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### Vocational Apologetics An Argument For Using The Lutheran Understanding Of Vocation As A Form Of Enfleshed Apologetics For The Church To Engage A Cultural Setting Influenced By The Criticism Of The New Atheists

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Dedicated to my very patient family: my wife Lori; and our six wonderful children; Johnathan, Matthew, Nathaniel, Abigail, Isaiah, and Samuel, who have seen much less of their husband and father than they should have during the writing of this dissertation.

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:16 (ESV)

Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.

Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the Word of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing him.

Attributed to Martin Luther

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Throughout the PhD process, I have had the joyful vocation of serving as pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Mascoutah, IL. I would like to thank the wonderful saints of God at Zion for allowing me to pursue this academic undertaking while also serving among you full-time as your called pastor. I hope that as I have grown intellectually, theologically, and spiritually through this course of study, you as members of the congregation have been able to grow through the growth of your pastor.

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## ABSTRACT

Clayton, Kirk M. "Vocational Apologetics: An Argument for Using the Lutheran Understanding of Vocation as a Form of Enfleshed Apologetics for the Church to Engage a Cultural Setting Influenced by the Criticisms of the New Atheists." Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2017. 252 pp.

This dissertation examines criticisms against Christianity from the New Atheists (Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, Hitchens, and Stenger), considers problems with how the church has formulated its apologetic response, and concludes that Martin Luther's understanding of vocation applied to the Christian life offers a significant contribution to shaping an apologetic response to the New Atheism.

Apologetics is best understood as a defense, and must be a responsive discipline. For the last several centuries apologetics has largely consisted of rational or evidential responses to challenges arising from the Enlightenment. However, the strength of the New Atheists' arguments lies not with their rational arguments, which are intellectually unserious, but with their moral arguments that Christianity is evil. These moral accusations, made with strong ethical and emotional appeals, have gained a hearing in a receptive culture. When the challenges presented to the Christian faith are of a moral nature, as with the accusations of the New Atheists, the apologetic response needs to demonstrate not only the truth of Christianity, but also the goodness of Christianity. While the apologetic response to the New Atheists has been prolific, it has been focused primarily on traditional apologetic methods such as Presuppositional Apologetics or Evidential Apologetics, providing intellectually correct answers to what really are moral challenges. Thus the apologetic response to the New Atheists so far has largely missed the main force of the attacks.

This dissertation uses Aristotle's rational, ethical, and emotional appeals to apply a rhetorical analysis to the New Atheists' writings in order to understand better the challenge they pose to Christianity. The dissertation then explores the developing field of Enfleshed Apologetics (also called Incarnational Apologetics and Lifestyle Apologetics) and argues that this form of apologetics should be used to respond to the lifestyle-oriented challenges of the New Atheists. Luther's teaching on vocation provides the theological basis for developing an enfleshed approach in which a morally exemplary Christian life becomes the apologetic answer to the moral accusations of the New Atheists. This approach can be used alongside traditional apologetic methods as part of an overall Cumulative Case apologetic response to the New Atheists.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: APOLOGETICS IN THE MIDST OF CHANGING CONTEXTS

Throughout its history, the church has been the subject of attacks on its doctrine and practice. The church has traditionally responded to attacks by the use of apologetics, and as the attacks against the church have changed, so also the form of the church's apologetic response has changed. However, many in the church have demonstrated a general resistance to any apologetic efforts and have not participated strongly in apologetics.<sup>1</sup> Some have gone so far as to attempt to put an end to apologetic efforts altogether and establish a "post-apologetic" outlook.<sup>2</sup> Based on some of the common understandings of the apologetic task, the hesitance to engage in apologetics is completely understandable. However, the understanding of apologetic approaches is changing. In particular, the field is broadening from primarily traditional apologetic methods like Presuppositional Apologetics, Classical Apologetics, and Evidential Apologetics to include an Enfleshed Apologetic methodology.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the cultural context in which apologetics is being practiced is changing, including the popularization of attacks against Christianity through

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<sup>1</sup> For an examination of the underlying causes of this phenomenon in the Lutheran Church, my own religious affiliation, see Alvin Schmidt, "Christianity Needs More Lutheran Apologetes," in *Tough-Minded Christianity: Honoring the Legacy of John Warwick Montgomery*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery, William A. Dembski, Thomas Schirrmacher, and James Innell Packer (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 495–512.

<sup>2</sup> See "Ambivalence about Apologetics," in Avery Cardinal Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 345–48.

<sup>3</sup> The distinction between these categories will be spelled out in greater depth later, but as a brief overview, traditional apologetic approaches are geared primarily toward the mind either through philosophy or evidences, including both Presuppositional and Evidential Apologetic approaches, while an Enfleshed Apologetic approach focuses on the defense of the Christian faith as embodied in the lives of Christian believers. This field focuses on establishing the plausibility of the Christian message through a consistent lifestyle before demonstrating the credibility of Christianity through truth claims. For further elaboration, see Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 15–16. See also David Wilkinson, "The Art of Apologetics in the Twenty-First Century," *ANVIL* 19, no. 1 (2002): 5 and 11, and Alister McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 154, where, as an extension of this thought, McGrath specifically comments that "Living out the truth can be thought of as an 'incarnational apologetic,' itself a powerful witness to that truth."

the works of the New Atheists. In the midst of these changes, some fears can be allayed and new apologetic insights can offer valuable contributions to the church at large. In particular, Martin Luther's teaching on vocation can shape the church's Enfleshed Apologetics as it engages a cultural setting influenced by the popular criticisms of the New Atheists.

### **The Thesis**

This dissertation will examine the criticisms leveled against Christianity by the New Atheism, explore how the church has formulated its apologetic response to these criticisms, and propose that Luther's understanding of vocation as practiced in the Christian life can be seen as a significant component of the apologetic task. This dissertation will propose that an effective way to respond to the popular cultural attacks of the New Atheism is for the church to utilize Luther's understanding of vocation as a way to guide Christians into tangible approaches to apologetic witness toward their neighbors who may be influenced by the writings of the New Atheism. In this way, I will contribute to the recent development of an Enfleshed Apologetics which engages the charges of the New Atheists directly rather than secondarily.

### **Apologetic Challenges and their Causes**

The hesitance to participate in apologetic endeavors has not been limited to any one particular denomination or persuasion, and at times those who refrained from apologetics did so with good reason. While apologetics is a helpful tool which the church has used since the first centuries of its existence, it can certainly be abused. Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli provide an example of one common apologetic problem in their "Personal Preface" to their work, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, where they write,

Our compelling reasons for writing this book are three:

1. We are certain that the Christian faith is true.
2. We are only a little less certain that the very best thing we can possibly do for others is to persuade them of this truth, in which there is joy and peace and love incomparable in this world, and infinite and incomprehensible in the next.
3. We are a little less certain, but still confident, that honest reasoning can lead any open-minded person to this same conclusion.<sup>4</sup>

As Christians look at this three-part statement, they certainly find nothing wrong with the first part. The second part, while perhaps objectionable to non-Christians who do not prefer the active proselytization demonstrated frequently by Christians, when properly understood is also acceptable. The problem comes in the third part of Kreeft and Tacelli's statement as they claim that honest reasoning can lead any open-minded person to the certainty that Christianity is true. Such a view would indicate that any human being, given the correct facts, could reason himself or herself to the Christian faith.

In approaches to apologetics that overemphasize reason, there is a parallel danger of overly intellectualizing the Christian faith and transforming a relationship with a living God into a mental exercise. There is nothing wrong (and much right!) with strongly intellectual defenses of Christianity, but problems certainly arise when the Christian faith becomes nothing more than an intellectual exercise. This can and has been a problem attributed to apologetics.<sup>5</sup> The Christian faith certainly can be defended with strong intellectual arguments, but the Christian faith can also be presented in many other ways as well, and it should be, since "reason alone cannot give answers to every question and reason alone does not represent Christian faith."<sup>6</sup> An exclusively

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Critical Questions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 7.

<sup>5</sup> David Wilkinson points out, "There is a classical view of apologetics as simply a dry, intellectual type argument, the legal defense. Indeed this defensive role has been an important part of its role in Christian history. . . . Such an approach is not just limited, it is dangerous. It can lead to intellectualism, exalting reason and intellect to the centre of Christian faith and mission." Wilkinson, "Art of Apologetics," 7–8.

<sup>6</sup> Wilkinson, "Art of Apologetics," 7–8. As a humorous commentary highlighting some of the additional

intellectual approach to the apologetic task, as has at times been practiced by some apologists, misses the importance of the Christian life as questions of the mind and intellect become all-consuming.<sup>7</sup> This exclusively intellectual trend in modern apologetics has led Craig Parton, a strong Evidential Apologist, to note that “Apologetics, a branch of theology interested in the defense of Christian truth claims, is an unwanted guest in many Christian churches. It is often ignored, despised, or totally unknown.”<sup>8</sup> Parton elaborates, “apologists are often viewed as unspiritual ‘intellectual types’ who sacrifice a heart relationship with the Lord for the academic pursuit of knowledge. It is often perceived that the apologist is either answering questions no one is asking or is attempting to ‘prove’ that which must be accepted by faith.”<sup>9</sup>

Such views of apologetics that overemphasize the role of reason and intellectualize the Christian faith call into question the work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion process, and threatens to make the act of conversion a working of the human mind and will. At the very least, such a view of apologetics places too much emphasis on the value of reason and runs the risk of giving the impression that Christianity is an affair of the mind instead of a relationship of faith. For Christian denominations that stress the inability of the fallen human being to move toward

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problems of an exclusively intellectual approach to apologetics in particular and the Christian life in general, John Stackhouse provides the following tongue-in-cheek definition of apologetics: “‘Apologetics’ is ‘telling someone why you’re sorry you are a Christian.’” John Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 114. He follows that with an even more tongue-in-cheek definition of apologetics from the opposing viewpoint as he writes, “There is more than a little irony in another whimsical definition: ‘Apologetics’ is ‘making someone *sorry he asked* why you are a Christian!’” Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 114; emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> For an example of the recognition of such a problem see Robert Webber, who in his book *The Younger Evangelicals*, points to his own experience with a cold, rationalistic approach to apologetics, and the lack of connection the intellectual undertaking of apologetics had on his faith and life. He writes that the rational approach to apologetics, “made faith an object to be proven. My head became filled with arguments, proof texts, distinctions, and a kind of intellectual arrogance. . . . My commitment to faith as intellectually verifiable did not strengthen my resolve to live in the pattern of Jesus’ death and resurrection.” Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 95.

<sup>8</sup> Craig Parton, *The Defense Never Rests: A Lawyer's Quest for the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 52.

<sup>9</sup> Parton, *Defense Never Rests*, 52.

God and participate in the conversion process,<sup>10</sup> a view such as that proposed by Kreeft and Tacelli is deeply problematic. Whatever the specific conversion process taught by a particular branch of Christianity may be, often an understanding that conversion is primarily an act of human will and reason runs counter to proper teaching of the conversion process. When apologetics is seen as using reason and the will as the primary means of conversion rather than relying more significantly on the guidance or work of the Holy Spirit, apologetics then runs afoul of doctrine especially in the area of conversion.<sup>11</sup> Views such as described above in Kreeft and Tacelli have created a backlash against apologetics. This backlash and resulting negative view of apologetics is noted by many, and can be seen across apologetic styles and categories.

Avery Cardinal Dulles in his widely read and respected work, *A History of Apologetics*, points to this unease with traditional apologetic approaches as he writes,

In the minds of many Christians today the term ‘apologetics’ carries unpleasant connotations. The apologist is regarded as an *aggressive, opportunistic person* who tries, *by fair means or foul*, to argue people into joining the Church. Numerous charges are laid at the door of apologetics: its neglect of the grace of prayer, and of

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<sup>10</sup> C. Stephen Evans offers a consideration of the possible conflict noted in Lutheran theology—my own religious tradition—between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of human reason as he notes, “it is not uncommon to hear Christians claim that if they appeal to evidence they are somehow relying on ‘human reason’ and not relying on God. Such a claim is sometimes found in Lutheran theology.” C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 285. Evans does admit that “Human reasoning to some looks dangerously like human ‘work,’ and thus something that has no part in coming to know God by faith.” Evans, *Historical Christ*, 285. However, Evans defends the rational approach to apologetics by using an analogy of healing through medicine versus healing by God, and “it is surely possible for one to go to a human physician in faith that God will heal through the agency of the human physician,” and thus, “In a similar manner, it seems to me to be a mistake to argue that the Holy Spirit could not operate by means of evidence. The Holy Spirit could be active in calling an individual’s attention to evidence, and in helping an individual properly to understand and interpret evidence, as well as in producing the conviction of sin that motivates the individual to receive the forgiveness that God offers. . . . I therefore reject the assumption that one must choose between the Holy Spirit and rational evidence.” Evans, *Historical Christ*, 285–86.

<sup>11</sup> Similar to the explanation of a doctor and patient offered by C. Stephen Evans in the preceding footnote, Kreeft and Tacelli also offer some corrective to their view in their *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics* as they write, “Arguments may not bring you to faith, but they can certainly keep you away from faith. Therefore we must join the battle of arguments. Arguments can bring you closer to faith in the same sense that a car can bring you to the sea. The car can’t swim; you have to jump in to do that. But you can’t jump in from a hundred miles inland. You need a car first to bring you to the point where you can make a leap of faith into the sea. Faith is a leap, but a leap in the light, not in the dark.” Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 10.

the life-giving power of the word of God; its tendency to oversimplify and syllogize the approach to faith; its dilution of the scandal of the Christian message; and its implied presupposition that God's word should be judged by the norm of fallible, not to say fallen, human reason.<sup>12</sup>

Dulles concludes his thoughts on this topic by acknowledging that “some Christian apologists have no doubt been guilty on each of these counts.”<sup>13</sup>

Another objection to apologetics arises from a similar concern not to confuse the work of God with the work of fallen human beings. The “Introduction” to Cornelius Van Til’s *Christian Apologetics* notes: “Defending the faith. . . . The idea is repugnant to some. It smacks to them of defensiveness, at best, or coercion, at worst. Should not God be left to defend himself with no help from us? Is not the idea as absurd as defending a tiger in a cage? Why not just let him out?”<sup>14</sup> A further criticism arises as noted by John Stackhouse, “In societies that pride themselves on being ‘multicultural’ nowadays, apologetics (in the traditional sense of religious argument) is often seen to be in bad taste, and even as offensive.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, apologetics comes in for criticism or recognition of criticism from many angles and apologetic approaches. What led to this condition? What gave rise to the forms of apologetic engagements that engender such challenges? Part of the problem is that the shape of apologetics as we generally recognize it was largely formed in the Enlightenment and by the forces of Rationalism. These movements brought about profound changes to the apologetic task, and the resultant apologetic approach is largely what we still recognize today. Dulles notes this dramatic change:

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<sup>12</sup> Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, xix; emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup> Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, xix.

<sup>14</sup> William Edgar, Introduction to *Christian Apologetics* by Cornelius Van Til (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 121.

Apologetics in the early modern period takes on a very different shape than it had in earlier centuries. For the Fathers it was a debate about the relative merits of paganism, Judaism, and Christianity. For the medieval theologians, apologetics was a contest among the three great monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—all of which appealed to historical revelation. But after the Renaissance, apologetics had to address thinkers who rejected revelation entirely and who in some cases denied the existence or knowability of God. For the first time in history, orthodox Christians felt constrained to prove the existence of God and the possibility and fact of revelation. In so doing they sometimes conceded too much to their deist adversaries, making it appear that unaided reason could erect a satisfactory natural religion that in many respects reduplicated Christianity itself.<sup>16</sup>

Dulles points out here that the early modern period, marked as it was with its emphasis on reason and a concurrent questioning of divine revelation, brought about the need for a new and different apologetic emphasis, with different goals and different methods. The resultant apologetic format is largely still the apologetic outlook current today in both message and methodology. This apologetic approach focuses largely on evidences, the scientific method, and reason as key tools. Dulles notes:

In the eighteenth century the forces of the Enlightenment staged a more blatant attack on the claims of Christianity, appealing to the positive sciences, especially history, to prove their case. Christian apologetics, seeking to answer in kind, concentrated increasingly on scientific historical evidences and relied rather less upon lofty metaphysical considerations.<sup>17</sup>

Among the prominent apologists rising to the challenge of the Enlightenment were Joseph Butler and William Paley. They can be seen as representative examples of the trend Dulles describes. Butler worked to “discredit deistic liberalism”<sup>18</sup> and his method was “empirically based in factual evidences.”<sup>19</sup> Butler was a practitioner of empiricism and held that evidence

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<sup>16</sup> Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 205–6.

<sup>17</sup> Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 146.

<sup>18</sup> L. Russ Bush, *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics A.D. 100–1800* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), xvii.

<sup>19</sup> Bush, *Classical Readings*, xvii.



always leads to the probability, although not the certainty, of truth.<sup>20</sup> In Butler, we can see the effects of the Enlightenment and Rationalism as it shaped the apologetic approach. In addition, in Butler, we can see how the forces of the Enlightenment and Rationalism in fact continue to lurk behind much of the apologetic methodology used to this day, as L. Russ Bush suggests, “Butler’s *Analogy* is perhaps the classic statement of the ‘evidential’ approach to apologetics.”<sup>21</sup> The form of apologetics shaped by Butler continues to serve as one of the prominent methodologies practiced today.

The same case can be made for William Paley. “Following in the evidential tradition of the Enlightenment, Paley argues for an evidential natural theology, the belief that God can be understood by anyone who will properly reference the natural world.”<sup>22</sup> As with Butler before him, Paley thought and worked within “the general evidential milieu”<sup>23</sup> of the era, which as noted was shaped and driven by the Enlightenment. Paley’s most prominent argument was that of the watch in need of a watchmaker, which is “perhaps the single most famous illustration of the teleological argument for the existence of God. For many people it continues to be a persuasive argument.”<sup>24</sup> As with Butler, we see that through Paley the forces of the Enlightenment still shape a large portion of what is considered to be the standard apologetic approach today. Thus, the current shape of apologetics is largely still being drawn by the same forces of the Enlightenment and the elevation of reason as ensconced there. Perhaps understandably, this method of approaching apologetics was shaped by the Enlightenment and by Rationalism as

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<sup>20</sup> Bush, *Classical Readings*, 328–29.

<sup>21</sup> Bush, *Classical Readings*, 329.

<sup>22</sup> William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, eds., *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 2:240.

<sup>23</sup> Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics*, 2:241.

<sup>24</sup> Bush, *Classical Readings*, 351.

much as the message was.

For the last several centuries, then, apologetics has generally been understood as a rational undertaking, by which I mean that apologetics is understood to use reason and logic to defend tenets of Christianity. The message has been the rational explanation of Christian truth, and the method has been to present the message in verbal or written form focusing on the logical cohesion of rational arguments, proofs for God's existence, and external evidence, among other things. This rational approach to the apologetic task is observable even in the common definitions given to apologetics. In *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven B. Cowan describes the apologetic undertaking thus: "As it concerns the Christian faith, then, apologetics has to do with defending, or making a case for, the truth of the Christian faith. It is an intellectual discipline."<sup>25</sup> Robert Velarde, in *A Visual Defense*, defines apologetics as "The rational defense of Christianity as 'true and reasonable.'"<sup>26</sup> William Lane Craig, in his *Apologetics: An Introduction*, writes that "Apologetics is primarily a theoretical discipline, though it has practical application. That is to say, apologetics is that branch of theology that seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith."<sup>27</sup> While this is obviously a brief overview of apologetic definitions and far from comprehensive, many more could be added of a similar nature.

The unifying factor in these understandings of the apologetic task is a focus on using reason to defend the objective truth claims of Christianity. One of the effects of this understanding of apologetics is that the apologetic endeavor has usually been worked out using textual approaches. Challenges to the Christian faith have arisen primarily in writing or in

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<sup>25</sup> Steven B. Cowan, William Lane Craig, John M. Frame, Kelly James Clark, and Paul D. Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 8.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Velarde, *A Visual Defense: The Case For and Against Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 195.

<sup>27</sup> William Lane Craig, *Apologetics: An Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), xi.

debate, and the apologetic answers have been given in similar manner, in textual fashion. Apologetics has primarily been a written or spoken discipline, drawing on logic and reason in one shape or another in an appeal to the mind. However, this approach does not fit well with the needs of the church today as culture continues to shift in several significant ways.<sup>28</sup>

As will be seen in the next chapter, attacks against Christianity are shifting in their approach, moving from a reliance upon the use of reason to a reliance upon emotion and the character of the speaker. Given that shift, I question whether understanding apologetics as a primarily rational endeavor is adequate. In response to the changing challenges of contemporary culture as exemplified by the New Atheists, the apologetic field needs to change in both message and methodology. However, before we can see how the apologetic approach needs to adapt to new challenges, we first need to see what the most common current apologetic approaches are, specifically regarding their use of reason and provable evidences to support the case for Christianity. Before focusing upon a new approach to apologetics, which I am suggesting, it is good to see how this approach fits into the field of apologetic approaches already developed.

### **Overview of Apologetic Approaches and Uses**

Classifying the many approaches in the field of apologetics is difficult because throughout the various eras of the church, Christian apologists have used a variety of methods to communicate its message of Christian truth. Adding to the challenge of describing apologetic approaches is the fact that authors who undertake such a task rarely agree on how to describe or divide the field. Cowan notes that apologists often differ in opinions about how best to go about the apologetic task and what kinds of arguments can and should be used to engage an unbeliever

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Webber was one of the first to recognize the apologetic implications of the shifting ground around Christianity, and I will seek to build on his call for a changing approach to the apologetic task. He notes, “There is a general agreement among younger evangelicals that the emphasis in apologetics has shifted from reason to embodiment.” Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, 101.

in apologetic discourse. This leads to a distinct challenge for any effort to label and characterize apologetic approaches: “How do we delineate the different approaches to apologetics? Of all the other books on apologetic methodology, no two classify the various methods in exactly the same way.”<sup>29</sup>

I would note that in the current shape of apologetics as an outgrowth from the Enlightenment and its questioning of revelatory authority, the basic challenge seems to be defending the existence of God, and then clarifying who this God is. The central question addressed by apologetics tends to be the same, no matter how one divides the schools of apologetics. No matter the system, the existence of God features as a central question. Beyond this similarity, one could also argue that the approach is similar among all these various methods. All of the apologetic categories just mentioned are primarily intellectual in practice. By this I mean that all of these approaches are geared toward the mind, rather than life. They are to be researched and pondered, rather than lived out in practice. As such, all of these approaches are traditionally strongly tied to the rational enterprise. However, these rationally-driven methods, while needed and important, are insufficient in light of changes in the cultural landscape as exemplified by the New Atheists.

While I will attempt to summarize various types of apologetic methodology below, my descriptions will be brief. My purpose is not to give an in-depth presentation on the strengths and weaknesses of Presuppositionalism, Evidentialism, and the other apologetic methods, as information of this kind is readily available in several excellent sources.<sup>30</sup> Rather, the goal is to

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<sup>29</sup> Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> For an excellent and in-depth examination of a range of apologetic approaches, using the writings and thoughts of key apologists of varying classifications as the method of consideration, see Brian Morley, *Mapping Apologetics: Comparing Contemporary Approaches* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015). Steven Cowan serves as the editor of a very helpful work called *Five Views on Apologetics*, in which he presents an essay written by a representative practitioner of each field of apologetics explored along with rebuttal essays from the other four

give only a cursory overview of various apologetic methods with special consideration given to how these apologetic methodologies flow out of the use of reason as the near-exclusive form of defense since the Enlightenment era. Instead of relying so extensively on rational argumentation, instead current apologetic approaches need to be expanded to meet new challenges.

As an identifiable and accessible way of seeing what these new challenges are, we will be using the writings of the New Atheists and their particular arguments against Christianity. The New Atheists do not present their arguments against Christianity in primarily rational terms using calm logic to argue that it is wrong, instead they attack Christianity on moral grounds alleging that it is evil. The arguments of the New Atheists are representative and reflective of the current cultural setting and call for a new and different apologetic method of response than has been offered to date. The heavy reliance on reason and logic in current apologetic approaches is ill-suited to meet the challenges of the New Atheists, so a new apologetic response is needed. This new apologetic response will need to be tailor-made for the challenges presented by the New Atheists, and it needs to be applicable to the cultural climate that they represent.

To see how a proposed new apologetic response relates with the current field of apologetics, the brief summaries of various current apologetic methodologies offered below will focus on issues related to reliance on reason and access to the use of outside evidence to support the claims being defended. We will start by considering the parts of the spectrum of apologetics that use the least evidence and rely almost exclusively on reason and special revelation. From there we will proceed to other apologetic methodologies that make increasing use of evidence,<sup>31</sup>

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contributors for each category. For a thumbnail sketch of each apologetic type, see Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 15–20. Dulles also gives helpful overviews of several apologetic approaches. See Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 353–65.

<sup>31</sup> My use of the term “evidence” to a limited extent fits with the definition given in *Five Views of Apologetics*, namely, “those objective facts in the world that warrant a conclusion.” Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 216n12. Of course, the degree to which any facts are truly “objective” is

and then open to even other forms of experience such as can be presented in the life of a Christian. The important consideration of the summaries offered here is less the actual school of apologetics and more the system of classification showing a shift from a strictly rational approach through approaches that allow for the use of tangible evidence to an approach that is open to additional forms of support outside of reason and tangible evidence. This will then set up the ability to evaluate how well-suited these apologetic approaches are to meet the needs of responding to new and changing challenges to the Christian faith.

### Presuppositional Apologetics

Presuppositional Apologetics represents the apologetic methodology with the least recourse to evidence, and with the strongest reliance placed on establishing the internal logical coherence or incoherence of a line of argument. In a specific sense, Presuppositionalism as it is currently practiced traces its roots back to the thought of Cornelius Van Til in the mid-twentieth century. William Edgar, writing the “Introduction” to a new edition of Van Til’s *Christian Apologetics*, notes that Van Til did much to articulate “the approach to apologetics that has become known as *presuppositionalism*. Though Presuppositionalism’s more distant roots are in the Anselmian soubriquet, ‘faith seeking understanding,’ the more contemporary context is the Dutch and Presbyterian theologies of his [Van Til’s] immediate horizon.”<sup>32</sup>

Presuppositional Apologetics is closely linked with a Calvinist/Reformed understanding of

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up for debate in some quarters, but I use “evidence” to indicate some degree of externalism as opposed to internal mental exercise or emotion. Velarde supplies what some of these external pointers may be: “Typical evidences include arguments from the reliability of the New Testament, archaeological support for the Bible, and arguments in support of the reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ.” Velarde, *Visual Defense*, 196. Each of these forms of evidence has a link to an external, often tangible, fact or artifact. This definition is particularly tied to the practice of Evidential Apologetics, and similar formats that rely to an extent on external verification. However, in a broader sense “evidence,” while still corresponding to an external event, can also be less tangible. For example, as I discuss the Christian life as a form of apologetics, the manner of life of a Christian can itself be a form of evidence. The points of common ground, perhaps, are that the evidence is external to the person considering the evidence, and that the external evidence corresponds favorably to a teaching of Christianity.

<sup>32</sup> Edgar, “Introduction,” in Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 3; emphasis original.

the nature of God and the total depravity of humanity.<sup>33</sup> One of the foundational starting points of this approach is the noetic effect of sin,<sup>34</sup> specifically its effect on human reason. Due to the overwhelming effect of sin on humanity, all knowledge is tainted and can only be ultimately understood in light of God's truth. All truth is God's truth, and only God's truth is truth in this line of thought. Without the (even unacknowledged) presupposition of God's existence, nothing can be known since human reason is seen as fallen and totally depraved. Brian Morley, in *Mapping Apologetics*, states that in a Presuppositional Apologetic approach, "unless we assume the existence of the God of (Reformed) Christianity, there is no way to account for human knowledge and experience."<sup>35</sup> Another implication of this view is that between the Christian and the non-Christian, there is no "common ground," no shared understanding or experience of the world by which people could have any possibility of reasoning together.<sup>36</sup> Morley also notes that in this viewpoint, "Christianity is not merely the best explanation, as is held by many traditional apologists. It is the only explanation that can possibly work."<sup>37</sup> As an extension of this thought, not only is Christianity the only explanation that can possibly work, it works absolutely, leading to complete 100 percent proof of Christianity, according to Presuppositionalism.<sup>38</sup> Van Til opines that anything less than 100 percent certainty is an affront to the sovereignty of God. "It is an insult to the living God to say that his revelation of himself so lacks in clarity that man, himself through and through revelational of God, does justice by it when he says that God *probably*

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<sup>33</sup> Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 64–65.

<sup>34</sup> Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 210–14.

<sup>35</sup> Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 82.

<sup>36</sup> Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 75.

<sup>37</sup> Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> "Van Til, by contrast, held that only 100-percent certainty is appropriate for apologetics. . . . Furthermore, faith itself requires 100-percent proof. Less than 100-percent proof could not justify 100-percent faith." Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 295. See also 186.

exists.”<sup>39</sup> Non-Christians, according to a strict Presuppositional view, can only understand the world “because they covertly function on the assumption that the God of (Reformed) Christianity exists. ... They know things, but only because they do not actually live by the worldview they profess. Instead they borrow from (Reformed) Christianity.”<sup>40</sup>

In a Presuppositional view, the basic role of apologetics is to show a non-Christian the supposed inherent dissonance within his or her own belief system. The Presuppositional apologist seeks to show:

that the non-Christian “makes nonsense” of his experience, and cannot even account for knowledge of any kind. The Christian invites the non-Christian to examine the Christian’s own view from within, viewing the world through Christian glasses, and to discover how it can account for knowledge, make sense of experience and more.<sup>41</sup>

The Presuppositional Apologist “Sees his argument as a *reductio ad absurdum*, that is, an argument that reduces the opposing argument to an absurdity.”<sup>42</sup>

In a strict interpretation, evidence supporting Christianity can play no role in discussion with an unbeliever, since no common ground of understanding exists between the two. The only valid use for reason is to confirm the faith that a believer already presupposes.<sup>43</sup> Van Til argues that when an apologist and a non-Christian use the same method of argument, namely facts uninterpreted by Christian, Biblical presuppositions, there can be no conclusive resolution.<sup>44</sup> The

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<sup>39</sup> Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), 291; emphasis original.

<sup>40</sup> Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 73–74.

<sup>42</sup> Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 68.

<sup>43</sup> Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 79.

<sup>44</sup> “All this is bound to lead to self-frustration on the part of the traditional apologist. Let us watch him for a moment. Think of him first as an inductivist. As such he will engage in ‘historical apologetics’ and in the study of archaeology. In general he will deal with the ‘facts’ of the universe in order to prove the existence of God. He cannot on his position challenge the assumption of the man he is trying to win. That man is ready for him. Think of the traditional apologist as throwing facts to his non-Christian friend as he might throw a ball. His friend receives each fact as he might a ball and throws it behind him in a bottomless pit. The apologist is exceedingly industrious.



resolution to the dilemma can only come through considerations of the coherence of an argument, not the evidence used to support it.

Dulles gives a helpful and brief summary of Presuppositional Apologetics as follows:

This position normally rests on the premise that human reason has been so damaged by sin that evidential apologetics is fruitless. Presuppositionalists therefore begin by assuming that the teaching of the Bible is true. Setting out from this axiom, the apologist argues that biblical revelation yields a coherent explanation of our experience in the world, and that other worldview traditions are, in comparison, incoherent. Some add that it is impossible to live or think without logically presupposing the reality of God, the source and measure of all truth.<sup>45</sup>

From this summary we can see the near-exclusive emphasis placed on the role of reason within Presuppositional Apologetics. This methodology starts with the premise that human reason is fallen, and thus only divine revelation imparted externally can impart wisdom or truth. The establishment of a coherent rational worldview based on God's revealed truth is the goal of the methodology. Evidence has little to no role in this apologetic approach, but likewise extra-rational appeals have no place either. This apologetic methodology is strongly beholden to the rationalistic Enlightenment outlook, and allows scant opportunity for the expression of human emotion or for other means for evaluating the reliability of a message. Reason alone is viewed as valid. Since current challenges to Christianity rely less on reason than has been the case in the

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He shows the unbelieving friend all the evidence of theism. He shows all the evidence for Christianity, for instance, for the virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ. Let us think of his friend as absolutely tireless and increasingly polite. He will then receive all these facts and toss them behind him to the bottomless pit of pure possibility. 'Is it not wonderful,' he will say to see 'what strange things do happen in Reality. You seem to be a collector of oddities. As for myself I am more interested in the things that happen regularly. But I shall certainly try hard to explain the facts you mention in accord with the laws that I have found working so far. Perhaps we should say that the laws are merely statistical averages and that nothing can therefore be said about any particular event ahead of its appearance. Perhaps there are very unusual things in reality. But what does this prove for the truth of your view?'" Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 297–98.

<sup>45</sup> Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 357. Dulles also writes that Presuppositional Apologetics "maintains that the issue between believers and nonbelievers in Christian theism cannot be settled except by reference to a conceptual framework in terms of which facts and laws become intelligible. The Christian must begin by presupposing that the revelation contained in Scripture is true and then find that reality and life make sense in terms of this presupposition. Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 322. For another helpful summary of Presuppositional Apologetics, see Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 18–19.

past, this outlook is simply inadequate to meet the changing challenges posed to Christianity and a broader understanding of apologetics is needed to meet current criticisms faced by the church.

### Classical Apologetics

In contrast to the method of Presuppositionalism, which relies almost exclusively on reason and allows virtually no recourse to evidence, Classical Apologetics allows evidence in support of its position, but only after the question of God's existence has been addressed. Dulles states that the Classical Apologetic method "became standard after the outbreak of deism in the seventeenth century, proceeds by stages, first demonstrating the existence of God as an omniscient and omnipotent Creator and then the validity of Christianity as the highest version of theism."<sup>46</sup> Classical Apologetics, utilizing reason and evidence as primary techniques, follows what can be described as a "two-step method" of apologetics to demonstrate the existence and nature of God, insisting that one must first demonstrate a theistic worldview before proceeding on to consider the particular truth of the Christian faith. Demonstrating the existence of God is the first, and necessarily prior, step in the apologetic program.<sup>47</sup> For the second step, which is the demonstration of the truth specifically of Christianity as opposed to other theistic systems, the apologist has access to evidence and can use it profitably.

Norman Geisler gives a clear example of this approach in the Preface to his work,

*Christian Apologetics*. Geisler writes:

The heart of this apologetic approach is that the Christian is interested in defending the truths that Christ is the Son of God and the Bible is the Word of God. However, prior to establishing these two pillars on which the uniqueness of Christianity is built, one must establish the existence of God. For it makes no sense to speak about an *act* of God (i.e., a miracle) confirming that Christ is the *Son* of God and that the Bible is

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<sup>46</sup> Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 353–54.

<sup>47</sup> Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 16.

the *Word* of God unless of course there is a *God* who can have a Son and who can speak a Word. Theism, then, is a logical prerequisite to Christianity.<sup>48</sup>

The “two-step” approach to apologetics can be clearly seen in Geisler’s description. He argues that establishing the existence of God is a necessary prerequisite for examining the works of God.

According to Classical Apologetics, any consideration of miracles is impossible or senseless to examine outside a theistic view which already holds a God who could work such miracles. Thus, it is vital to demonstrate theism before turning to any forms of evidence, which trace and point back to an acting God. In a Classical Apologetic approach, however, contrary to Presuppositionalism, after the existence of God is demonstrated, then evidences can certainly be used to point to the accuracy of Christianity. This is the essence of the “two-step” apologetic approach that marks Classical Apologetics.

Classical Apologetics is keen to answer the question of the existence of God, and does so with reason without recourse to evidence. Once the question of God’s existence has been settled by rational means, then a logical presentation of supporting evidence can follow. This methodology is helpful when the basic question being addressed is that of the existence of God. This is a recognition that needs to be considered when we explore what the questions being raised by the current culture actually are. Upon this consideration will depend much of the question as to how helpful of a methodology Classical Apologetics will be in responding to the current challenges of our culture.

### Evidential Apologetics

We now turn to a brief consideration of Evidential Apologetics, a method that, as its name suggests, gives full value to evidence in all areas of apologetic consideration. In common with

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<sup>48</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), “Preface;” emphasis original.

Classical Apologetics, Evidentialism as we know it today is largely the result of responses to the Enlightenment and Rationalism, and as such relies heavily on reason and logic. In contrast to the “two-step” approach that marks the Classical Apologetic approach which demands the demonstration of a theistic worldview before evidence can be considered, the Evidential Apologetic approach maintains that evidence can independently point back to the existence of God and the truth of Christianity without any *a priori* assumptions or proofs.

In contrast to the “two-step method” of apologetics as seen above in Classical Apologetics, a “one-step method” of apologetics as seen in Evidentialism claims that one can move directly to the demonstration of the truth or probability of Christianity in particular on the basis of reports of miracles, the historical record, evidentiary support, the accuracy and reliability of Scripture, philosophical consistency, and other means. This can be a valid move even if a shared basis of theism has not yet been established. However, one of the primary points to be demonstrated often is the existence of God, established by the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The logic typically flows as follows. The evidence strongly points to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. What do you call someone who has power over death? God. Jesus rose, therefore Jesus is God. Thus, God exists.

John Warwick Montgomery, a prime practitioner of the Evidential Apologetic method, and a legal scholar, practicing lawyer, and barrister, holds an apologetic approach that is compatible with the legal system’s methods of using evidences to establish guilt or innocence beyond a reasonable doubt. Such a view would hold that we can approach facts objectively, and to some extent the facts will point us to the proper interpretation.<sup>49</sup> Montgomery would argue that this approach is not at all unique to Christianity or apologetics, and is in fact quite independent of

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<sup>49</sup> Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*, 292.

theology. He writes:

Now if you are not inclined in the direction of Christianity—as I was not when I entered university—the most irritating aspect of the line of argumentation that I have taken is probably this: it depends in no sense on theology. It rests solely and squarely upon historical method, the kind of method all of us, whether Christians, rationalists, agnostics, or Tibetan monks have to use in analyzing historical data.<sup>50</sup>

The appeal directly to evidences such as those found in history, archeology, science, reports of miracles, and the like without previously establishing a theistic framework marks the “one-step” apologetic method of Evidentialism. Cowan writes that “Evidentialism as an apologetic method may be characterized as the ‘one step’ approach. Miracles do not presuppose God’s existence ... but can serve as one sort of evidence for God.”<sup>51</sup>

Dulles describes Evidential Apologetics as an approach that:

most frequently places primary reliance on external evidences, especially the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles as described in the New Testament. The Resurrection, taken as the central miracle, occupies a dominant place in this form of apologetics. The evidential method substantially coincides with the second phase of classical apologetics, but the two schools disagree about the necessity of natural theology. The classical method maintains that the existence of God and the possibility of miracles must be established in advance in order for miracles to be understood as signs of revelation. The evidential method holds on the contrary that the study of Christian evidences does not presuppose natural theology. The remarkable miracles of Jesus, including His Resurrection, are seen as proofs that the God He proclaimed is real.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the differences in starting points between “two-step method” apologists and “one-step method” apologists, these two seemingly disparate groups of apologetic thought still share striking similarities. Both of these groups of apologists focus on the same central question, namely the existence of God, and both of these groups of apologists approach the apologetic task

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<sup>50</sup> John Warwick Montgomery, *Where Is History Going? Essays in Support of the Historical Truth of the Christian Revelation* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1969), 53–54.

<sup>51</sup> Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 16. Cowan goes on to note, “Given this focus, evidentialists may and will argue both for theism and *Christian* theism at the same time without recourse to an elaborate natural theology. They might begin, for instance, by arguing for the historical factuality of Jesus’ resurrection and then argue that such an unusual event is explicable only if a being very much like the Christian God exists.” Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 17; emphasis original.

<sup>52</sup> Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 356.

through primarily intellectual means as they formulate their positions largely in response to the intellectual challenges of the Enlightenment. For this reason, the same question asked of Classical Apologetics regarding its applicability in responding to the changing challenges to Christianity is also valid to ask regarding Evidential Apologetics. It may be a somewhat helpful methodology when the challenges to Christianity are of a factual or historical nature or if questions regarding the existence of God are predominant. However, such an approach certainly has its limits and is not as helpful when the question changes.

### Historical Goodness Apologetics

A newer development within Evidential Apologetics is a method of apologetics I am calling Historical Goodness Apologetics.<sup>53</sup> This approach is significant because it highlights a change in the primary message of the apologetic task. Rather than examining questions about the existence of God, this approach addresses questions and challenges posed to Christianity about the goodness of God and the goodness of His followers. It does so by looking into history to show that the church has been a force for good within society in the past.

While this approach features a different message, it still uses the same methodology of Evidential Apologetics. While the common message of Evidential Apologetics revolves around pointing to proofs for the accuracy of the Christian accounts of the resurrection of Christ and by extension, the existence of God and the accuracy of the Scriptural record, Historical Goodness Apologetics does not actually look at the text of Scripture and defend its accuracy or interpretation. Rather, its message is to look at the implementation of Scriptural teaching in the lives of Christians and the actions of the church *throughout history* in order to begin to offer a

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<sup>53</sup> While the method is evidentialist and therefore not a new category, the content of the method is different enough from traditional evidentialist approaches that I believe it would be helpful to give it a name. I do not know of any others naming a category in this manner, the title is original to me.

response to criticism that Christian calls to virtue and service go unheeded in the lives of those who would claim the Bible to be their spiritual guiding force.

One of the earliest works in this method of apologetics is the superbly documented book by Alvin Schmidt entitled *How Christianity Changed the World*.<sup>54</sup> Schmidt relates that as he began thinking about this book, he found that,

there was a pronounced paucity of information extant and available regarding the influence and impact that Jesus Christ has had on the world for two thousand years. Yet, in a rather nebulous manner many of us “know” that much of our culture, especially in the Western world, bears prominent imprints of Christ’s influence. Much of that influence is still with us even in the ever-growing secular and religiously pluralistic milieu of today. But when one looks for particular examples in books and articles regarding the influence that Christ exerted through his followers, there is very little that has been specifically delineated.<sup>55</sup>

Schmidt, throughout his book, then traces the positive influence of Christianity in almost all areas of life, including education, economics, science, politics, slavery, and the arts.

When considered by methodology, Historical Goodness Apologetics is identical with Evidential Apologetics. The method considers and evaluates facts of history open to all, without requiring Christian presuppositions. It does not require a two-step approach to consider the goodness demonstrated in the history of the church; it allows direct access to the topic in a single evidential step. It uses the same methodological procedures as would be practiced by an Evidential Apologist studying more traditional apologetic topics. However, the message of this

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<sup>54</sup> Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). This book was formerly published as Alvin Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 12. Schmidt mentions five earlier works that he found helpful in his research to the topic. Only one, *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born*, by D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, was written within the previous 100 years, approximately. The next-newest work that Schmidt found was W. E. H. Lecky’s work, *History of European Morals*, which was published in 1911. The other works Schmidt cites include *The History of the Effects of Religion on Mankind* by Edward Ryan (1802), *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church* by Gerhard Uhlhorn (1883), and *The Social Results of Early Christianity* by C. Schmidt (1907). Schmidt notes, “Apart from the five books just cited, one can also find occasional references in some history books that note the Christian influence on values, beliefs and practices in Western culture, but such references are usually quite brief and tangential.” Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 12.

method has changed, in accord with changing cultural challenges. Thus this approach merits its own brief mention here in the overview of apologetic methods currently in practice. This approach is helpful in the way it demonstrates how apologetics can shift in its message when faced with new opponents of the faith.

The expanded message of Historical Goodness Apologetics can provide a needed flexibility when the scope of challenges to Christianity moves beyond the existence of God and the factual and historical nature of his word. This is a good step for the corresponding apologetic message. As the church faces new opposition, however, the message of apologetics is not the only thing that changes. Sometimes the very method of apologetics can change as well.

### Enfleshed Apologetics

Consider a very different method of apologetics, which departs significantly from the approaches considered above. Previous categories of apologetics have developed largely in reaction to the Enlightenment and Rationalism and use the approaches of philosophy, evidence, or historical examination. It is also important to consider a rather different approach to the apologetic method, one that is less beholden to the influences of the Enlightenment. This form of apologetics has been developing in reaction to postmodernism, and its attendant diminution of reason. This approach has variously been called Incarnational Apologetics, Embodied Apologetics, or Relational-Incarnational Apologetics, as no standardization has yet occurred in the terminology, but I will use the term Enfleshed Apologetics for this style of apologetic response. The applications for this form of apologetics are broader, but I will apply it more closely to the charges of the New Atheists.<sup>56</sup> Enfleshed Apologetics points to a significant shift in

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<sup>56</sup> Various terms—such as those listed—are currently in use for this apologetic form. I will be using the term “Enfleshed Apologetics.” In cases when I am citing authors who use a different term, I will use the author’s original language in the direct citations, but use the term “Enfleshed Apologetics” in my writing. A representative sampling



the apologetic field away from intellectual argument and toward embodied practice. The category of Enfleshed Apologetics moves from thinking or talking about apologetic topics to embodying a living apologetic of love toward others. The emphasis is not on what the apologist thinks or says, but on what the apologist does and how the apologist lives. Practitioners of this category of apologetics are responding to the common cliché, “I don’t care how much you know until I know how much you care.”<sup>57</sup> The apologist thus seeks to show how much he or she cares through a life of Christ-like love and service. I will refer to this style of apologetics as Enfleshed Apologetics.<sup>58</sup> As we consider various apologetic methodologies, all the previous approaches

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of varied usages follows: the term Incarnational Apologetics has been used in Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*; in Irving Hexham, Stephen Rost, and John Morehead, *Encountering New Religious Movements: A Holistic Evangelical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004); in David Wheeler, “Apologetics, Incarnational,” in Edward E. Hindson and Ergun Caner, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2008); in McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*; and in James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and Logic of Incarnation* (London: Routledge, 2002); although he is criticized as being vague and using the term in too many different ways in Neal DeRoo and Brian Lightbody, eds., *The Logic of Incarnation: James K. A. Smith’s Critique of Postmodern Religion* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009). In my writing, however, I will try to use the term Enfleshed Apologetics and leave the term Incarnation to Jesus alone, as is done by Norman L. Geisler and Patrick Zukeran. *The Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), as they consider Incarnational Apologetics as the method of apologetics that Jesus himself put into practice in his earthly ministry. The term Embodied Apologetics is employed in Kevin Graham Ford and Jim Denney, *Jesus for a New Generation: Putting the Gospel in the Language of Xers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995); in Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson, *The Cross Is Not Enough: Living as Witnesses to the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012); and in Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics*. The term preferred by Paul Louis Metzger is Relational-Incarnational Apologetics, see Paul Louis Metzger, *Connecting Christ: How to Discuss Jesus in a World of Diverse Paths* (Nashville: Nelson, 2012). More often, writers describe an approach to apologetics that is lived rather than thought or argued, but do not name it at all. Such approaches tend to focus on relationships or general lifestyle. All of these various titles and approaches I am grouping together in the category of Enfleshed Apologetics.

<sup>57</sup> This phrase has been cited by many apologists. Among the authors I have read, the phrase has been used in: Sean McDowell, “Apologetics for a New Generation,” *Christian Research Journal* 30, no. 1 (2007): 22–29 and Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 129. Going one step further, Paul Louis Metzger has traced down the origin or a very early use of the phrase in Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 5 as he quotes “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” and then attributes the citation to Floyd McClung, quoted in Joseph C. Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1993), 35.

<sup>58</sup> In examining the field of Enfleshed Apologetics, I have encountered the following works: Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics*; Ford and Denney, *Jesus for a New Generation*; Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*; Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*; Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2003); Hexham, Rost, and Morehead, *Encountering New Religious Movements*; Alister McGrath, “Challenges from Atheism,” in *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith That We Defend*, ed. Ravi Zacharias (Nashville: Nelson, 2007); Hindson and Caner, *Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics*; Tim Morey, *Embodying Our Faith: Becoming a Living, Sharing, Practicing Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009); Amarnath Amarasingam, ed., *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Clifford and Johnson, *Cross Is Not Enough*; Metzger, *Connecting Christ*; and McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*.

have been considered based on a greater or lesser use of evidence, or on an effort to find coherence or incoherence in argumentation. This new approach, Enfleshed Apologetics, does not seek to present more or less evidence. Instead, the evidence given is the life of the Christian itself. Likewise, Enfleshed Apologetics does not focus primarily on the internal coherence of the argument for Christianity. Instead, it focuses on the coherence of a Christian's life with Christianity's professed teachings.

As I just noted, early developments in the shift from more traditional, rationally-oriented apologetic methods towards Enfleshed Apologetics began in the mid-1990s in response to postmodernism.<sup>59</sup> After an incubation period of about five to ten years, other authors began to pick up the idea, also largely in response to postmodernism. In the development of this approach, advocates have stressed that Enfleshed Apologetics must be seen as an ecclesial practice, it must be praxis-oriented, and it can't neglect the sociological realities that face the postmodern church.<sup>60</sup> In their view, apologetics should involve life experience and moral behavior.<sup>61</sup>

Some of the earlier examples of Enfleshed Apologetics come from Robert Webber in his 2002 work, *The Younger Evangelicals*, and his subsequent book, *Ancient Future Evangelism*, of 2003. He writes, "I have already commented on how the church is the new apologetic in the post-Christian era,"<sup>62</sup> and he argues that, in our postmodern world, "people are not nearly as interested in rational arguments. They want to see truth embodied and made real."<sup>63</sup> While this

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<sup>59</sup> As the initial development of Enfleshed Apologetics arose in response to postmodernism, the point is made that with postmodernism's much-noted lack of emphasis on objective truth then the way that the church lives is of vital importance. "In the end, by listening to postmodernism's critique of modernism, the church may learn that it is not 'objective truth' which gives its testimony authority and intelligibility, but the fact that the church lives its life in a way incomprehensible apart from the God to whom it witnesses." Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics*, 20.

<sup>60</sup> Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics*, 21–22

<sup>61</sup> Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics*, 21–22.

<sup>62</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 73.

<sup>63</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 73.

may seem like a new and different approach, it is actually a return to a very ancient approach to apologetics. Webber traces the outlines of this form of apologetics, using the term Incarnational Apologetics. Webber begins his consideration of this apologetic method by looking back to the early church. He writes that the:

early church apologetic may be rightly called an “incarnational apology.” The church is the continuation of the incarnation. It is the earthed reality of the presence of Jesus in and to the world. Herein lies the *ancient apologetic*. The church by its very existence is a witness to the presence of God in history (Eph. 3:10). There is only one actual incarnation of God and that is in Jesus Christ, but the church, being his body, sustains an incarnational dimension. The church is a witness to the presence of Jesus in the world as it embodies and lives out the faith.<sup>64</sup>

Webber encourages a return to this earlier, incarnational outlook for apologetics in which the church embodies God’s presence in the world. He describes the implications for a current apologetic approach, rooted in the approach of the early church, this way: “truth is not proven, it is embodied by individuals and by the community known as church. There is a general agreement among younger evangelicals that the emphasis in apologetics has shifted from reason to embodiment.”<sup>65</sup> Webber further writes, “I have heard from numerous young people; they are moved more by an authentic lived-out faith than they are by internally flawless, logically coherent, and evidently consistent argument.”<sup>66</sup>

In looking briefly at Presuppositional Apologetics, Classical Apologetics, Evidential Apologetics, Historical Goodness Apologetics, and now Enfleshed Apologetics, we have seen a broad scope of apologetic methodologies in continuum from using a nearly exclusive reliance on special revelation interpreted by reason without recourse to external evidence, to methodologies that admit various forms of external, tangible evidence, to a new apologetic methodology that is

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<sup>64</sup> Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, 95; emphasis added.

<sup>65</sup> Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, 101.

<sup>66</sup> Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, 104.

able to consider the life of a Christian as a lived form of evidence for Christianity. This last approach, Enfleshed Apologetics, gives great flexibility to respond to the changing challenges faced by the church.

### Cumulative Case Apologetics

In addition to the previously described categories of Classical Apologetics, Evidential Apologetics, Presuppositional Apologetics, and Enfleshed Apologetics, another category called Cumulative Case Apologetics has been recognized in the last several decades. This category allows one to recognize that the previous methods of apologetics discussed can all be individually helpful at times, but each one individually may not be completely sufficient to every apologetic need. Cumulative Case Apologetics allows for the mixing and matching of other approaches to best meet the needs of a given challenge. Since Cumulative Case Apologetics may not be as widely understood as perhaps Evidential Apologetics or Presuppositional Apologetics might be, a definition and longer consideration is in order. Cowan describes Cumulative Case Apologetics this way:

According to advocates of cumulative case apologetics, the nature of the case for Christianity is not in any strict sense a formal argument like a proof or an argument from probability ... it is an informal argument that pieces together several lines or types of data into a sort of hypothesis or theory that comprehensively explains that data and does so better than any alternative hypothesis. ... Christian theists are urging that [Christianity] makes better sense of all the evidence available than does any other alternative worldview on offer, whether that alternative is some other theistic view or atheism.<sup>67</sup>

In some ways, the name “Cumulative Case Apologetics” does a fairly good job of explaining itself. Such an approach recognizes that the objections to Christianity are many<sup>68</sup> and

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<sup>67</sup> Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 18.

<sup>68</sup> Gene Edward Veith notes, “Today Christianity is being attacked from so many different sides, tarnished with so many false charges, and obscured with so many misconceptions that the apologetics enterprise—that is, defending the faith—is critically important. The attacks need to be fended off, the charges answered, and the

thus one size of response cannot fit all objections. No one single argument can refute all of the varied charges leveled against the Christian faith. Instead, many approaches and many different methods and modes of argumentation must be marshalled to meet the attacks against Christianity. Each of these Christian arguments has a significant contribution to make to the overall Christian response.<sup>69</sup>

While some Cumulative Case Apologetic arguments deal with the issue of the existence of God, as is the primary thrust of Presuppositional, Classical, and Evidential Apologetics as noted above, the category is in fact far broader than that one issue. Cowan notes, “The data that the cumulative case seeks to explain include the existence and nature of the cosmos, the reality of religious experience, the objectivity of morality, and certain other historical facts, such as the resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>70</sup> Cumulative Case Apologetics is not limited to one particular line of inquiry, or any one form of attack, or any single style of argumentation, so it can encompass any of the widely varied questions that may be of issue challenging Christianity.<sup>71</sup> In this way, Cumulative Case Apologetics is uniquely responsive to the questioner. Paul Feinberg notes that this methodology would see various elements in human experience that need explanation, and

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misconceptions cleared up so that Christianity can at least gain a hearing, which is all the Word of God needs to create faith (Romans 10:17).” Gene Edward Veith, “Foreword,” in *Making the Case for Christianity: Responding to Modern Objections*, ed. Corey Maas and Adam Francisco (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), vii.

<sup>69</sup> In a similar fashion, Robert Velarde gives a succinct and helpful definition of Cumulative Case Apologetics as he writes that Cumulative Case Apologetics is “An apologetic methodology that seeks to build a cumulative case in support of Christianity by drawing from various sources such as logic, historical evidence, and so forth. Taken together, the various arguments support the truth of the Christian worldview.” Velarde, *Visual Defense*, 196. Likewise, C. Stephen Evans defines Cumulative Case Apologetics as “Arguments for the existence of God (or some other complex claim) that do not consist of a single decisive argument but rather try to show that God’s existence makes more sense than any alternative hypothesis in light of all the available evidence.” C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 30.

<sup>70</sup> Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 18.

<sup>71</sup> In the work, *Five Views on Apologetics*, Paul Feinberg is the apologist who represents the Cumulative Case approach. Feinberg writes, “A cumulative case argument is a broad-based argument involving many elements formulated as an informal argument. It is broad based in the sense that it includes arguments for God’s existence, religious experience, and God’s revelation in the Scripture—to name a few of the elements—rather than relying on a single kind of argument.” Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 346.

that a Cumulative Case Apologetics “gives apologists a variety of places where they can start in defending the faith, depending on what arguments would be accepted by the one seeking confirmation.”<sup>72</sup> Note how receiver-sensitive this description from Feinberg is. The apologetic response offered is shaped and guided by the type of argument that would be accepted by the challenger, not determined by the one offering the response.

One key strength of Cumulative Case Apologetics is the flexibility this approach offers to recognize the strengths of various apologetic methods and use them as needed and appropriate. In a book with the interestingly transposed title of *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History*, author C. Stephen Evans lays out two streams of apologetic thought which he classifies as Evidential Apologetics and Reformed Apologetics (with this latter category basically being a synonym for Presuppositional Apologetics). In one of Evans’ latter chapters, entitled “Putting the Two Stories Together,” he demonstrates the combined usage of Evidential Apologetics and Presuppositional Apologetics, which he calls the Reformed story. He writes:

I propose understanding the two accounts as related in the following way: the Reformed story is the story that the Church tells when it is attempting to understand how Christians in fact gain the knowledge they claim to have. The evidentialist story is the story the Church tells when it is attempting to convince or persuade someone of what it takes to be the truth.<sup>73</sup>

Evans notes that the Reformed story at times is not actually apologetics at all but rather is a theological explanation “to make clear that this knowledge is primarily due to the work of God rather than being something people achieve for themselves,”<sup>74</sup> while the Evidentialist approach is a truer form of actual apologetics.

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<sup>72</sup> Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 131.

<sup>73</sup> Evans, *Historical Christ*, 283–84.

<sup>74</sup> Evans, *Historical Christ*, 284.

The purpose of the Evidentialist story is primarily apologetic, though the doubters to be convinced may be within as well as outside the church. This task must not be understood as the task of providing a once-and-for-all justification of faith, one that would be convincing to any rational person in any time or place, but as the task of persuading or convincing particular groups of people by responding to particular objections and appealing to particular beliefs already held.<sup>75</sup>

The consideration of recognizing the strengths of various apologetic approaches, and using varying methods as appropriate, is a helpful contribution of the Cumulative Case methodology of apologetics. In this particularly responsive approach, the apologist has the freedom to recognize the particular forms and nature of the challenges presented against Christianity and tailor the apologetic response to the type of attack, rather than starting with a ready-made, seemingly one-size-fits-all theory of apologetics and attempting to use that one form for all challenges presented. The opportunity to combine even diametrically opposed approaches such as Presuppositionalism and Evidentialism give the strengths and advantages of flexibility and variety to the overall apologetic task.

Those who practice Cumulative Case Apologetics also contribute another understanding that is vitally needed in the field. Apologetics cannot absolutely prove the truth of any position. The level of certainty never rises to 100 percent.<sup>76</sup> Apologetics can point to the strong likelihood of a position or argument, but it cannot claim to give an absolute proof. Instead of attempting to make an iron-clad and irrefutable argument, Cumulative Case Apologetics seeks to establish the

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<sup>75</sup> Evans, *Historical Christ*, 284.

