wagner affirms that God sovereignly orchestrated the happenings of missionaries; Wagner states that “the plan of God” meant that God closed “the door to Brazil and Peru only to open wide” the “door in Bolivia.”¹⁵⁹ In such context, Wagner acknowledges God’s sovereign orchestration of events of creation and the lives of people.

¹⁵⁵ Wagner and McCullough, *The Condor of the Jungle*, 136.

¹⁵⁶ Wagner and McCullough, *The Condor of the Jungle*, 156–57.

¹⁵⁷ According to Wagner,

I had never written a book, but I had the desire to do so. When I was doing my ThM in Princeton during furlough, I believe the Lord told me to cut my first book-writing teeth on missionary biographies. I remember discussing this with one of my professors who encouraged me. The person who first came to mind was one of my missionary heroes, Bill Pencille, who had been called to reach the savage Ayoré Indians. The Ayorés are the ones who had murdered the five New Tribes missionaries in 1943, about 13 years before Doris and I arrived in the jungle on our first term. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 73)

¹⁵⁸ Wagner wrote *Defeat of the Bird God* as a biography of Bill Pencille, SAIM missionary to the Ayoré Indians. The context of the quote is in relation to God’s accomplishing his divine purposes by the spreading of the gospel through missionaries. C. Peter Wagner, *Defeat of the Bird God: The Story of Missionary Bill Pencille, “Apostle to the Ayorés” of Bolivia* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 21.

¹⁵⁹ Wagner, *Defeat of the Bird God*, 47.

Knowledge of God. While reflecting on his foundational paradigm shift under McGavran, Wagner states that he “previously thought” understanding the dynamics of church growth “was something mysterious that could not be humanly determined. Only God knew, or so I thought, why one church would grow and another wouldn’t.”¹⁶⁰

Epistemology. Wagner employs epistemological priorities of divine knowledge, which stand in contrast to 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. But when the believer does recognize that “we give expression to divine wisdom in the form of a mystery” (1 Corinthians 2:7) and that God’s revelation is prior to all human wisdom, he thereby confesses his own finitude, and acquires a measure of intellectual humility.¹⁶¹

Wagner continues by stating that “once the believer submits to the authority of divine revelation, the Holy Spirit takes it upon Himself to provide the illumination necessary to understand it.”¹⁶² Wagner then employs epistemological priorities of human knowledge with Christian growth:

One thing that could and did stand in the way of the communication of knowledge by the Holy Spirit was carnality. While it might be expected that 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, Paul explains to the Corinthians that 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

¹⁶⁰ Wagner states,

McGavran had developed a whole new paradigm. This attracted me. He was the first person I had ever met in all my ministry and training who really had an understanding of the dynamics of the church-why some churches grew and others did not. I previously thought this was something mysterious that could not be humanly determined. Only God knew, or so I thought, why one church would grow and another wouldn’t. But McGavran dispelled the fog and allowed me to understand that there are good reasons for growth and non-growth. This new awareness turned me into a believer. It wasn’t that I hadn’t previously committed my life to fulfill the Great Commission. I had. But I was trying to do it with one hand tied behind my back. For all those years as a missionary I had no idea that someone-Donald McGavran-had developed both theoretical and practical instruments for fulfilling the Great Com-mission far more efficiently. (Global Church Growth, “We’ve Only Just Begun,” 7)

¹⁶¹ 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.

¹⁶² Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 45.

he will not find the *sophia* of the Holy Spirit that he could have if he were a spiritual Christian. Spirituality would have given the Corinthians both *sophia* and also the solution to their problem of divisions. This *sophia* comes not through further academic training or even through more doctrinal teaching, but rather through deeper sanctification, a closer walk with Jesus Christ.

Wagner does not provide the means through which a “carnal” Christian will grow in “deeper sanctification.”

Biblical-theological system. This section provides a thematic categorization of Wagner’s convictions and provides a means of observing his convictional change regarding God’s interaction with humanity. Wagner acknowledged the sovereignty of God over his creation (i.e., God’s omniscience and omnipotence) while also affirming that God has allowed Satan to rule as the “god of this age.”¹⁶³ According to Wagner, because Satan ruled this age, which “can be considered the kingdom of the devil,” he offered “it all to Christ at His temptation.” In contrast, Wagner affirmed that the “Kingdom of God” was an eschatological “event.” The bifurcated kingdoms led Wagner to hold to an affirmation of a temporal dualism between the “kingdom of God” and the “kingdom of the devil”:

This distinction between the two kingdoms is extremely important in today’s tension with secular theology, since it is one of the Biblical teachings that has been quite generally de-emphasized by those of the radical left. While some evangelical dispensationalists might not be in total agreement with the above reasoning, all evangelicals recognize the power of Satan in the world today, and the essential conflict between the church and the world. There is no need to deny that this describes a dualism. Naturally it is not an eternal, metaphysical dualism in the Greek sense, since God is and always has been sovereign. But in the mysterious plan of God for this world, He obviously permits a temporal dualism, and desires that His children be involved in some way in “this present evil age.”¹⁶⁴

Wagner states that “two collective human factions” comprise humanity: “the children of God” and “the children of the devil.”¹⁶⁵ The church is comprised of the “people who have

¹⁶³ Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 104.

¹⁶⁴ Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 104. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 148.

¹⁶⁵ Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 103.

been reconciled to God through Christ and have placed themselves under His lordship.” Conversely, those under the rule of Satan are “those who have not been born the second time into Christ” and “cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”

According to Wagner, God has an overarching mandate in which he wills that “all” people “be reconciled to Himself through Jesus and be baptized into the Church.”¹⁶⁶ Wagner held that God alone ushers in his kingdom. So emphatic was Wagner’s belief that he called the “utopian hope of ushering in the Kingdom of God by man’s efforts” a “radical departure from biblical truth.”¹⁶⁷ In *Latin American Theology*, Wagner states,

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 His second coming (*parousia*). 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.¹⁶⁸

After Wagner affirms open theism, he will later affirm that the church is to transform society, which becomes the manifestation of dominion theology and the “7 Mountain Mandate.”¹⁶⁹

Function of prayer. In *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, concerning prayer, Wagner states, “The power of God will not be released except through faithful intercession. The planting of new churches should be an individual and collective prayer burden of the whole congregation. As the congregation unites in prayer, God will move

¹⁶⁶ Wagner, *The Protestant Movement in Bolivia*, 215.

¹⁶⁷ C. Peter Wagner, “Evangelism and Social Action in Latin America,” *Christianity Today* 10, no. 7 (1966): 10. As a researcher’s note, I believe that this is Wagner’s public introduction to the metaphysical foundation that enables him to articulate an open theistic paradigm in the years to come. Though Wagner reflected upon his early years at Fuller, where he stated his frustrations toward the classic doctrine of God, he did not articulate these frustrations in writing until many years later.

¹⁶⁸ Wagner, *Latin American Theology*, 35.

¹⁶⁹ C. Peter Wagner, “Stewarding for Reformation,” in *Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate*, by Bill Johnson and Lance Wallnau (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2013), sec. “Stewarding for Reformation,” para. 1, Logos Bible Software.

the team out with spiritual power not otherwise available.”¹⁷⁰ In a 1970 article, Wagner states that Satan will challenge ministry opportunities; however, if Christians “take advantage of the power of the Holy Spirit,” then ministry efforts will not be defeated.¹⁷¹

Phenomenological theology. While reflecting on his return to Bolivia following his attainment of a degree in missiology, Wagner states,

The beginning of my paradigm shift came when I studied church growth under Donald McGavran at the School of World Mission. He taught us 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?¹⁷²

Wagner continues, “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!”¹⁷³

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

Though evangelism is a frequent topic for Wagner during the McCullough era, he did not greatly articulate his means of discipleship. Most references to discipleship

¹⁷⁰ Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* (1975), 193.

¹⁷¹ C. Peter Wagner, “A Mission Executive Speaks Out,” *Church Growth Bulletin* 7, no. 2 (1970): 103.

¹⁷² Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 81.

¹⁷³ Wagner continues,

Since my personal relationships with the Bolivian Pentecostal leaders was not the best, 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. I returned to Bolivia, made friends with the Pentecostal leaders, and we moved on from there. 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)

pertain to his discussion of the Great Commission. In *An Extension Seminary Primer* (1971), Wagner and Ralph R. Covell state,

The church has a relationship to the triune God. It has a responsibility to all the family members within its own fellowship. The church has a mission to the world that is best epitomized by the words of Jesus Christ, when he said, “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 lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age,” (Matthew 28:19–20). Jesus Christ sent his disciples out to proclaim the gospel, to make disciples of men and women, and then to teach them and to train them to live in the world and to serve him within this world.¹⁷⁴

For Wagner, the training of disciples necessitates the recognition of spiritual gifts.

Wagner employs 1 Corinthians 12:1 as the primary proof-text of his discipleship philosophy. He states, “Ignorance of spiritual gifts is a dangerous sin of omission for anyone involved in theological education. It is surprising, however, to learn how many Christians who have given their lives to training the ministry hold very superficial views on spiritual gifts.”¹⁷⁵ Spiritual gifts, according to Wagner, are “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.”¹⁷⁶ Discipleship is the effective use of one’s spiritual gifts. Wagner states, “Spiritual fruit is a *sine qua non* for an effective use of spiritual gifts.”¹⁷⁷ For Wagner, the ultimate purpose of discipleship is for believers to mature in their knowledge of their gifts so that they may know the “will of God” and be effective members of a church body. Wagner states,

Romans 12 tells us to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God. In order to do this, we must be “transformed” and “prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1–2). We must not make the mistake of isolating these verses from the total context of spiritual gifts in Romans 12, because one will

¹⁷⁴ Ralph R. Covell and C. Peter Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1971), 20.

¹⁷⁵ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 25.

¹⁷⁶ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 26.

¹⁷⁷ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 26.

only know the will of God for his life in a full way if he understands what spiritual gifts he has and what he is expected to do with them.¹⁷⁸

Spiritual maturity is the development of one's spiritual gifts. Wagner states, "Possessing a spiritual gift and recognizing it is only the first step. From there on, a Christian is responsible for developing it." Wagner employs Paul's instruction to Timothy to "stir up the gift of God which is in thee" (2 Tim 1:6).¹⁷⁹ In Wagner's 1971 publication *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, he states that "mature Christian[s]" should have "discovered" their spiritual gifts. He continues,

Every member of the body of Christ has at least one gift, and many have more than one. God would not leave you in the dark about spiritual gifts (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. He will not judge for more than you have, but whether it is one, two, or five talents, you are expected to gain a proportionate return during this life on earth. If you do, God will say "Well done, good and faithful servant."¹⁸⁰

Wagner concludes that "if a church does not possess and use spiritual gifts, it is sure to wither and die."¹⁸¹ Wagner postulates that the "charismatic movement" is successful because it emphasizes "a deep hunger for more teaching concerning spiritual gifts."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Wagner continues and provides a musing concerning the effectiveness of his evangelistic efforts:

Perhaps all do not have as prolonged an experience as I had in this process. During my entire first term as a missionary, for example, I was disturbed and frustrated because I did not see substantial results from my evangelistic efforts, public or personal. I wanted to be another Billy Graham, I did not discount the possibility of a spiritual obstacle, but after much prayer and heart searching I could not discover one. Finally God brought me to the realization that I did not have the gift of an evangelist, and it was like a great burden being lifted off my back. I now know that God is not going to hold me responsible for the gift of evangelist at the judgment day because he didn't give it to me in the first place. (Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 28)

¹⁷⁹ Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 29.

¹⁸⁰ Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 92–93.

¹⁸¹ Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 89.

¹⁸² Covell and Wagner, *An Extension Seminary Primer*, 26. Though Wagner would not publicly affirm his association with the charismatic movement until a few years later, he notes in *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World* (1971), he has "not been able to find adequate Biblical or historical evidence which would warrant" the conclusion 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 that they were not intended to continue after this." Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 87. Wagner, in 1971, did not affirm a contemporary second baptism of the Spirit. In *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, he states, "The spiritual baptism received by those who participated in the Pentecostal event was unique and does not need to be repeated in our lives today" (100). He does, however, affirm the spiritual gift of tongues for use

Wagner's paradigm of "making disciples" is through "establishing new churches." For Wagner, the means of spiritual growth is not through "more doctrinal teaching, but rather through deeper sanctification, a closer walk with Jesus Christ," which is evident through the employment of spiritual gifts.¹⁸³

Wagner seemingly speaks against the appropriation of the gospel to accommodate a message that will be more receptive among the lost. Wagner states,

The Corinthians thought they could toy around with a compromise with the world and through it be more useful to Christ. It didn't work then and it won't work now. The world does not respect the church more because she identifies herself more with the world. There is nothing like a clean-cut stand for Christ and a separated life. A fad has developed in some circles called "making the church relevant." This futile attempt to make salvation more palatable to sinners is as old as the Corinthians.¹⁸⁴

Wagner continues by citing Harold Lindsell: "Ultimately the Gospel is relevant to the true needs of men and for us to try to debase the good coinage of the Gospel by vitiating it so that we can make it more attractive to men is to lose the Gospel and to make it irrelevant."¹⁸⁵ The purpose of Christian maturity is for churches to "to change the world." Wagner concludes by stating, "Woe to the church which allows the world to dominate her and ultimately make her over in its image!"

in a Christian's private life and the corporate life of the church. Concerning the private use, he states, "Tongues are good for a personal spiritual experience with the Lord privately." He continues, "The personal testimony of many who have the gift of tongues is that through it they have enjoyed a fellowship with God more intimate than they had ever known before" (102). Concerning the corporate use of tongues, Wagner states, "Tongues should be used in public only when an interpreter is present." He continues, "Those who lead public meetings should be strict in not permitting a message in tongues if it is not to be interpreted for the edification of the whole group."

¹⁸³ Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 45.

¹⁸⁴ Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 122.

¹⁸⁵ Wagner, *A Turned-on Church in an Uptight World*, 122; Harold Lindsell, "Evangelicalism and the Next Ten Years," *National Association of Evangelicals*, 1969, 7.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 3. 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

Return of the Intercessor: A Church Growth Era (1972–1981)

Contextual Background

Wagner describes 1971 to 1982 as the “McGavran Era”; however, this section segments the era from 1972 to 1981.¹⁸⁶ Wagner’s theological convictions become evident to readers of his work as he began a prolific era of publishing articles and books. After Wagner’s nearly two-decade career as a missionary in Latin America, he began his academic career with a perceived critical disposition toward the liberation theological system of Latin America, “which was focused on social justice, leaving little or no room for the evangelical passion of saving souls and multiplying churches.”¹⁸⁷ Wagner’s passion for evangelism became the emphasis for the remainder of the decade as Wagner partnered with Donald McGavran in what became known as the Church Growth movement. Wagner “contextualized” McGavran’s church growth principles for the “American religious culture” after receiving a message from God.¹⁸⁸ Though the Church Growth movement becomes Wagner’s significant contribution to modern evangelicalism and is emphasized in Wagner’s writings during the remaining decade, this research merely interacts with the theological convictions of the movement, thereby allowing existing scholarship to interact with the movement in a more substantial manner.¹⁸⁹ In 1977, Wagner would earn a PhD in social ethics from the University of Southern

¹⁸⁶ The following chapter will employ 1972 as the beginning of the Fuller professorship era to allow for a segmentation of eras. Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 79.

¹⁸⁷ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 87.

¹⁸⁸ Wagner states,

When I returned to America after 16 years in Bolivia, I suddenly felt somewhat like a cross-cultural missionary to America. I had taught church growth in Bolivia, and I asked McGavran if he believed that church growth principles would also work in America. His response carried undisguised irritation. “Of course!” he replied. “They will work anywhere. But as far as applying them to a missionary sending nation like America, someone else will have to do it! I have no interest!” I did not say anything at the moment, but I believe the Lord spoke to me inwardly and said, “You will be that ‘someone else.’” (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 90)

¹⁸⁹ Analysis of the Church Growth movement and the Homogenous Unit Principle are outside the scope of this research.

California. His dissertation, “The Ethical Implications of the Homogeneous Unit Principle of Church Growth,” would be published as *Our Kind of People* the following year.¹⁹⁰ While reflecting on this era, Wagner credits the 1970s as the beginning movement of God to instill the new apostolic era; Wagner states that “the gift and office of intercessor began to be recognized by the Body of Christ” during the 1970s.¹⁹¹ In a foreword to Cindi Jacobs’s 1994 publication *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy: A Training Manual for Militant Intercession*, Wagner states,

We now find ourselves well into the greatest prayer movement at least in living memory and possibly for centuries. It began, so far as I can read history, around 1970. Since then, prayer movements, prayer ministries, prayer leaders, prayer for cities, prayer conferences, local church prayer programs and books on prayer have been multiplying at an increasing rate. There is a growing quantity and intensity of prayer across regional and denominational lines that has amazed some Christian leaders.¹⁹²

Theological Mile Markers

Church growth strategy and pragmatism. Wagner describes this paradigm shift as employing “sociology to spiritual things” and pragmatism to achieve strategic growth goals for missions.¹⁹³ While reflecting on this era, Wagner states,

One of Donald McGavran’s most notable breakthroughs in missiological theory was that production should be accurately measured. I recall him lamenting that book after book about missions carries not even a hint of what might have helped or hindered the growth of churches. The premise in such books is usually that the missionaries, no matter what, have been faithful to God, and 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

¹⁹⁰ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 290; C. Peter Wagner, *Our Kind of People: The Ethical Dimensions of Church Growth in America* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979).

¹⁹¹ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 12.

¹⁹² C. Peter Wagner, foreword to *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy: A Training Manual for Militant Intercession*, by Cindi Jacobs (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 11–12.

¹⁹³ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 103.

producing desired results, stop making excuses and discard the ineffective methods. Substitute methods that will work! Now!”¹⁹⁴

Homogenous Unit Principle. In Wagner’s published dissertation on the Homogenous Unit Principle, he states that the “ethical justification for homogeneous churches exists in social-psychological, theological, and biblical sources.”¹⁹⁵ Wagner, cites Paul’s example as demonstrating that the body of Christ is made up of interconnected congregations of “homogenous units.”¹⁹⁶ Wagner’s transition to homogenous units over personal evangelism and discipleship provides him with a greater means of transforming society. Wagner states,

It is important to understand the social psychology of conversion in a group with high people-consciousness or group identity. In such groups, individual action is frequently regarded as social treachery, and no individual is permitted to think independently of the group. A group decision, which is more than merely the sum of many individual decisions, is required in all important matters. During the decision-making process, each individual, according to his or her status, contributes to the final decision, but no one acts until the group as a whole is ready to act. When the decision is finalized, a new thing has happened, not to a person here and there, but to an entire people.¹⁹⁷

Concerning 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.¹⁹⁸

Though the Homogenous Unit Principle warrants further discussion and interaction with existing research, the noteworthy emphasis for this dissertation is Wagner’s shift from individual discipleship to a cultural discipleship paradigm.

¹⁹⁴ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 104.

¹⁹⁵ Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 2.

¹⁹⁶ C. Peter Wagner, “Pastor, You’re the Key to Church Growth,” *Dedication* 10, no. 6 (1978): 25.

¹⁹⁷ Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 21.

¹⁹⁸ Wagner, *Our Kind of People*, 18.

Gift of prophecy. In his 1988 publication *The Third Wave of the Spirit*, Wagner reflects on how his understanding of prophecy began to change from his previously taught and held convictions that prophecy had ceased. Wagner states, “Sometime during those next sixteen years in Bolivia my understanding of prophecy began to change. Some people I respected believed that God had not said all he wanted to say in the first century, but that he was still communicating directly with believers in the twentieth century.”¹⁹⁹ Wagner wrote *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming* as a reflection of his transition.²⁰⁰ While continuing to reflect on his transition, Wagner states,

In the later seventies I wrote *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Regal Books). When I began the project, I put myself on the spot by resolving that I would write a succinct definition for each of the twenty-seven gifts I had identified. No other author I know of had previously done that. The definitions were relatively easy for many of the gifts, but prophecy was not one of those. I clearly recall the struggle I had to go through to admit to myself that I no longer held that prophecy was preaching and nothing else.²⁰¹

In Wagner’s 1979 publication *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, he defines prophecy as “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.”²⁰²

Theological Dispositions

Knowledge of God. Wagner writes in his 1973 article “What in the World Is God Doing?”

¹⁹⁹ Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 106.

²⁰⁰ Wagner states,

One of the most important paradigm shifts that I experienced during my career was recognizing that God was indeed at work among the Pentecostals and charismatics. Previously, I had been anti-Pentecostal along with the majority of my fellow evangelical missionaries. When I discovered that the growth of Pentecostal churches far exceeded ours, I began to research the movement and develop relationships with their leaders. I wrote this book to help fellow evangelicals consider the same paradigm shift, and many did. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 289)

²⁰¹ Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 107.

²⁰² Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 106; Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1979), 228.

that

it comes no shock to God when man discovers His wonders. Nor is He surprised that the twentieth-century space conqueror cannot create a lasting peace or satisfy his inner emptiness. These goals elude the scientific approach. But God looks beyond man's technology. He probes past the varied hues of His rainbow race. He sees the heart. He knows each person, deep inside, is sinful and desperately wicked.²⁰³

For Wagner, the knowledge God holds of human affairs and the human heart correlate with the will of God. Wagner's 1970 publication *Latin American Theology: Radical or Evangelical?* introduces his biblical-theological metanarrative concerning the omnipotence of God and God's power over creation; however, Wagner does not emphasize the divine volition of God.

This section returns to Wagner's theological convictions concerning God's sovereign design of creation and Satan's power as Wagner broadens further develops his biblical-theological metanarrative concerning the will of God throughout the Church Growth era of the 1970s. Wagner's convictions concerning the nature of the bifurcation of God's decretive and preceptive wills become the thematic framework that shapes his theology throughout the remainder of his life.²⁰⁴

The divine will of God. Wagner summarizes God's divine will, stating that "some things God does by himself; some things He does using human beings."²⁰⁵ Though Wagner affirms that "God is the Lord of the universe" and "controls every aspect of the life of men and societies and nations," Wagner states that God "urges mankind to do the

²⁰³ C. Peter Wagner, "What in the World Is God Doing?," *Moody Monthly* (July–August 1973): 65.

²⁰⁴ Carl F. H. Henry defines the decretive will of God as God's secret will and the preceptive will of God as what God commands. Henry continues, stating that the "decretive will is what God does and preceptive will is what man does. The secret will is partially disclosed to man but only partially so. Acts of God's secret will are creation, redemption, election, consummation—partially revealed but we cannot predict or know entirely the matter of election, for instance." Henry, "Notes on the Doctrine of God: Systematic Theology," sec. "The Will of God."

²⁰⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On* (Glendale, CA: Regal, 1974), 86.

best he can in living the most human life possible.” Wagner continues, “God desires that the lot of mankind be improved.”²⁰⁶

God continues to punish sin, just as he did in the garden of Eden; those who do not “confess the Lord Jesus” and “believe in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead” are “headed for hell.” Though it is the will of God to punish humanity for sin, it is “God’s desire” that not “one person” perishes.²⁰⁷ For Wagner, the salvation of all humanity is God’s overarching will and desire. God requires humanity, through his design, to implement this will on earth:

There is no question as to God’s desire, but how does He carry out His purpose? If He wanted to. He could appear face to face with every one of the billions of people in the fourth world, speak to him in his own language, and tell him that Christ died for his sins and that He wants to save him. If God would do this, fine, there would be no need for missions. Why He doesn’t do it this way, all the theologians in Christendom don’t know. All we know is that He has decided to do it in another way. He has decided to use Christian people to do it.²⁰⁸

Wagner’s concentration on human action in carrying out the will of God influences his understanding of human responsibility in relation to God’s divine will. In his 1973 publication *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming*, Wagner states, “God delights to use Christian men and women to accomplish His purpose in the world.”²⁰⁹

In Wagner’s 1974 article “Some Theological Implications of the Call to Moratorium,” he contrasts three perspectives concerning the sovereignty of God:

Christians are naturally drawn to one side or the other. One side, which we might refer to as “cold-hearted Calvinism,” says that God is a sovereign God, and nothing we can do can make any difference as to God’s action in the world, so we simply depend on what God does. The other side, we have what might be called a “sentimentalized universalism,” the idea that no matter what we do or how hard we try, we can never reach everybody, and that God somehow will take care of them

²⁰⁶ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 18.

²⁰⁷ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 21.

²⁰⁸ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 21.

²⁰⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1973), 40.

and get them to heaven in spite of our failure to reach them. Neither extreme is biblically realistic. I believe that there is a middle line.²¹⁰

For Wagner, this “middle line” postulates that

1) People who are without Jesus Christ are alienated from God and from complete human fulfillment, and 2) The sovereign God has chosen Christian men and women as his agents to bring about redemption. Putting these two premises together gives us a view of missions that stresses heavily both God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. As I see it, the issue really boils down to this: if Christian men and women do not respond to the call and are not faithful, evangelism simply will not get done, and people will be eternally lost as a result.²¹¹

In *Your Spiritual Gift Can Help Your Church Grow* (1979), Wagner establishes bifurcated wills of God, citing Romans 12:1–6. Wagner states, “Now I will be the first to admit that there are many mature, faithful and useful Christian people who are doing God’s will without being able to describe in clear terms what their specific gift is.”

Wagner continues,

Many are in fact using their spiritual gifts without being able to articulate what they are doing. Nevertheless, I sincerely believe that such brethren are operating under God’s “Plan B.” I think that Romans 12:1–6 is clear enough to teach us that God’s “Plan A” is for members of the Body of Christ to be very conscious of the part each one plays in the “whole body fitly joined together” (Eph. 4:16). “Plan B” is functional. But “Plan A” is probably God’s best.²¹²

Divine partnership through human cooperation. Wagner accompanies the biblical-theological metanarrative with God’s having instituted two mandates for humanity: (1) the cultural mandate and (2) the evangelistic mandate. These two mandates undergird Wagner’s theology for the remainder of his life. Beginning in the 1980s, Wagner places greater emphasis on the cultural mandate; however, during the 1970s, Wagner stresses the evangelistic mandate through the Church Growth moment. These mandates are foundational to Wagner’s comprehension of the volition of God. To

²¹⁰ “C. Peter Wagner, “Some Theological Implications of the Call to Moratorium: A Panel - C. Peter Wagner, Sr. Virginia Fabella, Gerald H. Anderson,” *Future of the Missionary Enterprise*, no. 9 (1974): 63.

²¹¹ Wagner, “Some Theological Implications of the Call to Moratorium,” 63.

²¹² Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, 47.

understand Wagner's theological convictions, one must discern how the implications of his theology subsequently help define his understanding of the will of God.

Wagner defines the "cultural mandate" as God's "encouragement of partial solutions" to "man's social and material problems" caused by sin.²¹³ In describing this mandate, Wagner states, "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."²¹⁴ Wagner stresses that the cultural mandate is "penultimate, not ultimate." The "ultimate" mandate is the evangelistic mandate. The cultural mandate is a "stopgap" and subordinate to the evangelistic mandate.

Wagner aligns the preceptive will of God with the "cultural mandate." Wagner defines the "evangelistic mandate" as the responsibility of humanity to assist God in saving "many of those people lost" in the world by preaching "to them the gospel of Jesus Christ." For Wagner, God will only save people "through men and women."²¹⁵ Moreover, "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)."²¹⁶

The responsibility for humanity to partner with God to fulfill his will on earth is paramount for Wagner. God seemingly cannot accomplish the salvation of humanity without the aid of humans. The conviction of the immense responsibility of humans leads Wagner to believe the following:

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.

²¹³ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 18.

²¹⁴ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 26.

²¹⁵ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 22.

²¹⁶ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 26.

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.²¹⁷

Wagner bases his understanding of the evangelistic mandate on the command Jesus gave to his disciples; Jesus said he would “give them the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19).”²¹⁸ Wagner continues, “If we do not unlock the doors of the kingdom here on earth, they will not be unlocked in heaven either. In other words, there is somehow a theological relationship between the faithfulness of Christians and the eternal destiny of peoples.”²¹⁹

Wagner continues to emphasize the evangelistic mandate and its association with God's divine will throughout the decade. Wagner's evangelistic narrative drives his emphasis on pragmatism as he promotes church growth strategies. Wagner asserts that God “sovereignly” makes fertile the soil of people who are “receptive” to the gospel through his providence.²²⁰ Therefore, “man's chief responsibility in evangelistic work is to discern the hand of God in preparing soil or ripening harvests and to move in, under the power of the Holy Spirit, to sow the seed and gather the sheaves.”²²¹ Wagner continues the narrative in *Stop the World, I Want to Get On* (1974):

Some things God does by Himself; some things He does by using human beings. It seems, for example, that the difference between fertile and barren soil is basically a

²¹⁷ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 26.

²¹⁸ C. Peter Wagner, “Christian Missions: Dawn or Dusk?,” *Theology, News and Notes* 16, no. 2 (June 1972): 3.

²¹⁹ Wagner continues,

When Christ told his disciples that in order to build his church he would give them the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matt 19:19), he entrusted them, and us, with an awesome responsibility. If we do not unlock the doors of the kingdom here on earth, they will not be unlocked in heaven either. In other words, there is somehow a theological relationship between the faithfulness of Christians and the eternal destiny of peoples. Peter used the keys in helping to open the doors of salvation to the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2), to the Samaritans in confirming Philip's ministry there (Acts 8:14), and to the Gentiles in the hours of Cornelius (Acts 10). Since then the keys, metaphorically speaking, have been used to open the doors of salvation around the globe, especially today in what is now known as the Third World. (Wagner, “Christian Missions,” 3)

²²⁰ Wagner, *Look Out!*, 68.

²²¹ Wagner, *Look Out!*, 68–69.

matter of divine providence. The ripening of certain harvest fields at certain times can be attributed only to the sovereignty of God. “I have planted, Apollos watered,” writes Paul, “but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6). God brings the harvest to ripeness, but He does not harvest it. He uses Christian people to accomplish that task, and He is glorified when His people “bear much fruit.”²²²

Wagner reiterates the narrative in *Your Church Can Grow* (1976): “For reasons impossible to understand fully, God has not chosen to make the gospel known all by Himself. No question that He could do it if He wanted to, but instead He has chosen to use Christian people to do the job.”²²³ Wagner continues, “This implies that we human beings have a tremendously important responsibility in the execution of God’s plan for the world.” Wagner states further, “The Master wants lost men and women found and saved. He expects His stewards to accomplish this objective.”²²⁴ God “notices how many” lost “sheep are found,” which speaks to the tension between the responsibility of man and the knowledge of God.

Wagner’s understanding of the mandates and their relation to the will of God seemingly led to his methodological principles in his mission work throughout the 1970s, known as the Church Growth movement. In the 1973 article “‘Church Growth’: More than a Man, a Magazine, a School, a Book,” Wagner states, “The proper combination of the lordship of Jesus Christ and the responsibility of man requires church growth.”²²⁵

²²² Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 86.

²²³ C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Glendale, CA: Gospel Light, 1976), 36.

²²⁴ Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow*, 37. Wagner states “God wants Christians to be multiplied and He wants churches to be multiplied. The task is tremendous, and at the same time it is more complex than some might think. Sometimes God’s work is well done, but sometimes it is a disaster” (38). Wagner continues, “Theological ways were even developed to explain failure away. ‘Leave the results to God’ was the most frequently used phrase. With this slogan the worker could finish out a difficult and sacrificial missionary career with very little fruit and never be concerned at all about whether he might have been able to do a better job if he had only changed the way he went about it” (39). Wagner concludes, “The scientific aspect of church growth is vitally interested in understanding and describing all the factors which enter into cases of failure and success in evangelistic efforts.”

²²⁵ Wagner continues,

The proper combination of the lordship of Jesus Christ and the responsibility of man requires church growth. As our Lord, God has made his will clearly known in the Scriptures, and as his servants we do poorly if we do not pay attention. Our Lord, for example, is clearly not pleased with: Fishing without catching (Luke 5:4–11), An empty banquet table (Luke 14:15–23), Sowing without reaping (Matt. 13:3–9), A fig tree that bears no figs (Luke 13:6–9), Lost sheep that are not brought into the fold (Matt. 18:11–14), A lost coin that is sought but not found (Luke 15:8–10), Ripe harvests that are

Wagner encouraged church growth principles when engaging in the mandates. In discussing the methodological practices of the mandates, he stresses the strategy and objectives over teaching doctrine. Wagner states, “Overstressing the transcendence of God, the mysterious working of his providence, and the sovereignty of the ministry of the Holy Spirit—all true and good Christian principles—can squeeze out the equally valid elements of God’s way of relating to his servants.”²²⁶ Missions, therefore, “are not an afterthought to God. They are an integral part of His plan for “making disciples of all nations.”²²⁷

Wagner’s emphasis on the human responsibility to implement the will of God is synthesized in his 1974 work “Seminaries Ought to Be Asking Who as Well as How.” Wagner states, “I believe that God has given us spiritual potential in our churches sufficient to turn America upside down for Christ. One of the keys to unlocking this power and releasing it for good is a reshuffling of priorities in theological education.” For Wagner, the future implementation of the will of God is a possibility, provided that humanity fulfill its part.²²⁸

In a 1972 article, Wagner states,

When Christ told his disciples that in order to build his church he would give them the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19), he entrusted them, and us, with an awesome responsibility. If we do not unlock the doors of the kingdom here on earth, they will not be unlocked in heaven either. In other words, there is somehow a

not reaped (Matt. 9:36–38), Proclamation without response (Matt. 10:14). Or, by extension of these principles, God is not pleased with evangelistic or missionary work that does not result in church growth. In bolder terms, and contrary to some popular missionary literature, God is interested in results, since he is not willing that one man, woman, or child should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). (C. Peter Wagner, ““Church Growth’: More than a Man, a Magazine, a School, a Book,” *Christianity Today* 18, no. 5 [1973]: 12)

²²⁶ C. Peter Wagner, “Fierce Pragmatism in Missions: Carnal or Consecrated?,” *Christianity Today* 17, no. 5 (December 1972): 13.

²²⁷ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 49.

