

LOTS OF LOVE WITH A LITTLE CROSS:  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF VINEYARD MUSIC

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by

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## LOTS OF LOVE WITH A LITTLE CROSS: THE SPIRITUALITY OF VINEYARD MUSIC

John Wimber, a “beer-guzzling, drug-abusing pop musician, who was converted at the age of 29 while chain-smoking his way through a Quaker-led Bible study,”<sup>1</sup> later emerged to lead one of the most vibrant—and controversial—Christian movements of the late-20<sup>th</sup> century: The Vineyard Movement.<sup>2</sup> At the time of Wimber’s death in 1997 Vineyard churches numbered nearly 500 nationwide and over 250 internationally.<sup>3</sup> Prominent Pentecostal and Charismatic historian Vinson Synan told *Christianity Today* at the time of Wimber’s death, “The Vineyard has exercised influence all out of proportion to its number.”<sup>4</sup>

The Vineyard rode the crest of Peter Wagner’s “Third Wave”<sup>5</sup> and brought “signs and wonders,” “power evangelism,” and “power healing” into mainstream evangelical life. Yet, demonstrations of God’s kingdom power were not the only spiritual emphases the Vineyard

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<sup>1</sup>Carol Wimber, quoting a *Christianity Today* article in, “The Way It Was: The Roots of Vineyard

<sup>2</sup> The Vineyard Movement is best encapsulated in *Vineyard Ministries International* (hereafter VMI) and *The Association of Vineyard Churches* (hereafter AVC). VMI was formalized in 1983 to do four things: 1) facilitate John Wimber’s international conference activity, 2) be a distributing company for Wimber’s and the Vineyard’s music, for a teaching tape ministry, and for printed material, 3) facilitate conferences by other Vineyard pastors and/or associates of Wimber’s, and 4) oversee Vineyard church planting in the United States. As the movement continued to explode a second entity, AVC, was created in 1986. While VMI continued to handle Wimber’s renewal ministry, AVC was created to: provide a legal covering for the expanding movement and its joint activities, facilitate church planting, license and ordain pastors, raise and release funds for church planting, and oversee existing fellowships. See Bill Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle* (Cape Town, South Africa: Vineyard International Publishing, 1999), 95-97.

<sup>3</sup>Joe Maxwell, “Vineyard Founder Wimber Dies,” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1998/january12/8t1058.html>.

<sup>4</sup>Maxwell, “Vineyard Founder Wimber Dies.”

<sup>5</sup>Peter C. Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor, Mich: Servant Publications, Vine Books, 1988).

offered evangelicalism. Vineyard's praise and worship music eventually proved to be one of the greatest exports of and entry points into the Vineyard Movement.

This paper seeks to assess the spirituality found in Vineyard music. It will demonstrate that the dominant spiritual theme found in Vineyard music is desperation for an experience of God's love. The paper will first consider the Vineyard's history before providing an overview of the broad contours of Vineyard spirituality. With these foundations in place the explicit and implicit spirituality contained in the fifty most popular Vineyard songs of the Wimber-led era will be assessed. Finally, an appreciation and critique of Vineyard music will be offered.

### **The Vineyard's History: A Third Wave of Empowered Evangelicals<sup>6</sup>**

After sixteen years on the mission field in Bolivia, Peter Wagner joined the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary in 1971 as Professor of Church Growth.<sup>7</sup> His observations of the church in South America and subsequent research at Fuller led him to see that the fastest-growing churches around the world were Pentecostal in nature. By the early 1980s, Wagner was wondering aloud if a "third wave" of Pentecostal and Charismatic experience was about to begin. Wagner saw the Pentecostal revival of 1906 and the charismatic renewal of the 1960s as the first and second waves, respectively.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>The phrase "Empowered Evangelicals" comes from Rich Nathan and Ken Wilson, *Empowered Evangelicals: Bringing Together the Best of the Evangelical and Charismatic Worlds* (Ann Arbor, MI.: Vine Books, 1995). The authors appreciate Wagner's term "Third Wave" Christians, but find it wanting for three reasons: "1) It takes into account only the experience of Americans in the twentieth century and has limited cross-cultural value, 2) The Holy Spirit's activity is better described as a continually flowing river since the day of Pentecost; three waves or two hundred waves hardly does justice to the Holy Spirit's continuing activity, even if confined to the United States, and 3) The term "Third Wave" has been employed by futurists such as Alvin Toffler and has a popular meaning completely different from the one intended by C. Peter Wagner" (6). Therefore, "Empowered Evangelicals" is the chosen identifier for those "who regularly heal the sick in the power of the Holy Spirit, cast out demons, have a low-key perspective regarding tongues, and regularly receive prophecies" (6).

<sup>7</sup>David L. Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology* (Wheaton, Ill: Victor Books, 1992), 227.

<sup>8</sup>For a succinct history of Pentecostalism and Charismaticism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century see Vincent Synan, *The Pentecostal Holiness Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1997), 89. For detailed information about Charles Parham, the progenitor of Pentecostalism, see Sarah E. Parham, *The Life of Charles F. Parham, Founder of the Apostolic Faith Movement* (New York: Garland Pub, 1985) and James R. Goff, *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1988). For information about the Charismatic renewal in the mainline

In *Pastoral Renewal* Wagner wrote, “I see in the 80’s an opening of the straightline evangelicals and other Christians to the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that Pentecostals and charismatics have experienced, but without becoming either charismatic or Pentecostal.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, Wagner foresaw a time when evangelicals would not follow the central tenet of Pentecostalism: the need for a second baptism in the Spirit. He writes, “Doctrinally the third wave takes the position that the baptism in the Holy Spirit occurs at conversion and is not to be sought as a separate work of grace in the believer’s life subsequent to the new birth. Furthermore the third wave does not consider speaking with tongues as a validation of the believer’s having reached some higher spiritual plane.”<sup>10</sup> Wagner’s ideas came to reach their evangelical zenith in a colleague named John Wimber who rose to lead the Vineyard.

Before turning to Wimber we must first consider the context from which the Vineyard came into being.

### **Out of the Jesus People a New Movement Arrives**

The Vineyard came on the heels of the Jesus People movement in the late 1960s to early 1970s.<sup>11</sup> Chuck Smith’s Calvary Chapel was the epitome of a Jesus People church, a church

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denominations see Dennis Bennett, *Nine O’Clock in the Morning*, (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1970); Frank Farrell, “Outburst of Tongues: The New Penetration,” *Christianity Today*, Sept. 13, 1963, pp. 3-7; Robert J. Heyer, *Pentecostal Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974); Charles E. Greenaway, *Charismatic Movement in the Roman Catholic Church: A Collection of Articles* (S.l: s.n, 1977); David Manuel, *Like a Mighty River: A Personal Account of the Charismatic Conference of 1977* (Orleans, Mass: Rock Harbor Press, 1977); Kilian McDonnell, *Catholic Pentecostalism: Problems in Evaluation* (Pecos, N.M.: Dove Pub., 1970); Vinson Synan, *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins* (Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1975).

<sup>9</sup>Peter Wagner, “A Third Wave?” *Pastoral Renewal* 8, no. 1 (July-Aug. 1983); 1-5. For a book length treatment of The Third Wave concept see Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor, Mich: Servant Publications, Vine Books, 1988).

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in Synan, *The Pentecostal Holiness Tradition*, 272.

