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A WESLEYAN OPEN INCLUSIVIST APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND NEW ATHEISM

By: Benjamin Bradford DeVan

Abstract

Probing the “New Atheism” reveals not an isolated phenomenon, but a contemporary expression of a longer tradition of atheist advocacy and antagonism toward religion, beliefs about the Divine, and associated practices. Although not all critics of religion are atheists, and atheists display diversity among themselves, *A Wesleyan Open Inclusivist Approach to Religious Diversity and New Atheism* argues that New Atheists are sufficiently similar to religious people to be fruitfully approached utilizing conceptual tools that pertain to religious diversity, interaction, and dialogue.

Specifically, it proposes that an optimistic Open Inclusivist attitude from the philosophy of religion, grounded by and employing methodological, biblical, historical, and ethical resources supplied and integrated by the Wesleyan tradition, is productive for approaching religious diversity issues that incorporate atheism and New Atheists. A Wesleyan variety of Open Inclusivism lessens or eliminates difficulties that competing paradigms from philosophy of religion exhibit, and eschews complications implicit or explicit to select Reformed, Catholic, and Universalist theologies. It coherently urges genuinely significant, reciprocal learning among religious believers and atheists and a hopeful urgency about salvation. Insisting that every person possesses sacred worth or inherent dignity, it undergirds ir/religious liberty and constructive attempts to persuade. It prods collaboration around common priorities, empowers prudent opposition where necessary, and operates in what John Wesley called the more excellent way of love.

As one exemplar of ecumenical, Creedal, and evangelical Christianity; *A Wesleyan Open Inclusivist Approach to Religious Diversity and New Atheism* aims to interpret the Bible faithfully and to critically utilize historical precedents, reason, logic, and the sciences listening to existential and practical experience. Honoring each voice in conference, it effectively mediates ongoing dialogue on topics vital to atheism and religion, including the relationships of religion and science, problems of evil and suffering, and optimal ethical flourishing for physical as well as spiritual realities.

**A Wesleyan Open Inclusivist Approach
to Religious Diversity and New Atheism**

By:

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Durham

Department of Theology and Religion

2015

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Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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Along with input from these multiple editors and peer reviewers, Karen DeVan painstakingly copyedited the abstract, introduction, conclusion, and chapters 1-7. John Christopher Frame, Harold A. Netland, James Power, John E. Sanders, Jerry L. Walls, and William H. Willimon offered feedback on the dissertation draft as a whole or in part.

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Finally, “thanks be to God,” the topic of manifold intra-religious, inter-religious, and Christian-atheist dialogue whose grace Wesleyans believe empowers conversation.

¹ DeVan [2013a].

² DeVan [2012b].

³ DeVan [2012c].

⁴ Per DeVan [2012g].

DEDICATION

In memory of my father, James Wesley DeVan, who knows.

And in honor of our daughter, Grace:

May you forever grow in your namesake.

Introduction

At the time of this writing, a decade has passed since Sam Harris published *The End of Faith* launching the New Atheist movement, literary wave, or “Great Awakening,” as two sociologists and one senior scholar of American religion put it.¹ The sociologists credit the New Atheist “literary...revival” for sparking a twenty-first century revitalization of atheist and antireligious advocacy, especially in North America and Europe where eloquent, educationally credentialed, and media savvy atheists deride religion and belief in God to assorted public, university, secular, religious, and other mixed audiences.²

New Atheist books have enjoyed *New York Times* bestseller runs spanning up to six years with fresh—and in some instances postmortem—titles forthcoming. New Atheists engage in high profile debates with other scholars, clergy, celebrities, politicians, and journalists in mainstream and alternative media. They appear in or inspire popular entertainment, documentary films, Grammy award nominated music, Scottish Gifford Lectures, and Yale University Terry Lectures. Stirring countless conversations about God and religion, they regale crowds of hundreds or thousands, persist as the topics of myriad popular and scholarly articles and books, and write for or garner attention from university presses such as Baylor, Cambridge, Oxford, Toronto, and Yale.³

Who are these New Atheists and what makes them notable? Chapter 1 introduces prominent New Atheists and their critics, venturing that New Atheists manifest a long history with ancient and modern predecessors who criticize and ridicule “religion” and belief in God or gods. Examining trends and apertures in the scholarly literature, chapter 1 proposes to approach New Atheists with conceptual resources in the philosophy of religion, theology, ethics, and dialogue that address religious diversity.

Central to this effort is whether atheism can be reasonably construed as akin to a religious position, or analogous to a religious tradition, marker, or identity. Chapter 2.1 examines precedents for discussing atheism with other religious viewpoints, notes

¹ Cimino and Smith [2014: title, esp. 2-8, 16-17, 37-39, 131, 164, 169]; Marty [2014: ix-xii] taking cues from an unidentified orator at the 2012 “Reason Rally” headlined by New Atheist speakers where possibly tens of thousands gathered in Washington, DC, to celebrate and raise public awareness about atheism.

² Cimino and Smith [2014: 11] describe bestselling New Atheist books as providing “the cultural content most readily available to be conveyed” by atheist individuals, secular organizations, and networks.

³ Cf. DeVan [2012c] cataloguing by author religion/denomination about 150 responses in books.

difficulties in defining “religion” and “religious,” and determines that New and other atheists sufficiently resemble religious people as embodiments of religious diversity.

Chapter 2.2 parses three consequent angles of approach. The first regards how Christians and atheists optimally relate to each other as religiously diverse people who hold opposing persuasions about “the basic question[s] of life.”⁴ Second are questions about truth. Can Christians and New Atheists meaningfully learn from each other? Third are inquiries about salvation. Might New Atheists desire or experience eternal joy as Christians or other religious believers conceive it? Chapter 2.3 plots logical possibilities pertaining to truth and salvation utilizing the Exclusivist-Inclusivist-Pluralist spectrum and its variants. It investigates their implications for New Atheists, and concludes that a Wesleyan Open Inclusivist approach will be particularly profitable to each angle.

Chapter 3 assembles Wesleyan foundations for these endeavors, suggesting that “Honoring Conference” enunciated by Randy L. Maddox constructively grounds theology and channels priorities in Christian-New Atheist as well as other inter-religious dialogues. Honoring Conference highlights the Bible’s preeminence complemented by historical insights, the sciences, reason and logic, experiential testimony, the Apostle’s Creed, and a “discrimen” of God’s universal holy love and pardoning, transforming, responsible grace.

Open Inclusivism in Honoring Conference listens to each voice where applicable. Chapter 4 sifts biblical passages in support of Inclusivist sympathies, and seeks to ascertain which and how, if any, are relevant to New Atheists. Chapter 5 considers proto-Inclusivist yearnings or assertions in Christian history, evaluating a spread of scenarios that potentially shed light on New Atheists with reference to prospects for salvation and optimal flourishing. Chapter 6 recommends principles for productive relationships and interactions with New Atheists now, and chapter 7 illustrates how Wesleyan and Open Inclusivist patterns mediate dialogue with New Atheists at the “Religious Roundtable.”

The dissertation that follows does not presume to articulate the only paradigm capable of facilitating reciprocal critique, overlapping consensus, hope for salvation, and beneficial relationships with New Atheists. It aspires rather to set forth one fruitful approach to Christian-atheist and comparably challenging inter-religious encounters.

⁴ As Hunsberger and Altemeyer [2006: 11] differentiate atheists from people who believe in God or gods.

We proceed by keeping in mind several overlapping and intersecting audiences. Among them are philosophers of religion and comparativists in religious studies, ethics, and theology, as well as inter-religious innovators within but not confined to the interfaith movement. We submit that comparativist leitmotifs and selected philosophical schemas formulated to address religious diversity can be appraised and discerningly applied in theory and in practice to atheism and New Atheists. Components of our argument will also interest scholars of atheism and of religious-atheist or atheist-religious relations, along with atheists themselves who are willing to entertain how atheism might parallel a religious identity, or how atheists might express and participate in religious diversity.

Another cadre we speak to are religious people who are stymied as to how best to think about and respond to aggressive atheists, or who are unsatisfied with existing reactions to New Atheists and their ideas. We appeal to Christians specifically, and to the Wesleyan tradition directly and constructively, by fashioning a Wesleyan approach that deliberately evokes ecumenical and evangelical resonances. We adjure fellow Christians to contemplate whether our recommendations are not only trenchantly Christian, but conceptually and practically more rigorous than antithetical analysis or activities. In an Open Inclusivist spirit, we furthermore welcome religious people who do not identify themselves as Christians to adopt or adapt whatever edifies them in our proposal.

Chapter 1: The First Decade of New Atheists and their Critics

1.1 Beginnings

“Of making many books there is no end,” observed a biblical skeptic in Ecclesiastes 12:12, “and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”¹ The first if not the second prognosis readily applies to historic and contemporary endeavors to thwart and eliminate, as well as to defend and advocate, belief/s in the existence, justice, goodness, plausibility or beauty of God, gods, and myriad forms or expressions of theology, ethics, practices, rituals, structures, and institutions associated with the D/divine or “religion.”²

The first decade of the twenty-first century did not originate efforts to beckon individuals, societies, or the world to belief that there are (or were) no true or objective God or gods. It did not birth derision or critique of religious representatives, movements, and their claims in the attempt to persuade whoever would hear or read that atheism was truer, better, more sophisticated, and more scientific than rival options. The early twenty-first century did not inaugurate such ventures, but it was one prolific beginning for a number of writers and activists who rose to revitalize the atheist cause as they saw it.

Who were and are these “New Atheists?”³ What are their assertions and influences? How do they compare and contrast with other atheists or atheism as a wider or collective phenomenon? Who are their antecedents, roots, and trajectories? What are the urgencies or productive ways of responding to them? This chapter lays groundwork for such inquiries by introducing some leading New Atheists and their critics, then performs a preliminary analysis to focus the dissertation as précised in the introduction.

1.1.1 *Sam Harris:*

In August 2004, a previously unknown neuroscience graduate student at UCLA, Sam Harris (b. 1967), published a surprise bestseller. *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* won a 2005 PEN/Martha Albrand Award for nonfiction, sporting blurbs by Harvard’s Alan Dershowitz and this from Princeton ethicist Peter

¹ All Bible citations unless noted are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible* [1989], hereafter *NRSV*.

² See section 2.1 on defining religion and the possibilities for atheism as a category of religious diversity.

³ Cf. Zenk [2013: esp. 251-54] on twenty-first century origins for the phrases “New Atheism” and “New Atheists;” cf. “Neo-Atheism” or Neo-Atheists in e.g. Copan [2011: 9, 13-16, 223]; P. Williams [2013: 230].

Singer: “At last we have a book that focuses on the common thread that links Islamic terrorism with the irrationality of all religious faith.”⁴ Union Theological Seminary President John C. Hough and Harris’s fellow atheist Richard Dawkins praised Harris with language reminiscent of Buddhist Enlightenment: “Read Sam Harris and wake up.”⁵

Harris cited September 11, 2001, as instigating his writing, and commenced *The End of Faith* by speculating on the social-cultural-religious context and motivations of a suicide bomber.⁶ Discontent with attacking “extremism,” Harris cast “moderate” faith as sustaining global ills by providing a cover of respectability for religiously motivated myths and violence.⁷ The stakes were literally life and death: “Words like ‘Allah’ and ‘God’ must go the way of ‘Apollo’ and ‘Baal’ or they will unmake our world.”⁸

Consistent with diagnosing religion as not only dangerous but objectively false, Harris reviled post-modern relativism, insisting instead on absolute truth and morality.⁹ The problem with Abrahamic religion was not that it taught absolute truth but that it taught pernicious falsehoods as if they were true, leading the Catholic Church historically to promulgate, contribute, or remain passive in witch-hunts, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust.¹⁰

Islam for Harris was religion’s most deleterious prevailing manifestation. Harris reprinted nearly seven pages of *Qur’an* quotations to strengthen his point that it was not merely *abuse* of religion, nor evil disingenuously done in *the name of* religion, but “religion” itself that was and is horrific, root and branch.¹¹

⁴ Dershowitz and Singer in S. Harris [2005: 1]. *The End of Faith* was a *New York Times* hardcover bestseller one week September 26, 2004 and a paperback bestseller one hundred weeks October 10, 2005 to February 24, 2008. Yocanny Polcini of W. W. Norton in a March 14, 2011 e-mail to this dissertation author indicated that *The End of Faith* had by that date “424,900” in sales including cloth, paperback, and eBook.

⁵ Dawkins in S. Harris [2005: back cover]; Hough in S. Harris [2005: 2]; cf. S. Harris [2014: title]: *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion*.

⁶ S. Harris [2005: 333; cf. 2014: 202]: “I began writing this book...September 12, 2001.”

⁷ S. Harris [2005: esp. 16-23, 45].

⁸ S. Harris [2005: 14].

⁹ See S. Harris [2005: 50-79, 170-203] chapters on “the nature of belief” and “a science of good and evil.”

¹⁰ S. Harris [2005: 68-69, 106].

¹¹ S. Harris [2005: 117-23] more favorably portrayed Jainism and Buddhism supposedly shorn of the supernatural and complained that critics classified his work as “a stalking horse for Buddhism, New Age mysticism, or some other form of irrationality” [2005: 34]. Dawkins in Dawkins et al. [2007] admitted something like this misgiving, but affirmed S. Harris’s work overall. For atheism in Buddhist tradition, cf. e.g. Batchelor [2011]; Skilton [2013]; and on Jainism e.g. A. Vallely [2013].

Had *The End of Faith* appeared *sola*, its success might have been less noteworthy as an atheist polemic peppered with a few mystical elements to complement, supplement, or replace the likes of the more distinguished Bertrand Russell's two generations prior *Why I Am Not a Christian*.¹² *The End of Faith* was not, however, the end of the matter.

1.1.2 Daniel C. Dennett:

In 2006, Boston University philosophy professor Daniel C. Dennett (b. 1942) and Dennett's fellow atheist activist Richard Dawkins (b. 1941) cast their own bestselling polemics into public discourse. Before *The End of Faith* was a twinkle in Harris's neurons, Dennett was an accomplished philosopher notorious for his partly bait and switch title *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, nominated for a National Book Award.¹³ Dennett eventually became a champion of the designator "Brights" as a replacement moniker for "atheists," juxtaposed with "supers" who believed in supernatural being(s) or realities.¹⁴ Dennett declared in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*:

If you want to teach your children that they are the tools of God, you had better not teach them that they are God's rifles, or we will have to stand firmly opposed to you: your doctrine has no glory, no special rights, no intrinsic and inalienable merit. If you insist on teaching your children falsehoods—that the Earth is flat, that "Man" is not a product of evolution by natural selection—then you must expect, at the very least, that those of us who have freedom of speech will feel free to describe your teachings as the spreading of falsehoods, and will attempt to demonstrate this to your children at our earliest opportunity. Our future well-being...of all of us...depends on the education of our descendants.¹⁵

Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon was Dennett's 2006 book-length return to religious matters. "The spell that...*must* be broken is the taboo against a forthright, scientific, no-holds-barred investigation of religion as one natural phenomenon among many."¹⁶ Dennett pronounced without blush: "[Some] see me as just another liberal professor trying to cajole them out of their convictions, and they are dead right."¹⁷

¹² B. Russell [1957].

¹³ Dennett [1995: front cover].

¹⁴ Dennett [2003: title]: "The Bright Stuff;" Dennett [2006a: 21]: "Supers;" against C. Hitchens [2007b: 5]. Prothero [2010: 322]: "baptizing...'brights' into their own communion of the smarter-than-thou saints."

¹⁵ Dennett [1995: 519].

¹⁶ Dennett [2006a: 17, cf. esp. 14-28] emphasis in original unless noted.

¹⁷ Dennett [2006a: 53] brackets added unless noted. Yet the hardcover dust jacket assured Janus-faced: "*Breaking the Spell* is not an antireligious screed but rather an eye-opening exploration of the role that

Breaking the Spell's sales were more modest than those of *The End of Faith*, but Dennett two years later expressed solidarity with the mega-selling Harris, Dawkins, and Hitchens, who we will come to shortly.¹⁸ "I have almost no substantive disagreements with their claims. I set out to change some minds, and I get a gratifying number of messages from people who tell me that my book has done just that."¹⁹

1.1.3 Richard Dawkins:

Richard Dawkins' (b. 1941) *The God Delusion*, which sold more than two million copies by January 2010, was more successful in sales some four times over than *The End of Faith* and *Breaking the Spell* combined.²⁰ *The God Delusion* synchronized with and quoted liberally from Sam Harris's second bestseller, *Letter to a Christian Nation*.²¹

If *The End of Faith* attended principally to Catholicism and Islam, *Letter to a Christian Nation* turned attention to American Evangelicals and Fundamentalists to assert that Christianity was false, unreasonable, and violent.²² Harris styled it a necessary reply to Christians reacting to *The End of Faith* and "to arm secularists...who believe that religion should be kept out of public policy, against their opponents on the Christian Right...[who believe] the Bible is the inspired word of God and that only those who accept the divinity of Jesus Christ will experience salvation after death."²³

Dawkins for his part arranged *The God Delusion* around four "consciousness raising" concerns.²⁴ The first was that aspiring to be an atheist was brave and splendid:

religious belief plays in our lives." Contrast Dennett [2006b: back cover] in the paperback edition quoting Adler [2006]: "DENNETT AND...HARRIS ARE NOT WRITING POLITE DEMURRALS...PLEAS FOR TOLERANCE OR MODERATION, BUT BONE-RATTLING ATTACKS ON WHAT THEY REGARD AS PERNICIOUS AND OUTDATED SUPERSTITION" (capitalization in original unless noted).

¹⁸ *Breaking the Spell* was a bestseller three weeks in hardcover February 26-April 23, 2006 and four weeks in paperback March 25-April 22, 2007. Aikman [2008: 1]: "By mid-2007, the print run...reached 64,000."

¹⁹ Dennett [2008: online].

²⁰ Dawkins [2010b: online]: "two million." Forty-five weeks on the *New York Times* hardcover list October 8, 2006-September 23, 2007 and eighty-six weeks paperback January 13, 2008-January 16, 2011.

²¹ Dawkins [2006a: 18, 29, 113, 262, 285, 316, 343, 344, 446, 453, 455, 457]: paperback edition pagination throughout. *The God Delusion* and *Letter to a Christian Nation* first appeared together as bestsellers October 8, 2006; the latter twenty-seven weeks hardcover October 8, 2006-April 1, 2007 and seven weeks paperback February 3-April 6, 2008. S. Harris [2006: 92]: "Ten Books I Recommend" listed *Breaking the Spell*, *The God Delusion*, *Why I am Not a Christian*, Bart Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus*, and six others.

²² S. Harris [2006: 8-9]: "Many who claim to be transformed by Christ's love are...intolerant of criticism."

²³ S. Harris [2006: vii-viii]. *Letter to a Christian Nation* was already being used as a university textbook on a continuing basis in 2007 by e.g. Thomas W. Smythe, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at North Carolina Central University, and also at Harvard as reported by an anonymous Harvard student in fall 2009.

²⁴ Dawkins [2006a: 12, 23, 25, 139-43, 175, 379, 382, 447].

“You can be an atheist who is happy, balanced, moral, and intellectually fulfilled.”²⁵ In a rare favorable use of the term “religious,” Dawkins proclaimed himself “a deeply religious non-believer,” awestruck by the structure and glory of the world and universe.²⁶

In chapters two through four, Dawkins aimed to undermine agnosticism and debunk classical “proofs” for God’s existence in line with his second consciousness raiser that atheist accounts regarding natural selection had superior explanatory power. Chapters five through ten assaulted presumptions that the Bible or “religion” were useful or salubrious for culture, morality, and education; echoing Harris that “moderate” faith or faith in ““moderation? ... fosters fanaticism.”²⁷ In chapter nine, Dawkins elaborated his third consciousness raiser that children should not be identified with their parents’ religion and that raising a child to be religious was tantamount to aggravated child abuse. Chapter ten explicated God’s supposed absence as “a much needed gap” that humanity should fill with “Science...Art...Human friendship...Humanism...Love of this life in the real world, giving no credence to other lives beyond the grave...[and] a love of nature.”²⁸

Dawkins’ fourth and final consciousness raiser was atheist pride. “Being an atheist is nothing to be apologetic about...It is something to be proud of, standing tall to face the far horizon, for atheism nearly always indicates a healthy independence of mind, and, indeed, a healthy mind.”²⁹ Dawkins, like Dennett, was forthright: “If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down.”³⁰

Dawkins has been especially active on the speaking circuit. In one scheduled concert for the U.S. military, he sought almost literally to be a rock star.³¹ Dawkins also keynoted the March 24, 2012 “Reason Rally” in Washington, D.C. convened to showcase atheist numbers and political clout, allegedly attracting over 20,000 people who braved inclement weather for “the world’s largest secular event.”³²

Dubbed “Darwin’s Rottweiler” in the legacy of “Darwin’s bull-dog” Thomas H. Huxley (1825-1895), Dawkins has received at least ten honorary degrees from a bevy of

²⁵ Dawkins [2006a: 23].

²⁶ Dawkins [2006a: 31]. Reiterating Dawkins [1998] on atheist lenses for perceiving beauty and meaning.

²⁷ Dawkins [2006a: 341].

²⁸ Dawkins [2006a: 389].

²⁹ Dawkins [2006a: 26] one assumes in an apologizing sense rather than Platonic “apologetics” or defense.

³⁰ Dawkins [2006a: 28].

³¹ Mehta [2012b: online].

³² Cf. e.g. Farrow and Woods [2012]; Hagerty [2012: title]: “Woodstock for Atheists.”

European universities and literary accolades from quarters like the British Royal Society of Literature and *Los Angeles Times*.³³ *TIME Magazine* in 2007 featured him as one of a hundred people “whose power, talent or moral example is transforming the world.”³⁴ Dawkins was formerly Assistant Professor of Zoology at UC-Berkeley (1967-1969), returning to his alma mater Oxford as lecturer (1970), reader (1990), and finally “The Charles Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science” (1995-2008).³⁵

Dawkins’ undertakings include the nonprofit “Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science,” the atheist “out campaign” modeled after gay rights and feminism, product lines so profuse as to provoke derision as a “t-shirt vendor,” a sprawling website, www.richarddawkins.net, and supporting the United Kingdom’s first atheist bus ad campaign: “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.”³⁶

Dawkins published two popular books after *The God Delusion* along with his first memoir (a sequel is said to follow), an edited volume, and multiple documentary films.³⁷ Seventy-four years old at the time of this writing, Dawkins shows scarce signs of slowing down.

1.1.4 Christopher Hitchens:

Competing with Dawkins for chief protagonist in the phenomenon that by late 2006 was popularly broadcast as “New Atheism,” Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011) in 2007 unveiled his #1 *New York Times* bestseller *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.³⁸ Hitchens’ title and subtitle summed up his two-pronged grievance.³⁹

Hitchens has published or collaborated on at least thirty-three books plus twenty-seven contributions, introductions, forwards, or prefaces.⁴⁰ By popular vote on November 26, 2010, Hitchens slightly bested former British Prime Minister Tony Blair debating:

³³ Cf. Faircloth [2011]; Hall [2005]; Huxley [2012: 62]. An archived version of Dawkins [2008a] documents his curriculum vitae through 2005. No updated curriculum vitae for Dawkins was available in multiple online searches throughout 2014 or on February 15, 2015.

³⁴ Behe [2007: online]

³⁵ Simonyi [1995: online]: “Dawkins...provided me with a framework for the present program.”

³⁶ Butt [2009: online]; Schaeffer [2009: 52]: “t-shirt vendor.”

³⁷ E.g. Dawkins [2008b, 2009; 2011; 2013: front flap].

³⁸ *god is not Great* was a hardcover bestseller thirty-two weeks May 20, 2007-March 30, 2008 and in paperback thirty-four weeks April 26, 2009-March 11, 2012.

³⁹ In America signifying “god” in lower case, and like *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* nominated for a National Book Award. The British title capitalizes “God” and mutes the subtitle to *The Case against Religion*.

⁴⁰ Cf. C. Hitchens [2010b: 348] on his productivity: “a thousand printable” words per day; P. Jones [2010].

“Be it resolved, religion is a force for good in the world.”⁴¹ An observer of another Hitchens debate with Christian philosopher William Lane Craig opined that audience perception rather than argument was definitive:

Dr. Craig won the argument (he was the only one who even presented a formal argument), Hitchens won the debate. It’s not the argument of the debaters, it’s the condition of the audience that wins the day. Dr. Craig’s arguments are true and well-reasoned by [sic] difficult to comprehend on a first hearing. Hitchens’ arguments are what we’ll find spoken against God on prime time television, at the water-cooler, I’ve even heard some of them on Animal Planet.⁴²

Hitchens saw not only Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; but Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Mormonism, and Native American animism abounding with religious mischief. As with Harris, evil was not confined to atrocities boosted *by* religious rhetoric or *in the name of* religion, it emerged from “religion” itself.⁴³ All religion past, present, and potential was false, rife with and ripe for genocidal mania, and prone to infinite inanity. Hitchens christened himself not as an atheist who might wish that “religious belief[s]” were true, but “an antitheist...relieved to think that the whole story is a sinister fairy tale; life would be miserable if what the faithful affirmed was actually the case.”⁴⁴

Hitchens declared all religion hopelessly conflicted in its torrid manifestations, sustaining deadly mutually warring factions, and hazardous to health because of built-in superstitions and suspicion towards medicine and technology.⁴⁵ Hitchens projected “religion” at odds with the intellect, objective truth, and immorally demanding “special divine exemption for its practices and beliefs.”⁴⁶ It was hostile to women and sexuality, obsessed with the Apocalypse and an insipidly bland afterlife, spread by brute coercion or with “ingratiating smirks and outspread hands.”⁴⁷ Science rendered religion irrelevant, a universal Creator unnecessary, and all miracles fraudulent. Nature blackened a supposed creator’s character due to the vacuous inefficient waste of outer space and the brutality of

⁴¹ Blair and Hitchens [2010]. Keep Tony Blair for PM [2010: online]: Pre-debate polls 22% in favor of the motion, 57% against the motion, 21% undecided. Post-debate polls 32% in favor, 68% against.

⁴² TenNapel [2009: online] parentheses in original unless noted.

⁴³ This is Hitchens’ main contention in his November 26, 2010 debate with Tony Blair.

⁴⁴ C. Hitchens [2001: 55].

⁴⁵ C. Hitchens [2007b: 10-11, 15-36, 43-61, 63-71].

⁴⁶ C. Hitchens [2007b: 52].

⁴⁷ C. Hitchens [2007b: 10-11, 52, 54-61].

the animal kingdom.⁴⁸ The Old Testament “god” was a homicidal micro-manager, and the New Testament likely based on legends of “deranged prophets roaming Palestine,” one or more who “believed himself, at least some of the time, to be god the son or the son of god.”⁴⁹ Biblical religions required impossible ideals that heaped guilt on the faithful; the *Qur’an* was a plagiarism and rewrite of the Bible; Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and their spin-offs were dangerous, harmful and backward.⁵⁰ “Religion comes...from the bawling and fearful infancy of our species...[It is] a babyish attempt to meet our inescapable need for knowledge...comfort, reassurance, and other infantile needs.”⁵¹

Hitchens associating religion with history’s silliest or worst personalities and events sought to distance atheism from secular regimes such as Stalinism or North Korea, recasting them as religious due to virtually deifying their dictators.⁵² Islamist radicals and medieval Catholicism were norms for religion and caveats to allowing religious ideology to gain influence. Spiritual exemplars from Maimonides to St. Francis of Assisi, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Dalai Lama were duplicitous or ridiculous, and “faith” hampered or was irrelevant to whatever good they did.⁵³ Hitchens closed by inviting a renewed Enlightenment, a humanism denuded of divine devotion:

The study of literature and poetry...for its own sake and...eternal ethical questions with which it deals...pursuit of unfettered scientific inquiry...divorce between the sexual life and fear...The sole condition [is]...we banish all religions from the discourse. And all this and more is, for the first time in our history, within the reach if not the grasp of everyone...To clear the mind for this project, it has become necessary to know the enemy [religion], and to prepare to fight it.⁵⁴

1.1.5 *Other Riders with the “Four Horsemen”:*

The designators “New Atheism” and “New Atheists” did not originate with Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, or Hitchens; even though these authors came to typify New Atheism in public and academic conversation. British literary critic Professor Terry

⁴⁸ C. Hitchens [2007b: 78 quoting John Stuart Mill without citation, cf. 73-96, 139-53].

⁴⁹ C. Hitchens [2007b: 97-107, 118].

⁵⁰ C. Hitchens [2007b: 123-37, 195-204, 241-49].

⁵¹ C. Hitchens [2007b: 64]

⁵² C. Hitchens [2007b: esp. 229-52]; cf. e.g. Dawkins [2006a: 308-16]; Hitchens vs. Hitchens [2008]; Hitchens and Berlinski [2010].

⁵³ See also C. Hitchens [1995: title]: *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*.

⁵⁴ C. Hitchens [2007b: 283].

Eagleton disparagingly dubbed Dawkins and Hitchens “Ditchkins.”⁵⁵ Adding Harris and Dennett comprised the main core or big four New Atheists, the “Four Horsemen” so dubbed by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and a September 2007 roundtable featuring the four filmed at Hitchens’ Washington, DC residence.⁵⁶

Three of the Four Horsemen persist in their media and political activism, debates, speaking, and publishing at the time of this writing, and Hitchens has posthumous material forthcoming.⁵⁷ Following the Four Horsemen are would-be rough riders or companions-in-arms who receive, don, or welcome the New Atheist mantle, often though not always in imitation, solidarity, or praise by Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, or Hitchens. Mushrooming material has been so prolific that this section must constrain to major representatives.

Bart D. Ehrman (b. 1955), the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor in Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, has penned several bestsellers attacking traditional Christianity, Jesus, or the New Testament since 2005, also leveraging the “Problem of Evil” to undermine popular belief in God.⁵⁸ Ehrman is an accomplished scholar, debater, and media pundit intermittently classified with New Atheists, and has

⁵⁵ Eagleton [2009: 2] revising Eagleton’s April 2008 Yale University Terry Lectures, “Faith and Fundamentalism: Is Belief in Richard Dawkins Necessary for Salvation?,” and Eagleton [2006: 32-34].

⁵⁶ Barash [2007: 6]; Dawkins et al. [2007: online]; cf. e.g. Aikman [2008: 3, 6, 17-18, 27]: “the Four Musketeers” and “Gang of Four.”

⁵⁷ C. Hitchens [2015]. Tens of millions of video hits appeared in November 2014 searching Google Video in quotations: “New Atheism,” “New Atheists,” and individual New Atheist names. The Four Horsemen’s subsequently more modestly successful bestsellers at the time of this writing are: Dawkins [2009] ten weeks hardcover October 11-December 13, 2009 and five weeks paperback October 24-November 21, 2010; Dawkins [2013] one week hardcover October 13, 2013; S. Harris [2010] five weeks hardcover October 24-November 21, 2010; S. Harris [2012] six weeks paperback March 25-April 29, 2012; S. Harris [2014] six weeks hardcover September 28-November 2, 2014; C. Hitchens [2007b] twenty-three weeks paperback November 18, 2007-April 27, 2008; C. Hitchens [2010b] ten weeks hardcover June 20-September 5, 2010 and two weeks paperback January 8-15, 2012; C. Hitchens [2011] twelve weeks hardcover September 18, 2011-February 12, 2012 and sixteen weeks paperback September 23, 2012-January 13, 2013; C. Hitchens [2012] seven weeks hardcover September 16-November 11, 2012.

⁵⁸ Ehrman [2005] nineteen weeks hardcover January 8-May 21, 2006 and fourteen weeks paperback February 25-June 3, 2007 and March 3, 2008. Ehrman [2008] five weeks hardcover March 9-April 6, 2008. Ehrman [2009] twelve weeks hardcover March 29-June 21, 2009 and eleven weeks paperback February 28-May 9, 2010. Ehrman [2011] two weeks hardcover April 10-17, 2011; Ehrman [2014b] three weeks hardcover April 13-May 11, 2014.

inspired several scholarly and popular ripostes.⁵⁹ Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens each appeal to or recommend Ehrman in their books.⁶⁰

British philosopher A. C. Grayling (b. 1949) adds *Against All Gods: Six Polemics on Religion and an Essay on Kindness*, *The Good Book: A Humanist Bible*; and his 2013 *New York Times* bestseller *The God Argument: The Case against Religion and for Humanism*.⁶¹ Grayling has regularly partnered with Dawkins and Hitchens, for example, in a London debate with philosopher Roger Scruton, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, and Nigel Spivey.⁶² Grayling defended New Atheist anger and contemptuousness by comparing religion with slavery: “A dispassionate tone might fail to communicate the urgency and importance...Polite opposition did not abolish slavery. It took arguments, campaigns, and fearless outspoken criticism of the system and its fortifications. Freeing the human mind from the enslavement of superstition and religion requires the same approach.”⁶³

French philosopher Michel Onfray (b. 1959) in his *London Times* Book of the Year *In Defense of Atheism: The Case against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam* self-advertises: “Not since Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* has a work so daring and provocative challenged the world’s three major monotheistic religions...for their intolerance, their obsession with purity...antipathy to reason and intelligence, and their stance against freedom, desire, sexuality, pleasure, and women in general.”⁶⁴ *In Defense of Atheism* under various titles and translations according to one source sold 300,000

⁵⁹ Ripostes to Ehrman from various angles include Alcorn [2009: 95-107]; Bird et al. [2014]; Burroughs [2006]; Evans [2006]; T. Jones [2007]; Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace [2006]; Koukle [2010]; R. Stewart [2011]. Zindler and Price [2013] edit atheists dissenting from Ehrman on Jesus. Explicitly addressing Ehrman with New Atheists are e.g. Broocks [2013]; Copan and Craig [2009: subtitle, vi, vii, 114, 115, 148-66]; Markham [2010: 92-95, 153]. See Ehrman [2014a: online] for his publishing and media work. Ehrman [2008: 125, 265, 295] like Dawkins [2006a: 73-75] claims some level of agnosticism.

⁶⁰ E.g. Dawkins [2006a: 120]; S. Harris [2006: 115]; C. Hitchens [2007b: 120-22, 142, 300].

⁶¹ Grayling [2007; 2011; 2013]. Grayling [2013] was a hardcover bestseller two weeks April 21-28, 2013; cf. Bayer and Figdor [2014: title, 156]: *Atheist Mind, Humanist Heart* that also thanks the Four Horsemen.

⁶² Dawkins, Hitchens, and Grayling [2007: online]: “Some 2,000 people” turned out to hear debate on the motion: “We’d be better off without Religion.” (The motion carried, 1,205 to 778);” cf. Gumbel [2008: 7].

⁶³ Grayling [2013: 46-47]; cf. M. Buckley [1987: 239] quoting the axiom: “It is sometimes necessary to give wisdom an air of madness to procure a hearing;” Griffiths [2004: 18, cf. 20]: “The degree to which [writers] are interesting and illuminating is closely indexed to the full-blooded shamelessness of their commitments.”

⁶⁴ Onfray [2007: back cover].

copies from 2005 to 2008.⁶⁵ Scholarly and popular literature conjoins Onfray intermittently with the Four Horsemen, New Atheism, and other New Atheist writings.⁶⁶

Physicist Victor Stenger (1935-2014) affiliated with the Four Horsemen in *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Reason and Science*, but his New Atheist claim to fame is *God the Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows that God Does Not Exist*.⁶⁷ Dawkins and Harris endorsed and Hitchens forwarded the latter in paperback.⁶⁸ The hardcover edition appeared one week as the first *New York Times* bestseller for Prometheus Books, an atheist-friendly publisher that secular humanist Paul Kurtz founded in 1969.⁶⁹

Cambridge mathematician and physicist Stephen Hawking (b. 1942) with Leonard Mlodinow (b. 1954) published the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *The Grand Design* in 2010.⁷⁰ Oxford mathematician John Lennox's reply characterized *The Grand Design* as "the latest blockbusting contribution to the 'New Atheist' debate."⁷¹ Hawking in Laplace form summarized his thesis in one interview: "One can't prove that God doesn't exist, but science makes God unnecessary."⁷² Hawking here is more restrained than the Four Horsemen, but *The Grand Design* could be categorized as New Atheist in theme if not in tone as a popularly accessible assault on belief in God by a celebrity academic.⁷³ Two recent subtitles by academic presses already qualify this element of the New Atheism as "celebrity scientists versus God and religion" or "out of the lab and into the limelight," drawing on the prestige and authority of science to reinforce atheist activism.⁷⁴

A seventh New Atheist front runner is the Somali, then Dutch, then American Ayaan Hirsi Ali (b. 1969), who Dawkins hailed as "a major hero for our time."⁷⁵ Hitchens

⁶⁵ V. Day [2008: 198].

⁶⁶ E.g. Banks [2011: 21-22]; Cimino and Smith [2010: 144]; V. Day [2008: *passim*]; D'Souza [2007: 22, 262, 330]; Eberstadt [2010: 31, 66]; Fergusson [2009: 3]; Prothero [2010: 319, 371]; Ryan [2014: *passim*].

⁶⁷ Stenger [2007; 2009].

⁶⁸ Dawkins and S. Harris in Stenger [2008: back cover]; C. Hitchens in Stenger [2008: i-vii].

⁶⁹ See e.g. Mehta [2012a: online]; Stenger [2007] was a hardcover bestseller one week March 11, 2007.

⁷⁰ Hawking and Mlodinow [2010] was a bestseller twenty-three weeks in hardcover from September 26, 2010-March 6, 2011, and nine weeks paperback March 11-May 6, 2012; cf. Bloom [2012]; Krauss [2012: front cover, back cover] three weeks hardcover February 19-March 11, 2012, and endorsed in paperback by Grayling, S. Harris, and novelist Ian McEwan, with an afterword by Dawkins.

⁷¹ Lennox [2011c: back cover, cf. 19]; cf. Ray [2012].

⁷² Hawking in Watt [2010: online].

⁷³ Cf. Dawkins interviewing Hawking in Dawkins [2010a: online].

⁷⁴ Fahy's [2015] first three of eight profiles are Dawkins, Hawking, and Steven Pinker. Giberson and Artigas [2007] devote chapters to Dawkins, Gould, Hawking, Sagan, Steven Weinberg, and Edward O. Wilson; cf. Appignanesi [2002] yoking Einstein, Dawkins, Kuhn, Hawking, and Darwin in discussing postmodernism.

⁷⁵ Dawkins in A. Ali [2010: front flap].

praised and forwarded the paperback for Ali's memoir *Infidel*, which chronicled her journey to atheism and her service as a Dutch Member of Parliament, as well as threats to kill her following the graphic murder of her film collaborator Theo Van Gogh.⁷⁶

The Four Horsemen have collaborated with and acclaimed Ali as a leader in the front against Islam in the global war against religion.⁷⁷ Amid these four male brigadiers of European descent and an army of New Atheists fifty years or older (many over sixty or seventy), Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a youthful, multicultural, glamorous, eloquent, East African emigrant and former Muslim whose bestselling *Infidel* run rivaled *god is not Great*.⁷⁸

Ali's sequel *Nomad* suggested she preferred Christianity over Islam, but gave no indication that she wished to embrace Christianity herself.⁷⁹ Ali clarified on *The Colbert Report*: "I prefer John Locke...John Stuart Mill...[and Colbert's colleague] Jon Stewart to Jesus Christ."⁸⁰ Ali has been a Belfer Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and Brandeis University in 2014 invited her to speak to its graduating class and receive an honorary doctorate but withdrew both honors after organized protests.⁸¹

Thomas Zenk in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* identified fifteen additional writers or "social actors" in Europe and North America as New Atheists, and one might nominate many more.⁸² For example, David Mills re-released *Atheist Universe: The Thinking Person's Answer to Christian Fundamentalism*, and Dan Barker reissued

⁷⁶ Hitchens forwarding A. Ali [2008: xii-xix].

⁷⁷ E.g. Dawkins in A. Ali [2010: front flap]; Harris and Rushdie [2007]; Hitchens in A. Ali [2008: xii-xix].

⁷⁸ Twenty-nine weeks hardcover February 25 to September 16, 2007, forty-four weeks paperback April 27, 2008 to April 26, 2009.

⁷⁹ A. Ali [2010: *passim*] a hardcover bestseller three weeks June 6-20, 2010; cf. A. Ali [2015] a hardcover bestseller three weeks April 12-26, 2015; DeVan [2010c].

⁸⁰ A. Ali on *The Colbert Report* [2010].

⁸¹ Cf. e.g. Belfer Center [2015: online]; Perez-Pena and Vega [2014]. Dawkins' former employer University of California-Berkeley stood by atheist Bill Maher as its December 2014 graduation speaker despite comparable pressure. For details on protests against Maher, see e.g. Frum [2014: online].

⁸² Zenk [2013: 251-52]; e.g. Coyne [2009; cf. 2015] a hardcover bestseller one week February 22, 2009. Adding e.g. *New York Times* bestsellers De Botton [2012] two weeks hardcover on March 25 and April 8, 2012; Epstein [2009] one week hardcover January 17, 2010; Jillette [2011; cf. 2012] five weeks hardcover September 4-November 5, 2011; Shermer [2011] four weeks hardcover July 31-August 28, 2011; cf. Blackford and Schuklenk [2009]; Boghossian [2013]; Christina [2012; 2014]; Comte-Sponville [2007]; Konner [2007]; Harvie and Meyers [2010] featuring a Dawkins selection; Huberman [2007]; McGowan [2013]; P. Myers [2013]; Paulos [2008]; E. Wilson [2006]; Wolpert [2006]; R. Wright [2009] twelve weeks hardcover July 12-September 27, 2009; and Maher's [2008] *Religulous* "documentary" mocking Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Mormonism, and Scientology.

Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists.⁸³
Dawkins in *The God Delusion* tipped his hat to both authors and forwarded Barker.⁸⁴

Mills christened John W. Loftus's *Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity* "the crown jewel of the New Atheist movement," and Eric Maisel's *The Atheist's Way: Living Well without Gods*: "More witty than Hitchens, more polished and articulate than Harris, and more informative and entertaining than Dawkins."⁸⁵

New Atheist appeals to and use of wit and flair are exhibited in their positive press, book dedications, and reciprocal support by high profile atheist comedians. Stephen Fry has teamed with Hitchens in debate.⁸⁶ Dawkins dedicated *The God Delusion* in memory of Douglas Adams, headlined with Eddie Izzard and others the 2012 Reason Rally, and also collaborated with Ricky Gervais in *Sex, Death, and the Meaning of Life*.⁸⁷

In the United States, Bill Maher regularly hosted or hosts Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens on his shows.⁸⁸ Magician-comedian Penn Jillette endorsed *The God Delusion* and Dawkins reciprocated for Jillette's *God, No!*.⁸⁹ Dawkins in *The God Delusion* repeatedly quoted comedienne Julia Sweeney and ran a chapter heading from George Carlin who released his own final bestseller the same year as *The End of Faith*.⁹⁰ Seth McFarlane, deliverer of the 2006 Harvard University class day speech, has interweaved *The God Delusion*, atheism, and related themes in his animated comedy *Family Guy*.⁹¹

⁸³ Barker [2008; reissuing 1992]; Mills [2006; reprinting from 2004].

⁸⁴ Dawkins [2006a: 29, 66, 109, 365, 427, 432, 443, 449-50, 457, 458]; Dawkins in Barker [2008: ix-xii].

⁸⁵ Mills in Loftus [2008]; Mills in Maisel [2009: front cover]. On or for pastors turned atheists, cf. Andrews [2013]; C. Brown [2013: 235-40]; Daniels [2009]; Dennett and LaScola [2015]; DeVan [2013e]; DeWitt [2013]; Templeton [1999] in C. Hitchens [2007b: 282-86]; Price [e.g. 2006]. Loftus compiled essayists identifying with/as New Atheists in *The Christian Delusion* [2010]; *The End of Christianity* [2011]; and *Christianity is Not Great* [2014]. Barker in Loftus [2010: 13] favorably compared the first of these spinoff titles with Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, Hitchens, and Stenger.

⁸⁶ E.g. Hitchens et al. [2009b].

⁸⁷ Dawkins [2006a: 7; 2012].

⁸⁸ E.g. Maher [2012 Hitchens tribute; 2013 hosting Dawkins; 2014 hosting Harris].

⁸⁹ Dawkins [2006a: hardcover dust jacket; 2013: hardcover dust jacket]; Jillette [2011: back cover].

⁹⁰ Carlin [2004: title]: *When Will Jesus Bring the Pork Chops?* was a hardcover bestseller twenty-three weeks October 31, 2004-April 3, 2005 and paperback fourteen weeks November 6, 2005-February 5, 2006; Dawkins [2006a: 26, 29, 284, 317, 363-65, 442-43]; cf. Dixit [2008: title]: "George Carlin's Last Interview."

⁹¹ *Family Guy* [e.g. 2008; 2009a, 2009b]. When Maher [2009] asked MacFarlane how the latter felt about the purported rise of atheism's popularity, MacFarlane replied: "It's about f***ing time;" cf. Piper Chapman, the main protagonist in the hit comedy-drama *Orange is the New Black* [2013: 54:38-55:50]: "I believe in science...[and] Christopher Hitchens....I cannot get behind some supreme being who weighs in on the Tony Awards while a million people get whacked with machetes. I don't believe a billion Indians are going to hell....Religion makes it [life] easier....[But] feelings aren't enough. I need it to be real."

Approaching New Atheists as a cooperative movement or loose knit affiliation of likeminded believers is one possibility for applying paradigms that approach religious diversity, as chapter two considers. Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate analyze New Atheist solidarity not only among popular comedians but noted literati in *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic after 9/11*.⁹² Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Philip Pullman, and Salman Rushdie each link with one or more of the Four Horsemen.⁹³

Another communal feature is New Atheists passing the baton to future generations. Dale McGowan bolstered efforts to bequeath atheism to children in *Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids without Religion* assembling selections by Dawkins, Jillette, and Sweeney.⁹⁴ Sociologist Phil Zuckerman associates atheism with societal, social, and personal health; salts polemics with social science, and edits two volumes in one of three major academic handbooks or encyclopedias on atheism that reference or feature New Atheists, illustrating their perceived enduring significance.⁹⁵

1.1.6 *Interlocutors and Critics:*

Before venturing a preliminary analysis of New Atheists and New Atheism, section 1.1.6 surveys their critics and interlocutors.⁹⁶ If New Atheist writers and activists are legion, their responders are a multitude, indicating a vast concern for New Atheists and their perceived capacities to persuade, influence, and provoke public opinion.

An enormous literature responds, reacts, or replies to New Atheists and New Atheist contentions.⁹⁷ Dawkins, adapting W.B. Yeats, uncharitably pigeonholed his self-

⁹² Bradley and Tate [2010: title].

⁹³ Cf. e.g. Fergusson [2009: 4]; Harris and Rushdie [2007] defending A. Ali; C. Hitchens [2010b: *passim*] on Amis, McEwan, and Rushdie; Pullman endorsing Dawkins [2006a: hardcover dust jacket].

⁹⁴ McGowan et al. [2009]; cf. Dawkins [2011]; A. Harris [2013] by S. Harris's wife; McGowan [2007; 2014]; McGowan forwarding D. Mitchell [2014]; Mehta [2012c]; Miller and Eagle [2010]; Nall [2010].

⁹⁵ Zuckerman [2008; 2010; 2011]. M. Stephens [2014] argues comparably for atheism's positive function in world history as a—if not *the*—motive power for human advancement. Nearly half of the chapters in Bullivant and Ruse [2013, released January 21, 2014] address or reference New Atheism, New Atheists, or one or more Four Horsemen in the introduction and chapters 1, 4, 6-8, 15-18, 25-27, 29-34, 37-38, 43-44, and include essays by Grayling and Stenger. Martin [2007] includes Dennett [2007a: 135-48] who references Dawkins. Guthrie, Martin, and Parsons in Martin [2007: 4, 112, 295-97] reference Dennett. Zuckerman [2010] mentions New Atheism/New Atheists in his introduction and chapters 1:1-6, 2:5-8 of 19.

⁹⁶ Cf. DeVan [2010b] critiquing several critics of the New Atheism.

⁹⁷ One might arrange New Atheists' interlocutors and critics by any number of overlapping categories, e.g. academic or professional discipline, geography, context, publication date, or genre, cf. DeVan [2012c: 140-54] for one attempt to comprehensively catalogue book-length responses or significant references to New Atheism or New Atheists through December 2012 according to authors' religious affiliations.

styled refuters: “Was there ever a dog that praised his fleas?”⁹⁸ For Dawkins, critical interlocutors were simply leeching off Dawkins’ success to enhance their own statuses.

No straightforward riposte to New Atheists has yet, however, become a bestseller. Karen Armstrong’s *The Case for God*, Dinesh D’Souza’s *What’s So Great about Christianity*, and Tim Keller’s *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* are bestsellers that allude to without orienting themselves around New Atheists.⁹⁹

Some books billed as responses to New Atheists nevertheless border, if not cross into false advertising. Radical retired Episcopal bishop John Shelby Spong’s *Jesus for the Non-Religious* claimed on its hardcover dust jacket: “Speaks directly to those...who call God a ‘delusion’ and who write letters to a ‘Christian nation.’”¹⁰⁰ Despite Spong’s bibliography registering Dawkins and Harris, a text search reveals no reference to them.¹⁰¹ HarperCollins removed this descriptor from Spong’s paperback edition.¹⁰²

Paul Dahlke’s *New Atheism Meets Buddhism: The Religion of Meditation and Reason* does not contain the words “atheist,” or “atheism,” nor does it name any of the Four Horsemen in its text.¹⁰³ It appears instead to be a general Buddhism primer or an exercise in Buddhist philosophy. Steve Antinoff’s *Spiritual Atheism* likewise touts: “Continuing where writers such as Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris left off,” yet Antinoff makes no other references to New Atheists, nor to how he continues where they “left off.”¹⁰⁴

Other books allude to New Atheists in passing while developing tangential interests. The dust jacket for Peter Hitchens’ *The Rage against God: How Atheism Led*

⁹⁸ E.g. Dawkins [2007: online] apparently referencing W. B. Yeats, “To a Poet, Who Would Have Me Praise Certain Bad Poets, Imitators of His and Mine” in e.g. Pethica [2000: 39].

⁹⁹ However, D’Souza [2009b] a study guide for D’Souza [2007] was subtitled: “Your Guide to Answering the New Atheists.” Armstrong [2009: xvi, 302-23, cf. 130-89] addressing New Atheists in her final chapter was a bestselling hardcover four weeks October 11, 2009-January 17, 2010 and paperback thirteen weeks September 26, 2010-January 23, 2011. D’Souza [2007; cf. 2009a; 2012] was a hardcover bestseller four weeks November 4-December 9, 2007. Keller [2008] was a bestselling hardcover thirty weeks March 2, 2008-January 18, 2009 and paperback sixty-three weeks January 18, 2009 to August 5, 2012.

¹⁰⁰ Spong [2007a: front flap]. Garrison [2007: 28, 31-33, 198, 214-15] implied Spong was a closet New Atheist and notes that Dawkins [2006a: 269, 434] favorably cites Spong [2005].

¹⁰¹ Spong [2007a: 303, 309].

¹⁰² Spong [2007b].

¹⁰³ Dahlke [2009].

¹⁰⁴ Antinoff [2009: back cover].

Me to Faith promoted: “Two Brothers. Two Believers. Two Revolted. One Returned.”¹⁰⁵ Yet Peter barely interacts or writes about his brother Christopher here.¹⁰⁶

Sociologist William A. Stahl, Chris Hedges in *I Don't Believe in Atheists*, and Frank Schaeffer in *Patience with God: Faith for People Who Don't Like Religion (or Atheism)* are as much if not more critical of American Christian Fundamentalists than of New Atheists, classifying both as literalist, dogmatic, consumerist, warmongering, and intolerant of dissenters.¹⁰⁷ Such endeavors may be commendable in their own right, but their blurred foci are less adequate for a robust response to or evaluation of New Atheists.

A number of academic works also refer to New Atheists while proportionally pursuing alternative foci. Terry Eagleton's Yale Terry Lectures poked fun at Dawkins, Dennett, and Hitchens, but seemed most preoccupied to promote Christian socialism.¹⁰⁸ Several collections insert New Atheists or New Atheism into their titles, though some or most of their essays ignore or virtually ignore New Atheists.¹⁰⁹ Chapters by Michael Behe, Michael J. Murray, and John Polkinghorne in one collection evaluate evolutionary theories and multiverse hypotheses without mentioning New Atheists on these matters.¹¹⁰ Robbins and Rodkey in “Beating ‘God’ to Death: Radical Theology and the New Atheism” allude to Dawkins just once and quote one short line from Hitchens.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ P. Hitchens [2010: back cover].

¹⁰⁶ C. Hitchens appears eleven times in P. Hitchens' text [2010: 10-12, 143, 164, 193-94, 215-18].

¹⁰⁷ Hedges [2008] retitled in paperback [2009]: *When Atheism Becomes Religion: America's New Fundamentalists*. Schaeffer [2009; cf. 2007; 2014] has five chapters on New Atheists, two on American Evangelicals or Fundamentalists, and nine other chapters; but the five New Atheist chapters regularly use New Atheists as a foil for Schaeffer's apparently greater concern with Evangelicals and Fundamentalists. Cf. Bradley and Tate [2010: 3-10]; Douthat [2009: online] summarizing Armstrong [2009]: “Seeks to rescue the idea of God from atheists and literal-minded believers alike;” Hyman [2010: xiii-xiv]; Kimball [2008]; Markham [2010: 7-27, 141-43]; Prothero [2010: 322-23]; Reitan [2009: 7]: “My argument here, while occasioned by the recent ‘atheist literary wave,’ should be understood to be as much a critique of some dominant contemporary manifestations of religion....I'd started writing a book with a very different title....Dawkins' book inspired a shift of focus...[from] *How the Religious Right Gets Religion Wrong*;” Stahl [2010]. Hedges [2006: title]: *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* was a *New York Times* hardcover bestseller seven weeks January 28, 2007 to March 18, 2007. Mani Shankar Aiyar [2004: title] in India provocatively applied to himself: *Confessions of a Secular Fundamentalist*.

¹⁰⁸ Eagleton [2009: *passim*, esp. chapters 3 and 4, which are the last two in the book]; cf. the 2009 Terry Lectures by M. Robinson [2010]; and 2013 by Kitcher [2014: subtitle] on *Secular Humanism*.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. David, Keller, and Stanley [2010]; and other citations in the following two footnotes.

¹¹⁰ Behe [2009]; Murray [2009]; Polkinghorne [2009]. McKnight [2009] and Mittelberg [2009] also never mention New Atheists. All five are in the same book edited by Craig and Meister [2009].

¹¹¹ Robbins and Rodkey [2010] in Amarasingam [2010]; cf. DeVan [2012r] reviewing Amarasingam. Grigg's *Beyond the God Delusion: How Radical Theology Harmonizes Science and Religion* [2008: 2, 3, 8, 35, 36, 82, 123, 132, 140] references Dawkins a paltry six times, plus four footnotes.

Other scholars interact more intentionally. Paul Copan, Jeremy Evans, Matt Flannagan, David T. Lamb, and Heath A. Thomas consider New Atheist readings of Hebrew Scripture.¹¹² Russia and Sino-historian David Aikman, David Marshall, and Eastern orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart critique New Atheist renderings of historical events and history's grand sweep.¹¹³ William Lane Craig, Thomas O. Crean, Edward Feser, Dean L. Overman, Keith Ward, and Gregory E. Ganssle defend arguments for God's existence.¹¹⁴ Scientists Michael Bunner, David H. Glass, John Lennox, Alister McGrath, Malcolm McLean, and Michael Poole pen broad-spectrum replies.¹¹⁵ Michael Behe, David Berlinski, Neil Broom, William A. Dembski, Dave Hunt, Phillip E. Johnson and John Mark Reynolds, John Lennox, Stephen C. Meyer, Bradley Monton, and Ben Stein defend varieties of Creationism or Intelligent Design.¹¹⁶ Francis S. Collins, Conor Cunningham, David Fergusson, and Alvin Plantinga preserve theistic evolution over atheistic accounts.¹¹⁷ Rodney Stark and David G. Myers utilize social science to contend with New Atheists.¹¹⁸ Fergusson reacts to New Atheists in his 2008 Gifford Lectures, and philosopher Peter S. Williams shows how C. S. Lewis anticipated New Atheists.¹¹⁹ At least four scholarly journals have devoted full issues to New Atheists or New Atheism, and John Hughes collates *Sermons Responding to New Atheists* mostly by theologians.¹²⁰

Overlapping clergy and other reactions illustrate New Atheists' broad reception among agnostics, Buddhists, Deists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and the esoteric as well as

¹¹² Copan [e.g. 2011]; Copan and Flannagan [2014]; Lamb [2011]; Thomas, Evans, and Copan [2013]; cf. DeVan [2011d; 2012g] esp. on Genesis 1-11 and 19; Earl [2010: esp. title]; Fergusson [2009: 151-77].

¹¹³ Aikman [2008]; Hart [2009]; D. Marshall [2007]; cf. Stark [2007: 41-42, 118, 285, 374]; C. Sullivan [2009].

¹¹⁴ Craig [e.g. 2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2009a; 2009b]; Crean [2007: esp. 9-49]; Feser [2008]; Ganssle [2009a; 2009b]; Overman [2009]; Ward [2008]; cf. Falcioni [2010]; other philosophers or philosophically oriented: Fernandes [2009]; Flew and Varghese [2007]; Langthaler and Appel [2010]; Novak [2008]; Spiegel [2010].

¹¹⁵ Bunner [2013]; Glass [2012]; Lennox [2011b]; McGrath [2005; 2010]; McGrath and McGrath [2007]; McLean [2006]; Poole [2009]. For recent responses by scientists or about science beyond "Intelligent Design" or evolutionary theory, cf. e.g. Aczel [2014]; Sheldrake [2012]; C. White [2013].

¹¹⁶ Behe [2009]; Berlinski [2008]; Broom [2001]; Dembski [2009]; Hunt [2010]; Johnson and Reynolds [2010]; Lennox [2009; 2011c]; Meyer [2013] a bestseller July 7, 2013; Monton [2009]; Stein [2008]; see also West and West [2009: title]; *The Devil's Delusion: A Discussion Guide* based on Berlinski [2008].

¹¹⁷ F. Collins [2006: esp. 4, 161-95]; C. Cunningham [2010]; DeVan [2011m; 2012a]; Fergusson [2009: e.g. 61-90]; Plantinga [2007; 2011]; Dennett and Plantinga [2011]; cf. Markham [2010: 65-79].

¹¹⁸ Stark [2008: esp. 114-48]; D. Myers [2008]; cf. Bullivant [2010]; DeVan [2010f; 2012i]; Ryan [2014].

¹¹⁹ Fergusson [2009] is the published version of his Gifford Lectures; P. Williams [2013; cf. 2009].

¹²⁰ "Faith and Skepticism" [2011] in *Directions* 40 (1); Hughes [2013]; *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20:1 [2008] concerning or responding to Dennett; "The New Atheism" [2011] in *The Southwestern Journal of Theology* 54:1; "New Atheism and Its Critics" [2013] in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*.

Christians.¹²¹ Atheists Michael Ruse and Bruce Sheiman, as well as avowed agnostics John Humphrys and Rod Liddle are critical of New Atheists demonizing religion.¹²² Rabbis Bradley Shavit Artson, Moshe Averick, Schmuley Boteach, Julia Neuberger, David Wolpe, and self-described “Secular Jew” Intelligent Design theorist David Berlinski defend religion as publicly beneficial.¹²³ Former Nixon speechwriter and comedian Ben Stein interviewed Dawkins on Intelligent Design, as well as exploring Darwinian philosophy and the Holocaust for *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*.¹²⁴ Muslim responders include American convert to Sufi Islam Bill Whitehouse, Iranian-American creative writing professor Reza Aslan, and Egyptian pundit Tariq Ramadan – the grandson of Muslim brotherhood founder Hasan Al-Bana.¹²⁵ Whitehouse exemplifies rejoinders or title allusions to one New Atheist or book, writing twice to Sam Harris.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Cf. DeVan [2012c: 140-48]. Buddhist: Roshi [2013]; Deist: Amarasingam [2010]; Fallon [2009]; Flew and Varghese [2007]; Esoteric: Wilberg [2008]; Freeman and Freeman [2008]. Hindu: Dasa [2014].

¹²² Humphrys [2007]; Liddle [2006]; Monton [2009]; Ruse in McGrath and McGrath [2007: 49-50, 103]; Sheiman [2009]; cf. Bradley and Tate [2010: 2]; Corlett [2010]; Ruse [2009; 2015]; R. Saltman [2012].

¹²³ E.g. Averick [2010]; Berlinski [2008: xi]; Grayling et al. [2007]; Hitchens et al. [2009b, 2011]; Wolpe [2008]. Romain [2008: subtitle]: *Reform Rabbis Respond to the God Delusion* is not in circulation at the time of this writing; cf. “Messianic” Jewish responders Sarfati [2010]; D. Stone [2007; 2010].

¹²⁴ Stein’s [2008] *Expelled* premiered five months before *Religulous*, garnering slightly over half the latter’s box office success according to Box Office Mojo [2015: online] grossing \$7,720,487 in the United States.

¹²⁵ E.g. Aslan [2010: xiii-xv; 2014: online]; Hitchens and Ramadan [2010]; Whitehouse [2009; 2011]; cf. Abdullah [2014]; S. Ali [2012]; Hasan [2008]; Katwala [2002: title] on “Tariq Ali vs Christopher Hitchens.”

¹²⁶ To Dawkins: Aikman [2008]; S. Ali [2012]; K. Allen [2012]; Alper [2011]; Amann [2014]; Austin [2008]; Barlow [1991]; Barns [2011]; Berlinski [2008]; Beverley [2007]; Blinkist [2013]; BookRags [2000-2011; 2011-12]; Broom [2001]; Burt and Trivers [2006]; Cornwell [2007]; Crean [2007]; Curious Reader [2012]; Dasa [2014]; Distin [2005]; Earl [2010]; Edgell [2008]; Egan [2009]; Eldridge [2004]; Elsdon-Baker [2006]; Fallon [2009]; Fernandes [2009]; Flegr [2008]; Freeman and Freeman [2008]; Gary [2012b]; Goldschmidt [2005]; Grafen and Ridley [2006]; Grigg [2008]; Gumbel [2008]; Haas [2008]; Hahn and Wiker [2008]; Hart [2009]; Hasan [2008]; Hayes [2007]; Hockney [2014a]; Hunt [2010]; Hutchins [2012]; The Intelligent Community Initiative [2007]; G. Jackson [2012]; Jenman [2010]; K. Jones [2007]; Keefner [2012]; Keeran [2007]; Keogh [2014]; Khoury [2014]; M. King [2007]; Langthaler and Appel [2010]; Linick [2010]; Loftus [2010]; Madrid and Hensley [2010]; McCoy [2015]; McGrath [2005]; McGrath and McGrath [2007]; McLean [2006]; Messer [2007]; Michaels [2012]; Midgley [2010]; J. Miller [2011]; Nielsen [2010]; Nurnberger [2010]; Pessin [2009]; Q [2013]; Reeves [2010]; Reitan [2009]; Rilstone [2009]; Robertson [2007; 2010]; Rodgers [2014]; Romain [2008]; Roughgarden [2009]; Sagawa [1991]; Sarfati [2010]; Sexton [2001]; Slater [2012]; Starkey [2007]; Steer [2006]; Sterelny [2001]; D. Stone [2007]; Stott [2013]; Stove [1995]; Suggit [2007]; Tudge [2013] also to Dennett; Vaux [2001]; Ward [2008; 2010]; Webb [2012]; White [2013]; Whiz [2014]; Wilberg [2009]; A. Wilson [2007]; D. Wilson [2008a]; Wonderly [1996]. To Dennett: Alexis [2010]; Brockman [2007]; Brook and Ross [2002]; C. Cunningham [2010]; Dahlbom [1995]; McCarthy [2007]; McGrath [2007]; Tudge [2013]. To Harris: Hockney [2014b]; Hovey [2012]; Isaacson [2012]; Lawson [2011]; Leahy [2007]; Linetsky [2013]; Loftus [2011]; McDermon [2007]; Metcalf [2007]; Mumm [2014]; Reppert [2003]; M. A. Robinson [2007]; Slane [2008]; Whitehouse [2008; 2011]; D. Wilson [2007]; Zacharias [2008]. To Hitchens: Craig and Meister [2009]; Gary [2012a]; Loftus [2014]; Prothero [2010]; S. Sagan [2014]; T. Williams [2008]; D. Wilson [2008b]. Also to Loftus: D. Marshall [2015]; D. Stone [2010].

Christian or Christian flavored offerings accessible to lay audiences arrange loosely around traditional Catholic, traditional Protestant or Evangelical, and Progressive. Evangelicals defend a range of views on biological evolution, are less acerbic about conservative American politics, and are less likely to praise or defend Islam. Traditional Catholics and Evangelicals tend to stress issues in Christian apologetics such as Jesus's deity, resurrection, and the Bible's historical reliability.¹²⁷

Progressives emphasize more arcane, postmodern, radical, neo-orthodox, feminist, or liberal politics and theologies.¹²⁸ For example, Ian Markham portrays Islam and certain forms of homosexuality sublimely, scorns Creationism, and construes Genesis 1-3 as an exercise in "growing up," analogizing rebellion against God with adolescence.¹²⁹ Eric Reitan qualifies without immediately elaborating on what he labels are the dangers:

I will not be defending... biblical inerrancy because I think it is both mistaken and dangerous... [nor] the divine command theory of ethics (that is, the theory that morality is the product of God's decrees) because I think it is both mistaken and dangerous.... I will not... [defend] marginalization of gays and lesbians because I think that these things are objective moral evils [nor] 'Young Earth Creationism' because I think it is mistaken, dangerous, and well, silly.¹³⁰

In contrast, Reformed Evangelical Douglas Wilson praises Hitchens' "courage" in criticizing Islam.¹³¹ David Marshall, in probably the first book-length response to the *Four Horsemen* in aggregate, interacts sympathetically with both theistic evolutionists and Intelligent Design theorists.¹³² Marshall resists construing conservative American

¹²⁷ Evangelicals include Aikman [2008]; Beverley [2007]; A. Blair [2010]; Copan and Craig [2009]; Craig and Meister [2009]; Dembski [2009]; Geisler and McCoy [2014]; Gilson and Weitnauer [2012]; Gumbel [2008]; Hunt [2010]; Johnson and Reynolds [2010]; Keller [2008]; Lennox [2009; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c]; Lotz [2014]; McDowell and Morrow [2010]; D. Marshall [2007; 2015]; McFarland [2012]; McGrath and McGrath [2007]; Mohler [2008]; Orr-Ewing [2008]; Ortberg [2008]; Plantinga [2007; 2011]; Robertson [2007; 2010]; R. Stewart [2008; 2011]; Stokes [2012]; Stott [2013]; *The Southwestern Journal of Theology* [2011]; Turek [2014]; D. Wilson [2007; 2008a; 2008b]; Zacharias [2008]. More traditional Catholics are Crean [2007]; Eberstadt [2010]; Egan [2009]; Feldmeier [2014]; Feser [2008]; Hahn and Wiker [2008]; Madrid and Hensley [2010]; McLean [2006]; Novak [2008]; O'Malley [2008]; T. Williams [2008].

¹²⁸ Cf. Armstrong [2009]; Beattie [2007]; Cornwell [2007]; David, Keller, and Stanley [2010]; DeVan [2012]; Grigg [2008]; Haught [2008a]; Hedges [2008]; Hyman [2010]; K. Jones [2007]; Kimball [2008]; Markham [2010]; Reitan [2009]; Ryan [2014]; Schaeffer [2009]; Walters [2010]; R. Williams [2008].

¹²⁹ Markham [2010: 21-22, 55, 105-17, 130-31, 142, 145-46, 154 on Islam, 140-41 on committed homosexual relationships, 17, 19, 69, 73-74, 85-89, 129-30 on Genesis, Creationism, Intelligent Design].

¹³⁰ Reitan [2009: 7]. Markham [2010: 22, cf. 91] also opposes "biblical inerrancy" or asserting "the Bible is completely historically... accurate;" contrast: D. Marshall [2007: 95-134, 200, 234].

¹³¹ D. Wilson [2008b: 52-54].

¹³² D. Marshall [2007: 35-92, 207-20]. DeVan [2009b] reviews D. Marshall.

Christians as “The American Taliban,” and like New Atheists openly expresses his intent to persuade.¹³³ Marshall cites for inspiration a letter from Friedrich Engels who was “pious when young, and lost his faith reading David Strauss’s *The Life of Jesus*. ‘Why does not someone write a devastating refutation?’ he wrote his friend, Fritz Graeber.”¹³⁴

Not all reactions to New Atheists are delivered soberly. The “Unintentional Bestseller” by atheist Tao de Haas parodies: “In the beginning there was THE GOD DELUSION by Richard Dawkins. Then came THE DAWKINS DELUSION? by Alister McGrath. Now there is THE DELUSION DELUSION.”¹³⁵ Others are *The Atheist Camel Chronicles: Debate Themes & Arguments for the Non-Believer (and those who think they might be)* by “Dromedary Hump,” Russell Moffat’s *Atheists Can Be Wankers Too!: A Foot Soldier’s Response to the Four Horsemen*, and Becky Garrison’s “irreverent and insightful satire” *The New Atheist Crusaders and Their Unholy Grail: The Misguided Quest to Destroy Your Faith*.¹³⁶ Mary Eberstadt’s *The Loser Letters* follows the example of C. S. Lewis in her epistolary novel, employing the lilt of social media to address the New Atheists as “Dear Sirs,” then “Dear Major Atheist Author BFFs,” and later “Dear Distinguished Atheist Friends (that’s *Lieber Herren Doktoren Atheisten Freunde in Deutsch*).”¹³⁷ Counterpoised to the New Atheist friendly *Family Guy*, the popular animated comedy *South Park* lampooned Dawkins in a rare two-part episode showing that television’s denigrators of New Atheists also sometimes retort with mockery.¹³⁸

1.2 A Preliminary Analysis

The following preliminary analysis pursues two overarching motifs. First, are New Atheists a splendidly isolated phenomena or do they manifest a longer or larger

¹³³ D. Marshall [2007: 173-88] on “The American Taliban.”

¹³⁴ D. Marshall [2007: 200]; contrast Reitan [2009: 4-5, cf. 204]: “This book is not...an attempt to convince atheists and agnostics that they should become theists...[but] to show that those who do believe in God are not thereby irrational or morally defective...a reasonable person could be a theist...a reasonable person might also be an atheist;” cf. Aikin and Talisse [2011: e.g. 8-10] for matching statements by two atheists.

¹³⁵ De Haas [2008: front cover].

¹³⁶ Centre as “Dromedary Hump” [2008; cf. 2011] includes Dawkins’ stylized Scarlett “A” in the title design; Garrison [2007: back cover]; Moffatt [2009].

¹³⁷ Eberstadt [2010: 9, 65, 92]; cf. DeVan [2012e] reviewing Eberstadt [2010].

¹³⁸ *South Park* [2006a; 2006b] co-creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone in Tapper and Morris [2006: online] believe in God, but Parker added that all religions are silly, and atheism was the most ludicrous religion of all. See also collaborator with Christopher Hitchens and repeat responder to New Atheists D. Wilson [2003: title]: *A Serrated Edge: A Brief Defense of Biblical Satire and Trinitarian Skylarking*.

history, tradition, or trajectory even as they selectively depart from other atheists? Second, what gaps in the literature merit further study or reply, and which among these does the present thesis supplement, augment, redress, or fill?

1.2.1 *Antecedents and Trajectories:*

New Atheists as a group and individually display distinct styles, flairs, and emphases; but it would be a mistake to read them the way the Temple guards effused about Jesus per Johannine testimony: “Never has anyone spoken like this” (John 7:46)! Criticism—even ridicule—of religious beliefs, rites, and practices persists from antiquity to the present by atheists, as well as by some who believe in God or align with a religious tradition, notably in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures as chapter 4 discusses.¹³⁹

Jan N. Bremmer records ancient Greek doubts, challenges, and irreverence toward the gods, finding the first use of the Greek word *atheos* in Plato’s *Apology* §26c and *Laws* §12.967a denoting “intellectuals who denied the gods of the city or any form of deity.”¹⁴⁰ Bremmer does not categorize Epicurus (341-270 BCE) as an atheist, but quotes Epicurus’s *On Nature* §12 associating “raving lunatics” with the worship of and origins of belief in the gods, an invective preceding Dawkins’ “delusion” rhetoric by over two millennia.¹⁴¹

Turning to ancient Rome, Mark Edwards paraphrases Plutarch (46-120 CE) *On Superstition* §10 that atheism was preferable to worshipping a false or vicious Divinity: “Better to admit no God than to grovel to an ogre.”¹⁴² Plutarch foresaw possible virtue in rejecting belief or refusing to worship such G/gods as later chapters in this thesis develop.

Lucian of Samosata’s (c: 125-185) classic dialogues likewise preview debates between New Atheists and their critics. When “Damis” cites a brutal Scythian cult as “a specimen of the human propensity to superstition,” “Arethas” counters that Damis ought

¹³⁹ Cf. e.g. Banks [2011: 35-52]; DeVan [2012L] reviewing Banks; Quack [2013: esp. 653-54] summarizing parallels in ancient Indian, Pali, and Pakrit sacred texts within Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions.

¹⁴⁰ Bremmer [2007: 19, 25]; cf. Sedley [2013: 140].

¹⁴¹ Bremmer [2007: 19-21]; cf. Lucretius (c: 99-55 BCE) *On the Nature of Things*. M. Edwards [2013: 155]; Berlinerblau [2013: 324] for attempts to denounce philosophical opponents in Greece and other contexts by alleging they were atheists. Cf. accusations and counter-accusations of heresy, blasphemy, or denying specific rather than all divinities, as Appollonius leveled at the Jewish historian Josephus [c: 37-100]; and those to Christian martyrs such as Justin and Polycarp who refused to pay obeisance to the Roman pantheon.

¹⁴² M. Edwards [2013: 154]; cf. M. Buckley [1987: 9-10, 199]; Hyman [2007: 29] cite Sir John Cheke’s 1540 *On Superstition* translation as the first use of “atheism” in English, in that context resembling Deism.

not to conflate nobler religion with cultic distortions in the way one might mistake “an ignorant servant for the master...[or] all painting by an amateur’s daub.”¹⁴³

Michael J. Buckley designates the first modern atheist Jean Meslier (1694-1759), a French priest or *abbe* that wrote piercingly about his atheism long before Barker or Loftus.¹⁴⁴ Buckley in “The Atheistic Transformation of Denis Diderot” (1713-1784) also traced Diderot’s [d]evolution from devout family roots, into the Enlightenment “materialist” and Karl Marx’s favorite prose author who savaged Descartes and others’ “design” arguments.¹⁴⁵

Diderot’s popularizer Baron D’Holbach (1723-1789) in *The System of Nature: or, Laws of the Moral and Physical World* §1.18 predated Hitchens and Sigmund Freud: “In the lap of ignorance, in the season of alarm and calamity...humankind ever formed his first notions of the Divinity.”¹⁴⁶ D’Holbach’s colleague Jacques-Andre Naigeon (1738-1810) projected God as the ultimate tyrant and belief in God as hampering progress, the pursuit of happiness, peace, and reciprocity.¹⁴⁷ Opined still another French materialist, Julien Offray de La La Mettrie (1709-1751): ““The universe will never be happy, unless it is atheistic’...No more theological wars, no more soldiers of religion—such terrible soldiers! Nature infected with sacred poison, would regain its rights and its purity.”¹⁴⁸

Hailing from the British Isles, Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) styled d’Holbach’s *coterie* in a way that could have easily been a reaction to New Atheists: “With the bigotry of dogmatists...[They] rashly pronounced that every man must be either an Atheist or a fool.”¹⁴⁹ Trevor-Roper introduces Gibbon himself preceding Dennett in a kind of

¹⁴³ *Scholia* 75.26-27 in M. Edwards [2013: 157].

¹⁴⁴ M. Buckley [1987: 268-71] though Meslier’s atheist writings were distributed posthumously.

¹⁴⁵ M. Buckley [1987: 194-250, 415] citing Marx in McLellan [1973: 456-57]. Kors [2013: 208] calls Diderot an atheist. McGrath [2006: 25] avows Diderot was a Deist. Neither significantly backs up his claim in the sources cited. Rousseau [1799: 275-77] in *Emile or on Education* cited in Kors [2013: 197, 207] related disputations with French atheists under d’Holbach’s auspices on whether the observable world owed its order to “chance” and/or fortuitous combination rather than to design; cf. M. Buckley [1987: 255-56].

¹⁴⁶ D’Holbach in M. Buckley [1987: 421]. M. Buckley [1987: 252]: “Many, if not all, of its [d’Holbach’s *Le Systeme de la nature ou des loix du monde physique et du monde moral*] theses had been formulated before, principally by Diderot, but never had they been so radically or defiantly stated and so rigorously argued;” cf. Law [2013: 268, cf. 263-77] who applies Kant’s definition of Enlightenment as “emergence of man from his self-imposed infancy” to progressing from theism to atheism.

¹⁴⁷ Naigeon [1770: Discourses 1-16] in Kors [2013: 202-04, 210]; cf. M. Buckley [1987: esp. 267].

¹⁴⁸ La Mettrie, *L’Homme Machine* in M. Buckley [1987: 267, 418]; McGrath [2006: 33]; Taylor [2007: 293].

¹⁴⁹ Gibbon [1907: 223]; cf. M. Buckley [1987: 256-60] that D’Holbach’s *coterie* were not all atheists. New Atheist Onfray [2005: 30-31, 223-26] lamented perceived neglect of d’Holbach in recent scholarship.

scientific study of religion and religious history by handling “Church history in a secular spirit...[as] a human society subject to the same social laws as other societies.”¹⁵⁰ So too did David Hume (1711-1776) in the Scottish Enlightenment via his posthumous *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* forcefully criticize arguments for God’s existence, miracles, and appeal to natural disorders and suffering against a benevolent God.¹⁵¹

Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) in Germany preceded Dennett’s championing “natural” explanations for religion. “The substance and object of religion is altogether human; we have shown that divine wisdom is human wisdom; that the secret of theology is anthropology; [and] that the absolute mind is the so-called finite subjective mind.”¹⁵²

Hitchens expressed his debt to Marx (1818-1883), who also modified Feuerbach and classified criticism of religion as the prerequisite to all criticism.¹⁵³ “The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness...[It plucked] the flowers from the chain, not so that men may wear the chain without consolation, but so that they may break the chain, and cull the living flower.”¹⁵⁴

Susan Jacoby alludes to New Atheists’ bravura kinship with Colonel Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899). Ingersoll’s fiery writing and oratory drew crowds, bifurcated religion from science, and incited theologians to debate and rebut in “intellectual journals.”¹⁵⁵ Ingersoll in 1880 a century prior to Dawkins lauded Charles Darwin:

This century will be called Darwin’s century...one of the greatest men who ever touched this globe. He has explained more of the phenomena of life than all of the religious teachers. Write the name of Charles Darwin on the one hand and...every theologian who ever lived on the other, and from that name has come more light to the world than from all of those. His doctrine of evolution, his doctrine of the survival of the fittest, his doctrine of the origin of the species, has removed in every thinking mind the last vestige of orthodox Christianity.¹⁵⁶

Bracketing Ingersoll in propagating the science-religion warfare *topos* were New York University School of Medicine founder John William Draper in *History of the*

¹⁵⁰ Trevor-Roper introducing Gibbon [1963: x]; cf. McGrath [2006: 50]. As did Spinoza (1632-1677) in *Tractatus Theologico-politicus* according to Taylor [2007: 271] motivating modern biblical criticism.

¹⁵¹ Hume [2007: esp. 74-88, 109-12] on evil and suffering in the natural order; cf. Kors [2013: 201-02].

¹⁵² Feuerbach [1881: 270].

¹⁵³ Cf. C. Hitchens [2007b: 9-10; 2007b: 64]; Marx and Engels [2008: 41]. See e.g. Banks [2011: 80-86, 154-55]; M. Buckley [2004: 84-86] for Marx’s serious but ambivalent assessing of Feuerbach.

¹⁵⁴ C. Hitchens [2010b: 343] slightly rephrasing Marx and Engels [2008: 42].

¹⁵⁵ Jacoby [2013: 159]; cf. D. Nash [2013: 220].

¹⁵⁶ Ingersoll [1942: 380].