²²⁸ C. Peter Wagner, “Seminaries Ought to Be Asking Who as Well as How,” *Theological Education* (Summer 1974): 274.

theological relationship between the faithfulness of Christians and the eternal destiny of peoples.²²⁹

In *What Are We Missing?* (1978), while describing the function of evangelism, Wagner states, “God wants fruit. He wants the whitened fields reaped and the sheaves brought to the barn (Mt. 9:37–38). He is not willing that one should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pe. 3:9).” “Preaching the gospel,” according to Wagner, “should bear fruit for eternity” and “should make disciples”; in so doing, God’s will, “as expressed in the Great Commission,” will be fulfilled. Wagner continues, “Some missionaries even come to the point where they attempt to justify barrenness theologically, declaring that it may not be God’s will after all that the preaching of the gospel bring men and women to repentance and faith. They thus become addicted to fruitlessness, and are to be pitied.”²³⁰

Deemphasis of doctrine. Systematic theology and the Reformation become topics of consternation for Wagner as his career progresses.²³¹ During the 1970s, Wagner’s writings became more openly critical of the historical systematic theology brought forth from the Protestant Reformation. Wagner’s underlying assertion concerning theology lies in his belief that it can cause “underbrush” in churches and inhibit the work

²²⁹ Wagner, “Christian Missions,” 3.

²³⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *What Are We Missing?* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1978), 67; Wagner, *Look Out!*, 67.

²³¹ As a leader of the New Apostolic Reformation, Wagner sought to reduce the emphasis on systematic theology. In 2004, concerning the systematic theologies of the NAR, Wagner states,

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.

In the last chapter, I gave some reasons why 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)

of the Holy Spirit.²³² For Wagner, the Reformation brought with it a Europeanized theology, which was contextualized for Westernized countries. In “Moratorium, Three Views: All Africa Conference of Churches” (1975), Wagner calls for “a moratorium” on theological “imperialism.”²³³ “European theology has too long dominated theological thinking throughout the church.”²³⁴ For Wagner, the moratorium on European theology is necessary if the gospel is to spread through missions so that “the Spirit of God can work out his purpose.” In the 1975 publication “Colour the Moratorium Grey,” Wagner states, “A new generation of Third World Christian leaders” are “no longer satisfied with translations of Calvin, Barth, Tillich, and Henry. They are looking for new styles of theologizing Christian truth and thus are skeptical of traditional Western categorizes for systematic theology.”²³⁵ For Wagner, a missionary’s assertion that “what we need is not an African theology or a Latin American theology, but a biblical theology” represents a misunderstanding of the biblical text because the “New Testament was contextualized in Greco-Roman culture.”

In 1979, as the decade ended, Wagner states that “new knowledge” will make modern missionaries more effective than historic evangelistic efforts due to the “widening recognition of the inadequacy of traditional Western Theology.”²³⁶ Wagner continued McGavran’s commitment to “not allow church growth teaching to identify

²³² Wagner, *Look Out!*, 51.

²³³ C. Peter Wagner, “Moratorium, Three Views: All Africa Conference of Churches,” *World Encounter* 12, no. 4 (1975): 10.

²³⁴ Wagner, “Moratorium, Three Views: All Africa Conference of Churches,” 10.

²³⁵ Wagner continues,

A theology of the atonement, for example, which pays no attention to power over evil spirits makes little sense to Christians in Irian Jaya. A social ethic that does not start with the problem of the exploration 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. (C. Peter Wagner, “Colour the Moratorium Grey,” *International Review of Mission* 64, no. 254 [1975]: 172)

²³⁶ C. Peter Wagner, “The Decade Ahead,” *World Vision* 23, no. 2 (1979): 8.

itself with any particular paradigm of systematic theology.”²³⁷ For Wagner, “any systematic theological tradition” can employ growth strategies. Wagner distanced his church growth associations from a named tradition, which he referred to as “evangelical”; “church growth cannot be” labeled as “reformed or Wesleyan or Lutheran or Calvinistic or Pietistic or Pelagian or Arminian.”²³⁸ In Wagner’s 1980 publication “The Homogenous Unit Principal [sic] as a Missiological Tool,” he states. “Theological articulations of the understanding of Scripture should not be superimposed from one people to another.”

Wagner continues,

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.²³⁹

Biblical-theological system. In his 1974 publication *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, Wagner details his overarching biblical-theological metanarrative.²⁴⁰ Wagner asserts that the “Bible develops the story of how God took the initiative to save mankind from sin and death.” Wagner states that God created “man to live in the Garden of Eden where material and social problems were unknown.” When Adam sinned, he was “expelled and placed in the dog-eat-dog world of blood, hate, and filth.” Adam’s sin impacted humanity in three ways: (1) spiritually (“loss of fellowship with God”), (2) physically (“loss of immortality”), and (3) and materially (“loss of the Garden of Eden”).²⁴¹

²³⁷ Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, 83.

²³⁸ Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, 83.

²³⁹ Wagner concludes, stating 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 [Sic] as a Missiological Tool,” *Church Growth Bulletin* 2, no. 17 (1980): 19.

²⁴⁰ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 15–27.

²⁴¹ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 17, 19, 20.

Wagner says that God “wishes man were back in the Garden, but the cherubim with the flaming sword are there guarding the entrance.” Even though “God Himself put the cherubim there, and only He can take them away”; “so far, man has not returned to the Garden of Eden mainly because his sin will not allow it.” In furthering this narrative and God’s command, Wagner states,

If He wanted to remove the cherubim and let man return to the Garden, He could do it immediately. Instead He keeps man out. By His grace, however, man is never as bad off as he could be. God chides and corrects. He sends the rain on the just and the unjust. He sends His prophets to remind man that he is mistreating his neighbor, and admonishes him to live a better life. But man outside the Garden is somewhat less than human, and he has been for thousands of years.²⁴²

Humanity has been separated from the “tree of life (Gen. 3:24).” God’s final solution for humanity’s sin is for them to “once again be restored to the tree of life (Rev. 22:2).”

Wagner stresses that humanity awaits a New Jerusalem, which will be inaugurated when Jesus “conquers the last of all enemies, death.”²⁴³ Jesus brought “reconciliation to God” by having “died on the cross.”²⁴⁴ In the 1972 publication “Christian Missions: Dawn or Dusk?” Wagner states that Jesus “went to the cross and paid the penalty for sin in order to make the” spiritual and physical “reconciliation to God possible.”²⁴⁵ “In the meantime, Jesus set the example in doing what He could to relieve physical suffering” until the material reconciliation is completed in the New Jerusalem.

Epistemology. Wagner does not devote much attention to epistemology; however, he has a passing mention of the subject while devaluing its utility in evangelism. In *What Are We Missing?* Wagner states,

Pentecostalism has traditionally been a religion of the masses in contrast to the classes, even in the affluent countries. Missionaries from Pentecostal churches find

²⁴² Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 17.

²⁴³ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 19.

²⁴⁴ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 20.

²⁴⁵ Wagner, “Christian Missions,” 3.

identification with the Latin American masses a natural thing. Those from the more traditional denominations and missions have had an unfortunate tendency to regard Pentecostal missionaries with a degree of contempt because they were not seminary educated people, and many did not even have a Bible Institute diploma. But when all is said and done, the lack of skills in Hebrew, Greek, and epistemology may have been more than compensated for by the in-herent ability to identify with the proletariat.²⁴⁶

Phenomenological theology. In *Church Growth* (1986), while reflecting on this era, Wagner states,

In 1979 I published my doctoral dissertation under the title *Our Kind of People* (John Knox). I included a chapter entitled “Church Growth in the New Testament Mosaic,” in which I reexamined biblical evidence and found that New Testament church growth generally followed homogeneous unit lines. Because I used a phenomenologically-informed hermeneutical methodology, my conclusions were unacceptable to the traditionalists.²⁴⁷

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

Wagner experienced a significant change in his philosophy of discipleship during the McGavran era.²⁴⁸ A primary principle of the theology underlying the Church Growth movement, according to Wagner, “is called the homogeneous unit principle.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Wagner, *What Are We Missing?*, 70; Wagner, *Look Out!*, 70.

²⁴⁷ 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.

²⁴⁸ 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.

²⁴⁹ While reflecting on this era, Wagner states,

A major principle of church growth has been, is and will continue to be what is called the homogeneous unit principle. Even though it is a valid sociological and missiological principle, the strenuous efforts that I have made to communicate it over decades to the general public, for all intents and purposes, have failed. I have even been accused of racism because of my efforts! This has been one of my major life disappointments.

At the same time, another task of mine was to contextualize or adapt the teachings of Donald McGavran’s Church Growth Movement to the American scene. McGavran had done all of his research on Church growth in India and other Third World nations. After he invited me to join him on the faculty of the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission, I set out to research and write on how McGavran’s principles might apply to American churches. In this endeavor my 20 years of effort turned out to be successful. Not long ago, I was unashamed to spend some moments in personal satisfaction when a scholarly article documenting the fact that I had achieved my goal was published in the *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*. (C. Peter Wagner, *Humility* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 2002], 91)

According to Wagner, during the church growth era, his task was to “contextualize or adapt the teachings of Donald McGavran’s Church Growth Movement to the American scene.”²⁵⁰ Such changes became the underlying philosophy driving Wagner’s emphasis on church growth.²⁵¹ Wagner wrote extensively concerning his change in philosophy of discipleship in his 1974 publication *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, which Wagner wrote to change “the paradigm of the great majority of church leaders.”²⁵² The most significant evidence of Wagner’s philosophy is his bifurcation of discipleship and the making of disciples; he states, “Some have confused ‘making disciples’ with ‘discipleship.’”²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Wagner, *Humility*, 91; see also Global Church Growth, “We’ve Only Just Begun,” 8.

²⁵¹ Wagner states,

One of the drawbacks hindering evangelists and evangelistic missionaries from agreeing that the results of their ministry should be measured and their methods analyzed has been a failure to arrive at a consensus across the board as to what the product of evangelization really is. Should we measure evangelistic efforts by the number of those who have heard or otherwise been exposed to the gospel? Is our goal to count “decisions for Christ”? Or are unbelievers evangelized (past tense) only when they become true disciples of Jesus?

Wagner continues,

A major reason why I became concerned with saturation evangelism programs like Evangelism in Depth in Latin America is that I began reading reports of huge numbers of “decisions” or “conversions,” but with little or no change in the number of ongoing disciples in a certain territory as a result. For example, I did careful research on Evangelism in Depth in Bolivia in 1965 and found that, despite 20,000 public professions of faith, the church membership in the nation actually declined during and after the initiative. Following that, I researched citywide evangelistic efforts in the United States by such as Billy Graham and Campus Crusade and found that a high of 16 percent and a low of 3 percent to 5 percent who signed decision cards eventually became church members. This rather shocking information helped me understand the roots of the popular phrase “evangelistically speaking,” which means to most that undue exaggeration of numbers is being employed by the parties involved. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 105–6)

²⁵² Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 106.

²⁵³ Wagner continues,

Making disciples is the right goal of evangelism and missions according to the Great Commission. Once disciples are made, they then begin the lifetime road of discipleship. 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. Once disciples are made, they then begin the lifetime road of discipleship. 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. (Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 80)

For Wagner, a disciple is one “whose name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”²⁵⁴ Speaking in contrast to “unsaved people,” he states that “the instant one becomes a ‘new creature in Christ’ (2 Cor. 5:17),” a disciple is made.²⁵⁵ For Wagner, effective discipleship should provide demonstratable and measurable results. Wagner states,

Every one of Jesus’ commands to His people contains a goal of some kind. There are hundreds of them in the New Testament, and faithful servants will want to obey them all in every way possible. But one command above all others contains the goal for missions, and against that goal we must evaluate all missionary strategy. This commandment is known as the “Great Commission,” it is found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts.²⁵⁶

The making of disciples, for Wagner, is the end goal and the “right goal of mission strategy.” Wagner employs Matthew 28:19–20 as the interpretive framework for fulfilling the Great Commission.²⁵⁷ Wagner asserts that the verbal imperatives “going, baptizing, and teaching are means to be used toward accomplishing the end” purpose in the making of disciples. Wagner then asserts that contemporary mission strategies, during his era, were misguided: “In my judgment, the greatest error in contemporary missionary strategy is the confusion of means and end in the understanding of the Great Commission.”²⁵⁸ Wagner’s consternation is that some “have contented themselves with preaching the gospel whether or not their preaching makes disciples. Some have very meticulously counted ‘decisions,’ but they make no corresponding effort to count and report disciples.” Wagner continues,

Don’t forget, when we talk about right goals, we are talking about goals for the whole Body, not just for individuals. The doctrine of spiritual gifts teaches us that we all make different contributions. But as all members of the Body work together,

²⁵⁴ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 79.

²⁵⁵ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 80.

²⁵⁶ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 77.

²⁵⁷ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 77–78.

²⁵⁸ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 78.

the final result should be new disciples. Success or failure must be measured ultimately in those.²⁵⁹

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 4. 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

²⁵⁹ Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On*, 79.

CHAPTER 4
LATER THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATIONS BEFORE
AFFIRMING OPEN THEISM (1982–2000)

Bilbo Baggins, while reflecting on his adventure in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, says to Gandalf,

The Roads go ever ever on,
Over rock and under tree,
By caves where never sun has shone,
By streams that never find the sea;
Over snow by winter sown,
And through the merry flowers of June,
Over grass and over stone,
And under mountains in the moon.¹

This chapter continues on the road in Wagner’s journey toward affirming open theism from the years 1982 to 2000. This chapter covers two eras: the signs and wonders era (1982–1990) and the Third Wave era (1991–2000).

**Return of the Prophet: The Signs and
Wonders Era (1982–1990)**

Contextual Background

The 1980s significantly defined the course of Wagner’s career and theological journey. One cannot discuss the 1980s without providing contextual background to an experimental course at Fuller Theological Seminary, MC510: Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth.² While entire dissertations could be and have been written on this course

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 273.

² For more information on the course, see the “MC510 Signs and Wonders Collection” at Fuller Theological Seminary, which states,

The MC510 Signs and Wonders collection includes class materials, class records, and correspondence regarding MC510: Signs, Wonders, & Church Growth; MC511: Healing Ministry and Church Growth; and MC550: The Ministry of Healing in World Evangelization. Dates of the materials range from 1981–1989. Formats include manuscripts, typescript, print publications, audio

and its resultant influences on evangelicalism, this dissertation merely provides contextual background and its impact on Wagner's theological journey. Recalling this era, Wagner states, "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."³ Wagner partnered with John Wimber to offer a course in the experimentation with signs and wonders, which Wagner describes as "a radical departure" from "anything that had ever happened in the history of Fuller Seminary."⁴ As a result of MC510, Wagner embraced supernatural signs and wonders.

The 1980s are categorized, according to Wagner, as the beginning of a movement that he termed the "Third Wave," and he was a significant leader within the movement.⁵ Wagner states,

The term *third wave* is used to designate a movement that is similar to the Pentecostal movement (first wave) and charismatic movement (second wave) but has what its constituents perceive as some fairly important differences. It is composed largely of evangelical Christians who, while applauding and supporting the work of the Holy Spirit in 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

cassettes, audio CDs, and VHS tapes. This collection also includes two sets of seminar notes by Charles H. Kraft on "Christianity With Power" (1990) and "Deep Level Healing" (1992). (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/>)

³ C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 122.

⁴ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 125.

⁵ 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:

Although I had no denominational role, I was still regarded by some of the leaders as at least a marginal participant in the charismatic renewal movement because of the courses in signs and wonders that John Wimber and I had introduced to Fuller Theological Seminary, because of my charismatically-oriented adult Sunday School class in Lake Avenue Congregational Church and because I was a chief spokesperson for what I began calling the Third Wave. One consequence of this was that I was regularly invited to attend the Glencoe meetings. I did not feel that I should accept, however, because at the time I was advocating that those in the Third Wave should avoid, as much as possible, the label "charismatic." (C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church into the Future* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004], 43)

participating in other charismatic-type manifestations without disturbing the current philosophy of ministry governing their congregations.⁶

Theological Mile Markers

This section lists significant theological mile markers for Wagner during the 1980s.

Supernatural signs and wonders. Wagner's affirmation of the supernatural works of the Spirit was "completed" during this era, which was his "paradigm shift" away from cessationism.⁷ Wagner describes an occurrence of his believing that he received a supernatural healing during the MC510 course, stating, "By the time the course was over, I was no longer a spectator; I was as participant. And I have been a participant every since."⁸ In the 1982 article "Characteristics of Pentecostal Church

⁶ Wagner provides the following distinctions of "third wave" churches: (1) baptism of the Spirit occurs at conversion and is not a second work of grace; (2) expectation of multiple fillings of the Holy Spirit subsequent to the new birth and may resemble "baptism in the Holy Spirit"; (3) acceptance of tongues and prayer language; however, it is not considered validation of a "certain spiritual experience"; (4) "ministry under the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit as the portal of entrance into the third wave rather than a spiritual experience as is typical of the first two waves"; (5) "avoidance of divisiveness at almost any cost. Compromise in areas such as raising of hands in worship, public tongues, methods of prayer for the sick, and others is cordially accepted in order to maintain harmony with those not in the third wave." 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.

⁷ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 118.

⁸ Wagner recounts his participation in MC510, which he facilitated with John Wimber. While reflecting a specific evening during the course Wagner states that he went from an observer to a participant:

John simply started off by saying, "Who needs healing?" Without any premeditation, I suddenly found my hand in the air! So John said, "Peter, come up here" and he had me sit on a stool facing the class. I told him and the class that I had been diagnosed with high blood pressure for two years and that the doctor had put me on three medications to control it. When John started praying, I felt a warm blanket of power come over me and I felt like my mind was partially disconnected. I could hear most of what was going on, but I didn't care. To describe it in words that I learned later, I now know that I was slain in the Spirit, but I didn't fall, because I was on the stool. John was describing my physical reactions to the class like a sports announcer giving a play-by-play account of what was happening to me. "See the eyelids fluttering?" "There's some flushing on the sides of his face!" "Watch the lips—they're quivering!" "Thank You, Lord! More power!" A few days later, I went back to the doctor and he took me off one of the medications. Soon afterward, he took me off the second, and then the third. My blood pressure was fine. This was a turning point. From then on, instead of inspecting what other people were doing, I started praying for the sick as well. I found myself "doin' the stuff!" 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. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 130)

Growth,” Wagner credits Pentecostal theology for having restored the signs and wonders into modern evangelicalism:

Probably the greatest contribution that Pentecostalism has made to Christianity in general is restoring the reality of the miracle power of the New Testament. Such power had been absent among the other churches for so long that when it appeared in Pentecostalism around the turn of the century the only way many traditional Christians could handle it was to declare it a heresy and classify Pentecostals as a false cult. Most Christians are smarter now, and God has forgiven them for the past.⁹

Wagner states, “Through the years I have become very close to Pentecostals. Why? Primarily because I am a student of church growth; and, no matter where I look around the globe, I find that Pentecostal churches are leading the way in rates of increase.”¹⁰ For Wagner, signs and wonders were a means to bring unbelievers into the kingdom of God. Wagner states, “It does seem to me that 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.”¹¹

In Wagner’s 1986 publication *Church Growth: State of the Art*, he reflects on the emergence of signs and wonders in church growth:

Thirty years of research and field testing of church growth theories have contributed unprecedented technology to the implementation of Jesus’ Great Commission. Substantial strides have been made in the integration of evangelical theological constructs with social sciences, with organizational management, with

⁹ C. Peter Wagner, “Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth,” *Pentecostal Minister* (Summer 1982): 7.

¹⁰ Wagner affirms the supernatural gifts without identifying himself as a Pentecostal or charismatic: “Actually, I am not a very distant outsider. I am a born-again child of God, baptized in the Spirit, and thus part of the same spiritual household. I am growing in my faith, conscious of my spiritual gifts, and thanking God for the privilege of addressing Him in a language that I never learned.” Wagner, “Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth,” 4.

¹¹ Wagner continues, Not only do Pentecostals believe in miracle power, they also believe in soul-winning power. Sharing the faith is a constant way of life for Pentecostals. They believe that God wants to use them to win souls, and He does. When I consult with many denominations, I have to start by convincing them that the gospel is worth sharing and that God wants churches to grow. Not so with Pentecostals. It never occurred to them to question it. Pentecostals are possibility thinkers-their faith level is high. They believe in evangelism, and they believe in church growth. They trust God for great things, and God honors their faith. Pentecostal churches are churches of power. (Wagner, “Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth,” 7)

communication theory, with leadership development theory, and with many other contemporary fields of academic pursuit. 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.¹²

Wagner's affirmation of signs and wonders follows his affirmation of the kingdom of Satan, which is further discussed in a forthcoming section. In a 1986 article titled "Power Encounter in Christian Mission," Wagner states that "so long as Satan is the god of this age," Satan will cause evils that are outside the will of God; therefore, Christians "must reflect the values of the kingdom and combat these evils strenuously as possible." For Wagner, healing the sick combats Satan's evils and implements the will of God.¹³

Gift of prophecy. Wagner continues his affirmation of the gift of prophecy and extrabiblical revelation during the 1980s. As mentioned previously, Wagner's 1988 publication *The Third Wave of the Spirit* provides his reflection on his theological change concerning and affirmation of prophecy. Using the publishing success of his book as an acceptance indicator of prophecy, Wagner states, "I have heard virtually no negative reaction. This leads me to believe that the Christian public is much more open to understanding prophecy as a form of present-day revelation from God than they were when I went to seminary."¹⁴ Prophets, according to Wagner, are not infallible; for this reason, Wagner provides three "safeguards" for the use of prophetic words. First, the gift of prophecy must be recognized as a gift given to "some members of the body of Christ." Second, "No disagreement with Scripture is allowed in a true prophecy. Checking a prophecy against the written Word of God is essential, because God will not contradict

¹² 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), 36.

¹³ C. Peter Wagner, "Power Encounter in Christian Mission," *Trinity World Forum* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1986): 3.

¹⁴ Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 107.

himself.” Third, the “prophecy” must be confirmed other Christians who are in “agreement.”¹⁵

Power evangelism. While reflecting on the impact of power evangelism, Wagner states,

I turned one of the most significant corners of my thinking when John Wimber came on the scene and began ministering in signs and wonders. Before he came, I believed in the Holy Spirit, but I thought that effectiveness in evangelism came from applying the right principles at the right time. Wimber’s success in Anaheim Vineyard and his teaching in Fuller drove me back to the Scriptures and to the conclusion that spiritual power was the principal key to effective and sustained evangelism.¹⁶

While summarizing the 1980s, Wagner states, “One of my personal research goals for the decade of the eighties is 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.” For Wagner, “power evangelism reflects the New Testament pattern used by Jesus when he sent out his twelve disciples for the first time.” Wagner continues, “[Christ] commanded them to preach the message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Then he also commanded them to do the deeds: ‘Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.’”¹⁷ In *Church Growth: State of the Art*, Wagner furthers his reflection of power evangelism, stating that power evangelism brings the kingdom of God near to people, which results in church growth.¹⁸

¹⁵ Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 107.

¹⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 271.

¹⁷ Wagner, “The Church Growth Movement after Thirty Years,” 37.

¹⁸ Wagner states,

One of my personal research goals for the decade of the eighties is 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. I am very much interested in examining models of power evangelism. Power evangelism reflects the New Testament pattern used by Jesus when he sent out his twelve disciples for the first time. He commanded them to preach the message: “The kingdom of heaven is near.” Then he also commanded them to do the deeds: “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons” (Matt. 10:7–8, TLB). My initial findings indicate that while there are some cases of dramatic church growth without power evangelism, and while there are some cases of power evangelism with very little church growth, across the board power

Similarly, in *The Third Wave of the Spirit*, Wagner states, “God’s central purpose is to seek and save the lost, and at times he does it with unusually great manifestations of power.”¹⁹ For Wagner, the manifestation of power, which he “now” believes, means “that dead people are literally being raised in the world today.”²⁰

In *Church Growth: State of the Art*, Wagner summarizes power evangelism as follows:

In power evangelism, the Holy Spirit has the power, not us. Through him we will be encouraged to say and do things we wouldn’t ordinarily do. Under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, Jesus manifested all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ prayers for the sick, his evangelistic messages, even his recruiting techniques (“Come, follow me . . .”) are notable for their simplicity. Obviously he was operating in an unction greater than personal words. It is this unction that is to characterize power evangelism and its practitioners. 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. 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.²¹

Spiritual warfare. While reflecting on this era, Wager states, “Throughout my early ministry, I conceived of Satan as merely a nuisance in our efforts at spreading the gospel.” Wagner continues, “My contact with Cindy Jacobs and others awakened me to the reality of literal spiritual warfare. Far from being a mere nuisance, Satan is a

evangelism is clearly resulting in the most vigorous church growth. (Wagner, “The Church Growth Movement after Thirty Years,” 37)

¹⁹ Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 112.

²⁰ Wagner continues,

I, too, now believe that dead people are literally being raised in the world today. As soon as I say that, some ask if I believe it is “normative.” I doubt if it would be normative in any local situation, but it probably is normative in terms of the universal body of Christ. Even though it is an extremely uncommon event, I would not be surprised if it were happening several times a year. One of my objectives in bringing up the matter in this chapter is to open channels of communication. In some circles the subject is taboo. One missionary (in a foreign country) said he would tell me of a case of a dead person being raised if I promised I would not let his supporting constituency know about it. I don’t see that attitude in the Bible. (Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 112)

²¹ Wagner, “Who’s Who in Church Growth,” 224.

formidable enemy who must and will be defeated in the several theaters of spiritual warfare.”²² Wagner continues his affirmation of the role of intercessors and continues on his paradigm shift concerning the impact of prayer in spiritual warfare. In 1988, Wagner states, “In my ordained ministry of 35 years, it’s only been in the decade of the 80s that I have become aware of how urgent intercession is for our time.” Wagner continues,

Christian leaders are falling all about us today because they are not aware they are the target of the enemy. They are made more vulnerable because they do not involve their people in intercession as prayer warriors. Why is this needed so much today? Because, for one thing members of the New Age, Satanists, those in the occult, have covenanted informally with each other to pray for the destruction of Christian leaders and pastors.²³

In the 1988 publication “Intercession as Power—And as a Gift of the Holy Spirit (Part 3),” Wagner states that “intercession is power.” Wagner recounts an experience where he attributes the prayers of an intercessor, Cathy Schaller, to having saved his life.²⁴ He continues, If Cathy, an intercessor, had not “taken me on as her special prayer project, I am convinced I would not be alive today.” In 1991, Wagner further states that Cathy “literally saved” his life from an attempt of the enemy to murder him.²⁵ Wagner frequently cites his and Cathy’s stories throughout his writings.²⁶

²² Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 271.

²³ Wagner continues, “It probably began for me when I started my Sunday School class at Lake Avenue Congregational Church. We called ourselves the 120 Fellowship, named after the 120 in the Upper Room episode in the Book of Acts.” C. Peter Wagner, “The Most Needed Power Source: Intercessory Prayer,” *Asia Voice*, 1990, 9.

²⁴ C. Peter Wagner, “Intercession as Power—And as a Gift of the Holy Spirit (Part 3),” *Ministries Today* (January–February 1988): 100.

²⁵ C. Peter Wagner, “Praying for Leaders,” *Equipping the Saints* (May 1990): 25; Wagner, “The Most Needed Power Source,” 9; Wagner, “Praying for Leaders,” *Church Growth* (Winter 1991): 15; Wagner, *Prayer Shield: How to Intercede for Pastors, Christian Leaders, and Others on the Spiritual Frontlines*, Prayer Warrior Series (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1992), 130–38. Wagner credits Cathy Schaller as having been a significant influence on his life. Along with Cathy, Wagner lists “Edward Carnell, Joseph McCullough, Donald McGavran,” and “John Wimber.” C. Peter Wagner, “C. Peter Wagner, Donald McGavran Professor of Church Growth,” *Theology News and Notes* (December 1989): 8.

²⁶ Wagner’s most succinct depiction of the story is in his 1990 article “The Most Needed Prayer Source”:

On March 25, 1983, I was on a stepladder in my garage climbing into a latter ten feet above the concrete floor when I felt as though the ladder was being pulled from under me. I fell, landing on my head and neck on the concrete floor. My wife Doris came running out. Paramedics soon arrived and

Wagner writes extensively concerning the nature of Satan in *Church Growth: State of the Art*. He states, “In order to fully understand the validity of a signs and wonders ministry, we need to study the concept of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the rule of God (the age to come) which has invaded the kingdom (rule) of Satan (this present evil age) and is the arena in which signs and wonders occur.” Wagner continues, “The kingdom of Satan was his real enemy. A war is on! Jesus was sent by God to shatter the strongholds of Satan. His one purpose was Satan’s defeat. Jesus accomplished this through his death, resurrection, and ascension.” In *Church Growth*, concerning Satan, John Wimber says, “This demonstrated who was the victor, but Satan is not yet cast out and will not be until Christ returns to establish his kingdom forever. The church is God’s army in the continual fight which goes on with Satan as the church lives ‘between the times.’”²⁷

Wagner’s paradigm shift concerning spiritual warfare became the catalyst for his questioning of dispensationalism. Though Wagner’s eschatological affirmation of “victorious eschatology” will not occur until after his profession of open theism, Wagner states that “things first began to change” when he “became involved in spiritual warfare.” Wagner believes that “whole previously unreached people groups could break Satan’s stronghold and receive messengers of the gospel or the good news,” which “planted

took me to the hospital. At the same time, Cathy, my intercessor, was at a church concert about 15 miles away. Suddenly she felt an overwhelming sense of evil come upon her. The words she heard were “death and destruction.” Instantly, she began to pray in the Spirit against this evil. The moment she started praying, she felt a stabbing pain in her back, so bad that she asked her husband to put his hand over it and pray for her. After twenty minutes, the pain left. Cathy sensed the battle was over. Later that evening Cathy received a call from our Sunday School class prayer chain, with the message: “Pray for Peter; he has had an accident.” The time of my accident and her stabbing pain was 8:30 on the dot. God used that intercession in a mighty way, because in an accident that ordinarily would have been fatal, x-rays showed no broken bones. (Wagner, “The Most Needed Power Source,” 9)

²⁷ Wimber, “Signs and Wonders in the Growth of the Church,” 219.

some doubts in” his “mind as to whether the world was supposed to get worse and worse in preparation for the rapture.”²⁸

Soul-winning to discipleship of nations. After Donald McGavran’s death in 1990, Wagner’s “paradigm shift” from soul-winning to the discipleship of nations began as a result of his reading John Dawson’s 1989 book *Taking Our Cities for God: How to Break Spiritual Strongholds*.²⁹

Spiritual dualism and deemphasis of doctrine. In his 2013 publication *This Changes Everything*, Wagner reflects on the era of the 1980s and credits Paul Hiebert’s 1982 article “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle” as a “wake up call.” Hiebert’s writing caused Wagner to question his held Greek mindset.³⁰ In describing the Greek mindset,

²⁸ Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and Change Your Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 199.

²⁹ Wagner states that after having studied under McGavran,

I learned that he interpreted the Great Commission literally and understood *panta ta ethne* to mean that we should aim to disciple whole people groups. However, when I tried to apply this to America, after I had returned from Bolivia, I found myself so immersed in my paradigm of saving souls and multiplying churches that I intentionally downplayed McGavran’s position and took the individualistic approach that I told you about in the beginning. It was only after McGavran had gone to his eternal reward that I finally struggled through my paradigm shift and learned to take Jesus’ words literally. I now believe that Donald McGavran was right and that we must aim for discipling whole nations. (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 176)

For reference to Wagner’s citation of Dawson, see John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God: How to Break Spiritual Strongholds* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1989).

³⁰ Wagner continues,

One of the individuals who most helped me reexamine my inbred, Western, Greek mindset was Paul Hiebert, a former missionary to India and one of my colleagues on the faculty of the Fuller School of World Mission. In 1982, Hiebert wrote a very open and transparent essay confessing how his Western culture actually hindered his ministry among the people of non-Western India. He reflected on how Jesus ministered by demonstrating His power to cure the sick and cast out evil spirits. Then Hiebert wrote, “As a Westerner, I was used to presenting Christ on the basis of rational arguments, not by evidences of his power in the lives of people who were sick, possessed, and destitute.”

Wagner states that Hiebert “saw reality, like Plato did, in two tiers.” Wagner continues, “The lower tier was ‘secular’ science, dealing with sight and experience, natural order and this-world problems. The ‘sacred’ upper tier was religion, dealing with faith, miracles and other-world problems. However, the two were disconnected.” Wagner, citing Hiebert, states, “It should be apparent why many missionaries trained in the West had no answers to the problems of the middle level—they often did not even see it. When tribal people spoke of fear of evil spirits, they denied the existence of the spirits rather than claim the power of Christ over them.” Wagner then concludes, “The underlying root of this startling observation? Our Greek mindset! This, as you can imagine, was a wake-up call for me!” Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 130–32; see also Paul G. Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” *Missiology: An International Review* 10, no. 1 (1982): 35–47.

Wagner states, “Selected sacred things and people touched the real world on a higher level, whereas most people and most of everyday life would be secular, doing things that were relatively unimportant because they were just temporal,” which “leads to the separation between clergy and laity.”³¹ Wagner contrasts the Greek mindset with the Hebrew mindset, which he encourages Christians to adopt since the Old Testament is written in Hebrew.³² Wagner continues, “While the Greek mindset is human-centered, resulting in humanism, the Hebrew mindset is God-centered, resulting in theism. Truth, for Hebrews, does not emerge from human reason but from the revelation of God.”³³ Wagner asserts that “Greeks stress knowledge, or proper thinking,” while “Hebrews stress practice, or proper living.” For Wagner, Christian theology comes from the Greek mindset, concerning which Wagner states,

Have you noticed how much squabbling there is among Christians over correct doctrine? Some even think that what you believe is more important than what you do. This comes from our Western culture. Jews tend not to separate the two. A proper belief in God cannot be separated from following God’s moral and ethical principles. This clearly reflects what the New Testament teaches.³⁴

³¹ Wagner continues,

This leads to the separation between clergy and laity. Clergy would be those in touch with true spirituality, while others, such as pharmacists, truck drivers or computer programmers, would exist on a lower plane. In fact, through much of church history and even in some churches today, laity are not expected to have direct touch with God. In order to connect with God, they need to go through an ordained priest. Under the Greek mindset, the ideal for those lay people who truly wanted to serve God would be to quit their secular jobs and go into full-time ministry. To be a pastor or a missionary would please God much more than someone who is a mere businessperson, a schoolteacher or a mom who homeschools her children. (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 131)

³² Wagner continues,

Why would we Christian believers desire to move, as much as we can, from a Greek mindset toward a Hebrew mindset? It is because the inscripturated revelation of God, the Bible, is written from a Hebrew point of view. The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language. God chose Abraham to become the progenitor of the whole Hebrew culture through which He would make Himself known. The New Testament was written in Greek because it was the trade language of the Roman Empire at the time; but it was written by Hebrews, with the possible exception of Luke, whom most scholars identify as a Gentile, although some think he might have been a Hellenized Jew. (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 131–32)

³³ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 132.