<sup>11</sup>The standard history of the Jesus People and their widespread effect on American evangelicalism is Larry Eskridge, *God’s Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

trying to find a middle ground between the Word and Spirit while reaching the hippie community in Southern California.<sup>12</sup> With a Pentecostal pedigree and a deep desire to reach a jaded generation, Smith took the pastorate at Calvary Chapel in 1965 and almost immediately the church found great evangelistic success among the hippies. It was not long before major magazines such as *Look*, *Time*, and *Life* ran feature stories on the astounding success of Calvary Chapel. Smith himself tells of his church's effectiveness when he says,

Scholars such as Peter Wagner (Fuller Theological Seminary) and Ron Enroth (Westmont College) have observed [the Calvary Chapel] phenomenon and noted that it is not likely anything of such colossal proportions has occurred in American history. One estimate put the total number of Calvary Chapel (Costa Mesa) baptisms performed over a two-year period during the mid-1970s at well over 8,000. Additionally, over 20,000 conversions to the Christian faith took place during that same period. According to church growth experts, Calvary Chapel's 10-year growth rate was almost 10,000!<sup>13</sup>

Two things about Calvary Chapel's growth are pertinent to this paper. First, Smith welcomed and encouraged innovation in praise music. He eventually formed *Marantha! Music* to publish and distribute Calvary Chapel's original praise songs, ushering in a new age of music for corporate worship: gospel rock 'n roll. Second, Calvary Chapel was the foremost ecclesiastical influence not only on John Wimber, but also on the man who planted the first Vineyard church, Kenn Gulliksen.

### **Kenn Gulliksen's Vineyard**

Kenn Gulliksen and his wife Joanie "were a part of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa in the early 1970s during the boom years, when thousands were saved and baptized in the Pacific Ocean. Gulliksen was ordained through Calvary in 1971, eventually moving to El Paso, Texas where he and Joanie led a rapidly growing Calvary-style ministry called the Jesus Chapels (a

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<sup>12</sup>For an autobiographical account of Calvary Chapel see Chuck Smith, *The History of the Calvary Chapel* (Costa Mesa, CA: The Word for Today, 1982).

<sup>13</sup>Smith, quoted in Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 37.

group of six hundred young people).”<sup>14</sup> After a few years in west Texas, the Gulliksens returned to California where they soon launched the first Vineyard in Beverly Hills.<sup>15</sup> The Vineyard soon exploded into Southern California as other Vineyards were planted in the surrounding cities. By 1984, thirteen other Vineyard churches stood in the Gulliksen line.<sup>16</sup> Yet, by this point John Wimber was leading the Vineyard movement, and it is to him we now turn.

### **A Rock Star Comes to Christ**

John Wimber was born in 1934 in Kirksville, Missouri, “of hillbilly stock.”<sup>17</sup> With no siblings in his family to pass the time with Wimber made good use of his time mastering over twenty different musical instruments. By the age of eighteen Wimber was playing music full time as a professional artist. He later played saxophone for The Righteous Brothers, contributed to two top ten albums, released the smash hit “You’ve Lost that Loving Feeling,” and even opened for the Beatles.<sup>18</sup> Although Wimber’s musical career was on the up, his marriage was in shambles. Thomas Higgins writes,

[Wimber’s] wife Carol had suggested a sixty-day default divorce if things did not improve. Overwhelmed and in despair, Wimber pulled his vehicle to the side of a lonely desert road. ‘In my pain,’ Wimber wrote, ‘I looked up to the star-filled heavens and cried out, ‘If there is anyone there, help me!’ Immediately I felt self-conscious and embarrassed . . . ‘Oh no,’ I thought, ‘I’m in touch with the supernatural!’”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 80.

<sup>15</sup>The most detailed treatment of Gulliksen’s pivotal role in early Vineyard history is found in Thomas W. Higgins, “Kenn Gulliksen, John Wimber, and the Founding of the Vineyard Movement.” *Pneuma: The Journal Of The Society For Pentecostal Studies* 34, no. 2 (July 2012): 208-228.

<sup>16</sup>Higgins, “Kenn Gulliksen, John Wimber, and the Founding of the Vineyard Movement,” 210.

<sup>17</sup>Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 47. The best biographies on Wimber are David Pytches, *John Wimber: His Influence and Legacy* (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1998) and Carol Wimber, *John Wimber: The Way It Was* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999).

<sup>18</sup>Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 45.

<sup>19</sup>Higgins, “Kenn Gulliksen, John Wimber, and the Founding of the Vineyard Movement,” 210; cf. John Wimber, *Power Points* (San Francisco: Harper, 1984).

In 1964 the Wimbers joined an Evangelical Friends church in Yorba Linda, California where they were nurtured and became involved in ministry. Wimber estimated during the period between 1964-1970 he and Carol led hundreds to Christ.<sup>20</sup> By 1970, he was leading eleven Bible studies with over 500 people involved.<sup>21</sup> That same year Carol became an elder at the Friends church and John joined the pastoral staff. At the time of his departure in 1974 “the church [had grown] from 200 to 800 to become the largest church in the denomination.”<sup>22</sup> The church’s rapid growth caught the eye of Peter Wager at Fuller Theological Seminary and in 1974 Wagner hired Wimber to establish the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth. For the next few years Wimber traveled widely, meeting with some 40,000 pastors and being exposed to various expressions of Christianity. Wimber’s exposure to diversity in belief and practice produced radical changes in his theology and philosophy. “His contacts with visiting missionaries at Fuller had filled his mind with amazing stories of church growth accompanied by miracles such as healing and the casting out of demons,” tells Bill Jackson.<sup>23</sup> Wimber, along with Wagner, went through a “paradigm shift” in his worldview. They realized a rationalistic and modernist worldview prohibited them from giving the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit its rightful place in ordinary church life.

In 1977 Wimber began leading an expressly charismatic Bible study at his Friends church. Here, Jackson says, Wimber fully discovered the nature of worship and the gift of healing.<sup>24</sup> He avidly steered his growing group to a consistent practice of “signs and wonders” and in time the emphasis led to a split with the Friends congregation. Wimber was then

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<sup>20</sup>Wimber, *Power Points*, 163.

<sup>21</sup>Kevin N. Springer, “Applying the Gifts to Every Day Life,” *Charisma* (September 1985), 30.

<sup>22</sup>Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 51.

<sup>23</sup>Bill Jackson, “A Short History of the Association of Vineyard Churches,” in *Church, Identity, and Change*, ed. David A. Roozen and James R. Nieman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 134.

<sup>24</sup>Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 56-57.

encouraged to join with Calvary Chapel, and so on Mother's Day, May 8, 1977, the Calvary Chapel of Yorba Linda was born.<sup>25</sup> Wimber's church started with 150 attenders and increased to 2,000 by the time of its break from Calvary Chapel in 1982.