Conflict between Religion and Science (1874) and Cornell University co-founder Andrew Dickson White's two-volume sequel of sorts *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896).¹⁵⁷ One might also note Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and A. J. Ayer (1910-1989) crediting science as the sole reliable source for true or meaningful knowledge, which "Logical Positivism" coupled with logical reflection.¹⁵⁸

Partly following Feuerbach, Freud (1856-1939) whose propensity to scientism Merold Westphal expounds, plausibly inspired Hitchens and other atheists in branding religion as childish wishful thinking arising from misdirected fears or hopes.¹⁵⁹ It was like a childhood neurosis unable to "achieve its end. Its doctrines carry with them the stamp of the times in which they originated, the ignorant childhood days of the human race."¹⁶⁰

In twentieth century Britain and America, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and Carl Sagan (1934-1996) preceded the Four Horsemen as "media atheists" per Callum Brown's phrase.¹⁶¹ While Dawkins dubbed religion a "virus," Russell interpreted religion as "a disease born of fear...a source of untold misery."¹⁶² Like his fellow philosopher Dennett, Russell was a teenage atheist and anti-religionist: "My views on religion remain those that I acquired at the age of 16. I consider all forms of religion not only false but harmful."¹⁶³ Sagan for his part suggested religion thrived on ignorance that looked to a "God of the Gaps [who] is assigned responsibility for what we do not yet understand."¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁷ Draper [1874: title]; A. White [1896: title].

¹⁵⁸ E.g. Ayer [1952]; Comte [1975]; cf. McGrath [2006: 79-99].

¹⁵⁹ Westphal [1998: 38-54]. Freud [1989: 20]: "The derivation of religious needs from the infant's helplessness and the longing for the father aroused by it seems to me incontrovertible." Freud to Edward Silverstein on 7 March 1875 in Gay [1988: 28]: "Among all philosophers, I worship and admire this man (Feuerbach) the most." Freud [1949: 64] also claimed to stand in a longer tradition in *The Future of an Illusion*: "I have said nothing which other and better men have not said before me in a much more complete, forcible, and impressive manner.... All I have done... is to add some psychological foundation to the criticisms of my great predecessors;" cf. Freud in C. Hitchens [2007b: 147-54]; C. Miller [1880b] mentioning Huxley and reviewing Draper [1874] rehashing "relics of conflicts once waged;" Jacoby [2013: 188] on those accusing Ingersoll of refigiting "battles...thoroughly fought out before his day."

¹⁶⁰ Freud [1933: 229; 1949: *passim*].

¹⁶¹ C. Brown [2013: 41].

¹⁶² E.g. Dawkins [2003: 128-45]: "Viruses of the Mind;" B. Russell [1957: 24].

¹⁶³ B. Russell, October 1968 letter to *The Humanist* in Pidgen [2013: 307]. Dennett in a February 21, 2010 e-mail to this dissertation author: "I...had figured out that I was an atheist by about 15."

¹⁶⁴ C. Sagan [1996: 8]. McGrath and McGrath [2007: 31] cite Oxford chemist and Methodist lay preacher Charles A. Coulson in the twentieth century coining the phrase "the God of the gaps."

One might register many others in the long legacy of atheism advocacy, yet none of this implies that atheism is seamless, static, or monolithic.¹⁶⁵ New Atheists deviate as well as correlate with other voices in the history of atheism. John F. Haught diverges New Atheists from atheist existentialists such as Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, and to some extent Bertrand Russell.¹⁶⁶ New Atheists celebrate atheism as liberating, while Camus, Sartre, and Nietzsche were deeply affected by its nihilistic cost. Sartre mourned that if God does not exist, humanity is forlorn because neither within nor without do we find “anything to cling to.”¹⁶⁷ Russell predicted that all human achievement would be inevitably buried beneath debris of a universe in ruins so that “only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair can the soul’s habitation... be safely built.”¹⁶⁸ Nietzsche, despite so much talk about the *ubermensch*, brooded on suicide as a “powerful comfort,” helping one to get through “many a dreadful night.”¹⁶⁹ For such Existentialists, if God is “dead,” the proper reaction is a solemn staring into the abyss.

New Atheists break with such angst by marketing atheism as more fulfilling and jubilant than various “religious” approaches to life, but neither do they take up the full-fledged libertinism of a de Sade, the selfishness of a fictional *Dorian Gray*, or postmodern relativisms.¹⁷⁰ Vital to New Atheist ethics is an objective morality dissonant with libertinism, though they generally promote consensual sexual freedom consistent with the 1960s sexual revolution.¹⁷¹ Hitchens’ *Essential Readings* conspicuously omits the likes of de Sade, Nietzsche, Camus, Sartre, de Beauvoir, and postmodernists such as Rorty.¹⁷²

Bernard Schweizer in *Hating God: The Untold Story of Misotheism* differentiates New Atheists from popular or classical figures he sees as believing in, yet hating God.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁵ C. Hitchens [2007c] anthologizes atheist and critical literature from Lucretius to Mill to Sagan, including some theists and selections by New Atheists Ali, Dawkins, Dennett, Grayling, Harris, Jillette, McEwan, Rushdie, and Stenger. Neither Hitchens nor others above delve into global indigenous historic or contemporary atheisms, as do Bullivant and Ruse [2013: 337-79, 553-679] and Zuckerman [2010].

¹⁶⁶ Haught [2008a: esp. pp. xv, 16, 18, 20-24, 93]; cf. Markham [2010: 28-45].

¹⁶⁷ Sartre [1985: 22].

¹⁶⁸ B. Russell [1957: 107].

¹⁶⁹ Nietzsche [1989: 91].

¹⁷⁰ Cf. de Sade in Gillette [2005: *passim*]. Wilde [2011: title].

¹⁷¹ E.g. Eberstadt [2010: esp. 17] on this point; cf. especially chapters 6 and 7 of this dissertation.

¹⁷² C. Hitchens [2007c: vii-ix]; though Rorty endorses an earlier book by his fellow philosopher Dennett [1995: back cover]; cf. a briefer anthology by F. Collins [2010: title] *Belief: Readings on the Reason for Faith* on various religious perspectives perhaps evoked in part by Hitchens’ anthology.

¹⁷³ Schweizer [2011: title]; cf. DeVan [2012p] reviewing Schweizer; McGrath [2010: 70] for one twenty-first century example of violence arising from hatred of God and directed against the Amish.

Schweizer classifies as “misotheists” Algernon Swinburne (1837-1909), feminists like Rebecca West (for whom Hitchens penned an introduction), and Philip Pullman who endorsed *The God Delusion*.¹⁷⁴

Schweizer makes too much of this distinction, however. Reviling God is not necessarily inconsistent with renouncing God’s existence. Schweizer’s taxonomy better demarcates overlapping or interactive categories. Atheists do not inevitably hate God, but some do, if only as a deleterious phantom. Douglas Wilson challenged Hitchens: “Tenets of *true* atheism [are] One: There is no God. Two: I hate him.”¹⁷⁵ C. S. Lewis recounted his anger as an atheist at God’s apparent absence. “I was at this time living, like so many theists or Anti-theists in a whirl of contradictions. I maintained God did not exist. I was also very angry at God for not existing.”¹⁷⁶ Poeticized Marquis de Sade: “Yes, vain illusion, my soul detests you. / And I protest that, in order to further convince you, / I wish that for a moment you could exist / To have the pleasure to better insult you.”¹⁷⁷ Later chapters in this dissertation discuss whether New Atheists might genuinely despise God or respond implicitly to God’s grace, or disbelieve with integrity due to a love for the truth.

In the final analysis, New Atheists nuance their emphases and angles without breaking from the larger atheist and irreligious traditions, though they discount or ignore selected alternative atheisms. Unlike Existentialist atheists, New Atheists signify atheism not as nihilistic but as something joyful to celebrate. Unlike libertines, moral relativists, or post-modernists, New Atheists push to commandeer the absolute moral high ground by arguing that atheism allows for superior ethics over and against those of any “religion.” Unlike strict scientism and positivists, Dawkins and Hitchens appeal to and aim to exemplify art, music, literary, and other forms of human creativity and beauty as facets of a new Enlightenment for the sake of a maximally thriving humanity that revels in aesthetic as well as cognitive excellence.¹⁷⁸ Unlike ivory tower academic atheists, the New Atheists take atheism to the masses by writing to popular audiences as well as to fellow scholars.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ C. Hitchens in West [2007: xiii-xli]; Pullman in Dawkins [2006a: hardcover dust jacket]; Schweizer [2011: esp. 83-101, 127-47, 193-214] West’s love and hate toward God; cf. Meister [2012: 5]: “dystheists.”

¹⁷⁵ Hitchens and Wilson [2009: 58] begging questions about “*true* atheism.” Italics in original unless noted.

¹⁷⁶ Lewis [1955: 115].

¹⁷⁷ de Sade, *La verite* in M. Buckley [1987: 248].

¹⁷⁸ C. Hitchens [2007b: 283]; cf. Dawkins [1998; 2006a: 383-87].

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Gibbon [1963: 55]: “The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as

In some senses, all ideas, writings, and scholarship stand or build on antecedents and historical influences. New Atheism is no exception. Keeping the above predecessors and qualifiers in mind, what makes New Atheism “new” is what makes many movements in art, scholarship or popular culture “new,” their inflections, context, and aspiration to a paraphrase of Victor Hugo: “Nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come.”¹⁸⁰

If New Atheist ideas are not totally new, their personal style and presentation is fresh, with atheist ideas once again packaged to interest or stimulate current readers’ imaginations. The New Atheists muster resources from past generations’ rhetoric, persuasion, logic, and scientific theory; sifting and applying them to the present. They employ victimization language that feminists and gays inspire, and evoke fears of nuclear annihilation without “Mutually Assured Destruction” safeguards, since holy war wagers may not be deterred by counterstrike threats. Unlike the Soviets, New Atheists for now lack political power to forcefully marginalize or obliterate religion with the long arm of the state, instead facing religious resurgences globally that negate secularization theses even though some officially atheist states such as China and North Korea remain.¹⁸¹

Earlier atheists dismissed or disdained religion and theistic belief without contemporary categories such as fundamentalist, modernist, extremist, or moderate. Neither do New Atheists malign only “fundamentalist” religion as evil, but all religion including so-called moderate and liberal manifestations, and to a lesser extent agnosticism that they see as cowardly enabling extremism.¹⁸² New Atheists portray practices such as prayer not simply as ineffectual or wishful thinking but as contemptible and harmful, not just vestiges of a pediatric stage to outgrow but “child abuse” worse than rape.¹⁸³

equally useful,” also quoted by C. Hitchens [2007b: 155]; Nietzsche [1989: 72]: “The philosopher as we understand him, we free spirits—as the man of the most comprehensive responsibility who has the conscience for the overall development of man...will make use of religions for his project of cultivation and education, just as he will make use of whatever political and economic states are at hand.”

¹⁸⁰ A recurring translation or paraphrase of Victor Hugo in *Histoire d'un Crime*, Part II, §10 as employed by e.g. Bassiouni [2013: 920]; M. L. King [1986: 59, 96, 106]; and Shapiro [2006: 375].

¹⁸¹ Cf. e.g. Berger [1967; 1999]; Jenkins [2006; 2007; 2011]; Markham [2010: 128, 130-31, 155]; Noll [2009]; Sanneh [2008]. McGrath [2006] likewise dubiously predicted atheism’s *Twilight*.

¹⁸² E.g. Dawkins [2006a: 69-75]; Dennett [2006a: 199-265, 291-301]; S. Harris [2005: 16-23].

¹⁸³ Cf. e.g. Dawkins [2006a: 85-90, 349-87]; Dennett [2006a: 256; 2007b: 279-80]; S. Harris [2006: 52]; S. Harris in B. Saltman [2006: online]; C. Hitchens [2007b: 18-28, 217-28]. Yet at the same time partly base their anti-clericalism on Catholic priests violating sexual taboos, cf. Dawkins [2006a: 356-61]; S. Harris [2010: 199]: “I confess that...too little attention to...the [Catholic Church] sexual abuse scandal...it felt...unsportsmanlike to shoot so large and languorous a fish in so tiny a barrel,” C. Hitchens [2007b: 4].

New Atheists further seek to co-opt as proto-atheists Deistic thinkers like Jefferson, Paine, and Voltaire, along with pantheists like Spinoza and Einstein, presuming that such luminaries would have been atheists had they lived long enough to read Darwin, or in Einstein's case were at least deeply disgruntled with religion and sympathetic to New Atheist agendas.¹⁸⁴ If taken at face value, some New Atheists aim to excise religion from public discourse rather than allowing 'free inquiry,' though their media appearances and debates with Christians and other religious believers functionally negate this unless New Atheists view such debates as no more than temporary or pragmatic strategies. In short, New Atheists' aggressive proselytizing for atheism implicitly riffs on Mordecai's vision in Esther 4:14 "for...such a time as this," not to rescue the Jewish people alone but the whole human race from intellectual, moral, and physical oblivion.¹⁸⁵

To condense our overview thus far, one can conscientiously comprehend New Atheism as a literary, media savvy, pugnacious, and cooperative atheist advocacy movement initiated and epitomized by the bestselling writings and activism of Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and their associates, compatriots, imitators, and professed anti-religious sympathizers. As such, New Atheists personify an early twenty-first century continuation of an ongoing tradition whose campaigners condemn theistic and other religions as false, retrograde, anti-scientific transmitters of repugnant beliefs that directly or indirectly cause or exacerbate incalculable miseries, and which therefore must be vigorously combatted in both word and deed. Can religious believers nevertheless engage with New Atheists and their ideas fruitfully? What gaps are present in the already existing literature? We turn to these questions in section 1.2.2.

1.2.2 *Gaps in the Literature:*

An abundance of scholars and other writers have responded, reacted, riposted, or replied to New Atheists in popular media, scholarly journals, and books. Still, it would be a mistake to assume that they exhaust, are exhaustive, or suffice to profitably analyzing, understanding, or approaching New Atheists and those they influence; to say nothing of

¹⁸⁴ E.g. A. Ali [2006: 27-34]; Dawkins [2006a: 39, 51-68]; C. Hitchens [2005; 2006; 2007a: 303; 2007b: 155-65].

¹⁸⁵ See Maher [2008: 1:32:00-end] for one forecasting of this possibility dramatized in film.

atheists generally whose legacies, bearings, and perceptions by the public and religious communities New Atheists sway. We outline in the next few paragraphs arenas ripe for academic examination and/or expansion, and then focus on the enterprise at hand.

Pursuing historical and causal factors relating to New and other atheisms is one realm for inquiry, though conjecturing what gives rise to any intellectual or popular movement is necessarily tentative. For New Atheists, instigators include practices connected with Islam, mass murder by Muslims, countering “Intelligent Design” despite the 2005 Kitzmiller et al. v. Dover Area School District et al. case dismissing it from American science curriculums, and the actions of Christian political conservatives such as George W. Bush who spoke at least once to American military action as a “Crusade.”¹⁸⁶

One might correspondingly query whether politically powerful atheism weathering a major setback in Europe and globally when the Berlin Wall fell fifteen years prior to *The End of Faith*, along with changing European demographics and the perceived failures of African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian traditional or “fundamentalist” immigrants to assimilate to secular norms play roles in New Atheists’ timeliness and reception.¹⁸⁷

Combining European vicissitudes with the deaths of celebrity activist atheists in America such as Carl Sagan, Madeleine Murray O’Hare, and the British Antony Flew’s embrace of theism, did an atheist advocacy vacuum open in the Western public square?¹⁸⁸ Historians can probe these and other socio-cultural stimuli for their explanatory power.

Sociology of (New) atheism is a second province to explore. Anthologies edited by Phil Zuckerman, Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse have begun to quantify atheism in global and local milieus by delineating its expressions in Western Europe from Central and Eastern Europe, North America, the “Arab” and “Islamic World(s),” India, Ghana, China, and Japan.¹⁸⁹ Such social scientific, cultural, and “area studies” regularly reference

¹⁸⁶ Bush in e.g. Perez-Rivas [2001: online]. Popular atheist comic strip artist S. Adams [2004: title] of *Dilbert* fame envisaged a worldwide *Religion War* between the forces of Islam versus everyone else with Christians leading the counter-strike. Other bestsellers by Hedges [2006]; Phillips [2006]; and Sharlet [2008] symptomize with New Atheists on the latter what Bowman [2010] called a twenty-first century “God Scare;” cf. D. Brown’s [2003: title] wildly lucrative *The Da Vinci Code* shamelessly deriding the Catholic Church. McGrath [2010: 55] notes a December 2006 atheist “Yuletide Celebration” to gather and watch *The Da Vinci Code*, but contrast Dawkins [2006a: 123]: “The only difference between *The Da Vinci Code* and the gospels is that the gospels are ancient fiction while *The Da Vinci Code* is modern fiction.”

¹⁸⁷ Cf. e.g. esp. A. Ali [2006; 2007; 2010]; Caldwell [2009]; Jenkins [2007]; Macey and Carling [2011].

¹⁸⁸ Flew and Varghese [2007]; cf. Dawkins [2006a: 106] vs. Flew; McGrath [2006: 238-56]; Prince [2013].

¹⁸⁹ Bullivant and Ruse [2013]; Zuckerman [2010].

New Atheists, but with scant data or dicta on their impact in these contexts. Research on North American atheists by sociologists Bruce E. Hunsberger and Bob Altemeyer, Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith, David Williamson and George Yancey independently reveal that many “trace their evolution toward atheism through reading,” but there is more work that could be done on New Atheists’ persuasive power, and in analyzing comparably neglected atheist populations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.¹⁹⁰

Thirdly, North American testimonies about the power of reading atheist and/or religious literature should motivate those who wish to defend their hope and faith (see e.g. 1 Peter 3:15). Will Engels’ interested heirs have access to persuasive principled opposition that Marshall ideates, or will incessant New Atheist allegations go unanswered or badly answered via diversion or attempts to silence or to ignore them?

Ralph Wood, for example, argues that New Atheists such as Hitchens do not deserve attention and are not “worthy adversaries.”¹⁹¹ Former Dean of Duke University Chapel Sam Wells concurred but changed his mind for three reasons: 1) because many students and other Christians have a “lingering anxiety” that science or other disciplines have disproved Christianity; 2) New Atheists have massive popularity and public presence as demonstrated by Dawkins’ sold out Duke University appearances in October 2010 and John Lennox’s rebuttal lectures at Duke, Harvard, and elsewhere two years later; and 3) New Atheists raise issues pertinent to major questions in university life.¹⁹² New or other belligerent atheists therefore merit attention from philosophers, theologians, and apologists so long as the controversies they raise and how they raise them find resonance.

Wells’ three reasons coincide with C. S. Lewis’s conviction that less intelligent or less intellectual believers rely on their academically erudite sisters and brothers to articulate and defend Christian faith. “To be ignorant and simple now... would be to throw down our weapons and betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against... intellectual attacks... Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason,

¹⁹⁰ Cimino and Smith [2014: *passim*, e.g. 79]; Hunsberger and Altemeyer [2006: 45-56, 107]; Williamson and Yancey [2013: esp. 45-46 quote, 54-55, 59, 74, 135]; cf. Brewster [2014: 88, 102, 203]; Callum [2013: 241]. An anonymous Harvard University Student explained in a spring 2010 Hebrew Bible class: “They (New Atheists and particular books by New Atheists) just made more sense.”

¹⁹¹ Wood [2013: online]; contrast Riley [2015] even as Wood attends to C. Hitchens in this very article!

¹⁹² Wells [2010]; cf. Bradley and Tate [2010: 14]; Hughes [2013: title]: *The Unknown God: Sermons Responding to the New Atheists*; Markham [2010: 134]; Johnson and Reynolds [2010: 1, 69, 113].

because bad philosophy needs to be answered.”¹⁹³ David Fergusson in his Gifford lectures reiterated that theology has a “responsibility of attending to the claims of atheism,” and Professor Richard Crouter in his study on public intellectual Reinhold Niebuhr went so far as to list Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, and mega-church pastor Rick Warren as the primary “intellectual sparring partners” for contemporary Christians as “Tillich, Bertrand Russell...Freud, John Dewey, and Billy Graham” were for Niebuhr.¹⁹⁴

Neither apologetics, nor social science, nor historical research will be the dominant motif for the present thesis, though specialists in each field can complement one another’s nuances, insights, and priorities. Briefly put, our resolution is neither to “prove” New Atheists wrong, nor to meticulously quantify their effects, but to suggest that New Atheists and atheism may be fruitfully approached as species of religious diversity, and thus with conceptual resources pertaining to issues of truth, salvation, interaction, and dialogue. Given New Atheists’ focus on and orientation to “religion,” their fixation on religiously associated principles and practices, as well as their confronting, debating, dialoguing, and proselytizing among religiously diverse people (as believers in assorted religious traditions have long done with each other), it is remarkable that philosophical, theological, and ethical resources which speak to religious diversity have largely been overlooked for their fecundity to religious-atheist and Christian-New Atheist engagement.

A Wesleyan Open Inclusivist Approach to Religious Diversity and New Atheism eschews any pretense that religious diversity or New Atheists can be handled from a neutral or entirely “objective” perspective. We propose instead that an Open Inclusivist attitude from philosophy and theology of religion, grounded by and employing methodological, biblical, historical, and ethical resources supplied and integrated by the Wesleyan tradition, will be productive in approaching religious diversity in a manner that incorporates New Atheists. A Wesleyan variety of Open Inclusivism as one exemplar of ecumenical, evangelical, Creedal Christianity lessens or eliminates difficulties that competing paradigms exhibit, and eschews implicit or explicit complications in Reformed, Catholic, and Universalist theologies. Insisting that every person possesses sacred worth or inherent dignity, it coherently urges genuine reciprocal learning and a hopeful urgency

¹⁹³ Lewis [2001f: 58].

¹⁹⁴ Crouter [2010: 7]; Fergusson [2009: 30]. See also DeVan [2011k] reviewing Crouter.

about salvation. It undergirds ir/religious liberty, prods collaboration around common priorities and constructive attempts to persuade, empowers prudent opposition where necessary, and operates in what John Wesley called the more (or most) excellent way: a spirit of active love.¹⁹⁵

Chapter 2 samples precedents and postures for including atheists when discussing other religious positions, and for atheism as a class of religious diversity. Chapter 3 appraises Wesleyan theological foundations, chapter 4 proto-Inclusivist Biblical themes, chapter 5 traditional and coactive voices, chapter 6 personal, social, and global interaction; and chapter 7 dialogue surrounding science, suffering, and optimal ethical flourishing.

¹⁹⁵ E.g. Sermon 89, “The More Excellent Way,” esp. §4, *Works* 3:264-65. All references to *Works* per scholarly conventions hereafter refer to J. Wesley [1976-].

Chapter 2: Approaching Religious Diversity and New Atheism

Chapter 1 of this thesis examined the New Atheism, its historical precedents, its critics and trajectories. The current chapter analyzes philosophy and theology of religion approaches to religious diversity for their applicability to New Atheists. Section 2.1 assesses atheism as a manifestation of religious diversity. Section 2.2 introduces three partly overlapping issues, and section 2.3 evaluates the Exclusivist-Inclusivist-Pluralist spectrum and its variants for their bearing upon Christian-New Atheist interaction.

2.1 Is Atheism akin to a “Religious” Position? Can Atheists Be Religious?

Central to whether New Atheists and atheism are approachable with theological, philosophical, or practical tools pertaining to religious diversity are the ways one might treat atheism as a religious identity and New Atheists like religious people.¹⁹⁶ We begin by surveying a few Wesleyans who addressed atheism, together with other religions.

2.1.1 *Sample Wesleyans on Atheism and (other) Religions:*

Historically, Wesleyans have referred to atheists as infidels, as farthest from the truth in their beliefs about God, and as materialists who aver physical reality is the only reality.¹⁹⁷ As New Atheists do with religion, Wesleyans have harnessed atheism for polemics, comparison, and contrast.¹⁹⁸ Elizabeth Harris characterizes Wesley’s late-in-life sermons “On Faith” and “On Living without God” as declining to criticize “Heathens, Mahomettans and Jews,” but censuring atheists, materialists, Deists, and Christians who “trust in works rather than faith.”¹⁹⁹ Wesley rebuked corrupt or works-based Christianity

¹⁹⁶ Portions of 2.1 published as DeVan [2012b: esp. 121-26].

¹⁹⁷ Cf. e.g. Hinton [1882: 577-96]; W. King [1930: 371-75]; Miles [2000: 67]; C. Miller [1880a: 413-14; cf. 1880b: 63 on materialism]; Summers [1882b: 372-74].

¹⁹⁸ With other religions, Deism, and agnosticism. See e.g. Summers [1882a: 383; 1882b: 372] mentioning “antitheists” who “oppose the Deity;” J. Buckley [1906: esp. 33-61, 76, 112, 178, 189, 203-09]; Review of *Modern Atheism* [1857: 284]; Snow [1839: 94-105]; Review of *The Anatomy* [1890: 946] atheism as a pagan misconception of God; cf. the Calvinist Annan [1860: iv, 2, 13-14, 97, 136, 192, 331-36] on “The Heathen World,” Deism, “infidels,” and reproving Methodists for colligated their opponents with Essenes, Mohammedans, or *foul monstrous* atheism, but then casting Methodism as “upon the brink...of atheism”!

¹⁹⁹ E. Harris [1998: 56]; Sermon 106, “On Faith,” *Works* 3:492-501; Sermon 130, “On Living without God,” *Works* 4:169-76.

by coupling it with atheism, and in “The Unity of Divine Being” inveighed against “a religion of atheism; that is every religion whereof God is not laid for the foundation.”²⁰⁰

Wesley averred that humans by nature are atheists, but he doubted that few proper atheists existed who “seriously disbelieved the being of a God” since God’s prevenient grace enabled all people to respond to God freely.²⁰¹ Still, Wesley expressed this hope when he recollected two formerly atheist acquaintances: “Real literal atheists...even then, if they will condescend to ask it...may find ‘grace to help in time of need.’”²⁰²

Wesley more strongly reprimanded “practical atheists” who might call themselves Christians, but who lived without mindfulness or fellowship with God, and he submitted that the “carnal mind” birthed atheism, self-will, idolatry, and unbelief that dragged people away from God.²⁰³ Wesley cautioned believers not to pursue occupations or expertise that may incline them to atheism: “I could not study to any degree of perfection either mathematics, arithmetic, or algebra without being a deist, if not an atheist. And yet others may study them all their lives without sustaining any inconvenience.”²⁰⁴

Some atheists by inference could fall into atheism unwittingly if their activities, proficiencies, occupation, or (lack of) education exploit their spiritual weaknesses. This imaginably prompts Wesleyan compassion for any inadvertent atheists who parallel “disorder[ed]” Christians that due to some proclivity lack salvific assurance.²⁰⁵

Moving on to how atheism might qualify as a religion or atheists as religious, E. Stanley Jones elicited skeptical or irreligious input in India for *Christ at the Roundtable*.²⁰⁶ One doctor from a Sikh heritage avowed: “Religion to me is to free humanity from suffering, and I do that by attending to patients. This is my religion.”²⁰⁷ Another

²⁰⁰ Sermon 120, “The Unity of Divine Being,” §§15, 20, *Works* 4:66, 69; cf. Sermon 130, “On Living without God,” §14, *Works* 4:175.

²⁰¹ Sermon 130, “On Living without God,” §6, *Works* 4:171.

²⁰² Sermon 130, “On Living without God,” §6, *Works* 4:171 quoting Hebrews 4:16.

²⁰³ Sermon 44, “Original Sin” §II:3, *Works* 2:177; Sermon 79, “On Dissipation” §7, *Works* 3:118-19; Sermon 130, “On Living without God,” esp. §§1, 6, 7, 8, cf. 14, *Works* 4:169-76.

²⁰⁴ Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” §III:6, *Works* 2:165; Sermon 50, “The Use of Money,” §I:2, *Works* 2:270.

²⁰⁵ Cf. K. Collins [2007: 134-36, 362-63] citing John Wesley in Telford [1931: 5:358-59]. Philosophers Evans and Manis [2009: 34] suggest that those who are less educated decline to tackle complicated technical arguments that only confuse or bewilder them; cf. Maddox [2009: 50-52] in section 3.8 and Lewis in section 1.2.2 counseling those who possess requisite demeanors and expertise to employ their gifts and knowledge in dialogues, debates, and discussions where they are most intellectually and spiritually equipped.

²⁰⁶ E. Jones [1928: title].

²⁰⁷ E. Jones [1928: 37].

participant adjoined: “I have dismissed God and religion from my life. So many things are done in the name of God and religion that are revolting to me that I have simply dismissed them. I am asking what is my duty to my country. If that is religious, I am religious, if it is not, then I am not.”²⁰⁸ Jones deduced: “In the case of this nationalist, there is often more faith in honest doubt than in a great deal of easy, meaningless believing.”²⁰⁹ Jones, the doctor, and the nationalist inquiring whether felt duties to his country might be “religious” illustrate how notoriously difficult “religion” is to delineate.

2.1.2 *Is Religion Definable?:*

As we explore attempts to define religion, it is important to recognize misgivings such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s challenging assumptions that “religion” is even a valid category for describing non-European beliefs, rituals, and values since the term originates in Europe and historically applies haphazardly to non-European cultures and contexts.²¹⁰ Rita Gross cautions that everyone has an intuitive sense of religion, but it is often plagued by ethnocentric assumptions that all religions are like religions in one’s own culture.²¹¹

Scholarly and popular definitions of religion proliferate across disciplines and traditions. Religion has been catalogued as the voice of deepest human experience, behaviors concerned with supernatural or spiritual beings and forces, longing for or encounter with the transcendent numinous, a feeling of absolute dependence, a taste for the infinite, and a person’s beliefs about her vital relations to the mysterious universe or his duty and destiny there.²¹² The Dalai Lama posed that all major religions dedicate to “permanent human happiness,” while Gandhi in the culturally and religiously diverse India believed that the number of “religions” matched the number of individuals.²¹³

Chesterton wrote and Paul Tillich echoed more famously that religion was a sense of “ultimate” reality, the meaning of one’s existence and the existence of anything else.²¹⁴ Heibert, Shaw, and Tienou anthropologically define religion as beliefs about the ultimate

²⁰⁸ E. Jones [1928: 23, cf. 33, 40].

²⁰⁹ E. Jones [1928: 23].

²¹⁰ W. Smith [1991]; cf. Cavanaugh [2009]; Strange [2014: 36-37].

²¹¹ Gross [1996: 8].

²¹² Cf. e.g. Arnold [1993: 61]; Carlyle [1897: 8-9]; Otto [1958: 8]; Schleiermacher [1999: *passim*]; Tylor [1903: 30]; Yinger [1967: 18].

²¹³ The Dalai Lama [2001: 12]; Gandhi [1997: 52].

²¹⁴ Chesterton [1931: 72]; cf. e.g. Moser [2011: 77]: “life defining;” Tillich [1967: *passim*].

nature of things, deep feelings and motivations, fundamental values, and allegiances.²¹⁵ “True religion” for John Wesley had to do with “holy tempers,” one’s character, intents, and desires: “All other religion whatever name it bears, whether Pagan, Mahometan, Jewish or Christian: and whether Popish or Protestant, Lutheran or Reformed; without these is lighter than Vanity.”²¹⁶ Patriarch Timothy I (c: 778-823) analogously answered Muslim Caliph Harun al-Rashid’s query about which religion was true in God’s eyes: “That religion of which the rules and precepts correspond with the works of God.”²¹⁷

2.1.3 *Is (New) Atheism Religion?*

Building on the above considerations, can atheism be approached productively as one would an expression of religious diversity, or New Atheists as (or like) religious people? Navigating and enlisting an array of atheists and scholars who flesh out multiple nuances, the examples and precedents presented in this chapter yield a qualified “yes.”

British Methodist Geoffrey Wainwright lauds missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin who saw religion as: “All those commitments that, in the intention of their adherents, have an overriding authority over all other commitments and provide the framework within which all experience is grasped and all ideas are judged.”²¹⁸ Newbigin and others have situated Marxism, humanism, and other forms of atheism as religions or quasi-religions that sometimes proffered substitute “gods” or concepts of God.²¹⁹

Bruce Ellis Benson submits that Continental thinkers from Jacques Derrida to Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, and Slavok Zizek adopt or adapt religious themes for or within their phenomenological and/or atheistic philosophies.²²⁰ Owen C. Thomas appeals to John Dewey, Ludwig Feuerbach, G. W. F. Hegel, Thomas Huxley, Immanuel Kant, Soren Kierkegaard’s “lifeview,” Wittgenstein’s “world-picture,” post-modernists,

²¹⁵ Heibert, Shaw, and Tienou [1999: 35].

²¹⁶ Sermon 91, “On Charity,” §III.12, *Works* 3:106; cf. Sermon 7, “The Way of the Kingdom,” *Works* 1:218–32; Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” *Works* 3:199–209; Sermon 120, “The Unity of the Divine Being,” *Works* 4:61–71; Sermon 125, “On a Single Eye,” *Works* 4:120–30; “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” §4, *Works* 11:46: “ever showing itself by its fruits.”

²¹⁷ Patriarch Timothy I in Vine [1937: 109–10].

²¹⁸ Newbigin [1995: 160]; Wainwright [2000b]; cf. Bailey [1998: 18]: “commitment, of any kind.”

²¹⁹ Cf. Newbigin [1995: 94–120, 160]; Miceli [1971]; Pinnock [1992: 120, 125]; J. E. Smith [1994: title].

²²⁰ Benson [2011: 421–32]; cf. Meister [2011: 5].

and atheist philosopher Michael Martin to classify varieties of atheism as competing worldviews or “faiths” with (other) religions.²²¹

Relevant to New Atheists’ Darwinian rhetoric, philosopher Mary Midgley sees some advocates promoting evolution with religious-like zeal.²²² Historian Richard Hofstadter in the mid-twentieth century noted *On the Origin of Species* readers who treated it “with the reverence usually reserved for Scripture,” as though its pages held “the final fruition of human virtue and... perfectibility.”²²³ Nicholas Lash in the twenty-first century labeled evolutionism a “new religion” and Dawkins its reigning high priest.²²⁴

Atheism as a religious position, orientation, or as a position oriented to religion is also implied by anthologies such as *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, which reserves for its final chapter “A Naturalistic Perspective” by atheist and occasional critic of New Atheists Michael Ruse.²²⁵ John Hedley Brooke and Ronald L. Numbers in *Science and Religion around the World* insert a chapter on “Unbelief” amid others on Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam; Chinese, Indic, and African religions.²²⁶ Ian Hammett edits *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief* suggesting that atheism and other “unbelief” informs and participates in a vital religious pluralism.²²⁷ William Lloyd Newell christens Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche *Secular Magi* whose philosophies potentially interact constructively with Christian theology.²²⁸

Ray Billington analyzes such non-theistic religions as Buddhism and Taoism as *Religion[s] Without God* and Emile Durkheim designates them “great religions” wherein “the idea of gods and spirits is absent, or at least, where they play only a secondary and minor role.”²²⁹ Stephen Bullivant enquires whether humanism, Marxism, and Leninism

²²¹ Thomas [2010: 195-210] also citing Haught [2008b].

²²² Midgley [2002: title]; *Evolution as a Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears*.

²²³ Hofstadter [1992: 16].

²²⁴ Lash [2007: 521].

²²⁵ Ruse [2011]; cf. e.g. Ruse in McGrath and McGrath [2007: front cover, 49-50, 103] on New Atheists; Ruse [2005: 266-88; cf. 2009: 215-41] on Creationism and evolutionism as or like two “rival religions.”

²²⁶ Brooke and Numbers [2011]; Lightman [2011: title] whose essay opens with a discussion of Dawkins and *The God Delusion*; cf. Wallace [2009: 79]: “anti-religious religion, which worships reason, skepticism, intellect, empirical proof, human autonomy, and self-determination.”

²²⁷ Hammett [1990: title].

²²⁸ Newell [1995: title].

²²⁹ Billington [2002: title]; Durkheim [1976: 30]; cf. Dworkin [2013: title].

are genuinely atheistic religions as Theravada Buddhism and Jainism are, and philosopher John Hick names Marxism, Maoism, and Humanism “the great non-religious faiths.”²³⁰

Ninian Smart juxtaposed Marxist-Leninism and secular humanism as “rival religions in certain respects,” with the former espousing holistic doctrines, ceremonies, and policies for facilitating a future heaven on earth.²³¹ Bullivant traces Soviets trying to supersede Orthodox Church rituals and calendars, with a January 6 Great Winter Festival with red stars atop trees, Grandfather Frost bringing children presents, Soviet ceremonies to replace christenings and marriages, Lenin’s post-mortem apotheosis redolent of an orthodox saint, pilgrimages to Lenin’s tomb inscribed “Saviour of the World,” songs that Lenin “did not die,” and preaching that Soviet science will one day resurrect Lenin.²³²

New Atheists diverge from the above by abjuring belief or feelings of dependence on non-physical “supernatural” forces, and for now lack finical Soviet suppositions that science will eventually resurrect the long dead. Nevertheless, New and other atheisms are sufficiently analogous with religions or ideas about what constitutes religion when they express atheism as a deeply held conviction, feeling, motivation, fundamental value, chief allegiance, organizing belief about reality, aim to maximize happiness, awe at the “infinite” universe, or virtue related to “transcendent” human / ecological relationships.²³³

Dawkins in section one related with many of these entitling himself “a deeply religious non-believer.”²³⁴ Atheism for Dawkins and other New Atheists also provides explicit content and motivation for exhorting and recruiting.²³⁵ Former Harvard and later Stanford Humanist Chaplain Jonathan Figdor credits Hitchens for persuading him that “atheism is important enough to fight for (I’d previously been an apatheist or apathetic atheist).”²³⁶ Figdor’s Harvard colleague Chris Stedman anecdotally confirms that many who are persuaded into atheism afterward become “deconversion missionaries.”²³⁷

²³⁰ Bullivant [2012: 28-29]; Hick [1980: 21].

²³¹ Smart [1996: ix].

²³² Bullivant [2012: 32].

²³³ On atheism increasing human happiness, awe, wonder, moral or ethical values and behavior, see e.g. Dawkins [1998]; S. Harris [2010]; and chapter 7 of this thesis. Prothero [2010: 326]: Atheism for some atheists is “the center of their lives, defining who they are, how they think, and with whom they associate.”

²³⁴ Dawkins [2006a: 31-50].

²³⁵ See again e.g. Dawkins [2006a: 28]; Dennett [2006a: 53]; and other examples from chapter 1.

²³⁶ Figdor [2011: online] also alluding to his writing a Harvard Master of Divinity thesis on Hitchens.

²³⁷ Stedman [2013: online]; cf. e.g. Boghossian [2013: title]: *A Manual for Creating Atheists*.

Even when atheists reject religious beliefs, rituals, practices, and the supernatural, some yearn to join in conversations about ultimate matters and partner in projects with other religious traditions. Paul Chaffee recounts atheist protesters at a post-9/11 interspiritual service who complained to the San Francisco Interfaith Council: “Why didn’t you invite us?...We’re the atheists! We’re the humanists. No one invited us.”²³⁸

Mimicking religious institutional patterns and operations, some atheists seek to invest atheism with religious legal, institutional, or social status.²³⁹ The British Humanist Association and United States Humanist Society accredit celebrants for baby naming and godparent liturgies, marriages, civil partnerships, funerals, and memorials.²⁴⁰ For Figdor, atheists, humanists, and agnostics suffer the same challenges as the overtly religious (death, illness, the meaning of life) “and would like a sympathetic nontheist to talk to.”²⁴¹ Vanessa Brake remembered her university years: “I could have benefited from a supervisor and group...who shared my worldview and would engage with my existential questions....They bring a sense of the sacred, of wonder and awe, to a secular context.”²⁴²

Stanford University atheist organizations at the time of this writing locate as “faith-based” groups in the Religious Life Office and Stanford Associated Religions.²⁴³ So too has the Harvard Humanist Chaplaincy positioned itself alongside or within Harvard University religious life, retaining offices at the Harvard Memorial Church. Humanist Chaplain Chris Stedman was the inaugural director for the Parliament of World Religions sponsored *State of Formation* blog from 2010-2011, and Stedman’s first book is *Faithiest: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious*.²⁴⁴

Greg Epstein, who oversees the Harvard Humanist Chaplaincy, is caustically hostile to religious beliefs and behaviors, praises New Atheists on many points, publishes *The New Humanism* website, and yet posts with Stedman to *Newsweek/Washington Post* “On Faith.”²⁴⁵ Epstein broadcasts “‘Nonreligious’ is the fastest growing ‘religious

²³⁸ Chaffee [2013: online].

²³⁹ Cf. e.g. D. Davis [2005]; Prothero [2010: 372] listing several legal cases.

²⁴⁰ Bullivant [2012: 33].

²⁴¹ Figdor in A. Jones [2012: online]; cf. Bayer and Figdor [2014: title]: *Atheist Mind, Humanist Heart*.

²⁴² Brake [2013: online].

²⁴³ Don [2013: online].

²⁴⁴ Stedman [2012: title; 2015]. The third *State of Formation* director E. Boyd [2015] is also a humanist.

²⁴⁵ “About the New Humanism” [2015; cf. Epstein [2009: xvi, xvii, 9-11, 18, 19, 31, 64, 139, 151, 158-59, 204, 244-48] referencing Dawkins, Dennett, S. Harris, and/or C. Hitchens, usually favorably.

preference' in the United States," but is ambivalent about Humanism being categorized as a religion: "Feel free to use whatever terminology you prefer—that's not important. We don't believe a god created perfect religions or sacred texts, so why would we believe he or she created one perfect sacred name that all doubters were required to adopt?"²⁴⁶

Epstein sees Humanism differing from religious systems that promulgate "divinities and the supernatural," but sociologically "similar to a religion in the way that it involves shared values with efforts to organize a community and is essentially a way of life."²⁴⁷ He recommends "*lifescance*," more than a philosophy, but not a divinely revealed religion, invoking screenwriter Joss Whedon's phraseology exalting human goodness and dignity without G/god: "Faith in humanity means believing absolutely in something with a huge amount of proof to the contrary. We are the true believers."²⁴⁸

Bullivant corroborates August Comte's "Religion of Humanity" as a humanist harbinger akin to Soviet efforts to establish atheism with religious forms. Comte recast humanity as "the Great Being" worthy of worship in the "only real and complete religion" where atheists occupy themselves with the same questions as theologians, envisioning atheist scriptures, dogmas, rituals, liturgies, nine sacraments, thrice-daily devotions, churches, saints, icons, missionaries, priests, Metropolitans, and Cathedrals; with Notre Dame transformed into "the great temple of the west."²⁴⁹

Gretta Vosper in contemporary North America improvises on Comtean themes. Vosper as pastor of Toronto Canada's West Hill United Church leads her formerly Christian congregation in "deconstructing the idea of a supernatural, interventionist god called god."²⁵⁰ Vosper's congregants now identify as humanists, non-theists, religious secularists, freethinkers, atheists, and "different faith families" who want to "explore life on a deeper level," and who probably otherwise "wouldn't be in church."²⁵¹

²⁴⁶ Epstein [2009: xi-xii].

²⁴⁷ Epstein [2009: xv].

²⁴⁸ Epstein [2009: xv, 242; cf. 124] quoting Whedon [2009].

²⁴⁹ Bullivant [2012: 31]: Comte's "defunct temples and chapels" linger in France, as does a "Positivist Church" in Brazil; Comte in Lubac [1995: 149, 165, 173-74]; cf. Jacoby [2013: esp. 160-211] on Ingersoll appropriating religious phraseology; Prothero [323-26] on the French Revolution's "Cult of Reason."

²⁵⁰ Vosper [2013: online].

²⁵¹ Vosper [2013: online]; cf. J. Rogers [2015] on Bart Campolo, a former United Methodist youth minister turned University of Southern California Humanist Chaplain, also the son of evangelical Tony Campolo.

Whereas Brake, Comte, Vesper, and Whedon represent humanists or atheists as truer or better believers, John Gray negatively characterizes “humanism” of this sort as: “A secular religion thrown together from the decaying scraps of Christianity,” “not an alternative to religious belief, but rather a degenerate and unwitting version of it.”²⁵² Onfray likewise petitions for a more *Atheistic atheism* liberated from Christianity or other religious values, and Sam Harris detaches religion from atheistic versions of Buddhism or Jainism yet apparently concurs with Hitchens that Stalinism and Maoism are religious phenomena by blaming their atrocities on religion.²⁵³ Harris and Hitchens exploit religion’s definitional ambiguities, which lead to the simultaneous postulates that China in the 1970s had no religion and that Maoism *was* Chinese religion in this period.²⁵⁴

Many humanist or atheist rituals, practices, and celebrations have heretofore been typically associated with religion. This does not mean that humanism or atheism *must* be categorized or addressed as a religion, but neither does defining oneself in opposition to religion mean that one does not partake in something implicitly or explicitly like it.²⁵⁵ In the final analysis, treating atheists as potential or actual participants in religious diversity (or related phenomena), and atheism in its historic and ongoing exemplifications as possessing important commonalities with religion, has ample precedence in both public and academic discourse, as well as associatively in some Wesleyan conversation touching on non-Christian religions. The comparative religions scholar Stephen Prothero, who sometimes responds to New Atheists, recaps atheism as like a religion by functioning for some atheists as “the center of their lives, defining who they are, how they think, and with whom they associate.”²⁵⁶ Many atheists—like devotees or affiliates of the world’s religions—proselytize for atheism, have ethical codes, creeds, “cultus” such as the Secular Seasons calendar, and community organizations.²⁵⁷ Approximating Ninian Smart’s seven dimensions of religion, atheism can inspire, undergird, underline, or orient (and atheists can craft, cultivate, or enjoin) beliefs, narratives, or stories about ultimate reality; along

²⁵² Gray [2003: 31; 2004: 48].

²⁵³ Per Bullivant [2012: 29, 40-41]; cf. S. Harris [2005: 78-79; 231; 2006: 41]; C. Hitchens [2007b: 229-52]; Onfray [2007: 57-58, 215].

²⁵⁴ Clarke and Byrne [1993: 5].

²⁵⁵ Bullivant [2012: 34] italics added. Barth [1971: 31] predicated Christianity as e.g. “happy reversal and elimination of all religion,” yet twenty-first century conventions still designate Christianity as a religion!

²⁵⁶ Prothero [2010: 326].

²⁵⁷ Prothero [2010: 324-25].

with moral, legal, or ethical values and principles; personal and communal experiences, rituals, practices, and activism; “material” architecture, sculpture, other arts or media; creative initiatives in the humanities, philosophy, politics, institutional life, and so forth.²⁵⁸

Atheism as expressive of religious diversity could then be tentatively approached as the avouchment, conviction, or position with regard to religion that there is no G/god. We later inquire whether Wesley’s “true religion” applies to New Atheists in any way, and how Wesleyan and related literature supplies constructive perspicuities for interaction. To recapitulate the section above, New and other atheism is analogous to, or capable of functioning as or like a religious position when it constitutes a conviction about ultimate matters, an overriding framework or commitment for understanding reality, a presumption that informs or undergirds one’s life in the pursuit of optimal happiness or meaning, and/or a defining factor for a person or people’s individual or communal experience. For the purposes of the present endeavor, we will intentionally evaluate issues and practices associated with religious diversity for their applicability to New Atheists and atheism on crucial questions surrounding truth, salvation, and cooperative or dialogical relationships.

2.2 Three Distinct, Yet Mutually Influencing Inter-religious Concerns:

At least three intersecting sets of issues are applicable to approaching atheism as an expression of religious diversity. The first regards Christian-atheist personal, social, and other levels of relationship as religious ‘others,’ outsiders, or what Paul Griffiths crowns “religious aliens.”²⁵⁹ The second concerns questions about truth.²⁶⁰ A third involves *telos*, salvation, optimum flourishing, or enduring joy. If the New Heavens and New Earth, Nirvana, Utopia, *Qur’anic* Paradise, the Happy Hunting Ground, the Pure Land, or some variant exists or will exist (cf. e.g. John 14:1-3; Surah 9:72-73), will proportionally few, many, or every creature participate; and what role if any do religion, religious identity, or atheism play to enable or disqualify participation?

²⁵⁸ Smart [1998: 11-29] lists ritual, narrative / mythic, doctrinal / philosophical, ethical / legal, experiential, institutional / social, and material dimensions; cf. Cavanaugh [2009: *passim*] for an extended critique of both “functionalist” approaches (based on what “functions” as a religion) and “substantivist” confines of “religion” to named religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, while dichotomizing “secular” concerns or ideologies.

²⁵⁹ Griffiths [2001b: esp. 99-137; cf. 2011].

²⁶⁰ Griffiths [2001b: 17, 21, 48].

Assertions regarding truth and salvation do not automatically correlate. One could perceive other religions or religion *per se* as fatally flawed but hope or expect that every person will enjoy eternal happiness through God’s love, mercy, and Jesus’s atoning death on the cross.²⁶¹ Or, one might appreciate extra-Christian insights into truth but lament that people who are not explicitly Christian are without salvific hope until they believe in their heart that Jesus is Lord.²⁶² The Dalai Lama or Gandhi can declare that Buddhism or Hinduism insinuates the *best* account of reality or the most efficient path to enlightenment, yet anticipate that atheists, Jews, Christians, and Muslims will eventually achieve Nirvana despite their metaphysical errors, if taking more lifetimes to do so.²⁶³ Muslims might proclaim Islam is the truest or only authentic *din* د ن ة (religion) yet expect that Allah will reward some Jews and Christians with paradise, but bar some Muslims from entering.²⁶⁴

Neither do more or less “exclusive” perceptions of truth or salvation inescapably dictate negative personal, social, or political interactions. New Atheist first responder David Marshall rightly notes that scholarly and popular literature regularly conflate favorable opinions about religions or their teachings with positive dispositions toward their followers.²⁶⁵ This collapses approaches to relationships, truth, and soteriology into a binary where religious people and convictions fall into two non-overlapping categories: 1) The broad-minded, humble, sophisticated, liberal, peaceful, inclusive promoters of all religions as equivalently beautiful, valid, or benign at their best; and 2) the narrow-minded, ignorant, arrogant, literalist, conservative, militant, exclusive haters who will not countenance legitimacy to others’ opinions, cultures, or experiences.²⁶⁶ Such literature recollects New Atheist anecdotes about religious people behaving badly as evidence against religious postulations being true, and generalizes from historic or recent horrors associated with religious zealotry to any perception that one religion is true or salvific.

²⁶¹ Cf. e.g. Barth [2004: 280-361]; Griffiths [2001b: 151-54]; Karkkainen [2003: 174-80].

²⁶² Cf. Corduan [2002: e.g. 141-70].

²⁶³ Cf. e.g. The Dalai Lama [2001: 26-31]; Gandhi in Eastman [1999: 65-74].

²⁶⁴ Even the Muslim prophet Muhammad yearned for salvific assurance according to *Sahih al-Bukhari* in Khan [2015: 5:58:266, 8:75:377]. For the *Qur’an* on some Jews and Christians in paradise, cf. Surah 2:62, 2:111-12, 2:177, 2:253, 2:281, 3:113-14, 6:34, 10:94, 19:51, 22:42, 29:46, 42:15; Khalil [2012; 2013].

²⁶⁵ D. Marshall [2012: 382]; cf. Netland [2008] separating *logical* or *theological* from *social* exclusivism.

²⁶⁶ As in cf. J. Collins [2003: esp. 20-21]; Fisher [2008: 11, 503-10, 529]; Kimball [2008: 49-80, 218-21]; P. Valley [2002: 218-19]. McKim [2012: 23] on Plantinga [2000]: Exclusivism is “mightily abused and called almost every name in town: irrational, egotistical, unjustified, intellectually arrogant, elitist.”

Nazarene Wesleyans Al Truesdale and Keri Mitchell chronicle comparable attitudes in confessional circles, citing reactions at a Christian minister's conference after Truesdale divulged his belief that Jesus was "the universal [that is the only for all] Redeemer." Another minister replied: "How could you possibly be so narrow and uninformed as to believe Jesus is the only Savior....He is just one among many." Others dismissed Truesdale as "unschooled," lacking "cross-cultural awareness," "ignorant of other religions," and "oppressive toward others."²⁶⁷ Truesdale likened his experience to a group of worshippers visiting New York's Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine who were surprised by a Shinto altar in the sanctuary. The bishop of New York waved off the objectors as "narrow-minded people who couldn't appreciate the many paths to God."²⁶⁸

William Scott Green's Zogby International / University of Rochester data contests the supposed dissonances in believing: 1) that one knows the best or only route to flourishing now or eternally, and 2) (e.g.) equality with people in other religions. Exclusivist and superiority sentiments converged in some instances, but not others. 79% of Saudi Arabian Muslims believed that their religion offered the one true path to God and 71% answered "no" to whether people of other religions were their equals. However, 41% of United States "Born-again Protestants" declared: "My religion offers the one true path to God and success in the next life," yet 90% agreed that people in other religions were their equals. 24% of less exclusivist Russian Orthodox said: "My religion offers the one true path to God and success in the next life," but 18% answered "no" to equality.²⁶⁹

Contra Gandhian presuppositions about Indic diversity, Indian Hindus were split about evenly on "exclusivism," but only 79% affirmed non-Hindus as equals.²⁷⁰ Green's data reveals former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's diagnosis of India as "the least tolerant nation in social forms while the most tolerant in the realm of ideas" is inadequate to Indian outlooks, yet unlike sources that unify these descriptors, Nehru presciently detaches social, relational, and political praxis from doctrinal or ideological approval.²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 66].

²⁶⁸ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 67, 226] quoting: "Rev. I. H. Belser in a sermon delivered on July 13, 2003. Belser is the rector of St. Michael's Church, Charleston, South Carolina."

²⁶⁹ W. Green [2008: 3-14]. Portions of this section published in DeVan [2011L; 2012q].

²⁷⁰ W. Green [2008: 4-7].

²⁷¹ Nehru in Fellman [1998: 183].

Foiling negative stereotypes, it is quite possible that believers who are “exclusive” toward others’ religious doctrines might respect the same people as (e.g.) made in God’s image precisely because their “exclusive” beliefs push them to do so.²⁷² “Conservative” Christians may champion religious freedom, charity, love, and service; while supposed social progressives sometimes act viciously toward their opponents.²⁷³ Muslims could humbly and exclusively uphold that Muhammad is God’s final Prophet, while claimants to open minds might arrogantly contend that all religions are equally true, beautiful, or good.

To salvos that exclusivists are unschooled or unacquainted with other religions, some studies suggest that contact, awareness, or education about alternate religions or doctrines may or may not increase, stabilize, or reduce confidence that only one tradition is tru(est), right, or conveys ultimate truths facilitating salvation.²⁷⁴ For Evans and Manis, a believer who is convinced that her faith is true—without forsaking her convictions—can confess fallibility, hear others, and desire with integrity that others know the truth.²⁷⁵

Along the same lines, allegorical, symbolic, or poetic scripture readers, and not only literalists, have instigated violence or repression of religious others. For example, the Muwahhids or Almohads in medieval Morocco and Spain aggressed against the literalist Murabits or Almoravids.²⁷⁶ John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed reprove “conventional wisdom” that fanaticism, poverty, or unemployment drove the 9/11 hijackers to terrorism, since modern militants recurrently hail from the educated, urban, wealthy elite:

[They are] not from the poor, downtrodden, undereducated and alienated sectors of society, but...like their al-Qaeda leaders Osama bin Laden and Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri were well educated, middle to upper class...stable family backgrounds...graduates of private or public schools and universities...professionals...more educated than moderates [67% radicals vs. 52% moderates had secondary or higher education]...say they have average or above-average income [65% versus 55%]...[are] more satisfied with...standard[s] of living, and quality of life, and more optimistic about their personal future...No significant difference exists between radicals and moderates in mosque attendance.²⁷⁷

²⁷² Cf. Griffiths [2001b: 100].

²⁷³ Cf. e.g. Brooks [2006]; Cratty [2013]; J. Richardson [2009: 204-09]; see also Yancey [2011; esp. 2015] on “liberal Christian” acute hostility to “conservative” fellow Christians; Yancey and Williamson [2015].

²⁷⁴ See discussion in e.g. Brown and Brown [2011: 333-38] an article hostile to Evangelicals; Griffiths [2001b: 66-98] in a chapter titled “Religious Diversity and Epistemic Confidence;” McKim [2012: 9].

²⁷⁵ Evans and Manis [2009: 216]; cf. Trinitapoli [2007: esp. 475].

²⁷⁶ E.g. Furnish [2005: esp. 31-38, 64-65] documents multiple militant Sufi and/or Mahdist movements in Islam. On less educated rural Amish repudiating militancy cf. Kraybill, Nolt, and Weaver-Zercher [2007].

²⁷⁷ Esposito and Mogahed [2007: 65-72 chapter title]: “What Makes a Radical?;” cf. DeVan [2012h].

Cognizant of such complexities, Mohammad Khalil astutely detects negative and positive repercussions potentially arising from either Universalism or Exclusivism. The former might result in “recklessness on the assumption that all will be made well,” or spur esteem for the latent goodness in every individual.²⁷⁸ Exclusivists could be inspired by love to persuade others, or because of their exclusivism look down on others as “the damned—and treat them as such.”²⁷⁹ *Ad consequentiam*, elite, educated, non-exclusivist, non-literalists are not inevitably tolerant, peaceful, or generous in relating to religious others; nor do exclusivists on truth or salvation robotically oppress others as inferiors.

As a result, we must be careful about impugning or equating “exclusive” convictions about truth or salvation with destructive inter-religious relationships, or upholding that universal salvation or all “religions” are roughly equal or true leads to concord. Belief that a given doctrine or religion is true and merits belief or allegiance, and claims that all, many, or proportionally few will receive salvation remain distinguishable factors, though not utterly inapt, to healthy interactions among religiously diverse people.²⁸⁰ We will keep this in mind when we are determining the most rewarding approach to religious diversity, and to New Atheists as instantiations of it. Critiquing problems, liabilities, and incoherencies in competing approaches, we strive for a fair and consistent spirit that appreciates their acuties and strengths. Section 2.3 begins to evaluate philosophical and theological models toward truth and salvation in religious diversity, surveying the ubiquitous Exclusivist-Inclusivist-Pluralist continuum, its proposed alternatives, and some initial implications that succeeding chapters elaborate.

2.3 The Exclusivist-Inclusivist-Pluralist Continuum and Its Variants

United Methodist Diana Eck who directs the Harvard Pluralism Project writes that Exclusivist-Inclusivist-Pluralist “ways of thinking about the problem of religious diversity and difference are not simply Christian...[They are] recognizable in the thinking of people of other religious traditions and in the thinking of nonreligious people.”²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ Khalil [2012: 25].

²⁷⁹ Khalil [2012: 25].

²⁸⁰ Cf. e.g. Jabbour [2008: 83]; Volf [2011: 219-38, 260-62]. See DeVan [2011g] reviewing Jabbour.

²⁸¹ Eck [2003: 170].

For Christians and other religious believers interacting with New Atheists, the Exclusivist-Inclusivist-Pluralist spectrum and its variants supply nomenclatures to address issues of truth and salvation. David Marshall tracks one twentieth century genealogy: Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in the 1930s adapting the political “right, centre, and left;” Paul Tillich later marking Karl Barth as “exclusivist,” counterpointing pluralism and dialectical inclusivism; then Alan Race subdividing exclusivist from inclusivist and pluralist.²⁸² The burgeoning continuum loci, their precisions and nuances, dictate judiciously evaluating the available technical vocabulary to best distinguish the feasibilities of each position.

2.3.1 *Exclusivism, Restrictivism, Ecclesiocentrism, and Particularism:*

Christian Exclusivists or Restrictivists (alternately Ecclesiocentrists or Particularlists per discussion below) with fluctuating epistemological confidence usually purvey that God reveals divine, ultimate, or saving truths only in Christianity or to the One True Church, and before Jesus to God’s Covenant People.²⁸³ Griffiths sketches what this would look like in Buddhist style: “All non-Buddhists (and so all faithful religious people who are not Buddhist) are damned to eternal rebirth and redeath in the agonizing cycles of Samsara.”²⁸⁴ *Possibilist* Christian Restrictivists postulate that it is ‘possible’ that no non-Christian will be saved, while *Actualist* Restrictivists are certain none will.²⁸⁵

Restrictivism about truth can and often does coalesce with Restrictivism on salvation, but Griffiths reiterates that the first concerns “whether the religious alien may be thought of as teaching anything true,” and the second, “who gets saved and how.”²⁸⁶ The second is separable into the *means* of salvation (how) from *who* is saved. As with sports, how to play baseball skillfully is distinct from who gets to play the game.²⁸⁷

²⁸² D. Marshall [2012: 2-3]; Race [1983]; Radhakrishnan, [1959: 347]; Tillich [1990].

²⁸³ Sanders [1992: vii] claims to coin “Restrictivism;” cf. e.g. Pinnock [1992: 14-15]. Karkkainen [2003: 165-355]; Tiessen [2004: *passim*]; “Ecclesiocentrism.” Okholm and Phillips [1995-1996: *passim*]; “Particularist,” citing for precedence e.g. Tillich [1963: 35, 44]. Crouch [2008: 149] claims that from Babel until Pentecost: “God’s work...[was] contained within the story of just one cultural group.” Van Engen [1991: 187, 191] sees the New Testament proclaiming “cultural-universalism” but “faith-particularism.”

²⁸⁴ Griffiths [2001b: 151, cf. 163]; Griffiths [1991: 5]: “normatively exclusivist readings;” cf. Eck [2003: 174] on the “thirteenth century...[Japanese] Buddhist teacher Nichiren” as a “Lotus Sutra” exclusivist.

²⁸⁵ Griffiths [2001b: 162] here uses “Exclusivism” rather than “Restrictivism.”

²⁸⁶ Griffiths [2001b: 52, cf. 165-68] applies Restrictivism more broadly to any non-Universalist soteriology.

²⁸⁷ Griffiths [2001b: 140]; cf. McKim [2012: *passim*] distinguishing means of salvation from who is saved.

Hans Kung calls “traditional” the view: “Only one single religion is true. Or, all other religions are untrue.”²⁸⁸ Restrictivism of truth posits that one religion is uniquely privileged. Yet denying that truths of any sort exist in other religions is tenable only in theory due to overlapping truth claims as Christianity obviously has with Judaism, or with New Atheists on (e.g.) absolute truth versus relativism.²⁸⁹ Paul K. Moser poses *logical religious exclusivism* is unavoidable, however, wherever some views preclude others.²⁹⁰

To this end, Griffiths logically disentangles “contrariety” and “noncompossibility” from “contradictoriness.” Contraries cannot both or all be true, yet one or all might be false. “Gautama Sakyamuni is supreme among humans,” and “Jesus of Nazareth is supreme among humans,” and “Thomas Jefferson is supreme among humans,” cannot all be true if each intends the same regarding “is supreme among humans.”²⁹¹ All could also be wrong about who, if anyone, is supreme among humans. Contraries can divide core competing essentials or ancillary, trivial, optional, or disputable teachings in religions.²⁹²

“Exact” contradictories or contradictoriness are also logically irreconcilable, e.g. “Muhammad is God’s prophet” and “Muhammad is *not* God’s prophet.”²⁹³ Griffiths believes Exact contradictories are rarer than “Approximate contradictories,” which attempt to establish or give the *appearance* of contradiction, whether one was formulated to refute others, or contradictories evolved independently. New Atheists and Christians may disagree about which contradictories are Exact, Approximate, or contradictories at all. For example, are faith and reason, religion and science, Genesis and Darwin antagonistic, mutually exclusive, compatible, or complementary, and by what criteria and intensity?

Approximate contradictories potentially reconcile. Griffiths alludes to Surah 112:1-4, for instance, that God neither begets nor is begotten *يُولَدُ وَلَمْ يَلِدْ لَمْ*.²⁹⁴ Surah 112:1-4 can (though not inevitably) be reconciled with orthodox Christianity. If the *Qur’an* rejects that Jesus was a divine-human hybrid who was conceived in the manner of a Perseus through a divine-human sexual act, orthodox Christianity also repudiates this by

²⁸⁸ Kung [2001: 122-23]; cf. Hick [1980: 29-31]; Knitter [1985: 74-113]: “conservative evangelical model.”

²⁸⁹ Griffiths [2001b: 53-56]; D. Marshall [2012: 361, 370]; McKim [2012: 14-34]; Netland [2001: 327-28]. E.g. S. Harris [2010: 2, 4, 7-8, 15-22, 27-55, 72-73, 77, 189-91] on truth / objective morality vs. relativism.

²⁹⁰ Moser [2011: 78].

²⁹¹ Cf. Griffiths [2001b: 34]; C. Hitchens [2005]; Hitchens and Wilson [2008: 37, 40, 45].

²⁹² Griffiths [2001b: 22-36].

²⁹³ Griffiths [2001b: 32-33].

²⁹⁴ Griffiths [2001b: 33].

differentiating referrals to God “the Son” and “the Father” Θεου Υἱός as representative appellations for Jesus’s unique role and relationship within the Trinity. Muslims might object from other directions, but this case is only an Approximate contradictory if both voices disallow that Jesus was “begotten” through a divine-human sexual act.²⁹⁵ In the same way, there may be occasions where New Atheist points of contention with Christian or other religious believers are not necessarily irreconcilable as they first appear.

On the other hand, noncompossibility involves two or more mutually incompatible actions such as giving all of one’s surplus resources to Christ’s church versus giving all to the Buddhist Sangha or the British Humanist Society; or reading the Bible or the *Qur’an* or *On the Origin of Species* as the world’s most important book.²⁹⁶ In ethics, practices, or touted religious obligations, noncompossibilities unlike Approximate contradictories fundamentally conflict in that they cannot be concurrently performed personally or corporately at the same time in the same way. Even though New Atheists, Christians, and other religious practitioners will evidence noncompossibilities in sundry ways, Joseph Runzo reminds those who hold contradictory or noncompossible beliefs and practices that they may still unite around commonalities such as aiding the destitute or preventing genocide even if they disagree whether God, dharma, social or self-cultivation are the primary or sole reasons to do so.²⁹⁷ Chapter 6 examines such prospects for collaboration.

At this juncture, we concede a semantic vulnerability in Exclusivist or Restrictivist vocabulary. Every position is logically “exclusive” or “restrictive” in negating others that are incompatible, as Griffiths details. Still, one can identify degrees of commensurability, openness, plasticity, precision, scope, and restrictive or exclusive functions applying to religious diversity issues such as “who can be saved” (e.g. Matthew 19:25-30).

Christian Restrictivists on salvation vary as to whether all mentally disabled people or children who die young automatically receive eternal life, but usually agree that responsible adults, however defined, must explicitly believe in Jesus before they die.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ See DeVan [2011j] reviewing one effort to resolve Christian-Muslim Approximate Contradictories.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Griffiths [2001b: 34]; Hofstadter [1992: 16].

²⁹⁷ Runzo [2011: 74].

²⁹⁸ Cf. e.g. The Council of Florence (1438-1445) in Denzinger [1957: 714]; D’Costa [2009: 26-33]; Griffiths [2001b: 150-68]; Moser [2011: 82]; Morgan and Peterson [2008: esp. 54, 222, 227, 229]. Erickson [1991: 24]: “irrevocably fixed at death;” [1996: 33-64] on Catholic vs. Protestant exclusivisms; Strange [2008: 54]. Tennent [2010: 221] wants to re-christen this or comparable positions as “revelatory particularism.”

William Annan is one Calvinist optimist on infant salvation, and Inclusivist Wesleyan Jerry L. Walls hypothesizes that God enables post-mortem infants to receive or reject the Gospel, preserving universal free opportunity for responding to God's salvific grace.²⁹⁹

Methodist Timothy Tennent identifies as an "engaged exclusivist" (Restrictivist) interested in inter-religious dialogue for diplomacy, clarification, contextualization, and evangelism which comprehends other religions' deepest aspirations as fulfilled in Christianity or *preparatorio evangelica*, but stops short of asserting that any non-Christian adult after Jesus's incarnation may be saved.³⁰⁰ Restrictivists may restrict salvation or truth's scope to one religion, or concentrate more assiduously to a sect, denomination, or subgroup per the fictional Parson Thwackum in *Tom Jones*: "When I mention [true] religion, I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England."³⁰¹

This will lead to real-life ironies if a selected religion officially or largely envisions truth or salvation more expansively, as in the Boston heresy case where Yves Congar in a Wesleyan-evocative title *The Wide World My Parish* limericizes Father Leonard Feeney's excommunication for activist Restrictivism: "Thus a man who held, against the Church, that all those who are in fact outside the Church are debarred from salvation, finished up by being himself excluded from the Church by doing so: an odd situation!"³⁰²

Griffiths parses Restrictivists comprehending adherence to the One True Religion as both necessary and sufficient, or as necessary but not sufficient, so that membership or belonging to the One True Faith, per the examples above from Islam, is no guarantee.³⁰³ Islam to Christianity converts Ergun and Emir Caner at first blush avow the second: "Not only do we believe that 'good Muslims' go to hell, we believe 'good Baptists' go to hell... [and] we belong to the Christian theological tradition that goes by that name."³⁰⁴

Probing Evangelicals like the Caners often uncovers the saved and the damned demarcated not by denomination, but by another criterion: namely whether persons in the

²⁹⁹ Annan [1860: esp. 18, 40, 45, 57-65, 253-55]; Walls [2002: 63-91]; cf. Leckie [1922: 91-101]; Sanders [1992: 292] for Aquinas on infants; "Letter to Ann Bolton" (15 December 1786) in Telford [1931: 7:358].

³⁰⁰ Tennent [2002: 249]; cf. sections 2.2 and 2.3.3 whereby Tennent could be classified as a Closed or Open Inclusivist with regard to truth while remaining a Restrictivist or "engaged exclusivist" on salvation.

³⁰¹ Fielding [1998: 98]. See e.g. Fadel [2013] for Restrictivism in Islam.

³⁰² Congar [1961: 102].

³⁰³ Griffiths [2001b: 142].

³⁰⁴ Caner and Caner [2003: 193].

Christian era have repented of their sins and received Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This salvific scope is trans-denominational but restricts to Christianity without necessarily incorporating every self-identified Christian. It recasts a particular evangelical belief and confession in Jesus as necessary and sufficient for salvation, irrespective of earthly ecclesial contexts, where God alone knows who is a true believer in the One True Church and extricates the spiritual wheat that is presently entwined with weeds or tares.³⁰⁵

Christopher W. Morgan conceives three intra-Christian Restrictivisms or Exclusivisms as oriented to: 1) the “Church” (whether visible or invisible), 2) “Gospel exclusivism” where one must hear the Gospel before death to be saved, and 3) “Special revelation exclusivism” encompassing the Gospel as revealed through divinely inspired Scripture or other “special” means such as dreams, miracles, visions, or angels.³⁰⁶

Moser suggests three supplementary nuances. “Programmatic redemptive exclusivism” sustains that some programs for redemption instrumentally exclude others.³⁰⁷ For example, *Sola fide / sola gratia* gainsays performing rote rituals or laws to attain salvation. “Hypothetical personal exclusivism” avers that if certain religions or their teachings are explicitly or inferentially true, some people will not receive salvation. “Actual personal exclusivism” states more strongly that the correct religion explicitly or implicitly teaches that some are excluded from salvation.³⁰⁸ Moser discriminates here “predestinarian” from “doxastic” Actual Personal Exclusivisms, parallel to Gavin D’Costa’s taxonomy for five-point Calvinists and other “Restrictive-access exclusivists” who posit that God elects some to damnation in contrast with Arminian “Universal-access exclusivists” who hold that God saves whosoever believes in Jesus before they die.³⁰⁹

Since so-called Universalist and other positions also “exclude” discordant stances, “Restrictivism” is perhaps slightly less equivocal for designating the above salvific trajectories than “Exclusivism,” though it may be impossible to identify a category that is completely free from ambiguity.³¹⁰ A third option, “Ecclesiocentrism,” evokes Christian

³⁰⁵ Caner and Caner [2003: esp. 214]; imagery in Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 3:14, 20:20-26.

³⁰⁶ Morgan [2008: 17-39]; cf. Bretherton [1996: 75-77] interacts with notions of church tradition as special revelation. C. Hodge [1952: 2:646] suggests direct exposure to God’s written word is needed for salvation.

³⁰⁷ Moser [2011: 80].

³⁰⁸ Moser [2011: 80].

³⁰⁹ Cf. D’Costa [2009: esp. 7, 22-33]; Moser [2011: 82-84].

³¹⁰ Per section 2.2; cf. D’Costa [2009: 1-54].

institutional structures or *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* redolent of Morgan's Church exclusivism, but "ecclesiocentrism" is insufficient to replace or denote other varieties of Restrictivism or Exclusivism. Ecclesiocentrism could also refer to the Church mediating salvation without formal membership in the Church *ipso facto* determining salvation.³¹¹

"Particularism" too could refer to God's particular revelation to Israel or through Jesus without restricting salvation to Christians and ancient Israelites, or consigning other religions to utter error or distortion.³¹² Per Anglican Sri Lankan Vinoth Ramachandra: "The claim that God has revealed his truth in historical events does not entail... without further premises, that those who lack this revelation are excluded from the benefits of that revelation."³¹³ Averring that ultimate truth is somehow "exclusive" or salvation is "restricted" to one religion or tradition is less subject to this confusion, and we retain the language in a provisional Wesleyan spirit until better terminology surfaces.³¹⁴ Since hypothetical or Possibilist Restrictivism is more theoretical and overlaps with Possibilist or hypothetical Inclusivism (while diverging over emphases and reference points), we will appraise straightforward Actualist Restrictivism for Christian-New Atheist interaction.

Restrictivists are first quite capable of interacting with New Atheists in many of the fruitful ways that chapter 6 establishes via Inclusivist, Wesleyan, and other resources. Christian Restrictivists with Inclusivists can uphold New Atheists as *Imago Dei*, persons who possess sacred worth. Restrictivists can support New Atheist religious liberty, collaborate in shared concerns, dialogue in the public square, proclaim the Gospel, and better articulate their theology by listening to, challenging, and answering New Atheists.

The more inclusive approach that this dissertation advances nevertheless evades or subverts regrettable dispositions that Restrictivism may aggravate. These include, first, a lesser willingness to entertain any legitimacy in New Atheist contentions or gripes about Christianity, or anything else New Atheists aver. If Christianity is the One True Faith, how can Christians hope to learn anything valuable from New Atheist falsehoods? Any criticisms of Christianity can then be dismissed as sophistry or the product of unbelief.³¹⁵

³¹¹ See Bullivant [2012: 45-50, 66, 74, 78, 132, 13, 143, 175]; Morgan [2008: 17-39].

³¹² Thus Heim [1985: 125-27] specifies an "imperial particularity" like unto Exclusivism or Restrictivism.

³¹³ Ramachandra [1996: 130].

³¹⁴ Cf. Hick [1995: 50] near the opposing end of the continuum advising those disapproving of one or more of his theories: "Critics who don't like it should occupy themselves in trying to produce a better one."

³¹⁵ Cf. Evans and Manis [2009: 24] in context referring to Fideism rather than Restrictivism per se.

A corollary assumes that New Atheists speak and act from “bad faith” rendering empathy difficult, *ad hominem* invective attractive, and a propensity to attribute evil, immoral, or ulterior motives to New Atheists in every encounter.³¹⁶ Such assumptions could tempt Restrictivists to approach their New Atheist neighbors less than lovingly.

A third possibility that Khalil foresaw is looking down on New Atheists as the damned and treating them as such.³¹⁷ Restrictivists might mitigate this partly by hoping that New Atheists will convert, but Froese, Bader, and Smith in a Baylor University study document that Americans reporting belief in biblical literalism and “a wrathful God” (easily but not ineluctably linking to Restrictivism) correlate more with vocalized desires to impede atheists from public speaking, college teaching, and placing or housing atheist books in libraries.³¹⁸ These examples tread close to, if not outrightly endorsing inequities that deprive New Atheists of civil liberties. A Wesleyan approach guards against such pitfalls as referenced and developed in chapter 6.

Although Restrictivists ready to adjudge convinced atheists’ eternal destinies may display less charitable behavior per Ann Coulter’s irate, if satirical, gauntlet: “I defy any of my co-religionists to tell me they do not laugh at the idea of Dawkins burning in hell,” none of this proves that Restrictivists must reflexively, inevitably, or probably interact with New Atheists spitefully.³¹⁹ Still, it is intuitively harder to reckon Inclusivist, yet alone Universalist postures toward New Atheists inspiring Coulter’s hellacious, half-serious jocularly, since their presumptions naturally tone down such nastiness. We will critique Exclusivism or Restrictivism further throughout, but section 2.3.2 first inspects their polar opposites as we zero in on an Inclusivist Wesleyan *via media*.

2.3.2 Pluralism, Universalism, Relativism, and Religious Antipathy:

At the opposite pole from Restrictivism, soteriological or normative religious Pluralism (alternately Realitycentrism, cf. Theocentrism, religious indifferentism, and latitudinarianism) affirms that all religions, or at least the major ones, are equally valid

³¹⁶ See Ryan [2014: *passim*] documenting examples of this among several responders to New Atheists.

³¹⁷ See again Khalil [2012: 25]; cf. McKim [2012: 10-34, 52-71].

³¹⁸ Froese, Bader, and Smith [2008].

³¹⁹ Coulter [2006: 268]; cf. Schmidt [1991: 100] and Vermes [1973: 46] on angry ancient Essenes.

sources for ultimate truth and well-trod paths to Ultimate Reality.³²⁰ Methodist affiliates Diana Eck, Huston Smith, and Marjorie Suchocki insinuate or propagate species of this Pluralism, demonstrating that Inclusivism and Restrictivism are not the only perceived options for thinkers who self-reference with the Wesleyan tradition.³²¹

Soteriological Pluralism differentiates from sociological, sociocultural, or descriptive pluralism where representatives of multiple faiths co-exist contiguously, and is akin but not identical to historic Christian Universalism, Restorationism (*apokatastasis*), or universal salvation through God's grace and Jesus's atoning work.³²² In Universalist Restorationism, Jesus is *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life, but soteriological Pluralism is more likely to relegate Jesus to *a* way, *a* truth, or *a* path to God or the Real, no better nor worse than other ways or paths. Jesus for the first is *the* means or mediator of salvation, and for the second is only one of many. Griffiths interjects that select Pluralists "may certainly think that belonging to some religion or other" is indispensable for salvation, thereby circumventing total Universalism if anyone is properly non- or irreligious.³²³

Griffiths sequesters agnostic Possibilist Universalism (it is possible that all will be saved) from Actualist Universalism (all will be saved).³²⁴ Possibilist Restrictivism and Possibilist Universalism logically overlap but hold to opposing soteriological optimisms and points of reference. D'Costa parses Unitary Pluralism classifying all religions as valid paths to one divine reality, Ethical Pluralism casting religions as equal or equally divine ethical systems, and Pluriform Pluralism attributed to Raimundo Panikkar (popularized by

³²⁰ D'Costa [2009: 128, cf. 129-34, 143] on religious indifferentism; Griffiths [2001b: 146]; Hick [1989: 29-35, 307-08] on major world religions versus any conceivable religion; Karkkainen [2003: 160-73] on Theocentrism and Realitycentrism; B. Williams [1996]: "liberal pluralism" pretending to impartiality, neutrality, and objectivity; Yandell [2013: 163-79]: "Normative Religious Pluralism."

³²¹ Cf. e.g. Eck [2003]; H. Smith [1994a; 1994b]; Suchocki [2003]. Eck in spring 2010 to this thesis author said that she was a member of Epworth United Methodist Church, Cambridge, MA. Cf. Wesleyans who tend toward Restrictivism: Fernando [1987; 2001]; Tennent [2002; 2010]; and possibly Crouch [2008: 149]. Walls [1996: 560] notes Wesley cautioning "Joseph Benson, a Methodist who had universalist sympathies."

³²² Sanders [1992: 81-128]; Willimon [2008: 47]; Yandell [2013: 163-79]; cf. Geivett [2013b: 183].

³²³ E.g. Erickson [1991: 28]: "Pluralism without true universalism... would hold that one may be 'saved' by any one of several religions.... Persons who are not religious at all are outside the scope of God's favor." Morgan [2008: 33-34]: "World religions inclusivism" connotes comparably and with Structural Inclusivism below. Griffiths [2001b: 142] suggests a Buddhist Universalism "not a respecter of religious identity."

³²⁴ Griffiths [2001b: 165-66].