³⁴ Wagner continues,

Greeks like to analyze things in clearly defined categories. We have seen, for example, that from Plato on, their dualism separates existence into two levels: the lower one of the physical world and the upper one of the spiritual world. Hebrews would not do this. The only upper layer that they have

Wagner asserts, “The only upper layer that” the Hebrew mindset has “is God, and everything else is intertwined as part of His creation.” Therefore, “The spiritual is part of the physical, and the physical is part of the spiritual. The supernatural constantly works in with the natural.” In concluding, Wagner states, “To the degree that we can appreciate this, we can begin to take the Bible more at face value. When the Bible talks about things like evil spirits, miracles and resurrection from the dead, we should have no reason to question those things or, worse yet, ignore them.”

Kingdom of God. Wagner states that he began to see the “kingdom of God” as present reality. Though this notion is further explored in a forthcoming section, Wagner states the following in the 1986 article “Power Encounter in Christian Mission”:

In the Lord’s prayer we say, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” I must confess that up until recently those words had very little meaning for my life. I repeated them by rote memory without much spiritual processing taking place as I did. For one thing, my understanding was that the kingdom was something that was future; so my assumption was that I was praying for the return of the Lord. An accompanying assumption was that, because God is sovereign, His will is in fact being done on earth today and that we can rather passively accept what happens as something which God directly or indirectly approves of. I now see the theology of the kingdom in a different light. I now believe that when Jesus came, he introduced the kingdom of God into the present world.³⁵

is God, and everything else is intertwined as part of His creation. The spiritual is part of the physical, and the physical is part of the spiritual. The supernatural constantly works in with the natural. There is no flaw of the excluded middle. To the degree that we can appreciate this, we can begin to take the Bible more at face value. When the Bible talks about things like evil spirits, miracles and resurrection from the dead, we should have no reason to question those things or, worse yet, ignore them. (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 132)

³⁵ Wagner continues,

This was a direct confrontation or invasion of the kingdom of darkness ruled by Satan who is called “the god of this age” (2 Cor 4:4). I take Satan more seriously than I used to, recognizing that some things which occur today do so because of the will of the enemy, not because they are the will of God. The era between the first and second comings of Christ is an era of warfare between the two kingdoms. Two strong powers are occupying the same territory. (Wagner, “Power Encounter in Christian Mission,” 3)

Theological Dispositions

Incarnation-theology. As with previous eras, Wagner continues his affirmation of incarnation-theology throughout the signs and wonders era. In *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!* (1988), Wagner states,

While Jesus was God, through the Incarnation He became unequal. It is obvious that after the Incarnation Jesus was different from before. How, then, did He become unequal? Clearly, it was not by giving up His divinity, because He was always 100-percent God. No, Jesus became unequal to the Father not by giving up anything, but by taking on something the Father did not have. He received a human nature, “taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men.” From that time on, Jesus was different from both the Father and the Holy Spirit, because they have only one nature. Jesus had two.³⁶

Wagner affirms that “Jesus agreed to suspend the use of His divine attributes for the duration of His earthly ministry.” Wagner concludes that “the only nature that Jesus used while He was on earth was His human nature.” Citing Colin Brown’s publication *That You May Believe*, Wagner states that the earthly miracles performed by Jesus are “not attributed to Jesus as the Second Person of the Trinity. They are not presented as manifestations of his personal divinity.”³⁷

Wagner provides an extensive survey of his incarnation-theology in his 1983 publication “The Power of God and Your Power,” which is the basis for his affirmation that Christians should perform supernatural signs and wonders.³⁸ Wagner states that “Jesus was unequal with God not because He gave up His divinity, but because He took on humanity.”³⁹ According to Wagner, Jesus “agreed to become obedient to the Father for the duration of the incarnation.” Jesus’s agreement with the Father meant that he could not use any of his divinity; therefore, Christ relied on the Holy Spirit to perform all

³⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick!* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1988), 117–19.

³⁷ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 119; see also Colin Brown, *That You May Believe: Miracles and Faith Then and Now* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 97.

³⁸ C. Peter Wagner, “The Power of God and Your Power,” *Christian Life* 45, no. 3 (July 1983): 40–44.

³⁹ Wagner, “The Power of God and Your Power,” 41.

of his signs and wonders. Wagner continues, “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 he had done so, the plan of salvation would have been finished and Satan would have been victorious.” In concluding his theological implications concerning incarnation-theology, Wagner states, “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).”⁴⁰

Biblical-theological system. Wagner continues articulating his biblical-theological system throughout the 1980s. In his 1989 publication “God Wants Growth,” Wagner asserts that the will of God is for “church growth.”⁴¹ Wagner asserts that God created the human race to have fellowship with Himself.⁴² Wagner continues, “For a while things were going along well. Every time God came down to earth, the whole human race was there to greet Him.” When Adam and Eve sinned, their fellowship with God was broken, and they were not there when God visited. According to Wagner, since the fall of humanity, God has been doing “whatever is necessary to restore the fellowship of alienated human beings with Himself.” The Old Testament, for Wagner, “is largely the story of God’s best plans for the human race being frustrated by human sin, rebellion and ineptitude.” Wagner continues, “The culmination of God’s plan of salvation was sending His own beloved Son to die on the cross.” Jesus paid “the price of eternal redemption for

⁴⁰ Wagner, “The Power of God and Your Power,” 44.

⁴¹ C. Peter Wagner, “God Wants Growth,” *Pentecostal Minister* (Spring 1989): 6.

⁴² Wagner, “God Wants Growth,” 7.

the entire human race.” For Wagner, “other fringe benefits accompanied Jesus’ incarnation”; however, the purpose was to restore humanity’s fellowship with God.⁴³

Wagner states that Jesus “was not going to” build his church “by himself” and that God “is not going to reap the harvest any more than the vine will bear grapes.” Wagner asserts that “God expects us to do it.” For Wagner, the cross of Jesus should be understood as “a means toward an end.” Wagner continues, “Theologically speaking, only His death on the cross could provide what was necessary to reconcile men and women to the Father. Practically speaking, it had to do with growth.” Wagner states that the disciples’ “the three years of ministering with Jesus [were] insufficient to fulfill the commandment of Christ”; the disciples “had to receive the ‘power of the Holy Spirit’ to operate.” Wagner then states that the book of Acts describes what “God had in mind” to “show us the model He expects Christians to follow.” Wagner concludes, “Quite evidently the Holy Spirit wants growth, and He wants it in abundance accompanied by great power.”⁴⁴

In Wagner’s 1983 publication *On the Crest of the Wave*, he continues the theme of the impact of sin on humanity as he previously discussed in *Stop the World, I Want to Get On* (1973). Sin has had social, physical, and spiritual impacts upon humanity.⁴⁵ Wagner continues, “Because of sin, every man and every woman is headed for hell, but no one needs to arrive there. The difference between those who arrive and those who do not is Jesus Christ.”⁴⁶ God, according to Wagner, “does not want one person to perish” but desires for “everyone to be saved”; God “decided to use Christian people” to save those who are lost.

⁴³ Wagner, “God Wants Growth,” 6–8.

⁴⁴ Wagner, “God Wants Growth,” 6–9.

⁴⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave: Becoming a World Christian* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1983), 39.

⁴⁶ Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave*, 42.

In Wagner's 1988 publication *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, Wagner states, "Both sickness and lostness will be with us until Jesus comes. Why they continue when we know they are not the will of God is one of those puzzling questions the Bible simply does not answer for us. If someone comes up with the answer, I'm sure he or she will be a candidate for a Nobel prize in theology."⁴⁷ Wagner concludes,

Because I am a front-line representative of the kingdom of God, I will continue to oppose the works of Satan. In the power of the Holy Spirit I will witness to the lost and pray for the sick, knowing ahead of time that not all will be saved and not all will be healed. But some will, and that constitutes abundant reward for labors invested.⁴⁸

Phenomenological theology. In comparing the Church Growth movement to traditional theological discussions, such as "Calvinism and Arminianism or covenant theology and dispensationalism," Wagner states that previous scholars "have usually agreed on a theological methodology which adopts philosophy as a cognate discipline. Church growth, however, looks to social science as a cognate discipline and emerges with a phenomenological methodology." Wagner continues,

As a starting point, church growth often looks to the "is" previous to the "ought." Its epistemology tends to be centered-set rather than bounded-set, as Paul Hiebert of the Fuller School of Missions would put it. What Christians experience about God's work in the world and in their lives is not always preceded by careful theological rationalizations. Many times the sequence is just the opposite: theology is shaped by Christian experience.⁴⁹

Wagner concludes, "To the traditionalist, philosophy of religion is an important body of teaching for proper theologizing. For church growth, sociology of knowledge is a key." Citing Robert J. Schreiter, Wagner states, "While theology is by no means unilaterally

⁴⁷ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 111.

⁴⁸ Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry*, 112.

⁴⁹ Wagner, "The Church Growth Movement after Thirty Years," 33.

determined by historical circumstances, we are coming to realize how great a role environmental influences do indeed play in how our theologies develop.”⁵⁰

While reflecting on his theological change that allowed him to affirm supernatural signs and wonders, Wagner states,

When I try to analyze my own pilgrimage from believing that the power of the Holy Spirit was mainly for salvation and living a victorious Christian life to seeing that it is all of that but much more, it occurs to me that one of my problems was my theology. I was unable to appreciate much of what the Spirit of God was doing around me because I did not have a theological grid that could receive the signals. Then, as now, I believe that we must test all of our experience by God’s inerrant Word. However, sometimes such tests fail due to our own inadequate understanding of the Word.⁵¹

Pragmatic theology. In his writings throughout the 1980s, Wagner continues to affirm and discuss his affirmation of pragmatism, which for him serves as a means to implement the will of God. In *Strategies for Church Growth* (1987), Wagner affirms that Christ provides the basis for the use of pragmatism in discipleship; Wagner states that “the cross was a means toward an end. And, although Jesus dreaded it, as we observe in Gethsemane (see Matt. 26:37–39), He was pragmatic enough to do what was necessary to succeed. His death on the cross did open the way of salvation to increasing multitudes.”⁵² In his 1990 article “Advantages of Having a Strategy,” Wagner states, “If we accept the biblical pattern of concentrated pragmatism in our thinking about strategy planning, we

⁵⁰ Wagner, “The Church Growth Movement after Thirty Years,” 33; see also Robert J. Schreiter, “Culture, Society and Contextual Theologies,” *Missiology: An International Review* 12, no. 3 (1984): 262.

⁵¹ Wagner, “The Power of God and Your Power,” 40.

⁵² Wagner states,

The cross was a means toward an end. And, although Jesus dreaded it, as we observe in Gethsemane (see Matt. 26:37–39), He was pragmatic enough to do what was necessary to succeed. His death on the cross did open the way of salvation to increasing multitudes. In church growth terms, what did Jesus accomplish? Some assume that Jesus saw very slow growth and that only a few responded. But on the measuring scales which we now use, He did very well. If a church planter goes into a pioneer territory and the work grows to at least 500, possibly 650, in just three years, that is considered successful. No bishop or district superintendent would complain. Jesus left 120 faithful followers in Jerusalem, and over 500 in Galilee—whether they included the 120 we do not know. (C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 1987], 46)

will find that several advantages accrue.”⁵³ For Wagner, pragmatism became a means to increase the efficiency in using resources, for which “a great amount of God’s resources go to waste.”⁵⁴

In *Leading Your Church to Growth* (1984), Wagner states,

The Church Growth Movement has always stressed pragmatism, and still does even though many have criticized it. It is not the kind of pragmatism that comprises doctrine or ethics or the kind that dehumanizes people by using them as means toward an end. It is, however, the kind of consecrated pragmatism which ruthlessly examines traditional methodologies and programs asking the tough questions. If some sort of ministry in the church is not reaching intended goals, consecrated pragmatism says there is something wrong which needs to be corrected.⁵⁵

⁵³ C. Peter Wagner, “Advantages of Having a Strategy,” *Church Growth Ideas* (November 1990): 4.

⁵⁴ Wagner, “Advantages of Having a Strategy,” 4.

⁵⁵ Wagner continues, “Let me refer once again to pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Valley Community Church. I love his consecrated pragmatism. He is a leader who has clear goals and who will not allow anyone to use ‘we never did it that way before’ as an excuse for inaction, mediocrity, or Inertia.” C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1984), 201. Throughout the 1980s, Wagner frequently cites and credits Rick Warren. Wagner’s pragmatic means for church growth continue through his doctoral mentee Rick Warren, who studied under the mentorship and guidance of Wagner at Fuller Theological Seminary. See Richard Duane Warren, “New Churches for a New Generation: Church Planting to Reach Baby Boomers: A Case Study: The Saddleback Valley Community Church” (DMin project, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1993).

Warren cites Wagner as his “mentor” in his dissertation studies, in which he focused on the employment of Wagner’s principles of consecrated pragmatism. Warren discusses the scientific means through which church growth could occur in the same manner as at his church. He states, “The basic argument of this dissertation is that most Baby Boomers will never be reached by traditional churches. We must establish new churches to reach this new generation of Americans. It will require new churches that understand the Baby Boomer mindset and are intentionally designed to meet their needs, tastes, and interests.” Warren, “New Churches for a New Generation,” sec. “Abstract.” For Warren, Jesus was pragmatic: “Jesus spent the maximum amount of his time with those who would bear the maximum amount of ministry” (336). Moreover, rather than growth being a sovereign work of God, according to Warren, “the secret of church growth” is for churches to “do better” at what they “do best.” He continues, “Do not begin with your problems, but begin with your dreams. Where do you want to go?” He concludes, “We want to look at the potential for the future.”

Warren uncritically adopted Wagner’s church pragmatic growth practices in the United States. Wagner, in *This Changes Everything*, calls Warren a contemporary apostolic leader. Wagner states that

almost all of the pastors whom you see weekly on television with their Sunday morning services are truly apostolic leaders even though they belong to democratically oriented denominations. At this writing, one of the highest visibility pastors in America is Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Southern California. Rick is a personal friend, and he helped me teach my church planting classes when I was on the Fuller Seminary faculty, probably more than 20 years ago. Rick is clearly one of today’s most outstanding apostles, even though he personally would not accept the title. Nevertheless, he leads his church apostolically. As a Southern Baptist, he adheres to congregational government and thereby is required to convene a congregational business meeting at least once a year to make important church decisions, such as finances, and to cast the vision for the following year. However, I remember Rick, with a smile on his face, telling my students that he schedules the annual congregational meeting at the most inconvenient time possible, and he has no trouble persuading the few who attend to approve whatever he presents to them. Is this apostolic or what? (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 121–22)

Wagner, citing personal correspondence with Warren, states that Warren considers “prayer and church growth to be so linked together that it is a membership requirement to commit to praying for the growth of Saddleback. If you won’t commit to this you can’t join because it is a part of the membership covenant that you must sign to become a member.” Wagner states,

The largest, fastest-growing church on the West Coast at this writing is Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, California. Weekly attendance is currently running about 13,000. Prayer is a high priority for Pastor Rick Warren, a dear personal friend. In a recent letter to me, Warren said, “We consider prayer and church growth to be so linked together that it is a membership requirement to commit to praying for the growth of Saddleback. If you won’t commit to this you can’t join because it is a part of the membership covenant that you must sign to become a member.” Warren goes on to say, “I don’t know of any other church in America that requires its members to pray for its growth!” (C. Peter Wagner, *Praying with Power: How to Pray Effectively and Hear Clearly from God* [Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2008], chap. 6)

In *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, Wagner credits Warren with being an apostolic leader on the “Religion” and “Family” mountains in the 7 Mountain Mandate. C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God’s Call to Transform the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 148. In reflecting on his apostolic leadership and the influence of his students, Wagner states that the “greatest accomplishments in my life” is what he helped Warren obtain. In 1999, Wagner calls Warren’s Saddleback a New Apostolic Church. Wagner states,

I remember once hearing Rick Warren say “What are the things you will have to give up if you want your church to grow? As a starter, pastors will have to give up their ministry, and laypeople will have to give up their leadership.” This cuts directly to the heart of the issue. The traditional concept is that the congregation owns the church and that they hire the pastor to do their ministry for them. New apostolic churches, like Rick Warren’s, turn this around 180 degrees, as he explains in his best-seller, *The Purpose Driven Church*. (C. Peter Wagner, *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999], 215)

In Wagner’s 1984 publication *Leading Your Church to Growth*, Wagner praises Warren by stating, “I am impressed with his letterhead. Across the top in bold letters are the words ‘Richard Warren, Pastor.’ The church name is in small type along the bottom of the page.” Wagner continues,

Ultimately, the Body of Christ is the most important, and this is understood by those who are biblical Christians and serving the Lord. But Warren’s letterhead is not designed to impress Christians, it is targeted toward non-Christians, the 20,000 of them he hopes to win to Christ over the next thirty or forty years. An interesting survey was recently done in Georgia. It asked unchurched people what would be the one thing that would most encourage them to select a particular church. The highest factor by far was the pastor. The pastor was substantially more important to those unbelievers than the denomination, the facilities, the friendliness, the church program, the doctrine, and even whether they have friends who go there. Rick Warren knows this and he also knows that God has called him to build a great church. He himself is a modest person, but he is also willing to assume the responsibility for the growth of his church. (Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth*, 49)

Wagner sites Warren throughout his works spanning decades. See, e.g., 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), 27. Wagner’s most significant discussion of Warren is in *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, in which Wagner states that Warren has helped him teach his church planting course and “has inspired and challenged scores of students to step out and risk it for God.” Wagner states,

One of my greatest encouragements as I was coming to realize how valuable seminary students were for church planting was my close friendship with Rick Warren, a young Southern Baptist graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. Rick packed his family into a car with a U-Haul trailer and set out in 1980 to plant a church in south Orange County, California. He announced his goal as a church of 20,000 by the year 2020 and planting a new church each year on the way. Could a seminary student do it? By 1989 his attendance was running between 4,000 and 5,000, right on the curve toward 20,000. And instead of starting nine new churches, he had started 14. For years Rick Warren has helped me teach my church planting course at Fuller and he has inspired and challenged scores of students to step out and risk it for God. (C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest: A Comprehensive Guide* [1990; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010], 17)

In the same work, Wagner states, “A reason why goal setting taps into a source of spiritual power is that it reflects faith.” For this, Wagner praises Warren: “One of the things that impressed me about Rick Warren when I first came across him in 1980 was his unusual aptitude for goal setting” (125–26). In

Deemphasis of doctrine. In describing the need to clarify the theological foundation of the Church Growth movement, Wagner states that “the church growth theological methodology needs to be clarified, developed, and communicated to others.”⁵⁶ As mentioned previously, Wagner states that a primary tenet of the Third Wave is the “avoidance of divisiveness at almost any cost.” He continues,

Compromise in areas such as raising of hands in worship, public tongues, methods of prayer for the sick, and others is cordially accepted in order to maintain harmony with those not in the third wave. Semantics become important, with terms such as “charismatic” and “Spirit-filled” being rejected because of their alleged implication that those who are so labeled form a sort of spiritual elite of first-class as over against second-class Christians.⁵⁷

In an encouragement to Pentecostal churches, Wagner states, “Never allow educational requirements to substitute for spiritual gifts as the basis for ordaining new ministers.”⁵⁸ The following section explores Wagner’s discipleship philosophy in greater detail; however, notable now is Wagner’s emphasis on the teaching of spiritual gifts. In Wagner’s emphasis of spiritual gifts, theological education or doctrine is not present. He states that churches should “inform, motivate, and encourage” the congregation in knowledge of spiritual gifts.⁵⁹ While describing the role of a teacher, Wagner states, “The

2006, Wagner wrote to his partners at Global Harvest Ministries concerning Warren as a student of his and Warren’s financial wealth. Wagner states that “if we are serious about transforming society, we will need access to the wealth (among other things) to make it happen.” Wagner concludes that “Rick Warren will go down in history as one of the most prosperous pastors ever with the mega millions of dollars he has earned through his best sellers.” C. Peter Wagner, “Global Harvest Ministries,” September 26, 2006, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 31, Folder 4, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. Wagner viewed Warren’s success as evidence of God’s “great wealth transfer to change society.”

⁵⁶ Wagner continues,

I mentioned previously that Donald McGavran feels that “church growth” is first and foremost a theological statement. If so, not only do the theological ideas themselves need to be verbalized, but so also does the methodology used to derive them. This is doubly important because the theological methodology has been considerably different from the one traditionally employed in seminaries and theological textbooks. Much of the criticism directed toward the theological ideas of church growth comes from individuals who are operating out of a different methodological paradigm. (Wagner, “The Church Growth Movement after Thirty Years,” 32)

⁵⁷ Wagner, “Third Wave” (2003), 1141.

⁵⁸ Wagner, “Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth,” 9.

⁵⁹ Wagner continues,

gift of teaching is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to communicate information relevant to the health and ministry of the body and its members in such a way that others will learn.”⁶⁰

In *Strategies for Church Growth* (1987), when responding to critics who expressed concern regarding the limited theological developments of church growth, Wagner states that “dynamic movements directly involved in Christian ministry rarely begin with theological formulations. They usually begin with activists who simply assume a set of theological premises and go to work to change the world. Systematized theological work usually is developed from a movement, not vice versa.”⁶¹ Wagner continues,

Jesus never wrote anything, much less a theology. The book of Romans, the most systematized theological development of Jesus’ gospel in the Bible, was written 30 years after the preaching of the gospel began. Luther and Calvin did not systematize the theology of the Reformation until after it had begun. Theologians are still working on the theology of the Reformation 450 years later.⁶²

Divine partnership through human cooperation. Wagner continues his affirmation of God’s partnership with human cooperation. In *Strategies for Church Growth* (1987), Wagner states, “God wills all to be saved from sin and eternal death. His very nature is love and He wants all people reconciled to Him. For that reason He sent His only son, Jesus Christ.”⁶³ Wagner continues, “God has given His people a

This can be done, for example, by a series of sermons. and the pastor can mention spiritual gifts from the pulpit regularly. Many have found that spiritual gifts provide a stimulating subject for adult Sunday School classes or weeknight and home Bible study groups. For these I recommend three texts: the Bible, my book entitled *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Regal Books), and the *Spiritual Gifts Bible Study* workbook available from the Charles E. Fuller Institute (P.O. Box 989. Pasadena, California 91102). Church wide reading programs can also help. In my book I list the ten books on spiritual gifts I consider at the top of the line. Films and other resources are also available. (C. Peter Wagner, “Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism” [Notebook for American Festival of Evangelism, 1982], 3)

⁶⁰ Wagner, “Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism,” 3.

⁶¹ Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth*, 37.

⁶² Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth*, 37.

⁶³ Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth*, 40.

responsibility for saving souls, and the Holy Spirit works through them to accomplish the task. I previously discussed how the divine and human aspects come together in spreading the gospel.”

In *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (1990), Wagner states,

God wants His lost sheep found. God is “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). God’s priority is on the lost sheep even more than on those that have been found. Jesus’ parable tells us that the shepherd who has 100 sheep and finds only 99 who are safe leaves the 99 and searches for the lost one until it is found (see Luke 15:3–7). Our situation today is not 99 safe and one lost. By the most generous stretch of the imagination we now have more like 30 safe and 70 lost worldwide. We don’t have to call in a professional theologian to tell us what this means and where our priorities should be.⁶⁴

According to Wagner in “Jesus’ Attitudes toward Church Growth” (1989), Jesus says that we should not “be satisfied with the few sheep which happen to be in the fold.” Rather, “He is telling us to get our eyes on the lost and seek them until they are found. God does not want just a few sheep, He wants many. ‘It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish’ (Matt. 18:1).”⁶⁵

In an article titled “Power Encounter in Christian Mission” (1986), Wagner states,

Let me say quickly that I still believe in the sovereignty of God who, for his own reasons, has allowed this spiritual warfare to take place for almost two thousand now. And there is no doubt as to the outcome. Satan and all his demonic forces were defeated by the blood of Jesus on the cross. His is, at best, a holding action, but a ferocious, destructive and dehumanizing action which God expects us, as his servants, to actively oppose.⁶⁶

Wagner continues, “What are some things dearly out of God’s will which are happening today? In heaven there is no one poor, at war, oppressed, demonized, sick or lost.”

Wagner asserts that “even though it is not God’s will that any should perish,” the “world

⁶⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest: A Comprehensive Guide* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 31.

⁶⁵ C. Peter Wagner, “Jesus’ Attitudes toward Church Growth,” *Voice of Praise* (October–December 1989): 51.

⁶⁶ Wagner, “Power Encounter in Christian Mission,” 3.

today is full of those who are perishing.” Wagner concludes, “Our task, as instruments of God’s hands, is to reach out to them and bring them into the kingdom through the new birth.”⁶⁷

Function of prayer. Wagner’s continued understanding of the function of prayer is summarized in relation to his belief in a temporal dualism between the kingdom of God and Satan. In “Power Encounter in Christian Mission” (1986), Wagner states,

In the Lord’s prayer we say, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” I must confess that up until recently those words had very little meaning for my life. I repeated them by rote memory without much spiritual processing taking place as I did. For one thing, my understanding was that the kingdom was something that was future; so my assumption was that I was praying for the return of the Lord. An accompanying assumption was that, because God is sovereign, His will is in fact being done on earth today and that we can rather passively accept what happens as something which God directly or indirectly approves of.⁶⁸

Wagner continues by stating that he now sees “theology of the kingdom in a different light.” Concerning Wagner’s new paradigm, he asserts, “I now believe that when Jesus came, he introduced the kingdom of God into the present world. This was a direct confrontation or invasion of the kingdom of darkness ruled by Satan who is called ‘the god of this age’ (2 Cor 4:4).” Wagner states that he recognizes “that some things which occur today do so because of the will of the enemy, not because they are the will of God.” In concluding, Wagner states, “The era between the first and comings of Christ is an era of warfare between the two kingdoms. Two strong powers are occupying the same territory.” Wagner asserts that Christians are to “oppose” the will of Satan.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Wagner, “Power Encounter in Christian Mission,” 3.

⁶⁸ Wagner, “Power Encounter in Christian Mission,” 3.

⁶⁹ Wagner continues,

Let me say quickly that I still believe in the sovereignty of God who, for his own reasons, has allowed this spiritual warfare to take place for almost two thousand now. And there is no doubt as to the outcome. Satan and all his demonic forces were defeated by the blood of Jesus on the cross. His is, at best, a holding action, but a ferocious, destructive and dehumanizing action which God expects us, as his servants, to actively oppose. (Wagner, “Power Encounter in Christian Mission,” 3)

Referencing Joshua's battle against Amalek in Exodus 17, Wagner states that it was Moses's "intercession" that released the power of God through Joshua to win the battle." Wagner continues, "When the facts were known, it was Moses even more than Joshua who won the battle."⁷⁰ Lastly, Wagner states, "I know that prayer is closely related to church growth, and I have set as one of my research goals for the eighties an attempt to discover just how and why this is true."⁷¹

In "A Vision for Evangelizing the Real America," Wagner states,

Prayer is supreme, for we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. I must confess that for a large part of my own Christian ministry I thought that the inclusion of prayer under suggestions for strategy was simply a mandatory Christian platitude. Now I understand how wrong I was and how vital prayer really is for accomplishing God's purpose.⁷²

Extrabiblical revelation. In his 1984 publication *Leading Your Church to Growth*, Wagner states that the pastor of a congregation should function as a "spokesperson for God." Wagner, citing Jack Hayford as an example of his affirmed principle, states,

Once in a while Jack Hayford declares to his congregation, "God spoke to me and said . . ." I recall a few years ago, before the new sanctuary was completed, that in order to relieve the space problem he instructed his people that one Sunday morning per month instead of coming to the sanctuary they would meet with a house church group in their neighborhood. He said that he was announcing it as a part of the church's philosophy of ministry and that anyone who felt highly uncomfortable with it might better consider finding another church home. To emphasize his point, he said, "This is not Pastor Jack speaking to you. This is the Lord!"⁷³

Wagner, continuing to cite Hayford, states that Hayford "means that 'at a given moment, almost always when I least expected it, the Lord spoke words to me. Those words have been so distinct that I am virtually able to say, "And I quote."'"

⁷⁰ C. Peter Wagner, "Praying for Leaders," *World Evangelization* 15, no. 53 (1988): 25.

⁷¹ Wagner, "Characteristics of Pentecostal Church Growth," 6.

⁷² C. Peter Wagner, "A Vision for Evangelizing the Real America," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 10, no. 2 (April 1986): 63.

⁷³ Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth*, 85.

In *Signs and Wonders Today*, Wagner states that in his church's services, "we expect the Lord both to heal and to reveal His will through prophetic words. This occurs in a warm, rational and orderly environment. Visitors often remark, 'This is not what I have seen in the past.'"74

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

In his 1983 publication *On the Crest of the Wave*, Wagner again asserts that "the greatest error in contemporary missionary strategy is the confusion of means and end in the understanding of the Great Commission."⁷⁵ The Lord's goal of discipleship, according to Wagner, is the making of actual disciples, not simply obtaining professed decisions for Christ; this is a goal for "the whole Body of Christ, not just for individuals."⁷⁶

Proper evangelism, according to Wagner, creates disciples; "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."⁷⁷ Wagner states that evangelism is not "simply proclaiming the Gospel message," nor is "biblical" evangelism "doing good" or "getting decisions."⁷⁸ Evangelism is fulfilling the Great Commission to "make disciples." Wagner defines a disciple as "the basic meaning of a disciple in the New Testament is equivalent to a true, born-again disciple."⁷⁹ The making of disciples "is

⁷⁴ C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Signs & Wonders Today: New Expanded Edition with Study Questions and Applications* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987), 34.

⁷⁵ Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave*, 109.

⁷⁶ Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave*, 109.

⁷⁷ Wagner, "Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism," 1.

⁷⁸ Wagner, "Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism," 1.

⁷⁹ Wagner continues, "People are not disciples just because they have been born in a Christian country or, in many cases, even if they are church members. We have already mentioned that decisions in themselves do not necessarily lead to disciples. Not everyone who prays to receive Jesus ends up a disciple. The basic meaning of disciple in the New Testament is equivalent to a true, born-again Christian." He concludes that "in order to make a disciple you need to go to the fourth world, to people not yet true Christians. Unsaved people are the raw material, so to speak, for fulfilling the Great Commission. The

the right goal of evangelism and missions according to the Great Commission. Once disciples are made, they then begin the lifetime road of discipleship.”⁸⁰ For Wagner, the aspects of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20 of “going, baptizing, teaching, and any number of other Christian activities are evangelistic means or methodologies”; however, “the evangelistic goal is nothing less than disciples of Jesus Christ.”⁸¹ Wagner reiterates what he had discussed in previous eras concerning the role of discipleship and the making of disciples.⁸² He again summarizes that a disciple is “a responsible church member.”⁸³ Wagner states,

Theologically a disciple is made when the Holy Spirit does a sovereign and supernatural work of regeneration in the heart of an unbeliever. But, in the final analysis, no human being knows for sure if and when that event takes place in other people. As Jesus said, it is only “by their fruits” that you shall know them. What fruit do we look for? Many answers could be given to this question, but a great deal

instant one becomes a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), you have made a disciple.” Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave*, 110.

⁸⁰ Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave*, 110.

⁸¹ Wagner, “Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism,” 1.

⁸² Wagner continues,

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 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.” See also (C. Peter Wagner, *Stop the World, I Want to Get On* [Glendale, CA: Regal, 1974], 80; Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave*, 108–11)

⁸³ Wagner further defines the indication of discipleship. He states,

What does a disciple look like? How can you tell one when you see it? 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 “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Outsiders can recognize disciples because they “have love for one another” (John 13:35). In clearer terms, a disciple is a responsible church member. If a mission society moves into a pagan village one year, and moves out three years later leaving a group of 250 people who declare that Christ is their Lord, who meet together regularly for worship, who read the Bible and pray—they have made 250 disciples and to that degree have fulfilled the Great Commission. Now, these disciples might lack a great deal of polish. Many yet may be babes in Christ. They might not act like Wheaton, Illinois Christians. They might have a long way to go down the road of Christian discipleship, but nevertheless they are disciples. (Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave*, 111)

of research has shown that the most acceptable fruit for measuring evangelistic results is responsible membership in a local church.⁸⁴

Wagner states that “preaching the gospel is the preaching of the Kingdom of God.”

Wagner continues,

All this indicates that we should preach the Kingdom of God. We should be clear that the Kingdom is not some human utopian society on earth, nor is it the institutional church. The Kingdom is the company of those who have truly pledged allegiance to the King, almost all of whom reflect this by being responsible members of Christian churches.⁸⁵

Wagner distinguishes between “making disciples” and “discipleship.” For Wagner, discipleship is “equipping” the church for evangelism, which results in church growth.⁸⁶ “The key to equipping the church,” says Wagner, lies “in the area of spiritual gifts.” Wagner continues, “If spiritual gifts are operating as they should, the body will be equipped for evangelism. We must be clear however, as to what a spiritual gift is: A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the body of Christ according to God’s grace for use within the context of the body.”⁸⁷ Wagner concludes, “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.”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Wagner, “Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism,” 1.

⁸⁵ Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave*, 40.

⁸⁶ Wagner continues, “If evangelism involves adding to the church people who are being saved, then equipping for evangelism needs to focus on the whole church. It is not sufficient to equip a person here and there for the work of evangelism. Much good evangelistic work does not result in church growth because the church itself is not equipped to assimilate the new people who are won to Christ.” Wagner, “Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism,” 2.

⁸⁷ Wagner lists twenty-seven spiritual gifts: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, discerning the spirits, tongues, interpretations, apostle, helps, administration, evangelist, pastor, celibacy, voluntary poverty, martyrdom, hospitality, missionary, intercession, and exorcism. Included in the gifts, Wagner defines “apostle” as follows: “The gift of apostle is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to assume and exercise general leadership over a number of churches with an extraordinary authority in spiritual matters which is spontaneously recognized and appreciated by those churches.” Wagner defines prophecy thus: “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 divinely-anointed utterance.” Wagner, “Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism,” 2.