### **A Calvary Chapel Becomes a Vineyard**

Although Wimber was convinced about the need to pursue all the gifts of the Spirit, Jackson argues, "one could not say their church was 'charismatic.' There were no outbreaks of tongues or other over manifestations of the Spirit—that is, until May of 1980."<sup>26</sup> It was then that Wimber invited a man named Lonnie Frisbee to give his testimony.<sup>27</sup> At the conclusion of his time Frisbee uttered a phrase now legendary in Vineyard folklore, "The church has for years grieved the Holy Spirit. But He's getting over it! Come, Holy Spirit!"<sup>28</sup> After Frisbee's utterance most of the present attenders were overcome, filled with the Spirit, began to speak in tongues, and fell over with "the shakes." "Witnesses said it looked like a battlefield."<sup>29</sup>

The Frisbee event proved to be a catalyst for Wimber's church and precipitated Wimber's break with Calvary Chapel. Miller gets at the crux of the problem when he writes, "In

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<sup>25</sup>Higgins, "Kenn Gulliksen, John Wimber, and the Founding of the Vineyard Movement," 210; Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 63. Wimber's linking with Calvary Chapel happened for two reasons. First, at the outset of his time at Fuller Wimber met John McClure, a congregational pastor who Wimber later hired as his assistant. The would become lifelong friends. Higgins believes it was John McClure who led Wimber to affiliate with Calvary Chapel, when in fact, as Jackson shows, it was actually *Don* McClure—John's brother—who pushed Wimber into the Calvary fold. The second reason is that, at least doctrinally, Calvary Chapel and Chuck Smith agreed that all the gifts of the Spirit were available to Christians today. As we shall soon see, Smith and Wimber would split on the degree to which such gifts should be visibly practiced in gathered worship.

<sup>26</sup>Bill Jackson, "A Short History of the Association of Vineyard Churches," in *Church, Identity, and Change*, 134.

<sup>27</sup>Frisbee was one of the most famous Jesus People evangelists and played a key part not only in the rapid growth of the Vineyard movement, but also Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa. See Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 70-75; Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 35-36 and 72-76. For a detailed portrayal of Frisbee's life see especially David Di Sabatino; *Frisbee The Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher* (Jester Media, 2006).

<sup>28</sup>Wimber quoted in Higgins, "Kenn Gulliksen, John Wimber, and the Founding of the Vineyard Movement," 220.

<sup>29</sup>Jackson, "A Short History of the Association of Vineyard Churches," in *Church, Identity, and Change*, 134.

spite of Chuck Smith's background in the Foursquare church, he deemphasized overt expression of tongues, prophecy, and healing in public worship."<sup>30</sup> Jackson pithily summarizes the matter, "[Wimber] began to promote in the front room what Calvary was doing only in the backroom."<sup>31</sup> And so it was in April 1982, at a meeting of pastors of some of the largest Calvary Chapel congregations, that it was suggested Wimber's church leave to join the fledgling Vineyard movement. Wimber had met Gulliksen back in 1979 and thought the Vineyard would be a more suitable home for his views on the Spirit and church growth. The appreciation was reciprocal as the Vineyard churches had grown beyond Gulliksen's ability to manage and he believed Wimber was perfectly equipped to lead the Vineyard.<sup>32</sup> Wimber's Calvary Chapel of Yorba Linda soon became the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Anaheim. Higgins summarizes Wimber's immediate and long-term impact on the movement,

Wimber took steps to organize the Vineyard movement further; he created the Vineyard Ministries International in 1983 and the Association of Vineyard Churches in 1986. He tirelessly spread core values of the Vineyard around the world in his books, articles, and conferences, and he guided the expansion of the Vineyard movement so that by the time of his death in 1997, the movement encompassed 452 churches.<sup>33</sup>

With the Vineyard's history in place, it is necessary to note the key emphases in Vineyard spirituality as a whole.

### **The Vineyard's Spirituality: Kingdom Power**

The spirituality of the Vineyard is inexorably tied up within the spirituality of John Wimber. And the center point of Wimber's spirituality was his understanding of the kingdom of

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<sup>30</sup>Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 49.

<sup>31</sup>Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 85.

<sup>32</sup>Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 49: "Gulliksen explains that in 1982 he felt overwhelmed trying to oversee the handful of Vineyards that existed at the time. He was working fourteen hours a day and felt he needed another fourteen hours to respond to all the demands on him . . . in his words, 'I was over the edge and didn't know what to do. I was ready for an emotional breakdown . . . John was like a savior in a fat man's body for me at the time.'"

<sup>33</sup>Higgins, "Kenn Gulliksen, John Wimber, and the Founding of the Vineyard Movement," 222.

God.<sup>34</sup> Of particular importance here is how Wimber imbibed George Eldon Ladd's understanding of the kingdom of God. Jackson says,

The most influential [writing for Wimber] was the book *Jesus and the Kingdom* (now *The Presence of the Future*) by Fuller's own George Ladd.<sup>35</sup> John McClure had introduced Wimber to the teaching of Ladd, and Wimber immediately sensed its implications for parish ministry. Ladd's understanding of the kingdom of God gave Wimber the theological ground he needed to explain the combination of evangelism and the miraculous . . . knowing the kingdom was 'already' gave him a basis for the in-break of the miraculous in the present. Knowing that the kingdom was 'not yet' gave him a basis for explaining why not all people were healed and why there was still suffering in the world.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, for Wimber—and the Vineyard—a primary point of spiritual emphasis is that of *kingdom power*. He believes the kingdom of God came in power through the person and work of Jesus and still comes in power today for those who are open to the filling of the Spirit.<sup>37</sup> Power is found in “the signs of the kingdom,” which Wimber says are, “Casting out demons, raising people from the dead, healing the sick, providing food where there is none, and stilling the elements.”<sup>38</sup> This “kingdom power” focus is seen most clearly in the twin towers of Vineyard spirituality: power evangelism and power healing.

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<sup>34</sup>For an in depth analysis of the Vineyard's spirituality by way of Wimber and expressed in their statement of faith see Don Williams, “Theological Perspective and Reflection on the Vineyard Christian Fellowship,” in *Church, Identity, and Change*, ed. David A. Roozen and James R. Nieman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 163-187. Williams concurs with the kingdom shape of the Vineyard's spirituality when he writes, “In general, Wimber was driven by his understanding of the kingdom of God. Jesus came in the power of the Spirit to evangelize the poor, heal the sick, drive out demons, liberate the oppressed, and build a people living under his lordship” (167).

<sup>35</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); *Jesus and the Kingdom: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1974); *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

<sup>36</sup>Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 54.

<sup>37</sup>John Wimber, *Signs and Wonders, and Church Growth*, rev. ed. (Placentia, CA: Vineyard Ministries International, 1985), 3.7. For a careful analysis of Wimber's course at Fuller Theological Seminary entitled “Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth (MC 510)” as well as its popularity and fallout, see Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 110-126. A faculty critique of the class was published in Lewis B. Smedes, *Ministry and the Miraculous: A Case Study at Fuller Theological Seminary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987).

<sup>38</sup>Wimber, *Signs and Wonders and Church Growth*, 2.16.

## **Power Evangelism**

Throughout his entire ministry John Wimber was a prolific evangelist. Thousands were converted to Christ through his evangelistic labor. Yet, one would go wrong in assuming that by “evangelism” Wimber meant simply sharing the gospel of Jesus with a sinner. He did mean this, but he also meant so much more—to properly evangelize was to *show* the gospel. He defines evangelism as,

. . . a presentation of the Gospel that is rational but which also transcends the rational. The explanation of the kingdom of God comes with a demonstration of God’s power. It is a spontaneous, Spirit-inspired presentation of the Gospel. It is usually preceded and undergirded by demonstrations of God’s presence and frequently results in groups of people being saved.<sup>39</sup>

Here Wimber believes himself to be applying the truth of 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 where Paul says, “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”<sup>40</sup> Alongside power evangelism is the second tower of power in Vineyard spirituality: power healing.