S. Mark Heim as Orientational Pluralism) suggesting multiple ultimate goals, ends, or destinations based on religiously diverse understandings of what is true and good.³²⁵

Philosopher Gregory Bassham catalogs “extreme pluralism” (borrowed from Keith Ward) positing all religious beliefs are equally valid and true, “fundamental teachings pluralism” that essential teachings of all religions are true, “cafeteria pluralism” that truth is ascertained from a mix of beliefs from many religions, and “transcendental pluralism” that all religions mediate contact with the same ultimate reality variously experienced and conceptualized.³²⁶ Eugene F. Gorski deduces that: “*All* religions must be seen as partial and incomplete interpretations of a transcendent reality that fully surpasses humankind’s ability to name.”³²⁷ Bassham here complements Griffiths’ phrase “Parity with Respect to Truth” (or other parities), though Griffiths points out that perceived parity also arises for those who would pose that all religions are falsehoods on a par.³²⁸

Runzo further polarizes Religious antipathy reminiscent of New Atheists who classify all religions as mistaken in their core beliefs with “Religious subjectivism” where “every individual perspective within each world religion is correct and...incontrovertible insofar as it is good for the individual who adheres to it.”³²⁹ Per Wilfred Cantwell Smith, religions become “true” when believers put their teachings or narratives into practice.³³⁰

Runzo thrice more supplements “Religious relativism” in which religious truth claims are relative to communal worldviews, Nicholas Rescher’s “Epistemic Pluralism” where humans lack “direct access” to Truth due to dependence on conceptual schemes and

³²⁵ Or “Unitive” Pluralism per J. Robinson [1979: 39]. D’Costa [2009: 12-15] critiques Panikkar and Heim; cf. Tiessen [2004: 45] who cites Heim [2001: 8] self-identifying as a “convicted Inclusivist.” Hick [2009: 691] sees Heim as more Inclusivist than Pluralist since Heim specifies a hierarchy among “ends,” with Christianity’s heaven “incomparably the best” amid Buddhist Nirvana, Muslims enjoying *Qur’anic* paradise, etc. Indeed, for Heim [2001: 44]: “To realize something other than communion with the triune God and with other creatures through Christ is to achieve a lesser [and perhaps penultimate] good.”

³²⁶ Bassham [2005: 117-24]; Ward [1990: 2]; cf. “explanatory pluralism” partly miscible with Inclusivism in Haight [2007: 142] and McCauley [1996: 29]; Netland [2001: 312]: “inductive global theologizing” that eclectically draws on and modifies religious traditions; Prabhu [1996: 239]: “metaphysical universalism.”

³²⁷ Gorski [2008: 285].

³²⁸ Griffiths [2001b: 50]; cf. Basinger [2002: 65-68]: “transformational parity;” Geivett [2013b: 184-85]: “alethic” parity (equal truth claims or lack of truth claims), “epistemological” parity (equally valid grounds for claims), and “soteriological” parity; Legenhausen [2013: 174-75]; Yandell [2013: 171, 179]. The supposedly disinterested, apathetic, subjectivist, relativist, or purveyors of religious antipathy can also claim to conceive of all religions as equal, or in principle to oppose all religions equally.

³²⁹ Runzo [2011: 65]. Though as this dissertation documents throughout, New Atheists do not consistently equalize religions or expressions of religious ideas/practices regarding their perniciousness, harm, or danger.

³³⁰ W. Smith [1967: 89-90].

worldviews, and agnostic “Religious henofideism,” resembling hypothetical or Possibilist Inclusivism where one is committed to one’s own faith for accessing transcendence, while countenancing possibilities that other religions may do so.³³¹

Charting Pluralist subcategories, we pause to mention Wesleyan Donald A. D. Thorsen’s assessment of Paul F. Knitter’s attempt at a substitute spectrum where (1) a “Replacement Model” of religious diversity corresponds to Restrictivism or Closed Inclusivism (below) by casting one religion as “meant to replace” all others; (2) the “Fulfillment” model (also below) declares one religion “Fulfills the Many;” (3) a “Mutuality” model leans toward a dialogical Inclusivism or a dialogical transcendental Pluralism that places “greater weight” on God’s universal love and presence among all religions; and (4) “Acceptance” that does not hold any religion superior nor searches for common ground but simply accepts a “real diversity of all faiths.”³³² “Mutuality” for Knitter implies engaged interest, whereas “Acceptance” appears more un- or disinterested by resigning itself to non-intersecting diversities that are somehow still in parity.

Thorsen without expounding how or why pronounces Knitter’s schema more problematic, less popular or serviceable, and less expedient than Exclusivism-Inclusivism-Pluralism for approaching religious diversity ecumenically or inter-religiously.³³³ Its lesser popularity is verifiable by its proportional absence in other literature, but for our purposes Knitter helpfully distinguishes “Mutuality” from “Acceptance” that subdivides not only Pluralists but Inclusivists and Restrictivists. We favor an actively engaged Inclusivism that accepts “real diversity” but also covers and tills common ground.

Comparing the above perspectives on religious diversity reveals implications for the present project. Christian Restorationism / Universalism, Restrictivism, and Inclusivism are all better equipped to motivate treating New Atheists as *Imago Dei*, to challenge (even if in the first two instances not necessarily to learn from) New Atheists, to collaborate in shared priorities, and to proclaim the Gospel than are Pluralist, subjectivist, or other positions that relativize or equalize all such claims as no better, worse, true, or

³³¹ Runzo [2011: 65, 67, 75] citing Rescher [1993: 79].

³³² Thorsen [2012: 64-66] citing Knitter [2002: 19, 63, 109, 173]; cf. Tennent [2010: 206, 221-22] who wants to re-name Knitter’s “mutuality” as “dialogic pluralism,” and “acceptance” as “narrative postmodernism,” the latter wherein “shared stories...float autonomously.”

³³³ Thorsen [2012: 67].

false than others. Still, Restorationist reasons for proclaiming the Gospel to New Atheists will differ from those of Restrictivists who affect more negative verdicts for tenacious atheists' eternal destinies. James Stephens poeticizes total reconciliation for all creatures:

On a rusty iron throne
In the farthest bounds of space,
I saw Satan sit alone.
Old and haggard was his face,
For his work was done and he
Rested in eternity.

Down to him from out the sun
Came his brother and his friend
Saying, "Now the work is done,
Enmity is at an end."
And he guided Satan to
Paradise that he knew.

Uriel, without a frown,
Michael without a spear,
Gabriel came winging down,
Welcoming their ancient peer,
And they seated him beside
One who had been crucified.³³⁴

Restorationists believe that all beings reconciling with God is inevitable, but reconciliation journeys may be more or less rocky depending on the chosen road. "It hurts you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14).³³⁵ Contrary to Wesleyan sensibilities that we will advocate, Christian Restorationism or Universalism extirpates *free* response, so that freedom constricts to *when* rather than *whether* New Atheists respond to God's grace.

Unitary, Epistemic, Ethical, Extreme, Fundamental, Normative, Transcendental, and Parity Pluralists, Religious subjectivists, and relativists, if they approach atheism as a religion, may all struggle to critique or engage New Atheists if atheism is one more or less equivalent track to an equal or equally desirable good. Pluralists can correct New Atheists on what Pluralists comprehend are factual mistakes or blunders, but Pluralist bases are epistemologically shiftier for doing so given Pluralist approximations of truth. Pluriform

³³⁴ James Stephens, "In the Fullness of Time" in L'Engle [1996: 159] a novelist who is also a Universalist.

³³⁵ Thus the evangelical critic of Universalism Van Engen [1991: 186] concedes that Universalism need not mean "loss of evangelistic energy," but neither do strong missionary motifs guarantee that a message is true.

Pluralists, unless plotting hierarchies for the good (e.g. communing with the Blessed Trinity is better than ceasing consciousness at death *pace* Dawkins' unsubstantiated Twain attribution), face similar difficulties.³³⁶ New Atheism comparably for Cafeteria Pluralists is yet another quarry for mining truth, but without further clarification Cafeteria Pluralism begs standard questions about how truth is realized and adjudicated.

Religious subjectivism faces more intense objections that it reverses perceived or ontological cause and effect by doing violence to how many religious practitioners as well as New Atheists conceive of their beliefs about ultimate reality. As C. Stephen Evans and R. Zachary Manis illustrate, orthodox Christians do not believe they "make Jesus the Son of God or deny Jesus that status by the manner of believing," but rather, "because Jesus is the Son of God one should believe in him and act on that belief."³³⁷ Pluriform Pluralists here again are liable to analogous causality questions. How or why would individual or collective expectations prompt or force Reality to actualize Nirvana, paradise, loss of consciousness, etc. because people envision these and act pursuantly?

As for soteriological Pluralists, if they circumvent Universalism and assign nonreligious, anti-religious, or (ir)religious antipathies to New Atheists as necessarily antithetical to all religious paths to the ultimate good, such Pluralism is simply a broader Restrictivism that expands its soteriological circle to encompass any religion or religions subject to Pluralist approval. Aimee Upjohn Light, though identifying as an "inclusivist" (lowercase "i"), embodies this tendency when she offers to correct "Harris and Dennett's approach," by reputing that "critiques from outside the [religious] traditions themselves do not work."³³⁸ Light writes that New Atheists can hope to convince hearers and readers only if they grant "some legitimacy to a religion's most central claims...adopting an insider's or confessional stance when discussing multiple religious traditions."³³⁹

The problem with this is that Light effectively summons New Atheists to abandon their brand of atheism and to join any religion that she deems legitimate before taking their critiques seriously. Her precondition seems to preclude dialogue with New Atheists

³³⁶ Dawkins [2006a: 396] attributing without citing Mark Twain: "I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it;" cf. Joss Whedon's co-created television series *Agents of Shield* [2014: 10:13-12:00] for similar sentiments.

³³⁷ Evans and Manis [2009: 212-13].

³³⁸ Light [2009: 457].

³³⁹ Light [2009: 469].

as they are *now*, as well as denying that atheism provides a tradition from which to speak as section 1.3 adumbrates. In section 2.3.3, we introduce Open Inclusivism as *one* fruitful paradigm to more coherently, consistently, and effectively critique without purposing to thwart all others. Pluralists, Universalists, and Restrictivists are invited to clarify or revisit practical and theoretical complications that their positions appear to state or imply.

2.3.3 *Inclusivists and their Conceptual Kin:*

Christian Inclusivism toward truth serves as a *via media* between relativism and religious antipathy, or more concertedly between Exclusivism / Restrictivism and Universalism / Pluralism. Griffiths parses three assumptions: 1) Christianity most fully and accurately articulates ultimate truth, 2) both Christianity and other religions possibly teach truth, and 3) extra-Christian religions might teach “massive and damaging error.”³⁴⁰

Griffiths fails to qualify whether for Christian Inclusivists, however, Christianity can massively and damagingly err. One may speculate that this is due to his Roman Catholic ecclesiology. The United Methodist Tennent’s observations confront Griffiths’ silence on this matter: “Christianity at times has been co-opted by cultural forces and become an expression of human rebellion like any other religion.”³⁴¹ Tennent saliently cites Newbigin and Romans 3:2-3 that “it was the guardians of God’s revelation who crucified the Son of God.”³⁴² By conceding past and potential rebellion or fallibility in Christianity, Tennent propels humility and receptivity to New Atheist and other criticisms.

As with Restrictivism and Universalism, Inclusivism about truth can be Possibilist or hypothetical—it is possible that there are truths in multiple religions—or Actualist, confidently attesting that there *are*.³⁴³ Inclusivist strains in extra-Christian religions also extend truth, enlightenment, or salvation potentially beyond one tradition’s adherents, yet affirm that one or some religions, doctrines, or practices are better, truer to reality, more efficient, or for Griffiths more “advantageous” than others.³⁴⁴ As Krishna’s theophany in

³⁴⁰ Griffiths [2001b: xv, 48, 57, 60].

³⁴¹ Tennent [2010: 214; cf. 194]; cf. Kraemer [1956: 82] for a Dutch Reformed parallel. Tennent [2011] also crosses the Reformed aisle by forwarding the fifteenth anniversary edition of Carson [2011] where Tennent [2011: 6] speaks of “new atheism” as among the contemporary challenges of religious pluralism.

³⁴² Newbigin [1995: 170]; cf. Bretherton [2006: 198]: The church is then able to invite its neighbors to discipleship through its witness, or to change if it discerns a truer witness to Jesus among its neighbors.

³⁴³ Griffiths [2001b: 58-59]. Potentially varying in the quantity and significance of truths posited.

³⁴⁴ Griffiths [2001b: xv]. One could also add more comprehensive or definitive.

the *Bhagavad Gita* 9:23 counseled Arjuna: “Even those who in faith worship other gods, because of their love they worship me, although not in the right way.”³⁴⁵

Griffiths decouples Closed from Open Inclusivism toward truth. For Closed Inclusivists, “all alien truths are already taught in the home religion.” For Open, it is possible “some are not.”³⁴⁶ T. S. Eliot’s lines for D’Costa typify Closed Inclusivism:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time.³⁴⁷

Both Closed and Open Inclusivism can agree with historic Fulfillment Theology that elements in non-Christian religions serve as *preparatorio evangelica*, but per Tennent’s “engaged exclusivism,” Fulfillment theologies may not be soteriologically Inclusivist.³⁴⁸ Closed Inclusivism and Fulfillment Theology could also (unintentionally?) imply that Christianity as the religion based on Jesus’s revelation rather than Jesus *per se* fulfills non-Christians’ deepest aspirations. Whatever was good or true in extra-Christian religions would then be tertiary to its truer, superior articulated Christian counterpart.³⁴⁹

Marshall’s version of Fulfillment Theology better focuses on Jesus, not a “social construct called ‘Christianity.’”³⁵⁰ Truesdale and Mitchell reiterate that Jesus invites disciples to follow *Him* and not Christianity *per se*. Christianity’s truth is “not in itself as *a religion*,” but in its being the religion that bears fullest witness to Jesus as the Christ.³⁵¹ As E. Stanley Jones observed: “The final issue is not between the systems of Christianity and Hinduism or Buddhism or Mohammedanism, but between Christlikeness and un-Christlikeness, whether...within the non-Christian systems or within Christendom.”³⁵²

³⁴⁵ *Bhagavad Gita* §9.22, cf. 7.20-23, 9.24 in Mascaro [2003: 45, cf. 37-38].

³⁴⁶ Griffiths [2001b: 57, 62].

³⁴⁷ T. S. Eliot, “Four Quartets 4: Little Gidding,” V in D’Costa [1986: 137].

³⁴⁸ Tennent [2002: 249]; cf. Cracknell [1995: 58-59]; Strange [2014]: “Subversive Fulfillment;” Tiessen [2004: 16-17, 43]. Knitter [2002: 86] equates Fulfillment Theology with Inclusivism.

³⁴⁹ Cf. Griffiths [2001b: 57-59]. Pinnock [1992: *passim*] emphasizes Jesus rather than Christianity *per se*.

³⁵⁰ D. Marshall [2012: 94]: Christ in the Spirit “brings to fruition central truths within each tradition, which then crowd out harmful propensities; cf. Bretherton [2006: 84, 107, cf. 136]: “Neither can a single tradition provide...[a] definitive vision of the good life, only Jesus can...[the] work of the Spirit constitutes a rebuttal of any single institution or set of social relations to claim definitive status as the bearer of God’s order.”

³⁵¹ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 75-76]; cf. Strange [2014: 38] for some Reformed parallels.

³⁵² E. Jones [1928: 11].

A Christocentric Fulfillment Theology resonates with Closed and Open Inclusivism by calling attention to trans-religious and mythical yearnings, intuitions, and convictions, as well as to how the Gospel speaks to or “fulfills” these. If or when Fulfillment Theology equates or conflates Christianity with Jesus, however, it becomes less suitable to our approach. It leaves unresolved the soteriological dispute between Restrictivism and Inclusivism, as well as what Christians profit from interfaith or Christian-atheist encounters besides contextualizing their proclamation of the Gospel.

In contrast for Griffiths, Open Inclusivism stimulates interaction with religious others because Christians “might have something important to learn.”³⁵³ As Samir Selmanovic’s subtitle epitomizes, *It’s Really All about God: How Atheism, Islam, and Judaism made me a better Christian*.³⁵⁴ Methodist process thinker John B. Cobb’s “Transformationism” also proceeds in an Open Inclusivist spirit where practitioners as mutually transformative agents benefit from complementary truths in multiple religions.³⁵⁵

Father Francis X. Clooney and others analogously assert “Comparative Theology” that utilizes extra-Christian traditions as dialogue partners to question, probe, and invigorate Christianity.³⁵⁶ D’Costa differentiates Comparative Theology from “comparative religion” or general academic study of religions, since the first involves “transformation of the comparativist’s own religion” rather than merely comparison and contrast.³⁵⁷ Open Inclusivism through contact with New Atheists, religiously diverse people, and their ideas pursues the same transformative growth as Comparative Theology (and Cobb’s Transformationism) without confining to “Theology” as a discipline.

Turning to soteriological lexes, William Lane Craig’s “Acessibilism” partly parallels a salvific Inclusivism whereby salvation is universally available, which Terrance Tiessen develops interchangeably with D’Costa’s “Restrictivist Inclusivism” where Jesus

³⁵³ Griffiths [2001b: 60].

³⁵⁴ Selmanovic [2009: subtitle to the paperback edition]. For American evangelicals hinting at Open Inclusivism across confessions, cf. DeVan [2013d] reviewing the Catholic evangelical Kreeft [2010: subtitle]: *What Christians Can Learn from Muslims* in an evangelical Reformed journal; and the Reformed McDermott [2000a: title]: *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?* both published by InterVarsity.

³⁵⁵ Cf. e.g. Cobb [1994; 2004].

³⁵⁶ Clooney [1990: 73; 2010]; cf. D’Costa [2009: 37-45, esp. 45]; DeVan [2010a: title] modifying Proverbs 27:17: “As Iron Sharpens Iron, So Does One Religious Tradition Sharpen Another.”

³⁵⁷ D’Costa [2009: 38, 40].

saves some non-Christians even if their religions are not structurally salvific.³⁵⁸ Harold Netland documents a related species that he calls “modest agnosticism” straddling hypothetical Restrictivism and Inclusivism by leaving unevangelized people to God’s care but refusing to presume on their salvation since this allegedly goes beyond Scripture.³⁵⁹

Tiessen is optimistic, as we are, about biblical *hope* and not simply agnostic regarding salvation “for those who do not hear the gospel,” yet he insists that the Spirit’s gracious activity does not inexorably confer independent wide-ranging legitimacy on other religious traditions.³⁶⁰ What D’Costa calls “Structural Inclusivism” and Tiessen a [Karl] Rahnerian “religious instrumentalism” goes farther by proposing that Jesus orchestrates extra-Christian religions as viable, if less attuned instruments for facilitating salvation.³⁶¹

Both of D’Costa’s Inclusivisms allow for greater openness to other religions and to atheists than delimiting salvific beneficiaries or God-given truths and ethics to Christians, or to those credited to or derived from Christianity. They also evade logically self-defeating ethical or religious relativism by affirming that God’s revelation in Jesus, and by extension Christianity is normative as the religion based on God’s revelation in Jesus.

A Wesleyan Open Inclusivist *via media* navigating these soteriological proposals can affirm that Jesus is the only salvation mediator, the Spirit is universally active, and God draws people to salvation in Jesus via extra-Christian sources.³⁶² One way that a critical Wesleyan receptiveness to God’s grace amid religious diversity can negotiate “Structural” and “Restrictivist Inclusivism” is by adjusting Clark Pinnock’s “cautious” or “modal” or medial Inclusivism, which is open to manifestations of God’s universal grace without certifying any ir/religious program as a surefire dispenser.³⁶³ Wesleyan Philip Meadows prudently submits that extra-Christian “ways of being religious” can play

³⁵⁸ Craig [1995: 84]; D’Costa [2009: 7, 19-29, or 31: “Restrictive”]; Tiessen [2004: e.g. 33-47]. In Morgan’s schema [2008: 32-33]: “General revelation inclusivism” could explicate salvation via knowledge of God through God’s creation, in contrast with requiring some kind of “special revelation” in order to be saved.

³⁵⁹ Netland [2001: 321]; cf. Brewer [2013]. One might further differentiate a more modest soft agnosticism (I don’t know) from a less modest hard agnosticism (one cannot know or the answer is indeterminable).

³⁶⁰ Tiessen [2004: 33] citing with contrasting hopefulness Craig [1995: 84]; cf. D’Costa [2000: 113].

³⁶¹ Cf. Conn [1991: 199]: “Christ-of-religions;” D’Costa [2009: 7, 19-25]; the early Pannikar [1964: 54]: *Christ* not Hinduism saves “the good and *bona fide* Hindu,” yet normally *Christ* saves the Hindu through Hindu sacraments or the “*Mysterion* that comes...through Hinduism;” Tiessen [2004: esp. 34, 43].

³⁶² Some religious traditions might also be more attuned to select truths than others.

³⁶³ Pinnock [1995-1996: 100]: “God *may* use religion...[to grace] lives....It is *one* of God’s options for evoking faith and communicating grace. This avoids a priori judgments concerning God’s use or nonuse of religion.”

providential roles in salvation.³⁶⁴ Truesdale and Mitchell rightly confirm that religious identity is not a “settled reality,” but that God uses religion, culture, and we add atheism, providentially or preveniently. “We can’t neatly separate a person from his or her religion. The way a person responds to prevenient grace will likely be conditioned by...[her or his] belief structure characteristic...[and] the patterns of life it produces.”³⁶⁵

With these fellow Wesleyans, we suggest that the Holy Spirit may and does use extra-Christian channels as agents of grace, even if extra-Christian religions in and of themselves are not independent mediators or vehicles of eternal flourishing.³⁶⁶ We neither oppose inklings that God’s grace is present in and through religious or atheistic traditions, nor do we avow that Jesus’s saving activity sanctions all or any in particular—if admittedly imperfect—prescriptions or communities as guarantors of salvation by proxy.

Bringing this chapter to a close we assess remaining competing terminology for approaching truth and salvation. Pentecostal ecumenist Veli-Matti Karkkainen consults alternative monikers to Inclusivism, spotlighting Christocentrism, Christomorphism, Christo-pneumatocentrism, and Trinitarian(ism).³⁶⁷ The trouble with each is that Christian Restrictivists or Exclusivists, Universalists or Pluralists could claim application to their positions as well.³⁶⁸ These labels are overly multi-dimensional and too malleable across religious diversity persuasions to radically improve upon Inclusivism. Nor is re-categorizing Inclusivism as “Christocentrism (without any qualifications)” (complete with parentheses) and Restrictivism as “ecclesiocentric Christocentrism” (see section 2.3.1) preferable since the former *does* require qualification to indicate that God’s grace and truth are present and that God’s salvific work is untethered by Christian peripheries.³⁶⁹

D’Costa propounds two subcategories of “Postmodern Postliberalism.”³⁷⁰ First, “Ethical Deconstructionism” echoes Transformationism and Comparative Theology where religions transform and challenge each other leading to the “emergence of ethical practices

³⁶⁴ Meadows [2000: 125]; cf. Bretherton [2006: 107]: “The Spirit is constantly bringing different social realities into relation in new ways so as to enable the possibility that all may respond gratefully to what Christ has done and be directed to the embrace of the Father.”

³⁶⁵ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 153, cf. e.g. 205, 239]; cf. Van Engen [1991: 189].

³⁶⁶ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 72, cf. 145].

³⁶⁷ Cf. e.g. Karkkainen [2003: 216].

³⁶⁸ Cf. D’Costa [2009: 34]. It is difficult to imagine Christian Restrictivists not doing so, e.g. R. Peterson [1998: 199]. Carruthers [1990] is a Pluralist who utilizes parallel vocabulary.

³⁶⁹ Karkkainen [2003: 168]. The latter is an even more complicated and ambiguous phraseology!

³⁷⁰ D’Costa [2009: 45-53].

out of the flux of history.”³⁷¹ Second, John Milbank’s “Radical Orthodoxy” construes Christianity as “*the* truth because of its beauty, constantly out-narrating other religions.”³⁷² Christianity as most true and beautiful comports with both Inclusivism and Restrictivism, but for D’Costa, Milbank errs by neglecting issues of salvation for the unevangelized and in the ahistorical judgment that religions progress in “seamless narrative succession.”³⁷³

Without decidedly espousing Radical Orthodoxy or Ethical Deconstructionism, Truesdale and Mitchell exemplify Wesleyan possibilities for integrating what D’Costa portrays as their essential points. One can appreciate how all religions undergo historical evolution through internal succession and/or contact with other traditions, as in Transformationism, Comparative Theology, and Ethical Deconstructionism. One may also proceed in a Milbankian spirit without taking a stand on Radical Orthodoxy or its auxiliary controversies as a movement: When people living “by other stories” hear the Gospel’s fullness, they may recognize a “story whose splendor outshines their own.”³⁷⁴ Truesdale and Mitchell cite as examples Zacchaeus in Luke 19:2-10, a sinful woman in Luke 7:37, and first century hearts embracing the Gospel’s “liberation and promise, unlike the old stories [they lived by]....Jesus Christ is God’s and the world’s metanarrative.”³⁷⁵

In assessing *via media* designates between Religious antipathy and subjectivism or Exclusivism / Restrictivism and Pluralism / Universalism, Inclusivism persists as useful if not uniform for addressing religious diversity issues surrounding salvation and truth.³⁷⁶ For now, it also retains brand recognition that percolates to pulpits, lecterns, and didactic literature. Wesleyan Michael Peterson co-authors one of many philosophy of religion textbooks that extrapolate Inclusivism, and United Methodist District Superintendent Dana Everhart preached “I am an Inclusivist” at this dissertation author’s home church.³⁷⁷

As with any appellative, Inclusivism is susceptible to criticism and ambiguity. Mary Pat Fisher confuses it with universal salvation, and Moser blends “Inclusive Exclusivism” to denote Jesus as the sole salvation mediator whose work protrudes beyond

³⁷¹ D’Costa [2009: 46].

³⁷² D’Costa [2009: 8, 50] italics added.

³⁷³ D’Costa [2009: 50-51].

³⁷⁴ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 75, 86, but cf. 222-23 footnotes mildly favorable to Radical Orthodoxy].

³⁷⁵ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 86].

³⁷⁶ D’Costa [2009: 8] notes salvation often dominates these debates, however.

³⁷⁷ Everhart [2010] independent of prior discussion with this dissertation author; Peterson et al. [2012].

Christian boundaries.³⁷⁸ A soteriologically hopeful Wesleyan Open Inclusivism that Pinnock, Meadows, Truesdale and Mitchell preview will be more cautious than Structural Inclusivism or religious instrumentalism, which slouches toward a kind of hierarchical Pluralist soteriology whereby Jesus saves some people via secondary religious or ideological structures. It will concurrently be less pessimistic than D’Costan Restrictivist Inclusivism or Craig’s Accessibilism if these discard all prospects for God’s gracious activity in the aforesaid arenas.³⁷⁹ Closed and Open Inclusivism along with Fulfillment Theology also dispose one to entertain that God draws New Atheists toward full salvation in Jesus via any truths or goodness that God’s grace empowers New Atheists to intuit.

Open Inclusivists enjoy a practical advantage over Closed Inclusivists in Christian-atheist and inter-religious dialogue, however. If Closed Inclusivists try to defend Christianity as superior at every point or as expositing with grander eloquence any topic that atheists might remark upon, then Closed Inclusivists reduce Christian dispositions to humility, learning, or receiving correction from New Atheists or other extra-Christian sources, concurrently increasing Christian temptations to arrogance or dismissal.

Closed Inclusivism further hobbles Transformationism, Comparative Theology, and Ethical Deconstructionism by comprehensively relegating all atheist insights into truth to dimmer reflections of already resplendent Christian radiance. Muslim Caliph ‘Umar’s alleged rationalization for burning the Library of Alexandria appealed to the same Closed Inclusivist logic: If books “agree[d] with the Koran they are superfluous and need not be preserved; if they disagree[d] they are pernicious, and ought not to be preserved.”³⁸⁰

Open Inclusivism that is eager to learn from and to challenge New Atheists is more promising. It spreads a supple umbrella category to weather others’ weaknesses while incorporating, assimilating, or resonating with aims, assertions, and yearnings in Knitter’s Mutuality, Fulfillment Theology, Transformationism, Comparative Theology, and Postmodern Postliberalism bracketing Ethical Deconstructionism and Radical Orthodoxy.

To summarize, the most pertinent philosophical and theological approaches to religious diversity on which we concentrate for the purposes of this dissertation are

³⁷⁸ E.g. Fisher [2008: 11]; Moser [2011: 85-88]; cf. Sanders [1992: 131-286].

³⁷⁹ D’Costa [2009: 7, 19-29, 44]; Tiessen [2004: 33-47, 56, 270, 302, 309, 385] citing Craig [1995: 84].

³⁸⁰ Muslim Caliph ‘Omar quoted in multiple popular sources, e.g. Fadiman and Bernard [2000: 417].

straightforward *actualist* rather than *possibilist* or hypothetical forms of Exclusivism or Restrictivism, along with Open and Closed subclasses of Inclusivism, Universalism of salvation, and the various normative or parity pluralisms, religious subjectivism, and relativism. With Sanders and others, we define Exclusivism and Restrictivism more or less interchangeably: First, that ultimate truth is somehow “exclusive” to, or the singular privilege of, one religious (sub-) tradition; and second that salvation is consequently “restricted” to the authorized religion’s adherents. We define Universalism, including Christian Restorationism, as mandating that every living being will eventually receive and experience salvation or optimal flourishing, though this need not carry the corollary that every religious or spiritual tradition equally accesses the truth, or enunciates the nature of ultimate reality, or accounts reliably for how salvation is accepted, dispensed, or attained.

Contrariwise, the Unitary, Epistemic, Ethical, Extreme, Fundamental, Normative, Puriform, Soteriological, Transcendental, and Parity Pluralisms outlined above *do* roughly or strictly equalize all (or in some cases, all major) religious paths, respectively placing their emphases on epistemic access, transformational or ethical qualities, capacities for discerning and speaking to truth, or soteriological criteria and results. Relativism implies parity across religious communities, and subjectivism ascribes parity among individuals.

The Christian Inclusivism we set forth here assumes that when Christianity bears the fullest witness to the Triune God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it most completely or precisely conveys ultimate truth. Yet this does not forswear extra-Christian sources of God-given truth, wisdom, or morality. Closed Inclusivism holds that all important extra-Christian truths are already present, if neglected, in Christianity or the Christian tradition. Open Inclusivism, in contrast, permits the possibility that Christians can learn truths from extra-Christian sources that are (or were) heretofore unrealized or less prominent within Christianity. Soteriologically, our Wesleyan Open Inclusivism, which is receptive to providential extra-Christian channels of God’s grace, falls somewhere between D’Costa’s “Restrictivist Inclusivism” that appears to rule out extra-Christian religious resources as efficacious toward salvation, and Structural Inclusivism that endorses them as lesser but operational mechanisms whereby practitioners can inadvertently obtain salvation in Jesus.

The Inclusivist *via media* that we suggest is justifiably agnostic about individual New Atheists’ salvation. Unlike Restrictivists whose principles compel them to adjudge

that people who die as convinced atheists are damned—and equally departing from Universalist insinuations that New Atheists will be coerced into salvation—our critical Wesleyan vector preserves universal possibilities for *free* response to God’s saving grace that may continue via divinely ordained processes at the moment of or after death.³⁸¹

Chapters 4 and 5 advance prospects for New Atheist salvation. Yet posing that God might somehow save atheists beyond pre-mortem confession that Jesus is Lord ought not to dissuade Inclusivist Wesleyans from sharing the Gospel (as Wesley did earnestly) with New Atheists *in this life* in the hope that every hearer will explicitly believe in Jesus, and even now (cf. 1 John 5:13) experience salvific assurance along with other joys and benefits of Christian discipleship. We turn in chapter 3 to foundations for an orthodox, ecumenical, evangelical, and faithfully Wesleyan method and temperament to ground and guide theology, interaction, and dialogue with inter-religious and atheist interlocutors.

³⁸¹ Per e.g. the Inclusivist Wesleyan Jerry L. Walls [esp. 2002; 2012]; see esp. sections 5.2, 7.3-7.4.

Chapter 3: “Honoring Conference”: Wesleyan Foundations for Engagement and Dialogue

Chapter one of this thesis examined New Atheist personas, precedents, parallels, and trajectories. Chapter two appraised philosophy and theology of religion approaches to New Atheism, nominating Open Inclusivism as the presently optimal paradigm. The current and third foundational chapter orchestrates three refrains. First, that Wesleyan tradition as ecumenical, orthodox, and evangelical supplies irenic, fecund, and practical bases for Christian-atheist interaction.¹ Second, that Wesleyan tradition’s conjunctive spirit naturally aligns with and mutually reinforces Open Inclusivism. Third, that Randy L. Maddox’s elaboration of Wesleyan “Honoring Conference” is a generative ground and guide for theology that is extendable to inter-religious and Christian-atheist encounters.

The present work does not pretend to a definitive, unanimous, or full-scale account of the Wesleyan tradition that deftly dodges all past and anticipated disputes. Nor is a denominational agenda afoot to derail non-Wesleyan or extra-Christian approaches that may be worthwhile in their own ways.² It rather aspires to one vigorously authentic Wesleyan perspective listening to prior voices, literature, and conceivably proto, partial, implicit, or “anonymous” Wesleyans who consolidate Wesleyan emphases.³

3.1 What Constitutes Wesleyan Theology?

If the Wesleyan tradition is fruitful to address New Atheists, what characterizes that tradition? Five Wesley scholars mediated by Rex Matthews ruminate and inaugurate *Methodist Review: A Journal of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies*, recollecting first Albert C. Outler’s “Phase III” of Wesley studies looking back to John Wesley and his sources, then forward with his sense of heritage and openness to the future.⁴ They propound a “Phase IV” applying Phase III precedents to constructive theological work in the Church, and not only for the sake of Christians or polities historically connected to the Wesleys.⁵

¹ Much of this chapter was published as DeVan [2013a].

² Maddox [2011: 3] eschews claims to a definitive “canonical model” of Wesley or Wesleyan theology; cf. Cracknell and White [2007: ix] for a modest Methodist spirit within the wider Christian family.

³ Cf. DeVan [2012d: esp. 185] and Volf [2012: esp. 188] regarding *a* or *one* vs. *the* orientation / response.

⁴ Lancaster et al. [2009: 7-8]; cf. Phase I heroizing Wesley, Phase II on his place in wider Christian history.

⁵ Lancaster in Lancaster et al. [2009: 7].

Sarah Heaner Lancaster appreciates Outler's vision for Wesley as relevant to broader Christian history, new times, and new places. She cites the multidisciplinary Wesleyan Studies Group designating "Wesleyan" to encompass not only John Wesley's theology and legacy, but Charles Wesley, Susanna Wesley, and other contributors to the movement "begun and nurtured by the Wesley brothers," including offshoots distinct or now independent from their Methodist roots.⁶ Lancaster and Matthews magnify to other potential figures and groups Philip R. Meadows' five approaches to Wesley.⁷

The first sees Wesley as prescriptive to contemporary theology and tasks, while the second prefers his accents and trajectories as instructive. The third plumbs Wesley's substance for extant contexts while resisting tendencies to anachronism. The fourth probes Wesley's thought, logic, and intentions for "incipient or premonitory themes" beyond his original horizons, in one permutation exploiting Wesley as a "launching pad" for "admittedly discontinuous" lines of argument.⁸ The fifth dismisses Wesley as no longer helpful, theologically irrelevant, but honorable as a founder-leader. Catherine Keller, Donald A. Thorsen, and Charles M. Wood locate variously across these stances.

Keller draws on John and Charles Wesley's oceanic imagery to describe her fluid connection to John Wesley as one who evokes "reflection beyond himself to the depths of God."⁹ Keller recounts her journey away from approach 5 to appreciating Wesley as a precedent or exemplar important to thinkers and ideologies including feminist, liberation, process, and Wesleyan Ted Runyon's triad of *orthodoxy*, *orthopraxy*, and *orthopathy*.¹⁰ Wesley and other Wesleyans for Keller are neither prescriptive nor a party line but edifying instructors [approach two] and supporters [three] whose insights still resonate [four]. Wesley in Keller's imagery shapes a mighty delta for plunging into the larger divine ocean that Wesleyans must keep primary in life, theology, and practice.¹¹

Donald A. Thorsen, originally a Free Methodist although not attending a Methodist church at the time of his writing, affirms approach three and a "holy love" theology for dealing with the breadth and complexities of life. Thorsen finds six Wesleyan concepts

⁶ Lancaster in Lancaster et al. [2009: 8-9, cf. 11].

⁷ Lancaster referring to Matthews in Lancaster et al. [2009: 10-11]; Meadows [1999: 191-95].

⁸ Lancaster in Lancaster et al. [2009: 10].

⁹ Lancaster introducing Keller in Lancaster et al. [2009: 11]; Keller in Lancaster et al. [2009: 13-16].

¹⁰ Keller in Lancaster et al. [2009: 13-14] citing Runyon [1998].

¹¹ Keller in Lancaster et al. [2009: 13-16].

instructive but not exhaustive of subsequent developments in Wesleyan, Methodist, Holiness, Pentecostal, evangelical, “and other theological traditions that have drawn—to greater and lesser degrees—from Wesley.”¹² They are: (1) a love-centered doctrine of God, (2) a Quadrilateral-centered doctrine of religious authority and theological method; (3) a synergistic anthropology where freedom of choice represents an aspect of *Imago Dei*; (4) a holiness-centered holistic soteriology harvesting (4a) “right heart or experience of God (orthokardia, orthopathy, or orthoaffectus),” (4b) right belief (orthodoxy), and (4c) right action (orthopraxis) wherein God sanctifies and perfects believers in love for God and their neighbors. (5) “Social holiness” assimilates advocacy and compassion as expressive of personal holiness; and (6) a “Catholic spirit” ecclesiology enlivens life, service, evangelism, discipleship, the sacraments, spiritual disciplines, study, activism, and ecumenism within the universal church.¹³ African-American Methodist Dennis C. Dickerson who is briefest on Matthews’ panel also underscores the sacred synergy in social, scriptural, and spiritual holiness as quintessentially Wesleyan.¹⁴

United Methodist Charles M. Wood regards John and Charles Wesley’s work as a tradition integrating literary output with other accomplishments or activities. Wood hears Wesleyan theology in three keys: (1) the Wesleys as sources of reflection for historic or official Wesleyans and other interested Christians; (2) understanding how the Wesleys or a portion of their works function normatively for certain communities in life, witness, and other situations; and (3) conditionally requiring continued testing by Holy Scripture and to a lesser degree by other Quadrilateral categories to filter current or proposed doctrinal standards, potentially correcting Wesley himself.¹⁵ Wood believes that these keys for Wesleyans coordinate and extricate theologies, practices, or their features that impede from those that promote life and work of the “one holy catholic and apostolic church.”¹⁶

¹² Thorsen in Lancaster et al. [2009: 16-18] refers to “holy love” and Wesley as “suggestive.”

¹³ Thorsen in Lancaster et al. [2009: 18-20].

¹⁴ Dickerson in Lancaster et al. [2009: 20-21] affirms AME Deaconess and American civil rights icon Rosa Parks’ “Wesleyan social holiness” unified her Eucharistic duties and social responsibilities.

¹⁵ Wood in Lancaster et al. [2009: 22-24, cf. 11]; Abraham [2012: 131, cf. 126]: Wesleyans best honor Wesley “by discarding his errors and developing his insights in ways that best serve the truth of the gospel and the glory of God in the salvation of souls today.”

¹⁶ Wood in Lancaster et al. [2009: 25].

3.2 Locating the Present Thesis

Matthews' forum registers positions and priorities expedient for classification but also liable to criticism. As with the philosophical approaches in section 2.3, the polarities are most problematic, but neither are the *via media* positions pristine.

Critiquing the first, present-day Wesleyans will undoubtedly continue to look to Wesley at some level as a model, but difficulties arise depending on what “prescriptive” means to contemporary theological enterprises and tasks in theory and in practice. Is Wesleyan theology mere exegesis and submission to John Wesley (or to Charles, Susanna, etc.) or to a corpus that Wesley or his appointed heirs deem normative?

The peril here is a kind of overriding third testament, canon, or scripture that functions like the *Book of Mormon* or *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, even if refusing such approaches in theory.¹⁷ Granting Wesley or select Wesleyans regulatory, infallible, or functionally inerrant authority could excessively stifle theology and practice.

The second option looks to Wesley or other Wesleyans as instructive, raising again issues of intensity and whether Wesleyans might “instruct” or “correct” as well as be corrected by Wesley. The third faces similar questions on “substance” and allows more flexibility than stance one, but in opposing “anachronistic correlation with Wesley’s past answers,” it may neglect crucial insights by attempting not to be hedged in by Wesley.¹⁸

Stance four is still thornier. Tenuously jumping from or pinpointing virtually any theme as “incipient or premonitory,” especially if pursuing “admittedly discontinuous” lines of argument, risks ceasing to be noticeably Wesleyan generally or particularly.¹⁹

Stance five is most nettlesome in its procedural vehemence by dismissing Wesley (and other historic Wesleyans?) as unhelpful and irrelevant. It exceeds ignoring Wesley by bordering or crossing over into actively repudiating him. It displays a chronocentrism presuming uniqueness of the moment in opposition to the past that Wesley represents. Its self-imposed strict discontinuity or merely accidental continuity with Wesley exposes its practitioners to becoming less Wesleyan than if they had never referenced Wesley at all.

¹⁷ A similar theme underlies disputes between New Testament scholars Craig Blomberg (an Evangelical) and Mormon Stephen E. Robinson [1997: esp. 52-53] whom Blomberg urges—against much Mormon tradition—to soften claims about Joseph Smith in ways reminiscent with approaches 2-5 to Wesley.

¹⁸ Lancaster in Lancaster et al. [2009: 10].

¹⁹ Lancaster in Lancaster et al. [2009: 10].

The Wesley Studies Group attending to neglected voices is commendable, yet John Wesley is likely to retain ample—even if not hegemonic or exclusive—primacy as a founder, organizer, and thinker debuting the Wesleyan tradition. An engagement with New Atheists amenable to Phase III will look back to Wesley and other Wesleyans, forward with a sense of heritage and openness to future Christian-atheist relations, and with Phase IV implement new proposals from prior Wesleyan work. It will aim, without itself limiting to John Wesley’s precedent, for relevance to the larger history of Christian-atheist interaction in a “new time and place” inhabited and affected by New Atheists.²⁰

Following Keller, this dissertation utilizes Wesley and other Wesleyans as forerunners and exemplars whose reflections point beyond themselves to the fuller Divine Ocean and the Universal Church. It consults Wesley and other Wesleyans as enriching instructors or mentors, as supporters who are incipient, instructive, and premonitory; but not as regulators of a rigidly prescribed party-line.²¹ It diverges from positing John Wesley, other Wesleys or Wesleyans as determinative, normative, functionally infallible, inviolable or alternately discontinuous, anachronistic, unhelpful, or irrelevant.²²

Following Thorsen, Runyon, and Keller, the outlook defended here affirms a Wesleyan “holy love” theology that is practical, supportive, or suggestive in addressing the breadth and complexities of Christian life applied to interaction with New and other atheists, and a Wesleyan synergistic anthropology where God-given freedom of choice is part of the *Imago Dei* inclusive of all people, including New Atheists.²³ Dickerson reminds Wesleyans to integrate a “catholic spirit,” personal and social holiness, ecumenical ecclesiology, and holistic evangelical soteriology wherein God partly through Wesleyans transforms hearts, emotions, minds, beliefs, actions, and practices.

Finally adapting Wood, this dissertation strives to participate in Wesleyan literary, theological, and academic tradition by protracting prior insights to interact and respond to New Atheists. It exploits Wesley and Wesleyan principles as critical resources, but stops short of adjudicating their regulatory function or status, and prefers a more modest yet authentically Wesleyan Inclusivist undertaking that is open to progression and revision.

²⁰ Lancaster in Lancaster et al. [2009: 8].

²¹ Cf. e.g. Keller in Lancaster et al. [2009: 13-15]; Maddox [1992: 7] per Wynkoop [1975: 5-14]: “mentor.”

²² Cf. e.g. Abraham [2012: 129]; Maddox [2011: 3].

²³ Thorsen in Lancaster et al. [2009: 18-19].

3.3 Quadrilateral or Honoring Conference?

A further path to qualify is Thorsen and Wood’s advocacy for the pervasive yet historically contentious Outlerian, Wesleyan, or Methodist Quadrilateral.²⁴ In 2012, the longtime Quadrilateral defender and Inclusivist-oriented Wesleyan Randy Maddox recommended exchanging the Quadrilateral for the currently less divisive paradigm “Honoring Conference” to facilitate intra-Wesleyan and Christian conversation.²⁵ Although Honoring Conference is pervious to its own criticisms, this chapter argues that it holds promise as a Wesleyan tool for ecumenical, orthodox, and evangelical response to New Atheists, and more generally as a ground and guide for intra-Wesleyan, interdenominational, and inter-religious dialogue, discernment, and debate.

Maddox surveys Quadrilateral history and motifs, noting that twentieth century scholars traced John Wesley’s appeal to four theological warrants—Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. Albert C. Outler popularized the resulting Quadrilateral against one-sided Biblicism, traditionalism, rationalism, narcissism (or empiricism), but regretted the literal-minded who inferred this geometric imagery to downgrade Scripture.²⁶ Maddox thus first proposed a “unilateral *rule* of Scripture” and trilateral *hermeneutic* of reason, tradition, and experience, but now contends for dialogical/conferring imagery.²⁷

Maddox references Wesley’s 1744 and later discussions with preachers on spiritual discipline, doctrinal formation, and practical negotiation that personally embrace scriptural truths, harking also to the 1972 UMC General Conference call for accountability to core Christian teachings.²⁸ Honoring Conference for Maddox mirrors Wesley by drawing on resources and criteria most pertinent to a particular situation or audience, steering away from a less sustainable, unrealistic Foundationalist prolegomena that attempts to muster all imaginable evidence from each category. To modify William J. Abraham, fixations on

²⁴ Cf. e.g. Abraham [1995]; Bevins [2006: 229-46]; Cobb [1987: 4-6, 8-9]; Gunter et al. [1997]; Hynson [1985: 19-33]; Keefer [2010: 117-33]; Kinghorn [1987: 6-8]; Thorsen [1990].

²⁵ Maddox [2012: 77-116] slightly adapted from earlier publication in Matthews [2012: 55-97]; cf. Maddox [2011]. For Inclusivist-oriented themes in Maddox, see e.g. [1992: 7-29; 1994: 26-35].

²⁶ Outler [1995: 463]; Maddox [2012: 78-90, 110]; cf. Bevins [2006: 243] citing Land [1993: 41] warning against spirituality and theology fragmenting into intellectualism, sentimentalism, or activism.

²⁷ Maddox [2012: 81]; cf. e.g. Tuttle [1986: title]: “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral – Not Equilateral.”

²⁸ Maddox [2012: 99-100].

encyclopedically justifying every comprehensible issue fuels false certainty and obsession with epistemological recipes over the spiritual feasts they purport to flavor.²⁹

Maddox purveys Honoring Conference as more flexible to a swath of personal and cultural contexts, and more faithful to Wesley's emphases. He parses or adds to the Quadrilateral prayer with the Holy Spirit (cf. Revelation 2:7), consulting historic and living Scripture readers, hermeneutical helps, the "Book of Nature" or natural sciences, the "analogy" of faith or the Apostle's Creed liturgizing the grand truths of God's work, and a *discrimen* of God's universal pardoning transforming love.³⁰

3.4 Conferring with the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and Hermeneutical Helps

The Bible is preeminent in Honoring Conference. Wesley recalled early Oxford Methodists as people of "one book" in tempers, words, actions, and youthfully yearning "to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came down from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book!...Let me be *homo unius libri*."³¹

Isolating this quote might imply that Wesley relied solely on the Bible. Yet Wesley admonished: "If you need no book but the Bible, you are got above St. Paul (who requested to be sent some books)."³² Wesley compiled a *Christian Library*, read avidly on horseback, and cited contemporary or classical literature from Plato to Virgil, Horace, John Milton, and Alexander Pope.³³ Still, he regarded no book equally to the Bible.³⁴

Maddox underscores Wesley as an eighteenth century Anglican valuing the entire Protestant Canon and preaching on texts from each book except Esther, Song of Songs, Obadiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Philemon, and 3 John.³⁵ Although alluding to the

²⁹ Metaphor rephrased from Abraham [2012: 128] on the dangers of "canonizing" any epistemology; cf. Abraham [1995: 63] cited in Maddox [2012: 105, cf. 106-07].

³⁰ Cf. Maddox [2009; 2011; 2012: esp. 83-91, 106, 112].

³¹ *Sermons on Several Occasions*, vol. 1, Preface §5, *Works* 1:104-6; Sermon 107, "On God's Vineyard," §I.1, *Works* 3:504.

³² *Minutes* (1766), Q. 30, *Works* 10:340, cf. 10:887.

³³ Bevins [2006: 234] citing "Abridgments of Various Works," *Works* 14:220; S. Jones [1997: 42, 148].

³⁴ Maddox [2012: 83-84] citing *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, §10 in T. Jackson [1958: 11:373]; cf. K. Collins [2012: 282]. T. Jackson [1958] reprints the T. Jackson [1873] collection of Wesley's *Works*.

³⁵ See Maddox [2011: 4-5, 16-17] on Wesley rejecting the Apocrypha as canonical, the Anglican Articles of Religion (Article VI) reservedly commending the Apocrypha's "example of life and...manners," and sixteen apocryphal books as potential aids to understand the "more authoritative" books in S. Wesley [1735: 29-30].

Apocrypha, Wesley rejected its canonicity in 1756 and 1779, and omitted it from his 1784 Anglican Articles abridgement for the Methodist Episcopal Church.³⁶

Wesley valued scholarly tools, Hebrew and Greek grammars, lexicons, histories, commentaries, and text critical resources for understanding the Bible.³⁷ He sought to blend “scholarship with pastoral concern” in “accessible commentaries...to guide laity in addressing difficult passages...and unifying themes.”³⁸ He pushed his protégés to read the Bible as a rule or guide to form and inform Christian belief, theology, practice, and hope; as a means of grace to leaven readers’ characters or tempers that in turn affects their thoughts, words, and actions.³⁹ He also applied inspiration to the Holy Spirit enabling Christians to love and to read the Bible profitably (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16): “We need the same Spirit to *understand* the Scripture which enabled the holy men of old to *write* it.”⁴⁰

Wesley prayerfully conferred with the Holy Spirit when confused by Scripture, pondered parallel or apparently clearer Bible passages, and consulted those “experienced in the things of God, and then the writings whereby, being dead, yet they speak.”⁴¹ Honoring Conference in this spirit is prayerful, practical, and holistic. It attunes to relevant confessional or scholarly literature, and affirms the Bible’s preeminence without discarding other resources.

Discerning Wesley’s conceptions and applications of the Bible clarifies Scripture’s import in Wesleyan Honoring Conference. It exemplifies Wesleyan affinity with historic Christian and evangelical regard for the Bible, grounds foundations for responding to New Atheists, and guides Wesleyans on how to optimally utilize Scripture within and for inter-religious, interdenominational, and intra-Wesleyan dialogue.

³⁶ E.g. Ecclesiasticus 28:1-2 in *Journal* (30 September 1786), *Works* 23:420; yet per Westerfield Tucker [2012: 237] curiously left Tobit 4:8-9 in the Sunday Service; cf. Charlesworth [1996: 63-88; 162]; Schlimm [2007]: “Defending the Old Testament’s Worth;” Watson [2012: 162]; “Popery Calmly Considered,” I.4 in T. Jackson [1958: 10:141]; *Roman Catechism, with a Reply Thereto*, Q. 10 in T. Jackson [1958: 10:92].

³⁷ Maddox [2011: esp. 6-7, 13; cf. 2012: 83-84] citing several examples: e.g. Baker [1989]; Casto [1977].

³⁸ Maddox [2011: 8-9]. J. Wesley [2015: online] in *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament and Old Testament Notes* is hereafter referenced as *OT Notes* or *NT Notes* followed by corresponding Bible passages. J. Wesley [1760-1762; 1765] are original standard editions reprinted in e.g. J. Wesley [1975; 2012].

³⁹ Maddox [2011: 30-34] citing Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace,” II.1 & III.7–10, *Works* 1:381, 386-89; Sermon 107, “On God’s Vineyard,” I.1, *Works* 3:504; Sermon 115, “Dives and Lazarus,” III.7, *Works* 4:18.

⁴⁰ “Letter to Bishop of Gloucester” (26 November 1762), II.10, *Works* 11:509; *OT Notes*, Preface, §18 in T. Jackson [1958: 14:253] in Maddox [2011: 14-15] noting *The Imitation of Christ*; cf. Bevins [2006: 234-35]; *Advice to the People Called ‘Methodists’*, §6, *Works* 9:124; *Sermons*, Vol. 1, Preface, §5, *Works* 1:105-06.

⁴¹ *Sermons*, Vol. 1 (1746), Preface, §5, *Works* 1:106-07 in Maddox [2012: 85-87]; cf. Thorsen [1990: 19].

Virtually all Christians recognize the Protestant and Jewish (Old Testament) canons as scripture, but Catholic and Eastern Orthodox readers may perceive that omitting the Apocrypha or deuterocanon lacks inclusivity. Wesleyans might recast this as focus on books “whose authority was never any doubt,” or more precisely those enjoying broader, if not universal, church consensus.⁴² Wesleyans can thus value edifying historical and spiritual literature in the Apocrypha but privilege ecumenically accepted books of scripture.

Christians appealing to the Bible as an inter-religious resource may also gain some traction with Muslims on the basis of the *Qur'an* Surah 10:94: “if thou [Muhammad] art in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture (that was) before thee.”⁴³ The *Qur'an* and Hadith literature regularly paraphrase or extrapolate the New Testament, and some Muslim historic luminaries acclaimed Jewish and Christian scriptures as divinely revealed or preserved with the *Qur'an*, which can be interpreted to affirm or confirm Jewish and Christian scriptures.⁴⁴

Many Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, and others will perceive the Bible’s importance in dialogue with Jews and Christians, and may especially express interest in understanding it if Jews and Christians reciprocate with attentiveness to Hindu, Buddhist, or other sacred texts. Even Dawkins appreciates the Bible’s significance in history and literature.⁴⁵

When any party questions or perceives misunderstandings or disputes regarding the Bible or other sacred texts, Honoring Conference supports an array of illuminating, adjudicating resources.⁴⁶ Dialogue partners may adjust Honoring Conference principles for non-biblical texts, and Christians may discover that inter-religious and religious-atheist dialogue augments Christian exegesis, hermeneutics, and theology (see section 6.4).

3.5 Conferring with the Community of Saints:

Reading the Bible in Honoring Conference includes the great cloud of witnesses whose lives and legacies reverberate across time, geography, and culture.⁴⁷ For Wesley, a *via media* navigates idealizing and condemning Christian history as regressive or corrupt,

⁴² Oden [2008: 117; cf. 165].

⁴³ Pickthall [2006: 159].

⁴⁴ Cf. Cook [2006: 185-223]; DeVan [2012d: esp. 183-84; 2012m: 393-95]; Tennent [2007: 59-60].

⁴⁵ Dawkins [2006a: 383-87 section heading]: “Religious Education as a part of Literary Culture.”

⁴⁶ Cf. DeVan [2012g] cataloging and replying to New Atheist readings of Genesis 1-11 and 19.

⁴⁷ Cf. Maddox [2011: 17-20; 2012: 85-87]; *Sermons*, vol. 1 (1746), Preface, §5, *Works* 1:106-07.

and values Christianity's first three centuries in the Greek East, Latin West, and seventeenth-century Anglican standards.⁴⁸ Representing the early church were "Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, and Polycarp...more at large in the writing of Tertullian, Origen, Clemens Alexandrius, and Cyprian; and...[in the fourth century reeling from Constantine] in the works of Crysostom, Basil, Ephrem Syrus, and Macarius."⁴⁹

Arthur Christian Meyers, Jr. documents Wesley interacting with Syrian as well as Greek and Latin Christians.⁵⁰ Wesley consulted tradition partly for disputation, leveraging Athanasius against "Neo-Arians" and Augustine against Calvinists: "He who created us without ourselves will not save us without ourselves."⁵¹

Ted A. Campbell highlights tradition specifically in African-American Methodism and world or global Christianity.⁵² Samuel Hugh Moffett, Kenneth Cracknell and Susan J. White reveal that Methodists are in some 135 countries from Albania to Brazil, China to Ghana.⁵³ United Methodist Bishop William H. Willimon adds the Methodist roots for Pentecostalism to Wesley's legacy of looking "upon *all the world as my parish*...and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation."⁵⁴

Outler construed tradition as the "collective Christian wisdom of other ages and cultures between the apostolic age and our own," while Maddox calls for "critical appropriation" of history's miscues and blind alleys, as well as its exemplary models.⁵⁵ Critical conferring complements Christian discernment by nurturing holy creativity roving outside overt or subconscious margins stipulated by spirits of the age, and by ameliorating

⁴⁸ Maddox [2012: 88; cf. 79, 81, 109]; cf. Im [1994].

⁴⁹ Sermon 132, "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel, near the City Road, London," §II:3, *Works* 3:586.

⁵⁰ Meyers [1985: v-vi, 118-53, 162-63] specifically Tatian the Syrian, Greek Apologists Quadratus, Aristides of Athens, Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Athenagorus of Athens, and Theophilus of Antioch; Latin apologists Minucius Felix, Arnobius of Sicca, Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, as well as Irenaeus, Epiphanius of Salamis, John of Damascus, Pope Eleutherius, Pope Victor I, Alexandrian Father Pantaeus, and Antiochian Father Eusebius of Caesarea; cf. Cracknell and White [2005: 99-100].

⁵¹ Campbell [1997: 71-72, 153-54] citing e.g. Sermon 85, "On Working out Our Own Salvation," §III:7, *Works* 3:199-209; "Letter to a Member of the Society" (16 September 1774) and "Letter to Dr. Erskine" (24 April 1765) in Telford [1931: 4:296, 6:113]; *Journal* (January 1756) in Curnock [1938: 5:145-46]. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1.1.1.8.I.1847 [2000: 452]: "Augustine, *Sermon* 169, 11, 13: PL 38923."

⁵² Campbell [1997: 74-75].

⁵³ Cracknell and White [2005: esp. viii, 1, 3, 5, 62-89, 172, 271-72]; Moffett [2005: 658-733].

⁵⁴ "Letter to the Revd. John Clayton?" (28 March 1739?) *Works* 25:616; Willimon [2007: 25]. cf. Dayton [2009: 171-87]; Heitzenrater [1995b: 97, 100].

⁵⁵ Maddox [2012: 108-09]; Outler [1985: 11]; cf. Bretherton [2006: 70]: "Not only...moral wisdom of the past but the whole record of the way the Christian life was lived by former generations in the history of the Church: the ensemble of story and memory as well as thought;" Campbell [1997: 63-65, 74-75, 150-51].

propensities to ethnocentrism, chronocentrism, and cultural myopia. As Christopher J. H. Wright explains: “Theology is a cross-cultural team game with global players....No part of the global body of Christ can say to any other part, ‘I have no need of you.’ Every part is enriched—theologically too—by every other part.”⁵⁶

Seeking the Spirit’s work more widely within what Methodist world religions scholar Huston Smith deems “the distilled wisdom of the human race” leads Wesleyans to inquire if we might find fruitful dialogue partners outside the Church and among New or other atheists.⁵⁷ Who is the Holy Spirit leading present and future Wesleyans, and other Christians, to learn from and enrich in turn? Wise Christians would be glad to know.

Maddox reiterates that appropriating insights from tradition and the community of saints “might legitimately go beyond Scripture. However, it should never go against Scripture.”⁵⁸ Scripture retains prominence in Honoring Conference that listens to history’s testimonies, insights, and wisdom; particularly the great cloud of Christian witnesses (cf. Hebrews 11-12) who provide venerable, mixed, and negative examples in their lives and writings that may yet speak to contemporary dilemmas and encounters.

3.6 Conferring with Reason and Logic

Wesley esteemed reason as God’s precious gift to process, understand, compare, and respond to God’s revelation in Scripture, tradition, and creation.⁵⁹ Reason is “joined” and goes “hand in hand” with religion or faith.⁶⁰ Departing from genuine reason departs from genuine Christianity.⁶¹ Wesley counselled those who debated theology: “Use no other weapons than those of truth and love, of Scripture and reason.”⁶² God intends

⁵⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright in Tennent [2007: front matter].

⁵⁷ H. Smith in *The Wisdom of Faith* [1996].

⁵⁸ Maddox [1994: 43].

⁵⁹ Maddox [2012: 94]; cf. Miles [1997: 77-78, 154]; “Letter to ‘John Smith’” (28 September 1745), §14, *Works* 26:158; Sermon 69, “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge,” §1:4, *Works* 2:590.

⁶⁰ *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, §27, *Works* 11:55; *Journal* (28 November 1750), *Works* 20:371; “Letter to Dr. Thomas Rutherford” (28 March 1768), §III.4, *Works* 9:382; “Letter to Joseph Benson” (5 October 1770) in Telford [1931: 5:203].

⁶¹ “A Dialogue between An Antinomian and His Friend” in T. Jackson [1958: 10:267]; *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, §27, *Works* 11:55 in Miles [1997: 79, 155].

⁶² Miles [1997: 78-79, 155] quoting *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, §27, *Works* 11:55; *Journal* (28 November 1750), *Works* 20:371; “Letter to Dr. Thomas Rutherford” (28 March 1768), §III.4, *Works* 9:382; “Letter to Joseph Benson” (5 October 1770) in Telford [1931: 5:203].

“children of light...[to] walk by the joint light of reason, Scripture, and the Holy Ghost.”⁶³ Wesley perceived Jesus and the disciples appealing to Scripture and reason, and sought “in every point, great and small, [to be] a scriptural, rational Christian.”⁶⁴

Wesley for Rebekah L. Miles vociferously championed reason in part because Enlightenment-era critics charged Methodists with enthusiastic irrationality, and some Christians (e.g. Luther) derided reason. Miles recounts Wesley as a fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford “taught logic, Greek, and rhetoric—all subjects that promote critical reasoning.”⁶⁵ Wesley commended logic to ministers and Kingswood students to direct their faith and action. “Let reason do all that it can, employ it as far as it will go.”⁶⁶ Wesley rebuked extreme rationalists who claimed supernatural revelation was *irrational*, and averred that reason by itself might describe but not impart faith, hope, and love.⁶⁷

Reason in Honoring Conference is consequently useful to weigh arguments and motives, calculate whether these are reliably based, compare and contrast new with earlier data, and catalyze active reflection and dialogue.⁶⁸ When reason evaluates data that God provides via sensory and spiritual experience (including Bible study mediated through the senses), it can accomplish much in understanding and communicating Scripture.⁶⁹

Reason all the same can be co-opted for deception. Cognizance of its limits and distortive powers helps reasoners to avoid hubris and drives them to the God of all reason and experience. Miles sees Wesley confronting reason’s “overvaluers,” since reason and science also bring technologies of destruction as well as healing. Wesley’s example rebukes claims to establish “what all rational people believe,” and prompts sensitivity to the role of human power in shaping what people conceive to be rational.⁷⁰

Wesley inversely encourages postmodern or religious undervaluers of reason to reconsider logic as a tool in self-understanding and dialogue that unconsciously or

⁶³ Letter to “John Smith” (28 September 1745), §14, *Works* 26:158.

⁶⁴ Miles [1997: 80, 155]; cf. Thorsen [1990: 300]; “Letter to Freeborn Garrettson” (24 January 1789) in Telford [1931: 8:112].

⁶⁵ Miles [1997: 82, cf. 80-81, 156].

⁶⁶ Sermon 70, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered,” §II:10, *Works* 2:599-600.

⁶⁷ See Miles [1997: 83-84, 97-98, 157-60] citing multiple Wesley works; Sermon 70, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered,” §II.10, *Works* 2:599.

⁶⁸ Cf. Miles [1997: 84-88, 157].

⁶⁹ Miles [1997: 94-97, 104, 159] citing multiple Wesley works. Reasoning on or about the Trinity is a classic example of orthodox Christianity relying on and reasoning from data in Scripture and tradition.

⁷⁰ Miles [1997: 100-01, 104].

consciously influences even those supposedly hostile or ambivalent toward reason.⁷¹

Although reason is limited and vulnerable to abuse, it serves as a professed mediator with New Atheists. Wesleyans are concomitantly conscious that undervaluing or overvaluing reason, as many interlocutors might do, are opposite pitfalls that their *via media* spurns.

3.7 Conferring with Personal and Corporate Experience

Wesley articulated experience as subjectively feeling affected, sympathizing with others in similar situations, skills honed through repeat performance, lifelong learning, trial and error, and simple observation.⁷² Experience can involve a felt inward relationship with God, a sure trust and confidence, practice in works of mercy, long-term leadership acumen, training others for God's work, and a factor in examining spiritual fruit.⁷³

Experience also has its limits. Individuals are susceptible to misapprehending experience, so Christians best interpret Scripture and their experiences with counsel from Christian brothers and sisters, including marginalized or excluded voices.⁷⁴ Wesley advised conferring with mature believers, in groups socially, listening to opponents and critics, and privileging publicly verifiable experience over individual subjective claims.⁷⁵

Experience that empowers Christ-like living via felt awareness of God's grace endows Christian life with "existential force," and together with other categories helps to winnow disputable teachings based on the fruit they ostensibly bear.⁷⁶ Experience for early Christians was a *guide* to the *goal* of abundant life, a "stimulus or goad" for doctrinal

⁷¹ Cf. Miles [1997: 101-03]; Sermon 70, "The Case of Reason Impartially Considered," §§3-6, II:10, *Works* 2:588-89, 599.

⁷² Maddox [1997: 108-12, 161-62] for documentation.

⁷³ "A Letter to the Author of 'The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared'" (27 November 1750), §32, *Works* 11:374; *Journal* (27 February 1740, 5 June 1772), *Works* 19:158, 22:336; "Letter to Henry Stebbing" (25 July 1739), §6, *Works* 25:671; "Letter to Miss March" (27 December 1774) in Telford [1931: 6:133]; *NT Notes*, Matthew 16:21, Matthew 23:34, John 17:13, Acts 22:19, Romans 15:14, and Titus 2:3; *Preface to Primitive Physick: Or, an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* §§4-7, 9 in T. Jackson [1958: 14:308-10]; *Preface to The Christian's Pattern; or, a Treatise of the Imitation of Christ*, §III.6 in T. Jackson [1958: 14:207-08]; Sermon 98, "On Visiting the Sick," §II.3, *Works* 3:390-91.

⁷⁴ Maddox [1997: 116, 137, 162, 165]; cf. *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Preface §§4-5 in T. Jackson [1958: 14:321]; Sermon 26, "Sermon on the Mount, IV," §O.1, *Works* 1:533-34; "Minutes" (25 June 1744) in T. Jackson [1958: 8:275].

⁷⁵ Maddox [2011: 17-19; 2012: 86-87].

⁷⁶ Outler [1985: 10-11]; cf. Heitzenrater [1995b: 80]; Maddox [1997: 117-18, 162; 2012: 111] citing esp. A *Second Letter to the Author of 'The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar'd*," §20, *Works* 11:399; Sermon 11, "Witness of the Spirit, II," §§II.6, V.2, *Works* 1:287-88, 297.

reflection.⁷⁷ Maddox perceives the Wesleyan tradition treasuring experience in contrast with much academic theology “written by scholars for scholars in response to scholarly questions... seldom read by pastors—let alone the broader community. This is not to say that professional theologians are happy with this situation!”⁷⁸

In Honoring Conference, experience tests theology’s concrete force and motivates the content and manner of ecumenical, inter-religious, and religious-atheist interactions. Speakers can testify to ambivalent, positive, and negative personal, social, and spiritual experiences with religion, agnosticism, or (New) atheism, fostering opportunities for empathy and conveying existential significance. John Cobb counsels in an open-hearted fashion: “If we trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we have no reason to fear that truth from any source will undercut our faith. Indeed, we have every reason to believe that all truth, wisdom and reality cohere in him.... Faith in Jesus Christ encourages and even requires us to assimilate into our tradition what others have learned.”⁷⁹

God moreover may re-sensitize seared consciences and sharpen dulled minds through dialogical experiences. God’s prevenient grace makes fruitful dialogue possible by granting every person some ability to will good, some conscience of the moral law that condemns or approves actions and passions, “some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray” that sooner or later, more or less, enlightens everyone.⁸⁰ Dialogues are one of many means through which God’s prevenient and transforming grace may fertilize and cultivate what Wesley described as “the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight, transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life, some degree of salvation, the beginning of a deliverance from a... heart...insensible of God.”⁸¹ Honoring Conference compares, contrasts, and hears testimonies in dialogue for what God might say to or through them.

⁷⁷ Maddox [1997: 120-26, 163-64] citing e.g. *Doctrine of Original Sin*, Part II, §II.20, Part III, §§ II, VII, Part IV, Q .1, §3 in T. Jackson [1958: 9:295, 9:318, 9:338, 9:361]; Sermon 44, “Original Sin,” §II.2, *Works* 2:176.

⁷⁸ Maddox [1997: 126].

⁷⁹ Cobb [1994: 749].

⁸⁰ Sermon 85, “On Working out Our Own Salvation,” §III.4, *Works* 3:207; cf. e.g. Romans 2:15.

⁸¹ Sermon 85, “On Working out Our Own Salvation,” §II.1, *Works* 3:203-04; cf. Sermon 34, “The Original Nature, Property, and Use of the Law,” §1.4, *Works* 2:23.

3.8 Conferring with the “Book of Nature” (the Sciences)

Wesley’s Anglican upbringing emphasized God’s revelation in the “natural world” for strengthening faith awakened by Scripture and deepening admiration for God’s power, wisdom, and goodness. These attitudes undergird Wesley’s biblical eschatological vision of God renewing the whole of created reality, including fauna and presumably flora (see chapter 7 for discussion with New Atheists). Wesley furnished his *The Desideratum; or, Electricity Made Plain and Useful* (1760) and *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation; or, A Compendium of Natural Theology* (1763 and later) to Methodist preachers, exhibiting his “enchantment,” in Joel B. Green’s diagnosis, with natural sciences.⁸²

Wesley abridged science books and journals extensively, expanding the 1777 edition of his *Survey* to five volumes with excerpts serialized and supplemented in the *Arminian Magazine*.⁸³ Wesley’s life-long medical study in the tradition of other Anglican clergy is further evidenced by Wesley’s *Primitive Physick: Or, an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (1747 and later).⁸⁴ He compiled his survey “to display the invisible things of God, his power, wisdom, and goodness,” and to “warm our hearts, and fill our mouths with wonder, love, and praise!”⁸⁵ For Wesley, studying nature confirmed Christian faith and evoked awe for God’s magnificent design rather than coercing or requiring belief as “evidentialist apologetics” attempted to do.⁸⁶

Wesleyan David Wilkinson contends that theology and science both encounter objective realities, but their interpretations are fallible and open to modification.⁸⁷ Wesley told one critic, “Permit me, sir, to give you one piece of advice. Be not *so positive*, especially with regard to things which are neither easy nor necessary to be determined.”⁸⁸ And, “God has so done his works that we may admire and adore, but we cannot search them out to perfection.”⁸⁹ One best proceeds when faced by apparent conflict between the Bible and Book of Nature not by bickering about which is more authoritative, but aiming

⁸² J. Green [2010: 185]; Maddox [2009: 25].

⁸³ See Maddox [2009: 25, 28, cf. 41] summarizing Harvard science historian Schofield [1953: 337-38] as suggesting that for its time: “There was likely no better single survey treatment for general readers.”

⁸⁴ Cf. Donat [2006: 285-98]; Maddox [2007b: 5-6].

⁸⁵ “Preface, §1, *Survey*, 1:ii-iv, viii in T. Jackson [1958: 14:300-02]; cf. J. Green [2010: 186].

⁸⁶ Maddox [2009: 38-43; 2010b: 169-70]; cf. Wilkinson [2010: 84]: consistency and “pointer[s]” vs. proofs.

⁸⁷ Wilkinson [2010: e.g. 6, 25-26, 54].

⁸⁸ “Letter to the Editor,” *London Magazine* 35 (1 January, 1765), 28 in Telford [1931: 4:286].

⁸⁹ Preface, §5, *Survey*, §1:vii in T. Jackson [1958: 14:301]; Maddox [2009: 45].

for “*justice to all*” to the extent realizable at that moment.⁹⁰ Science and other Honoring Conference voices provoke awareness of obscured biblical and other truths, but accommodation should flow not *only* from science, rational critique, or experience to hermeneutics and theology. Maddox instead urges dialogue by those who possess requisite knowledge or expertise in areas of consonance and dissonance.⁹¹

Finally, Book of Nature appreciation counters “anthropocentric exploitation.”⁹² Contra a Baconian equation or reduction of science to technological benefits, Wesley endorsed stewardship wherein everything ultimately belongs to God who consigns aspects of creation to human care to fulfill human and other creature’s needs. Eden prefigured and the New Heavens and New Earth consummate this interactive thriving.⁹³

Science is an exceptionally fertile subfield of inter-religious dialogue. *Science and Religion around the World* relays the interplay in Judaism from the Hebrew Bible to Ashkenazi Jews; in Christianity from the early Church to Galileo, Newton, Faraday and others; in Islam from medieval philosophy to Ottoman interactions with “Western” science; in “Indic religions” Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism on mathematics, medicine, and astronomy; and in Chinese religion on music, medicine, and technology invigorated by interactions with the Jesuits.⁹⁴ Armistead, Strawn, and Wright edit scholars who further refract the “Book of Nature” through behavioral, human, or social sciences in *Wesleyan Theology and Social Science: The Dance of Practical Divinity and Discovery*.⁹⁵ They delve into moral, self, systems, and social psychologies, cognitive science, and research on the unconscious to form, shape, and stretch Wesleyan theology.

Science or “the Book of Nature” together with reason and experience function as common courts of appeal for Christians and New Atheists, as well as some adherents or affiliates of other religious traditions, despite anti-scientific charges and protests to the

⁹⁰ Maddox [2009: 46, cf. 50]. For example, Maddox [1996: 215]: “Rational reflection helped recover a critique of patriarchy present within scripture itself.”

⁹¹ Maddox [2009: 50-52]; cf. Wilkinson [2010: e.g. 182-84].

⁹² Maddox [2009: 52]; cf. Lodahl [2010: 24, 30].

⁹³ Maddox [2009: 53-54] citing Sermon 1, “The Good Steward,” §I.1, *Works* 2:283; Sermon 28, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, VIII,” §§11, 25-26, *Works* 1:618-19, 628-29; Sermon 50, “The Use of Money,” *Works* 2:266-80; cf. Maddox [2007a: 49-66]; Richter [2008]; Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” §1.6, II, III.10, *Works* 2:441-45, 449.

⁹⁴ Brooke and Numbers [2011]; cf. DeVan [2011m].

⁹⁵ Armistead, Strawn, and Wright [2010: title].

contrary. In what ways or emphases Wesleyan Open Inclusivism yields fruit from and for this mutual—if contested—appreciation will be worthy to consider.⁹⁶

3.9 Conferring with the “Analogy” of Faith (Apostle’s Creed)

The “Rule” or “Analogy” of faith in Honoring Conference is the core convictions of apostolic Christianity, “the central narrative of God’s saving work in Scripture,” or for Wesley, the grand biblical truths.⁹⁷ Maddox grounds *regula fidei* phraseology in Augustine’s directions to interpret difficult Bible passages by “more open” Scripture and tradition; and the “analogy of faith” (*analogia fidei*) via Romans 12:6 as early Christians’ “communal sense of what was most central and unifying in Scripture, to aid in reading the whole of Scripture.”⁹⁸ This ideally nourishes a non-vicious circularity where central Christian beliefs and the Bible from which they arise are interdependent and synergistic.

Reformation controversies recast the “Rule of Faith” as Holy Scripture and the “Analogy of Faith” as “at least the Apostle’s Creed” for interpreting Scripture.⁹⁹ Wesley extolled: “In order to be well acquainted with the doctrines of Christianity you need but one book (besides the New Testament)—Bishop Pearson *On the Creed*.”¹⁰⁰ Samuel and Susanna Wesley commended *On the Creed* to John who used it at Oxford, assigned it to assistants, and recommended it in correspondence. John Wesley wanted Methodists to assert Christianity’s central historic doctrines in conjunction with liberty to “think and let think” on “opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity.”¹⁰¹ He yearned for unity neither in “*peculiar notions*” nor “*doubtful opinions*,” but in “undoubted, fundamental branches (if there be such) of our *common Christianity*.”¹⁰²

Thomas C. Oden compares dozens of Methodist, Wesleyan oriented, or Wesleyan influenced denominational faith statements as complementary to or extrapolating the Apostle’s Creed and Wesley’s abridgement of the Anglican Articles of Religion. The

⁹⁶ See esp. sections 1.2.1, 7.1.

⁹⁷ Maddox [2012: 89]; *NT Notes*, Romans 12:6.

⁹⁸ Maddox [2011: 21; 2012: 89] citing Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, Book III, §2.

⁹⁹ Maddox [2011: 22-23; 2012: 89] referencing *The Character of a Methodist*, §1, *Works* 9:34; Sermon 5, “Justification by Faith,” §2, *Works* 1:183; *An Address to the Clergy*, §II.1 in T. Jackson [1958: 10:490]; Sermon 62, “The End of Christ’s Coming,” §III.5, *Works* 2:483; Sermon 64, “The New Creation,” §2, *Works* 2:501.

¹⁰⁰ “Letter to Cradock Glascott” (13 May 1764) in Telford [1931: 4:243].

¹⁰¹ *The Character of a Methodist*, §1, *Works* 9:33-34 in Maddox [2011: 24].

¹⁰² Sermon 4, “Scriptural Christianity” §IV:4, *Works* 1:173.

original Articles were developed from the Augsburg Confession, Nicene, Athanasian, and Chalcedonian Creeds; and the United Methodist doctrinal standards relate “closely to their ecumenical precedents: the patristic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican sources, and their continuing relation to the vast international Wesleyan family of churches.”¹⁰³

Readers at this point may perceive that a Wesleyan response to the New Atheists is *ipso facto* Christian, potentially rigorously so. Yet Duke Divinity School Dean Richard B. Hays in his opening convocation alluded to popular comedian Jon Stewart’s bon mot to illustrate that this perception is by no means ubiquitous: “Being a Methodist is easy! It’s like the University of Phoenix of religions! We’ll take anybody!”¹⁰⁴ Hays partly conceded and partly corrected: “Often our churches have...acquiesced to a lowest-common-denominator religion that offers faith without discipleship, inclusivity without transformation, and blessing without mission. Even where we find examples to the contrary...many such examples—we are often surprised, inappropriately.”¹⁰⁵

Wesleyans with glad and generous hearts (Acts 2:46) invite “anybody” to join in Christian discipleship.¹⁰⁶ Yet Wesley did not pursue “*speculative latitudinarianism*” but fidelity to Scripture, Tradition, and the “Rule” or “Analogy” of Faith in historic orthodox Christianity.¹⁰⁷ Inter-religious and religious-atheist dialogue grounded by Honoring Conference can therefore prioritize this “common Christianity” over intra-Christian quarrels, even if situationally tackling intra-Christian dissent. Christians must be tentative, however, about assuming that or how interlocutors might mirror adherence to equivalent analogies of faith such as Maimonides’ thirteen principles, Islam’s five pillars, the Buddhist Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path, or New Atheist substitutes for the Ten Commandments.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Oden [2008: 1, 159, cf. 91-210]. Chilcote [2002: 19-21] reprints “A World Methodist Affirmation” as one representative, globally ratified, thoroughly orthodox Methodist confession.

¹⁰⁴ *The Daily Show* [2010: online].

¹⁰⁵ Hays [2010: online]; cf. DeVan [2011i].

¹⁰⁶ Cf. e.g. Willimon [1986: title].

¹⁰⁷ Sermon 39, “Catholic Spirit,” §III:1, *Works* 2:92.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. e.g. A. Ali [2006: 79-87]; Bayer and Figdor [2014: subtitle]: *Rewriting the Ten Commandments for the Twenty-first Century*; Dawkins [2006a: 298-300]; Epstein [2009: 118-42]; Grayling [2011].