<sup>76</sup> Obviously this contradicts the strong opinion of Cornelius Van Til and those who follow his Presuppositional Apologetic approach. Thus we are forced to acknowledge that, while Cumulative Case Apologetics can make use of a variety of forms of apologetic approaches, it at times cannot take the distinct approach in its entirety, but in a modified format. Thus, regarding Presuppositional Apologetics, Van Til's claim that any degree of certainty less than 100 percent is an insult to God must be set aside, but the Presuppositional technique of working with a non-Christian's point of view to show inherent inconsistencies and then inviting the non-Christian to consider the philosophical consistency of Christianity may be a useable approach.

probability of a claim, not the proof of a claim. Charges against Christianity are answered in order to support the Christian position, but not to prove it.<sup>77</sup> The arguments assembled by Cumulative Case Apologetics seek to show their position to be probable—not proven, but probable.<sup>78</sup>

Paul Feinberg points out that some forms of apologetics seek proof. He writes:

Some have argued that we can prove the truth of Christianity or at least theism by offering *demonstrably sound arguments*. Such arguments are logically valid and have premises that can be shown to be true. A demonstrably sound argument is coercive in the sense that anyone who wants to retain rationality must accept the argument.<sup>79</sup>

However, Feinberg points out, there is another option.

A second way to understand the case for theism and Christianity is to argue that we can make a *probable case*. We will relax the standard and give up the search for absolute certainty. While we cannot prove that God exists and that Christianity is true, we can at least show that it is probable, maybe even very probable.<sup>80</sup>

Feinberg holds that the second option has more promise, and that the option seeking probability rather than proof is Cumulative Case Apologetics.<sup>81</sup>

### **Apologetics as a Responsive Discipline**

As has been seen in this brief overview of apologetics, apologetics is a responsive discipline. It changes in method and in message depending upon the context in which it is practiced and the controversies it is addressing. Because each time period presents its own challenges to the church, the Christian apologist needs to be aware of the past approaches in

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<sup>77</sup> Robert Velarde explains that in Cumulative Case Apologetics, “various arguments *support* the truth of the Christian worldview. Velarde, *Visual Defense*, 196; emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> C. Stephen Evans explains that in this approach while any one argument put forth by an apologist is in itself decisive, yet “since each argument has some evidential force, the cumulative case is alleged to make the existence of God probable.” Evans, *Pocket Dictionary*, 30. Note that Evans says the goal of Cumulative Case Apologetics is to demonstrate the probability of the claims being presented, not to offer absolute proof.

<sup>79</sup> Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 148; emphasis original.

<sup>80</sup> Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 150; emphasis original.

<sup>81</sup> Cowan, Craig, Frame, Clark, and Feinberg, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 151.



apologetics and yet also open to new developments.

In being aware of past approaches, one can note a dependence on logic and reason in apologetic approaches growing out of an Enlightenment mindset. Logic and fact-based arguments predominated in these methodologies of apologetics. This was appropriate to respond to the challenges which grew out of the enlightenment and were predominantly rooted in reason. The question of the existence of God was a critical question in the challenges faced by Christianity coming out of the Enlightenment, and traditional forms of apologetics addressed this question through straight reason, through straight evidence, or some combination thereof.

In looking at new developments in apologetic methodologies, we saw in *Enfleshed Apologetics* an increased flexibility to meet changing challenges to Christianity. *Enfleshed Apologetics* was marked with a less exclusive reliance on reason and a much greater openness to other forms of support in defense of Christianity. Evidences for Christianity no longer needed to be exclusively rational or evidential, but could include support such as the nature and experience of the Christian life. *Enfleshed Apologetics* did not develop in reaction to Enlightenment challenges, so its development was unencumbered by a near-exclusive reliance upon reason. Other avenues of persuasion were welcomed, and in fact given prominence. A Christian life of love, matching Christ's teaching of love, was in itself seen as an apologetic support for Christianity.

Various times and people pose a wide variety of questions or challenges to Christianity, so apologetics needs to offer a wide variety and style of responses. An approach to apologetics needs to be flexible because the changing challenges posed to Christianity need to be evaluated and each given its most favorable and probable response. In the past several centuries, the attacks against Christianity have been primarily intellectual, driven by the challenges of the

Enlightenment and Rationalism, so intellectual methods of response have been appropriate to a degree. However, in recent years the attacks on Christianity have broadened in our current cultural situation from intellectual challenges into the area of a Christian's life, so also the apologetic method of response needs to broaden accordingly.

At times, an apologetic approach can be broadened by looking to past methods of apologetics used in eras where similar challenges to those currently being faced were also addressed. However, a note of caution is in order. To use the same modes and methods of apologetics used in previous eras just because they were effective at that time does not mean the same previously successful approaches will be relevant today. Dulles notes, "Not surprisingly, therefore, no apologist from previous centuries or generations precisely fills the prescription that might be written for a present-day apologetic."<sup>82</sup> Alister McGrath further explains the problem by saying, "Each age generates its own specific concerns and critiques of the Christian faith. ... Indeed, reading older apologetics often seems like a journey down memory lane, marked by the names of writers and controversies that no longer seem relevant."<sup>83</sup> In some cases utilizing apologetic modes and methods of the past might be helpful, to a greater or lesser degree, but rarely can they simply be applied entirely without update. Giving correct answers, no matter how true they may be, to different questions runs the risk of speaking without being heard. New questions and new challenges also require new thoughts and new responses.<sup>84</sup> The apologist's job is to keep an attentive finger on the pulse of culture and sense any changes in the heartbeat of society so that a properly tailored apologetic response can be given in a timely fashion.

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<sup>82</sup> Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, xx.

<sup>83</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 28.

<sup>84</sup> Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm note that one of the underlying assumptions for the discipline of apologetics is that it responds to the criticism of a given time and place, so apologetics is ever-changing. Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics*, 183.

Otherwise, if an apologetic technique or approach that was developed in response to a challenge from a previous era is used simply because it is common or because it worked previously, one is left with the problem of trying to use a square peg to plug a round hole.

Perhaps the simplest way to navigate the challenge of broadening apologetic approaches while avoiding the problem of applying either contemporary or ancient views inappropriately is to remember that apologetics is, in its root and most basic definition, a defense. Gene Edward Veith, makes this point:

The word apologetics comes from the Greek word for “defense.” Christian apologetics is not necessarily about trying to argue someone into the faith, if that were possible. At its heart, apologetics is about defending Christianity from those who attack it.<sup>85</sup>

A defense specifically is given in the area of attack. When the attacks against Christianity change, the defense against those attacks also needs to change.<sup>86</sup> When the focus of apologetics

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<sup>85</sup> Veith, “Foreword,” in Maas and Francisco, *Making the Case*, vii.

<sup>86</sup> Dulles makes this point well as he writes in the “Preface to the First Edition” of his work, *History of Apologetics*, that “Every Christian must somehow come to terms with the current objections to religious faith.” Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, xxiii. In his concluding chapter of the book, Dulles comes back to the same theme as he observes, “As long as people ask questions and pose challenges to one another, believers will be called upon to give a reason for the faith that is in them.” Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 367. Apologist John W. Morehead picks up on Dulles’ understanding of apologetics as a responsive discipline, and expands on the thought as he writes, “As Avery Dulles’ historical survey shows, in every generation apologists have had to address different kinds of questions and issues. This has meant that apologetic styles and methods have been reconfigured very often so as to effectively handle the spiritual problems of the day. Once again we find ourselves in circumstances where the apologetic challenges and questions are changing, and so it is appropriate that we pause to reassess and reformulate apologetics in order to create a fresh agenda for the discipline in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” John W. Morehead, “A Fresh Agenda for Apologetics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Answers in Action*, accessed August 16, 2012, [http://www.answers.org/apologetics/fresh\\_apologetics.html](http://www.answers.org/apologetics/fresh_apologetics.html), 1. Further, Morehead notes that “The mission of the church needs constantly to be renewed and reconceived,” Morehead, “Fresh Agenda,” 1. Morehead comes to the conclusion that “In our age of religious and cultural pluralism, apologetics still has a vital role to play. But as we have seen, apologetics must be reassessed and reformulated in order to serve more effectively in communicating the gospel with cultural relevancy.” Morehead, “Fresh Agenda,” 6. As I will explore in much greater detail in later in this work, Morehead points out that as a wide variety of questions continue to be asked about the Christian faith, a wide variety of answers still need to be given—including from rationalistic approaches. Morehead writes, “With the need for a culture-specific apologetic in mind consider examples of contextualized apologetic approaches. In the first example, a rational emphasis will be appropriate in modernist circles where reason and logical argumentation are valued, whereas a relational approach will be more effective in postmodern contexts. This shift in emphasis should not be construed as an abandonment of reason or the use of apologetics as a capitulation to some form of irrationalism. Rather, it is an acknowledgment of shifting cultural realities in the West and strategic changes that should be considered in order for apologists to be effective communicators. In the modernist context great value was attached to arguments and evidences. In this context it was appropriate to provide ‘evidences that demand a verdict.’”

remains on defending the faith against attacks, then apologetics should be understood as a responsive discipline. Stated another way, the role of apologetics is to respond to the attacks leveled against Christianity. Apologetics is not and indeed cannot be done in a vacuum. The apologist's role is to respond to the charges made. This is why I call apologetics a responsive discipline.

Since apologetics must be contextual in its approach, apologetics must be taking note specifically of what attacks are being launched against Christianity, and adjust accordingly. David Wilkinson comes to the same point in his article, "The Art of Apologetics in the Twenty-First Century." He writes:

If the apologetic task in the twenty-first century involves the question of relevance, then part of its practice is identifying what are the apologetic obstacles and opportunities of today, and indeed the future. What are the issues that are going to become important in the years to come? The task of the apologist is to learn to listen, hearing what people are asking, and anticipating the things that will influence people.<sup>87</sup>

The first job of an apologist is not to analyze or argue, but to listen. Only in carefully discerning the nature of the attacks against Christianity can a truly appropriate answer be given. In our current context, an apologist needs to be attuned to the culture and its appraisal of Christianity.

In the understanding of apologetics as a responsive discipline, the apologist is always starting on "enemy turf." The apologist properly understood can never claim "home-field advantage." Apologetics does not start from a safe or even neutral starting point, it always starts under attack. Apologetics is, by its very definition, defensive. It does not choose the time or the

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In the postmodern context, reason is still valuable (since human beings are rational creatures created in God's image), but the place of reason in spirituality is different. For a postmodernist, truth and experience go hand in hand. There must be a combination and integration of the rational and the experiential. The use of a traditional evidential apologetic, with heavy emphasis on logic and evidence is often rejected by a generation interested in truth, but often looking for it in relational ways, and in ways that also make room for mystery and experience." Morehead, "Fresh Agenda," 2.

<sup>87</sup> Wilkinson, "Art of Apologetics," 13.

place or the means of the engagement. In fact, the method of defense is in large part dictated by the method of the attack. An apologetic approach thus needs to respond in a manner carefully crafted to the precise attacks presented.

### **Introduction to the Changing Cultural Setting**

Since apologetics needs to be highly attentive to the challenges faced by Christianity, it is vital to consider the condition of the culture into which an apologetic response is to be given. Thus, we now turn to a consideration of the rise of unbelief taking place in America as a basis for determining what apologetic response can be offered in light of the current cultural situation. While the specific focus is the challenge of New Atheism, it is also important to see an overview of the context in which New Atheism arose.

James Emery White, in his book, *The Rise of the Nones*, shows that the number of people claiming no religious affiliation has accelerated rapidly over the course of the last two decades. He writes:

To put this in perspective, consider that the number of *nones* in the 1930s and '40s hovered around 5 percent. By 1990 that number had only risen to 8 percent, a mere 3 percent rise in over half a century. Between 1990 and 2008—just eighteen years—the number of *nones* leaped from 8.1 percent to 15 percent. Then, in just four short years, it climbed to 20 percent, representing one of every five Americans. Even more telling was the discovery in the National Study of Youth and Religion that a third of U.S. adults under the age of thirty don't identify with a religion.<sup>88</sup>

The rise of the nones means that people will not be affiliated with a particular form of religious belief, and this lack of conscious affiliation may mean more openness toward critical examination of the role of religious belief in the public sphere. This is particularly the case regarding a critique of those who, unlike the nones, do have a religious affiliation and attempt to

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<sup>88</sup> James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 16; emphasis original.

bring that religious affiliation into the public discourse and practices of the country. As perhaps one marker of this changed environment regarding the role of religion in the public square, George Yancey and David Williamson, in their book entitled *So Many Christians, So Few Lions*, point out that the public voice of the Moral Majority has subsided in recent years, but an opposite counterpart, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) has grown 235 percent since 2005.<sup>89</sup>

The criticism of the role of religion in the public square is reflective of a somewhat different approach than has been the case in recent centuries. The attacks on Christianity have not been coming as forcefully or as frequently in the area of doctrine, but instead the attacks have been coming in the area of practice. The challenges to Christianity have not been intellectual in nature, but instead have been focused on the morality of Christianity. Instead of attempting to challenge Christianity on intellectual grounds, the more recent methodology has been merely to dismiss religious beliefs, simply because they are religious, and thus are deemed not worthy of consideration due to perceived moral failings of Christianity.<sup>90</sup>

However, rather than trying to restate the views of non-Christians, here are some non-Christians' thoughts in their own words regarding Christians: "I am only too well aware of their horrific attitudes and beliefs—and those are enough to make me see them as subhuman. (Female, aged 66–75 with some graduate school.)"<sup>91</sup> Another: "I would not live in a neighborhood that was almost all Christian Right. I would probably kill some of them. (Male, aged 66–75 with some graduate school.)"<sup>92</sup> And yet another: "They should be eradicated without hesitation or

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<sup>89</sup> George Yancey and David Williamson, *So Many Christians, So Few Lions: Is There Christianophobia in the United States?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 25.

<sup>90</sup> Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 27. See also George Yancey, *Hostile Environment: Understanding and Responding to Anti-Christian Bias* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2015), 117. While this is certainly part of the reason for a dismissal of Christianity, it is not the only reason.

<sup>91</sup> Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 9.

<sup>92</sup> Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 9.

remorse. Their only purpose is to damage and inflict their fundamentalist virus onto everyone they come into contact with. (Female, aged 66–75 with master’s degree.)”<sup>93</sup> These citations show the severity of the hostility held against Christianity in the current cultural situation. Non-Christians fear that Christians are trying to force their Christian views upon everyone around them. Non-Christians also seem to dehumanize Christians, in order better to rail against them. The non-Christians interviewed would deny people of faith a voice in dealing *with* society’s problems, and in fact blame Christianity *for* society’s problems.

The question of morality regarding Christianity is approached largely through the issue of tolerance and intolerance. Tolerance is elevated to the level of the highest societal virtue, and Christianity is then shown to be a seedbed of intolerance. One non-Christian who was interviewed about the possibility of whether the United States should have explicit laws punishing Christians responded, “[I] don’t believe in targeting a group of people with a law designated to control behavior. As long as they leave me alone and stay out of influencing government and political activities, let them wallow in their stupidity. (Male, aged 56–65 with some college.)”<sup>94</sup> The respondent himself demonstrates a high priority on tolerance, saying that he would not favor outright intolerance against Christians. However, he hints that Christianity itself is intolerant as he qualifies his statement by adding, “as long as they leave me alone and stay out of influencing government,” thus implying that Christians trying to force their views on others is a common problem.

When Christianity is viewed as intolerant, then it is not only not seen as the height of virtue, but in fact as its opposite. Intolerance is seen as being immoral.<sup>95</sup> If Christianity is

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<sup>93</sup> Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 9.

<sup>94</sup> Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 91.

<sup>95</sup> Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 67. Yancey and Williamson note that many respondents of

perceived as being intolerant, which is how Christianity is perceived,<sup>96</sup> then Christianity itself is immoral. Current culture goes a step further yet from seeing Christianity as being immoral, it even makes the claim that Christianity is evil. Christians can “be seen as hateful, especially if they are tied to a tendency to perceive conservative Christians as evil and without any redeeming value. Indeed, many with anti-Christian animosity did have a propensity to perceive conservative Christians as evil.”<sup>97</sup> If Christianity is viewed as evil it is also viewed, of course, as a detriment to society. In light of this style of animosity toward Christianity, Yancey and Williamson introduce the concept of “Christianophobia” as the best way to describe the current cultural view of Christianity.<sup>98</sup>

David Kinnaman and the Barna Group also offer insights into the thoughts of the culture that currently surrounds us and its views on religion, they published four books of particular interest to our topic.<sup>99</sup> Based on this elaborate and extensive survey research, these books analyze the culture that gave rise to the New Atheists and shaped many of the challenges currently faced by Christianity. In Kinnaman’s first book, *UnChristian*, he deals directly with the perceptions

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their surveys find the perceived attempted imposition of Christian moral ideas (seen as intolerance) to be immoral. See also Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 55.

<sup>96</sup> Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 54.

<sup>97</sup> Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 78. One respondent, a female, aged 46–55, with a master’s degree, said regarding Christians, “I believe they are the definition of evil.”

<sup>98</sup> “In chapter 7 we argue that the term “Christianophobia” best illustrates the characteristics exhibited by the respondents. This term refers to an unreasonable hatred toward and fear of conservative Christians.” Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 12.

<sup>99</sup> These four books consist of David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity ... And Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church—and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011); George Barna and David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2014) and David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Good Faith: Being a Christian When Society Thinks You’re Irrelevant and Extreme* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016). These three books are based on extensive research done over a period of 20 years stretching from 1995 to 2014, constructing surveys with various demographic groups including self-identified Christians who are churched, others adults who are unchurched, and in some cases focusing on the 18–29 year old age category, probing their reaction to faith-based questions. Together the three books reflect the research of approximately 50 surveys, representing both qualitative and quantitative polling. Most surveys had a sample size of either approximately 600 or approximately 1000 with overall numbers totaling tens of thousands of respondents.



that “outsiders” such as atheists have of Christianity which reflect the themes of the New Atheists and help depict the broader cultural milieu.<sup>100</sup>

Kinnaman proposes six broad themes at the center of *UnChristian*, namely that Christians are seen as 1) hypocritical, 2) too focused on getting converts, 3) antihomosexual, 4) sheltered, 5) too political, and 6) judgmental.<sup>101</sup> One could note that none of these challenges is particularly oriented toward the truth claims of Christianity or the accuracy of beliefs held by Christians. Instead, they mirror in many ways the issue of intolerance within Christianity. Christians are seen as being “unChristian,” meaning immoral, because they are intolerant. Several of Kinnaman’s points lean in the direction of perceived intolerance. A focus on converts means that whatever beliefs a potential convert holds are inferior and intolerable. Obviously, an antihomosexual stance is intolerant towards homosexuals. The political activities of Christians foster the perception that Christians are politically active in order to impose their intolerant view of morality upon an unwilling culture. Finally, the view that Christians are judgmental is another obvious connection to perceived intolerance among Christians. Thus, in light of Kinnaman’s research, we could summarize that our current culture does not concern itself as much with alleged doctrinal errors in Christianity as it is concerned that Christianity is a moral evil due to pervasive intolerance.

Kinnaman and Lyons stress that the ideas expressed by outsiders that shaped the book were

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<sup>100</sup> Kinnaman and co-author, Gabe Lyons note, “The main group we studied is ‘outsiders,’ those looking at the Christian faith from the outside. This group includes atheists, agnostics, those affiliated with a faith other than Christianity (such as Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Mormonism, and so on), and other unchurched adults.” Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 17. Kinnaman and Lyons reaffirm the same definition of the “outsiders” they study as the focus of the book later as well. See Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 249. The views reflected by Kinnaman and Lyons are based on surveys reflecting thousands of interviews, including a crucial component of interviews with people aged 16 to 29. Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 15.

<sup>101</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 29–30. Many of these themes are also echoed in Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*. The theme that Christians are too political comes across especially forcefully. See Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 45, 50, 52–54, and 81. They note that progressives worry about the Christian Right and politics, and suspect an attempted Christian takeover leading to theocracy.

not formed in a vacuum or without good reason. To the contrary, those interviewed were quite familiar with Christianity, and with Christians personally. They note, “Most Mosaics and Busters in America have an enormous amount of firsthand experience with Christians and the Christian faith.”<sup>102</sup> Most have attended a church for a significant amount of time, at least a matter of months, and nine in ten say they know Christians personally.<sup>103</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons point out the importance of a careful consideration of lifestyle in light of this research. They write:

Young people said they formed their views of Christians based on conversations with others, often with Christians. This is significant because not only does it mean we have a great deal of responsibility in developing many of the perceptions that people hold, but it also suggests the possibility that our words and *our lives can change these negative images*.<sup>104</sup>

Kinnaman and Lyons reinforce that the primary current objections to Christianity are not based on intellectual objections to doctrine but on emotional responses to the perceived “UnChristian” manner of many Christians’ lives.

Kinnaman’s next book, *You Lost Me*, was published in 2011. Kinnaman notes in this work that one of the disconnects between culture and Christianity is that Christianity is seen as

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<sup>102</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 31.

<sup>103</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 31. This statistic stands in stark contrast, however, with research by Yancey and Williamson in *So Many Christians*. Yancey and Williamson note that anti-Christian sentiment, or Christianophobia, is highest among those who have the least contact with Christians. Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 48, 50, 86–87. In fact, they note that those with anti-Christian sentiment attempt to avoid contact with Christians. Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 66. They also find that many with Christianophobia have no Christian friends, and try to avoid them. Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 84. This lack of contact with Christians, in Yancey and Williamson’s view, leads to the harsh nature of attitudes against Christians. Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 123. The difference between Kinnaman and Lyons’ research showing significant personal contact between outsiders and Christians, and Yancey and Williamson’s research showing little to no contact between those with Christianophobia and Christians may be due in part to a significant age difference in the survey samples. Kinnaman and Lyons worked with significantly younger respondents, many aged 16 to 29. Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 15. At this age and stage of life, people are perhaps more bound to the existing environment and the mix of people in it. By contrast, Yancey and Williamson noted that those with Christianophobia skewed significantly older, and tended to be concentrated in academia. These respondents had, perhaps, reached an age and opportunity to be able to select their environment more specifically, and they naturally had gravitated to like-minded colleagues and social networks.

<sup>104</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 31; emphasis added.

antiscience.<sup>105</sup> Of particular interest to my project regarding this topic, however, is that by the time *You Lost Me* was written, Kinnaman begins to note several of the New Atheists by name.

Kinnaman notes:

Another dimension of our scientific culture is the many scientists today who enjoy rock star status. Well-known scientists who promote atheism, such as Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Stephen Hawking, are front and center in our culture today. They have gained popular attention not only because of the post-Christian Zeitgeist, but also because the Internet amplifies provocative voices, enabling them to reach niche audiences and leverage their powers of persuasion to generate mainstream attention.<sup>106</sup>

Kinnaman brings two thoughts to the discussion of the interplay between the New Atheists and the shape of conversations about religion in popular culture. First, by recognizing that much of the perception of religion held by “outsiders” already in 2007 matches strongly with themes seen in New Atheist writings, we see that the New Atheists were already poised to have a significant cultural impact even before their writings had the time to permeate culture as they have today. Second, as Kinnaman does not even mention any of the New Atheists in his earlier work from 2007, but lists two by name in the 2011 book, we see that Kinnaman begins to hint at a degree of cultural influence exerted by the New Atheists, which could be suspected but not clearly seen in *UnChristian* from 2007. I am not arguing that the New Atheists have caused the changing attitudes toward Christianity that are becoming recognizable in culture but rather arguing that the New Atheists are accurate and applicable representations of the challenges from culture. However, Kinnaman seems to hint that his theory is that the New Atheist critiques are indeed working their way into the general cultural consciousness.

A subsequent book produced by the Barna Group, co-authored by George Barna and David Kinnaman, entitled *Churchless*, published in 2014, shows the further progression of New Atheist

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<sup>105</sup> Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, in particular see chapter 7, “Antiscience” 131–48.

<sup>106</sup> Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 134.

ideas into the culture. In this work, Barna and Kinnaman use the term “Atheist Renaissance” to describe what has taken place in the early years of the twenty-first century.<sup>107</sup> They point to the work of the “energetic anti-God evangelism of Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and others”<sup>108</sup> as being a factor in a dramatic increase in the unchurched population of the United States in the current decade.<sup>109</sup> According to Barna and Kinnaman, due in large part to the work of the New Atheists, atheism has been transformed from “cultural anathema to what all the cool kids are doing.”<sup>110</sup> In this more recent book, we can trace the further inroads New Atheist thought has made into current culture, as now Barna and Kinnaman name three of the five New Atheists by name, whereas seven years earlier Kinnaman had vaguely described some themes of the New Atheism being reflected in culture, but had not named any of the authors in particular. Thus, while the New Atheists have not caused the cultural shift we see occurring, they are representative of it in a significant, concrete, and documented manner.

### **Conclusion**

The culture in which the church finds itself has become increasingly hostile towards Christianity in recent years. The growing challenges toward the church have not by and large been presented on intellectual grounds, challenging the factuality of Christianity, but instead have grown from an understanding that Christianity is seen as a moral evil, in part due to its perceived intolerance of other views. As these styles of challenges have become more vocal in culture, the New Atheists have been recognized more commonly as representative voices of this

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<sup>107</sup> Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 8.

<sup>108</sup> Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 8–9.

<sup>109</sup> Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 9. They note that in 1990, the rate of churchlessness was 30 percent, in 2000 the rate had increased only three points to 33 percent, but in the following decade the rate of churchlessness jumped 10 percent to 43 percent of US adults.

<sup>110</sup> Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 147.

shift.<sup>111</sup> This indicates that it is important to consider carefully the writings of the New Atheists for two reasons. First, the arguments made by the New Atheists are representative of current culture, where such ideas continue to spread and gain in influence. Second, the New Atheists ask helpful questions for Christianity to ponder, even though as representatives of a coarsening culture their questions and critiques are significantly harsher than what has been heard for centuries. However coarse the critiques of the New Atheists, the way these challenges are framed can lead the church to consider an apologetic response that does not rely upon reason alone for defense. Instead, the challenges of the New Atheists should push apologetics to formulate a method of defense that is applied directly to a Christian's life, which is where the challenges of the New Atheists and the current culture find fault. The basic New Atheist charge, reflecting the view of current culture, is that Christianity is evil and a detriment to society. This challenge has raised a good and needed question: How can the church demonstrate that it is not a force for evil in society, but that in fact Christianity has a positive contribution to make for the benefit of society? But first, we need to look at the way the New Atheists have framed their attacks on the church.

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<sup>111</sup> This can be noted in the successive works of Kinnaman as the New Atheists receive more specific attention in each subsequent book, as noted above.

## CHAPTER TWO

### NEW ATHEISM AS A POPULAR CULTURAL CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIANITY

We now turn more specifically to the actual writings of the group of authors known as the New Atheists, noting how they embody the current culture's critique of Christianity. The New Atheists make no secret of their desire for religion to be given far less respect and deference in society than it has been accorded for centuries, and for atheism to be accorded a proportionally greater degree of moral respect. This is a surprising and relatively recent reversal of the status of atheist voices in contemporary American culture. For centuries, the ethos of Western culture saw atheists as immoral and untrustworthy, while religious leaders were held in esteem as being moral leaders and trustworthy authority figures. David Williamson and George Yancey, in their book, *There Is No God: Atheists in America*, note that "A generation ago, most [atheists] were tight lipped about their atheism because they knew the judgment that likely awaited them. That reticence is understandable and not without foundation."<sup>1</sup> Williamson and Yancey point out that, as late as the 1990s, most Americans would prefer to vote for someone who identified as gay or for a Muslim for President of the United States over voting for an atheist.<sup>2</sup> In fact, based on a 2006 study published just as the books of the New Atheists were beginning to gain popularity, atheists were considered to be among the least trustworthy recognizable groups in the United States, when compared to "Catholics, Christian fundamentalists, Mormons, even Muslims and

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<sup>1</sup> David Williamson and George Yancey, *There Is No God: Atheists in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Williamson, and Yancey, *There Is No God*, 6.

gays.”<sup>3</sup> While today names like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens are fairly commonly known, and known specifically for being atheists, that was not necessarily the case before the publication of the New Atheist books starting in 2004. Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, if they were recognized by name, would have been known instead as an evolutionary biologist and a journalist and literary critic, respectively. Their atheism would have been far less prominently known or proclaimed due to the stigma held against atheism in society.

In summary, in the closing days of the twentieth century, Christianity was generally viewed with at least some degree of trust among many members of the general public as reflected in the surveys cited by Williamson and Yancey. Atheists, on the other hand, were distrusted and disdained. Then came September 11, 2001 and the New Atheists.

### **A Brief History of the New Atheist Writings**

On September 11, 2001, the landscape changed. Certainly, the landscape of Manhattan changed as the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center were reduced to rubble by passenger planes used as guided missiles. But more than the landscape of Manhattan changed. The landscape of culture changed, and specifically the landscape of popular religious culture in America. The attacks of September 11, 2001, planned and carried out by Islamic terrorists, cast a new light on how people viewed religion and religious fervor.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Williamson and Yancey, *There Is No God*, 6, citing Penny Edgell, Joseph Gerteis, and Douglas Hartmann, “Atheists as ‘Other’: Moral Boundaries and Cultural Membership in American Society,” *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Sam Harris himself claims the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were the motivating factor for his writing. In the “Acknowledgements” section of *The End of Faith*, Harris points clearly to the link between his thoughts on religion and the terrorist attacks. He writes, “I began writing this book on September 12, 2001. Many friends read and commented on a long essay that I produced in those first weeks of collective grief and stupefaction, and that text became the basis for this book.” Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004), 323. This connection has been noted elsewhere. Massimo Pigliucci, for example, notes that the burst of New Atheist writings “was triggered (according to Harris himself) by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.” Massimo Pigliucci, “New Atheism and Scientism,” in Peter French and Howard Wettstein, *The New Atheism and Its Critics* (Boston: Wiley Periodicals, 2013), 142. Robert Stewart notes in his introduction to

While discontent with organized religion is not a new phenomenon or a phenomenon isolated to a handful of recent writers by any means, and thus the New Atheists can be seen as representative of broader cultural trends, the September 11 terrorist attacks served as the impetus for a small handful of persuasive atheists—the New Atheists—to publish books that gained international attention.

Who are the New Atheists and what books constitute their publishing moment? Victor Stenger, in his survey of the New Atheism, argues that the following authors and books established a new genre of atheist literature:<sup>5</sup> Sam Harris' *The End of Faith*;<sup>6</sup> Sam Harris' *Letter to a Christian Nation*;<sup>7</sup> Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*;<sup>8</sup> Daniel C. Dennett's *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*;<sup>9</sup> Stenger's own book, *God: The Failed Hypothesis*;<sup>10</sup> and finally Christopher Hitchens' *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*;<sup>11</sup> all of

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the book, *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath & Daniel Dennett in Dialogue*, that "Our world was changed forever by the events of September 11, 2001. On at least a surface level Al Qaeda is a religiously motivated organization. The New Atheists typically insist that contemporary religious terrorism is no mere historical accident." Alister E. McGrath, Daniel Clement Dennett, and Robert B. Stewart, *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath & Daniel Dennett in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 6. Alister McGrath also notes in his book, *Why God Won't Go Away: Is the New Atheism Running on Empty?* that "[t]he 9/11 attack turned out to be the intellectual and moral launchpad for the New Atheism." Alister McGrath, *Why God Won't Go Away: Is the New Atheism Running on Empty* (Nashville: Nelson, 2010), xii. Perhaps the most memorable link between 9–11 and the New Atheism comes from the pen of New Atheist Victor Stenger himself. He writes, "Science flies us to the moon. Religion flies us into buildings." Victor Stenger, *The New Atheism* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2009), 59.

<sup>5</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Harris, *End of Faith*.

<sup>7</sup> Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Victor Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis—How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007). Various authors cite this book with different forms of capitalizations. Some will use the more grammatically common form of the title, *God Is not Great*, and if this form of capitalization is used in a direct quote from another author, I will preserve this form. However, if I am citing Hitchens directly, I will use the capitalization format, *god is not Great*, which is how the title actually appears on the book itself. I think Hitchens was making a specific point about his disbelief in any higher power by leaving the "g" of god un-capitalized, so I will preserve what I suspect to be his authorial intent despite the unconventional spelling.



which were published from 2004–2007.

This listing of authors and books comprising the New Atheist movement is somewhat standard, but not universal. Of these authors, four figure prominently in summaries of New Atheism. Some have called them “The Four Horsemen” of the New Atheist movement, and this group includes Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens.<sup>12</sup> Hitchens also picks up on this term, “The Four Horsemen,” and uses it to describe that same group of writers.<sup>13</sup> While these four men are always included in lists of the New Atheists, other names are added descriptions as well. The most common additional name is that of Victor Stenger.<sup>14</sup> Stenger is a self-proclaimed member of the New Atheists.<sup>15</sup> Various authors include other writers in the list of New Atheists,<sup>16</sup> but for the purposes of this dissertation I will include

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<sup>12</sup> McGrath, *Why God*, 3–4.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22* (New York: Twelve, 2010), unnumbered photo interleaf page. This association comes as the caption to a photo in Hitchens’ memoir, which is not numbered. The photo, showing Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, and Harris gathered together for a conversation in Hitchens’s Washington, D.C. apartment, and including the pertinent description referenced above, is immediately prior to page 309.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Louis Markos adds Victor Stenger in addition to Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens in his book, *Apologetics for the Twenty-First Century*. Louis Markos, *Apologetics for the Twenty-First Century* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 216.

<sup>15</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 11–13. Here Stenger lists the primary books that he claims constitute the core New Atheist works, and he includes his own book, *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, on this list.

<sup>16</sup> For example, John Lennox notes that formerly the most prominent New Atheist was Richard Dawkins, but now perhaps Stephen Hawking could claim that title, since in his latest book he moved from agnosticism to atheism. John Lennox, *Gunning for God: Why the New Atheists Are Missing the Target* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2011), 9–10. Chad Meister and James K. Dew add in Richard Carrier and his book, *Why I am Not a Christian* to the list. Chad Meister and James K. Dew, *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 198. Jonathan Kvanvig develops a category he calls “The belittlers,” including the New Atheists whom he lists in as being Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and Daniel Dennett in French and Wettstein, *New Atheism*, 109n1. John Haught provides an exception to the standard listing of the New Atheists as he excludes Daniel Dennett from the group, saying “I was initially tempted to include Daniel Dennett’s *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* more focally in my survey of the new atheism, but Dennett’s book is an unnecessarily lengthy argument for a relatively simple, and by no means exceptional way of assaulting religion.” John Haught, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), ix. I would note that Jerry Coyne is never listed as a member of the New Atheists group, but he is frequently quoted favorably in New Atheist writings. As an additional possibility, I would mention that A. C. Grayling has published a brief book entitled *Against All Gods: Six Polemics on Religion and an Essay on Kindness* (London: Oberon, 2007) in which he covers the same ground as the New Atheists, but his book adds nothing new to the conversation and in my judgment does not represent a significant development in the thoughts of the New Atheists.

“The Four Horsemen” of Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, and Hitchens and add in Stenger as the group that most clearly constitutes the New Atheists.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to establishing a list of New Atheist authors and books, Stenger provides some of the major themes of the New Atheists. Stenger writes:

In 2004 Sam Harris published *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*. This marked the first of a series of six best-selling books that took a harder line against religion than had been the custom among secularists. This movement has been termed New Atheism.

Motivated primarily by the events of September 11, 2001, which he laid directly at the feet of the religion of Islam, Harris did not leave Christianity or Judaism off the hook. Nor did he pardon religious moderates.<sup>18</sup>

Here, Stenger sets forth several characteristics of the New Atheist movement that are worthy of note. While positioning the New Atheists within the broader secularist movement, he points out that the New Atheists take a harder line against faith than had previously been done. With arguments that are more harsh and aggressive than other atheists, they lay the blame for much of the world’s violence (exemplified by the September 11, 2001 attacks) at the feet of religion. Here, it is important to note that Harris does not focus his attention only upon a

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<sup>17</sup> I have chosen these five as specific representatives of the New Atheists based on the commonly held association of the “Four Horsemen” of the New Atheism being Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, and Hitchens—these four are obvious inclusions—and Stenger, as he self-identifies with the group. Michael Shermer, the founder of SKEPTIC magazine and a well-recognized atheist argues that Stenger should be included in the list of the leading New Atheists. He writes, “Vic was active not only in the distinct movements for scientific skepticism (of the type we do here at the Skeptics Society and at INSIGHT in particular) and secular humanism, but also a prominent contributor to the atheist movement. I have titled this essay ‘The Fifth Horseman’ because in 2007 his book, *God: The Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* (Prometheus Books) made it to the coveted *New York Times* bestseller list on the heels of four other similar works that also made the list: Sam Harris’ *The End of Faith* (2004), Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* (2006), Daniel Dennett’s *Breaking the Spell* (2006), and Christopher Hitchens’ *God is Not Great* (2007). These four authors became known as the ‘Four Horsemen of the New Atheism’ (or “The Four Horsemen of the Non-Apocalypse”) and were featured prominently in many popular publications as such. *I always wondered why Vic wasn’t included (outside of the obvious fact that the ‘Five Horsemen’ does not fit the literary reference). I know that Vic wondered that as well, but he was too proud to ever express it out loud. He was the only physicist of the group, and his expertise in answering the many physics-related arguments for the existence of God (the origin of the universe, the fine-tuned nature of the laws of physics, etc.) was crucial in the debate about to what extent science could answer theological or religious arguments.”* Michael Shermer, “The Fifth Horseman: The Insights of Victor Stenger (1935–2014),” SKEPTIC.com, September 20, 2014, accessed May 17, 2015, <http://www.skeptic.com/insight/the-fifth-horseman-the-insights-of-victor-stenger-1935-2014/>; emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 11.

radically violent interpretation of certain Islamic religious texts by certain religious zealots in a particular act of terror. Instead, he broadens his argument both to include the Abrahamic faith traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and to extend to the larger public realm. Such a broader argument is common in the literature of New Atheism.<sup>19</sup> By linking religions and violence, Sam Harris led into his larger argument that religions should not be tolerated for the greater good of society. This argument runs throughout the corpus of New Atheists texts.

Not only is the argument harsher in content, it is also harsher in tone. In the writings of these early works, the New Atheists function more with shock value than scholarship.<sup>20</sup> They do not present original or profound ideas stated as rational appeals as much as they catch the attention of the media and the popular imagination through visceral emotional appeals to a secular audience.<sup>21</sup> Such positions play well in the media, which thrives on extremes and shocking statements that sell much better than carefully crafted academic considerations. It also led to the flourishing of the New Atheists in popular culture. This connection between the New Atheists and the media is not surprising since Christianophobia is common among media personalities,<sup>22</sup> journalists, and in the entertainment industry.<sup>23</sup> New Atheism, thus, can be considered a popular cultural movement, occasioned by an increase in religious tension and violence and both welcomed and exploited by the mass media.

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<sup>19</sup> For a more in-depth survey of the New Atheist genre from a self-described New Atheist, see Stenger, *New Atheism*, 11–13.

<sup>20</sup> Alister McGrath, “Evidence, Theory, and Interpretation: The ‘New Atheism’ and the Philosophy of Science,” in French and Wettstein, *New Atheism*, 178.

<sup>21</sup> Alister McGrath, along with his wife Joanna Collicutt McGrath, in their book *The Dawkins Delusion* note (specifically referring to Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*, but the application fits all the New Atheist books) that “*The God Delusion* is a work of theater rather than scholarship—a fierce, rhetorical assault on religion. ... None can doubt the visceral appeal that this book will make to a secular audience.” Alister E. McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 96–97.

<sup>22</sup> Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 125.

As a publishing venture, however, New Atheism is waning. Following the New Atheist publishing outburst which lasted from 2004 to 2007, all of the New Atheists have published additional works, but the content of these later works by the New Atheist authors are less uniform in their message than the initial round of publications.<sup>24</sup> Of the five New Atheists, three have moved on in their writings away from strident denunciations of faith to other topics,<sup>25</sup> and two have died.<sup>26</sup> In showing that the authors have moved on, Dawkins writes regarding a subsequent work, “It is not intended as an anti-religious book. I’ve done that, it’s another T-shirt, this is not the place to wear it again.”<sup>27</sup> Harris similarly notes in one of his more recent books, “For many years, I have been a vocal critic of religions, and I won’t ride the same hobbyhorse here.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> After *The God Delusion*, Dawkins has published *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 2009); *The Magic of Reality: How We Know What’s Really True* (New York: Free Press, 2011); *An Appetite for Wonder: The Making of a Scientist* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013); and *Brief Candle in the Dark: My Life in Science* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015). After *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Harris has published *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010); *Free Will* (New York: Free Press, 2012); *Lying* (Opelousas, LA: Four Elephants, 2013); and *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014). After *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett has written *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking* (New York: Norton, 2013). He has also contributed to a book investigating the nature of consciousness, edited by Maxwell Bennett, *Neuroscience and Philosophy: Brain, Mind, and Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); co-authored a book (actually a record of a debate) with Alvin Plantinga, *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); co-authored a book with Reginald B. Adams and Matthew M. Hurley on the nature and evolution of humor, entitled *Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT, 2011); and co-authored a book with Linda LaScola based largely on interviews with pastors who have lost their faith in God and wrestle with decisions about abandoning their careers, *Caught in the Pulpit: Leaving Belief Behind* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2015). After *god is not Great*, Hitchens has published *Hitch-22*, in 2010; and his final book, entitled *Mortality* (New York: Twelve, 2012), is a compilation of essays he wrote while battling cancer, compiled by his wife after his death and published posthumously. After *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, Stenger has published *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2009) and *God and the Folly of Faith: The Incompatibility of Science and Religion* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> The three who have moved to other topics are Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris. This does not indicate their own positions and thoughts about religion have changed, but their professional writing focus has changed.

<sup>26</sup> The two who have died are Christopher Hitchens and Victor Stenger. Perhaps ironically, the three New Atheists still living have softened their approach toward religion somewhat in subsequent writings, while the two who have died are the ones who maintained their harder, more abrasive stance toward religion in their subsequent writings.

<sup>27</sup> Dawkins, *Greatest Show*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Harris, *Waking Up*, 7.

## Why Continue to Focus on the New Atheists?

A valid question might be asked: if three of the five New Atheists have changed course in their writings, and have toned down their harsh pronouncements about religions so that the publication of New Atheist works has died down, and the other two New Atheists have died, why respond to a publishing movement that seems to have enjoyed its moment and moved on?

To answer that question, it is important to remember that the New Atheist movement was never an academic exercise. It was and is a movement within popular culture. The New Atheists should be seen not as careful scholars who bring about profound changes in culture through their original thought, but as representations of popular culture. The New Atheists serve as examples of the objections that society itself is increasingly posing to Christianity. The popular and non-academic nature of New Atheism has been readily recognized. As Amarnath Amarasingam notes, the academic community “has largely dismissed their writings as unsophisticated, crude, and lacking nuance.”<sup>29</sup> He characterizes the New Atheists as “characteristically petulant and provocative, challenging yet cranky, urgent but uninformed,”<sup>30</sup> but “their respective books have been selling extremely well.”<sup>31</sup> One of the characteristics Victor Stenger consistently noted in his works was the bestselling status of New Atheist books, that for example, the *The God Delusion*, spent 51 weeks on the *New York Times* Best Seller List, or that Hitchens’ *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* debuted in first place on the *New York Times* Best Seller List.<sup>32</sup>

This points to the ongoing need for responses to the New Atheists for two reasons: 1) the arguments made by the New Atheists, while not being profound and original in themselves, are representative of current culture, where such ideas continue to spread, and 2) the New Atheists

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<sup>29</sup> Amarasingam, *Religion*, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Amarasingam, *Religion*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Amarasingam, *Religion*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 12–13.

actually ask good questions of Christianity that can lead the church to formulate a cultural response that goes beyond a strictly rational defense of the faith. The New Atheists pose challenges that Christians would ignore only to their own detriment.

The first reason that an ongoing response to the New Atheists is needed is that their arguments can serve as representations of popular culture. While it is difficult to discern how deeply a movement is accurately reflective of popular culture, it is perhaps an indication of the nature of New Atheism as a symbol of a larger cultural movement that Richard Dawkins headlined a “Reason Rally” which drew an estimated 20,000 participants to the National Mall in Washington DC on March 24, 2012, and another “Reason Rally” was held in June of 2016.<sup>33</sup> Or perhaps the ongoing cultural connection to the New Atheists and their thoughts can be gauged by the following they have generated online. A recent check of the web site for the Richard Dawkins Foundation showed that the site had 1,275,890 Facebook fans, 173,046 Google+ Subscribers, 7,405 Instagram Followers, 57,666 Twitter Followers, and 209,335 Youtube Subscribers.<sup>34</sup> Thus, while the publication of recognized New Atheist books seems to have ended, New Atheist thought continues on as a movement reflective of popular culture<sup>35</sup> and so the thoughts of the New Atheists continue to call for Christian apologetic responses.

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<sup>33</sup> Hemant Mehta, “Where Was the Crowd for the Reason Rally?” June 5, 2016, accessed June 7, 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2016/06/05/where-was-the-crowd-for-the-reason-rally/>. The second Reason Rally had significantly lower attendance than the first one. Whereas the first rally drew an estimated 20,000 people, the second one seemed to be under 10,000. Hemant Mehta, in the blog cited here, speculated that one reason for the lower attendance was that planners moved away from speakers that were strident atheists to try to attract a broader base of seekers, which may have backfired. Mehta speculates that if prominent, vociferous atheists (along the line of the New Atheists) had headlined the event, attendance may well have been higher.

<sup>34</sup> Accessed April 21, 2015. <https://richarddawkins.net/>.

<sup>35</sup> Perhaps another way to gauge the extent to which the New Atheists have penetrated culture is to note that—although the New Atheists’ writings themselves are not scholarly in execution—the influence of the New Atheists is now being examined in a summer course at Harvard based on the cultural impact the New Atheists have made. Harvard University, accessed July 8, 2015, <http://www.summer.harvard.edu/courses/summer-seminar-engaging-new-atheism%E2%80%94why-religion-remains>. It is interesting that, regarding the New Atheists, the course examines both “religious belief and its relation to rationality” as well as “how it [religion] functions in human life.”

Richard Dawkins, in his memoir, *Brief Candle in the Dark*, recognizes both that the New Atheists happened to catch a cultural movement of which they became vocal representatives, and also that they in turn had some effect on shaping the direction of the cultural argument as well.

He writes:

[S]omething exceptional was taking place. It wasn't just the sales that were exceptional, it was the fact that the book had struck a vital chord with the public. I think it is no exaggeration to say that it started a whole new debate, certainly for this generation, about religion and its place in society and became a game-changer.<sup>36</sup>

Dawkins goes on to write:

I think it's true that something really did happen in our culture between *The End of Faith* in 2004 and *God is not Great* in 2007. ... Our books do seem to have hit the proverbial nerve, in a way that many excellent books that preceded them did not. ... Was it that our books were especially outspoken and uninhibited? Maybe that had something to do with it. Was it something in the atmosphere of the first decade of this century: wings of a *Zeitgeist* hovering in the air waiting for an updraft from the next four books that came along? Possibly.<sup>37</sup>

Because of this, the New Atheists can serve as a vehicle by which to begin to consider the current status of culture. Cultural trends now facing the church are prefigured by, and encapsulated in, the writings of the New Atheists. Thus a response to the New Atheists' writings from a decade ago comes very close to being a response to cultural challenges against Christianity as they are being expressed at the current time.

The second, and perhaps more pertinent reason to respond to the New Atheists is a recognition that the questions the New Atheists ask lead the church at large and not just intellectuals to formulate more than a rational response, but instead push the church in the direction of a response applied in life.<sup>38</sup> The New Atheist charge that Christianity is evil and a

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<sup>36</sup> Dawkins, *Brief Candle*, 173.

<sup>37</sup> Dawkins, *Brief Candle*, 175.

<sup>38</sup> While phrased somewhat differently, this is similar to the case that Phillip Johnson and John Mark Reynolds make, writing "What I like about atheists is that although they tend to give the wrong answers, they also tend to raise the right questions." Phillip Johnson and John Mark Reynolds, *Against All Gods: What's Right and*

detriment to society has raised a good and needed question: How can the church *demonstrate* that it is not a force for evil or a curse upon society, but in fact is a help and a great blessing to society?

For these reasons, it is a needed and helpful project to consider and respond to the challenges of the New Atheists carefully. The response, however, must go beyond academic or intellectually oriented responses rooted in primarily rational appeals and address as well the popular and emotional and ethical appeals formulated by the New Atheists with such force.

### **Analysis of the Rhetorical Appeals and Arguments Made by the New Atheists**

For centuries, most of the debate between Christians and atheists consisted of rational/logical appeals about the existence of God. However, the New Atheists are less interested in the question of the existence of God than they are in the question of the goodness of God and by extension of his followers. The prominent New Atheist, Daniel Dennett, writes, “I decided some time ago that diminishing returns had set in on the arguments about God’s

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*Wrong about the New Atheism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 8. They explain that the challenging questions of the New Atheists force Christians to clarify their thinking, which is a good and needed project. Stephen Bullivant makes a related argument in his essay in *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal*, edited by Amarnath Amarasingam. Rather than say that the pointed criticisms of New Atheism force Christians to think with clarity, instead Bullivant makes the argument that the challenges of the New Atheists could stir new life into a religious culture overwhelmed by indifference. He expects that the New Atheist writings will cause an increase in professed atheists, but will also cause some complacent Christians to become more engaged in their faith. Stephen Bullivant, “The New Atheism and Sociology,” in Amarasingam, *Religion*, 123. Bullivant also asks who is buying all the copies of the bestselling New Atheist works. He notes that, “Aside from a few sold to curious atheists, the vast majority are presumably bought by religious believers who, although they may feel challenged by the new atheists, believe (or hope) that their arguments are not insuperable. For a significant number of these believers, then, *The God Delusion* (or whichever book) may eventually lead to the strengthening, rather than the abandoning, of religious faith and practice.” Bullivant, “The New Atheism,” 123. In the same work, Jeffrey W. Robbins and Christopher D. Rodkey note that the New Atheism might allow a freer conception of God to be reborn, although their conception of God is one that they hope would be “stripped free of the straightjacket of theological theism.” Jeffrey W. Robbins and Christopher D. Rodkey, “Beating ‘God’ to Death: Radical Theology and the New Atheism,” in Amarasingam, *Religion*, 26–27. Their hope is that the New Atheist criticism will dampen fundamentalist, or literalist interpretations of who God is. While this is not what many Christians would consider to be a healthy form of “rebirth,” it is a related argument to the one noted above that the New Atheists could bring improvement to Christian thought through their criticisms—it just depends on what one considers to be an “improvement.”



existence, and I doubt that any breakthroughs are in the offing, from either side.”<sup>39</sup> Instead of questioning the existence of God, the New Atheists attack the goodness of God, and the goodness of Christians as God’s followers.

As we see here from Dennett, the question about the existence of God is not the foremost question addressed by the New Atheists. This is not to say that they do not make any arguments against the potential existence of God. They do.<sup>40</sup> Instead, the claim that I am making is that while the New Atheists do at some points venture into the arguments regarding the existence of God, their main focus and strongest arguments lie elsewhere. The argument has shifted from the existence of God to the goodness of God and his faithful followers. They work with the overarching thesis that atheism should have a stronger voice in society than religion, since religion's many moral failings show that religions are evil and a detriment to society rather than a force for good.

### The Message of the New Atheists

What is the primary message of the New Atheists if truth claims such as the existence of God are not central? Victor Stenger speaks well for his own genre of New Atheism as he writes in his book, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason*, that faith should not be given respect or deference in society because “it is always foolish and leads to many of the evils of society.”<sup>41</sup> The main point of Stenger’s argument is not against the rationality of Christianity but against the moral standing of the faith. Later in this work he elaborates, “The new atheists

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<sup>39</sup> Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 27. Alister McGrath points out that the belief that there is not a God is just as much a matter of faith as the belief that there is a God, and that the belief in atheism is ultimately a circular argument. Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 180.

<sup>40</sup> We will look in more depth at the most prominent of these attempts at the start of Chapter Three.

<sup>41</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 15.

argue that faith is far from a benign force that can simply be tolerated by those who know better. Rather, it plays a significant role in much of the violent conflict in the world.”<sup>42</sup>

In fact, it might be better to think of the New Atheists as strongly anti-theistic agnostics rather than true atheists.<sup>43</sup> Christopher Hitchens makes this claim in his earlier book *Letters to a Young Contrarian*, “I’m not even an atheist so much as I am an antitheist; I not only maintain that all religions are versions of the same untruth, but I hold that the influence of churches, and the effect of religious belief, is positively harmful.”<sup>44</sup> However, this group has been labeled as the “New Atheists” by the popular culture they exemplify. It is unlikely that the title will change, no matter how technically inaccurate it may be.<sup>45</sup> For this reason I will continue to use the term “New Atheist,” but with the understanding that the movement, like the label, is more popular than academic. The New Atheists are arguing more against the presence of a Western Judeo-Christian religious tradition in the public realm due to their claim of a link between religion and violence than they are arguing about the existence or non-existence of God.

As noted by Stenger, the most basic message communicated by the New Atheists is that religion is evil. It is not an incorrect but benign superstition to ignore, but an evil to eradicate.

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<sup>42</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 46.

<sup>43</sup> The difficulty in classifying the New Atheists as strict atheists can be seen, for example, in Richard Dawkins himself as he develops a seven-point scale to describe the range of faith from “1”—someone who is certain about the existence of God to “7”—someone who is equally certain about the non-existence of God. Dawkins labels himself as a six out of seven. Dawkins describes the seventh positions as a “Strong atheist. ‘I know there is no God’”, but he labels his own position as a 6, which he calls a “*De facto* atheist.” In this categorization, while Dawkins calls himself a “*De facto* atheist”, he is in fact describing in the strictest sense of the term an agnostic position. Dawkins himself says that he would be surprised to find very many people in his seventh category at all, and he does not see the strong atheistic position as a likely possibility. Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 50–51; emphasis original.

<sup>44</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *Letters to a Young Contrarian* (New York: Basic, 2001), 55.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Dawkins provides a first-hand take on the name “New Atheist” in his memoir, *Brief Candle in the Dark*, and he comes to a fairly similar point. “Wherever the phrase came from, ‘New Atheists’ seems to have stuck. ... I don’t object to any of these phrases. It is, however, necessary to disclaim any suggestion that ‘new’ atheism is philosophically different from earlier versions espoused by, say, Bertrand Russell or Robert Ingersoll. Nevertheless, although it isn’t really very new, as a journalistic coining ‘New Atheism’ has its place because I think it’s true that something really did happen in our culture between *The End of Faith* in 2004 and *God is Not Great* in 2007.” Dawkins, *Brief Candle*, 174–75.

Stenger is quite bald-faced in his claim that religion is evil, as he writes, “Faith in God is the cause of innumerable evils and should be rejected on moral grounds. Morality does not require belief in God, and people behave better without faith than with it.”<sup>46</sup> At the conclusion of his book, Stenger summarizes the position of the New Atheists as arguing that faith is worthless and dangerous, and religion is a moral sickness.<sup>47</sup> Or, as Richard Dawkins says in *The God Delusion*, quoting Nobel Prize-winning American physicist Steven Weinberg, “Religion is an insult to human dignity. With or without it, you’d have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, it takes religion.”<sup>48</sup> Other similar arguments on the part of the New Atheists could be added as well.<sup>49</sup>

The basis of the New Atheists claim that religion is evil is that in their view, religion is a common cause of violence. Sam Harris writes in the first of the New Atheist books, *The End of Faith*, “We can see at a glance that aspiring martyrs will not make good neighbors in the future. We have simply lost the right to our myths and to our mythic identities.”<sup>50</sup> In his next book, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Harris writes:

Faith inspires violence in at least two ways. First, people often kill other human beings because they believe the creator of the universe wants them to do it. . . .

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<sup>46</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 160.

<sup>47</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 238–44.

<sup>48</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 249.

<sup>49</sup> This argument is also well-noted, although not well-refuted, in secondary sources about the New Atheists. Ted Peters states that the New Atheists condemn not just belief in God but respect for belief in God since religion is not only wrong but evil. Ted Peters, “The God Hypothesis and the Future of Atheism,” in McGrath, Dennett, and Stewart, *Future of Atheism*, 168. Richard Harries argues that the New Atheists, whom he calls attack dogs, believe that religion is not only wrong but “pernicious, an evil or poison that needs to be eliminated from the bloodstream of society.” Richard Harries, “Foreword,” in Amarasingam, *Religion*, xi. Phillip Johnson and John Mark Reynolds argue that the New Atheists see religion as evil and claim that it should no longer be tolerated. Johnson and Reynolds, *Against All Gods*, 17. Dinesh D’Souza writes that the New Atheists make the charge “that Christianity is worse than irrational—it is evil.” Dinesh D’Souza, *What’s So Great about Christianity* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2007), 203.

<sup>50</sup> Harris, *End of Faith*, 48.

Second, far greater numbers of people fall into conflict with one another because they define their moral community on the basis of their religious affiliation.<sup>51</sup>

Daniel Dennett, in *Breaking the Spell*, argues that violence can be fueled by religion, as “religions are certainly the most prolific source of the ‘moral certainties’ and ‘absolutes’ that such zealotry depends on.”<sup>52</sup> Richard Dawkins wittily links religions and violence in *The God Delusion* as he writes, “Immunized against fear by the promise of a martyr’s paradise, the authentic faith-head deserves a high place in the history of armaments, alongside the longbow, the warhorse, the tank, and the cluster bomb.”<sup>53</sup> The connection between violence and religions motivation is common throughout the pages of the New Atheist books.<sup>54</sup>

The New Atheists tend to make the argument that religions are violent because the holy books upon which they are based are violent either by example or by admonition. Victor Stenger, in his book, *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, notes that “The Old Testament is filled with atrocities committed in the name of God. These are rarely mentioned in Sunday School, but anyone can pick up a Bible and read them for herself.”<sup>55</sup> In his later book, *The New Atheism*, Stenger devotes several pages to listing violent passages in the Bible and supposedly morally questionable teachings ascribed to Jesus.<sup>56</sup> Richard Dawkins demonstrates both avenues of Scriptural

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<sup>51</sup> Harris, *Letter*, 80–81.

<sup>52</sup> Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 285.

<sup>53</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 308.

<sup>54</sup> Again, this connection can be seen readily in the secondary literature. John Haught notes that the New Atheists place the blame for killing and maiming on religions, and to free the world of such violence a radical solution is needed—no more faith. Haught, *God*, 7. Jeffrey Robbins and Christopher Rodkey note, “Taken together in sum, the new atheists tell us religion has been one of the principal causes of human suffering, that it has led to violence, and that it promotes extremism.” Robbins and Rodkey, “Beating ‘God’ to Death,” 25. Alister McGrath claims that the New Atheists make the allegation that Christianity causes violence. McGrath, “Challenges from Atheism,” 26. From the same compilation, we find Sam Soloman arguing that there is the widely held and unquestioned belief that religion is the main cause of violence and oppression in the world. Sam Soloman, “Challenges from Islam,” in Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion*, 52.

<sup>55</sup> Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, 203–4.