## **Power Healing**

Wimber was convinced that healing was an essential demonstration of the kingdom and manifestation of the Spirit’s anointing. He “maintained that the key to the growth of Vineyard churches was their learning ‘to know when God’s unction or anointing had come for a task like healing in a particular situation.’”<sup>41</sup> Wimber expected a focus on healing would manifest in compassionate prayer for the hurting and miraculous demonstrations of kingdom power.

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<sup>39</sup>John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Points* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1991), 172-173.

<sup>40</sup>All Scripture quotations come from *The English Standard Version*.

<sup>41</sup>Wimber quoted in, Donald Kammer, “The Perplexing Power of John Wimber’s Power Encounters,” *Churchman* 106.1 (1992), 55.

After an extended period of praying for healing with no success, Wimber claimed his first healing in 1977 and it was a catalyst for the Vineyard often being known as much for healing as anything else. Wimber himself exclaimed, “Today we see hundreds of people healed every month in the Vineyard Christian Fellowship services. Many more are healed as we pray for them in hospitals, on the street, and in homes. The blind see; the lame walk; the deaf hear. Cancer is disappearing.”<sup>42</sup> The Vineyard’s leader rejected the idea that illnesses could be exclusively explained by physical and rational means; illnesses actually had spiritual, emotional, and even demonic forces.<sup>43</sup> Here we find a key component to the Vineyard worldview: the average Western worldview is “chained to secularism, rationalism, materialism, and mechanism that it excludes any practical concept of the supernatural’s intrusion into everyday life.”<sup>44</sup> Writing in *Christianity Today*, Tim Stafford argues, “[Wimber] scorns the practice of claiming the Spirit’s presence purely by faith. When the Holy Spirit moves in power, he says, you know without a doubt something supernatural has occurred.”<sup>45</sup>

Few aspects of the Vineyard stirred strong, opposing opinions as its focus on healing.<sup>46</sup> One of Wimber’s colleagues at Fuller said, against Wimber’s claims, “People are not coming to the Vineyard to be renewed in their hope for the future; they are coming for healing in the present . . . this is far from a theology of the Cross.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 56.

<sup>43</sup>John Gunstone, “Learning from the Vineyard,” *Renewal* (Dec. 1989), 26-27.

<sup>44</sup>David L. Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology*, 230.

<sup>45</sup>Tim Stafford, “Testing the Wine from John Wimber’s Vineyard,” *Christianity Today*, August 8, 1986, 18.

<sup>46</sup>For a sustained critique see Charles W. Colson and Michael Scott Horton, *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992; John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 160-164.

<sup>47</sup>Stafford, “Testing the Wine,” 21.

## Power Warfare

A third emphasis of Vineyard spirituality and the power of the kingdom is that of spiritual warfare, or “power encounters.”<sup>48</sup> Wimber summarizes spiritual warfare as happening in three areas: temptation, oppression, and demonization. Of particular note is the third category of demonization. Wimber says demon possession is a foreign concept to the Bible, thus it is more accurate to speak of demonization—or levels of demonic influence in an individual. “The term ‘demonized’ refers to people who are in varying degrees of levels of demonic bondage,” Wimber asserts. “In all instances of bondage people are subject to periodic attacks by one or more demons that may affect them physically, mentally, and spiritually.”<sup>49</sup>

This understanding of demonic prevalence within Christians and non-Christians alike led the Vineyard to emphasize warfare against territorial spirits. Territorial spirits are “powerful angels . . . who exercise influence over cities, regions, even nations.”<sup>50</sup> Warring against these spirits was primarily done through the labor of intercessory prayer—what the Vineyard typically called warfare prayer.<sup>51</sup>

If evangelism, healing, and warfare are the primary means by which Vineyard churches *demonstrate* the power of Christ’s kingdom, then musical worship is the main vehicle by which they *experience* the love of Christ’s kingdom.

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<sup>48</sup>John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Encounters Among Christians in the Western World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). For a critique of this view on spiritual warfare see David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995). A key volume espousing the Vineyard’s view on spiritual warfare to the wider evangelical world is Timothy Warner, *Spiritual Warfare* (Wheaton: Ill.: Crossway, 1991).

<sup>49</sup>Wimber and Springer, *Power Healing*, 117.

<sup>50</sup>John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Points*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991), 182.

<sup>51</sup>C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer: How to Seek God's Power and Protection in the Battle to Build His Kingdom* (Ventura, Calif., U.S.A.: Regal Books, 1992)

## Vineyard Worship: More Love, More Power

Forged in the counterculture of the 1960s, the original Vineyard leaders were loving proponents of one of the counterculture's main expressions: rock 'n roll music. As mentioned already, John Wimber was a rock star in his own right and the original Vineyard planted by Ken Gulliksen included arguably the two most influential Christian rock figures in Chuck Girard and Larry Norman.<sup>52</sup> It is thus not surprising to hear Bill Jackson declare in his history of the Vineyard, "We value a common mission to rock 'n roll culture. The Boomers cut their teeth on rock 'n roll and grew up in denim. Our mission is to reach Boomers, Busters, and their kids by offering church [music] they can relate to."<sup>53</sup>

Additionally important for our understanding of Vineyard music's style is the corporate worship culture from which it came: that of Calvary Chapel. In *God's Forever Family* historian Larry Eskridge chronicles the amazing influence of Calvary Chapel on the wider evangelical world. He argues that Calvary Chapel was the driving force behind the widespread acceptance of "simple, self-composed songs, largely influenced by folk music" saturating evangelical worship services. He writes,

The single most important source [for praise and worship music] was the original Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, where pastor Church Smith bankrolled a recording of the church's chapel groups and subsequently Maranatha! Music. Maranatha!'s first album, *The Everlastin' Living Jesus Concert*—later simply *Maranatha!* (1971)—*blurred the boundaries between Jesus music as entertainment and Jesus music intended for worship*; the record sold more than 160,000 copies and spread the Calvary Chapel praise sound beyond Southern California.<sup>54</sup> (emphasis added)

From Calvary Chapel Wimber got the idea to institutionalize the Vineyard's music in order to perpetuate it to the masses. Not long after assuming leadership of the Vineyard John

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<sup>52</sup>Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 268. Girard was the lead singer of the hugely popular Christian rock band *Love Song*, and Norman is widely considered to be "The Father of Christian Rock."

<sup>53</sup>Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 107.

<sup>54</sup>Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 268.

Wimber commissioned Randy Rigby to produce new worship music for the movement under the name Mercy Records.<sup>55</sup>

So then, from its start the Vineyard cultivated and encouraged a style of music that fit comfortably with a generation raised on rock 'n roll and anti-establishment simplicity. The Jesus People movements of Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard popularized the now ubiquitous praise band (acoustic guitar, electric guitar, bass guitar, keyboard, and drums). If this is the nature of Vineyard's music's style, what can be said of its theology of worship?