3.10 God's Universal Holy Love and Pardoning Transforming Grace

A final Honoring Conference category for Maddox is a Wesleyan “*discrimen*” of God’s universal, pardoning, transforming love.¹⁰⁹ When Bill Moyers asked Huston Smith what chief wisdom Christianity had bequeathed to the world, Smith replied: “That God is love. Now, other traditions do not deny that, but they do not place it in the centrality of the faith.”¹¹⁰ Kenneth J. Collins in *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* likewise prioritizes “Holy Love” facilitating Wesleyan doctrinal and theological concerns, while Maddox’s *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* indicates God’s enabling people to freely respond to God’s love and grace.¹¹¹

Maddox cites David H. Kelsey mapping differences among twentieth-century theologians who affirmed biblical authority and drew on historical methods but differed in their *discrimen* or interpretive lens for Scripture and convictions about *how* God is salvifically present among the faithful, and the *ultimate goal* of God’s work. Maddox summarizes Kelsey on the point that interpreters see their *discrimen* “as a perceptive insight into the deepest themes of Scripture, not a foreign imposition upon it.”¹¹²

Helpful in determining Wesley’s *discrimen* is the “working canon” he often appealed to for interpreting Scripture broadly.¹¹³ For Wesley, every truth in Scripture matters, yet some are more immediately conducive to salvation. Wesley prioritized teachings he perceived the Bible reiterating: 1 Corinthians 13 as “a compendium of true religion,” and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) as “the noblest compendium of religion found in the oracles of God.”¹¹⁴ Maddox adds Psalm 145:9: “The Lord is loving to every [person], and his mercy is over all his works.”¹¹⁵ Wesley also praised 1 John as “the deepest” Holy Scripture, alluded to it in sermons proportionally more than any other

¹⁰⁹ Maddox [2011: 26-30; cf. 2012: 114-16].

¹¹⁰ H. Smith in *The Wisdom of Faith* [1996].

¹¹¹ K. Collins [2007: title]; Maddox [1994: title]; Thorsen in Lancaster et al. [2009: 17]; cf. Heitzenrater [1995b: 319-20].

¹¹² Maddox [2011: 26] citing Kelsey [1999: esp. 163-67, 193-96].

¹¹³ Cf. Kelsey [1999: 103-04]; Maddox [2011: 26]; Sermon 91, “On Charity,” proem, *Works* 3:292.

¹¹⁴ Sermon 73, “Of Hell,” §1, *Works* 3:31; *Journal* (17 October 1771 and 30 March 1789), *Works* 22:293, 24:126. Maddox [2011: 27] notes Wesley preached from the Sermon on the Mount in thirteen of forty-four sermons gathered in Wesley’s original first four volumes.

¹¹⁵ Maddox [2011: 30].

biblical book, and designated 1 John 4:19, “we love because God first loved us” as “the sum of the whole gospel.”¹¹⁶ Maddox clinches his reading of Wesley’s *discrimen*:

Wesley increasingly and self-consciously read the whole of the Bible in light of a deep conviction that God was present in the assuring work of the Spirit both to *pardon* and to *transform* all who respond to that inviting and empowering love—and *all* can respond!...Reading the Bible in “Wesleyan” ways...[embraces] Wesley’s central *discrimen*, even as one continues to test and refine it by ongoing conference with the whole of Scripture and the range of other readers.¹¹⁷

Countless Christians instinctively adopt a universal holy love and pardoning transforming grace *discrimen*, yet Calvinists or the Reformed may prefer Divine sovereignty or eternal decree, Charismatics or Pentecostals pneumatology, Eastern Orthodox theosis, Catholics the teaching magisterium, Muslims submission or surrender to God, Hindus and Buddhists *moksha*, atheists social or self-actualization, and so forth. Wesleyans do not dictate others’ *discrimen*, but for Wesleyans love is most essential, even over the abounding wisdom Honoring Conference facilitates. Wesley proclaimed, “For how far is love, even with many wrong opinions, to be preferred before truth itself without love! We may die without knowledge of many truths and yet be carried into Abraham’s bosom. But if we die without love, what will knowledge avail?”¹¹⁸

3.11 Conferring Together

Honoring Conference as a dialogical framework for common or “real” Christianity looks to Wesley using “all available tools to enable persons to live fully and well.”¹¹⁹ It polishes his vision for Methodists, “being of no sect or party, are friends to all parties and endeavor to forward all in heart-religion, in the knowledge and love of God.”¹²⁰ It ideally engages “the full range of divine revelation” orchestrating Scripture, history, reason,

¹¹⁶ Maddox [2011: 27-30]: *Journal* (18 July 1765 and 9 November 1772), *Works* 22:13, 22:352; “Letter to Richard Thompson” (28 June 1755), *Works* 26:566-67; *Sermons*, Vol. 5, Preface, §6, *Works* 2:357.

¹¹⁷ Maddox [2011: 30]: “George Whitefield defends God’s ‘distinguishing love’ rather than God’s universal love (p. 26) and rejects any possibility of sinless perfection (pp. 19-20) in *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Wesley, in answer to his sermon entitled ‘Free Grace’* (London: T. Cooper & R. Hett, 1741);” contrast Koskie [2012: 314] for disagreement regarding 1 John as a “canon within the canon” for Wesley.

¹¹⁸ “Preface,” §10, *Works* 1:107.

¹¹⁹ Armistead, Strawn, and Wright [2010: 3].

¹²⁰ *The Character of a Methodist*, §18, *Works* 9:42; Sermon 121, “Prophets and Priests,” §18, *Works* 4:82; cf. Outler [1985: 17].

experience, the Book of Nature, the Creed, and God’s universal pardoning transforming love and grace in a glorious ensemble resounding through the communion of saints.¹²¹

Honoring Conference is nonetheless corruptible if Wesleyans discard Scripture’s preeminence, pit categories against each other, attempt exhaustive Foundationalist structures, or refuse to consider revisions or replacements. To reapply Russell Richey’s appraisal of the Quadrilateral, Honoring Conference works best as an “operative methodology, a way of doing theology, not itself a doctrine to be subscribed.”¹²²

So-called secular fields of inquiry, atheists, and other religions may enliven Honoring Conference, but can any or all cohere as permanent contributors? This chapter provisionally concludes that academic disciplines might be integrated into the “Book of Nature” or other categories. Atheists, atheism, other non-Christians and religions are perhaps best welcomed as challenging and enriching guests, honored delegates who intercede where applicable. If honored guests become permanent partakers in Christian Honoring Conference, they must in some sense be willing to sing in harmony with Christian Scripture and other Honoring Conference voices. Christians can cordially accept interlocutors’ counter-invitations to dialogue or to serve as delegates at other conferences chaired or moderated by other religions or atheism, but *Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor* will ever impel Wesleyans to hope and invite “whosoever will” (Revelation 22:17) to pursue full Christian discipleship around the Lord’s Table.¹²³

3.12 Speaking Ecumenically, Evangelically, and Holistically

Bringing relevant voices to Maddox’s Honoring Conference illuminates Wesleyan tradition as a vibrant microcosm within ecumenical orthodox Christianity possessing solid foundations for Christian-New Atheist interaction. Outler summarizes that Wesleyan attitudes fruitfully link “with other doctrinal traditions without threatening to supplant any of them...[or] forfeiting its own identity.”¹²⁴ British Methodist and Duke Professor Geoffrey Wainwright suggests additionally that a generous orthodoxy, apostolic

¹²¹ Maddox [2012: 110, cf. 105-10].

¹²² Richey in Richey, Campbell, and Lawrence [2005: 13].

¹²³ Italicized phrase from S. Jones [2003: title].

¹²⁴ Outler [1985: 17].

preaching, attending to the sacraments, and by implication other “means of grace” such as prayer unite Wesleyans with other Christians.¹²⁵

With regard to Evangelicalism, David W. Bebbington in the British context updated his also controversial Evangelical “Quadrilateral” to a five-fold schema for global Evangelical Christianity across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas cohering in the Bible, the Gospel, the cross, social activism, and eagerness for Christian converts.¹²⁶ Wesleyan tradition elucidated in this chapter coincides by prioritizing Scripture, personal and social mission, evangelism, discipleship, and Jesus facilitating God’s gracious gift of salvation through the cross. Honoring Conference appends to these reason, science, the Apostle’s Creed, and a Wesleyan *discrimen* conjointly enhancing each other.

A final kinship between the Wesleys and the New Atheists provides precedents for Christian-atheist engagement in the public sphere in a manner that is comprehensible and compelling as Doug TenNapel appreciated in Hitchens.¹²⁷ Both the Wesleys and New Atheists straddle[d] academic and public spaces through media, activism, anthologies, and other platforms that use diverse literary genres to express and disseminate their ideals.¹²⁸ The Wesleys worked through education, social initiatives, music, “poetry as the handmaid of piety,” sermons, treatises, periodicals, satire, apologia, and polemical flair (see sections 6.3-6.6).¹²⁹ The Wesleys, like Dawkins at the 2012 Reason Rally, regularly preached to thousands, with the former engaging a range of audiences and speaking to “sinners, the justified, the diligent, the proud, the careless, and the weak in understanding.”¹³⁰

John Wesley for Kenneth Collins handled Christian doctrine as a “folk theologian” (per Outler) of “experimental” or “practical divinity” to enrich all dimensions of Christian life: “[the] public and private, heart and mind, personal and social that attests to the truth of Scripture.”¹³¹ Wesley favored “a diversity of truths in tension,” “eclectic style” over “one-sided readings,” and held together grace and works, divine initiative and human

¹²⁵ Wainwright [1995: 283-84].

¹²⁶ Bebbington [1996: 46; cf. 1989: 2-17]; Rack [2006: esp. 194] a Wesleyan mildly critiquing Bebbington.

¹²⁷ See section 1.1.4 quoting TenNapel [2009: online].

¹²⁸ Cf. chapter 1 and section 6.6 of this dissertation; Heitzenrater [1995b: 178-79]; Koskie [2012: 195].

¹²⁹ Abraham [2012: 132; cf. e.g. 2005: 21, 62]; Heitzenrater [1995b: 237, 272-73, 287-88, 322] and citations; Westerfield Tucker [2010: 237].

¹³⁰ Pasquarello [2012: 256, cf. 259, 321] citing e.g. “Letter on Preaching Christ,” (December 20, 1751) in T. Jackson [1958; 11:486-92]; cf. e.g. Heitzenrater [1995b: 100, 165, 188];

¹³¹ K. Collins [2007: 1-2, 328, 333]; e.g. Outler [1977: title]: “John Wesley: Folk Theologian.”

response, holiness and love.¹³² Wesley's conjunctive practical linking of "plain truth for plain people" with scholarship and literature is profitable for interacting with New Atheists, who, like the first Methodists, are partly a popular movement via Oxford through alumni Dennett, Grayling, Hitchens, the "Professor of the Public Understanding of Science" Dawkins, and other activist intellectuals and scholars in the public sphere.¹³³

Later chapters explore how applying Wesleyan tradition and Honoring Conference leads to strategies and nuances varying with those that others prioritize. Yet *The Society for the Study of Psychology and Wesleyan Theology* with an Open Inclusivist bearing assures that Wesleyan thought can be demonstrably fruitful without insisting that it must be "better" in every conceivable way than contending frameworks.¹³⁴ How then would Wesleyans benefit from dialogue with fellow members of Christ's body and other interlocutors if they have nothing to learn from them? Keeping this in mind modifies Douglas M. Koskela: Wesleyan reflections draw on the broader theological traditions of the church catholic, but sing them in a Wesleyan dialect.¹³⁵ Or, as Joel Green puts it: "Much of what characterizes a Wesleyan hermeneutic must be that Wesleyans do it."¹³⁶

¹³² K. Collins [2007: 4-5, 333]; cf. Heitzenrater [1995b: 320]; Outler [1975: esp. 71].

¹³³ "The Preface to Sermons on Several Occasions," §3, *Works* 1:104; cf. P. Williams [2013: 3-5] on Oxford.

¹³⁴ Armistead, Strawn, and Wright [2010: 2].

¹³⁵ Koskela [2012: 144].

¹³⁶ J. Green [2004: 124].

Chapter 4: The Bible: Wesleyan Inclusivist Pillars, Part 1

Chapter 2 analyzed philosophy and theology of religions for their applicability to atheism and New Atheists. It tentatively established that Open Inclusivism—of which there may be Wesleyan varieties—is fruitful for approaching issues of ethics, truth, and salvation pertaining to religious diversity and Christian-New Atheist relationships.

Multiple consequences proceed from wedding Open Inclusivism with Wesleyan Honoring Conference under a *discrimen* of God’s universal holy love and pardoning, transforming, responsible grace. First is a theology where God universally invites everyone to salvation and abundant life, Jesus mediates salvation, and God’s Spirit is at work not only among Christians, but in and through New Atheists wherever they present authentic challenges, verities, loveliness, and virtues to Christian and other interlocutors.

Second, since people’s background experiences and beliefs (including exposure to atheism) influence how people respond to God’s grace, God may providentially use New Atheists for God’s salvific purposes. This emboldens appreciating components of God’s grace in any goodness, beauty, justice, joys, or truths that New Atheists articulate or exemplify, whether or not New Atheists reciprocate or recognize their origins in God.

Third, because God’s invitation to salvation is universal, this strengthens a reasonable hope that Jesus will save *all* who faithfully respond to God’s pardoning and transforming grace, however they now or at their time of death affiliate ir/religiously. Wesleyan Inclusivism can hold such optimism about salvation together with conviction that Christianity as the religious tradition based on God’s revelation in, about, and through Jesus proclaims truths and a story whose splendor “outshines all others” in witnessing to God, God’s work, and God’s way of salvation.¹ That God might somehow save any number of atheists after they die does not negate sharing the Gospel with them now so that any who are persuaded might sooner and more immediately know and rejoice in its truth.

As chapter 3 argued, Holy Scripture is preeminent for Wesleyan theology, ethics, and practice. A Wesleyan variety of Open Inclusivism addressing issues of truth, righteousness, and salvation will therefore resonate with the Bible. The current chapter also suggests that Inclusivism supplies a compelling interpretation of the biblical material

¹ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 86].

without pretending to be the only responsible way to read the Bible. We proceed in three stages: 1) mobilizing passages that Wesleyans, Inclusivists, and the likeminded cite to support Inclusivism, or as best accounted for by it; 2) subjecting these to critical alternate readings; and 3) examining their portents for New Atheists.

4.1 Open Inclusivist Themes in Hebrew and Christian Scripture

Wesleyan Terry C. Muck with Frances S. Adeney collates 239 Bible passages germane to inter-religious encounter.² This chapter concentrates on those that Wesleyan, Inclusivist, and related scholars accentuate. A constructive synthesis for the project at hand puts forward three meta-themes: 1) wise or righteous gentiles in the Hebrew Bible and non- or pre-Christians in the New Testament who exemplified, received, or conveyed God's revelation or truth; 2) God in Hebrew Scripture calling nations beyond God's Covenant People Israel to repentance and righteousness, and in the New Testament to a universal opportunity for salvation; and 3) prospective warnings and actual wickedness in the false or hypocritical worship of the true God and idolatrous worship of false "gods."

4.1.1 Gentile Exemplars in the Hebrew Bible and Pre-Christians in the Gospels and Acts:

Embarking with Genesis, Clark Pinnock (1937-2010) introduces Abraham: "Though Abram has a special calling from the Lord, he is not to think (and we are not to think) that there are no believers among the nations and no positive contributions to be appreciated from non-Israelite religion and culture."³ British Methodist Kenneth Cracknell cites Abel, Enoch, and Noah as pre-Abrahamic exemplars, and "Nimrod" in Genesis 10 as "a mighty hunter before the Lord."⁴ Cracknell, Pinnock, Willimon, and Reformed Evangelical Inclusivist Tiessen who is regularly in conversation with Pinnock,

² Muck and Adeney [2009: 379-85].

³ Pinnock [1992: 26]; cf. Cracknell [2005: 22-23]; Karkkainen [2003: 49]. Pinnock credits Wesleyan tradition and the Quadrilateral for his theological method in a theological biography by longtime *Wesleyan Theological Journal* editor and former society president Barry L. Callen [2000: e.g. 96, 181, 260, 265].

⁴ Cf. Cracknell [2005: 25]; Karkkainen [2003: 36-88, 209, 322]; Pinnock [1992: 21-111, 158-79]; Tiessen [2004: 24, 57, 83-170, 220-21, 311, 330, 344, 348, 415] citing e.g. Genesis 4-10, 38; 1 Chronicles 1:10; Ezekiel 14:14; Hebrews 11:7; and 2 Peter 2:5 partly against *OT Notes*, Genesis 10:9 conjecturing negatively about Nimrod as a conquering hunter.

cite Job as a righteous worshipper caring for the needy, lame, widows, and orphans; yet the text does not specify Job (from “Uz,” 1:1) was an Israelite.⁵

Cracknell, Pinnock, and Tiessen assert Abraham’s contemporary Melchizedek, the Canaanite priest of *El Elyon*, is another gentile exemplar to whom Abraham gives tribute as a “type” for Christ.⁶ Abimilech of Gerar is a second Abrahamic contemporary that Pinnock and Tiessen read reverencing God, acting with integrity in his heart, receiving God’s warning, and partial vindication despite Abraham presuming no “fear of God” among Abimelech and his people (Genesis 20).⁷

Cracknell reads Judah’s Canaanite wife Shua (or the daughter of Shua) and Tamar as comparatively righteous non-Israelites.⁸ Despite Tamar deceiving Judah, Judah declares her “more righteous than I” (Genesis 38:26) in Judah’s refusal to wed her to his son Shelah.⁹ Pharaoh King of Egypt in the same generation perceives God’s Spirit in Joseph, who tells Pharaoh that God has revealed to Pharaoh what God is about to do. Joseph marries at Pharaoh’s behest Asenath, daughter of Potiphara, the priest of On, and the Bible records no rebuke for this union begetting Ephraim and Manasseh.¹⁰

Moving through the Torah (תּוֹרָה), Cracknell, “freewill” Inclusivist John Sanders, and Tiessen cite Pharaoh’s servants rightly perceiving God’s work on Israel’s behalf and imploring Pharaoh to release Israel to worship God and “no longer be a snare” to Egypt.¹¹

⁵ Job 29:12-16, 31:16-23; James 5:11; Cracknell [2005: 24-25]; Pinnock [1992: 26]; Tiessen [2004: 415]; Willimon [2008: 53]; cf. in conversation with Pinnock and Sanders: Tiessen [2000; 2004].

⁶ Genesis 14:17-24, Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 5-7; Cracknell [2005: 21-22, 224, 227]; Karkkainen [2003: 37, 48-49]; Pinnock [1992: 22, 26, 84, 92-96, 107, 179]; Tiessen [2004: 367-68]. One might add Abraham’s second wife Hagar and son Ishmael who receive a theophany and blessings but without God’s promise in the same way as Isaac (cf. Genesis 16-17, 21, 25; 1 Chronicles 1:29; Galatians 4). Abraham also petitions God in Genesis 18 not to destroy Sodom if ten or more righteous—not least his nephew Lot—reside there.

⁷ Genesis 20-21, 26; Pinnock [1992: 26-27, 92-96, 111-12, 161]; Tiessen [2004: 115, 170]: Abimelech in this episode acts more generously than Abraham who attempts to deceive Abimilech; cf. *OT Notes*, Genesis 20:11: “There are many places and persons that have more of the fear of God in them than we think they have; perhaps they are not called by our name, they do not wear our badges, they do not tie themselves to that which we have an opinion of; and therefore we conclude they have not the fear of God in their hearts!”

⁸ Cracknell [2005: 25]; cf. Genesis 10:8-10, 38; 1 Chronicles 1:10.

⁹ *The Holy Bible, New International Version* [2011]: hereafter *NIV*. *NRSV*: “more in the right than I.”

¹⁰ Genesis 41:37-50, 46:20; cf. Cracknell [2005: 25]; Tiessen [2004: 368, 419]. Jacob in Genesis 47 also blesses Pharaoh. *OT Notes*, Genesis 41:44 confirms that Pharaoh “honourably” married Joseph “to a prince’s daughter,” whom the text specifies as Asenath, daughter of Potiphara, the priest of On.

¹¹ Exodus 10:1-7; Sanders [1995: 27]; cf. a different pharaoh’s daughter in Exodus 2 who rescues, adopts, and names the baby “Moses,” whom she drew out of the water. Sanders described in a February 16, 2012 e-mail to this dissertation author: “I have Wesleyan sympathies...soteriology...in the tradition of what I call the “freewill tradition” of the church (which includes the Eastern Orthodox, Arminians, and Wesleyans).”

Moses' father-in-law Jethro, a priest of Midian, advises Moses on governing Israel, praises God, and offers sacrifices to God ostensibly at Israel's tent of meeting.¹² Still later in Israel's journey to the Promised Land, Balaam son of Beor is hardly above reproach in his dealings with the Israelites, yet Balaam (and his donkey!) receive and deliver God's revelation despite Balaam being an apparently gentile and/or pagan soothsayer.¹³

Tiessen transitions to the Historical Books where God sends Elijah to reside in the region of Sidon and to bless a widow of Zarapheth who greets Elijah as a "man of God" (1 Kings 17:18 and 17:24; cf. Luke 4:25-26).¹⁴ Pinnock, Tiessen, and others note Elijah's protégé Elisha in like manner heals Naaman the Syrian of leprosy and directs Naaman to "go in peace" when Naaman petitions permission or preemptive forgiveness to kneel in the temple of Rimmon to physically assist his head of state.¹⁵ Tiessen sees God's grace active in the lives of still other proselytes who join and reside with God's people: Rahab, Bathsheba, Ruth, and the righteous Ethiopian eunuch Ebed-melech.¹⁶

Pinnock celebrates non-Israelite monarchs such as the Queen of Sheba in 2 Chronicles 9:1-12 for seeking God's wisdom and looks ahead to Matthew 12:42 where Jesus prophesies that "the Queen of the South" (putatively Sheba) will give testimony at the Final Judgment.¹⁷ Tiessen notes Hiram King of Tyre praises God in 2 Chronicles 2:11-12 as the maker of heaven and earth who loved Israel by supplying her with the wise and prudent king Solomon.¹⁸ Sanders and Tiessen qualify Pharaoh Neco in 2 Chronicles

¹² Exodus 18:1-12, cf. 3-4; Cracknell [2005: 23]; Sanders [1992: 219]; Tiessen [2004: 174, 182]; cf.

Karkkainen [2003: 49]. *OT Notes*, Exodus 18:12 comments: "Jethro took a burnt offering for God - And probably offered it himself, for he was a priest in Midian, and a worshipper of the true God."

¹³ Cracknell [2005: 23-24] *in errata* refers to Balaam, not Balak, as "son of Zippor;" cf. Numbers 22-24, 31; Deuteronomy 23:4-5; Joshua 13:33, 24:9-10; Nehemiah 13:2; Micah 6:5; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11; Revelation 2:14; Tiessen [2004: 114]. *OT Notes*, Exodus 22 Intro: "Balaam inspired by God, blesses Israel again;" cf. *NT Notes*, 2 Peter 2:15; contrast *OT Notes*, Joshua 24:10, Jude 1:11, Revelation 2:14.

¹⁴ Tiessen [2004: 196].

¹⁵ 2 Kings 5, cf. Luke 4:27; McGrath [1995-1996: 178]; Pinnock [1992: 92, 101]; Tiessen [2004: 57, 170, 173-74, 196]; Willimon 2008: 81]; Jesus in Luke 4:24-26 references the Zarepheth widow and Naaman the Syrian favorably in comparison to their and to his Israelite contemporaries.

¹⁶ Joshua 2:11, 6:23; Ruth 1:16-17; 2 Samuel 11:3-4; Jeremiah 38-39; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25; cf. Cracknell [2005: 25]; Tiessen [2004: 170]; *OT Notes*, Joshua 6:23; *NT Notes*, James 2:25: "After Abraham...the apostle cites Rahab, a woman, and a sinner of the gentiles; to show, that in every nation and sex true faith produces works, and is perfected by them...by the grace of God working in the believer."

¹⁷ Matthew 12:42; Pinnock [1992: 27]: The Queen of Sheba prefigures the Magi in Matthew 2:1-12 by traveling "from a distant pagan culture to worship God;" cf. Karkkainen [2003: 49].

¹⁸ Tiessen [2004: 114]. 1 Kings 4:29-31 declares that God gave Solomon great wisdom, discernment, and breadth of understanding so that his wisdom surpassed all Eastern and Egyptian wisdom: "He was wiser

35:21-22 rebuking King Josiah with words from the mouth of God, and Persian King Cyrus declaring that God charged Cyrus to build God's temple.¹⁹ God condescends to be heard by Nebuchadnezzar through pagan divination, and speaks to Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar via dreams, which Daniel interprets.²⁰ King Darius too confesses that Daniel's God is the living God whom Darius's subjects must reverence.²¹

New Testament reproofs to those in and outside the church mingle with non-Jewish exemplars in the gospels, righteous pre-Christians in Acts, and others who possess false, little, incomplete, or apparently no knowledge about Jesus. Jesus declares some to be citizens of God's kingdom who are unexpected to themselves or others, possibly including residents from the proverbially wicked Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, and Gomorrah.²²

At Jesus's birth, divinely guided Magi—possibly Persian or “pagan” astrologers—are among Jesus's earliest worshippers.²³ Jesus in Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30 acclaims a Canaanite or Syro-Phoenician mother's faith.²⁴ Jesus upholds a Samaritan over a priest and a Levite exemplar in Luke 10:25-27, and in Luke 17:18 heals ten lepers, but only a “foreigner” or “Samaritan” expresses gratitude.²⁵ Jesus speaks of outcasts and Samaritans entering God's kingdom ahead of Israelite religious leaders, and commends a

than anyone else...than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, children of Mahol;” thereby implicitly lauding these non-Israelites' lesser wisdom by esteeming Solomon as even wiser than them.

¹⁹ 2 Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:2; Tiessen [2004: 114, 115, 366]; Sanders [1995: 220, 242]. Isaiah 44:28, 45:1 designate Cyrus God's shepherd and sense of calling as a Temple builder; cf. *OT Notes*, Isaiah 45:1.

²⁰ Ezekiel 21:18-23; Daniel 2:1, 2:29-47, 3:28, 4:34, 4:37, 5:5; Tiessen [2004: 115]; cf. Genesis 41 on Joseph and Pharaoh. *OT Notes*, Daniel 4:37 states strongly: “What authority had any one to say, that this man [Nebuchadnezzar] ‘was no convert.’ We can no more doubt of his salvation than of Solomon's.”

²¹ Daniel 6:16, 6:26-27; Tiessen [2004: 115]; cf. Cracknell [2005: 24]; Pinnock [1992: 22]; and Tiessen [2004: 330-31] each suggesting Ezekiel 14:14-14:20 upholds a different “Daniel” or “Dan'el” as a righteous gentile linked to Job and Noah against *NT Notes*, Ezekiel 14:14.

²² Cf. Matthew 10:15, 11:22, 12:41-42, 20:1-16, 25:31-46; Cracknell [2005: xxii, 45-46, 153, 221]; Pinnock [1992: 31, 151, 153]; Sanders [1992: 87, 108, 112, 175, 191, 253, 259]; Tiessen [2004: 82, 148, 233, 237, 342, 415-16; 495]; Willimon [2008: 15, 70-77, 88, 98].

²³ Matthew 2:1-12; Pinnock [1995-1996: 27, 95]; cf. Inclusivist-oriented Wesleyan Hamilton [2005: 27-29].

²⁴ Cracknell [2005: 28, 151, 221, 232]; Pinnock [1992: 32]; Sanders [1992: 221]; Tiessen [2004: 341].

²⁵ Luke 10:25-37; Tiessen [2004: 197, 433] notes that the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” responds to “what must I do to inherit eternal life?,” to which Jesus concludes: “Go and do likewise;” cf. Pinnock [1995-1996: 32, 253]; Sanders [1995: 34]; Tiessen [2004: 175]; Willimon [2008: 11, 77, 81]. *NT Notes*, 10:31: The parable is “an emblem of many living characters, perhaps of some who bear the sacred office... is not the day coming, when the virtues of heathens and Samaritans will rise up in judgment against you [?]”

Roman centurion for greater faith than any Jesus found in Israel.²⁶ A gentile soldier is among the first to confess when Jesus dies: “Surely this man was the Son of God!”²⁷

In John 4:7-15, Jesus commends a Samaritan woman’s thirst for “living water” without rejecting Samaritan worship on Mount Gerizim. Jesus in the same pericope classifies Samaritans as less knowledgeable in their worship than Jews, but foretells a time when Jews and Samaritans will worship God together in Spirit and in truth.²⁸

Sanders references where Pinnock states that pre-messianic Jews were saved by faith even though they lacked considerable knowledge about their future savior.²⁹ Jesus honors children who lack sophisticated concepts of God but exemplify kingdom inheritors in other ways, namely by their humility.³⁰ Jesus’s apostles likewise display fluctuating theological sophistication from understanding Jesus first as a teacher with unusual authority (Mark 1:16-28, 4:38), then a prophet (Mark 6:1-4), Messiah (Mark 8:29), and finally the Son of God (Matthew 16:16).³¹ The brigand on the cross in Luke 23:39-43 sets his heart on Jesus with little opportunity for progressing in faith or knowledge pre-humously, yet Jesus pledges that they will be together in paradise.³²

Pinnock sees in Acts 10 a generous spirit extending to those ignorant of the Gospel, and perhaps ignorant of God’s prior dealings with Israel, who receive further benefits by the Gospel fulfilling their righteous but incomplete faith.³³ Peter declares after a vision and change of heart: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts...from every nation [those] who fear him and do what is right.”³⁴

The gentile Cornelius is God’s catalyst for Peter’s heart-change. God hears Cornelius’s prayers, accepts his alms, and enjoins him through a vision or angelic

²⁶ Matthew 8:10, 21:31; Cracknell [2005: 28, 217]; Pinnock [1992: 31, 95]; Sanders [1992: 221]; Tiessen [2004: 196-97, 341-42]; Willimon [2008: 98].

²⁷ Mark 15:39; Karkkainen [2003: 42]; Tiessen [2004: 193].

²⁸ Cracknell [2005: 28]; Pinnock [1992: 32, 101]; Tiessen [2004: 341].

²⁹ Sanders [1992: 259, cf. 257-64; 1995: 38-51]; Pinnock [1995-1996: 110]; Willimon [2008: 97].

³⁰ Matthew 18:3, 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16-17; 1 Corinthians 7:14; Sanders [1992: 285, 289]; Tiessen [2004: 212]. *NT Notes*, Matthew 19:14: “Little children, either in a natural or spiritual sense.”

³¹ The man born blind in John 9:1-38 progresses similarly in confession; cf. Mark 8:17-21; Tiessen [2004: 131, 191-94, 314]. Jesus’s greeting to Nathaniel in John 1:48-51 as a righteous Israelite in whom there is no guile implies pre-Messianic righteousness or innocence since Nathaniel did not yet directly know Jesus.

³² Cf. Pinnock [1992: 176]; *NT Notes*, Luke 23:40-42; Willimon [2008: 55, 66, 89, 119].

³³ Pinnock [1992: 32].

³⁴ Acts 10:34-35; Cracknell [2005: 30, 207-28]; Pinnock [1992: 32, 96, 105, 165]; Sanders [1992: 40, 65, 153, 222-23, 260]; Tiessen [2004: 37-39, 128, 143, 149, 175, 224, 342, 408]; Willimon [2008: 50, 97].

visitation. In Open Inclusivist fashion, God uses Cornelius to teach Peter before Cornelius hears the Gospel (Acts 10). Yet even as the angel commends Cornelius, God sends Peter to preach the Gospel to his household in order to perfect Cornelius's faith.³⁵

Tiessen and Willimon cite Saul's reception of a divine visitation even while Saul is persecuting Christians (Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-31, 22:1-21, and 26:9-18).³⁶ In Acts 16:11-15, Saul renamed Paul preaches to Lydia, who like Cornelius is described as righteous, but who grows in her knowledge and experience of God through the Gospel.³⁷

Paul in Lystra tells hearers that "God [in the past] let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony" (Acts 14:16-17); and in Acts 17:22-34 acknowledged good intentions behind Greek worship of an "UNKNOWN GOD" who overlooked past ignorance but now calls all to repentance.³⁸ Sanders interprets that some Athenians in a "clearly imperfect but nonetheless genuine sense...did worship the true God."³⁹ A number became Christians, others scoffed or wanted to hear more, and all received opportunities to grow in faith by coming to know the UNKNOWN GOD.

Finishing Acts, God assures Paul that many of God's people, who Tiessen describes as evidently not (yet) Christians, reside in particular cities (18:9-11).⁴⁰ Paul in Acts 19:1-7 teaches twelve disciples of John the Baptist about Jesus and the Holy Spirit without condemning their repentance-based discipleship.⁴¹ Paul in Acts 23:1-6 tells his

³⁵ Cracknell [2005: 29-30]; Pinnock [1995-1996: 109]; Tiessen [2004: 39, 62, 128, 143, 149, 175-77, 191, 224, 331, 342, 408, 474]. *NT Notes*, Acts 10:35: "But in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness...endeavours, according to the best light he has, to do all things well; is accepted...through Christ, though he knows him not. The assertion is express, and admits of no exception. He is in the favour of God, whether enjoying his written word and ordinances or not. Nevertheless the addition of these is an unspeakable blessing to those who were before in some measure accepted. Otherwise God would never have sent an angel from heaven to direct Cornelius to St. Peter." Karkkainen [2003: 44]; cf. Sanders [1992: 153] comparably construes Philip's preaching to an Ethiopian and to Samaritans in Acts 8:26-40.

³⁶ Tiessen [2004: 113, 185-87]; Willimon [2008: 97-98, 118]. Saul become Paul in 1 Timothy 1:13 testifies that although he is a former blasphemer, he received mercy because he "acted in ignorance and unbelief;" cf. Pinnock [1992: 101] quoting 1 Timothy 1:13; Tiessen [2004: 129, 185].

³⁷ Sanders [1992: 285]; Tiessen [2004: 235, 240, 243, 495].

³⁸ Acts 17:22-34, *NIV* translates in all capitals; cf. Romans 3:25, Hebrews 1:1-3; 1 Peter 1:14; Cracknell [2005: 31-34, 45, 158, 229]; Pinnock [1992: 32, 76, 96, 101-39]; Sanders [1992: 28, 40-41, 191, 228-60, cf. 25-26]; Tiessen [2004: 39, 85-90, 100-33, 150, 178, 232, 299, 309-16, 342-44, 369, 375, 379, 400, 449]. *NT Notes*, Acts 17:23, 28 claims that some credited the attribution to G/god "unknown" to Socrates, who was covertly devoted to the true God against heathen gods, or to the God of Israel whose image is unrenderable and whose name was unknown to gentiles. Paul quotes Athenian poet Aratus, also in a Cleanthes hymn to "Jupiter or the supreme being, one of the purest and finest pieces of natural religion in...Pagan antiquity."

³⁹ Sanders [1992: 246-47]; Cracknell [2005: 34].

⁴⁰ Tiessen [2004: 186-87, 202, 284-85].

⁴¹ Cracknell [2005: 161]; Tiessen [2004: 185, 197]; cf. Acts 18:24-26 Prisca and Aquilla to Apollos.

Sanhedrin “brothers” that he worships the “God of our ancestors.”⁴² Tiessen sees the God “who revealed his Son” in Jesus as the same God who Paul served as a Pharisee, yet Jesus imparts to Paul a more holistic faith in God.⁴³ Jesus likewise commissions disciples to share their glorious privilege by teaching others what he taught them.⁴⁴

Wesleyan Inclusivists who share the gospel need not read Jesus or the apostles as teaching that those whose eyes did not (yet) see, or ears did not (yet) hear, but hungered to do so have no hope of salvation as a strict Restrictivist would argue. Instead, prevenient and transforming grace is always at work in responsive hearts and minds. Recipients of God’s revelation in Hebrew Scripture, Jews and non-Jews in Jesus’s ministry, pre-Christian Jews in Acts like the antagonistic Saul, and gentiles like Cornelius and Lydia signal that God’s truth, righteousness, and transforming grace are active among gentiles and pre-Christians who range from proselytes, widows, outcasts, religious functionaries, civil servants, and others besides Abraham’s Israelite descendants. The Bible moreover underlines God’s redemptive purposes overflowing not only to individuals, but to nations.

4.1.2 *God’s Care for the Nations:*

Hebrew Scripture communicates that God is in dialogue not only with non-Israelite individuals but also non-Israelite nations. Pinnock points to an everlasting, post-deluvian, irrevocable covenant that God institutes with all flesh in Genesis 9 surpassing simple “preservation from another flood.”⁴⁵ Cracknell and Pinnock infer the Genesis 10 “table of nations” intimates that God remembers and attends to all people and nations.⁴⁶

⁴² Cracknell [2005: 157]; Tiessen [2004: 186].

⁴³ Tiessen [2004: 186-87] citing Peace [1999: 82].

⁴⁴ E.g. Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 10:23-24; cf. Matthew 13:16-17; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 1:12; Cracknell [2005: xix, 150-53, 243]; Pinnock [1992: 61]; Sanders [1992: 43, 284]; Tiessen [2004: 84, 113, 124, 260, 264]; *NT Notes*, Matthew 13:16: “Prize the light...given you;” Willimon [2008: 40, 59-60, 127].

⁴⁵ Pinnock [1992: 21, 35, 53, 104, 117, cf. 1995: 109] citing Genesis 9:17; Revelation 4:3, cf. 7:9, 10:6, 15:3 where the rainbow encircling God’s throne echoes the cosmic Noahic covenant and intends not solely physical preservation but cosmic redemption; Cracknell [2005: 11-15]; Karkkainen [2003: 36-38]; Tiessen [2004: 144]. Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, and 28:14 reiterate the Abrahamic blessing; cf. *OT Notes*, 1 Chronicles 1:28: “All nations but the seed of Abraham are already shaken off from this genealogy. Not that we conclude, no particular persons of any other nation but this found favour with God. Multitudes will be brought to heaven out of every nation, and we may hope there were many, very many...names were in the book of life, tho’ they did not spring from the loins of Abraham;” *NT Notes*, Revelation 15:3.

⁴⁶ Cracknell [2005: 12-13]; Pinnock [1992: 21].

For Pinnock, God in Deuteronomy apparently allowed non-Israelite nations to worship in ways inappropriate for Israel.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Tiessen cites Solomon in 1 Kings 8:41-43 asking God to answer foreigners' prayers offered toward the temple so that all "peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel."⁴⁸

Jacques Dupuis notes that Hebrew Scripture does not say how many among the nations recognize God, but all are called to do so: In "Psalms of the Reign" (47, 93, 97, 98, and 99) the nations praise God's universal royalty.⁴⁹ Psalm 47 directs: "Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of Joy....God reigns over the nations... nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham. For the kings of the earth belong to God."⁵⁰ Psalm 82:8 exults: "Rise up, O God, judge the earth...all the nations are your inheritance."⁵¹ God declares in Psalm 87:4: "I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush."⁵²

Tiessen and Willimon recognize God in the Prophets calling Israel to proclaim God's salvation to the ends of the earth so that knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as waters cover the sea.⁵³ The Prophets announce not judgment only, but salvation and peace in Isaiah 19:23-25 to Egypt, Jeremiah 48-49 to Moab, Amon, and Elam; Ezekiel 36:23 to nations who "will know that I am the Lord."⁵⁴ Isaiah 2:1-4 envisions the nations gathering at the Lord's mountain to learn to walk in God's ways, and 19:25 invokes: "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."⁵⁵ God in Isaiah 25:6-9 and elsewhere promises a feast for all peoples, to remove their veils of blindness, swallow death forever, wipe away their tears, and invites all nations to sing a new song, to

⁴⁷ Pinnock [1992: 101] citing Deuteronomy 4:19.

⁴⁸ Tiessen [2004: 170, 329] comparing Hezekiah in 2 Kings 9:15; cf. Cracknell [2005: 25] on another possible non-Israelite exemplar, "Ithra the Ishmaelite (2 Samuel 17:25)," appointed army chief by Absalom.

⁴⁹ Dupuis [1997: 39-40]; cf. Cracknell [2005: 16-18].

⁵⁰ *NIV* quoted here is more gender inclusive than *NRSV*; cf. Joshua 4:24; Psalm 102:15, 102:22; Cracknell [2005: 17]; Pinnock [1992: 24, 28, 30]; Tiessen [2004: 326, 415].

⁵¹ Pinnock [1992: 20, cf. 24] quoting Psalm 82:8; Psalm 8:1, 22:27-28, 46:10, 47:1, 47:9, 49:1, 65:5, 66:1, 66:8, 67:3, 82:8, 87, 96:3, 96:7, 96:10, 97:9, 98, 99, 100:1; Tiessen [2004: 415]; Willimon [2008: 4]; cf. *OT Notes*, Psalm 47:9: "He doth not say the people of Abraham, lest this should be...the Israelites; but the people of the God of Abraham who worship the God of Abraham, whether they be Jews or Gentiles."

⁵² Cracknell [2005: 17]; Pinnock [1992: 28] quoting Psalm 87:4. Cracknell [2005: 74] also quotes Psalm 68:5-6 and 103:13-14 as using potentially universal language when depicting God as a father of orphans and a protector of widows, a giver of homes to the desolate and prosperity to prisoners.

⁵³ Tiessen [2004: 334] citing Isaiah 11:9, 66:19; Habakkuk 2:14; Willimon [2008:51] citing Isaiah 11:9.

⁵⁴ Karkkainen [2003: 40]; Tiessen [2004: 332] citing Psalm 67:2: God's saving purposes for "all nations."

⁵⁵ Pinnock [1992: 29] quoting Isaiah 19:5. *OT Notes*, Isaiah 19:5: "This title, and those which follow, that were peculiar to the people of Israel, shall now be given to these and all other nations."

walk in God's glory, to turn and be saved.⁵⁶ Willimon cites Isaiah 45:8 resembling the Flood's universality pouring forth life rather than death: "Let the skies rain down righteousness...the earth open that salvation may spring up."⁵⁷

Pinnock avers that in the Major Prophets contrite spirits and fidelity to God's moral commands are criteria for the nations to participate in God's future kingdom.⁵⁸ God proclaims in Jeremiah 18:7-8: "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned."⁵⁹

Through Israel's chastisement, the Ammonites, Moabites, Philistines, Tyre, Sidon, and Egyptians become witnesses that God alone is God.⁶⁰ God allows "Gog" to invade Israel, and later to be destroyed for Gog's own sins so that "the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I display my holiness before their eyes."⁶¹ Cracknell foresees foreigners in Ezekiel 47:21-23 sharing the land as Israel's fellow inheritors.⁶²

Tiessen cites additional passages in the Minor Prophets to peoples outside Israel.⁶³ Joel 3:11-15 envisions God judging multitudes in the "valley of decision."⁶⁴ God poses in Amos 9:7: "Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?...Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?"⁶⁵ Obadiah, Jonah, and Nahum "deal extensively with pagan nations."⁶⁶ Jonah records non-Israelite sailors behaving more righteously than Jonah in trying to spare Jonah's life and offering sacrifices and vows to "the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (1:9).⁶⁷ Jonah's bitterness at God's withdrawing wrath contrasts with God's mercy

⁵⁶ Isaiah 2:2-4, 42:10-12, 45:14-24, 49:23, 55:3-5, 56:6-7, 60, 66:18-19; Jeremiah 1:5, 3:17; Zechariah 14:16-17; Cracknell [2005: 18-19]; Pinnock [1992: 30, 151]; Tiessen [2004: 331-34, 344]; Willimon [2008: 122]. *OT Notes*, Isaiah 56:7: "free access to mine house and altar, as the Jews themselves."

⁵⁷ Isaiah 45:8 as quoted by Willimon [2008: 5].

⁵⁸ Cf. Isaiah 58:6; Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; Mark 12:28-34 on "Works of Mercy" > "Works of Piety;" Pinnock [1996a: 209-10]; Tiessen [2004: 415]; Sermon 92, "On Zeal," §II.5, 9, *Works* 3:313-14.

⁵⁹ Pinnock [1992: 29, 161] quoting Jeremiah 18:7-8; cf. Cracknell [2005: 18].

⁶⁰ Cf. Isaiah 55:7; Ezekiel 18:32-21:6, 25:5-17, 26:6, 28:22-24, 29:6-16, 30:19, 30:26, 32:15; Tiessen [2004: 245-46, 255, 332]. Sanders [1995: 26; cf. 1992: 133-34, 236] interjects that God's ways are not ours in that God is willing to forgive those who seriously wrong God; cf. Isaiah 55:6-8.

⁶¹ Ezekiel 38:16, cf. 38:2, 38:23; Tiessen [2004: 334-35].

⁶² Cf. Cracknell [2005: 38].

⁶³ Tiessen [2004: 334, 415]; Isaiah 13-23; Jeremiah 46-51; Ezekiel 25-32; Amos 1:3-2:3.

⁶⁴ Pinnock [1992: 118] quoting Joel 3:11-15.

⁶⁵ Pinnock [1992: 27, 94, 117] quoting Amos 7:9; Tiessen [2004: 334, 468].

⁶⁶ Karkkainen [2003: 40].

⁶⁷ Sanders [1992: 220].

to the Ninevites whose repentance God accepts without requiring them to visit Jerusalem's Temple or to join Israel.⁶⁸ God declares in Malachi 1:11: "From the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among the nations."⁶⁹

In a nutshell, Hebrew Scripture proclaims God calling the nations to repentance and righteousness rather than shrinking God's redemptive care to Israel. These themes signpost God's pardoning transforming grace both to non-Israelite individuals and to nations that the children of Israel are called to be a light unto (e.g. Isaiah 51:4, 60:3).

Pinnock turns to the New Testament maintaining that the universal reach of God's salvation central to Jesus's proclamation indicates not that all *will* be saved, but all have *opportunity* to be saved.⁷⁰ God's kingdom hallmark is God's mercy to the undeserving, and God wants God's house filled with repentant sinners from east, west, north, and south gratefully taking their places at God's kingdom feast.⁷¹ Those who are excluded or exclude themselves harden their hearts, plug their ears, and suppress the truth.⁷²

For Pinnock and Willimon, Jesus's kingdom imagery and the book of Acts portray lavish increase rather than narrow salvation of a fortunate few. Salvation is not "done in a corner."⁷³ Yeast leavens a lump, a tiny seed produces a miraculous harvest, talents are multiplied; Jesus goes to prepare a place with *many* rooms or mansions; Christians foster the homecoming of Christ's sheep from other flocks.⁷⁴ Jesus when approached by Greeks promises to draw "all people" to himself (John 12:32).⁷⁵

Matthew 25:31-46 pictures universal judgment of "all the nations...[and] people" at Jesus's throne. Separating the righteous from the accursed are their responses to the

⁶⁸ Pinnock [1992: 28]; cf. Cracknell [2005: 19-20]; Sanders [1995: 28].

⁶⁹ Pinnock [1992: 28-29]: Many prophetic passages render best in present tense comparing contemporary Israelites to gentiles and nations; quoting Malachi 1:11 with Cracknell [2005: 18-21]: Yet in Zechariah 8, people from all nations and languages yearn for the closeness to God they perceive Jews retain: "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you;" cf. Tiessen [2004: 11, 335, 344]; Willimon [2008: 122].

⁷⁰ Pinnock [1992: 30, 156, 202]; cf. e.g. 1 Timothy 2:3-4, 4:10; 2 Peter 3:9; Cracknell [2005: 126]; Sanders [1992: 25-28, 61, 83, 90, 108, 133, 135, 199, 217, 257]; Tiessen [2004: 236, 247, 291, 342, 488-89]; Willimon [2008: 45, 50, 76, 87, 120]. *NT Notes*, 1 Timothy 2:4: "Who willeth seriously all men...To be saved...They are not compelled."

⁷¹ Pinnock [1992: 31]; e.g. Luke 13:29; 1 Timothy 1:15; cf. Sanders [1992: 217].

⁷² Cf. section 7.3; Pinnock [1992: 31, 153, 180, 188]; Sanders [1992: 28, 39, 64, 154, 180, 191, 208]; Tiessen [2004: 87, 112, 132-45, 236-64, 289, 321, 376, 414-15, 443, 490].

⁷³ Acts 26:26, 28:28; Romans 3:21, 5:9, 8:1; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Cracknell [2005: 29]; Tiessen [2004: 85]; Willimon [2008: 10, 39-42].

⁷⁴ Pinnock [1992: 104]; Willimon [2008: 99, 100-02, 151]; cf. Matthew 13:31-35, 25:14-30; 13:18-20, 19:11-27; John 10:16; 14:2-3; Cracknell [2005: 59]; Tiessen [2004: 202, 224].

⁷⁵ Sanders [1992: 27, 83, 217]; Tiessen [2004: 341-42].

hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and prisoners who Jesus identifies as “the least of these...members of my family.”⁷⁶ Willimon comments on the apparent astonishment that the blessed and the accursed express. “There will be surprises for everyone!...The judge who sits on the throne surprises because his judgments are unlike ours.”⁷⁷

Wesleyan-resonant Inclusivists also detect universal access to salvation in the Epistles. Sanders differentiates two types of gentiles in Romans 1 and 2: those who are aware of but refuse to worship God, and God’s acknowledgers who are ashamed of sin and act according to God’s will.⁷⁸ God in Romans 1 and 2 makes God’s power and deity known through God’s creation and by writing moral law(s) on every heart so that people’s consciences “accuse or *perhaps excuse* them” on Judgment Day.⁷⁹ Romans 3:29-30 asks: “Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also?...He will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.”⁸⁰

Tiessen cites Romans 4:15 that those ignorant of “the law” are judged apart from it: Where there is no law, there is no transgression.⁸¹ Sanders translates Romans 4:24 not “believe in the resurrection...to be saved,” but “believe in *God who raised Jesus*” emphasizing God rather than possession of pre-mortem data about God’s work through Jesus.⁸² God shows mercy to whom God desires (Romans 9:18) and God graciously desires to offer mercy to all (Romans 11:32).⁸³ Since God will judge all, Sanders cites Romans 14:10 echoing Jesus’s cautions about judging others.⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

⁷⁶ Matthew 25:40-45; Pinnock [1992: 151, 163-65]; Sanders [1992: 252-53, 259]; Tiessen [2004: 148, 414-16]; Willimon [2008: 54, 70-71, cf. 76].

⁷⁷ Willimon [2008: 70].

⁷⁸ Sanders [1992: 235] citing multiple commentators.

⁷⁹ Sanders [1992: 257, 261, cf. 28, 39, 59; 235] quoting Romans 2:15; cf. 1 Corinthians 4:4; Cracknell [2005: 31, 51]; Pinnock [1992: 33]; Tiessen [2004: 39, 101-30]; Willimon [2008: 41-42, 76, 79].

⁸⁰ Sanders [1992: 221]; Tiessen [2004: 124].

⁸¹ Tiessen [2004: 76]; Old Testament Covenantal Law in context; cf. Romans 2:12, 5:13-20; Sanders [1992: 27-28, 83, 102, 103, 107-08].

⁸² Sanders [1992: 68, 227, 234]; cf. Colossians 2:12; *NT Notes*, Romans 4:24: “Him who raised up Jesus—God the Father...is the proper object of justifying faith.” All have “heard” to a degree through God’s creation in Romans 10:18 quoting Psalm 19:4; Pinnock [1992: 104]; Tiessen [2004: 106, 266, 268, 487]. *NT Notes*, Romans 10:18: “Their unbelief was not owing to the want of hearing.”

⁸³ Sanders [1995: 50, 149]; cf. Exodus 33:19; Pinnock [1992: 19]; Sanders [1992: 133, 236]; Tiessen [2004: 169, 234, 236, 254]; Willimon [2008: 38, 77, 120]. Also citing James 4:8 that God will come near to whoever draws near to God with pure hearts; Pinnock [1992: 102-03]; Sanders [1992: 236]; Tiessen [2004: 151, 422]; cf. 2 Chronicles 16:9; Psalm 9:10; Jeremiah 29:13.

⁸⁴ Cf. Matthew 7:1-5; Luke 6:37-38, 19:11-26; Pinnock [1992: 176]; Sanders [1992: 262].

encourages addressees not to judge before God brings to light all hidden things and every heart's purposes, when each person will receive requisite commendation from God.⁸⁵

Revelation reiterates God's universal mercy.⁸⁶ When the New Jerusalem descends from heaven, the earth's kings bring the nations' healed and restored glory and honor into it.⁸⁷ Pinnock cites Revelation 7:4, 11:15, and 15:4 that "All nations will come and worship before [God]."⁸⁸ Willimon remarks: "One might think Revelation—addressed to a persecuted and struggling church—would stress the fortunate few rescued and safe before the Lamb's throne. Although Revelation is not above such limiting judgments, here Revelation's stress is upon...A huge crowd... 'of every creature.'"⁸⁹

Cracknell complements Willimon and Pinnock by spotlighting two motifs in Revelation. The first implies limited salvation (14:9-10, 20:11-15, 21:7-8), the other God's victory encircling all peoples and creation (1:7, 4:3, 5:13, 14:14, 15:4, 21:5, 21:22-23). "Because John is what we might call today a 'dialectical theologian,' he deliberately uses both sets of images...the ultimate triumph of God...[and] dire portrayals of choosing to reject the truth and of living in allegiance to false gods."⁹⁰

If the above are correct, then God does not sequester transforming grace, wisdom, righteousness, or the possibility of salvation to Israel in or before Jesus's earthly ministry, nor exclude any nations or individuals in the Christian era. Simultaneously in dissonance with Parity Pluralism, religious subjectivism, and relativism is Jesus's commission to his disciples to proclaim everything he taught to all nations without qualifying the scope of proclamation by nationality, philosophy, religion, or the fact that some people are already graced variously, recognize important redemptive truths, or live righteously. Proclamation for Parity Pluralists would appear unnecessary or redundant if all religions or philosophies

⁸⁵ Tiessen [2004: 63, cf. 422] alluding to Newbigin [1995: 196]; cf. the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:24-30, 13:36-41; Willimon [2008: 36, 80]. *NT Notes*, Revelation 20:12: "Hidden things will then come to light; and...have quite another appearance....Every man [shall then] know himself."

⁸⁶ E.g. Psalm 36:6; Romans 8:22; Revelation 5:11-13; Cracknell [2005: 35]; Sanders [1992: 182]; Tiessen [2004: 100, 220, 294]; Willimon [2008: 28, 40, 44, 88].

⁸⁷ Revelation 21:24-26, 22; cf. Isaiah 60; Cracknell [2005: 18, 34-38]; Pinnock [1992: 20, 34]; Sanders [1992: 191, 195]; Tiessen [2004: 220, 309, 332-33]; Willimon [2008: 6, 19]. *NT Notes*, Revelation 22:17 on God's universal invitation: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life."

⁸⁸ Pinnock [1992: 3, cf. 20, 117, 153]; cf. Cracknell [2005: 35]; Tiessen [2004: 293].

⁸⁹ Willimon [2008: 44-45] citing Revelation 5:11-13; cf. Cracknell [2005: 35]; Sanders [1992: 182]; Tiessen [2004: 220, 294].

⁹⁰ Cracknell [2005: 35, cf. 36-39, 92-93, 135]; Pinnock [1992: 34-35, 116, 153]; Sanders [1992: 182]; Tiessen [2004: 82, 148, 220, 233, 309, 418].

are equally valuable, true or false ontologically, functionally, or both for whoever believes or practices them. The Gospel and Christianity would ostensibly be no better nor worse than any other beliefs its audiences or recipients conceived of or practiced.

In contradistinction, Inclusivists sustain that some doctrines, beliefs, ethics, and practices may be and are better, truer, or more “advantageous.”⁹¹ This is palpably reinforced in biblical condemnations of idolatry and other forms of false religion.

4.1.3 *False Religion, Hypocrisy, and Idolatry:*

In tension with claims that all G/gods, religion(s), and/or worship are on a par or rough par per normative, transcendental, extreme, unitary, and ethical Pluralism, Inclusivists underscore a third theme in Hebrew and Christian Scripture: the repudiation of false, wicked, hypocritical, diabolical, and idolatrous perversions of true piety. Christiana de Groot highlights Genesis 31 hinting at this disparity in Rachel’s duplicitous seizure of her father Laban’s household idols resulting in inter-family conflict and humiliation of these non/gods by having an allegedly menstruating woman sit on them.⁹²

Sanders and Tiessen cite God judging Egypt’s gods in Exodus, so that the Egyptians will know there are none like God.⁹³ God punishes Israel for worshipping the golden calf and crediting other “gods” for bringing them out of Egypt, and the Decalogue famously forbids Israel to worship other gods, make idols, or use God’s name in vain.⁹⁴

Torah censure of reprehensible worship practices is not confined to Israel.⁹⁵ Deuteronomy asserts Canaanites do “abhorrent things” for their gods that God hates.⁹⁶ Other denunciations link false religion in or beyond Israel with immoralities such as child sacrifice, cultic prostitution, and oppressing the foreigner, poor, orphan, and widow.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Griffiths [2001b: xv].

⁹² de Groot [2002: 21]. *OT Notes*, Genesis 31:30 contrasts Laban’s household “gods” with the Lord: “Foolish...to [sic] call those his gods that could be stolen! Could he expect protection from them that could neither resist nor discover their invaders [sic] Happy are they who have the Lord for their God.”

⁹³ Exodus 9:14, 12:12, cf. 7:5, 7:17, 8:10, 8:22, 9:14, 10:2, 12:12, 14:4, 14:18, 16:12; Deuteronomy 4:35, 4:39, 32:39; Sanders [1992: 134]; Tiessen [2004: 325-26].

⁹⁴ Exodus 20:1-7, 32:4, cf. 32-34, Deuteronomy 5:7-11; Joshua 24, Judges 2; Tiessen [2004: 133, 210, 233, 300-48, 399, 408]; Willimon [2008: 16]. Psalm 106:19-20, cf. 115: “They made a calf at Horeb and worshipped a cast image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass!”

⁹⁵ Cf. Karkkainen [2003: 282-317] critiquing Hick, Knitter, Pannikar, and Stanley J. Samartha.

⁹⁶ Tiessen [2004: 326, 330, 337] citing Deuteronomy 18:9-11 and 20:18.

⁹⁷ Cracknell [2005: 27]; Pinnock [1992: 98]; Sanders [1992: 220]; Tiessen [2004: 246, 334, 337, 352, 415, 419]. On child sacrifice: e.g. Leviticus 18:21, 20:1-5; 1 Kings 11:5; 2 Kings 23:10; Isaiah 57:9, Jeremiah

In dramatic examples from the Historical Books, the statue of the Philistine god Dagon in 1 Samuel 5:1-7 falls on its face before the Ark of the Covenant; and Elijah ridicules the prophets of Ba'al in 1 Kings 18:16-40.⁹⁸ Throughout Hebrew Scripture, the ba'als and other idols Israel or the nations reverence are characterized as “no gods.”⁹⁹ Pinnock casts angelic or ruling “mighty” ones in Psalms 29:1 and 97:7 as not divine in the same way God is, but invited to worship and ascribe to God glory and strength.¹⁰⁰

As in Hebrew Scripture, the New Testament denounces idolatry, false doctrines, and immoral practices. Jesus rebukes Jewish leaders who hanker after honorific titles, external regulations, and legal niceties as “blind leaders of the blind.”¹⁰¹ Jesus warns about scheming false prophets: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven.”¹⁰²

Paul faces diabolical opposition in Acts 13:6-12 and 19:11-41, and is provoked by idol worship in Acts 17:16-29.¹⁰³ Paul and Barnabas are distraught in Acts 14:6-18 by Lystrans who want to worship them as Zeus and Hermes, addressing them as “friends” who bring good news to forsake worthless idols and turn to the living God who made heaven, earth, sea, rain, and fruitful seasons to fill their stomachs and hearts with joy.¹⁰⁴

32:35; on cultic prostitution: Deuteronomy 23:17; 1 Kings 15:24, 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Hosea 4:14; on the foreigner, poor, orphan and widow: Job 31:16; Psalm 12:5, 14:6, 82:3, 140:12; Proverbs 14:31, 19:17, 21:13, 22:9, 22:16, 22:22, 29:7; Isaiah 3:14-15, 10:2, 61:1; Jeremiah 5:28, 22:16; Ezekiel 16:49, 18:12, 22:12, 22:29; Amos 2:7, 4:1, 5:12, 8:4-6; Zechariah 7:10.

⁹⁸ *OT Notes*, 1 Samuel 5:4 on Dagon's broken pieces: “The head is the seat of wisdom; the hands the instruments of action... he had neither wisdom nor strength to defend himself or his worshippers.” When set upright, Dagon falls again breaking into pieces. One also could compare Daniel 3 where God vindicates Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar's statue, and Daniel 1-2, 4-6, and 10 where Daniel does not reject his title “Belteshazzar” after Nebuchadnezzar's “god,” nor refuse to oversee Babylon's “wise men” or “magicians,” but will not cease praying to God alone despite threats on his life.

⁹⁹ Cf. Deuteronomy 32:17; 1 Kings 18; 2 Kings 21; Isaiah 37:18-19, 41:21-22, 43:9-10, 44:6-9, 45:6-22; Jeremiah 2:11, 2:26-28, 3:6-13, 10:1-16, 16:20; Hosea 8:4-7; Amos 5:26; cf. Acts 14:15, 19:26; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, 10:14-31; Galatians 4:8; Cracknell [2005: 161]; Pinnock [1992: 122]; Sanders [1992: 236, 242, 312]; Tiessen [2004: 260, 300-48, 372, 468]. *OT Notes*, Deuteronomy 32:17: “These pretended gods were really devils, and therefore that it was the height of madness to honour or worship them;” cf. Jeremiah 2:27: “Sottish stupidity of this people, to take a lifeless stock or stone to be their maker.”

¹⁰⁰ Pinnock [1992: 121].

¹⁰¹ Pinnock [1992: 89] quoting Luke 11:37-52; cf. Matthew 23:1-37; Tiessen [2004: 316].

¹⁰² Pinnock [1992: 97] quoting Matthew 7:15-23, cf. 21:22-23, 25:31-46; Cracknell [2005: 153]; Sanders [1992: 112, 218; 1995: 33]; Tiessen [2004: 46, 82, 148, 170, 233, 237, 342, 415-16]. According to Matthew 7:22-23; cf. Luke 13:26-27; Pinnock [1992: 158]; Tiessen [2004: 82, 233, 290, 414]; Willimon [2008: 76] some evildoers even claim to work miracles, prophecy, and cast out demons in Jesus's name.

¹⁰³ Even as Paul favorably quotes a Greek philosopher-poet; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:14-21; Ephesians 2:2; Revelation 9:20; Cracknell [2005: 31, 161-62]; Pinnock [1992: 90, 120, 129-30, 142]; Sanders [1992: 244-45]; Tiessen [2004: 187, 244, 277, 300, 313, 342-44, 396, 472, 487, 495].

¹⁰⁴ Acts 14:17; cf. Sanders [1992: 228-60]; Tiessen [2004: 100-28, 342, 357, 400]; Willimon [2008: 42].

Sanders and Tiessen cite the Epistles and Revelation reproaching rival powers / gods, false gospels / prophets, misguided zeal, and church corruption.¹⁰⁵ 1 Thessalonians 1:9 praises believers who turn from idols to God.¹⁰⁶ The corrupt “claim to know God” but by their actions deny God.¹⁰⁷ 1 John 4:1 directs: “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”¹⁰⁸ Only one of seven churches in Revelation 2-3 escapes censure, and 3:9 rebukes a “synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but...liars.”¹⁰⁹

In solidarity with Christian Universalists and Restrictivists, an Inclusivist reading of the Bible induces confession that Jesus is the unique savior of the world, the New Testament’s decisive counter to false gods.¹¹⁰ Idols and hypocritical lip service to the True God are not equally good and true paths to the Real, contra reductionisms that any and every form of “religion” must be equally true or false, pleasing to or emitting from, inspired or not inspired by God or Ultimate Reality. Wesleyan Inclusivism expediently incorporates Restrictivist denunciations of human proclivities to idolatry, false religion, and depravity with Universalist stresses on the multinational universal imagery and scope of God’s salvific care for the nations and all individuals within them. Sanders summarizes biblical Inclusivism as repudiating idolatry while upholding God’s grace, truth, wisdom, righteousness, and hope for salvation beyond ancient Israel and later Christianity:

None seek God apart from divine grace...the Scriptures are replete with calls to seek God and promises that we shall find him when we seek him with all our heart and that he is good to those who seek him (Deut. 4:29; 2 Chron 15:2; Proverbs 8:17; Isa 55:6; Jer 29:13; Lam. 3:25; Amos 5:6; Luke 11:9-10; Acts 17:27; and Heb. 11:6)...[We] find hope in these...God’s work and concern.¹¹¹

In reading the whole arc of the biblical canon, these themes become less easy to dismiss as eisegetic proof texts. One can contend that their principles emerge from a responsible reading, even if it is not the only imaginable reading, which emerges when

¹⁰⁵ Sanders [1992: 28, 109, 180, 259, 290]; Tiessen [2004: 35-39, 62-76, 107, 127-45, 185, 207, 223, 415, 495]; cf. Romans 2:6-15, 10:2; 2 Corinthians 11; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Pinnock [1992: 86-97, 161-63, 175].

¹⁰⁶ Pinnock [1992: 89]; Tiessen [2004: 124, 343]; Willimon [2008: 126].

¹⁰⁷ Pinnock [1992: 98] quoting Titus 1:16.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. 1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22; Pinnock [1992: 84, 109]; Tiessen [2004: 316, 377]. *NT Notes*, 1 John 4:1: “We are to try all spirits by the written word.”

¹⁰⁹ Pinnock [1992: 90, 175, 154]; Sanders [1992: 203]; cf. 1 Peter 4:17; Tiessen [2004: 260, 313, 343].

¹¹⁰ Psalm 118:22; Acts 4:11; 1 John 2:2; Cracknell [2005: 94]; Sanders [1992: 26-27, 63, 83, cf. 202]; Tiessen [2004: 86-87, 487-90]; Willimon [2008: 74, 116].

¹¹¹ Sanders [1992: 236].

Scripture is brought into dialogue with questions of truth, righteousness, and salvation posed and organized by philosophy and theology of religion. A conscientious Wesleyan Inclusivism here aspires to confirm and be confirmed by faithful consistent readings of Scripture, to harmonize rather than to distort the pluriform biblical witness. Still, the above readings are not without detractors. Section 4.2 reconnoiters alternative interpretations of the biblical pericopes that are referenced above to sustain an Inclusivist position.

4.2 Dissenting Readings:

In an information era where databases, digitizing, and disciplinary specializations allow access to millennia of biblical commentaries and scholarship, any consensus on biblical selections deemed friendly or foundational will be provisional at best. Even so, Open Inclusivism *eo ipso* profits from testing by alternate or hostile readings. Restrictivist or Exclusivist scholars attempting to “demonstrate the superiority of exclusivist exegesis” provide direct rejoinders to Inclusivists, but their limitations may create the impression that if this is the best that Restrictivists have to offer, one prudently aligns with Inclusivism or another paradigm.¹¹² We begin with Hebrew Scripture.

4.2.1 Of Melchizedek, Abimelech, and Jethro:

Exclusivist Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser and systematic theologian Robert A. Peterson start with Genesis, casting Melchizedek as a shadowy figure and possible unique recipient of special revelation who is too abstruse to compel commitment to either Inclusivism or Exclusivism. They call more inclusive apprehensions of Melchizedek into question rather than disallowing them outright, conceding that Melchizedek was possibly “saved” through direct, archetypal, or archeological access to some sort of special or general revelation, even though they are highly skeptical about the latter.¹¹³

¹¹² R. Peterson [2008: 194]. This dissertation writer is unaware of any sustained critique of Inclusivist scripture readings from a Pluralist perspective. Talbott [2008: 446-61, esp. 446-47, 455-58] argues for a Christocentric Universalism based on “universal” passages from the New Testament, but ignores Hebrew Scripture in this essay and offers little critique of alternative New Testament readings.

¹¹³ Kaiser [2008: 130-32]; R. Peterson [2008: 184-85] citing Strange [2002: 188-89].

Kaiser and Peterson in their concession recall Possibilist Inclusivism more than Abrahamic-line Restrictivism, leaving this writer to wonder if they experience unmitigated Restrictivism, at least in select instances, as too burdensome to bear. Kaiser and Peterson want to retain their identities as Special Revelation Exclusivists, but their treatment of Melchizedek overlaps Exclusivist and Inclusivist categories, and is potentially recast as a pessimistic Inclusivism skeptically allowing that God's salvific grace operates, if rarely, outside the Abrahamic line.¹¹⁴ If Melchizedek in God's grace served God because he benefitted from some type of independent, ancestral, or general revelation, or another supplementary source, Inclusivists justifiably inquire whether others outside the Abrahamic line before Jesus or beyond the visible church in the Christian era might, like Melchizedek, be faithful servants of "God Most High" (Genesis 14:18-22).

A second dismissal from Reformed Restrictivist philosopher Ronald H. Nash casts doubt on Abimelech and other non-Israelites' righteousness or saveability. "Few of the people cited [by Inclusivists] impress us as examples of redeemed believers."¹¹⁵ This will strike some readers as arbitrary, since Nash does not delineate criteria for this impression, and leaves open that some (if "few") would or *do* impress as "redeemed believers." Even if Inclusivists omit Abimelech, Restrictivists must deal with remaining examples.

Whatever Abimelech's final salvific status, Inclusivists can be hopefully agnostic in light of the Genesis 20 episode where Abimelech claims and exhibits integrity in his dialogue with God. Abimelech experiences and communicates revelation from God, and rebukes Abraham congruent with Open Inclusivism in learning God's truth and appreciating God's grace beyond God's visible Covenant Community.

Kaiser tries to shore up his Abrahamic-line Restrictivism by speculating that Jethro's ancestors somehow connected with Abraham who instructed them in God's ways and passed these down to Jethro over "some six hundred years."¹¹⁶ Kaiser proffers this hypothesis without referring to any evidence, inserting as a post-script that Jethro was in any case "a believer in full fellowship with the People of God."¹¹⁷ Yet Kaiser is silent

¹¹⁴ Kaiser [2008: 141]; R. Peterson [2008: 184-200].

¹¹⁵ R. Nash [1994: 129]; cf. Kaiser [133-34] on Balaam, whose salvation one can also be agnostic about.

¹¹⁶ Kaiser [2008: 132-33].

¹¹⁷ Kaiser [2008: 133].

about the scope or sense of Jethro's "full fellowship," perhaps given Exodus 18:27 where Moses sends Jethro on Jethro's way, and Jethro returns to his own country.

For both Kaiser and Inclusivist readings, Jethro's status and function as a priest of Midian remains open before and after Jethro welcomes Moses as his son-in-law. The text does not indicate a perspicuous "conversion" that would render Jethro a Jewish proselyte, nor an 'ordination transfer' to the Israelite priesthood when Jethro offers sacrifices at the Tent of Meeting.¹¹⁸ Kaiser's reading of Jethro does little to unsettle Inclusivist readings.

In Open Inclusivist fashion, Jethro and Moses receive God-given wisdom from each other. Jethro for Open Inclusivists is a righteous gentile who leads authentic worship of God, and Jethro wisely instructs Israel and Israel's leader Moses in the civil and just administration of God's Covenant People (Exodus 18).

4.2.2 *Of Pertinent New Testament Passages:*

What about alternate readings of New Testament texts? First, Restrictivists demur on Cornelius.¹¹⁹ Peterson following Daniel Strange speculates that like Jethro, Cornelius must have had contact with "Jewish faith," and because Cornelius received an "angelic visitation," he cannot be analogized with the unevangelized who have not received special visitations.¹²⁰ Kaiser believes Cornelius illustrates that God will send a messenger to preach Jesus to whoever lives up to the light that they possess, then concentrates his point of contention: "[If] Cornelius was a believer before Peter preached in his house...why trouble Peter to make the arduous trip from Joppa to Caesarea?"¹²¹

One might reply that if God must send a human messenger like Peter to preach the Gospel (Acts does not record the angel mentioning Jesus to Cornelius), then "acceptable" light-livers are limited to earthly preachers' geographic reach in tension with Peter's confession in Acts 10:34-35: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."¹²² Instead of

¹¹⁸ Kaiser [2008: 132] refrains from leveraging Jethro's Exodus 18:11 confession, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods," though conjecture could constitute this as a conversion of sorts.

¹¹⁹ Kaiser [2008: 138-40]; R. Nash [1994: 137-40]; R. Peterson [2008: 189-91] on Cornelius.

¹²⁰ R. Peterson [2008: 190]; Strange [2002: 194-95]; cf. R. Nash [1994: 138].

¹²¹ Kaiser [2008: 139-40]; Pinnock [1992: 165-66].

¹²² Cf. Pinnock [1992: 166]: "If...the divine messenger could be a vision or an inner voice...then it could be part of my own theory. But usually the theory calls for a human messenger."

“every nation,” Restrictivist assumptions isolate recipients of salvation in the Christian era to times and places where Jesus’s disciples gain access.

Restrictivists could then surmise that God might miraculously transport disciples to faraway places and people, just as the Spirit transported Philip in Acts 8. Absent anti-supernatural bias this is theoretically conceivable. Is there any evidence of it comparable to Christianity’s documented spread into Asia, Europe and Africa?¹²³ If not, Restrictivists are hard pressed to avoid concluding that after Jesus’s ascension, only the Roman Empire and its adjacencies contained righteous light-livers, or at the very least a greater proportion than faraway lands more deficient in Christian preaching and presence.

As for Kaiser’s “why trouble Peter,” one reason is that not only was Cornelius transformed, so was Peter. And as for Cornelius, John Wesley quotes Acts 10:35 that while Jesus in some sense accepts people who live up to the light they have, the “addition” of God’s written word and ordinances—which surely includes the Gospel—are “an unspeakable blessing to those who were before in some measure accepted. Otherwise God would never have sent an angel from heaven to direct Cornelius to St. Peter.”¹²⁴

Nash and Peterson lash out at postulations that one need not necessarily attain a minimal level of pre-mortem information about Jesus in order to be saved by Jesus. Nash is evasive on whether and how this Restrictivist principle applies to “infants and mental incompetents” but inquires using John 14:6: “What good is a truth and a life that people know nothing about?”¹²⁵ Peterson yokes John 14:6 with other Johannine texts (5:21-24, 8:38-47, 10:24-28, 11:25-27) proclaiming that Jesus is “the proper object of saving faith” and that no one can be saved without faith explicitly and rightly informed about Jesus.¹²⁶

An Inclusivist Wesleyan will not dispute that there is any proper object of saving faith other than the Triune God in whom Jesus is God incarnate. The issue is how one responds to grace God grants through Jesus—the one and only Savior, the way the truth and the life (John 14:6), the mediator between God and human beings (1 Timothy 2:5) in

¹²³ Cf. e.g. Moffett [1998; 2005]; Oden [2007]; Robert [2009] on Christianity’s historic geographical spread. See also DeVan [2010e; 2012k] on Christianity in Asia, Africa, and its fluctuating presence in these regions.

¹²⁴ *NT Notes*, Acts 10:35. Pinnock [1992: 166] recapitulates Wesley that Cornelius was “not hellbound” before meeting Peter, but benefited immensely through the gospel and its assurance of salvation in Jesus.

¹²⁵ R. Nash [1994: 136, 148] appears to allow “infants and mental incompetents” as exceptions, then retreats to Restrictivism and mystery: “I do not know anyone who knows how to answer questions like these, and I see little to be gained by extending speculation beyond what God has chosen to tell us.”

¹²⁶ R. Peterson [2008: 186-87].

whose name salvation is made sure for all who willingly receive it (Acts 4:12)—and if belief, recognition, and confessing that Jesus is Lord must occur before death. Will all who fail to properly confess Jesus prehumously, in whatever circumstances, be damned?

Reformed Restrictivist J. Nelson Jennings insists that they assuredly will be damned: “Apart from ancestors or anyone else having heard, believed, and (time permitting between believing and dying) born fruit of their saving faith, we should hold no false hope of...salvation.”¹²⁷ Jennings’ certitude controverts universal salvific opportunity as well as Jesus’s and other warnings about judging before the appointed time.

Proceeding through Romans, Peterson claims that Romans 1 offers only the assurance of condemnation, Romans 2 gives no hope that any person will live up to light they receive, and Romans 10:18 applies to Jews alone.¹²⁸ Restrictivists are free to read Romans 1, 2, and 10 this way; but it is only one way to read them, and not nearly the best for Inclusivists who seek to attend to the full Scriptural witness of God’s universal holy love and pardoning, transforming, responsible grace.

Inclusivists need not dispute that Romans 1:18-31 reveals God’s wrath against all wickedness and godlessness. Peterson’s Romans 2 reading, however, appears to neglect verses in context that are more harmonious with Inclusivist readings. Restrictivists omit Romans 2:6-7, 2:10, and 2:16 to render Romans 2 unequivocally condemnatory. Romans 2:6-7 states that God will repay each according to their deeds (cf. Psalm 62:12; Proverbs 24:12). To those patiently doing good, seeking glory, honor, and immortality, God “will give eternal life” (cf. 2:10). In Romans 2:14-16, Gentiles’ consciences bear witness and their thoughts sometimes accuse and sometimes excuse them.

Peterson reads Romans 10:18 as restrictive to Israel because of Romans 10:19: “Again I ask, did Israel not understand?”¹²⁹ One can concede that Romans 10:16-21 discusses Israel without nullifying its allusion to the worldwide chorus of God’s creation pouring forth divine speech. Israel is the focus of Romans 10:16-21, but divine speech in Romans 10:18 goes out “to the ends of the world.”¹³⁰

¹²⁷ J. Jennings [2008: 238].

¹²⁸ R. Peterson [2008: 184-89, 191-200] citing for support e.g. Carson [1996: 311]; R. Nash [1994: 121]; Strange [2002: 40-47]; and Reformed Restrictivist New Testament scholar Schreiner [1998: 85-86].

¹²⁹ R. Peterson [2008: 194-97].

¹³⁰ Romans 10:18 again quoting Psalm 19:4.

In addition to conveying gratitude for Restrictivists posing possible counter-readings, more inclusive readers who yearn to learn from criticism can thank scholars such as Jennings, Kaiser, Peterson, Nash, and Strange for taking Inclusivist readings of the Bible seriously enough to critique them. Nevertheless, these Restrictivists or Exclusivists offer no objections that seriously jeopardize the readings of Abimelech, Melchizedek, Jethro, Cornelius, John 14:6; Acts 10; or Romans 1-3 and 10 developed here.

Restrictivists, Universalists, and others will perceive themselves justified in reading the Bible through their own *discrimen*, yet Wesleyan Inclusivism advantageously synthesizes Universalist imagery with Restrictivist denunciations of wickedness by utilizing a *discrimen* of God's universal holy love and pardoning transforming grace that enables but does not coerce reception or refusal. Restrictivist readings, while plausible to Restrictivist presumptions, fall short of decisively refuting an Open Inclusivist reading of the Bible.

4.3 Are Inclusivist Readings of the Bible Relevant to New Atheists?

At this juncture we are primed to scrutinize which, if any, Inclusivist Bible readings appertain to New Atheists. We pivot first as before to the Hebrew Scriptures.

4.3.1 The Hebrew Bible:

In evaluating Inclusivist readings for application to New Atheists, it is first expeditious to note that some biblical figures such as Nimrod, Shua (or daughter of Shua), and Ithra the Ishmaelite are too textually obscure to compare significantly. Second and diverging from New Atheists, many righteous gentiles in the Bible explicitly served, sought, or honored God and God's people rather than denying God's existence.

In passages section 4.1 references, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Job, Melchizedek, Jethro, the widow of Zarapheth, and Naaman are or become intentional walkers with, worshippers of, or acknowledgers of God and God's servants Moses (Jethro), Elijah (the widow of Zarepheth) and Elisha (Naaman the Syrian). Balaam, Hiram, the Queen of Sheba, Naaman, and Darius overtly praise or reverence rather than revile God. Pharaoh Neco claims to deliver words from God's mouth rather than denying that the God of Israel speaks or exists. Pharaoh with Joseph and the wicked king Belshazaar with Daniel are at

least open to Joseph and Daniel's interpretations based on their revelations received through dreams or handwriting on the wall. New Atheists have either not received or not perceived such special revelations (whether directly in the way of Nebuchadnezzar or Abimelech, or via interpreters like Joseph or Daniel) or they *have* received or perceived possibilities of revelations but rebuffed them or refused to communicate them as such.¹³¹

New Atheists contrast with Rahab, Bathsheba, Ruth, the righteous Ethiopian eunuch Ebed-melech, Cyrus, and Darius in that New Atheists brook no inclination that they wish to or are attempting to join or contribute to God's covenant community. New Atheist writings and activism try to galvanize communal atheist resolve against (other) religions, indicating desire for cooperative likeminded believers gathered not around confession of the One True God but stated opposition to belief in any and all G/gods. New Atheists who deny all G/gods and cluster the God of Israel as equally non-existent more troublingly resemble Sennacherib in 2 Kings 18:22-19:37 and 2 Chronicles 32:10-33 implying that Israel's God is in parity with impotent "gods" of other nations. Nor do New Atheists demonstrate Ninevah-like corporate repentance to whatever degree is necessary for any willful rebuffing of God's call to repentance, justice, and transformation.