⁸⁸ Wagner, “Equipping the Local Church for Effective Evangelism,” 3.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 5. 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
<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

Return of the Apostle: The Third Wave Era (1991–2000)

Contextual Background

The 1990s marked the radical change in the structure of church leadership, which introduced the leadership roles of the apostles, prophets, and intercessors. Wagner cites apostolic leadership as “*the most radical change in the way of doing church since*

the Protestant Reformation!”⁸⁹ Wagner “began seriously to consider the apostolic movement in 1993.” It became apparent to Wagner 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.” By the end of the Third Wave era, Wagner calls for churches to not only recognize but also embrace the roles of prophet and apostle in the church today. Wagner states that “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.” He cites Ephesians 4:13 as a prooftext for his assertion:

The last words establish a specific time frame for the operation of these five gifts: “Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). 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.⁹⁰

In Wagner’s 1998 publication *Radical Holiness for Radical Living*, he summarizes the thematic theological overtone of the 1990s:

The whole body of Christ finds itself in a new place in the 1990s, not only here in America but around the world. Never has the Christian church seen such an ongoing harvest of souls, such a dramatic outward manifestation of supernatural power, such a worldwide prayer movement, or such compassion for the poor and needy. We are members of the first generation ever to experience the live possibility of completing the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in our lifetime. But, perhaps most significantly of all, we are seeing the divine government of the church coming into place before our very eyes.⁹¹

Apostolic leadership converged with the need for aggressive spiritual warfare against the onslaught of demonic powers. Wagner’s partnerships with Cindy Jacobs and Chuck Pierce define the era and Wagner’s theological dispositions.

⁸⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 205.

⁹⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000), 8.

⁹¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs: Wagner Institute for Practical Ministry, 1998), 8.

Theological Mile Markers

Apostle. In *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, while reflecting on his paradigm shift to the apostolic leadership of the church during the 1990s, Wagner states,

As soon as I began taking seriously the biblical teaching that the foundation of the church is apostles and prophets, I began shifting my paradigm from democratic forms of government, typical of traditional churches and denominations, to apostolic leadership, which holds that the Holy Spirit delegates considerable amounts of authority in church affairs to individuals whom He calls and assigns to specific tasks.⁹²

Wagner explains that his shift to apostles and their “spheres of authority” began through “communication with friends” and “followers.”⁹³ The apostolic leadership of churches must include both “vertical apostles” and “horizontal apostles.” According to Wagner, “Vertical apostles consider their primary responsibility to minister within their particular apostolic network,” while “horizontal apostles have a special ability to convene other apostles (e.g., vertical).” While both types of apostles are needed in the church, Wagner notes that an “aggressive missionary mind-set is an established part of the springboard from which the apostles are taking” the church “forward today.”⁹⁴

Wesleyan Holiness. While reflecting on his paradigm shift to Wesleyan Holiness in *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, Wagner states that once he became involved in spiritual warfare, he “found that the Reformed view of sanctification” would “not be sufficient.” Wagner then “shifted to John Wesley’s view,” which affirms that Christians “could and should live lives of purity and holiness, thereby shutting many doors through which Satan’s demonic forces could enter and thwart” their “effectiveness.”⁹⁵ While reflecting on his time at Fuller during the 1950s, Wagner states,

⁹² Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 272.

⁹³ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 65.

⁹⁴ Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 14.

⁹⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 271–72.

“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.”⁹⁶ For Wagner, Wesleyan Holiness makes it “possible” to “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.”⁹⁷

In Wagner’s 1998 publication *Radical Holiness*, he states that when he prays for Jesus to “deliver us from evil,” he expects “God to answer.” Wagner continues,

If He does keep me from Satan, I will not be tempted because God does not tempt people (see James 1:13). It is the devil who tries to get me to yield to my own desires and to sin. Holiness is not some evasive and unrealistic goal. If it were, God wouldn’t command us to be holy, and expect us to obey His command. Can it be done? Yes, it can be done!⁹⁸

In Wagner’s 2004 publication *Changing Church*, he reflects on his affirmation of Wesleyan Holiness and states that some of the “theological conclusions” of the sixteenth-century Reformers, such as John Calvin and Martin Luther, could be “questionable” and should not be viewed as “absolute” theological doctrine. For Wagner, the Reformers’ “doctrine of sanctification” was “corrected” through the work of John Wesley’s doctrine of holiness.⁹⁹

Prayer changes history. Wagner devotes a section of his 1993 publication *Churches That Pray* to the theme “Prayer Changes History,” which he calls “the law of

61. ⁹⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Revival! It Can Transform Your City!* (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 1999),

⁹⁷ Wagner, *Revival!*, 62.

⁹⁸ Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 34.

⁹⁹ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 169. This research was shared with Rebecca Vivian Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework to Assess and Evaluate C. Peter Wagner’s Doctrine of Sanctification” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 3.

prayer.”¹⁰⁰ According to Wagner, the law of prayer affirms that “God desires to do many things, but He will not do them unless or until Christian people, using their God-given freedom, pray and ask Him to do it (see Jas. 4:2).” Citing Jeremiah 33:3, Wagner states, “No one can change God, but our prayers can have a direct influence on what God does or does not do. This is the way God Himself has structured reality.” Wagner continues, “Suppose we do not call on Him? The answer is too obvious to state.” Wagner concludes, “If I do not pray, something that God Himself desires will, in fact, not be done”¹⁰¹ Citing Hayford’ publication *Prayer Is Invading the Impossible*, Wagner states, “If we don’t, God wont.”¹⁰² Citing Richard Foster, Wagner states, “No one has said it better than

¹⁰⁰ 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), 43.

¹⁰¹ Wagner, *Churches That Pray*, 43.

¹⁰² Wagner, *Churches That Pray*; Jack W. Hayford, *Prayer Is Invading the Impossible* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994). In Wagner’s 1997 publication *Praying with Power*, Wagner recommends Jack Hayford, *Prayer Is Invading the Impossible*, what Wagner calls “a no-nonsense straightforward look at prayer as a weapon of spiritual warfare.” Hayford receives credit in *This Changes Everything* in the chapter “From Classical Theism to Open Theism.” Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 147–48. Wagner states, “Jack Hayford likes to say, ‘If we don’t, He won’t.’” Wagner continues,

The underlying thought is that, if we pray, God will do certain things that He wouldn’t do without our prayers. This is open theism. Jack Hayford likes to say, “If we don’t, He won’t.” It’s not that God can’t—He can do anything. However, His nature is to choose not to know all that will happen in the future so that He can decide what the future will be, based, to whatever degree He chooses, on our prayers and our actions. Earlier in this chapter I used my healing ministry as an example. I’m quite sure that if I hadn’t prayed for certain people on a given night, they would still have had their back pain the next morning. If I didn’t, He wouldn’t have! (Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 147)

Wagner cites Hayford, *Prayer Is Invading the Impossible*. Wagner, using the same reference citation, writes in his 2005 publication *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary*,

One of the things that helped me understand the true dynamics of prayer was a chapter titled “If We Don’t, He Won’t” in Jack Hayford’s book *Prayer Is Invading the Impossible*. Notice that Jack Hayford did not say, “If We Don’t, He Can’t,” because obviously God can do anything that He wants to do. But Hayford, in my opinion, has a much more satisfactory view of the outworking of God’s sovereignty than we tend to learn from Calvinism. He believes that what God does or does not do can actually depend, at least to some degree, on whether we pray and on how we pray.

Wagner continues,

Here’s how I think about it. True, God is sovereign and He can do anything He wants to do. The sovereign God, however, apparently 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. (C. Peter Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005], 81–82)

Hayford became an influential leader in the New Apostolic Reformation movement. In 2005, Jack Hayford moderated an NAR leadership conference in Orlando, Florida. From the conference, prominent NAR leaders drafted the “Orlando Statement.” Such leaders included Rod Parsley, Joyce Meyer, Rick Joyner,

Richard Foster in his classic, *Celebration of Discipline*. ‘We are working with God to determine the future. Certain things will happen in history if we pray rightly.’”¹⁰³ Citing Brother Andrew, Wagner states, “One of the books on prayer I currently recommend to my students at Fuller Seminary has a provocative title: *And God Changed His Mind*. It is written by Brother Andrew, who says, ‘God’s plans for us are not chiseled in concrete. Only His character and nature are unchanging; His decisions are not!’”¹⁰⁴

In “Waging War against Territorial Spirits,” a 1995 publication for Morris Cerullo World Evangelism, Wagner states that “social structures, like demonized human

Myles Munroe, Peter Wagner, John Bevere, Cindy Jacobs, and Bill Hamon. In the Orlando Statement, the “five-fold” offices of the church were affirmed and became the distinction of NAR churches.

Robert Morris, leader of Gateway Church, has called Jack Hayford “the Apostle Paul of our generation.” Schuyler Moore, *Pastor Jack: The Authorized Biography of Jack Hayford* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2020), sec. “Statesman for the Holy Spirit.” While introducing Hayford during the 2015 First Conference, Morris states, “I believe that every generation gets an Apostle Paul, and this is the Apostle Paul to the Body of Christ.” Hayford responds concerning Morris, stating, “I’m only an Apostle. I think this is the fourth member of the Trinity.” See Robert Morris, “Jack Hayford - Pathway to Permanence” (presentation at First Conference, Gateway Church, Southlake, TX, January 7, 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtEKIWmxmOg>. During the 2018 First Conference, Robert Morris calls Jack Hayford the “Apostolic Elder” of Gateway Church. Robert Morris, “Robert Morris and Jack Hayford” (presentation at First Conference, Gateway Church, Southlake, TX, January 6, 2018), <https://gatewaypeople.com/sermons/robert-morris-and-jack-hayford>.

During the 2013 Gateway Leadership Conference, Jimmy Evans and Robert Morris affirmed the apostolic office of Gateway Church in Southlake, Texas, and Trinity Fellowship Church in Amarillo, Texas. See Tom Lane et al., Robert Morris, Jimmy Evans, and Preston Morrison, “Leadership and the Apostolic Role of the Church” (presentation at Gateway Leadership Conference, Gateway Church, Southlake, TX, 2013), <https://app.gatewayresource.com/resource/754>.

¹⁰³ Wagner, *Churches That Pray*, 44; Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988), 35. Wagner frequently cites Richard Foster throughout his writings concerning the topic of prayer during the 1990s. See 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), 23; Wagner, *Praying with Power: How to Pray Effectively and Hear Clearly from God*, Prayer Warrior Series (Ventura, CA: Destiny Image, 1997), 31; Wagner, *Seven Power Principles That I Didn’t Learn in Seminary* (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2000), 65; Wagner, *Lighting the World: A New Look at Acts: God’s Handbook for World Evangelism*, Acts of the Holy Spirit Series 2 (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1994), 124. This research was shared with Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 142.

¹⁰⁴ Wagner, *Churches That Pray*, 44; Brother Andrew, *And God Changed His Mind* (Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen, 1990), 15. Brother Andrew devotes chapter 8 (“Does Prayer Create Things - or Us?”) to the topic of prayer. Though Wagner does not cite Brother Andrew’s works beyond Andrew’s 1990 publication, openness theology predates Andrew’s 1990 publication. Andrew states, “If I run for my life, then the devil would catch up with me. I can only have God’s full protection if I stay in the center of his will.” Brother Andrew, *Building in a Broken World* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1981), 79. Brother Andrew is among the earliest cited open theists whom Wagner cites. Wagner seemingly first cites Brother Andrew in his 1993 publication *Churches That Pray* in a section titled “Prayer Changes History.” In his 1997 publication *Praying with Power*, Wagner recommends Andrew’s *And God Changed His Mind*, stating, “This is one of my favorite books about prayer. Do not miss the chapter titled ‘When It’s Satan’s Will, Not God’s.’” Wagner, *Praying with Power* (1997), 32.

beings, can be delivered from demonic oppression through warfare prayer”; therefore, “history belongs to the intercessors.”¹⁰⁵

In “Becoming a Praying Church in the 1990s,” Wagner states,

In the effective execution of many other forms of prayer, numbers are not significant. However in local church corporate prayer the numbers are highly significant. When Jesus says that where two or three are gathered He is present, He is contrasting that with the prayers of individuals. Agreement is important. The power of twenty or thirty in agreement is greater than two or three. Two hundred or three hundred is even better.¹⁰⁶

Theological Dispositions

This section provides Wagner’s theological dispositions from 1991 to 2000.

The will of God. In *Churches That Pray*, Wagner states,

It is important for us to realize that all that happens in this world is not the will of God. It is not a pleasant thought, but Satan is described as no less than “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). It is God’s will, for example, that none should perish (see 2 Pet. 3:9), but many do because the god of this age has blinded their minds (see 2 Cor. 4:3,4).¹⁰⁷

In “Waging War against Territorial Spirits,” Wagner states that prayer “changes what is possible for God.”¹⁰⁸ In *Churches That Pray*, Wagner cites Walter Wink’s 1986

¹⁰⁵ Wagner continues,

Principalities and powers are, to be very specific, evil spirits or demons. Social structures in themselves are not demonic, but they can be and often are demonized by some extremely pernicious and dominating demonic personalities, which I call territorial spirits. This opens up the possibility that social structures, like demonized human beings, can be delivered from demonic oppression through warfare prayer. This is why I believe that history belongs to the intercessors. (C. Peter Wagner, “Waging War against Territorial Spirits,” *Victory Miracle Living* [Morris Cerullo World Evangelism][July 1995]: 28)

¹⁰⁶ Wagner continues, “Because numbers are important in corporate prayer, measurement is possible. The most feasible way of quantifying local church corporate prayer can be reduced to this question: What percentage of church members who come for Sunday worship also return at least once a week for corporate prayer?” Wagner ends with the following affirmation: “The number one reason why believers stay away from corporate prayer is that the meetings are boring. Make each meeting an exciting and fulfilling experience.” C. Peter Wagner, “Becoming a Praying Church in the 1990s,” *Pastor’s Update* 2, no. 3 (1990): 1, 4.

¹⁰⁷ Wagner, *Churches That Pray*, 44.

¹⁰⁸ Wagner continues,

Evil is operating through society that cannot be explained simply by analyzing human nature, depraved as it might be, or by the application of sociological principles. Prayer is our major spiritual weapon against these territorial spirits and this new element in prayer—the resistance of the powers

publication *Unmasking the Powers*: “This new element in prayer—the resistance of the Powers to God’s will—marks a decisive break with the notion that God is the cause of all that happens.”¹⁰⁹ Using Wink, Wagner states, “We are told in Scripture that Daniel prayed and God answered his prayer on the same day. However, the answer took 21 days to arrive, not because God was slow, but because the ‘Prince of Persia’ succeeded in delaying it (see Dan. 10).” Wagner continues, “If Daniel had not continued fasting and praying, would the answer have ever arrived? Probably not. That is why prayer is so important and why history belongs to the intercessors, as Wink would say.”¹¹⁰

In comparing the will of Satan and the will of God, Wagner asserts that Satan, too, has a bifurcated will. In *Hard-Core Idolatry: Facing the Facts* (1999), Wagner devotes a section called “Satan’s Plan A and Plan B” to the will of Satan. Wagner states, “One of our duties as Christians is to be aware of what Satan is up to”; therefore, “it becomes clear that if we are ignorant of Satan’s devices, we make ourselves unnecessarily vulnerable for him to take advantage of us.”¹¹¹ Wagner asserts that Satan’s “Plan A” is to “weaken or destroy” Christians by resurrecting the “‘old man’ who should

to god’s will—marks a decisive break with the notion that God is the cause of all that happens Prayer changes us, but it also changes what is possible for God. (Wagner, “Waging War against Territorial Spirits,” 28)

¹⁰⁹ Wagner, *Churches That Pray*, 44; see also Walter Wink, *The Powers*, vol. 2, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 91.

¹¹⁰ Wagner, *Churches That Pray*, 44–45. In Wagner’s 1996 lecture notes “Praying in the Church,” Wagner states that “prayer works.” Wagner cites the following: Hayford, *Prayer Is Invading the Impossible* (1983); Brother Andrew, *And God Changed His Mind*; Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*; Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*. Wagner then cites and quotes R. A. Torrey,

There is nothing else in which the Church of today, and the ministry of today, or, to be more explicit, in which you and I, have departed more notably and more lamentably from apostolic precedent than in this matter of prayer. We do not live in a praying age, A very considerable proportion of the membership of our evangelical churches today do not believe even theoretically in prayer, that is, they do not believe in prayer as bringing anything to pass that would not have come to pass even if they had not prayed. They believe in prayer as having a beneficial “reflex influence,” that is, as benefiting the person who prays, a sort of lifting yourself up by your spiritual boot-straps, but as for prayer bringing anything to pass that would not have come to pass if we had not prayed, they do not believe in it and many of them frankly say so, and even some of our “modern ministers” say so. (R. A. Torrey, *The Power of Prayer* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955], 15)

¹¹¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Hard-Core Idolatry: Facing the Facts* (Colorado Springs: Wagner Institute for Practical Ministry, 1999), 8.

have been crucified with Christ” in order to “inflict” Christians with “some kind of curse,” “find openings which he can assign demons to afflict” Christians, or “seduce” Christians into “seeking supernatural power from sources other than God.”¹¹² Wagner asserts that Satan will fail in pursuing his “Plan A” if Christians are “living lives of radical holiness,” “fully committed to God,” and “protected with a shield of intercessory prayer.” Satan, however, has a second will, a “Plan B.” According to Wagner, 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.¹¹³

Divine interventional mutability. In *Churches That Pray*, Wagner states that “the Bible gives several examples of God changing His plans because of intercession.”¹¹⁴ Wagner continues, explaining that it was the Lord’s “intention to pour out His wrath and consume Israel when Moses came back from Sinai with the tablets of the Law.” Citing Exodus 32:14, Wagner then asserts that the Lord “relented” as a result of Moses’s intercession.

In *Confronting the Powers*, Wagner states that “prayer makes a difference.”¹¹⁵ Wagner continues, “Although our prayers do not change the nature or character of God, they can have a direct influence on what God does or does not do.” According to Wagner, God “has made certain things He wishes to do in human affairs contingent on the prayers of His people.” Wagner continues, “If God’s people are obedient and faithful in prayer, God’s ‘Plan A’ so to speak, will go into effect. If not, we can expect a less desirable ‘Plan

¹¹² Wagner, *Hard-Core Idolatry*, 8.

¹¹³ Wagner, *Hard-Core Idolatry*, 9.

¹¹⁴ Wagner, *Churches That Pray*, 44.

¹¹⁵ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 23.

B.’ Asking for Plan A does not violate our obedience to God—just the opposite. It reflects our obedience to God and our mutual desire for His perfect will to be done.”¹¹⁶ In *Seven Power Principles That I Didn’t Learn in Seminary* (2000), Wagner continues his assertion of two plans of God:

God is sovereign and He can do anything He wants to do. The sovereign God, however, apparently 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. God’s Plan A is obviously better for all concerned than Plan B. However, the choice, according to the design of our sovereign God, is ours, pure and simple.¹¹⁷

The omnipotence of God. In *Confronting the Powers* (1996), concerning God’s sovereign design of the means for implementing his will on earth, 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. 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.¹¹⁸

Wagner continues, stating that the “keys” given to the disciples are the ability of “binding and loosing,” which is the “power to unlock and penetrate the gates of hell.”¹¹⁹ According to Wagner, though Christians have the power to bind and loose, “even when it is the will of God that a certain territorial spirit be bound, efforts to do so might not succeed.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 23.

¹¹⁷ Wagner, *Seven Power Principles* (2000), 65.

¹¹⁸ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 154.

¹¹⁹ Wagner continues,

“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (v. 19). 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)

¹²⁰ Wagner provides two reasons why such binding might fail, stating, “Those who desire to lead effective spiritual warfare must themselves be holy before the Lord, have no unconfessed sin and be free of carnal motives. For another, we must be realistic enough and humble enough to admit that certain

Extrabiblical revelation. In Wagner’s 1996 lecture notes “Praying in the Church,” Wagner affirms “extra-biblical revelation,” which he contrasts with his previous teachings from Fuller and Princeton.¹²¹ Wagner cites his 1994 publication *Your Spiritual Gifts* as defining the basis for extrabiblical revelation, stating, “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.”¹²²

While reflecting on the 1990s in *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, Wagner states that once the intercessors, prophets, and apostles “came into place, the stage was set for entering the Second Apostolic Age in 2001.”¹²³ For Wagner, the restoration of the offices of apostle, prophet, and intercessor becomes an essential element for Christians to receive extrabiblical knowledge from God, thereby implementing the will of God on earth. While reflecting on the triadic nature of the offices, Wagner states, “Let’s speculate for the moment as to why God might bring to the surface intercessors in the 1970s, prophets in the 1980s, and apostles in the 1990s, in that particular sequence.”¹²⁴ Wagner calls the passing of the will of God to the church a “sequence.” For Wagner, intercessors “clear

spiritual powers could be too mighty for us to handle at a certain time and in a certain place.” Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 156.

¹²¹ Wagner cites Jack Hayford’s 1991 publication *Glory on Your House* as evidence of extrabiblical revelation. C. Peter Wagner, “Lecture Notes: Praying in the Church,” 3, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 6, Folder 8, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. According to Hayford,

And yet when I say that the Lord has spoken to me, I mean something even more specific than general revelations or private inner impressions. I reserve these words intentionally for the rare, special occasions when, in my spirit, I have had the Lord speak directly to me. I do not mean, “I felt impressed,” or, “I sensed somehow.” Instead, I mean that at a given moment, almost always when I have least expected it, the Lord spoke words to me. Those words have been so distinct that I feel virtually able to say, “And I quote.” (Jack W. Hayford, *Glory on Your House* [Tarrytown, NY: Chosen, 1991], 139)

¹²² Wagner, “Lecture Notes: Praying in the Church,” 3; Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1994), 214.

¹²³ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 29.

¹²⁴ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 27–28.

the pathway in the invisible world between heaven and earth” by binding and neutralizing “demonic powers.” Moreover, “when they do their job well, the voice of God can be heard more clearly here on earth.” Prophets, then, according to Wagner, “are those most strongly anointed by God to hear His voice.” When intercessors bind demonic powers, the prophets “can hear from God more accurately and communicate that message to the Body of Christ.” Apostles then “take the word of the Lord from prophets” and “judge and interpret the word; they strategize their procedures; and they assume leadership in implementing it.” In concluding, Wagner states that “for God’s purposes to be fully realized then, intercessors, prophets and apostles are all needed, and in that sequence.”¹²⁵

Epistemology. In *Confronting the Powers*, Wagner devotes a chapter (“How Do We Know What We Know? Evaluating Epistemology”) to epistemology. Wagner states that knowledge of God can be gained through three sources: “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.”¹²⁶ Wagner asserts that Christians can gain knowledge and “learn from the world of darkness.” Wagner states 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.” Wagner continues, stating that 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, although these are indispensable. Undoubtedly some parts of reality are primarily spiritually discerned, and therefore do not lend themselves to scientific analysis.” Wagner asserts that “spiritual insight, which receives information directly from the spirit world, is not an

¹²⁵ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 29.

¹²⁶ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 64.

exclusive faculty of those who have been born again. Spiritual discernment certainly constitutes at least some dimension of the image of God.” Wagner concludes,

The primary source of knowledge about God and the spiritual realm is the Bible—the written Word of God. This, however, is not our exclusive source. When we have proper safeguards and are under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we can also receive valuable information from the *rhema*—or spoken Word of God—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.¹²⁷

Limited dualism. In his 1996 publication *Confronting the Powers*, Wagner affirms “limited dualism.” For Wagner, “Satan and his forces of evil are not yet all under Jesus’ feet as they will be sometime in the future.” Therefore, “the conflict between good and evil is not merely a figment of our imaginations, or a reversion to ancient mythology, but it accurately describes the spiritual reality in which we live and minister in the world of today.”¹²⁸

In “Waging War against Territorial Spirits,” Wagner continues his dualistic paradigm between Satan and God. Wagner states that Christians “are engaged in mop-up operations. The Kingdom of God is here and we are a part of it, but it will not arrive in its fullness until Jesus’ second coming.” Wagner continues, explaining that Satan, “the prince of the power of the air,” is “constantly being pushed back as the Gospel spreads throughout the world.”¹²⁹ Wagner asserts that Satan “has a lust for power over nations”

¹²⁷ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 70–71.

¹²⁸ Wagner continues, “Our sovereign God has, for His own reasons, permitted dark angels to exercise their power to steal, kill and destroy. He has like-wise provided for us the weapons of warfare needed to serve Him as “a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 2:3).” Wagner provides a qualification to his affirmation of a limited dualism:

I must say that as a Christian I could never subscribe either explicitly or implicitly to a philosophical dualism, because I believe in “God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,” as the Apostles’ Creed states. This means that the devil himself as well as every principality and power and demonic being inhabiting the invisible world of darkness are creatures brought into being and subject to the almighty God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who “must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet” (1 Cor. 15:25). For biblical Christians, there is no such thing as an eternal conflict—only God is eternal. (Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 64–65)

¹²⁹ Wagner, “Waging War against Territorial Spirits,” 30.

and “commits fornication with political rulers who have authority over nations.” Wagner continues,

These nations Satan desires to control are the same kingdoms he offered to Jesus at the temptation in the wilderness. And they are the same nations to which Jesus refers in the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19, NKJ). Jesus commands us to move out in His authority to retake the nations Satan has under his dominion. 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. We are taking from him his lovers!¹³⁰

In a 1992 private correspondence to John Wimber, Wagner lists the significant aspects of his professed understanding of the nature of spiritual warfare: (1) “Satan is a real supernatural being with a personality of his own.” (2) “Demons are real supernatural beings with personalities of their own.” (3) “Satan controls a hierarchy of demonic beings which seek to rule a kingdom of darkness diametrically opposed to God’s kingdom of light. The role of the demonic beings is to carry out the will of Satan.” (4) “Spiritual warfare is an actual phenomenon in which invisible forces of God’s kingdom of light clash with invisible forces of Satan’s kingdom of darkness.” (5) “Jesus Christ has delegated His authority (*exousia*) over some of the demonic forces of darkness to believers.”¹³¹

Pragmatism. In Wagner’s 2000 publication *The Queen’s Domain*, he asserts that he is “intensely task-oriented,” and he states, “If I am working on a job I want to see

¹³⁰ Wagner, “Waging War against Territorial Spirits,” 31.

¹³¹ Wagner continues by citing additional elements: (6) “We can identify some demonic beings by functional names (e.g. ‘spirit of infirmity’) or proper names (e.g. ‘Wormwood’) on various levels of the hierarchy (e.g. from ‘deaf and dumb spirit’ to ‘Legion’ to ‘Beelzebub’).” (7) “We are to use the authority which Jesus gives us to cast out demons according to God’s will and timing.” (8) “When we minister to the demonized, we address the demonic spirits directly and personally, sometimes by name as God so reveals, rebuking them and casting them out in the name of Jesus and by the authority He has imparted to us. When we do this we do not ordinarily ask God to cast out the demons at His discretion, but we take the initiative and authority ourselves as the Father directs us.” (9) “We do not address the person of Satan directly.” (10) “We do not find a biblical prohibition against addressing or taking authority in the name of Jesus over demonic beings on any position in the hierarchy under Satan himself.” (11) “The church is to make known the wisdom of God to high ranking principalities and powers (Eph. 3:10).” C. Peter Wagner, “The Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare Dialogue between John Wimber and Peter Wagner,” 1, February 24, 1992, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 32, Folder 4, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

that job done, or at least I want to be able to see considerable measurable progress toward the goal.” Wagner continues,

I have been accused of being pragmatic by some of my critics, and all I can say in reply is that they are correct! If God has given me an assignment, I want to do whatever it takes to accomplish the purpose that He has in mind. I have always felt that obedience to God demands a pragmatic, results-oriented approach. If, for some reason, I don’t get the job done, I find myself deeply disappointed.¹³²

For Wagner, prayer is a means to achieve God’s will. He states, “If I pray, ‘Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,’ I need to be encouraged by seeing tangible evidence of the hand of God at work.” Wagner concludes, “If our underlying purpose is evangelizing the lost, which it is, I want to see more people being saved and more churches being planted after strategic prayer than before we prayed.”¹³³

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

In *Confronting the Powers*, Wagner summarizes his philosophy of discipleship by stating,

Nothing is closer to the heart of Jesus than winning the lost. The last command He gave to His disciples was the Great Commission to preach the gospel to every creature and make disciples in every nation or people group (see Matt 28:19,20). The Great Commission will continue to be Jesus’ highest priority until it is completed. In moving out to reach the lost, Jesus has instructed us to overcome or to bind the strongman. Part of the Great Commission is Jesus’ specific commission to His disciples and to us today to engage proactively in strategic-level spiritual warfare.¹³⁴

In *Hard-Core Idolatry*, Wagner states that “Jesus came ‘to seek and to save that which was lost.’ His last words spoken on the face of this earth were what we now call the Great Commission”; Wagner then quotes Acts 1:8: “You shall receive power

¹³² C. Peter Wagner, “Prayer Is Shaking the World,” in *The Queen’s Domain: Advancing God’s Kingdom in the 40/70 Window*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Colorado Spring: Wagner, 2000), 21–22.

¹³³ Wagner, “Prayer Is Shaking the World,” 22.

¹³⁴ Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 159.

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.” For Wagner, Christians are to move in the “power of the Holy Spirit” and “advance the Kingdom of God.” Wagner asserts that Christians are likely seeing the “literal enactment of Revelation 12:12: ‘The devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.’” Wagner concludes that Satan “is furious because kingdoms and people groups in which he has enjoyed free reign for millennia are now bursting open to the light of the Gospel.”¹³⁵

Similarly, in *Radical Holiness*, Wagner states that the “newly-found recognition of prophets and apostles completes the divine government of the church. With the government in place, God is now willing to entrust the body of Christ with revelation, supernatural power, and spiritual equipment that has not previously been known, at least by churches across the board.” Wagner continues,

This relates directly to fulfilling the Great Commission, as I have mentioned. We are realizing that in the process of spreading the Gospel, especially in the darkest regions of the world which are now coming into light, spiritual warfare is at the very heart of any significant advance of the kingdom. People cannot hear the Gospel because the “god of this age” has blinded their minds (see 2 Cor. 4:3–4).¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Wagner, *Hard-Core Idolatry*, 7–8.

¹³⁶ Wagner, *Radical Holiness for Radical Living* (1998), 9.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 6. Wagner's Theological Dispositions (1991–2000)

Systematic Theology	Beginning of Era	End of Era
<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>	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 and Reality	Present Reality
<i>Eschatology</i>	Frustrated by Dispensationalism	Frustrated by Dispensationalism

CHAPTER 5
FINAL THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATIONS AFTER
AFFIRMING OPEN THEISM (2001–2016)

Speaking to Frodo Baggins concerning his journey ahead, Lady Galadriel whispers, “Even the smallest person can change the course of history.”¹ For Frodo, the journey he had embarked on would determine the fate of all Middle Earth; history belonged to the journey before him. Similarly, 2001 begins the concluding chapter to Wagner’s journey, a time when he would affirm that the course of human history is dependent upon those who pray rightly. In the 2001 publication *Destiny of a Nation*, Wagner quotes Walter Wink as saying, “History belongs to the intercessors.”² *Destiny of a Nation* bifurcates Wagner’s theological journey, for this publication contains his initial public affirmation of openness theology. While the previous chapter explored Wagner’s theological convictions before affirming openness theology, this chapter summarizes Wagner’s theological convictions after his public affirmation of openness theology until the time of his passing.

Wagner’s theological system seemingly reached maturity in his 2004 publication *Changing Church*. Though Wagner’s works published after 2004 were seemingly recapitulations of his maturing theological system, *Changing Church* is

¹ The following quote is not original to J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Fellowship of the Ring* novel. It is found in the screenplay adaptation *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, directed by Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001).

² C. Peter 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), 9. Walter Wink, *The Powers*, vol. 3, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 298.

Wagner’s update and follow-up to *Churchquake!* (1999).³ Wagner wrote *Churchquake!* as a foundational “textbook” concerning the office of apostle in the modern church.⁴ In *Changing Church*, Wagner writes of the theological “paradigm shifts” required for the New Apostolic Reformation.⁵ Wagner’s 2008 publication *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* provides the matured “biblical and theological framework” of Wagner’s New Apostolic Reformation and its respective theology.⁶ For this reason, this chapter reviews Wagner’s matured theological system as a background to his theological telos.

History Belongs to the Intercessors: The New Apostolic Reformation Era (2001–2016)

Contextual Background

Wagner formally ended his tenure at Fuller Theological seminary in 2001. As the new millennium dawned, so too did Wagner’s New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement, which defined the remaining years of Wagner’s life. Though Wagner founded Wagner Leadership Institute (WLI) in 1998, he devoted the remaining years of his life to equipping those within the NAR movement to become prophets, apostles, and intercessors through WLI and other formed apostolic networks⁷ In 2017, after Wagner’s

³ C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004); Wagner, *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999). In a letter to the International Collation of Apostles (ICA), Wagner provides an advance copy of *Changing Church*. He states, “One of the great blessings in this season of life is to be connected with ICA. You truly represent the cutting-edge of what the Spirit is saying to the churches today. I have collected so many ideas from you that I have put them into a new book, *Changing Church*, which Regal will release in July 2004. This is a sequel to *Churchquake!* and I know that you will see yourself in chapter after chapter.” See C. Peter Wagner, “Memorandum to ICA Members,” April 22, 2004, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 13, Folder 4, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians: Lessons from a Lifetime in the Church: A Memoir* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 271.

⁵ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 298.

⁶ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 302.

⁷ In 1998, Wagner receives a personal prophecy from the Lord, through Cindy Jacobs, to start Wagner Institute. Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 246; Wagner, *Apostles*

death, Che Ahn assumed WLI's chancellorship and renamed the institution to Wagner University.⁸

The New Apostolic Reformation movement. As a named movement, the NAR became a recognized evangelical movement due to Wagner's bestowing the name *New Apostolic Reformation* to an existing community of neo-charismatic churches and organizations in 1998.⁹ In this introductory section, the discussion concerning the NAR is confined to a few remarks regarding its distinctives rather; this section does not provide an extensive history of the movement or its unifying theological convictions.¹⁰ Though the movement unified under a common moniker as the sun was setting on the twentieth

and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000), 116. Wagner University describes itself as having the following emphasis:

Founded in 1998 by Dr. C. Peter Wagner, WU reflects a new paradigm for unique training in practical ministry. Unlike traditional seminaries, we focus on equipping "in-service" leaders with a hybrid online and in-person style of teaching and learning, as well as impartation and activation. When you embark on the journey with us, you will have opportunities for hands-on, practical application, and Spirit-led ministry. You'll be equipped to bring the kingdom of God into the 7 Mountains of culture including the church, family, business, media, arts & entertainment, education, and government. Lastly, you'll develop a network of relationships with like-minded leaders around the globe. (Wagner University, "About Us," 2021, <https://wagner.university/about-us/>)

⁸ According to Wagner University,

In 1998, Dr. C. Peter Wagner was inspired by a prophetic word to create Wagner Leadership Institute (WLI). In 2010 Dr. Wagner appointed Dr. Che Ahn as the International Chancellor. In 2017, WLI became Wagner University (WU). As a global Christian University, 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")

⁹ Wagner first defined the New Apostolic Reformation movement by stating, "The new Apostolic reformation is 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." 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* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998), 18.