### **Worship: An Experience With God**

The Vineyard's "Core Values & Beliefs" booklet lists "Experiencing God" as the movement's second distinctive. It equates "Experiencing God" with experiencing the kingdom. "The kingdom of God is a dynamic realm," the document declares. "When one enters the kingdom she/he experiences the dynamic reality which exists within the triune God . . . This means that the experience of the kingdom of God is central to our faith and Christian life."<sup>56</sup> Where does a Christian experience God? In worship through song. The mission of Vineyard Worship (formerly Mercy Records) is "the cultivation and empowerment of the core value of worship in the Vineyard or more simply put 'to help the local church experience God.'"<sup>57</sup>

Jackson says the early days of Wimber's church in Yorba Linda were days of "discovering worship." Fueled by guitar driven melodies "the group would experience a profound sense of the presence of God . . . it was during the songs with words addressed directly

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<sup>55</sup>Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 139. For a more detailed history of Mercy Records see Donn Edwards' article "A Beginner's Guide to Vineyard Music," from *Vineyard Music EXTRA!* available at <http://www.worship.co.za/pages/history.asp>. Mercy Records began was founding in 1985 and has since changed its name to Vineyard Music.

<sup>56</sup>The Vineyard's "Core Values & Beliefs," <http://www.vineyardresources.com/CoreValuesAndBeliefs.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup>"Vineyard Worship's Mission," <http://www.vineyardworship.com/about>.

to God that they experienced a more profound sense of his presence.”<sup>58</sup> For the Vineyard then, experiencing God is the penultimate reality of the Christian life and it is a reality ordinarily—if not exclusively—situated in musical worship. Therefore, to properly understand Vineyard spirituality one must grapple with the spirituality contained in its songs. In *Reinventing American Protestantism* Donald Miller quotes Kevin Springer (a key figure in the Vineyard during its peak Wimber years) as saying, “You don’t understand the Vineyard if you don’t understand the worship music. That is probably the greatest contributor to the growth and advancement of the Vineyard movement. More than healing, more than books, more than tapes. It’s Vineyard music.”<sup>59</sup>

The remainder of this paper seeks to “understand the worship music” of the Vineyard. If Springer is right, what are the main themes of that which contributed the most “to the growth and advancement of the Vineyard movement?” To answer that question I will unfold the major spiritual themes contained in the fifty most sung Vineyard songs of the John Wimber era.<sup>60</sup>

### **Desperation for God’s Presence**

No spiritual theme in the Vineyard’s most popular songs during this era is as prominent as that of desperation. While many songs offer explicit language of “desperation” many more are, structurally and tonally, desperate pleas for all manner of things. Donald Miller gets at the issue well when he writes, “Vineyard music is distinctive in that the lyrics are often

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<sup>58</sup>Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 59.

<sup>59</sup>Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 83-84.

<sup>60</sup>My objective basis for discerning the top fifty songs is *Christian Copyright Licensing International* (CCLI). CCLI is the main resource evangelical churches have used since its inception in 1988 for reporting, for publishing royalty purposes, which songs they have used (“copied”) through “congregational singing, including computer projections, songsheets, bulletin inserts, recording your service and more.” I have searched the CCLI archives to determine the fifty most sung Mercy Records/Vineyard Music songs *written before John Wimber’s death*. It seemed wise to limit the songs for analysis to the Wimber period for two reasons: 1) the changing landscape of worship music around the turn of the twentieth century makes it difficult to expect any fluidity should one analyze over thirty-five years of Vineyard Music, thus limiting the time period is advantageous, and 2) one cannot truly grasp the Vineyard’s spiritual heartbeat apart from Wimber’s influence, leadership, and teaching.

intended as a form of prayer or direct personal communication with God.”<sup>61</sup> Song after song in the catalogue can be defined as “a desperate plea.”

Marie Barnett’s “Breathe” codified the language of desperation for the movement with the cry, “And I, I’m desperate for you.”<sup>62</sup> The particular point of desperation for God in the song is, “Your holy presence / Living in me.” It is impossible to understand the spirituality of Vineyard music if one does not recognize an experience of God’s presence as the ultimate goal of the Christian life. Kelly Carpenter’s smash hit, “Draw Me Close to You,” cries out,

Draw me close to you  
Never let me go . . .  
You’re all I want  
You’re all I’ve ever needed  
You’re all I want  
Help me know you are near.<sup>63</sup>

Andy Park’s “In the Secret” strikes a similar chord by singing,

I want to know you  
I want to hear your voice  
I want to know you more.  
I want to touch you  
I want to see your face  
I want to know you more.<sup>64</sup>

From these songs it must be noted how intimate the language is; it is language of knowing, touching, seeing, and “feel[ing] the warmth of your embrace.”<sup>65</sup> Vineyard’s songs of desperation are routinely those of longing for an intimate, loving encounter with God. Jude Del

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<sup>61</sup>Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 87.

<sup>62</sup>“Breathe” (Marie Barnett, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing). Originally written in 1995, Barnett’s song did not take off in the mainstream evangelical world until Michael W. Smith recorded it for his “Worship” album in 2001. It promptly became the *American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers*’ (ASCAP) most recorded song of the year in 2002.

<sup>63</sup>“Draw Me Close” (Kelly Carpenter, © 1994 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>64</sup>“In the Secret” (Andy Park, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>65</sup>“Draw Me Close” (Kelly Carpenter, © 1994 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

Hierro's "More Love, More Power," longs for, "More love, more power / More of you in my life."<sup>66</sup> Wimber's own "Spirit Song" says,

O let the Son of God enfold you  
With His Spirit and His love  
Let Him fill your heart and satisfy your soul  
O let Him have the things that hold you  
And His Spirit like a dove  
Will descend upon your life and make you whole.<sup>67</sup>

Craig Musseau longs to be found, "in your arms of love";<sup>68</sup> Brian Doerksen pleads for God's "love and mercy to fill my senses / I am thirsty for Your presence, Lord"; Brent Helming calls God's children to revel in that knowledge they are God's "beloved";<sup>69</sup> and Scott Underwood wants to know "You (God) love who I am."<sup>70</sup>

This proliferation of focus in intimacy with God leads Miller to conclude, "Worship may be viewed as a form of sacred lovemaking, transcending the routinized rituals that so often structure the human-divine communication."<sup>71</sup> He goes on to quote from a Vineyard worship leader who declares, "My goal is to see people who are 'gone' [to God's love] . . . What I want to see is people who have 'checked out' and who are with the Lord, who are communing with God in the Spirit, who have made the 'connection' [to God's love]."<sup>72</sup> All the language of love leads me to ask, "Does Vineyard music present God's character in little more than categories of love?" A proper analysis yields the answer, "Mostly."

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<sup>66</sup>"More Love More Power" (Jude Del Hierro, © 1987 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>67</sup>"Spirit Song" (John Wimber, © 1979 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>68</sup>"Arms of Love" (Craig Musseau, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>69</sup>"Your Beloved (Brent Helming, © 1996 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>70</sup>"You Are in Control" (Scott Underwood, © 1997 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>71</sup>Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 87.

<sup>72</sup>Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 88.