Psalms 14:1, 53:1, and cf. 10:4 may also serve to reprimand New Atheists, though one best proceeds with restraint if "fool" in (e.g.) J. Clinton McCann's reading of Psalm 14, "is more a moral assessment than [denoting] an intellectual...[or] philosophical atheism."¹³² Psalms 14 and 53 introduce corrupt evildoers, oppressors, or perverse people who do abominable deeds as: "Fools [who] say in their hearts, 'There is no God.'" If the wicked scoff in their hearts that there is no God to hold them to account, one naturally infers that some, if not necessarily all people who say to themselves that there is no God, are foolish or villainous. Be that as it may, to claim from Psalms 10, 14, and 53 that every person is a "fool" who fears or doubts, or is convinced, or who tells others that they believe no God exists risks freightening the texts with more than they portend. One can nefariously or foolishly deny that there is a God, but these do not exhaust reasons, options,

¹³¹ Cf. Sermon 98, "On Visiting the Sick," §I.3, *Works* 3:387-88 per pled ignorance concealing a hard heart.

¹³² McCann [1996: 729, cf. 716-21, 728-31, 892-93]; cf. *OT Notes*, Psalms 10, 14, 53 stressing wickedness. Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1-3 lament in potential hyperbole that all humanity is corrupt, yet Pinnock [1992: 102-03, cf. section 6.1] puts a Wesleyan spin on Psalm 14, 53, and Romans 3 quoting them: Atheists with *all* sinners "on their own...[do not] seek God, but under the influence of prevenient grace they may choose to do so."

or motives for why atheists might disbelieve. An Inclusivist approach need not excuse or exempt atheists from foolishness, nor pronounce every atheist a “fool” (cf. Matthew 5:22).

Qualified by such divergences, we can affirm that God universally and graciously summons New Atheists and all others of every nation and language (Isaiah 66:18) to God’s ways, kingdom, and truth; defensibly plotting trajectories between individual New Atheists and Abimelech, Tamar, and the Queen of Sheba. With Abimelech, individual New Atheists could be sincere, non-culpable, or less culpable for their atheism due to their ignorance, experience, or integrity in reading the evidence rather than because they willfully resist God’s grace. As E. Stanley Jones put it: “There is often more faith in honest doubt than in a great deal of easy, meaningless believing.”¹³³

To the extent that New Atheists sincerely react to and rebuke the sins of religious history, injustice, banalities, misplaced priorities, and behaviors in the name “God” from all ages and today, Inclusivists can hazard that atheism may be held with integrity of heart and innocent hands (Genesis 20:4) until God makes God’s existence, self, truth, and will clear to New Atheists as God does with Abimelech. Chapters 5 and 7 explore further likelihoods that atheists may hold to disbelief or withhold belief with integrity.

Turning to Judah and Tamar, Open more than Closed Inclusivists or Restrictivists ponder possibilities that New Atheists may be “more righteous” than particular Christians—including themselves—in select instances, perhaps like Job in caring for the poor, widow, lame, orphan, blind, and needy extrapolated below. Open Inclusivism in this way increases receptivity to atheist rebukes wherever said rebukes are apropos.

Tracing parallels with the Queen of Sheba, the text is reticent on her initial attitude toward Solomon—whether she is skeptical, hopeful, or multiply motivated. Her retinue and gifts in 1 Kings 10 show she is prepared in the event that rumors of Solomon’s wisdom prove true. Upon observing Solomon’s wisdom, justice, and righteousness for herself, she is “overwhelmed” (1 Kings 10:5).¹³⁴ She praises Solomon profusely (10:6-9) and there is no indication that she is dismissive, combative, or derisive of King Solomon as New Atheists are toward Jews, Christians, and other religious believers.

¹³³ E. Jones [1928: 23] in section 2.1.

¹³⁴ *NIV* is more concise for the purposes of this thesis than the *NRSV*: “There was no more spirit in her.”

Atheists parallel the Queen of Sheba, however, when they “test” religious believers with “hard questions” (1 Kings 10:1). New Atheists’ uninhibited pugnaciousness—whether delivered in the interrogative, declarative, imperative, or exclamatory mode—is part of what makes their questions “hard.”

Open Inclusivists consistently entertain that one aggravator of atheist derision is that the Church’s wisdom, justice, and righteousness at points, if not generally as New Atheists would have it, is less than “overwhelming.” For Rahner, “atheism essentially lives on the misconceived ideas of God from which theism in its actual historical forms inevitably suffers.”¹³⁵ Antonio Perez-Esclarin states compatibly: “Atheism may actually be the rejection of false notions of God...a real form of solid faith.”¹³⁶ New Atheists who deny “God” but actually protest *false notions* of God may unwittingly take steps toward a more “complete faith” as Bishop Tikhon reckons in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Demons*.¹³⁷

Open Inclusivist readings make sense of God’s gracious activity operating through New Atheists whenever they display a zeal for the truth, rebuke idolatry, false gods, false conceptions of God, and carry on the first half of Elijah’s and other biblical legacies by loudly denouncing historic and contemporary equivalents of Ba’al. Bullivant believes that Justin Martyr’s reply to charges of atheism—that Christians are atheists toward “gods” but not God—is a partial patristic precedent for atheists’ idol smashing.¹³⁸

In appreciating Hitchens as an idol smasher, Candler School of Theology’s Thomas G. Long looks to Paul Ricoeur’s precedent dubbing Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche masters of suspicion who “purify discourse of its excrescences” and “liquidate the idols.”¹³⁹ Long concedes that Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, and New Atheists by extension are often reductionist, yet their “furious efforts” may in God’s providence be instruments of grace to shake people, churches, and traditions free from idolatries large and small.¹⁴⁰ Long eulogizing Hitchens hopes that Hitchens is “sailing on a sea of mercy. But before we hand Hitchens a chalice, let’s let him keep his sledgehammer a little longer.”¹⁴¹ In

¹³⁵ Rahner [1975: 48-49].

¹³⁶ Perez-Esclarin [1980: 53].

¹³⁷ Dostoyevsky [2000: 688].

¹³⁸ Bullivant [2012: 38].

¹³⁹ Ricoeur [1970: 27, 32-35, 64].

¹⁴⁰ T. Long [2012: 35].

¹⁴¹ T. Long [2012: 35].

Long's view, Hitchens in some unknown way or through the legacy of his writings "still has the Lord's work to do smashing idols in the sanctuary."¹⁴²

Even Dawkins' purported denial of a monotheistic God as "one god further" when he denies the gods of polytheism or henotheism such as Zeus, Amon Ra, Mithras, Baal, Thor, Wotan, and "the Golden Calf" may in fact be denying a false G/god but not the true God, even if Dawkins proceeds unaware.¹⁴³ The God Dawkins scorns might not, in the end, be the same God Christians believe in and worship.¹⁴⁴ As French Dominican Marie Dominique-Chenu once averred to his interlocutors: "If that is your God, you have every right to reject him, and I am an atheist...like you."¹⁴⁵

For a Wesleyan variety of Open Inclusivism attuned to responsible grace, reading New Atheists in the tradition of biblical iconoclasts who confronted and ridiculed priests of Ba'al stops short of diagnosing that no New Atheist truly refuses God or that God will not allow New Atheists to reject God ultimately. Bertrand Russell's debater Frederick C. Copleston cautioned against overstating either that no atheist truly repudiates God, or that all atheists in 'bad faith' revile the True God. "It cannot be safely assumed that what an atheist rejects is simply a caricature....There are no doubt cases in which this assumption is verified...but it is by no means all atheists who are ignorant....The claim may be true in a good many cases; but it seems to me an exaggeration to assert it is *always* true."¹⁴⁶

To summarize, an Open Inclusivist reading of Hebrew Scripture confirms or complements God's universal pardoning and transforming grace operative among New Atheists in ways putatively paralleling Tamar, Abimelech, the Queen of Sheba, and idol smashers such as Elijah or Gideon. Each of the above Hebrew Bible readings represents Open Inclusivism with regard to truth in ways preparatory to discussions regarding salvation. Turning to to the New Testament, we commence exposition of the latter.

¹⁴² T. Long [2012: 35].

¹⁴³ Dawkins [2006a: 77].

¹⁴⁴ Bullivant, [2012: 38].

¹⁴⁵ Chenu [1975: 141].

¹⁴⁶ Copleston [1973: 26] italics added.

4.3.2 *Considering The New Testament:*

Open Inclusivist readings of the New Testament consistent with Hebrew Scripture make sense of God's gracious activity effective in and through New Atheists whenever New Atheists display zeal for truth, rebuke idolatry as Paul and Barnabas do in preaching to the Lystrans; and confront or expose past, present, and potentially corrupt practices or teachings in the church as Jesus does with the seven churches in Revelation 2-3.

Wherever New Atheists deservedly denounce wicked "religion," they are "God's whistleblowers" in Selmanovic's phrase.¹⁴⁷ Where New Atheists diverge from Paul's and Barnabas's preaching in Lystra is in scorning "the living God" as just one idol further.¹⁴⁸

New Atheists in this way contrast with the Magi's worship of Jesus in Matthew 2:1-11, Cornelius's worship of God, the brigand crucified beside Jesus (Luke 23:39-43), the gentile soldier at the cross confessing Jesus is the Son of God (Mark 15:39), and with explicit believers in "God who raised Jesus from the dead" (Romans 4:24). It is also difficult to draw analogies with the grateful Samaritan leper (other than where atheists are societal outcasts), with the Canaanite/Syro-Phoenician mother, or with children who humbly approach Jesus, since New Atheists in their rhetoric are often far from humble.

Hebrews 11:6 insinuates that atheism is at odds with faithful exemplars in Hebrews 11, which Sanders, Pinnock, and Tiessen cite to support at the very least a monotheistic Inclusivism.¹⁴⁹ "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Sanders annotates, "without a positive response to God a person cannot be saved."¹⁵⁰

For comparison, it is worth noting that a Restrictivist or other exclusionary reading of Hebrews 11:6 rules out not only New Atheists but every other nontheist as well. Even so, as with Psalms 14 and 53, many commentators are reluctant to ascribe to Hebrews 11:6 a "polemic" against "abstract" or "speculative atheism," yet it would also be difficult to defend in light of this verse or the biblical data generally a parity Pluralism that maintains atheism is as indicative or congruous with Ultimate Reality as is every other belief.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Selmanovic [2009: 188].

¹⁴⁸ Cf. e.g. again Dawkins [2006a: 77].

¹⁴⁹ Pinnock [1992: 22, 111, 158-60]; Sanders [1992: 28, 153, 228, 236]; Tiessen [2004: 124, 166-70, 223, 398].

¹⁵⁰ Sanders [1992: 228].

¹⁵¹ Cf. e.g. Attridge [1989: 318]; Long [1997: 117]; Pfitzner [1997: 157]; Purdy and Cotton [1955: 723].

Questions arising for both Inclusivist and Universalist perspectives are whether and how any who profess themselves atheists might implicitly, unconsciously, unwittingly, or volitionally “seek” the God they do not see, respond with faith to whatever grace they receive, and if decisive faith in the unseen God must be constrained to this life such that all who die as atheists are damned. Can one hold a discriminating hope that some atheists are not utterly cut off, but somehow “seek” God, or that the fruits of their lives or their cohesion with other righteous exemplars evidence faith or response that pleases God?

Inclusivist readers of the Samaritan woman in John 4:7-5 can readily pray that all, including themselves and New Atheists, who are less knowledgeable but responsive to God’s grace will one day worship God together in spirit and in truth. One can then hope that as Paul “acted in ignorance and unbelief” (1 Timothy 1:13), New Atheists who are ignorant or possess incorrect assumptions about God will respond faithfully and receive mercy, just as Paul did when God made God’s identity, truth, and will clear to Paul. At whatever point New Atheists “hear” God accurately (Romans 10:18), however, Acts 17 cautions that God overlooks past ignorance but calls all who are aware to repent of past mischaracterizations and misdeeds rather than hardening their hearts, plugging their ears, and suppressing the truth as Romans 1-2 warns wicked Jews and gentiles do. God wants God’s house filled with repentant sinners from all nations (Luke 13:29, Matthew 28:18-20), including those who are or were Wesleyans, Inclusivists, or New Atheists.

In regard to 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, Inclusivism does not encourage judging New Atheists’ eternal destinies before the appointed time when God will bring to light all hidden things and the purposes of every heart. It neither unbendingly relegates New Atheists who fail to confess Jesus is Lord before they die to hell as Restrictivists do, nor insists with Christian Universalists that every New Atheist will—indeed must—be saved. An Inclusivist Wesleyan who reads with a *discrimen* of God’s Universal Holy Love and pardoning transforming grace thereby steers a *via media* between Restrictivism and Universalism as she aims to faithfully interpret the full witness of Holy Scripture.

In cahoots with the Hebrew Prophets and Job’s care for the poor, widow, lame, orphan, blind, and needy; reading the New Testament inclusively takes up the prospect that atheists can evidence God’s grace by implicitly obeying God and serving Jesus in

caring for the poor, needy, prisoner, and related parties in Matthew 25:31-46, and the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” in Luke 10:25-37.¹⁵² James 1:27 echoes: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress.” John Wesley alluded to Hosea 6:6 and Matthew 9:13 that “works of mercy” took priority if conflicting with “works of piety” including important pious disciplines such as Bible reading and the Lord’s Supper.¹⁵³

Pinnock identifies two possible identities for “the least of these” in Matthew 25. They might be missionaries Jesus sends (cf. Matthew 10:43 and 28:16-20) or “deeds of love done to needy people...regarded at the last judgment as having been done to Christ, even though the Gentiles did not and could not have known it under the circumstances.... Jesus is in this portrait—the son of man standing in solidarity with the human race.”¹⁵⁴

Colluding Pinnock for the second is a midrash on Psalm 118: “If he says, ‘I have clothed the naked!’ it will be said to him, ‘This is the gate of the Lord—you who have clothed the naked, enter in the same.’”¹⁵⁵ Joachim Jeremias elaborates that Jesus’s audience would have been astonished that those “who showed kindness to the hidden and unrecognized messiah...would be numbered among the people of God at the last day.”¹⁵⁶

Restricting “the least of these” to Christian missionaries once again reduces the scope of “all nations” to times and places that Christian missionaries visit, whereas the presence of the poor, the prisoner, and the needy ubiquitously transcend geographical regions and eras (e.g. Matthew 26:11; Mark 14:7). Pinnock concludes that Jesus identifies with humanity “in every condition, receives the deeds done to the poor as deeds done for him, underlining the point about loving God through care of the neighbor.”¹⁵⁷

Catholic Social reformer Dorothy Day sustained a complementary conviction that those who do not encounter Jesus in other ways are able to serve Jesus through his presence in their neighbors: “It is no use saying that we were born two thousand years too late....Christ is always with us...[in] the voice of our contemporaries....Giving shelter or

¹⁵² Job 29:12-16, 31:16-23; Cracknell [2005: 24-25]; Pinnock [1992: 26]; Tiessen [2004: 415]; Willimon [2008: 53]. See also DeVan [2009a] on “true religion” as caring for orphans and widows.

¹⁵³ Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” §§II.5, 9, *Works* 3:313-14; cf. Bullivant [2012: 179].

¹⁵⁴ Pinnock [1992: 164]; cf. Bullivant [2012: 151-59] documents traditional precedents for this reading.

¹⁵⁵ Pinnock [1992: 164, 203] referring but without full citation to Beasley-Murray [1986: 308-09, 409].

¹⁵⁶ Jeremias [1958: 47] in Pinnock [1992: 164, 203].

¹⁵⁷ Pinnock [1992: 165].

food to anyone in need who asks for it or needs it, is giving to Christ...*They are* Christ, asking us to find room for Him, exactly as he did at the first Christmas.”¹⁵⁸

Bullivant believes Mother Teresa’s attitude in her spiritual agonism is likewise “relevant to a study of atheism,” since Teresa at times expressed having “no faith” and missing any sense of Christ’s presence. She “sought him instead” in the Eucharist, the destitute, and the dispossessed.¹⁵⁹ Teresa interpreted Matthew 25: “We should not serve the poor like *they were* Jesus. We should serve them *because they are* Jesus.”¹⁶⁰

Whether or not one aligns with Day’s and Teresa’s sacramental theology, Teresa complements Pinnock in holding out hope and a warning. “At our hour of death, you and I, regardless of whom we were (Christian or non-Christians...) will stand before God and be judged...[for] how we have acted toward the poor.”¹⁶¹

Reading Matthew 25 along these lines need not descend into so-called “works salvation” so long as serving the “least of these” is an implicit or explicit faithful response to God’s transforming grace that represents encounters with Jesus who identifies with the “least of these.” As Willimon predicts, God’s (unwitting?) servants and their observers who hear “Come and share your [true] master’s happiness” at the Final Judgment (Matthew 25:21, 25:23) may be surprised at who God invites.¹⁶²

Presupposing the Bible’s preeminence in Wesleyan Honoring Conference, the above-mentioned proto-Inclusivist themes pervading the biblical canon are vital to a biblically conscientious, Wesleyan Open Inclusivist approach to religious diversity that contends atheists are potential recipients, bearers, or implicit responders to God’s truth and grace. Chapter 5 builds on this biblical data with other Honoring Conference voices that corroborate or clarify prospects for God’s pardoning and transforming grace to and through New Atheists. We turn first to precedents and patterns from Christian tradition.

¹⁵⁸ D. Day [2005: 94, 97].

¹⁵⁹ Bullivant [2012: 160-61] citing Teresa in Kolodiejchuck [2008: 187].

¹⁶⁰ Teresa [1980: 30].

¹⁶¹ Teresa [1980: 36].

¹⁶² Willimon [2008: 70].

Chapter 5: History, Reason, and other Honoring Conference Voices: Wesleyan Inclusivist Pillars, Part 2

There is a convincing case that critically appropriating tradition, the Analogy of Faith, the Book of Nature, experience, and reason within a Wesleyan *discrimen* of God's universal holy love and pardoning, transforming, responsible grace strengthens and advances Inclusivist readings of the Bible.¹ The present chapter listens to these complementary Honoring Conference voices to fortify an Open Inclusivist Wesleyan approach to religious diversity and New Atheists.

Discerning proto-Inclusivist proclivities in the community of saints or Christian tradition is crucial to Wesleyan Honoring Conference (section 3.5). It is also no trivial matter since some illustrious philosophers and theologians oversimplify traditional Christian voices as “unremittingly negative” or a “total rejection” of non-Christians.²

On account of such conventions, corroborating proto-Inclusivist or sympathetic notables throughout the history of Christianity is requisite to Honoring Conference. This chapter aims not to demonstrate that Christian tradition is strictly or primarily Inclusivist, but that there are reputable precedents who express or admit proto-Inclusivist inclinations, some of which theoretically transpose to New Atheists.

5.1 Proto-Inclusivist Themes in Christian Tradition:

Inclusivist, Wesleyan, and associated scholars helpfully allude to proto-Inclusivist convictions that philosophical and theological luminaries throughout Christian history express. Karkkainen detects a measure of Inclusive openness in Justin Martyr (101-163 CE), Irenaeus (c: 100s-202), Clement of Alexandria (c: 150-215), Theophilus of Antioch (d. 181), Athenagoras (c: 133-190), and Origen's (c: 184-254) Universalism.³

¹ Cf. Maddox [2012: 108-09].

² Hick [1980: 29]; Sigountos [1991: 231]; cf. Eck [2003: 166-99]; Knitter [1985: 75] “conservative evangelical model;” Kung [2001: 122-23]. Even Karkkainen [2003: 63] designates a post-Cyprian (c: 200-250): “consolidation of the exclusive attitude” largely until the post-Enlightenment era, yet one can distinguish frequent from total negativity, and extra-Christian religious practices from individuals (see section 2.2).

³ Karkkainen [2003: 55-63]; cf. Pinnock [1992: 36-37]. Appealing to the first three are Cracknell [2005: 49-53, 89, 236]; Pinnock [1992: 36-41, 90-91, 97, 158, 162, 182-83]; Sanders [1992: 53-54, 177, 184-85, 239-41]; Tiessen [2004: 40-41, 48-51, 110-11, 218, 315, 416] adding Gregory of Nazianzus. Willimon [2008: 71-75, 85, and 139] also notes Origen. Cf. Campbell [1997: 68-70] and Meyers [1985: 122-28, 137-39, 148-61] for Wesley mostly positive on Justin, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and

Karkkainen, Pinnock, and Sanders allude in the medieval period to Abelard (1079-1142) and Aquinas (1225-1274), as does Sanders to Dante (1265-1321).⁴ Pinnock, Karkkainen, Sanders, and Tiessen interact with Luther (1483-1546) and Zwingli (1484-1531).⁵ Pinnock and Sanders cite Erasmus (1466-1536) and Sanders Arminius (1560-1609).⁶ Sanders and Pinnock quote Puritan Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Sanders John Milton (1608-1674), and Tiessen Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758).⁷ Cracknell, Maddox, Karkkainen, Pinnock, Sanders, Tiessen, and Willimon all solicit Wesley (1703-1791).⁸

Inclusivists document additional sentiments or assertions from the eighteenth through the early twenty-first centuries in Anglicans William Paley, C. S. Lewis, John Stott, N. T. Wright, and Alister McGrath; the Reformed William G. T. Shedd, Bernard Ramm, Loraine Boettner, Lesslie Newbigin, Diogenes Allen, and perhaps J. I. Packer.⁹ Karkkainen labels Paul Tillich and Wolfhart Pannenberg Lutheran Inclusivists.¹⁰ Cracknell, Sanders, and Tiessen cite Wesleyan philosopher William J. Abraham, F. D. Maurice, Richard Watson, and Salvation Army founder William Booth.¹¹ Catholic theologians since Vatican II variably espouse Inclusivism, including Pope John Paul II.¹²

Theophilus of Antioch. Cracknell [2005: 54-55] also cites Athanasius, “On the Incarnation of the Word” and “Treatise against the Greeks” on God’s “reason” in John 1 illuminating everyone, all creation.

⁴ On Aquinas and Abelard: Karkkainen [2003: 69, 83-84]; Pinnock [1992: 167, 174, 204, cf. 141, 166]; Sanders [1992: 19, 152-58; 268-69]. On Aquinas but not Abelard: Tiessen [2004: 176-78, 224, 433]; for Dante, see Sanders [1992: 160-62, 211]; but Walls [2012] is more skeptical about the extent of Dante’s Inclusivism and Tiessen [2004: 309] cites Dante somewhat less supportively when critiquing Heim [2001].

⁵ Luther in Sanders [1992: 139-42]; Tiessen [2004: 56-57]; cf. Luther as more exclusivist in Karkkainen [2003: 71-75] and Pinnock [1992: 40-42, 81, 182-83]. Zwingli in Karkkainen [2003: 43-44, 53-55, 97]; Pinnock [1992: 158, 167]; Sanders [1992: 96; cf. 300-01 on infants]; Tiessen [2004: 56-57]; Calvin mostly exclusivist in Karkkainen [2003: 75-77, 85-87] and in Tiessen [2004: 57-58, 109, 143, 210, 249-50, 267].

⁶ Erasmus in Pinnock [1992: 42, 177, 183, 189] and Sanders [1992: 139-40, 270-71]; Arminius in Sanders [1992: 155-56, 162, see 299 on universal infant salvation].

⁷ Henry in Pinnock [1992: 165, 203] and Sanders [1992: 271]; Milton in Sanders [1992: 271]. See Tiessen [2004: *passim*] often referencing McDermott [2000b] for ambivalences in Edwards.

⁸ Cracknell [2005: 120-22, 143, 236, 243]; Karkkainen [2003: 55-57, 100-01, 117]; Pinnock [1992: 158, 193, 202]; Sanders [1992: 72, 249-51, 300]; Tiessen [2004: 61-62, 208-11, 236-38, cf. 478]; Maddox [1992]; Willimon [2008: *passim*].

⁹ Karkkainen [2003: 149, 172, 245-62, 325-52]; Pinnock [1992: 35, 38, 91, 152, 165, 185, 190, 202]; Sanders [1992: 24, 35, 142-46, 231, 243, 251-57, 271-75; 1995: 32-33, 37, 45, 141, 165]; Tiessen [2004: *passim*]; cf. McGrath [1995-1996: esp. 131, 169, 177, 185-86]. On C. S. Lewis’s Inclusivism and related topics cf. Pinnock [1992: 12, 74, 99-100, 190, 195]; Sanders [1992: x, 113, 231, 251-57, 275; 1995: 20, 22, 45-46, 55, 104, 159-61]; Tiessen [2004: 227-28, 350]; and Willimon [2008: 26, 28, 69, 84, 102, 38-139]. Sanders [1992: 253] *précises* Lewis that Jesus’s work in human hearts manifests in holy fear, awe, joy, the moral law, and a sense of transcendent accountability; cf. Otto [1958].

¹⁰ Karkkainen [2003: *passim*]; cf. Sanders [1992: 19-21; 1995: 20, 55].

¹¹ E.g. Cracknell [2005: 8]; Sanders [1992: 273, 275]; Tiessen [2004: 61, 168, 199, 208, 236-38].

¹² Pinnock [1992: 75-76, 91, 107, 159, 179; 1995: 99, 106, 110]; Pope John Paul II [1994]. Sanders [1992: 148, 159, 279-80]; Tiessen [2004: 52-56, 181, 473].

Approaching religious diversity and New Atheists with the perspective of the present thesis will consult early Christian tradition per Wesley and later eminent figures, suggesting several that Inclusivists pass over such as Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), Eastern Patriarch / Mar Timothy I (728-823), and Melkite Bishop Paul of Antioch (1140-1180). Four twentieth century Protestants are also worth mentioning who, like New Atheists and the Wesleys, deliberately engaged with larger public audiences. They are the evangelist Billy Graham (1918-), American civil rights icon Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), and Anglican scholar-novelists C. S. Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957).¹³ Willimon supportively cites Graham.¹⁴ African Methodist Episcopal-Zion (AME-Z) scholar Mozella G. Mitchell sees Martin Luther King, Jr. continuing to inspire especially AME-Z Wesleyans.¹⁵ Lewis and Sayers anticipate polemical refrains New Atheists promulgate and are Wesley's as well as many New Atheists' fellow Oxonians.¹⁶

Comprehensively cataloging Inclusivist themes in Christian tradition is beyond this chapter's purview, but the "cloud of witnesses" surveyed illuminates historical precedents, even if a large portion are European or Levantine men. Other Inclusivist-oriented voices will no doubt be heard more clearly as harvests from indigenous, global or world Christian theologies continue to season conversations beyond their original seedbeds.

5.1.1 *Truth Inclusivism:*

Cracknell, Karkkainen, Pinnock, Sanders, Tiessen, and Willimon do not distinguish between Closed and Open Inclusivism, but many of Christianity's seminal thinkers gesture towards one, the other, or both. Justin Martyr and Irenaeus lean toward Closed Inclusivism explicating the *Logos* in John 1, which according to Karkkainen is rooted in the Hebrew *davar* (wisdom) through which God created the world in Genesis 1,

¹³ The last four receive trans-denominational approbation as an evangelist, civil rights leader, and two literature scholars whose legacies cross into popular novels and Christian apologetics in the public sphere. The Pluralist-tinged McKim [2012] in his recent Oxford textbook *On Religious Diversity* interacts with Lewis in 7 pages and Graham in 6 pages, both more than he does with scholars Pinnock (3 pages), Race (5 pages), Rahner (2 pages), and 1 page each on William J. Abraham, Cobb, Eck, Heim, *Lumen Gentium*, Maddox, Tiessen, Tillich, and John Wesley; also interacting with Griffiths in 7 pages and Hick 16 pages.

¹⁴ Willimon [2008: 89, 140] on Graham.

¹⁵ M. Mitchell [1998: 159-74] on King.

¹⁶ See section 1.1.6 on Lewis; Sayers [2004: subtitle] collects *Passionate Arguments for the Relevance of Christian Doctrine*.

Psalm 33:6, and the deuterocanonical Wisdom 7:26, 9:9-11.¹⁷ For Justin, the divine Logos scattered *logos spermatikos* throughout history, seeds of wisdom or reason so that Christ is known genuinely but “darkly” via humanity’s reasoning capacities:

Christ is the First-born of God, and we have declared...that he is the Word of whom every race...were partaken, and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists. For example, among Greeks, Socrates, and Heraclitus, and men like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias, and Azarias, and Misael, and Elias, and many others.¹⁸

What reason glimpses darkly, Jesus’s incarnation shines brightly, says Justin. “The right principles that philosophers and lawgivers have discovered and expressed they owe to whatever of the Word they have found and contemplated in part....Why they have contradicted each other is that they have not known the entire Word...[in] Christ.”¹⁹

Justin purported that Plato writing on immortality of the soul, punishment, and heavenly contemplation was prophetic but not infallible, perhaps plagiarizing Israelite sources.²⁰ Irenaeus like Justin on truth stipulated Jesus as God’s “novelty” or unique revelation, while Christ as Logos witnessed within hearts, minds, and God’s creation.²¹

Clement of Alexandria straddled Closed and Open Structural Inclusivism, analogizing Greek philosophy with the Old Testament as “two tributaries of one great river.”²² God gave Israel the Law and philosophy to the Greeks as their “testament.”²³ Clement sought to “embrace the truth...mixed in with the dogmas of philosophy.”²⁴ Philosophy allowed Greeks accurately, if dimly, to perceive God so that they were without

¹⁷ Karkkainen [2003: 56-57; cf. 26, 41-56] on Justin and wisdom among the nations (cf. Proverbs 8:14-21). Calvin (1509-1564) in [1847: 1:38] acknowledged centuries later that the *Logos* imbued humanity with reason, intelligence, and conscience so that there was no person “whom some perception of eternal *light* does not reach;” cf. Karkkainen [2003: 75-77, 85-86]; Tiessen [2004: 109, 143, 210, 249-50, 267].

¹⁸ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 46, cf. 44; *Second Apology* 8-13 in Schaff [1885a: 471-74, 511-16]; cf. Carola [2010: 25, 34-37]; Karkkainen [2003: 56-57]; Pinnock [1992: 36, 162]; Tiessen [2004: 48-49]. Justin’s imagery here is reminiscent of the “Parable of the Sower” in Matthew 13, Mark 3, and Luke 8.

¹⁹ Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 10, cf. 13 in Danielou [1973: 41].

²⁰ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 44, 59 in Schaff [1885a: 471, 487]; cf. Carola [2010: 34-37]. Gregory of Nazianzus (c: 329-390), *Oratio in Laudem Basililii* 31:5 in Tiessen [2004: 111]; Plato and Aristotle “caught a glimpse of the Holy Spirit;” cf. Carola [2010: 40-42] on ambivalence in Eusebius of Caesarea.

²¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.34.1 in Schaff [1885a: 1269]. See also footnotes on Irenaeus below.

²² Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.28-29, 4.67, 117 as cited in Tiessen [2004: 110, see also 40, 49-50]; cf. Cracknell [2005: 49, 52-53]; Karkkainen [2003: 57, 61-62]; Sanders [1992: 184-86, 268].

²³ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.8.3 in Tiessen [2004: 111].

²⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.1.18 in Carola [2010: 37-40, 519].

excuse but able to prepare for fuller faith and knowledge through Jesus.²⁵ Clement also hypothesized some of God's elect amidst those who "obey the precepts of Buddha; whom, on account of his extraordinary sanctity, they have raised to Divine honor."²⁶

Moving to Medieval proto-Inclusivism, Griffiths quotes Augustine: "Pagan learning contains not only false and superstitious fictions...but also liberal disciplines better suited to arriving at the truth, as well as some most useful moral precepts, and...some truths having to do with the worship of the one God."²⁷

Christian-Muslim encounters occasioned other proto-Inclusivist estimations. Patriarch/Mar Timothy I spoke of the Muslim prophet Muhammad to Abbassid Caliph al-Mahdi as "tro[d] in the track of the lovers of God. All prophets taught the doctrine of one God and since Muhammad taught...the unity of God...[and] drove men away from bad works, and brought them nearer to good works...[and] prophesied about God, His Word, His Spirit, Muhammad walked therefore, in the path of all the prophets."²⁸

Melkite Bishop Paul of Antioch similarly considered that God could have sent Muhammad providentially to "pagan Arabs," even though not as a universal prophet.²⁹ For Paul of Antioch, God may have worked through Islam to rid Arabs of multiple idolatries even though Islam falls short of God's fuller revelation in Jesus.³⁰

Sanders, Tiessen, and Dominican Thomas F. O'Meara detect Closed and Open Inclusivist themes in Aquinas, and Tiessen notes that Muslim Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126-1198) mediated Aquinas's critical use of Aristotle.³¹ Aquinas wrote that Cornelius in Acts 10 was a believer with implicit faith in Jesus prior to meeting Peter, otherwise Cornelius's works "would not have been acceptable to God, whom none can please without faith...Peter was sent to him, to give him full instruction in the faith."³² Aquinas gave

²⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7:2 in Schaff [1885b: 2:526]; cf. Clement, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 11:116 in Schaff [1885b: 2:204]; 1 Corinthians 13:12 imagery also with Justin above.

²⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1:15 in Schaff [1885b: 316].

²⁷ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* 2.40.60 in Griffiths [2014: 36].

²⁸ Patriarch Timothy in Samir [2001: 93-94]; cf. Bennett [2008: 89-101]. Walking in the path of the prophets is not quite the same as truly *being* a prophet specially inspired by the Holy Spirit.

²⁹ Cf. Bennett [2008: 108-09] for other Inclusivist-oriented statements toward Islam by Bishops William of Tripoli (1130-1186) and William of Tyre (1120-1173).

³⁰ Paul of Antioch in Bennett [2008: 107-08].

³¹ O'Meara [1997: 91-131]; Tiessen [2004: 176-78, 224, 243]; cf. and contrast some comments in Becker et al. [2010: 65-67, 247, 252, 305-07, 312, 342, 368]; Karkkainen [2003: 69].

³² *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 10 A. 4 and A. 11 in Dupuis [1997: 114]; cf. O'Meara [1997: 106-07, 112].

some credence also to possibilities that other gentiles before Jesus received angelic annunciations or other special revelation as with the Sibylline prophecies.³³

Edging closer to the Reformation, Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa asserted amid European terror at the Ottomans conquering Constantinople in 1453 that the *Qur'an* purveyed Gospel-resonant elements despite Muhammad's lack of proper exposure to the Gospel, and potential involvement by the "god of this world... who blinds the minds of unbelievers."³⁴ Nicholas in his dialogical *De Pace Fidei (The Peace of Faith)* was persuaded that elements of true religion were present in various rites throughout many religions of the world and that people worshipped the one true God "in everything they are seen to adore;" yet he labored to show, for example, that the Trinity was compatible with Islamic teaching so that Muslims would not needlessly disdain it.³⁵

John Wesley in a quote suggestive of Closed Inclusivism proposed that God's gracious revelation emerged "in a continuum of progressively more definite expressions, beginning with a basic knowledge that was universally available and reaching definitive expression in Christ."³⁶ Far from equalizing all non-Christian doctrines or dogmas, Wesley in one sermon labeled Islam, for instance, a "miserable delusion."³⁷

Wesley at other times sounded more Open Inclusivist with regard to ethical wisdom practice. John C. English cites Wesley's "Jewish parishioners" in Georgia bearing fruits of true religion through holy curiosity, integrity, collegiality, sharing Scripture, and preparing food for immigrants.³⁸ Martin Forward notes that Wesley in his 4 April 1737 Journal entry considered that some Jewish Georgians "seem[ed] nearer the mind that was in Christ than many of those who call him Lord."³⁹

³³ Cf. Aquinas, *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, Q. 14, A. 11; *Summa Theologica* I:2, Q. 98, A. 5, and II:2, Q. 2, A. 7; 68, A. 1; Q. 14, A. 11 all in Sanders [1992: 155-58] where: "Aquinas acknowledges his indebtedness to Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy* 9.4;" cf. O'Meara [1997: 101-02, 110-11]. Sanders [1992: 160] conjectures following Archibald MacAllister that some church authorities were suspicious of Dante's similar esteem for ancient pagan learning and that this may have prevented Dante from conveying his beliefs with maximal force.

³⁴ Nicholas of Cusa, "Bibratio Alkorani," 23 and 41 in Volf [2011: 276]; cf. Morali [2010a: 71-72]; Bennett [2008: 109]; Hopkins [1994: 971, 984].

³⁵ Nicholas of Cusa, *De Pace Fidei* in Volf [2011: 48, cf. 40-58, 68-86, 134-48, 194, 273-90].

³⁶ Maddox [1992: esp. 14, 16, 26]; cf. e.g. Sermon 106; "On Faith," *Works* 3:492-501; Sermon 35, "The Law Established Through Faith I," *Works* 2:20-32.

³⁷ Sermon 63, "The General Spread of the Gospel," §3, *Works* 2:486.

³⁸ English [1998: esp. 220-21].

³⁹ Forward [2000: 99]; cf. E. Jones [1928: 217] suggesting that Jews who bore a "cross of rejection" were nearer, even in their prejudices, to their Jewish brother Jesus than Christians who persecuted Jews.

Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke similarly of his admiration for Gandhi as “probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale.”⁴⁰ King further commended considering “The enemy’s point of view...his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves. For from his view we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our own condition, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit.”⁴¹

King’s near contemporaries in Great Britain, C. S. Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers both displayed a kind of Closed Inclusivism. Lewis saw God’s grace and truth leading responsive non-Christians to “concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity,” paralleling patristic authors that whatever is good and true in other religions is consummated and perfected in Jesus, or as we argue chapter 2, in Christianity as the religion based on God’s fullest revelation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.⁴² Stories or myths about a god who dies, comes to life again, and in doing so brings or gives new life are fainter revelations, archetypes, or “good dreams” that Jesus fulfills or clarifies.⁴³ Jesus’s relation to such stories is as “myth become fact.”⁴⁴

Sayers colludes with Lewis when she compares and contrasts the realistic, historic, and detailed tone of the gospels with mythic parallels such as Aeschylus’s *The Eumenides*. “In most theologies, the god is supposed to have suffered and died in some remote and mythical period of prehistory. The Christian story, on the other hand, starts off briskly in St. Matthew’s account with a place and a date.”⁴⁵

Lewis on Moses’ Egyptian training might be read as Closed or as Open Inclusivist: “Whatever was true in Akhenaten’s creed came to him, in some mode or other, as all truth....There is no reason why traditions descending from Akhenaten should not have been among the instruments...God used in making himself known to Moses.”⁴⁶

How may a Wesleyan Inclusivism make use of or challenge these proto-Inclusivist sentiments from Christian tradition? Justin and Calvin appeal to the light of reason, Justin

⁴⁰ C. King [1987: 24].

⁴¹ M. L. King [2010: 29].

⁴² Lewis [2001d: 209].

⁴³ Lewis [2001d: 50].

⁴⁴ Lewis [2001b: 63-67].

⁴⁵ Sayers [2004: 3] in an essay titled “The Greatest Drama Ever Staged.”

⁴⁶ Lewis [1986: 86]; cf. Acts 7:22 mentioning Moses’ Egyptian training.

and Clement of Alexandria laud philosophy, Aquinas spoke well of Aristotle and the Sibylline prophecies, Augustine and Dante credibly regarded ancient learning, Nicholas of Cusa various rites and the *Qur'an*, Wesley progressively more definite expressions of truth, King learning from Gandhi and one's enemies, Lewis Moses' Egyptian training, and Lewis with Sayers extra-Christian prefigures or echoes of the Gospel. Each variedly maintained that God graces at least some people or systems apart from Christianity or Abrahamic revelation in the Hebrew Bible with significant, often redemptive truths.

Inclusivist Wesleyans emphasizing the Protestant canon as Scripture (see section 3.5) will nevertheless avoid applying Clement literally to level Greek philosophy and Hebrew Scripture, nor necessarily the Sibylline prophecies a la Aquinas's phrasing, nor approve of divinizing anyone such as Buddha in the same sense as Jesus, whatever truths they embody or teach.⁴⁷ Wesleyan Inclusivists contra Pluralists will insist on Jesus's uniqueness and the Bible's special inspiration even if the Holy Spirit's activity is not limited to Jesus's direct teaching or to the text of Holy Scripture. Inclusivists along with Christian Restrictivists, Universalists, and New Atheists will also with Wesley concur that there are doctrines, theories, and practices which proceed under the rubric of "religion" or particular named religions that represent "delusion" or untold miseries.⁴⁸

Historical disputes purporting plagiarism (e.g. Justin Martyr on Plato) or genealogy can be helpful in pursuing truth and the history/origins of ideas whether or not direct lines to Holy Scripture can be delineated. If passages from Plato, the *Qur'an*, or even New Atheists' writings and assumptions believably display influence by or contain remnants from the biblical tradition, one can consider these with Nicholas of Cusa or Paul of Antioch as indicators of God's providential grace without claiming that God is constrained to operate within Scripture's influence.⁴⁹ Recognizing Scriptural influence would not, to be sure, entail placing any given text as a whole on an equal spiritual footing with the Bible. Any biblical or general virtues or truths that other writings demand or exposit—with or without properly crediting biblical sources—can be appreciated without

⁴⁷ As Clement quoted earlier characterized some of the "elect" among Indian Buddhists doing.

⁴⁸ Sermon 63, "The General Spread of the Gospel," §3, *Works* 2:486; cf. Nicholas of Cusa, "Bibratio Alkorani," 23 and 41 in Volf [2011: 276] via involvement by evil spiritual as well as temporal powers, e.g. "the god of this world." See sections 6.4, 6.6, 7.2-7.4 of this dissertation for debates on what doctrines, principles, and practices are truly based in delusions or more naturally contribute to associated miseries.

⁴⁹ Cf. e.g. DeVan [2012f] referencing New Testament themes in the *Qur'an* and Muslim hadith literature.

presuming they are literally equitable to Holy Scripture, or in the case of atheist writings or writings that atheists admire, God's equally dependable "testament" to atheists.

At the same time, God may use any truth, justice, goodness, and beauty in Plato, philosophy, the *Qur'an*, or even *god is not Great* to accomplish God's purposes and draw readers toward fuller truth and holiness to whatever extent is viable with sources at hand. Some will be more useful than others for particular intentions, persons, and contexts, so Pinnock's "cautious" or "modal" Inclusivism is apropos.⁵⁰ God *may* use New Atheist exhortations sometimes against their stated resolve to grace people's lives. New Atheists *may* constitute counter-intuitive options to increase faith and communicate grace by confronting believers with hard or prophetic questions. Yet New Atheist writings will be more problematic as individual or corporate means of grace for the less educated or other readers who are unequipped or ill prepared to sift them. Inclusivists must exercise prudence reckoning the profitability or extent of God's use/nonuse of specific materials.

Connected difficulties arise from Nicholas of Cusa's contention that people worship God in all they are seen to adore.⁵¹ If God is the font of all truth, glory, beauty and goodness, believers in God can receive and enjoy God's good gifts with gratefulness. Still, adoration can be misplaced as idolatry, and God-given goods and truths perverted or misused. A rejecter of God can enjoy aspects of God's creation or truth while willfully refusing to love God or their neighbors. Wesleyans may hope that New Atheists will not in the end reject God decisively, but responsible grace permits everyone this possibility.

Concurrently vital for educational and growth purposes is that Open Inclusivists can encourage Christians to learn from atheists and others who possess specialized knowledge or life experience, and who communicate their expertise with excellence and integrity.⁵² Atheist educators and communicators can serve as instruments of God's grace through research, writing, teaching, etc. as Aristotelian or Augustinian Christians might argue God did through Ibn Rushd for Aquinas. Dawkins' *The Ancestor's Tale* or *The Greatest Show on Earth* in whole or in part may grace readers with knowledge of evolutionary theory and God's creation, just as Hitchens' biographies of George Orwell,

⁵⁰ See section 2.3.3; Pinnock [1995-1996: 100].

⁵¹ Nicholas of Cusa, *De Pace Fide* 5 in Volf [2011: 48].

⁵² Cf. Billy Graham in Beam [1978: 156]; Graham [1998] in Lowe [1999: 174, 217] at a personal level citing convert to Islam Muhammad Ali as a role model in their mutual struggle with Parkinson's disease.

Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine might illuminate these personages.⁵³ Wesleyans have long prioritized education, and Inclusivists can partner with atheists in educational endeavors to inform and advance scholarship as Catholic Stephen Bullivant and atheist Michael Ruse do co-editing the *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*.⁵⁴

Inclusivism about truth and salvation overlap when Christian tradition denotes that Jesus saves people who do not possess certain truths about salvation, or whose lives shine with redemptive grace without overtly aligning with Christianity. Section 5.1.2 plots and critiques some of these proto-Possibilitist and proto-Actualist Inclusivisms on salvation.

5.1.2 *Hope for Salvation:*

Karkkainen and Sanders glimpse Augustine enunciating Inclusivism of salvation to people who lived before Jesus's earthly ministry: "From the beginning of the human race, all those who believed in him and knew him and lived a good and devout life according to his commands, whenever and wherever they lived, undoubtedly were saved by him."⁵⁵ Sanders believes Augustine fails to adequately address Porphyry's (c. 204-335) objection re-applied to the "informationally B.C.," who lived after Jesus but without sufficient comprehension or exposure to the Gospel to respond definitively before death:

If Christ declares Himself to be the Way of salvation, the Grace and the Truth, and affirms that in Him alone, and only to souls believing in Him, is the way of return to God, what has become of men who lived in the many centuries before Christ came...who were in no wise blameworthy, seeing that He in whom alone saving faith can be exercised had not yet favored men with His advent?⁵⁶

Justin Martyr preemptively replies to Porphyry and to New Atheists (see sections 7.2 and 7.3) who parallel Porphyry. Justin feared that denying Christ's work among those who knew Christ only as the Logos might unnecessarily defame Christianity, as though all who were "born before [Jesus's ministry] were irresponsible [or reprobate]."⁵⁷ Justin in

⁵³ Dawkins [2004; 2009]; C. Hitchens [2002; 2005; 2006].

⁵⁴ Bullivant and Ruse [2013: title]; The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry [2015: online] of the United Methodist Church reports that over "700 schools, colleges, and universities around the world share a commitment to the Wesleyan tradition of education."

⁵⁵ Augustine, "Letter 102.11-12" in F. Sullivan [1992: 29]; cf. Karkkainen [2003: 65-66] Sanders [1992: 241] also references Augustine in *City of God* 19.22 that the "God" of the pagans "is also our God."

⁵⁶ Porphyry quoted by Augustine in a letter to Deogratias in Schaff [1974: 416]; extended by Sanders [1992: 11-12, 52-56; cf. 1995: 8, 40].

⁵⁷ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 46 in Schaff [1885a: 474].

an Actualist Inclusivist spirit averred that only *some* who lived before Jesus were unreasonable, wicked, or irresponsible like those that slew Socrates or other Logos followers who opposed false gods and demon worship, or who “lived reasonably” like Jesus.⁵⁸ Irenaeus too designated desirers of God’s redemption in every generation:

It was not merely for those...in the time of Tiberius Caesar that Christ came, nor did the Father exercise His providence for...only the men who are alive, but...altogether, who from the beginning, according to their capacity, in their generation have both feared and loved God, and practiced justice and piety towards their neighbors...earnestly desired to see Christ, and to hear His voice. Wherefore He shall, at His second coming...give them a place in his kingdom.⁵⁹

Clement congruently posits God saving all faithful, if imperfect graspers of truth. “Greeks and...barbarians, and in their own time those were called who were predestined to be among the elect.”⁶⁰ Among these were: “Indian gymnosophists...other non-Greek philosophers...Sarmanae...Brahmins....Some, too of the [Buddhist] Indians.”⁶¹

Medieval proto-Inclusivist readers of the Bible ranged from Gregory the Great (c: 540-604) classifying Job as a “Just pagan,” to Abelard favorably appraising Athenians in Acts 17: “How shall we dismiss these men to the realms of infidelity and damnation?”⁶² Abelard averred that God saved noble non-Christians, and in *A Dialogue of a Philosopher and a Jew and a Christian* has the philosopher contend that God hears prayers of non-Jewish people in the Bible and saves people based on their faith and love:

Notable as they were in faith and life we cannot doubt that they obtained indulgence of God, or that their conduct and worship of the One God which they both held and made known by writing acquired for them the divine favor in the present existence and in the world to come, along with the things necessary for their salvation.⁶³

Aquinas may have thought that most people who lived during his era had already heard the Gospel. For rare feral children and remote forest peoples: “It pertains to the

⁵⁸ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 46; cf. 5, 21; *Second Apology* 1 in Schaff [1885a: 428, 446, 474, 503]. Perhaps persecutors of those who were ‘reasonable’ prefigure crucifiers of the embodied Logos.

⁵⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.22.2, cf. 2.6.1, 4.20.6-7 in Schaff [1885a: 952, 1219-20, 1228] cited by Sanders [1992: 240-41]; cf. Karkkainen [2003: 58-59]; Pinnock [1992: 97] citing *Against Heresies* 4.13.1 in Schaff [1885a: 1192]; Tiessen [1993; 2004: 40-41, 49-52].

⁶⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7:2 in Schaff [1885b: 524-25].

⁶¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1:15 in Schaff [1885b: 316].

⁶² Abelard [1948: 59]; Gregory the Great in Danielou [1957: 4].

⁶³ Abelard [1948: 66; 1979: 97]; cf. discussion in Morali [2010b: 53, 62, 68]; Dupuis [1997: 103]; Karkkainen [2003: 83-84]; Sanders [1992: 268-69].

divine providence to furnish everyone with what is necessary for salvation....If someone so brought up followed the direction of natural reason in seeking good and avoiding evil... God would either reveal...inner inspiration [to them]...or would send some preacher.”⁶⁴

Aquinas gave some credence to “baptism by desire” but impressionably curtailed its parameters: “[If] some were saved without receiving any revelation, they were not saved without faith in a Mediator, for though they did not believe in him explicitly, they did, nevertheless, have implicit faith through believing in divine providence, since they believed God would deliver mankind.”⁶⁵ On the iniquitous among the unevangelized: “Those alone are deprived of grace who in themselves present an impediment to grace, like someone who closes his eyes to the sun illuminating the world.”⁶⁶

Sanders glimpses Inclusivism in lines from Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*. Dante placed “noble pagans” Virgil, Homer, Ovid, Hector, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, and Averroes in a limbo of “untormented sadness” at the highest level of hell (Canto IV), but other non-Christians and non-Jews such as Cato of Utica in Purgatory after deliverance from limbo (*Purgatorio*, Canto I).⁶⁷ Still others such as Ripheus the Trojan are in heaven.⁶⁸ Dante presents his contemporary “Trajan,” thanks to Pope Gregory I’s intercession, as receiving a temporary resurrection so that the embodied Trajan might accept Christ (*Paradisio*, Canto 20). In *Paradisio* Cantos 19 and 20, Dante sustains that Jesus is the sole source for salvation but warns his audience against judging before the appointed time about who, how, and how many Jesus will save:

A man is born in sight of Indus’ water, and there is none there to speak of Christ, and none to read or write....He dies unbaptized and cannot receive the saving faith. What justice is it damns him? Is it his fault that he does not believe?...To this high empery [Heaven] none ever rose but through belief in Christ, either before or after

⁶⁴ Aquinas, Q. 14, A. 11, *The Disputed Questions on Truth* in Sanders [1992: 155] as God did with Cornelius; cf. O’Meara [1997: 98, 108]; Sanders [1992: 152-58, cf. 19] on presuppositions in Aquinas’s milieu that only a few people(s) remained unevangelized.

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II:2, Q. 2, A. 7; cf. II, Q. 2, A. 8 in Sanders [1992: 157-58]; O’Meara [1997: 104-05].

⁶⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 159; cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, II-II in O’Meara [1997: 108, cf. 120-24]. See Pinnock [1992: 174, 204, cf. 141, 166] on Aquinas and potential post-mortem belief.

⁶⁷ Sanders [1992: 160-61].

⁶⁸ Sanders [1992: 160-61] reads Ripheus as receiving a vision of the pre-Incarnate Christ. Heim [2001: 114-15] presents Rhipeus’s [alternate spelling] salvation first as mysterious, but then Heim appeals to Rhipeus living a life of love. Quoting Canto X.118-23: “By a grace from such deep ground / Gushing that no created eye can plumb / Its hidden well-springs where they run profound / On righteousness spent all his earthly sum / Of love; whence God from grace to grace unsealed / His eyes to the redemption yet to come.”

his agony. Mortals, be slow to judge! Not even we who look on God in heaven know, as yet, how many he will choose for ecstasy.⁶⁹

Reformers and their contemporaries occasionally disclosed proto-Inclusivist hopes. Some were Possibilist in the manner of Dante. Others tilted toward Actualist Inclusivism with Clement, Abelard, and others. Luther speculated that God's "accidental mercy" would save gentiles who would have responded to the Gospel if they had the opportunity.⁷⁰ Luther cites Cicero as one example of an excellent philosopher and a precious man who "read and passed judgment on many things and then could also speak. He wrote about his subject in earnest...as did Aristotle and Plato...I hope our Lord God will be gracious to him and his like, though it is not for us to judge and determine."⁷¹

Ulrich Zwingli received a portion of Calvin's and Luther's wrath for his more audacious vision of heavenly fellowship in Christ:

All the saints and sages and believers and the steadfast and the brave and good who have ever lived since the world began...Socrates Aristides, Antigonus, Numa, Camillus, the Catos and Scipios; Louis the Pious...the Phillips, Pepins, and all your ancestors who have departed this life in faith. In short, there has not been a single good...pious heart or believing soul from the beginning of the world to the end, which you will not see there in the presence of God. Can we conceive of any spectacle more joyful or agreeable or indeed sublime?⁷²

Desiderius Erasmus hypothesized slightly more guardedly in both Possibilist and Actualist Inclusivist modes: "Perhaps the spirit of Christ is more widespread than we understand, and the company of saints includes many not in our calendar...Saint Socrates, pray for us!"⁷³ Erasmus elsewhere wrote that the Christ who invites all nations to salvation will save all the godly from the beginning to the end of the world.⁷⁴

Arminius, in whose tradition Wesleyans regularly identify, ventured in an Inclusivist direction that God utilized Special or General Revelation to save those who

⁶⁹ Alighieri [2001: 218-19]; Sanders [1992: 160-62, 211].

⁷⁰ Luther [1958: 302; cf. 1972: 181]; Sanders [1992: 139-42]; Tiessen [2004: 56-57].

⁷¹ Luther in Plass [1959: 1050]; cf. e.g. Karkkainen [2003: 71-75] for more Restrictivist themes in Luther.

⁷² Zwingli, "An Exposition of the Faith" in Bromiley [1953: 275-76]; Calvin [1960: 2.6.1]; Karkkainen [2003: 75-76; 85-87]; Luther [1971: 234]; Tiessen [2004: 57-58]; cf. Pinnock [1992: 158, 167]; Sanders [1992: 96; cf. 300-01] for Zwingli on infants; W. Stephens [2009: esp. 25-29] for Inclusivist themes in Zwingli's successor Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575).

⁷³ Erasmus [1957: 155, 158].

⁷⁴ Erasmus [1975: 63-71, cf. 117-19]; Sanders [1992: 139-40, 270-71]; G. Williams [1969: 324-37]. Pinnock [1992: 42, 177, 183, 189] says this optimism did not erode Erasmus's support for missionaries. Indeed, Wesley's and Graham's examples undercut claims that Inclusivism and evangelism discord.

were otherwise unevangelized. Was it not plausible that God “converts great numbers of persons, by the internal revelation of the Holy Spirit or by the ministry of angels?”⁷⁵

On the other side of the Calvinist aisle, Puritan Matthew Henry opined that God will never castoff honest gentiles like Cornelius who fear and worship God, live charitably, justly, sincerely, and righteously to the light they have.⁷⁶ Milton commented on variant standards he saw for responding to God’s grace in Hebrews 11 and John 8:

Implicit faith, which sees not the objects of hope, but yields belief with a blind assent, cannot possibly be genuine faith, except in the case of novices or first converts, whose faith must necessarily be for a time implicit...before they have entered upon a course of instruction. Such was that of the Samaritans, John iv. 41. of the nobleman and his family, v. 53. of Rahab, Heb xi. 31. and of the disciples, who believed in Christ long before they were accurately acquainted with many of the articles of faith. Those also belong to this class, who are slow of understanding and inapt to learn, but who, nevertheless believe according to the measure of their knowledge, and striving to live by faith, are acceptable to God.⁷⁷

Gerald R. McDermott in *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods* observes that the final decade of Edwards’ notebooks and correspondence indicate that Edwards hazarded possible holy pagans among the Stockbridge Indians.⁷⁸ In *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards countenanced Melchizedek, Job, and others were saved through traces or traditions of true religion to ancient peoples; and Edwards declared in *Miscellanies* that so-called heathens “are not so entirely and absolutely cast off...there is a possibility of their being reconciled; and God has so ordered the case, that there is an equal possibility of their receiving the benefit of divine revelation.”⁷⁹

John Wesley’s views vacillated on indigenous Americans, but for Maddox, Wesley generally contended that God reveals God’s existence and some attributes through Creation and the Holy Spirit’s inward voice.⁸⁰ God’s grace enables faithful response to whatever God reveals.⁸¹ God invites people to live up to “the light they had. But many of

⁷⁵ Arminius [1956: 1:331, cf. 1:322-32]; Sanders [1992: 155-56, 162].

⁷⁶ Henry [n.d.: 133] in Pinnock [1992: 165, 203]; Sanders [1992: 271] cites the same passage from Henry.

⁷⁷ Milton 1.20, cf. 1.17 [1853: 338, cf. 319-327]; Sanders [1992: 271] listing Milton as an Inclusivist.

⁷⁸ McDermott [2000b: 138-39, 223] comparing again Cornelius in Acts 10.

⁷⁹ J. Edwards [1989: 179]; cf. McDermott [2000b: 80, 94-96]; Tiessen [2004: 60, 152, 171].

⁸⁰ E.g. Maddox [1992: 11-15, 24-26]; Sermon 106, “On Faith,” §I.4, *Works* 3:494.

⁸¹ Maddox [1992: 18, 19, 28-29]; Tiessen [2004: 236-37]; e.g. Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” *Works* 3:199-209. To whom less is given less is required (Luke 12:48): Sermon 106, “On Faith,” §I.4, *Works* 3:494; cf. Sanders [1992: 249-50].

them, we have great reason to hope, although they lived among the Heathens, yet were quite of another spirit; being taught of God, by his inward voice, all the essentials of true religion.”⁸² True religion’s essence was again “holy tempers [character, intentions, desires]. Consequently all other religion, whatever name it bears, whether pagan, Mahometan, Jewish or Christian; and whether popish or Protestant, Lutheran or Reformed, without these is lighter than Vanity itself.”⁸³

God according to Wesley preferred “goodness of the heart rather than the clearness of the head...God will not cast him into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels because his ideas are not clear, or because his conception is confused. Without holiness, I own, no man shall see the Lord; but I dare not add, or clear ideas.”⁸⁴

Wesley’s proto-Inclusivist hopes about salvation are forthright in several other sermon passages and correspondence. God “is not the God of Christians only, but the God of the heathens also; that he is rich in mercy to all that call upon him, according to the light they have and that in ‘every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.’”⁸⁵ “Nor do I conceive any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation. It is far better to leave them to him that made them, and who is ‘the Father of the spirits of all flesh’...who hateth nothing that he hath made.”⁸⁶ God extends benefits of Jesus’s death not only to people who possess “distinct knowledge of his death and sufferings, but even unto those who are inevitably excluded from this knowledge. Even these may be partakers of the benefit of his death, though ignorant of the history, if they suffer his grace to take place in their hearts.”⁸⁷

⁸² Sermon 106, “On Faith,” §I.4, *Works* 3:494; cf. Sanders [1992: 249-50].

⁸³ Sermon 91, “On Charity,” §III.12, *Works* 3:306; cf. Sermon 7, “The Way of the Kingdom,” *Works* 1:218-32; Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” *Works* 3:199-209; Sermon 120, “The Unity of the Divine Being,” *Works* 4:61-71; Sermon 125, “On a Single Eye,” *Works* 4:120-30.

⁸⁴ Sermon 130, “On Living without God,” §15, *Works* 4:175. Against rigidity on correct rituals, practices, and opinions cf. e.g. Sermon 4, “Scriptural Christianity,” *Works* 1:159-80; Sermon 7, “The Way to the Kingdom,” *Works* 1:218-32; Sermon 20, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” *Works* 1:449-65; Sermon 38, “A Caution against Bigotry,” *Works* 2:63-78; Sermon 39, “Catholic Spirit,” *Works* 2:81-99.

⁸⁵ Sermon 91, “On Charity,” §I.3, *Works* 3:296; cf. E. Harris [1998: 56].

⁸⁶ Sermon 130, “On Living without God,” §14, *Sermons* 4:174; cf. Cracknell [2005: 120-22].

⁸⁷ Meadows [2000: 122] incompletely cites this quote from *A Letter to a Person Lately Joined with the Quakers* in T. Jackson [1958: 10:178-79]; Skuce [2009: 71] also cites “Letter to Thomas Whitehead(?)” (10 February 1748) in Telford [1931: 2:118].

Nevertheless, God's non-Christian "servants" lack assurance that empowers faithful living, which Christians enjoy as God's adopted children or "sons."⁸⁸ These examples and Wesley's commentary in chapter 4 signify valuable affinities undergirding a vital Inclusivism open to learning from any or all responders to God's transforming grace.

Returning to the twentieth century, Willimon recounts Billy Graham's counsel to Barbara and young George W. Bush on whether only "born again Christians" were eligible for heaven: "No one should try to play God....God alone knows who has or has not received Christ as Savior."⁸⁹ Graham spoke as more Actualist Inclusivist elsewhere: "I used to play God, but I can't do that anymore...[believing] pagans in far-off countries were...going to hell—if they did not have the gospel of Jesus Christ preached to them. I no longer believe that....There are other ways of recognizing [God]...through nature, for instance—and plenty of other opportunities, therefore, of saying 'yes' to God."⁹⁰

Historian Martin E. Marty wrote that some critics maligned Graham as a "sellout who compromises his Christ by keeping company with agnostics, Jews, Catholics, moderate Protestants, the worldly, and not-yet or never-won converts."⁹¹ Yet in whatever company Graham kept he never ceased proclaiming Jesus as the Savior of the world, regularly preaching on Acts 17 that being "very religious" was no substitute for the eternal assurance Christians experience in knowing Jesus Christ as their Lord.⁹²

Graham's fellow Baptist minister Martin Luther King, Jr.'s writings and speeches naturally intone with Inclusivist hope on salvation. King, like Wesley, cautioned against both naiveté regarding human sin and Calvinism exaggerating human depravity to the point of (for King) callously justifying infant damnation.⁹³ King preached that humanity desperately needed salvation, that Jesus was salvation's source and the principal purveyor

⁸⁸ As E. Harris [1998: 57-58] discusses; cf. Maddox [1992: 15, 26]; Skuce [2009: 68-74]; Sermon 70, "The Case of Reason Impartially Considered," *Works* 2:587-600; Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Salvation," 3:199-209; Sermon 105, "On Conscience," *Works* 3:480-90; Sermon 106, "On Faith," *Works* 3:492-501; Sermon 119, "Walking by Sight and by Faith," *Works* 4:49-59.

⁸⁹ Graham in Gibbs and Duffy [2007: 44] cited by Willimon [2008: 89, 140].

⁹⁰ Graham in Beam [1978: 158]. McKim [2012: 161] credits to Jon Meacham [this thesis author has been unable to confirm a primary source] for asking Graham if "a moral secularist or good Muslim or...Jew would go to heaven. His reply: those decisions are for God to make, not men;" cf. Dwight L. Moody in Gundry [1976: 97] on Robert Ingersoll: "We are not his judges. It is for God alone to judge."

⁹¹ Marty [1996: 05B]. Recalling objections to the company Jesus kept in Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17.

⁹² For Graham's use of Acts 17 both early and late in his career, cf. e.g. Graham [1958: online; 2005: online]; Graham and Toney [2011: 287-97] especially "on Religion," and "on Repentance."

⁹³ M. L. King [1981: 127-36] sharing Wesley's reservations about Calvinist implications.

of God's commands and truth.⁹⁴ King rhetorically contrasted Jesus with a false "god of revenge" and the "altar of retaliation."⁹⁵ Resembling Wesley on goodness of the heart, King looked forward to the day when people would be judged not by race or outward identities but by "the content of their character," when "Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics" would sing together in unity: "Thank God almighty we are free at last."⁹⁶

King's contemporary C. S. Lewis in *Possibilist* and other times *Actualist* tenor protested both Restrictivism and religious indifferentism on salvation: "Though all salvation is through Jesus, we need not conclude that He cannot save those who have not explicitly accepted him in this life."⁹⁷ Although it would be unfair to limit "new life" to Christians: "If you are worried about the people outside, the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself. Christians are Christ's body.... You must add your own little cell to the body of Christ who alone can help them."⁹⁸

Many Inclusivists neglect related motifs in Lewis's popular fiction. The Christ figure Aslan tells Edmund in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*: "There is a way into my country from all the worlds," and that in Edmund and Lucy's world, Aslan has "another name."⁹⁹ In favor of a Christocentric Inclusivism, Aslan in *The Silver Chair* tells Jill before she knows who Aslan is that "there is no other stream" where Jill can find living water.¹⁰⁰ Aslan in *The Horse and His Boy* conveniently and providentially escorts and directs Shasta and Aravis despite their having heard only distortions and rumors about Aslan.¹⁰¹ Aslan interacts with, challenges, and judges the religious and moral perceptions of at least one aggressive evildoer, Rabadash, yet in the process allows for Rabadash's semi-restoration via a temple cult later exposed as demon worship.¹⁰²

Like Pinnock in section 1.1.3 on angelic or ruling "mighty" ones in Psalms 29:1 and 97:7, the existence and power of the demon "god" Tash and other angelic or demonic Narnian forces are within Aslan's province. They include the White Witch Jadis, the

⁹⁴ Cf. e.g. M. L. King [1981: 134, 136; 1986: 10, 16, 267; 2001: 48-49].

⁹⁵ M. L. King [1981: 42].

⁹⁶ M. L. King [1986: 216, 219].

⁹⁷ Lewis [2001b: 102].

⁹⁸ Lewis [2001d: 64].

⁹⁹ Lewis [2000e: 246-47]. Sennett [2005: 236] is a partial exception.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis [2000f: 23]; cf. Sennett [2005: 237] on "no other stream."

¹⁰¹ Lewis [2000c].

¹⁰² Lewis [2000c: 219; cf. 2000g]; Sennett [2005: 238-43].

slightly dubious but playful “Bacchus” and Aslan’s servant the “River god” in *Prince Caspian*, and archetypal beings who usher the Narnian universe to an end in *The Last Battle*.¹⁰³ Lewis’s *Space Trilogy*, particularly *Perelandra*, also presents “gods” and other lesser spiritual powers as angelic beings (eldils) subject to the One True God (Maleldil).¹⁰⁴

The more recognized “Emeth” (“truth” in Hebrew) in *The Last Battle* perhaps applies most to overtly hostile atheists, considering that Emeth is involved in militant opposition toward Narnians, though he worships Tash rather than denying existence of all G/gods. Emeth encounters Aslan as Aslan truly is at the antechamber of the New Narnia:

I fell at his feet and thought, Surely this is the hour of death. . . . He answered, Child, all service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me. . . . Not because we are one, but because we are opposites, I take to me the services which thou hast done to him. For I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and not which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath’s sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted. . . . But I said also (for the truth constrained me), Yet I have been seeking Tash all my days. Beloved, said the Glorious One, unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek.¹⁰⁵

After perceiving the truth, Emeth hazards a Transcendental Pluralism, but Aslan reaffirms Aslan’s unique goodness over Tash, who is not another name for Aslan but a malevolent demon. Aslan explains that he receives those who because of their integrity overtly spurn him, but rejects evil done in his name by his supposed followers.¹⁰⁶ Sanders elaborates that sincere seekers of truth, goodness, and beauty “will find God; those who seek falsehood, evil, and the ugly will find it in hell.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Lewis [2000a; 2000d; 2000f; 2000g]; cf. Sennett [2005: 243].

¹⁰⁴ See esp. Lewis [1972: 158, 172-85]. *Perelandra* is the second volume in Lewis’s *Space Trilogy*.

¹⁰⁵ Lewis [2000g: 188-89; cf. 1993: 428]: “Every prayer which is sincerely made even to a false god or to a very imperfectly received true God, is accepted by the true God. . . . Christ saves many who do not think they know him;” cf. *Bhagavad Gita* §§7.20-23, 9.23-24 in Mascaro [2003: 37-38, 45]; Kierkegaard [1941: 179-80] in Erickson [1996: 187] that God is perhaps less pleased with right theology prayed in a false spirit than bowing to an idol with passion for the Infinite. Referencing the Emeth episode are Hamilton [2005: 30]; Pinnock [1992: 99-100]; Sanders [1992: 255-57]; Sennett [2005: 231-40]; and Tiessen [2004: 227-28].

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Jesus in Matthew 7:21: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

¹⁰⁷ Sanders [1992: 256-57].

Critically appropriating Possibilist and Actualist Proto-Inclusivism of salvation in Christian tradition reinforces Inclusivist readings of the Bible on just and exemplary gentiles, idol smashers, and Jesus's teachings about justice and neighborly love in (e.g.) the Parable of the Good Samaritan and Matthew 25. Justin and Irenaeus avow that the Logos shines through those who live reasonably and justly toward their neighbors. Patriarch Timothy I mentions how the Muslim prophet Muhammad and by implication others can or did walk in the path of the prophets. Abelard appreciates philosophers who lived justly, as Dante does Ripheus's love, and Erasmus with Zwingli all the brave and good people who ever lived. King on Gandhi and Wesley on his "Jewish parishioners" acclaim a Hindu and Jews who seemed in some ways more righteous than Christians.¹⁰⁸ Paralleling Justin, Timothy I, and C. S. Lewis for a new context, some people thought of by others or themselves to be unbelievers or atheists may walk in the path of the prophets by rebuking evil acts or intentions, and by teaching or exemplifying righteous character.

Frequent if not consistent hopes for criteria or mitigating factors whereby God through Jesus might save some people who are or lived outside the visible church illustrate the intuitive, existential, and cognitive dissonance of Restrictivist soteriology in light of a God who is and shows Universal Holy Love. Traditional voices sometimes frame hopes for named or unnamed individuals in history, and other times hypothesize righteous people among groups that they associate as distinct from Christianity.

Broaching Possibilist or probabilist inclusive sentiments are Abelard's *Dialogue*, Dante's *Paradiso* Cantos 19-20, Luther on Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero; Justin, Erasmus, and Wesley (see section 4.1.1) on Socrates; Arminius on internal revelation and angelic annunciation, Edwards on Stockbridge and other "heathens," Wesley on the "heathen and Mahometan world;" King on Jews, Gentiles, Protestants, and Catholics; Graham to the Bush family, and Lewis on those who do not accept Jesus in this life.

Other statements tending toward convinced Actualist Inclusivism are Augustine for some who lived before Jesus, Justin for all who lived "reasonably," Irenaeus for people responsive according to their capacities," Clement for the "elect" among non- or pre-Christian philosophers, Indians, and Buddhists; Abelard for Areopagans, Aquinas on God speaking through inner or angelic inspiration among the unevangelized, Zwingli on pious

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Chapter 4 on Genesis 38:26 where Judah comparably vindicates Tamar.

good hearts and believing souls, Erasmus on the godly from all epochs, Matthew Henry on honest gentiles, Milton on novices or first converts, Wesley on all who call upon God, work righteousness, and suffer God's grace to work in their hearts; Graham on pagans who recognize God, and Lewis on Jesus saving many who think they do not know Jesus. Porphyry's quote is framed as an objection to "Christ," but his thrust is only damaging to a Restrictivist account of Jesus's work that Actualist Inclusivism resolves.¹⁰⁹

These examples from tradition buttress an Inclusivist hope for salvation in both its Possibilist and Actualist flavors, yet we can still critique them on numerous points. First, Wesleyan responsible grace clarifies Abelard's refusal to dismiss Paul's Areogapan audience "to damnation" (cf. Wesley's refusal to sentence "Mahometans" and "heathens") because Inclusivists need neither to presume that all will be saved as Universalists do, nor certify specific non-Christian individuals as incontestable recipients of salvation as do Justin and Zwingli. A hopeful agnosticism for those who never hear the Gospel, or who like New Atheists at first reject, ridicule, or simply express interest in hearing or discussing it further is advisable for Inclusivists attuned to responsible grace, and transposes more easily to New Atheist interlocutors who mirror Areogapans as section 4.2 surveys and 6.3 extrapolates. Wesleyans in the meantime can testify to their assurance if God graciously grants it, and observe fruits of God's grace in extra-Christian lives while waiting for God to unveil the hidden purposes in every heart (1 Corinthians 4:1-5).

Second is Abelard's riff on "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet" (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 2).¹¹⁰ As Lewis portrays in his novel, confusing Aslan with Tash and vice versa is a grievous error not necessarily fatal if corrected, but error even so.¹¹¹ Orthodox Christians believe that Jesus is the only Savior, even though Jesus may save some who are temporarily mistaken or ignorant about his identity. To confess Jesus is Lord is to confess that others are not, even though it is possible that the One True God may be responsibly referred to by manifold cultural designators.¹¹² Jesus, Yeshua,

¹⁰⁹ Nicholas of Cusa's interest above in reconciling Trinitarian and Islamic teaching is another example of attempting to show a disagreement is only approximate rather than exact, noncompossible, or contrariety.

¹¹⁰ Abelard [1979: 97].

¹¹¹ Aslan corrects but does not damn Emeth for Emeth's Transcendental Pluralist misapprehension(s).

¹¹² Cf. D. Richardson [1981: e.g. 18, 40-44] in a missionary classic evaluating merits and possibilities for adopting indigenous and philosophical designators for God on a case by case basis, arguing that the Septuagint translators rejected "Zeus" as a name for God in part because Zeus was purported to be the

Emmanuel, the Logos, and in a fanciful mode Aslan correspond to God the Son, the second person of the Divine Trinity, on multiple levels. More dubious is referring to God or Jesus as Buddha, Artemis, Satan, or King's "god of revenge," as these other identities are associated with other beings, and/or are discordant with God's nature or character. God may have many names, but for Wesleyans many named beings are not God.

Third, in contrast with Wesley's (and King's to the first) emphasis on goodness of the heart rather than clearness of the head, Aquinas *prima facie* conditions salvation on belief in a Mediator and/or divine providence, as Abelard does with belief in One God, apparently disqualifying henotheists, agnostics, polytheists, and atheists.¹¹³ Yet proposing a minimum knowledge, assent, awareness, or belief prior to death to be eligible for salvation raises additional issues for young children, the cognitively impaired, and other unevangelized who hold mistaken or underdeveloped assumptions. One might again correlate Wesley's spiritually "disordered" Christians, who due to some proclivity lack salvific assurance, with Blaise Pascal's acknowledgement of people who attest they are "so constituted that I cannot believe," a disposition Hitchens adopts for himself.¹¹⁴

God allowing such constitutions or "disorders" may be explored in theodicy or meditations on Divine providence, yet Restrictivism compounds difficulties in reconciling an innate inability to "believe" with God's universal love if there is no possibility to replace or repair that disposition and to enable meaningful response as some Inclusivists postulate God graciously provides at or after death.¹¹⁵ Quoting Irenaeus, the variously disordered and everyone else will be judged "according to their capacity."¹¹⁶ Or, as Wesley would have it on Luke 12:48, to whom less is given, less is required.¹¹⁷

offspring of two other gods—Chronos and Rhea. "Theos" was chosen for the Supreme God discussed by Xenophanes, Plato, and Aristotle, even if these writers could be mistaken in some respects about God.

¹¹³ Abelard [1948: 66]; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II:2, Q. 2, A. 7, cf. II, Q. 2, A. 8 in Sanders [1992: 157-58]; Sermon 130, "On Living without God," §15, *Works* 4:175; but cf. Bullivant [2012: 102] on Aquinas.

¹¹⁴ K. Collins [2007: 134-36, 362-63] citing Telford [1931: 5:358-59]; C. Hitchens [2007b: 6]; Pascal [1829: 114]. C. Hitchens in Sheahen [2007] added: "To us, when people talk about faith, it's white noise;" cf.

Lumen Gentium 16 in Pasquini [2000: 37]: "Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those, who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and... not without grace, strive to live a good life;" *Ad Gentes Divinitus* 7 in Pasquini [2000: 57]: "In ways only known to himself, God can lead those, who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please him (Heb. 11:6)."

¹¹⁵ See sections 5.4, 7.2-7.3.

¹¹⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.22.2, cf. 2.6.1, 4.20.6 in Schaff [1885a: 952, 1219-220, 1228].

¹¹⁷ Sermon 106, "On Faith," §I.4, *Works* 3:494.

As chapter 4 analogized with Abimelech, Luke 12:48 may moderate New Atheist culpability regarding constitutions, disorders, and ignorance. Yet those trotted out as leaders of the New Atheist movement, at least, have been granted other graces in wealth, culture, education, information access, Christian colleague and debater relationships, and so forth. These New Atheists are harder to liken with Aquinas's feral or forest peoples—Dawkins' childhood 'on safari' notwithstanding—or to those unable to hear a preacher per Graham, or in Dante's Canto IXX-XX the geographically disadvantaged with little or no access to the Gospel.¹¹⁸ If New Atheists are inculpably ignorant, they are so despite comparable wealth, information access, and countless other luxuries. Still, as sections 5.2-5.4 suggest, and Nicholas Cusa insinuated with the Muslim prophet Muhammad, some New Atheists may perceive or internalize only distortions of the Gospel.

That Jesus may or will save some New or other atheists who respond implicitly per Aquinas and Milton synergizes with the hypothesis that New Atheists serve God, and God's grace, when they smash idols or love neighbors as chapter 4 contended. Attempts to invoke a baptism of desire for atheists who assert that atheism is liberating rather than heartbreaking will be essentially implicit for atheists who have no conscious desire to join the visible church. We might tweak the Emeth episode for such atheists to read this way:

I fell at his feet and thought, "Surely this is the hour of death, for the Lord (who is worthy of honour) will know that I have served the cause of atheism all my days and not him." But the Glorious One said, "Son [or daughter], thou art welcome." But I said, "Alas, Lord, I am no servant of Thine but a convinced atheist." Answered the Lord, "Child, all service thou has dedicated to atheism for the sake of goodness, justice, beauty, and truth, I account as service done to me. If anyone demonstrates integrity for its own sake, it is to me they have responded, though they know it not, and I reward them. "Yet I asserted atheism all my days." "Beloved, said the Glorious One, unless thy desire had been for me, thou wouldst not have fought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek."

The American novelist Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), whose intense style occasionally matches New Atheists, penned in *Huckleberry Finn* a counterpart to Emeth.¹¹⁹ When an admonisher tells Huck that Huck will burn in hell if Huck does not reveal the whereabouts of the runaway slave Jim, Huck at first attempts to mollify this threat by composing a letter to Jim's owner. Huck then contemplates his friendship with

¹¹⁸ Cf. Dawkins [2013: 3-81].

¹¹⁹ Twain [2007: title].

Jim, Jim's kindness to Huck, and other examples of their mutual camaraderie. Faced with risking hell or betraying Jim, Huck resolves: "All right, then, I'll go to hell."¹²⁰

Inclusivism accounts for Huck's resolution not as stoking hellfire, but as a self-sacrificing, implicit response to God's transforming grace. Father John Pasquini expands in a Luke 10:25-37 spirit: "Should we fail to recognize the active power of grace in a man who, although categorically atheistic, gives up his life to save a stranger?"¹²¹

Jesus in Matthew 21:28-31 illustrates the implicit obedience and disobedience that Lewis imagines with Emeth:

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" Jesus's listeners replied, "The first."

Balancing hopes for New and other atheists, we must concede that the second brother in Jesus's parable opted finally to eschew obedience. Some New or other atheists—not to mention hypocritical Christians—may resist God's grace without excuse per Clement, cling to wickedness per Justin, or per Aquinas harden their hearts "like someone who closes his eyes to the sun illuminating the world."¹²²

Truth and salvation come together in two scenes from Narnia that other Inclusivist literature has failed to notice. Lewis depicts the willful shutting of eyes to the truth through "Uncle Andrew" and the "dwarfs [who] refused to be taken in."¹²³ Andrew is a ridiculous sniveler whose final fate remains unclear, but the dwarfs symbolize eternal consequences for willful blindness. At the New Narnia's antechamber, they will not allow themselves to see Aslan's glorious New Creation, nor the sumptuous feast Aslan sets before them. Aslan tells Lucy: "You see...they will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison, and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out."¹²⁴ To adapt

¹²⁰ Twain [2007: 237].