¹⁰ Wagner defines the New Apostolic Reformation as follows:

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)

century, the NAR unified as a culmination of previous twentieth-century movements. According to Wagner, each latter decade of the twentieth century brought forth advancements, culminating in the Second Apostolic Age¹¹ in 2001: 1950s Latter Rain movement, 1960s healing evangelism, 1970s intercessors, 1980s prophets, and 1990s apostles.¹² For Wagner, this new era was the “most radical change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation.”¹³ What distinguished the NAR from traditional Christian movements was the “recognition of the role of apostles in the body of Christ.”¹⁴ Though the NAR has other theological distinctives, one such distinctive is what Wagner calls dominionism (or Kingdom Now theology), which establishes its paradigm on open theism.¹⁵

Theological Mile Markers

Wagner frequently discusses his theological “paradigm shifts” throughout his writing career; however, beginning with the 2004 publication *Changing Church*, Wagner

¹¹ In personal correspondence with Wagner’s editor regarding edits to *Changing Church*, Wagner distinguished between the New Apostolic Reformation and the Second Apostolic Age. Wagner states,

I will be using the phrases “New Apostolic Reformation” and “Second Apostolic Age” frequently throughout this book, so it might be well up front to clarify their meanings. 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)

¹² 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.

¹³ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 10.

¹⁴ C. Peter Wagner, foreword to *Apostles, Prophets, and the Coming Moves of God: God’s End-Time Plans for His Church and Planet Earth*, by Bill Hamon (Santa Rosa Beach, FL: Destiny Image, 1999), xxii.

¹⁵ Wagner, “Unpublished Manuscript: Second Apostolic Age,” 5; C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2008), 7.

discusses the transitions with great specificity.¹⁶ Wagner devoted considerable attention to disclosing his theological transitions and the implications to his praxes. Many of his professed transitions are beyond the scope and purpose of this dissertation, however. For a more comprehensive list, see *Changing Church* (2004), *Dominion!* (2008), *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians* (2010), and *This Changes Everything* (2013).

Church vision to a kingdom vision. According to Wagner, Jesus “never sent out His disciples to preach the gospel of the church, but rather the gospel of the Kingdom.”¹⁷ For Wagner, this paradigm stands in contrast to his previous belief that “the kingdom of God” is “confined to the four walls of the local church.”¹⁸

Church growth to societal reformation. Wagner, describing his paradigm shift as what he terms dominionism, states, “The Great Commission says that we are to make disciples of all the nations. I used to think that it meant that we are to go into nations to win as many souls as possible and to multiply churches.”¹⁹ Continuing, Wagner states that he “now” takes “the Great Commission literally to mean that we should reform the nation (or people group) entirely so that the whole society begins to reflect the values of the kingdom of God.” Further discussion concerning dominionism occurs in the following section.

¹⁶ Wagner published *Changing Church* as an update to *Churchquake!* (1999). In a 2004 memorandum to the International Coalition of Apostles, Wagner states,

One of my great blessings in this season of life is to be connected with ICA. You truly represent the cutting-edge of what the Spirit is saying to the churches today. I have collected so many ideas from you that I have put them in a new book, *Changing Church*, which Regal will release in July 2004. This is a sequel to *Churchquake!* and I know that you will see yourself in chapter after chapter. (Wagner, “Memorandum to ICA Members,” April 22, 2004)

¹⁷ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 272.

¹⁸ Wagner continues, “I will not forget that after I published what I considered one of my best books, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, Ray Bakke commented that I had not mentioned the Kingdom even once in a book on the church’s social responsibility. I looked back and he was right! Since then I have not made that mistake again. Check out, for example, *Changing Church*.” Wagner, *Changing Church*, 272; Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1981).

¹⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 272.

Classic theism to open theism. Before this dissertation can engage in Wagner's theological dispositions from 2001 until 2016, it is necessary to establish his affirmation of open theism as his preferred theological system.²⁰ As presented in chapter 1, Wagner asserts that once open theism had become a codified system after the publication of *The Openness of God* (1994), he "finally" had a "biblical and theological paradigm that made sense of what I had been thinking and what I had been doing *all along*."²¹ Wagner first publicized his support of open theism in his 2001 publication *Destiny of a Nation: How Prophets and Intercessors Can Mold History*.²² Open theism continued to be a theological theme through the remaining fifteen years of his life. In his 2002 publication *Humility*, Wagner states that he prefers "the openness of God to classical theism."²³ Wagner began to publish his appropriation of open theism in his 2004 publication *Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church into the Future*. Wagner states, "I know that some will criticize me for espousing open theology." He continues, "I am simply suggesting that open theology is a deduction based on biblical evidence concerning the nature of God."

Furthermore, in notes to his editor for *Changing Church*, Wagner states,

In my original outline, I projected an entire chapter on open theism, but on the advice of some with whom I shared the book's ideas, I desisted and just made it a section in a chapter. I feel that presenting cons would be a distraction. Furthermore, I personally hold to open theology, so I wanted a brief apologia rather than an in-depth discussion.²⁴

²⁰ Researcher's note: Wagner's printed copy of "Does God Know Your Next Move?" circles the following quote from Bruce Ware, "Ware asks, how can God possibly know, at least from an openness perspective, that Abraham will remain faithful in the future?" C. Peter Wagner, "Does God Know Your Next Move?," 8, n.d., Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 16, Folder 13, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA; Christopher A. Hall, "Does God Know Your Next Move?," *Christianity Today*, May 21, 2001.

²¹ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 80 (emphasis added).

²² Wagner, "History Belongs to the Intercessors," 7–16.

²³ C. Peter Wagner, *Humility* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2002), 109.

²⁴ The editor's question is as follows:

Wagner devotes chapter 6 (“Powerful Pray”) of his 2005 publication *7 Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* to the discussion of open theism. In affirming openness theology, he states,

God is sovereign and He can do anything He wants to do. The sovereign God, however, apparently 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.²⁵

Wagner writes his most comprehensive theological presentation of his affirmation of openness theology in the 2008 publication *Dominion: How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*.²⁶ Before affirming his theological position of open theism, Wagner states, “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.’”²⁷ In Wagner’s 2010 autobiography *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, he states that he shifted from “classical theism to open theism.” He continues, “I was taught that God has determined and therefore knows ahead of time everything that ever happens. However, once I began flowing with the prayer movement in the 1990s, I began to believe strongly

Peter, you do a good job of laying out the pros of Open Theology, but would you consider addressing the cons (possible objections one might have) or at least listing them? These cons may include viewing God as weak, that His actions are totally conditional on human actions, that He is not free to act independently and that He actually becomes part of His creation, not Creator and Sustainer of it (as in process theology).

In response, Wagner states, “Interesting point. In my original outline, I projected an entire chapter on open theism, but on the advice of some with whom I shared the book’s ideas, I desisted and just made it a section in a chapter. I feel that presenting cons would be a distraction. Furthermore, I personally hold to open theology, so I wanted a brief apologia rather than an in-depth discussion.” C. Peter Wagner, “Unpublished Manuscript: Changing Church Editorial Notes to Stephanie Parrish,” 8, February 9, 2004, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 13, Folder 4, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

²⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Seven Power Principles I Learned after Seminary* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 81–82.

²⁶ Wagner states, “I presented my theological argument supporting this open theism in chapter 4 of my latest book, *Dominion!*” Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 273.

²⁷ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 76.

that our prayers can actually influence what God will do next. They can change God’s mind.”²⁸

Wagner devotes chapter 4 (“A New Theological Breakthrough: God Has an Open Mind”) of his 2012 publication *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God’s Call to Transform the World* to open theism. Concerning open theism, he states that he “felt” that he was “theologically born again” after having the “biblical and theological paradigm” of “open theism.”²⁹ Wagner devotes chapter 11 (“How I Became an Open Theist”) of his 2013 publication *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and Change Your Life* to open theism. Wagner states that he “had become an unapologetic open theist!” after reading Gregory Boyd’s *God of the Possible*.³⁰

Wagner publishes his seemingly final theme concerning open theism in the foreword to Harold Eberle’s 2015 publication *Systematic Theology for the New Apostolic Reformation: An Exposition to Father-Son Theology*, in a section titled “Open Theism.” In introducing Eberle’s work, Wagner states, “Most systematic theologies of the past assume that because God is omniscient and unchangeable, He has foreknowledge of everything that ever happens or will happen.”³¹ Wagner continues by stating “that God is

²⁸ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 273.

²⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God’s Call to Transform the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 84.

³⁰ Wagner provides additional context regarding open theism in a footnote. Wagner states, For any who desire to read more about open theism than this chapter provides, I suggest first *Who Is God?* by Harold R. Eberle. This is the clearest, most direct book I know of on the topic. Second, I suggest *God of the Possible* by Gregory A. Boyd, which has more theological content but is still very easy reading. Then, for those who might want to go to the graduate level, I recommend *Does God Have a Future?* by Christopher A. Hall and John Sanders. This is an expansion of the Christianity Today articles I referred to, and it goes into as much theological detail as most people could possibly digest. (Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and Change Your Life* [Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013], 142n1)

³¹ Wagner states,

Most systematic theologies of the past assume that because God is omniscient and unchangeable, He has foreknowledge of everything that ever happens or will happen. This is not the place to fully argue the matter, but as you read on, Eberle will describe the point of view that God is sovereign enough to limit His own omniscience if and when He chooses to do so. That means he leaves the outcome of certain things up to human decisions, which helps to explain the numerous biblical references to God changing His mind. How important is this? In my opinion, it is the fifth most important doctrinal

sovereign enough to limit His own omniscience if and when He chooses to do so. That means he leaves the outcome of certain things up to human decisions, which helps to explain the numerous biblical references to God changing His mind.”

Wagner writes extensively of his appropriation of open theism. For Wagner, open theism is a contrasting position to classical Reformed theology. Wagner states,

Classical theism had led me to believe that because God was sovereign, He had all things under control. He was all-powerful. He had predetermined everything that would ever happen in history. It was impossible for God not to know everything ahead of time. Nothing ever took God by surprise. Whatever happened through the ages must somehow fit into His overall design. Even though He didn’t like evil, everything that took place, both good and bad, ultimately glorified God.³²

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.”³³ Wagner states that his appropriation of open theism “starts out with a clear biblical understanding that God is sovereign.”³⁴ 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.”³⁵ 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.”³⁶ Concerning

advance since Jesus’ death and resurrection. The first four would be that the Gentiles can be saved without circumcision, justification by faith, the use of means to save heathen, and the Pentecostal view of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. (C. Peter Wagner, foreword to *Systematic Theology for the New Apostolic Reformation: An Exposition in Father-Son Theology*, by Harold R. Eberle [Yakima, WA: Worldcast, 2015], 6)

³² Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 84.

³³ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 84–85.

³⁴ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 85.

³⁵ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 85.

³⁶ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 147.

the paradigm of God in his openness system, Wagner concludes that God’s “nature is to choose not to know all that will happen in the future so that He can decide what the future will be, based, to whatever degree He chooses, on our prayers and our actions.”³⁷

Wagner’s handwritten notes for *Changing Church* state that “we are moving from passive determinism to personal responsibility.” Wagner describes the “old wineskin” perspective as follows: “We can pray, but God already knows (and thus has determined) how it will come out.”³⁸

Church ministry to workplace ministry. According to Wagner, “Up until a few years ago, I believed that all Christian ministry was congregationally based.” Wagner continues, “I even thought that spiritual gifts could only be used in church activities. I have now repented of this because I understand that the church also exists in the workplace and that what believers do in the workplace is a legitimate form of ministry.”³⁹ Wagner devotes his 2006 publication *The Church in the Workplace* to this topic.⁴⁰

³⁷ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 147.

³⁸ C. Peter Wagner, “Open Theol!” 10, 2004, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 16, Folder 12, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

³⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 273; C. Peter Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2006).

⁴⁰ Wagner concludes that doctrinal minimalism is essential to modern Christians. In discussing his conclusion, Wagner states, “Those of us who have studied in traditional Bible schools and seminaries know that the conventional wisdom among those who develop the curriculum for training nuclear-church leaders is that studying and mastering doctrine are essential.” Wagner continues, “Placing high value on doctrine does not carry over to the extended-church rule book. Most nuclear-church leaders, if they were flying somewhere, would tend to check two large suitcases of doctrine. Extended-church leaders, on the other hand, would probably make the same trip with a small carry-on.” Wagner then states,

One of the reasons that nuclear-church leaders consider doctrinal details important is because, by and large, they were trained by professional theologians and scholars. The party line is that solid doctrine is necessary for Christian maturity; it helps draw the lines to differentiate your church or denomination from others; it is a test of accurate Bible knowledge; and it is a badge of closeness to God.

Wagner concludes,

When I was in seminary, I was required to pass tests on the *filoque* [sic] clause, anthropomorphism, predestination, Pelagianism, supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism, substitutionary atonement, *homousios* [sic] versus *homoiousios* [sic], and much more. When I got into the real world, however, I was surprised that there were believers who had excellent Christian character and whose ministry surpassed mine in many areas but who had never passed a test on any of the above.

Wagner concludes that those involved in workplace ministry “tend to be doctrinal minimalists” who pay “little attention” to theological topics such as asking if “God has foreknowledge of every decision that we make.”

Escapist eschatology to victorious eschatology. Wagner describes his shift to a “victorious eschatology” as “a long time coming.”⁴¹ In *This Changes Everything*, Wagner states that he transitions from an “escapist” eschatological paradigm to a “victorious” eschatological paradigm.⁴² Wagner describes the “escapist” paradigm as his former view of dispensationalism.⁴³ Wagner credits Harold Eberle’s *Victorious Eschatology* (2007) as his “tipping point.” Citing Eberle, Wagner states that victorious eschatology is a “partial preterist” view, which ““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.””⁴⁴ For Wagner, Eberle presented a paradigm that articulates his dominion perspective; the “dominion mandate, or the literal interpretation of the Great Commission that tells us to make disciples of whole nations. A futurist eschatology

Most believers in the extended church are not overly concerned about whether the church is to be raptured before the tribulation or whether babies should be baptized or whether tongues is the initial physical evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit or whether Holy Communion is a sacrament or whether God has foreknowledge of every decision that we make. They tend to be doctrinal minimalists, paying little attention to the fact that every one of the doctrinal items that I just mentioned has been and still is a subject of energetic debate among nuclear-church leaders. (Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace*, 161–62)

⁴¹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 273.

⁴² Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 195.

⁴³ While reflecting on his change to victorious eschatology, Wagner states, I think I was still in Bolivia when I began questioning the premillennial, pretribulation Rapture eschatology that I had been taught. The idea was that the world would get worse and worse and at just the right time, we would be raptured out and the Antichrist would take over. I didn’t think I really believed that, but I simply put the issue on the back burner for decades. However, when I started understanding the Dominion Mandate, it became clear that I needed a better view of the end times. The light came on when I read Harold Eberle and Martin Trench’s *Victorious Eschatology*, and their partial preterist view is what I now believe. (Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 274)

⁴⁴ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 200; Harold R. Eberle and Martin Trench, *Victorious Eschatology: A Partial Preterist* (Yakima, WA: Worldcast, 2007), 148.

that expects to escape from the world through a rapture of the church does not fit this viewpoint.” Wagner further states,

Jesus came to reconcile the world, which Satan had usurped from Adam, back to the Father. He gave the ministry, or the implementation, of that reconciliation to us, His disciples. Since Jesus died on the cross, huge progress has been made. The world and the quality of life of the human race is much better now than it was 2,000 years ago. One day the restoration of all things will be completed, but that day has not yet come. Jesus is still in heaven. Do you think He could come today? Not if we take this Scripture at face value, because all things have not yet been restored. This is one of the compelling reasons why I have found my old paradigm of futurist eschatology deficient.⁴⁵

Theological Dispositions

In previous sections, Wagner’s theological dispositions were discussed either in isolation or within some theological grouping; however, in this section concerning the New Apostolic Reformation era, the entirety of the dispositions are discussed under the theological system of open theism, for open theism gave Wagner a “biblical and theological paradigm” that articulated what he had been “thinking” and “been doing all along.”⁴⁶

Biblical-theological system (dominionism). Wagner’s theological dispositions after affirming open theism manifest from his formed biblical-theological system. Wagner’s biblical-theological system describes realities, as he saw them, in the physical and spiritual realms; this system became Wagner’s dominion theology. Wagner writes extensively concerning his dominion theology in his 2008 publication *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*. He summarizes dominionism in the 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

⁴⁵ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 204.

⁴⁶ Wagner asserts, “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.

means our marker must be nothing short of social transformation.”⁴⁷ Dominion theology, according to Wagner, begins with the foundational premise that God’s original intention “was to create the human race so that they would ‘have *dominion* over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’ (Genesis 1:26, emphasis added).”⁴⁸ God, therefore, first commanded Adam and Eve to “‘be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have *dominion* over [all the creation]’ (Genesis 1:28, emphasis added).”⁴⁹ For this reason, God established “a government for the earth” with Adam and Eve as the governors. Wagner states that because God “gave Adam and Eve full authority to take dominion in His name” and because God created them as “free moral agents,” they could freely “give their authority” away.⁵⁰ Humanity, therefore, must work to reclaim authority from Satan so that the will of God is manifested upon earth.

For Wagner, taking physical dominion on the earth results in a spiritual war in the unseen realm.⁵¹ Wagner states that Satan “rules a belligerent hierarchy of evil. On a global scale, this kingdom of darkness had not been directly challenged before the

⁴⁷ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 160.

⁴⁸ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 63.

⁴⁹ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 64.

⁵⁰ Dominion theology is a common theological conviction among nondenominational churches that affirm Apostolic eldership, such as Robert Morris at Gateway Church in Southlake, Texas. On Easter Sunday, March 2018, Morris taught that the Lord had given Adam and Eve dominion over creation. Adam then relinquished the authority to Satan after the fall. Jesus, therefore, had to reclaim dominion over the Lord’s creation. Morris postulates that Christians give Satan authority when they “believe” Satan’s lies. Christians, therefore, must continuously reclaim authority through Christ. Robert Morris, “More than Words Series: Dominion,” (sermon preached at Gateway Church, Southlake, TX, March 30, 2018), <https://gatewaypeople.com/series/more-than-words?sermon=dominion>. Researcher’s note: This was the last sermon I attended as a member of Gateway church; I would leave the NAR movement the next month, after having a conversation with Steve LeBlanc and Bruce Ware.

⁵¹ Wagner states,

We have seen that the second Adam, Jesus Christ, came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), meaning the first Adam’s loss of the dominion over creation that God had designed for him and for the human race. Jesus came to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Satan might have usurped Adam’s authority over creation in the Garden of Eden, but Jesus came with the aggressive intention of turning history back around. (Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 115)

coming of the second Adam. But when Jesus came, He launched a full-scale invasion.”⁵² “All spiritual warfare is not the same,” asserts Wagner; for this reason, there are three “theaters” of spiritual warfare.⁵³ (1) “Ground-level” warfare is the casting of demons out of individuals, “most commonly known as deliverance ministry.” (2) “Occult-level” warfare, according to Wagner, “is not confronting individual demons, but rather dealing with more organized activities of evil spirits, such as would be found in witchcraft, voodoo, Eastern religions, Satanism, Freemasonry, Santería, New Age, Macumba, magic, Wicca, and the like.” Lastly, (3) “strategic-level” warfare, according to Wagner,

enters the invisible realm of principalities and powers of darkness that often take the form of territorial spirits assigned to keep whole geographical areas, social spheres or cultural groups in bondage to evil. This is clearly the most demanding area of spiritual warfare. It can result in casualties if not done wisely, according to spiritual protocol and under the specific direction and assignment of the Holy Spirit. Having said this, much of the warfare directly related to taking dominion and social transformation will obviously be on the strategic level.⁵⁴

Concerning dominion and spiritual warfare, Wagner states, “Note that dealing with issues of the land provides the foundation for the whole process, and overarching everything is the need to confront cosmic powers in such a way that the entire atmosphere is open to connect heaven to earth.”⁵⁵ While summarizing, Wagner asserts,

Notice how the land forms the arena on which social transformation will occur. The Bible says, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). Land can be polluted. Bloodshed, tyranny, oppression, trauma, injustice, broken covenants, sexual perversion, corruption, idolatry and war can provide entry points for principalities and powers to take dominion. When they do, the land comes under spiritual bondage, and it needs healing.⁵⁶

⁵² Wagner continues, “What were the works of the devil that Jesus came to destroy? They were obviously the misery, the systemic poverty, the injustice and the oppression that Satan had succeeded in inflicting on the human race since the Garden of Eden.” Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 116.

⁵³ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 126.

⁵⁴ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 126–27.

⁵⁵ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 129.

⁵⁶ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 130.

Epistemology. As discussed in chapter 3, since Wagner’s early days at Fuller Theological Seminary during the 1950s, he has “never been able to make even a vague connection between” epistemology “and anything I have done in the rest of my life so far.”⁵⁷ Wagner wrote his most extensive work concerning the development of his epistemology in chapter two (“How Do We Know What We Know? Evaluating Epistemology”) of his 2011 publication *Spiritual Warfare Strategy: Confronting Spiritual Powers*.⁵⁸ For Wagner, epistemology is mere “discernment” concerning the “reliability” of information outside the written Scriptures—originating from God or “demonic” sources. The telos of epistemology, for Wagner, that Christians would be effective in spiritual warfare; he states, “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.”⁵⁹ Wagner seldom devoted previous works to epistemology beyond brief mentions of the subject. Until Wagner’s 2011 publication *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, his most extensive discussion concerning epistemology was his 1996 publication *Confronting the Powers*.⁶⁰ Reflecting on the value of epistemology and practitioners within the New Apostolic Reformation movement, Wagner states, “Few Christians who are on the front lines of strategic-level spiritual warfare” will “ever see

⁵⁷ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 36.

⁵⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy: Confronting Spiritual Powers* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011). This book is a 2011 republication of Wagner’s 1996 publication *Confronting the Powers*. An evaluation of the 2011 edition occurs in a later chapter of this thesis. For the original edition, see 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).

⁵⁹ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 40.

⁶⁰ The following works contain Wagner’s previous mentions concerning epistemology: C. Peter Wagner, *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1973), 70; Wagner, *What Are We Missing?* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1978), 70; 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; Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1986), 68; Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*, 39–72; Wagner, *Praying with Power: How to Pray Effectively and Hear Clearly from God* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2008), 41; Wagner, *Churchquake!*, 236; C. Peter Wagner, *Seven Power Principles That I Didn’t Learn in Seminary* (Colorado Springs: Wagner, 2000), 11; Wagner, *Seven Power Principles* (2005), 10; Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 62; Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 35; Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 39–70.

books” in “the field of philosophical theology” and “the subject of epistemology”; nor will they take “time to explore and master their rather intricate reasoning.”⁶¹

Wagner defines epistemology as an “inborn” and a “discernment system” that enables one to determine the truthfulness of “something.”⁶² Wagner asserts that most “normal people” employ this discernment system every “day of their lives without so much as giving thought to whether it is there, much less how it works.”⁶³ For Wagner, one’s epistemological discernment system must be employed if one is “going to do warfare prayer and confront the powers of darkness in the invisible world”; therefore, “it is essential that we have accurate information about the nature and function of these powers.”⁶⁴

Citing Charles Kraft’s 1989 publication *Christianity with Power*, Wagner categorizes knowledge in three ways: intellectual, observational, and experiential.⁶⁵ Knowledge gained from these sources can be validated to determine a claim’s truthfulness. Wagner asserts that valid knowledge about God comes from three sources: reading the “written Word of God,” hearing the “voice of God,” and observing the “works of God.”⁶⁶ According to Wagner, the “written Word of God” provides the “*logos*” word.⁶⁷ The “*rhema*” Word of God, Wagner asserts, “most frequently refers to the

⁶¹ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 40.

⁶² Wagner does not specify whether the origin of the inborn discernment system is from a regenerate mind or is part of the human faculties found in the *imago Dei*.

⁶³ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 39.

⁶⁴ Wagner continues, “This raises crucial questions in the minds of thinking Christians. Is such knowledge available? If it is, where does it originate? How do we access it? How can we tell what is true from what is false? How do we know if something is real—if it is a clever deception of Satan, or if it is merely a figment of our imaginations?” Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 40.

⁶⁵ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 48; see also Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1989), 88–89.

⁶⁶ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 54.

⁶⁷ Wagner states,

Two Greek terms are used in the New Testament to describe the Word of God: *logos* and *rhema*. Although biblical scholars tell us we cannot draw an absolute distinction between the way they are

directly *spoken* word of God.” Wagner asserts that “evangelicals are used” to the “*logos*” Word of God; however, the “*rhema*” Word of God is rejected by cessationists, which he once denied as well.⁶⁸ Wagner continues, explaining that one receives the “*rhema*” knowledge of God by “hearing the voice of God as He communicates His thoughts directly to us as individuals.” Lastly, Wagner proposes that one can “obtain accurate information about the supernatural by observing or experiencing God’s works.” Wagner terms the observed and experienced works of God as “narratives.” For Wagner, theological conclusions can be drawn from “extrabiblical revelations,” provided that the conclusions do not contradict biblical teaching.⁶⁹ Wagner affirms that “the strict laws of scientific proof” cannot “answer” observed narratives “to the satisfaction of ‘scientific’ skeptics.” Wagner further states, “We validate the authenticity of reported narratives on the basis of the credibility of those who observe them or experience them.”⁷⁰ Wagner concludes with the following:

used, because at times the two words are used interchangeably, a somewhat different meaning seems to be attached to each word. In simple terms, *logos* most frequently refers to the written Word of God (an exception being a reference to Jesus in John 1), and *rhema* most frequently refers to the directly spoken word of God. (Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 50)

⁶⁸ Wagner cites Jack Deere and Cindy Jacobs as influential figures concerning his paradigm shift, stating, “Both Jack Deere and I now believe that God does speak to His people directly today and that He always has. In my paradigm shift, I was helped most of all by my good friend Cindy Jacobs, who has put her excellent teachings about prophecy into a recent book titled *The Voice of God* (Regal Books).” For more information, see Cindy Jacobs, *The Voice of God: How God Speaks Personally and Corporately to His Children Today* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1995); Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God: How God Speaks Today through Prophecies, Dreams, and Visions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

⁶⁹ Wagner affirms and cites Jack Voelkel’s conclusions regarding observational knowledge. Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 55. See Jack Voelkel, “Spiritual Warfare: Just What Is It and What Does the Bible Say?,” *Church Planter’s LINK* (Fourth Quarter 1994 and First Quarter 1995): 34.

⁷⁰ Wagner provides two anecdotal examples of such a validation:

Beginning in the early 1970s, I suffered severe headaches for ten consecutive years. It was so bad that at one point I had no relief from the pain at all for 70 days and 70 nights. No available painkiller could stop the headaches. Then in 1983, John Wimber received a *rhema* word from God that the root cause of my headaches was a demon and that I was to drive it out myself rather than ask someone else to do it for me. I obeyed. I cast out the demon in the name of Jesus, and I have not suffered any such headaches since that day.

Wagner offers a second example.

I have traveled frequently to Argentina and Brazil. I have talked to many people who have had their teeth filled by the power of God, including some who have had old bridges removed and replaced and some who have seen new teeth grow into places where former teeth have been extracted. I have personally looked into enough mouths and cross-examined enough people who have experienced

Seeing is not always believing. Frequently the opposite is the case: *believing is seeing*. In other words, accurately learning from or interpreting or explaining certain works of God, whether physical healing or the new birth, is only possible for those who first believe such things are indeed possible and not preposterous. In the final analysis, it is a matter of faith.

Regarding extrabiblical interpretation, Wagner states, “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.” For Wagner, “criteria for evaluating” extrabiblical claims “should not be limited to the five senses” nor to “scientific laws”; “some parts of reality are primarily spiritually discerned, and therefore do not lend themselves to scientific analysis.”⁷¹ Spiritual alliance, either to Satan or God, determines the truth claims concerning the validity of experiential knowledge. According to Wagner,

The larger question is not whether the operative modality of the spirit world is a part of total reality, but what we, as servants of the most high God, choose to do with this information. Committed animists have chosen to submit themselves to the power and authority of demonic spirits. They have chosen to give their allegiance to the creature rather than to the Creator. Christians, on the other hand, have decided to renounce all allegiance to the hosts of wickedness and to give their full allegiance to the Son of God. Make no mistake about it: this is a difference of great magnitude.⁷²

divine dental work to be completely convinced, beyond any doubt, that this miracle has happened and is happening with considerable frequency in those two nations. (Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 57)

⁷¹ Concerning spiritual discernment, Wagner states,

It becomes evident that some non-Christians, whether animist shamans, gurus, lamas, philosophers, or whatever, may be able to communicate to us some information about the reality of the spirit world in which they have gained considerable expertise. These non-Christian sources, of course, must be evaluated with much prayerful scrutiny and caution. Still, we must keep in mind that the spirit world to which they are dedicated is a real world, not the figment of their ‘heathen’ imaginations. Therefore, some things about it can be accurately known. A particularly important source of credible information may be those occult practitioners who have been born again and filled with the Holy Spirit. Not everything former occultists say may be true, but with biblical discernment, certain insights can be gained. (Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 67)

⁷² Wagner concludes,

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. (Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 68)

In summarizing, Wagner states, “The primary source of knowledge about God and the spiritual realm is the Bible—the written Word of God”; however, “it is not” the “exclusive source.” As Wagner avers,

When we have proper safeguards and are under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we can also receive valuable information from the rhema or spoken word of God; 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. As we know, hostile witnesses do not have a reputation for reliability.

For Wagner, the importance of the epistemological sources and validations of knowledge—“Word of God,” “Voice of God,” and “Acts of God”—becomes evident in dominion theology and the New Apostolic Reformation leadership model, which are discussed further in the following section. Wagner states, “Teachers research and expound the *logos*, prophets bring the *rhema*, and apostles put it together and point the direction into the future.”⁷³

Theology defined. Wagner discusses, in-depth, his definition of theology in *Changing Church*.⁷⁴ Wagner employs Ted Haggard’s circular modality to define theology: the inner circle contains “absolutes,” the middle circle contains “interpretations,” and the outer ring contains “deductions.”⁷⁵ Concerning “absolutes,” Wagner states that “God gives us some absolutes, several of which are His existence, the integrity of Scripture, the death and resurrection of Christ, and the existence of heaven

⁷³ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 63.

⁷⁴ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 141–62.

⁷⁵ Wagner states, “Let’s imagine that theology is something like 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.” Wagner continues,

The best explanation I have seen of these theological layers comes from Pastor Ted Haggard of New Life Church in Colorado Springs. With his permission, I have included his diagram that pictures the theological onion. 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 norms and the like. (Wagner, *Changing Church*, 146; see Ted Haggard, *Dog Training, Fly Fishing and Sharing Christ in the 21st Century: Empowering Your Church to Build Community through Shared Interests* [Nashville: T. Nelson, 2002], 111)

and hell.”⁷⁶ Wagner then states that the “key theological premises of the Protestant Reformation: the authority of Scripture, justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers” are common “absolutes” within NAR churches. Wagner asserts that “there is no absolute formula for deciding what goes into the absolute circle.”⁷⁷ Wagner uses the theological concept of the “Trinity” as an example of a deduction rather than a theological absolute within his model.⁷⁸ Wagner states, “Most apostolic leaders today would agree that while Trinitarian theology might be a strong conviction to the majority of us, it might not be regarded as an absolute on which we would gauge our ability to support each other and work together in advancing God’s kingdom.”⁷⁹ Interpretations, for Wagner, are one’s point of view on a passage, and there can be many “acceptable” interpretations.⁸⁰ Continuing Haggard’s definition of a deduction, Wagner states that a

⁷⁶ Wagner continues,

We will find that the total number of items included in the absolutes circles of apostolic leaders will generally be considerably smaller than it was in the old wineskin. Since there is no overarching apostolic agency that dictates what must be in everyone’s absolutes circle, it would be expected that different churches and ministries and apostolic networks would end up with different sets of absolutes. (Wagner, *Changing Church*, 147–48)

⁷⁷ While corresponding with the editor for *Changing Church*, the editor asks Wagner, “According to our theological editor, the importance of the Trinity should not be slighted (chapter 9). He does not understand how the authority of the Scripture, justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers can be considered theological absolutes and the Trinity not be? (A related question is how can we know what is supposed to be an absolute and what is supposed to be a deduction?)” In responding, Wagner states that “there is no absolute formula for deciding what goes into the absolute circle.” Wagner’s correspondence continues concerning the Trinity and Oneness; Wagner states that “I do not consider my oneness friends heretics.” Wagner, “Unpublished Manuscript: Changing Church Editorial Notes,” 6–7.

⁷⁸ Wagner states,

Should our view of the persons of God be a part of our absolutes theological category or a part of our deductions category? For example, all Christians are presented in the Bible with the many scriptural references to God as Father, to Jesus the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian Christians in the West (Roman Catholics and Protestants) have fit these Scriptures together and used the term “Trinity” and the phrase “three Persons in one essence” to describe God’s self-revelation. These theological terms and phrases are nowhere found in the Bible, but to Western Christians they suitably describe the biblical evidence. (Wagner, *Changing Church*, 158)

⁷⁹ Wagner discusses the Oneness eviction from the Assemblies of God in 1917:

In 1914 a group of pastors from the early Pentecostal movement in the Assemblies of God resurrected the ancient Modalistic view of God. At first they called their movement “Jesus Only,” and later the term “Oneness Pentecostalism” became the accepted designation. They were expelled in 1917 from the Assemblies of God, which regarded Trinitarianism as a theological absolute. In fact, of 585 ministers holding Assemblies of God credentials, no fewer than 156 were dismissed, along with their congregations. (Wagner, *Changing Church*, 159)

⁸⁰ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 149.