<sup>56</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 107–11.

guidance, example and admonition, in *The God Delusion*. He writes:

There are two ways in which scripture might be a source of morals or rules for living. One is by direct instruction, for example through the Ten Commandments, which are the subject of such bitter contention in the culture wars of America's boondocks. The other is by example: God, or some other biblical character, might serve as—to use the contemporary jargon—a role model. Both scriptural routes, if followed through religiously (the adverb is used in its metaphoric sense but with an eye to its origin), *encourage a system of morals which any civilized modern person, whether religious or not, would find—I cannot put it more gently—obnoxious.*<sup>57</sup>

As with the previous lines of New Atheist argumentation, other examples linking Scripture with motivation for violence and mischief could be given as well.<sup>58</sup>

In conjunction with these linked lines of argumentation that religion is evil, the New Atheists also make the argument that the God worshiped by Christianity is himself evil. This argument can also be extended out to his followers. If God is evil and his followers seek to imitate him in nature and in actions, then the followers are evil also. Stenger makes the argument that a God who is described as being willing to damn people to hell might be a possible God, but such a God would not be a moral God. However, Stenger shrewdly argues, an evil God *would* be perfectly compatible with evidence we see of evil in the world.<sup>59</sup>

The New Atheists hold that religion is evil and a detriment to society for five reasons, some of which have received significant apologetic responses, and some of which have not been adequately addressed. While I will list all five reasons the New Atheists claim religion to be evil, I will devote significant time to an exploration of those topics which have not been adequately

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<sup>57</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 237; emphasis added. For a longer section devoted to this theme, see Dawkins' chapter, "The 'Good' Book and the Changing Moral *Zeitgeist*." Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 235–308.

<sup>58</sup> From apologetic responses to the New Atheists we also see Alister McGrath making the case that a central New Atheist claim is that religion poisons everything, and that the Bible leads people to violence. McGrath, *Why God*, 62.

<sup>59</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 61. For evidence of this line of argumentation noted in the secondary literature, see David Beck's "Evil and the New Atheism," in which he notes the New Atheists' most provocative and common themes as being "the alleged pervasive evil of religion in general and, specifically, the allegedly morally repulsive nature of the Jewish/Christian/Islamic God." David Beck, "Evil and the New Atheism," in Meister and Dew, *God and Evil*, 197–98.

answered by apologetic responses. The five reasons the New Atheists hold that religion is not a neutral topic but a negative topic, a root of evil, are: 1) religions, in the accusations of the New Atheists, are the most prominent sponsor of worldwide violence,<sup>60</sup> 2) religions are inherently intolerant, and thus unworthy of toleration themselves,<sup>61</sup> 3) religious moderates, in the view of the New Atheists, provide cover for extremist religious views and thus are equally responsible for violence,<sup>62</sup> 4) religions, according to the New Atheists, define faith almost exclusively as blind faith,<sup>63</sup> and 5) religions, in the view of the New Atheists, hinder or try to circumvent scientific exploration, and science should be held as the primary or nearly exclusive source of

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<sup>60</sup> See, among many other places, the claim that faith is not benign but leads to violence in Stenger, *New Atheism*, 46. Several additional references are provided above, and I will continue to document and support this theme in the coming pages as well.

<sup>61</sup> We have already seen signs of intolerance toward religions in the New Atheists as for example in Sam Harris' quote that "aspiring martyrs will not make good neighbors in the future. We have simply lost the right to our myths and to our mythic identities." Harris, *End of Faith*, 48. While the New Atheists will occasionally make an outright call for an active intolerance of faith, often their intolerance is more circumspect, as in the example just noted. However, whether by active means or passive, the New Atheists' intolerance toward religion is quite apparent. John Haught notes that "In many years of studying and conversing with scientific naturalists, I have yet to encounter such a sweeping intolerance of tolerance. Intolerance of tolerance seems to be a truly novel feather of the new atheists' solution to the problem of human misery." Haught, *God*, 10. See also Johnson and Reynolds, *Against All Gods*, 17.

<sup>62</sup> Sam Harris makes the claim that religious moderates are as guilty as extremists in the opening pages of the very first New Atheist book, *The End of Faith*. He writes, "Of course, people of faith fall on a continuum: some draw solace and inspiration from a specific spiritual tradition, and yet remain fully committed to tolerance and diversity, while others would burn the earth to cinders if it would put an end to heresy. There are, in other words, religious *moderates* and religious *extremists*, and their various passions and projects should not be confused. One of the central themes of this book, however, is that religious moderates are themselves the bearers of a terrible dogma: they imagine that the path to peace will be paved once each of us has learned to respect the unjustified beliefs of others. I hope to show that the very ideal of religious tolerance—born of the notion that every human being should be free to believe whatever he wants about God—is one of the principal forces driving us toward the abyss." Harris, *End of Faith*, 14–15. One of the clearest acknowledgements of this theme has already been noted from Victor Stenger, as he writes in summary of Harris' *The End of Faith*, "Nor did he pardon religious moderates." Stenger, *New Atheism*, 11. Richard Dawkins advances this idea also in *The God Delusion* as he writes, "As long as we accept the principle that religious faith must be respected simply because it is religious faith, it is hard to withhold respect from the faith of Osama bin Laden and the suicide bombers. The alternative, one so transparent that it should need no urging, is to abandon the principle of automatic respect for religious faith. This is one reason why I do everything in my power to warn people against faith itself, not just against so-called 'extremist' faith. The teachings of 'moderate' religion, though not extremist in themselves, are an open invitation to extremism." Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 306.

<sup>63</sup> For the claim from the New Atheists that faith is understood as blind faith rather than faith founded on fact, see Stenger, *New Atheism*, 45. This is also noted in Haught, *God*, 3–4 and in Johnson and Reynolds, *Against All Gods*, 28.

knowledge.<sup>64</sup> As a result of these five reasons the New Atheists see religions as a source of evil. Thus, they demonstrate an openly evangelistic zeal to de-convert readers of their works from any and all religious faith traditions and convert people to an atheist view. In addition, they seek to limit toleration of religious views.<sup>65</sup> In general, the New Atheists argue that atheism should have a stronger voice in society than religion, since religion's many moral failings show that religions are evil and a detriment to society rather than a force for common good. The first three summary statements are rooted in the New Atheists' approach utilizing emotional and ethical rhetorical appeals, while the last two summary statements present a rational rhetorical argument regarding the nature of faith as the word is variously defined and the facts of scientific inquiry.

### The Methods of the New Atheists

As the New Atheists constitute a shift away from traditional atheistic arguments, they also

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<sup>64</sup> See Victor Stenger's *The New Atheism* where he notes that his main themes are regarding science and regarding violence in religion. Stenger, *New Atheism*, 14–15. The thoughts on violence have already been noted, here the significance of the reference is to note the importance placed on science. See also Haught, *God*, xiii–xiv. Stanley Hauerwas finds it somewhat of a curiosity that the New Atheists assume “that the most decisive challenges to the truthfulness of Christian convictions come from developments in the sciences or, perhaps, more accurately put, the ‘method’ of science.” Stanley Hauerwas, *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 74. Hauerwas thus finds that the New Atheists' emphasis on the methodology of science is misplaced, and I would agree that this is not their strongest critique of Christianity. However, Hauerwas goes on to imply that the New Atheists “think it important to show what Christians believe to be false.” Hauerwas, *Approaching the End*, 74. Hauerwas finds it strange that the New Atheists would attempt to show the falsehood of Christianity because the Christian life has become so watered down as to be virtually indistinguishable from other lifestyles. While I would tend to agree with Hauerwas that the Christian lifestyle has become unremarkable and my project is to show positive opportunities for Christians to demonstrate their Christian faith through applied service in vocation, I think the New Atheists view the Christian life (or any life rooted in faith) to be dangerous, rather than culturally accommodated and benign. However, despite this perceived threat, I would also assert that the New Atheists do not so much try to prove what Christians believe to be false as they launch a broadside attack against implementing faith in life at all, whether it is true or not.

<sup>65</sup> While these five summary statements are, to the best of my knowledge, original to me, others have come to quite similar conclusions. For example, Alister McGrath states that in his view, there are four main challenges from the New Atheists. 1) Christianity, like all religions, leads to violence. 2) God is just an invention designed to console losers. 3) Christian faith is a leap in the dark without any reliable basis. 4) The natural sciences have disproved God. McGrath, “Challenges from Atheism,” 28. For similar views, see Michael Ian Borer, who writes, “The entire notion of faith, as opposed to knowing, is condemned by the New Atheist as infantile and fantastic. Harris defines faith as ‘belief without evidence’ (2004, 59–73, 85). Hitchens sees faith as a practice that ‘poisons everything’ (2007b), and Dawkins writes that ‘Faith can be very, very, dangerous. ... Suicide bombers do what they do because they really believe what they were taught in their religious schools: that duty to God exceeds all other priorities’ (2006, 9). Religious faith stands in direct opposition to the New Atheists' *faith* in Science (with a capital S).” Michael Ian Borer, “The New Atheism and the Secularization Thesis,” in Amarasingam, *Religion*, 134.

demonstrate a shift toward harsher tones of attack. The change in the message of the New Atheists, attacking the goodness of religion rather than the truth of religion, also brings about a change in the method of their argumentation. While arguments about the factual nature of religion are most naturally conducted using logic and reason, arguments about the goodness of Christianity are less naturally suited to logical discussion and debate. Thus the New Atheists shift their method of presentation accordingly. The New Atheists do not so much argue that Christianity is factually wrong as they argue that Christianity is morally wrong. To do so, they present their case on the ground most favorable to their proposition, and rightly so. The most favorable ground, however, is not logical argument, but the provision of examples of religion as a moral evil presented with emotional power and coupled with claims to the moral superiority of atheism. For this reason, the New Atheists have subtly changed their method of argumentation. Rather than relying exclusively on rational/logical appeals in their rhetorical approach, the New Atheists broaden the attack to include emotional and ethical appeals in their rhetorical arsenal. In fact, the New Atheists are less effective in their writing when they use rational appeals, and their strongest points are made using emotional and ethical appeals.

The tendency of the New Atheists to rely more on emotionally charged, passionate arguments than on dispassionate reason has been noted even by other atheists. This is reflected in the way that Victor Stenger presents a discussion among various atheists at a meeting called *Beyond Belief* held at the Salk Institute in San Diego in November of 2006. Stenger reports that Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins were a part of the meeting, and “Top scholars in science also attended and most of those who spoke were atheists.”<sup>66</sup> Stenger writes, “I was somewhat taken aback by the benign view of religion presented by the atheistic scientists other than Harris and

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<sup>66</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 29.



Dawkins.”<sup>67</sup> He also laments that “Other atheist speakers came down hard on Harris and Dawkins, arguing that their approach will not earn any converts to atheism and asking what right do atheists have to deny believers the comforts of faith.”<sup>68</sup> Stenger bemoans that, while Harris and Dawkins tried valiantly to make their case, the other atheists at the conference were not swayed.<sup>69</sup>

It is interesting to note that, while Stenger calls attention to the fact that most attendees at the conference were scientists and atheists, what interests Stenger in his description of the conversation is not the scientific material presented in defense of atheism, but instead the approach to rhetoric preferred by most atheists as opposed to the harsh tenor of the New Atheists. The pushback from the scientifically atheistic representatives at the conference, and the point of resentment with Stenger, comes in regards to the question of what approach to communicating atheism will be most helpful or least detrimental. The majority of attendees at the conference apparently noted the tendency of the New Atheists to use harsh, violence-driven, fear-laden emotional appeals against religions, and feared that such a tactic would offend and drive people away from atheism rather than attract them. The disagreement had nothing to do with the rational content of atheism in general or various scientific approaches suggested to support the claims of atheism, rather the disagreement at the conference revolved around what type of rhetorical attack is best used to appeal to people who may be leaning toward atheism.

The New Atheists recognize that their approach bears rhetorical differences from the standard approach other atheists have taken over the years, and as Stenger identified, the

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<sup>67</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 29.

<sup>68</sup> Stenger, *New Atheism*, 29.

<sup>69</sup> Alister and Joanna Collicutt McGrath ask, somewhat sarcastically, why the New Atheists do not take the more gentle approach of Michael Shermer, and they answer, “because it doesn’t make for slick and simple soundbites that will reassure the godless faithful.” McGrath and McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, 95.

rhetorical presentation of their arguments is of great interest to their overall project. For this reason, I will approach the New Atheist writings by using a limited form of rhetorical analysis focusing on their use of the three methods of appeal: rational appeal, emotional appeal, and ethical appeal. These three methods of appeal are, of course, only a small component within the overall field of rhetoric, and I do not plan to engage here in a full rhetorical analysis of the New Atheist writings. However limited, I believe even a focus on just the three rhetorical appeals as used by the New Atheists can bring a new and helpful understanding of how it is that the New Atheists seek to advance their argument that religion is evil, and this focus on the rhetorical appeals can hopefully also point to ways that the New Atheist message can then be countered in Christian message and methodology.

In recent years, consideration of rhetoric has been resurgent in Christian scholarship, and with a much broader approach than what I will be implementing. As but one example of this trend, one could consider the “Socio-Rhetorical Commentary Series” undertaken by Ben Witherington III.<sup>70</sup> A fuller treatment of rhetoric within the Christian tradition not only marks Scriptural interpretation, but has certainly also been used in other theological disciplines as well. A fuller rhetorical treatment has been attempted in the field of apologetics, notably by Mark Edwards in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*.<sup>71</sup> When this in-

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<sup>70</sup> Ben Witherington, *Socio-Rhetorical Commentary Series*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995–2011).

<sup>71</sup> Edwards considers how the early church structured its apologetic message according to the rhetorical guidelines and expectations of the day. “It is worth remembering that literature in the ancient world was closely tied to the spoken word. Writing was a way of recording speech; letters were thought of as ways to make an absent person present; and texts were realized only by being ‘performed’—that is, read aloud or recited. Rhetoric was therefore fundamental to all prose composition, and it is in the context of analyzing rhetorical types that the word *apologia* is at home: according to Anaximenes’ *Art of Rhetoric*, once ascribed to Aristotle, there are three types of rhetoric—deliberative, forensic, and epideictic—and forensic oratory may take the form of *katēgoria* (accusation) or *apologia* (defence). It could be said, therefore, that ‘apology’ is not a genre, but properly the end or purpose of a speech, particularly a speech for the defence in court, and then more loosely a defence or excuse offered in a less precise context or genre. Demetrius’ catalogue of letter types includes the apologetic letter: ‘The apologetic type is that which adduces, with proof, arguments that contradict charges that are being made.’ This confirms the conclusion: the genre is ‘letter’, the content ‘defence’, following the model of the lawcourt speech.” Mark Edwards,

depth form of rhetorical treatment has been used in the apologetic field, it has invariably been utilized to consider the format of early Christian apologetics, since Aristotle's rhetorical guidelines were much more influential in the apologetic approaches of the early church. However, with the Enlightenment the rational appeal became central to the near exclusion of the emotional and ethical appeals. These more in-depth rhetorical approaches, while they are of considerable value in these respective disciplines, are more than what is needed to analyze the fairly blunt and inelegant approach to argumentation implemented by the New Atheists. A consideration of their use of the three rhetorical appeals will suffice to show their overall methodological approach.<sup>72</sup>

As we consider the New Atheists' use of the three rhetorical appeals we need to keep two things in mind. First, we must recall that for the past several centuries, attacks on Christianity have used the rational appeal (*logos*) almost exclusively, and this is the method of argument that traditional apologetic approaches have also utilized to respond. Thus, when we see that the New

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Martin Goodman, Simon Price, and Christopher Rowland, *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 90. For other studies of rhetoric as it was utilized in early Christian apologetics, see Anders Klostergaard Petersen, "The Diversity of Apologetics: From Genre to a Mode of Thinking," in *Critique and Apologetics: Jews, Christians, and Pagans in Antiquity*, ed. Anders-Christian Jacobsen, Jörg Ulrich, and David Brakke (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), 15–41; Anders-Christian Jacobsen, "Main Topics in Early Christian Apologetics," in Jacobsen, Ulrich, and Brakke, *Critique and Apologetics*, 102–10; Anders-Christian Jacobsen, "Apologetics and Apologies—Some Definitions," in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Early Christian Apologetics*, ed. Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, and Maijastina Kahlos (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), 5–21; John Eugene Fojtik, "Tatian the Barbarian: Language, Education and Identity in the *Oratio ad Graecos*," in Ulrich, Jacobsen, and Kahlos, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 23–33; and Maijastina Kahlos, "The Rhetoric of Tolerance and Intolerance: From Lactantius to Firmicus Maternus," in Ulrich, Jacobsen, and Kahlos, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 79–95. Note that all of these rhetorical studies involve consideration of early church apologetic texts. They do not research modern apologetic efforts.

<sup>72</sup> For Aristotle's Rhetoric itself, see Aristotle and Lane Cooper, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle, An Expanded Translation with Supplementary Examples for Students of Composition and Public Speaking* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1932) and Aristotle, W. Rhys Roberts, Ingram Bywater, and Friedrich Solmsen, *Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics* (New York: Modern Library, 1954). For fuller consideration of the overall rhetorical approach, see Edward P.J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); James A Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric: An Introduction* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998); George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Mark Garrett Longaker and Jeffrey Walker, *Rhetorical Analysis: A Brief Guide for Writers* (Boston: Longman, 2011).

Atheists do not rely exclusively on the rational rhetorical appeal but rather advance their argument predominantly, and perhaps most strongly and effectively, through the emotional rhetorical appeal (*pathos*) and the ethical rhetorical appeal (*ethos*), this alone is sufficient justification for using the rhetorical appeals to explore the New Atheist books. Second, we need to remember that while the rational appeal has been given priority of place for the last several centuries, the emotional and ethical appeals are not illegitimate forms of argument. They are not “illogical” or “irrational.” Aristotle, on whose work subsequent consideration of the three rhetorical appeals is based, notes the importance of the ethical and emotional appeals.

Aristotle places great emphasis on the emotional appeals and devotes significant time to exploring how they work. One of the reasons Aristotle focused on the validity of the emotional appeal is that he stressed that the when goal of rhetoric was to persuade, *pathos* along with *ethos* and *logos* were all valid means to achieve that end. He writes:

Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. This is not a function of any other art. Every other art can instruct or persuade about its own particular subject-matter; for instance, medicine about what is healthy and unhealthy, geometry about the properties of magnitudes, arithmetic about numbers, and the same is true of the other arts and sciences. But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us.<sup>73</sup>

Aristotle’s stress of the validity of the emotional appeal flows from his emphasis that rhetoric is persuasive. He notes, “The Emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgements.”<sup>74</sup> Rhetoric cannot be limited to *logos* and merely informing, but also necessarily includes making use of emotional appeals. James Herrick, in *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*, notes:

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<sup>73</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.2. Aristotle, Roberts, Bywater, and Solmsen, *Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.1. Aristotle, Roberts, Bywater, and Solmsen, *Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, 91.

As Aristotle views emotions, they are not irrational impediments to decision making. Rather, they are rational responses to certain kinds of circumstances and arguments. ... Thus, emotional appeals need not be irrational and irrelevant elements of persuasive discourse; they can become part of a carefully reasoned case.<sup>75</sup>

Mark Longaker and Jeffrey Walker, in *Rhetorical Analysis*, add, “*Pathos* is the emotion of the audience. This mood or feeling motivates the audience to believe or do something. It is often said that *pathos*—desire, fear, anger, love, and so on—moves a person to take action.”<sup>76</sup> The use of emotion to persuade is not, according to Aristotle, irrational, and it is often of great effect in moving an audience from complacent agreement to action. Aristotle notes, “persuasion is effected through the audience, when they are brought by the speech into a state of emotion; for we give very different decisions under the sway of pain or joy and liking or hatred.”<sup>77</sup>

Not only does Aristotle place great emphasis on the emotional appeal as a means to motivate hearers to action through persuasion, he also places a high value on the ethical appeal to the character of the speaker. In this regard, he writes:

The orator must not only try to make the arguments of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his own character look right and put his hearers, who are to decide, into the right frame of mind ... it adds much to an orator’s influence that his own character should look right and that he be thought to entertain the right feelings toward his hearers; and also that his hearers themselves should be in just the right frame of mind.<sup>78</sup>

In fact, as noted in an historical study of rhetoric:

Aristotle apparently held that of the three artistic proofs—*logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*—this last one, *ethos*, potentially was the most persuasive. When people are convinced that a speaker is knowledgeable, trustworthy, and has their best interests at heart, they likely will accept as true what the speaker has to say.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Herrick, *History and Theory*, 88.

<sup>76</sup> Longaker and Walker, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 46.

<sup>77</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.2. Aristotle and Cooper, *Rhetoric of Aristotle*, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.1. Aristotle, Roberts, Bywater, and Solmsen, *Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, 90–91.

<sup>79</sup> Herrick, *History and Theory*, 88.

For Aristotle, the ethical appeal was developed within the content of the speech itself, rather than being seen in the life of the orator. Corbett and Connors note:

The ethical appeal is exerted, according to Aristotle, when the speech itself impresses the audience that the speaker is a person of sound sense (*phronēsis*), high moral character (*areté*), and benevolence (*eunomia*). Notice that it is the speech itself that must create this impression. Thus a person wholly unknown to an audience (and this is often the case when we listen to a speech or read an article in a magazine) could by his or her words alone inspire this kind of confidence.<sup>80</sup>

Aristotle “did not feel that the listener should concern himself unduly with the orator’s actions outside of the immediate rhetorical situation.”<sup>81</sup> However, other writers on rhetoric, notably Quintilian, disagreed. Quintilian’s “good man theory” held that the character of the speaker was of vital importance, and that depth of character must extend outside the confines of the speech itself. “In Book XII of his *Institutes of Oratory*, Quintilian develops his concept of the perfect orator. First, he is a good man and after that he is skilled in speaking.”<sup>82</sup> While the way a rhetorician presents himself or herself within communication is certainly important and needs to be considered with care, I will also work with the broader understanding of Quintilian that the character of the rhetorician outside the act of communication itself is of great importance.

While the ethical appeal involves the character of the speaker, it is important to note that the *ad hominem* attack is not a component of the ethical appeal. While the two are related in that an *ad hominem* attack has an effect upon the hearer’s understanding of the speaker’s character, an attack upon the character of an opponent, by itself, is not an ethical appeal. Since such attacks are frequent in New Atheist writings, however, it is important to consider how they may function. If used carefully, with an audience that has been predisposed to a certain viewpoint, an

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<sup>80</sup> Corbett and Connors, *Classical Rhetoric*, 72.

<sup>81</sup> James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist, and William E. Coleman, *The Rhetoric of Western Thought* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt, 1976), 77.

<sup>82</sup> Golden, Berquist, and Coleman, *Rhetoric of Western Thought*, 77.

*ad hominem* attack can work in concert with an ethical appeal. For example, if an audience already has a distrust toward one party, and at least the likelihood of sympathy with the speaker, a careful *ad hominem* attack can serve to further distance the hearers from the one party and align them more closely with the speaker, whom they now see as of higher moral character. In such a case, the *ad hominem* attack, while not been the ethical appeal itself, has furthered the cause of the ethical appeal.

However, the opposite can also be true. If a speaker attacks an opponent using an *ad hominem* attack that the audience finds to be unfair, inaccurate, or abusive, then the hearers are just as likely to think less of the moral character of the speaker and reject the argument. In such a case, an *ad hominem* attack can backfire from the standpoint of an ethical appeal. As Corbett and Connors point out, “The effect of the ethical appeal might very well be destroyed by a single lapse from good sense, good will, or moral integrity. A note of peevishness, a touch of malevolence, a flash of bad taste, a sudden display of inaccuracy or illogic could jeopardize a person’s whole persuasive effort.”<sup>83</sup>

From this brief overview of rhetoric, first from Aristotle and then from Quintilian, we see two important themes. First, emotional arguments, while not being rational appeals, are not therefore irrational. Second, ethical appeals may be the most persuasive of all. These two themes will guide our understanding of the New Atheist arguments as we move forward through three case studies from their books. They will also guide thoughts on how to shape a Christian response.

Christian apologists frequently note that the New Atheists are weak or worse in their

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<sup>83</sup> Corbett and Connors, *Classical Rhetoric*, 73.

scholarship on the topic of religion.<sup>84</sup> While that is true, it is equally important to recognize that New Atheism is not a scholarly movement persuading people by its scholarly arguments. Rather, it is a popular publishing phenomenon.<sup>85</sup> At its heart, New Atheism is a populist movement started by the publication of a series of best-selling books that has gained traction in popular culture. As a popular cultural experience, New Atheism has been shaped by and in turn shapes conversations about religion in American culture. Since that is the case, it is helpful to broaden one's approach in evaluating the New Atheism and to consider it as a popular cultural experience rather than only as a scholarly academic endeavor.

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<sup>84</sup> David Bentley Hart suggests that Richard Dawkins' writing displays an "embarrassing incapacity for philosophical reasoning," Christopher Hitchens has a "talent for intellectual caricature [that] somewhat exceeds his mastery of consecutive logic," and that Sam Harris provides an "extremely callow attack on all religious belief." David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 4. In more specific areas of study, David Beck states that, regarding serious discussion of the nature of the goodness of God in the face of the reality of evil, Christopher Hitchens' book *god is not Great* contains "so little serious argumentation there that it does not deserve separate treatment." Beck, "Evil," 203. Regarding the New Atheists' attempts to debunk the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God through reason and philosophy, Edward Feser flatly states that "the criticisms raised by the New Atheists are intellectually unserious." Edward Feser, "The New Atheists and the Cosmological Argument," in French and Wettstein, *New Atheism*, 157. In a later essay in the same work, Alister McGrath suggests that "The 'New Atheism' has made a limited contribution to serious philosophical debate, given its overriding desire to present a simplified, rhetorically effective case for atheism, which causes it to take logical short cuts, misrepresent their opponents, and present occasionally crass accounts of complex philosophical, theological, and scientific debates." McGrath, "Evidence, Theory," 188. Alister and Joanna McGrath assert that "*The God Delusion* is a work of theater rather than scholarship." McGrath and McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, 96. Ian Markham compares the New Atheists to thinkers he labels "strong atheists," a group including Nietzsche, Camus, and Sartre, and finds the New Atheists severely lacking. In contrast to strong atheism which must be contended with in academic earnestness, Markham alleges that the New Atheists see "no implications of atheism for morality and truth," while he asserts that a more realistic, substantive atheistic understanding would have dramatic implications for how to understand morality and truth. Ian Markham, *Against Atheism: Why Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris Are Fundamentally Wrong* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 27. Markham also writes specifically concerning *The God Delusion* that "Dawkins is guilty of a basic sin of the academy. He wrote a book on a subject about which he knew very little: he set himself up as an authority on atheism, but never worked hard to understand the grammar of theism. In so doing, Dawkins betrayed the traditions of [Oxford,] the university at which he works." Markham, *Against Atheism*, 103. John Haught also contrasts the New Atheist position with the much more far-reaching projects of strong atheists such as Nietzsche, as well as Camus and Sartre as he writes, "This approach to atheism, of course, is precisely the kind that nauseated Nietzsche and made Camus and Sartre cringe in their left bank cafés. Atheism at the least possible expense to the mediocrity of Western culture is not atheism at all. It is nothing more than the persistence of life-numbing religiosity in a new guise." Haught, *God*, 21. John Lennox also notes that the New Atheists are "soft atheists" compared to "hard atheists" such as Nietzsche, Camus, and Sartre. Lennox, *Gunning for God*, 114. Thus, the New Atheists at times attempt to buttress their works with reason and intellectual arguments, but fellow scholars bat away their efforts with ease. Thus, the true appeal of the New Atheists should be sought elsewhere than in clear, solid reason.

<sup>85</sup> The popular nature of books published by Richard Dawkins, in particular, is noted by Wilkinson, "Art of Apologetics," 16. He notes that the books sell heavily and exercise influence over popular culture.



A rhetorical analysis of the core New Atheist writings will show that, while the New Atheists utilize all three forms of rhetorical appeal to some extent, they work most powerfully with the emotional and ethical appeals. In a culture that has historically placed great value on the rational appeal, this does not mean, however, that the New Atheists should be dismissed lightly. To the contrary, the New Atheists have the potential of being far more damaging to Christianity with their emotional appeals than an isolated rational argument ever could as culture itself is moving away from rational appeals in favor of emotional presentations. This transition from the use of rational rhetorical appeals to the more prominent use of emotional and ethical rhetorical appeals has been underway for some time. In fact, already in 2002 before the New Atheists wrote, David Wilkinson made the case in an article entitled “The Art of Apologetics in the Twenty-First Century” that Christians are losing ground in public appeal because they are not making any serious contact with the wider public whereas the leading scientists (he specifically names Richard Dawkins) are communicating directly with the public, and their communication is a rhetorically persuasive one.<sup>86</sup>

In order to encourage a form of apologetics that will communicate at the level of cultural critique, I will examine four examples of such emotional and ethical appeals from New Atheist writings, working thematically with the categories of “Emotional Appeals Connecting Religion with Violence,” “Emotional Appeals Challenging the Authority of Scripture,” “Emotional Appeals Showing Religion Is Evil and a Detriment to Society,” and “Ethical Appeals Showing the Moral Superiority of Atheism.” While I will present only a handful of samples demonstrating the emotional and ethical appeals utilized by the New Atheists, I suggest that these are representative of the larger genre.

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<sup>86</sup> Wilkinson, “Art of Apologetics,” 16.

## Case Study 1: Emotional Appeals Connecting Religion with Violence

While it is, in fact, sometimes difficult to find a clear and well-reasoned rational appeal in the writings of the New Atheists, emotional appeals show up early and often. In fact I would argue that the very first pages of the very first of the New Atheist books, Sam Harris' *The End of Faith*, set the example and tone for this form of appeal. In the very first paragraphs of his book, Harris sets out an emotionally loaded scenario in which he makes a very clear case for linking religions with violence. The segment is included in its entirety below to allow the full emotional appeal to develop. Harris writes:

The young man boards the bus as it leaves the terminal. He wears an overcoat. Beneath his overcoat, he is wearing a bomb. His pockets are filled with nails, ball bearings, and rat poison. The bus is crowded and headed for the heart of the city.

The young man takes his seat beside a middle-aged couple. He will wait for the bus to reach its next stop. The couple at his side appears to be shopping for a new refrigerator. The woman has decided on a model, but her husband worries that it will be too expensive. He indicates another one in a brochure that lies open on her lap. The next stop comes into view. The bus doors swing. The woman observes that the model her husband has selected will not fit in the space underneath their cabinets. New passengers have taken the last remaining seats and begun gathering in the aisle. The bus is now full. The young man smiles. With the press of a button he destroys himself, the couple at his side, and twenty others on the bus. The nails, ball bearings, and rat poison ensure further casualties on the street and in the surrounding cars. All has gone according to plan.

The young man's parents soon learn of his fate. Although saddened to have lost a son, they feel tremendous pride at his accomplishment. They know that he has gone to heaven and prepared the way for them to follow. He has also sent his victims to hell for eternity. It is a double victory. The neighbors find the event a great cause for celebration and honor the young man's parents by giving them gifts of food and money.

These are the facts. This is all we know for certain about the young man. Is there anything else that we can infer about him on the basis of his behavior? Was he popular in school? Was he rich or was he poor? Was he of low or high intelligence? His actions leave no clue at all. Did he have a college education? Did he have a bright future as a mechanical engineer? His behavior is simply mute on questions of this

sort, and hundreds like them. Why is it so easy, then, so trivially easy—you-could-almost-bet-your-life-on-it easy—to guess the young man’s religion?<sup>87</sup>

In this passage, Sam Harris is setting up his argument that religions are evil in part because they cause violence. However, if that were all he were trying to do, he could have simply mentioned a suicide bomber, and linked him to a particular religion, thus making his case rationally. Why does Harris go to the lengths he does to describe the crime and carnage? Because he wants to present an emotional appeal in this case, more than a rational one. It is hard to miss the vivid presentation that Harris offers regarding the suicide bombing.

Harris notes that when the bomber boards, the bus is crowded, and headed for the heart of a city. By mentioning the heart of a city, Harris draws an allusion to society as an organic whole, in which the faith-deluded actions of one person injure the whole of society. Harris chooses to describe the destination of the bus not as the business district or the shopping district or as the city center, but as the heart of the city. Thus, the religiously motivated act of violence being carried out strikes not a geographical area but a heart, setting up the charge the religion kills society itself.

Notice the personalization that Harris brings to the victims. The couple that sits next to the bomber is middle-aged, and we are given a snippet of their life to identify with them. They are trying to decide what refrigerator to buy. These are common, everyday people. They are simply carrying out the duties of everyday life. They could be any one of us. They are not fanatics, they are not engaging in any high-risk or questionable endeavors. They are shoppers. We are all, at times, shoppers. By focusing on commonality, Harris is by extension placing each one of us in the seat next to the bomber—or perhaps our parents or our children or our friends or our neighbors. The point is that this form of religiously motivated violence is indiscriminate. It could

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<sup>87</sup> Harris, *End of Faith*, 11.

affect any of us at any time, so we all have a stake in eliminating this form of violence. The New Atheists would say that the best way to do so would be to eliminate religions.

After setting the scene and allowing us to identify with the future victims, we are given a glimpse into the mental state of the bomber. Harris initially describes the bus as being crowded, but we come to see that it is not yet completely full. The complete carnage desired by the bomber is not yet possible. However, after another stop, the bus is full to the point that the last seats are taken and the passengers are gathering in the aisle. He smiles. He is happy that his destructive act will affect the largest number of people he could reach. Harris makes sure we recognize that the bomber is engaging in cold, calculated, premeditated murder. He hints at the bomber's diabolical plan by explaining that the bomber intentionally chooses to wait until a second stop to make sure the bus is filled to capacity. Harris ends his account of the bombing act itself by saying that from the bomber's perspective, all has gone according to plan. This is no accident. This is premeditated mass murder at its most malignant. By showing the reader the bomber's pleasure at the devastation he plans and anticipates, we are led to feel revulsion towards him—and by extension, towards his motives, which are rooted in his religious faith.

For Harris however, feeling revulsion toward the bomber is not enough. Harris does not want the reader to feel anger only toward an individual terrorist. Instead he wants his audience to experience disgust toward the terrorist's entire religion. This is why Harris offers the third paragraph, narrating the scene that unfolds when the bomber's family hears about the suicide attack. We are told that they feel tremendous pride at their son's accomplishment, but even that does not implicate enough people in the deed for Harris. He goes on to tell of how the neighbors, who here representing a broader swath of the entire religious group in question, celebrate the wonderful event and offer gifts to the proud parents. Harris leads his readers to feel revulsion at

this celebration of violence. Whereas rational people might bring presents to parents to celebrate new life, such as the birth of a child, in the religious system Harris describes neighbors celebrate the death of a child, so long as he takes infidels with him in a gory act of religious glory.

Finally, notice that Harris tries to plant the seed that what he has actually done is make a rational argument. He states “These are the facts.” Facts are impersonal, rational things. Harris makes the claim that he is dealing with the building-blocks of reason. In fact he is not, at least not primarily. The facts could be presented thus: “Muhammed Bin Mohammed, age 19, detonated a suicide bomb on a city bus just after it pulled out from Central Station, killing all 23 people on the bus, and also injuring five people on the street.” (While the names and figures are fictitious, they parallel the details in Harris’ account.) Beyond that, Harris in the paragraphs he actually wrote was not dealing in the realm of reason and fact, but in the realm of emotion. While presenting to his reader that he is presenting a rational case, Harris actually pulls a bait-and-switch and substitutes an almost entirely emotional appeal instead.

Harris proceeds, in the closing paragraph of this illustration, to link religion to societal ills. He mentions specifically education and socioeconomic status, but states that he could list hundreds of other categories as well, such as race, gender, and the like. He then implies that the root cause of the suicide bomber’s actions are deeper, and thus more problematic, than any of these. The root cause for Harris is religion. If the problem were education, then address the educational problem. If the problem were socioeconomic, then address income inequality. Both of these are topics of lively debate in society today. However, Harris implies that religion should be of far higher importance for society to address and “fix” than any of these others. Harris’ suggested “fix” for religion is its eradication.

For Harris in setting up this scenario, all has gone according to plan. It is a nicely executed

tug on the reader's heartstrings and it brilliantly sets up the central argument of Harris' book that faith causes violence and thus we must find a way to bring about the "end of faith."

### **Case Study 2: Emotional and Ethical Appeals Challenging the Authority of Scripture as a Guide to Morality**

Sam Harris' second book, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, is also solidly within the New Atheists genre, and like its predecessor, it likewise demonstrates a heavy reliance on emotional rhetorical appeals as just seen in the introduction to *The End of Faith*. In the passage examined below Harris adds to the argument that religion and violence are connected as he goes a step further to use tendencies to violence to make a subtle attack on the authority of Scripture as an appropriate guide to morality. By seeking an emotional reaction against the moral authority of Scripture, by extension the overall reliability of Scripture is also at stake. In his *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Harris writes,

The idea that the Bible is a perfect guide to morality is simply astounding, given the contents of the book. Admittedly, God's counsel to parents is straightforward: whenever children get out of line, we should beat them with a rod (Proverbs 13:24, 20:30, and 23:13–14). If they are shameless enough to talk back to us, we should kill them (Exodus 21:15, Leviticus 20:9, Deuteronomy 21:18–21, Mark 7:9–13, and Matthew 15:4–7). We must also stone people to death for heresy, adultery, homosexuality, working on the Sabbath, worshipping graven images, practicing sorcery, and a wide variety of other imaginary crimes.<sup>88</sup>

Harris begins his argument by referencing the Christian claim that the Bible offers a "perfect guide to morality." By referencing perfection, Harris gestures toward Christian claims of inerrancy and holiness for their Scriptures. If Scripture is inerrant, Christians would claim that it is historically accurate and non-contradictory in its content. Harris has this level of perfection in his sights as he attacks the moral perfection of the Bible also. By referencing a guide to morality, Harris suggests such biblical counsel has practical implications for daily life. At this point,

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<sup>88</sup> Harris, *Letter*, 8.

however, Harris' analysis of Scripture takes an ironic and humorous turn. Harris offers a series of various situations that are coordinated with biblical commands. The listing moves from common situations in which one could expect general agreement about moral behavior like matters of parenting, through controverted public debates such as homosexuality, to specific situations that are clearly religious including worshipping graven images and sorcery. While the situations proceed from common to religious and from simple to complex, the biblical guidance is simply and consistently violent and intolerant to an extreme. Whether one is working with a wayward child, homosexuality, or sorcery, the common moral guidance is to kill. Harris describes such consistent violence as "God's counsel," ironically playing upon the normal associations of counsel with therapeutic care; and his description of this counsel as "straightforward" deflects serious moral consideration through humor. Harris implies that God's direction for every situation will always be for Christians to kill. One can hardly be more "straightforward" than that.

Harris' irony and humor signal that he is not approaching this argument seriously. To do so would require a much more rigorous standard of interpretation that would need to be applied to all of the Biblical passages he is citing and an honest evaluation of how Christianity treats such passages in relation to ethical guidance for its people. Harris, however, is not making a rational appeal to persuade his readers. Instead, he is relying upon an emotional and ethical appeal. Emotionally, Harris is highlighting teachings that would offend most of his readers, for example the admonition to kill children when they "talk back" to their parents. He is also highlighting situations that are emotionally charged because of a highly sexualized culture as he touches on adultery and homosexuality. In addition, he shocks the reader when he uses the term "simply astounding" by subverting the common cultural assumption of a benevolent deity at the heart of

the Christian faith with a revelation of a violent deity whose consistent counsel is to kill.

In terms of an ethical appeal, Harris is building the case for a much larger argument that limits the cultural influence of Christianity out of righteous anger and public concern. Harris claims that Christianity fabricates rules and then imposes death upon those who disobey them. Rather than call these rules “imaginary” up front, however, Harris strategically waits until the end to label all of this fictitious. By that time, the reader will have moved from general examples that belie common sense such as killing a child for talking back, through specific examples that are complex and presently debated within the culture like homosexuality, to sectarian examples that are much harder to define including working on the Sabbath and worshipping graven images. If even Christians are not in agreement on what constitutes the Sabbath or worshipping graven images, is it really just to command death as the penalty? Appealing to the reader’s desire for fairness and the protection of life, Harris labels these matters “imaginary crimes,” constructing a vision of the church as an institution that makes up rules to criminalize people and then kills them for disobeying. The language of “imaginary crimes” is intentional. Through the emotional argument comparing Scriptural morality to criminal behavior, Harris is seeking to separate his readers from their seemingly crime-drenched faith and lead them to see the supposed moral superiority of his atheistic position. By extension, if the moral authority of Scripture is not to be trusted, then the factual accuracy of Scripture can also be called into question with ease. If the moral teaching of Scripture is abandoned, then the historical teachings of the Bible are trivial or irrelevant at best.

If the argument is rhetorically powerful, it is partly because Harris is building upon a model of Scriptural interpretation that has been manifested by the church itself in the public square. The use of proof texts without proper contextualization or communal deliberation did not originate



with the New Atheists. In fact, many readers would associate such proof texting with the church. Several writers who have responded to the New Atheist movement have noted the literalistic manner in which the New Atheists deal with Scriptural interpretation. They have compared the New Atheist approach to Scripture with the approach used by Fundamentalists within Christianity. Those who critique the movement often refer to the New Atheists as “Fundamentalist Atheists.”<sup>89</sup> The rationale for this designation rests on the idea that they interpret Scripture in the same literalistic way that fundamentalist Christians interpret Scripture. In fact, at times the New Atheists are even *more* literalistic in their interpretation of Scripture than are fundamentalist Christians.<sup>90</sup> That, however, is not because they are ignorant<sup>91</sup> but rather because they are shrewd. Desiring to persuade their readers that Christian religious texts inspire violence, they use popular but erroneous methods of Christian interpretation to demonstrate how religious texts sanction violence. Whether or not Christians truly interpret texts this way does not matter. What matters is that their readers think they could.

The New Atheists’ literalism in interpreting Scripture is particularly obvious in dealing with texts that seem to call for acts of violence on the part of followers of the Scripture in

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<sup>89</sup> This relationship is noted by multiple writers in Amarasingam, *Religion*. In the “Preface,” Reza Aslan notes on page xiii, “It is no exaggeration to describe the movement popularized by the likes of Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens as a new and particularly zealous form of fundamentalism—an *atheist* fundamentalism.” Aslan, “Preface,” *Religion*, xiii. An entire chapter of Amarasingam’s compilation is devoted to considering this comparison. The chapter, written by William Stahl, is entitled “One-Dimensional Rage: The Social Epistemology of the New Atheism and Fundamentalism.” Stahl writes, “What is striking about the current debate is the frequency with which the New Atheists are portrayed as mirror images of religious fundamentalists.” William Stahl, “One-Dimensional Rage: The Social Epistemology of the New Atheism and Fundamentalism,” in Amarasingam, *Religion*, 97. Additionally, John Haught writes “the important point to keep in mind is that the new atheist places the same literalist demands on the Bible as do Christian and other fundamentalists.” Haught, *God*, 32–33.

<sup>90</sup> Aslan, “Preface,” xiii.

<sup>91</sup> On this point specifically, Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath call the bluff when dealing with Richard Dawkins and claims that Christians execute disobedient children or those who break the Sabbath: “Dawkins knows this is not true, enough Christians have told him so. His repetition of this nonsense does him little credit and simply suggests that he expects his readers seriously to believe that Christians are in the habit of stoning people to death.” McGrath and McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, 91.

question. Any command given by God to His followers to kill, injure, or maim is taken with absolute literality and utmost importance by the New Atheists. Of course, in the rare case when any passages of Scripture urging tolerance or moderation or advocating mercy and charity are brought up by the New Atheists, their tendency toward literal interpretations fades rapidly. The New Atheists are more interested in fear-driven emotional appeals coming from violent passages of Scripture than they are in presenting a rational appeal based in a reasoned interpretation of Scripture using a balanced and respectable hermeneutical approach.<sup>92</sup>

In addition to a literalist method of interpretation, the New Atheists claim that people of faith will act in literal accord with the teachings they interpret literally.<sup>93</sup> Thus, the New Atheists wed a literal interpretation of Scripture to the effect such a reading has on the lives of those who actually believe.<sup>94</sup> In order to hold the position that believers regularly act on their interpretation of violent passages of Scripture, the New Atheists are extremely selective in the examples they cite from the world. By way of distortion, the New Atheists amplify any hint of violence perpetrated in the name of religion even if no direct causal link can be established and ignore any

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<sup>92</sup> Gregory Peterson points out “a profound misunderstanding on the part of the new atheists; that Christianity simply consists of reading biblical texts much like one would simplistically read a contemporary code of law, woodenly applying isolated biblical texts shorn of context to contemporary moral issues.” Instead, Peterson argues that “The theological starting point of the Christian faith is not a book, but a person and an understanding of that person’s significance. Consequently, it is the understanding of Christ that informs the reading of the Old Testament, and not the other way around.” He further notes, “Scripture is better understood as a resource than a law book; it is something to turn to for inspiration, reflection, and sometimes-difficult moral wrestling, not as a list of directives to be slavishly obeyed.” Gregory R. Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism and the New Atheism,” in Amarasingam, *Religion*, 173–74.

<sup>93</sup> Sam Harris makes the related point regarding belief more broadly understood. Regarding belief itself, Harris writes, “The belief that it will rain puts an umbrella in the hand of every man or woman who owns one.” He concludes, “As a man believes, so will he act.” Harris, *End of Faith*, 44. This more general statement about the connection between belief and action easily extends to the New Atheists’ assumptions about the actions of people who take Scripture literally. If a man will act according to how he believes, and he believes God is literally calling him to kill unbelievers, then he will act accordingly.

<sup>94</sup> For an example of this see Richard Dawkins’ citation of a survey asking children if the violent means Joshua used to conquer the Promised Land were correct. Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 254–57.

possible examples of good done in the name of religion, or under the influence of religion.<sup>95</sup> This unbalanced and exaggerated presentation of Scripture as given in the New Atheists is immediately recognizable and easily refutable.<sup>96</sup> In all likelihood, the New Atheists are not truly guilty of such inexcusable ignorance on this topic; instead, they are rhetorically sophisticated in their presentation of the ills of religion.

The New Atheists don't have a serious interest in solid Scriptural interpretation, as a rationally sustainable argument is not their primary intent. Instead, the New Atheists work with Scripture to advance their cause along emotional and ethical lines, not rational ones. The basic charge leveled against faiths by the New Atheists is that religion is evil, a charge supported through setting before the readers a series of graphic descriptions of religiously inspired

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<sup>95</sup> Terry Eagleton explores this tendency on the part of the New Atheists as he writes in *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate*, "Such is Richard Dawkins's unruffled impartiality that in a book of almost four hundred pages, he can scarcely bring himself to concede that a single human benefit has ever flowed from religious faith, a view which is as a priori improbable as it is empirically false. The countless millions who have devoted their lives to the selfless service of others in the name of Christ or Allah or the Buddha are simply wiped from human history—and this by a self-appointed crusader against bigotry. As for Hitchens, *God Is Not Great* promises on page 27 to discuss 'many' instances of selfless acts on the part of believers, but apart from one or two perfunctory allusions mysteriously fails to do so. We are also informed in courageously self-incriminating style that 'humanism has many crimes for which to apologise' (250), but never find out exactly what they are. In any case, Hitchens's book appears to claim any good that religious men and women have achieved for the cause of secular humanism, which is rather like arguing that any advances made by feminists are due entirely to the benign influences of their fathers." Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 97. After he decries the New Atheists for overlooking any positive contributions of religious believers as cited above, Eagleton goes on to mention some positive influences of Christianity briefly as he writes of "the work in alleviating human suffering which Christianity and other faiths have carried on for centuries among the wretched of the earth, or their efforts in the cause of global peace, or the readiness some religious types have shown to lay down their lives for their fellows, or those clergy who have given their lives as martyrs in the struggle against U.S.-supported autocracies. Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution*, 98.

<sup>96</sup> In their book, *The Dawkins Delusion*, McGrath and McGrath counter the unbalanced view of Scripture that New Atheists present in sections of *The Dawkins Delusion* book entitled "Christianity and the Critique of Religion" and "On Reading the Old Testament." They write, "One of the great themes of the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures (not touched upon, by the way, in Dawkins's excoriation of the Bible) is that Israel's religion has become corrupted and detached from faithful obedience to a God who loves justice, mercy, and personal integrity." McGrath and McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, 88. They also note, "The prophetic tradition is predominantly (though not exclusively) in tension with the cult throughout the Old Testament, especially where the priestly cult and the king are seen to have lost the spirit of the law, and the powerful are exploiting the weak." McGrath and McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, 89. They also acknowledge, "Dawkins is right when he argues that it is necessary to critique religion; yet he appears unaware that it possesses internal means of reform and renewal. This is especially evident in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth." McGrath and McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, 89.

violence, leading to the ethical appeal the New Atheists actually have equal or likely, *even greater* moral standing to influence culture with their views than do people of faith. In their view, religion is not an incorrect but benign superstition to ignore, but an evil to eradicate.

The New Atheists do at times use some rational lines of reasoning regarding the historical accuracy of Scripture, such as allegations that the Bible is filled with contradictions,<sup>97</sup> Jesus did not historically rise from the dead,<sup>98</sup> or even that Jesus is not a historical figure at all, having possibly never existed.<sup>99</sup> However, the moral outrage against the ethical authority of the Bible, built through the emotional appeal alleging that Scripture is the base cause of violence and societal evil is a stronger, more creative, and more culturally persuasive line of attack put forth by the New Atheists.

In this way the New Atheists tap into the cultural fear of intolerance sensed in religions. Society has come to elevate tolerance to the highest virtue. Thus, Harris' move to show extreme intolerance on the part of Scriptural believers finds a ready and receptive audience in culture. Harris argues here that if the Bible says to kill children simply because they talk back to their parents, that is intolerant in the extreme. Then, the next step of the argument is to demonstrate that if the Bible teaches something, it is logical to assume that Christians will follow through.

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<sup>97</sup> In the specific New Atheist book we have been considering in this section, Sam Harris' *Letter to a Christian Nation*, for example, we read, "The Gospels also contradict one another outright." Harris, *Letter*, 58. The specific example given here by Harris is whether the day Jesus was crucified was the day before the Passover meal was to be eaten, or the day after. Christopher Hitchens makes broader claims, writing, "The contradictions and illiteracies of the New Testament have filled up many books by eminent scholars, and have never been explained by any Christian authority except in the feeblest terms of 'metaphor' and 'a Christ of faith.'" Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 115.

<sup>98</sup> See Richard Dawkins, "When pressed, many educated Christians today are too loyal to deny the virgin birth and the resurrection. But it embarrasses them because their rational minds know it is absurd, so they would much rather not be asked." Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 157. Victor Stenger also writes, "Lack of evidence from outside of scripture also surrounds the most important tale of the New Testament—Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection." Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, 179.

<sup>99</sup> For example, Christopher Hitchens notes "the highly questionable existence of Jesus." Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 114. Richard Dawkins notes that "It is even possible to mount a serious, though not widely supported, historical case that Jesus never lived at all." Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 97.

Christians acting intolerantly based on Scriptural writings is, in the eyes of the New Atheists, intolerable. When this is connected to the New Atheist insinuation that atheism is thus more peaceful, more tolerant, and less violent than Christianity, then the New Atheist ethical appeal can be fully recognized.

### **Case Study 3: Emotional and Ethical Appeals Showing Religion Is Evil and a Detriment to Society**

Richard Dawkins also relies heavily on emotional appeals in *The God Delusion*. In the passage to be examined, he presents a more complex charge that religion is evil and a detriment to society. Dawkins roots a substantial part of his criticism of religions in an allegation that the character of the God worshiped by these religions is evil. The way that Dawkins uses the charge that religions are evil matches well with a parallel cultural critique as documented by George Yancey and David Williamson in *So Many Christians, So Few Lions*.<sup>100</sup> Thus Dawkins' message has an attentive audience, and is at the same time readily reflective of the fears already lodged in the readers' minds. In describing God as evil, Dawkins is setting his readers up for an emotional response that seeks to move his readers from a reverence toward God to a revulsion toward God, and from adoration of God to anger at God. Dawkins does not stop his emotional appeal with attitudes toward God, he also extends his emotional appeal to God's followers as well. According to Dawkins, those who follow such a God would be apt to act in an evil way, either because their God demands such behavior or because their God, in his character, models such behavior for them. Consider the following prominent and oft-quoted<sup>101</sup> description of God in *The*

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<sup>100</sup> See pages 37–39 of this dissertation.

<sup>101</sup> Perhaps the most oft-quoted passage by Dawkins himself as well. He notes in the “Preface to the Paperback Edition” that this is the passage he reads as a “warm-up act” to break the ice with new audiences in public readings of *The God Delusion*. He notes that this passage “is guaranteed to get a good-natured laugh.” Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner, 2008), 17. I will use and cite two editions of *The God Delusion*. The hardcover first edition from Houghton Mifflin will be used as the primary reference for citation. When Dawkins'

*God Delusion:*

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully. Those of us schooled from infancy in his ways can become desensitized to their horror.<sup>102</sup>

Note how Dawkins builds on the previous two arguments in this passage. First, his connection of religion and violence is fairly obvious. He refers to several forms of murder openly in the passage such as infanticide, genocide, filicide, and outright ethnic cleansing. The alleged connection between religion and violence is apparent, but Dawkins uses this basic argument for a deeper purpose. Perhaps more subtle is the way that Dawkins builds on the argument that the authority of Scripture should be questioned. Dawkins works in this sub-argument with a single word: “fiction.” By calling God the most unpleasant character in all of fiction, Dawkins subtly but clearly undermines the authority of Scripture, and does so in a somewhat humorous and mocking way, just as Harris did in the passage from *Letter to a Christian Nation*. While these two basic lines of argumentation, accomplished through emotional rhetorical appeals, are present and fundamental to the fuller argument put forth here by Dawkins, he also moves on to a more complex charge that religions are evil and a detriment to society.

In the immediate context where this passage shows up in *The God Delusion*, Dawkins has just completed his opening chapter clarifying that he is not arguing against an idea of God that is simply standing in for the laws of nature. (Dawkins quotes Carl Sagan to this end, “if by ‘God’ one means the set of physical laws that govern the universe, then clearly there is such a God.

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own writing about the book is referenced, that material is taken from a newly written “Preface” from a paperback edition from Mariner. Unless Mariner is specified—as above in this reference—all references will be to the Houghton Mifflin hardcover edition.

<sup>102</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 31.

This God is emotionally unsatisfying ... it does not make much sense to pray to the law of gravity.”<sup>103</sup>) Instead, Dawkins stresses that he is arguing against specifically supernatural gods.<sup>104</sup>

For example, in his Chapter 2, “The God Hypothesis,” Dawkins traces developments in the understanding of God from polytheism through monotheism through a weak, supposedly scientifically compatible version of theism (NOMA) and through agnosticism, with other stops along the way. In this chapter, he is trying to show a progression from understandings of God as many to ultimately non-existent. He notes, “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.”<sup>105</sup>

In the specific passage under examination, Dawkins depicts the evil character of God in language that carries an undeniable emotional power. Through the nouns he chooses, Dawkins identifies God as a “control-freak,” an “ethnic cleanser,” and a “bully.” Each of these designations is then preceded by a list of adjectives that are emotionally charged and culturally resonant for the reader.

It is perhaps most appropriate that Dawkins begins this emotional appeal by listing an emotion: God is jealous—jealous and proud of it. While jealousy as described of God as used in Scripture is in fact a positive trait pointing to a shielding, protecting enactment of pure love, in our current cultural usage jealousy is an almost entirely negative word, and that is exactly how Dawkins intends it. He links God to the emotion of jealousy, and in so doing links God in our mind to an immediate emotional alertness. The media is filled with stories of jealous lovers and

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<sup>103</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 19.

<sup>104</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 20. He specifically mentions that “the most familiar to the majority of my readers will be Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. I shall come to him in a moment.”

<sup>105</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 53.

the damage they can bring to partners who try to leave them. The common cultural advice to partners being consumed by a jealous lover is to flee. Dawkins taps into this flight reaction by describing God as being jealous. Later in the book, Dawkins returns to this theme as he writes, “God’s monumental rage whenever his chosen people flirted with a rival god resembles nothing so much as sexual jealousy of the worst kind.”<sup>106</sup>

Dawkins’ initial description of God being jealous, in addition to setting the emotions on edge, has the extra advantage for Dawkins of giving some degree of credibility to his subsequent attacks. God is indeed described as jealous in the Bible, and in the very prominent location of the 10 Commandments.<sup>107</sup> Dawkins begins his list with an accurate term, albeit with an inaccurate meaning for the term, for God. This helps his cause as he begins from an authentic description of God and then moves to increasingly vehement descriptions of his own making as he builds his self-described humorous broadside. While the Bible does refer to God as a jealous God it does not, for example, refer to him as a megalomaniacal God.

After beginning his description of God with the emotion of jealousy, Dawkins labels God as a “petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak.”<sup>108</sup> This pairing of “unjust” and “unforgiving” catches the attention. By using two words back-to-back beginning with “un,” Dawkins further roots his description of God in the negative. God is thus being depicted not just as somewhat bad, but as the opposite of good. In fact, God here is described as the exact opposite of common characteristics of him. God is often thought of as just, and even more frequently described as being forgiving. Building on the credibility he established by first describing God as jealous, a recognizably accurate term, Dawkins now undoes and reverses common positive impressions of

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<sup>106</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 243.

<sup>107</sup> God is prominently described as a “jealous God” in between the first and second commandments, or between the second and third commandments, depending on numbering systems. Ex 20:5 (ESV).

<sup>108</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 31.



God.

The final word of the second phrase of Dawkins' description is "control-freak." This is a very important component in his understanding of who God is and what he expects or demands from his followers. God is to be followed slavishly in Dawkins' view. He is, as a control-freak, a domineering presence in every aspect of a believer's life. For a control freak, and a jealous control freak at that, every thought and action of a follower must be brought into strict, subservient conformity with the will of the deity. Service to such a deity is strictly set forth, and utmost devotion is demanded. Dawkins bases many of his other ideas of a deity on this central thought that God is a jealous control-freak.

Next in Dawkins' paragraph is his description of God as an ethnic cleanser. The term "ethnic cleanser" brings about an immediate emotional association with prominent examples of ethnic cleansing near the time of publication, including in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia (Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia).<sup>109</sup> Those with an eye toward more current events could relate with the recent tragedies in Iraq and Syria. For other readers, the horrors of the Holocaust in World War II might come to mind. God, in Dawkins' description, becomes the ultimate Hitler, Slobodan Milosevic or ISIS jihadi. Later in his work, Dawkins sees ethnic cleansing as part of the history of God's people: "the ethnic cleansing begun in the time of Moses is brought to bloody fruition in the book of Joshua."<sup>110</sup> He also compares supposed ethnic cleansing under God's direction with modern versions as he writes, "the invasion of the Promised Land in general, is morally indistinguishable from Hitler's invasion of Poland, or Saddam Hussein's

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<sup>109</sup> The genocide in Rwanda, which took place in 1994, and the ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, which took place around 1992–1995 are the examples cited most often in the New Atheists. The New Atheist books were published 2004–2007, or about a decade after these events took place. However, the events were—and are—still fresh enough in readers' minds to make the point effectively for the New Atheists.

<sup>110</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 247.

massacres of the Kurds and the Marsh Arabs.”<sup>111</sup>

With images of beheadings on beaches, suicide bombers in concert venues, active shooters in shopping malls, schools, and sanctuaries, and even trucks used as tools of mass murder in vacation paradises filling media screens on a regular basis and with a seeming spike in mass murders perpetrated by openly religious shooters and bombers, this image is probably even more emotionally powerful now than when Dawkins wrote it 10 years ago. The implication is obvious: God is violent, and not just violent but violent on a massive scale. God himself, and his followers by extension, are guilty of violence that ascends to the level of crimes against humanity. New Atheism repeatedly voices this theme that religions are the most prominent sponsors of worldwide violence. Furthermore, they are inherently intolerant, and thus unworthy of toleration themselves. Based on these thoughts, the New Atheists conclude that, far from being a blessing to humanity, God and his followers have become its greatest curse and therefore should be silenced or at least controlled.