**Vineyard Music on God’s Character.** By categories of love I am thinking about those attributes of God traditionally understood as attributes of benevolence: love, mercy, grace, goodness, and compassion.<sup>73</sup> Undeniably, these are the attributes on which Vineyard music majors. Musseau’s “Good to Me” repetitively exalts in God’s goodness, while also recognizing God is full of love and mercy, and is “My strength in weakness.”<sup>74</sup> Along with love and goodness, God’s faithfulness is commonly extolled. In “Faithful One” Doerksen—whose songs are the most overtly theological in the Vineyard catalogue—sings, “Faithful one, so unchanging / Ageless one, you’re my rock of peace . . . Your love, is the anchor.”<sup>75</sup> Here then is a confession of dependence on an eternal, immutable, and benevolent God. John Barnett strikes a similar chord in “Father of Lights” by praising God for “You never change / You have no turning.”<sup>76</sup> Andy Park worships God for, “Your great faithfulness has been my shield . . . Your great faithfulness is my reward.”<sup>77</sup>

While the Vineyard catalogue is silent on God’s wisdom it does rejoice in God’s sovereignty over the lives of his children. Underwood’s “You Are in Control” is a confession of trust in God’s sovereignty, declaring,

I won’t be afraid  
 Because you are in control  
 You are in control  
 You are in control  
 You are in control  
 You cause everything to work together  
 You truly have a sovereign plan.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>See John Frame, *Doctrine of God*, (Philipsburg, PA: P&R, 2002), 402-445.

<sup>74</sup>“Good to Me” (Craig Musseau, © 1990 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>75</sup>“Faithful One “ (Brian Doerksen, © 1989 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>76</sup>“Father of Lights “ (John Barnett, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>77</sup>“Blessed Be the Name” (Andy Park, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing) .

<sup>78</sup>“You Are in Control” (Scott Underwood, © 1997 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing). See also “Let Your Glory Fall” (David Ruis, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing) for a plea for God’s sovereign plan to fall on his church; i.e. “let Your kingdom come” by filling this place with your presence.

Stephen Charnock, a great Puritan theologian, stated, “[Holiness] is the crown of all [God’s] attributes, the life of all his decrees, the brightness of all his action.”<sup>79</sup> However, this umbrella-like attribute of God receives scant attention in Vineyard songs. Cindy Rethmeier’s “Exalt the Lord” commands worshipers to lift their voice to the Creator, “For the Lord our God, He is Holy.”<sup>80</sup> The only other Vineyard song in the top fifty to adore God in His holiness is Andy Park’s and Craig McCoy’s “I See the Lord.” The song pulls together a few verses from Isaiah 6 and puts them to melody, continually declaring, “Holy, holy is the Lord.”<sup>81</sup> Curiously though, the song never actually employs the three-fold repetition of God’s holiness, thereby robbing the text of its strongest superlative.

By maximizing God’s love and downplaying God’s holiness it is thus predictable to find precious few Vineyard songs reveling in the gospel as the good news of Christ come to save sinners.

**Vineyard Music on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.** Only two songs in the top fifty reflect upon the work of Christ at Calvary.<sup>82</sup> Randy and Terry Butler tell us they “know a place, a wonderful place / Where accused and condemned / Find mercy and grace . . . At the cross / He died for our sin.”<sup>83</sup> In a more sustained manner Michael Christ’s “It’s Your Blood” meditates on the cross by singing,

It’s Your blood that cleanses me  
It’s Your blood that gives me life  
It’s your blood that took my place

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<sup>79</sup>Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (Edinburgh, Scotland: James Nichol, 1864) 2:194.

<sup>80</sup>“Exalt the Lord” (Cindy Rethmeier, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>81</sup>“I See The Lord” (Andy Park & Craig McCoy, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>82</sup>“I Believe in Jesus” by Marc Nelson is a creedal like hymn that contains the lines, “I believe You died and rose again / I believe you paid for us all,” but the line is ultimately used to lead Nelson to celebrate that, by virtue of his death and resurrection, Jesus lives in His church primarily through healing power.

<sup>83</sup>“At the Cross” (Randy Butler & Terry Butler, © 1993 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

In redeeming sacrifice  
Washes me whiter than the snow, than the snow  
My Jesus, God's precious sacrifice.<sup>84</sup>

Other songs in the catalogue praise Christ's life-giving power,<sup>85</sup> satisfying love,<sup>86</sup> anointed sweetness,<sup>87</sup> reign of peace,<sup>88</sup> victory over death in the resurrection,<sup>89</sup> and kingship.<sup>90</sup> On the whole then, the cross of Christ—the climax of Christ's work and of Scripture as a whole—is relegated to being an afterthought in the popular Vineyard songs. And this is something of which John Wimber himself recognized and came to regret.

In March of 1990 Wimber traveled down to Sydney, Australia for a four-day Vineyard conference entitled, "What the Holy Spirit is Saying to the Church Today." Wimber met with a group of prominent Australian pastors concerned about the Vineyard. This group included Philip Jensen, the pastor of St. Matthias Anglican Church in Sydney, John Woodhouse and David Cook. The meeting produced little unity and much discord, resulting in the Australian men asking Wimber to cancel the conference. After Wimber denied the request Jensen devoted a double issue of his journal *The Briefing* to a scathing review of the Vineyard movement.<sup>91</sup> One of *The Briefing's* primary critiques was of Vineyard songs being short on the cross. Bill Jackson writes, "The Vineyard [in their response] did acknowledge the validity of *The Briefing's* observation that the message of the cross was not emphasized enough . . . [Wimber] called the Vineyard's main

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<sup>84</sup>"It's Your Blood" (Michael Chirst, © 1985 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>85</sup>"Every Move I Make" (David Ruis, © 1996 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>86</sup>"Spirit Song" (John Wimber, © 1979 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>87</sup>"Holy and Anointed One" (John Barnett, © 1988 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>88</sup>"Isn't He" (John Wimber, © 1980 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>89</sup>"You Are Mighty" (Craig Musseau, © 1989 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>90</sup>"You Are My King" (Brian Doerksen, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>91</sup>This edition of *The Briefing* garnered sufficient interest for the author to eventually publish it in booklet form, Philip Jensen and Tony Payne, *John Wimber: Friend or Foe? An Examination of the Current Teaching of the Vineyard Ministries Movement* (Sydney, Australia: St. Matthias Press, 1990).

songwriters together to confess his shortcoming to them and to exhort them to study the cross and to begin to write more songs demonstrating the centrality of the atonement.”<sup>92</sup>

Part and parcel to a small understanding of the cross is a small understanding of sin. Where sin is deemphasized, the cross will tend to recede to the background. This is apparently what happened in Vineyard music. Man’s need, in the Vineyard songs, is expressed most often in terms of “weakness.”<sup>93</sup> Therefore, what is most needed from Christ from Christ is strength, not atonement. Redemption is thus relegated and the cross is curtailed.

If Jesus’ substitution for sinners is largely neglected in the Vineyard’s most popular songs, one aspect of Christ’s work that does receive prominent focus is Christ’s second coming. David Ruis’ “We Will Dance” shouts,

Sing a song of celebration  
Lift up a shout of praise  
For the Bridegroom will come  
The glorious One  
And oh, we will look on His face  
We’ll go to a much better place.<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, John Willison adapts the language of Job 19:25 to fix the Christian’s gaze upon Jesus’ return by singing, “For I know that my redeemer live / And I will stand with him on that day.”<sup>95</sup> A triumphalist and apocalyptic tone permeates “We Will Ride,” an Andy Park song inspired by the language of Revelation, particularly chapter 19. The song announces,

He has fire in His eyes and a sword in His hand  
And He’s riding a white horse across this land  
And He’s calling out to you and me,  
“Will you ride with me?”  
He has a crown on His head

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<sup>92</sup>Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle*, 157. As this came before the vibrant Vineyard songwriting years of 1994-1996 (see Appendix A) one wonders why the exhortation did not apparently spill over into the Vineyard producing a variety of popular cross-centered songs in the years just prior to Wimber’s death.