“deduction is taking one verse from one place in the Bible, connecting it with a verse from another place, and then coming to a conclusion that would not be evident from either of the verses on its own.”⁸¹ Wagner categorizes both classic theism and open theism as deductions.⁸²

Phenomenological theology. As Wagner articulates his epistemological axioms, he also establishes the underlying thesis of the functional use of his epistemological paradigm. Affirming Ray Anderson’s thesis, Wagner states, “Ministry precedes and produces theology, not the reverse.”⁸³ Wagner continues,

At first glance, this may not seem like a significant point. It has, however, become an issue of much debate among professional theologians. The opposite camp believes that theology must be correct in order to precede and produce correct ministry. I, however, agree with Ray Anderson. Though good theological understanding informs good ministry, I believe that ministry ordinarily comes first and then theology follows.⁸⁴

Wagner views theology as a circular paradigm: “ministry” provokes “theology and the new theology” provokes “subsequent ministry.” Theology, for Wagner, is “a human attempt to explain God’s Word and God’s works in a reasonable and systematic way.”⁸⁵ Wagner asserts that “traditional” theologians attempt to explain God’s Word and assume “that everything that God wanted to reveal to human beings is contained in the Bible.”⁸⁶

⁸¹ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 149–50.

⁸² Wagner states,

A respectable view is that neither classical theism nor open theism should be categorized as a theological absolute. I like the suggestion that we can classify our theological views as “absolutes” “interpretations” and “deductions.” By this definition, both classical theism and open theism would clearly be deductions. Good, solid, respectable theologians have the freedom to take their choice between the two points of view. (Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 87)

⁸³ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 42; see also Ray Sherman Anderson, ed., *Theological Foundations for Ministry: Selected Readings for a Theology of the Church in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 7.

⁸⁴ Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy*, 43.

⁸⁵ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 65.

⁸⁶ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 63.

In Wagner's 2012 publication *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, he states, "I know that theology can be dull and boring." Wagner asserts that theology has "very little intersection with practical reality."⁸⁷ Continuing, Wagner states,

Back when I went to seminary, practically the whole church was laboring under the assumption that a prerequisite for ordination was thorough instruction in systematic theology, epistemology and the history of dogma. A rationale for this was that such expertise would be necessary for the church to avoid heresy. Ironically, however, it has become evident that some of the most damaging heresies currently plaguing the churches, at least in Europe and North America, have been perpetrated by none other than learned theologians.⁸⁸

Wagner predicted that theologians would "become relics of the past as the Second Apostolic Age progresses."⁸⁹ In *Changing Church*, Wagner articulates a similar theme, that those in the NAR movement place less value on 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."⁹⁰

⁸⁷ 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.

⁸⁸ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 62.

⁸⁹ Wagner did not see reverence for theology within the New Apostolic churches:

I don't find the same level of reverence for theology in most churches associated with the New Apostolic Reformation. Take, for example, the school that I founded several years ago, Wagner Leadership Institute (WLI). Since WLI was designed to train adults who are already in ministry, I, for one, decided not to have any required courses in the curriculum. My thought was that the mature students whom we were teaching would know better what they needed for improving their own ministry than some faculty committee might surmise. One of the realities of this new tailored approach that quickly came to our attention was that if we offered traditional courses in systematic theology, epistemology or the history of dogma, practically no one would sign up for them.

I'll go one step further and predict that theologians per se will likely become relics of the past as the Second Apostolic Age progresses. The Catholic Church has officially recognized the office of theologian, and the Protestant equivalent is seminary professors (whose courses, by the way, are, by necessity, required for graduation). New Apostolic churches, on the other hand, do not seem to be following in these footsteps. Their leaders do not seem to be carrying the excessive amount of doctrinal baggage that many of their predecessors did. Theologians are not mentioned, for example, in Ephesians 4:11 alongside of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. All this does not imply an absence of sound theology, however. It is just that apostles, prophets and teachers are becoming the new custodians of a dynamic theology that turns out to be just as much practical as theoretical. (Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 63)

⁹⁰ Wagner states that the Wagner Leadership Institute does not offer systematic theology courses:

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

The function of prayer. The function of prayer was an instrumental catalyst driving Wagner’s theological affirmation of open theism. Wagner states that “it is one thing to see that the Bible clearly teaches that God has an open mind, but it is another to understand how it applies to our service to God in real life.” Wagner continues, “One of the key areas of Christian life in which open theism is either a spoken or an unspoken assumption is intercessory prayer.”⁹¹ For Wagner, intercessory prayers are “powerful prayers.” In Wagner’s 2004 publication *Praying with Power*, he states, “A central thesis underlying all my writings about prayer is that prayer works. Not all prayer works, but *effective* prayer does. *Powerful* prayer works.”⁹² Wagner asserts that effective prayers are “higher” levels of prayers; Christians must seek for their “prayers to be more effective in the future than they have been in the past.”⁹³ Citing and affirming Mary Alice Isleib, Wagner states,

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*, 144–45)

⁹¹ Wagner reflects upon his time at Fuller and the previous theological conviction that he once held:

Just bringing this up forces me to think back once again to seminary, where my professors were classical theists of the Calvinistic type. Since they didn’t believe that anything that human beings did could change what God had predestined and had foreknown since the foundation of the world, prayer was a bit problematic for them. Why do we pray? What difference will it make if we do pray or if we don’t? Does God need us to pray or does He just want us to pray? Their conclusion was that our prayers don’t affect God or His plans, but rather they change us. Our prayers help us to fit into whatever God has already planned. (Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 95–96)

⁹² Wagner states,

A central thesis underlying all my writings about prayer is that prayer works. Not all prayer works, but *effective* prayer does. *Powerful* prayer works. I have emphasized those adjectives to highlight what many of us already know in our hearts, but sometimes hesitate to admit—not all prayer is equal. Just as some prayer is effective, so some is ineffective, and some is in between. Just as some prayer is powerful, so, unfortunately, some is equally impotent. I am enough of a born pragmatist to have virtually no incentive to write a series of books about prayer in general. My interest is almost exclusively in powerful prayer, not in the other kinds. (C. Peter Wagner, *Praying with Power: How to Pray Effectively and Hear Clearly from God* [Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011], chap. 1 “Prayer Can Be Powerful (Or Otherwise),” sec. “Prayer Really Works,” para. 1, Logos Bible Software)

⁹³ Wagner continues,

I wish all my prayers would be like Elijah’s. I must confess, however, that I have not arrived at Elijah’s level—yet. I am not even at the level of many of my closest friends—yet. One thing I do know is that I am on a higher level than I was last year, and that next year I intend, with God’s help,

Every time we pray, if we do so correctly, God’s mighty power is released and made available to bring victory and breakthrough into even seemingly impossible situations. . . . In many cities and nations, [God’s power] has been withheld for years, not because of God’s reluctance to act, but rather, because God’s people have lacked the spiritual understanding necessary to break through and use His power to see their prayers answered.⁹⁴

The nature of Satan. Wagner states that Satan was primarily concerned with the dominion that God gave to Adam and Eve. For Wagner, “the traditional interpretation is that Satan wanted to break Adam and Eve’s relationship with God and thereby introduce original sin, which would then be transmitted genetically to all their human progeny through the ages so people would not go to heaven but to hell.”⁹⁵ Satan, according to Wagner, had “power and authority” in heaven before having been “cast down” from heaven after attempting to “assert his own authority above God’s.”⁹⁶ Satan used the opportunity to “take back authority he had lost” by using the free moral agency of Adam and Eve. Wagner continues, “This may sound strange at first, but think about it. 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.” Moreover, according to Wagner, the “apple” became “simply the visual symbol of Adam’s choice.” Adam “passed over to Satan the authority to take dominion over God’s creation. Worse yet, Adam put himself and the whole future human race under the authority of Satan as well.” Wagner uses the biblical account of the temptation of Christ (Matt 4:9) as scriptural evidence that Satan had authority over the earth; Jesus “never questioned the devil’s authority over the kingdoms of the world.”⁹⁷ For Wagner, the nature of Satan

to be higher than I am now. I may never reach Elijah’s level, but it is not because such a thing is impossible. (Wagner, *Praying with Power* [2011], chap. 1 “Prayer Can Be Powerful (Or Otherwise),” sec. “Measuring Prayer,” para. 2)

⁹⁴ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 97; see Mary Alice Isleib, “Releasing God’s Mighty Power,” *The Voice*, July 2006, 12.

⁹⁵ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 64.

⁹⁶ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 65.

⁹⁷ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 67.

should be viewed in the context of a “cosmic” war, and the church is “expected” to actively engage in and win the war.⁹⁸

The will of God. For Wagner, “God’s plan for history suddenly changed with the first Adam in the Garden of Eden.”⁹⁹ God’s plan for history “changed back with the coming of the second and last Adam, Jesus Christ.” For Wagner, the will of God, through Christ’s death on the cross, had an “apostolic dimension” beyond the traditional “pastoral dimension” of the “substitutionary atonement” theory.¹⁰⁰ Wagner cites Joseph Mattera to establish his interpretation of the purpose of Christ: “The main purpose of Jesus dying on the cross was not so that you can go to heaven. The main purpose of His death was so that His kingdom can be established in you so that, as a result, you can exercise kingdom authority on the earth (Luke 17:21) and reconcile the world back unto Him (2 Corinthians 5:19).”¹⁰¹ For Wagner, the gospel becomes a “ministry of reconciliation” to save “that which was lost.”¹⁰² Wagner contrasts his convictions from that of the “traditional”

⁹⁸ Wagner interprets this paradigm from Revelation 12. Using verse 7, he states that “Satan obviously has a powerful army of evil under his command. The war starts in heaven.” In verse 8, he states that the “final victory is settled.” Verse 9: “Satan is cast down.” Verse 10: “Satan takes the war from heaven to earth.” He continues, “The battles now must be fought by those of us here on earth.” Using verse 12, he states that “Satan is more ferocious now than he has ever been.” Continuing, he states that “it would stand to reason that as time moves on, the enemy will become more desperate and even more dangerous.” Using verse 17, he states that Satan “wars against God’s people.” Employing verse 11, he states

God wins! Three things ultimately win the war (see verse 11): (1) what Jesus has done—“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb”; (2) what we say—“By the word of their testimony”; and (3) what we do about it—“They did not love their lives to the death.” We must not be passive. We must be fully committed to destroying the works of the devil even if it might mean our lives. Every Allied soldier storming the beaches of Normandy on D-Day was committed to giving his life if necessary. Why should we be any less committed to extending the Kingdom of God? (Wagner, *Dominion!*, 118–20)

⁹⁹ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 67.

¹⁰⁰ Wagner states,

Most preaching, like Billy Graham’s for example, highlights the pastoral dimension of Jesus’ death on the cross. He died for our personal sins in order to reconcile us individually to God. Theologians call this the “substitutionary atonement.” Through Jesus we can become saved, born again, new creatures in Christ, holy, saints of God and whatever else is necessary to fulfill the destiny for which God put each of us on the earth. And ultimately we end up in heaven. (Wagner, *Dominion!*, 68)

¹⁰¹ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 68. Wagner cites Joseph Mattera, *Ruling in the Gates* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2003), 5.

¹⁰² Wagner, *Dominion!*, 69.

understanding of the purpose of Christ; for Wagner, Christ came to reclaim the “dominion over creation that Adam lost in the Garden of Eden.”¹⁰³ Christ, therefore, restores God’s original plan for creation. Wagner summarizes by stating that “God’s will is not only to save souls, but also and more broadly to transform society.”¹⁰⁴ Continuing, he states that “God’s will being accomplished on earth as it is in heaven depends on His people, empowered by the Holy Spirit, moving into action.”¹⁰⁵

The gospel of Christ. Wagner calls the “Gospel of the Kingdom” the manifestation of Luke 4:18–19: “Heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set liberty those who are oppressed.”¹⁰⁶ Wagner shifts the priority of the gospel “from redeeming individuals to redeeming society as” its ultimate “end goal.”¹⁰⁷ Lastly, Wagner states that “Jesus came to ‘seek and to save that which was lost’ (Luke 19:10). What is it that was lost? Adam’s dominion over creation.”¹⁰⁸ For Wagner, the gospel was to spread the “colonization” of God’s kingdom; “God’s reign was in the heavenlies, and He created the earth with the thought of extending His reign. Earth was to be a colony of heaven.”¹⁰⁹ Therefore, “the second

¹⁰³ Wagner states,

At one point, here is how Jesus described His own mission: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Our traditional pastoral understanding of this statement has been that Jesus came to save “those” who were lost, not “that” which was lost. Of course He did come to save individual souls, as I have said, but this particular verse does not refer to individuals; it refers to the dominion over creation that Adam lost in the Garden of Eden. (Wagner, *Dominion!*, 69)

¹⁰⁴ Peter C. Wagner, “Wagner Response to Marguerite Duerr (Re: Dominion),” June 15, 2006, 4, Collection 0181: C. Peter Wagner Collection, 1930–2016, Box 14, Folder 6, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.

¹⁰⁵ Wagner, “Wagner Response to Marguerite Duerr,” 4.

¹⁰⁶ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 70.

¹⁰⁷ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 71.

¹⁰⁸ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 204.

¹⁰⁹ Wagner continues,

God’s reign was in the heavenlies, and He created the earth with the thought of extending His reign. Earth was to be a colony of heaven. God was the King of all, and He delegated the human race,

Adam did all that was necessary to put back in place God’s original design for the earth as a colony of heaven. Once He did, He then delegated the responsibility of bringing God’s plan into being.”¹¹⁰ Jesus, according to Wagner, “won back authority” so that he could “rule over it.”¹¹¹ Christ, having ascended to the Father, delegated the responsibility to the church to “rule and reign” over creation. In so doing, God “wants to give us the authority and the resources and the revelation to move out in the power of the Holy Spirit and take back dominion from Satan.”

Philosophy of pragmatism. Wagner writes extensively concerning the topic of pragmatism in his 2006 publication *The Church in the Workplace*.¹¹² Wagner affirms that “the end justifies the means. What else could possibly justify the means except the end?” Wagner states that with the exception of social ethics, the axiom “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.” Concerning the means to achieve social transformation, Wagner states to “do whatever works.”¹¹³

Wagner continues,

Through the years, some attempts to transform society have worked better than others. Let’s learn from both our successes and our failures. 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.¹¹⁴

represented in the beginning by Adam, as governors over this colony. The visible earth is supposed to reflect the nature and essence of the invisible parent Kingdom of heaven. Jesus’ announcement in the synagogue of Nazareth was a declaration that this original intent of God would, from then on, begin to materialize in its fullness. (Wagner, *Dominion!*, 70)

¹¹⁰ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 71.

¹¹¹ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 71.

¹¹² Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace*, 144–50.

¹¹³ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 206.

¹¹⁴ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 206–7.

For Wagner, the means to achieve transformation should continuously change in response to the results produced.¹¹⁵ Pragmatism is a valid means that justifies the end; “those who do not understand the relationship of the means to the end or who have a knee-jerk aversion to pragmatism are generally satisfied with harboring good intentions, as opposed to insisting on verifiable production.”¹¹⁶ When reflecting upon his career, Wagner states, “I have always been a person who values pragmatism.” Wagner establishes his use of pragmatism with three axioms: (1) “a clear and precise definition of our goal,” (2) “the most efficient strategy to accomplish that goal,” (3) “a measuring device to gauge and evaluate the progress made.”¹¹⁷ Wagner, citing Bryant Myers, asserts that “mission strategy must include ‘learning our way into the future.’”¹¹⁸

Discipleship Philosophy Summary

Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship is grounded in open theism, dominionism, and the apostolic leadership framework of the New Apostolic Reformation movement.¹¹⁹ Wagner centers his philosophy of discipleship on Matthew 28:19: “Make

¹¹⁵ Wagner states, “Simply because until now, the strategies for social transformation with which we have experimented have not worked as well as we hoped. We have tried and tried and tried. We have seen many encouraging signs. But transformation? Our quivers are not yet filled with stories of transformed human societies in which that transformation has subsequently been sustained. God’s Kingdom is yet to come on earth as it is in heaven.” Wagner, *Dominion!*, 157.

¹¹⁶ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 158–59.

¹¹⁷ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 159. In his 2013 publication *This Changes Everything*, Wagner reflects upon his use of employing pragmatism, which he terms “consecrated pragmatism” (61). See chap. 4, “Consecrated Pragmatism,” in Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, for more information on Wagner’s employment of pragmatism. Wagner recognizes Donald McGavran as an influencer of his use of pragmatism, which McGavran termed “fierce pragmatism.” Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, 71–72. McGavran’s employment of pragmatism is evidenced in McGavran’s 1955 publication *The Bridges of God*. See Donald Anderson McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (London: World Dominion, 1955). In discussing McGavran’s influences, Gary L. McIntosh states that McGavran “resolved to memorize the meat of the summary at the end of each chapter” of John Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*. Gary L. McIntosh, *Donald A. McGavran: A Biography of the Twentieth Century’s Premier Missiologists* (Boca Raton, FL: Church Leader Insights, 2015), chap. 3, “Serving as Missionary,” para. 9, Kindle.

¹¹⁸ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 160; see also Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 146–47.

¹¹⁹ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 245–56.

disciples of all the nations.” Discipleship is for one to “become spiritual and social activists until Satan’s dominion is ended.”¹²⁰ Wagner’s discipleship philosophy emphasizes the reorientation of society rather than individual followers of Christ. Wagner cites Donald McGavran to define his interpretation of the Great Commission mandate:

According to the Great Commission the peoples are to be discipled. Negatively, a people is discipled when the claim of polytheism, idolatry, fetishism or any other man-made religion on its corporate loyalty is eliminated. Positively, a people is discipled 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.” Such a reorientation of the *social organism* around the Lord Jesus Christ will be accompanied by some and followed by other ethical changes.¹²¹

Wagner concludes, “Even though Jesus came and changed history, He is waiting for us to do our part in bringing restoration to pass in real life. Meanwhile, He 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).”¹²² It is a Christian’s task to become spiritual and social activists until Satan’s dominion is ended.¹²³

Wagner summarizes his concept of “equipping the saints” with the following statement:

¹²⁰ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 73.

¹²¹ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 72–73 (emphasis added); see also McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, 14.

¹²² Concerning Wagner’s theological change, he states,

Although I am a bit reluctant to suggest it, I am convinced that we need to take a closer look at the Great Commission. We need to come to grips with what Jesus meant when He commanded His followers to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). 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 concludes, “As the first incumbent of the Donald McGavran Chair of Church Growth at Fuller Seminary, I knowingly became a McGavran revisionist at that point. One of the first things I now want to do when I get to heaven is to find McGavran and apologize! Without using the term, he was inherently convinced that we should take dominion, and I now agree.” Wagner, *Dominion!*, 72–73.

¹²³ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 77.

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!¹²⁴

According to Wagner, “I no longer believe that evangelism and church planting are the legitimate *ends*—or final goals—of the Great Commission.”¹²⁵ For Wagner, equipping the saints is to holdback spiritual forces in order to allow others to make disciples, thus creating greater opportunities to reclaim dominion on earth and usher in the kingdom of God.

The Great Commission. As mentioned in previous sections, Wagner reevaluated his conviction concerning the Great Commission and the implications of discipleship; in the New Apostolic Reformation era, Wagner’s philosophy of discipleship had fully matured and aligned with his biblical-theological system grounded in open theism. In *Dominion!*, Wagner states, “Although I am a bit reluctant to suggest it, I am convinced that we need to take a closer look at the Great Commission. We need to come to grips with what Jesus meant when He commanded His followers to ‘make disciples of all the nations’ (Matthew 28:19).”¹²⁶ In Wagner’s 2015 publication *Breaking Spiritual Strongholds in Your City*, he greatly expounds on his reevaluation of the Great Commission. Wagner asserts that Mark 16:15–16 is an “individualistic” declaration to preach the gospel to all people, whereas Matthew 28:19 is a “corporate” one.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Wagner, *Wrestling with Alligators, Prophets, and Theologians*, 266.

¹²⁵ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 175.

¹²⁶ Wagner, *Dominion!*, 72.

¹²⁷ The 2015 publication is a reissue of a 1993 edition. Concerning the reissue, Wagner states, “When this book was first released in 1993, it was part of the A.D. 2000 Movement—more specifically, part of its United Prayer Track. The slogan was, ‘A church for every people and the gospel for every person by the year 2000.’ Look closely at the slogan. You will see that it is focused on individuals and on churches. The idea is that the gospel will be preached so that as many individuals in as many people groups (preferably *unreached* people groups) as possible will be saved and gathered into churches. Is this biblical? Of course it is. Mark’s last quote from Jesus Himself is,

Matthew shows us that saving souls is not our final goal. We now must concentrate on the cities or nations or regions or people groups or any significant segment of society where these individuals live. We must strive to transform the “nation” (the Greek is *ethne*, which means “people group”) so that it corporately acknowledges Jesus as Lord and reflects the values and blessings of the Kingdom.¹²⁸

Wagner continues, “Jesus never sent out His disciples to preach the gospel of the church. In fact, He never sent them out to preach the gospel of salvation. He always sent them out to preach the gospel of the Kingdom.” For Wagner, this mandate is the foundation to discipleship: “We now realize that we must be doing our part to participate in the fulfillment of the prayer Jesus taught us to pray: ‘Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matt. 6:10). This summarizes the Dominion Mandate.”

For Wagner, discipleship is carrying out the Great Commission through strategic-level spiritual warfare to make new disciples; spiritual warfare principles must be employed to enable those who do not believe in the gospel to believe without demonic forces frustrating discipleship efforts. Wagner states,

When we preach the gospel, the good news of salvation, to lost people and they do not respond, something is wrong. This is the best news they could ever hear, but when they don’t accept it, why not? The Bible is clear: “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Cor. 4:3–4, emphasis added).

Wagner continues, “The ‘god of this age,’ a synonym for Satan, is at the root of this. His agenda is the greatest obstacle to the spread of the gospel. Since this is the case, it would not be unreasonable to expect that God would provide us the necessary tools for

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:15–16).

This form of the Great Commission was front and center in the minds of all the authors who wrote chapters in *Breaking Strongholds in Your City*. At that time we advocated that spiritual mapping was a valuable tool to help target our intercession, particularly our *warfare* intercession, so that God’s glory could be freely loosed and that more souls would be saved. Now, in 2015, the Holy Spirit has brought those of us in our stream of Christianity one step beyond what I have just described. We are more aware of the Kingdom of God than we used to be. The church is vitally important, but the kingdom of God is not confined to the four walls of the church—it is much bigger. (C. Peter Wagner, *Breaking Spiritual Strongholds in Your City* [Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2015], chap. Preface, sec. “The Dominion Mandate,” para. 2. Logos Bible Software.)

¹²⁸ Wagner, *Breaking Spiritual Strongholds in Your City*, preface, sec. “The Dominion Mandate,” para. 4.

removing these obstacles that he puts up.”¹²⁹ The “assignment” of discipleship, for Wagner, is the following:

Our assignment is to attack aggressively. Now is not the time for passivity. Sitting back and hoping against hope that someone else (like God!) may come along and do the job for us will not carry the day. God did not say, “I will evangelize the world.” He said, “You will evangelize the world.”

Our assignment, therefore, is to go into the invisible world for hand-to-hand combat, to “wrestle,” as Paul said, making reference to the closest and most intense contact sport in Greco-Roman culture: “For 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 wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).¹³⁰

The apostle, prophet, and intercessor. For Wagner, the New Apostolic Reformation established the ecclesiological foundation to supply the means of discipleship. Wagner states, “Our responsibility is to confront high-level spirits directly by declaring to them the will of God. God’s desire is that “the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the *church* to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10, emphasis added).”¹³¹ Wagner then states, “Now that apostles are in place, the kingdom of Satan is in trouble.” Employing Ephesians 2:20, Wagner states “that the foundation of the church is apostles and prophets. This reflects not just a historical phenomenon which ceased shortly after Jesus departed and His apostles died,

¹²⁹ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 116.

¹³⁰ Wagner, *Changing Church*, 116.

¹³¹ Wagner continues,

Some who read this will observe that these ideas about spiritual warfare, especially on the higher levels, are not prominent in literature throughout the history of the Church. It is not that they are absent; they do appear from time to time, as I have documented elsewhere. However, it is true that such teaching, at least to our knowledge, has never been as prominent and widespread as it is today. That is one reason why most leaders today did not have courses in spiritual warfare in seminary or Bible college, as I mentioned previously. I personally spent some time retracing my own seminary experience and wrote a small book, *Seven Power Principles That I Did Not Learn in Seminary* (Wagner Publications). Since invading the kingdom of Satan is not new to God, why then would the Spirit have waited until only recently to speak to the churches about it?

I think that the answer to this intriguing question lies in the theme of this book, namely the Second Apostolic Age. Apostles are the major figures to whom God has given the role of serving as generals in His army, to use a military term. Consequently, while the Church has always been in a spiritual battle to some degree, it is understandable that God would hesitate to release His armies into higher levels of conflict until His apostolic generals were in place. (Wagner, *Changing Church*, 117)

but it is a reality in the church today.”¹³² Wagner asserts that the office of apostle and prophet has returned along with the role of the teacher within the church (1 Cor 12:28).

In returning to the epistemology, Wagner states that “teachers research and expound the logos, prophets bring the rhema, and apostles put it together and point the direction into the future.”¹³³ Furthermore, he states,

The role of intercessors is essentially to stand in the gap and open the communication highways between heaven and Earth. Once they are open, the voice of God can be heard more clearly. Although we can all hear from God, the prophets are the most specifically designated individuals to hear God’s voice. It is their role to receive and make known the divine messages directed to God’s people. But most prophets will themselves admit that they have little idea of what to do with most of the words they receive. It is the apostles, working hand in hand with prophets, who have the task of setting in order and implementing what God wants done on Earth in a certain season.¹³⁴

Though Wagner discusses the role of the apostle, prophets, and intercessors in greater detail, this dissertation limits the discussion to what is relevant to the means of discipleship.¹³⁵

¹³² Wagner, *Breaking Spiritual Strongholds in Your City*, preface, sec. “Apostolic Government,” para. 1.

¹³³ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 63.

¹³⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles Today* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2006), 15.

¹³⁵ Wagner did not equate the office of apostle with the traditional role of a pastor. According to Wagner,

Who are the God-appointed leaders or spiritual gatekeepers of the city? I am afraid that we reached a misguided answer to this question in the 1990s. Our assumption then was that the local church pastors were the spiritual gatekeepers of the city. I even carried this questionable idea into some of the books I wrote during that season.

One reason why many agreed with this conclusion in the 1990s is that back then we were only beginning to learn about apostles. We knew there was a church of the city all right, but we were not mature enough to understand that the God-given foundation of that church is apostles and prophets (see Eph. 2:20). Nor was the governmental order clear to us: “First apostles, second prophets, third teachers” (1 Cor. 12:28, emphasis added). We were actually getting it backward! Since most pastors who preach weekly sermons function also as teachers, they fit quite well into the third category. Biblically, however, 1 Corinthians 12:28 shows that the true spiritual gatekeepers of the city would be apostles, not pastors (or teachers). Of all the different kinds of apostles, it is the territorial apostles who would be the ones most likely to provide the persevering leadership that is required for city transformation. (Wagner, *Apostles Today*, 125)

Seven Mountain Mandate. Wagner’s “practical implementation” of dominionism is called the Seven (or 7) Mountain Mandate.¹³⁶ Wagner furthers the Seven Mountain concept originally offered by Lance Wallnau, which proposes that culture and society can be determined by seven overarching categories or “mountains”: religion, family, education, government, media, arts and entertainment, and business. Affirming and citing Walnau, Wagner states, “If the world is to be won, these are the mountains that mold the culture and the minds of men. Whoever controls these mountains controls the direction of the world and the harvest therein.”¹³⁷ Wagner continues, “The paradigm of the Seven Mountains has now become common currency among those committed to a literal fulfillment of the Great Commission.” For Wagner, Christian disciples employ spiritual warfare tactics to reclaim dominion of the mountains. Wagner calls Johnny Enlow’s publication *The Seven Mountain Prophecy* “a manual for spiritual mapping each of the seven mountains.” He continues, explaining that Enlow’s book

identifies the spiritual principality that Satan uses to keep each mountain in the kingdom of darkness, preventing it from moving into the kingdom of light: The Religion Mountain is dominated by the spirit of religion, the Family Mountain by Baal, the Government Mountain by Lucifer, the Media Mountain by Apollyon, the Education Mountain by Beelzebub, the Arts and Entertainment Mountain (which Enlow calls Celebration) by Jezebel, and the Business Mountain (which he calls Economy) by Mammon.¹³⁸

Bill Johnson, senior leader at Bethel Church in Redding, California, coauthored *Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate* (2013) with Lance Wallnau, in which Wagner contributed, as a theological exposition of the 7 Mountain Mandate and dominion theology.¹³⁹ In Johnson’s introduction, he states,

¹³⁶ Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 183.

¹³⁷ Wagner credits an unpublished, private, and undated manuscript from Wallnau, called “A Prophetic, Biblical, and Personal Call to the Workplace.” Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 185.

¹³⁸ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 193.

¹³⁹ Modern churches ascribing to dominion theology continue the functional open theism promoted by Wagner. Bill Johnson, senior leader at Bethel Church in Redding, California, coauthored *Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate* (2013) with Lance Wallnau, in which Wagner contributed, as

God has called us to make disciples of all nations. We are to preach the Good News that God's Son came to save us and to welcome us into His family and His realm. We look to Jesus' life on earth as a perfect representation of God the Father's heart for us. Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, breathed life into those around Him, and He declared justice and peace to the world. We are called to be His disciples and to bring His presence into our workplaces, our homes, our schools, our government, our media, our arts, and our religion.¹⁴⁰

a theological exposition of the 7 Mountain Mandate and dominion theology. Bill Johnson and Lance Wallnau, *Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2013). Concerning dominionism, Johnson states that there are "seven realms of society that must come under the influence of the King and His Kingdom. For that to happen, we, as citizens of the Kingdom, must invade. The dominion of the Lord Jesus is manifest whenever the people of God go forth to serve by bringing the order and blessing of His world into this one." Bill Johnson, "Invading Babylon," in *Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate*, by Bill Johnson and Lance Wallnau (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2013), sec. "Invading the Mountain of Influence," para. 1, Logos Bible Software. Wagner, contributing to Johnson's work and affirming dominion theology, states,

In my personal reckoning, the season in which those of us who are charismatically inclined evangelicals began to put the Dominion Mandate front and center began in 1990, and it sharply accelerated after the turn of the century. We have been doing everything we know how to do to see our cities transformed. However, after 20 years we cannot point to a single city in America that has been reformed according to objective sociological measurements. (C. Peter Wagner, "Stewarding for Reformation," in Johnson and Wallnau, *Invading Babylon*, sec. "Stewarding for Reformation," para. 1)

Kris Vallotton, a leader at Bethel Church in Redding, California, citing senior Bethel leader Bill Johnson, states that "God is in charge but He is not in control. He has left us in control." Kris Vallotton (@kvministries), Twitter, October 15, 2016, 9:02 p.m., <https://twitter.com/kvministries/status/787458684725190656>. Bill Johnson, who partnered with Wagner throughout his ministry, is currently a residential instructor at Wagner University. Wagner University, listing Bill Johnson as a "Core Residential Faculty," states

Bill is a fifth-generation pastor with a rich heritage in the Holy Spirit. He and Beni have been pastors of Bethel Church since 1996 with a one-word mission statement: revival. Bill's priority in life has been to learn how to host the Presence of God and minister to Him. Bill is passionate about seeing the kingdom of heaven invade earth across all spheres of influence. The wisdom of God is to be displayed through the church, government, education and the arts. Bill travels extensively to share what he has learned through his experience, with the conviction that the only way to increase what has been given is to give it away. (Wagner University, "Meet Our Residential Training Instructors," 2021, <https://wagner.university/faculty/>)

Bethel leaders and pastors such as Vallotton and Brian Simmons are currently on staff at Wagner University as residential faculty. Concerning Vallotton, Wagner University states,

Kris Vallotton is a noted prophetic voice in Northern California, and has trained prophetic teams in this region. He is a sought after speaker with a vision for equipping an "Elijah generation" for the end-time harvest. Kathy's practical wisdom and prophetic insight combine to give her a unique and profound ministry as both an instructor and the school's administrator. Kathy is also an anointed worship leader, assisting with the training of the worship teams at the school. Both Kris and his wife Kathy have a vision to raise up a company of warriors to impact this generation for Christ. Their goal is to see the fulfillment of Isaiah 61 with their own eyes. This prophecy begins with individual people getting delivered and healed—it ends with the ruined cities being restored.

Concerning Brian Simmons, Wagner University states,

Brian Simmons has been described as a true pioneer in ministry. As a spiritual father, his teaching and spiritual gifts have opened doors in many nations to take the message of authentic awakening and revival to many. For the last 40 years he has labored together with his wife, Candice, to present Christ in His fullness wherever God sends them. Brian is committed to finishing the translation of the entire Bible into a new dynamic-equivalent version called, The Passion Translation. See www.PassionTranslation.com for more info. (Wagner University, "Meet Our Residential Training Instructors")

¹⁴⁰ Johnson and Wallnau, introduction to *Invading Babylon*, para. 20.

Tithing to open the gates of heaven. Wagner, in contributing to Johnson's work, states,

Now, in light of the Dominion Mandate, we take it literally and see that we are to disciple nations as whole social units. Our task, then, is nothing less than reforming nations or people groups or social units of whatever scope. The values and blessings of God's Kingdom must become characteristic of whole cities or states or countries. But practically speaking, part of the process of making that happen is to have large amounts of wealth available.

Wagner states that "influence is attained one way in the Religion Mountain and another way in the other six. In the Religion Mountain, spirituality is a chief factor contributing to influence. However, spirituality is not considered to be a prerequisite for influence in any of the other six." Wagner continues, "In the other six mountains, success is the determining factor. Successful people are the ones to whom colleagues and co-workers ordinarily look for guidance and mentoring." Wagner concludes, "In the workplace, successful people are more than likely rich."¹⁴¹

For Wagner, faithful disciples are those who tithe and contribute to the reformation of society through wealth.¹⁴² Wagner states, "If you want God to open the gates of prosperity in your life, you must be a giving person, and you must give cheerfully."¹⁴³ Wagner continues, "If you are going to be a reformer you must give tithes, offerings, and firstfruits." In conclusion, Wagner states,

Tithes are clearly mandated by Scripture. My advice is to take Malachi 3 seriously as a word from God and not try to argue it away. It tells you that if you don't bring your tithes (10 percent of your income) to God's storehouse, you are robbing God! But if you do tithe, God will open the windows of Heaven and pour out blessing.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 189.