This larger theme of religious intolerance surfaces again in the final phrase of Dawkins’ famous paragraph, a phrase which testifies to his rhetorical art. Through homoioteleuton, he joins the words “misogynistic, homophobic” and the longer series “infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal” as he drives forward with near poetic power to his conclusion of God being a “sodomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” While the use of “genocidal” recalls his previous assertion that God is an ethnic cleanser, Dawkins uses the words “misogynistic, homophobic, racist” to bring the malevolence of God closer in association to the church’s presence in the public sphere.

Later in his work, Dawkins illustrates this character of God through Biblical stories.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 247.

When he relates the story of Lot offering his daughters to the men of Sodom for them to rape, Dawkins writes, “Whatever else this strange story might mean, it surely tells us something about the respect accorded to women in this intensely religious culture.”<sup>113</sup> Then Dawkins notes the similarity between the story of Lot and the story of the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19: “again, the misogynistic ethos comes through, loud and clear.”<sup>114</sup> Later, describing the conquest of the Promised Land, Dawkins comments on the “xenophobic relish”<sup>115</sup> that is demonstrated. The words, “misogynistic, homophobic, racist,” set up Dawkins’ later discussion about out-group hostility vs. out-group altruism and resonate with a cultural setting that is engaged in religious battles over matters such as women’s roles, homosexuality, and race.

Dawkins also builds to his emotional climax by using a repetition of several themes. Notably, he reinforces his charge that God is involved in ethnic cleansing by describing him as genocidal, and further accentuates the charge of violence in God by surrounding that term with infanticidal and filicidal. Dawkins wants to leave no doubt that God is violent—criminally violent in each of these cases. As with other words in the phrase under examination, Dawkins returns to the same themes in Chapter 7, again accusing God of mass murder and the murder of children. There, he writes, “Do not think, by the way, that the God character in the story nursed any doubts or scruples about the massacres and genocides that accompanied the seizing of the Promised Land,”<sup>116</sup> and he also notes that the Midianites “were the victims of genocide in their

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<sup>112</sup> Dawkins’ tendency to interpret Scripture as a fundamentalist is noticeable in his usage of Biblical stories. For his take on the charge of fundamentalism, however, see Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 282–83.

<sup>113</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 240.

<sup>114</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 241.

<sup>115</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 247.

<sup>116</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 247.

own country.”<sup>117</sup> He also gives the examples of Abraham almost sacrificing Isaac<sup>118</sup> and Jephthah actually sacrificing his daughter.<sup>119</sup> In this instance, Dawkins’ humor is worth printing. He relates that the daughter spent two months in the mountains to bewail her virginity, and then, “At the end of this time she meekly returned, and Jephthah cooked her. God did not see fit to intervene on this occasion.”<sup>120</sup> Thus, while Dawkins may be launching a humorous broadside against God, his point is actually anything but light-hearted. Dawkins is quite serious. For him, God’s character is an example of moral evil.

Since part of Dawkins’ overall argument found primarily in Chapter 7 is that Christians take their morality from God as their role-model, then the moral characteristics of God also apply to the moral characteristics Dawkins ascribes to Christians. Christians are required slavishly to serve a control-freak God who demands the utmost allegiance from them and models highly unethical and immoral examples of what such allegiance looks like. Christians, like their God, are violent bullies with violence reaching to the level of crimes against humanity. Christians are, like their God, hostile toward people not of their in-group, including women, homosexuals, and people of other races. The Christian God is a most distasteful fellow, fictitious though he is in Dawkins’ view. However, for Dawkins the greater problem is that Christians also are a most distasteful lot, and they are all too real! The implication is that the world would be a better, safer, more pleasant place without either Christians or their God.

Dawkins is here playing on a strongly emotional appeal to his readers. The characterization Dawkins gives of God portrays him as hate-filled toward group after group—infants, women,

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<sup>117</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 245.

<sup>118</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 242.

<sup>119</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 243.

<sup>120</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 243.

homosexuals, minorities, and the like. By extension, Dawkins implies that faithful Christians who follow the Christian God faithfully exhibit the same hateful tendencies. The natural emotional response to hatred is hatred in return,<sup>121</sup> which is exactly Dawkins' desired goal. As Dawkins depicts Christians and the Christian God as hateful, he hopes his readers will come to hate Christianity as he does. As Dawkins depicts Christianity as intolerant, he hopes to make it intolerable for his readers. Since society has elevated tolerance to the highest moral position, if Dawkins can depict religions as being intolerant, he can also make the case that religion is immoral and thus a detriment to society.

In addition to an emotional appeal, Dawkins supports his argument of the evil of religion through an ethical appeal. He does this in two ways. First, he points to his own standing and ability as a scholar. Second, he appeals to the ethical values of his readers and asks them to evaluate where their sensibilities match better—with his depiction of Christianity or with Dawkins and atheism.

The first form of this ethical appeal has been noted by Ian Markham in his book *Against Atheism: Why Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris are Fundamentally Wrong*. While not calling it an ethical appeal, Markham notes that the New Atheists present “a very benign, quite attractive, Oxbridge atheism,” featuring “the conversations and humor of the university common room, [an] affection for the King James’ version of the Bible, and [a] love of choirs.”<sup>122</sup> This “Oxbridge atheism,” cultured and polite, peaceful and reasonable, is presented to give Dawkins and the other New Atheists the ethical standing they seek to be heard despite the hard message they

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<sup>121</sup> Ironically, the response of hatred toward hatred seems to come naturally to humans, but Christianity—which Dawkins tries to paint with this brush—is ironically a strong advocate of the opposite view, as Jesus taught: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” Mt 5:43–45 (ESV).

<sup>122</sup> Markham, *Against Atheism*, 27.

convey. In this particular passage, one sees the juxtaposition of different registers of language such as “megalomaniacal” and “bully” to create a rhetorical display of confident erudition marked by a subtle suggestion of humor.

The second form of the ethical appeal here functions as Dawkins uses language common to his educated readers, such as “misogynistic, homophobic, racist.” In doing so, Dawkins is calling on his readers to identify with his ethical standing and values, and to give him a hearing based on shared moral standards. For example, those who are concerned about the problem of “homophobia” will give Dawkins a hearing because Dawkins shows himself to be aware of the problem. People concerned with women’s rights will note his use of the term “misogynistic” and sense a kindred spirit in Dawkins as opposed to the Christianity with which they may have been previously aligned. Someone who has been stung by racism will recognize in Dawkins someone who empathizes with his or her plight, and will be more open to give the New Atheists a hearing based on this ethical appeal.

At the close of the prominent passage from *The God Delusion* under examination, Dawkins notes how Western culture has “schooled” people in the ways of this God and, through such schooling, they have been “desensitized” to the horrors of his character.<sup>123</sup> Here, we see another common theme of the New Atheist writings: religious moderates provide cover for extremist religious views and thus are equally responsible for violence. Dawkins argues here that the vast majority of Western culture has been lulled into peaceful, blissful ignorance about the true dangers of religion by more moderate, milquetoast versions of religions experienced in early educational opportunities such as in religious boarding schools, which Dawkins experienced,

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<sup>123</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 31.

and, for most of his readers, perhaps in Sunday School or Children's Story Bibles.<sup>124</sup> Dawkins argues that due to the early influence of this religious teaching, faith traditions are given a far higher respect in culture than they deserve.

In response, Dawkins fights against any privileged view of religious discourse that would not allow it to be publicly attacked or its writings to be ridiculed. This, in fact, is the reason that Dawkins writes about religion in the way that he does. What some in the church would call sacrilegious, Dawkins would call realistic. For too long the church has been able to hide behind a sacred privilege and Dawkins wants to be able to talk about religion in plain speech.

In the "Preface to the Paperback Edition," Dawkins notes the rhetorical function of the intentional sacrilegious humor he is using. In giving his own rhetorical analysis of the passage in question, Dawkins acknowledges that he is often described as "'strident' or 'shrill.'"<sup>125</sup> Dawkins counters that his "intention was closer to robust but humorous broadside than shrill polemic."<sup>126</sup> Dawkins explains that he is trying to desacralize religion and the language we use about religion, with the overall goal of making religion the subject of concrete, clear, and plain speech. He argues that he regularly reads stronger language in restaurant reviews, and that his choice of words regarding religion should be less hurtful than those because "restauranters and chefs really exist and they have feelings to be hurt, whereas blasphemy, as the witty bumper sticker puts it, is a victimless crime."<sup>127</sup> For Dawkins, since God does not exist and is a "character in fiction,"<sup>128</sup> one should be able to talk about him freely.

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<sup>124</sup> See the recent survey of editorial redactions in Children's Bibles published in America from 1850 to the present in Russell W. Dalton, "Perfect Prophets, Helpful Hippos, and Happy Endings: Noah and Jonah in Children's Bible Storybooks in the United States," *Religious Education* 102, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 298–313.

<sup>125</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner, 2008), 17.

<sup>126</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner, 2008), 17.

<sup>127</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner, 2008), 16.

<sup>128</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner, 2008), 51.

In the chapter of *The God Delusion* that contains the prominent passage we have been examining, Dawkins offers examples of how theologians try to defend God and their obfuscating theologizing. Instead, Dawkins will write about God in plain speech for the average reader, even though he could write more academically if he desired. In fact, Dawkins demonstrates an awareness of his academic tone when he describes how he sought to create the “incongruous mismatch between a subject that *could* have been stridently or vulgarly expressed, and the actual expression in a drawn-out list of Latinate or pseudo-scholarly words (‘filicidal,’ ‘megalomaniacal,’ ‘pestelential’).”<sup>129</sup> Dawkins is implying that enculturation in the Judeo-Christian beliefs has caused otherwise educated people not to see the horror of the character of God. When it comes to God, people are fairly foolish, and he, an intelligent scholar, is seeking to use plain speech to help people recognize the moral failings of God and disrespect or disbelieve him. His ethical appeal, then, is that he is an intelligent scientist who chooses to use plain speech to reveal the horrors of religious discourse in order to educate the public who have been desensitized to these horrors and encouraged to believe these things by theologians. The famous quotation captures the rhetorical artistry of their emotional and ethical appeals.

Culture is primed and ready for the charge that Christianity is not a societal benefit, but in fact a societal detriment. Religion is not a moral good, but a moral evil. When this suspicion is already planted in culture, making a receptive audience for the attacks of the New Atheists, the ethical appeal of the New Atheists also has a greater chance of success. Whereas previously atheists had been seen as untrustworthy and immoral, and in fact one of the least trustworthy groups in the United States,<sup>130</sup> now the roles have been reversed. People of faith are seen as immoral, so atheists can more readily proclaim their ethical appeal by claiming moral superiority

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<sup>129</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner, 2008), 17.

<sup>130</sup> Williamson and Yancey, *There Is No God*, 6.



over people of faith. Thus, the message of the New Atheists should, according to their ethical appeal, be granted standing and respect.

#### Summary of the Use of the Rhetorical Appeals by the New Atheists

In summary, the New Atheists argue in an emotionally riveting way that religions are violent, but they do not present this argument as an end unto itself. Instead, the New Atheists are seeking to make the case that religions have no moral standing to be heard because of their moral failings exemplified by their participation in violence. In fact, the New Atheists are taking a historical argument used to silence atheism and now using it to silence religion. As Gregory Peterson points out, “historically, atheism and immorality have often been equated. . . . Presumably, since the atheist believes that there is no God to enforce the moral law, the atheist has no external compulsion requiring the keeping of one’s word if it proves inconvenient.”<sup>131</sup>

Peterson then observes:

It is a shared theme of the new atheism that this argument is not only wrong, but that it should be turned on its head. The new atheists almost uniformly claim that it is modern atheists who hold the moral high ground, and that it is the practitioners of the world’s religions that are immoral, both in historical practice and in fundamental commitment.<sup>132</sup>

The foundational charge of the New Atheists is that religion is evil, a charge backed up with emotional intensity through the graphic descriptions of religiously inspired violence. The New Atheists engage in a prolonged emotional appeal to create fear of religions and

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<sup>131</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 159.

<sup>132</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 159. The specific New Atheist charge that Peterson is countering revolves around the topic of out-group altruism. We have met this charge briefly above in Dawkins’ final phrase examined, as he mentions that the faithful are “misogynistic, homophobic, racist.” See Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 31. The New Atheists argue that out-group altruism—the tendency to act charitably towards those who are different from oneself and unrelated, with no expectation of reward or benefit—is founded in evolutionary biology, rather than in religions. See Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 214–22. In fact, the New Atheists would allege that Christianity actually teaches only in-group altruism, paired with out-group hostility rooted in the teachings of Jesus. See Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 253.

corresponding intolerance for religions in readers of their works. The New Atheists couple this emotional appeal with an ethical appeal based on their standing as scholars and scientists, carefully cultivating a genteel, elite, trustworthy persona, coupled with a fiery fervor to root out religious oppression. The New Atheists would argue that religions have no moral standing to exert influence in culture due to their oppressive and violent track records, while the New Atheists claim the moral high ground of toleration and peace. In this way, the New Atheists take the calculated risk of joining an *ad hominem* attack to their powerful emotional and ethical appeals. Based on the reaction of the culture, the risk seems to be paying off.

In large part we have been dealing with the three facets of the New Atheists' arguments that work by means of ethical and emotional appeals—namely that religions, in the accusations of the New Atheists, are the most prominent sponsor of worldwide violence; that religions are inherently intolerant, and thus unworthy of toleration themselves; and that religious moderates, in the view of the New Atheists, provide cover for extremist religious views and thus are equally responsible for violence.<sup>133</sup> As to the other two main arguments advanced by the New Atheists to support their overall claim that religion is an evil to be eradicated—namely, that faith is blind faith rather than faith founded on fact, and that religion impedes the progress of science—they are geared more toward a rational rhetorical argument in the New Atheists' methodology. These styles of claims are much more comfortably suited to the methods of apologetics in common practice for the last several hundred years. For this reason, apologists have been much more ready and prepared to defend Christianity against these last two forms of argument from the New Atheists. Further rebuttal of these points is, therefore, not needed, although I will give a brief consideration of some of the apologetic responses along these lines at the beginning of the next

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<sup>133</sup> See pages 60–62 of this dissertation.

chapter. While these traditional rational apologetic responses to the New Atheists are important and needed and have been given, I would also argue that the emotional and ethical rhetorical appeals are significantly stronger in their challenge to Christianity. They are also much more culturally attuned. For this reason, it is to the cultural compatibility of the New Atheists that we now turn.

### **Cultural Analysis of the Challenge the New Atheists Pose to Christianity**

James Davison Hunter, in his book, *To Change the World*, published in 2010, offers a theory of cultural change that suggests that the church should be concerned about the challenges of the New Atheists. By the time Hunter wrote *To Change the World*, he had been studying religion and culture for over twenty years. In his 1991 *Culture Wars*, Hunter argued that not only was American culture in conflict, but also the lines of cultural conflict in the United States had shifted. Regarding the existence of the conflict itself, Hunter writes:

I define cultural conflict very simply as political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding. The end to which these hostilities tend is the domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others. Let it be clear, the principles and ideals that mark these competing systems of moral understanding are by no means trifling but always have a character of ultimacy to them.<sup>134</sup>

It is not difficult to see the New Atheist challenge to Christianity in the terms Hunter sets forth here. They would claim that a religious outlook has for millennia exerted the dominance of its moral ethos over all others, and the New Atheists are pushing back to exert the dominance of their moral ethos over any faith-based system.

However, the New Atheists represent a shift from the way Hunter set up the culture wars in 1991. At that time, Hunter argued that a cultural re-alignment had taken place. Whereas previously in America, the cultural struggles had been between different religious

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<sup>134</sup> James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic, 1991), 42.

denominations, the new alignment was between worldviews or “impulses,” namely an “orthodox” worldview and a “progressive” worldview.<sup>135</sup> Hunter makes clear that these new fault lines cleave church affiliations into “orthodox” and “progressive” components. He notes, “because of common points of vision and concern, the orthodox wings of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism are forming associations with each other, as are the progressive wings of each faith community.”<sup>136</sup> That is to say, Lutherans and Presbyterians were no longer struggling against Catholics and Jews but instead “orthodox” Lutherans, Presbyterians, Catholics, and Jews were struggling against “progressive” Lutherans, Presbyterians, Catholics, and Jews. That was the situation Hunter described in 1991.

Now, with the rise to cultural prominence of the New Atheists, we might note that yet another realignment has occurred. The New Atheists set themselves up not as aligned with either the “orthodox” or the “progressive” camps, but rather they set themselves up over against *all* religious worldviews, whether “orthodox” or “progressive.” For the New Atheist, the fault lines are these: Any and all religious faith systems against atheism. The quest for the New Atheists remains as described by Hunter: “the domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others.”<sup>137</sup>

With this understanding of the way the fault lines are drawn, we can now turn to his more recent work, *To Change the World*, to see how either the New Atheists could have the possibility of influencing an already sympathetic culture further, and to formulate a response as to how the church could respond faithfully to rebuff the challenge of the New Atheists.

According to Hunter, culture can change, and can in fact change quite profoundly, when

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<sup>135</sup> Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 42–43.

<sup>136</sup> Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 47.

<sup>137</sup> Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 42.

the proper forces align to bring this about. He lays out eleven propositions to show how cultures function and how cultures change.<sup>138</sup> The first seven propositions show the symbols, interconnections, and power structures inherent in the way cultures work. The final four propositions describe how cultural changes come about utilizing the structure described in the first seven propositions. Cultures, according to Hunter, are more complex and deep-seated than commonly assumed, and neither a strictly idealist nor a strictly materialist view of culture can adequately account for the interrelations and accretions that comprise culture. This complex cultural form is to a large extent shaped and controlled by elite authority figures within status-driven power structures, and are only tangentially influenced by grassroots activism. Since cultures are largely shaped by those respected as holding symbolic capital within the society, any change must work within the structure of social capital as well. Based on Hunter's theory of cultural change, the New Atheists are well-positioned to make a persuasive argument in the current cultural climate, even if that argument is not particularly rational or defensible.

Hunter's theory about the nature of culture proposes that "a Ph.D. has more symbolic capital than a car mechanic; a member of the National Academy of Sciences has more symbolic capital than a high school science teacher, the winner of a Nobel Prize in literature has more symbolic capital than a romance novelist."<sup>139</sup> While this may seem somewhat obvious, this line of thought explains how the New Atheists receive a hearing despite the inherent weaknesses of their arguments. Four of the five New Atheists have earned doctorates (Dawkins and Dennett from Oxford, Harris and Stenger from UCLA), and the remaining one (Hitchens) was Oxford-educated, and for a time served a time as a professor of "liberal studies" at the New School in

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<sup>138</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 32–47.

<sup>139</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 35–36. This is Hunter's "Proposition Four."

New York. Thus, their academic credentials place them in a position to have a persuasive voice in culture. This forms a component of the ethical rhetorical appeal utilized by the New Atheists.

In fact, Hunter, in his discussion about symbolic capital, specifically mentions the cultural prestige of the National Academy of Sciences and Nobel Prize winners.<sup>140</sup> Richard Dawkins appeals to both groups in *The God Delusion* as examples of people who tend not to believe in God. Dawkins notes the correlation between advanced scientific training and atheism. He notes that “of those American scientists considered eminent enough by their peers to have been elected to the National Academy of Sciences only about 7 per cent believe in a personal God.”<sup>141</sup> Dawkins points to even lower levels of religious belief among Fellows of the Royal Society in Britain. Among that group of scientists, “only 3.3 per cent of the Fellows agreed strongly with the statement that a personal god exists ... while 78.8 per cent strongly disagreed.”<sup>142</sup> As to Nobel laureates, Dawkins writes:

The efforts of apologists to find genuinely distinguished modern scientists who are religious have an air of desperation generating the unmistakably hollow sound of bottoms of barrels being scraped. The only website I could find that claimed to list “Nobel Prize-winning Scientific Christians” came up with six, out of a total of several hundred scientific Nobelists. Of these six, it turned out that four were not Nobel Prize-winners at all; and at least one, to my certain knowledge, is a non-believer who attends church for purely social reasons.<sup>143</sup>

The New Atheists are well-positioned, to be invested with great symbolic capital in society, and Dawkins appeals to this quite openly.

Hunter’s propositions regarding the way in which cultures change argues that “Cultures change from the top down, rarely if ever from the bottom up.”<sup>144</sup> He notes, “the work of world-

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<sup>140</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 35–36.

<sup>141</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 100.

<sup>142</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 102.

<sup>143</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 100.

<sup>144</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 41. This is Hunter’s “Proposition Eight.”

making and world-changing are, by and large, the work of elites: gatekeepers who provide creative direction and management within spheres of social life.” Thus, the New Atheists’ standing as holders of PhDs from highly respected institutions, members of prestigious societies of science, authors published and reviewed by prominent sources, they find themselves among the elite who can exert much force and give strong direction as gatekeepers of cultural creation.

Hunter also notes that “Change is typically initiated by elites who are outside of the centermost positions of prestige.”<sup>145</sup> Again, this description describes the New Atheists. A strong claim could certainly be made that in the past century, the absolute center of elite power rested in well-educated, coastal gatekeepers who were of a liberal Christian (Mainline Protestant) persuasion, or at least of a moral persuasion compatible with liberal Christianity. The New Atheists, obviously, do not fit in this absolute center of elite power, despite their impeccable academic and publishing credentials. They are certainly of the elites, but not at the absolute center of the elites. Thus, Hunter would indicate the New Atheists actually have a *greater* probability to initiate cultural change.

Hunter further suggests that cultural change takes place most profoundly when related networks of people and organizations with significant social capital converge for a unified goal.<sup>146</sup> In this way, Hunter seeks to debunk the myth of the “great man” who accomplishes profound cultural change merely by the strength of his own ideas or personality. Hunter notes, “The only problem with this perspective is that it is mostly wrong.”<sup>147</sup> Rather, Hunter argues, cultures change when strong individual leaders and other organizations align to bring about far more profound change than any one person or organization could have accomplished

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<sup>145</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 42. This is Hunter’s “Proposition Nine.”

<sup>146</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 37–38 and 43. These arguments are found specifically in Hunter’s “Proposition Six” and “Proposition Ten.”

<sup>147</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 38.

individually.<sup>148</sup> He argues that “when networks of elites in overlapping spheres of social life come together with their varied resources and act in common purpose, cultures do change and change profoundly.”<sup>149</sup> Hunter also recognizes that:

Persistence over time is essential; little of significance happens in three to five years. But when cultural and symbolic capital overlap with social capital and economic capital and, in time, political capital, and these various resources are directed toward shared ends, the world, indeed, changes.<sup>150</sup>

The alignment of individuals and institutions is taking place around the work of the New Atheists, even as the New Atheists themselves represent trends at work in society. The New Atheists are elite educators possessed of significant social capital due to their academic pedigrees and positions in the scientific community. Other institutions are also aligning with them. The media aligned with the New Atheists quite quickly, as the New Atheism was a publishing phenomenon.<sup>151</sup> The way the New Atheists align in culture shows an powerful combination of elites endowed with symbolic capital communicating in a way that reaches the grassroots quickly and broadly. Hunter offers a chart in which he lays out various levels of cultural change, entitled “The Cultural Matrix.”<sup>152</sup> At the top of the chart Hunter lists areas of strong social capital, where cultural change can have a powerful impact. Here he lists institutions such as elite research universities and elite NYC publishers. By and large the New Atheists either hold degrees from elite universities, teach at elite universities, or both. This shows the potential for the New

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<sup>148</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 38.

<sup>149</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 43.

<sup>150</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 43.

<sup>151</sup> George Yancey and David Williamson demonstrate that the media alignment with the New Atheists is not surprising due to the demonstrable fact that the media is significantly more “progressive” than the general populace, and “Christianophobia” is more common in more “progressive” atmospheres. They write that animosity towards Christians noticeable in the media is “not an accident since individuals in the media are generally more politically progressive than the general public, and Christianophobia is tied to political progressivism.” Yancey and Williamson, *So Many Christians*, 115. See also page 125.

<sup>152</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 90.



Atheists to have an outsized voice in the way they represent culture. However, the New Atheists also function at the middle and bottom of Hunter's chart as well. In the middle range of influence, Hunter mentions television and film, and Dawkins in particular has developed programs for television in Great Britain. In fact, Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*, in part grew out of a television project.<sup>153</sup> At the lowest level of the cultural matrix, Hunter lists journalism and mass-market book publishing. Again, the New Atheists function in this level also. Christopher Hitchens spent much of his career as a journalist, and the New Atheist books have certainly sold well in the mass market of publishing. Thus, not only do the New Atheists have the social prestige to work with cultural elites, but they also have the communication foundation to spread their message more broadly in the overall cultural matrix.

Academia has also begun to align more and more noticeably with the goals of the New Atheists, not necessarily in open tone, but in more subtle implementation of intolerance toward religious practices in general, and religious professors in particular.<sup>154</sup> The New Atheists are not lone voices, and of course have not been from the first. The New Atheist movement has been a popular cultural movement, in which the New Atheists happened to align with rising forces of opposition to Christianity. They have been, perhaps, a particularly vocal exemplification of cultural trends, but they have generally been representative of a rising anti-religious attitude in

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<sup>153</sup> Dawkins, *Brief Candle*, 171–72.

<sup>154</sup> George Yancey documents the strong and often surprisingly open hostility toward Christianity displayed in the academic realm. He claims that “there is a notable anti-Christian bias in academia.” Yancey, *Hostile Environment*, 15. Yancey also notes that “In key areas of our society, Christians are at a disadvantage simply because they are Christians. I alluded to this with my discussion above regarding the Christian disadvantage in academia. An overwhelming majority of the respondents from some disciplines, such as anthropology and English literature, stated a willingness to religiously discriminate.” Yancey, *Hostile Environment*, 17. Byron Johnson, in his introduction to his book, *More God, Less Crime*, relates his own personal experience of religious discrimination as he was fired from his first university teaching position because of his Christian faith. Despite his superior student evaluations and steady record of publications, he was let go. In a meeting with his provost, Johnson was told, “I don't need to have a reason” to fire you, “I can let you go if I don't like the color of your eyes.” Obviously Christian faith is a much more serious offense than improper eye color in the sight of the provost! Byron Johnson, *More God, Less Crime: Why Faith Matters and How It Could Matter More* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton, 2011), 4–7.

broader culture. The New Atheists also draw the support and alignment of other institutions and carriers of cultural capital in a way that can make a significant impact on the culture.

For these reasons, the New Atheists are quite well positioned to make a significant change in cultural outlook, even though the New Atheists themselves are very small in number. This stands in stark contrast with Hunter's assessment of the culture-making ability and position of Christianity in America. Despite the solid majority of professing Christians in America, and despite the large market for Christian literature, media, etc., Hunter argues that Christians:

*have been absent from the arenas in which the greatest influence in the culture is exerted.* The culture-producing institutions of historical Christianity are largely marginalized in the economy of culture formation in North America. Its cultural capital is greatest where leverage in the larger culture is weakest.<sup>155</sup>

This meshes well with an observation made by David Wilkinson that Christians are losing ground in public appeal because they are not making any serious contact with the wider public, in contrast with scientists who are doing exactly that.<sup>156</sup>

### **Conclusion**

For centuries Western culture saw atheism as immoral and untrustworthy, and Christianity was seen as honorable and honest. Has that situation changed through the writings of the New Atheists? The answer is yes. At least it certainly seems that atheism is on the ascendancy in cultural acceptance. Whether this can be directly traced to the New Atheists is more difficult to prove, as causality is always difficult to determine with precision. Without question, however, the New Atheists have been prominent and prolific voices advocating for the advance of atheism since 2004. In the research of David Kinnaman and the Barna Group we can see an increasing recognition of New Atheist themes and authors. James Davison Hunter shows how the New

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<sup>155</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 89; emphasis original.

<sup>156</sup> Wilkinson, "Art of Apologetics," 16.

Atheists are well-positioned to lead a significant change in cultural outlook.

How has this shift been undertaken? The New Atheists may well have led the way by changing rhetorical tactics. Instead of relying extensively or exclusively on calm logic, the New Atheists shifted the form of argumentation to feature emotional appeals and ethical appeals. The description of God and his followers established by the New Atheists exerts power in contemporary culture largely *because* it is not primarily grounded in rational appeals. Instead, the New Atheists rely heavily on emotional appeals to shape an overarching ethical argument that Atheism offers a more moral view, and thus represents a more respectable guiding voice in culture, than does religion. The New Atheists' appeals have been much stronger when using emotional appeals than when using rational appeals. These arguments from the New Atheists, when taken all together, constitute an *ad hominem* attack on religion. The New Atheists then couple this emotional appeal with an overarching ethical appeal claiming the moral superiority of atheism. In order for Christianity to respond, it must rebuild its own ethical standing. The apologetic approach needed must recognize and respond to the particular attack of an ethical argument against Christianity. Thus, what is called for is not first and foremost a rational response on the part of Christianity, but an emotional and ethical response.

While atheism may not yet have supplanted Christianity as the moral and ethical guide of secular society, the playing field has certainly been leveled in recent years. The cultural view of Christianity is changing. That is not really in question. The question that remains is "how does the church respond?"

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE DEVELOPMENT AND SHAPE OF ENFLESHED APOLOGETICS

Having looked at several of the New Atheist writings, we move on to formulate an appropriate apologetic answer. The New Atheist challenge that Christianity is a force detrimental to society because of its intolerance, violence, and hatred calls for a lifestyle-oriented apologetic approach. In response, Enfleshed Apologetics holds promise as a helpful way forward for the church in its apologetic task. Scholarly work in this area is needed because the primary response to the claims of the New Atheists has been through the use of traditional rationally-focused apologetic methods. While these apologetic approaches do answer some of the arguments of the New Atheists, they do not answer all of them and, more to the point, they do not adequately answer the emotional and ethical appeals that are so persuasive in the popular culture.

The need to focus on an Enfleshed Apologetic response to the New Atheists does not mean that more traditional, rationally-driven forms of apologetic response to the New Atheists are inappropriate or unnecessary. Quite to the contrary, these responses are helpful and needed when the New Atheists do make allegations against Christianity utilizing rational forms of argumentation. Where a criticism is leveled, a response should be given. For this reason, rationally-based apologetic responses to the New Atheists remain a needed component of the overall apologetic response.<sup>1</sup> However, rational arguments made by the New Atheists are not the

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<sup>1</sup> The publication of New Atheist books from 2004 to 2007 was followed by Christian responses which began appearing in 2007 and have continued up to the present time. Richard Dawkins has taken to calling books published in response to the New Atheists books (*The God Delusion* in particular), “fleas.” He remarks about “the remarkable collection of ‘fleas’ that the book [*The God Delusion*] has gathered. . . . [W]e call them ‘fleas’ after a W.B. Yeats poem that I had going round in my head at the time:

You say, as I have often given tongue

most prominent arguments to take root in our culture and to limit one's response to this approach leaves other challenges unaddressed. To that end, I begin by showing some rationally based responses to New Atheists arguments, but also that a more complete apologetic is needed to respond to their emotional and ethical appeals.

### **The Need and Challenges of Rational Responses to the New Atheists**

One of the primary rational arguments made by the New Atheists involves the issue of the simplicity or complexity of God's nature. Richard Dawkins claims that this question regarding the nature of God is "the big one,"<sup>2</sup> and he calls his framing of this question "the Ultimate

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In praise of what another's said or sung,

T'were politic to do the like by these.

But was there ever dog that praised his fleas?"

Dawkins, *Brief Candle*, 174. In *Brief Candle in the Dark*, Dawkins offers an image of several of the "fleas" he has collected, including Thomas Crean, *God Is No Delusion: A Refutation of Richard Dawkins* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007); Thomas Crean, *A Catholic Replies to Professor Dawkins* (Oxford: Family, 2007); Kathleen Jones, *Challenging Richard Dawkins: Why Richard Dawkins Is Wrong about God* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury, 2007); Mike King, *The God Delusion Revisited* (Raleigh: Lulu, 2007); McGrath and McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*; David Robertson, *The Dawkins Letters: Challenging Atheist Myths* (Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2007); Andrew J. Wilson, *Deluded by Dawkins? A Christian Response to The God Delusion* (Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway, 2007); Michael Austin, *Dawkins' Dilemmas: Deluded or not Deluded? That Is the Question* (Camarillo, CA: Xulon, 2008); David Berlinski, *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretensions* (New York: Crown, 2008); Scott Reeves, *The Dawkins Delusion: An As-I'm-Reading-It Response to The God Delusion* (Los Gatos, CA: Smashwords, 2010) e-book; and Ian Stott, *The God Solution—Are You Ready? Revealing America's Social and Economic Collapse and the Coming World Government* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2013). Obviously the quality of books on the list varies widely, from reputable scholars including McGrath, Crean, and Berlinski published through well-known publishing houses to self-published e-books. Dawkins characteristically does not distinguish among them, and would tend to dismiss them all equally. In addition to the books listed by Dawkins, reputable and helpful Christian responses to the New Atheism have included Ravi Zacharias, *The End of Reason: A Response to the New Atheists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); Haught, *God*; Douglas Wilson, *God Is. How Christianity Explains Everything: A Reply to Christopher Hitchens' God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2008); Hart, *Atheist Delusions*; Amarasingam, *Religion*; Johnson and Reynolds, *Against All Gods*; McGrath, *Why God*; Markham, *Against Atheism*; Lennox, *Gunning for God*; David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Meister and Dew, *God and Evil*; and French and Wettstein, *New Atheism*. While I specified that the list included above would be Christian responses, two additional works provide another perspective: Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution* and J. Angelo Corlett, *The Errors of Atheism* (New York: Continuum International, 2010). Both are highly critical of the New Atheism, but from the standpoint of agnosticism rather than Christianity. For this reason, the harsh critiques of Eagleton and Corlett may actually be more telling regarding the weaknesses of the New Atheists than are the more expected and predictable critiques of Christian authors.

<sup>2</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 113. In his later memoir, *Brief Candle in the Dark*, Dawkins writes that he specifically nominates this point as the central argument of *The God Delusion*. Dawkins, *Brief Candle*, 419–20.

Boeing 747 gambit.”<sup>3</sup> This line of argumentation is certainly represented in other New Atheist books as well.<sup>4</sup> Dawkins’ argument here revolves around the logical progression from simplicity to complexity. In Dawkins’ evolutionary outlook, that which is now complex must have started in a simpler form, or been developed by something that is more simple than itself. A complex object or being must have an explanation for its own existence in the form of a simpler being or object from farther back. He writes:

The first cause that we seek must have been the simple basis for a self-bootstrapping crane which eventually raised the world as we know it into its present complex existence. To suggest that the original prime mover was complicated enough to indulge in intelligent design, to say nothing of mindreading millions of humans simultaneously, is tantamount to dealing yourself a perfect hand at bridge. ... To suggest that the first cause, the great unknown which is responsible for something

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Dawkins also notes that this argument in *The God Delusion* brought about a large number of replies to the argument about apparent design and the need of a designer, and he recognizes that the nature of the argument in the responses also extended to the nature of God. He writes that his Ultimate Boeing 747 gambit, “led to a large number of alleged replies to the point about God being complex and therefore no solution to the riddle of complexity. The replies are all the same and all equally weak. They can be summed up in one sentence: ‘God is not complex but simple.’ How do we know? Because theologians say so, and they’re the authorities on God, are they not? Easy. Win the argument by fiat! But you cannot have it both ways. Either God is simple, in which case he doesn’t have the knowledge and design skills to provide the explanation of complexity that we seek. Or he is complex, in which case he needs explaining in his own right no less than the complexity that he is being invoked to explain. The simpler you make your god, the less qualified he is to explain the complexity of the world. And the more complex you make him the more does he require an explanation in his own right.” Dawkins, *Brief Candle*, 420. As Dawkins alludes, many refutations of this argument have indeed been published. These responses, however, generally do not merely consist of a bald-faced appeal to authority as Dawkins asserts. Instead, the apologists who respond use historical arguments, grounded in solid, long-respected reason and logic, to show the errors in Dawkins’ own argumentation. However, Dawkins refuses to engage the rebuttal on the level of reason, and instead tries to dismiss the arguments as appeals to power and authority. This is a bald mischaracterization of the responses, and does nothing to further the consideration of this substantive topic. Thus, with the New Atheists, an effort from apologist to engage in responses with the use of reason does not go anywhere. The New Atheists simply show themselves to be disinterested in rational theological dialog as their main strengths of argument lie elsewhere. For valid and helpful apologetic rational responses to Dawkins’ Ultimate 747 gambit, see: William Lane Craig, “Richard Dawkins on Arguments for God,” in *God Is Great, God Is Good: Why Believing in God Is Reasonable and Responsible*, ed. William Lane Craig and Chad Meister (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 13–31; Michael Behe, “God and Evolution,” in Craig and Meister, *God Is Great*, 78–90; Alvin Plantinga, “The Dawkins Confusion: Naturalism ‘Ad Absurdum’: A Review of Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*,” in Craig and Meister, *God Is Great*, 247–58; Feser, “The New Atheists,” 154–77; Markham, *Against Atheism*, 14–16 and 76–78; McGrath and McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, 27–28; Beck, “Evil,” *God and Evil*, 197–213; William Dembski, “Evil, Creation, and Intelligent Design,” in Meister and Dew, *God and Evil*, 259–69; Karl Gilbertson and Francis Collins, “Evil, Creation, and Evolution,” in Meister and Dew, *God and Evil*, 270–90; and Wilson, *God Is*, 30–31.

<sup>3</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 113

<sup>4</sup> For example, see: Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 240–48; Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 77–96; and Stenger, *God and the Folly*, 165–98.

existing rather than nothing, is a being capable of designing the universe and of talking to a million people simultaneously, is a total abdication of the responsibility to find an explanation. It is a dreadful exhibition of self-indulgent, thought-denying skyhookery.<sup>5</sup>

In Dawkins' attempt at a rationally driven argument, God must be ultimately simple because the world as we see it is now complex. God could not, by Dawkins' definition, ever be more complex than the universe as it currently exists if he is to be seen as a cause for the universe as it now exists. Thus, God, if he exists, which Dawkins of course thinks to be unlikely, is ultimately simple and thus unworthy of the title of "God."

An apologetic response based on rational appeals is very appropriate to the New Atheists' challenges regarding the simplicity or complexity of God, as for example is done by Edward Feser. After laying out a strong logical and far-reaching historical defense of the cosmological argument in general,<sup>6</sup> Feser turns to the particular New Atheist argument exemplified by Dawkins' 747 gambit. He writes:

Of course, a New Atheist might say that he isn't convinced that any version of the cosmological argument succeeds in showing that there really is something that could not in principle have had a cause—something that is purely actual, or absolutely simple, or which has a sufficient reason for its existence within itself, or which lacks a temporal beginning. He might even try to argue that there is some sort of hidden incoherence in these notions. But *merely* to ask "What caused God?"—as if the defender of the cosmological argument had overlooked the most obvious of objections—simply misses the whole point. A serious critic has to grapple with the details of the arguments. He cannot short-circuit them with a single smarmy question.<sup>7</sup>

He also notes:

Aquinas devotes around a hundred double-column pages of dense argumentation in Part I of the *Summa Theologiae* alone—just after presenting the Five Ways—to showing that to the cause of the world we must attribute simplicity, goodness,

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<sup>5</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 155.

<sup>6</sup> See especially the section entitled "The Simplicity/Composition Approach" in Feser, "New Atheists," 164–66.

<sup>7</sup> Feser, "New Atheists," 170.

infinity, immutability, unity, knowledge, life, will, power, and the like. ... Dawkins, Krauss, and the other New Atheist writers offer no response at all to these arguments. In fact it seems that they are entirely unaware that the arguments even exist.<sup>8</sup>

When topics like the cosmological argument are presented, both by the New Atheists and by most apologists, the result is an argument based on logic and reason. Rightfully so as the subject matter calls for such an approach.<sup>9</sup> A problem arises, however, when rational appeals are used to defend against New Atheist attacks that are predominantly ethical or emotional in nature. When a strictly rational response is given to a challenge that is highly emotional due to a misdiagnosis of the nature of New Atheist attacks, the result is incomplete at best. For example, Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson make the mistake of thinking the New Atheists are making a rational appeal when what the New Atheists are presenting often tends to be a thin veneer of reason superimposed over what is in actuality a strong emotional or ethical argument. As a result, their response misses the most powerful point of the New Atheist attacks. We see this problem as they write:

The New Atheism movement is reactionary and propelled by rhetoric that scathingly typecasts religious people as gullible and unintelligent. Some sneer that Christians believe in an invisible imaginary friend. Beneath that rhetoric lie persistent objections that, irrespective of our friendliness, will not evaporate.<sup>10</sup>

Although Clifford and Johnson recognize the rhetorical nature of the New Atheist attack, they wrongly argue that the New Atheists focus primarily on logical appeals rather than heavily utilizing emotional appeals and ethical appeals. Clifford and Johnson write that the New Atheists accuse Christians of being “gullible and unintelligent.”<sup>11</sup> They footnote this allegation with a

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<sup>8</sup> Feser, “New Atheists,” 175.

<sup>9</sup> I have cited here extensively from Edward Feser largely because he devotes his entire essay to this particular question. However, for another very good response to Dawkins’ Ultimate Boeing 747 gambit as a smaller portion of a larger book, see Crean, *God Is No Delusion*, 10–19. Crean covers such topics as “An ‘argument from complexity,’” “Can a designer be simple?” and “Must an omnipotent God be complex?”

<sup>10</sup> Clifford and Johnson, *Cross Is Not Enough*, 70.

<sup>11</sup> Clifford and Johnson, *Cross Is Not Enough*, 70.



single reference, namely to the entirety of Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, without further specification. Clifford and Johnson follow that statement immediately with the claim that the New Atheists "sneer that Christians believe in an invisible imaginary friend."<sup>12</sup> Actually, the most prominent reference to New Atheists' comments about imaginary friends comes not from Dawkins, but from Sam Harris in his *Letter to a Christian Nation*. Clifford and Johnson present this as a rational appeal against Christianity since the New Atheists reference intelligence. However, it is actually an emotional appeal when used by the New Atheists. Let us look at the more prominent quote about Christians having an imaginary friend from Sam Harris, and another on a related topic from Christopher Hitchens, to see this point.

Harris writes, regarding the destruction of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina:

Examples of God's failure to protect humanity are everywhere to be seen. The city of New Orleans, for instance, was recently destroyed by a hurricane. More than a thousand people died; tens of thousands lost all their earthly possessions; and nearly a million were displaced. It is safe to say that almost every person living in New Orleans at the moment Hurricane Katrina struck shared your belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, and compassionate God. But what was God doing while Katrina laid waste to their city? Surely He heard the prayers of those elderly men and women who fled the rising waters for the safety of their attics, only to be slowly drowned there. These were people of faith. These were good men and women who had prayed throughout their lives. Do you have the courage to admit the obvious? These poor people died talking to an imaginary friend.<sup>13</sup>

Clifford and Johnson would suggest that this passage indicates that the New Atheist challenge to Christianity is a rational, logical one rooted in the claim that Christians are unintelligent. On the other hand, I would argue that this very passage does a much better job of showing that the New Atheists do not primarily argue on logical grounds, but by using emotional appeals. Harris is not calling people of faith stupid, he is mocking them emotionally by calling

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<sup>12</sup> Clifford and Johnson, *Cross Is Not Enough*, 70. Dawkins does use the terminology, "imaginary friend," but he uses it more as an illustration of childlike innocence. He cites A. A. Milne's children's poem, "Now We Are Six" and its reference to "Binker" as an example of an imaginary friend. Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 347-52. Dawkins' description of God as an imaginary friend is more benign, while Harris' comment is far more cutting.

<sup>13</sup> Harris, *Letter*, 52.

for them to be pitied. Actually, the people in the cited paragraph had done the intelligent thing in the face of rising flood waters; they had sought higher ground. Harris' point is not to mock their intelligence, but to evoke our pity at the dual facts that their God was impotent to save them and they died not realizing this.

Harris' intent to evoke pity with an emotional appeal rather than to make a rational point can be seen in several ways. The primary indicator is that in the very last sentence Harris refers to those who died believing in their impotent imaginary friend as "poor people." By this I understand him to be referring to their pitiful condition, not poverty in a monetary sense. Harris does not call those who died foolish or stupid, which would indicate a more open attack on the intelligence of the residents of New Orleans. Another mark of Harris' emotional appeal is that he remarks that a thousand people died and tens of thousands lost all their earthly possessions. Harris is appealing to the heart rather than the mind of his reader. He is setting the reader up to feel sorry for the victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, because they were supposedly failed by their God and as a result they lost everything. This is not a rational argument, but one geared to evoke pity. Logically, faith had nothing to do with having one's possessions destroyed in a flood. If a Christian and an atheist had lived side by side on ground of equal elevation in New Orleans, both would have lost their belongings. Faith played no role. The relative intelligence of the atheist and unintelligence of the Christian would not have rendered a different outcome in the face of Hurricane Katrina. Intelligence is not the issue in this passage from Harris as he is not making a rational appeal to his reader. Harris is arguing emotionally, and I would suggest that he is quite effective in his approach.

Even when the New Atheists seem to make a rational argument, the appeal is actually emotional and ethical. Consider this section from Christopher Hitchens' *god is not Great*. Here,

at least, Hitchens attempts to compare religious origins with educational level. Hitchens writes:

One must state it plainly. Religion comes from the period of human prehistory where nobody—not even the mighty Democritus who concluded that all matter was made from atoms—had the smallest idea what was going on. It comes from the bawling and fearful infancy of our species, and is a babyish attempt to meet our inescapable demand for knowledge (as well as for comfort, reassurance, and other infantile needs). Today the least educated of my children knows much more about the natural order than any of the founders of religion, and one would like to think—though the connection isn't a fully demonstrable one—that this is why they seem so uninterested in sending fellow humans to hell.<sup>14</sup>

On the surface, this may seem to support the claim that New Atheists argue rationally to allege that people of faith are unintelligent. In fact, however, this is not primarily a rational argument but an ethical appeal. If anything, one could make the case that Hitchens pays a backhanded compliment to founders of religion who actually sought to meet humanity's inescapable demand for knowledge, and were hampered by the lack of scientific progress of their era. Hitchens even mentions that “the mighty Democritus” essentially had no idea what the world was truly like. Hitchens is not making the argument that people of faith are unintelligent, nor that the founders of religion were unintelligent. If anything, by lumping early religious leaders in with Democritus, whom Hitchens admires, he shows them a certain patronizing respect.

What Hitchens is more interested in doing here is making the case for the ethical superiority of the New Atheists. He is less making a statement that people of faith are unintelligent than he is making a claim that the New Atheists are more appropriately attuned to the scientific advances of the modern era, and therefore they are more authoritative voices to hear and heed based on the now-known nature of the world. That is one form of ethical appeal that Hitchens employs. He offers a second form of ethical appeal in the last sentence as he

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<sup>14</sup> Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 64.

mentions that atheist children do not feel the need to send others to hell. In this way, Hitchens paints those who follow the leadership of the New Atheists as being more peaceful, more tolerant, and more caring than religious believers who obsess about eternal torments for those not like themselves. These two ethical appeals point to the moral superiority of atheism. What is not present is a sustained rational appeal about the lack of intelligence on the part of people of faith.

Clifford and Johnson also suggest that the New Atheists charge people of faith with being gullible. This claim by Clifford and Johnson is much easier to support. Yes, the New Atheists do argue that people of faith are gullible. However, Clifford and Johnson's suggestion that this claim must be combatted with rational, rather than emotional or ethical appeals, fails to adequately address the challenge. The charge of gullibility is an *ad hominem* attack that is paired with a corresponding ethical appeal to the superiority of the New Atheist position. What is needed in the face of this *ad hominem* attack is not a rational argument to the contrary from Christians, but instead a countering ethical appeal showing the trustworthy and steadfast nature of Christians as they live their everyday life.

Clifford and Johnson misunderstand the New Atheists as being overwhelmingly rational in their approach, arguing that their primary charges are that Christians are unintelligent and gullible.<sup>15</sup> As a result, their apologetic response fails to gain traction, even if it is not technically wrong. Rational responses are needed, and helpful, but not sufficient. Additional approaches are needed to counter the new challenges raised against Christianity. What is needed is not more refutation of the New Atheists through rational argumentation, but an approach that builds a positive alternative outlook to the harsh descriptions of Christianity provided by the New Atheists. In addition, it would be helpful if this approach were practiced not only by a few

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<sup>15</sup> Clifford and Johnson, *Cross Is Not Enough*, 70.

intellectuals on behalf of the church but by all of the members of the church in all of their varied walks of life. It is time to turn to a newer and less-tried form of apologetic response to the lifestyle-oriented challenges of the New Atheists and look to a different methodology of apologetics to make the positive case for Christianity. It is time to turn our attention to Enfleshed Apologetics.

### Background to Enfleshed Apologetics

A new Enfleshed Apologetic approach has developed over the course of the last 10 to 20 years primarily in light of postmodernism and the challenges it posed to the faith. It developed largely without reference to or consideration of the New Atheists.<sup>16</sup> In fact, on the rare occasions that the New Atheists are referenced regarding Enfleshed Apologetics, the approach has been dismissed as an unhelpful methodology.<sup>17</sup> Contrary to this tendency, however, the Enfleshed

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<sup>16</sup> Perhaps one reason that writers addressing postmodernism have not recognized significant crossover applicability for a similar apologetic approach between postmodernism and the New Atheists could be that the New Atheists—being firmly rooted in empirical science and thoroughly modern in their outlook—can be quite critical of postmodernism themselves. Sam Harris, for example, claims that “most forms of relativism—including moral relativism, which seems especially well subscribed—are nonsensical. And dangerously so.” Harris, *End of Faith*, 178. For a fuller representation of New Atheist thought on this topic, see Harris’ entire section, “The Demon of Relativism.” Harris, *End of Faith*, 178–82. Christopher Hitchens also shows himself to be no fan of what he calls “the morally lazy practice of relativism.” Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 281. Earlier, Hitchens has already commented, “But it is better for us not to fall into relativism.” Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 68. While it is a somewhat passing reference, Richard Dawkins also shows himself to be averse to relativism, as he dismisses “Philosophers, especially amateurs with a little philosophical learning, and even more especially those infected with ‘cultural relativism.’” Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 282.

<sup>17</sup> Authors who have recognized the development of an Enfleshed Apologetic technique and rejected it for application to the New Atheists include Morey in *Embodying Our Faith* and Clifford and Johnson, *Cross Is Not Enough*. Morey is a strong advocate of Enfleshed Apologetics in many cases, but dismisses its helpfulness in specific application to the New Atheists. Morey proposes Enfleshed Apologetics exclusively in a postmodern context, without application to the New Atheist challenges to the Christian faith. For his summary of postmodernism and the introduction of his call for an Enfleshed Apologetic approach in light of relativism and pluralism, see Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 31–38. In fact, Morey specifically rules out Enfleshed Apologetics as a response to the New Atheists. He claims, “as the so-called new atheism makes its appeal to the masses on the basis of reason, it continues to give an avenue for a reasoned response.” Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 44. Clifford and Johnson, on the other hand, are generally critical about Enfleshed Apologetics in general, and are expressly dismissive of its helpfulness regarding the New Atheists. They describe their understanding of Enfleshed Apologetics thus: “One approach touted as being necessary for post-Christendom is an embodied apologetic, in which my life as a follower of Jesus *is* the apologetic. In this approach, instead of entering into discussions or debates, one must simply live a life that attracts non-Christians to Jesus.” Clifford and Johnson, *Cross Is Not Enough*, 69; emphasis original. Clifford and Johnson claim, “The embodied apologetic model reflects an overreaction to individuals who lack

Apologetic approach should be seen as an important response to the New Atheists. Since the most powerful criticisms of Christianity from the New Atheists are lifestyle-oriented, utilizing emotional and ethical rhetorical appeals, a lifestyle-oriented approach as proposed through Enfleshed Apologetics is most appropriate.

This move from the apologetic approaches common since the Enlightenment to Enfleshed Apologetics points to a significant shift in the basic definition of apologetics. Most definitions of apologetics given by modern apologists involve the words “rational” or “logical” or “intellectual” in some form in the definitions themselves. These modern apologetic approaches have been offered in primarily written or verbal form, and were rational in approach. Enfleshed Apologetics goes a different direction.

Seeing lifestyle as a form of apologetics may seem like a new, unusual, or even improper development, but it is actually an ancient apologetic approach with a rich history. Early Christian apologists used this approach as they argued that the moral behavior of Christians was a beneficial influence within society. Dennis Hollinger notes, “In our postmodern world it can *again* be a powerful apologetic as it seeks to show the coherence between our life-world foundations and their expression in moral and ethical living.”<sup>18</sup> Although it has an ancient history, at present, Enfleshed Apologetics is just beginning to be explored.<sup>19</sup> In order to see the

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humility and enjoy the adrenaline rush of debates.” Clifford and Johnson, *Cross Is Not Enough*, 71.

<sup>18</sup> Dennis Hollinger, “The Church as Apologetic: A Sociology of Knowledge Perspective,” in Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics*, 191; emphasis added. In a similar vein, David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins state that the church needs to rediscover vocation and return to ancient church patterns and practices by recovering an apologetic method rooted in the life of vocations. Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 201–2.

<sup>19</sup> The approach I am calling Enfleshed Apologetics is helpful overall in meeting the new challenges posed to the church in a manner reminiscent of far earlier apologetic approaches as our current culture experiences a diminishing of the role of reason. Any new era will not be suited by exactly the same apologetic approach as any that has come before, as each challenge will be slightly different and unique, and once an era has left its mark it can never be fully avoided. However, with the reduced role for reason that seems to mark the postmodern era, coupled with the increasing intensity of lifestyle-oriented criticisms of Christianity that mark current culture as represented by the New Atheists, an apologetic approach related to earlier efforts is appropriate. Enfleshed Apologetics is one such approach.

origin and development of Enfleshed Apologetics more clearly, we will first look at two transitional categories that bridge the gap between predominantly rational apologetic methods and an Enfleshed Apologetic. These two transitional categories are Humble Apologetics and Historical Goodness Apologetics.

### **Precursors to Enfleshed Apologetics**

One precursor to Enfleshed Apologetics arises in an approach called Humble Apologetics.

The primary contribution to this field was made by John G. Stackhouse in his book *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today*. In a Humble Apologetic approach, the main focus is humility on the part of the apologist, rather than any particular content being presented.<sup>20</sup>

Stackhouse notes that in many people’s minds, apologetics in general has earned a bad reputation as being overly argumentative. As a humorous illustration of this problem, Stackhouse offers “a whimsical definition: ‘Apologetics’ is ‘making someone *sorry he asked* why you are a Christian!’”<sup>21</sup> Based on his understanding of the problem apologetics has faced, Stackhouse offers the clearest basis for the need for the Humble Apologetic approach as he writes, “It is this penchant of apologists to turn people off and away, to annoy and repel rather than to engage and

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<sup>20</sup> The most prominent writer in the field of Humble Apologetics is Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*. Other writers in the field include James W. Sire, *A Little Primer on Humble Apologetics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Morehead, “Fresh Agenda,” Bob Passantino, “The Golden Rule Apologetic,” *Answers in Action*, accessed August 16, 2012, <http://www.answers.org/apologetics/goldenapol.html>; Wilkinson, “Art of Apologetics;” and to an extent, Tim Keller, “The Advent of Humility: Jesus Is the Reason to Stop Concentrating on Ourselves,” *Christianity Today* 52, no. 12 (December 2008): 50–53. For a contrary opinion, calling into question the usefulness and validity of this approach as a form of apologetics, see Craig Parton, “Review of *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* by Alister McGrath,” accessed May 19, 2015, [http://www.phc.edu/UserFiles/File/\\_Other%20Projects/Global%20Journal/10-3/Parton,%20Book%20Review%20of%20McGrath.pdf](http://www.phc.edu/UserFiles/File/_Other%20Projects/Global%20Journal/10-3/Parton,%20Book%20Review%20of%20McGrath.pdf). Parton links Humble Apologetics, referencing Stackhouse, with McGrath’s version of Incarnational Apologetics. Parton claims—among other things—that “‘humble apologetics’ reduces to focusing on the character of the apologist at least as much as on the actual message being proclaimed. The story of Jesus plays second fiddle to the story of McGrath. . . . When the focus shifts to the character of the apologist and his/her ‘authentic living’ of the Gospel, you can be sure that Christ and His saving office is no longer of central importance.” Parton, “Review of *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* by Alister McGrath,” 3.

<sup>21</sup> Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 114; emphasis original.

attract, that acts as a foil for much of what this book promotes instead.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the shape of Humble Apologetics is formed in reaction to the negative view of the apologetic task as being overly argumentative and hostile.

For this reason, the development of Humble Apologetics shifts to the life of the Christian. The theological basis is closely rooted in the incarnation, the word becoming flesh, in Jesus Christ. The combination of humility rooted in the incarnation of Jesus and humility in the Christian life is encouraged:

Our apologetics must be humble. It must be humble for several reasons, but chief among these is that God himself comes to us in humility, seeking our love and drawing us to him. The Lord Jesus Christ is our model of humility; the Holy Spirit of God is our humble companion who helps us to follow Christ’s example as we proclaim Christ’s message.<sup>23</sup>

Our approach as Christians is to be humble in part because God comes to us in humility, seeking and drawing rather than compelling and demanding, and our approach to our neighbors should follow accordingly.

Humble Apologetics is not a fully Enfleshed approach, however. It still functions as a validation of careful, considerate, but rational methods of apologetics used since the Enlightenment, while broadening the methodology. John Stackhouse accomplishes this by describing a model of “grace and truth.”<sup>24</sup> While often an apologist has been rightly focused on truth, the call to grace has been neglected. However, to neglect either grace or truth proves to be detrimental to the other. Truth without grace is unlikely to be heard, and grace without truth is unhelpful. Apologists must recognize that “offering one without the other is ... actually harmful

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<sup>22</sup> Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 114.

<sup>23</sup> Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 227.

<sup>24</sup> Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 137. Stackhouse is using a somewhat loose understanding of “grace” here. While doctrinally speaking, “grace” refers to a gift of God, Stackhouse uses the term here more as a synonym for “gracefulness.”



to the gospel.”<sup>25</sup> In this outlook, rationally-oriented apologetics is equated with “truth,” and is strongly upheld as a valid and necessary apologetic approach. Humble Apologetics is aligned with “grace,” in that humility on the part of the apologist should lead to a gracious presentation of the truth in all apologetic methodologies including the rational apologetic. Thus, the life and methodological approach of the apologist go hand-in-hand with the message of apologetics.

In summarizing Humble Apologetics one can argue that the central apologetic message itself, while potentially remaining entirely rational and verbal in form, would be heard and received better if it were to be presented with humility on the part of the apologist. Bob

Passantino writes:

If you apply the Golden Rule Apologetic every time you defend the Christian faith, you will find that those of opposing beliefs will listen more closely to what you say, respect your position even if they continue to deny it, give greater weight to your arguments, and be more willing to examine their own beliefs. You will not only give a good representation of Christianity, you will also be used by God to extend his mercy and patience to others, just as it was extended to you.<sup>26</sup>

In this approach, while the lifestyle of the apologist is brought into focus, the message of the apologetic proclamation itself is not changed. Truth and grace are held together. The apologetic message, that is, the traditional, rationally-driven apologetic message, is unchanged and remains central. The admonition is to present the message gently and humbly in order to be heard more openly. Thus, Humble Apologetics focuses more on method than on message, but the importance of the message itself is not in any way denied.