<sup>93</sup> See “Good to Me” and “Let Your Glory Fall.”

<sup>94</sup>“We Will Dance” (David Ruis, © 1993 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>95</sup>“My Redeemer Lives” (John Willison, © 1993 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

He carries a scepter in His hand  
And He's leading His armies across this land  
And He's calling out to you and me,  
"Will you ride with me?"  
We say, "Yes, yes Lord, we will ride with you."<sup>96</sup>

On this point, the Vineyard ought to be commended. Few popular songs in recent decades have called for the church to look up for Christ's return and done so with language so clearly shaped by Scriptural truth.

A final point to mention in the Vineyard's central motif of desperation for God's presence is seen in how their kingdom theology appears in their songs. The Vineyard's catalogue indeed mirrors the larger movement's focus on at least one tower of power; that of power healing. Craig Musseau cries out for God's hand of mercy to heal,<sup>97</sup> Marc Nelson believes Jesus is present in power to heal now,<sup>98</sup> and Cindy Rethmeier longs to be like Jesus, to have "serving hands / to heal the sick and raise the dead / hands that set people free."<sup>99</sup>

Thus, the primary emphasis of spirituality in the popular Vineyard music is one of desperation for God's presence. It chooses to focus on God's love, minimize God's holiness, and so offers many emotional pleas for an experience of nearness, while giving scant attention to the cross of Christ. The major secondary emphasis of the Vineyard's songs is that of consecration unto holiness.

### **Consecration Unto Holiness**

While explicit language of the plight of sin and power of God in salvation is not found in the Vineyard catalogue, there is a strong focus on the need to grow out of sin—on the need to

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<sup>96</sup>"We Will Ride" (Andy Park, © 1994 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>97</sup>"Good to Me" (Craig Musseau, © 1990 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>98</sup>"I Believe in Jesus" (Marc Nelson, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>99</sup>"I Want to Be Like Jesus" (Cindy Rethmeier, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

grow in holiness, or be consecrated before God. Scott Underwood’s “Take My Life” is the quintessential Vineyard song on the topic, saying,

Holiness, holiness is what I long for  
Holiness is what I need  
Holiness, holiness is what you want from me  
Take my heart and form it  
Take my mind, transform it  
Take my will, conform it  
To Yours, to Yours, Oh Lord.<sup>100</sup>

Doerksen longs for God’s refinement, crying out, “Refiner’s fire / My heart’s one desire / Is to be holy,”<sup>101</sup> while Terry Butler asks God to, “Make me wholly devoted to you.”<sup>102</sup> Eddie Espinosa’s immensely popular “Change My Heart O God,” is little more than a sung prayer of consecration to God,

Change my heart oh God  
Make is ever true  
Change my heart oh God  
May I be like you.  
You are the potter, I am the clay  
Mold me and make me  
This is what I pray.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to being like God, a prominent feature of consecration in Vineyard spirituality is “following” God. Consider the following lines:

- “It is the cry of my heart to *follow* You.”<sup>104</sup>
- “My desire is to *follow* you forever.”<sup>105</sup>
- “Jesus lead on, I will *follow*.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>“Take My Life” (Scott Underwood, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>101</sup>“Refiner’s Fire” (Brian Doerksen, © 1990 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>102</sup>“Cry of My Heart” (Terry Butler, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>103</sup>“Change My Heart O God” (Eddie Espinosa, © 1982 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>104</sup>“Cry of My Heart” (Terry Butler, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>105</sup>“Good to Me” (Craig Musseau, © 1990 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

- “I want . . . feet that *follow* after you.”<sup>107</sup>

What the songwriters exactly mean by “follow” God is not always clear, but the ordinary context leads me to conclude the songwriters pray for hearts to follow, in obedience, the Lord’s leading in their lives.

This theme of consecration fits well within the overall tone of desperation permeating Vineyard music. The songwriters are desperate for an experience of God’s presence that will empower them to be consecrated unto holiness.

### **An Assessment of Vineyard Music’s Spirituality**

There is much one must affirm about the spirituality found in Vineyard music. Many of the songs overflow with the language of Scripture, be it direct quotation and unmistakable paraphrasing. A spirituality divorced from God’s word is a spirituality that is like dust in the wind, blowing wherever the winds of the world make take it. It has no mooring or foundation to anchor its adherents’ lives. Clearly, Vineyard spirituality wants God’s word to shape Christian experience. A second point of appreciation is how the Vineyard, much like the psalmists of old, view music as a worthy vehicle for prayer. In her book *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*, Stanford anthropologist Tanya Luhmann chronicles and analyzes her visit to various American evangelical churches. After a series of visits to Vineyard churches she rightly concludes, “At a church like the Vineyard, music is prayer.”<sup>108</sup> This causes the majority of Vineyard songs to feel as through the church member is in intimate, personal conversation with God.

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<sup>106</sup>“Jesus Lead On” (Brent Helming, © 1996 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>107</sup>“I Want to Be Like Jesus” (Cindy Rethmeier, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing).

<sup>108</sup>T.M. Luhmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 4.

While intimate conversation with God is surely a component of biblical and musical worship, what about the *corporate* element of song? The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 5:18-19, commands the church to “be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” There is thus a horizontal dimension to worship the Vineyard almost totally excludes. Forty-four of the top fifty songs are written exclusively from the first person singular perspective. The songs are all about “I, me, my, and mine.” Hence why Luhrmann can say, “The [Vineyard’s] worship is intensely individual, *even when everyone sings together*” (emphasis added).<sup>109</sup> This radical individualism leads me to the glaring flaw in the Vineyard’s most popular music: it prioritizes God’s immanence to the expense of His transcendence.

### **A Kingdom of Love and Nearness**

A quagmire any church or Christian has to navigate with care is that of falling into a dichotomous understanding of God. Should we speak about his love or his wrath? Should we focus on grace or truth? Should we celebrate God’s immanence or transcendence? Should our accent on the kingdom be that of the “already,” or the “not yet”? False dichotomies abound and we dare not force one another to make a choice on any of these questions, for the proper answer is, “Both.” Yet, knowing biblical balance is the right pursuit is easier than putting biblical balance into a right practice. Such is the case with the Vineyard’s music.

The “realized kingdom” Wimber took from George Ladd provided a basis on which to construct an entire movement almost exclusively on the “already” of the kingdom. While Wimber did understand the kingdom is also “not yet”—thus his language of having a theology of power and a theology of pain<sup>110</sup>—the undeniable accent of his leadership in the Vineyard churches was on kingdom power and presence *now*. Healing, miracles, prophecy, kingdom

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<sup>109</sup>Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 4.

<sup>110</sup>See Rich and Nathan, *Empowered Evangelicals*, 43-64.

power, signs and wonders became the clarion calls of the movement. It is thus natural for the vast scope of Vineyard music to reflect this concentration on the “already” of the kingdom by consistently speaking about God’s immanence. This they do through the oversaturation of language on God’s loving and near presence. Yet, our churches’ songs must also reflect the truth that God is “wholly other.”<sup>111</sup> He reigns over the world in brilliant holiness and glorious transcendence. We worship him because he not only has condescended to us in Jesus Christ, but that he exists above us in glory and honor. If an overemphasis on the “already” of the kingdom was the theological impetus for prioritizing God’s immanence through song, there is another strong impetus not yet mentioned: Vineyard pragmatism.