¹⁴² Researcher's note: To be in a leadership position at Gateway Church, even if it is a volunteer position, one is ineligible if one does not pass a tithe audit. When I assumed the volunteer lead at Gateway Church, Fort Worth Campus, for pre-marriage, I had to successfully demonstrate that I had faithfully tithed a minimum of ten percent for at least one year.

¹⁴³ Wagner, "Stewarding for Reformation," sec. "Open the Gates by Giving," para. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Wagner, "Stewarding for Reformation," sec. "Open the Gates by Giving," para. 1.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 7. Wagner’s Theological Dispositions (2001–2016)

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

At Journey’s End: The Final Biblical-Theological Narrative of C. Peter Wagner

This section concludes Wagner’s story; it is where the journey comes to its end. Wagner passed away in October 2016, yet he actively wrote until he could do so no longer. Doris Wagner published Wagner’s final manuscript, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life: Wisdom for Thriving in Life*, in 2021. According to Doris, “Peter last sat at his

computer” in August; he died the following October, “before he could finish” his final book.¹⁴⁵ Though Doris constructs the remaining portion of the publication from Wagner’s notes, this section interacts with his penned writing.¹⁴⁶ The previous section presented Wagner’s theological dispositions; for this reason, this following section omits the previous structure. In its place, only Wagner’s theological dispositions concerning his biblical-theological system are presented.¹⁴⁷ Lastly, Wagner’s last manuscript does not present any theological or convictional change but does provide a continuation and conclusion of his codified theological system in the new millennium.

The Biblical-Theological Narrative of C. Peter Wagner

Divine presence and humanity. Wagner states, “As I think back, I can hardly remember a whole sermon analyzing what is meant biblically as ‘the presence of God.’”¹⁴⁸ Wagner provides a threefold taxonomy of the presence of God: omnipresence, indwelling presence, and manifest presence.¹⁴⁹ Wagner asserts, “Classic theology teaches

¹⁴⁵ C. Peter Wagner and Doris M. Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life: Wisdom for Thriving in Life* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2021), 14, 88.

¹⁴⁶ Wagner’s firsthand work ends on page 82, with Doris’s finishing the remainder. 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.

¹⁴⁷ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 31–53. See “Live in the Presence of God.”

¹⁴⁸ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 32.

¹⁴⁹ Wagner introduces the topic by stating,

I imagine that just about everyone who begins reading this chapter will be quite familiar with the phrase “the presence of God.” Different ones may explain its meaning in different ways. In the charismatic/Pentecostal circles where I move these days, we regularly hear about “the presence of God” from the pulpit. It most frequently comes when, for whatever reason, the audience enjoys an uplifting emotional experience. The pastor may say words to the effect, “Did you feel that? The presence of God is here!” We all agree and we take it as a stamp of God’s approval on what we are doing. This is just a guess, but I imagine we see this in around 75 percent of our meetings.

Wagner defines the categories as follows: omnipresence means “God is everywhere”; indwelling presence means “God dwells in believers”; manifest presence means “God, from time to time, makes His presence unusually evident to our eyes or our ears or our spirits.” Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 31–32.

that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent.”¹⁵⁰ He concludes, “The theological omnipresence of God is true, but it is really rather abstract. For most people it is a vague concept. In fact, a lot of people think that God lives in some distant place and that He is not around here with us.”¹⁵¹ Elsewhere, Wagner states, “God is omnipresent and we worship Him for it. God visits us with His manifold presence and we enjoy it. But we live, day in and day out, in His indwelling presence. This provides us strength and nurture in our Christian walk.”¹⁵² Wagner asserts, “The indwelling presence of God will be there, but it is our responsibility to make sure we are living in it.”

Human cooperation and divine partnership. For Wagner, only those who have prayed “what we call the sinner’s prayer” enjoy “the indwelling presence of God.”¹⁵³ Wagner describes those who have prayed the sinner’s prayer as those who want to be “used” by God.¹⁵⁴ Wagner cites the apostle Paul as an example of one who took the indwelling of God “to a place that all of us ought to strive for—he has allowed Christ to live his life for him.” Wagner asserts that few “will duplicate Paul’s accomplishment,” and Wagner concedes he does not “think” himself to be “among those who have.”¹⁵⁵

Concerning the responsibility of Christians to “make sure” they are “living” in the indwelling presence of God, Wagner states, “I have never forgotten about the indwelling presence of God in my life, and this has helped me sustain whatever I might have attained as a fruitful life.”¹⁵⁶ He continues, “Notice that I wrote, ‘I have never

¹⁵⁰ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 32.

¹⁵¹ Wagner does not offer any commentary concerning omniscience and omnipotence. Wagner comments only that “the theological omnipresence of God is true.” Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 33.

¹⁵² Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 36.

¹⁵³ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 37.

¹⁵⁴ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 38.

¹⁵⁵ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 39.

¹⁵⁶ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 39–40.

forgotten.’ This does not reflect God’s initiative, it reflects mine. God’s initiative is to endow us with His indwelling presence, but it is our initiative to live it.”

Human responsibility through practical holiness. Wagner categorizes two aspects of holiness: positional and practicing. Positional holiness, according to Wagner, “refers to our status as a true child of God.”¹⁵⁷ “You do not work on positional holiness if you are truly born again.” Practicing holiness, Wagner states, “implies that, unlike positional holiness, we have to work on it. It does not come automatically.”¹⁵⁸ Citing 1 Peter 1:15, Wagner continues, “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 concludes, “If we choose to live in the presence of God, I repeat, holiness becomes second nature.”¹⁵⁹ For Wagner, Christians can “live a holy life without even trying.”¹⁶⁰

Human responsibility for divine reconciliation. Concerning the eternal promises of the eternal kingdom of God, Wagner states, “Good things 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 earth.”¹⁶¹ For Wagner, the kingdom of God contains no poverty or sickness. Referencing Matthew 6:10, Wagner continues, “Jesus taught us to pray, ‘*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*’” Wagner asserts that Jesus’s prayer affirms that “God’s will for earth as well as in Heaven” is for there to be no sickness or poverty. The present reality of sickness and poverty is the result of Satan’s frustrating the implementation of the kingdom of God on earth.

¹⁵⁷ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 44.

¹⁵⁸ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 45.

¹⁵⁹ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 46.

¹⁶⁰ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 43.

¹⁶¹ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 47.

God created Adam to take authority and govern His creation. But satan succeeded in usurping that authority and taking charge of the world. This is why Jesus Himself called satan “*the ruler of this world*” (John 14:30). But Jesus also came as the “last Adam” in order to destroy the works of satan. He paid the price to defeat the devil on the cross. He brought the Kingdom of God. He came to reconcile the world once more to God, but He gave us the ministry of reconciliation (see 2 Corinthians 5:18).¹⁶²

Wagner continues and offers his final conclusion:

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?¹⁶³

To his rhetorical question, asking how long until Jesus brings God’s kingdom to earth, Wagner offers his final summary concerning God’s omnipotence and humankind’s responsibility: “Until all things have been restored. Meanwhile, even though it’s not God’s will, we are going to have to put up with worldliness like poverty and sickness.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 47–48.

¹⁶³ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 48.

¹⁶⁴ Wagner and Wagner, *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life*, 48.

Theological Dispositions Summary

Table 8. Wagner's Theological Dispositions (1955–2016)

Systematic Theology	1955	2016
<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

CHAPTER 6

THERE AND BACK AGAIN: THE CONCLUSIONS

This chapter first summarizes the findings of this project by reviewing the research questions answered by this dissertation. Second, the chapter presents this research's contribution to the existing literature base and suggests future research topics associated with the findings. Third, the chapter presents the conclusions of the dissertation along with the research's application to scholars, pastors, and individuals. Lastly, the chapter returns to this dissertation's definition of discipleship by briefly contrasting a Wagnerian philosophy of discipleship with the previously defined philosophy of discipleship by Michael Horton.

Research Questions

This dissertation sought to answer how the progressive adoption of an openness theological paradigm impacted C. Peter Wagner's discipleship philosophy by answering the following questions:

1. What were C. Peter Wagner's theological affirmations concerning the doctrine of God before explicitly affirming open theism?
2. What were C. Peter Wagner's theological affirmations concerning the doctrine of God after explicitly affirming open theism?
3. What was C. Peter Wagner's philosophy of discipleship before explicitly affirming open theism?
4. What philosophy of discipleship emerged after C. Peter Wagner affirmed open theism?

Research Question 1 Conclusion

Research question 1 asked the following question: "What were C. Peter Wagner's theological affirmations concerning the doctrine of God before explicitly

affirming open theism?” Chapters 3 and 4 explored Wagner’s theological affirmations concerning the doctrine of God before explicitly affirming open theism. This research concludes that 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. 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. Wagner functionally dismissed the classic theism spectrum of the doctrine of God, which affirms either a Calvinistic or Arminian paradigm of God’s sovereignty. 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. 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 God’s sovereign decision to shape the future. Before Wagner affirmed open theism, the newly introduced concepts of *divine interventional mutability* and *cooperationism* were evident during his earliest years and became a theme throughout his writing career.

Research Question 2 Conclusion

Research question 2 asked the following question: “What were C. Peter Wagner’s theological affirmations concerning the doctrine of God after explicitly affirming open theism?” Chapter 5 explored Wagner’s theological affirmations concerning the doctrine of God after explicitly affirming open theism in 2001, which Wagner explicitly and unapologetically professed until his passing in 2016. After Wagner’s 2001 affirmation of openness theology, he proclaimed the foundational convictions of open theism, which affirms God’s willful limitation of his foreknowledge

and sovereignty. Wagner outwardly dismissed the classic theism spectrum of the doctrine of God. Moreover, Wagner's retrospection and articulation of his theological convictions concerning the doctrine of God confirm the findings and conclusion of this research. After Wagner affirmed open theism, *divine interventional mutability* and *cooperationism* remained evident and explicit themes of his writing until he passed away in 2016.

Research Question 3 Conclusion

Research question 3 asked the following question: "What was C. Peter Wagner's philosophy of discipleship before explicitly affirming open theism?" While Wagner's doctrine of God—*divine interventional mutability*—was a thematic constant throughout his career, Wagner's philosophy of discipleship evolved to allow him to have a functional means to better accomplish his perceived goal of discipleship—the making of disciples and responsible church members. Wagner's philosophy of discipleship is fulsomely articulated by the newly introduced concepts of *cooperationism* and *commissional pragmatic consequentialism*. Though the axioms and praxes changed year after year, the thematic constant is encapsulated in the newly proposed term *Wagnerianism*.

Research Question 4 Conclusion

Research question 4 asked the following question: "What philosophy of discipleship emerged after C. Peter Wagner affirmed open theism?" Though Wagner's praxes evolved year after year, his underlying biblical-theological system of *cooperationism* did not change. The means of discipleship evolved; however, the formal affirmation of open theism did not seemingly cause a change in his underlying theological priority. Further articulation of this conclusion is discussed in the next section.

Contribution to Literature

This section reviews this project's contribution to the existing literature base and academic field concerning C. Peter Wagner, the Church Growth movement, the Third Wave movement, and the New Apostolic Reformation movement.

Proposed Terms and Definitions

Divine interventional mutability. This research proposes the introduction of the term *divine interventional mutability* or *divine interventionist mutability* to rightly articulate Wagner's conviction of God's mutability. Divine interventional mutability describes God's volitional act of intervening in the ways that he does only after considering particular prayers of his people—prayers that he does not know prior to believers' praying but only learns of at the initiation of the prayers themselves. Furthermore, divine interventional mutability provides a functional contrast with the classic theist perspective of God's immutability. Francis Turretin describes the classic theist articulation of God's immutability as the "incommunicable attribute of God by which is denied of him not only all change, but also all possibility of change, as much with respect to existence as to will."¹ In contrast, open theology proponent Richard Rice describes the nature of God's relation with creation by stating,

God interacts with his creatures. Not only does he influence them, but they also exert an influence on him. As a result, the course of history is not the product of divine action alone. God's will is not the ultimate explanation for everything that happens; human decisions and actions make an important contribution too. Thus history is the combined result of what God and his creatures decide to do.²

Rice's description of the nature of God's mutability is the functional manifestation of divine interventional mutability. God intervenes in creation only after considering humanity's prayers. This research concludes that Wagner affirmed the theological

¹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, *First through Tenth Topics*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 204.

² Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, by Clark H. Pinnock et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 14–15.

description provided in the definition of divine interventional mutability “all along” throughout his career.

Cooperationism. 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 on foreknowledge is not significant. The emphasized concept is God’s limited knowledge of future events rather than the nature of God’s foreknowledge as being volitional or ontological.

Traditional theological terms such as *Pelagianism*, *semi-Pelagianism*, and *synergism* do not properly articulate Wagner’s theological system with the needed specificity. Both Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism describe the impact of a sin nature concerning an individual’s salvation and the *ordo salutis*. Ron Highfield ascribes Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism to salvation, stating that Pelagianism affirms that “human beings do not need grace” and semi-Pelagianism affirms that “human beings can merit grace by their free openness to grace.”³ While salvation is not a primary emphasis of Wagner, neither term aligns with God’s divine interventional mutability and human responsibility. Furthermore, synergism does not adequately articulate divine interventional mutability. According to John Macpherson, “Synergism admits the inability of the sinner unaided to do anything for his salvation, but insists that he cooperates to this end with the Spirit.”⁴ While synergism most closely aligns with the

³ Ron Highfield, “God Controls by Liberating,” in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Dennis W. Jowers, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 149.

⁴ John Macpherson, *Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898), 241.

proposed notion, it, too, emphasizes the work of salvation. This research concludes that C. Peter Wagner was a *cooperationist*.

An anticipated objection to introducing the proposed term cooperationism into theological academia lies in the concern regarding the progressive and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and its relationship with human responsibility. The fundamental concept in the proposed term lies in the volitional functional equality between humanity and God. For Wagner, the cooperative relationship between humanity and God is essential to unfolding human history and instantiating God's will. Though Rebecca Vivian Pietsch's 2022 thesis details the relationship of Wagner's theological distinctives concerning sanctification and their relationship to a classic theistic paradigm of progressive sanctification,⁵ cooperationism's emphasis is more elemental than the doctrine of the Christian life and sanctification. The phenomenological nature of God's interaction with humanity and humanity's responsibility in living the Christian life in partnership with the Spirit is not within the scope of the proposed term. Existing terms such as progressive sanctification describe such a relationship and are not within the construct of the term cooperationism.

Commissional pragmatic consequentialism. 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 accomplish the Great Commission, which seeks the making of disciples to enact the will of God in order to take dominion of the earth, through

⁵ Rebecca Vivian Pietsch, "Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework to Assess and Evaluate C. Peter Wagner's Doctrine of Sanctification" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022).

cooperationism, so that all things can be restored to Christ and usher in the second advent.

First, commissional pragmatic consequentialism begins with the utilitarian ethic of consequentialism. Anrea Viggiano defines consequentialism as the affirmation of the statement “what makes right actions right is the net value of their total consequences, as compared to that of the total consequences of their alternatives.”⁶ Consequentialism describes the axiom that an end justifies the means. Second, commissional pragmatic consequentialism utilizes commissional as a moniker for the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20). For Wagner, his end and perceived greatest good was his interpretation of fulfilling the Great Commission through cooperation and partnership with God.

This research has determined that the designation of pragmatism to Wagner does not fully articulate his discipleship philosophy once it is placed in the context of cooperationism and openness theology. Though Wagner calls himself a pragmatist, the term is insufficient because the conflation of a philosophy of pragmatism and its use of pragmatic means does not rightly describe Wagner’s axiom. Rebecca Vivian Pietsch has determined that Wagner, though directly influenced and shaped by John Dewey, an early propagator of the philosophy of pragmatism, employed pragmatic and phenomenological means as instrumentalism rather than as a philosophical system ascribing ethical values to his actions.⁷ The phenomenological and theological changes throughout Wagner’s life align with continual adaptations to better achieve his perceived purpose of making the greatest number of disciples so that the Great Commission can be fulfilled; therefore, Wagner was a consequentialist and not a philosophical pragmatist.

⁶ Andrea Viggiano, “Consequentialism and the Causal Efficacy of the Moral,” *Philosophical Studies* 177, no. 10 (2020): 2929.

⁷ 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.

Wagnerianism. This research 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.

Introductory Systemization of Wagner's Theological Dispositions

This research provides an introductory artifact that begins to systematize and index C. Peter Wagner's theological dispositions and progression toward open theism. Until this research was completed, no previous studies have been published to date researching Wagner's progression toward open theism as a result of his convictional change regarding the doctrine of God. This research explored the impact of Wagner's discipleship philosophy as a result of his affirmation of open theism. Lastly, this research provides contextual evidence to the epistemology of Wagner's praxes and methodologies, which enables the Christian community to critically evaluate the degree of appropriation or adoption of his work. I hope that this work is merely the beginning effort of retrospectively studying Wagner's work *in toto* and that others will carry on this effort.

Further Research Needed

This research merely introduced the systemization and indexing of Wagner's theological convictions. More research is warranted to allow for a greater systemization of Wagner's theology to make additional conclusions.⁸

⁸ Though academic research concerning the New Apostolic Reformation and C. Peter Wagner are beginning to emerge, the works of Yvie Ruth Baker and David Woodfield are particularly noteworthy. Baker's 2021 dissertation emphasizes the epistemology of Wagner's dominionism and its eschatological

Text-Based Research

The following proposed topics seek to further the textual research into those who profoundly influenced Wagner's theology and those he influenced; such research will enhance the existing literature base by systematizing primary source materials.

What was Donald McGavran's philosophy of discipleship and how did it evolve throughout his life? According to this research, Donald McGavran's theological conclusions and praxes were among the most influential thought systems that shaped Wagner's philosophy of discipleship more than any other figure. For this reason, a similar study, which shares the methodology with this research to systematize McGavran's works, becomes necessary to read Wagner's early years in a fuller context. Furthermore, to understand McGavran's underlying convictions concerning the doctrine of God, a study is warranted to fully comprehend and articulate McGavran's philosophy of discipleship.

Moreover, this researcher proposes a subsequent question seeking to determine if McGavran held to open theistic priorities or influenced Wagner's theology concerning God. What textual characteristics of *cooperationism* or *commissional pragmatic consequentialism* do Donald McGavran's works contain, if any? To achieve a comprehensive answer to this question requires one to embark on a text-based study and utilize a thematic document analysis methodology to systematically document the

implications. Though Baker only briefly mentions the open theism of Wagner, Baker states that Wagner declared that his "position on open theism significantly was at odds with McGavran's views." See Yvie Ruth Baker, "From Peter Wagner to Bill Johnson: The History and Epistemology of the 'New Apostolic Reformation'" (PhD diss, University of Otago, 2021), 45. Similarly, Woodfield briefly discusses Wagner's position on open theism; however, Woodfield does not devote attention to a comprehensive review of Wagner's position or its development. Moreover, Woodfield states, "After extensive internet search, it is not immediately clear whether Open Theism is generally espoused by the wider NAR body." David Woodfield, "The Eschatological Worldview of C. Peter Wagner and the New Apostolic Reformation" (ThM thesis, North-West University, 2017), 75. Given this thesis's new contribution to the field of study concerning Wagner and the New Apostolic Reformation, Woodfield's question can be definitely answered by this thesis's research; however, it too is outside the direct scope of this research. It is the conclusion of this research—especially in light of (1) Wagner's foreword to *Systematic Theology for the New Apostolic Reformation: An Exposition in Father-Son Theology*, by Harold R. Eberle (Yakima, WA: Worldcast, 2015), 1–7; (2) Jack Hayford's theological convictions; and (3) those of other NAR proponents—that it is a likely conclusion that those within the New Apostolic Reformation either outwardly profess open theism or functionally operate in an openness paradigm of God's sovereignty.

writings of Donald McGavran concerning the doctrine of God and the philosophy of discipleship. Furthermore, McGavran's praxes and methodologies concerning his philosophy of discipleship must be evaluated once a comprehension of his convictions concerning God has been established. The study will document, catalog, systematize, and evaluate the works of McGavran. One such work upon which to further the study is Patrick Julian Melancon's 1997 PhD dissertation "An Examination of Selected Theological Topics in the Thought of Donald A. McGavran."⁹

What was Ralph Winter's philosophy of discipleship and how did it evolve throughout his life? Ralph Winter, like Donald McGavran, profoundly influenced Wagner. This research proposes that the same methodology as suggested to McGavran should be applied to Ralph Winter. Similarly, this researcher proposes a subsequent question seeking to determine if Winter held to open theistic priorities or influenced Wagner's theology concerning God.

What is Rick Warren's philosophy of discipleship and how has it evolved throughout his life? A Twitter post credited to Rick Warren states, "Never ask anyone to be your mentor until you know who his/her mentors have been and currently are."¹⁰ As was previously discussed, Wagner mentored and advised Rick Warren on his 1993 dissertation at Fuller, which sought to incorporate Wagner's principles of church growth at Saddleback Church.¹¹ With Wagner having mentored Warren, this research proposes systematizing Warren's philosophy of discipleship and doctrine of God from the time of

⁹ Patrick Julian Melancon, "An Examination of Selected Theological Topics in the Thought of Donald A. McGavran," (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997).

¹⁰ Warren's 2013 post has since been removed and deleted from Twitter. At the time of this writing, a reposting of the Tweet can be found at <https://twitter.com/RickWarrenQT/status/381079214679523328>. Rick Warren, "Tweet," Twitter, 2013, <https://twitter.com/RickWarren/status/121829233885585408>.

¹¹ Richard Duane Warren, "New Churches for a New Generation: Church Planting to Reach Baby Boomers: A Case Study: The Saddleback Valley Community Church" (DMin project, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1993).

his dissertation to present. This research proposes that the same methodology as suggested for McGavran be applied to Warren. Similarly, this researcher proposes a subsequent question seeking to determine if Warren holds to open theistic priorities or was influenced by Wagner's theology concerning God. Moreover, has Rick Warren adopted Wagner's priorities aligned to *divine interventional mutability, cooperationism, or commissional pragmatic consequentialism*? Lastly, a comprehensive response must also determine if Warren's theological convictions have evolved since the publication of his 1993 thesis.

Mixed-Methods Research

The following proposed topics seek to determine the extent of Wagnerian theological priorities and praxes held by modern evangelical churches and to what extent Christians explicitly or functionally hold to its convictions.

To what extent, if any, have evangelical churches either explicitly or implicitly adopted *cooperationalist theology* by employing a *commissional pragmatic consequentialist ethic* to evangelism? Existing research has emphasized and analyzed the Church Growth movement's praxes and methods; however, without assessing the underlying consequentialist ethic of the movement, a narrative of the existing research does not articulate the necessary emphasis fulsomely. Moreover, because Wagner held to a functional open theistic paradigm during the Church Growth era, it is a logical conclusion that the Church Growth movement's praxes originate from an epistemological openness of God. Wagner did not explicitly affirm open theism until the impacts of the Church Growth movement were already established and realized the late twentieth century. Therefore, this research proposes that research is warranted to examine and articulate the underlying theological convictions of God in evangelical churches.

To achieve a comprehensive answer to this question requires one to embark on a mixed-methods research approach to assess churches qualitatively and quantitatively. A

survey instrumentation is recommended to assess qualitatively a multifaceted approach to assessing the influence of *cooperational* theology on evangelical churches. According to this research, the churches most likely influenced by Wagnerianism will be baptistic non-denominational evangelical churches with 200 or more members.¹² The survey instrument will assess the theological convictions of church leaders and church members. A subsequent interview of survey participants will supply the qualitative assessment of church leadership and church members. The survey instrumentation will need to supply theological questions concerning *divine interventional mutability*, *cooperationalism*, and *commissional pragmatic consequentialist* ethics to discipleship. The demographic portion of the survey must include denominational or network affiliations.

General Research Topics

1. Following the conclusions of this research and knowing that Wagner held to an openness paradigm of God throughout his career, a reevaluation is warranted of his academic and theological contributions to evangelicalism concerning the (1) Church Growth movement, (2) Signs and Wonders movement, (3) Charismatic Renewal movement, and (4) Third Wave movement, and the (5) New Apostolic Reformation movement.
2. Wagner openly acknowledged and interacted with critics of his theological conclusions and praxes. This research proposes that existing critical literature must be reevaluated with the inclusion of a developed Wagnerian theological system and open theism.
3. The extent to which Wagner's espoused theological system and praxes have influenced the discipleship praxes of the modern church can be assessed with greater clarity now that his *commissional pragmatic consequentialist* ethic has been articulated. One such example is Wagner's mentorship of Rick Warren and the resultant influence of Wagner on Warren's career.
4. How does affirming *divine interventional mutability* impact one's relationship with orthodox theology?
5. What factors influence one to affirm *divine interventional mutability*?

¹² Wagner uses various taxonomies to describe stages of a church's growth. C. Peter Wagner, "Overcoming Small Church Barriers of 200 People," in *The Everychurch Guide to Growth: How Any Plateaued Church Can Grow*, by Elmer L. Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 23–25. Elmer Towns, who cowrote *The Everychurch Guide to Growth* with Wagner and Thom Rainer, calls a matured church over 1000 members (see p. 4).

Conclusion of the Research

The following section will summarize the conclusion of the research and establish a visual representation of Wagner's theological framework, which attempts to identify the commitments that influenced the evolution of his praxes and theological axioms. As mentioned previously, this research has proposed three theological terms to rightly describe Wagner's theological paradigm: *divine interventionist mutability*, *cooperationism*, and *commissional pragmatic consequentialism*.

Virtuous Christian Knowing

The relationship of the proposed terms to describe Wagner's theological commitments manifests by employing John David Trentham's taxonomy of *Virtuous Christian Knowing* (VCK). Trentham describes Virtuous Christian Knowing as "a series of corresponding categories, each with identifiable" priorities, implications, and commitments.¹³ *Priorities* define the center and core of the taxonomy, which represents a "life-defining truth" or one's metaphysical foundation. *Implications* are the "life-informing framework" or one's epistemology, which is informed by one's *priorities*. Lastly, *commitments* are the "life-defining practices" or one's axioms that manifest through the *implications* of *priorities*. VCK, in summary, describes how one's metaphysical priorities informs one's epistemological commitments, which establish one's praxes and axioms (see figure 1).¹⁴

Trentham expounds upon the taxonomy of VCK in "Mere *Didaskalia*: The Vocational Calling and Mission of Christian Teaching Ministry."¹⁵ The three dimensions

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Trentham, "Virtuous Christian Knowing and Learning" (2022), 2.

¹⁵ John David Trentham, "Mere *Didaskalia*: The Vocational Calling and Mission of Christian Teaching Ministry," *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 2 (2021): 218.

of VCK have a core, which is the truth that our hearts believe and love.¹⁶ If the core is infected with heresy, then it is going to expand and appropriate itself out into the other areas: the discernment or worldview, framework, and praxes dimensions.

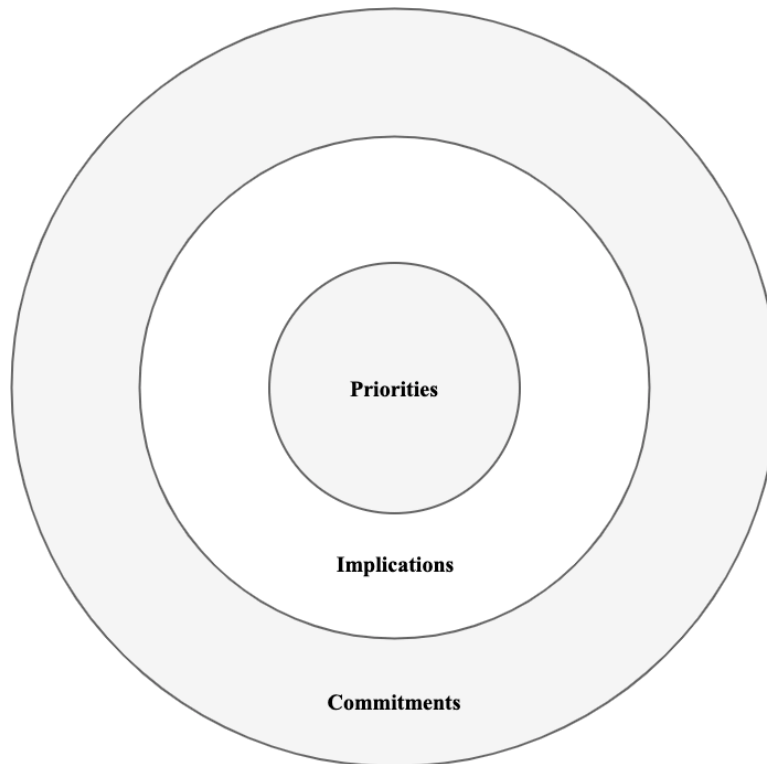


Figure 1. Corresponding categories to Virtuous Christian Knowing¹⁷

Virtuous Christian Knowing and Wagnerianism

Though Trentham employs VCK in a confessional and Reformed paradigm, when the proposed terms used to describe Wagner’s theological priorities, implications, and commitments are placed into the VCK taxonomy, their relationship emerges (see

¹⁶ Trentham uses Anselm’s phrase from *Proslogium*, “which my heart believes and loves.” Sidney Norton Deane, trans., “Proslogium,” in *The Major Works of Anselm of Canterbury*, by Anselm (Chicago: Open Court, 1939), 1–34, 34.

¹⁷ Trentham, “Mere *Didaskalia*,” 218; Trentham, “Virtuous Christian Knowing and Virtuous Christian Learning” (handout, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), 1. Used with permission.

figure 2). 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 his cognitive understanding of the Great Commission. Throughout Wagner’s life, his commitments and axioms are all recapitulations of his commitment to a *commissional pragmatic consequentialist* ethic. Wagner’s underlying belief in a God whose sovereignty is limited not only inflected all aspects of his practical theology and praxes, it established the very foundation of his biblical-theological system. 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.

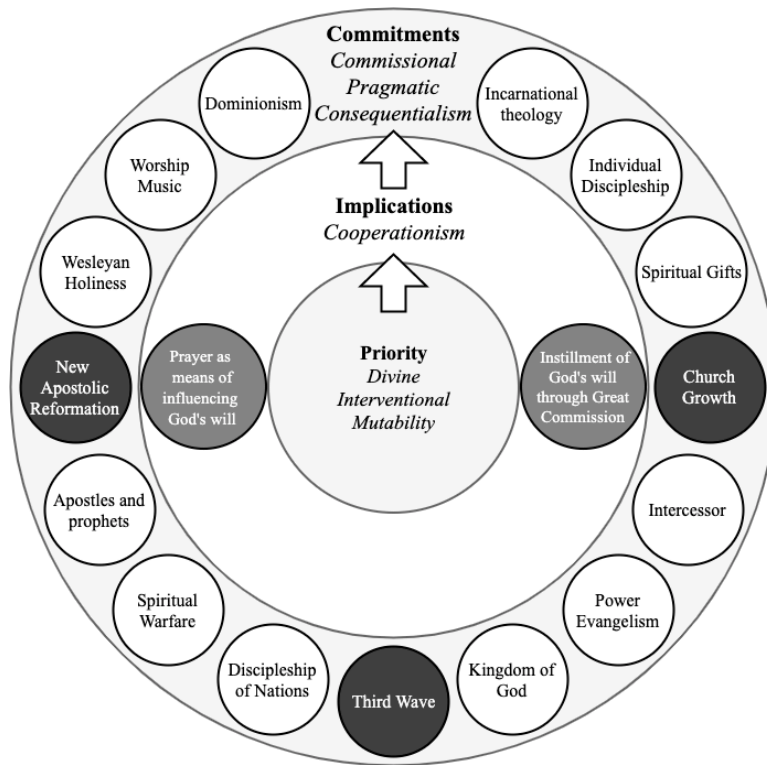


Figure 2. Wagner’s Philosophy of Discipleship

A visualization of Wagnerianism. The proposed model (see figure 2) attempts to summarize Wagnerianism visually. The outer ring represents the commitments and praxes of Wagner that originated from a *commissional pragmatic 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. Wagner's seemingly complex, constantly evolving praxes and theological changes become articulated and simplified. A fulsome articulation of a solitary change to his theology or praxes requires a deeper analysis of his underlying cooperational theology and convictional premise concerning the mutability of God.

The inner ring represents two primary implications that drove his praxes and were influenced by a mutable paradigm of God: prayer and the Great Commission, which is articulated by the proposed term *cooperationalism*. Throughout Wagner's career, his understanding of prayer and the Great Commission mandate of Christ remained unchanged; however, the means through which these were fulfilled evolved, which the outer ring depicts. For Wagner, the fulfillment of the Great Commission necessitates humanity's success in making disciples to achieve the instillment of God's will. Furthermore, a theological constant throughout his life was the underlying notion that God acts as a result of human prayers. Thus, the fulfillment of the Great Commission requires humanity's partnership with God, in which he acts through human intervention. Wagner's understanding of prayer and the Great Commission revolves around the fundamental element of open theism, *divine interventional mutability*.

Lastly, 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. Like a visual depiction of a solar system, the central ring of the model is the center element by which all other elements revolve. Therefore, when one analyzes an element of Wagner’s praxes, one must view the underlying motivation to an outworking of an open theistic paradigm of God, a God with *divine interventional mutability*. Rebecca Vivian Pietsch adds a third element to the inner ring that depicts “Disciple.”¹⁸

Application of Research

This section summarizes the application of the findings of this research for scholars, pastors, and Christians.

Application to Scholars and Theologians

Never before in history has humanity had access to the amount of knowledge and information readily available for consumption. While the generation of knowledge is a manifestation of the wisdom of God through the use of the human faculties inherent to the *imago Dei*, not all human-generated knowledge is virtuous or redemptive. Furthermore, not all theological articulations of God have strived to pursue God’s glory in earnest. Therefore, theologians throughout church history have strived and labored to precisely articulate the foundational basics of Christianity with earnest specificity and have generated theological works to include articulated systems of belief that have been deemed to account for the whole counsel of God fulsomely. Regardless of knowledge’s redemptive and God-glorifying value or its inversely consistent God-dishonoring value, such knowledge creation is evidence of God’s creative order and humanity’s glorifying God with the cultivation of knowledge through language.

¹⁸ Pietsch, “Utilizing a Reformed Sanctification Framework,” 297.