While Humble Apologetics begins to shift toward an Enfleshed Approach by recognizing the importance of the apologist’s lifestyle, this format developed slightly before the New Atheist books were published and so does not respond directly to the challenges presented there. A more

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<sup>25</sup> Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, 136–37.

<sup>26</sup> Passantino, “Golden Rule Apologetic.”

recent development which serves as at least an indirect answer to some of the charges of the New Atheists is a style of apologetics I am calling Historical Goodness Apologetics.<sup>27</sup> Rather than examining questions about the existence of God and related questions of truth and authority, this approach directly addresses the questions and challenges posed to Christianity by the New Atheists regarding the goodness of God and the goodness of His followers. It does so by looking backwards into history to show that the church has been a force for good within society. Historical Goodness Apologetics looks at the implementation of faith in the lives of Christians and the actions of the church *throughout history* in order to begin to offer a response to the New Atheist charges that Scriptural calls to virtue and service go unheeded in the lives Christians. Unlike Humble Apologetics, Historical Goodness Apologetics does interact directly with the New Atheists, but it does not directly make application to the current Christian life. Therefore, like Humble Apologetics, Historical Goodness Apologetics serves as a transitional category moving toward Enfleshed Apologetics, not as a fully Enfleshed Apologetic in itself. Historical Goodness Apologetics can provide evidence for Christians living for the benefit of society in the past (even in the very recent past), but it cannot actually live that good life in the present.

I describe this format as Historical Goodness Apologetics to differentiate it from what some apologists describe as Historical Apologetics. Ergun Caner, for example, locates Historical Apologetics in efforts to document the historicity of the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup> This approach

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<sup>27</sup> Of three works I am referencing in the field of Historical Goodness Apologetics, one—Alvin Schmidt’s *How Christianity Changed* was written before the main New Atheist publications, but the topics he covers mesh very closely with the later charges of the New Atheist books, and two—Dinesh D’Souza’s *What’s So Great* and David Bentley Hart’s *Atheist Delusions*, were written after the New Atheist books, and in direct response to them.

<sup>28</sup> Ergun Caner, “Apologetics, Historical,” in Hindson and Caner, *Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics*, 48–50. Caner also writes the article on Types of Apologetics, and again locates the topic of Historical Apologetics in Evidential Apologetics. Caner notes that apologists seeking evidence of Jesus’ resurrection—notably Gary Habermas, Michael Licona, and John Warwick Montgomery—are practicing Historical Apologetics. Caner also describes Archeological Apologetics as a form of Historical Apologetics. Ergun Caner, “Apologetics, Types Of,” in Hindson and Caner, *Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics*, 64–67.

seeks to document the historical authenticity of the life of Jesus Christ and the accuracy of his words and deeds, using the tools open to historical research to do so. The primary focus is on the events of the life of Christ. As generally understood, Historical Apologetics does not deal with events after the close of the first century AD. Historical Goodness Apologetics, however, is quite different, being focused not just on historical evidences of the life of Jesus Christ, but on the historical records of the positive effect that the church has had on society. Thus, the focus is not just on the events in the life of Jesus, but on the effect that Jesus' life and teaching had on the life of the church flowing out into the world in the centuries since his life, death, and resurrection.

Likewise, Historical Goodness Apologetics is different from a History of Apologetics, such as that offered by Dulles. A History of Apologetics approach does not seek to respond to any particular challenge addressed to Christianity and offer current approaches to meet these challenges. Instead, it offers a look at past challenges faced by the church and the means the church used in the past to address these challenges. By contrast, Historical Goodness Apologetics starts from current criticisms of the church, namely that it has been a force of evil and a detriment to society, and it seeks to address that current challenge by documenting that in the past the church has been beneficial to society. Historical Goodness Apologetics is not a record of past apologetic approaches but rather a current and needed apologetic refutation of charges against Christianity using the historical record of the church.

While this is a direct response to the New Atheists, the approach which is rooted in the study of history still appeals primarily to facts and rationality rather than to the urge to put such ideas into practice in the current life of the church. It thus remains a secondary or indirect response to the New Atheist allegations and a transitional category moving toward Embodied Apologetics. However, it does begin to offer an ethical appeal for Christianity to counter the

claims of the New Atheists that religions should have little moral standing and that the atheist worldview should be considered over Christianity.

In order to see the contrast that Historical Goodness Apologetics allows us to draw regarding the benevolent or malevolent nature of Christians over time, remember how Richard Dawkins describes the Christian God in his famous paragraph of *The God Delusion*. Dawkins describes God as a “jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak.”<sup>29</sup> Dawkins would infer that Christians, like their God, are jealous, petty, and controlling. By contrast, writers using Historical Goodness Apologetics argue that it is worthwhile to examine the actual record of history and see if Dawkins presents an accurate characterization of Christians as being the opposite of charitable and generous, namely being jealous and controlling.

According to Historical Goodness Apologetics, in most of ancient history only Christians as a cultural group can consistently be seen as *not* jealous and controlling. According to Dinesh D’Souza, most cultures in the ancient world operated with a reward or alliance basis for any seemingly generous act, while Christianity exemplified actual self-giving generosity without expectation of return. In most ancient cultures, if people of another region or another class suffered a tragedy, those not affected would be of the opinion that “yes, that is a problem, but it’s not our problem.”<sup>30</sup> Good deeds that were done in the ancient world, such as the funding of baths, parks, and the like were done not for the common good of the poor or disadvantaged, but to raise the status of the family name and testify to their family nobility and personal greatness.<sup>31</sup> Contrary to the allegations of the New Atheist that Christianity is jealous and controlling, D’Souza points out that the prevailing idea of the ancient world which was based on a reciprocal

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<sup>29</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> D’Souza, *What’s So Great*, 64.

<sup>31</sup> D’Souza, *What’s So Great*, 64–65.

reward system, “is not the Christian view, which demands that we act out of compassion, which means ‘suffering with others.’ . . . Christian humility is the very opposite of classical magnanimity.”<sup>32</sup>

The Christian practice of *caritas*<sup>33</sup> as opposed to classical magnanimity naturally flowed to the care of the sick, leading to the development of health care in the ancient world. While human compassion, especially with regard to the sick and dying, was rare among ancient Greek and Roman cultures, D’Souza notes that by contrast:

It was the Christian spirit of mutual love and communal charity that astonished and impressed the pagans and the Romans. The emperor Julian, seeking to revive paganism in the fourth century, professed admiration for the way in which Christians looked after their poor, their widows, and orphans, and their sick and dying. However paradoxical it seems, people who believed most strongly in the next world did the most to improve the situation of people living in this one.<sup>34</sup>

While D’Souza does not mention this explicitly, it is not hard to connect the dots to see that early Christians recognized Jesus’ compassionate love for those who were sick and suffering, and they sought to care and serve as Jesus had.<sup>35</sup> As Christians put their desire to follow Jesus in the care

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<sup>32</sup> D’Souza, *What’s So Great*, 65.

<sup>33</sup> Alvin Schmidt, in *How Christianity Changed*, notes the difference between the classical view of kindness and the Christian view of charity. He writes, “Christian charity differed profoundly from that of the Greco-Romans. The early Christians practiced *caritas*, as opposed to the *liberalitas* of the Romans. *Caritas* meant giving to relieve the recipient’s economic or physical distress without expecting anything in return, whereas *liberalitas* meant giving to please the recipient, who later would bestow a favor on the giver. For centuries the Roman pagans practiced *liberalitas*, not *caritas*. Only in extremely rare instances did some of the Romans give without expecting something in return.” Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 126. Schmidt also notes that, contrary to any imaginable Roman practice, “Christian charity was completely voluntary. According to the Roman culture of that era, such behavior defied common sense; it was seen as a sign of weakness and was viewed with suspicion. There was nothing to be gained by expending time and energy, even if voluntary, with people who could not contribute to Roman valor and to the strength of the state. The prevalence of Stoic philosophy also made it disrespectful to associate with the weak, the poor, and the downtrodden. To Christians, however, the individual, regardless of his social or economic status, was valuable because he possessed a soul redeemed by Jesus Christ. Thus, the differences between Christian and Roman charity in regard to motivation and practice were profound.” Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 127. Schmidt here has the stronger argument than D’Souza’s thoughts about Christian kindness versus classical magnanimity, but since Schmidt writes before the New Atheists and D’Souza is responding directly to the New Atheists, I have prioritized D’Souza’s form of the argument here.

<sup>34</sup> D’Souza, *What’s So Great*, 65.

<sup>35</sup> What D’Souza leaves implicit, Schmidt states openly as he ties this work directly to the influence of Jesus Christ. “The gospels of Matthew and Mark speak in several instances about Jesus having compassion for the people,

of the sick into practice, they developed what we today would think of as a health care system and hospitals. D’Souza notes, “In the West, the Christians built the first hospitals.”<sup>36</sup> The contrast with the care given to those who were sick and in need in ancient pagan cultures and in early Christianity was profound. In times of plague, the pagans of Rome “thrust aside anyone who began to be sick, and kept aloof even from their dearest friends, and cast the sufferers out upon the public roads half dead.”<sup>37</sup> By contrast, instead of running away from the sick and abandoning them as the pagans did, Christians stepped in to provide care and dignity to those in need.

Thus a first way Historical Goodness Apologetics can address the challenges of the New Atheists is by means of contradiction. While the New Atheists would claim that Christianity has been detrimental to society, authors using Historical Goodness Apologetics look to history to point out specific ways in which Christianity has been a blessing instead. This is seen, for example, through the founding of hospitals and the development of other means of charitable work. The second, deeper way that Historical Goodness Apologetics addresses the challenges of the New Atheists concerns not how Christianity founded certain institutions for the betterment of humanity or worked for the good of people in need, but how Christianity shaped the entire moral outlook of Western culture. Put bluntly, without the positive guiding influence of Christianity on Western culture, the New Atheists would not have a moral ground on which to stand to offer their criticisms of Christian morality.

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particularly for those who were sick. ... So it was with the early Christians when they saw the sick and dying.” Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 128. Schmidt continues the theological justification for the care Christians demonstrated in ancient society in a subsequent chapter as well. “The early Christians unequivocally rejected the callous, inhumane culture of the Greco-Roman world. They saw each person as having a redeemable soul, and therefore it was God-pleasing to nurture and nurse any and every person, regardless of his or her social status. Because eternal life awaited all those who believed and died in Christ, life on earth was not the ultimate value. Even if one died while caring for the sick, a greater and better life lay ahead; moreover, if a sick or dying person came to see and accept Christ’s forgiveness, another soul was gained for eternal life. That kind of behavior was totally foreign to pagan thought.” Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 153.

<sup>36</sup> D’Souza, *What’s So Great*, 65.

<sup>37</sup> Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 152.

We have seen the allegations from the New Atheists that Christianity sponsors violence. Such charges include the segment from Harris' *Letter to a Christian Nation* discussing the supposed Deuteronomical mandate to kill disobedient children and the segment from Dawkins' accusing God of being a genocidal ethnic cleanser. However, for apologists practicing Historical Goodness Apologetics, this style of criticism has a serious problem. The basis of the criticism itself is rooted solidly in Judeo-Christian morality, which was not held in the ancient world outside of followers of the Bible. The New Atheists here are attempting to criticize Christian morality on the basis of ethics drawn from Christian morality.<sup>38</sup> Another way to phrase this is to consider the effectiveness of the New Atheists' emotional appeals. When the New Atheists describe what they interpret to be Scripturally-mandated violence, we are repulsed by the idea that the Bible, when read in a surface manner, seems to advocate violence in some situations. So, why are we today shocked and revolted by such descriptions of death and violence? Something over time has changed in the moral makeup of Western society. David Bentley Hart argues that the one overwhelming thing that brought about this change in Western society was specifically Christianity. He claims:

Stated in its most elementary and most buoyantly positive form, my argument is, first of all, that among all the many great transitions that have marked the evolution of Western Civilization, whether convulsive or gradual, political or philosophical, social or scientific, material or spiritual, there has been only one—the triumph of Christianity—that can be called in the fullest sense a “revolution”: a truly massive and epochal revision of humanity’s prevailing vision of reality, so pervasive in its

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<sup>38</sup> For a more detailed examination of this problem in the New Atheist approach, see Douglas Wilson in *God Is*. Wilson shows that even the basic New Atheist claims that religions are evil rest on the premise that one can define evil. The standards of evil that the New Atheists use to call religions evil are essentially the standards of Christianity. Thus, the New Atheists are trying to maintain Christian morality without Christianity and without God, and Wilson points out that this can't be done. Wilson, *God Is*, 4–9. Wilson comes back to this theme frequently throughout the book. The end result for the New Atheists is that they promote an understanding of “good” and “evil” that is virtually indistinguishable from a Christian understanding of what is “good” and “evil,” but with absolutely no theoretical basis for doing so. For example, Wilson notes that Hitchens complains that “religion poisons everything.” Wilson then wonders according to whose standard of morality is it actually wrong to poison everything? One cannot easily justify the wrongness of poisoning things while at the same time dismissing the existence of the One who gave the command, Wilson argues. Wilson, *God Is*, 4–9.

influence and so vast in its consequences as actually to have created a new conception of the world, of history, of human nature, of time and of moral good. To my mind, I should add, it was an event immeasurably more impressive in its cultural creativity and more ennobling in its moral power than any other movement of spirit, will, imagination, aspiration, or accomplishment in the history of the West. And I am convinced that, given how radically at variance Christianity was with the culture it slowly and relentlessly displaced, its eventual victory was an event of such improbability as to strain the very limits of our understanding of historical causality.<sup>39</sup>

That is to say, the moral goodness of Christianity demonstrated in history is one of the most shockingly effective means ever used to change the course of civilization—and, in light of the charges from the New Atheists, it needs to be clarified—change it for the better.

The ancient world was not better off without Judeo-Christian morality, and the current culture would not be improved if Christianity were to be abandoned either. The idea advanced by the New Atheists that Christianity sprang upon an edenic, idyllic world of admirable morality and poisoned everything is a gross historical fiction. The New Atheists, under the influence of Western Civilization, have assumed that as morality is now, so it always has been, or that it would have developed along a similar, or better, trajectory without the influence of Christianity.<sup>40</sup>

This is not the case. According to Hart, ancient morality, especially when it comes to the value

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<sup>39</sup> Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, xi. Paul Doerksen elaborates on Hart's thesis: "Christianity was not just another mystery cult that happened to have the most engaging myths, nor was it simply a series of threats and promises that suckered ignorant folk into believing, but a faith in which train follows social and moral difference. For Hart, the fact that hospitals appear wherever Christians have a significant presence—or better, the way Christians have a significant presence by building hospitals, hospices, and so on—that is evidence of a revolution. And, he claims, women, slaves, and the poor really feel the difference that the Christian revolution brings about—imperfectly to be sure, but the law of charity is one that cannot be swept away." Paul Doerksen, "Responding But Not Replying: David Bentley Hart and the 'New Atheism,'" *Direction* 40, no. 1 (2011): 86.

<sup>40</sup> Dawkins argues, "we do not—even the religious among us—ground our morality in holy books, no matter what we may fondly imagine. How, then, do we decide what is right and what is wrong? No matter how we answer that question, there is a consensus about what we do as a matter of fact consider right and wrong: a consensus that prevails surprisingly widely." Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 262. Since he does not view morality as divinely given, Dawkins offers an alternate version of the Ten Commandments which he found on an atheist website. The new version includes such profound ideas as "Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you." "In all things, strive to cause no harm." "Live life with a sense of joy and wonder." "Question everything." Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 263–64. The argument is essentially that God and religion are not needed for the development of morality, and that exemplary moral values can be held independently of any belief in God. Dawkins summarizes this belief by writing, "It seems to me to require quite a low self-regard to think that, should belief in God suddenly vanish from the world, we should all become callous and selfish hedonists, with no kindness, no charity, no generosity, nothing that would deserve the name of goodness." Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 227.



and dignity of human life, was very different from what we take for granted today. It was only under the profound and positive influence of Christianity, the triumph of which Hart considers to be the only true revolution, which brought about the respect for human life we enjoy today.

The Christian view of life, which repudiated and replaced the coarser moralities that preceded it,<sup>41</sup> is fundamental and foundational to Western culture. In fact, this Christian morality is so deeply engrained that it can at times become invisible which unfortunately allows the New Atheists' attempt to turn the now-embedded Christian view of the value of life against Christianity itself. The very means of appeal chosen by the New Atheists to advance their argument, notably the emotional appeal, is itself dependent on the widespread assimilation of Judeo-Christian ethics into the Western mindset. The New Atheists are able to tug on emotional heartstrings regarding mass murder and genocide because Christianity has, over time, vastly elevated the value of human life in Western ideals. Ancients would have been as likely to relish in the gore of genocide as to be repulsed by it. Likewise, the emotional appeals employed by the New Atheists about supposed abuse and injury done to children in the name of religion would have made little sense had Christianity not raised the status of children so significantly. Think again about Harris' claim in *Letter to a Christian Nation* that the main message of Scripture is to beat and to kill, and then ask: why do we find this idea ethically and emotionally repugnant in the first place? We find what we call abuse repulsive because of the morals given by Christianity. The New Atheists can upset us regarding violence and abuse because Christianity

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<sup>41</sup> Schmidt describes the extent to which Christian morality supplanted that of ancient paganism. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do.' So goes an old saying. But when the early Christians arrived in Rome from Jerusalem and parts of Asia Minor, they did not do as the pagan Romans did. They defied the entire system of Rome's morality." Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 48. Schmidt notes that a low view of human life, which was distinctly different from Christian morality, was a hallmark of Roman society. A person was valued only if he was a part of the political fabric and able to contribute to society, leading to the view that a person's reason for being was to further the affairs of the State. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 48. This low and utterly utilitarian view of life demonstrated by the Romans "was a shocking affront to the early Christians, who came to Rome with an exalted view of human life. Like their Jewish ancestors, they saw human beings as the crown of God's creation." Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 48.

has first raised our consciousness regarding the value of life.

Far from “poisoning everything” as the New Atheists would allege, Historical Goodness Apologetics shows in multiple ways that the influence of the Christianity has been of great benefit to society. Schmidt notes:

People who may think that current human charity and compassion in the Western world, whether it is state welfare or voluntary charity, developed on its own as a result of mere civilization, without the impetus and influence of Christianity are misinformed. ... In short, every time charity and compassion are seen in operation, the credit goes to Jesus Christ. It was he who inspired his early followers to give and to help the unfortunate, regardless of their race, religion, class, or nationality. ... These early Christians set a model for their descendants to follow, a model that today’s modern secular societies seek to imitate, but without Christian motivation. Sympathy toward the poor is a concept that comes from Christianity, for the rich and well-to-do in Greece and Rome despised the poor.<sup>42</sup>

Historical Goodness Apologetics traces a dramatic shift in the valuation of human life demonstrated in the early years of the church, tied to the twin understandings that humanity is the special and priceless creation of God and that in the person of Jesus Christ, God himself became one with humanity in the incarnation. When one looks at a human being and realizes the implications of the incarnation, eyes are opened to see the dignity of God bestowed on mere humanity. Historical Goodness Apologetics argues that Christianity is *not* an evil detriment to humanity, and is not primarily responsible for the wide-spread violence against humanity alleged by the New Atheists. The evidence shows otherwise. To perpetrate violence against humanity would run directly counter to the Christian value of life, so unique in human history.

The category of Historical Goodness Apologetics is the most direct response so far to the criticisms leveled by the New Atheists that Christianity is evil. Since the apologetic task is to respond directly to the questions and challenges being raised, this sub-category of apologetics can be very helpful in the current cultural situation. It does respond to the New Atheists at the

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<sup>42</sup> Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 147–48.

same rhetorical level of attack, providing an ethical appeal for Christianity to counter the *ad hominem* attacks of the New Atheists against the moral standing of Christianity. It is a direct response to the emotionally significant appeals of the New Atheists, and counters with the compassion of Christianity in history being demonstrated with equal emotional intensity. Such an approach also begins to rebuild the ethical standing of the Christian apologist, thus giving the Christian an opportunity to gain a hearing. This is a very important development in the way the church responds to the New Atheists apologetically.

However, it is one thing to say that the church *was* a force for good in society in the past as a counter to the claim of the New Atheists, it is quite another thing to demonstrate that the church is *currently* working for the good of society today. The Historical Goodness approach to apologetics fits the first of these two options, not the second. The approach focuses on past evidence of the church's goodness, and is intellectual in its orientation. It appeals to the minds of the hearer, rather than the life of those who would follow Jesus Christ. Thus, Historical Goodness Apologetics is not fully Enfleshed Apologetics. Rather it is an Evidential approach that uses the facts of Christian life in history to counter New Atheist claims. While not being fully Enfleshed Apologetics, Historical Goodness Apologetics can begin to build a bridge to Enfleshed Apologetics as a helpful and needed apologetic reply to the New Atheists.

### **The Developing Shape of Enfleshed Apologetics**

David Wheeler provides a helpful definition of Enfleshed Apologetics:

*Incarnational Apologetics* is the representative public and private lifestyle of a Christian that validates to the world the absolute truths of the Bible. It should be the natural result of a born-again experience and is communicated to the world through both actions and attitudes of Christians as they consistently live out the tenets of their faith in community with both the redeemed and the unredeemed.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Wheeler, "Apologetics, Incarnational," 50; emphasis original. Also of interest in Wheeler's article, he

In a proper understanding of Enfleshed Apologetics, doctrine and life are not placed in competition with each other, but viewed rightly as working in conjunction with one another. Wheeler writes, “The simple truth is that the incarnational life is merely living as Jesus lived by balancing beliefs with behavior.”<sup>44</sup> Wheeler does not downplay doctrine in favor of life. He seeks a balance. Beliefs are not superseded by behavior; they are balanced by behavior. Neither one can replace or substitute for the other. Christians should consistently live out their faith-driven actions and attitudes, and in so doing validate the more theological tenets of their faith such as Scriptural inerrancy, doctrinal authority, and the reality of the resurrection.<sup>45</sup> Both lifestyle and theology are held together tightly.

Both lifestyle and theology are important because the shape and approach of apologetics are usually formed in contrast to a perceived challenge or problem. The perceived problem shaping this particular approach is the charge of hypocrisy often leveled against Christianity.<sup>46</sup> In response, an Enfleshed approach to apologetics seeks to strengthen the connection between doctrine and practice, between belief and behavior. Wheeler notes:

While this approach [a rational apologetic approach focusing on a verbal message while overlooking the call to live out the commands of Christ by meeting simple human needs] values much knowledge, it often misses the point of living out a transformed life and *underestimates the impact, upon unbelievers, of an inconsistent lifestyle.*<sup>47</sup>

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contrasts incarnational apologetics with informational apologetics, writing that: “Informational apologetics represents the explanation of essential biblical tenants [sic] to the Christian faith. Incarnational apologetics represents the actualization of those same biblical belief systems into the authentic expressions of a believer’s life. It is, in a sense, wrapping one’s faith in the flesh of daily living.” Wheeler, “Apologetics, Incarnational,” 50–51.

<sup>44</sup> Wheeler, “Apologetics, Incarnational,” 53.

<sup>45</sup> Wheeler, “Apologetics, Incarnational,” 51.

<sup>46</sup> Recall that “Hypocritical is one of the primary criticisms of the church noted by Kinnaman and Lyons in *UnChristian*. See their chapter of the same title in Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 41–66. For another other example of this charge, see Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus, but not the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 65.

<sup>47</sup> Wheeler, “Apologetics, Incarnational,” 52; emphasis added.

Enfleshed Apologetics does well to defend against the frequent charge that Christians are hypocritical when they teach love in their words but seem to show indifference or worse in their lives. Philip Kenneson points out:

It does absolutely no good for us to sit here and insist that the proposition “Jesus is Lord of the universe” is objectively true while at the same time we live our lives in such a way that this lordship remains completely invisible. If Christians feel compelled to claim that Jesus is Lord of the universe, then that lordship must be visible somewhere. . . . God called the church into being to bear witness by its embodied life together that God has come to earth and dwelt among us, a mission that should not have left things the way they were.<sup>48</sup>

As a response to the charge that Christians might speak the words of Christ but do not live the life of Christ, Enfleshed Apologetics seeks to live a Christ-like life as those who bear his name, bringing life in line with doctrine and thus attempting to reply to and refute the charge of hypocrisy. This approach to Enfleshed Apologetics sees the apologetic endeavor strengthened as members of the community “look more and more like Jesus.”<sup>49</sup>

The Christian lifestyle does not just serve to open the door for a later proclamation of an apologetic message or serve as a precursor to the apologetic task. Instead, the life of the church and the life of the Christian *is* the apologetic approach in itself. Tim Morey recognizes that the church community itself, if it has been transformed by Christ, can serve as a powerful apologetic testimony.<sup>50</sup> Morey writes, “In living as a new creation we become the apologetic God means us to be.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, the life of God’s people is itself a method of apologetics. This is Enfleshed Apologetics.

Instead of expecting doctrine to represent Christianity in the face of a contrary witness in

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<sup>48</sup> Philip D. Kenneson, “There’s No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It’s a Good Thing, Too,” in Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics*, 168.

<sup>49</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 164.

<sup>50</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 151.

<sup>51</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 151.

life, an Enfleshed Apologetic approach recognizes that a rational apologetic approach must be paired with an Enfleshed Apologetic approach as Christians live in ways that imitate the service and humanitarian approach demonstrated in Christ himself. Thus Enfleshed Apologetics supports and reinforces rather than contradicts the well-argued tenets of the Christian faith.

Enfleshed Apologetics seeks to pair Scriptural teaching with a representative lifestyle. Both words and works have a proper place and are each inadequate without the other. A Christian is by all means called to use words and teach doctrine, but stopping there is insufficient. Morey writes, “It is not enough for us to talk about God’s love of the world—we have to enact it.”<sup>52</sup> Words and works, beliefs and behaviors are brought together and held together. In terms of apologetics, one could say that both traditional rational apologetic approaches and Enfleshed Apologetic approaches are vitally needed, and neither one can replace the other. Both are significant and both are in fact central components of the apologetic task. They need to be paired rather than pulled apart.

Robert Webber provides a view of Enfleshed Apologetics in his 2002 work, *The Younger Evangelicals*. He writes that the:

early church apologetic may be rightly called an “incarnational apology.” The church is the continuation of the incarnation. It is the earthed reality of the presence of Jesus in and to the world. Herein lies the ancient apologetic. The church by its very existence is a witness to the presence of God in history (Eph. 3:10). There is only one actual incarnation of God and that is in Jesus Christ, but the church, being his body, sustains an incarnational dimension. The church is a witness to the presence of Jesus in the world as it embodies and lives out the faith.<sup>53</sup>

As Webber brings in the topic of apologetics he does so by considering it as a continuation of the incarnation. He sets up God’s presence in the world as a significant component of the unique incarnation of Jesus. Thus the church as a continuation of the incarnation is also a continuation

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<sup>52</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 166.

<sup>53</sup> Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, 95.

of the presence of God in and for the world. Being present with and among people is an important understanding of the role of the church. Webber uses the term Incarnational Apologetics for this approach as it is rooted in the idea that the church is the continuation of the incarnational presence of God in the world.<sup>54</sup>

Webber continues to explore the church as an ongoing incarnation of the presence of God among us in his subsequent book, *Ancient Future Evangelism*. One can see the idea of the church as the incarnational presence of God among his people, but here Webber moves deeper into a more active, engaged model of Enfleshed Apologetics. He writes:

The church is the witness to the reality of God's activity in history ... this witness of the church is not in words alone. The church not only *says* God's mission, it *does* God's mission because it embodies the very reality of God. The church by its very existence makes the reality of God present.<sup>55</sup>

The church is both presence and action. Furthering the idea that the church is the incarnational presence of God, Webber writes that "The church is not a mere collection of individuals, a human entity, but in a mystical way it is a real and actual experience that connects with the Son and the Spirit."<sup>56</sup> He further notes that the purpose of the church "is to become the embodied reality of the rule of Christ over the lives of its people."<sup>57</sup>

God's presence in the world through his people is enacted in the lives of God's people. The church remains an apologetic in itself, not just because it embodies God's presence but because the people of the church live God's love toward the lost. The presence of God in the church leads to disciples carrying God's work out into the world. Webber notes this connection and emphasis

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<sup>54</sup> Where Webber and others use the term "Incarnational Apologetics," I will use the term "Enfleshed Apologetics" so as not to infringe upon the unique and unrepeatable event of the incarnation in Jesus Christ as God became human.

<sup>55</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 74; emphasis original.

<sup>56</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 155.

<sup>57</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 158.

as he writes, “Because the church is the reality of God made present, the church itself is a womb for disciple-making.”<sup>58</sup> He adds, “The new disciple must be immersed in the life of the church because it is the presence of God’s life in the world.”<sup>59</sup>

Gailyn Van Rheenen offers another example of Enfleshed Apologetics, also connecting it with the earthly presence of God among his people. He notes:

Christianity is incarnational, unlike other world religions. This means that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, Christianity teaches that God came down into our world and lived among humans as a human. Put another way, the creator of the universe came to earth and got his hands dirty. We believe that the incarnation teaches all Christians that they are to mix with ordinary people, share their experience, and attempt to understand their beliefs.<sup>60</sup>

In this fascinating description, just as God “got his hands dirty” in the incarnation by coming down into the world and living as a human, so the church should “mix with ordinary people.” The church should, so to speak, get its hands dirty by engaging with people where they live, on their ground. The church needs to share life with the world. The focus of Enfleshed Apologetics is seen as mixing with those around, just as in the incarnation Jesus Christ mixed with humanity, sharing the experience of the neighbor, just as Jesus shared our human experience. Thus the church lives as a continuous presence with our neighbors.<sup>61</sup> In this Enfleshed Apologetics outlook, the shared life of a Christian and his or her neighbor becomes nothing less than a continuation of Jesus’ incarnational presence with his neighbors across time and space.

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<sup>58</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 74.

<sup>59</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 75.

<sup>60</sup> Gailyn Van Rheenen, “Foreword,” in Hexham, Rost, and Morehead, *Encountering New Religious Movements*, 18.

<sup>61</sup> As has often been pointed out in Lutheran theology, the mere presence of God is not of itself a good thing. God could be with humanity to judge just as easily (and more deservedly!) than to bring good news. God’s presence is not automatically a gospel-centered, saving presence. Focusing on God’s mere presence among humanity in the person of Jesus Christ misses the point of the incarnation. Jesus was not merely God *among* the people, Jesus was God *for* the people. Jesus as God in the flesh did not seek to establish relationships with people just to be nice, Jesus sought to restore the broken relationship between God and humanity for all eternity by His salvific death on the cross and resurrection.



In Enfleshed Apologetics, relationships are central, just as relationships are seen as foundational to Jesus' ministry. Mikel Neumann points out, "Jesus' life demonstrates the importance of the incarnation. Jesus became human in order that people might have a relationship with God."<sup>62</sup> Neumann elaborates, "relationship with human beings was foundational for Jesus' ministry. He took the time and effort to leave heaven and become human."<sup>63</sup> This takes time. A relationship cannot be developed in passing. Neumann emphasizes that as a part of Jesus' incarnational task, focused on relationships, "he took the time to be profoundly involved with his audience."<sup>64</sup> The focus of Enfleshed Apologetics on relationships has significance for how the people of Christ continue his ministry in the world. It gives shape to the way the church and Christians look outward into the world around them to form lasting, loving relationships. In Christ, God established relationships with humanity.

While this foundation for relationships may seem to be limited only to those in Christ, the implication of God's broader work of creation is also significant. In a more basic and fundamental sense, God has designed the created order with interwoven relationships and placed everyone within this web of personal connections. As neighbors in the created order, all people have a responsibility to sustain God's creation and work for the good of those around us. God's loving design places human beings as the caretakers of his creation, and that includes care of our fellow human beings through relationships. Due to our role in God's creation we really are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. We are placed by God in a network of relationships within the created order. Those who would practice Enfleshed Apologetics diligently seek to cultivate such relationships and do so in light of the good order that God has designed.

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<sup>62</sup> Neumann, "Incarnational Ministry," 28.

<sup>63</sup> Neumann, "Incarnational Ministry," 28.

<sup>64</sup> Neumann, "Incarnational Ministry," 30.

## Enfleshed Apologetics Applied to the New Atheists

Having looked at the theological justification for various forms of Enfleshed Apologetics, we now move out of the realm of theory into the realm of practice as we consider authors who respond to the New Atheists by beginning to apply Enfleshed Apologetics. Enfleshed Apologetics began to develop before the main writings of the New Atheists, and thus the early work in Enfleshed Apologetics obviously does not offer a response to them. A few writers are, however, beginning to see Enfleshed Apologetics as a possibly helpful approach to the New Atheists. This needs to expand since the New Atheist's arguments have resonated in society based on their use of the emotional and ethical rhetorical appeals and an Enfleshed Apologetic provides the needed response to the lifestyle-oriented challenges of the New Atheists.

The first author we will consider who is beginning to use Enfleshed Apologetics to reply to the New Atheists is Alister McGrath. In the book, *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith That We Defend*, he pens a pertinent chapter for applying new apologetic methods to the New Atheists entitled "Challenges from Atheism." McGrath lists and describes the various writings of the New Atheists. He acknowledges the standard New Atheist charge that Christianity leads to violence.<sup>65</sup> However, his response at this point primarily is to show that atheism led to more violence in the twentieth century than did Christianity, rather than calling for a form of Enfleshed Apologetics among Christians.<sup>66</sup> McGrath's basic argument here is that violence is not so much attributable to religion, or even to atheism, for that matter, but instead violence accompanies the possession of power in society. He writes,

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<sup>65</sup> McGrath, "Challenges from Atheism," 28. McGrath states that in his view, there are four main challenges from the New Atheists. 1) Christianity, like all religions, leads to violence. 2) God is just an invention designed to console losers. 3) Christian faith is a leap in the dark without any reliable basis. 4) The natural sciences have disproved God.

<sup>66</sup> McGrath, "Challenges from Atheism," 27–30.

Once, it was possible to argue that religion alone was the source of the world's evils. ... Atheism argued that it abolished violence and tyranny by getting rid of what ultimately caused it: faith in God. It was a credible claim in the nineteenth century precisely because atheism had not yet enjoyed the power and influence once exercised by religion. But all that has changed. Atheism's innocence has now evaporated. In the twentieth century, atheism managed to grasp the power that had hitherto eluded it. But then atheism proved just as fallible, just as corrupt, and just as oppressive as any belief system that had gone before it.<sup>67</sup>

McGrath goes on to argue that the most flagrant examples of the use of violence in the twentieth century were perpetrated by atheistic regimes.<sup>68</sup>

While there is truth and accuracy to these claims, the fundamental problem is that this approach merely tries to reduce religion to the lesser of two evils. Yes, violence can be a problem in religion, but the same problem can really be far worse in atheism. Thus, religion may be bad, but atheism is worse. While McGrath does go on to present a positive case for Christianity as opposed to atheism, this particular component of the overall argument is perhaps less helpful than other approaches. Christianity will not be well-received if it is merely the lesser of two evils. The lesser of two evils is still an evil. Obviously a more positive presentation of the faith is needed.<sup>69</sup>

McGrath comes closer to an Enfleshed Apologetic approach to the New Atheists in *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith*. Here, McGrath points more significantly to Enfleshed Apologetics. He writes that apologetics has a strongly positive

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<sup>67</sup> McGrath, "Challenges from Atheism," 29.

<sup>68</sup> McGrath, "Challenges from Atheism," 29–30. The same basic argument is made in McGrath, *Twilight of Atheism*, 232 and in McGrath, Dennett, and Stewart, *Future of Atheism*, 170–71. See also D'Souza, *What's So Great*, 203–21.

<sup>69</sup> McGrath acknowledges this need as he admits that a harsh version of religion will drive people away. In his book, *The Twilight of Atheism*, he writes, "Paradoxically, the future of atheism will be determined by its religious rivals. Those atheists looking for a surefire way to increase their appeal need only to hope (for we cannot reasonably ask them to pray) for harsh, vindictive, and unthinking forms of religion to arise in the West, which will so alienate Westerners that they will rush into godlessness from fear and dislike of its antithesis. When religion is seen as a threat to people it will fail; when it is seen as their friend, it will flourish." McGrath, *Twilight of Atheism*, 278.

dimension, “setting out the full attractiveness of Jesus Christ so those outside the faith can begin to grasp why he merits such serious consideration.”<sup>70</sup> He goes on to say:

As we shall see, one classic way of doing this is to show that Christianity is rationally compelling. It makes better sense of things than its rivals. Yet it is vitally important not to limit the appeal of the gospel to human reason. What of the human heart? Time after time, the Gospels tell us people were drawn to Jesus of Nazareth because they realized he could transform their lives. While arguments are important in apologetics, they have their limits. Many are attracted to the Christian faith today because of their belief that it will change their lives. Their criterion of validation is not so much “Is this true?” But “Will this work?”<sup>71</sup>

In this section of his book, McGrath is working with the idea that apologetics has two basic themes: defending and commending the Christian faith.<sup>72</sup> McGrath includes this reference to the Christian life as a way to “commend” the faith.<sup>73</sup> McGrath describes a way of accomplishing this with primarily verbal means. He says we should “help people realize”<sup>74</sup> how wonderful Christianity is and help people grasp the attractiveness of the faith. However, in this section of the book, McGrath does not mention that one of the best ways to show the attractiveness of the Christian life is to *live* an attractive Christian life. Demonstrating the beauty of the Gospel is often best done with deeds, not just descriptions. McGrath does not deny or discount the importance of Christian life here, he just doesn’t mention it at this point. More can and should be said about lifestyle as a form of apologetic approach. Unfortunately McGrath doesn’t flesh out this topic at this point in his work, although he does later.

It is vitally important as a means of commending the value and wholesome nature of Christianity to see sacrificial love and service enacted in life. Of course, this “commending” role

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<sup>70</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 19.

<sup>71</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 19.

<sup>72</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 19.

<sup>74</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 19.

for the Christian life is needed, and McGrath is correct to recognize it as a form of apologetics in this sense. However, McGrath here misses that in light of the lifestyle-oriented charges against Christianity leveled by the New Atheists, a lifestyle-oriented approach to apologetics serves not just a “commending” role, but also a “defending” role. McGrath recognizes that not all challenges to the Christian faith are intellectual, although he recognizes that often they are.<sup>75</sup> He writes:

it is important to realize that not all of these difficulties fall into this category [of intellectual questions]. Some are much deeper concerns, and are not so much about problems with rational understandings as about problems with existential commitment. French apologist Blaise Pascal (1623–62) once perceptively commented: “The heart has its reasons, which reason knows nothing about.” Apologetics aims to identify these barriers to faith, whatever their nature, and offer responses that help to overcome them.<sup>76</sup>

While this is a key recognition, at this point of his text McGrath says the way to offer responses to such existential qualms is by thinking through our own such struggles carefully. “Apologetics thus encourages Christians to develop a ‘discipleship of the mind.’ Before we can answer the question others ask us about our faith, we need to have answered them for ourselves.”<sup>77</sup> McGrath is accurate in his diagnosis of the range of challenges to Christianity, and his suggested answers are not incorrect, they are just incomplete at this point. Questions about the Christian life can be answered by talking about the Christian life, but they can also be answered by living the Christian life.

McGrath becomes much more clear about this when he returns to the idea of lifestyle apologetics later in *Mere Apologetics*. In his chapter on “Gateways for Apologetics” McGrath suggests that methods such as stories and images, along with tools such as films, poetry, and

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<sup>75</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 17.

<sup>76</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 17–18.

<sup>77</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 18.

works of art, along with more traditional methods of apologetics such as explanation and argument, are helpful gateways to open the door for apologetics,<sup>78</sup> and he adds lifestyle as an additional possible gateway for apologetics.<sup>79</sup> He writes:

the way in which Christians live and embody their faith can serve an important apologetic function. Many are moved to ask about faith when they realize that their friends seem to have something they do not—for example, a sense of peace or purpose, or a deep-seated compassion and love for their fellow human beings. “Where did that come from?” they ask, secretly wondering if they could possess it as well. The love of God is both embodied and proclaimed when Christians serve their neighbors in the world. . . . Living out the truth can be thought of as an “incarnational apologetic,” itself a powerful witness to that truth. We need more than just arguments; we need to show that the Christian faith is life-changing and life-empowering.<sup>80</sup>

Since McGrath includes this description of “incarnational apologetics” under the heading of “gateways for apologetics,” it is tempting to understand him as saying that lifestyle is not an apologetic approach in and of itself, but instead just a means to open a door to a true apologetic discussion. However, elsewhere in *Mere Apologetics*, McGrath expresses plainly that lifestyle can indeed be seen as a valid apologetic approach in its own right. For example, his concluding chapter is entitled, “Developing Your Own Apologetic Approach,” and he explains that his method throughout the book has been to “help you develop your own approach. . . . My concern throughout this work has been to help you and encourage you to develop an apologetic method, rather than simply presenting you with a list of apologetic answers.”<sup>81</sup> In that chapter, he specifies that one of the ways apologetics is best done is “through the example of our lives and attitudes.”<sup>82</sup> Thus, while McGrath could be read as indicating that Enfleshed Apologetics is only

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<sup>78</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 127–55.

<sup>79</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 154.

<sup>80</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 154.

<sup>81</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 181.

<sup>82</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 181.

a precursor to apologetics, he also at times makes more clear that it is a valid apologetic approach in its own right as well.

McGrath is certainly open to a variety of apologetic approaches, and his writing shows that the field of apologetics needs to be construed in a wider way than it had been in the modern era. He is perceptive in his recognition that not all challenges to the Christian faith are intellectual, and he later advocates the Christian life as a form of apologetics, but at times he misses the opportunity to connect the dots. *Enfleshed Apologetics* comprises a helpful addition to the apologist's approach as he or she shares life with friends who may have questions about the Christian faith that are not intellectual in nature, for example if they have an outlook that may be discolored by exposure to the toxic criticisms of Christianity leveled by the New Atheists.

The second author making some use of *Enfleshed Apologetics* as a means of replying to the New Atheists is Paul Louis Metzger. His book *Connecting Christ* calls for a more complex analysis regarding the New Atheists. Metzger recognizes that many are coming to view Christianity as an opponent to the common good, and he specifically states that "Perhaps the greatest antagonist against religion in any form today was Christopher Hitchens, who in his book *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* speaks of religion's courtship with fascism over the centuries."<sup>83</sup>

In response to Hitchens and the New Atheists, Metzger takes the opposite approach from Historical Goodness Apologetics. Instead, Metzger acknowledges that too often in the past violence has in fact been a part of the church's history. He writes,

Fascism and other related evils have indeed grievously marked the church throughout its history, as illustrated by the church's oppression of other faiths during the

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<sup>83</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 228.

Inquisition, its association with the Hitler regime during the Holocaust, and its execution of ‘witches’ in Salem, Massachusetts, in the 1600s, to mention but a few.<sup>84</sup>

Metzger argues that “fascist ways have horrifically impacted the church’s witness over the centuries; such evils committed in the name of Jesus actually deny Jesus, failing to account of the triune God’s identity, claims, and ways.”<sup>85</sup>

While these comments are given in the section of Metzger’s book that most closely deals with the New Atheists, he addresses problems of violence and abuse within the church in other chapters also. He does so most prominently in Chapter 4, “Why Should We Apologize?” Here, Metzger comes closest to saying that Christian apologetics should mean to say we are sorry for the various problems associated with Christianity over the centuries. Metzger references “the need in post-Christendom for Christians to be redemptive in their witness and make apologies for the past and present failures of the church.”<sup>86</sup> In addition to the problems previously listed such as the Inquisition and the Holocaust, Metzger also points to problems in the way the church dealt with Native Americans or First Nations people<sup>87</sup> and problems with how much of the church interacted with the African American civil rights movement.<sup>88</sup> Metzger gives several reasons to propose that saying “I’m sorry” is a valid form of apologetics, including that Christians “bear the same name as those guilty of victimization,”<sup>89</sup> that “confession of sin is viewed in Christian Scripture as a mark of growth in righteousness,”<sup>90</sup> and finally, “If Jesus can apologize, so to speak, in that he died our death, taking our penalty to himself as his own as the sinless one, then

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<sup>84</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 228.

<sup>85</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 229.

<sup>86</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 35.

<sup>87</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 36–37.

<sup>88</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 37–38.

<sup>89</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 38

<sup>90</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 38.



how in the world can we think we shouldn't apologize for the church's' actual and inherited sins?"<sup>91</sup>

Metzger advocates that the church use what he calls "relational-incarnational apologetics" in their response to the current cultural condition. Relational-incarnational apologetics:

goes beyond simply addressing what people think and want and focuses attention on why they think such thoughts and what it is they truly need. ... As Christ's witnesses we are called to engage people relationally. Encountering people relationally entails addressing them as more than simply rational beings or as cultural creations with religious appetites. God's Word did not become incarnate primarily to share incredible ideas about God or to promote a heavenly marketing plan or business strategy. He became incarnate to share life with us and to take us home to his Father's house through his costly sacrifice.<sup>92</sup>

In this approach, people are not seen merely as brains, merely rational beings, to be filled with information, but as people to be loved in relationships. Also one notes that this model of Embodied Apologetics points specifically to Jesus' sacrifice of atonement. The value and depth of Christ's relationship with us is seen ultimately in sacrifice, and understanding the profundity of God's relationship with humanity requires understanding the profundity of the atonement.

Metzger locates his relational-incarnational apologetic in the nature of God since within the Trinity God is in relation and in Christ God becomes incarnate. Metzger sees the church's apologetic task flowing from these facets of God's nature. He also places emphasis on the life of the Christian in discipleship as the shape of his relational-incarnational apologetic. In particular, he sees the Christian life as one formed by love. He writes:

The more we as Christ's church exercise sacrificial love so our views about Christ can be heard, the more we will be heard. ... No matter what happens, may we never stop sharing Jesus' sacrificial, redemptive love in word and deed, for Jesus is calling us as his community to live into and out of his life as the ultimate apologetic.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 38.

<sup>92</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, xxi.

<sup>93</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 60.

In a theological justification for his argument that the church needs to function in relationships and in response to the charge of violence inherent in the church, Metzger makes the argument that the Triune God, because of relational space within the Trinity, makes space for relationships and otherness in human thought as well.

The triune God's identity revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus creates space for otherness because God has relational space within his own being for otherness. Over against fascist and totalitarian tendencies present in various monistic ideologies, which champion the one over the many, the triune God, whose being signifies unity in diversity, creates relational space so that we can be one yet many as God's people and give space to those outside the church to live freely in relation.<sup>94</sup>

In response to the charge raised by the New Atheists that the church has at times used violence in its past, Metzger writes, "We must not simply bear witness with true words but also in loving actions. How can it be otherwise when God's gracious and true word became incarnate? The Word became deed."<sup>95</sup> He also argues that "it is certainly important that as Christian apologists we take seriously our christological and trinitarian convictions, but it is equally and exceptionally important that we live them out."<sup>96</sup>

As he nears the conclusion of his chapter about the challenges posed by Christopher Hitchens, Metzger argues:

Discerning followers of Jesus do not seek to take back America from their enemies by lobbying for one's own kind of people over against the common good; they lay their lives down for others, including their enemies, for the uncommon God who seeks after the common good of all. We fight not as the world fights, and our battle is not with flesh and blood, but with the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12). We wrestle through the Word and in prayer, not compelling people by force but loving them and appealing to them in view of God's mercies to be reconciled to God. Discerning Christians evangelize, not by pushing but by leading people to Christ.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 229.

<sup>95</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 230.

<sup>96</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 231.

<sup>97</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 235.

Metzger does well in recognizing that Enfleshed Apologetics is a proper response to the New Atheists and can be used alongside approaches such as Presuppositional Apologetics, Classical Apologetics, or Evidential Apologetics. However, Metzger's exploration of the New Atheists themselves is minimal, so he is not able to develop a carefully tailored apologetic response to the specific challenges posed by the New Atheists. In fact, the only work he interacts with is Hitchens' *god is not Great*, and that in only one sentence.

While Metzger's interaction with the New Atheists is brief his prescriptions for apologetics are appropriate and helpful. As with McGrath, Metzger draws a contrast between the ways of the world and the ways advocated by the church. He gives a truer and more profound exposition of Christian methodology than we have seen developed in Enfleshed Apologetic writings so far. Metzger reminds his reader that "We fight not as the world fights. . . . We wrestle through the Word and in prayer, not compelling people by force but loving them."<sup>98</sup> Note that Metzger specifies that the way Christians demonstrate love is by laying down their lives for others. The method of Christian apologetics is not by enforcing a superior power, but by self-giving sacrifice.

This approach described by Metzger serves as a direct refutation of the charges of the New Atheists. Consider, for example, the famous passage from Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* where he alleges that Christians, in following after the violent tendencies of their most unpleasant God, engage in misogyny, racism, homophobia, and more. Note that each of these activities are rooted in power struggles. Misogyny is the struggle for one gender to dominate over the other, forcing it into subjection. Likewise, racism seeks to use power to elevate one race and dominate another. These are modes, as Dawkins points out, of bullying.

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<sup>98</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 235.

Metzger counters that Christians work differently. Whereas Dawkins charges Christians with fighting exactly the way the world fights, with power struggles and with bullying, Metzger says that Christians should shun the ways of the world and demonstrate love and sacrifice, an approach that eschews earthly power struggles. Metzger's work is marked by calls for Christians to seek ways to serve rather than be served, even laying down ones' life even for ones' enemies.<sup>99</sup> The only full refutation of the New Atheists' charges is an enacted, enfleshed one, not a verbal one. Metzger's argument that Christians persuade not by force but by sacrificial love is particularly powerful.

This is a needed argument against the New Atheists because they charge that Christians are overwhelmingly interested in seeking political power to enforce their closed-minded views and values on the rest of society. Hunter points to this problem as he notes that faith "has become highly politicized. Non-Christians view Christianity politically and Christians themselves stake out their own positions in ideological terms."<sup>100</sup> The New Atheists make the same accusations. Dawkins claims that "religious fanaticism is rampant in present-day America,"<sup>101</sup> and that the religiously politicized climate in the United States "would have horrified Jefferson, Washington, Madison, Adams, and all their friends."<sup>102</sup> For these reasons, the charge that Christians are seeking to "take back America" as Metzger notes,<sup>103</sup> can become a true obstacle for Christians trying to share their gospel-centered love with those around. This barrier of mistrust needs to be reduced or removed before the gospel can be heard, and Metzger rightly advocates an apologetic

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<sup>99</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 235.

<sup>100</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 109.

<sup>101</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 41.

<sup>102</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 45.

<sup>103</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 235.

method in which “Discerning followers of Jesus do not seek to take back America,<sup>104</sup> but rather serve in self-giving, sacrificial love.

The third example of a fuller Enfleshed Apologetics is a fine collection of essays directed in response to the New Atheists, *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal*, edited by Amarnath Amarasingam. In this work, Amarasingam gathers together recent apologetic responses to New Atheism. Several of the authors included in this volume recognize the prominence of the charge from the New Atheists that religion is violent or evil. However, of the 13 essays in his work, only one considers Enfleshed Apologetics as an appropriate response: Gregory Peterson’s “Ethics, Out-group Altruism, and the New Atheism.”

Peterson’s insights do merit careful consideration. Peterson is responding to the New Atheist argument that Christianity teaches only in-group altruism, coupled with out-group hostility, while evolutionary biology gives a sufficient rationale for out-group altruism. In response, Peterson argues that evolutionary biology provides only a contingent basis for out-group altruism,<sup>105</sup> while Christianity has a much stronger grounding for the concept in its theological framework.<sup>106</sup>

The significant point of Peterson’s argument revolves around where he locates the non-contingent expectation for out-group altruism in Christianity. He locates it not in the text of Scripture, but in the person of Christ as the basis for the Christian life.

Christianity begins with the encounter with Christ, both as a historical figure who lived some two thousand years ago, and as a real presence today. . . . As such, Jesus’ life and action are revelatory, pointing to God’s identity and providing, through his life and teaching, a model and point of reflection for living a truly good life.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 235.

<sup>105</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 172.

<sup>106</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 172–74.

<sup>107</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 173.

He adds, “The theological starting point of the Christian faith is not a book, but a person and an understanding of that person’s significance.”<sup>108</sup> What sets Peterson apart is that he references Jesus, but also goes on to draw out the implications for followers of Jesus in their lives of discipleship.<sup>109</sup> After noting that “Christianity begins with the encounter with Christ,”<sup>110</sup> he moves on to point out that while out-group altruism *is* in fact taught in the text of Scripture, “if the language of discipleship is taken seriously, it implies something much more: a following after the pattern that Jesus has set.”<sup>111</sup> This move from text to life is the movement from a traditional apologetic approach to an Enfleshed Apologetic approach, and it is done specifically in response to the charges of the New Atheists.

Peterson makes one other notable move in his brief description of Enfleshed Apologetics. He moves the grounding for out-group altruism outside of an exclusively incarnational model to see the call to care for those different from oneself in God’s order and plan for the world. He writes, “A concern for the other, the outsider, can be found in the life and teachings of Jesus, but it can also be connected to the broader Christian worldview. By the Christian account, the world

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<sup>108</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 173.

<sup>109</sup> The way Peterson frames this argument differs from how apologists responding to the New Atheists with a primarily rational appeal set up their responses to the discussion of out-group altruism. Haught, in *God*, addresses the challenge of altruism, but does little more than argue that the New Atheists are wrong in locating out-group altruism as a natural phenomenon. He does not show how Christianity teaches the concept. Haught, *God* 66–72. Lennox, in *Gunning for God*, gives a brief consideration to the topic, and notes that the Bible (including the Old Testament) does contain instructions for the care of the outsider. Thus, he makes a textually based argument for the justification for out-group altruism within Christianity. Lennox, *Gunning for God*, 127. McGrath and McGrath, in *The Dawkins Delusion*, go one step further. They point out that the key to Scriptural interpretation is Jesus Christ. McGrath and McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, 90–91. Thus, like in Peterson’s essay in Amarasingam, *Religion and the New Atheism*, they base their case for out-group altruism in Jesus. However, the McGraths’ argument remains essentially textual and thus rational in its appeal. Jesus is, for the McGraths in this instance, the key to understanding Scripture, and Scripture then is seen to teach out-group altruism. This approach on the part of the McGraths is, therefore, not a form of Enfleshed Apologetics even though it is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ as many forms of Incarnational/Enfleshed Apologetics are.

<sup>110</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 173.

<sup>111</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 173.

is itself created, and the creation is affirmed as good.”<sup>112</sup> Peterson notes the implications of this move as he points out that the goal of Christian life then is “a life engaged in service and commitment to the other.”<sup>113</sup> As the capstone of this line of argumentation, Peterson writes that “Rather than being a foreign element reluctantly grafted onto it, the concern for the other, including the radically other, is at the heart of the Christian understanding of the moral life, embodied in God’s own creative and redeeming actions.”<sup>114</sup> Here Peterson is focusing on relationships and the way that relationships turn us outward toward the world. The world that the Christian is called to address is affirmed by Peterson as good, and a valid and valuable place for worthwhile service. As the Christian is turned outward to serve in the Father’s world, he or she sees the neighbor as the recipient of love and service. Peterson points out that the Christian approach to dealing with the neighbor differs dramatically from the New Atheist approach, at least the approach demonstrated in their publishing style. Peterson asks the question:

How best can I love my neighbor? The new atheist solution seems to be to vilify my neighbor as publicly as possible, threaten to remove their children, and then forcibly educate them with opposing ideas. Perhaps this would work, but it could hardly be called love. Love, it would seem, requires engagement and encounter, without being weak or unprincipled. . . . True concern for the other involves engagement and even sacrifice, even when that engagement and sacrifice is not reciprocated or deserved.<sup>115</sup>

While laying a good foundation, Peterson does not devote significant time to showing a framework for what such an Enfleshed Apologetic approach would actually look like. The field of Enfleshed Apologetics needs to be filled out in order to offer richer and fuller response to the challenges of New Atheism. The examples we have seen are a helpful beginning of applying Enfleshed Apologetics to the New Atheists, but more development is needed.

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<sup>112</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 174.

<sup>113</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 174.

<sup>114</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 174.

<sup>115</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 177.

## Enfleshed Apologetics Put into Practice

Enfleshed Apologetics holds significant promise for addressing the challenges of the New Atheists, but the approach is marked by the general problems of a lack of depth and a lack of development. Tim Morey provides one of the more comprehensive views of Enfleshed Apologetics in *Embodying our Faith: Becoming a Living, Sharing, Practicing Church*, but even Morey notes, “The term *embodied apologetic* is commonly used among younger churches, but very little has been said about how we might construct such an apologetic.”<sup>116</sup> While the topic needs additional development, Morey goes farther than most in showing in practice what an Enfleshed Apologetic could look like. In his book, he suggests one concrete shape that such an apologetic might take, and he writes that he hopes others would follow him and suggest other concrete shapes as well.<sup>117</sup>

In laying out a form of an Enfleshed Apologetic approach, Morey proposes that such an approach should be experiential, communal, and enacted in order to satisfy three societal hungers: for transcendence, community, and purpose. Morey writes that the Enfleshed Apologetic facets of experiential faith, communal faith, and enacted faith correspond with the three hungers he identified and these features “are interrelated and will have considerable overlap in the church’s practice.”<sup>118</sup> Morey describes how these facets of Enfleshed Apologetics develop in the life of a congregation corporately and the lives of the members individually:

As we become a community of people who look more and more like Jesus, we begin to practice a communal apologetic. In our congregation we find certain ministry structures, including high-commitment membership, small groups, and hospitality, to be especially helpful in cultivating this.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 44; emphasis original.

<sup>117</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 44.

<sup>118</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 48–49.

<sup>119</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 164.



As Christians come to resemble the life of Christ in their own personal life, they are led into community, into high-commitment engagement, and into hospitality towards those around them. It is important to note that while the congregation seeks to implement Enfleshed Apologetic strategies through intentional ministry structures, the applied work of Enfleshed Apologetics is not the sole responsibility of a few trained experts within the congregation. Enfleshed Apologetics permeates the lives of individual members. This is seen in the reference to hospitality. In Morey's example, hospitality is not just practiced by the congregation, perhaps on Sunday mornings or by trained leaders such as the pastor. It is also implemented by the membership individually.

Morey illustrates this as he shares a story of this, and his congregation's, Enfleshed Apologetic approach to a young woman who suffered a devastating miscarriage two days before her due date. The woman, named Michelle, was not a member of the congregation Morey served, but worked at a Starbucks where Morey often visited. When Morey heard of the tragedy, he visited her in the hospital. "We wept together, talked about and prayed to the God she didn't know if she believed in."<sup>120</sup> After the memorial service, which Morey conducted, members of the congregation made meals for Michelle and her boyfriend and sent them cards, putting into practice individually the hospitality fostered by the congregation corporately.<sup>121</sup>

Morey writes:

Our faith must be lived out in ways that show God's compassionate heart. ... As we consider how to embed an enacted apologetic in the fabric of our congregations, our ministries of compassion and justice stand out as especially relevant. Along with worship gatherings and smaller expressions of community, our congregation has

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<sup>120</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 165.