### **Pragmatic Spiritual Therapy**

It must not be forgotten that John Wimber was a church growth practitioner, *par excellence*. His affinity for pragmatism is not something that need be inferred from Vineyard life, it is something he freely confessed. In *Christian Life* magazine Wimber says, “Dr. Donald McGavran, known worldwide for his enormous contribution to the subject of church growth, inspired in me a fierce pragmatism.”<sup>112</sup> One can see the Vineyard’s pragmatism quite clearly in its songs. Why so few songs on the cross? Might it just be that the songwriters realized the cross is offensive to the human mind (1 Cor. 1:23)? That which is offensive will never seem to fall in the category of “that which works.” Why so many songs saturated with a desperate, therapeutic, and individualistic view of the Christian life? Maybe its because such a view makes perfect sense to the modern—and Western—mind. This is after all, as David Wells has so convincingly shown in *God in the Whirlwind*, the age where God is preeminently seen as Concierge and Therapist.

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<sup>111</sup>Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Edwyn Clement Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1933), 315f.

<sup>112</sup>John Wimber, “Zip to 3,000 in 5 Years,” *Christian Life* (October 1982), 20. For a critique of Wimber’s pragmatism see John Macarthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 170-172 and Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival* (Nashville: Word, 1997), 108-11.

He writes, “In our minds we have exited the older moral order in which God was transcendent and holy, and we have entered a new psychological world in which he is only immanent and only loving. This is the framework in which we now understand everything.”<sup>113</sup>

Luhrmann gets down to the depths of Vineyard’s pragmatic core when she says, “These worship songs suggest that . . . [h]e is in you, but he is also apart from you, someone whom you love and who loves you and cuddles you.”<sup>114</sup> This is pragmatic spiritual therapy in its very essence.

### **Conclusion**

Founded by Ken Gulliksen and catalyzed by John Wimber, the Vineyard was a movement aimed at restoring biblical balance to church life. For too long the church lived under the dark shadow of Enlightenment rationalism that pushed out the supernatural from church life. Wimber’s discovery of the “already” of God’s kingdom set him on a course to correct this glaring flaw. He created a movement of “signs and wonders,” leading hundreds of thousands—if not millions—of Christians into a greater awareness of God’s immanence in power. Yet ironically, Wimber’s aim of restorative balance ended up being a mighty contributor to an imbalance on the opposite end of the spectrum: a prioritization of God’s immanence to the expense of God’s transcendence. Nowhere is this more evident in the songs of the Vineyard music.

Analysis of the top fifty songs of the Wimber-led era of the Vineyard reveals a spirituality defined by desperation for an experience of God’s love. Should people long for an experience of God’s love? Absolutely. But the glaring flaw in Vineyard music’s spirituality is how it manages to divorce God’s love from God’s holiness. The Vineyard would be wise to heed

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<sup>113</sup>David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-Love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2014) 25.

<sup>114</sup>Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 4.

David Wells' clarion call for the church to return to the biblical moorings of God's "holy-love."<sup>115</sup> For where is the holy-love of God manifestly revealed? At the cross of Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 4:8-10). Unfortunately, the Vineyard offers a vision of God's immanent love that forgets the cross of Christ. Which is hardly love at all.

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<sup>115</sup>Wells, *God in the Whirlwind*, 14.

APPENDIX A: TOP FIFTY VINEYARS SONGS  
OF THE JOHN WIMBER ERA (1982-1997)<sup>116</sup>

1. “Breathe” (Marie Barnett, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
2. “Draw Me Close” (Kelly Carpenter, © 1994 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
3. “Take My Life” (Scott Underwood, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
4. “Change My Heart O God” (Eddie Espinosa, © 1982 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
5. “In the Secret” (Andy Park, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
6. “Every Move I Make” (David Ruis, © 1996 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
7. “Refiner’s Fire” (Brian Doerksen, © 1990 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
8. “More Love More Power” (Jude Del Hierro, © 1987 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
9. “Spirit Song” (John Wimber, © 1979 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
10. “Holy and Anointed One” (John Barnett, © 1988 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
11. “Cry of My Heart” (Terry Butler, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
12. “Let the River Flow” (Darrell Evans, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
13. “The River is Here” (Andy Park, © 1994 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
14. “We Will Dance” (David Ruis, © 1993 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
15. “I Lift My Eyes” (Brian Doerksen, © 1990 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
16. “Good to Me” (Craig Musseau, © 1990 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
17. “I Believe in Jesus” (Marc Nelson, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
18. “Arms of Love” (Craig Musseau, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
19. “At the Cross” (Randy Butler & Terry Butler, © 1993 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
20. “Light the Fire” Again (Brian Doerksen, © 1994 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
21. “Isn’t He” (John Wimber, © 1980 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
22. “Psalm 19” (Terry Butler, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
23. “Come Fill Me Up” (Brian Doerksen, © 1990 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
24. “Show Your Power” (Kevin Prosch, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
25. “Jesus Lead On” (Brent Helming, © 1996 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
26. “My Redeemer Lives” (John Willison, © 1993 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
27. “The Lord Almighty Reigns” (Terry Butler, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
28. “Pour Out My Heart” (Craig Musseau, © 1994 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
29. “Faithful One “ (Brian Doerksen, © 1989 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
30. “You Are Mighty” (Craig Musseau, © 1989 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
31. “Father of Lights “ (John Barnett, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
32. “I Will Trust In You” (Danny Daniels, © 1987 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
33. “Let Your Glory Fall” (David Ruis, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
34. “I Will Change Your Name” (D.J. Butler, © 1987 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
35. “Your Beloved (Brent Helming, © 1996 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
36. “I See The Lord” (Andy Park & Craig McCoy, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
37. “We Will Ride” (Andy Park, © 1994 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
38. “Holy is the Lord” (Jeff Searles, © 1996 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)

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<sup>116</sup>As accessed from CCLI June 23, 2015.

39. "Sweet Wind" (David Ruis, © 1994 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
40. "I Want to Be Like Jesus" (Cindy Rethmeier, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
41. "It's Your Blood" (Michael Chirst, © 1985 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
42. "Mercy Is Falling" (David Ruis, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
43. "You Are My King" (Brian Doerksen, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
44. "Exalt the Lord" (Cindy Rethmeier, © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
45. "His Banner Over Me" (Kevin Prosch © 1991 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
46. "Blessed Be the Name" (Andy Park, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
47. "Sweet Mercies" (David Ruis, © 1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
48. "You Are in Control" (Scott Underwood, © 1997 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
49. "Nothing is As Wonderful" (Scott Underwood, © 1996 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)
50. "Glory" (Danny Daniels, © 1987 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing)

### **The Most Sung Songwriters**

David Ruis, with six publications has more songs in the top fifty than any other songwriter. Brian Doerksen and Andy Park each have five, while Terry Butler and Craig Musseau have four. The

### **When the Songs Were Written**

John Wimber wrote the earliest song of the period by penning "Spirit Song" in 1979. The mid-90s were the golden ear of song writing during the Wimber era. Six of the top fifty were published in 1994, twelve in 1995, and five in 1996. That means nearly half of the top songs were published in a three-year period. The only other year with more songs published than 1994 or 1996 is 1991 with 8.

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