¹²¹ Pasquini [2000: 11].

¹²² Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 159; cf. *Summa Theologica* I-II, II-II in O'Meara [1997: 108, cf. 120-24].

¹²³ Lewis [2000a: 136-45; 2000g: 156-70].

¹²⁴ Lewis [2000g: 169]; cf. Hunsberger and Altemeyer [2006: 66-68, 119, 126-27] on atheists who said that "absolutely...nothing conceivable...could change their minds on the existence of the traditional God;" P. Williams [2013: 218-19, 224] for related discussion by Lewis, Aldous Huxley, and Thomas Chalmers.

Wesley against Universalism, those who willfully and assiduously exchange God's truth for a lie will reap the disastrous repercussions of their "miserable [self] delusion."¹²⁵

5.2 Listening to Reason and Other Honoring Conference Voices

The aforesaid representatives from tradition extend or comport with Inclusivist readings of Scripture regarding truth and possibilities that atheists might implicitly receive, respond to, and bear fruits of God's transforming grace. Section 5.2 considers whether remaining Honoring Conference voices confirm, clarify, or advance Inclusivist readings of the Bible and tradition in approaching religious diversity and New Atheism.

5.2.1 *The Apostles Creed:*

Wesleyans and others in the community of saints confess the "Analogy" of Faith or Apostle's Creed as a traditional outline of Christianity's core convictions, the grand biblical truths, or the central narrative themes of God's saving work (see section 3.9). Inclusivists can rejoice that Restrictivists, Inclusivists, and Universalists together can confess the Creed, even if they differ in their nuances of it.

Section 5.2.1 suggests nevertheless that an Inclusivist reading of the Creed possesses a number of advantages. For example, it may dictate less troubling qualifiers than constraining "the forgiveness of sins, and the life everlasting" to Christians who hold proper beliefs when they die as according to Restrictivism. Such a Restrictivism clashes with God's universal holy love and grace by postulating that Jesus who was "crucified, died and buried" for the whole world's sins (1 John 2:2) relegates myriads to everlasting death who had no opportunity to believe in him.¹²⁶ This is a heavy load for Restrictivists to shoulder or for religious outsiders to admire as just or good news.¹²⁷

Complicating matters is that "God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth" presumably retains power, wisdom, love, and motivation to grant opportunities for

¹²⁵ Sermon 63, "The General Spread of the Gospel," §3, *Works* 2:486; cf. Romans 1:25-32.

¹²⁶ In short, it would have been better for them had they never been born per Judas in Matthew 26:24; Mark 14:2; Luke 22:22. Restrictivists might also demarcate Jesus's second coming or Parousia as the point when fates are sealed for all who are then alive. "Life Everlasting" would delimit to sincere, rightly confessing Christians, presumably with possible exceptions for e.g. Old Testament saints and infants (cf. chapter 2).

¹²⁷ Or for whom Jesus *could* have died depending on assumptions about un/limited atonement. Cf. Erickson [1996: 215] lamenting his belief that proportionally few of those who bear God's Image will be saved: "It is not with any satisfaction that we arrive at this conclusion....It is with a great sense of sorrow."

salvation to all of God's creatures. A soteriological hopefulness excluding none from ultimate joy due to their abilities, circumstances of birth, or inculpable predilections is conceptually and intuitively more congruous with a "Father" and "Maker" of Holy Love.

It is also more in keeping with Jesus's metaphors in Luke 15 that heaven rejoices over repentant sinners like a shepherd recovering a lost sheep, a woman finding her lost coin, or a parent welcoming a wayward child home. Ezekiel 18:23 and 2 Peter 3:9 signal that God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, but genuinely (versus conflictedly, in pretense, or weakly) wants no creature to perish, and all to repent of sin.¹²⁸

Universalists will indubitably applaud Inclusivists as moving in the right direction, but not far enough on "the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting" as universally *applicable* versus merely *available*, and whether the Judge of "the living and the dead" rightly sentences anyone to eternal death.¹²⁹ A Universalist can argue that nothing merits such sentencing, or that it is justified only in conditions that never come to pass (see section 5.2.3). This will be dissonant, however, with Jesus's and other biblical warnings about hell as a possible consequence rather than a deceptive or superfluous threat.¹³⁰

Another Universalist price is that "God, the Father Almighty" brokers no departing from God's presence, no perseverant insurgence, thereby adjoining if not succumbing to New Atheist and French anarchist associations of G/god as a consummate tyrant who forces God's self, will, and ways on all of God's subjected creatures.¹³¹ In Universalism, there is quite literally no escape from God. This "*god*" for Hitchens is worse than any human dictator since, "you can't defect from North Korea, but at least you can die."¹³²

Upholding Creedal keys is further problematic for Parity Pluralists and their Epistemic, Ethical, Normative, Soteriological, Transcendental, Relativist, and Subjectivist kin. Any approach reducing the Creed to an individual or communal confession with limited or no objective purchase stands in at least approximate contradictory with historic, ecumenical, and evangelical conceptions of the Creed as not only subjectively relevant, but reflecting of Ultimate Reality. An Orientational Pluralism where Jesus judges only

¹²⁸ See Piper [2013] for a Restrictivist Calvinist articulating two salvific "wills" in God.

¹²⁹ Cf. Crockett [1996: *passim*]; Erickson [1996: 217-32] in approaching religious diversity. Griffiths [2014: 143] defines "*convenientia*, [as] judgments about what it is more fitting that the Lord should do."

¹³⁰ Undercutting e.g. assurances that God in and through Jesus does not lie (cf. Titus 1:2).

¹³¹ C. Hitchens [2007b: 13] but here more on being left alone by religious people than by "*god*" per se.

¹³² C. Hitchens in Katz [2005: online]; cf. C. Hitchens [2007b: 247-49].

Christians is inadequate to arbitrate disputes about whether Jesus eschatologically judges any or all of “the living and the dead,” except perhaps in a non-literal sense through his teachings and example. None of this means that Orientational Pluralists cannot recite the Creed with integrity, but that Inclusivism dodges some adversities to this position.

Wesleyan Inclusivism toward truth casts the Creed as more theologically astute or precise than comparable extra-Christian counterparts without qualifying that all others are demonic or only accidentally accurate on any point. For Inclusivists about salvation, Jesus will judge New Atheists and others who identify apart from or against Christianity as possible recipients of everlasting life depending on how they ultimately respond to God. Restrictivism frustrates universally available saving grace, while Universalism controverts free response. God’s universal holy love and responsible transforming grace accord more easily with Inclusivism by declaring that God comprehensively bestows everyone with opportunity for—without compelling anyone to receive—“forgiveness of sins, and the life everlasting.” Do the Book of Nature and experience collude this Creedal reading?

5.2.2 *Science and Experience:*

Wesleyans in sections 2.1.2 and 7.3 seek to avoid overestimating the sciences to deliver ultimate meaning, salvation, or to reverse death, yet neither does the attitude advocated here insist that the sciences have no relevance whatsoever to religious diversity.¹³³ Building on Muslim philosopher Muhammad Legenhausen, attitudes in the sciences broadly conceived recurrently parallel Open Inclusivist approaches to truth. Scientists and other scholars do not normally denounce competing schools of thought or disciplines as utterly worthless or irrational, even if they believe their school or discipline best articulates or accounts for what is true, real, or significant in specialized capacities.¹³⁴ Rival theorists often concur on important points, appreciate other systems’ elegance, beauty, or slants on truth amidst disagreements about crucial issues or explanatory power:

Logicians (although essentially the same points could be made with reference to...physics, economics, etc.)...are intuitionists, logicians, formalists, conventionalists, dialethists, pluralists, and many others. The adherents of these schools differ from one another about what logic is, how it should be studied, and

¹³³ As opposed to more modestly utilizing science to enhance the quality of life or ease transitions to death.

¹³⁴ Cf. Lennox [2009: 41] for an alternative metaphor analogizing the sciences as primarily complementary.

what valid results have been proven. Even...[so called] logical pluralists do not grant that there is truth in equal measure in all the different logical sects.¹³⁵

Disputants may leverage conflicts to prompt research, nuance their positions, or adopt new ones.¹³⁶ If scientists are not frequently Restrictivists in theory or practice, neither are they Parity Pluralists who take disagreement as evidence that all frameworks or methodologies equally reveal reality. Legenhausen analogizes that religious practitioners are not obliged to be Parity Pluralists either unless demonstrable differences show why parity follows in religion or philosophy, but not in the sciences.¹³⁷

Before delving into one juncture of science, experience, and salvific Inclusivism, it is important to reiterate that Honoring Conference discourages establishing doctrine on experience alone (see section 3.7). Nevertheless, Open Inclusivism makes experiencing novel insights from New Atheists intelligible, while Restrictivism and Closed Inclusivism shrink atheist-Christian dialogue to reminding Christians what they should already know.

An Inclusivism of salvation and righteousness likewise makes meaningful the appearance of God's transforming grace in atheists' characters and works of mercy, including any that exceed particular Christians in extent or fecundity. Inclusivists need not disdain atheist fruits of grace in every instance as 'splendid sins,' but attend to Jesus's admonition that spiritual sheep and wolves are distinguished by their fruits, even if God alone perfectly and thoroughly fathoms every character, intent, and action.¹³⁸ Inclusivism and Restrictivism also make experiences with inner and outer depravity comprehensible by recognizing less credulously than Universalism creaturely intransigence in rebuffing God's overtures, and more consistently than Pluralism the need for transformation.

With regard to Inclusivism of salvation, Near Death Experiences (NDEs) are controversial phenomena that some Wesleyans defend at the intersection of science and experience. Abraham remarks: "In philosophy, arguments for and against eschatological claims...traditionally made appeal to...empirical arguments from...near death experiences."¹³⁹ Walls quotes Carol Zaleski: "Experiential reports of life after death are popularly considered to be practical evidence, which, when verified in the lab, will yield

¹³⁵ Legenhausen [2013: 173, cf. 175].

¹³⁶ Legenhausen [2013: 173-74].

¹³⁷ Legenhausen [2013: 174].

¹³⁸ See section 6.5 and 6.7 for sample fruits by New and other atheists.

¹³⁹ Abraham [2008: 586]

scientific confirmation of religious hopes.”¹⁴⁰ Wesleyan Pentecostal J. P. Moreland with Gary Habermas assumes “the credibility of the vast majority of NDEs,” and Wesleyan New Testament scholar Ben Witherington recounts as edifying a story that one of his parishioners tells that is in a similar vein to a Near Death Experience.¹⁴¹

NDEs are regularly vivid, profound, and real according to their experiencers.¹⁴² Critics discount NDEs as wholly naturalistic, perhaps induced by endorphins or dying brains, but nothing more.¹⁴³ We do not adjudicate quarrels about NDE authenticity here. However, in light of their proliferation in the literature and Wesleyan scholars invoking NDEs, it is still worth asking what they portend for religious diversity and New Atheists.

Inclusivists can cautiously assert that NDEs in conglomerate are more harmonious with Inclusivism or Orientational Pluralism than with Restrictivism or Universalism in Walls’ cross-cultural review of NDEs from aboriginal Australia, China, Guam, India, New Zealand Maori, Native American, and “Western New Britain” populations with repeated commonalities including a tunnel, out of body experience, life review, encountering other beings, and perceiving another world or existence.¹⁴⁴ Zaleski diversifies with medieval reports of torment, purification tests, obstacles, and perceptions of doom; while Habermas and Moreland supplement what they believe are NDE-like events in Scripture, Hindus and Christians meeting “religious figures” in NDEs, and hell-like chronicles.¹⁴⁵ Near Death Experiencers have not finally died at the time that they recount their testimonies, so NDEs may represent penultimate, partial, or only temporary experiences of life after death.¹⁴⁶

Wesleyans are prudently cautious about NDE claims to objectivity, even though hell-like NDEs generate friction for Universalists and joyful extra-Christian NDEs

¹⁴⁰ “Heaven and Visions of Life after Life” in Walls [2002: 133-60, 211-13]; Walls [2002: 136, 211] quoting Zaleski [1987: 99]; cf. Habermas and Moreland [1998: 157-97, 204-18].

¹⁴¹ Habermas and Moreland [1998: 156-218]; Moreland in a March 3, 2014 e-mail to this dissertation author; Witherington [2007; 2009] the latter in a context responding to Bart Ehrman.

¹⁴² Walls [2002: 40-41, 212] and Zaleski [2008: 625] cite Catholic public intellectual Neuhaus [2000: 19].

¹⁴³ S. Harris [2014: 172-200] compares NDEs with psychedelic drug trips; cf. comments by Habermas and Moreland [1998: 178-93]; Walls [2002: 137-60]; Zaleski [2008: 619, 622-24]. One could also measure NDE physical correlates yet uphold, remain agnostic about, or deny their spiritual components.

¹⁴⁴ Walls [2002: 138].

¹⁴⁵ Habermas and Moreland [1998: 178-80, cf. 164-65] citing Acts 7:55-56, cf. Luke 16:22-24, 2 Corinthians 12:1-5; J. Collins [2008: esp. 46] on “otherworldly journeys” in the ancient world and biblical apocalyptic literature; Walls [2002: 152 on the Apostle Paul’s possible Near Death Experience; cf. 2012: 19-20]; Zaleski [1987: 26-28; 2008: 615: “purgatorial and infernal” experiences, 620-22].

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Habermas and Moreland [1998: 181-83]; Walls [2002: 153, 212].

challenge Restrictivism.¹⁴⁷ Inclusivists angling to offset Orientational Pluralism might assert that Hindus due to their perceptual categories mistake Jesus or angels for (e.g.) Krishna or Rama, or that Rama and Krishna could be angels per C. S. Lewis in section 5.1, but this edges toward special pleading absent corroborating factors.¹⁴⁸

More promising are fruits of transforming grace that correlate with or are attributed directly to NDEs. Walls writes: “If one thing is clear from the public reaction to NDEs, it is that they have given many people fresh reason to hope for life after death.”¹⁴⁹ Some who experience hellish, challenging, or beatific NDEs turn away from sins toward God. Betty Malz testifies that her NDE helped to divest her of racial prejudice.¹⁵⁰ Bruce Grayson documents decreased suicidal thinking among patients whose NDE befell them during a suicide attempt.¹⁵¹ The Venerable Bede in *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* retells the testimony of a Northumbrian named Drythelm: “I am now truly risen from death and permitted again to live among men, however I am not to live hereafter as I wont, but from henceforward after a very different manner.”¹⁵²

Inclusivists, Restrictivists, and Universalists alike can be grateful when NDEs catalyze pardoning and transforming grace for their experiencers or hearers. Still, NDEs do not always convince atheists who experience them to believe in God or an afterlife.¹⁵³ Neurologist Ernst Rodin first described his NDE as ecstatic and revelatory, but later concluded that it was an illusion caused by toxic psychosis or hypoxia.¹⁵⁴ Analytic philosopher A. J. Ayer confronted “a red light...[that was] very painful even when I turned away from it. I was aware that this light was responsible for the government of the

¹⁴⁷ Walls [2002: 140-48] seeks a *via media* between skeptical dismissal and naïve approbation: “Christian doctrine gives us at least some hints about what lies on the other side of death, and NDEs *confirm* these expectations, at least to a significant degree.”

¹⁴⁸ DeVan [2012s: 38-47] for an Inclusivist reading of the *Ramayana*; cf. Walls [2002: 154]: “It might be argued that there are better historical grounds for accepting Christianity [and thus Christian interpretations of NDEs]...Persons whose prior beliefs and cultural conditioning are shaped by it [Christianity] will have the best categories for interpreting and conceptualizing their experience...Persons whose prior beliefs and cultural conditioning are least shaped by [or most at odds with] Christian categories, will naturally be least prepared to interpret and describe accurately an encounter with God, even if it is...genuine.”

¹⁴⁹ Walls [2002: 159]; cf. Zaleski [2008: 617].

¹⁵⁰ Malz in Walls [2002: 139, cf. 134-35]; cf. Habermas and Moreland [1998: 162-63].

¹⁵¹ Greyson [1992-1993: 81-89]; Zaleski [2008: 618, 626].

¹⁵² Bede in Zaleski [2008: 620, 627]. See also DeVan [2012o] for dreams as transformative experiences.

¹⁵³ In keeping with free response to God’s grace and notwithstanding NDEs’ ubiquitous lucidness.

¹⁵⁴ Rodin [1980: 259-63] in Zaleski [2008: 619, 626].

universe....I also had the motive of finding a way to extinguish the painful light.”¹⁵⁵ In a selection Hitchens anthologizes, Ayer attested that his Near Death Experience, “slightly weakened my conviction that my genuine death...will be the end of me, though I continue to hope that it will be. They have not weakened my conviction that there is no God.”¹⁵⁶

Restrictivist interpreters of Ayer’s NDE as veridical will likely read his response as a real-life example of Lewis’s dwarfs, but Inclusivists are able to be less quick to judge.¹⁵⁷ Ayer’s biographer conveys Ayer’s transformation through and following his NDE as facilitating “a kind of resurrection.”¹⁵⁸ Ayer’s mental acuity, social and professional life revived; he saw natural landscapes more vividly, friendship as more precious, remarried his second wife, and revealed his paternity to an adult daughter.¹⁵⁹

Restrictivism constrains these graces to God’s final efforts to woo Ayer, which compound Ayer’s condemnation if he never believed in Jesus, nor converted to Christianity before his “genuine death.”¹⁶⁰ Inclusivism mediates hope that Ayer’s end-of-life period following his Near Death Experience indicates inklings of a response to God’s grace that, as with other atheist or unwitting responders, might ignite with brighter clarity after death. Yet Inclusivism declines Universalist certitude that Ayer, and indeed all convinced atheists, must and will partake in salvation. Section 5.2.3 (cf. 7.2-7.4) consults reason as to how implicit responses to God’s grace might continue, in Ayer’s phrase, creative maturing and “prolongation of our experiences” beyond the grave.¹⁶¹

5.2.3 *Come, Let Us Reason Together:*

Transitioning to reason as a tool, we allude first to a path that we will not expound here, but that we commend to future work in epistemology: Specifically, how a Wesleyan Inclusivism might formally call into question or replace more foundationalist-oriented philosophies such as “*evidentialist apologetics*” referenced in section 3.8.¹⁶² Instead, from

¹⁵⁵ E.g. Ayer [1988: 38-40]; cf. selections in Habermas and Moreland [1998: 413] and Zaleski [2008: 627].

¹⁵⁶ Ayer in C. Hitchens [2007c: 270-76, quote on 275].

¹⁵⁷ Lewis [2000g: 156-70]; cf. Habermas and Moreland [1998: 172].

¹⁵⁸ Ayer in B. Rogers [1999: 349].

¹⁵⁹ Zaleski [2008: 624].

¹⁶⁰ Ayer in C. Hitchens [2007c: 275].

¹⁶¹ Ayer [1988: 39-40] per the above is conflicted in his attraction to this “prolongation of our experiences.”

¹⁶² E.g. Maddox [2009: 38-43; 2010b: 169-70].

a Wesleyan viewpoint, we apply reason as detailed in section 3.6 as a means to process, compare, understand, and respond to revelatory data in Scripture, tradition, and creation.

Walls in reason's light acclaims Inclusivism as turning aside the chief moral and existential objection to Restrictivism: "It is unfair that something as monumental as eternal salvation should be exclusively available, or even more readily available only to certain persons."¹⁶³ A perfectly good, wise, and loving God would desire all creatures to have "full and fair opportunity to freely receive the gift of salvation...[and] do everything he could, short of overriding freedom, to elicit a positive response for all persons."¹⁶⁴

Honoring Conference uses reason in considering how God might bring about responsible grace for New Atheists or others who are precluded or inhibited from culpable response before death, as chapter 4 inferred from Scripture and section 5.1 gathered from Christian tradition. If salvation is universally available, a capable response must be effective at the moment of death (*in articulo mortis*), or at some point after, perhaps eschatologically per C. S. Lewis's fictive *The Last Battle*.¹⁶⁵ For Sanders, once people perceive the Gospel clearly and existentially, this enables a "fully free act...similar to the decision the angels made—in full knowledge of the truth, unhindered by any constraints...fully awake and aware of the situation."¹⁶⁶ Dawkins and Hitchens quoting Bertrand Russell's fanciful riposte, "Not enough evidence!," to what Russell would say about his disbelief if he were to meet God after death, would no longer excuse forgoing belief or response.¹⁶⁷

All scenarios that Sanders, Walls, and others suggest here would proceed from God's grace. Clearly encountering Jesus at the moment of death, Jesus saving those who would have responded had they been able before they died, Jesus allowing the saved to intercede for others at the Final Judgment, Jesus welcoming "servants" who responded by living in the light they received, and postmortem / eschatological evangelism by Jesus or

¹⁶³ Walls [2002: 66].

¹⁶⁴ Walls [2002: 66-67].

¹⁶⁵ Lewis [2000g: title, 171-211].

¹⁶⁶ Sanders [1992: 164].

¹⁶⁷ Dawkins [2006a: 131] and C. Hitchens [2007b: 211]; cf. Searle [1998: 36-37] reporting B. Russell. Abraham [2008: 583-84] conjectures possible limited post-mortem awareness reminiscent of C. S. Lewis's dwarfs: "The nonbeliever might well be surprised by the experience of a resurrected life after death, but...need not necessarily...believe that God brought it about....[S/he] would be surprised...and forced to find a way to undermine the new experiential evidence....Burden of proof would shift....Life after death could in principle provide confirmation for theist claims without reaching all the way to verification."

other preachers evoking the concededly arcane 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6 would all transpire by grace.¹⁶⁸ New Atheists need not be definitively excluded from any said grace unless they irrevocably spurn not caricatures or distortions, but the true God and Gospel as they are.

Reasoning with a *discrimen* of God's universal love and grace reveals select proposals falling prey to thornier hitches than others. Salvation based on what would have happened, or how one would have responded in other circumstances, carries the potential corollary of damnation based on what would have happened in other circumstances.

William Lane Craig alternately hypothesizes that God providentially arranges for all who would respond to the Gospel to hear it, while also arranging for (at least some?) who would refuse the Gospel to lack the necessary fortuities to hear or understand it.¹⁶⁹

Millard Erickson improvises that God in order to universally save all who die as infants—and universally condemn all who die as non-Christian adults—provides that all the former would have accepted the Gospel if they had lived long enough to hear it, and all the latter would either live long enough to reject the Gospel or sin damnably in some other way.¹⁷⁰

Both positions are problematic. Salvation based on what one would have done faces protests that it unjustly damns or saves on hypothetical bases.¹⁷¹ Craig's second option impels prejudice. Those perceiving themselves providentially disposed or located will be tempted to view those who live where the Gospel is more readily accessible or comprehended as more receptive to God's grace than other individuals, cultures, eras, groups, or nations who experience less or no identifiable acquaintance with the Gospel.

A variable quandary arises if it is possible to receive or miss out on salvation due to other people's intercessions or lack of them. Section 5.1 noted that Dante's *Paradisio*, Canto 20, dramatized Pope Gregory I interceding for Trajan. Calvinist Inclusivist R. Todd Mangum ventures: "Is it possible that believers will have the opportunity to 'vouch for' some of those who did not explicitly join the covenant community while on Earth?"¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Cf. e.g. some *Descendit ad inferna* elaborations of the longer Apostle's Creed; Hornik [2008: 634].

¹⁶⁹ Craig [2013: 237-38]. One is here reminded of Jesus in Matthew 7:6 on the folly of giving to dogs what is sacred or casting pearls before swine. Yet one must also ask why some of those who hear the Gospel still refuse it, and if some who do not hear the Gospel might have gladly received it had they known it. Perhaps per Restrictivism, providential access to the Gospel is necessary but not sufficient for positive response?

¹⁷⁰ Erickson [1996: 245-53] admits the logic of his position compels mass infanticide but urges readers to resist logic in this instance because it "attempts to promote a good end by the use of very evil means."

¹⁷¹ Cf. Walls [2012: 127-29] on middle knowledge as a more hopeful basis for post-mortem transformation.

¹⁷² Mangum [2004: 134] appealing to "our role" in 1 Corinthians 6:2 and Revelation 2:26-27, 3:21, 20:4.

Wesleyans and other Creedal Christians confess “the communion of saints” as the interdependent web of relationships mediating real occasions to serve as instruments of God’s grace. Yet does God condemn people who have no, fewer, or less effective non-Divine intercessors on their behalf?¹⁷³ If intercessory deficiencies dispatch some to hell, then one person’s eternal damnation can effectively hang on another person’s response.¹⁷⁴

Possible post-mortem evangelism and discipleship by Jesus and/or members of Christ’s body per C. S. Lewis’s whimsical *The Great Divorce* (one might speculatively posit angels or other creatures evangelizing or discipling) invites inquiry into the efficacy or wisdom of flawed humans engaging in evangelism or discipleship before death if Jesus, angels, or departed saints do so more impeccably eschatologically.¹⁷⁵ Wesleyan Open Inclusivists and others can reply that evangelism and discipleship are faithfulness to Jesus’s commission to make disciples so that the whole world will know the Gospel, and so that God’s servants among the nations might sooner realize their heirship with surety as members of Christ’s body along with other joys and graces that prepare people for God’s kingdom. Discipleship and explicit faith in Jesus advances Christians *now* along the path to abiding holiness, communion with God, God’s people, and the rest of God’s creation.¹⁷⁶

As with intercession, imperfectly communicating the Gospel to those who have never heard or understood it is disquieting only if God exploits one person’s deficient communication to harm or damn another. The latter especially does not comport with a God of universal holy love and pardoning, transforming, responsible grace.

Finally, pardoning and transforming grace could result in explicit and/or implicit believers’ instantaneous maturity and clear perception at death or at judgment, or allow for initial change followed by incremental and/or perpetual growth.¹⁷⁷ Full immediate change

¹⁷³ Cf. Griffiths [2008: 442-43]: Henry VII “made provision in his will for 10,000 masses to be said for his soul after his death and...built an ornate chapel at Westminster for the sole purpose of housing monks who would pray in perpetuity for the repose of his soul. This was a king who was taking no chances;” cf. Walls [2012: 30-31] on King Philip II of Spain building “a palace monastery complex that was at the time the largest building in the world...with tens of millions of years of indulgences...[and] numerous monks whose sole responsibility was to offer constant masses and prayers for the king and other...royal family.”

¹⁷⁴ For references in Christian history and in some world religions to intercession for the dead, see Walls [2008: 96, 102, 134, 239, 430, 442-43; 2012: 76, 81, 88, 118, 124, 136, 139, 155, 184-85].

¹⁷⁵ Lewis [2001c: title and *passim*]; cf. e.g. Erickson [1996: 265-69] raising this question/objection.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. e.g. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.8.1, cf. 5.6.1 in Daley [2008: 95, 106]: “Preparing us for incorruption, as we grow accustomed, little by little, to receive and bear God.” People properly informed, equipped, and motivated might also store up treasures in heaven more resourcefully (Matthew 6:19-21).

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Aquinas [1955-1957: 3.51.6, online] on Christ-likeness and perceiving God rightly or clearly.

for atheists and others would seem to deprive them of coming to grips with and processing their relationship with God in light of their former assumptions.¹⁷⁸ Walls admits that John Wesley and Wesley's colleague John Fletcher as Anglican divines were amenable to instantaneous transformation at death, yet post-mortem sanctification or glorification proceeding responsively "appears to be a natural extension of Wesley's thought."¹⁷⁹

If post-mortem evangelism and discipleship are viable, is it also then possible that some who believed in Jesus before death might rebel against God after they die?¹⁸⁰ Walls follows Aquinas and more recently James Sennett to reason that post-mortem apostasy is unlikely for followers of Jesus progressing toward "fulfillment of all their desires...all the happiness and satisfaction they naturally seek....They simply have no motive to ever turn away from God or the perfect joy they know as they gaze on his beauty."¹⁸¹ Furthermore:

In heaven...[we will be] so completely transformed that we will naturally and willingly worship God and choose the true on all occasions. We will know with full clarity and certainty that God is the source of happiness and evil the source of misery. The truth will have worked so through our character that sin will have lost all appeal....Character will determine their [our] choices at this point... [but the] choices that formed that character were not determined....While sin and disobedience will be ruled out...[we will have] libertarian freedom within the happy limits of a character that always desires what is truly and deeply good. Exactly how this desire will be carried out will be up to each individual.¹⁸²

This is attractive and provocative, but post-mortem apostasy is hard to definitively rule out if free response to God's grace persists after death. An increase in clarity that evokes positive reactions in some could trigger latent insurrection from others. Walls' diagnosis more persuasively applies to after the Final Judgment, to the New Heavens and New Earth, where presumably every citizen with full and sufficient clarity freely embraces everlasting life with God and God's people in the New Creation (cf. sections 7.3-7.4).

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Walls [2012: 179]: "One such issue is...whether there would be sufficient continuity that we could recognize ourselves as the same person were we to undergo dramatic instantaneous moral transformation." Walls [2012: subtitle, esp. 153-75, 188] leverages *The Logic of Total Transformation* as one ecumenical rapprochement for a Protestant theology of Purgatory that is controversial but not without Wesleyan precedent: cf. e.g. Pinnock [1996b]; Sangster [1943: 65-70]; Willimon [2008: 84-87].

¹⁷⁹ It is also less continuous with experiences of growth before death: Walls [2012: 47, 56, cf. 36-51, 118-22]. Pinnock [1996b: 129] analogizes proposals that those who die as infants grow in heaven to maturity.

¹⁸⁰ Or be unmasked as implicitly wicked per Aslan's dialogue with Emeth in section 5.1.

¹⁸¹ Walls [2002: 105; 2012: 148, 196] citing *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3-4, 8 [sic?], 62-63, 92; Sennett [1999].

¹⁸² Walls [2008: 405; cf. 1996: 559].

If God saves New Atheists and other religiously diverse people after they die, this will not for the position we argue here guarantee that specific atheists will welcome God's pardoning and transforming grace at that point if they do not do so now. All the same, we have reasoned that several scenarios conceivably shed light on how atheists or others who do not overtly yield to God's saving grace in this life might do so in the next.

Deducing how atheists could implicitly share in God's grace and eschatologically delight in the God in whom they previously professed disbelief coheres with an Inclusivist reading of the Bible, tradition, and the Creed, eluding complications intrinsic to Pluralist, Universalist, and Restrictivist glosses. A Wesleyan species of Inclusivism commiserates further with transformative "Near Death" experiences, plus observations that God's grace appears to be operating in and through atheist lives. Reasonably extrapolating from the Bible, tradition, and the interface of science and experience, we project how atheists could partake in eternal life via lucid, defining, postmortem encounters with God as God truly is at or prior to Final Judgment. We stop short of pinpointing precisely how God through Jesus would bring this about, but critique conjectures that historical-geographical contexts, non-divine intercession, or predicating what someone would have done in counterfactual circumstances is decisively justifiable. Even so, one or a combination of eucatastrophes could incorporate New Atheists in P. T. Forsyth's vision, wherein: "There are more conversions on the other side than on this, if the crisis of death opens the eyes."¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Forsyth [1948: 37].

Chapter 6: Applying Wesleyan Reflection to Interaction and Relationships

How ought Wesleyans to interact with New Atheists and others who Christians believe are created in God's image, yet who deny God exists? Chapters 4 and 5 critically delved into Wesleyan Honoring Conference as an approach to issues of truth and salvation as they pertain to religious diversity and New Atheists. The current chapter turns to the third area of concern that section 2.2 introduced: interactive relationships.¹

Methodist John B. Cobb classified early Christian relations first as intra-Jewish, then as diffusing to followers of other religions.² Chapter 6 continues this extension by proposing principles for Christian-New Atheist interaction based on Wesleyan approaches to and reflection on extra-Christian religions and non-Methodist denominations from the beginning of the Methodist movement to the present day. In an Open Inclusivist spirit mindful of God's universal grace, we also supplement synergetic non-Methodist and extra-Christian contributions, where applicable, for the purpose of attuning to prospects of commensurability with New Atheists and with other religious traditions.

The present chapter argues that Wesleyan Inclusivist reflections and practices for interacting with believers of other religious traditions are also constructive to interacting with New Atheists. We further contend that many of these principles are not confined to Wesleyans, but are matched by intuitions in the wider communion of saints, as well as in extra-Christian religions and by New Atheists themselves. As a result, each section of this chapter reinforces Wesleyan positions with harmonious religious and atheist voices. We set forth seven Wesleyan principles for interaction, which partly overlap with comparable ideals among atheists and other selected religious believers. In doing so, we demonstrate how a Wesleyan Inclusivism can underwrite and call for mutually beneficial interactions, even as it critiques alternative or antithetical priorities and presumptions.

6.1 New Atheists Possess “Sacred Worth”

One foundational Wesleyan principle is the inherent or “sacred worth” of every human being. The United Methodist Social Principles stipulates that all persons possess

¹ Portions of chapter 6 published as DeVan [2012b: esp. 126-139].

² Cobb [2002: 7].

“sacred worth.”³ God in Genesis 1 pronounces animals and plants “good” (טוֹב) but after creating humans God pronounces creation good “exceedingly” (טוֹב מְאֹד).⁴ Irenaeus foresaw: “The glory of God is humanity fully alive, and the life of humanity is the vision of God.”⁵ The core challenge then for interfaith relationships is as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks puts it, “to see God’s image in one who is not in our [religious] image.”⁶ Wesleyans who take this to heart do so with anthropological, theological, moral, and practical underpinnings.

Wesley taught that God creates humans in God’s image with a measure of righteousness, rational abilities to discern good versus evil, affections, passions, tempers, the will or liberty to do right and wrong, and to serve their fellow creatures as God’s vice-regents on earth.⁷ For Wesleyans, God gives New Atheists a portion of this grace, inviting them and all people to reconciliation with God and their fellow creatures.

Dehumanizing alleged atheists has a calamitous history. In 1619, the Parliament of Toulouse executed philosopher Cesare “Lucilio” Vanini for “crimes of *lese-majeste* and atheism.”⁸ Judicial magistrate Gabriel Barthelemy de Grammond recalled the cutting out of Vanini’s “sacrilegious tongue,” whereupon Vanini “let out a horrible cry that you could say resembles a cow bellowing...the shout proved him to be an animal in death.”⁹

A Restrictivist mindset may aggravate this type of dehumanization and other oppressive behavior as is evident from Queen Mary I’s rationalization: “As the souls of heretics are hereafter to be eternally burning in hell, there can be nothing more proper than for me to imitate the divine vengeance by burning them on earth.”¹⁰

³ “The Nurturing Community,” §161:II:F, *The Book of Discipline* [2012: 111].

⁴ E.g. Christensen [2005: 21, 55, 78].

⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV:20:7 in Di Berardino and Studer [1997: 136].

⁶ Sacks [2003: 60].

⁷ K. Collins [2007: 51-57, 342-43] citing e.g. T. Jackson [1958: 9:434]; Sermon 141, “The Image of God,” §I.1, *Works* 4:293; cf. Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15-25, 9:6, James 3:9-10; Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 234] summarizing Wesleyan “natural, political, and moral” *Imago Dei*. E. Jones [1928: 11] in a multi-religious context on human dignity, concerns, and joys as hardly confined to self-identifying Christians.

⁸ Robichaud [2013: 179].

⁹ Grammond in Robichaud [2013: 192-93] also quotes “Fancois de Rosset” calling Vanini a “mad dog.”

¹⁰ Queen Mary I in Alger [1880: 515].

Calvinists, even those who identify as Inclusivists such as R. Todd Mangum, may also be susceptible to dehumanizing those who they classify as non-Christians in ways that Wesleyans more easily eschew.¹¹ Mangum employs serpentine rhetoric:

It would be perfectly justifiable for God...to judge humans as damnable for their depraved *nature* alone....The farmer who stumbles across a nest of rattlesnake eggs does not need to ponder whether this individual rattlesnake fetus has committed deeds—or will commit deeds—worthy of destruction. Knowing full well the nature of rattlesnakes and what will be the inevitable result if he does not intervene, the farmer is well justified in destroying each and every rattlesnake egg. The nature of the rattlesnake—even outside consideration of what opportunity was or was not had to commit deeds like or unlike a typical rattlesnake—is reason enough to justify their destruction....God is justified in regarding—and judging depraved human beings in like manner.¹²

Cracknell citing F. D. Maurice demurs from this highly pessimistic snake-nest anthropology by reading the Bible as presenting humanity individually and corporately not as evil in themselves, but only when they are fighting God’s purposes and laws.¹³ Rather than leaving anyone in a default state of corruption, Wesleyan anthropology celebrates God’s endowing all people with abilities to accept, experience, and responsively work out their salvation and its accompanying joys with God. The Holy Spirit for Wesley graces all people with some degree of salvation, some deliverance from a heart insensible to God, some conscience of moral law that condemns or approves her or his actions and passions, a measure of light that “sooner or later, more or less” enlightens everyone (John 1:9).¹⁴

Catholic Terrence W. Tilley ecumenically complements a Wesleyan *discrimen* of pardoning and transforming grace by coupling God’s universal salvific will with the “dignity of *each and all* human persons.”¹⁵ Since Jesus according to Pope John Paul II is “in a way united” with all people, even those unaware of this unity, Wesleyans with

¹¹ F. Cunningham [1998: 192]; cf. Yong [2013: 10] distinguishes Wesleyan prevenient grace from some Calvinist understandings of “common grace” that posit post-culpa remains of the *Imago Dei* simply restrain elements of intrinsic depravity without effecting or contributing directly to God’s gracious salvific work.

¹² Mangum [2004: 126].

¹³ Cracknell [2005: 9, 226]; Maurice [1886: 193].

¹⁴ *NT Notes*, Hebrews 3:12; Sermon 62, “The End of Christ’s Coming,” §§I:3-8, *Works* 2:474-76; Sermon 85, “On Working out Our Own Salvation” §§II.1, III.4, *Works* 3:203-04, 207. K. Collins [2007: 74, cf. 79, 348-50] cites multiple complementary sources from Wesley bolstering this point.

¹⁵ Tilley [2013: 61-62] italics added.

Catholics need not assume religious others like New Atheists are left utterly or totally depraved, nor that God's grace merely restrains their essential evil.¹⁶

Wesleyan anthropological and soteriological optimism helpfully allays Hitchens' invocation of Fulke Greville: "Oh, wearisome condition of humanity...Created sick, commanded to be sound."¹⁷ Philosopher Robert Adams analogizes that imposing binding obligations without communicating them, and then pronouncing guilt on those who fail to guess what they are, is an unsavory game "no nicer if God is thought of as a party."¹⁸

Against such arbitrariness, a Wesleyan appreciation of God's universal work emboldens Christians to treat New Atheists as joint recipients of grace, even if atheists refuse to reciprocate.¹⁹ Wesley in the spirit of Jesus called for "unspeakable tenderness" to others' welfare, counseling courtesy—in his milieu more than bare politeness—toward the high and low, rich and poor, good and bad, Godfearers and *those who do not fear God*.²⁰ Wesleyans consequently resist all dehumanization against or by atheists in solidarity with the "Humanist Manifesto III" rendition of every person's "inherent worth and dignity," which Dawkins signed.²¹ This leads to a second interaction guideline.

6.2 Ir/Religious Liberty

A Wesleyan Inclusivism towards truth and salvation upholds religious liberty without Restrictivist insecurities that ignorance, misunderstandings, or mistaken perceptions result in eternal damnation, or that all theologies or spiritualities outside Christian doctrine are merely inadvertent truths or pernicious lies. Neither does it portend

¹⁶ John Paul II [1979: §14, online]; cf. Gorman [2013: 42]; Heim [2001: 189]; Rahner [1972: 146]. C. Hitchens in Hitchens et al. [2009b: 16:31-36] at Methodist Central Hall in Westminster uncharacteristically commented on Pope John Paul II without elaborating on the details: "It troubles me not at all to say he was a very impressive and serious human being;" see also C. Hitchens [2007b: 193] on being a "guarded admirer."

¹⁷ Fulke Greville, *Mustapha* in C. Hitchens [2007b: front matter]; cf. Barton [2014] also inspiring the Andrew Hozier-Byrne [2014: title] Grammy song of the year nominee: "Take Me to Church;" cf. Catatonia [1998]; DeVan [2007] on a dialogue featuring atheist punk rocker Greg Graffin of the band "Bad Religion."

¹⁸ R. Adams [1999: 261]; cf. Burson and Walls [1998: 227-28].

¹⁹ E.g. Yong [2013: 11] affirming that all people are made in God's image in the realm of prevenient grace whatever their religious labels; cf. Yates [2013: 54, 57] in the same forum introduced by Callen [2013].

²⁰ Sermon 39, "Catholic Spirit," §III:5, *Works* 2:95; Sermon 100, "On Pleasing all Men," §II.4, *Works* 3:424 italics added.

²¹ "Humanism and Its Aspirations," §6 [2003]; Sermon 100, "On Pleasing all Men," §II:5, *Works* 3:425: Those who bear God's image are due "honour" in part for their Creator and respective Redeemer's sake; cf. E. Harris [1998: 76]. S. Jones [2003: title, 47, cf. 57, 84]: "*The Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor*...always involves God's effort to love people, restoring them to their full humanity."

with Parity Pluralism or relativism that all beliefs are ontologically, soteriologically, or otherwise on a par. Either of these positions may weaken the motivation or urgency to install, protect, and sustain religious liberty. Restrictivism fosters ambivalence toward liberty's tolerance for error, and Parity Pluralists will strain to coherently justify religious liberty against opposing "religious" claims that on parity assumptions must be equally valid. Inclusivist Wesleyans moreover defend liberty more consistently than any Universalism that declares God will eventually and in every case overwhelm free will.

The United Methodist Social Principles yokes religious liberty to human dignity: "Our respect for the inherent dignity of all persons leads us to call for the recognition, protection, and implementation of the principles of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*."²² Numerous religiously diverse populations in 1948 ratified the latter declaration linking human dignity to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, worship, practice, observance, opinion, and expression "without distinction of any kind."²³

Notwithstanding such affirmation, religious liberty in what the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue christens "*The Dialogue of Life*" (living in a neighborly spirit conducive to religious diversity) is far from ubiquitous historically or globally.²⁴ Contemporary literature documents a resurgence in violations of religious freedom, conscience, and expression under "blasphemy laws" and other sanctions against Christians, atheists, dissenting Muslims, and many others.²⁵ Some violate not only freedom of affiliation, but freedom *within* religious specifications or to be recognized as a religion. For instance, Indonesian polities designate what constitutes "true" belief within state sanctioned religions and prescribe punishments for dissenters.²⁶

²² "The Social Community," §162, *The Book of Discipline* [2012: 116-17]. §162:B portends to protecting all faith votaries from legal, political, economic, or social discrimination; cf. Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatus humanae*, §2 [1965]: "Religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person."

²³ "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" [1948], Article 2. Articles 2, 16, and 18 address religion.

²⁴ Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue §42 [1991: online] in Tilley [2013: 60]. Atheism too can retain a privileged position per Robertson [2010: 19] commenting on Dawkins' anti-religion documentaries: "When was an Evangelical Christian last given the opportunity by a national [British] TV channel to produce a film...[on] the evils of atheism?;" cf. DeVan [2012n: 113] reviewing Robertson on this point.

²⁵ Cf. e.g. J. Allen [2013]; "Annual Report" [2006-2014]; Cox and Rogers [2011]; Grim and Finke [2011]; Guinness [2013]; Ibrahim [2013]; Marshall, Gilbert, and Shea [2013]; Marshall and Shea [2011]; Pew Research Center [2013]; Shortt [2012]; Stark [2014]; Yancey and Williamson [2015].

²⁶ Beyer [2003: 333-39]; cf. Lawrence [2013: 297, 30, 308].

Owen C. Thomas cites historic Western discrimination against atheists in Plato's *Laws* §908, Aquinas, Thomas More, and Locke's qualifying that atheists are dangerous to society even as he opposed the death penalty for atheism: "Not at all to be tolerated [are those] who deny the being of a God."²⁷ Leonardus Lessius (1542-1623) said of Europe in his day: "There may be many who deny in their secret judgments all divine power and Deity, yet are they not much known...feare of the lawes doth impose silence to these."²⁸

Oxford in 1811 expelled Percy Bysshe Shelley for publishing "The Necessity of Atheism," and Parliament did the same to Charles Bradlaugh in 1880 after Bradlaugh's irregular oath swearing.²⁹ Gey complains that the House of Lords upheld a criminal conviction for anti-religious speech that was not "decent and temperate in language" in 1979, and the U.S. Constitution and European Convention refer to religion and religious adherents without plainly specifying these freedoms to include atheists.³⁰ Section 3.3.1 cites Americans who in effect opposed full liberty for atheists, and atheists as late as 2011-12 were still soliciting Ireland, England, and Wales to legalize humanist weddings.³¹

The press records anti-atheist agitation in Arabic and South Asian contexts. In Egypt, one can legally register only as Muslim, Christian, or Jewish.³² Egyptian police in December 2012 imprisoned and instigated violence against Alber Saber after his mother called police to protect her son when a threatening mob accused him of atheism.³³ In April-May 2013, thousands of marchers in Bangladesh petitioned to arrest or hang eighty-four "atheist" bloggers following the February 2013 stabbing of atheist Asif Mohiuddin and the killing of another alleged atheist named Rajib.³⁴ *Agence France-Press* in January 2014 revealed that five students and a cleric hacked an atheist blogger to death in

²⁷ Gey [2007: 252-53]; Locke [2003: 426]; Thomas [2010: 205].

²⁸ Lessius [1977: 1.1:5-6]; contrast Weltecke [2013: 176] on medieval European "extant court records and legal collections....Neither religious law nor any concrete forms of persecution were aimed at...atheists."

²⁹ Cf. M. Buckley [1987: 11, 372]; Gey [2007: 254-55]; D. Nash [2013: 218-20]; Thomas [2010: 205].

³⁰ Gey [2007: 260-61, 266] the 1979 'crime' regarded a poem portraying Jesus as a practicing homosexual.

³¹ Cf. DeVan [2011h: 346-47] reviewing Macey and Carling [2011: 31].

³² Schielke [2013: 646-48].

³³ Spencer [2012]. "Egypt Security Investigates" [2013: online] also recorded the arrest of a Suez Canal University student under "Article 98 of Egypt's penal code...[where] anyone convicted of offending religion in any form can face up to six years in prison," for forming a Facebook group for atheists.

³⁴ Alam [2013]; Allchin [2013]; "Police Say One Killed" [2013].

Bangladesh.³⁵ *Daily Mail* noted that Saudi Arabia in April 2014 “officially identified atheists as terrorists in sweeping new laws that threaten up to 20 years in prison.”³⁶

Schielke mourns massive state violence connected to accusations of atheism in the 1965-1966 Indonesian “genocide against communists” in which maybe half a million people were killed.³⁷ Less lethal but still disturbing was Alexander Aan’s eighteen month prison stint in Indonesia for professing atheism. Aan was released in February 2014.³⁸

The history of Methodism bestows embryonic patterns for religious liberty with Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, non-conforming, and dissenting traditions coexisting in modern Britain and beyond; as well as the American separation of church and state that Hitchens praised Jefferson for enshrining.³⁹ Wesley said of North America: “Total indifference to the government there whether there be *any religion or none* leaves room for the propagation of true scriptural religion without the least let or hindrance.”⁴⁰ *The Book of Discipline* permits some interaction but forbids state promotion of religious beliefs, including atheism: “Nor should the church seek to dominate the state.”⁴¹

Scott J. Jones reiterates Wesleyan responsibility to actively protect religious freedoms rather than merely abstaining from oppressive behavior, and to establish and maintain freedom of religion, expression, and conscience wherever they are threatened.⁴² Reginald Broadnax underlines Wesley’s anti-slavery activism and the sentiments that articulated it: “Liberty is the right of every human creature...and no human law can deprive him of that right which he derives from the law of nature.”⁴³ The love of liberty was “the glory of rational beings.”⁴⁴ Unkindness to anyone for following conscience was “a species of persecution.”⁴⁵ One wisely allows others the liberties one desires for

³⁵ “Cleric, Students Charged” [2014].

³⁶ Tomlinson [2014: online].

³⁷ Schielke [2013: 647].

³⁸ Rashid [2014].

³⁹ E.g. Cobb [2002: 38]; C. Hitchens [2011: 3-7].

⁴⁰ Sermon 102, “Of Former Times,” §20, *Works* 3:452, italics added. Thorsen [1990: 40, 256] references Jeremy Taylor’s “profound effect” on Wesley, with the former rejecting in the title of one of his works “the Unreasonableness of Prescribing to other Men’s Faith, and the Iniquity of Persecuting Differing Opinions.”

⁴¹ “The Political Community,” §164:C in *The Book of Discipline* [2012: 135].

⁴² S. Jones [2003: 183]; cf. e.g. DeVan [2002-2003] on fighting injustice; Thomas [2010: 205]; Sermon 127, “On the Wedding Garment,” §§16-17, *Works* 4:146-47 on “holiness” as exceeding “harmlessness.”

⁴³ “Give liberty to whom liberty is due...to every partaker of human nature,” *Thoughts upon Slavery*, §V:6 in Broadnax [2012: 74-77, 291] citing also T. Jackson [1958: 11:79].

⁴⁴ “Thoughts upon Liberty” quoted apparently without full citation in Hynson [1972: 37, cf. esp. 40-45].

⁴⁵ Sermon 127, “On the Wedding Garment,” §14, *Works* 4:146.

oneself.⁴⁶ Wesley advised in reacting to the censorious not to “imitate the bigotry you blame. At least allow *them* the liberty which they ought to allow *you*.”⁴⁷

Wesleyans who put Wesley’s principles into practice will support liberties to identify as an atheist and to defend atheism, and will welcome forthright conversations that are brought about when, in Dawkins’ description, non-believing choirs “come out” of the closet.⁴⁸ Wesleyans in this way stand with Voltaire oft quoted by New Atheists: “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it;” and George Orwell: “The journalist is unfree, and is conscious of unfreedom, when...forced to write lies or suppress what seems to him important.”⁴⁹ Stedman likewise appeals to fellow atheist Carl Sagan on human dignity and liberty: “Every one of us is, in the cosmic perspective, precious. If a human disagrees with you, let him live. In a hundred billion galaxies, you will not find another.”⁵⁰ Writes A. C. Grayling regarding human rights:

Having them on paper, making an issue of them, allowing NGOs to submit comments...may make little practical difference to what happens in dark cellars in delinquent countries, but it is vastly better than...silence and indifference....One day it might start having an effect—or more of an effect, for it would be wrong to say it does no good at all....In the comfort of seminar rooms on peaceful campuses there can be scepticism about the very idea of human rights, in dark cellars and harsh prisons they—or at least the hope of them—are far from an abstraction.⁵¹

Christian-New Atheist accord on the free exercise of religion and *lack of establishment thereof* empowers a third dynamic for Christian-New Atheist interaction.

6.3 A Bustling Marketplace of Ideas

A free and open religious marketplace is natural but not axiomatic to religious liberty because it takes initiative to represent, defend, and recruit. The apathetic and isolationist may abstain, but New Atheists, Wesleyans, and other evangelical or “missionary” movements impel adherents to live faithfully by sharing their faith with

⁴⁶ Cf. e.g. Heitzenrater [1995b: 209]; Sermon 39, “Catholic Spirit,” §I:6, *Works* 2:84-85.

⁴⁷ Sermon 20, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” §II:20, *Works* 1:463.

⁴⁸ Dawkins [2006a: 18].

⁴⁹ Cf. A. Ali [2007: 275]; Dawkins [2006a: 345]; Dennett [2006a: 240]; S. Harris [2005: 85]; C. Hitchens [2002; 2007b: 11, 31, 38, 232-33, 245, 248, 264]; Orwell [1984: 373]; Voltaire in Tallentyre [1906: 198-99].

⁵⁰ C. Sagan [1980: 339] in Stedman [2012: 168].

⁵¹ Grayling [2013: 179-82].

others.⁵² William J. Abraham effectively connects liberty with a marketplace of ideas where “the best way forward in adjudicating claims is to allow particular, positive claims and their particular appropriate defeaters to proceed without prejudice or restriction.”⁵³

Truesdale and Mitchell revisit New Testament precedents, which chapter 4 alluded to briefly for a dynamic bustling marketplace of ideas from the first-century Greco-Roman world. In Acts 17, Paul spoke in synagogues and in the marketplace where Wilkinson estimates that Paul risked being “mocked and misunderstood,” as religious believers do today when engaging aggressive atheists.⁵⁴ In the Acts 17 background, Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in Athens were conscious of Epicurus who, although convinced that much popular piety was misguided, did not forbid his disciples or the masses from participating in local cults.⁵⁵ These philosophers tolerating, if at times ridiculing, a miscellany of religious practices and their advocates in the marketplace environment were able to hear the Gospel from Paul as an alleged preacher of foreign gods (Acts 17:18).

Wilkinson and others portray Paul as distressed by idols, yet in I. Howard Marshall’s words, also identifying “glimmerings of truth” in the very marketplaces where idol makers and philosophers sought profit or debate for intellectual pleasure.⁵⁶ Christians can look to Paul’s example in not coercing audiences to believe, nor resorting to mean-spirited misrepresentation, intimidation, bribery, or second-order perks, but trusting in God that the Gospel would “carry its own weight” in public deliberation.⁵⁷

Former E. Stanley Jones School of Missions and Evangelism Dean Terry S. Muck and his wife Francis S. Adeney consequently exhort Christians to compete with integrity in the marketplace. They reason that it is selfish to hide the Gospel’s light (cf. Matthew 5:16); it is obedient to Jesus’s call to teach and preach to all nations (cf. Matthew 28:18-

⁵² Stedman [2012: 99, 115] rebukes himself: “Refusing to open up about my own beliefs and experiences, I also denied them [others] the opportunity to learn about me—to really know me and understand...isolating myself from interreligious exchange, I missed opportunities to learn, grow, and collaborate.”

⁵³ Abraham [2008: 587-89].

⁵⁴ Wilkinson [2002: 211-12]; cf. Kostenberger [2008: 209] citing also 1 Corinthians 9:1-23; 2 Corinthians 11:7; Schnabel [2008: 109-10]; Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 94].

⁵⁵ Acts 17:18; Schnabel [2008: 116]; cf. M. Buckley [1987: 370].

⁵⁶ Acts 17, esp. 17:19-21; I. Marshall [1980: 289]; Muck and Adeney [2009: 20-21]; Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 94-97]; Wilkinson [2002: 205-16]; cf. Kostenberger [2008: 209].

⁵⁷ S. Jones [2003: 179-80] urges Wesleyans to participate in digital technology, personal conversation, preaching, or in whatever ways Wesleyans are able. Schnabel [2008: 109-10] also cites Paul exhorting Christians to ethical and civil sensitivity in Romans 12:9, 13:3, 14:16, 15:2, 16:19; 1 Corinthians 10:32; 1 Thessalonians 4:12, 5:15; and Colossians 4:5; cf. Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 87, cf. 13, 86, 167-68].

20); it is arrogant to reduce all religions to an artificial common denominator; and because missionary religions like Christianity demand competition by their premises, claims to universal objective or significant truth, ethical ideals, and practical imperatives.⁵⁸

A dynamic bustling marketplace of ideas is not without controversy. Objectors may consider the metaphor friendlier to Cafeteria Pluralism than to Open Inclusivism. There is some merit to this objection, yet the marketplace metaphor allows presentation and defense not just of sequestered doctrines or practices, but of Christianity, the Gospel, and other belief systems as a whole. As prior chapters argue, Open Inclusivists rejoice consistently in truth wherever found, and are consequently unthreatened if practitioners discover truth, beauty, and wisdom from other sources besides categorical Christianity.

Hitchens for his part is contemptuous of religious exhibitionists who peddle wares “with ingratiating smirks and outspread hands, like an unctuous merchant in a bazaar.”⁵⁹ Truesdale and Mitchell qualify that the Gospel is not “on the showroom floor as just one more religious option.”⁶⁰ The Gospel and the Triune God who authors it merit more than mere notional assent resembling a private or personal preference, taste, or opinion that Cafeteria Pluralism and the marketplace metaphor may imply. Diminishing the Gospel in such ways is inappropriate for a Wesleyan approach, and slouches closer to New Atheist agendas that would cast “religion” as an eccentric hobby or adults-only guilty pleasure.⁶¹

Alternative phraseology is also available, but whatever vocabulary one employs should not inhibit or excuse Wesleyans from sharing or defending the Gospel in the public sphere. James Wooten Hinton in the 1882 *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* utilized martial imagery more reminiscent of Restrictivism for atheism, Christianity, and other religions locked in “a real war of ideas, a conflict of thought on the most stupendous issues of being and destiny.”⁶² United Methodist Timothy C. Tennent summons twenty-first century conversers to the “religious roundtable” so that they can strive hard to persuade others that their worldviews are the clearest and most coherent on

⁵⁸ Muck and Adeney [2009: 20-22].

⁵⁹ C. Hitchens [2007b: 67].

⁶⁰ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 193].

⁶¹ Cf. section 6.6 in this chapter.

⁶² Hinton [1882: 579].

matters of life-changing significance.⁶³ Exemplifying a Reformed consonance with this martial, roundtable, and marketplace imagery, Puritan John Milton penned in a classic tract sharing its namesake with the Areopagus where Paul spoke in Acts 17:

Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience....Though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously, by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?"⁶⁴

Both Christian and New Atheist pursuers of truth can view at least some attempts to persuade or convert each other as offered in a spirit of love, goodwill, or best interest as atheist Gina Welch does Evangelical efforts to convert her.⁶⁵ Ayaan Hirsi Ali provides perhaps unexpected fortification by hoping that her friends Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens "will not be dismayed" if she pushes Christians to stem global violence by serving Muslim communities domestic and abroad, by building schools, hospitals, community centers, and teaching "*what you believe in...a God who rejects Holy War and who has sent his son to die for all sinners out of love for mankind.*"⁶⁶ Dawkins' fellow atheist and mutual book endorser Penn Jillette likewise promotes "proselytizing" as a moral imperative for anyone who believes every person will spend eternity in either a heaven or a hell: "How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them?"⁶⁷

Freedom to speak is balanced with freedom to remain silent, to decline to listen, or to listen and disagree without reprisal, but criminalizing or curtailing free expression forces believers to choose between political conformity and bearing witness to what many religious people and atheists perceive is important or most significant.⁶⁸ Gulags, imprisonment, inquisitions, discrimination, subjugation based on religion, and cultural

⁶³ Tennent [2002: subtitle, 16] inspired by E. Jones [1928: title]; cf. New Atheist responder V. Day [2008: 193]: "open spirit of inquiry;" Grayling [2013: 134-37] on non-coercive efforts to persuade; John Stuart Mill in D. Nash [2013: 218]: "open platform;" D. Nash [2013: 228]: "unfettered investigation;" New Atheist Onfray [2007: 17]: "partisans of free examination;" Taylor [2007: 185-90]: "a common space."

⁶⁴ Milton [1874: 50-52] in the serendipitously named anthologist John Wesley Hales.

⁶⁵ Welch in Dalrymple [2010: online].

⁶⁶ A. Ali [2010: 238] italics added; cf. DeVan [2010c].

⁶⁷ Jillette [2008: 3:00-4:55] adds: "I don't respect people who don't proselytize....Atheists who think that people shouldn't proselytize...keep your religion to yourself;" endorsing each other's books: Jillette in Dawkins [2006a: hardcover dust jacket; 2013: hardcover dustjacket]; Dawkins in Jillette [2011: back cover].

⁶⁸ Cf. e.g. Acts 1:8, 4:19, 5:29.

relativisms that forbid disparate groups to critique each other belong in one Methodist American President's axiom to "history's unmarked grave of discarded lies."⁶⁹

Social scientists Grim and Finke document that societies providing for religious freedom curtail rather than increase religion-based persecution and conflict, while Sociologist Rodney Stark avows that contrary to top-down impositions of one or no faith, societies grow more religious as they grow freer.⁷⁰ Samuel Solivan sees this principle operating in the birth and rise of Wesleyan-influenced Pentecostalism in America.⁷¹

While Stark and Solivan are unlikely to motivate New Atheists on these points, atheist Phil Zuckerman pragmatically distinguishes coercive atheism in North Korea and the Soviet Union with a more "organic atheism" gaining ground without government compulsion in Sweden and Holland. Zuckerman marks the former by "all that comes with totalitarianism: poor economic development, censorship, corruption, depression and so on;" while the latter "are among the healthiest, wealthiest, best educated, and freest societies on earth."⁷² Zuckerman thus coheres with Stark, but for the sake of atheism.

Finally, Christian courtesy in the marketplace may attract some atheists to the Gospel. David Robertson reports one atheist testifying to becoming a Christian after she or he witnessed Robertson's purportedly gracious, reasonable, and persistent interactions with apparently less than gracious or reasonable interlocutors on www.richarddawkins.net, including one ostensibly fake yet detailed death threat against Robertson that Dawkins declined to remove from the website for a full week.⁷³ As Robertson illustrates, gracious participation in open dialogue is one way to fulfill Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father in heaven."

6.4 Reciprocal Critique

A dynamic marketplace of ideas quickens a fourth interaction principle: mutual enrichment through theological, ethical, and practical critique.⁷⁴ According to Owen C.

⁶⁹ Bush [2001: online]; Muck and Adeney [2009: 22]: "True religion prospers only when...freely chosen."

⁷⁰ Grim and Finke [2011: back cover]; Stark [2007: 113-55, 282-338] on Rome, Christianity, and Islam.

⁷¹ Solivan [1998: 37].

⁷² Zuckerman [2007: 57]. Taylor [2007: 3] defines one sense of a secular society in the manner of a marketplace "where belief in God...is understood to be one option among others."

⁷³ Robertson [2010: 135-42, chapter title]: "Salvation Came through Dawkins;" cf. DeVan [2012n: 115].

⁷⁴ Cf. The Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, §42 in Tilley [2013: 60] on *Exchange/Experience*.

Thomas, when the Communion of Saints in history faced attacks from other religions, philosophies, and worldviews such as Judaism, Middle Platonism, Gnosticism, Roman paganism, Islam, Renaissance humanism, Deism, skepticism, rationalism, naturalism, and Positivism, Christians often inquired whether there was any truth to their critics' salvos.⁷⁵ A clearer, fuller apprehension of ideas, issues, and the truth is subsequently primed to emerge when, in Alex Shand's metaphor, "mind clashes with mind, and sparks of brilliant intelligence are set flying, as from the sharp contact of flint striking upon steel."⁷⁶

Methodist exemplars in particular display precedence for theological, ethical, and practical sharpening through debate, dialogue, and discussion. For Wesley, humility is apropos given *humanum est errare et nescire*, all people are ignorant of many things and mistaken in some.⁷⁷ Richard Heitzenrater credits Wesley's theology as maturing due to Wesley's long-term ability to thrive during turmoil, crisis, contention, controversy, and to turn criticism into occasions to sharpen proclamation.⁷⁸ Wesley cordially entreated:

My mind is open to conviction. I sincerely desire to be better informed....Are you persuaded you see more clearly than me?...Point out to me a better way than I have known....If I linger in the path I have been accustomed to tread, and am therefore unwilling to leave, labour with me a little....But be not displeased if I entreat you not to beat me down in order to quicken my pace....May I not request of you, farther, not to give me hard names in order to bring me into the right way? Suppose I was ever so much in the wrong. I doubt this would not set me right. Rather it would make me run so much the farther from you—and so get more and more out of the way. Nay, perhaps, if you are angry so shall I be too, and then there will be small hopes of finding the truth.⁷⁹

Wesley mused further that God let loose Islam to reform Christians, when like the ancient Israelites, Christians acted worse than "heathens" with "all manner of wickedness,

⁷⁵ Thomas [2010: 204].

⁷⁶ Shand [1888: 62]; cf. M. Buckley [1987: 34] in a book on atheism: "One of the ways...humans can come together is to fight;" Proverbs 27:17: "Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another."

⁷⁷ Sermon 39, "Catholic Spirit," §I:4, *Works* 2:84 tracing this proverb to numerous historical sources.

⁷⁸ Heitzenrater [1995b: 48, 220]; cf. African Methodist Mvume Dandala [2000: 77]: Dialogue refines not only beliefs themselves but also how beliefs are expressed.

⁷⁹ Preface to *Sermons on Several Occasions*, §§8-10, *Works* 1:107; cf. e.g. "Principles of a Methodist," §13 in T. Jackson [1958: 8:365]. Following after Wesley are Iliff School of Theology's first president Harris Franklin Rall [1940: 81] and Methodist missionary educator Edmund Davison Soper [1918: 15, cf. 13-16] who counseled seeing God wherever honest investigation uncovered truth. Forward [2000: 99] assumes Methodism is true but develops his understanding through inter-religious conversation. Conway [2000: 59-60] and Seaman [2013: 141-42] acclaim dialogue for mutual correction. Yong [2013: 27] concurs with Cobb [1995: 155-76] that dialogue is a tool for mutual teaching, learning, change, and renewing minds.

neither fearing God nor regarding man.”⁸⁰ In the early twentieth century, E. Stanley Jones confirmed that non-Christian insights also compelled Christians in India to rethink their ideas, and Dana L. Robert reports that missionaries in turn inspired Hindu reform.⁸¹

More recently, United Methodist Bishop Scott J. Jones asserts that Christianity’s basic commitments are correct but enhanced by inter-religious engagement; and Bishop Willimon affirms that Jesus transforms Christians through “dialogue with those who do not yet know the risen Christ.”⁸² Cobb once again references ancient Israelites adapting Egyptian and Persian wisdom, indicating that believers can learn even from their enemies:

If we trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we have no reason to fear that truth from any source will undercut our faith. Indeed, we have every reason to believe that all truth, wisdom and reality cohere in him.... Faith in Jesus Christ encourages and even requires us to assimilate into our tradition what others have learned... [and] to transform ourselves by being open to this wisdom and goodness.... It is also incumbent upon Christians to share the saving wisdom that we have derived from our own tradition.... In fact, as we are transformed by what we learn from others, our witnessing may become far more convincing to them.⁸³

Wesleyans eager for the Holy Spirit to bring every person closer to truth and its ultimate source can thus utilize New Atheist criticisms to filter gold from dross, take substantive attacks seriously, counter or dismiss tractionless tirades, and offer critique in return.⁸⁴ As Wesley preached about Islam, God can work through New Atheists to motivate Christians to reform when Christians are disinclined to reform themselves. Methodist L. Gregory Jones for similar reasons endorsed Westphal’s program of reading

⁸⁰ Sermon 69, “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge,” §II:8, *Works* 2:581; *Journal* (5 August 1754), *Works* 20:489; cf. Sermon 122, “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” §§4, 7, *Works* 4:88, 90; Puritan Cotton Mather [1968: 6]: “Christian, beware lest a Mahometan be called in for thy condemnation.” See also DeVan [2010d: 432; 2011j]; Haykin [2007]; Richie [2003]; Stephens [2009] for the Wesleys on Islam.

⁸¹ S. Jones [1928: 16, cf. 56-60]; Robert [2009: 97]. Cf. Heim [2001: 146] and the Methodist Lott [2000: 265] for Christian and Hindu mutual edification and potential hazards; Yong [2013: 12, 16] with Buddhists.

⁸² S. Jones [2003: 182]; Willimon [2008: 107, 141]; cf. Campbell [1997: 73-75]. *The Book of Discipline* §642:G, [2012: 475] encourages “openness of mind toward an understanding of other major world religions.” Miles [2000: 73] emphasizes interfaith dialogue as a goad to self-understanding.

⁸³ Cobb [1994: 749-50].

⁸⁴ Cf. Abraham [2005: 149]; E. Harris [1998: 53-54]; Haykin [2007: 192]. Noble [2013: 71]: Wesleyans can urge non-Christians if the spirit is present among them to be true to their own best insights. The Catholic Church also modeled such receptiveness when it persuaded Hitchens to stand in as “Devil’s Advocate” at Mother Teresa’s beatification hearings in C. Hitchens [2010b: 337].

“atheism for Lent” to stimulate self-examination, personal and corporate spiritual vitality.⁸⁵ Christians should thereby benefit when atheist assaults are *Partly Right*.⁸⁶

If God works by whosoever God pleases and the Spirit teaches the Church even via boorish adversaries, then atheists’ legitimate complaints about callousness, collusion, corruption, deceit, fraud, or malice align with the biblical prophets, though the latter spoke from sacred zeal rather than unbelief. Atheists in prophetic mode might then unwittingly serve as God’s “extraordinary messengers,” in Wesley’s vision, to “reform the nation, particularly the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”⁸⁷

Moreover, as Augustine admonished, if “every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he finds truth, it is his Lord’s,” then Open Inclusivist Wesleyans are being faithful in probing for the truth in New Atheists’ prophetic rebukes, and are more optimistic in doing so than either Closed Inclusivists or Restrictivists that privilege Christianity’s corner on significant truth claims.⁸⁸ If God can speak through a dead dog or a communist to adapt Barth, promote liberty through Christianity’s Enlightenment critics, to cite Kenton Sparks, or use goodness and truth in modernity to challenge the church for D’Costa; then God can speak through New Atheists to Wesleyans and vice versa.⁸⁹

Inclusivists also value such transformation more consistently than do Parity Pluralists or relativists. To paraphrase Heim, the “concentrated wisdom,” expertise, or particular graces of religious others may help to productively – and not just incidentally – inform, expand, and transform Christian faith whenever Christians are receptive.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ L. Gregory Jones in Westphal [1998: back cover; cf. ix, 3-10, 16] that Christians may recognize painful truths about themselves in atheist invectives that instigate renewal. Westphal [2010] reiterated “Atheism for Lent” in a collection responding to the New Atheism; cf. Skuce [2009: 77]: “meeting Christ...unexpected.”

⁸⁶ Even if some are more manipulative than true; cf. e.g. Thorsen [1990: 168]; Campolo [1985] republished in [2008] as *We Have Met the Enemy, and They Are Partly Right: Learning from the Critics of Christianity*.

⁸⁷ “A Plain Account of the People called Methodists,” §I.1, *Works* 9:254; “‘Large’ Minutes,” Q. 4, *Works* 10:845; Sermon 39, “Catholic Spirit,” §II:6, *Works* 2:91; Sermon 121, “Prophets and Priests,” §11, *Works* 4:82; cf. Heitzenrater [1995b: 179]; Thorsen [1990: 159-60, 166-67]. Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 124, 234, cf. 144] look to Flannery O’Connor’s short story “Revelation” [1971: 488-509] for exemplifying openness to reproach by rude interlocutors. In one scene, “Mary Grace” diagnoses the self-righteous, self-congratulatory, classist racist Ruby Turpin “a wart-hog from hell,” and Ruby takes the garish rebuke to heart. Jesus transforms Ruby’s character through this “Revelation” in O’Connor’s story.

⁸⁸ Augustine [1958: 54].

⁸⁹ Barth [2010: 53]; D’Costa [2000: 111]; Sparks [2012: 62, 115]; cf. Cardinal Bonomi in Tomkins [2005: 146]: “The best way to beat the heretics is not to deserve their criticisms.”

⁹⁰ Heim [2001: 294-95, cf. 116, 145] citing Dante with Virgil as an example of a so-called pagan leading a Christian into “more truth” as Jesus promised his disciples, possibly in light of John 16:13.

As Dana L. Robert interjected above, critical enrichment need not flow in only one-direction. Just two examples of extra-Christian sources conveying a kind of kindred receptiveness at the religious roundtable are the Hindu *Rig Veda*'s yearning for noble thoughts or auspicious powers from every direction, and the Confucian aphorism that where three or more walk together, one follows whatever is excellent among them.⁹¹

It would be easy to object that New Atheists, in contrast, appear to be more intentional about giving critique than receiving it. Yet it is conceivable that Christian openness to self-amendment will induce some level of reciprocity even from inimical interlocutors.

Evidencing one New Atheist's interest in seeking the truth in and through critiques by other roundtable guests or hosts, Grayling abridges Plutarch's "Dinner of the Seven Wise Men." Grayling endorses the conversational duties of keeping well informed, cultivating the ability to argue well and to revise one's views, listening to hear others accurately, challenging where necessary; and pursuing clarity, understanding, and truth that together exemplify but do not exhaust fruitful avenues for collaboration.⁹²

Encouraged by Wesleyan, Christian, and other religious precedents, as well as by Grayling's metaphor paralleling the "religious roundtable," we submit that reciprocal critique can be constructive not only among sundry religious traditions, but also between Christians and atheists. Section 6.5 explores a fifth principle for interaction.

6.5 Collaborate in Shared Concerns

Can Wesley's "true religion" fuel collaboration in what the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue designates "*The Dialogue of Action*"?⁹³ "What if I were to see a Papist, an Arian, a Socinian casting out devils?...I could not forbid even him without convicting myself of bigotry. Yea...a Jew, a deist, or a Turk doing the same, were I to forbid him either directly or indirectly, I should be no better than a bigot still."⁹⁴

⁹¹ Confucius in *Analecets* 7:21 [2001: 119] and also modifies whatever is defective; Griffith [1896: 1:89:1].

⁹² Grayling [2013: 139-40]; cf. Stedman [2012: 3-5, 167, 172].

⁹³ Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, §42 in Tilley [2013: 60]. Maddox [1992: 11, 24] and Miles [2000: 64] cite e.g. Sermon 106 "On Faith," §I:3-4, *Works* 4:494-95 on the probability that some non-Christians intuit true religion by God's inward voice.

⁹⁴ Sermon 38, "A Caution against Bigotry," §IV:4, *Works* 2:77. E. Harris [1998: 74-75]: "Bigots...refuse to praise the casting out of values inimical to the Beatitudes or the[ir] presence...in whatever faith or ideology." Contrast Wesley's unwillingness with Socinians or Deists in Wainwright [2000a: 70].

Heitzenrater interprets Wesley as looking past questionable or defective theology to common concerns, holistic needs, and *imitatio Christi* by doing good.⁹⁵ For example, Wesley accepted financial support from Quakers and collaborated on legal restraints to curtail starvation.⁹⁶ Might Wesleyans conceivably extend Wesley's invitations to Christians of other denominations to willing atheists? "If your heart is as my heart, then take my hand." "Though we can't think alike, may we not love alike?" "So far as in conscience thou canst...join me in the work of God, and let us go on hand in hand."⁹⁷

God for Wesley and many Wesleyans is not limited to Christian instruments for doing God's work or signaling foretastes of God's Kingdom. Cunningham construes God's goal to make Christ-like kingdom citizens as transcending religious boundaries.⁹⁸ Cobb reproves as vanity opinions that God cannot or does not work through non- or not-yet Christians to bring God's Kingdom to pass.⁹⁹ Amos Yong stresses Mahayana Buddhism's bodhisattva ideals of compassion for those who suffer, and Joe Gorman honors Liberian Christian and Muslim women for cooperating in non-violent resistance.¹⁰⁰

Muck maintains that the Gospel demands just social systems and uniting with people in other traditions to the extent that the latter contributes to the former.¹⁰¹ Elaine Heath draws attention to Jesus cooperating with the Holy Spirit and human co-workers, even one such as Pilate.¹⁰² Yong remarks in the same forum: "It is no wonder Wesleyan traditions have been socially alert...from abolition to women's suffrage, from slum work to prison philanthropy, from conscientious objection to engaging unemployment."¹⁰³

Duke University Methodist Chaplain Jennifer Copeland extended an olive branch to Richard Dawkins by inviting New Atheists to partner in common goals and values.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁵ E.g. Heitzenrater [1995a: title, 58].

⁹⁶ Heitzenrater [1995b: 52, 138, 253, 321, 323, cf. 166] also citing T. Jackson [1958: 11:57-59].

⁹⁷ Sermon 39, "Catholic Spirit," §§4, 5, II:1, 2, 3, 7, III:5, *Works* 2:81-95 quoting 2 Kings 10:15.

⁹⁸ F. Cunningham [1998: 205-06].

⁹⁹ Cobb [2002: 16].

¹⁰⁰ Gorman [2013: 49] citing Gbowee [2011]; Yong [2013: 19, cf. 20-26].

¹⁰¹ Muck [2000: 43]. So too for Yong [2013: 23]: "The call to scriptural holiness invites Wesleyans to consider potential partnerships with all people of good will, regardless of their religious commitments."

¹⁰² Heath [2013: 35-36]. Selvanayagam [2000: 92] attributes Methodist "flexibility and pragmatism" as informing and motivating creative collaboration; but per Pilate cf. Lewis [2001e: 111]: "You will certainly carry out God's purpose...but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John."

¹⁰³ Yong [2013: 22].

¹⁰⁴ Jennifer Copeland in Dawkins [2010c: 1:20:20-1:22:50]. Dawkins replied: "Let's go on trying to do good in the world...[while parting on claims about what is true]. But yes, let's be friends by all means."

Opposing agendas will find Wesleyan-atheist collaboration disconcerting, but “left” and “right” causes provide collaborative occasions in politics, liberty, justice, economics, poverty, environmental stewardship, peacemaking, and challenging powerful pretenses.¹⁰⁵ The aforementioned evangelist Billy Graham upheld the biblical Daniel’s example in serving a “pagan court” for Christians cooperating with non-Christians in government, and Martin Luther King, Jr. collaborated with secularists such as the AME preacher’s son turned “Humanist Manifesto II” signatory, A. Philip Randolph.¹⁰⁶

Philosopher John Rawls ventures that working together destabilizes Restrictivist sentiments. “It is difficult, if not impossible, to believe in the damnation of those with whom we have, with trust and confidence, long and fruitfully cooperated in maintaining a just society.”¹⁰⁷ Mohammad Fadel claims collaboration and inclusivism (or Possibilist Universalism) mutually reinforce. In collaborating with nonbelievers, one is “likely to become more optimistic regarding their prospects for salvation despite their nonbelief.”¹⁰⁸

Critics will question collaboration’s feasibility if both parties must be willing to cooperate, or if one party lacks the wherewithal to pursue good works.¹⁰⁹ Interfaith Youth Core founder Eboo Patel commented on a gesture by Stedman: “One struggles to imagine the late Christopher Hitchens performing that intimate act of mercy. Or Sam Harris or . . . Dennett or Richard Dawkins or any of the other prominent . . . New Atheists.”¹¹⁰

This is not entirely fair. Stedman stands in solidarity with New Atheists’ helping “people find liberation from oppressive beliefs,” but qualifies that atheists ought not to simply eradicate religion, but improve the world: “For many these aims aren’t mutually exclusive, but surely the latter must be our *ultimate* aim.”¹¹¹ Stedman bids Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Pagans, Sikhs, Buddhists, Humanists, agnostics, and atheists:

¹⁰⁵ *The Book of Discipline* §642 [201: 475] provides for inter-religious and interchurch higher education initiatives, issue oriented tasks, and other community action projects. Cobb [2002: 21] summons work “for the coming of God’s realm” through education, gender justice, healthcare, agricultural development, democracy, ministering to personal needs, and nurturing peace and goodwill among nations. S. Jones [2003: 183, 186, 196] puts forward world peace, the environment, racism, participating in God’s coming and present way of justice, food banks, employment services, medical and legal clinics, and other development.

¹⁰⁶ Graham in Beam [1978: 156]; Kurtz and Wilson [1973].

¹⁰⁷ Rawls [1996: xxv].

¹⁰⁸ Fadel [2013: 36]; cf. DeVan [2011f] on another Muslim calling for collaboration versus dichotomization.

¹⁰⁹ E.g. Malcolm Muggeridge [1969: 157]: “I never, as it happens, came across a hospital or orphanage run by the Fabian Society or a Humanist leper colony;” cf. DeVan [2011d: 387-88] replying to this statement.

¹¹⁰ Patel in Stedman [2012: xii] but Stedman [2012: 156] objects to affects that he is the “one good atheist.”

¹¹¹ Stedman [2012: 13, 154, cf. e.g. 12, 141-43, 148-79].

“We may not agree on the existence of God or an afterlife, but surely we can agree that life in the here and now requires that we create peaceful, collaborative ways to work and live together.”¹¹² Stedman looks to the example of his Methodist grandmother inviting HIV patients into her home, and his experience as an atheist serving at Lutheran affiliated Augsburg College’s Campus Kitchen and Minnesota Lutheran Social Services.¹¹³

Motives for Christians and atheists collaborating in areas of shared concern both diverge and overlap. Stedman promotes interfaith cooperation to atheists for the sake of self-transformation and raising public consciousness.¹¹⁴ Tilley proceeds in an Open Inclusivist posture: “We can talk about what is true, beautiful, good, and just across traditions even if we might dispute just what better or best satisfies these criteria.”¹¹⁵

If and when collaboration conceals envy, rivalry, selfish ambition, or insincerity, Wesleyans adapting Philippians 1:15-18 may nonetheless rejoice in the “little moves against destructiveness” that comprise implicit and explicit Kingdom work.¹¹⁶ As Camus addressed the Dominicans: “Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children.”¹¹⁷

The Wesleyans we cite in this section concur. In applying their convictions, we can also add to Camus, collaborating to reduce homelessness, hunger, ignorance, illness, loneliness, meaninglessness, oppression, tribalism, and myriad more sins and miseries.