For human language to function rightly, individual words and phrases require an association of formed concepts to have meaning. Without the proposed terms of *divine interventional mutability*, *cooperationism*, and *commissional pragmatic consequentialism* to articulate the underlying system of beliefs of *Wagnerianism*, no existing terms encapsulate the meaning necessary to communicate the concepts of Wagnerian theology or its praxes. Since Wagner's core priority of God remained constant while his praxes evolved with each passing decade, the articulation of his beliefs through the proposed terms will provide theologians with a means to further evaluate and articulate Wagnerian philosophy. Furthermore, a fulsome evaluation of Wagner's praxes necessitates interaction with his *commissional pragmatic consequentialist* philosophy. This preliminary systemization of Wagnerianism and its proposed concepts should contribute to the existing dialogue concerning the influence or adoption of open theism within modern evangelicalism.

Application to Pastors

This research has proposed that the Wagnerian philosophy of discipleship was formed within an open theistic paradigm of God. For Wagner, the function of prayer and his interpretation of the Great Commission influenced his axioms and praxes. Moreover, Wagner's philosophy of discipleship was an influential contribution to missiology and evangelism.¹⁹

One must reflect upon professed evangelicals' underlying theological commitments, implications, and priorities before one considers adopting those individuals' praxes. This research provides pastors with empirical evidence that they must fulsomely evaluate Wagner's axioms and praxes rather than uncritically adopt his discipleship philosophy. The Church Growth movement, the Third Wave movement, and

¹⁹ 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), 241.

the New Apostolic Reformation movement were manifestations of Wagner's underlying concepts articulated by Wagnerianism. Therefore, pastors must evaluate the purposefulness and utility of modern practices such as worship, discipleship, teaching, and preaching. Pastors must determine whether modern practices are a means to create disciples through *cooperationism* and whether a church's discipleship philosophy is established within the ethic of *commissional pragmatic consequentialism*. Lastly, this research encourages pastors to evaluate the metaphysical foundation and convictions concerning the doctrine of God when interacting with one's philosophy and understanding of the function of prayer. One's professed understanding of the function of prayer is a manifestation of one's perception of God's sovereignty and (im)mutability.

Application to Individual Christians

Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley begin their study on the doctrine of God by stating that "the knowledge of God in the heart transforms a person." They conclude that "God's people derive their faith, hope, and love from their understanding of who God is and how he works in the world."²⁰ Christians' cognitive comprehension of God establishes the very foundation of their faith and constitutes their "life-defining truth." This research has labored to establish the importance of how one's understanding of God influences the entirety of one's biblical-theological system. Classic Christian theism affirms the assertion of John Calvin: "Scripture, when it wishes to assert what is peculiar to God, joins these two things inseparably; first, God foresees all things, since nothing is hidden from his eyes; and next, he appoints future events, and governs the world by his will, allowing nothing to happen by chance or without his direction."²¹ Classic theism's paradigm of God affirms that he is immutable and unchanging. Wagner, rejecting the

²⁰ Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Revelation and God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 501.

²¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 1, *Daniel 1–6*, trans. Thomas Myers, Calvin's Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 142.

notion of God’s immutability, affirmed the concept of *divine interventional mutability*. Christians’ spiritual formation will be dependent on the foundation of their cognitive understanding of God. Theological concepts must not be casually avoided or dismissed because of consternation or if an articulation of a concept does not ease dissidence.

Wagner’s developmental years as a young seminary student of theology caused him considerable consternation as the classic and Reformed paradigm of the doctrine of God did not align with his constructed paradigm. Wagner summarizes his thematic consternation of classic theism 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.”²² Mark 12:30 commands Christians to worship God “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” According to Joel Williams, the phrase “with all your mind” in verse 30 emphasizes other concepts related to thinking, understanding (v. 33) and thoughtfully (v. 34), thereby “making the love of God with one’s mind an emphasis in the passage as a whole.”²³ Christians must know the God to whom they pray, and they must believe that all things—past, present, and future—are in the sovereign hands of God.

Philosophy of Discipleship Evaluation

This research began with the assertion that how one defines a disciple will impact one’s preferred means of discipleship. As mentioned previously, Michael Horton states that drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship must be equally emphasized.²⁴

²² Peter Wagner, *This Changes Everything: How God Can Transform Your Mind and Change Your Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013), 142.

²³ Joel F. Williams, *Mark*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 208.

²⁴ Michael S. Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God’s Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 143.

Moreover, Horton asserts that one must have a proper understanding of the overarching and unfolding drama of Scripture to form a foundation for discipleship. Horton states,

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.²⁵

This research humbly asserts that Wagner's philosophy of discipleship exemplifies a manifestation of Horton's caution when discipleship is not driven by doctrine or placed in the context of Scripture's drama and Christian doxology. Horton states that an "obsession with discipleship," apart from drama, doctrine, and doxology, "will generate a kind of mindless and eventually heartless moralism that confuses activism with the fruit of the Spirit."²⁶

For Wagner, the overarching story of Scripture remained consistent throughout his career. Classic theism asserts that in eternity past, God created an eternal intratrinitarian covenant to redeem humanity through Christ—a concept known as the *pactum salutis*.²⁷ For Wagner, God executed a contingent redemptive plan as a result of an unforeseen fall of humanity into sin. Furthermore, Wagner deconstructs the

²⁵ 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)

²⁶ Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 144.

²⁷ Michael S. Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 58; Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 42.

foundational basis for an eternal intratrinitarian covenant through his minimalization of trinitarianism and his welcoming of modalism's rejection of the Trinity.

Classic theism and Wagner find a vernacular agreement that God commanded humanity to subdue and take dominion of creation; however, the means of dominion is different for each paradigm. Classic theism, articulated by Stephen Wellum, states that "the Lord created and covenanted with Adam for the purpose of bearing God's image in human dominion over creation. This dominion, therefore, must be a vice-regency. Adam was called to rule over creation under the rule of God in obedience to his commands and ways of righteousness."²⁸ Classic theism affirms that humanity came under the judgment of God when Adam sinned; hence, they no longer rule as "God's kingly stewards."²⁹ Though humanity came under the judgment of God, human beings continue under God's decree to take dominion through the glorification of God by living God-honoring and enjoying creation. For Wagner, dominion was the object of loss as a result of humanity's fall into sin; Satan, therefore, assumed ownership of creation's dominion. Wagner's redemptive plan, differing from classic theism, restores dominion to humanity rather than propitiating the wrath of God for humanity. Lastly, classic theism affirms that God has authored the entire story of humanity in eternity past; therefore, God's knowledge is complete and is not enlightened through the temporal existence of humanity in accordance with the passing of time. For Wagner, God's mutability necessitates that humanity implements God's will on earth; therefore, Christ tarries until humanity has reclaimed dominion from Satan. Though classic theism and Wagner share many concepts, the drama of Scripture depicts different narratives for each theological paradigm.

²⁸ Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior*, Five Solas Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 41.

²⁹ Wellum, *Christ Alone*, 112.

In conclusion, within the context of Wagner’s scriptural narrative, his philosophy of discipleship manifests as a means of implementing the will of God on earth. An abundance of disciples means the greater installment of God’s will; therefore, Christ can return once all things have come under his authority. As one ventures with Wagner throughout his career, one perceives that his discipleship methods changed to account for phenomenological results while pursuing the telos of making disciples. In the end, his means of discipleship were created within the contextual narrative of open theism. Wagner was correct when he stated that his methods aligned with open theism “all along.”

Summary Evaluation of Wagnerianism on Discipleship

This research has begun systemizing Wagner’s primary theological convictions as they evolved throughout his career. Though each primary theological concept—doctrine of God, doctrine of Scripture, doctrine of church, doctrine of the Holy Spirit, doctrine of Christ, and doctrine of last things—impacts Wagner’s biblical-theological system, this research emphasizes the doctrine of God. The scope of this research limits the discussion to the primary concept of God; however, further articulation and implications of the other topics are warranted through additional research. The final conclusion of this research establishes the implication of Wagner’s articulated concepts of God on discipleship by contrasting the concepts with traditional orthodox interpretations. A reductionistic interpretation of classic theism would limit such an association to a Calvinistic interpretation; however, classic theism includes both Arminianism and Calvinism. For this reason, the emphasis of the following section is not on a theological distinction between Arminianism and Calvinism but on the contrast between classic theism and Wagner’s dismissal of classic theism entirely.

Though the doctrine of God contains many theological concepts, this research emphasizes two aspects of God—omnipotence and divine foreknowledge—because these

categories became the primary concepts of contention for Wagner. Wagner's remaining concept of contention—the mutability of God—is a logical consequence of his affirming a God with limited power and knowledge. The following list describes the implications of Wagner's doctrine of God on discipleship (see table 9 [p. 216] for a summary of the implications of Wagnerian discipleship and classic theism).

Discipleship Is an Ontological Contingency Rather than an Eternal Divine Decree

The first implication of Wagnerianism on discipleship asserts that discipleship is an ontological contingency rather than an eternal divine decree.³⁰ This implication emphasizes God's *divine interventional mutability*. 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.”³¹ 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.” Moreover, Wagner's contingent reality of discipleship alters the classical concepts of *pactum salutis*, *historia salutis*, and *ordo salutis*, which cannot be intrinsically separated from discipleship. Without an eternal trinitarian decree of humanity's redemption (*pactum salutis*), the historical and

³⁰ See previous sections on Wagner's positions concerning the limitation of sovereignty; however, for a brief overview from Wagner, see C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Answer God's Call to Transform the World* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 79–98.

³¹ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 144.

progressive unfolding plan throughout the Scriptures (*historia salutis*) results in an altered means and nature of individual human redemption (*ordo salutis*).³² Therefore, for Wagner, the fundamental ontology of a disciple is not in agreement with classic theism.

According to classic theism, God’s redemptive plan is a divine decree. Classic theism asserts that discipleship is a divine and eternal decree. Beeke and Jones, proponents of classic theism, assert that believers’ union with Christ—discipleship—is a redemptive plan “purposed by God in eternity.”³³ Classic theism proponent Fred Sanders states that “the history of salvation and the order of salvation” are “centered on the work of Christ and the Spirit.”³⁴ Sanders continues, “A Trinitarian soteriology would be a two-handed doctrine of salvation that attended to the pervasive presence of the Son and the Holy Spirit across this whole span from the *historia salutis*, through the *ordo salutis*, to the shape of a Christian life that follows from them.” Sanders asserts that Christian discipleship “bears” the “Son-Spirit” nature of the Trinity.³⁵ Classic theologians articulate Christian discipleship as having begun in eternity past, made possible through the work

³² Though the individual order of each *locus* within the *ordo salutis* model is debated among theologians, the model stands in general agreement; God employs a unified and ordained order to the redemption of humanity, though the order itself is debated.

³³ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 488.

³⁴ Fred Sanders, “Evangelical Trinitarianism and the Unity of the Theological Disciplines,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60, no. 1 (2017): 73.

³⁵ Sanders continues,

The great Protestant missions movement, especially in its evangelical phase, made much of the great commission, which is the risen Christ’s command to go into all the world and make disciples. Jesus commanded his disciples to go and make disciples. And in Matthew’s theology, that commission is based on the fact that Jesus, God with us, has been given all authority and is with us to the end. But for most of Christian history, the church’s proclamation of the gospel, even across cultural boundaries, was not footnoted to Matthew 28 but to Acts 2. At most times and places, Pentecost drove missions, and if asked why they were going out to testify, Christians would answer that they were equipped by the Spirit to bear witness. Just as Luke and Matthew are both canonical Gospels, both rationales for mission are valid. A two-handed, Trinitarian approach to mission draws its power from the Spirit poured out on all flesh, who was not given until Christ ascended. The Son and the Spirit are not competing missions agencies; you cannot have one without the other, nor the Father without them both, nor them without the Father. For this reason, Christ, who is with us to the end of the age (so Matthew) is present precisely by the agency of the Spirit (so Luke). No wonder, then, that he commanded us to baptize disciples in the one name of the three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Sanders, “Evangelical Trinitarianism and the Unity of the Theological Disciplines,” 73)

of Christ, continuing throughout the life of a believer, and culminating in the glorification of the second coming of Christ.

God Does Not Know Who His Disciples Will Be

The second implication of Wagnerianism on discipleship asserts that God does not know who his disciples will be. This implication emphasizes God's *divine interventional mutability*. According to Wagnerian theology, God has limited divine foreknowledge due to his volitional limitation of knowledge concerning future events. Moreover, Wagner does not delineate what knowledge God chooses to limit: "He [i.e., God] chooses what of the future to know and what not to know."³⁶ Though Wagner does not explicitly state that God does not know who his disciples will be until individuals become disciples, an epistemological openness demands the assertion or, at the very least, introduces a potentiality that God is unaware of such knowledge. Classic theists affirm God's exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge.³⁷ For Wagner, God's knowledge of who will become disciples at their birth is unknown to God, just as the fall of humanity was. Therefore, Wagnerianism disagrees with classic theism.

God Does Not Know When One Will Become a Disciple

The third implication of Wagnerianism on discipleship asserts that God does not know when one will become a disciple. This implication emphasizes God's *divine interventional mutability*. Though the implication follows the previous assertion that God does not know *who* his disciples will be, this distinction emphasizes the *timing* of the effectual happening, which instantiates discipleship. The functional implication of

³⁶ Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 147.

³⁷ Roger E. Olson, "The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views*, ed. Bruce A. Ware (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), sec. "Classical Arminianism"; R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1986), 103.

Wagnerianism demands the conclusion that God's knowledge of when individuals will become disciples at their birth is unknown to God, just as when the fall of humanity was going to occur. Therefore, Wagnerianism disagrees with classic theism.

God Does Not Know How One Will Become a Disciple

The fourth implication of Wagnerianism on discipleship asserts that God does not know how one will become a disciple. This implication emphasizes God's *divine interventional mutability* and *cooperationalist theology*. Though the implication follows the previous assertions that God does not know *who* or *when* one will become his disciple, this distinction emphasizes the *means* of discipleship. The unknown *how* is likely the most significant implication concerning the means of Wagnerian discipleship, which is the logical conclusion of *cooperationalist theology*. The methodological changes to Wagner's praxes of discipleship throughout his life show a continual desire to affect the means by which one becomes a disciple. Wagner measured and justified his discipleship means by constantly changing his phenomenological standards rather than being unwavering toward biblical standards of discipleship, which classic theism affirms (drama, doctrine, and doxology). For Wagner, God does not know *how* one will become a disciple. Therefore, Wagnerianism disagrees with classic theism.

Devaluation of Theological Maturity

The fifth implication of Wagnerianism on discipleship is the equating of spiritual maturity with the knowledge of one's spiritual gifts rather than cognitional maturity in doctrine. As Wagner progressed throughout his life, his devaluation of doctrine significantly increased (according to this research's conclusion) as a result of his philosophy of discipleship. Classic theists affirm that one'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. Wagner's emphasis on merely becoming a disciple bifurcates Christian discipleship. For classic theists, discipleship is the process by which God matures a sinner to glorification. Discipleship is not merely a decision to follow Christ, but is no less than that. For Wagner, becoming a disciple, one who has accepted Christ, was the end goal. For classic theists, accepting Christ is merely the effectual empowerment of the Holy Spirit in one's life, a life that is in a continual state of maturing unto the likeness of Christ. For classic theists, God does not need an atmosphere created through a modern worship experience, modern validation through signs and wonders, or megachurch movements to create disciples. The unadulterated gospel, presented through cognitive reasoning found through historical doctrines, stirs the soul to create passion. According to oft-affirmed phrase among classic theists, "the depth of one's theology determines the height of one's doxology." Moreover, during the New Apostolic Reformation, Wagner's philosophy of discipleship relied on the contemporary revelation of God (given through the intercessors, prophets, and apostles), rather than the study of historic doctrines, to mature the Christian body.³⁸

Hebrews 5:11–6:3 establishes the biblical foundation for discipleship and theological cognition, as the author of Hebrews metaphorically presents an analogical journey to spiritual maturity through human development.³⁹ First, the author establishes both the state of maturity and the evidentiary attributes coinciding with maturity. The author uses the term "infant" to represent a state of spiritual immaturity and the concept

³⁸ See Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 13–14.

³⁹ Albert Mohler explains that the author of Hebrews uses 5:1–6 to establish the "theological framework" for the Christological assertions needed for Christian maturity. See R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: Holman, 2017), "The Chosen High Priest," para. 1. The following two paragraphs have subsequently been included in Evan Phillip Pietsch, "A Metacognitive Analysis of Conceptual Thinking in Spiritual Formation Utilizing Vygotsky's Concept Theory," *Christian Education Journal*, September 24, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/07398913231203261>, 9–10.

of being “unskilled” in the Scriptures to establish the evidence of the immaturity.⁴⁰ Conversely, the author ascribes the adjective of “mature” to those who have been “trained” to “distinguish good from evil.”⁴¹ Second, the author establishes that those who are spiritually immature will encounter difficulty in comprehending theological categorical concepts beyond the “basic principles” of God. Third, the author provides the enablement for growth—“solid food” from the Word of God. The solidity of spiritual food corresponds with the degree to which one handles the Word of God. Lastly, the author establishes the function of spiritually mature believers by expecting that the spiritually mature should be “teachers.” Conversely, by implication, those who are immature are unable to teach and are to be taught by those who are mature. While the author establishes an analogical journey to spiritual maturity through human development, he correctly acknowledges that spiritual maturity will only occur if “God permits.”⁴²

Lastly, this research concludes that Wagner’s seeming unwillingness to wrestle through complex historically affirmed theological concepts—sovereignty of God and

⁴⁰ Concerning the infancy of the audience, Thomas Schreiner states that “those whose diet is milk remain unacquainted with the message of righteousness.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 171.

⁴¹ Concerning the spiritually mature, Schreiner asserts, “Those who are mature have their faculties trained to discern good from evil. In the illustration those who eat solid food are those who are spiritually mature. They have no need to relearn basic and elementary teachings, and hence they are able to instruct others in spiritual truths.” Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 171.

⁴² Hebrews further establishes the framework for theological maturity. Hebrews 1:1–6:3 establishes many orthodox theological concepts concerning Christ, thus supplying many Christological doctrines. The author of Hebrews uses the first five chapters to proclaim the superiority of Christ as the final Prophet, Priest, and King. Before the author admonishes the audience’s spiritual immaturity, he discusses the interconnected concepts of Christ’s work as the Great High Priest. The interconnected categories of Christ were far more specific than Christ as a redeemer. For one to comprehend Christ’s function as the Great High Priest, one must understand many other theological categories, such as Christ as both man and God through the hypostatic union, the function of Christ as the intercessor, the nature and purpose of old covenant sacrifices for sins, and Christ’s decree as the eternal redeemer of his people. The author of Hebrews then pauses, seemingly in mid-thought, and states that there is “much to say” concerning such Christological categories; he then states that the topics are “hard to explain” since the audience is spiritually immature (5:11). The author then returns to the generalized concepts of God. When Hebrews is viewed as establishing divine categorical truths concerning Christ, one can determine how the author of Hebrews is working to establish these categories and the interconnectedness of the categories. See Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 171–90.

epistemology—resulted in a theological basis primed for continual change as a result of his *commissional pragmatic consequentialist* ethic and praxes of discipleship.⁴³

Theological maturity is foundational to discipleship as it is a means of God’s revealing himself to humanity. According to Pierce Taylor Hibbs, language is “communicative behavior” in that “its purpose is the expression of one person towards another”; “it presupposes community.”⁴⁴ Those who are in Christ, “the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15), are themselves “a new creation” (1 Cor 5:17). The existence of the new creation in Christ presupposes a communicative relation among the ontological existence of the new humanity. The language of the new humanity is Christ; however, even the ontological existence of this language is grounded in the communal attributes of the triune Godhead. “All of our communicative behavior represents on a finite, analogical scale the communicative behavior of the trinity.”⁴⁵ Hibbs further states that “if we wish to understand being, we must account for divine purpose, and we cannot account for divine purpose aside from the verbal revelation of the trinitarian God.”⁴⁶

The triune God chose to communicate himself to humanity through the inspired Scriptures. Therefore, Scripture is the language in which Christians must become fluent so that they may worship Christ “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Michael Horton states that “by questioning and testing our interpretation of God’s Word, we come to know what we believe and why we believe it, so that the grammar of faith becomes our own language of worship through which we interpret all of reality and live in the

⁴³ As an example of Wagner’s seeming unwillingness to wrestle through complex theological topics, see Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 83–84.

⁴⁴ Pierce Taylor Hibbs, “World through Word: Towards a Linguistic Ontology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 79, no. 2 (2017): 346–47.

⁴⁵ Hibbs, “World through Word,” 354.

⁴⁶ Hibbs, “World through Word,” 20.

world.”⁴⁷ Since Scripture is the language of *imago Dei*, then Christians can apply systematic categories—doctrines—to Scripture in order to enable categorical thinking. Horton affirms such a notion by stating,

To dismiss the importance of a systematic understanding of the faith is to deny, at least by implication, that the Bible is a canon—that is, a collection of varied texts that are united by their divine source (the Father’s speaking), their content (the Son’s work of redemption), and their power to generate the world of which they speak (the Spirit’s work of inspiration, illumination, and regeneration).⁴⁸

Therefore, because Wagner devalues systematic theology and the use of human-interpreted doctrines in discipleship, Wagnerianism is not in agreement with classic theism.⁴⁹

God Is Not the Sole Agent in the Enactment of His Will

The final implication of Wagnerianism on discipleship asserts that God is not the sole agent in the enactment of his will; therefore, the assurance of discipleship depends on human efforts. Thus, the will of God is mutable and is influenced by the cooperational prayers of humans. For Wagner, discipleship is a cooperational partnership with God, which is a means of influencing God’s actions on the future.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the cosmological reality of a Christian disciple, according to Wagner, is that of a temporal spiritual dualistic world between God and Satan. Satan’s powers frustrate the

⁴⁷ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 22.

⁴⁸ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 27.

⁴⁹ Wagner asserts,

What is theology anyway? Here is my attempt at a definition: Theology is a human attempt to explain God’s word and God’s works in a reasonable and systematic way. This is not a traditional definition. For one thing, it considers God’s works as one valid source of theological information. For another, it sees God’s word as both what is written in the Bible (*logos*) as well as what God is currently revealing (*rhema*). Admittedly, a downside of seeing theology in this way is possible subjectivity, but the upside is more relevance to what the Spirit is currently saying to the churches on a practical level. Teachers research and expound the *logos*, prophets bring the *rhema*, and apostles put it together and point the direction into the future. (Wagner, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 63)

⁵⁰ As an example, see Wagner’s affirmation that “history belongs to the intercessors.” Wagner, *This Changes Everything*, 147–48.

volitional will of God on the earth because Satan has taken the dominion authority that God gave to Adam—an authority that the disciples of Christ are tasked to reclaim so that Christ can return.

In contrast to Wagnerianism, the cosmological reality of classic theism affirms that God is sovereign over all creation; therefore, nothing frustrates the will of God or influences his divinely established volition, and there is no means of temporal dualism between God and Satan. Satan’s perceived power on the earth is only allowed through the will of God, and such power will ultimately be used to glorify God at the consummation of God’s eternal kingdom. In his 2009 publication *Does Prayer Change Things?*, R. C. Sproul states,

Nothing escapes God’s notice; nothing oversteps the boundaries of His power. God is authoritative in all things. If I thought even for one moment that a single molecule were running loose in the universe outside the control and domain of almighty God, I wouldn’t sleep tonight. My confidence in the future rests in my confidence in the God who controls history.⁵¹

Concerning the implication of an open theistic cosmology, Bruce Ware states in his 2000 publication *God’s Lesser Glory* that

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. From the outset, then, God knows that he will never get all that he would like, and he must work hard to persuade if he hopes (which he does) to fulfill most of what he desires. God is optimistic, but the entire creation project truly faces God with massive risk.⁵²

The omnipotence of God, according to Beeke and Smalley, describes “God’s infinite power.”⁵³ Moreover, Beeke and Smalley, citing William Ames, state, “The omnipotence

⁵¹ R. C. Sproul, *Does Prayer Change Things?*, Crucial Questions Series (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2009), 7.

⁵² Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 163.

⁵³ Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 1:773.

of God is that by which he is able to effect all things which he wills or could will.”⁵⁴ By affirming that God has power over all things, a traditional orthodox affirmation of the omnipotence of God extends the absolute sovereignty of God to include discipleship. The classic theism perspective concerning 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.

Lastly, the function of prayer in discipleship is essential to spiritual maturity and a Christian’s relational connectedness with its Creator, the triune God. For Wagner, Christ’s command to pray for God’s “will be done on earth” (Matt 6:10) provides a means of instilling the volitional will of God into creation—a creation that needs the restoration of humanity’s dominion over Satan. For classic theism, prayer does instill the will of God; however, prayer is a sinful creature’s plea for that which is incorruptible to sustain and grow him or her unto the likeness of Christ. Concerning Matthew 6:10, Calvin states,

And in asking this we renounce the desires of our flesh; for whoever does not resign and submit his feelings to God opposes as much as he can God’s will, since only what is corrupt comes forth from us. And again by this prayer we are formed to self-denial so God may rule us according to his decision. And not this alone but also so he may create new minds and hearts in us [cf. Ps. 51:19], ours having been reduced to nothing in order for us to feel in ourselves no prompting of desire but pure agreement with his will. In sum, so we may wish nothing from ourselves but his Spirit may govern our hearts; and while the Spirit is inwardly teaching us we may learn to love the things that please him and to hate those which displease him. In consequence, our wish is that he may render futile and of no account whatever feelings are incompatible with his will.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 1:773; see also William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 92.

⁵⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles, vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 906–7. Classic theists hold to the notion that prayer is not without purpose. Classic theist proponent John Frame states that God uses prayer as a means to accomplish his purpose, but his purpose is not dependent on prayer: “Now of course prayer doesn’t change the eternal plan of God. But within that eternal plan are many plans for means and ends.” John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 925.

Table 9. Theological implications of Wagnerian discipleship and classic theism

Implication	Wagnerianism	Classic Theism
What is the ontological nature of discipleship?	Discipleship is a volitional contingency of God to realize the contingent plan of the Great Commission since God did not know that humanity would fall into sin in eternity past—the Great Contingency.	Discipleship is intrinsic to the classical concepts— <i>pactum salutis</i> , <i>historia salutis</i> , and <i>ordo salutis</i> —and triune decree purposed by God in eternity past as a means to make effectual the work of redemption.
Does God know who his disciple will be?	God does not know who his disciples will be nor has decreed who they are in eternity past because of his limited foreknowledge.	God knows whom his disciples are and has decreed who they are in eternity past through his exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge.
Does God know when one will become a disciple?	God does not know when a disciple will be made because of his limited foreknowledge.	God knows whom his disciples are and has decreed who they are in eternity past through his exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge.
Does God know how one will become a disciple?	God does not know how a disciple will be made because of his limited foreknowledge, limited omnipotence, and reliance on human cooperation to achieve his will.	God has determined how one will become his disciple and has decreed how discipleship will be effectual in eternity past through his exhaustive foreknowledge and omnipotence.
What is the role of theology in discipleship?	Discipleship relies on the contemporary revelation of God—given through the intercessors, prophets, and apostles—to mature the Christian body rather than study historic doctrines and devalues systematic theology due to its human attempt to interpret Scripture.	A 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.
What is the role of prayer in the life of a disciple?	The prayers of disciples instill the will of God on earth, influence God’s actions, determine the future of humanity, and release God’s power against territorial demons in a spiritually dualistic cosmos that Satan currently rules.	As a privilege granted through the work of Christ, disciples are commanded by God to pray in order to glorify God, align a sinner’s soul to God’s perfect will, and grow in the Christian life. ⁵⁶

⁵⁶ See questions 178–96 of the Westminster Larger Catechism.

Concluding Remarks

In the introduction of this research, it was stated that when an author finishes his book, readers have the privilege of engaging the story in its full context. Wagner's final work, *Six Secrets to a Living a Fruitful Live* (2021), concludes the life of Wagner and reveals the final context of Wagner's end journey. Moreover, it provides two teleological conclusions to the culmination of Wagner's theological conclusions and praxes. The conclusions result from the foreword written by Chuck Pierce. First, Pierce states that Wagner helped to "equip believers to minister in the areas of apostolic ministries, wealth, Kingdom advancement, and reformation of society."⁵⁷ For Wagner, the making of disciples was established in an over-realized eschatological paradigm of societal reformation through the cooperative work of humanity in a world whose future is not certain to God, whose epistemology is phenomenologically subjective, and which is theologically governed by apostles whose lineage was restored from the first century church. Second, Pierce continues, stating that Wagner "was a masterful convener of leaders in the quest to communicate the paradigm shifts needed in the Church." Wagner emphasized the need for continual "paradigm shifts" that evolved from phenomenological subjectivity rather than teaching the church to "observe all that" Christ commanded (Matt 28:20) for the faith once for all given to the saints (Jude 3).

Wagner profoundly influenced modern discipleship methods and contemporary missional praxes. Wagner's publications on missiology and Church Growth are likely to be found on course syllabi as required reading to this day. Many missiologists and pastors know of Wagner only within the contextual framework of modern missions while being categorically unaware of Wagner's affirmation of a Second Apostolic Age as part of the New Apostolic Reformation or his theological affirmation of open theism. The praxes of Wagner, such as apostles, prophets, and pragmatism, should be evaluated against a

⁵⁷ Chuck D. Pierce, foreword to *6 Secrets to Living a Fruitful Life: Wisdom for Thriving in Life*, by C. Peter Wagner and Doris M. Wagner (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2021), 3.

commissional pragmatic consequentialist ethic and should not be uncritically adopted. Moreover, Wagner's praxes should not be evaluated without the contextual framework of open theism.⁵⁸

The Christ Wagner proclaimed, the gospel Wagner confessed, and the God Wagner served should cause a theological dissonance among orthodox scholars, theologians, pastors, and disciples of Christ. As one who once taught and professed the gospel in accordance with the teachings of Wagner, I can assert that such a gospel is no gospel and that it is a means to create a false assurance of faith in disciples through a God who is incongruent with the Scriptures. Moreover, Christians' spiritual maturity depends upon deepening their knowledge of God. Christians have sought to articulate God's revealed knowledge through the Scriptures for over two thousand years. Christians have the privilege of standing on the shoulders of the saints of history who established the orthodox path through the fields of time that carry on into the future. Christian disciples can rely on an unchanging, all-powerful, and good God. On this solid foundation, Christians can carry on into the future, knowing that God, not humanity, changes history. How we make disciples matters and how we describe God matters. Wagner's seemingly greatest consternation was that what we do for God under classic theism does not matter. I fear this understanding caused Wagner a lifetime of consternation and a means of continual theological change. As a classic and Reformed theist, I can assert that what I do for God matters. As Solomon states in Ecclesiastes 12:10–14,

⁵⁸ Researcher's note: Wagner seemingly overgeneralizes classic theism's concept of God's complete sovereignty with the attribute of immutability. In associating Calvinism with God's immutability and rejecting classic theism, Wagner states, "Much of what human beings do really matters in determining history." See C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church: How God Is Leading His Church into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004), 154. Classic theists also affirm a genuine relationship with humanity. Wagner's limited use of nuanced theological concepts causes him to profess a rejection of classic theism when he seemingly holds to its primary tenets. Wagner affirmed the Apostles' Creed because it "contains absolutes," such as the "authority of Scripture, justification by faith, the priesthood of all believers, Jesus' virgin birth, His resurrection, heaven and hell" (161). However, Wagner considered the doctrine of the Trinity a theological "deduction" rather than an absolute (161). Though a rejection of the Trinity would be a fundamental rejection of a core tenet of classic theism, Wagner did affirm much of classic theism, though he overgeneralized its position of God's immutability.

The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Epilogue

The end of Frodo's journey led him far away from the Shire, a place to which he would never again return. The words of Frodo's trusted traveling companion Samwise Gamgee mark the end of the epic journey in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy: "He drew a deep breath. 'Well, I'm back,' he said."⁵⁹ Just as Samwise arrived back in the Shire, this research, too, has returned to the place from which it began. Perhaps this research has allowed readers to understand Wagner in his full context as each chapter of his life unfolded. Perhaps Wagner's name has become a little more known to readers than before this journey began. Like Frodo's adventure, Wagner's journey led him further and further away from the theological conviction that was quite different than what he learned at Fuller as a young man. Wagner's journey had many chapters full of changes in praxes, yet one thing always remained; he believed "all along" that humanity cooperates with God to determine tomorrow. As Mr. Baggins once penned amidst the mystical splendor of Rivendell, *THE END*.

⁵⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, vol. 3, *The Return of the King* (New York: William Morrow, 2012), 155.

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF OPEN THEISM ON C. PETER WAGNER'S PHILOSOPHY OF DISCIPLESHIP

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This dissertation demonstrates that Wagner's philosophy of discipleship emerged from a theological basis established in open theism, affirming God's limited foreknowledge and omnipotence while denying his immutability. Moreover, an underlying consequentialist ethic drove Wagner's understanding and praxes of the Great Commission. Wagner's telos sought to create disciples by any means necessary so that God could instill his will upon the earth. This research introduces three new terms to articulate Wagner's theological convictions and praxes: *divine interventional mutability*, *cooperationism*, and *commissional pragmatic consequentialism*. The present chapter introduces the need for the research. Chapter 2 serves as an excursus on the history and culture of American evangelicalism (1900–1930) and the early developmental years (1930–1952) of C. Peter Wagner. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 articulate Wagner's primary theological dispositions concerning the doctrine of God throughout his career (1952–2016). Chapter 6 provides the research conclusions and articulates the implications of Wagnerian theology on discipleship praxes and ethics.

Wagner's early theological writings demonstrated minimal parity with open theism, though some functional similarities existed. His early philosophy of discipleship emphasized individual means by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit through theological education. As Wagner progressed through life and no longer held to the traditional primary tenets of American fundamentalism, his theological writings aligned

with open theism. Wagner's theological basis evolved into a pragmatic means of discipleship, affirming God's dependency upon the prayers of humanity. In 2001, Wagner formally adopted open theism and articulated a revised means of discipleship through Dominion theology, marginalizing theological education and doctrine. In conclusion, within the context of Wagner's scriptural narrative, his philosophy of discipleship manifests as a means to implement the will of God on earth. An abundance of disciples means the greater instillment of God's will; therefore, Christ can return once all things have come under his authority. Wagner continuously changed his discipleship praxes throughout his career by measuring the phenomenological success of his discipleship methods. In the end, Wagner's means of discipleship manifested from the contextual narrative of open theism all along.

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