<sup>121</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 166.

made compassion one of the three central ministries that we urge everyone to participate in.<sup>122</sup>

This focus on compassion practiced by Morey's congregation in large-scale ways led to the compassion shown to Michelle in her time of need. Morey explains that when he started having conversations with Michelle and her boyfriend, they were wary of him because of his church connection:

They were a little wary of me as a pastor and made it clear they were not interested in church or talking about God. But the door to spiritual conversation began to open one day when I told them a story about our church's compassion work. Our congregation is deeply involved in issues of poverty and disease in Africa and our own city. They were surprised that a church would be so involved in real-world issues ("I thought you guys just kind of sat around and talked about what you believed and in what you are and aren't supposed to do") and were particularly fascinated by our work in Africa.<sup>123</sup>

Because of the congregation's Enfleshed Apologetic work in international compassion, doors opened for Enfleshed Apologetic work on a local and personal scale as well. This is but one example of how Enfleshed Apologetics could be applied in the life of a congregation and the lives of the congregation's members.

One additional example of Enfleshed Apologetics applied to actual life situations is provided by Paul Louis Metzger in *Connecting Christ*. Metzger tells the story of his friend, "Rick," who moved to Baghdad, Iraq in the days following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. "Rick was helping assess and meet the needs of the poor, distributing food and caring for children and the elderly, renovating schools, and helping with a transition from emergency relief to community development in the war zone."<sup>124</sup> Rick, however, decided to engage in an even deeper shared life experience, and so, "As time went on, Rick decided to try to move into a

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<sup>122</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 166.

<sup>123</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 166.

<sup>124</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 87.

dangerous, crime-ridden, inner-city neighborhood<sup>125</sup> in Baghdad. Metzger writes about the inroads Rick made in an impoverished, violence-prone community through his decision to live among the people of the community, pray for them, and seek opportunities to share life with them. As Rick became more accepted in the community and was welcomed into people's homes, he had the opportunity to share his faith and present stories from the Bible with his hosts.<sup>126</sup> This level of loving encounter bears promise for the field of Enfleshed Apologetic work.

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<sup>125</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 87.

<sup>126</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 87–92.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **VOCATIONAL APOLOGETICS**

After looking at the writings of the New Atheists in some depth and considering various forms of apologetic approaches that work together to respond to them, it is time to move on to a proposal for a more fully developed Enfleshed Apologetic response to the New Atheists. The role of apologetics is to respond to challenges to Christianity. The responses must be appropriate to the questions asked, starting from the standpoint of the challenger, not from the familiar ground of the apologist. When new challenges arise, or when challenges arise that have not been faced for some length of time, the apologetic response needed may look significantly different than what had gone before. Apologetics needs to be a responsive discipline. Having looked at the specific forms of challenges presented by the New Atheists and the culture influenced by them, the needed response cannot be merely rational or intellectual in nature, but also, or even primarily, lifestyle oriented.

#### **A Theological Framework for Enfleshed Apologetics**

Enfleshed Apologetics offers helpful contributions to the field of apologetics responding to the criticisms of the New Atheists. It is now time to take these helpful contributions and develop a solid theological foundation for Enfleshed Apologetics. For this theological foundation, we will turn to a creedal format showing the Triune nature of God, and consider the implications for a Christian life lived in vocation.

In a theological understanding of Enfleshed Apologetics guided by a creedal framework,

we begin with the Father as the giver and sustainer of life, who places human beings in the world to work on his behalf and preserve it. The Father places his people in the world as his agents of help and support. Humans are called by God in their various positions in life to care for the world even as the Father would care for it and everything in it. Of course, this extends also to fellow human beings. As God's agents on earth, his people are to provide as God would provide for his people. Enfleshed Apologetics, then, is the active living out of the work that God has called Christians to do and placed before them as his representatives in the created order.

A creedal framework for Enfleshed Apologetics would then turn from God the Father to focus on Jesus Christ. This creedal framework calls Christians, even in the field of Enfleshed Apologetics, to see Jesus primarily as redeemer first, and then as example. A creedal format focuses us on the primary work of Christ: he was crucified for us and for our salvation and rose again on the third day. Jesus' saving work, rather than his exemplary life, must be held as the central background and foundation of an Enfleshed Apologetic. Christ's exemplary life, however, is not left out. The implications of seeing Jesus, first, as redeemer and, second, as example point ahead to Enfleshed Apologetics. Christ's work is and remains *his* saving work. Our life of service plays no role in that work of salvation. Since our relationship with Christ is firmly established by his work rather than ours, our efforts are now freed up to be directed outward to the neighbor and, therein, serve as an Enfleshed Apologetic.

To say that Christ is proclaimed primarily as redeemer and only secondarily as example, however, certainly still allows Jesus' life to be used as an example to be emulated at all. Once salvation is seen as clearly separated from any human work, then it becomes admirable, even vital, for Christians to follow Christ's example. The goal is not to please God or earn salvation, but to serve those whom God has placed around us. Martin Luther, in his *Church Postil*, makes

clear that there is indeed a role for the exemplary life of Christ. He writes:

When you now have Christ in that way as the basis and chief blessing of your salvation, then the second part follows, namely, that you take Him as an example and devote yourself to serving your neighbor, just as you see that He devoted Himself to you. Then faith and love are both active, God's commandment is fulfilled, and the person is cheerful and fearless to do and suffer anything. Therefore, just look at this: Christ as gift nourishes your faith and makes you a Christian. But Christ as an example uses your works, which do not make you a Christian, but rather they come from you who have already been made a Christian. Now as far as gift and example are separate, so far are faith and works separate. Faith has nothing of its own, but only Christ's work and life. The works do have something special from you, but they should also not be your own, but belong to your neighbor.<sup>1</sup>

As is typical of Luther, once the primary issue of salvation is clearly established and the secondary issue of the human life modeled on Christ becomes the topic of consideration, the focus shifts from God to the neighbor. God does not need our works, and he does not need our Enfleshed Apologetic. Our neighbor does. Luther writes:

We receive Christ not only as a gift by faith but also as an example through love toward our neighbor, to whom we are to give service and do good as Christ does to us. Faith brings and gives Christ to you as your own with all His possessions. Love gives you to your neighbor with all your possessions. These two things [faith and love] constitute a true and complete Christian life.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian rejoices in salvation through Christ's work received by faith, and then turns outward toward the neighbor in a life of service that imitates Christ's service. In this way, the saving message of the church is preserved in its position of primacy, but yet the Christian life is not neglected. The message of the church is that of salvation in Christ's actions for us, his death and resurrection. Then flowing from that, the life of the Christian is one of humble service in the world. Christ is savior, but he is also example. In the church the proclamation of Christ and his saving work remain absolutely central. While central, however, it is not alone. Works do follow faith. Enfleshed Apologetics does flows forth from the work of Christ, but without

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<sup>1</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 75 (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 75, 41–42.

supplementing salvation it or supplanting it.

As part of the second article of the creedal framework, the works that flow out focus on Christ's ongoing rule and reign in the world. However, this ongoing reign is not at all in the crass political means envisioned by the New Atheists and feared by a culture that resents the idea of theocratic rule. Instead, the ongoing reign of Jesus mirrors the establishment of the reign of Jesus. Christ's reign was established in his sacrificial death on the cross on behalf of his people. His defeat in death was his victory as king. As his reign was established in sacrifice, so also it is extended in sacrifice. Jesus continues to reign following his death, resurrection, and ascension, but this reign on earth is radically misunderstood if it is seen as seeking earthly power and political clout. Rather, Christ rules through the humble service of his people. As Christ sacrificed for the good of his people, thereby establishing his reign, so his people continue that reign by serving the needs of those around them. This is accomplished through meeting the earthly needs of those in the world where God has placed his people.

A creedal framework for Enfleshed Apologetics then moves from the saving work of Christ to the work of the Holy Spirit as the one who guides and directs God's people in their Christian lives of service. The Father and the Son empower people of faith, but empower them to serve rather than dominate, by sending forth the Holy Spirit. The Father places his people into his world to continue to preserve and sustain life through the work of his people. This is the same world into which the Son came. The Son came not just as a token of God's presence among his people, but to bring peace and reconciliation through his sacrificial suffering, death, and resurrection. The Son now extends his loving service to humanity through the ongoing work of his redeemed people. In this same world, the Holy Spirit works both to gather and to send. The Holy Spirit gathers the church around Christ, and then sends the members of the church out into

their daily lives of love and service. In this way, under the guidance of the Spirit, an Enfleshed Apologetic approach flows from salvation outward into service. The message of salvation is never diluted or downplayed, but given full respect as the Spirit first points Christians back to Christ and then guides them out into the world.

A creedal framework for Enfleshed Apologetics, allowing God's work to be his alone and fully sufficient for salvation, frees the Christian life to be open to the entire spectrum of human life as a fruitful field of service. Enfleshed Apologetics is driven by the actual needs of the people among whom God places his followers. The Father places his people in the world to serve. The Son, by accomplishing salvation fully and separate from any of our efforts, sets his people free to serve in whatever capacity is needed. The Spirit both points the Christian back to the affirmation of his accomplished salvation in the work of Christ, and points the Christian back out into the Father's world to serve the needs of the neighbor freely and without hindrance. This creedal theological framework helps us articulate how Enfleshed Apologetics finds its fulfillment in Luther's understanding of vocation.

### **Analysis of The Ecclesial Response To Cultural Change**

To understand how the creedal framework for Enfleshed Apologetics focusing on God's work to preserve and build up his people in creation functions in practice, we turn back to James Davison Hunter. Just as Hunter offered a helpful analysis of the dynamics of culture that have led to the popularity of the New Atheism, so too he offers helpful directives for the church's response. While not mentioning the New Atheists specifically, Hunter certainly recognizes the effects of similar arguments as a part of what he calls the problem of difference. He writes:

As Christianity has moved from being the dominant culture-shaping influence to just one among many, its historic role as defender of social order has dissolved ... many



Christian leaders continue to aspire to play a role, but in playing it they will be viewed (and are viewed) *as much as a danger to the social order as a support*.<sup>3</sup>

Hunter analyzes that current Western culture suffers from the twin problems of difference and dissolution, with the latter particularly contributing to a form of nihilism.<sup>4</sup> Hunter uses the paired terms “difference” and “dissolution” to articulate the challenges of pluralism and relativism.

Regarding “difference,” Hunter writes, “The challenge of difference is rooted in the ever-present, indeed unavoidable realities of modern pluralism.”<sup>5</sup> The challenge of difference or pluralism has been present to a degree throughout history to those who lived along trade routes or engaged in travel. Now, however, due to urbanization and the ease of communication and travel, the effect of multiculturalism is felt by an unprecedented percentage of the population. “The incidence of pluralism has increased massively, which means that average people experience it more frequently and more intensely than ever before in human history.”<sup>6</sup> In the past, the challenge of difference was stabilized by a strongly dominant culture, but “pluralism today—at least in America—exists without a dominant culture.”<sup>7</sup> He notes that “as the Christian community has lost its prominence in American public life and the culture has pluralized, the grammar of Christian faith has become more strange and arcane, less natural and more foreign, spoken awkwardly if at all.”<sup>8</sup> This is what Hunter presents as the challenge of “difference.”

By “dissolution,” Hunter is indicting the deconstruction and relativism sometimes described as flowing from postmodernism. “By dissolution, I refer to the deconstruction of the

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<sup>3</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 204; emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 200–8.

<sup>5</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 200.

<sup>6</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 201.

<sup>7</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 201.

<sup>8</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 203.

most basic assumptions about reality.”<sup>9</sup> Regarding “dissolution” he points particularly to the breakdown in language of a connection between signified and signifier in which “words are emptied of their meaning. The forces of dissolution, then, lead us to a place of absence, a place where we can never be confident of what is real, what is true, what is good; a place where we are always left wondering if anything in particular is real or true or good.”<sup>10</sup> The end problem of dissolution for Hunter is that, when such confidence is broken down, the only things that remain irrefutable are “will and power—that is, a will to power rooted in desires and judgments that have no justification but are their own measure of moral worth and significance.”<sup>11</sup>

Hunter’s use of the word “negation” connects tightly to his understanding of the word “dissolution.” Negation establishes identity through angry separation from people and ideas with which one disagrees. Negation does not present a positive alternative, it primarily seeks to tear down what has been built by those considered to be enemies. This functions as “the condemnation and denigration of enemies in the effort to subjugate and dominate those who are culpable.”<sup>12</sup> Hunter links fear, anger, and revenge tied to a will to domination with the concept of negation. When meaning and agreement are broken by dissolution, leaving only the will to power remaining, the result is the path of negation. Negation points to that place of absence devoid of any certainty, where one can perhaps see what should not be, but cannot make a definitive statement as to what should be.

Hunter’s use of nihilism is tied to his thoughts on negation and dissolution, and his construal of nihilism is particularly interesting and pertinent. On the one hand, he acknowledges

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<sup>9</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 205.

<sup>10</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 206.

<sup>11</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 206.

<sup>12</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 108.

that “radical skepticism leading to radical nihilism is, of course, rare. Apart from a few celebrity nihilists and a few disaffected graduate students, there are actually few consistent relativists or committed postmodernists for the simple reason that it is not livable. Dissolution is always a matter of degrees and yet, even in its approximations, it is highly toxic.”<sup>13</sup> He states that “Nietzsche ... was the first to understand radical skepticism of this kind and its portentous implications for the Western world.”<sup>14</sup> He argues that much of Western culture is fundamentally nihilist at least in approximation.<sup>15</sup>

In response to the twin problems of difference and dissolution with the related challenges of negation and nihilism, Hunter proposes the twin responses of affirmation and antithesis. These two responses form the call to “faithful presence,” and are worth considering carefully. He points out:

The pairing of “affirmation” and “antithesis” appears asymmetrical at first. Affirmation would seem better paired with negation, and antithesis would seem better paired with synthesis. There are several reasons why these are not paired. The first is that unlike “antithesis” which is constructive opposition, representing a contradiction and resistance but with the possibility of hope, the concept and practice of “negation” have become expressions of nihilism. It offers nothing beyond critique and hostility. It is antagonistic for its own sake. This, it would seem, is contrary to the gospel. “Synthesis” is problematic because it presupposes a blending and an accommodation with that which it opposes. “Affirmation,” by contrast, does not require assimilation

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<sup>13</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 207–8.

<sup>14</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 207.

<sup>15</sup> Hunter defines nihilism as “autonomous desire and unfettered will legitimated by the ideology and practice of choice. ... [T]he problem ... is not with the freedom of will as such but rather its autonomy from any higher value. The power of the will first becomes nihilistic at the point at which it becomes absolute; when it submits to no authority higher than itself; that is, when impulse and desire become their own moral gauge and when it is guided by no other ends than its own exercise. The nature of pluralism, as I have argued here, creates conditions in which one is required to choose. The dynamics of dissolution are that it dissolves all reality, all meaningful authority, and all meaningful moral purposes but will. In America, nihilism of this kind tends to foster a culture of banality that is manifested as self-indulgence, acquisition for its own sake, and empty spectacle that makes so much of popular culture and consumer culture trivial.” Hunter, *To Change the World*, 211. For a significant example of Hunter’s understanding of how Western culture is nihilistic, see page 264 where he writes, “Nihilism may not be all-pervasive but it is endemic to the late modern world.” He points to the idea of market utility as one of many forms of instrumentalism, and argues that “autonomous instrumentality is also fundamentally nihilistic.” Hunter, *To Change the World*, 264.

with its opposition to validate actions or ideas generated by the opposition of which it approves.<sup>16</sup>

To the challenge of “difference,” Hunter encourages affirmation. Affirmation involves recognition of the good that is present in the work of others, even if that work is done by someone significantly different. Thus, affirmation continues to recognize the importance of all of God’s creatures working for the good of a creation that is fallen, but not destroyed. Hunter notes, “Affirmation is based on the recognition that culture and culture-making have their own validity before God that is not nullified by the fall.”<sup>17</sup> Affirmation celebrates the beauty, truth, and goodness witnessed in creation,<sup>18</sup> even when good is accomplished by those who do not recognize the creator.

Through affirmation, a Christian can, for example, commend the humanitarian work done by a secular relief agency, even if the Christian does not fully agree with all the positions on which the relief agency is based. Affirmation does not imply full agreement in all details, with a complicit degree of acceptance. Rather, affirmation allows for disagreements in background theory to remain, while recognizing unity in outward actions. A Christian and a New Atheist could both donate generously to a disaster relief fundraiser. The Christian could affirm the New Atheist’s generosity, and even rejoice in the fact that people in need are being helped. This act of affirmation, however, in no way implies that the Christian agrees with the beliefs of the atheist. This is why Hunter emphasizes “affirmation” rather than “synthesis,” for the latter would imply that both parties have come to a new trajectory based on interaction with the other.

In response to the challenge of “dissolution,” Hunter calls for Christians to offer an “antithesis.” Antithesis involves providing a positive alternative to the position with which one

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<sup>16</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 332n7.

<sup>17</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 231.

<sup>18</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 231.

disagrees. It is not enough to point out problems. That is merely the path of negation. Rather, a Christian is called to provide a better alternative. The essence of the idea of antithesis is an outlook of construction rather than destruction. Antithesis fully accounts for the problems of culture and does not gloss over them. Indeed, antithesis seeks to subvert the detrimental structures of society. However, the subversion is to be done in a way that builds a viable, better way. Hunter writes:

In our present historical circumstances, this means that the church and its people must stand in a position of critical resistance to late modernity and its dominant institutions and carriers. ... But here again, let me emphasize that antithesis is not simply negational. Subversion is not nihilistic but creative and constructive. Thus, the church—as a community, within individual vocations, and through both existing and alternative social institutions—stands antithetical to modernity and its dominant institutions in order to offer an alternative vision and direction for them.<sup>19</sup>

The problem, alleges Hunter, is that rather than offering an antithesis to culture, the church has instead sought to influence the culture through its drive to influence the political process. In this way, the church has fallen into the path of negation. “By nurturing its resentments, sustaining them through a discourse of negation toward outsiders, and in cases, pursuing their will to power, they [Christians] become functional Nietzscheans, participating in the very cultural breakdown they so ardently strive to resist.”<sup>20</sup> What the church should do instead is provide a positive alternative, an antithesis, to the void that is represented in culture. The church should not spend its energy primarily attacking the culture where it disagrees, but instead offer “more of a bursting out of new creation from within it.”<sup>21</sup> When the church disagrees with a component of culture, which is not uncommon, often the first instinct is to lobby political leaders to force a change by legislating against the perceived wrong. As a use of the will to power, this is

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<sup>19</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 235.

<sup>20</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 175.

<sup>21</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 265.

a work of negation. It is also a work of negation because it causes the church to be defined by what it is against, by what it seeks to oppose.

What the church should spend more time and effort doing, Hunter would argue, is building alternative positive structures within the culture. This would offer not a negation of the component with which the church disagrees, but a true antithesis. That is, Christians should offer a constructive counter-reality that provides *the possibility of hope*. As Hunter very wisely notes, Christian responses to cultural challenges can easily go wrong either if they fail to offer a constructive alternative,<sup>22</sup> or if they assimilate problematic thoughts or philosophies which lead them to be less than authentically Christian.

As a way of living in the manner of offering affirmation and antithesis rather than negation and nihilism, Hunter advocates an enactment of a ministry of “faithful presence” on the part of the church. He asserts that just as God in Christ has become present with us, so Christians are to identify with, and become present for, those around us.<sup>23</sup> As Hunter develops a theme of “faithful presence” he is able to move considerably beyond Peterson’s advocacy of out-group altruism, by calling on Christians to be present “to each other,” which includes the stranger and those outside the community of faith,<sup>24</sup> “to our tasks,”<sup>25</sup> and “within our spheres of influence.”<sup>26</sup> Hunter gives

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<sup>22</sup> It could be noted that this could be a charge fairly leveled against much of the apologetic endeavor. Of the apologetic methods described previously as having arisen largely in the effort to respond to the challenges of Rationalism, such as Presuppositional Apologetics, Classical Apologetics, Evidential Apologetics, and the like, most would fall prey to this criticism. They refute the attacks of the New Atheists, but a refutation of an attack is at its heart still a negation. Historical Goodness Apologetics might be able to claim a position above mere negation with its portrait of a helpful and constructive Christianity seen in history, but if it stays rooted exclusively in the past it to could be guilty of no more than negation of charges. As has been emphasized in regard to the charge that Enfleshed Apologetics seeks to replace traditional apologetic methods, it should be noted that this argument does not make rational approaches invalid or incorrect, but it does indicate that they are insufficient. One must not be content only to tear down. One must also seek ways to build. This is the role that can be played significantly by Enfleshed Apologetics.

<sup>23</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 238–86.

<sup>24</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 245. Hunter notes, “To welcome the stranger—those outside of the community of faith—is to welcome Christ. Believer or nonbeliever, attractive or unattractive, admirable or disreputable, upstanding or vile—the stranger is marked by the image of God.” One sees here strong echoes of

an overview of his theology of faithful presence as he writes:

Thus, when the Word of life is enacted within the whole body of Christ in all of its members through an engagement that is individual, corporate, and institutional, not only does the word become flesh, but an entire lexicon and grammar becomes flesh in a living narrative that unfolds in the body of Christ; a narrative that points to God's redemptive purposes. It is authentic because it is enacted and finally persuasive because it reflects and reveals the shalom of God.<sup>27</sup>

It is significant that Hunter sees that faithful presence specifically points to God's redemptive purposes. It is a presence that is enacted. It is an engaging, living presence that through life experience points to the saving work of God himself, remembered and seen in the loving, sacrificial lives of his people. Love lived in faithful presence seeks to reveal God's work and God's activity among his people. For this reason, Hunter calls for ongoing thought toward developing a practical application of his call to a "faithful presence." Hunter notes,

Before more can be said of a practical nature here, let me make a caveat: volumes could and should be written to address the question surrounding practical application. It is essential to address this question through further biblical and theological reflections. Every bit as important are stories from individuals, organizations, and churches that are creatively practicing faithful presence, whether by instinct or by conscious design. For all that could be said, my purposes here are modest; to be suggestive rather than comprehensive.<sup>28</sup>

I intend for this chapter of the dissertation to be an expression of the need recognized by Hunter to address questions surrounding the application of a theology of faithful presence. Luther's

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David Bentley Hart's moving description of seeing the unattractive in the light of God: "To be able, however, to see in them [disabled child, the derelict, the homeless, the impoverished, the diseased, etc.] not only something of worth but indeed something potentially godlike, to be cherished and adored, is the rarest and most ennoblingly unrealistic capacity ever bred within human souls." Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, 214. To say that in Hunter one sees strong echoes of Hart does not imply that one is drawing upon the other. In fact, Hunter does not list Hart in his bibliography and gives no indication of having interacted with him at the point of writing *To Change the World*. Rather, I would suggest the two sound like echoes of each other because both draw from the proper wellspring of Christian understanding which sees love for all as a hallmark of the Christian faith, in stark contrast to the interpretive efforts of the New Atheists to paint religions in a highly negative light.

<sup>25</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 246.

<sup>26</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 247.

<sup>27</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 254.

<sup>28</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 261.

doctrine of vocation will serve as the guide for how to apply an Enfleshed Apologetic response to the New Atheists in ways that are both concrete and contextual, recognizing both presence and place.

### **Vocational Apologetics**

Martin Luther's doctrine of vocation can provide a helpful guide for developing Enfleshed Apologetics in a way that embraces Hunter's ideas of affirmation and antithesis. It offers the opportunity both for affirmation of the common good within culture, including the common good advocated by the New Atheists, without assimilating or synthesizing that which is contrary to its message. It provides a vitally needed antithesis by enacting a positive and up-building alternative to the moral challenges posed by the New Atheists, without resorting to straight negation in responding to challenges.

In order to provide a basic understanding of Luther's teaching on vocation, I will give some attention to his writing and thought, but ultimately it is not my intent to offer an in-depth study on the theological particulars of Luther's doctrine of vocation.<sup>29</sup> Rather, it is my intent to present Luther's doctrine of vocation as a means to an end. That is, I plan to utilize Luther's basic and central understanding of vocation—namely that God calls all Christians to serve their neighbors in all walks of life such as family, community, employment, and the church—as the framework for demonstrating the shape of an Enfleshed Apologetic model. I will provide some elaboration of Luther's views on vocation for clarity and specificity, but the broader intent is to utilize insights from Luther regarding vocation to shape an apologetic method. I will argue that Luther's

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<sup>29</sup> For such treatments, from contrasting viewpoints, see Einar Billing, *Our Calling* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana, 1958) and Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957). For a more recent article contrasting these two interpreters of Luther on vocation, see Kenneth Hagen, "A Critique of Wingren on Luther on Vocation," *Lutheran Quarterly* 26 (Autumn 2002): 249–73.



understandings of vocation and various kinds of righteousness<sup>30</sup> will provide a theological foundation that can guide the church in an Enfleshed Apologetic approach that answers the charges of New Atheism. I will seek to demonstrate two things. First, understanding Luther's doctrine of vocation through the lens of two kinds of righteousness clarifies for apologists the nature of an Enfleshed Apologetic. Second, understanding Luther's doctrine of vocation through the lens of three kinds of righteousness enables the Enfleshed Apologetic to engage the challenges of the New Atheists.

As the field of Enfleshed Apologetics encourages Christians to live out their faith in daily life, some writers have already turned to the work of Martin Luther to seek guidance for the desired integration of faith and life. Robert Webber offers thoughts about Christian Vocation, but

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<sup>30</sup> It is sometimes described as two kinds of righteousness and sometimes called three kinds of righteousness at various times by Martin Luther and Phillip Melanchthon. For a thorough development of these concepts see Robert Kolb and Charles Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) in particular the first essay, "'Our Theology': Luther's Definition of the Human Creature through 'Two Kinds of Righteousness'" and Joel Biermann, *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014). Kolb and Arand use terminology for two kinds of righteousness, using "passive righteousness" or "righteousness *coram Deo*" as the first kind of righteousness and "active righteousness" or "righteousness *coram mundo*" as the second kind of righteousness. A broader treatment of various kinds of righteousness, in the thought of both Luther and his close co-worker Philip Melanchthon, is offered in Biermann's *Case for Character*. Biermann shows that Melanchthon makes a distinction between civil righteousness and righteousness of faith. Biermann, *Case for Character*, 86–103. Later, he points to Luther's terminology of righteousness *coram Deo* (which is passive) and righteousness *coram mundo* (which is active). Biermann, *Case for Character*, 119. Biermann explains, "Luther's enumeration of the varieties of righteousness, not atypically, is somewhat less than thoroughly systematic." Biermann, *Case for Character*, 119n42. Quoting from *Luther's Works* 26:4, he cites Luther, "For righteousness is of many kinds. There is political righteousness. . . . There is ceremonial righteousness. . . . There is, in addition to these, yet another righteousness, the righteousness of the Law or the Decalog, which Moses teaches. . . . Over and above all these there is the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness, which is to be distinguished most carefully from all the others." Biermann, *Case for Character*, 119n42. Biermann summarizes, "Talk of two kinds of righteousness, then, is burdened with a certain amount of ambiguity, an ambiguity exacerbated by the multiplication of synonyms for the various types of righteousness produced by both Luther and his younger colleague. One could easily compile a list of a score of righteousnesses named by the two reformers." Biermann, *Case for Character*, 121. Biermann himself, on page 127, suggests a "three-kinds-of-righteousness framework" which includes 1) a "righteousness that applies to all people, regardless of a person's standing before God, whether justified *coram Deo* or not 2) righteousness of salvation or alien righteousness, which would roughly correspond with what Kolb and Arand call "passive righteousness," and 3) actual righteousness or righteousness of the law, which would correspond with what Kolb and Arand label "active righteousness." Biermann, *Case for Character*, 127. This proposal will utilize Biermann's terms for these three kinds of righteousness, namely governing righteousness, justifying righteousness, and conforming righteousness. Biermann, *Case for Character*, 129. In particular, the concept of "governing righteousness" will be helpful in fleshing out the concept of "affirmation," and "conforming righteousness" will be useful in showing a vibrant concept of "antithesis."

he uses vocation as a means of assimilating new members into the church, not as an apologetic approach.<sup>31</sup> Paul Louis Metzger calls for the church to adopt what he terms a “relational-incarnational apologetics”<sup>32</sup> and he makes significant use of Martin Luther as he develops his apologetic methodology, focusing on Luther’s theology of the cross.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Alister McGrath makes use of Martin Luther’s thoughts about the interplay between reason and faith.<sup>34</sup> While there has been an interest in making use of Luther’s theological insights for the shaping of an enfleshed form of apologetics, no appropriation has yet been made of Luther’s teaching on vocation for directing faith in action as a form of Enfleshed Apologetics. I hope to build on Gregory Peterson’s undertaking which locates Enfleshed Apologetics in a creedal framework under the first article,<sup>35</sup> answer Hunter’s call for practical application of his concept of faithful presence,<sup>36</sup> and add the component of Luther’s thoughts on vocation as a new way of shaping the current discussions of Enfleshed Apologetics. This will function in response to the ethical and emotional appeals made by the New Atheists in their challenges to Christianity. I am proposing a new category under the umbrella of Enfleshed Apologetics, which I am calling Vocational Apologetics.

### Luther’s Doctrine of Vocation

A Christian’s calling, or vocation,<sup>37</sup> tends to be seen in two different ways. Due to this

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<sup>31</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 103–18.

<sup>32</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, xviii.

<sup>33</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 25–31.

<sup>34</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> Peterson, “Ethics, Out-Group Altruism,” 174.

<sup>36</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 261.

<sup>37</sup> Placher equates these two words, commenting that “‘Vocation’ is just a Latin word for ‘calling’—the two words are more or less interchangeable.” William Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1.

variety of understandings of vocation, it is necessary to spend some time working to understand how the term “vocation” has been used and then clarifying how Luther used the concept.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, vocation is a call to the work and life of the church.<sup>38</sup> Karl Holl, in his article “History of the Word Vocation (*Beruf*),” traces this view as far back as the *Vita Antonii* of Athanasius, written about 360 AD. This work describes how St. Anthony, while on his way to church, recalled the joy in sacrifice shared by Christians who preceded him, and a “divine voice led him also as he took the last step and withdrew completely into the depth of the wilderness.”<sup>39</sup> Holl suggests that the sign of separation (from civilization) was the mark of a calling that separated the true disciple of Christ from the half-hearted disciple.<sup>40</sup> He then adds:

Such a call (*Ruf*) meant not only renunciation; it was also highest grace. Whoever departed from the world shook off by that act his whole previous life and also all the sins of that life. ... The liturgy of the ordination of the monk established all of this securely. Even the novice in his initiation was told that God had called him and made him worthy to be a disciple of Christ—for the full monk even the words Apostle of Christ were used. To the monk it was expressly stated that he had now received a second baptism and he was admonished to live a life worthy of his calling.<sup>41</sup>

This view is not unique to Roman Catholicism, however. In much of Protestantism as well, the exclusive link between a “calling” from God and professional church work is quite strong.

Nancy Pearcey, in her book, *Total Truth*, has pointed out that across the church, “ordinary work

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<sup>38</sup> Karl Holl, “History of the Word Vocation (*Beruf*),” trans. Heber F. Peacock, *Review and Expositor* 55 (April 1958): 126. Holl makes clear that Roman Catholics historically equate vocation exclusively with monasticism and the priesthood. “This is illustrated, for example, in a pamphlet by Ludwig von Hammerstein in 1892 with the title, ‘An Order-vocation (*Ordensberuf*) at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.’ Or, to give another example, one can find this wish expressed in a catholic religious paper, ‘May God send us many Order-vocations.’ ... Roman Catholics could never say, in a corresponding way, ‘A Merchant-vocation in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’ or ‘May God give us many scholar-vocations.’ For indeed they do not understand that one is ‘called’ (*berufen*) to be a merchant or a scholar.” Marc Kolden also states that “Luther developed his understanding of vocation in opposition to the medieval Roman Catholic view. That latter view saw vocation as referring explicitly to church occupations, unless the term was used to refer to the general call to be a Christian.” Marc Kolden, “Luther on Vocation,” *Word & World* 3, no. 4 (Fall 1983): 382.

<sup>39</sup> Holl, “History of the Word,” 129.

<sup>40</sup> Holl, “History of the Word,” 129.

<sup>41</sup> Holl, “History of the Word,” 130.

is actually denigrated, while church work is elevated as more valuable.<sup>42</sup> She describes the experience of a student at a Christian college “where the unspoken assumption was that the only way to *really* serve God was in full-time Christian work.”<sup>43</sup> The thought that vocation is tied exclusively to church work is still widely held across the church by both Roman Catholics and Protestants.<sup>44</sup> While this view of vocation is somewhat less prominent today than it was in Luther’s time, it is still present.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps even stronger, however, is a second view of vocation that links vocation exclusively with occupation. Many Christians, in their desire to expand vocation beyond just the confines of church work, move into the realm of work and occupations, but go no further. David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, in *You Lost Me*, are representative. They write that vocation is a “powerful, often ignored intersection of faith and calling,”<sup>46</sup> but they miss the opportunity to extend vocation to service to the neighbor outside of a job. They write:

Millions of Christ-following teens and young adults are interested in serving in mainstream professions, such as science, law, media, technology, education, law enforcement, military, the arts, business, marketing and advertising, health care, accounting, psychology, and dozens of others. Yet most receive little guidance from their church communities for how to connect these vocational dreams deeply with their faith in Christ. This is especially true for the majority of students who are drawn to careers in the fields of science, including health care, engineering, education, research, computer programming, and so on. These young Christians learn very little in their faith communities about how to live honestly and faithfully in a world dominated by science—much less how to excel in their chosen scientific vocation. *Can the Christian community summon the courage to prepare a new generation of*

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<sup>42</sup> Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 36.

<sup>43</sup> Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 36; emphasis original.

<sup>44</sup> Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 36.

<sup>45</sup> Gene Edward Veith notes, “The word *calling*, or in its Latinate form, ‘vocation,’ has long been used in reference to the sacred ministry and the religious order.” Gene Edward Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross: The Way of the First Evangelicals* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2010), 96; emphasis original.

<sup>46</sup> Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 29.

*professionals to be excellent in their calling and craft, yet humble and faithful where God has asked them to serve?*<sup>47</sup>

This exclusive relationship of vocation and work becomes even more clear in this thought from Kinnaman and Hawkins: “One hallmark of the exiles is their feeling that their vocation (or professional calling) is disconnected from their church experience.”<sup>48</sup> Note that vocation is specifically referred to here as “professional calling,” not including anything outside of paid work. Kinnaman and Hawkins then go on to elaborate, “Their faith is ‘lost’ from Monday through Friday. The Christianity they have learned does not meaningfully speak to the fields of fashion, finance, medicine, science, or media to which they are drawn.”<sup>49</sup> Kinnaman and Hawkins link vocation with a job, that which is done Monday through Friday. They also note that “Callings may include science, math, medicine, business, congregational ministry, art, music, or any number of other vocations.”<sup>50</sup> They do not, however, extend vocation outward from a job.

Thus, we can see that if vocation is not equated exclusively with professional church work, it is tied to an occupation.<sup>51</sup> William Placher recalls, “When I was in high school, ‘vocational education’ meant courses in auto shop and typing, for people who weren’t going on to college. ‘Vocation’, I suppose just meant ‘a job.’”<sup>52</sup>

Luther, however, sees vocation in a different way.<sup>53</sup> Luther recognizes the work of the

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<sup>47</sup> Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 29–30; emphasis original.

<sup>48</sup> Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 75.

<sup>49</sup> Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 75.

<sup>50</sup> Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 128.

<sup>51</sup> Veith writes, “Today, the term has become commonplace, another synonym for a profession or job, as in ‘vocational training.’” Veith, *Spirituality of the Cross*, 96.

<sup>52</sup> Placher, *Callings*, 1–2. Placher, however, does not endorse this view, he simply lists it descriptively.

<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that in addition to the two understandings of vocation discussed so far—that vocation is only church work and that vocation is only one’s occupation—there is another understanding of vocation that is held by virtually all sectors of the church, namely that Christians are called by God to faith. This first calling is not in

church and the importance of occupations. But Luther sees vocation as distinct from, and operating within, both of these categories. Vocation, for him, is broader than any occupation, whether it be within the church or without. Marc Kolden, in an article entitled “Luther on Vocation,” writes:

The popular view of Martin Luther’s teaching about Christian vocation is that it has to do with one’s occupation. That is when one is “called” to follow Christ one’s occupation becomes a “calling” in which one serves God. This is not a completely wrong interpretation of Luther as much as it is one-sided and incomplete.<sup>54</sup>

Luther broke with the medieval Roman Catholic understanding that vocation was a special calling held only by priests, monks, and nuns. Luther’s view on this matter becomes clear in one of his great 1520 treatises, entitled “To The Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate.”<sup>55</sup> In this treatise, Luther identified three “walls” which needed to be broken down in order to reform the church.<sup>56</sup> The medieval Roman Catholic understanding of vocation represents the first of these three walls. Luther writes, “In the first place when pressed by the temporal power they have made decrees and declared that the

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debate (in general, although of course the specifics of how that calling takes place are a subject of heated debate between denominations ... the basic recognition of the call is generally held). At issue is the nature of a second calling. Einar Billing speaks of the “call to God’s kingdom,” but then “the word ‘calling’ took on its second meaning, that which now concerns us.” Billing, *Our Calling*, 6. Placher writes, “generally, when the Bible talks about ‘call’ or ‘vocation,’ it characteristically means a call to faith or to do a special task in God’s service. ... Some scholars therefore argue that the initial call to faith or calls to a special mission are the *only* biblically warranted meaning of the word ‘call.’ But it is always dangerous to argue that something did not exist just because the historical record does not mention it.” Placher, *Callings*, 4–5; emphasis original. Preece adds a third category to the two mentioned so far, separating church work specifically from other work in general, thus categorizing vocation as “1) the gospel message calling people to become God’s children; 2) the work each person does as, for instance, a farmer or prince; 3) the calling to or entering of the office of preaching.” Gordon Preece, *The Viability of the Vocation Tradition in Trinitarian, Creedal, and Reformed Perspective: The Threefold Call* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1998), 61. For the purposes of this study, we will combine Preece’s third category, the calling to the office of preaching with his second category, the calling to the work each person does (and Luther’s broader understanding of this category, as will be described in detail later).

<sup>54</sup> Kolden, “Luther on Vocation,” 382.

<sup>55</sup> While several versions of this treatise are available, I will be citing from the version contained in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 115–217.

<sup>56</sup> Luther writes, “The Romanists have very cleverly built three walls around themselves. Hitherto they have protected themselves by these walls in such a way that no one has been able to reform them. As a result the whole of Christendom has fallen abominably.” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44, 126.

temporal power had no jurisdiction over them, but that, on the contrary, the spiritual power is above the temporal.”<sup>57</sup> Luther attacks this “wall” of reserving the vocation of religious life to a higher state as he writes, “It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy.”<sup>58</sup> Luther gives his rationale for this claim by writing, “all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office. ... This is because we all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism, gospel, and faith alone make us spiritual and a Christian people.”<sup>59</sup> For Luther, all Christians are called by virtue of their baptism into an equal estate with none elevated above another based on a further vow, such as that of priesthood or monasticism. In this way, Luther placed himself against the medieval Roman Catholic understanding that vocation meant a call to a specifically religious life.

Luther not only showed a disagreement with the medieval Roman Catholic understanding of vocation, he also opened a space for vocation wider than the common understanding of just occupation. Instead, Luther points a man to his duty to his family and his neighbors in addition to his responsibilities in an occupation. Again addressing the medieval tendency to elevate spiritual works over earthly ones, Luther attacks the idea that spiritual pilgrimages were helpful, and instead points to the needs of a family. He writes that “people think that going on a pilgrimage is

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<sup>57</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, 126.

<sup>58</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, 127.

<sup>59</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, 127. Luther also emphasizes the importance of baptism as being a factor of equality among Christians in another of his 1520 treatises, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” where he writes that in fact only the baptismal vow should be honored in the church. In writing this, Luther is seeking to downplay the importance that the medieval Roman Catholic Church placed on priestly and monastic vows. He writes, “*One thing I will add—and I wish that I could persuade everyone to do it—namely that all vows should be completely abolished and avoided, whether of religious orders, or about pilgrimages or about any works whatsoever, that we may remain it that which is supremely religious and most rich in works—the freedom of baptism.*” Then he adds, “we have vowed enough in baptism, more than we can ever fulfil; if we give ourselves to the keeping of this one vow, we shall have all we can do.” *Luther's Works*, vol. 36, 74–75; emphasis original.

a precious good work. This is not true.”<sup>60</sup> Instead, Luther writes, “God has commanded that a man should care for his wife and children, perform the duties of a husband, and serve and help his neighbor.”<sup>61</sup> Luther lambasts that a man can waste large amounts of money on a pilgrimage thinking he is fulfilling an honorable undertaking because it is a spiritual task, all the while permitting “his wife and child, or his neighbor at any rate, to suffer want back home.”<sup>62</sup> Luther encourages an advisor to show a man who thinks a pilgrimage is a noble undertaking “how to use the money and effort for the pilgrimage for God’s commandments and for works a thousand times better by spending it on his own family or on his poor neighbors.”<sup>63</sup> For Luther, duty to family and neighbors is more noble than the supposedly spiritual undertakings encouraged in medieval piety.

Interpreters of Luther’s thought on vocation also note that his usage of the term broadens the understanding significantly to include family and neighborly relationships in addition to occupational responsibilities. Gustaf Wingren notes in *Luther on Vocation* that it is important to emphasize that vocation is not confined to occupation, but also includes biological orders such as fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters.<sup>64</sup> Gene Edward Veith in his book *God at Work*, locates specifically the family as the central focus of Luther’s view of vocation. He writes: “The family is the foundational vocation. Other earthly authorities grow out of the authority exercised in the family. ‘For all other authority is derived and developed out of the authority of parents,’ says Luther in the ‘Large Catechism,’ relating parenthood to the other vocations.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44, 170.

<sup>61</sup> *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44, 170.

<sup>62</sup> *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44, 170.

<sup>63</sup> *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44, 171.

<sup>64</sup> Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Gene Edward Veith, *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 91.



That is not to say that Luther in any way denied the connection between vocation and occupation. Luther found great value in all legitimate occupations, with a special emphasis on the jobs many would see as lowly and less honored by society. He writes:

Just as those who are now called “spiritual,” that is, priests, bishops, or popes, are neither different from other Christians nor superior to them, except that they are charged with the administration of the word of God and the sacraments, which is their work and office, so it is with the temporal authorities. They bear the sword and rod in their hand to punish the wicked and protect the good. A cobbler, a smith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops. Further, everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all the members of the body serve one another.<sup>66</sup>

Kolden has also pointed out that Luther’s view of vocation includes not only family but also occupation. He says that Luther’s great contribution to the understanding of vocation is that we carry out God’s command to love our neighbors “exactly by discharging the duties of our occupations.”<sup>67</sup> He notes:

Luther’s point is that people can serve God in whatever situation they find themselves. To have a divine calling, they need not do something “religious.” Thus, Christian vocation includes all aspects of life—family, community, education, citizenship, paid and unpaid work, and long-term and occasional responsibilities of other types.<sup>68</sup>

Let us consider this by looking at three vocations, one representing each of the possible classifications of vocations: a friar, a farmer, and a father. The Roman Catholic understanding of vocation would recognize that the friar is in a vocation, but would say the other two are not. The next level of understanding would recognize the farmer as holding a God-given vocation as well. Luther, then, would go one step farther and recognize fatherhood as a vocation established by

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<sup>66</sup> *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44, 130.

<sup>67</sup> Marc Kolden, “Work and Meaning: Some Theological Reflections,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 48, no. 3 (1994): 267.

<sup>68</sup> Kolden, “Work and Meaning,” 267.

God also. In fact, in many ways, Luther would prefer the vocations of the farmer and the father over that of the friar because they are able to serve those around them in more tangible ways. More than that, the father and the farmer are doing a God-directed work, while the friar is actually doing a man-created work that violates God's will by taking him out of his earthly tasks and responsibilities.<sup>69</sup> For this reason, we will not focus as much on the friar, but instead consider the farmer and the father. Both are legitimate vocations, even though they do not involve church work. The vocation of father is valid, even though it is not a professional position. Each vocation has particular, unique duties to fulfill for the good of humanity.

The farmer is positioned in such a way that if he does not do his vocation, others suffer, and if he does his vocation well, many others may benefit. The primary role of this vocation, of course, is to grow food. Other vocations, such as merchant or miner have other roles to play, but theirs is not the responsibility to grow food for others. If a farmer diverts his attention to mining, then people may not be fed. It is the responsibility of each vocation to fulfill its own unique role for the common good. The responsibility of the father is to provide for his children, including feeding them. For a small child, this may mean literally gathering food on a spoon and placing it in the baby's mouth.

Thus, both the father and the farmer in their vocations have the responsibility of feeding people, but even that shared responsibility is carried out in different ways. It would not be a farmer's vocation to travel 500 miles to place food in the mouth of a stranger's baby, nor would it be the vocation of a father to travel to a farm and drive a combine through a wheat field. If either one were to do so, he would be acting outside of his specific vocation. The distinctions of

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<sup>69</sup> For further elaboration on Luther's repudiation of monastic vows and the cloistered life as opposed to fulfilling earthly, human duties, see Luther's "Letter to Hans," and his writing, "Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows," for which his "Letter to Hans" serves as a Preface. See Martin Luther, "To Hans Luther, November 21, 1521," *Luther's Works*, vol. 48, 330–36 and Martin Luther, "Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows," *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, 245–400.

responsibilities from one vocation to another do not negate the importance or validity of each vocation, and the variety of vocations are all needed for the smooth functioning of society. Thus, a friar, a farmer, and a father all have vocations, which may in some cases overlap at points, but each one also has separate, distinct responsibilities not given to the others which need to be carried out within that specific vocation.

If we were to present ideas of vocation on a scale, from narrow to broad, Luther's position would be at the broad end of the scale. At the narrow end would be the medieval Roman Catholic understanding that vocation applies exclusively to priests, monks, and nuns and their work of prayer. In the middle of the scale would be the view held in much of the Protestant community that vocation includes all jobs, whether jobs in the church or jobs in the secular realm. A painter holds a vocation as much as a priest, a metalworker is just as called as a monk, and a nurse works in a calling as much as a nun. But Luther's understanding of vocation is even broader. Vocation, for Luther, encompasses not only a job, but every facet and station of life as we are called to serve one another in love. This includes relationships with family members, friends, and neighbors in vocation, in addition to those we serve through our occupations.<sup>70</sup> It is

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<sup>70</sup> I have shown that Martin Luther used the term vocation differently than the term had developed through the monastic tradition of the early Roman Catholic Church, but it should be mentioned that the early church did not use the term vocation in the way that Luther developed it. Karl Holl points out, "The seizure of the title *vocatio* by monasticism prevented for a long time in the West the development of a proper religious evaluation of secular occupations and made it impossible for the word *vocatio* to become customary for them. . . . There is no passage in the writings of the early Fathers where *vocatio* means anything like occupation (*Stand*)." Holl, "History of the Word," 136. Kenneth Hagen, in his article, "A Critique of Wingren on Luther on Vocation," gives a lengthy analysis of the ongoing validity of Holl's claim. Hagen states, "It seems that no one has successfully challenged Holl's history (1924) of the word "Beruf." Hagen, "Critique of Wingren," 268. Holl also points out that while Luther claims that the word "vocation" or "calling" (*Ruf*) was already being used in his time to mean an occupation or profession, in fact no examples (at least in Latin) have been found expressing this sense of the word *vocatio* to mean an occupation before the Reformation period, and this usage is generally first seen in the writing of Luther himself." Holl, "History of the Word," 145. Einar Billing also attributes the transformation of the understanding of the word "vocation" to Luther, saying, "For it is true that not only the idea of a call but to a certain degree the word 'calling' itself is a creation of the Reformation. . . . We can put our finger almost exactly on that period of time when our Germanic ancestors for the first time learned to speak about a calling of theirs. Sporadically, the word may, indeed, have appeared earlier, but as a clearly defined idea it comes first to light in the Reformation writings of Luther." Billing, *Our Calling*, 6–7. Gordon Preece also attributes the idea that vocation applies to those outside the monastic communities and the priesthood and extends into and beyond the working lives of laypersons to Luther, and states,

Luther's broad understanding of vocation that is most helpful in addressing the criticisms that the New Atheism puts to Christianity.

While this may seem to be only a definitional difference, Luther's inclusion of non-professional categories within the topic of vocation is important to the way Vocational Apologetics works to respond to the New Atheists. As we saw in Chapter Three, *Enfleshed Apologetics* provides a helpful focus on relationships. Luther's teaching on vocation, with his important inclusion of non-professional relationships such as family and neighbors can bring greater strength and clarity through its focus on where these relationships are found and how they are established. This, in turn, shows the importance of vocation for the task of *Enfleshed Apologetics*.

#### Luther's Doctrine of Vocation as It Functions in Two Kinds of Righteousness

In the twentieth century, two works came to light as key interpretations of Luther's teaching on vocation, albeit with somewhat different points of emphasis: Einar Billing's *Our Calling* and Gustaf Wingren's *Luther on Vocation*. Essentially the variance in understanding Luther's teaching on vocation between these two comes down to the distinction between law and gospel.<sup>71</sup> Billing sees vocation as being inseparably tied to the gospel, asserting that for Luther,

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"This use of the term is new." Preece, *Viability*, 61.

<sup>71</sup> In addition to the discussion among Lutheran authors regarding the best understanding of Luther's teaching of vocation within the categories of law and gospel, another discussion of Luther's teaching on vocation merits brief mention. The charge has arisen in scholarship that Luther's view of vocation leads to the alienation of the labor force. This view, voiced by Miroslav Volf in his book, *Work in the Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Gordon Preece, in his book, *The Viability of the Vocation Tradition*, point out that Luther wrote before the Industrial Revolution, when vocational output in the family and workplace were much more tightly interwoven from the production of goods to their purchase and consumption. They allege while that Luther's view of vocation may have been tolerable for his time, it becomes stifling in a more mobile society where labor is so often separated from the benefit of that labor. However, Marc Kolden points out that Volf's view of Luther on vocation (and Preece's view is based in large part on Volf's) stems from a misunderstanding of Luther since Volf reads Luther "through the eyes of reactionary nineteenth-century German Lutheranism and so does not see the dynamic possibilities in his notion of vocation." Kolden, "Work and Meaning," 271n17. Hence we will not dwell on this objection to Luther's understanding of vocation as voiced by Volf and Preece any further.

“the call is primarily a gift, and only in the second or third place a duty. His teaching of the call is primarily gospel, only in the second or third place a commandment.”<sup>72</sup> Wingren, on the other hand, locates vocation under the law, writing, “The cross of Christ is grouped with the law, the old man, vocation, the earth. But the resurrection of Christ belongs with the gospel, the new man, the church, heaven.”<sup>73</sup> For Wingren, vocation becomes the way in which we experience the law on earth, before attaining to the gospel in heaven.<sup>74</sup>

Veith attempts to find a middle ground on the connection between law and gospel in the term *vocatio/Beruf*. He points out that when vocation is viewed as what we do in our work there is a relationship to the law and the cross, but Luther’s view of vocation is not so much what we

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<sup>72</sup> Billing, *Our Calling*, 8. In further exposition of the idea that vocation is a form of the gospel, Billing also writes: “Where you sit or go about your menial tasks, there you have even now everything, there you have God Himself. ‘Should not now the heart of man jump and beat with joy, as he undertakes such works?’” Billing, *Our Calling*, 8. Billing explicitly ties vocation to the heart of the gospel, namely the forgiveness of sins. “So it still remains more correct to say, as we just stated it, very briefly thus: the call is the forgiveness of sins. Or, more specifically expressed: my call is the form my life takes according as God Himself organizes it for me through His forgiving grace. Life organized around the forgiveness of sins, that is Luther’s idea of the call. Billing, *Our Calling*, 11. Billing further develops this idea by writing, “Among the most wonderful gifts in the forgiveness of sins is this one that God permits us, poor children of the earth, to become co-workers in His kingdom. The sum of these gifts of the forgiveness of sins to the individual constitutes his calling.” Billing, *Our Calling*, 19. Billing sees that through the forgiveness of sins, a Christian can have great confidence in whatever is given to do. The certainty of forgiveness empowers action in vocation. The Christian need not fear failure in a task undertaken in even challenging works undertaken in vocation because the promise of forgiveness brings comfort. The forgiveness of sins brings peace in a Christian’s calling. Billing, *Our Calling*, 22–23.

<sup>73</sup> Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 57. A few pages later, Wingren provides a similar grouping of words that he uses for law meanings, as he talks about the realm which is “under the rule of the law, the earthly kingdom, the realm of neighbor and vocation.” Again, earth, vocation, and the neighbor are strongly connected to the concept of law for Wingren. Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 62.

<sup>74</sup> Wingren writes, “Vocation belongs to man’s situation before the resurrection, where there are two kingdoms, earth and heaven, two contending powers, God and the devil, and two antagonistic components in man, the old man and the new, related to the constant battle for man. The old man must bear vocation’s cross as long as life on earth lasts and the battle against the devil continues. As long as he continues in his earthly vocation, there can be no end to the struggle. After death comes a new kingdom free from the cross; heaven has taken the place of earth, God has conquered the devil, and man has been raised from the dead. Then man’s struggle is at an end.” Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 250–51. While it may well be outside the scope of this dissertation, the following thought is worth consideration: If Gene Edward Veith is correct that family is the central focus of vocation—as we will see later in this chapter of the dissertation—and family was instituted by God in the Garden of Eden before the fall, and if the eternal promise of God is a restoration of creation as it was intended to be, then it would be safe to assume that vocation is not a curse and a cross to be rid of at the resurrection, but also a blessed joy to be carried into eternity. The same case that I just made for vocation in the family can just as readily be made for work, as God placed Adam in the Garden to end it and care for it (work) before the fall.

do (law) as what God does through us (gospel). He writes,

What is distinctive about Luther's approach is that instead of seeing vocation as a matter of what we should *do*—what we must *do* as a Christian worker or a Christian citizen or a Christian parent—Luther emphasizes what *God does* in and through our vocations. That is to say, for Luther, vocation is not just a matter of the Law—though this is a part of vocation that neither Luther nor this book will neglect; rather, above all, vocation is a matter of Gospel, a manifestation of *God's* action, not our own. In this sense, vocation is not another burden placed upon us, something else to fail at, but a realm in which we can experience God's love.<sup>75</sup>

Veith also points out that in a great reversal, just as God works through us for the good of our neighbor, even so God is also hidden in our neighbor. God's good work through us to our neighbor ends up also being our service directly to God disguised in our neighbor. Veith writes,

Indeed, just as God is hidden in vocation, Christ Himself is hidden in our neighbor: "As you did it to one of the least of these My brothers"—fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick, came to the prisoner—"you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40). It turns out, we serve Christ after all, but we do so by serving our neighbors.<sup>76</sup>

Among Billing, Wingren, and Veith, we see a difficulty in working with the topic of vocation under the heading of law and gospel. Billing preserves the heart of the gospel as not just God's work, but God's saving work rooted in the forgiveness of sins. However, his linking of vocation to the gospel (through the Christian being "called" by God to receive the gift of salvation) is not what vocation is assumed to mean in common usage. Wingren falls on the other extreme, but runs the risk of making vocation into a law-driven burden, with vocation serving as yet another hammer of the law to point out a Christian's many failures in each of the many vocations a Christian holds. Veith, in trying to find a middle ground, runs into difficulty regarding a strict definition of "gospel," in that not all that God does is gospel just because God does it. This is true of God's work in general; just because God does something does not make it

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<sup>75</sup> Veith, *God at Work*, 23; emphasis original.

<sup>76</sup> Veith, *Spirituality of the Cross*, 101.

gospel. God also judges and chastens, which are functions of the law. God's work of the gospel is rooted in his work for the salvation of humanity anchored in Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. Both chastening and forgiving are works of God, but only the latter is of the gospel.

If this distinction is true of God's work in general, it is also true of God's work through his people in their various vocations. There are vocations in which the holder of the vocation rightly needs to exert discipline or punishment (including the vocation of parent), and according to Veith the holder of that vocation would be acting on God's behalf in doing so. However, this would be God acting through human vocation as a work of law, not gospel. Again, just because the work is to some extent ascribed to God does not make it thereby inherently of the gospel. We find challenges in each of these three attempts to work with vocation under the heading of law and gospel.

Perhaps, then, a better way forward in the debate between those who would locate vocation under the gospel (following Billing) and those who would locate vocation under the law (following Wingren) would be to view the entire topic of vocation instead through the lens of Luther's teaching on the various kinds of righteousness.<sup>77</sup> This approach preserves the gospel as gospel, frees the Christian to engage in service under the law but without the burden of seeking thereby to merit God's favor, and provides a very important focal point, the neighbor, directing vocational service there.

For Luther, the issue of vocation might best be seen as a question not of "Who has a vocation, church workers or all workers?" or "Is vocation an issue of law or of gospel?" but a question of "Whom has God placed around me to love and serve?" This recognizes vocation as

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<sup>77</sup> For further, in-depth treatment of this topic, see Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, in particular the first essay, "'Our Theology': Luther's Definition of the Human Creature through 'Two Kinds of Righteousness'" and Biermann, *Case for Character*.

part of God’s good design for the world. Rather than focus on whether a church worker or a lay worker has a vocation, Luther would place the focus of vocation on the one who receives whatever good is done through a calling. For Luther, vocation focuses not on the specific type work, or even on the worker, but instead on the neighbor, and how each specific vocation (whether work-oriented or family-oriented or community-oriented) serves the neighbor in the distinct ways open to that particular calling.

For example, to use two vocations cited by Luther—a cobbler and a smith—a broad understanding of vocation recognizes the work of each, but the focus is on how the needs of the neighbor are served. If the neighbor needs new shoes, then the cobbler serving in his vocation is able to serve the neighbor’s need by making a high-quality pair of shoes. This is a work of the cobbler, but the focus is to meet the need of the neighbor. If, on the other hand, the peasant needs new shoes for his horse, it would not be the cobbler’s vocation to serve in that way. Instead, this need would be met through the vocation of the smith. Of course, these examples deal with vocations on a professional level, but the idea could be expanded to include family vocations as well. If a child needed a pair of shoes, the cobbler’s vocation could meet that need to provide the shoes. However, the parent also has a calling, to assist the child to put the shoes on and maintain them. In each case, the purpose of the vocation, whether professional or personal, is to help and serve those around. In his 1520 treatise, “The Freedom of a Christian,” Luther writes,

We shall also speak of the things which [a Christian] does toward his neighbor. A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; *rather, he lives only for others and not for himself*. . . . He cannot ever in this life be idle and without works toward his neighbors, for he will necessarily speak, deal with, and exchange views with men.<sup>78</sup>

Luther makes clear that these works directed toward the neighbor have nothing to do with a

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<sup>78</sup> Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 73; emphasis added.



person's righteousness *coram Deo*, in which man remains completely passive. He writes in the very next paragraph from the quotation cited above,

Man, however, needs none of these things [referring to the good works a man does for the benefit of his neighbor] for his righteousness and salvation. Therefore he should be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and the advantage of his neighbor. Accordingly the Apostle commands us to work with our hands so that we may give to the needy, although he might have said that we should work to support ourselves. He says, however, "that he may be able to give to those in need" [Eph. 4:28]. This is what makes caring for the body a Christian work, that through its health and comfort we may be able to work, to acquire, and lay by funds with which to aid those who are in need, that in this way the strong member may serve the weaker, and we may be sons of God, each caring for and working for the other, bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ [Gal. 6:2], that is, it finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward; and for himself he is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith.<sup>79</sup>

A few paragraphs later, Luther writes,

[The Christian] ought to think: "Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ."<sup>80</sup>

Luther's focus on the neighbor and his or her need is in no way separated from an even more important focus on the prior work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. The two are tied inseparably together.