6.6 Disciplined Opposition

What about when Wesleyans should *not* collaborate with New Atheists? Non-negotiable flashpoints are a reality. Three will briefly suffice here. Wesleyans cannot

¹¹² Stedman [2013: online; cf. 2012: 132-33] using the language “interfaith table.”

¹¹³ Stedman [2012: e.g. xi, 20-21, 61, 94, 106-08, 113, 134].

¹¹⁴ Stedman [2012: 173]: “If atheists do not participate in ongoing interfaith efforts, we leave the field open for the idea that [non-atheist] faith is the only driving factor that compels people to work for a better world;” cf. Stedman [2012: 21; cf. 140, 153, 163, 175] with New Atheist-like coarseness: “Make this f***ed-up world just a little less f***ed up.” The Harvard Humanist Chaplaincy for Stedman [2012: 146] is one model for mobilizing interfaith social service in Boston and beyond, e.g. “Help Us Package 9,110 Meals and Be Better Together” in “Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard” [2011]; cf. Dawkins [2012] on “non-believers giving aid;” Don [2013: online]: the “Bleedin’ Heathens Blood Drive;” and Yoder [2013: online]: Russia’s 2013 National Prayer Breakfast on “the common good” featuring “non-believer” Andrey Tomanov.

¹¹⁵ Tilley [2013: 73] evaluating Netland [2001: 294-307].

¹¹⁶ Phrase from Bedford [2002: 157-79]; cf. DeVan [2005] reviewing Bedford and others; Philippians 1:18: “Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.”

¹¹⁷ Camus [1964: 47-53] in a section entitled: “The Unbeliever and Christians.”

remain neutral even while agreeing that New Atheists possess the right to speak freely when they denounce the Bible as immoral, or religion *en toto* as child abuse, or bear false witness by exaggerating non-atheists' sins while exculpating atheists.¹¹⁸ Tony Richie portends that misinformation breeds misunderstanding, which may birth maltreatment.¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Harris's foundational Wesleyan inter-religious principle is "do not bear false witness."¹²⁰ *Truthful* witness isolates real contentions for authentic dialogue.¹²¹

Wesleyans stand for truth in the name of the one who assured: "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). Jesus throughout the gospels confronted hypocrites and false witnesses, and Wesleyan pupils of Jesus ought not to lie supine under shams, smears, and spurious accusations if New Atheists overstate or indict erroneously. People are sinners enough without embellishment, and the role of "religion" in history is too complex to blotch with a broad bloody brush.

Authentic dialogue for Cobb requires that we explain, and here we add act upon, our deepest convictions even if doing so offends our dialogue partners.¹²² Determining what methods or causes to practice, prioritize, or oppose is debatable, but sacred worth, religious liberty, and marketplace integrity moderate zeal and uncharitable action.

David Robertson confronts psychologist Nicholas Humphrey, who Dawkins quotes on the "human right" for children "not to have their minds crippled by exposure to other people's bad ideas....We should no more allow parents to teach their children to believe, for example, in the literal truth of the Bible than we should allow parents to knock their children's teeth out or to lock them in a dungeon."¹²³ Robertson ripostes to Dawkins' shrill resolution that child sexual abuse by priests is eclipsed by the worse psychological damage in bringing up a child Catholic in the first place:

You [Dawkins] think I would have been better off being sexually abused...than being brought up having been taught about Jesus Christ. And you accuse me of being worse than a paedophile because I happily teach young children that God loves them, that they are important and have a purpose and place in this

¹¹⁸ For New Atheist allegations that "religion" constitutes child abuse, cf. e.g. Dawkins [2006a: 85-90, 349-87]; Dennett [2006a: 256]; C. Hitchens [2007b: 217-28]; S. Harris in B. Saltman [2006: online].

¹¹⁹ Richie [2003: 92].

¹²⁰ E. Harris [1998: 71]; cf. Yong [2013: 26-27].

¹²¹ Richie [2003: 92]; cf. M. Buckley [1987: 24].

¹²² Cobb [2002: 66].

¹²³ Humphrey originally in W. Williams [1998: 59] and quoted in Dawkins [2006a: 366-67].

world....[Is it] not right to be more than a little frightened by the consequences of such a perverse view?¹²⁴

Wesley sometimes proceeded with correspondent flair, suggesting that adroit panache might on occasion be an appropriate response to New Atheist and other polemics, keeping in mind Abraham's caution against any "sermonic hyperbole" that obstructs "systemic clarity."¹²⁵ Wesley opposed Restrictivist-oriented Calvinism this way:

Sing, O hell, and rejoice ye that are under the earth! For God, even the mighty God, hath spoken and devoted to death thousands of souls, for the rising up of the sun unto the going down thereof. Here, O death is thy sting! They shall not, cannot escape; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Here, O grave, is thy victory! Nations yet unborn, or ever they have done good or evil, are doomed never to see the light of life, but thou shalt gnaw upon them for ever and ever. Let all those morning stars sing together who fell with Lucifer....All the sons of hell shout for joy! For the decree is past, and who shall disannul it!¹²⁶

Wesley's last known letter to William Wilberforce on slavery exhibited Wesley's matching passion for ethics and liberty:

Unless the divine power has raised you to be as *Athanasius contra mundum*, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.¹²⁷

Cunningham following Wesley highlights Holiness theology spurring nineteenth century abolitionism and other reforms with its "optimism of grace" provoking empathy and compassion for those outside the church.¹²⁸ Martin Luther King Jr. in the legacy of abolitionism exemplified disciplined opposition to those who told him to be patient, that civil rights would emerge in their own time: "The time is always ripe to do right."¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Dawkins [2006a: 366-67]; Robertson [2010: 117, cf. 111-23]; cf. DeVan [2012n: 114].

¹²⁵ Abraham [2005: 62]; cf. section 3.12 on the Wesleys' creativity in public engagement; Sword [2012: title and *passim*]; *Stylish Academic Writing*. Classical antiquities scholar William V. Crockett [1996: 51] discloses that ancient rabbis, including Jesus, crafted colorful speeches to make their points, though their disciples should be careful about claiming hyperbole if the speaker or text portends literal interpretation.

¹²⁶ Sermon 110, "Free Grace," §28, *Works* 3:557-58.

¹²⁷ "Letter to William Wilberforce" (24 February 1791) in T. Jackson [1958: 13:153].

¹²⁸ F. Cunningham [1998: 189].

¹²⁹ M. L. King [1986: 270] in "Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution."

“Justice too long delayed is justice denied.”¹³⁰ “When evil men plot, good men must plan. When evil men burn and bomb, good men must build and bind. When evil men shout ugly words of hatred, good men must commit themselves to the glories of love.”¹³¹

Wesleyans in the same spirit as Martin Luther King, Jr. and the AME Zion Methodists who applaud King oppose New Atheists where applicable not by endeavoring to humiliate their New Atheist opponents, but to win New Atheists’ friendship, understanding, and acknowledgement of what is right.¹³² As Pope Pius II wrote to Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II amid inter-religious conflict in 1461: “We are hostile to your actions. Not to you. As God commands, we love our enemies and pray for our persecutors.”¹³³ Pius II’s epistle prefaces a seventh Wesleyan-New Atheist dictate.

6.7 The More (or Most) Excellent Way of Love

Does Madalyn Murray O’Hair’s post-divorce diary: “somebody, somewhere, love me,” have relevance to Christian-New Atheist relations?¹³⁴ If Wesleyans speak with empathy, dignity, liberty, and tolerance; if they collaborate, listen, learn, and refute every falsehood; if they proclaim the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3) but have not love, 1 Corinthians 13 warns that they gain little or nothing.

Love might seem uncontroversial, yet Mangum criticizes “sentimental” Wesleyan and other anthropologies as “dangerously close to ‘loving the wicked’” in ways the Bible allegedly prohibits.¹³⁵ Contra “political correctness,” Mangum calls faithful Christians to “hate” people who “hate” God!¹³⁶ J-J. Rousseau extemporized analogously in *The Social Contract*: “It is impossible to live in peace with those one believes to be damned. To love them would be to hate God who punishes them.”¹³⁷ Hitchens thundered: “Hatred, yes, I

¹³⁰ M. L. King [1986: 292] in “Letter from Birmingham City Jail.”

¹³¹ M. L. King in C. King [1987: 51]; cf. Romans 12:21: “overcome evil with good;” DeVan [2003].

¹³² Cf. M. L. King [1986: 7, 10, 12, 18, 87, 482, 487]; M. Mitchell [1998: 159-74] in section 5.1.

¹³³ Aenus Silvius Piccolomini [Pope Pius II], *Epistola ad Mahomatem II (Epistle to Mohammed II)* [1990: 2]. Volf [2011: 44, 177] nuances this episode.

¹³⁴ O’Hair [1976] in Le Beau [2003: 250, 356].

¹³⁵ Mangum [2004: 127]; contrast Yong [2013: 16].

¹³⁶ Mangum [2004: 127] citing e.g. Deuteronomy 6:16; 2 Chronicles 19:2; Psalm 15:4, 26:5, 31:6, 139:19-24; Ezekiel 9:3-5; Luke 14:26; 1 John 2:15.

¹³⁷ Rousseau [2011: 250].

plead guilty to that...Go love your own enemies, don't be loving mine. I'll get on with the business of destroying, isolating, combatting the enemies of civilization."¹³⁸

A Wesleyan "sentimental" *discrimen* diverges by privileging Jesus's charge to love enemies and pray for one's persecutors (e.g. Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:32), and 1 John 4:19 that Wesleyans love because God first loved us.¹³⁹ God for Wesley is "the Father of the spirits of all flesh" (Numbers 16:22) who "hateth nothing that he hath made."¹⁴⁰

Chapters 4 and 5 alluded to the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:24-27 displaying love between adherents of opposing religions and ideologies, and Thorsen looks to Jesus's actions with Samaritans as an interfaith role model at a time when Jews and Samaritans harbored mutual ethnic, historic, and religious enmity.¹⁴¹ David T. Lamb partly responding to New Atheists cites complementary material in Hebrew Scripture: Exodus 23:4-5 laws of justice and mercy, Proverbs 25:21, Isaiah 2:4, Jeremiah 29:7, Jonah 3, Micah 4:3, King David to Saul, Elisha and an unnamed Israelite slave girl toward Naaman the Syrian, and Elisha to the Arameans.¹⁴² Reapplying these and Jesus's Good Samaritan parable is not purely hypothetical in light of Hitchens' 2009 Beirut brawl and beating a few miles from the Jericho road in Jesus's parable.¹⁴³

How do Christians love New Atheists who indicate that they only want to be "left alone," which believers supposedly refuse?¹⁴⁴ Practicing *Justice, Courtesy, and Love*, Christians may politely acquiesce if atheists request to change the subject, raise their children with anti-theist hostility, or avoid most religious rituals by shunning religious gatherings.¹⁴⁵ Like Queen Gertrude in *Hamlet* (3:2:243) however, one may also object

¹³⁸ C. Hitchens in Hitchens and Boteach [2008: 38:54-39:16]; cf. Marquardt [2004: 174]: One difference "between Jesus and the people of Qumran was that the latter were taught to love the sons of light and to hate the sons of darkness, whereas Jesus taught his disciples to love their neighbor, even...their enemy."

¹³⁹ Cf. e.g. Gorman [2013: 46]; Maddox in section 3.9 on 1 John; Yates [2013: 57].

¹⁴⁰ Sermon 130, "On Living without God," §14, *Works* 4:174. God's *soi-disant* enemies are not exempt from God's love as Jesus modeled from the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing" (Luke 23:34; cf. Ezekiel 33:11); cf. Gorman [2013: 46, 49-51]: Christians love their enemies "perceived and real, because Jesus loved his enemies....As Christ's followers we love those who dislike us or may even hate us. Christlike love doesn't mean agreement, but active goodwill...tending to the spiritual, physical, emotional, relational, and economic needs of every person." Yong [2013: 16] insists not on cultivating good feelings for one's neighbors, but concretely meeting their needs with works of mercy.

¹⁴¹ Thorsen [2012: 62]; cf. Cracknell [1986: 130; 2005: 28, 119, 151, 217]; Luke 9, 17; John 4, 8.

¹⁴² Lamb [2011: esp. 85, 108-09, 123]; 1 Samuel 24, 26; 1 Kings 5, 6; cf. 2 Samuel 14, 20.

¹⁴³ Baram [2009: title]: "Christopher Hitchens Beat Up By Lebanese Thugs During Street Brawl."

¹⁴⁴ C. Hitchens [2007b: 13, 96].

¹⁴⁵ Cracknell [1995: title].

that Hitchens protested too much about being “left alone,” since he vociferously solicited debate and confrontation rather than going quietly about his atheist business.¹⁴⁶

Theodore Jennings identifies Wesley’s lifelong “Preferential Option for the Poor” as one application of love.¹⁴⁷ Wesley collected food, “visited prisoners, helped the poor help themselves, established schools for children, provided clean water, clothes for cold bodies, medicine for the sick, hospitality to the imprisoned, assisted the weak and sick by building medical clinics, and gave microloans for small business.”¹⁴⁸ At age eighty-two, he “begged” for a week in London’s snowy muddy streets, soliciting two hundred pounds for the poor.¹⁴⁹ John Wesley modified Herbert’s “Join hands with God to make a poor man live,” while Charles Wesley lyricized:

Thy mind throughout my life be shown,
While listening to the wretch’s cry,
The widow’s and the orphan’s groan,
On mercy’s wings I swiftly fly,
The poor and helpless to relieve;
My life, my all, for them to give.¹⁵⁰

Gorman champions “the poor of other religions” for whom he recounts Christian churches helping to create households, supply bedding, dishes, furniture, and food.¹⁵¹ Wesley’s spiritual descendants can likewise love angry atheists who possess less economic or social capital than those who enjoy lucrative media royalties. In March 2012, Texas Christians extended financial assistance to atheist activist Patrick Green after they learned that he might lose his eyesight. At first flabbergasted and refusing their assistance, Green later enthused that these Christians’ service to him was so amazing that he may write a book about it: *The REAL Christians of Henderson County*.¹⁵² Will New

¹⁴⁶ Cf. e.g. Gritz [2007: online].

¹⁴⁷ T. Jennings [1989: 10-29]; cf. e.g. Luke 4:18, 14:13, 14:21, 16:19-21, 21:3. Heitzenrater [1995a: 63]: “Why did Wesley work with the poor? Because Jesus did...told him to do so and would help him do so.”

¹⁴⁸ Gorman [2013: 52]; Heitzenrater [1995a: 49; 1995b: 165-69, 320-21]; “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” §§X:1-XV:7, *Works* 9:272-80.

¹⁴⁹ Heitzenrater [2002: 31, 223]; cf. Gorman [2013: 46-47].

¹⁵⁰ “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” §2, *Works* 9:280 citing “George Herbert, *The Temple*, ‘The Church Porch’, ver. 63, l:4, ‘Join hands with God to make a man live;’” Sermon 99, “The Reward of Righteousness,” §III:2, *Works* 3:413 citing “Charles Wesley, *Scripture Hymns* (1762), II.380, on Jas 1:27 (*Poet. Wks.*, XIII.167);” and Sermon 59, “God’s Love to Fallen Man,” §I.9 and note 53, *Works* 2:430. See also e.g. Sermon 84, “The Important Question,” §III:5, *Works* 3:191.

¹⁵¹ Gorman [2013: 47]; cf. e.g. Stanley [2003: 138-59].

¹⁵² “Christian’s [sic] Raise Funds” [2012: online].

Atheists one day commend Wesleyans as Roman Emperor Julian “the Apostate” heralded early Christians: “[They] support not only their poor, but ours as well?”¹⁵³

Thorsen cites Scripture as bidding believers to also love through “care for the alien.”¹⁵⁴ Truesdale and Mitchell relay atheist Hitoshi (Paul) Fukue’s story. When Fukue’s Tokyo school closed following an earthquake, an American professor invited Fukue to enroll at Northwest Nazarene College. Fukue reflected on his reception: “Never had I been in a setting where people cared so much for each other.”¹⁵⁵

Fukue was at first unable to discern good reasons to believe in God but he resolved to attend a church where the “same spirit of love greeted him,” and he met Jesus in a mystical encounter of pardoning and transforming grace.¹⁵⁶ Fukue recounted Jesus’s invitation to “‘follow Him.’ This I have done, by His grace, from that day to this.”¹⁵⁷

Wesley ended his Preface to *Sermons on Several Occasions* that without love, all is lost. “For how far is love, even with wrong opinions, to be preferred before truth itself without love! We may die without knowledge of many truths and yet be carried into Abraham’s bosom. But if we die without love, what will knowledge avail?”¹⁵⁸

Is there any evidence consistent with Open Inclusivism that the Holy Spirit quickens non-Christians to love their enemies, perhaps through Jesus’s example? Martin Luther King, Jr. again praised Gandhi for practicing Jesus’s love ethic as “a powerful and effective social force on a large scale.”¹⁵⁹ Surah 41:34 reads: “Repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend.”¹⁶⁰

Gandhi and the *Qur’an* represent Hindus and Muslims, but is Hitchens normative for atheists? Sam Harris admires a Rabbi who received threatening phone calls from a white supremacist. Rather than calling the police, the Rabbi “heard the man out, every

¹⁵³ Emperor Julian in Ayerst and Fisher [1971: 179-81].

¹⁵⁴ Thorsen [2012: 62-63]; cf. Pohl [1999].

¹⁵⁵ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 130].

¹⁵⁶ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 131].

¹⁵⁷ Truesdale and Mitchell [2006: 131-32; cf. 119-20, 160-61] for this and equivalent anecdotes.

¹⁵⁸ “Preface,” §10, *Works* 1:107; cf. Sermon 39, “Catholic Spirit,” §III:4-6, *Works* 1:94-95: “Now run the race that is set before thee, in the royal way of universal love...[for] neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies,” cited by Cracknell [1986: 133] and Lott [2000: 244].

¹⁵⁹ M. L. King [1958: 97].

¹⁶⁰ Surah 41:34 in Abdel Haleem [2005: 309]. Patel as an Ismaili Muslim tells a related story of following Jesus’s example in Stedman [2012: xiv]. See e.g. DeVan [2011b; 2011n] for related examples.

time he called, whatever the hour. Eventually they started having a real conversation... became friends. One certainly likes to believe that such breakthroughs are possible.”¹⁶¹

Ingersoll praised Thomas Paine who, as an honorary French citizen, risked his life in opposing King Louis XVI’s execution: “You will find but few sublimer acts than that of Thomas Paine voting against the King’s death. He, the hater of despotism, the abhorrer or monarchy...accepting death to save the life of a deposed tyrant—of a throneless king... was the last grand act of his political life—the sublime conclusion of his...career.”¹⁶²

Stedman felt smug and superior when self-styled missionaries accosted him shouting: “Fags! Repent,” yet something prompted Stedman to engage their passion:

Though we all remained relatively fixed in our convictions, we came to understand one another as fuller human beings instead of as mere caricatures of our sexualities or religious identities. I never saw them shout at gay people on that street corner again...There are times where personal safety is a higher priority than respectful discourse. Yet I will also always remember my night outside a gay bar, sharing stories...with new friends who were supposed to be enemies.¹⁶³

Wesley preached on 1 Corinthians 13 that God is not the God of Christians only, but of “Heathens also; that he is ‘rich in mercy to all that call upon him.’”¹⁶⁴ Wesley here does not mention atheists with “heathens,” and he deplored the spiritual states of Deists, Materialists, and atheists in passages that section 2.1 cites. Still, Wesley’s heirs who seek to embody God’s love and mercy to (and with) atheists have ample patterns to do so.¹⁶⁵

Priorities set forth in this chapter have practical import for Wesleyan-New Atheist and other inter-religious relationships in the present and the future. During the Cold War, the United States and many of its Christian majority allies faced off against the officially atheist Soviet Union and its satellites in a policy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Tensions among atheists and Christians are not now so noxious on the contemporary global stage, but if Christians or atheists neglect each other’s inherent worth and liberties, reciprocal critique, collaboration, disciplined opposition, and love; the world and its peoples will be spiritually, relationally, and perhaps materially impoverished.

¹⁶¹ S. Harris [2014: 46].

¹⁶² Ingersoll, *Works* I:133 in Jacoby [2013: 145, 217].

¹⁶³ Stedman [2012: 119-22, cf. 128, 168, 178, and directly referencing Jesus 36-39, 45-48, 56, 58, 90-93, 101, 109, 169]; cf. Heath [2013: 35] on a gay Christian in Alaska striving to love critics of homosexuality.

¹⁶⁴ Sermon 91, “On Charity,” §1.3, *Works* 3:296.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. e.g. E. Harris [1998: 56]; Sermon 106, “On Faith,” §§I:1-II:2, *Works* 3:493-99; Sermon 130, “On Living without God,” §§1-14, *Works* 4:169-75.

Martin Luther King Jr., who collaborated with secularists, preached an imperative as pertinent to Christians and atheists today as it was to King's original audience: "We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools."¹⁶⁶ If such perishing comes to pass, it will be in spite rather than because of Wesleyan, other religious, and atheist concord on ethical interaction, and fidelity to the most excellent way.

¹⁶⁶ M. L. King [1986: 209] in "The American Dream."

Chapter 7: Dialogue Hard?

With New Atheists at the Inter-religious Roundtable

Chapters 1 through 6 analyzed New Atheists and their critics first by arguing that New and other atheism in many ways resembles a manifestation or expression of religious diversity, then that an Open Inclusivist mentality toward religious diversity anchored within the Wesleyan tradition supplies fruitful resources for approaching New Atheists on issues of truth, ethics, salvation, transformation, and interactive relationships. Chapter 7 applies this Wesleyan Open Inclusivism to a crucial aspect of said relationships, namely to perennial Christian-atheist and inter-religious dialogue on controversies involving science and religion, problems of evil or suffering, and optimal ethical flourishing.

Without pretending to pronounce the final words on these topics, the present chapter signifies how the approach that we defend leavens ongoing conversation around such concerns with New Atheists and others at what Wesleyan Timothy C. Tennent envisioned as *The Religious Roundtable*.¹ We suggest not only that an Open Inclusivist form of Wesleyan Christianity is more amenable to consilience and less vulnerable to many New Atheist critiques, but that it is also in certain respects more capable than its rivals for mediating discussion and debate. As opposed to struggling to secure irrefutable deductions that disprove every dissenting voice, we illustrate how a Wesleyan Open Inclusivist ethos helps to unblock arguments that are needlessly locked into opposition, strives to sort their merits from their liabilities, and expedites qualified conclusions to energize and illumine rather than close down continuing directions for dialogue.

7.1 Dialoguing about “Science and Religion”

In religion and science dialogue, as with other subjects, an Open Inclusivist Wesleyan approach encourages input from numerous voices, including non-Inclusivists. Section 7.1 argues that this generous yet critical outlook precludes a number of difficulties that its competitors are more susceptible to with New Atheists and other interlocutors.²

¹ Tennent [2002: title]: *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable* inspired by E. Jones [1928: title]: *Christ at the Roundtable*; alternately interreligious, inter-religious, multi-religious, interfaith table and so on.

² Section 7.1 partly published as DeVan [2011m; 2012a]; cf. DeVan [2011a] adapting this chapter title.

7.1.1 Wesleyan Open Inclusivist Attitudinal Advantages:

In what Wilkinson describes as Ian G. Barbour's "now classic fourfold typology of conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration to map possible relationships between science and religion," New Atheists assert science incorrigibly conflicts with religion and belief in G/gods.³ New Atheists are not the first to allege this, but they are among the most vociferous in the early twenty-first century.⁴ Chapter 1 alluded to nineteenth century polemical disjunctions of science and religion via the likes of Huxley, Ingersoll, Draper, and White. Numbers collates "*Myths about Science and Religion*" surrounding Galileo, Giordano Bruno, Darwin, T. H. Huxley debating Samuel Wilberforce, the Scopes Trial, and other examples that New Atheists sometimes cite or disseminate.⁵ Numbers and others argue that history is more complex, but as Naomi Riley (citing Dawkins and Harris) abridges in her 2015 précis of Cimino and Smith's sociology of American atheists: "It is axiomatic in atheist circles that science is incompatible with religious belief."⁶

Stenger subtitles his bestseller: *How Science Shows that God Does Not Exist*.⁷ Dawkins, Hawking, and Mlodinow invert science and "design" rhetoric against theists.⁸ *The God Delusion* construes "Fundamentalism" as disrupting to science by teaching the religious to never change their minds, nor to pursue "exciting things...available to be known" through scientific inquiry.⁹ Dawkins objects to scientific "proofs" for God's existence, and ridicules appeals to "admired religious scientists."¹⁰ *Letter to a Christian*

³ Wilkinson [2010: 182]. Barbour [2000: 13, 93-97, 122-23, 144, 155, 159, 188-91, 194] was already citing Dawkins and Dennett as conflict exemplars. Dawkins [2006a: 77-85]; Dennett [2006a: 30, 383-84, 406]; S. Harris [2006: 62-65]; and C. Hitchens [2007b: 282] all attack Gould's [1999]: "Non-Overlapping Magisteria" (NOMA), which poses that science and religion do not conflict because they are independent or speak to different issues. One might alternately adhere to a conflict model due to anti-scientific presumptions, or to perceiving one or more scientific hypotheses are incompatible with one's religion.

⁴ Barbour [2000: *passim*] interacts with twentieth century advocates of the conflict model, including but not limited to Dawkins and Dennett. Plantinga [2011: 13, 31] writes that Dawkins and Dennett are "among the most eloquent and influential voices (the soloists, we might say)...in the [conflict model] choir."

⁵ Cf. e.g. Dawkins [2006a: 321]; Dennett [2006a: 408]; Eller [2011: 71]; S. Harris [2005: 105]; C. Hitchens [2007b: 65, 255-70; 2007c: xxii, 12, 21, 78, 97, 102-03, 143, 246, 369, 423, 471; 2009: 285]; Numbers [2009: title, 59-78, 152-69, 178-87]; *The State of Tennessee v. Scopes*; Stenger [2009: 73]. Readers are invited to consult e.g. Brooke and Numbers [2011]; Numbers [2009]; cf. Sampson [2000] for scholarly essays about or surrounding such "myths."

⁶ Riley [2015] reviewing Cimino and Smith [2014].

⁷ Stenger [2007: subtitle]. Stenger [2009: title, subtitle] characterizes *The New Atheism* as *Taking a Stand for Reason and Science*, which Stenger repeatedly dichotomizes with "religion" and belief in G/gods.

⁸ Dawkins [1996]; Hawking and Mlodinow [2010].

⁹ Dawkins [2006a: 319-23].

¹⁰ Dawkins [2006a: *passim*, esp. 123-30 section title, 100-89 more broadly].

Nation uses clash and conflict imagery wherein religion undermines intellectual integrity and honest appraisal.¹¹ Hitchens concludes *god is not Great* by conditioning “unfettered scientific inquiry” on banishing religions from the discourse, since “the attitude of religion to science...is always necessarily problematic and very often necessarily hostile.”¹²

The present section, rather than delving into specific historical cases as Numbers, Brooke, and others have done, argues that an Open Inclusivist attitude possesses advantages over its alternatives in science and religion dialogue generally, and with New Atheist or other promulgators of the conflict model particularly. Here we depart from Restrictivists, Exclusivists, Closed Inclusivists, and others as defined in chapter two of this dissertation, who pose that Christians have only to teach or to refute but not to learn or to receive correction from New Atheist allegations that scientific inquiry has met or does meet with uncharitable Christian and other religious opposition. Listening for and expecting the Holy Spirit’s correction, wisdom, and grace to flow not only from fellow Christians, but also from those ill-disposed toward Christianity, Open Inclusivism primes Christians to sincerely ask if there is any truth to New Atheist accusations, whatever motives might drive New Atheists to accuse.¹³

Promoting repentance or revision in theory and practice if and when New Atheists accurately object to behavior and suppositions that inhibit ethical scientific inquiry, Inclusivists in Honoring Conference will attend to “the Book of Nature,” aiming to do justice to all available relevant data.¹⁴ Clinging “in the teeth of the evidence” to any mode, interpretation, or authority as if it exclusively or exhaustively mediated God’s truth is not an option.¹⁵ Wesleyans with appropriate expertise will acknowledge and inspect rather than suppress tensions or data that question cherished understandings, opinions, or methods; and decry efforts to deny atheist scientists or anyone else civil rights.¹⁶

¹¹ S. Harris [2006a: 65].

¹² C. Hitchens [2007b: 46-47, 283, cf. 18, 57-59, 64, 229, 255, 260. C. Hitchens [2007b: 193] as a “guarded admirer” faintly praises Pope John Paul II for openness to “science and inquiry.”

¹³ See especially section 6.4.

¹⁴ Wesleyan Inclusivists and others agree in principle with Hitchens on “unfettered scientific inquiry,” if qualified by “ethically implemented,” though disputes will persist over what count as ethical criteria.

¹⁵ Section 3.8; Dawkins [2006a: 232] again partway diverging on what counts as relevant data/evidence; cf. e.g. Bretherton [2006: 121]: “criteria of evaluation;” Plantinga [2011: xiii, 163-90]: “evidence base.”

¹⁶ See especially sections 3.8, 6.1-6.3.

These endeavors will entail neither receiving New Atheist antagonism credulously, nor maligning New Atheist propositions as *ipso facto* deceitful or depraved. Motives may mix for any party, but a consistent Wesleyan Inclusivist will search for grace in dialogue while confessing that only God precisely fathoms every motive, word, and action.

By esteeming science, truth, and their pursuit, one stands with New Atheists contra relativism and Parity Pluralism, which if taken to heart devitalize the scientific enterprise as little or nothing more than assembling perceptions. Relativists and Pluralists might permit scientists who experience subjective satisfaction to carry on or to change their own minds (as relativists presumably consent to any subjective gratification). Yet their presuppositions eliminate a major drive for scientific endeavor—discovering components in the intricate and objective nature of physical reality.¹⁷ Relativist and Parity Pluralist premises thus undercut possibilities that any scientific evidence or hypothesis is more revealing or superior to any other. Nor is it evident how relativism or Parity Pluralism makes sense of any given scientific methods or tools supplying better, worse, or optimal resources to discern the nature of reality or its features in any situation or context.¹⁸

Open Inclusivism is also more receptive than Restrictivism, Exclusivism, or New Atheism to winnowing and appreciating Barbour's and other models of science-religion encounter, as well as aspects of extra-Christian traditions that bring science and religion together without demanding submission to a Parity Pluralism where every paradigm or tradition has uniform veracity or lack thereof. An Inclusivist mode will search for grace in historic and contemporary cross-pollinations between religion and science as Brooke and Numbers coordinate in *Science and Religion around the World*.¹⁹

Instead of relegating all extra-Christian "science and religion" reflection to duplicity, delusion, the demonic, or the relative; one grows gladly grateful for any and all of God's truth and grace, as manifested for example in: (1) traditional Indian astronomy, medicine, mathematics, and "related biological ideas" originating from Hindu, Jain, and

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. Barbour [2000: 37]; Plantinga [2011: 283, cf. 92]: "For science to flourish, scientists and others must *believe*...our world in fact manifest[s] regularity and law-like behavior....As Whitehead put it: 'There can be no living science unless there is a widespread instinctive conviction in...an *Order of Things*.'"

¹⁸ E.g. Dawkins [2006a: 319-20] in "Fundamentalism and the Subversion of Science," where Dawkins presents "cultural relativism" as presenting and/or equalizing all truth claims.

¹⁹ Brooke and Numbers [2011: title].

Buddhist practices without endorsing every element;²⁰ (2) Gandhi reproving not science but “craze for machinery,” echoing Honoring Conference restraint against anthropocentric exploitation;²¹ (3) Jewish aspirations in the Hebrew Bible, Talmud, and Middle Ages to unravel the “secrets of nature” or “natural wisdom,” and cooperating with Christians and Muslims in math, philosophy, and medicine;²² (4) Sana Saaed’s religiously diverse profiles of twentieth and twenty-first century “Giants Engaged in both Science and Religion” from Muslim astronauts to Jewish-Catholic biochemists to Hindu star theorists:

This list could be multiplied many, many times...of scientists who were able to pursue their passion for science while practicing a religious faith. To be sure, there are many humanist and atheist scientists...but it is misleading to assume that all scientists lack a religious perspective or spiritual life, even though they might be in a field that is challenging popular religious assumptions.²³

Inclusivists by extension rejoice if atheist scientists unconsciously or inadvertently serve God through science. Dawkins’ memoir *An Appetite for Wonder: The Making of a Scientist* recounts an adolescent religious experience hearing Elvis sing about natural wonders: “In this unexpected record [I fancied] Elvis was speaking personally to me, calling me to devote my life to telling people about the creator god—which I should be especially well-qualified to do if I became a biologist like my father.”²⁴ Dawkins post-scripts that he is not “proud of this period of religious frenzy,” and a Restrictivist can only bemoan what might have happened if Dawkins had not repudiated his Creator and calling.

An Open Inclusivist stance will also yearn for atheists to be reconciled with God, but will exercise more charity in estimating atheists’ work and legacy. To the degree that Dawkins teaches and evokes wonder for the natural world, Dawkins may unwittingly

²⁰ Subbarayappa [2011: 196-97].

²¹ See section 3.8; Subbarayappa [2011: 205-06, 209].

²² Efron [2011: 20, 28-29].

²³ Saaed [2013: online]; cf. Leahy [2007: 55-62, 171-73] writing to Sam Harris on the religious views of historic pioneering scientists: Isaac Newton as a committed but not a Trinitarian Christian, Catholic priests Claude Bernard and Copernicus, other Catholics Galileo, Lavoiser, and Pasteur; Lutherans Kepler and Heisenberg, Presbyterian James Clerk Maxwell, Scottish Sandeminian Michael Faraday, and the Jewish Franz Boas (1858-1942). D. Myers [2008: 18-19] adds “scientific Magellans” Blaise Pascal and Augustinian geneticist monk Gregor Mendel as motivated by their Christian faith. Harrison and Lindberg [2011: 84, 91] cite Francis Bacon, among other scientific luminaries, as viewing science through theological lenses.

²⁴ Dawkins [2013: 142]: “This seemed to be my vocation.”

fulfill a substantial portion of his God-given vocation if God is ever and in some sense enticing creatures to respond through natural splendor, appreciation, and elucidation.²⁵

Turning to Barbour's models, both Inclusivism and Honoring Conference allow for genuine "conflict" among various contentions and contenders while working to clarify, repair, resolve, and move past unnecessary, superficial, or mistaken notions of conflict (see sections 2.3, 3.8). Inclusivists concede that even if science and theological disciplines are also not fully "independent," they differ in emphases, functions, ask supplementary questions, and uncover data that is less or inaccessible to disciplines working in isolation.

Open Inclusivism resonates with Barbour's "dialogue" model by looking for "*significant parallels*" across fields while "preserving the integrity of each," but contests dialogue that neglects interdisciplinary overlap or lacks directions for integrating mutually transformative fruits.²⁶ Honoring Conference as a practice within Wesleyan tradition further coheres with Barbour's "integration" model that starts with a religious tradition, revelation, or experience, before taking a theology of nature into account to reformulate existing doctrines. Yet Honoring Conference goes farther by emboldening "the Book of Nature" to speak for itself without forcing its deferral to experience or tradition.²⁷

In summary, an Open Inclusivist deportment in the instances and manner that we describe above is more sensitive than Restrictivism, Exclusivism, Closed Inclusivism, or New Atheism to fresh grace and truth within many paradigms and approaches to "science and religion" by atheists or religious believers. Its premises more readily than those of relativism, Parity Pluralism, or subjectivism facilitate evaluation of scientific methodologies or hypotheses, and make meaningful advances possible in science-religion dialogue and integration. With the humility to learn from New and other atheists, a Wesleyan Open Inclusivism enlivens the hope that religiously diverse interlocutors on religion and science can and do make evocative contacts with objective aspects of God's creative reality.

²⁵ Cf. e.g. Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27 for parables on wise and foolish use of entrusted resources.

²⁶ Barbour [2000: 27].

²⁷ Barbour [2000: *passim* e.g. 31, 170]. Honoring Conference privileging Scripture parallels Barbour that the Book of Nature does not supplant but instigates reformulation or understanding of Scriptural teachings.

7.1.2 “*Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?*” Issues in Discussion and Debate:

Section 7.1.2 probes further how a Wesleyan Open Inclusivism critiques, affirms, and improves historic and contemporary “religion and science” dialogue/s. Indicating the intense interest in “debate” featuring New Atheists and religious believers, the American Philosophical Association for its final session in Chicago 2009 sponsored Daniel Dennett and Alvin Plantinga to dispute *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?*²⁸ It will be useful to explore this debate in detail as it illustrates some of the pitfalls and inhibitors to conversation that exclusivist-style conflict debaters display and purvey when a winner-takes-all or triumphalistic tone is prevalent in discussions about religion and science.

Plantinga in his book co-authored with Dennett based on their debate begins with an ecumenical inclusive posture hinting at some areas of consensus among the Abrahamic faiths. “I’m thinking of C. S. Lewis’s ‘Mere Christianity,’ something like the intersection of the great Christian creeds. Although what I say is explicitly concerned with Christian belief, it will also be relevant to many versions of Judaism and Islam.”²⁹

Plantinga here and in a contemporaneous volume contends that atheistic naturalism—with New Atheists as its key champions—is a religion or “quasi-religion” that unlike Christianity is *incompatible* with contemporary science.³⁰ For Plantinga, the Judeo-Christian Creator who orchestrates life’s emergence and development is in harmony with evolutionary theses of an ancient earth, descendant life forms modifying or mutating from forbears, and genetic ancestry linking all living organisms together. Naturalistic claims that evolution must be “unguided” for it to be a truly scientific hypothesis are in Plantinga’s estimate nothing more than metaphysical prejudice or theological add-ons.³¹

Plantinga anticipates the most common philosophical objection to theism, the “problem of evil,” with reference to evolution’s role in human and animal suffering, and proffers multiple explanatory theodicies that section 7.2 sieves and synthesizes.³² Nor, according to Plantinga, is atheistic materialism preferable due to Ockham’s razor, since

²⁸ Dennett and Plantinga [2011: title]; cf. Plantinga [2007: online]. James P. Serba in Dennett and Plantinga [2011: vii] recalled that sessions at this timeslot were usually poorly attended, but that this debate had to be transferred to a larger venue, which was itself filled to capacity with standing room only.

²⁹ Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 2].

³⁰ Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 3, 16-17, 21] italics added; Plantinga [2011: esp. x, xiv, 311, 349-50].

³¹ Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 3-7]; Plantinga [2011: xii, 8-12, 63, 77, 79, 129, 253, 308-09].

³² Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 7-11] e.g. the Augustinian “O Felix Culpa!” Leibniz’s “Best Possible World,” Satanic, demonic, and errant human agency that God providentially redirects for good.

arguments from design, intuition, and spiritual experience corroborate God's existence. He pronounces that naturalistic or reductive materialism—the position that the physical world constitutes all of reality—is untenable because it fails to account for truthful or trustworthy beliefs and for nonphysical realities such as mathematical formulas that somehow transcend their manifestations in human brains and other physical media.³³

Dennett commences with three concessions: (1) evolutionary theory is compatible with theistic belief; (2) evolution does not demand mutations which are by chance alone; and (3) evolution by itself does not deny divine design.³⁴ Dennett per Dawkins, Francis Crick, and Sagan poses intergalactic travelers—conjecturally Superman from the planet Krypton—as equally plausible to the Judeo-Christian God for sourcing life on earth.³⁵ He then derides possibilities of supernatural agents whose existence would supposedly destabilize scientific investigation or legal proceedings, if inquirers were to allow the possibility that (e.g.) “Satan and his minions’...may be involved...[Rather,] naturalism is tacitly assumed in all reputable courts of law and throughout scientific investigation.”³⁶

Plantinga ripostes as to whether God devising and guiding evolution is truly as ridiculous as Superman sourcing terrestrial life, and argues that atheism, like solipsism, denies hardwired beliefs held by the vast majority of humanity. Plantinga plays on Dennett's flair: Superman is “certainly impressive,” but God is “all-knowing, all-powerful, and wholly good; furthermore, God has these properties essentially....Of course we can modify the Superman story to make Superman more like God,” but eventually “Superman” would simply become another referent for “God.”³⁷

Neither does science tacitly assume that no God exists: Plantinga reiterates that many scientists see themselves exploring, explaining, and discovering how the universe that God created works. Posing science and religion are irreconcilable harms both by pitting belief in God against scientific prestige and insisting that scientists are duty-bound to reject God. If forced to choose, some will opt for “God” over “science,” draining the

³³ Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 12-23]; Plantinga [2011: 307-50].

³⁴ Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 26-34] anticipating the philosophical sophistication of his audience?

³⁵ Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 28-29]; cf. Crick [1982]; Dawkins in Stein [2008: 1:30:30-1:33:10]; C. Sagan in Crick [1982: front cover].

³⁶ “Satan and his minions” is a phrase employed by both Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 31, cf. 11].

³⁷ Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 58-59]. There is some irony in this analogy, given that scholarly as well as popular arguments by e.g. Kozloff [1981] and Kozlovic [2002] purport that Superman is a Christ figure.

aspiring pool of competent scientists and crippling public support for the subsidies on which modern science depends.³⁸

Dennett concludes by recapitulating that Supermianism lacks only the advantage of a creed or “ancient tradition with many eminent contributors.”³⁹ Dennett additionally denounces miracles, which Plantinga preempts by underscoring science as describing “the normal course of things,” but not *ipso facto* excluding divine interventions.⁴⁰

An Open Inclusivist temperament unveils both affinities and critiques for Dennett and Plantinga, as well as to attitudes and emphases whereby “science and religion” debates are frequently conducted. Wesleyans in Honoring Conference are free to track with Plantinga in: (1) attending to theodicy and miracles, (2) appealing to tradition and the Creed, (3) openness to inter-religious consensus, (4) atheistic naturalism as like a religion or a quasi-religion, and (5) repercussions of dichotomizing “science” and “religion.”

Plantinga and Dennett are elsewhere more problematic. First, they reductively refer to “science” and “evolution” (cf. religion and belief in God) interchangeably, but they are surely aware that evolutionary theory is but one major bailiwick in science and philosophy of science, if one prevalent in popular media. Honoring Conference, as section 3.8 models, broadens “science and religion” beyond evolutionary parameters.⁴¹

Second, Dennett and Dawkins cited above dismiss eminent religious scientists as irrelevant to religious truth claims. The smart and the educated can indeed be mistaken, even about what matters most to them, but this is a bizarre grouse from Dawkins and Dennett who campaign to replace the standard “atheist” with “Bright” as a designator.⁴²

Third, Dennett is at times more modest in his presentation than Plantinga, and in this way Dennett comports better with an Inclusivist spirit. Plantinga aggressively perturbs that atheistic naturalism is *incompatible* with contemporary science and evolutionary theory. Such dogmatism easily over-extends, as Maddox admonished attempts to coerce or require belief.⁴³ Plantinga’s points befit a more provisional attitude

³⁸ Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 42, 61-63]; Plantinga [2011: 53-54].

³⁹ Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 45-48].

⁴⁰ Dennett and Plantinga [2011: 64-66, 73-77]; cf. Plantinga [2011: 65-125].

⁴¹ Even if, as biologist Michael Zimmerman [2013] estimates, evolution is a “main front” for controversy. New Atheists such as S. Harris [2012] try to re/open other arenas, imagining a more belligerent culture war than “has been waged on the subject of evolution” if scientific consensus ever declares free will is illusory.

⁴² See section 1.1.2; also e.g. Dennett [2006a: 27, 55, 245, 279, 300, 306, 338].

⁴³ See Maddox in section 3.8; Dennett and Plantinga [2011: esp. 17]; Plantinga [2011: 148, 275, 307-50].

that paradoxically may be more persuasive if arguing that atheism is *less* compatible than Christianity is with evolution. A provisional Wesleyan spirit arguing for compatibility and complementarity with science will also take care not to wed too closely with the spirit of the age or with standing scientific consensus, lest it or they be discredited as scientists modify their discourse and methods, advancing new or revised explanatory models.

Wesley once again warned: “Be not *so positive* especially with regard to things which are neither easy nor necessary to be determined.”⁴⁴ Buckley’s seminal work is relevant on how attempts to “prove” God’s existence from the natural order backfired on Enlightenment-era theists who allowed—and sometimes encouraged—discourse and evidence to be delimited to natural philosophy (science) and reason, while ignoring or neglecting revelation (scripture), tradition, doctrine, and personal experience. This according to Buckley helped to lay *The Origins of Modern Atheism*, to which Plantinga and Honoring Conference in chapter 3 supply correctives by stipulating Christianity’s “evidence base” to include, but also to be broader than, the natural sciences.⁴⁵

When triumphalism pervades Book of Nature debates, an Open Inclusivist vector steers a *via media* by seeking the wisdom to mutually critique not solely New Atheists or evolutionary Christians such as Plantinga, but Intelligent Design theorists and others who unite biological evolution with (e.g.) Social Darwinism as if they were inseparable.⁴⁶ Conor Cunningham positions the latter as alter egos to Dawkins, Dennett, and other “ultra-Darwinists” who interpret the Bible as if it were a technical, scientific, or information manual; posit God as a provable or disprovable scientific hypothesis, and finally dishonor physical reality by either over-spiritualizing heaven against the physically renewed “New Heavens and Earth” (Creationists), or by reducing all of reality to its physical description (New Atheists).⁴⁷ Both according to Cunningham over-generalize Darwin’s insight into an operational theory of everything, when it better dignifies the intrinsic interrelatedness

⁴⁴ John Wesley, “Letter to the Editor,” *London Magazine* 35 (1 January 1765), 28 in Telford [1931: 4:286].

⁴⁵ M. Buckley [1987: title; 2004]; Plantinga [2011: xiii, 163-90] though the sciences for both Plantinga and Honoring Conference offer potential correctives to interpretations of scripture, tradition, and experience.

⁴⁶ Cf. S. Harris [2010: 24]; Phillip E. Johnson in Johnson and Reynolds [2010: 49-59, esp. 53-59] sees scientists and philosophers like Plantinga who affirm biological evolution as fascinating conversation partners that stymie atheists at the price of purveying a flawed and appalling philosophy themselves.

⁴⁷ Cf. C. Cunningham [2010: 66, 164, 180, 182, 197, 242, 253, 256, 279, 294-96, 322, 378, 381-82, 393].

in God’s creation that gives rise to and sustains all physical creatures, including the *Imago Dei*, who God fashions through the intricate processes that Darwin delineated.⁴⁸

Wesleyans in Honoring Conference who hear God’s voice subtly anew through evolution or other Book of Nature voices moderate Plantinga by affirming that Christian belief and biological evolution are compatible or complementary, but not inescapably intertwined.⁴⁹ History is less likely to reprove an Open Inclusivist epistemic humility and modest theology of nature as premature, overconfident, or bearing false witness—even if ignorantly—by peremptorily pronouncing on the Book of Nature or the Book of Scripture as decisively confirming or conflicting with particular scientific theories or data.⁵⁰ At the same time, contrary to New Atheists and other promulgators of the “science versus religion” trope, the demeanor set forth here celebrates God’s grace, glory, and conjunctive illumination through both the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture.

7.2 The “Problem of Evil” and Suffering

Plantinga connected religion and science dialogue to problems of evil, suffering, and theodicy, which like topics surrounding science and religion recur in controversies with New and other atheists. A Wesleyan Inclusivist will evaluate and appreciate where apropos New Atheist reflections, critiques, and attempts to remedy evil and suffering more easily than a Restrictivist who might slur them as delusions, blind stabs, or splendid sins.⁵¹

As with dialogue and debate on other topics, Open more than Closed Inclusivism entertains that New Atheist or other extra-Christian wisdom potentially enriches Christian practice and thought. Dissenting from Parity Pluralism, it expects that select atheist insights will have more veracity than others, even if the less rigorous evince some grace or

⁴⁸ Cf. C. Cunningham [2010: 113, 124, 214, 246, 261, 267, 269, 296, 310, 321-66, 381, 399, 418, 476]; DeVan [2011m: 450] on Cunningham’s overall argument; Robert Sokolowski in C. Cunningham [2010: ii].

⁴⁹ See Zimmerman [2013] for testimonials illustrating implications in the spiritual lives of organizers and attendees of Zimmerman’s annual “Evolution Weekend” for clergy and churches. In balance, Maddox [2009: 25-28, 48-49]; cf. K. Collins [2007: 36-37] and Thorsen [1990: 119, 276] caution Book of Nature interpreters about claiming that Wesley was a proto-evolutionist, since the “chain of being” Wesley embraced in historical context assumed a complex range of static beings culminating in God.

⁵⁰ Cf. Barbour [2000: 64]: “We should not tie our religious beliefs irrevocably to any one [scientific] theory;” S. Harris [2013: 5]: “Representing one’s degree of uncertainty is a form of honesty.”

⁵¹ Cf. Sermon 99, “The Reward of the Righteous,” §1.4, *Works* 3:403-04: “When you feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty; when you assist the stranger, or clothe the naked; when you visit them that are sick or in prison; these are not splendid sins...but ‘sacrifices wherewith God is well pleased.’” *Works* 3:404, footnote 31: Wesley was possibly responding here to dismissing “virtuous pagans” for *splendida peccata*.

acumen. Inclusivism further disputes religious indifferentism to problems of evil by extricating, refining, and expanding justified from unjustified criticisms, thereby diverging from Knitter's "Acceptance" that concludes dialogue by merely recognizing diversity.

7.2.1 *The "No God" Solution:*

New Atheists and their critical kin constantly call attention to religious teachings and practices that carry misery, conflict, and angst in their wake.⁵² They also insist that waste, disharmony, and ferocity in the non-human animate and inanimate physical worlds are dissonant with an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient Creator.⁵³ Dennett's "lancet fluke" and Dawkins' "ichneumon wasp" are ruthless micro-exemplars, while Hitchens highlights past, present, and projected terrestrial and macrocosmic decay.⁵⁴

Hitchens, Stenger, and Ehrman in his bestseller *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* quote Hume directly.⁵⁵ "Is [God] willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?"⁵⁶

Dennett recounts that the "Argument from Evil" against a good, all powerful, all knowing God occupies ample time and energy for "many of us brights...at some point in our lives."⁵⁷ Harris classifies it "insurmountable" for Christians, and Hitchens claims it is a "non-quandary" for atheists but "impossible" for theists to settle.⁵⁸

Dawkins mentions, then swiftly disparages, "childishly easy...rationalizations" to evil and suffering as the price to pay for free will, cosmic order, Divine dualism, or "a

⁵² Cf. sections 1.1, 1.2, and 6.4. September 11, 2001 is paradigmatic. Typical is Dawkins [2006c: title] documentary *Root of All Evil?*. Dawkins [2013: 66, 77, 96-98, 124-25, 206-07] regrets human evils not strictly delimited to "religion," such as bullying. S. Harris [2010] in theory opposes any thwart to human thriving. C. Hitchens [2010b: 24-31] also ponders self-inflicted death and pain such as his mother's suicide.

⁵³ C. Hitchens [2007c: xviii-xx] introduces *The Portable Atheist*: "What kind of designer or creator is so wasteful and capricious...cruel and indifferent...[to] the problem of nonhuman animal suffering...[and] human animal suffering up until God decides to reveal himself to them and/or to do something about it." Darwin [1958: 90] who grieved his daughter's early demise, also saw the suffering of "lower animals throughout almost endless time" signaling against a benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient God.

⁵⁴ Dawkins [1995: 95, 131-32; 2009: 395, 400] without citing the original work also notes Darwin [1888: 105] on the "ichneumonidae;" Dennett [2006a: 3, 5, 63]; C. Hitchens [2007b: 73-96, 139-53, esp. 80].

⁵⁵ Ehrman [2008: 10, title]; C. Hitchens [2007b: 268]; Stenger [2009: 135-57] relies heavily on Ehrman.

⁵⁶ "Philo" via Epicurus in Hume [1779: 186]; cf. Mackie [1955: 201]: "A good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can and...there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do." Crenshaw [2005: 201] reproduces a longer quote from Epicurus as preserved by Lacantius (c: 240-320) in *De Ira Dei* 13.

⁵⁷ Dennett [2006a: 27] though affecting not to pursue it as a philosophical problem in *Breaking the Spell*.

⁵⁸ S. Harris [2005: 173; 2006: 55]; C. Hitchens [2007b: 267-68].

more sophisticated solution—postulate a god with grander things to do than fuss about human distress.”⁵⁹ Atheism for Dawkins is most sensible: “The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference... Meaningless tragedies... are exactly what we should expect, along with equally meaningless *good* fortune.”⁶⁰

It is not clear from these examples that New Atheists wrestle carefully with atheism’s implications or alternatives in light of the problem of evil, but this dearth is not utterly ubiquitous as Section 1.2 surveyed for the likes of Camus, Sartre, Nietzsche, and Russell who were acutely affected by what they sensed were atheism’s repercussions. It is one thing to pronounce Hume’s trilemma a non-quandary, another to say so for evil and suffering themselves. Chad Meister rejoins that any robust worldview or lifescape must grapple with theoretical, evidential, and practical questions about evil and suffering.⁶¹

Nor does atheism *prima facie* exhibit how or why good and evil are ontologically objective, reliably distinguished, or how atheism as a lifescape rationally motivates or entails fury toward or opposition to evil and suffering.⁶² While sections 7.3 and 7.4 engage these topics vital to any intellectually, intuitively satisfying worldview, the present section interacts with New Atheist allegations that the problems of evil and suffering are for Christians “impossible” or “insurmountable,” in order to illustrate how a Wesleyan Open Inclusivism sifts and integrates aspiring schematas at the religious roundtable in ways that often coincide and plausibly moderate New Atheist and other objections without undertaking to “disprove” or compel belief. An Open Inclusivist spirit allows that diverse sources for tackling problems of evil and suffering are potentially grace-filled, synergetic, or contain complementary components or insights.⁶³ Inclusivists will be more reticent to proclaim that a particular theodicy, defense, or conglomerate explicates specific evils or

⁵⁹ Dawkins [2006a: 135-36]. C. Hitchens [2007b: 65-66, cf. 179, 268] dubs Deism “rational...for its time.” C. Sagan in C. Hitchens [2007c: 236] adds evil as illusory, part of a big picture, or a “greater good.”

⁶⁰ Dawkins [1995: 132-33].

⁶¹ Cf. section 2.2; Meister [2012: 13]: “Plausibility of a religion or worldview to some extent depends upon its capacity for... a coherent and livable schema for understanding our experiences of evil and good.”

⁶² Cf. Wesleyans Baggett and Walls [2011: 223].

⁶³ Cf. DeVan [2013f] reviewing one effort at synthesizing diverse moral philosophies on sexual integrity.

suffering exhaustively, but Honoring Conference delivers surer tools for winnowing than do Parity Pluralism, relativism or subjectivism absent objective bases.⁶⁴

7.2.2 *Is God Helpless, Absent, Evil, Amoral, Semi-benevolent, Ignorant and/or Foolish?:*

Select answers to Hume's trilemma reduce or revise God's attributes, exploiting strategies that Dawkins, Harris, and Sagan cast as inferior to atheism.⁶⁵ Traditional orthodox Christians and New Atheists agree that each of these is less superlative. For many Wesleyans, they forfeit too much since a less than all powerful, all knowing, ever present, or omnibenevolent God controverts the first article of the Creed, a *discrimen* prioritizing God's Universal Holy Love, much scripture, and much Christian Tradition.⁶⁶

Even so, Inclusivists unlike New Atheists (except on Deism) consistently search for grace and goodwill in each compromise. Pluralist-inclined Wesleyans Suchocki and Cobb write about or affiliate with Process Theology qualifying God's omnipotence.⁶⁷ Rabbi Harold Kushner illustrates why some find this solution attractive: "I can worship a god who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason."⁶⁸

Many Wesleyans and others will have qualms about whether abjuring omnipotence is wise in light of Scripture, tradition, and pervasive intuitions about God; yet they can applaud process theodicy for spotlighting God's benevolence. Promethean New Atheists are likelier to disregard a finite "god" as just one more to dispense with, as do Dawkins

⁶⁴ "Defenses" attempt to demonstrate logical consistency between God's existence and evil/suffering. Leibniz [2009] coining "Theodicy" in 1710 is more ambitious a la Milton's 1667 poem *Paradise Lost* 1:22-26 in Sermon 59, "God's Love to Fallen Man," §4, *Works* 2:424: "to justify the ways of God with men."

⁶⁵ Dawkins [2006a: 135]: e.g. a "nasty god." S. Harris [2005: 173] implies as logical possibilities non-omnipotent or non-omniscient and in [2006: 73]: "either impotent or evil...[or] fiction, like Zeus and...other dead gods whom most sane human beings can now ignore." C. Sagan in C. Hitchens [2007c: 236]: "God is not benevolent or compassionate...isn't omniscient...has business elsewhere...[or] isn't omnipotent."

⁶⁶ K. Collins [2007: 19-32, 336-39]; Maddox [1994: 50-53, 275-77] for Wesley on these attributes. Oden [1998: 1:51-82] and Wesleyan sympathetic Geisler [2003: 2:137-232] for primary sources in Scripture and tradition on God's goodness, power, presence, and knowledge; cf. and contrast Crenshaw [2005].

⁶⁷ Cobb [1982; 2003]; Cobb and Griffin [1976]; Cobb and Schroeder [1981]; Suchocki [1982]; cf. discussion and debate edited by Cobb and Pinnock [2000]. Meister [2012: 5-8, 111]: Omnipotence is the ability to do anything that is logically or metaphysically possible. That God cannot make a square circle "does not describe anything which it is coherent to suppose can be done." One may add that God will not act contrary to God's character. The Arminian Copan [2013a: 114] critiques one Calvinist compromise of omnipotence, which asserts that not only creatures but God is coerced by God's "strongest desire[s]."

⁶⁸ Kushner [1981: 134]. Baggett and Walls [2011: 221] doubt a limited God can guarantee evil's defeat.

and Ehrman, but Inclusivists need not reduce Process Theology to delusion or guile as New Atheists and Restrictivists who dissent from Process Theology will want to do.⁶⁹

Second, Dawkins disdains a “nasty god” who reinforces immorality, again in agreement with a Wesleyan *discrimen* invoking the corollary: Is the nasty G/god “willing to prevent good, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is benevolent. Is He both able and willing? From where, then comes goodness?”⁷⁰

Walls comments that an immoral or amoral God is unlikely to fashion people with the moral nature and intuitions they express and is not a live option for most thinkers or believers.⁷¹ If God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and evil; then problems of evil and suffering compound, and any resistance will be ineffectual and hazardous. New Atheists, Wesleyans, and Plutarch (see section 1.2) might all agree that an evil God is worse than none. Yet Inclusivists can positively regard the “nasty god” as a contrast to other explanations and a cue to re/examine prospects of lesser spiritual malevolence.

A dualistic, Manichean, amoral, morally indifferent, or ambivalent G/god per Dawkins suffers analogous, if less intense difficulties, including why such a God would want or work for good versus evil.⁷² Calvinist Gordon Clark pronounces it baldly: “I wish very frankly and pointedly to assert that if a man gets drunk and shoots his family, it was the will of God that he should do so.”⁷³ R. C. Sproul, Jr. advocates what he sees as repercussions: God, desiring “to make his wrath known...is as delighted with his wrath as...with all of his attributes;” God to exhibit God’s wrath in all of God’s glory, “needed something on which to be wrathful. He needed to have sinful creatures....[I also suggest that] he created sin.”⁷⁴ This dualist resolution taxes God’s love and justice at great cost, again calling into question the morality, if not the prudence, of worshipping such a God.

Restrictivists, New Atheists, even certain brusque Inclusivists interacting with those who would seek to reduce or jettison God’s omnipresence via a deistic, apathetic, or

⁶⁹ E.g. Dawkins [2006a : 77]: “I have found it an amusing strategy, when asked whether I am an atheist, to point out that the questioner is also an atheist when considering Zeus, Apollo, Amon Ra, Mithras, Baal, Thor, Wotan, the Golden Calf and the Flying Spaghetti Monster. I just go one god further.” Ehrman [2008: 272] dismisses a weaker, less than omnipotent “god” as conceptually flawed, like a mother or kindly neighbor, but not correspondent to the “GOD” that most believers and atheists designate or intuit.

⁷⁰ As per Cahn [2005: 14].

⁷¹ Walls [2002: 21-28]; cf. Baggett and Walls [2011: 221, 266].

⁷² Dawkins [2006a: 135].

⁷³ Clark [1961: 221].

⁷⁴ Sproul [1999: 52-57].

aloof God (or who first allow, then discharge these options per Dawkins and Sagan) may sympathize with Elijah in 1 Kings 18:27: “Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating...wandered away, or he is on a journey, or...asleep and must be awakened.” Even though this attempted resolution will also be too costly for many Wesleyans, an aloof or absentee God prompts roundtable discussion about experiences of divine hiddenness and the perceived lack of divine action to prevent present evils.

The Methodist Meister instills God’s hiddenness as a facet or feature in theodicy. God may remain hidden due to providential (or prevenient) grace, if God revealing God’s self would: (1) cause a person to respond negatively in the present but not in later circumstances, (2) if God-cognizance would disrupt a transformative stage in emotional or intellectual maturity, or (3) if a higher level of God-consciousness would overwhelm free response.⁷⁵ As chapters 4 and 5 elucidated, atheist disbelief or absence of belief may be held with integrity if God has not revealed God’s self or God’s will to the atheist.

Whatever the reasons are for God’s existential or intellectual hiddenness, the sense or impression that God is absent or indifferent resonates with the Psalms of lament, the Hebrew prophets, and Jesus’s cry from the cross: “God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Given these scripture themes, is it possible that comparable yearnings for communion with God undergird atheist claims or cries that God is absent or non-existent? Inclusivism can reckon this conceivable without attesting that it is so in every case.

Rather than reducing, eliminating, or reversing God’s omnipresence, Pinnock and Gregory A. Boyd have been accused of undermining God’s omniscience, a move that Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens, and Sagan admit resolves the argument from evil, but that they decline together with many Wesleyans.⁷⁶ Pinnock argues that God to preserve libertarian freedom “limits his knowledge” so that (some?) future free choices are inherently unknowable.⁷⁷ This sits uneasily with historic Wesleyan confession of God’s foreknowledge, yet it goads sober rumination on free will like that in section 7.2.5.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Meister [2012: 47-62].

⁷⁶ E.g. Alcorn [2009: 146-62].

⁷⁷ Pinnock [1986: 141-77]. Pinnock [2001: 3, 25-29, 37, 40, 53, 57, 75-93] re/defines omniscience as maximal wisdom and knowing all that is knowable. G. Boyd [2001: 126-33] counsels “neo-Molinism,” wherein God knows all future possibilities but foregoes surety about select choices that free agents make.

⁷⁸ Cf. K. Collins [2007: 25, 337]; Maddox [1994: 52-53, 277].

Starker is ceding God's wisdom by intimating that God is stupid, senile, or silly per New Atheist Pullman's novel *The Amber Spyglass*, or Macbeth 5:5:16-27: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."⁷⁹

Pullman's fictional, thoughtless, doddering "God" is more suited for pity or exasperation than adoration or worship, and like Dawkins' nasty god has little capacity as a live option for most roundtable interlocutors. A Divine Senility offers little or no hope that "the wrong shall fail, the right prevail;" yet an inclusive disposition licenses empathy for Pullman's portrayal as an expression of pathos and a contrast to other alternatives.⁸⁰

New Atheists and Inclusivist Wesleyans can concur that adjusting God's attributes permits logical resolution of the argument from evil, but that each is less satisfying than atheism is for New Atheists, and Christian theism is for many Wesleyans. Inclusivists parting with Parity Pluralists concede further that denying omni-attributes might fall prey to Carl Sagan's mock: "My God is a little God, and I want him to stay that way."⁸¹

A Wesleyan Inclusivism simultaneously rebukes New Atheist manners at the religious roundtable. Rather than pouring on derision, it fosters gratitude for partial truths, holy reminders, and honorable motives in efforts to resolve problems of evil.

Consequently, engaging modified "God" positions with New Atheists at the religious roundtable is less about their conclusions, as important as these are. Significant rather is a generous open posture over a smug and self-righteous one as purveyors and searchers for hope and truth amidst evil and suffering. Inclusivism nurtures further possibilities for dialogue, notes areas of concord, and reciprocally prods reflection and critical benefit from each other's proposals. Within what Dawkins ridicules as "childish," Open Inclusivism prods joyfully discerning clues to Ultimate Reality along with experiential and existential pathos drawing attention to salient aspects of God's character through a variety of emphases that nevertheless necessitate sorting wheat from chaff.

⁷⁹ Shakespeare [1998: 90]; Pullman [2000: *passim*] in tension with fine tuning arguments since a Lummox God is less likely to orchestrate so intricate a cosmos and life within it, even if marred by evil and suffering.

⁸⁰ Longfellow in McClatchy [2000: 476] in the 1863 poem "Christmas Bells," Verse 7, lines 3-4.

⁸¹ C. Sagan [1994: 50] quoted in Dawkins [2006a: 33].

7.2.3 *Suffering as Punishment, Karma, or Divine Judgment:*

Sacrificing or modifying God's existence or purported attributes are two routes to relieving Humean and New Atheist dissonance. The present section shifts to defenses or theodicies that retain belief in God, God's power, goodness, wisdom, and presence. Inclusivism expedites colloquy on diverse theodicies, since a Restrictivist approach is more prone to absolutize or reject any given reason for why God permits perceived evils and sufferings while Parity Pluralists, relativists, and subjectivists will be less equipped to critically engage theodicies or defenses other than countenancing their comforts.

Ehrman documents God in the Bible punishing individual and corporate wickedness.⁸² Hindu and Buddhist voices will state that karma guarantees past lives and actions cause present sufferings.⁸³ If their supposition that God does not exist is honestly held (see chapters 4 and 5), atheists by definition cannot accept the former, and therefore again deny it with integrity. New Atheist Stenger observationally adds: "Are only the wicked punished while the righteous are free from suffering? Hardly."⁸⁴

Inclusivist Wesleyans can respect New Atheists' consistency and meet them partway by rebuking karmic-style Restrictivism that consigns *all* suffering to deserved or just chastisement. Four biblical examples countering the latter are Job, Jesus's retort to his disciples on "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?," the tower of Siloam victims (cf. September 11, 2001), and Jesus's own innocent suffering.⁸⁵

Pessimistic Reformed anthropologies emphasize retributive suffering in ways that exacerbate tensions with New Atheists. Amyraldian Calvinist Randy Alcorn writes:

Had we been [the biblical Adam]...we would have made the same evil decision...months or years later is irrelevant....Bad things do not happen to good people....Good people do not exist....I am Osama bin Laden. I am Hitler....This isn't hyperbole, it's biblical truth....We're of precisely the same stock as...Stalin

⁸² Constraining to a few examples in Ehrman [2008: 20-123] are: Genesis 6, 19; Deuteronomy 28; 2 Kings 17, 22; Proverbs 3:33; the prophets Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah; Matthew 25 and Revelation on "eternal punishment;" cf. DeVan [2012g] on justice and judgment in Genesis 1-11 and 19. Interlocutors can contest Ehrman's interpretations while acknowledging that suffering for and/or from one's sins is a biblical theme.

⁸³ Cf. Meister [2012: 79-94] for a philosophical analysis of karma interacting with some primary sources.

⁸⁴ Stenger [2009: 139].

⁸⁵ If Jesus uniquely bears God's punishment in place of the redeemed, then Jesus's suffering still does not flow from his own sins. See Job 42:7 for God responding to Eliphaz and Job's friends who accused Job of deserving suffering; Luke 13:1-5; John 9:3; cf. Ehrman [2008: 162-89, 275] for a hostile reading of Job; Guinness [2005: 201] on karma: "Do we really believe the abused child, the battered wife, and the tortured dissident are reaping injustice as their karma? The thought revolts the mind, not to speak of the heart."

and Mao.... We flatter ourselves... [saying] ‘I would *never* do that.’ Given our evil natures and a similar background, resources, and opportunities, we would.⁸⁶

Alcorn later implies that everyone by their nature merits not just the suffering they actually endure, but exponentially more: “Hell” on earth, eternally, or both!⁸⁷ Ironically, Alcorn scorns “prosperity theology” that also blames victims of suffering by reproaching sufferers when they fail to receive healing, riches, or other blessings because they allegedly lack the faith, will, resolve, or virtue to be receptive to God’s gifts.⁸⁸ A Wesleyan Inclusivist will be less keen to decree either form of blanket judgment, avoiding the ambivalences toward suffering inherent to Alcorn and to prosperity theology accounts.

Moral agents who absolutize punitive suffering will be hard pressed to oppose it if they deduce that suffering is God’s will in every instance, and may actively inflict it as God’s or karma’s self-appointed instruments.⁸⁹ Inclusivist Wesleyans with Dennett can instead consistently censure any initiative that conscripts people to be “God’s rifles.”⁹⁰

Wesleyans readily agree with New and other atheists that punishment is insufficient to rationalize all suffering, yet those who prioritize Scripture cannot ignore biblical warnings that some suffering results from divine reprimands to individual or social sins. Pursuable in dialogue is whether a universe that lacks punitive consequences, to say nothing of those meted by an omniscient just judge, is truly or maximally desirable.

7.2.4 Adversity as a Transformative Means of Grace:

A second warrant for an all-powerful, all-good God countenancing some suffering is as a means of developing character. Dawkins’ and Hitchens’ memoirs tacitly recognize adversity’s role in character formation.⁹¹ New Atheist John Loftus quotes Darwin “imagining” that some suffering might lead to “moral improvement.”⁹² More emphatic is Nietzsche’s “That which does not kill me makes me stronger,” and the Indian *Bhagavad Gita* 18:37: “What at first seems a cup of sorrow is found in the end immortal wine.”⁹³

⁸⁶ Alcorn [2009: 70, 72, 76]. See Alcorn [2010] on his four-point Calvinism.

⁸⁷ Alcorn [2009: 76].

⁸⁸ Alcorn [2009: 378-90] on “prosperity theology” citing several primary sources.

⁸⁹ Meister [2012: 92] that a serial killer via karma becomes the “instrumental means” to punish victims.

⁹⁰ Dennett [1995: 519].

⁹¹ Dawkins [2013: *passim*]; C. Hitchens [2010b: *passim*] whether good, ill, or ambivalently.

⁹² Loftus [2010: 238] quoting Darwin [1958: 85-96]; cf. Ehrman [2008: 125-57]: “redemptive suffering.”

⁹³ *Bhagavad Gita* §18.37 in Mascaro [2003: 82]; Nietzsche [2007b: 5].

Biblical testimony identifies some travail as remedial discipline. Hebrews 12 analogizes a human parent. God “disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness....Discipline...seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”⁹⁴

James 1:2-4 and Romans 5:3-5 exhort readers to rejoice in trials that test faith, evoke perseverance, character, and hope. 2 Corinthians 12:7 associates suffering with humility, Philippians 4:12-13 with learning contentment and strength, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 and Galatians 6:2 with training to comfort others. Job 23:10 and 1 Peter 1:6-7 analogize “testing” with a refiner’s fire that burns away impurities to bring forth gold.⁹⁵

Hick prior to the full flowering of his Pluralist hypothesis, looked to Irenaeus in Christian tradition that pain was profitable because creatures without pain will not attain to the highest virtues, wisdom, or creativity.⁹⁶ Perseverance requires obstacles, forgiveness being wronged; courage, self-sacrifice, and overcoming temptation genuine or perceived jeopardy.⁹⁷ Origen taught: “Virtue, if unopposed, would not shine out nor become more glorious by probation. Virtue is not virtue if it be untested and unexamined....There would be no crown of victory in store for...[those] who rightly struggled.”⁹⁸

New Atheist conventions normally constrict character building to one mortal lifetime without further preservation.⁹⁹ Inclusivists can agree that character building of any sort is precious, but if it is confined to one lifetime it furnishes a lighter counterweight to evil and suffering than if it contributes to ongoing perfection after death.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, some desolation kills or destroys instead of strengthening on this side of the “vale.”¹⁰¹ This complication is diminished if character-building, contra New Atheists, goes on in an afterlife where even enduring an agonizing death might somehow subsidize sanctification.

⁹⁴ Hebrews 12:10-11; cf. Job 36:15; Psalm 94:12, 119:72; 2 Corinthians 7:8-9.

⁹⁵ Cf. Deuteronomy 8:2; Job 7:18; Isaiah 48:10 for more humility, testing, and refining imagery.

⁹⁶ Hick [1966: e.g. 291-92]; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4:37-38 in Spiegel [2013: 82-84, 335].

⁹⁷ Cf. Spiegel [2013: 83]; 1 Corinthians 10:13 on temptation; Alcorn [2009: 396] is here more helpful: “God uses suffering to purge sin from our lives, strengthen our commitment to him, force us to depend on his grace, bind us together with other believers, produce discernment, foster sensitivity, discipline our minds, impart wisdom, stretch our hope...know Christ better...long for truth, lead us to repentance...teach us to give thanks in times of sorrow, increase our faith, and strengthen our character.”

⁹⁸ Origen, *Num. Hom.* 14:2 in Bettenson [1956: 264].

⁹⁹ S. Harris [2005: 242] is the exception, posing that reincarnation may recur.

¹⁰⁰ But cf. 1 Corinthians 15:19: “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” Meister [2012: 86-93] analyzes reincarnation/rebirth questions fruitful for roundtable discussion.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Keats [1933: 252] contrasts seeing the world as a “vale of soul-making” versus a “vale of tears.”

On Restrictivist soteriological presuppositions, effective character building would avail only for adherents of a favored sub/tradition, so that any New Atheist virtues gained from adversity on Restrictivist terms would be ineffectual. What use is character growth in hell? Wesleyan Inclusivists are more optimistic about God's transforming grace among New Atheists and others who sub- or unconsciously respond to God's promptings.

Restrictivism in spirit if not confession is disposed to either repudiating character building in favor of some other explanation, or to presuming that character formation validates all suffering.¹⁰² As with equating suffering with punishment, there is a risk that viewing (all) suffering as sanctifying will eliminate or weaken resolve to relieve it and undermine partnerships with atheists in doing so.¹⁰³ Wesleyan "works of mercy," on the other hand, may build character in their laborers who work to ease others' sufferings and evoke gratitude in their beneficiaries.¹⁰⁴ As to impressions that evil, suffering, or sin is somehow necessary for good, one could pose that if God ingeniously breaks and inverts evil's power, will God not all the more use righteous obedience for holy ends?¹⁰⁵

7.2.5 *Free Will:*

For an Inclusivist Wesleyan, free will and responsible grace will be crucial to how sufferers react and seek to alleviate evil or affliction through "works of mercy" and other means. Wesley stressed God's prevenient grace as enabling a measure of human freedom over divine determinism.¹⁰⁶ Free will historically inspires not only an enormous literature on its own, but also intramural disagreement among New Atheists.¹⁰⁷ Hitchens debating Calvinist Douglas Wilson castigates the God that Wilson defends for rendering "freedom"

¹⁰² Cf. Spiegel [2013: 83] who scolds Hick for setting an antagonistic tone among different theodicies.

¹⁰³ The admittedly Methodist Fanny Crosby [1903: 14] illustrates this tendency: "If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it...I verily believe it was His intention that I should live my days in physical darkness, so as to be better prepared to sing His praises and incite others to do so."

¹⁰⁴ Cf. e.g. Abraham [2005: 107-21]: "Help is in the Works," and Jesus's healing ministry in the gospels. Conceptual debates also arise as to whether all adversity is truly "evil," if exertion required accomplishing tasks or goals need not necessarily depend on moral evils or miseries to stimulate it. In Genesis 1-3, God works, rests, and delegates work or care of Eden to Adam and Eve, ostensibly before they sin or suffer.

¹⁰⁵ Contrast e.g. Schleiermacher [1999: 337] who saw sin as "ordained by God...for otherwise redemption itself could not have been ordained;" with Guinness [2005: 209]: "That is not to say...deeper character [explains all] suffering...Evil...may be as malevolent and senseless as ever. But in a raging storm...there may still be a silver lining in the clouds;" Lewis [1972]; Meister [2012: 37]: "Could not mature persons be developed...without Auschwitz?;" Romans 6:1-2 on "By no means!" to sinning so that grace will abound.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. e.g. Abraham [2005: 159-80]; K. Collins [2007: 78-79, 175, 349]; Maddox [1994: 83-93, 278].

¹⁰⁷ See e.g. Kane [2002; 2011: title]. The latter heavily revises the former *Oxford Handbook of Free Will*.

and “‘free will’...devoid of all meaning.”¹⁰⁸ Harris penned a short polemic against *Free Will* that Dennett in turn critiqued.¹⁰⁹ Dawkins in “Let’s all stop beating Basil’s Car” broaches determinism via “nonsense of the very idea of responsibility.”¹¹⁰ Stenger on “Suffering and Morality” does not comment on determinism, but assumes that free will speaks only to human moral evils and is immaterial to natural or physical evils.¹¹¹

Free will for these reasons may be more appropriate to dialogue with particular New Atheists, but Open Inclusivist Wesleyans can present free will theodicies to any atheist for constructive, if hostile criticism (cf. section 6.4). As with retributive woes and adversity as a means of grace, one need not imagine free will is a justification for all suffering and evil, nor assume the opposite that free will has no explanatory power.

Wesley located evil’s origin in the Devil or Satan who was “self-tempted...[and by] abuse of his liberty introduced evil” into creation.¹¹² For Wesleyan-leaning Calvinist Norman Geisler, God “made evil *possible* by creating free creatures; they are responsible for making it *actual*.”¹¹³ Modifying Plantinga’s “transworld depravity,” a universe with free creatures who never chose to sin might be logically possible, but God may have foreseen that no such world would occur prior to a New Heavens and Earth where all inhabitants had already experienced sin, suffering, evil; and gladly forsook them.¹¹⁴

Contra Stenger, some thinkers insist that much natural evil arises from non-human free will. Boyd in *God at War* and *Satan and the Problem of Evil* lays responsibility partly on spiritual agents, since Jesus acted as if some physical and mental infirmities were spiritually inflicted.¹¹⁵ Non-theist or “atheist” Buddhists and Jains are also not irreconcilable to granting agency to menacing or mischievous spirits, or to some type of immaterial-material world interaction; though the most this might carry with New Atheists

¹⁰⁸ Hitchens and Wilson [2009: 12].

¹⁰⁹ Dennett [2014]; S. Harris [2012].

¹¹⁰ Dawkins [2006b: online].

¹¹¹ Stenger [2009: 139].

¹¹² K. Collins [2007: 58-59, 344] quoting e.g. *Works* 2:476-77; cf. Walls [1996].

¹¹³ Geisler [2011: 31].

¹¹⁴ Geisler [2011: 64]; Plantinga [2001: 114]; cf. Dew [2013] against Mackie [1955: 209].

¹¹⁵ Matthew 4:24, 9:32-33, 15:21-28, Mark 3, 5, 7:26-30; Luke 4:33-41, 8:26-27, 9:42, 11:14-26, 13:10-16. The Satan in Job 1:16-18 seems to influence or cause natural disasters; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 16:14; G. Boyd [1998; 2001]. J. Russell [1977: 228]: “No theodicy that does not take the Devil fully into consideration is likely to be persuasive.” Roundtable interlocutors who believe in gods, devils, jinn, or other non-human agents are likely to be receptive to this.

would be as pure conjecture about unknown causal factors to slacken the logical tension between an all-powerful, all good God and physical suffering.¹¹⁶ Plantinga thus pitches non-human spiritual agents as a “defense,” but not as a full-throated theodicy.¹¹⁷

Other sufferings encroach from people abusing or neglecting their bodies or the nonhuman world, or are byproducts of natural laws that organize reality in other ways as Dawkins refers to one “rationalization” for the problem of evil.¹¹⁸ To the first, one whimsical meditation proceeds: “Someday I’d like to ask God: Why do you allow poverty, famine, and injustice to continue, when you could do something about it?...I’m afraid God might ask me the same question.”¹¹⁹

Representatives of Augustinian and other free will traditions anchor not just moral but natural “evils” to human choice in Genesis 1-3, and to other scriptures such as Romans 8:19-22.¹²⁰ Reading Genesis 1-3 as history will not satisfy many interlocutors at the religious roundtable, yet Genesis 1-3 may still be meaningful for discussing free will.¹²¹

Friendlier to New Atheists like Dennett who ridicule notions of Satan and his minions are Wesleyan scientist Karl W. Giberson and sometime Methodist Francis S. Collins who propound quantum mechanics, electron behavior, cosmic and evolutionary processes as evidencing some measure of self-determination. God “built in [their] creative powers...to explore novelty and try new things, but within a framework of overall regularity....God bestowed on the creation...the gift of freedom God bestowed on us.”¹²²

Giberson and Collins do not address whether their defense leads to some species of pantheism, panentheism, or consciousness in these features of the physical universe; nor whether such processes can in any way be held responsible or aware of their free actions. Although ambiguities linger, Wesleyan and other free will theists maintain that a creation where sentient beings of whatever sort are free in their attitudes and actions to choose justice, goodness, love, and relationship with God over oppression, injustice, and other

¹¹⁶ Skilton [2013] on Buddhism; A. Valley [2013] on atheism and Jainism; cf. Frazier [2013] on Hinduism.