While we were unworthy and our works were worse than worthless, Christ bestowed upon us all the riches of righteousness and salvation. This is the prior and absolutely necessary ground

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<sup>79</sup> Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*, 73–74.

<sup>80</sup> Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*, 75.

for the vocational focus on the neighbor to follow. Christ first gives himself to us, and then Christians give themselves to the needs of the neighbor. Christians then have no need to focus on their own needs, they are already satisfied in Christ. This frees Christians to focus on the needs of the neighbor.

Luther continues:

Behold, from faith thus flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves one's neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss. He does not distinguish between friends and enemies or anticipate their thankfulness or unthankfulness, but he most freely and most willingly spends himself and all that he has, whether he wastes all on the thankless or whether he gains a reward. As his father does, distributing all things to all men richly and freely, making "his sun rise on the evil and on the good" [Matt. 5:45], so also the son does all things and suffers all things with that freely bestowing joy which is his delight when through Christ he sees it in God, the dispenser of such great gifts.<sup>81</sup>

In this portion of Luther's writing we see a solid grounding for out-group altruism, as advocated by Peterson. The call to living the Christian life through vocation is not grounded in slavish obedience to a text, but instead in the relationship with a personal God, known through the actions of Jesus Christ. As Jesus offered himself for the salvation of humanity and offered himself for all without thought of the worthiness of the recipient or the possibly for the recipient to repay his sacrifice, Christians also are called to serve wherever the need is demonstrated, without giving thought to gratitude or ingratitude, repayment or lack of compensation, profit or cost, or any other distinguishing mark. Friend or enemy, family or outsider, all are equally eligible to receive help from Christians as Christians themselves have been the beneficiaries of undeserved and unpayable blessings from Jesus. This out-group altruism, to use the term advanced by the New Atheists, is grounded in the loving response experienced due to a relationship Christians have with Jesus Christ. Whereas the New Atheists have at best a tenuous

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<sup>81</sup> Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*, 75–76.

grounding for out-group altruism, with a more probable case for mere reciprocal altruism, Christians have an unquestionable mandate to serve those around them based on a relational understanding of the work of Jesus Christ.

Luther goes on to write:

Just as our neighbor is in need and lacks that in which we abound, so we were in need before God and lacked his mercy. Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.

Surely we are named after Christ, not because he is absent from us, but because he dwells in us, that is, because we believe in him and are Christs one to another and do to our neighbors as Christ does to us.<sup>82</sup>

Here we see in Luther's teaching on vocation an idea of an ongoing presence of the incarnation of Christ among his people. Specifically, in the vocational service rendered by Christians, God is made present to his people. This is not to say that the Christian life is salvific for the Christian or the neighbor in any way. The work of a Christian in vocation is not the same as Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Rather, the work of a Christian life is based on a theology of noted need, paired with specific ways to meet that need which vary from vocation to vocation. As God in Christ saw the ultimate need of humanity for reconciliation and responded in a manner appropriate to the noted need in his death and resurrection, so the Christian is to see the need of the neighbor and respond in a manner appropriate to the noted need.

At various points in this chapter we have mentioned vocations such as friar, farmer, father, cobbler, smith, miner, and merchant. Each of these God-given vocations has a specific work to do to meet the needs of those around them, guided by the shape of their vocation. When people step outside their vocation to try to meet needs not naturally addressed by their vocation they

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<sup>82</sup> Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*, 76.

may end up neglecting their own vocational opportunities to the detriment of those around them. Within each of the many and varied vocations that God gives, people are called to do that which is at hand to their particular calling and thus serve the neighbor in that specific way. Through such varied vocations, people work together to build a stronger society and yet work individually contributing to what is appropriate for their vocation.

Vocational Apologetics thus leads to the questions, “What can I do to address the need of my neighbor?” or, “What would God have me do to serve my neighbor’s need?” as the guiding principle for Christian action, recognizing that Jesus then serves the neighbor through our vocational service. Christians today can serve confidently, say, in the vocations of farmer or father since the need for the sustenance of those around can be served in these ways. The Christian recognizes that God is in fact providing the gift of food through the vocation of the farmer, and God is providing food along with many other needs through the vocation of a father. The result is that God is serving our neighbor through us, not that we are serving God through our neighbor.

However, a note of caution is needed. Luther writes:

In our day we are taught by the doctrine of men to seek nothing but merits, rewards, and the things that are ours [that is, the focus shifts from the needs of the neighbor to our own need to do good works]; of Christ we have made only a taskmaster far harsher than Moses [that is, we have lost the salvation proclaimed in the pure gospel].<sup>83</sup>

The life of a Christian cannot seek to replicate that central, all-important event in the life of Christ. For a Christian to live with such intent would detract from the love Jesus has shown in making the once-for-all sacrifice to bring life. This emphasis must remain central: the message of Jesus’ sacrificial death for the salvation of fallen humanity is of foundational importance to the

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<sup>83</sup> Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*, 76–77.

proper understanding of the Christian life. The works of a Christian life seen through vocation flow from God's saving work in Christ, without contributing anything to it. The prior message of salvation in Jesus must be bound firmly together with any thought of the subsequent life of a Christian in vocation, or the balance of the Christian life is thrown out of proper perspective.

When the focus of vocation is located under the law whereby we try to please God, we also note that we lose both the beauty of the gospel as the free gift of salvation and we lose the focus on the neighbor as the recipient of good works for the neighbor's good. Kolb and Arand point out, "By confusing the two kinds of righteousness, or by collapsing one into the other, the medieval church ultimately undermined salvation and failed the neighbor."<sup>84</sup> This recognition is of vital importance. When vocation is misunderstood, in addition to losing a focus on the gospel message of salvation, it also loses a focus on the needs of the neighbor, since any good done for a neighbor is really a means of seeking personal reward from God. Again Kolb and Arand explain,

Works done on the premise of becoming righteous before God are ultimately works done not for one's neighbor but for the glory and salvation of self. Our neighbor's needs then become little more than means to an end. . . . Whatever benefit [our good works] give the neighbor is collateral, like "icing on the cake." In the process, the neighbor either becomes instrumentalized as a means to an end or devalued as of little use.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 30.

<sup>85</sup> Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 83. Kolb and Arand note that monastic vows, the system against which Luther framed his ideas on vocation, caused exactly this shift of focus. They write regarding the monastic system, "But these works of striving for salvation took attention away from serving the needs of one's neighbor." Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 84. On the next page, Kolb and Arand argue that the postmodern shift to make God more of a "friend or therapist" has had, ironically, the exact same effect. They note, "Such an approach to God plays down his love for his creatures as he designed them and diminishes human moral standards. Too often it focuses largely or exclusively on feeling good about self. . . . Christ is viewed as one who assists us along the journey of our lives by providing us with the grace and strength needed to become righteous. At times, Christ might be seen as a name for the power of God that I need in order to achieve personal happiness or reach the fulfillment of my human potential rather than as the person he is. Within all of this, the religious seeker may be advised to follow prescribed steps for spiritual living in order to obtain God's blessing. The works we do are directed at ourselves and aimed at building self-esteem or self-confidence to make us feel good about ourselves. Yet one's neighbor is still instrumentalized, though in a different way than in the Middle Ages. Now I help others because it makes me feel good about myself, which means that anything I do for them I really do for myself." Kolb

The problem of the neighbor becoming instrumentalized is entirely possible in any outlook on vocation that does not clearly distinguish God's saving work from the following action of humanity, rooted in a law/gospel distinction. Trouble arises when the *purpose* of vocation is seen as a tangible, earthly form of the law, in which its purpose is to drive us to repentance and to receive the gospel. When the purpose of vocation is to drive us to our knees in repentance due to the struggles we have with our neighbor on earth, then the neighbor is pushed back in importance to becoming little more than a hammer God uses to hit us over the head in order to get our attention regarding our need for forgiveness. Our relationship with our neighbor then is not actually about the needs of our neighbor, but about our own needs to recognize our sinful failings and seek forgiveness. As Kolb and Arand note above, "Our neighbor's needs then become little more than means to an end,"<sup>86</sup> this time the end being our recognition of our need for the gospel.

This misunderstanding of vocation becomes especially problematic in light of the criticism from the New Atheists that God is jealous and seeks slavish service to him for no purpose other than to satiate his megalomaniacal need. Christians who live seeking to please God by their actions rather than seeking to meet the need of the neighbor fall into the trap set by the rhetorical work of the New Atheists. Writers such as Dawkins would insinuate that Christians, in their headlong rush to placate a vicious and violent God, actually become a detriment to society as they subjugate the needs of the neighbor under the demands of a jealous God. When Christian vocation is properly understood in light of the two kinds of righteousness, this criticism from the New Atheists is significantly mitigated as the attention of Christians is turned away from the demands of God (which have already been satisfied in full by Christ under the first kind of righteousness) and toward the needs of the neighbor.

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and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 85.

<sup>86</sup> Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 83.

The criticism from the New Atheists is a real problem when the two kinds of righteousness are misunderstood or misapplied. When vocation is linked with law and the cross, which sooner or later becomes linked with the “Second Use of the Law,” then the neighbor is lost in vocation as the function of the law is not to help or serve the neighbor but to crush and kill the sinner in response to the demands of a harsh, violent, vindictive God. Then the neighbor becomes marginalized and instrumentalized, and vocation becomes only a painful means to drive us to the gospel.<sup>87</sup> Good works are, of course, of no good before God, but, in this view, they are actually of very little use before the neighbor either. Rather than driving us to repentance and forgiveness, the good works of vocation lead us to care for those around us.

Kolb and Arand show that Luther’s thoughts on the two kinds of righteousness create a different understanding of the role that good works play in the Christian life, in two key ways. First, our active righteousness (righteousness *coram mundo*) does not contribute to our salvation (our righteousness *coram Deo*) which remains entirely passive, entirely a gift of God’s grace. Second, however, this does not mean that active righteousness is of no value in the world.

Faith makes us righteous in the eyes of God. Good works serve a different purpose. Pastors are to urge Christians with a stipulation: “Help your neighbor, not because it saves you, but because it is good for your neighbor and because it is the way in which God intends humanity to be enjoyed.”<sup>88</sup>

Regarding vocation, Wingren writes, “In heaven, before God, vocation has as little to contribute as do good works. Good works and vocation (love) exist for the earth and one’s neighbor, not for eternity and God. God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does.”<sup>89</sup> Here, the neighbor is in full view, and there is no mention people being crushed by the weight of the law

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<sup>87</sup> Kenneth Hagen notes this problem in Wingren as he writes, “Wingren has voided the very goal and direction of vocation in Luther. In Luther the direction of vocation is the neighbor. In Wingren the direction is the self—all the works of the law aimed at killing the self.” Hagen, “Critique of Wingren,” 267.

<sup>88</sup> Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 104.

<sup>89</sup> Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 10.

through vocation. The Christian is simply freed to love and serve the neighbor as needed. This is the great benefit of the two kinds of righteousness.

Again, Wingren writes,

The hand, the body, and their vocation belong to earth. There is no redemption in that, but that is not the idea. The purpose is that one's neighbor be served. Conscience rests in faith in God, and does nothing that contributes to salvation; but the hands serve in the vocation which is God's downward-reaching work, for the well-being of men.<sup>90</sup>

The focus of vocation should rightly be the need of the neighbor, not the unworthiness and sin of the doer. Locating vocation *primarily* as a function of the law in the law/gospel dichotomy always runs the risk of making the purpose of vocation to point out sin. *Lex semper accusat*. Locating vocation *primarily* in the category of active righteousness frees the Christian to serve joyfully, rather than fear the crushing weight of the law. Can a struggle or failure in vocation turn the Christian to prayer and repentance? Of course—after all active righteousness is a function of the law—but that is not the primary point. Instead, the need of the neighbor is kept clearly in focus.

Regarding the direction of vocation, Wingren writes:

Works belong to the earthly realm, in service to others, directed downward in vocation which bears altogether the stamp of the earthly realm. And vocation is most purely and really served when through the gospel it has become clear that vocation has nothing to do with salvation. God receives that which is his, faith. The neighbor receives that which is his, works.<sup>91</sup>

Good works, such as those done in and through vocation, are here clearly and distinctly separated out from any notion of salvation. This sets vocation free to rejoice in good works done in service of the neighbor on earth. Seeing vocation as a function of active righteousness under the two kinds of righteousness frees vocation to function as it is intended—producing good

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<sup>90</sup> Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 11.

<sup>91</sup> Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 11.



works for the benefit of the neighbor.

Veith also notes the proper direction of good works done in a Christian's vocation. He writes,

Genuine good works have to actually help someone. In vocation, we are not doing good works for God—we are doing good works for our neighbor. This locates moral action in the real, messy world of everyday life, in the conflicts and responsibilities of the world—not in inner attitudes or abstract ideals, but in concrete interactions with other people.

*The purpose of vocation is to love and serve one's neighbor.* This is the test, the criterion, and the guide for how to live out each and every vocation anyone can be called to: How does my calling serve my neighbor? Who are my neighbors in my particular vocation, and how can I serve them with the love of God?<sup>92</sup>

Veith shows here that Luther's understanding of vocation, carefully understood in the framework of the two kinds of righteousness, directs Christians outward into the world to serve those around us, and to do so in very tangible ways through the structure of vocation. In this way, we recognize that God does not need our good works done in vocation. Vocational service is not directed toward God. Rather, it is directed toward the neighbor.

Steven Hein, in an article entitled "Luther on Vocation: Ordinary Life for Ordinary Saints" writes, "Christ indeed intends us to serve him, but Luther realized there is one hitch that we must never forget. He does not need anything from us."<sup>93</sup> While God does not need anything from us, that is not true of the human beings around us. Hein continues:

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<sup>92</sup> Veith, *God at Work*, 39–40; emphasis original. Kenneth Hagen, in his article, "A Critique of Wingren on Luther on Vocation," also makes the point that vocation is intended to serve the neighbor for the neighbor's own sake, but he sets this thought into his argument against Wingren's view of vocation. He writes, "This analysis of Luther's ethic shows that one key ethical norm is that the Christian loves the neighbor for the neighbor's own sake, not as a means for some further good or reward but as an end in itself. The direction of Christian love is this-worldly, and that is where it stops because one's neighbor is that important and deserves that much." Hagen, "Critique of Wingren," 265. On the next page he shows how this is lost to Wingren: "The vocation of love, serving the neighbor, is not optional. The whole structure of God's world is ordered so that the neighbor is served in and by vocation. Wingren has voided the very goal and direction of vocation in Luther. In Luther the direction of vocation is the neighbor. In Wingren the direction is the self—all the works of the law aimed at killing the self." Hagen, "Critique of Wingren," 266.

<sup>93</sup> Steven Hein, "Luther on *Vocatio*: Ordinary Life for Ordinary Saints," *Reformation & Revival* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 133.

But, as Luther noted, our neighbor needs us and the gifts, skills, time and blessings that the Lord has entrusted to us. Our spouse, our children, those who live next door, fellow employees, the customer, the client—those whom we encounter where we live, work and play—these are the ones who need our goods and works of service.<sup>94</sup>

Hein also notes, “Here then was Luther’s economy for faith and works: place your faith in God and send your works off to your neighbor.”<sup>95</sup> Again in harmony with Luther’s understanding of two kinds of righteousness, Hein remarks, “Faith in Christ is first expressed in fear and love of God. Then our love of God becomes channeled into loving service toward others. Our justification through faith in Christ is thus expressed in life through loving service to our neighbor.”<sup>96</sup>

Thus, as Luther’s teaching on vocation understood through the lens of two kinds of righteousness shows, genuine good works actually have to help someone. In vocation, we are not doing good works for God, who doesn’t have any need for them; instead we are doing good works for our neighbor who does need them, with the understanding that God himself is working for the good of our neighbor through our vocation. The farmer’s vocation is God’s means of feeding his people. A parent’s vocation is God’s means of caring for children and providing for their needs. This locates moral action in the real, messy world of everyday life, in the conflicts and responsibilities of the world—not in inner attitudes or abstract ideals, but in concrete interactions with other people encountered in the varying vocations of life. The purpose of Christian good works, done through vocation as understood in two kinds of righteousness, is *not* to please God. Or, to speak in a manner reminiscent of the New Atheists, good works are not done to placate a jealous, bloodthirsty, vicious God by slavishly seeking to serve him. Instead, good works done through vocation have the purpose of seeking to make the lives of those around

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<sup>94</sup> Hein, “Luther on *Vocatio*,” 133.

<sup>95</sup> Hein, “Luther on *Vocatio*,” 133.

<sup>96</sup> Hein, “Luther on *Vocatio*,” 138.

us better, to the extent that is possible for any given Christian in his or her circumstances. Thus, a two kinds of righteousness view of vocation contributes directly to an Enfleshed Apologetic response to the New Atheists.

We have seen the creedal framework for Enfleshed Apologetics take shape through the development of a Vocational Apologetics approach rooted in the writing of Martin Luther. This creedal framework includes an understanding of God the Father as the creator who placed his people in the world as caretakers and managers of the created order. In fact, the Father extends his benevolence in the work of creation through his people who use the created gifts of God given to them to serve and provide for those around them. Kolb and Arand point out, “God carries out his work by enlisting human beings as instruments of his creative activity for the good of his creation. . . . Luther describes creatures as ‘the hands, channels, and means through which God bestows all blessings.’”<sup>97</sup> God’s expectation that his people serve as his hands and feet for carrying out his work of preserving his world directs the Christian outward into engagement with the neighbor. Vocation sees the neighbor as being served by God with the bounty of creation through the generosity of his Christian people. The Father sustains life through his people as through instruments in his hands. Kolb and Arand explain, “By enlisting our active engagement within the world, God makes us coworkers or partners in his ongoing work of sustaining the human community within the world and preserving creation’s resources.”<sup>98</sup> A creedal framework for Vocational Apologetics begins with God’s creation and the Christian looking outward for his or her position within it to work as the Father’s representatives toward those in need. In fact, Luther would claim that through vocation, Christians have no other reason for living on earth

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<sup>97</sup> Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 55.

<sup>98</sup> Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 57.

than to be of help and service to those around them.<sup>99</sup>

We have also seen in a creedal framework that, despite the mandate for Christians to turn outward to work in God's stead for the sustaining of his creation, this outward work in no way contributes to the work of salvation. The active righteousness that marks the Christian's involvement in sustaining God's created order follows, and is no way contributive to, the passive righteousness by which Jesus bestows redemption on fallen humanity through the unaided work of his sacrificial death and resurrection. Once the issue of salvation has been recognized as fulfilled in Christ, this sets the Christian free to focus outward on the needs of the neighbor rather than to focus inwardly on the need to please God by his or her actions in a way that contributes to salvation. The neighbor is not misplaced in attention, but made central by the sufficient work of Christ for salvation.

A creedal framework for vocation then culminates in the work of the Holy Spirit who maintains the connection between the message of salvation fulfilled in the work of Jesus Christ and the focus of the Christian life on the needs of the neighbor. The Holy Spirit keeps the work of Christ before the Christian, and would never allow that message to be obscured in any way that would detract from the accomplished actions of Jesus. The Holy Spirit then sends the Christian out into the world in a manner that may look identical to the way God places all people in the created order. However, while the manner of sending (and in fact the results of work in the created order) may look indistinguishable, under the third article work of the Holy Spirit, Christians are sent into the created order fully mindful of the way Christ has met the ultimate needs of humanity, with an eye towards meeting the outward needs of the neighbor. As Kolb and Arand summarize, "The Holy Spirit gives us a new orientation that is less egocentric and more

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<sup>99</sup> Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 186.

exocentric, oriented toward other people, precisely because it is christocentric.”<sup>100</sup>

All people are placed in vocation, whether they recognize that as a calling from God or not, whether they are Christians or not. Richard Dawkins, for example, has served in the vocation of professor, author, and family man, among others. By all accounts, he has done so diligently and well, and in fact through his foundation he is seeking to work for the betterment of humanity, which is to be commended. A Christian may have similar vocations, and from all outward appearances Dawkins and a faithful Christian serving in similar vocations may seem very similar. But under the calling of the Holy Spirit, the Christian also sees this as following Christ’s love by serving others even as Christ as served us and given himself for us. The outward works viewed under the first article work in the created order of vocations may look the same, but the motivation guided by the calling of the Holy Spirit under the third article provides a difference for viewing Christians in their vocations.

#### Contribution of Luther’s Doctrine of Vocation to Enfleshed Apologetics

When the topic of Vocation is seen through the lens of the two kinds of righteousness, then we can readily see that Luther’s focus on the neighbor in light of vocation drives us back into culture. Kolb and Arand explain the connection:

If the creature of faith no longer does good works for the purpose of self-improvement or enhancing one’s standing with God, but instead for the sake of others, it means that an entirely different arena is opened up in which our active righteousness finds its proper place; within creation. Faith in the God who justifies is at the same time faith in the God who created the world. Thus, faith embraces the world as God’s good creation. . . . The passive righteousness of faith returns us to creation. The concept of the passive righteousness of faith in Christ eliminates all of our works from consideration when thinking of how we can justify our lives to God, using them to secure our relationship with him. This concept relocates these works in the world God created for human beings in the first place; they belong there for the sake of others, for the common good. Here the Lutheran doctrine of justification

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<sup>100</sup> Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 105.

expresses itself in a robust doctrine of vocation that the Christian embraces as one reenters creation.<sup>101</sup>

Kolb and Arand point out that the neighbor lives in the created world. The neighbor also lives in culture. We relate to our neighbors in culture as a part of the created world. As a corollary, apologetics always works within a given culture, and is bound to the questions asked by the target culture and linked to the problems posed by the target culture. Veith notes, “Recovering the doctrine of vocation can help Christians influence their culture once again as they carry their faith into the world, into its every nook and cranny, through the plenitude of vocations.”<sup>102</sup>

Apologetics functions as a responsive discipline, and an apologetic approach based in vocation can respond to a wide variety of issues, reaching into “every nook and cranny” of life. Flowing from that we can consider how vocationally-shaped Enfleshed Apologetics can be used to respond to the criticisms of the New Atheists.

Other than Tim Morey in his book, *Embodying our Faith*, nobody provides an in-depth plan or strategy for what an Enfleshed Apologetic looks like or how it functions. Recall that even Morey notes regarding Enfleshed Apologetics, “very little has been said about how we might construct such an apologetic.”<sup>103</sup> As of yet, there is no well-developed blueprint for what an Enfleshed Apologetic approach looks like. In turning to Luther’s teachings on vocation, we will find just such a needed and practical pattern for Enfleshed Apologetics.

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<sup>101</sup> Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 106–7. A few pages later, Kolb and Arand return to this point as they write, “Luther realized that like Christ, Christians are sent into the world to become deeply involved in daily life. There they find that this physical world of creation is our home even though it needs purging, renovation, and restoration. Therefore, Christians respond to the fallen world (even as Christ did) not by flight into Christian colonies but ‘by standing tall, rolling up one’s sleeves, and saying, ‘I am not going anywhere; this world has been bought by Christ and his [work], and I am going to serve by living life as he intended it to be.’” Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 110–11. Here Kolb and Arand cite Robert Rosin, “Christians and Culture: Finding Place in Clio’s Mansions,” in *Christ and Culture: The Church in a Post-Christian (?) America*, Concordia Seminary Monograph Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 69.

<sup>102</sup> Veith, *God at Work*, 157.

<sup>103</sup> Morey, *Embodying Our Faith*, 44.

Luther's teaching, while being firmly and rigorously rooted in theology is also eminently practical and specifically located for application and implementation. Vocation is directed toward the neighbor to meet the neighbor's need. Kolden shows that when we carry out God's command to love our neighbors, this makes love concrete.<sup>104</sup> He notes that as we live our everyday lives, confronted by the needs of our neighbors:

The specific requirements of our work will prevent us from being paralyzed by global or idealistic expectations about "love of neighbor" and will enable us to focus on the particular piece of God's all-encompassing work that we can accomplish. This insight has the potential to make many types of work more tolerable or attractive and to reduce the "glamour" of those jobs that draw us primarily for selfish reasons.<sup>105</sup>

Thus, the need of the neighbor as viewed through Luther's teaching on vocation both provides a solid, concrete starting point for Christians' engagement with the culture and it prevents Christians from becoming overwhelmed by the enormity of the needs of the entire world around them. The question, "Where does one start?" can become crippling. Vocation gives clarity and focus to what needs and problems can be addressed and in what priority.

The guidance provided through a proper understanding of vocation frees Christians to make a difference in the most likely areas to have a beneficial effect. What should a Christian do? Don't start by seeking to serve far outside a practical sphere of influence. Instead, start by meeting the needs noticed through the various vocations in which God has placed a Christian. These are the specific places where he or she can most likely make a positive difference. Then, work outward from there. This model does not preclude service on a larger stage or a global scale,<sup>106</sup> but it starts in a more local, tightly connected manner before branching out.

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<sup>104</sup> Kolden, "Work and Meaning," 267.

<sup>105</sup> Kolden, "Work and Meaning," 267.

<sup>106</sup> Hunter provides a helpful clarification. "I would suggest that a theology of faithful presence first calls Christians to attend to the people and places that they experience directly. It is not that believers should be disconnected from, or avoid responsibility for, people and places across the globe. Far from it. Christians are called to 'go into all the world,' after all and to carry the good news in word and deed that God's kingdom has come. But

That is, parents should attend primarily to the needs of their family before moving outward from their vocation as parents. However, those parents will likely also have vocations as neighbors to the people who live around them, and the needs of those close by also should receive attention and care, but to a less involved degree than the nuclear family. Likewise, these same parents may be employed and have a paid or professional vocation, where they will enact God's love in their relationships with coworkers. Then, these same servant-hearted Christians might become involved in community activities such as redevelopment projects, literacy support, housing refurbishment, and the like. On the next level, perhaps on a more episodic basis, these same Christians might join a group from their church to serve in a larger capacity by participating in a domestic or international mission trip. In these ways the reach of vocation begins to expand as Christians fulfill what is theirs to do, recognizing that each particular station is a valid and valuable gift from God and a means to serve the neighbor.

Kolb and Arand show how these expanding spheres of vocation function in Luther's theology:

Luther believed that the social web of mutually constitutive relationships in which people carry out their work is not a matter of arbitrary social construction. With other reformers, Luther believed that when God created human beings for community with each other, he placed them and bound them together in comprehensive spheres or structures of life (*genera vitae*), which might be called created orders or walks of life.<sup>107</sup>

Kolb and Arand point out that in the Large Catechism Luther ordered these structures in four groups including marriage and family life (*domus*), economic life (*oeconomia*), public life (*civitas/politia*), and religious life (*ecclesia*).<sup>108</sup> Various interpreters of Martin Luther define these

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with that said, the call of faithful presence gives priority to what is right in front of us—the community, the neighborhood, and the city, and the people of which these are constituted.” Hunter, *To Change the World*, 253.

<sup>107</sup> Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 58.

<sup>108</sup> Kolb and Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 58–59.



spheres of vocational influence in slightly different ways. For the purpose of this work, I will largely follow Kolb and Arand with the four categories of Family, Work, Public Life, and the Church as the titles for the spheres within which Christians live out their vocations.<sup>109</sup>

While exact naming of the spheres of vocation varies, the sentiment that these various locations of vocation tie Christians to a very concrete world to serve in very concrete ways is commonly held. Robert Benne, in his book *Ordinary Saints* notes, “The general, overarching calling of each Christian is made concrete in specific callings. God the Spirit works through us to serve others in particular places of responsibility.”<sup>110</sup> Veith adds, “Indeed this is the purpose of all

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<sup>109</sup> This categorization is a common one, but it is not universal. Luther at various times and in various writings delineated vocation in different ways, and recent theologians have at times followed different means of categorizing the expanding ripples of vocation. The primary division occurs in two areas: first regarding whether family and work are separated into two categories, as I have chosen to do, or combined into one (which would be just as logical from Luther’s point of view as so many occupations were family-based), and second regarding vocation in the church and “the order of Christian love,” which I have chosen to combine in the final category, and others keep separate. Kolb and Arand describe vocation as operating within the home, in the economic walks of life, in government and wider society, and the church. Kolb and Arand *Genius of Luther’s Theology*, 113. Robert Benne, in his book *Ordinary Saints*, points to the concrete locations of marriage and family, work, public life, and religious life as the areas where Christians are called to serve others. These works use a four-fold division of vocational circles similar to the one I am choosing to use. Robert Benne, *Ordinary Saints* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 127. On the other hand, Kenneth Hagen and Gene Edward Veith separate the church and the “Common order of Christian love.” Veith, in *Spirituality of the Cross*, writes, “In addition to the three estates of the household, the state, and the Church, Luther speaks of a fourth estate ... the common order of Christian love.” Veith, *Spirituality of the Cross*, 98. Two pages later, Veith lists the areas of vocation as 1) family, 2) household, 3) government, and 4) the common order of Christian love. Veith, *Spirituality of the Cross*, 100. However, Veith in his earlier book on vocation, *God at Work*, utilizes the categories of Worker, Family, Citizen, and Church, and devotes a chapter to each one. Veith, *God at Work*, 61–132. Kenneth Hagen, in his article, “A Critique of Wingren on Luther on Vocation,” writes that for Luther, “The three estates are: first, the priestly *Amt* (pastors, those who supervise the common chest, sextons, servants and messengers of these); second, the married estate (husband/wife, parents, children, servants, widows, single people); third, the worldly authorities (civil government) including princes, lords, judges, civil officers, state officials, notaries, and servants for these persons.” Hagen, “Critique of Wingren,” 249–50. Hagen also notes on page 250 that Luther adds the common order of Christian love. Hagen writes, “In his 1528 *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper*, Luther discusses the three ‘orders and true religious institutions’: *Ecclesia, oeconomia, politia* (Church, household, government). ... All Christians are members of the church, a household, and society, and beyond all that is the common order of Christian love. All these stations and orders and the ‘common order’ are created by God. The created order of God’s civil kingdom is structured with a myriad of occupations and obligations, all geared to make the kingdom of God’s world work, and the working of it all is pleasing to God.” Hagen, “Critique of Wingren,” 250. In a different look at the circles of vocation, Gordon Preece, in *The Viability of the Vocation Tradition*, says that Luther, divided life into three stations: the household economy, the state, and the church, thus combining family and work into the single category of “the household economy,” and he leaves out “the order of Christian love.” Preece, *Viability*, 9.

<sup>110</sup> Benne, *Ordinary Saints*, 127. For further, much more in-depth elaboration on this way of looking at vocation as circles consisting of Family, Work, Public Life, and the Church, look to Benne in *Ordinary Saints*, as he devotes one chapter of the book to each of the locations vocation is lived out in each of these circles as described

vocations: to love and serve our neighbors. God does not tell us to love humanity in the abstract, but to love our neighbor: the actual, tangible human being whom He calls into our lives.”<sup>111</sup>

Vocation will often start with those nearby, either in relationships or in the various events and needs of life. As one begins to recognize various vocations, the web of interaction becomes more complex. Vocation starts within a family, but Veith shows the degree of complexity even within the sphere of the family. He writes:

The most fundamental estate in God’s design is the family, with its offices of marriage—comprising the vocations of husband and wife—and parenthood—with its vocations of mother, father, and child. God brought each of us into existence by means of our parents and so called us into a family, with its subsidiary vocations of brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. God may then call us to form a new family of our own, calling us to marriage and parenthood. Again, each person has many vocations in the family: an individual may be the wife to her husband, a mother to her children, and a child to her mother (not to mention being a sister to her brother, a cousin to her cousin, and so on).<sup>112</sup>

Vocation starts with families, but then it necessarily reaches out from there. As families live together in a model of the overflowing love that God shows for us, they are uniquely positioned to engage the world around them in love. A well-balanced family starts from the strength of vocation vested there, but God has called individuals into various spheres of vocation and, even as they serve in the family, they are also called to serve in other areas as well. This points to Hunter’s call to reach out to “the other,” noted briefly at the beginning of the chapter and examined in more depth later in this chapter. Benne makes clear that “our own love cannot be limited to our spouse and family. ... Families strong in love must share it with the world, usually through their efforts in other callings but sometimes directly in person-to-person service

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above: Family (chapter 7), Work (chapter 8), Public Life (chapter 9), and the Church (chapter 10).

<sup>111</sup> Veith, *Spirituality of the Cross*, 98.

<sup>112</sup> Veith, *Spirituality of the Cross*, 96–97; emphasis original.

when occasions call for it.”<sup>113</sup> Benne argues that, “families strong in love are particularly able to welcome the stranger, whether that stranger is a foreign student, a lonely neighbor, an orphan, a handicapped child, or even a ‘difficult’ child of their own.”<sup>114</sup>

As one begins to recognize various vocations, the interactions continue to become more complex. Hein helpfully recognizes the hands-on nature of this complexity. As human beings called into service in various vocations, we are called into direct relationships with others in specific times and places. Hein sees this concretely centered focus for vocation coming directly from Luther’s thought:

Luther recognized that our neighbor is determined by where we are placed in life. We are limited and dependent creatures who have been called by the Gospel to live within the communities that make up our vocational call. This context we could call our circle of nearness, which particularizes and limits our call to serve. Here we encounter real flesh-and-blood people with names and faces. Luther did not believe that we have been called to love some abstract humanity. This does not mean that love is limited to simply my station and its duties. Our circle of nearness also includes the stranger whom we encounter in our path with emergency needs as we tend to our station and its duties.<sup>115</sup>

Hein anchors our spheres of vocation in the actual experience of the world, with our circle of nearness made up of people with names and faces, including not just family members or co-workers but even the stranger who may be near to our vocational service at that time. The complexity of vocational service arises from the fact that God’s people have been called to various vocations and are doing God’s work in those concrete areas of service as situations arise. Because of this complexity, there will always be various vocational services to various people

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<sup>113</sup> Benne, *Ordinary Saints*, 142–43.

<sup>114</sup> Benne, *Ordinary Saints*, 142–43. In illustrating an example of this concept, Benne writes, “One strong family in my acquaintance had a severely handicapped child. After the inevitable pain of working through such an untoward happening, the young father told me: ‘We have come to the conclusion that if God wanted to choose just the right family for a child as wounded as Matthew, we are it! We can care for him.’ Thus, as in other areas of life, Christian love serves to restore, enrich, broaden, and focus our ordinary earthly loves. It transforms the love inherent in an order of Creation into a more enduring and expansive form of being together.” Benne, *Ordinary Saints*, 142–43.

<sup>115</sup> Hein, “Luther on *Vocatio*,” 138.

fulfilled as need and occasion require. The circumstances of our location will often dictate what sphere has the strongest effect at any given time. As Christians work through this complexity, serving in the spheres of family, work, public life, and church, God's love will be exercised in tangible, recognizable ways in the world.

As vocation points us back into the created world, back into culture, it does so in hands-on and helpfully direct ways. The most important opportunities for faithful presence in vocation are often with those who are closest to us—family, and then neighbors, expanding out to coworkers, and on from there. A woman who is a surgeon has a vocational responsibility to seek to work for healing in her patients during her working hours, but she may also have a vocation as a mother in which she is to care for her children and provide for their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. This personal calling as a mother is more foundational, and thus more prominent, than the professional calling as a surgeon. A woman in her vocation as a mother is likely to be a part of her children's lives for decades, while that same woman in her vocation as a surgeon may be a part of her patients' lives for only a few days or weeks, and on a much less profound level.

However, the immediacy of life events also exert an influence on the overlapping, interconnected spheres of vocation. The surgeon may ultimately have a stronger and more lasting relationship with her child than with any of her patients. However, when she has a patient on the operating table in front of her, she had better give full priority to the person whose life is a stake when the circumstances of life place a scalpel in the surgeon's hands. I have personally experienced the interaction of vocational spheres in an operating room. My wife and I are blessed with six children, all of whom have been born by C-section. During the birth of our first child, all electronic devices were strictly banned in the operating room. However, by the time our last child was born, one of the nurses in the operating room was talking with a family member on

her cell phone, trying to determine the location of a set of car keys, while the surgery was taking place. Was the nurse's long-term relationship with her family member of more lasting significance than her relationship with my wife? Undoubtedly. We had never met that nurse before the day our child was born, and we have never seen her since. However, one might think that for the time of the surgery itself, perhaps attending to my wife's and child's needs might have been a higher priority than locating a set of keys!

While within personal vocation needs are prioritized based on relationships and the needs of the situation, starting with those nearby and working outward, in the apologetic application of vocation the actual impact may be somewhat different. In a Christian's personal life lived in vocation, the strongest focus is placed where the most influence is possible, or where one has the greatest opportunity to offer care within the variety of vocations to which a person is called, with work expanding out from the central base of family and proximal neighbors. However, in Vocational Apologetics, the greatest influence *in apologetic terms*, may well be from interactions somewhat outside the immediate spheres of family or proximal neighbors. While a father's strongest and most lasting impact through personal vocation should be with his family, this is unlikely to be looked upon as a noticeable apologetic endeavor in the eyes of the world. On the other hand, a Christian who volunteers one day a week to read with underprivileged children in an impoverished school district, as that activity is seen by teachers, staff, and parents in the school, would likely have a stronger Vocational Apologetic impact than the time the father spends reading with his own children each night. The long-term impact of the latter is likely stronger on a personal level, but the visible impact of the former is likely to provide a stronger apologetic message. As apologetics itself is to be a responsive discipline, so also Christians living in their variety of vocations need to be responsive to the human care needs around them

and serve as appropriate to the situation.

### Luther's Doctrine of Vocation as it Functions in Three Kinds of Righteousness

To see how Christians can come alongside culture to help and serve guided by the love of Christ, we return to Hunter for guidance. Hunter reminds us that in an age of digital media in which we are spending more time relating with others through a screen, actual presence seems less vital than it once did.<sup>116</sup> Vocation however, points us back to the real, physical neighbor with real physical needs, thus fulfilling Hunter's call for "faithful presence." As Hunter stresses, "faithful presence" must include relationships not just with others within the body of Christ, but also and especially with those outside the community of faith.<sup>117</sup> This interaction takes place, according to Hunter, in affirmation and antithesis.<sup>118</sup>

While the two kinds of righteousness terminology from Luther and other early reformers is helpful in clarifying the outward direction of vocation, another formulation of the topic from Luther and Melancthon—three kinds of righteousness—provides greater clarity in understanding outward-looking initiatives with and alongside secular culture. The two kinds of righteousness distinction was particularly helpful in clarifying the role of vocation in light of justification and sanctification. However, we have also seen a distinction between the way the Father calls all to vocations in creation under the first article of the creed and how the Holy Spirit under the third article of the creed uses specifically Christians in their vocations. In this way, while the outward works of a Christian and a non-Christian may be identical in vocation, the spiritual motivation may in fact be different. This distinction can be considered with greater clarity through the lens of three kinds of righteousness. Joel Biermann examines these categories

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<sup>116</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 240.

<sup>117</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 244.

<sup>118</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 281–84.

of three kinds of righteousness in *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics* and this formulation is particularly well-suited to fulfill Hunter's call for affirmation as one component of a "faithful presence."

An understanding of vocation, rooted in various kinds of righteousness, can provide a means to implement the call Hunter makes for demonstrating "faithful presence" to those outside the community of faith. It does so first by recognizing that those outside the community of faith also are valuable contributors to the needs of the neighbor. They also have valid vocations. They also serve those around them for the common good. This can be seen in the way that Biermann points to three divisions of righteousness. The three kinds of righteousness expounded by Biermann are governing righteousness, justifying righteousness, and conforming righteousness.<sup>119</sup>

Biermann's first kind of righteousness, "governing righteousness," recognizes the ability of all people to contribute to the common good, whether they happen to be Christian or not. Biermann writes, "the first righteousness is the righteousness that applies to all people, regardless of a person's standing before God, whether justified *coram Deo* or not. A key aspect of the first kind of righteousness is its grounding in the recognition that God's will (that is, the law) has been revealed and is still present throughout all of creation."<sup>120</sup> This kind of righteousness, exercised through vocation, recognizes and commends the common ground of moral understanding even between Christians and the New Atheists.<sup>121</sup> When a New Atheist

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<sup>119</sup> Biermann, *Case for Character*, 130.

<sup>120</sup> Biermann, *Case for Character*, 127.

<sup>121</sup> The New Atheists, by and large, assume and operate in an ethical framework that is grounded in Judeo-Christian morality. Numerous apologists responding to the New Atheists have made this point. Haught, in his book *God and the New Atheism* notes, that the New Atheists seek to preserve a basic form of Judeo-Christian morality and only exclude the Divine from the equation. He argues, "The new atheists' interest is in preserving rather than radically reforming the cultural milieu uncritically reflected in their wishes for a safer world. They would have the God religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—simply disappear, after which we should be able to go on

decries violence, or urges support of humanitarian causes, or a myriad of other options in a largely shared view of overall morality, a Christian—guided by Biermann’s understanding of the first kind of righteousness—can applaud the New Atheist (or anyone else) and affirm their cause whole-heartedly. In this way, Luther’s doctrine of vocation enables the church to engage in the affirmation encouraged by Hunter by seeing that all acts done for the good of humanity are works of civil righteousness, and thus the church can commend all good acts that are done regardless of who does them. And yet, this affirmation in no way requires the synthesis of false doctrine or practice. Affirming that a New Atheist can (and does) do good work in supporting and encouraging humanitarian causes in no way leads a Christian to affirm the New Atheist’s belief that there is no God, or that God’s existence is at least highly questionable.

In this way, governing righteousness enables Christians to practice affirmation (to use Hunter’s term) regarding the good that all people, including the New Atheists, do in their vocations. This recognition, admission, and “affirmation” emphasizes that Christianity does not speak only in radical spiritual condemnation of those who are non-Christian. Rather Christianity affirms the good that is done in all worthy vocations, gives thanks for the valuable contributions of others and supports the practices of all that can be conducive to the common good. Hunter’s

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enjoying the same lifestyle as before, only without the nuisance of suicide bombers and TV evangelists. We should be able to salvage the best that life has to offer right now, but without worrying about getting blown up by God-inspired fanatics.” Haught, *God*, 20. Douglas Wilson, in his book *God Is* makes a similar argument, showing that even the basic New Atheist claims that religions are evil rest on the premise that one can define evil, and the standards of evil that the New Atheists use to call religions evil are essentially the standards of Christianity. Thus, the New Atheists are trying to maintain Christian morality without Christianity and without God, which Wilson points out cannot be done. Wilson, *God Is*, 4–9. Wilson comes back to this line of argument frequently throughout the book. The end result for the New Atheists is that they promote an understanding of “good” and “evil” that is virtually indistinguishable from a Christian understanding of what is “good” and “evil,” but with little theoretical basis for doing so. Ian Markham shows how dependent the New Atheists are on Judeo-Christian morality by comparing them with the far more radical moral program of Nietzsche. Markham argues that the New Atheists would like to dismiss the hypothesis of God’s existence but keep other outgrowths of theism (such as morality) unchanged, which Markham states Nietzsche rightly understands to be impossible. Markham, *Against Atheism*, 28–45. The pertinent point to the argument here is not the contrast between the New Atheists and Nietzsche *per se*, but rather the implication that the New Atheists utilize a recognizably Judeo-Christian morality in their ethical outlook. This is the “common ground of moral understanding even between Christians and the New Atheists” to which I refer above.



call for affirmation, practiced through governing righteousness, is an answer to the depiction of Christianity as consistently fostering hatemongering anti-social people who harm others and seek to disrupt or destroy social relations. Instead, Biermann's governing righteousness seen as a function of Hunter's affirmation shows Christians as fellow co-workers for the common good of society, working along with those outside the Christian faith. Thus Christianity is not anti-social as Dawkins would depict but pro-social, and rather than disrupting social relationships it seeks to establish relationships of mutual cooperation as public work for the common good is openly affirmed.

The New Atheists would make the allegation that people of faith in their relational dealings with those around them are inherently intolerant, and thus unworthy of toleration themselves. Vocational Apologetics reverses this view as it accepts and affirms the work for the common good done by all, even without affirming doctrinal differences. Of course, human relationships will always include some degree of difference, but as Hunter notes, the paired efforts of affirmation and antithesis work to overcome the problem of difference. As such, Christian relationships should be marked by respect and peace, even when they are not marked by full agreement. Starting with relationships in the family, and then expanding out through the spheres of vocation to the broader world, this harmony and respect includes relationships among ethnicities, genders, Christians, non-Christians, and others. All these relationships should be marked with generosity and honest love.

Luther's doctrine of vocation also fulfills well Hunter's call for antithesis which he understands as "constructive opposition ... with the possibility of hope."<sup>122</sup> In a focus on vocation through the lens of conforming righteousness, the Christian can offer a different view of the

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<sup>122</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 332n7.

impact of faith than the picture painted with such vivid power by the New Atheists. Where the New Atheists describe Christianity as seeking violent domination, vocation through the lens of conforming righteousness offers the antithetical view of Christianity as humble, peaceful service to others. The lens of conforming righteousness pictures Christians offering a non-threatening manifestation of their beliefs in action for the good of the community and culture. In this way, even when serving as an antithesis to the New Atheist depiction of Christianity, the Christian voice is not violent but patient, long-suffering, and of service to the other in tangible manifestation of God's presence among his people. The Christian living in vocation serves as a means of answering the problems of difference and dissolution described by Hunter through an enfleshed joining of word and event.

Vocation as a grounding for Enfleshed Apologetics meshes well with Hunter's call for affirmation and antitheses as the basis for a theology and practice of "faithful presence," overcoming the partnered problems of difference and dissolution. Hunter offers "two essential lessons for our time"<sup>123</sup> regarding these issues:

*The first is that incarnation is the only adequate reply to the challenges of dissolution; the erosion of trust between word and world and the problems that attend it. From this follows the second: it is the way of the Word became incarnate in Jesus Christ and the purposes to which the incarnation was directed that are the only adequate reply to the challenge of difference. For the Christian, if there is a possibility for human flourishing in a world such as ours, it begins when God's word of love becomes flesh in us, is embodied in us, is enacted through us and in so doing, a trust is forged between the word spoken and the reality to which it speaks; to the words we speak and the realities to which we, the church, point. In all, presence and place matter decisively.*<sup>124</sup>

Luther's understanding of vocation addresses both the matters of presence and place recognized as decisive needs by Hunter. Vocation focuses on the work done in the specific locations where

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<sup>123</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 241.

<sup>124</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 241; emphasis original. It is hard to miss the similarity and overlap in terms used by Hunter to explain "faithful presence" and the terms used to develop an Enfleshed Apologetic methodology.

God has placed people to be, expanding outward in the spheres of Family, Work, Public Life, and the Church, and it also addresses the manner of service rendered by the one present in that place.

Luther's doctrine of vocation provides an Enfleshed Apologetic answer to the New Atheists' challenge that Christianity is not a force for good in society by saying that Christianity does in fact demonstrate goodness. However, on a surface level this argument only devolves into a difficulty of conflicting reports of goodness and evil. To deny charges verbally from one seen as an adversary is to be defined by what you are against, rather than by what you are for. Hunter would point out that this is merely the path of negation leading to nihilism, not a path of true affirmation and antithesis. The beauty of vocation as a form of Enfleshed Apologetics is that it allows a much-needed move from mere negation to the creation of a positive new outlook. To use Hunter's terms, vocation as a form of Enfleshed Apologetics goes beyond "contradiction ... critique and hostility"<sup>125</sup> to build "the possibility of hope."<sup>126</sup>

It is important to clarify that to encourage Hunter's concepts of affirmation and antithesis is not to deny that a verbal rebuttal of error has an important place in the role of apologetics. Apologetics functions best when it utilizes all available means to defend the Christian faith. Traditional, rational objections to Christianity can and should be refuted through traditional apologetic means. Rational and vocational apologetics should not be set in opposition to each other, but should be seen as working together to bring a fuller defense to a challenge than could have been presented otherwise. While traditional, rationally-focused apologetic methods do function in a way as a negation of the charges they address, they are still needed tools for the apologist to use. The challenge comes if they are used alone, without any recourse to an

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<sup>125</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 332n7.

<sup>126</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 332n7.

Enfleshed Apologetic approach, leaving the impression that apologetics only tears down without offering uplifting alternatives.

Enfleshed Apologetics rooted in vocation offers a healthy complement as it leads the Christian not just to speak in defense of Christianity or refute the charges of the New Atheists with words (all of which are still necessary but run the risk of serving as a form negation rather than a means of building up), but calls the Christian to put into practice in life what one professes as well. Vocation guides the Christian to real, tangible, and concrete ways and places to work for the common good, embodying a vision of human flourishing that is credible and offers hope.

An example from current culture may serve to illustrate this point. In recent years, access to affordable health care has become a significant societal issue. Due to the politicization of American life, the approach taken to address the challenge has been a legislative one. A will to power pushed one vision of an answer through the political process, and a competing will to power has sought to tear down the legislative “victory” and replace it with an equally political alternative. The church has taken the role of political lobbyist for or against various proposals and it has often played the part of the wronged victim when the political process goes the opposite direction from church preferences. This victimization has been seen in the many lawsuits church bodies have filed through the course of the ongoing healthcare debate. All of this activity on the part of the church from every side of the political spectrum can be classified as walking the path to negation. Positions are delineated in opposition to those with whom particular branches of the church disagree and losses are carefully cultivated into resentments.

What is needed, by way of alternative, is not a political negation—or a political synthesis for that matter—but a true antithesis, a positive alternative offering the possibility of hope. This has begun in some places as the church, in a very vocational approach, has engaged members

with specializations in the medical fields to provide parish-based medical care outside of the political and insurance systems. Parish nursing positions and parish health clinics are representative of this opportunity for the church to offer a real antithesis to the destructive tendencies of society led by the political system. The church does not so much fight in the ways of the world as offer “a bursting out of new creation from within it.”<sup>127</sup> That is Vocational Apologetics in practice.

As Christians seek to live for the good of those around them through vocation they actively work to counter the New Atheists’ emotional and ethical argument against Christianity. I would propose that Vocational Apologetics moves on to present “the possibility of hope” while offering an ethical appeal to rebuild the credibility of Christianity in society. It does so by showing that Christians embody Scriptural morality reflecting God’s nature as the gracious sustainer of life as they care for the neighbor in ways that are simple, concrete, and contextualized.

### **Christian Responses To The Rhetorical Appeals Used By The New Atheists, Rooted In Vocational Apologetics**

One of the foundational charges of the New Atheists is that religion causes violence. This was demonstrated through the case study of Harris’ depiction of a bus suicide bombing, and also came out in the case study of Harris’ writing about the passages in Scripture that advocate violence such as killing children who talk back to their parents. A Christian apologetic approach would seek to refute this allegation of violence from the New Atheists. Apologists, however, must be careful to consider Hunter’s charge that mere negation leads to nihilism. Vocational Apologetics, as I am proposing, does not serve as a verbal negation of the charge from the New Atheists that religion causes violence, it does not say “No, religions are peaceful rather than

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<sup>127</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 265.

violent,” and in fact Vocational Apologetics is not just a negation of the charge of violence by simply living peaceful and non-violent lives to offer a living contradiction to the charge of violence. Rather, Vocational Apologetics moves beyond straight contradiction of the New Atheist allegations, as that would represent only the path of negation, and instead seeks to build the possibility of hope. It does so by actually serving the neighbor in ways that counteract the effects of violence, work for the healing of those who are hurt, and seek to establish a more lasting peace. When the New Atheists charge that religion causes violence, Vocational Apologetics does not so much contradict the charge in the manner of negation as it actively seeks to reverse the effects of violence in a way that builds hope as Hunter urges. In this way, Vocational Apologetics allows the church to be seen in what it says and does, rather than only what it opposes.

In support for their claim that religions lead to violence, the New Atheists claim that people of faith will act in literal accord with the teachings they interpret literally, and they further claim that Christian Scriptures advocate violence. Harris writes, “The belief that it will rain puts an umbrella in the hand of every man or woman who owns one.”<sup>128</sup> He concludes, “As a man believes, so will he act.”<sup>129</sup> Of course, in this way, the New Atheists are asserting that Christians who take Scripture literally are doing so in a way that is a danger to society—eventually leading to violence.

Those who would practice Vocational Apologetics would agree wholeheartedly with Harris that as a Christian believes, so should he or she act, but would seek to show that acting on Christian belief is a positive benefit to society. Instead of causing violence, Christianity is shaped by the violence done to Christ in his sacrificial life and death. This central message of the saving

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<sup>128</sup> Harris, *End of Faith*, 44.

<sup>129</sup> Harris, *End of Faith*, 44.

work of Christ then leads to the outworking of the Christian life in manners of sacrificial service meeting the needs of the neighbor. Thus, not only is Christianity not violent, it would in fact rather suffer violence than inflict it and still seek to serve the common good in a way that answers Hunter's call for the establishment of hope. The New Atheists would try to claim that following the Bible leads to evil, but this form of apologetics seeks to respond by showing forth work for the common good embodied in the vocational life of Christians.

The New Atheist assertion that following the Bible literally leads to violence is a simplistic misinterpretation of the Bible, and such a faux-fundamentalist reading is easily refuted on academic, scholarly, theological grounds.<sup>130</sup> However, that is not where most of the problem lies. As often is the case, the world needs living proof, not just academic proof. The New Atheists say that following the teachings of the Bible will lead to violence and slaughter. Solid Scriptural theologians can explain violent passages responsibly and point to an overarching narrative of peace. However, for the watching world, the proof will not be in libraries but in lives. This is the form of living proof offered by those who would practice Vocational Apologetics. What does it mean to put into practice the beliefs one holds from Scripture? Vocational Apologetics says watch and see. True enough, "As a man believes, so will he act,"<sup>131</sup> but Vocational Apologetics will strive to show others that those actions are helpful rather than hurtful.

Harris does recognize the possibility of religious motivation for sacrificial service, as he writes:

It is true that there are millions of people whose faith moves them to perform extraordinary acts of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. The hope rendered to the

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<sup>130</sup> See Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011); Paul Copan, "Are Old Testament Laws Evil?" in Craig and Meister, *God Is Great*, 134–54; Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to Terms with the Justice of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014); McGrath, *Why God*, 67–68; and McGrath and McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, 82.

<sup>131</sup> Harris, *End of Faith*, 44.

poor by Christian missionaries in the developing world demonstrates that religious ideas can lead to actions that are both beautiful and necessary.<sup>132</sup>

However, Harris then proceeds to argue “But there are far better reasons for self-sacrifice than those that religion provides. . . . It can be quite possible, even reasonable, to risk one’s life to save others without believing any incredible ideas about the nature of the universe.”<sup>133</sup> However, Harris does not explain or even list any better reasons. He leaves this as an unsupported assertion. A Christian can fully agree that there are motivations apparently outside of religious belief that can lead people to sacrifice for the common good, and faithful Christians can rejoice at the common ground this creates. However, Christians would seek to support their claims that Scripture gives very good reasons for self-sacrifice through a demonstrated life of discipleship. Unlike Harris, Christianity would not leave its assertion of goodness unsupported. Through Vocational Apologetics connected to Biermann’s three kinds of righteousness and Hunter’s call for affirmation, Christians can rejoice in what good is done by all, including atheists. But even while rejoicing in the common good, Christians also seek to supplement it through their own lives of faithful service to those around them.

According to Dawkins, as we saw in the case study of his famous and oft-quoted rhetorical gem, those who follow such a God as described by Dawkins as a jealous, violent, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser<sup>134</sup> would be apt to act in an evil way. This could be the case either because their God demands such behavior or because their God in his character models such behavior for them. Note that Dawkins’ description of God under consideration is very relational in nature. The God Dawkins decries is not a hands-off, removed deity who works from a distance, but instead a very interactive, relational God. Dawkins goes to great lengths to show problems with

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<sup>132</sup> Harris, *End of Faith*, 78.

<sup>133</sup> Harris, *End of Faith*, 78.

<sup>134</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 31.



God in relationship after relationship. Dawkins points to problems in relationships among couples and families by using such words as jealous, petty, and control-freak. He points to problems in relationships among ethnic groups by using such words as ethnic cleanser, racist, and genocidal. Dawkins points to problems in relationships between genders with such words as misogynistic and homophobic. With these terms, Dawkins ascribes of God problems common and readily observable in human relationships, and Dawkins attributes these problems to God's followers by extension.

By way of example, recall that Dawkins attributes to God an emotion: God is jealous—jealous and proud of it.<sup>135</sup> While jealousy can properly be understood in a relationship as a positive trait pointing to a shielding, protecting enactment of pure love, in our current cultural context jealousy is commonly considered to be a negative trait in a relationship. Jealousy in a relationship would indicate that one or the other partner's motivation is self-interest and self-promotion, rather than seeking the good of the other. Thus, while the world sees the description of Christian relationships built on a model of a jealous God to be inherently selfish, those who practice Vocational Apologetic seek to show instead a commitment to the other based on selflessness and sacrifice as the essence of love. This enactment of loving relationships flows, in Vocational Apologetics, directly from the message of the saving relationship that Jesus Christ established, a relationship based on sacrifice and service.

When apologetics is understood as a response to a particular line of challenge or attack, and the New Atheists in a way attack the nature of Christianity's relationship with the outside world, then healthy Christian relationships, with other Christians and especially with non-Christians, are themselves a form of apologetics. Relationships at their best are rooted in love, and love

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<sup>135</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 31.

becomes an important factor in counteracting Dawkins' variously-worded charges of hatred within Christianity. In Dawkins' argument, God is hate-filled toward group after group, thus Christians are hate-filled toward group after group to the point of becoming a detriment to society, and those who hate should be hated in return. Vocational Apologetics builds on the strengths of Enfleshed Apologetics, and would agree that Christians are to follow their God in their relationships recognizing the structure of relationships in which God has placed them. Christians practicing Vocational Apologetics also show by their actions of kindness and generous goodness toward those around them that the God they serve is likewise kind, generous, and good to an even greater extent.

To see how the church could formulate an ethical appeal to counteract the attacks of the New Atheists using Vocational Apologetics, consider a depiction given by Margaret Feinberg in Kinnaman and Lyons book, *UnChristian*. Dawkins depicts Christians and their God as hostile to outsiders and inward facing by using descriptors such as "jealous," "vindictive," "misogynistic, homophobic, racist," and the like.<sup>136</sup> By way of contrast, Feinberg paints a picture for the church of Vocational Apologetics put into practice in the present and future. Feinberg calls for Christians putting their faith into action (not using the term "vocation" specifically, but including some elements of vocation in her thought):

I would hope people would look at us and say, "Those Christians are the ones who run in when everyone else is running out. Those Christians are the ones who didn't give up on the crumbling inner cities. Those Christians are the ones who brought peace to Darfur. Those Christians are the ones who put an end to human trafficking. Those Christians are the ones who helped win the war on AIDS around the world. Those Christians are the ones who write those incredible lyrics, pen those unforgettable books, and create artwork that's mesmerizing. Those Christians are the ones who helped my mother when she got Alzheimer's. Those Christians are the ones

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<sup>136</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 31.

who were kind to me when I was new in the area. Those Christians are the ones that made me want to believe in God.”<sup>137</sup>

While Feinberg did not necessarily have Dawkins’ passage in mind when she wrote this, consider the points of comparison. Dawkins says Christians are racist, Feinberg calls for Christians to work in crumbling inner cities. Dawkins says Christians are homophobic, but Feinberg calls for Christians to work for the end of the AIDS epidemic. Dawkins cumulatively depicts Christians as closed in, Feinberg calls for Christians to be open in service to all.

In Chapter Three we saw how in times of plague, Romans fled from cities leaving their infected loved ones to die in the streets. The Christians, meanwhile, brought the plague-stricken pagan Romans in and provided basic nursing care, saving many lives.<sup>138</sup> Feinberg suggests the same move for the church today and into the future. Run in to the inner cities when the rest of society is rushing out. Provide nursing care and bring healing in light of the AIDS crisis. Give human care when no one else will. Feinberg’s description of the future of the church actually looks very much like the past practice of the church. Vocational Apologetics is the present and future implementation of past charitable practices described in Historical Goodness Apologetics. In doing so, Vocational Apologetics as Christian life lived in service to those around, driven by the needs of our various neighbors, serves to refute the emotionally-laden charges of the New Atheists with a competing account of faithfulness that has an emotional power all its own.

Feinberg’s paragraph not only can be seen to address the New Atheists’ emotional appeals on a congruent level of emotional appeal, but also begins to address the *ad hominem* attacks of

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<sup>137</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 233–34. A few pages later, Kinnaman and Lyons also include thoughts from Rick Warren about the importance of the church implementing what I am calling Vocational Apologetics. Warren writes, “My dream is that thirty years from now, the church will be known more by what it is *for* than what it is *against*. For some time now, the hands and feet of the body of Christ have been amputated, and we’ve been pretty much reduced to a big mouth. We talk far more than we do. It’s time to reattach the limbs and let the church be the church in the twenty-first century.” Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 245.

<sup>138</sup> Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 152.

the New Atheists against the moral standing of Christians. Because of the good Christians do in many walks of life (demonstrating an Enfleshed, Vocational Apologetic as for example Feinberg points out with her references to Christians providing health care, rebuilding inner cities, caring for new neighbors, and the like), others may desire to be associated with them. This directly counteracts the ethical appeal used by the New Atheists as described above, in which they present atheism. The ethical appeal given by Feinberg counteracts the varied rhetorical appeals of the New Atheists. It counteracts them not by mere contradiction, but by offering a vision of Christian presence that works toward the common good in the civil realm. This ethical appeal shows that the Christian is even willing to suffer personal misfortune for the sake of such service. Willingness to sacrifice on behalf of a cause is a strong marker of integrity, and forms a significant ethical appeal on the part of Christianity to claim a valid voice against the challenges of the New Atheists.

Work for the common good is both a function of “affirmation” and “antithesis” as described by Hunter. In a world marked by difference, Hunter’s term for pluralism, this approach finds common ground in sacrificial service, affirming those who seek to manifest care in such situations. Also, in a world marked by dissolution, Hunter’s word for deconstruction, such an approach begins to rebuild a missing and much-needed ethical basis for Christianity, rooted in sacrificial work towards the common good. The vocational approach to Enfleshed Apologetics does not require the alteration of Christian teaching or accommodation to the thought patterns of the secular world, but it gives open evidence of a different approach to life, one rooted in the embodiment of Christ’s love in the lives of his people.

The impact of a Vocational Apologetic approach that focuses on life and not just on words can be noted in no less a difficult case than Christopher Hitchens himself. In *god is not Great*,

Hitchens relates his experience in a rehabilitation center in northern Uganda that was established to help children who had been kidnapped and enslaved by Joseph Kony. Hitchens attempts to paint Kony as a fanatical Christian, describing him as “a passionate former altar boy who wanted to subject the area to the rule of the Ten Commandments. ... His was a fanatical preachment of Christianity.”<sup>139</sup> In this description, one sees the core components of the New Atheist argument against Christianity: its systematic sanctioning of violent behavior from youth (“altar boy”) that manifests itself in a radical act of political and social persecution based upon its Scriptural texts (“to subject the area to the rule of the Ten Commandments”).

Hitchens notes that the rehabilitation center he visited was run by a fundamentalist Christian organization, and he recounts an interview he held with a missionary who was trying to give medical and humanitarian care and counseling to victims who had suffered under Kony and his militia, the Lord’s Resistance Army. Hitchens asked the missionary which one—the missionary or Kony—was the truest believer? Hitchens justifies his question by claiming, “Any secular or state-run outfit could be doing what [the missionary] was doing—fitting prosthetic limbs and providing shelter and ‘counseling’—but in order to be Joseph Kony one had to have real faith.”<sup>140</sup> Again, one sees the core components of New Atheist reasoning: religion leads to radical acts of violence.

Hitchens recalls that he was surprised with the missionary’s answer, in which he did not dismiss the question outright. “It was true, he said, that Kony’s authority arose in part from his background in a priestly Christian family ... all that the missionary could do was to try and show people a different face of Christianity.”<sup>141</sup> Hitchens writes, “I was impressed with this man’s

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<sup>139</sup> Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 189.

<sup>140</sup> Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 189.

<sup>141</sup> Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 189.

frankness. There were some other defenses that he might have offered.”<sup>142</sup> And yet, the missionary’s simple, lifestyle-oriented answer, “All that a missionary could do was to try and show people a different face of Christianity”<sup>143</sup> elicits perhaps a slight bit of praise from Hitchens: “I was impressed with this man’s frankness.”<sup>144</sup> This statement is, by my reading, one of the strongest compliments Hitchens gives to religion anywhere in his book. The defense of Christianity that most moved Hitchens was not a rational one, but one that might best be described as aligning with a Vocational Apologetic approach, this time understanding vocation as the job of the doctor.

To be sure, other unbelieving doctors could have been, and have been, serving in ways that are outwardly quite similar to the doctor interviewed by Hitchens, and their service is also commendable. This is the realm of governing righteousness as expounded by Biermann, in which the outward works of both Christians and non-Christians are similar and equally admirable. Hitchens is happy to point out such examples as he does when he writes that although he has met some extremely dedicated relief workers who are believers, “as it happens the best ones I have met are secularists who were not trying to proselytize for any faith.”<sup>145</sup> However, while the outward effect may be the same, in this case doctors working to heal people in war-ravaged regions of the world, the Christian has the added motivation of serving as Christ has given himself for us, and demonstrating by his actions the good that Christianity does in the world. This is the realm of Biermann’s conforming righteousness in which Christian motivation guided by the call of the Holy Spirit to testify to the work of Christ is taken into account.

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<sup>142</sup> Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 189.

<sup>143</sup> Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 189.

<sup>144</sup> Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 189.

<sup>145</sup> Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 192.

Consider Hitchens' own example of the doctor in Uganda in light of Vocational Apologetics as a way of responding to the various New Atheist arguments presented. Harris alleges that faith drives people to blow themselves up on buses. A straight negation of that allegation would be the contrary argument that no, in fact religion causes people to be less violent and terrorism is much more likely a political or socio-economic tool than a religious expression as described by Harris.<sup>146</sup> The doctor in Uganda, on the other hand, in seeking to present a different face of Christianity, chooses not to argue with words but by his deeds of fitting prosthetic limbs to those who had been injured. He provides a living alternative to violence by working to undo the damage of destruction. In this way he works in a manner reflective of Hunter's description of antithesis rather than negation. When Harris makes an effort at an emotionally laden Scriptural argument regarding harsh punishment of children and frequent encouragement towards killing, the doctor described by Hitchens does not give a contrary Scriptural interpretation of passages that point toward violence,<sup>147</sup> instead he puts into practice in his life what he in fact actually believes based on his understanding of Scripture. While Dawkins describes Christianity as a religion of ethnic cleansers, the doctor doesn't pass the blame for ethnic cleansing elsewhere or deny the charge with an attempt at a rational explanation. Instead he sets about in his life to show forth love and care for all he can reach, including victims of crimes against humanity, whatever the root cause of that violence may be. In all cases, the reply

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<sup>146</sup> Karen Armstrong makes a convincing argument for this position. See Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (New York: Knopf, 2014). Armstrong has shown that religion—even fundamentalist versions of it—has been an overwhelmingly peaceful movement, even across religious lines. She argues that fundamentalism, be it Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, is not in itself a violent phenomenon. Only a tiny proportion of fundamentalists commit acts of terror; most are simply trying to live a devout life in a world that seems increasingly hostile to faith." Armstrong, *Fields of Blood*, 302–3. Armstrong is writing here specifically about fundamentalist movements, not the supposedly even more peaceful moderate movements, but about fundamentalism, and she shows that "only a *tiny* proportion of fundamentalists commit acts of terror." Armstrong, *Fields of Blood*, 302–3; emphasis added. See also McGrath, *Why God*, 67–68 and McGrath and McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, 82.

<sup>147</sup> As is done, for example, in Copan, *Is God* and in Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command*.

to the New Atheists is more powerful because it is not a merely a verbal denial of the charges, but it is an active antithesis of the New Atheist arguments.

All of the charges from the New Atheists described in the preceding paragraph could be refuted by means of traditional, rational apologetic responses. Such a response would be valid and helpful, but insufficient. Verbal and enfleshed forms of apologetics should be held together, rather than pulled apart. Traditional apologetics could show that the New Atheists are wrong in their attacks on Christianity. Historical Goodness Apologetics could show that the church in the past has been a force for the common good of society, contrary to the claims of the New Atheists. But only Enfleshed Apologetics lived by Christians in their vocations can build a positive current case for Christianity. Any of these approaches could be used productively to rebuff the arguments of the New Atheists. But used together, they form a case stronger than the individual sum of the parts.

### **Consideration of the Difference between A Written Description of Vocational Apologetics And A Lived Example of Vocational Apologetics**

Written apologetics, even writing about Vocational Apologetics as a form of Enfleshed Apologetics, can only ever be an example of recently enacted Historical Goodness Apologetics. Before an action can be transformed into writing, it is already by definition history. This is the great challenge of Enfleshed Apologetics. It can be described in writing, but it cannot be fulfilled in writing. True Enfleshed Apologetics must be experienced not in written form, but lived and enacted.

Vocational Apologetics calls for action within the contemporary Christian life. This active, insistent call to serve the neighbor in vocation is different from the form of apologetics I described above as Historical Goodness Apologetics. The emphasis of that form of apologetics



was to show that in the past, Christians had done wonderful things for the good and advancement of society. In *Enfleshed Apologetics*, shaped through Luther's understanding of vocation, the focus is not relegated to what Christians have done in the past. Instead, the call is for Christians to engage actively in public life through their vocational outlook in the present and work for the betterment of society in the here and now through their expanding spheres of influence. This is what sets what I am calling Vocational Apologetics apart from Historical Goodness Apologetics.

Vocational Apologetics calls Christians from the couch out into culture through living their vocations in concrete action. But it must be granted that this movement is humble and hard to discern to the eyes of the world. Christians are not necessarily called to serve the world in huge, eye-catching or headline-making ways. Instead, Christians are called to serve in simple, everyday ways that typically don't make news. Vocational Apologetics focuses more on the quiet, ordinary life of everyday Christians in the regular relationships around them expanding outward from there into the wider world. In some ways, Vocational Apologetics would seem to be a strange way to approach the New Atheists. After all, the New Atheists are anything but quiet and ordinary in their accusations against Christianity. They are brash, harsh, strident, and nearly violent in their denunciation of religion. The temptation for an apologist is to respond in kind. But the better approach than to respond in *kind* is to respond in *kindness*, with humility and grace by urging faithfulness in the ordinary lives of believers.

Luther's teaching focuses upon the blessings of vocation exercised by the lowest and most menial forms of service. Hein observes that in putting Luther's ideas of vocation into practice, "the saints of God ended up appearing very ordinary in the eyes of the world. [Luther's] depiction of faith faithfully going to work in the world presented the Christian with a regimen for

life that looks rather indistinguishable from would-be citizens of the Kingdom of the Devil.”<sup>148</sup> In fact, the work that Christians do in vocation is in many instances *exactly the same* as what non-Christians would do in the same circumstances. That is the point of Biermann’s first kind of righteousness, “governing righteousness,” and of Hunter’s call to “affirmation,” namely to validate that non-Christians also work for the common good. Thus, Vocational Apologetics will not be flashy or readily noticed. That does not, however, make it any less valid or valuable of an apologetic approach. Quite the contrary.

As mundane as it may seem, Vocational Apologetics stresses the ongoing nature of a Christian’s commitment to the world around. Living in vocation becomes the training ground for Christians to continue learning how to serve the needs of the neighbor. God locates his people in specific places among specific people, to develop a faithful presence with them. Christians live in the location where God has placed them. There, they grow deeper in their relationships with their families, their neighbors, their co-workers, the people in their communities and churches, living in their various vocations. Eventually they find themselves reaching out into the broader world as they continue to learn how best to serve and love those around them. The expectation is that the Vocational Apologetic engagement will deepen and strengthen over time. It is a learning and growing process. Hein explains:

Here our Lord calls us to express our faith in him and his righteousness by loving service within the social communities to which we already belong through the responsibilities that arise from our stations and offices within them. Our roles and commitments within these communities are the schools by which our Lord teaches us

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<sup>148</sup> Hein, “Luther on *Vocatio*,” 121. On a similar note, Karlfried Froelich, in his article, “Luther on Vocation,” argues, “One’s *Beruf* was not something special, but something down-to-earth, something exercised right *in* the world of everyday work and toil. It was the word for the Christian’s calling, wherever exercised, as an act of faith active in the love of God and neighbor.” Karlfried Froelich, “Luther on Vocation,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 13, no 2 (Summer 1999): 200.

how to live out our faith as his children. Here he would teach us how faith is to be acted out in life as loving service.<sup>149</sup>

Unfortunately, writing can only go so far, especially concerning Enfleshed Apologetics.

The ultimate value of Enfleshed Apologetics is in actual work for the common good accomplished through the variety of vocations given to each Christian. But, while words cannot be actions, one hopes they can spur readers on to actions. To that end, a few examples of Vocational Apologetics at work (even though only described in words) are in order.

Benne relates the story of a Christian woman living in her vocation as an art teacher, who had a problem student named Jimmy. He was dumped in her class one year for lack of anywhere else to put him. Jimmy did not turn in any homework all term, so the art teacher failed him. The next year, Jimmy asked the teacher if he could take art again, and the teacher refused. However, she did allow Jimmy to spend his study hall in her classroom, which coincided with her planning period. The teacher relates:

As time passed, Jimmy began to talk to me and to ask if there was anything he could do to help me. I knew enough about him to be hesitant to say yes, but then decided maybe he needed someone to trust him and to give him some responsibilities. I began by giving him small things to do and as the year progressed gave him more and more. Not once did he ever make a mistake or refuse to do what I asked him. He did his work and was a tremendous help to me.

The last week of school we always had an assembly program at which the seniors read their last will and testament. When Jimmy got up to read his, he looked straight at me and left me his undying friendship. Needless to say, I was shocked and know there must have been tears in my eyes. Here was a student I had refused to let take art but who in the past year had come to consider me his friend. That made all the heartache worthwhile and I've often wondered what happened to Jimmy and what he is doing now.<sup>150</sup>

Benne then points out that, "True to life, the story has no triumphant end with Jimmy going on to be president of IBM. But his chances of making a decent way in the world were enhanced by that

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<sup>149</sup> Hein, "Luther on *Vocatio*," 132.

<sup>150</sup> Benne, *Ordinary Saints*, 117.

ordinary saint.”<sup>151</sup> This shows an apologetic refutation through the example of a life lived in vocation—in this case the vocation of a teacher. Here is a form of Vocational Apologetics in which a disrespectful child is treated by a Christian believer with love and patience.

Benne’s anecdote also addresses the allegations of the New Atheists at the level of rhetorical attack the New Atheists utilize. Benne does not make an argument about the goodness of the Christian life so much as he provides an emotionally powerful example of the Christian life in action. That is to say, Benne here presents primarily an emotional appeal rather than a straight rational appeal. In responding to the New Atheists, this is a very helpful methodology.

We have seen in the previous example that Vocational Apologetics can make a difference with individual youth, but can it go farther? What if a group of committed Christians become involved together? Consider the following example from Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, in *How Now Shall We Live?* as they describe a project that took place in Montgomery, Alabama. Fifty Christian teenagers armed with hedge clippers and weed whackers descended on a neighborhood of mostly elderly people. Determined to tackle the overgrown bushes that provided hiding places for vandals, burglars, and muggers, the kids trimmed towering hedges, thinned low-hanging tree branches, and even replaced burned-out lights and installed peepholes in doors. The project was called Youth Cutting Down on Crime, and it was organized by Neighbors Who Care, a Prison Fellowship ministry that mobilizes churches to help crime victims.<sup>152</sup>

These activities took place because Christians encouraged other Christians to act on the vocation God had given them, in the location where God had placed them.<sup>153</sup> Colson and Pearcey

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<sup>151</sup> Benne, *Ordinary Saints*, 117.

<sup>152</sup> Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1999), 367.

<sup>153</sup> When projects such as this happen, Colson and Pearcey describe the effect that such involvement has on

argue that Christians “have a worldview capable of providing workable solutions to the problems of community life. Thus, we ought to be in the forefront, helping communities take charge of their own neighborhoods.”<sup>154</sup> They suggest that what is happening through the example they cite is nothing other than:

what Christians should be doing everywhere: converting chaos into the *tranquillitas ordinis*, one house at a time, one block at a time, one neighborhood at a time, one community at a time. . . . We begin with our personal lives and habits, move out from there to our families and schools and then into our communities—and from there into our society as a whole.<sup>155</sup>

Note that Colson and Pearcey follow the outline of the spheres of vocation even without using the term. They call for Christians living in vocation to start “one house at a time,” thus working within the family to begin the most fundamental, profound changes to society. They then work outward in the expanding ripples of located vocation by working on “one block,” “one neighborhood,” and “one community.” Their approach, parallel to the vocational methodology laid out above, does not overreach. It does not try to skip over the more humble local needs to try to engage in flashier, more publicity-driven global efforts. Thus it is not as likely to succumb to paralysis of doing nothing because a global effort is out of reach. This approach calls on Christians to make a difference in their everyday life through their vocational placements in the manner that is most needed locally.

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neighborhoods. They cite a research study that showed the importance of a strong sense of working for the good of the community (such as that instilled by churches) as a major factor in reducing crime rates. They document: “Researchers at Harvard University, the Kaiser Institute, and the University of Chicago joined together to survey 382 Chicago neighborhoods, all with different ethnic, racial, and economic characteristics. They could find no common thread in traditional demographics. In some minority communities crime was high, while in others it was low. The same was true of poverty. The only common pattern researchers found was that rates of violence were lower in areas that had a strong sense of community values and a willingness to impose those values on the public space—for example, where neighbors felt free to step in and discipline kids who skip school or scribble graffiti on the walls or hang out on the streets. In other words, even disadvantaged communities can overcome adverse conditions if they have common values and are willing to enforce them especially among the young.” Colson and Pearcey, *How Now*, 368. The study cited is by Robert J. Sampson, “Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy,” *Science* 277, no. 5328 (August 15, 1997): 918.

<sup>154</sup> Colson and Pearcey, *How Now*, 369.

<sup>155</sup> Colson and Pearcey, *How Now*, 371; emphasis original.

This approach does not just say, “Christians clean up neighborhoods and reduce crime.” Instead, a Vocational Apologetic approach relies on the communicative value of actions in addition to words. Christians do not just say that the implementation of their faith is for the good and up-building of society; they actually do it and lead the way. They work to establish the *tranquillitas ordinis*, which is in every case the antithesis of the violent depictions provided by the New Atheists. In an innermost circle of vocation, that of the family, establishment of the *tranquillitas ordinis* is the antithesis of violence in the home as alleged by Harris. In an outwardly expanding circle of community, the establishment of the *tranquillitas ordinis* is the antithesis of city-wide violence such as a bus bombing described with emotional flourish in the opening pages of *The End of Faith*. Finally, in the broadest circle of vocation, reaching out into society as a whole, seeking to establish the *tranquillitas ordinis* is the antithesis of social violence like genocide as described by Dawkins, accomplished by establishing tranquility and trust in place of race-based mistrust, anger, and hatred. In the end, this builds trust in the Christian message, because actions and words speak loudest when they work in concert with each other.

When words become actions, when writing Historical Apologetics of the near-recent past truly becomes Vocational Apologetic in action, the results can at times be plain to see—even in the effect it can have on activist atheists. George Yancey, in his book *Hostile Environment*, tells of the example of Patrick Greene, a committed atheist from Ontario, California. Greene was following courses of action much in line with the New Atheist approach, including protesting the display of nativity scenes at Christmastime. However, Greene was diagnosed with a detached retina that could eventually cause him to become blind. Local Christians, who were by extension Greene’s Christian neighbors, heard about his trouble and gave Greene donations to help with his

medical care. As a result of this act of Christian love and kindness shown by his community neighbors, Greene for a time converted to Christianity. He has since left the church and renounced his conversion, but as of the time Yancey wrote, he had not returned to his hostile activism against Christianity.<sup>156</sup> Actions and words had worked together. That is the essence of Enfleshed Apologetics.

### **Conclusion**

These thoughts and examples considered above from varied sources all serve as an effort to direct the Christian response to the New Atheists away from only the realm of rational argumentation and evidence and into the realm of enactment in life. The harshest accusations of the New Atheists are not theoretical or intellectual—that Christianity is wrong on certain points of doctrine—but instead the charges are practical and lifestyle-oriented, but that Christianity is in fact and in life a force for evil in culture. The way to counteract these criticisms of Christianity is not primarily in the realm of traditional apologetics, but by putting faith into practice through the directed, tangible framework of vocation as understood by Martin Luther.

An apologetic focus on vocation and the humble service Christians render to the world is appropriate as a means of countering the claims of the New Atheists, even though it may not be exciting or news-worthy. The congruity of the arguments made by the New Atheists and the response given in Vocational Apologetics can be hard to see, since the New Atheists shout their messages of displeasure toward Christianity from every media microphone they can access, while Christians set about simply serving those around them in need. But while the volume between Vocational Apologetics and the vocalizations of the New Atheists is nowhere near compatible, the rebuttal provided by vocational service to the New Atheist charge that

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<sup>156</sup> Yancey, *Hostile Environment*, 112.

Christianity is wicked is a resounding one indeed.

It also is exactly what is sought by younger generations of Christians themselves. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons document this in their book *UnChristian*.<sup>157</sup> In the final chapter of the book, Kinnaman and Lyons set the stage for transforming the negative image of the church by means of changing the church's focus toward service. They write, "A young generation of outsiders is raising significant criticism of the Christian faith and its people. Knowing the problem and diagnosing the hostility are just the start. How will we respond? What will we do to address the unChristian perception of our faith?"<sup>158</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons present what they call a straightforward but challenging idea: "We have to be defined by our service and sacrifice, by lives that exude humility and grace. If young outsiders say they can't see Jesus in our lives, we have to solve our 'hidden Jesus' problem."<sup>159</sup>

While they do not use the term, what Kinnaman and Lyons describe is readily compatible with Luther's expansive view of vocation. Later in the chapter, they note the benefit of a faith that is lived, to use our framework, within Luther's ideas of vocation:

Mosaics and Busters, perhaps as much as any American generation before them, need to experience faith that is expressed toward others. They want to do more than learn *about* their faith; they want to *live* it. We interview many young people who have fallen away from faith because it was never more than a mere allegiance to life principles, not a deep inner connection to a living God who wants his people to give themselves away in sacrifice and service.

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<sup>157</sup> I argued above that in his book, *You Lost Me*, (which Kinnaman co-authored with Aly Hawkins) Kinnaman functions with a definition of "vocation" that incorrectly links this term exclusively with a profession—that is, the job that is considered a vocation does not have to be a job within church work (this is the narrow, restrictive concept they are writing against), but vocation is still tied exclusively to a job. Luther's broader understanding of vocation that includes the family structure and wider society in addition to the economic realm is not in view for Kinnaman and Hawkins in *You Lost Me*. However, in Kinnaman's earlier book coauthored with Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian*, a broader application of vocation is in view—but the term "vocation" itself is not generally used. Thus, while the term is not used, *UnChristian* may actually be a more helpful consideration of the topic of vocation, as it is broader in its outlook.

<sup>158</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 205.

<sup>159</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 206.



And so, to move from unChristian to Christian, young people need to see Christianity rejecting self-preservation and insularity and embracing true concern and compassion for others.<sup>160</sup>

Kinnaman and Lyons argue that:

Currently Christianity is known for being *unlike* Jesus; one of the best ways to shift that perception would be to esteem and serve outsiders. This means being compassionate, soft-hearted, and kind to people who are different from us, even hostile toward us. In this book's afterword, many leaders describe this element, saying that our future reputation as Christians is intricately connected to our passion for justice, service, and sacrifice.<sup>161</sup>

Preceding this call to action by nearly 500 years, Martin Luther, in his thought on vocation, calls for Christians to serve others with God's love in the specific and concrete locations where God has placed them. This solid call to serve provides ample opportunity for Christians—living and serving in vocation—to show the error of the New Atheist charge that Christianity is a force for evil in the world. As a response to the criticism of the New Atheists, this is an apologetic undertaking. As it is rooted in Luther's understanding of the spheres that comprise Christian vocation, it is a vocational approach. Thus, Vocational Apologetics can be a very direct and appropriate means for the church to respond to the vitriolic attacks of the New Atheists, and as such it should be incorporated into the church's overall apologetic framework.

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<sup>160</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 214–15; emphasis original.

<sup>161</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 212–13; emphasis original.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

In apologetics, the final chapter is never really written, at least not conclusively so. People continue to ask new questions or pose new challenges to the Christian faith, and often old challenges and questions are posed in new ways. As long as people pose challenges to the Christian faith, Christians need to find appropriate and creative apologetic responses. At times the answers to old questions are helpful. Still today, apologetic answers arising out of the Enlightenment can be of assistance in supporting the truth claims of Christianity when the questions point in that direction. At times, however, new challenges require new responses. The emotional and ethical charges of the New Atheists need to be answered using a rhetorically similar approach, which is the role of an Embodied Apologetic shaped by Luther's teaching on vocation. Whether the answers are tried and true or new, the responses given through apologetics need to meet the specific challenge presented, rather than just providing a general restatement of apologetic answers that have found success in the past. Apologetics needs to be seen as a responsive discipline. That is why apologetics can never really have a definitive final chapter. New and different challenges will continue to require new and different defenses.

A number of apologists, who recognize that apologetics is a responsive discipline and needs to adapt based on changing challenges, have written of a future for the field of apologetics that looks somewhat different from the present. Sean McDowell—the son of Josh McDowell, the prominent apologist of the late-modern era—writes:

To say that apologetics is critical for ministry today is not to say that we just continue business as usual. That would be foolish. Our world is changing, and it is changing

*rapidly*. . . . We have certainly made mistakes in the way we have defended our beliefs in the past . . . but this hardly means we should abandon apologetics altogether. Rather, we ought to learn from the past and adjust accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, David Wilkinson argues that Christian apologetics should adopt a form that is “not merely intellectual confrontation or defense, but which is personal and holistic and which takes contemporary culture seriously. The truth of the message is not diluted, but the character and attitude of the apologist is as important as the arguments he or she deploys.”<sup>2</sup> Wilkinson writes that apologetics “is an art to be developed rather than a science to be understood.”<sup>3</sup> He notes that “Often our western theological tradition has narrowed the practice of apologetics, making it largely irrelevant to contemporary mission.”<sup>4</sup> Wilkinson summarizes his view of apologetics in the twenty-first century by saying, “Apologetics therefore needs to reflect a diversity of approaches. It must reflect the diversity of different ways of knowing, and the importance of role models and mentoring . . . the medium needs to reflect the message in twenty-first century apologetics.”<sup>5</sup> One way that our culture is changing is that the style and form of attacks on Christianity are broadening. Criticisms of Christianity are no longer exclusively or predominantly rational in nature. Lifestyle challenges are just as prominent, or more prominent under the influence of the New Atheists. Since the criticisms of Christianity are becoming more diverse, Wilkinson’s call for a diversity of apologetic approaches is a very valid one. This call can be answered, in part, by an Enfleshed or Vocational apologetic, rooted in Luther’s teaching, distinguishing two and three kinds of righteousness.

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<sup>1</sup> Sean McDowell, *Apologetics for a New Generation* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2009), 17–18; emphasis original.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkinson, “Art of Apologetics,” 5.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkinson, “Art of Apologetics,” 5.

<sup>4</sup> Wilkinson, “Art of Apologetics,” 5.

<sup>5</sup> Wilkinson, “Art of Apologetics,” 15.

The challenges that have been brought forward by the New Atheists tend to go in a different direction than apologists have been accustomed to defending. For the New Atheists, questions about the existence of God fade from prominence and charges regarding the nature of God as unjust and immoral, with related questions about the goodness of Christians and their benefit to society, come to the fore. For this reason, the approach taken in the apologetic task needs to change as well. Apologetic responses that defend traditional Christian teachings or truth claims address the accusations of the New Atheists only secondarily or indirectly. Therefore, in order to address the criticisms raised by the New Atheists more directly, the church needs to recognize that how Christians live in their daily spheres of vocation as recognized by Luther is also important as a form of apologetics.

This is, in part, what is driving the calls we have seen in McDowell and Wilkinson for a broadening of the understanding of the apologetic task. As apologetics must shift from answering the question “Does God exist” to answering the questions, “If God does exist, is he good?” or even “Are Christians good, or are they a force for hate, division, strife, and violence?” the form of the answers must shift responsively. A focus on the goodness of Christianity as it is applied in life can become a valid apologetic approach. Throughout this dissertation I have been considering the challenges posed to Christianity from our current culture, largely using the writings of the New Atheists as representative samples of the broader culture. I have argued that the New Atheists’ strongest challenges to Christianity come in the area of lifestyle rather than doctrine, and thus a lifestyle-oriented approach is needed as a response. This led to a consideration of Enfleshed Apologetics in general, and specifically a form of apologetics shaped by Luther’s views on Christian vocation, which I have been calling Vocational Apologetics.

While a Vocational Apologetic view of the Christian life is certainly good and godly in its

own right, the underlying apologetic question up to this point could be understood as, “Is this actually a form of apologetics?” Few would object to the call for Christians to be pointed out into the world to serve as Christ has served us. The call to serve is not in question. The question is, “Does this qualify as apologetics?” I will provide two brief concluding affirmative answers.

First, the question about whether the Christian life experienced in the spheres of vocation is actually apologetic is at heart a definitional question. If apologetics is defined as a rational endeavor, as it often has been in the recent centuries, then lifestyle is out of bounds as an apologetic undertaking. However, if the definition of apologetics is more broadly understood as “a defense in the area of attack” and if the area of attack is the Christian life as I have shown it to be with the New Atheists, then an Enfleshed Apologetic focusing on the Christian life in vocation is indeed an apologetic undertaking.

Second, while Vocational Apologetics does not lend itself to a more traditional, rational apologetic approach, it does fit very well in an understanding of apologetics in which the definition of the task is not limited to reason alone, and therefore can become one component in the overall sample of apologetic methods available for use. The life of the Christian, reflective of God’s love for us, becomes the apologetic method needed when the criticism of Christianity is lifestyle-based, and thus becomes one component of an overall apologetic approach. Enfleshed or Vocational Apologetics fits well into Cumulative Case Apologetics.

Cumulative Case Apologetics is not beholden to any one exclusive methodology, but recognizes the validity of a diverse variety of apologetic methods to respond to the diverse challenges presented to the Christian faith. Even such seemingly opposite approaches as Presuppositionalism and Evidentialism can both find a place in Cumulative Case Apologetics, with each being able to be used appropriately for answering different challenges to Christianity.

If both Presuppositionalism and Evidentialism can be included in Cumulative Case Apologetics, then both traditional apologetic methodologies and newer apologetic approaches that point to the vocational nature of the Christian life can find a place together under the umbrella of Cumulative Case Apologetics. Vocational Apologetics, then, which emphasizes emotional and ethical rhetorical appeals, finds a place alongside more commonly used and understood methodologies.

Is Vocational Apologetics really a form of apologetics to be considered under the overarching program of Cumulative Case Apologetics? Without using the specific terms, but echoing the concepts, two prominent apologists answer in the affirmative.

William Lane Craig is broadly regarded as a leading apologist and his most prominent book is *Reasonable Faith*. He is known for his *kalām* cosmological argument, and his definition of apologetics tends to side with more traditional, rationally driven understandings. He writes that “Apologetics is primarily a theoretical discipline, though it has practical application. That is to say, apologetics is that branch of theology that seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”<sup>6</sup> With such credentials, including a book called *Reasonable Faith*, a significant contribution to the rational apologetic of the cosmological proofs, and a reason-based definition, Craig is certainly not an outside or fringe voice when it comes to understanding what comprises the apologetic undertaking. Yet at the end of his book *Reasonable Faith*, he turns to the Christian life as a form of apologetics. Granted, he does not use the terms Enfleshed or Vocational Apologetics, but he devotes the last chapter of his book to the Christian life, under the title of “The Ultimate Apologetic.” There he writes:

Now I want to share with you what I believe to be the most effective and practical apologetic for the Christian faith that I know of. This apologetic will help you to win more persons to Christ than all other arguments in your apologetic arsenal put together.

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<sup>6</sup> Craig, *Apologetics*, xi.

This ultimate apologetic involves two relationships: your relationship with God and your relationship with others.<sup>7</sup>

What will be the final result when these two relationships are strong and close? There will be a unity and warmth among Christians. . . . And what will be the result of this unity through love? . . . Our love is a sign to all people that we are [Jesus'] disciples; but even more than that, our love and unity are living proof to the world that God the Father has sent his Son Jesus Christ and that the Father loves people even as he loves Jesus. When people see this—our love for one another and our unity through love—then they will in turn be drawn to Christ and will respond to the gospel's offer of salvation. More often than not, it is who you *are* rather than what you *say* that will bring an unbeliever to Christ.

This, then, is the ultimate apologetic. For the ultimate apologetic is—your life.<sup>8</sup>

If the author of *Reasonable Faith* makes the case that the Christian life itself is the ultimate apologetic methodology, then Vocational Apologetics as one form of an overall Cumulative Case approach is certainly on solid ground as a valid apologetic undertaking.

The second prominent apologist to recognize the importance of a good and attractive Christian life to the overall apologetic task is Blaise Pascal. While writing in the 1600s, Pascal's themes seem startlingly reminiscent of the present time. He writes, "Men despise Religion. They hate it and fear to find it true. To cure this, I must begin by showing that Religion is not contrary to reason—is venerable—inspire respect for it; next, render it attractive; make good men wish it were true, and then show that it *is* true."<sup>9</sup>

Without referencing it specifically, Pascal points to the importance of the Christian life. A good Christian life, well-lived in the spheres of vocation, does much to demonstrate the attractiveness of the faith. This in itself will be a tremendous help to people who start from a

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<sup>7</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton: Good News, 2008), 405.

<sup>8</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 407; emphasis original.

<sup>9</sup> Numbering of Pascal's *Pensées* is challenging as different editors use different arrangements. The translation here places it as *Pensée* 3 in Blaise Pascal and H. F. Stewart, *Pascal's Pensées. With an English Translation, Brief Notes and Introduction* (New York: Pantheon, 1950), 3; emphasis original. Alternatively, see *Pensée* 187 in Blaise Pascal, W. F. Trotter, and Thomas M'Crie, *Pensées; The Provincial Letters* (New York: Modern Library, 1941), 64.

position of hating religion and fearing it. Interestingly, Pascal holds together the rational, emotional, and ethical rhetorical appeals in this famous portion of the *Pensées*. Due to his time, he places the rational appeal first and foremost. However, he recognizes that the rational appeal alone will not sway those who are firmly opposed to Christianity to the point of despising it, hating it, and fearing it. In such cases, people also need to be shown the beauty of the faith<sup>10</sup> and the attractive nature of the Christian life. This effort correlates most closely with the ethical and emotional appeals, rather than the rational appeal. Granted, Pascal placed the position of the rational appeal in his presentation as chronologically first, but he did not discount the Christian life as a form of the emotional and ethical appeals.

This brings us back to the nature of the rhetorical appeals as outlined by Aristotle, and their application for apologetic uses. In general, Vocational Apologetics is a valid and legitimate form of apologetics, functioning as one of several available approaches to be applied as needed based on a careful responsiveness to the exact challenges presented within a Cumulative Case Apologetic methodology. In particular, Vocational Apologetics can help significantly to rebuild the ethical standing of Christianity in a culture where its moral authority has been battered by the attacks of the New Atheists. In the current situation of Western Christianity, a concentrated focus on an ethical rhetorical appeal is much needed. Aristotle noted, “it adds much to an orator’s influence that his own character should look right.”<sup>11</sup> Currently, the character of Christians does not at all “look right,” but instead appears to be immoral and dangerous. Thus, the message of Christianity is dismissed because the speaker is not trusted or respected.

This shows the extreme importance of the ethical rhetorical appeal. As Herrick pointed out

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<sup>10</sup> A similar approach was taken by François-René Chateaubriand, who lived about a century after Pascal. See François-René Chateaubriand, and Charles I. White, *The Genius of Christianity: Or, the Spirit and Beauty of the Christian Religion* (New York: Fertig, 1976).

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.1. Aristotle, Roberts, Bywater, and Solmsen, *Aristotle’s Rhetoric and Poetics*, 90.



in *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*:

Aristotle apparently held that of the three artistic proofs—logos, pathos, and ethos—this last one, ethos, potentially was the most persuasive. When people are convinced that a speaker is knowledgeable, trustworthy, and has their best interests at heart, they likely will accept as true what the speaker has to say.<sup>12</sup>

If a speaker is seen as unreliable or immoral, then whatever the speaker says—even if it is factually accurate and logically sound—could possibly be dismissed. If, however, the speaker is seen as reputable and trustworthy, then the rational content of the speaker’s message is more likely to be accepted even if the logic is faulty or even perhaps if it is factually in error. That is the power of the ethical rhetorical appeal. If a speaker fails at establishing a strong ethical appeal, then the reception of the speaker’s message could be in jeopardy, regardless of the quality and rational legitimacy of the message itself.

This situation, I would argue, is the current standing in the field of apologetics. For centuries, Christian apologists have developed logically sound, factually-based, rational arguments in defense of the existence of God and various points of doctrine and historical accuracy for the Christian faith. These rational arguments worked well in a culture with two basic tenets: first, under the influence of the Enlightenment, reason was seen as a supreme authority; and second, the moral authority of the church was not questioned, at least not to the point of becoming an ethical detriment to the message it presented. The rational, logical, factually driven apologetic answers set forward were generally well-received because their grounding in reason was respected, and the ethical standing of Christianity allowed these apologetic answers to be heard.

The problem is that neither of these basic tenets continues to hold in today’s culture. The cultural sway of unaided reason and objective truth-claims has receded as the influences of

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<sup>12</sup> Herrick, *History and Theory*, 88.

Rationalism and the Enlightenment have weakened under the force of postmodernism. For this reason, the logical, rational apologetic arguments deployed by Christian apologists would likely receive a lukewarm-at-best reception from many challengers under even the best of circumstances.

But we do not face the best of circumstances. The New Atheists have made an effective two-pronged challenge to Christianity. First, they have employed a successful ethical appeal of their own, raising their ethical standing through various appeals: to their carefully cultivated personas as scholars and scientists; to having their audiences identify with them through presenting morally recognizable dilemmas in such a way that the hearers or readers would group themselves with the New Atheists rather than with people of faith; to the moral and ethical superiority of an atheistic lifestyle as opposed to a lifestyle based on Christian morality. They have paired this ethical appeal in favor of atheism with strong emotional appeals, especially a perceived link between religion and violence, and complemented these ethical and emotional rhetorical appeals with *ad hominem* attacks against the moral standing of people of faith in general and Christianity in particular.

This leads to a significant change in balance in the way a message is heard in the culture. Whereas previously the rational apologetic messages of Christianity were likely to be received because of the ethical appeal inherent in the church's moral authority, and atheist arguments were likely to be dismissed because atheists were seen as untrustworthy,<sup>13</sup> now the places have been reversed.<sup>14</sup> Due to a general disrespect for the moral authority of Christianity, its rational

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<sup>13</sup> Williamson and Yancey note that until recently, atheists were seen as the least trustworthy group identified in a list including Catholics, Christian fundamentalists, Mormons, Muslims, and members of the homosexual community. Williamson and Yancey, *There Is No God*, 6. Peterson likewise notes, "Historically, atheism and immorality have often been equated. ... [T]he atheist has no external compulsion requiring the keeping of one's word if it proves inconvenient." Peterson, "Ethics, Out-Group Altruism," 159.

<sup>14</sup> Peterson points out, "It is a shared theme of the new atheism that this argument is not only wrong, but that

apologetic arguments are likely to be dismissed, even though they are solid. Due to the very effective ethical appeal employed by the New Atheists, their rational arguments are likely to be accepted, even if they are weak or nearly non-existent. This points to the need for Christianity to rebuild its ethical appeal in light of the New Atheist attacks against the moral goodness of the Christian life. Enfleshed Apologetics, shaped through Luther's understanding of vocation, does exactly that. As Christians live in their spheres of vocation, where God has placed them to be his hands to care for the needy and his arms to carry the weak, they humbly shore up the church's ethical appeal one act, one life at a time. This is not accomplished on a flashy, news-making level, but on a deeply personal but powerful level where the most lasting impact can be made.

While it seems clear that the church needs to work to rebuild its moral standing in culture through an intentional use of the ethical rhetorical appeal, it is important to note that for Aristotle, rhetorical appeals were used together in an overall argument. All three rhetorical appeals would lead toward a comprehensive presentation. Ethical and rational rhetorical appeals were not seen as separated or independent from each other (or from the emotional appeal, for that matter), but the one opened the door to the other. Certainly, the church needs to rebuild a strong ethical appeal, and doing so is a valid form of apologetics in itself. However, a strong ethical rhetorical appeal is not to be separated from an equally strong rational appeal applied when needed. Thus, an Enfleshed Apologetic approach, while being a valid form of apologetics as part of a Cumulative Case, can at times also serve an important role to open ears to complementary (not competing) rational appeals of Christianity when and as they are needed.

The need for the church to rebuild its ethical appeal in order to support and further its rational appeal has been recognized by others in the field of apologetics, even if they have not

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it should be turned on its head. The new atheists almost uniformly claim that it is modern atheists who hold the moral high ground, and that it is the practitioners of the world's religions that are immoral, both in historical practice and in fundamental commitment." Peterson, "Ethics, Out-Group Altruism," 159.

used the same terminology. Philip Kenneson points to the need for the church to redevelop its ethical appeal in our current culture, while also recognizing the validity and necessity of a strong rational rhetorical appeal. He says that without a consistent and visible Christian life on the part of the apologist, the church's message is not heard. He writes:

To their credit, evangelicals, perhaps more than anyone, are poised to give answers; the problem is that no one is *asking*. Unless we are content to answer questions no one is posing, it seems to me the most urgent apologetic task of the church today is to live in the world in such a way that the world is driven to ask us about the hope we have. Until that happens, I fear all the theories in the world about apologetics are in vain, and the truth we *say* we bear witness to will be heard as falsehood.<sup>15</sup>

In a similar manner, Paul Louis Metzger also begins to recognize the need for the church to rebuild its ethical appeal in order to regain a hearing for its message. He sees the Christian life as a part of the relational-incarnational apologetic approach as central. He writes, "Our lives as God's people must create the space for our views to be heard."<sup>16</sup> He further elaborates, "our words must be accompanied, undergirded, and energized by lives lived with the people with whom we are sharing. Christ's church as a lived and living community of holistic care that suffers for others and even at the hands of others, while seeking to do them good, is one of the greatest testimonies to the truthfulness and power of the Gospel."<sup>17</sup>

David Wheeler likewise points to the need for the church to rebuild its ethical appeal as a way to open ears to hear the church's rational appeals in contemporary culture. He writes, "In the end, Christians must understand that an unbelieving world will not believe what we say about

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<sup>15</sup> Kenneson, "There's No Such Thing," 169; emphasis original. In another essay in the same larger work, James Sire expresses the fear that the Christian message will "be ignored unless it is placed in the context of a Christian's personal story. The story of the big picture can best be told through a narrative of the little picture—the intimate picture of someone's personal life." James Sire, "On Being A Fool for Christ and an Idiot for Nobody: Logocentricity and Postmodernity," in Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics*, 113.

<sup>16</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 59.

<sup>17</sup> Metzger, *Connecting Christ*, 59.

Christ until they see Christ in us. In short, this is incarnational apologetics at its best.”<sup>18</sup> As these few brief illustrations show, one of the great opportunities for Vocational Apologetics is to begin to rebuild the ethical standing of Christianity. The life of the Christian itself becomes the ethical rhetorical appeal, and thus becomes the heart of the needed apologetic task. While Vocational Apologetics is a functioning apologetic in itself and not merely a precursor to what others might argue should truly be understood as apologetics, it is also plain that without Vocational Apologetics to rebuild the ethical standing of Christianity, a more traditional, rationally-driven apologetic message may not be given the honor of being heard outside the church.

One way to fill this need for the church to rebuild its ethical standing in society is for Christians to demonstrate the goodness rather than evil of their faith. They can show the benefit rather than detriment of the Christian life to society by actually living a life that benefits society through the spheres of Christian vocation. God has placed Christians in families, in communities, in occupations, in churches, and in various other relationships where they have many opportunities not just to talk about what is right, but actually to do it. In these daily, humble, often unnoticed outpourings of goodness enacted by his followers, God works to preserve and sustain his creation. Christians are seen as a good for society, and its message is heard as a blessing, because Christians demonstrate themselves to be, in fact, good.

Of course, the recognition that the Christian life well-lived can serve to establish trust and reputability on behalf of God and his church is not new to apologetics. The Bible gives exhortations of the same nature, including from Jesus Christ himself. “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father

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<sup>18</sup> Wheeler, “Apologetics, Incarnational,” 53. A later article in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics*, contributed by Ergun Caner, describes “New Forms of Apologetics” and defines incarnational apologetics as “an ethically driven form of apologetics popular among many younger Christians. It is a servant form of ‘earning a hearing’ by offering a servant model of Christianity.” Caner, “Apologetics, Types Of,” 67. It is helpful to see that Caner recognizes the need for apologists to “earn a hearing.”

who is in heaven.”<sup>19</sup> When Timothy faced a weakness of ethical rhetorical appeal due to his young age, Paul encouraged, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”<sup>20</sup> Peter also, while not using the terminology of an ethical rhetorical appeal, notes the importance of a good life in the face of accusations to the contrary, and that an honorable lifestyle will silence attacks against Christianity. He writes:

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.<sup>21</sup>

Not only recent apologetic developments, but also Scripture call for a well-lived life on the part of Christians to serve as a component of God's message to the world.

Even with a strong Vocational Apologetics, however, it is not a given that the culture, or at least broad swaths of the culture, will be significantly swayed. In his book, *Hostile Environment*, George Yancey has laid out the challenges that Christians face. He notes that in his experience, he has found that working with people with racial bias is easier than working with people with a strong anti-Christian bias, which he calls Christianophobia. Yancey notes that regarding racial differences people want to find agreement, but those angry at Christians take steps to make conciliatory communication almost impossible. Yancey therefore has little hope for compromise with those who hate Christians.<sup>22</sup> Yancey acknowledges that Christians do need to strive to live as Christians, but that alone will not eliminate anti-Christian hatred. He argues that Christians

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<sup>19</sup> Mt 5:16 (ESV).

<sup>20</sup> 1 Tm 4:12 (ESV).

<sup>21</sup> 1 Pt 2:12–16 (ESV).

<sup>22</sup> Yancey, *Hostile Environment*, 82–84.

need to do more than live right,<sup>23</sup> which is an acknowledgement that rhetorical appeals need to work together to create a comprehensive overall presentation. While Yancey argues that those with Christianophobia will likely not adopt a kinder view of Christians even if they are treated kindly by Christians, he takes a different tack to arrive at basically the same place. Yancey argues that Christians must do what is right simply because it is right. If living a good Christian life brings greater acceptance of Christianity and Christians, that is an added bonus in Yancey's view.<sup>24</sup>

It is important to note, however, that the intended recipient of Vocational Apologetics is not necessarily the hard-core atheist or the person with severe Christianophobia. Rather, Vocational Apologetics works on a much more local scale, in the more intimate spheres of vocational influence where a Christian is already active. Will a Vocational Apologetic approach convince Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, or Daniel Dennett of the goodness of Christianity? Almost certainly not.<sup>25</sup> Will it change the views of people with Christianophobia about the nature of Christianity? Yancey finds this to be unlikely, and thus he advocates the Christian life as a good end to itself rather than an apologetic undertaking. However, can a Vocational Apologetic approach respond to the questions about Christianity raised by a non-Christian neighbor who has been influenced to a degree by those with Christianophobia, or who is familiar with the arguments of the New Atheists, or who is a Christian but has been rattled by the claims of the

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<sup>23</sup> Yancey, *Hostile Environment*, 117.

<sup>24</sup> Yancey, *Hostile Environment*, 142.

<sup>25</sup> However, even there the impact of a good Christian life cannot be entirely discounted. Even strong atheists (at times) are forced to acknowledge the good done through religions and by people of faith. Daniel Dennett grudgingly admits that “religions do most of the heavy lifting in large parts of America” when it comes to charity (although he attributes that to his idea that people are by nature good and generous—“people really do want to help others”—and that if secular organizations would step up and compete with churches for charity dollars, they would become just as prominent). Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 287. On a less nuanced note, Michael Shermer—the president of the Skeptics Society—writes, “However, for every one of these grand tragedies [caused by religion] there are ten thousand acts of personal kindness and social good that go unreported.” Michael Shermer, *How We Believe* (New York: Freeman, 2000), 71.

New Atheists? I think this is where the apologetic strength of a vocational approach has real merit and possibility. As has been pointed out through the consideration of Luther's spheres of vocation, the closer one is to the center of the of Vocational Apologetic influence, the more likely one is to see the defense of Christianity thus lived as beneficial.

Yancey seems to arrive a similar position, as he does advocate that Christians should strive to develop friendships with those with Christianophobia to reduce the animosity felt toward Christians.<sup>26</sup> While he is skeptical of the ability to sway those with Christianophobia, he has occasionally seen evidence that kindness can moderate some strong emotional reactions against Christianity.<sup>27</sup> Such signs are encouraging.<sup>28</sup> He writes:

Willingness to love those who hate us is of paramount importance (Matthew 5:44). We likely have friends, family members, coworkers and other in our lives with Christianophobia. Though we may not become close friends, we can still care about them. If we get an opportunity, we must act in ways that benefit them, whether by providing resources, advice on issues they will listen to us on, or time and attention, or by any other way we might serve them. Such service may help them to rethink their anti-Christian stereotypes and prejudices though this should not be the main reason for serving them.<sup>29</sup>

While Yancey again stresses that any outcome or apologetic effort must not be the main reason for living a Christian life in vocation, he does recognize that within a Christian's circles of influence a degree of change can at times be affected. Even without specific reference to a Christian living in vocation, Yancey references family members, co-workers, and friends, who constitute the three closest spheres of influence in Vocational Apologetics: family, work, and public life.

While not thinking in apologetic terms, Einar Billing—a Lutheran theologian writing about

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<sup>26</sup> Yancey, *Hostile Environment*, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Yancey, *Hostile Environment*, 152.

<sup>28</sup> Yancey, *Hostile Environment*, 152–53.

<sup>29</sup> Yancey, *Hostile Environment*, 153.



Luther's thoughts on vocation—noted:

I think each one of us knows some such humble Lutheran Christian who for us has been a personal gospel. Those who saw him from a distance did not notice it, but they who stood closer to him felt it in proportion to their intimacy with him, and daily they praised God for this His gospel.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the New Atheists themselves stand too far away from humble Christians living in vocation to see the love of Christ lived out in everyday life. But what may not be noticed by the New Atheists themselves is seen and recognized with rejoicing by the Christian's neighbor. The Christian does not need to travel to the far-flung locations of the New Atheists themselves. This is likely not the vocation of most Christians. However, they *are* called to model Christ's love and service for those around them, in the concrete spheres of vocational influence where God has already placed them. In these areas where Christians already have a degree of influence in their families, careers, communities, churches, and the like, they can also have a positive apologetic influence on a local scale. And perhaps in God's plan of vocation, that is exactly the way it is supposed to be.

At various points I have cited research regarding the status of views of Christianity within culture. Kinnaman and his co-authors, while realistic about the dire state of the church's reputation in culture, advocate a strong emphasis on the Christian life as a helpful way forward.

Kinnaman and Lyons write:

Young people said they formed their views of Christians based on conversations with others, often with Christians. This is significant because not only does it mean we have a great deal of responsibility in developing many of the perceptions that people hold, but it also suggests the possibility that our words and *our lives can change these negative images*.<sup>31</sup>

Kinnaman and Lyons return to the theme of the Christian life as a way to address the challenges

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<sup>30</sup> Billing, *Our Calling*, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 31; emphasis added.

of our current culture in their most recent, book, *Good Faith*. In this book, Kinnaman and Lyons argue that in current culture, Christianity is seen as the unlikely combination of being both irrelevant and extreme.<sup>32</sup> In this unlikely combination of descriptors, we see an echo of the relationship between the rational rhetorical appeal and the ethical rhetorical appeal. The fact that Christianity is seen as irrelevant is a result of the rejection of the overall rational appeal of Christianity. This rejection is influenced by the view that Christianity is extreme, which shows the fundamental problem with the church's ethical appeal. The moral standing of the church is called into question, thus leading to the view that Christians are extremists, and as a result the doctrinal message or the truth claims of Christianity are seen as irrelevant since the Christian has been dismissed as a reputable representative in society.

Kinnaman and Lyon's most recent research corroborates the arguments about what kind of New Atheist challenges to Christianity are taking root in the broader culture. Their studies have found that "One-quarter of non-Christian Millennials believe the Bible is a 'dangerous book of religious dogma that has been used for centuries to oppress people.'"<sup>33</sup> Three out of ten Americans who profess no religious belief say that the church is not a benefit to society, and another three out of ten non-religious Americans say that they don't know if the church is of any benefit or not.<sup>34</sup> After a Barna study was published showing an uptick among young people in Scotland in Christianity, the chairman of the Scottish Secular Society was quoted in the newspaper as saying, "People now struggle to associate religion with anything other than conflict, sectarianism, child abuse, homophobia, misogyny, violence, and privilege. Religion is

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<sup>32</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *Good Faith*, 21–23. They elaborate on these claims in Chapter 2, "Irrelevant," Kinnaman and Lyons, *Good Faith*, 25–38, and in Chapter 3, "Extreme," Kinnaman and Lyons, *Good Faith*, 39–48.

<sup>33</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *Good Faith*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *Good Faith*, 81.

now perceived as the catalyst for the horrors we see on our televisions every day.”<sup>35</sup> The lifestyle oriented charges of the New Atheists are not abating, but seem to be taking root in culture.

In response, Kinnaman and Lyons advocate a lifestyle oriented approach for Christians to regain their cultural footing. Among the topics explored by Kinnaman and Lyons include neighborliness and relationships.<sup>36</sup> They encourage Christians to form households, be faithful in marriage, and practice hospitality<sup>37</sup> along with focusing on parenting.<sup>38</sup> Again, the connections to Luther’s thoughts on Christian Vocation are apparent.

Kinnaman and Lyons stress the importance of the Christian life as a response to the challenges faced from the current culture, but they miss the apologetic implications of such a life, since they function with a common, Enlightenment-based, rational understanding of the apologetic task. They write, “How good faith Christians engage in relationships says more about the truth of what we believe than all our well-argued apologetics or carefully worded doctrinal statements.”<sup>39</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons separate and distinguish the Christian life from apologetics. I am arguing that, in fact, how Christians engage in relationships *is* apologetics. Apologetics can and should go well beyond the bounds of reason alone in its effort to respond to the many and varied criticisms of Christianity faced in current culture.

Ultimately, apologetics is not bound to any style or rigid approach. At its heart, apologetics is a defense, a response to a particular line of criticism. When the line of criticism advanced against Christianity utilizes a form of argumentation other than a strictly rational appeal, then the apologetic defense likewise needs to respond using approaches other than sheer logic, reason,

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<sup>35</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *Good Faith*, 236.

<sup>36</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *Good Faith*, 46–47.

<sup>37</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *Good Faith*, 250.

<sup>38</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *Good Faith*, 251.

<sup>39</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *Good Faith*, 154.

and facts. When the challenges to Christianity are framed as an attack against the moral nature of the Christian life, then the Christian life—lived in humble service guided by Luther’s teaching on Christian Vocation—*becomes* an apologetic in and of itself.

The defense that is given (apologetics) must be tailored to and appropriate for the specific attack being presented. The current challenges to Christianity include being simultaneously irrelevant and extremist, with the New Atheist writings sounding the alarm against all forms of faith as versions of evil, violent extremism. In such a situation, the needed, focused, specifically tailored apologetic response is not to explain the historicity of the resurrection or the accuracy of Scripture. The challenges of the culture and of the New Atheists skirt the question of Christian truth claims and drive instead to the question of the morality of Christianity. When the criticism of Christianity is not that it is necessarily factually wrong, but that it is not good, the answer is not just to be right, but also to *be good*.

Some have suggested that living a good Christian life, such as through Vocational Apologetics, will not work to convert hard-core atheists to Christianity. That may be true, (in fact, it certainly is true, as conversion is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit, not the work of any Christian) but in regards to the apologetic task it is also an irrelevant question. Apologetics goes wrong, and becomes deservedly much maligned<sup>40</sup> when it focuses on the outcome (conversion to Christianity), instead of being faithful in the defense of the faith in response to specific areas of attack. Will it “work” in the sense of leading opponents of Christianity to be converted to Christianity? That is an open (but irrelevant) question. The Christian apologist is not called to make converts, but to make a defense. Peter admonishes:

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<sup>40</sup> Even extremely recent works of apologetics continue to note the problem of apologetics being argumentative and harsh. “Apologetics has a reputation problem. We’re the ones who ‘like to argue.’ We’re the ones with a need to win. We’re the people who don’t understand people, though we claim to understand everything else. That may be distorted, but it’s not entirely off the mark ... We do have a problem.” Tom Gilson, “Servant Apologetics,” in *A New Kind of Apologist*, ed. Sean McDowell (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2016), 39.

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.<sup>41</sup>

The Christian apologist is simply called to make a defense, gently and respectfully, exhibiting good behavior as befits the Christian life. That is the apologetic task. The outcome is up to God.

Only he can write the definitive conclusion to the final chapter of apologetics.

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<sup>41</sup> 1 Pt 3:14–16 (ESV).

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