¹¹⁷ Plantinga [1974: 58]; cf. DeWeese [2013: 62]: “This suggestion need not be true for a defense to succeed; it need only be possible and consistent with...God’s omnipotence and omnibenevolence.”

¹¹⁸ Dawkins [2006a: 135].

¹¹⁹ Kreeft in Strobel [2000: 50]; cf. e.g. DeWeese [2013: 53-54]; Sanders [2007: 274].

¹²⁰ Cf. e.g. Copan [2013a; 2013b]; Geisler [2011: 17-25, 71-78]; Geivett [2013a]; Meister [2012: 30-34] also valuable for defining evil as corruption, parasitic, privation, or absence of good that should be present.

¹²¹ E.g. DeVan [2012g: 39-47] interacting with New Atheists on Genesis 1-3; Richter [2008: 92-118].

¹²² Giberson and Collins [2013: 277-79, 287-88]; cf. e.g. DeWeese [2013: 56-59]; Plantinga [2011: 276]; Polkinghorne [1988: 66-67].

evils facilitates responsible grace and serves as one rationale or defense for why an almighty munificent God consents to at least some incidence of evil and suffering.

Free will as a defense, theodicy, or component in a composite theodicy is more problematic for New Atheists of determinist persuasions, less credible for Restrictivists who broach no effectual opportunity for the unevangelized to freely receive God's grace, and is weakened by an exclusivist mindset dichotomizing free will with other defenses and theodicies. Free will pertaining to a conclusive response to God is meaningless for Universalism, equalized with every other postulate for Parity Pluralists, and loses its objective status by morphing into a taste or opinion for Cafeteria Pluralists, relativists, and religious subjectivists. Wesleyans contrariwise suggest that a level of free will makes some sense of moral and natural evils, and Open Inclusivism presages that free will functions better conjunctively or cooperatively within a big-picture or meta-theodicy.¹²³

7.2.6 Meta-Defenses / Meta-Theodicies:

Restrictivism of truth or salvation might be capable of accommodating a multi-faceted defense or theodicy, but Restrictivists will apply its redemptive effects to a narrower range of recipients than will Inclusivists or Universalists. Restrictivists are likewise less amenable to conjunctive dispositions congruent with multi-faceted proposals that listen to a plethora of sources within and beyond any one tradition. Conversely, if Pluralists or relativists insist on a strict parity among defenses or theodicies, they must either reject or accommodate all of them. Presuming parity would also appear to forestall adjudicatory devices if defenses or theodicies contradict each other. Open Inclusivism through a paradigm such as Honoring Conference is able to interact more discerningly with multiple factors, and remains approachable with further considerations and critiques not only from or by Christians, but also other religions, philosophies, and New Atheists.

Wesleyan philosopher Michael Peterson implies "Greater Good Theodicies" potentially incorporate more than one element in their attempt to explain why "some class of evils is necessary to [or allowable given] some greater good."¹²⁴ Leibniz articulated

¹²³ M. Peterson [2013: 78] uses "meta-theodicy...regarding the nature and strategy of theodicy," but in the same paragraph employs the phrase "Greater Good Theodicies" potentially integrating multiple theodicies.

¹²⁴ M. Peterson [2013: 78].

one notorious greater good theodicy, supposing that if sufferers adequately understood “the order of the universe, we should find that it surpasses all the desires of the wisest of us, and that it is impossible to render it better than it is, not only for all in general, but also for each one of us in particular, provided that we cleave to the author of us all.”¹²⁵

The idea that what exists is the “best of all possible worlds” is derided not least by Voltaire in *Candide*.¹²⁶ New Atheists Stenger, Ehrman, and Sagan in Hitchens object to “greater good,” “mystery,” “redemptive” or “illusory” suffering; but the last is more of an objection to Eastern spiritualities or to Mary Baker Eddy than to orthodox Christianity.¹²⁷

For Wesleyans, scriptures such as Romans 8:28 comport Leibniz to the degree “that all things work together for good *for those who love God*” (emphasis added). Peterson softens Leibniz by depicting perceptibly atrocious evils “properly understood... [as] part of a world order which seems to be precisely the kind God *would* create to provide for certain goods.”¹²⁸ Individual or combined evil/s might themselves be pointless, but God could permit them within or because of a greater good. The current world may not yet be the best actualizable, but it may be optimal to precipitating the best possible world that section 7.3 extrapolates as the New Heavens and New Earth.¹²⁹

Even in the extant cosmos, an all-wise God may have countless momentous and minute reasons for allowing specific trials or evils, to which infinite wisdom does not yet give God’s creatures epistemic access.¹³⁰ Those who claim Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong to the LORD our God,” need not play the mystery card too quickly if “the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever.” Inclusivist Wesleyans might tentatively submit the following conjectures about what is yet to be revealed.¹³¹

If God is all wise, all-powerful, and all-righteous, is God then worthy of trust to redeem all suffering for those who love God, to leverage for good all evil that free

¹²⁵ Leibniz [2005: 63; cf. 1965: 123-24]: “The infinite wisdom of the Almighty allied with his boundless goodness has brought it about that nothing better could have been created, everything taken into account....As a consequence all things are in perfect harmony and conspire in the most beautiful way.... Whenever, therefore, some detail...appears to us reprehensible, we should judge that we do not know enough...and that according to the wise who would understand it, nothing better could even be desired.”

¹²⁶ Voltaire [1998: *passim*].

¹²⁷ Ehrman [2008: 125-57]; C. Sagan in C. Hitchens [2007c: 236]; Stenger [2009: 140-41].

¹²⁸ M. Peterson [1982: 117].

¹²⁹ Cf. Alcorn [2009: 194, 370-77] with continuing relevance to the “problem of evil.”

¹³⁰ Cf. e.g. Alcorn [2009: 349].

¹³¹ E.g. by God’s gracing seekers with glimpses “in a mirror, dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12, cf. 2:10).

creatures perpetrate, to discern what gradation or extent or timing of suffering is best for transforming grace; and how, when, where, why, or if ever to intervene? Would God know that creating free beings who respond to or rebuff God's grace is preferable to refraining to create, or to automata that always "choose" righteousness from the beginning? If God is omnipresent, how is God available to comfort creatures who suffer?¹³² If God somehow became human in Jesus, has (or how has) God directly shared in creatures' sufferings?¹³³ If finite creatures can perceive how *some* misfortunes fortify their character, will clearer eschatological vision disclose how all suffering does?¹³⁴

A Restrictivist outlook is likelier to presume that atheists are uniformly devious or benighted, and to respond to New Atheists' critiques or arguments accordingly. Parity Pluralists from the opposite direction will equalize every inquiry and response. The above conversational stimuli are per a Wesleyan Open Inclusivist *via media* more amenable to innovation, supplementation, fresh interaction, and the graceful perspectives they educe. Yet on both Wesleyan and New Atheist premises, dialogue must never distract from the verdict: "Suffering...should not lead merely to an intellectual explanation. It...calls for a living response."¹³⁵ This is at the heart of section 7.4, but 7.3 first traces "life after death" as a trajectory in meta-theodicy foundational to dialogue on evil, suffering, and ethics.

7.3 Considering Life after Death

Hearing New and other atheists on life after death interweaves "the problem of evil" with heaven, hell, who presumably goes to each, and why. New Atheists convey a deep disquiet with what they intuit are arbitrary, disproportionate, and emotionally disturbing Restrictivist notions of hell, where criteria for sentencing are holding wrong beliefs and failure to correctly perform (or to perform correct) religious rituals or

¹³² E.g. Psalm 23, 46; Isaiah 41:10; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 on God comforting sufferers in their affliction.

¹³³ Cf. e.g. Isaiah 43:3; Hebrews 4:15.

¹³⁴ Adapting Dawkins' [2011: 257] expression of faith in the mysteries that the sciences have not yet unexplained: There is much that "we don't yet understand, but we're working on it;" cf. Walls [1996: 536].

¹³⁵ Ehrman [2008: 122, 276-78] and ends by recommending specific sufferings to alleviate.

practices.¹³⁶ *Letter to a Christian Nation* angles to address those who believe “that only those who accept the divinity of Jesus Christ will experience salvation after death.”¹³⁷

New and historic atheists, including those Hitchens anthologizes in *The Portable Atheist*, object to hell as expressed by Jesus and in Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism for its apparent vindictiveness.¹³⁸ Hitchens homes in on Christianity as never “evolve[ing] a tempting heaven at all—but it has been lavish in its promise of sadistic and everlasting punishment.”¹³⁹ Earthly aspirers to savoring tortures of the damned exacerbate this.¹⁴⁰

D’Holbach, Feuerbach, Freud, Marx, Spinoza, and New Atheists proscribe religion applied to hankerings after heaven in particular as emerging from infantile fear, fantasy, wishful thinking, and ignorance.¹⁴¹ Dennett, Hitchens, and Stenger rewrite Marxist imagery of belief in heaven as sedating earthly justice and thriving.¹⁴² Dawkins and others implicate trust in heaven with evils such as suicide bombing and other mania.¹⁴³

For Harris, imagining heaven incites among believers anti-physical cravings to shed their “corporate ballast” for a context where “overly rational people and rabble will be kept out.”¹⁴⁴ According to Hitchens, faith in heaven arouses yearning for the earth’s destruction, and distastefully presages an eternal compulsion to “praise and adoration,

¹³⁶ Cf. Dawkins [2006a: 49, 243-44, 288, 357-66] also on fearing hell for the unbaptized [350] and for homosexuals [329]; S. Harris [2005: 11, 15, 20, 74, 85, cf. 30, 39, 50, 117-27, 177; 2006: vii-viii; 2008: 4, 6, 74, 86; 2010: 18; 2014: 21, 67, 201], and for oath breaking: [2010: 135, cf. 254]; C. Hitchens [2007b: 52, 55, 62, 64, 110, 117, 168, 175, 219; 2007c: xvi, xxv, 478-80], cf. [2007a: 233]: “We are the pure and chosen few, and all the rest are damned. There’s room enough in hell for you—we don’t want heaven crammed;” Stenger [2009: 329]. Cf. various complaints anthologized by C. Hitchens [2007c]: George Eliot [86], Ian McEwan [352], John Stuart Mill [58-59], Charles Templeton [285], and Ibn Warraq [408].

¹³⁷ S. Harris [2006: viii].

¹³⁸ Cf. C. Hitchens [2007c: 55, 64, 110, 168, 175, 219-20] and other sources footnoted in this section.

¹³⁹ C. Hitchens [2007b: 55; cf. 57 and 219]: “Nothing proves the man-made character of religion as obviously as the sick mind that designed hell, unless it is the sorely limited mind that has failed to describe heaven—except as a place of either worldly comfort, eternal tedium, or...continual relish in the torture of others.” C. Hitchens [2007b: 219] cites Tertullian as an example; cf. *The Shows* 30 in Erickson [1996: 34].

¹⁴⁰ C. Hitchens [e.g. 2007a: 271; 2012: 20] on those who tell him to burn in hell; cf. Warraq in C. Hitchens [2007c: 407]; B. Russell in C. Hitchens [2007c: 203]: “Heaven for ourselves and hell for our enemies.”

¹⁴¹ Cf. section 1.2.1; Feuerbach [1881: 174]: “To my wishes, my longing...no distinction between God and heaven;” Goldman, Marx, and Spinoza in C. Hitchens [2007c: 22, 64, 130]; McGrath [2003: 146-50].

¹⁴² Dennett [2006a: 35-36]; C. Hitchens [2007b: 5, 17, 56-58] and [245] on *Animal Farm* where “Moses the raven” is allowed to preach and pacify others who are enslaved by regaling “a heaven beyond the skies;” cf. Marx and Stalin in McGrath [2003: 147-48]; B. Russell in C. Hitchens [2007c: 190]; Stenger [2009: 329].

¹⁴³ Dawkins [2006a: 316, 334, 346, 399-403]; Dennett [2006a: 210, 278-85, 302, 408]; S. Harris [2010: 33]; C. Hitchens [2007c: 131, 133, 333-34, 440]; Onfray [2005: 65-67]. E.g. Mohammad Atta in Lincoln [2003: 96] consoled himself and other September 11, 2001 hijackers: “Be happy, optimistic, calm, because you are heading for a deed God loves...the day, God willing, you will spend with the women of paradise.”

¹⁴⁴ S. Harris [2005: 36, 288 cf. 28, 78, 265]; cf. Onfray [2005: 95-96].

limitless abnegation and abjection of self; a celestial North Korea.”¹⁴⁵ Inclusivism can resonate with many of these gripes more easily than Restrictivism that discounts atheist sources, or Parity Pluralism and relativism that deny objective standards to evaluate.

7.3.1 *Qualified Concord:*

New Atheists who do not countenance heaven or hell’s existence nonetheless serve as peculiar prophets to philosophies and theologies of life after death. Together with *Letter to a Christian Nation*, this dissertation has argued against Restrictivism that mistaken or missing information, beliefs, rituals, or practices are repellant criteria for damnation. Inclusivism versus Parity Pluralism coherently weighs New Atheist allegations while welcoming Pluralist, subjectivist, relativist, or other ruminations on emotional or experiential expectancies about life after death. Open Inclusivists also harbor greater optimism than Restrictivists and Closed Inclusivists concerning truth, holy criticism, and other reflective fruits budding beyond Christian tradition.¹⁴⁶ Restrictivists, Inclusivists, and Universalists can all concur against Parity Pluralists that objective as well as subjective postulates about life after death are worth sifting; but Inclusivists eschew Restrictivist evangelistic panic about hell and bring a more balanced urgency to dialogue about life after death than Universalists who are certain that everyone is going to heaven.

Unease with Restrictivism does not exhaust New Atheist-Inclusivist concord. Hitchens’ North Korea reference above rebukes idolatrous maleficence. Open Inclusivists freely entertain that unreasonable and non-biblical fear and wishful thinking infect ideas about the hereafter. Heaven as a solace for suicide bombing and other mayhem is repugnant to Wesleyans and to numerous “religious” people. Denunciations of heaven as a spiritual narcotic palliating or a stimulant perpetrating injustice challenges passivity, self-deception, and fancying heavenly sanction for individual and collective vendettas.

New Atheists who reprove gloating at another person’s damnation enunciate for Open Inclusivists on this point holier attitudes than the gloaters they reprove.¹⁴⁷ Harris’s

¹⁴⁵ C. Hitchens [2001: 64; 2007a: 56; cf. 2010: 337]; cf. Jacoby [2013: 41] on Ingersoll’s distaste for a heaven of endless Sundays “*where congregations ne’er break up / And Sabbaths never end.*”

¹⁴⁶ Cf. e.g. Griffiths [2001a] consulting premises in Buddhist Nirvana for insights into the New Creation; Viviano [2008: 82] on “Jewish, Marxist, atheist” Ernst Bloch “push[ing]” Moltmann’s eschatology.

¹⁴⁷ Coveting hell for enemies per B. Russell in C. Hitchens [2007c: 203] is incongruous with loving them; cf. Volf [2001: 89] per Barth on whether “in heaven we will see again our loved ones....Barth is reported to

savaging a paradise where “overly rational people and rabble will be kept out” reproaches reason’s under-valuers in section 3.6, and echoes Bible passages where Jesus intentionally sought “rabble” to save.¹⁴⁸ Additional points dictate more sustained interaction.

7.3.2 *Temporal and Enduring Joy:*

Distinct from Restrictivist and other pessimistic anthropologies, Wesleyan Inclusivists need not disdain atheists’ delight in the natural world, love, growth, relationships, physical, emotional, intellectual, and social fulfillment as in every incidence splendid sin or common grace that compounds atheists’ condemnation. Lesser glories can be perverted into idols or opiates (as Marx said of religion), but Wesleyans are able to exult in every stream of grace from the Deriver of all wholesome pleasure, love, and growth even if New Atheists do not consciously or rightly track its origins.¹⁴⁹

Inclusivists consistently rejoice that atheism permits metaphorical, theoretical, ‘soft,’ or prospective immortality through art, community, larger identities, causes, children, successors, and laboring in fields or disciplines such as science, literature, and ethics.¹⁵⁰ New Atheists and others who work, craft, and write in D. H. Lawrence’s phrase, thereby perform “act[s] of faith” for “unseen witnesses.”¹⁵¹ One can hypothesize that prevenient grace partly drives such efforts to surpass or lengthen one’s influence because God has “set eternity” in every heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11).¹⁵²

Believers in a holy afterlife maintain its desirability even if atheists do not depend on heaven to live joyfully or to inspire beyond their years.¹⁵³ If atheists impute “wishful

have responded, ‘Not only the loved ones!’...[People] better learn to love each other now since they will spend eternity together.” Inclusivism applies this prospective eternal love to others besides Christians.

¹⁴⁸ E.g. Matthew 9:10-13, 11:19, 21:32; Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:29-31, 7:33-50, 18:9-14; Acts 4:13.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Griffiths [2001a: 27]: “My idol may be your icon; what was once my idol might become my icon.”

¹⁵⁰ E.g. Dawkins [2003: 241-48]: “A Prayer for My Daughter;” C. Hitchens [2007c: esp. 5, 283].

¹⁵¹ D. H. Lawrence in Kinkead-Weekes [1994: 328]; cf. Ann Druyan in C. Sagan [1997: 275] epilogues that Sagan’s writing, work, and legacy “allow me to feel, without resorting to the supernatural, that Carl lives.”

¹⁵² *NIV*; cf. *NRSV*: “a sense of past and future” amidst mystery about God’s work from beginning to end.

¹⁵³ Jillette in C. Hitchens [2007c: 349-50]: “[I have] love, blue skies...family...learning...joy in every day.” See Habermas and Moreland [1998: 31-35] on history/utility of “argument[s] for desire” as suggestive if not decisive for life after death. Lewis [2001d: 135-37]: “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger...there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim...there is...water...sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is...I was made for another.”

thinking,” the sword cuts both ways.¹⁵⁴ Atheists are also hard pressed to abjure fellow atheist Shelley’s “Ozymandias” and Russell’s cosmological conclusion that children, successors, memory, causes, and all human striving is destined for burial beneath a “universe in ruins.”¹⁵⁵ Mortal life must be enough for materialist atheists, such that atheist Woody Allen’s quip is wistful at best: “I don’t want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve immortality by not dying.”¹⁵⁶ Walls details how a good life after death attends to and allays atheist obstacles to lasting meaning and joy:

The ultimate end of something casts its shadow over it and gives it final definition....Even wonderful goods may lose their meaning, or...have their meaning significantly diminished, if they come to a negative end....It may be exciting or wonderful at the time, but it finally comes to futility and frustration if death is the end....If these things are truly good things to be cherished, it is odd to say that it would be a triumph to be forever cut off from experiencing them....It might be better than to allow the prospect of death to rob one of all joy, but it is hardly for that reason an unqualified triumph.¹⁵⁷

Some atheists rest in qualified triumph, but others may toil toward “immortality” via naturalistic devices. Two are cryonics and Frank J. Tipler’s collective “Omega point” theory where God-like information processors simulate or somehow sustain every person who ever lived.¹⁵⁸ Polkinghorne estimates the second as desperately implausible, but far-fetched or not, it harnesses hope that the last enemy death might somehow be routed.¹⁵⁹

7.3.3 *Hell?*:

Before turning to death’s defeat, we first interact with New Atheists on death’s acutest expression. Contemporary Wesleyans and other Christians, even those of an orthodox or evangelical bent, are frequently loathe to write about or deal with everlasting

¹⁵⁴ E.g. Nagel [1997: 130]: “I hope there is no God!...I don’t want the universe to be like that;” cf C. Hitchens [2001: 55]; C. Hitchens in Mayer [2007: online].

¹⁵⁵ B. Russell [1957: 107]; cf. C. Hitchens [2010a: online]; Weinberg [1993: 154-55]: “Future extinction of endless cold or intolerable heat...seems pointless.” “Ozymandias” reads in part: “On the pedestal these words appear: / ‘My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings: Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’ / Nothing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that colossal wreck...lone and level sands stretch far away.”

¹⁵⁶ Allen quoted in Flew [2000: 3].

¹⁵⁷ Walls [2002: 175-81, cf. 182-97]. Oden [1998: 3:463]: “No happiness can be complete if constantly dogged by the awareness that it might soon end; hence perfect happiness must be eternal happiness.” Weinberg [1993: 154] finds some solace in active research seeking to understand the physical universe.

¹⁵⁸ Tipler [1994: e.g. xv, 8, 57, 104]; cf. e.g. Baukham [2008: 674]. Walls [2002: 184-85] and Wilkinson [2010: 19-20, 45-46, 85-86, 171, 178, 180, 186] are two Wesleyans critiquing Tipler.

¹⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:26: “The last enemy to be destroyed is death;” Polkinghorne [1998: 20-21].

death. Maddox's seminal work on Wesley's theology devotes just a few paragraphs to hell respecting "possible final rejection" of God's healing, where its alternates are "irresistible or indiscriminate salvation, both of which are contradictory to a God of *responsible grace*."¹⁶⁰ Collins in three paragraphs on Hades inserts Wesley's reference to "the nethermost hell."¹⁶¹ Wainwright in *Doxology* systematically ignores hell.¹⁶² Anglican Bishop N. T. Wright in *Surprised by Hope* is torn between the lack of inclination to write about hell, and the "recognition that one must at least say something."¹⁶³

New Atheists, their antecedents, and descendants will in all probability continue to demand accountability for ideas about hell.¹⁶⁴ Bertrand Russell before Hitchens claimed belief in hell was "one very serious defect" in Jesus's character.¹⁶⁵ Hume connected hell with theodicy.¹⁶⁶ Nietzsche preceded Dawkins by despising hell as "eternal hate."¹⁶⁷

Catholic philosopher Peter T. Geach's reply to Russell and other objectors gets at the quandary for Wesleyans and others who look to Jesus and Scripture as authorities. Christians cannot follow Jesus unless the gospels "give at least an approximately correct account of Christ's teaching."¹⁶⁸ The gospels forewarn that some creatures are eternally lost, but are less clear whether this means "endless misery or ultimate destruction."¹⁶⁹

Open Inclusivism declines Restrictivist and Universalist stringencies about who goes to hell or what hell consists of, thus licensing serious consideration of variant proposals in dialogue.¹⁷⁰ New Atheists are unlikely to be satisfied with any model of hell,

¹⁶⁰ Maddox [1994: 251, cf. 15, 161, 371-72].

¹⁶¹ K. Collins [2007: 318, 298] citing *Works* 4:190, 33; cf. Maddox [1994: 250]; Oden [1998: 3:395-96, 440], but see Oden's [3:450-59] proportionally longer section on Satan and "The Final State of the Unjust."

¹⁶² Wainwright [1980: 65, 450, 459-60] quotes hell only when referencing other authors or positions.

¹⁶³ N. Wright [2008: 175].

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Berdyaev [1948: 275-76]: "God will judge the world, but He will judge the idea[s] of hell too." Hindus, Muslims, etc. may respond for themselves to New Atheists on extra-Christian concepts of hell.

¹⁶⁵ B. Russell [1957: 17]. C. Hitchens [2007b: 175-76]: "The advent of the Prince of Peace...[portends the] ghastly idea of further punishing and torturing the dead...presaged by...the rantings of John the Baptist."

¹⁶⁶ Hume in Mossner [1980: 570] on Leibniz and "the best of all possible worlds."

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Dawkins [2006a: 359-61]; Nietzsche [2007a: 29].

¹⁶⁸ Geach [1977: 123].

¹⁶⁹ Geach [1977: 124]. See images of hell, wrath, judgment, and/or punishment in the gospels: e.g. Matthew 3:7-12, 5:22-30, 7:15-23, 8:10-12, 10:28, 10:33, 12:36-37, 13:36-50, 18:7-9, 22:1-14, 23:15-33, 24:45-51, 25:30-46; Mark 9:42-48; Luke 3:7-9, 12:5, 13:27-30, 16:19-31; John 3:18, 5:28-29.

¹⁷⁰ Contrast Hanegraaff [2000: 128] over-extending Restrictivist confidence, even if correct in his denial: "One way to God categorically demonstrates that resurrection and reincarnation can never be harmonized;" contrast Griffiths [2014: 176-77, 191] on "reincarnation" as a transition from a proposed disembodied state after death to bodily resurrection, distinguishable from transmigration of the soul or self.

but some models will be less objectionable, more faithful to Wesleyan witness, and more rightly mitigate charges that hell must be vindictive, arbitrary, or *schadenfreude*.¹⁷¹

Wesley preached hell to deter people from it.¹⁷² United Methodist Thomas Oden comparably taught that biblical rhetoric about fire, darkness, and regret was “intended to disturb....[It motivates] us to live so that we need not fear it.”¹⁷³ Still, Wesley contrary to Universalism insisted that hell was a true danger, not simply a “scarecrow” to frighten people away from sin.¹⁷⁴ Hell’s occupants for Wesley are those who “resolve to have their portion with the devil and his angels,” are self-enslaved to unholy passions, cut off from joy’s Source, and punished by degrees of severity based on their wickedness.¹⁷⁵

If, like Wesley, one countenances hell in any form, integrity prompts urging people away from it per Jillette and others in section 6.3.¹⁷⁶ Hell is a “high-consequence event,” ill-suited to flippant disregard whether it is conceived as self-exclusion, permanent separation from God, perpetual suffering, terminated conditional immortality, eternal loss of consciousness, annihilation after punishment for sin, or an amalgamation of factors.¹⁷⁷

Hell’s core for Wesleyan Inclusivists at the religious roundtable might then be the self-chosen corollary of refusing “to love the truth [and thus, the God of truth] and so be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10).¹⁷⁸ This is less coherent for Restrictivists who preclude that

¹⁷¹ See the previous sections introducing 7.3, 7.3.1, and 7.3.2 on arbitrariness and *schadenfreude*.

¹⁷² Sermon 73, “Of Hell,” §2, *Works* 3:32.

¹⁷³ Oden [1998: 3:453]; cf. Griffiths [2014: 249].

¹⁷⁴ Sermon 73, “Of Hell,” §II.4, *Works* 3:38.

¹⁷⁵ Sermon 73, “Of Hell,” *Works* 3:30-44; cf. Geach [1977: 138]: “God is the only source of beauty and knowledge and love: to turn away from God’s light is to choose darkness, hatred, and misery;” Walls [1992: 152]: “Heaven has many rooms, so perhaps hell. All have not sinned in the same manner, so all will not suffer in the same manner...[each suffers] appropriate to his sin and the character he has formed.”

¹⁷⁶ Alleviating Russell’s moral defectiveness indictment; cf. DeVan and Smythe [2006: 110-13, 128-29] defending Jesus to atheist philosopher Michael Martin; Walls [1992: 28]: If Jesus’s teaching about hell grew out of vindictiveness, Jesus’s words and actions in loving enemies lead to the opposite conclusion.

¹⁷⁷ Wilkinson [2013: 95] cites Almar and Tarter [2011] on another controversial “high-consequence event.” For concepts of hell, cf. e.g. Crockett [1996]; Kvanvig [2008]. Craig [2013: 233] warns that hell’s penalties may be self-perpetuating if the damned stoke their own sin and hatred, thus accruing more guilt. See Maddox [1994: 248, 251, 372] and McGonigle [1998: 153-75] on Wesley as less amenable to annihilation.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. section 5.2; Hebrews 2:2-4; Revelation 22:15: “Outside are...everyone who loves and practices falsehood;” Kvanvig [2008: 431]: “For in truly loving another, we must risk losing the other, and part of loving completely requires a willingness to lose the other completely.” Nichols [2010: 176]: “If there were love in hell, then there would be the possibility of salvation, for ‘love [*agape*] is from God; everyone who loves [*agapon*] is born of God and knows God’ (1 John 4:7).” Walls [1992: 150-51]: “Since God wants all creatures to be happy, the only way any could end up otherwise would be if their happiness were no longer possible.” An enraged person cannot be at peace. Resolute resentment cannot be content. Self-righteous contempt, dishonesty, and other vices clash “with real joy.”

people unevangelized before death have any chance to avoid hell, and is less sustainable for Universalists who oblige every conscious being to love the truth. Walls quotes C. S. Lewis and John Milton: “The choice of every lost soul is expressed in the words ‘Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.’ There is always something they insist on keeping even at the price of misery.... You see it easily enough in a spoiled child that would rather miss its play and its supper than say it was sorry and be friends.”¹⁷⁹

Inclusivist Wesleyans true to their tradition will incorporate into dialogue that whoever wants to elude hell can rejoice that Jesus proffers salvation and transforming grace to everyone who will responsibly receive it (e.g. Mark 10:45; John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 6:20). Section 7.3.4 explicates how Jesus also previews everlasting life.

7.3.4 The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting:

Harris and Hitchens protest above a blinkered heaven of “worldly comfort” or alternately “eternal tedium” that despises the physical world and debases the self through compulsory praise. How do Inclusivist Wesleyans gainfully interact? First, as in other instances, by appreciating the grace-invigorated aspects in New Atheists’ objections.

Christians and others who believe in life after death often fall prey to Platonic, dualist, Gnostic, Docetic, Manichean, and a host of other anti-physical presumptions and philosophies that human bodies and physical reality are inherently shameful, demonic, prisons for the soul or spirit, created by a lesser or evil being such as a *demiurge*, destined for destruction, or otherwise despicable, unworthy, or antithetical to higher reality.¹⁸⁰ Hitchens alludes to heavenly visions polarizing lascivious harems (usually tailored to male tastes) with disembodied mental or intellectual contemplations that again in their vicious forms relish the agonies of the damned.¹⁸¹ Other theories and polarities range from theocentric ontologies where creatures are absorbed into the D/divine and virtually or

¹⁷⁹ Lewis [2001c: 71] quoted in Walls [2009: 165]; cf. R. Adams [1988: 104]: “God cannot demonstrate his inclusiveness toward separatists if they refuse to be included.... The persistent separatist thereby forces God to compromise his policy of inclusiveness itself: either he includes the separatist and excludes those with whom the separatist refuses to associate; or he includes the latter and the former separate themselves.”

¹⁸⁰ Feuerbach [1881: 287]: “*Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the salvation of his soul.*” For Wesleyan repudiations and interactions with this type of allegation, cf. e.g. K. Collins [2007: 313-31]; Maddox [1994: 230-53; 2004b: 21-52]; Oden [1998: 1:225-315]; Walls [1992; 2002; 2008; 2012]; Wilkinson [2010]; and Willimon [2007: 99-111]. But see Maddox [2013] for Charles Wesley’s less sanguine sentiments about human and cosmic physicality.

¹⁸¹ See again C. Hitchens [2007b: 5, 17, 52-58, 62-64, 110, 117, 168, 175, 219-20, 233].

actually cease to exist as individuals, to anthropocentric gratifications where God's presence is muted or effectively irrelevant. Others cast a static perfectionism with no opportunity for change or growth if one is already 'perfect,' or else a backward-looking reunion of family and friends comprising little more than fond reminiscence.¹⁸²

Wesleyans at their best will be unwilling as well as unable to force New Atheists to countenance life after death, commending instead orthodox Christian esteem for physical reality and other "tempting" features of eternal life in reciprocally loving God and God's creation forever.¹⁸³ The Apostle's Creed confesses that God made physical reality; Jesus partook of it via birth, resurrection, and physical healings; and the community of saints persists through bodily resurrection to everlasting life. Scripture and Wesleyan tradition put flesh on Creedal frames.¹⁸⁴ Ensuing paragraphs concentrate on Jesus's resurrection as a touchstone for the final physical character of life after death.

Mainstream Wesleyans with other Christians from their inception recite liturgy and confessional theology that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day *ex vetere* in the same yet transformed body that he was crucified, died, and buried according to testimony corroborated by his empty tomb.¹⁸⁵ Jesus for such Wesleyans was not resuscitated in the same manner as Lazarus (John 11), replaced by a doppelganger or replica, swooned and later revived naturally or therapeutically, had his body stolen or his disciples hallucinate or encounter his immaterial "ghost;" nor did Jesus merely symbolically rise from the dead in his followers' hearts.¹⁸⁶ In addition to departing from Christian orthodoxy, each of these undercuts concrete physical resurrection. Jesus's resurrected presence in the gospels was recognizable (if not always immediately), had flesh and bones; bore marks of his crucifixion; could cook, eat, talk, be touched, and probably travel more efficiently than his pre-resurrection body (cf. Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Sometimes bestselling literature on assorted heaven concepts are: Albom [2003]; Alcorn [2004]; Chopra [2006]; Eadie [1992]; Janney [2009]; McDannell and Lang [2001]; McGrath [2003]; and J. Russell [1997].

¹⁸³ Cf. e.g. Sermon 33, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, XIII," §II.2, *Works* 1:692; sections 7.2, 7.4 for additional "tempting" (per Hitchens) features pertaining to resolution of evil, ethics, and morality.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Abraham [2008: 591] revelation as essential to claims about future divine action.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. K. Collins [2007: 110-12, 166, 357]; Maddox [1994: 95-98, 106, 205, on resurrection / eschatology generally: 231-38, 248-51, 290, 305, 309, 370-71]; Oden [1998: 2:451-501, 3:402]; Willimon [2007: 9, 20-28, 37, 42, 101, 116]. N. Wright [2003] is the standard early twenty-first text on Jesus's resurrection.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. e.g. Habermas and Moreland [1998: 112-54] for a Pentecostal Wesleyan and non-Calvinist Baptist interaction on how characters and circumstances in the gospels negatively prefigure these options.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. John 2:19-21; perhaps exempting his Matthew 17:1-13, Mark 9:1-13, Luke 9:28-36 transfiguration.

Philippians 3:20-21 succinctly enunciates the hope that 1 Corinthians 15 and other biblical witness expands: “Christ...will transform the body of our humiliation (or our humble bodies) [so] that it may be conformed to the body of his glory.”¹⁸⁸ 1 Corinthians 15 calls Jesus’s resurrection “first fruits,” anticipating “all who will be made alive,” and analogizing a buried seed that “dies” in order to be raised to greater glory, as well as diverse glories shown through animals, birds, fish, the sun, moon, and stars.

Millard Erickson suggests that the ascended Jesus was further transfigured, such that his resurrected physicality developed in [at least] two stages. If future resurrections progress as Jesus’s did, they could surpass his early gospel resurrection appearances.¹⁸⁹ Wesleyans may speculate similarly with the proviso that the exalted Jesus who the Creed affirms sits at God’s right hand may shine with a distinct splendor from God’s creatures.

Central to Wesleyan conviction is that all of physical creation, not just humanity, partakes in renewal or resurrection of what constitutes a New Creation, a New Heavens and New Earth at the micro, macro, and every level in between.¹⁹⁰ Christians debate whether an interim disembodiment, “sleep,” or loss of consciousness after death precedes bodily resurrection, but most affirm a robustly physical New Creation, perhaps variously acclimated for angels or other purely spiritual beings.¹⁹¹ Romans 8:19-24 is crucial:

For the creation...subjected to futility...will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Cf. e.g. 1 John 3:2 in Hays [2001: 130]: “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed we shall be like him, for we will see him as he is.” As Benjamin Franklin at age twenty-three recorded by his grandson [1838: 196] poeticized: “The Body of Benjamin Franklin Printer (Like the cover of an old book, Its contents torn out, And stript of its lettering and gilding) Lies here, food for worms. But the work shall not be lost, For it will (as he believed) appear once more, In a new, and more elegant edition, Revised and corrected by THE AUTHOR.”

¹⁸⁹ Erickson [2013: 1100]; cf. Hays [2001: 126]: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 is “a new embodied state beyond our limited powers of imagination;” Thiselton [2012: 114]: “Christ represents a sample of the resurrected mode of existence *as it appears in this world*... [not] the raised mode of existence *comprehensively*.”

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Berdyaev in Louth [2013: 238, 245-46]: “Animals, plants, minerals, every blade of grass—all must be transfigured...brought in...;” Craig [2008c: 605]: Jesus’s resurrection betokens cosmic resurrection. Westermann [1984: 176]: “That the first page of the Bible speaks about heaven and earth, the Sun, the Moon, and stars, about plants and trees...birds, fish, and animals, is a certain sign that the God whom we acknowledge in the Creed...is concerned with all these creatures, and not merely with humans.”

¹⁹¹ E.g. K. Collins [2007: 313-27]; Maddox [1994: 247-53]; Oden [1998: 3:367-468]; Walls [2002; 2008].

¹⁹² Cf. Wilkinson [2010: 61-84] for a Wesleyan engagement with “eschatologies of the Bible” in Isaiah 11:1-9, 65:17-25; Romans 8:18-30; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1-8.

Wesley in a sermon on Romans 8:19-22 exhorted that God is rich in mercy to all God's "works," does not overlook nor despise any part of creation, originally intended animals to be immortal and to experience some quality of passion, understanding, and [free?] will; and for every creature to "to be happy, according to their degree."¹⁹³ Wesley tacitly countered anthropocentric exploitation that Maddox reproves (cf. section 3.8) and predicted that fauna and implicitly flora will be delivered from all corruption to receive "a measure, according as they are capable, of 'the liberty of the children of God.'"¹⁹⁴

Wesley speculated that if God restores redeemed humanity "equal to the angels," God might augment other "chain of being" segments by amplifying non-human animals' capacities to reason, know, love, and enjoy the "Author of their being."¹⁹⁵ Revelation 5:13 testifies to "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessings and honor and glory and might forever and ever!'"¹⁹⁶ God according to Wesley will heal all natural evil and wipe away not only human tears, but those of every willing creature who personalizes Romans 8:18 in light of eternity: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory...to be revealed to us."¹⁹⁷

Wesley preached that God transforms, vivifies, and heals physical creation of every danger and damage in a "universal restoration" at elemental, corporeal, and macro levels; even supposing the possibility of "a plurality of [inhabited] worlds."¹⁹⁸ Wilkinson extends this consummation in more detail to any extra-terrestrial intelligence God creates, and speaks to pessimistic views not only of telluric or solaric freeze, meltdown, entropy,

¹⁹³ Sermon 60, "The General Deliverance," *Works* 2:436-50; quotation from §2, *Works* 2:438.

¹⁹⁴ Sermon 60, "The General Deliverance," §III.2, *Works* 2:445; cf. Calvin 3.9.1-2 [1989; 2:28-29].

¹⁹⁵ Sermon 60, "The General Deliverance," §§I.5, III.6, *Works* 2:441, 448. The wicked may inversely descend beneath animals, cf. §III.11, *Works* 2:449-50; K. Collins [2007: 326-32]; Maddox [1994: 253]; Wilkinson [2010: 162-70] redeeming animal nature. Pauw [2001: 48] interpreting Jonathan Edwards that God will exalt "good angels...far above the devil's original stature." Alcorn [2004: 389-90] surmises at least some resurrected animals may talk per narrative imagery in Genesis 3; Numbers 22; Revelation 5, 8.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. imagery of non-human creatures or "all things" portrayed in Deuteronomy 7:13-14, 28:1-4; Psalm 50:11, 104, 145:13; Ecclesiastes 3:21; Isaiah 11:6-9; Matthew 19:28; Revelation 8:13, 21:5.

¹⁹⁷ Sermon 60, "The General Deliverance," §III.2, *Works* 2:446 commenting on Revelation 21:4; cf. §III.4, *Works* 2:447; 2 Corinthians 4:17. Yet Wesley in e.g. §III.5, *Works* 2:447-28 did not relativize all creatures' worth and dignity; cf. K. Collins [2007: 325-27, 400]; DeVan and Smythe [2006: 117-18, 134-35]; Griffiths [2014: 289, cf. 293] on New Creation reconciling "blood-soaked" human-animal relationships.

¹⁹⁸ Outler and Heitzenrater [1991: 493]; Sermon 64, "The New Creation," §§7-10, 18, *Works* 2:503-04, 510; *NT Notes*, 2 Peter 3:13: "holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in paradise." Griffiths [2014: 301-02]: Inanimate creations' damaging relations with other creatures too will be put right.

or collapse, but to Russell's universe in ruins: The physical universe will not devolve or 'dematerialize' into nothing. God will purify resurrect, and release it from decay.¹⁹⁹

New and other atheists may holler "wishful thinking!," and without God's transforming grace, it is.²⁰⁰ Wesleyan and other Christians nevertheless constructively offer in dialogue an understanding of resurrection that heightens "tempting" (ala Hitchens) consequences for a number of priorities that atheists as well as Christians cherish.

First among these is healing, resuming, and enhancing relationships with other creatures. New Atheist grumbles against "religion" normally target sin, pain, and evils which Oden and Revelation 21 envision God banishing from the New Heavens, New Earth, and New Jerusalem along with all inhibitors of meaningful, mutually enriching relationships.²⁰¹ For optimistic Inclusivists, God's maximally gracious invitation does not restrict to those who identify as Christians after Jesus or God's covenant people before Jesus, but to all who freely respond to God's grace as the source of all that is good, true, and lovely. God transmutes all partakers in New Creation to be free from defects and sin, enabling them to signify Jesus's great commands to love God, others, and themselves.²⁰²

Wesleyans can posit steps in prevenient and transforming grace among responsive creatures perhaps first to admire reconciliation, then to mature in willingness and longing to reconcile, and finally to foster reconciliation with and amidst others. Recommencing at least select relationships with friends, children, colleagues, and other loved ones after death will surely be more attractive to some atheists than obliteration; and mending relationships with those who to a lesser degree one has hurt or was hurt by could fortify character crucial to reconcile with enemies.²⁰³ An interim heaven, Purgatory, Final Judgment, growth in New Creation, or a combination of these might facilitate this.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ Wilkinson [2010: e.g. 75-78, 86; 2013]; cf. Abraham [2008: 592-93]; Oden [1998: 3:371-72, 442-43] for traditional concord. On God not fashioning such a cosmos first see section 7.2 on transworld depravity.

²⁰⁰ Nichols [2010: 139]: "All this indicates that we cannot evolve naturally into the state of resurrection;" but Craig [2008c: 602, 606] theistically adapts Dyson [1979: 447] that cosmological oblivion is based on assuming "intelligent agents do not interfere with...envisioned natural processes;" cf. S. Davis [2008: 394].

²⁰¹ Oden [1998: 3:463-68].

²⁰² Cf. Oden [1998: 3:403-09]. One can view this transmutation as gradual, punctuated, or instantaneous; Habermas and Moreland [1998: 277]: "Part of the glorification process...[will either likely] involve the free choice to reach the state where we can no longer sin...[or else] *be able not to sin.*"

²⁰³ Or maybe enemies must begin reconciliation with those most estranged first: cf. Volf [2001: 105].

²⁰⁴ Cf. Volf [2001: esp. 99-102]: "Reconciliation of those who died unreconciled will be included in the eschatological transition," but the wicked refuse to show or receive grace or truth from God and others.

Per 1 Corinthians 13:12, Oden foresees relationships with God, other creatures, and the created order enhanced by authentic communication and sharper knowledge: “We will fully love, for we will fully know, knowing even as we are known.”²⁰⁵ Quoting Jerome, New Creational knowing builds on earthly precedents: “Learn on earth that knowledge which will continue with us in heaven.”²⁰⁶ In boundless growth or C. S. Lewis’s epektatic language of “further up and further in,” this knowing may not portend omniscience, but accurate epistemological faculties directed by impeccable intention.²⁰⁷

Oden cites traditional Christian sources to forecast life everlasting as terminating homelessness and customizing contexts for creativity and service.²⁰⁸ This synergistic, reciprocal, and interactive New Creation fits with Lewis’s proposal that:

[Each person] has a curious shape...made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions....All that you are, sins apart, is destined, if you will let God have His good way, to utter satisfaction....Your place in heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, because you were made for it.”²⁰⁹

Wesleyan Inclusivists can resonate with the Reformed A. A. Hodge on human activity in the New Creation, and with Alcorn that humans worked in Eden, that labor was only cursed *post culpa*, that Genesis 1-2, John 4:34, and 5:17 declare God the Father and Jesus are workers who find satisfaction in their work, and that humanity as God’s image bearers will pursue gratifying enterprises in the New Creation.²¹⁰

The eternal home...[of redeemed humans] must necessarily be thoroughly human in its structure, conditions, and activities...rational, moral, emotional, voluntary and active...exercise of all the faculties, the gratification of all tastes, the development of all talent capacities, the realization of all ideals. The reason, the intellectual curiosity, the social affinities, the inexhaustible resources of strength

²⁰⁵ Oden [1998: 3:447, 461]; cf. 1 Corinthians 13:9-13 for immediate context; Thiselton [2012: 91-92].

²⁰⁶ Jerome, *Letters* 53 in Oden [1998: 3:462]. As with heavenly “treasures” in e.g. Matthew 6:20-21.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Coakley [2001: 65-66]; Danielou [1961]; Hart [2008: 488]; Nichols [2010: 62-63, 80, 170-71, 200]; Robb-Dover [2008] on Gregory of Nyssa, ecstatic pilgrimage, endless transformation and adventure. Lewis [2000g: 211, cf. 85-210]: “Every chapter is better than the one before.” Cf. Wesleyans Bounds [2013]; Maddox [1994: 253, 373]: “Growth in grace was so characteristic of the Christian life that the ‘perfect’ would continue to grow to all eternity....One is tempted to say...Wesley finally exchanged the static ‘rest’ of heaven for the progressive ‘life’ of the new creation;” Middleton [2014: 71-73]; J. W. Smith [2003]; Walls [2008: 403]: “constantly increasing desire;” Wilkinson [2010: 132]; Willimon [2007: 101, 105].

²⁰⁸ Oden [1998: 3:462-63] citing voices from Christian tradition on e.g. creative worship and music; S. Harris [2014: 209] affirms Hitchens speaking for “spiritual pleasures afforded by...poetry, music, and art.”

²⁰⁹ Lewis [2001e: 152].

²¹⁰ Alcorn [2004: 308-21]; cf. Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” §§I.1-3, *Works* 2:438-40 on Eden prefiguring New Creation and humanity as viceregent stewarding other creation(s); N. Wright [2008: 161].

and power native to the human... must all find in heaven exercise and satisfaction
....[There will always be] a goal of endeavor before us, ever future.²¹¹

All of this proceeds wherein “divine glory and creaturely happiness coincide.”²¹²
Atheists who hope and plug away for theoretically infinite progress in philosophy, ethics,
literary and artistic acumen, and science that contributes to physical, mental, aesthetic,
social and cosmic flourishing may still dismiss any or all of the above as propitious
fantasy. Yet sober deliberation renders New Creation’s physical character and its
correlates not coercively convincing, but poignantly appealing in whole as well as in
parts. Cessation of all relationships, ingenuity, growth, physicality, and other glories is
hardly preferable, except to the metaphysically suicidal or the incorrigibly defiant.²¹³

7.4 Ethics and Eternity

Tallying ethical and other prospering together with science and the problem of evil
encompasses a noteworthy portion of New Atheist complaints about or to “religion.” New
Atheists decrying religion-associated immorality normally dissociate from unbridled
libertinism, historic French anarchists, and postmodernism to avow that atheism nourishes
ethical thriving.²¹⁴ Barker, Dawkins, and Jillette advocate children’s character
development “*without religion.*”²¹⁵ Harris employs landscape imagery wherein atheism
gears humanity to scale ethical peaks, while “religion” leads to valleys of moral,
experiential, and societal squalor and death.²¹⁶ Hitchens culminates *god is not Great* by
calling for “a renewed Enlightenment” where literature and poetry flowers “for its own

²¹¹ A. Hodge [1976: 400]; cf. Griffiths [2014: 279]: “what is properly delightful...to the maximal degree;”
Habermas and Moreland [1998: 279-280]; McGrath [2003: 118]: “All that is good about humanity will
be...retained, yet transfigured.” New Testament hints at post-mortal activity are e.g. Matthew 19:28 on
disciples “judging” at “the renewal of all things,” Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27 parables on
overseeing or increasing treasures or cities; 2 Timothy 2:10-12 and Revelation 20:4-6, 22:3-6 on reigning,
Revelation 19:1-4 loud voices and worship, Revelation 21:24-27 indicating travel and/or transport of
glorious, honorable, splendid (goods or wealth?) from or by royalty among the nations.

²¹² Pauw [2001: 45]; cf. Psalm 16:11 conjoins God and God’s ways with “pleasures forevermore;” Walls
[2008: 406-07] parses self-exhausting from repeatable, inventively patterned, well-distributed pleasures.

²¹³ Cf. e.g. atheist Philip Larkin, *Aubade* in Griffiths [2014: 209]: “The mind blanks at...total emptiness for
ever...sure extinction that we travel to and shall be lost in always...And soon; nothing more terrible.”

²¹⁴ But cf. Nietzscheans such as Onfray. C. Hitchens [2007c: vii-ix] again omits de Sade, Nietzsche, and
postmodernists such as Rorty. See DeVan [2011c; 2011e] for parts of 7.4 in earlier form.

²¹⁵ In McGowan [2007: title]: *Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids without Religion.*

²¹⁶ S. Harris [2010: 7, 28, 33-34, 41, 53, 74, 77, 102, 184, 190, 206-07, 225-27, esp. 145-76 on religion; cf.
2005: 50-79, 170-203]. Dawkins, Krauss, McEwan, and Pinker all endorse S. Harris [2010: back cover].

sake and for the eternal ethical questions with which it deals.”²¹⁷ Hitchens in a scheduled October 2015 posthumous release reiterates *Why Religion is Immoral*, as do other New Atheist projects by Barker, Dawkins, Dennett, Epstein, Pinker, and Stenger.²¹⁸

7.4.1 *Once More to Attitudinal and Operational Advantages:*

Section 7.4 does not attempt to construct a comprehensive Wesleyan ethic or to terminate give and take by “disproving” New Atheist allegations as heirs to *evidentialist apologetics* might try to do.²¹⁹ Instead, as with science and religion, problems of evil and suffering, a Wesleyan Open Inclusivist approach demonstrates a number of advantages for dialogue on ethics and the good life that mitigate liabilities in alternative approaches.

Open more than Closed Inclusivism, Restrictivism, or Exclusivism in any religious tradition impels diverse interlocutors to value each other’s ethical insights, virtues, and from a Wesleyan angle God’s transforming grace beyond as well as within the visible church. Gratefulness for God’s grace through any conduit is neither taken aback, nor suffers dissonance, if atheists and others who do not now confess that Jesus is Lord display virtue, articulate moral truths or wisdom, or personify practices individually or in aggregate that seem more faithful, spiritually attuned, innovative, sophisticated, or mature in certain respects than Christians individually or corporately. Sensitivity to God’s universal grace also underwrites “good faith” Christian-atheist relationships wherever their ethical convictions and practices intersect, but without the Universalist surety that every atheist must eventually—if to differing degrees or some taking longer than others—acquiesce to true and holy ethics and practices that God compels them to enact.

Baggett and Walls interject that Wesleyan tradition is more helpful than traditional forms of Calvinism with regard to overlapping criteria, intuitions, and religiously diverse interlocutors’ abilities to discriminate good from evil. If Calvinists qualify that God’s or other goodness is not commonly *recognizable* due to human depravity or to unconditional election where not every person receives an authentic opportunity to accept God’s

²¹⁷ C. Hitchens [2007b: 283] again (hyperbolically?) “banish[es] all religions from the discourse.”

²¹⁸ C. Hitchens [2015: title; cf. 2007b: 173-94]; Barker [2011; 2015]; Dawkins [2006a: 241-67]; Dennett [1995: 452-510; 2006: 278-307]; Epstein [2009]; Pinker [2008]; cf. Aikin and Talisse [2011]; Flanagan [2007]; King and Garcia [2009]; Shermer [2015]; Zuckerman [2014].

²¹⁹ Maddox in section 3.8 on *evidentialist apologetics*. For more wide-ranging Wesleyan ethics or ethics by Wesleyans: Dunning [1998]; Hays [1996]; D. Long [2005]; Lowery [2008]; Oden [2014]; R. Stone [2001].

regenerative grace, this inclines to a “radical Voluntarism” with God’s goodness as arbitrary, and “our noetic faculties are too skewed to trust our own moral judgments.”²²⁰ Baggett and Walls contrast God’s prevenient and transforming grace as universally enlightening human conscience, so that: “While God’s goodness exceeds ours...it’s still ultimately recognizable, perhaps with difficulty in some cases, as real goodness.”²²¹

The forms of Calvinism Baggett and Walls demarcate along with Restrictivism, Exclusivism, and Closed Inclusivism strain to make intelligible when, why, or how people or groups differentiating from Christianity appear to live, reason, or communicate more righteously, honorably, or winsomely than their Christ-following counterparts.²²² If Christianity or Christians by definition outdo or intensify every extra-Christian virtue, then Closed Inclusivists must appeal to the unknown or undetectable, oblige special pleading against nonpareil extra-Christian moral philosophy and behavior, or remonstrate that sufficiently devastating corruption underlies all extra-Christian praxes and prudence; unnecessarily diminishing rapport with atheist and other extra-Christian interlocutors.

Restrictivist or Exclusivist presuppositions further foment suspicion if they deplore extra-Christian virtues as degenerate, demonic, depraved, sham, or “splendid sin.”²²³ For Inclusivist Wesleyans, Rabbi Gamaliel’s counsel in Acts 5:34-39 cautions against Restrictivist or Exclusivist postures that devalue or inveigh against God’s transforming grace in pre-Christian, extra-Christian, or self-styled anti-Christian lives. One must be careful how, what, and whom one censures, lest one find oneself fighting against God.

Parity Pluralism, relativism, and subjectivism beget their own hazards to ethical percipience, dialogue, and action. Each fails to stabilize ontological or epistemic bases to coordinate or adjudicate ethics among disparate traditions, because they rule untenable any firm foundations for objective right and wrong. Relativism by definition does not defend objective goodness, and it cannot be relied upon to critique perceived moral travesties.²²⁴

²²⁰ Baggett and Walls [2011: 66, 71, 73-74, 80]: How does one rationally trust one’s moral intuitions if they deceive about the maximal “moral hideousness” of arbitrarily damning the non-elect, if and when God could have just as easily reconciled with them in eternal joy?

²²¹ Baggett and Walls [2011: 80].

²²² Allocating all such extra-Christian virtues to satanic deception is one uncharitable way to resolve this.

²²³ As in section 7.2; cf. e.g. Sermon 99, “The Reward of the Righteous,” §1.4 *Works* 3:403-04.

²²⁴ Cf. Duke Divinity School ethicist Luke Bretherton [2006: 147] esp. quoting Catholic David Hollenbach [2002: 41]: “When acceptance of difference becomes acquiescence in deep social disparities and human misery it becomes part of the problem, not part of the solution;” Wesleyan Andy Crouch [2008: 141]: How do relativists rebuke the “cultural dead ends of history, from...gas chambers to waterboards?”

Harris epitomizes New Atheists disavowing cultural and ethical relativism:

Even the most bizarre and unproductive behaviors—female genital excision, blood feuds, infanticide, the torture of animals, scarification, foot binding, cannibalism, ceremonial rape, human sacrifice, dangerous male initiations, restricting the diet of pregnant and lactating mothers, slavery, potlatch, the killing of the elderly, sati, irrational dietary and agricultural taboos attended by chronic hunger and malnourishment...etc.—have been rationalized, or even idealized in the fire-lit scribbles of one or another dazzled ethnographer.²²⁵

Harris states that some modes of living are absolutely healthier, more worthwhile, and more moral than others.²²⁶ Not every resolution to ethical predicaments is equally desirable or free from error, but science illuminating physical reality supplies data for ethical decision-making that in turn bolsters physical and other types of wellbeing.²²⁷

Today, a person can consider himself physically healthy if he is free of detectable disease, able to exercise, and destined to live into his eighties without suffering obvious decrepitude. But this standard may change....Walk[ing] a mile on your hundredth birthday will not always constitute “health.” There may come a time when not being able to run a marathon at age five hundred will be considered a profound disability.²²⁸

Objective morality and thriving are vital to New Atheist ethics, but Inclusivists and other non-relativists best push New Atheists in dialogue to substantiate how or why atheism with “reason” and “science” establishes coherent ontological bedrock for the absolute, universal, normative, utilitarian or consequentialist ethics they profess.²²⁹ How is absolute morality feasible if there is no ultimate or God-like grounding for it? Harris in *The Moral Landscape* and Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* outline intuitions and motives for behaving ethically (e.g. to maximize pleasure, sexual fitness, reputation and reciprocity,

²²⁵ S. Harris [2010: 20].

²²⁶ E.g. S. Harris [2010: 19]: “Must we really argue that beneficence, trust, creativity...in a prosperous civil society are better than the horrors of civil war endured in a steaming jungle filled with aggressive insects?”

²²⁷ Cf. S. Harris [2010: 7-9, 12-22, 189-91]; also [2010: 2, cf. 4, 12, 42, 52, 72-72, 77] prognosticates that better ways of living are truer to the facts. That humans do not yet know *all* facts—and disagree how to weigh competing values—does not make facts and values imaginary, strictly subjective, or relative.

²²⁸ S. Harris [2010: 12]; cf. Isaiah 65; Taylor [2007: 99-145] notes ever-increasing standards for presumably civil behavior, manners, and ethical practices in Europe from the late medieval to the early modern periods.

²²⁹ Noting this omission are e.g. Copan [2008: 141-161]; Crean [2007: 95-106]; Eberstadt [2010: 92-105]; P. Hitchens [2010: 141-52]; P. Williams [2013: 133-70]; Wilson in Hitchens and Wilson [2008: 33-34, 37-41, 46-49, 55-58, 63-66]; Linville [2009: 58-73]; Madrid and Hensley [2010: 55-124]; Meister [2009: 107-18]; G. Peterson [2010: 159-77]; cf. M. Buckley [1987: 44-45, 76, 377, 383]; Ryan [2014: *passim*]. Nor do New Atheists appeal to Platonic forms or eternity as non-theistic bases for morality per Taylor [2007: 114, 163-64, 367, 446]; cf. Garcia and King [2009] for atheist and theist philosophers on “objective moral duty.”

hope to avoid pain in this life or the next), but they do not supply an ontological source, authority, or arbiter for moral convictions and outrage.²³⁰

Hitchens feints that questioning atheist coherence about morality is equivalent to declaring that atheists are incapable of living morally: “Name one ethical statement made or one ethical action performed, by a believer that could not have been uttered or done by a nonbeliever. And here is my second challenge. Can any reader...think of a wicked statement...or an evil action performed, precisely *because* of religious faith?”²³¹

When atheist and Wesleyan ethical priorities coalesce, and when atheists behave as or more ethically than Christians, they serve as peculiar prophets to spur Wesleyan and other Open Inclusivists to live more faithfully. One can remain sympathetic to ethical kinships with New Atheists as we have seen throughout this thesis without ignoring or excusing New Atheist deficiencies in grounding objective morality.

7.4.2 *Proleptic Epektasis*:

As earlier chapters argued, Wesleyans and New Atheists converge on commitment to truth, logic or reason, scientific research, awe at the physical universe, and realism about its travails. Wesleyans concur in principle with New and other atheists on human dignity and creativity valuing literary, disciplinary, and aesthetic excellence; cultivating character, the intellect, and beneficence; relieving suffering, pursuing present and lasting joy, open discussion, and collaboration. Wesleyan Inclusivists and New Atheists oppose spiritual and social ills such as warmongering, slavery, devaluing medicine or technology, worship of morally obscene divinities, idolatry, superstition, pretenses to “prove” God exists, and ignorance or mistaken ideas as sufficient or decisive for damnation.²³²

²³⁰ Dawkins [2006d]; S. Harris [2010: *passim*]. Are local or universal governance, majority consensus, might makes right, personal passion, preference, or satisfaction ontologically adequate? If so, how?

²³¹ C. Hitchens [2007a: online]. Weigel [2005] proposes that atheism is less likely to inspire specific types of beauty or goodness such as cathedrals, Donne’s sonnets, much art, literature, and music. One may also revisit atheism aligned with or vindicating militancy by the likes of Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot. See DeVan [2011e: online] for multiple replies to “Hitchens’ challenge.” Wesleyan scripture readers might ask how New Atheist premises would generate e.g. the Sermon on the Mount, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (cf. section 6.7 on Hitchens disdaining enemy love), many if not all of the Ten Commandments, or invigorate living by Jesus’s two greatest commandments in Mark 12:28-33.

²³² Thus contesting that atheist ethics fundamentally skew from ethics of (other) religious traditions.

Section 7.2 concluded with Ehrman that suffering should not lead to intellectual explanations alone, but to “living response.”²³³ Harris also concedes, if minimally, that “rewards and punishments of an afterlife...[alter] temporal characteristics of the moral landscape.”²³⁴ Wesleyan-New Atheist dialogue on maximally meaningful, ethical lives thus asks what kind of people and priorities Wesleyan New Creational faith evokes.²³⁵

First, if physicality at the micro, macro, and every level in between is not a prison for souls or spirits, devilishly derived, or ill-fated to final freeze or fry, but “very good,” ordained for purification, resurrection, and growth in a glorious New Heavens and Earth; the imports for proleptic or anticipatory living reverberate from the nuclear to the cosmic levels. Bill Maher presages “religion” propelling nuclear world war, but the *United Methodist Book of Discipline* concretizes stewardship stimulating not ecological or other recklessness, but God’s redemptive flourishing for every aspect of the physical world: the air, animal life, atoms, climate, energy, minerals, outer space, plants, soil, and water.²³⁶

Second, if non-human animals including “the Pig” whom Hitchens states “Heaven Hates,” are co-participants in the New Creation whose capacities to reason, know, love, and enjoy God and each other will be gloriously uplifted, what sort of “living response” prefigures this?²³⁷ Some will opt for vegetarianism, as Wesley did “for a time.”²³⁸ The *Discipline* sustains protecting and conserving animal life and health, “humane treatment of pets, domesticated animals...research, wildlife, and the painless slaughtering of meat animals, fish, and fowl.”²³⁹ If humans share eternity with other creatures who at or beyond Judgment Day receive recompense and accountability for suffering, Wesleyans

²³³ Ehrman [2008: 122, 276-78] to address poverty, homelessness, violent oppression, disease such as malaria, access to clean food and water, education, living wages, genocide, bigotry, racism, gender or sexual discrimination, building friendships, cherishing family, food, drink, art, music, visiting the sick, supporting local and international charities, volunteering, and voting for just political initiatives / politicians.

²³⁴ S. Harris [2010: 18]; cf. [2014: 79]: “albeit ones that stand a good chance of being...imaginary.”

²³⁵ Cf. e.g. Baggett and Walls [2011: 180-206]; Maddox [1994: 242-47, 367-70; 2004b: *passim*, esp. 49]; Middleton [2014: 24]; N. Wright [2008: 230, 284, 286, cf. 148]: “Christian ethics...celebrates and embodies...new creation...*We should live in the present as people...made complete in the future.*”

²³⁶ *The Book of Discipline*, §160 [2012: 105-07]: e.g. “cleanup of polluted air, water, and soil, curbing industrial byproducts and nuclear waste;” Maher [2008: 1:32:00-end]; cf. Maddox [1994: 242-43].

²³⁷ C. Hitchens [2007b: 37-41]; Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” §§1.5, III.6, *Works* 2:441, 448.

²³⁸ K. Collins [2003: 283]; cf. Maddox [2007b: title, 18-19, 29-31].

²³⁹ *The Book of Discipline*, §160 [2012: 106] regrets commercial, multinational, and corporate wildlife exploitation, eco-destruction, compromising biodiversity, and damaging animal population resilience. Meister [2012: 108] advises volunteering, adopting, or caring for neglected/abused animals, or donating time or money to shelters. One could add initiating structures to care for animals when such needs are unmet.

proleptically strive for animal thriving that Wesley and Wilkinson in section 7.3 implied includes any extra-terrestrial intelligence or other life that God has created.²⁴⁰

Third, chapter 6 argued that all people as *Imago Dei*, candidates for the New Heavens and Earth, merit freedom of conscience, expression, religion, collaboration, constructive competition or opposition where applicable, voluntary participation in the marketplace of ideas, and most of all, love. The *Discipline* adjoins that derogatory actions or language toward people of any ability, age, culture, economic, ethnic, gender, immigrant, marital, national, race, religious, sexual status, background, or other feature “does not reflect value for one another, and contradicts the gospel of Jesus Christ.”²⁴¹

The *Discipline* supports societal structures for food safety and distribution, mental and medical health care, the dying and those affected by abortion, organ transplants and donors, many genetic and scientific technologies, sexuality’s inherent goodness, healing and preventing abuse, exploitation, harassment, and violence; restraint toward alcohol, chemical drugs, consumerism, gambling, and tobacco; assisting the poor, and challenging the rich.²⁴² Wesley wrote proleptically: “I...as well as the other preachers who are in town, diet with the poor on the same food and at the same table. And we rejoice herein as a comfortable earnest of our eating bread together in our Father’s kingdom.”²⁴³

Wesleyans living proleptically will invest in various ethical arenas according to their capacities, talents, resources, and ardor.²⁴⁴ Those alert to Wesleyan New Creational hope, however, will advance all of the above as ethically laudable in what the *Discipline* declares are nurturing social, economic, and political communities.²⁴⁵

Fourth, if Wesleyan hope for God’s creatures is eternal growth rather than static or duplicative “perfection,” then earthly life inaugurates kaleidoscopic trajectories for infinitely reflecting the *Imago Dei* “from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians

²⁴⁰ Cf. Griffiths [2014: 289, 293]: “Plants and animals will be resurrected...to permit the transfiguration of human blood-soaked relations with them, and thus bring those relations to their proper perfection...In the resurrection...[humans will] delight in the mosquito...coyote...rattlesnake as much as the newborn lamb.”

²⁴¹ *The Book of Discipline*, §§161-66 [2012: 108-42].

²⁴² *The Book of Discipline*, §§160-66 [2012: 105-42]; cf. e.g. Dunning [1998: 137] tentative on logistics.

²⁴³ “Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” §XIII.2, *Works* [1989: 9:277]; cf. Pohl [1999: 54-56].

²⁴⁴ Cf. sections 2.1 and 3.8 on “requisite expertise;” Romans 12:4-8: “different gifts;” 1 Corinthians 12.

²⁴⁵ *The Book of Discipline*, §§161-64 [2012: 108-38] paragraph titles. Duke Divinity School ethicist Bretherton [2006: 109, 137, 144, 189] thus calls Christians to proleptic eschatology through social service that invites “non-Christians” to participate whether or not they ever overtly become Christians [109].

3:18).²⁴⁶ In this view, God woos every receptive creature further “on to perfection,” departing from the Catholic Inclusivist Griffiths’ speculation that God and humans in heaven adore each other in “repetitive stasis,” that humans in heaven lack further “experience,” and that the Beatific vision annihilates all human aesthetics, artifacts, creativity, culture, fine arts, labor, liturgy, music, social/political structures, systems, tools, or any modifications of “inanimate creation” because they are no longer needful.²⁴⁷

A Wesleyan epektasis will accord with Griffiths on God’s pervasive presence in New Creation, yet venture that humans glorify God not by inert or “repetitive stasis” but by vibrant growth and productivity as God’s image bearers and co-creators, a hope that is more “attractive” but not provable to New Atheists and other interlocutors.²⁴⁸ *Proleptic epektasis* energizes passions like Jerome’s for pursuing education and/or knowledge that blossoms ever more fully in eternity. It colludes Weinberg’s joy in scientific research by yielding it hypothetically limitless in a New Heavens and New Earth. Epektasis reinforces theodicies where mortal adversity underpins eternal character development and heartens creativity, work, and play as more than torpid improvisations doomed to annihilation.²⁴⁹

Wesleyan Andy Crouch optimistically coins *Culture Making* that labors to extricate depravity from human creative projects that in other ways make life thrilling and beautiful.²⁵⁰ Crouch looks to the New Jerusalem in Isaiah 60 and Revelation 21 receiving “the glory and honor of the nations...teeming with cultural goods...domesticated animals, ships, precious minerals and jewels, and timber.”²⁵¹ Quoting Richard Mouw:

[T]his vision...[depicts] the future destiny of many items of ‘pagan culture’...gathered into the Holy City to be put to good use there...When the kings come marching in...they bring the best of their nations—even the *cultural goods that had been deployed against God and his people*. The final vision of the

²⁴⁶ The *NIV* is perhaps more straightforwardly epektatic in its phrasing: “with ever increasing glory.”

²⁴⁷ Cf. e.g. “1766 Examination of Preachers” in Heitzenrater [1995b: 235]; Hebrews 6:1-2; Philippians 3:12. Griffiths [2014: 67-68, 236, 301]; cf. Nichols [2010: 170] on the stasis view in Boethius, Augustine, and Aquinas. Griffiths [2014: 237, 304-07] admits that this “is not attractive to most who hear it. Almost everyone responds with distaste and anger,” but he blames this on “the fall,” adding that human modification of “inanimate creation” is at best a transitory beauty with profound imperfections that do deep, ugly damage: “The human act of making—of combining, shaping, and burnishing...is not proper to human felicity.”

²⁴⁸ Middleton [2014: 40, 104] précis that Christians must (re)define worship as not only emotionally charged or verbal expressions of praise, but everything creatures do for God’s glory (e.g. Romans 12:1-2).

²⁴⁹ See Griffiths [2014: 303-09]; Walls and Weinberg in section 7.3. The Catholic D’Costa [2014: 57] also believes that music, art, and other created realities participate in God’s glory, and are eternally enjoyed.

²⁵⁰ Crouch [2008: title, 77, 90-98, 104-05, 156]. Middleton [2014] develops Crouch with more detail.

²⁵¹ Crouch [2008: 165-67]; cf. Middleton [2014: 21-59]: New Creation rebirths technological, societal, artistic, and intellectual “cultural life on earth” rather than removing creatures to a non-physical “heaven.”

City is one filled, not just with God’s glory and presence, not just with his own stunningly beautiful architectural designs, not just with redeemed persons from every cultural background—but with redeemed human culture too.²⁵²

Crouch declares that “cultural goods will be recognizably what they were in the old creation—or perhaps more accurately, they will be what they always could have been....The latent potentialities of the world will be discovered and released by creative, cultivating people.”²⁵³ This raises the ethical plumb line for all activity and its fruits: Will they be honored or continue in the New Jerusalem, New Heavens, and New Earth?

Crouch’s *Culture Making* intimates not Hitchens’ “eternal tedium,” nor the incessant church service that Ingersoll dreaded, but the ongoing and dynamic cultivating and purifying of every “human love and labor” inspiring ingenuity, everlasting synergy, and endless delight in God and God’s co-creators who shape potentiality into being.²⁵⁴ Such ethical concerns for human as well as non-human animate and inanimate realities are not mere “nebulous humanism” as Hitchens dubiously ascribed to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.²⁵⁵ They rather typify, naturally flow from, carry on, or at least are consistent with Wesleyan epektatic hope in a maximally ethical, magnificently physical, relationally rich New Creation. With a careful discerning liberality exceeding Restrictivism, Exclusivism, relativism, and naturalistic reductionism, one can join forces with alacritous New Atheists and others at the religious roundtable for ethical consilience, interests, and passions, even if they hold to them for discrepant reasons. To tweak Wright slightly, Christian proleptic ethics and holy living cheerfully overlap with those “often done very well, by those of other faiths and none.”²⁵⁶

If the above ratifications are true and profitable, then Restrictivism, Exclusivism, and to a lesser degree Closed Inclusivism are extensively blind to and shut out a deeper appreciation for significant works of God’s prevenient, restoring, and transforming grace;

²⁵² Mouw [2002: 20-30] in Crouch [2008: 167-68] italics added.

²⁵³ Crouch [2008: 169-70]: “I don’t expect any...to appear without being suitably purified and redeemed, any more than I expect my own resurrected body to be just another unimproved version of my present one;” cf. N. Wright [2008: 185, 208-32]: on people contributing to New Creation now and to fresh projects later.

²⁵⁴ Crouch [2008: 171-76] surmises inclusively: “Some of the cultural goods found in the new Jerusalem will have been created and cultivated by people who may well not accept the Lamb’s invitation....Yet the best of their work may survive. Can that be said of the goods that we are devoting our lives to?”

²⁵⁵ C. Hitchens [2007b: 7, 176].

²⁵⁶ Cf. N. Wright [2008: 268].

which Parity Pluralism and relativism diminish to a bare equivalence with every other supposition. New and other atheists who snub many religious doctrines and practices, but who genuinely long and struggle to scale ethical peaks, may be astonished in this life or the next by who their fellow climbers are, and by Inclusive Wesleyan reckoning at the One who graciously beckons them—and whosoever will—on to perfection, ever higher.

A Wesleyan Open Inclusive approach will not resolve to be the single viable paradigm for dialogue, nor the solitary conceivable portal for faithful conciliation with New Atheists. Nevertheless, as we have striven to illustrate in this chapter, this Inclusive Wesleyan form of Christianity is less vulnerable to New Atheist criticisms particularly surrounding perennial conversations about religion and science, problems of suffering or evil, and optimal ethical flourishing. It simultaneously clears away striking obstructions to interchange on these topics. By pinpointing substantial regions of concord in the midst of mutual critique, we make inroads toward incisive discussion and collaboration with New Atheists, in addition to other traditions or persuasions at the religious roundtable.

Conclusion

Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff in an Open Inclusivist spirit improvises on the metaphor of Egyptian gold in Exodus 3:21-22 and 12:35-36 where Egyptians shared their treasures, perhaps including statuary, with departing Israelites. Analogizing that Christians ought to welcome conceptual riches offered by “non-theological” disciplines, Wolterstorff asks: “Does it all reek of idolatry?” Is there not much “to learn” or to value from secular sources that are in some respects “OK” or glorious as they are?¹

This dissertation has proposed that Open Inclusivism as a *modus operandi* is organically sensitive to deciphering the “gold” amidst the dross that antagonistic as well as conciliatory communicators deposit. Without dismissing New Atheists as mere expressers of depravity or dispensers of blasphemy as Exclusivist, Restrictivist, and some Reformed stances imply, nor ignoring their ungodly tones, the approach asserted here recommends Wesleyan Honoring Conference for refining Christian-atheist interactions. It sets forth one ecumenical, orthodox, and evangelical program for listening to and engaging with virtually any interlocutor without presuming to construct the sole feasible paradigm.

Forbearing to pronounce on New Atheists’ or anyone else’s eternal destinies, Inclusivists forego damning any individual but foreswear Universalist certainties that God will compel every creature to receive salvation. Proceeding with a Wesleyan inflection, chapter 4 sought to read the Bible faithfully and critically on these points, and chapter five chronicled proto-Inclusivist speculations or assurances in Christian history. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, Timothy I, Paul of Antioch, Aquinas, Nicholas of Cusa, John Calvin, John Wesley, and more recently Martin Luther King, Jr., C. S. Lewis, and Dorothy L. Sayers are among those who acknowledge or appeal to a wider appreciation of God’s truth and grace not strictly constrained to organized Christianity or to confessing Christians. Together with Gregory the Great, Abelard, Dante, Luther, Zwingli, Erasmus, Arminius, Henry, Milton, Edwards, and evangelist Billy Graham, many luminaries hazard possibilities or confidence that some people who do not explicitly confess “Jesus is Lord” before they die might still with integrity experience opportunities to do so if they have not already definitively responded to God’s grace.

¹ Wolterstorff [1993: 45].

The Apostle's Creed without requiring such optimism allows it, while Truth Inclusivism recollects analogies in philosophy of science as it accounts for impressions that God's grace is incipient in and through atheist lives. Wesleyan reflections and relationships with people who identify apart from or without referring to Christianity naturally encompass New Atheists, and concur with them on select priorities: human and ecological dignity, freedom of ir/religion, caring for the poor and hungry, and standing up for the victimized. New Atheists, if inadvertently at times, remind Wesleyans and others who are receptive to live in accord with their mutual social and ethical principles.

Seeking to challenge and be challenged by atheists and others at the religious roundtable, Open Inclusivist Wesleyans inquire what the Spirit might say to the churches. Does fear or opposition to the sciences infect Christian hearts? Would disparate parties benefit from sharpening their understandings and approaches to evil or suffering? New Atheist "reverse prophetism, an unconsciously prophetic criticism toward the church from outside" prods Christian and other religious believers to revisit their theologies, behaviors, and institutions with "sober judgment" (Romans 12:3) while *proleptic epektasis* promotes numerous jointly cherished endeavors that vitalize ethical flourishing.²

If there will always be a worthy goal facing "the far horizon" as Dawkins puts it, what immediate paths might other scholars and practitioners chart?³ Inter-religious or interfaith practitioners, philosophers and apologists, scholars, clergy and laity who muse and act proleptically will undoubtedly embark in fresh directions that the present venture only gestures at or initiates imperfectly. To quote an exclusivist systematician inclusively, one hopes that those who possess the requisite resources "will charitably recognize the integration" attempted here "and offer more rigorous contributions in the future."⁴

Muck and Adeney list 239 Bible passages germane to inter-religious concerns.⁵ Exegesis and biblical studies on these and other Hebrew and New Testament texts will uncover insights that confront, revise, or reroute trails that chapter 4 provisionally blazes.

Historical theology in the extant Inclusivist literature largely documents Levantine and European ancient, medieval, or modern authorities. Africanists and inhabitants or

² "Reverse prophetism" from Tillich [1967: 3:214].

³ Dawkins [2006a: 26].

⁴ Strange [2014: 35].

⁵ Muck and Adeney [2009: 379-85].

experts in the Americas, Asia, and Oceania will contribute additionally to the enrichment of local and global theologies and praxes that pertain to religious diversity and atheists.

Related to the above are targeted or regional ‘area studies’ involving anthropology, psychology, sociology, history, and political science on atheism and religious-atheist interfaces.⁶ Wesleyan Honoring Conference esteems these forays into “the book of nature,” and missiologists can look to them for aspects of God’s providential and transforming grace. Practical application of empirical analyses will also interest atheist advocates and activists, Christian witnesses and missionaries, or others who want to build bridges, proclaim their persuasions, or serve in and with diverse peoples and cultures.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation and four essays in Bullivant and Ruse signal trends in the arts and humanities.⁷ How are atheists or atheism embedded or portrayed in the visual, plastic, and fine arts; in film, theatre, music, literature, and popular culture? What characterizes artists’ and journalists’ representations of atheism and/or matters of religious diversity? How have and do atheists continue to influence or utilize media and the arts?⁸

Questions for ecclesiology straddle systematics, theological ethics, and practical theology. Do God’s atheist “servants” belong to Christ’s body, or are they more like guests at the Lamb’s marriage feast in Revelation 19:6-10? What do “godly” atheists portend for Protestant ecclesiologies that do not employ Catholic categories such as “anonymous Christians” or “baptism[s] of desire”? Which assemblies and spaces are fitting to collaborate communally with atheists, or for a minister or celebrant to “interview an atheist,” or to invite atheists or persons from different religious traditions to take part in services, liturgies, or to give a “sermon” in worship?⁹ Contemplating these and further controversies, Open Inclusivist departments are not *so positive* that they cannot modify their theologies, ethics, or praxes; nor so relative that they slacken the impetus to do so.

G. K. Chesterton’s fictional atheist editor in *The Ball and the Cross* distilled from the latter’s spirited back and forth with a devout Catholic: “[We both] think that God is essentially important.”¹⁰ New Atheist vehemence suggests that they too believe that ideas

⁶ Chapter 1.2.2 introduced existing studies focusing most often on North American atheism.

⁷ See chapter 2.1; Bertagnolli [2013]; Elwell [2013]; Power [2013]; Schweizer [2013].

⁸ DeVan [2013c; cf. 2013b: encyclopedia title] outlines corresponding issues affecting *Islam and Women*.

⁹ The author of this thesis has participated in Christian worship where clergy of another religion delivered the sermon; cf. e.g. K. Jones [2013]; Tedesco [2013] on hosting atheist speakers in Sunday services.

¹⁰ Chesterton [1909: 113].

and practices associated with God are intensely significant. For this if no other reason, Christians can expect to encounter God's grace conversing with New Atheists.

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