

# JOHN WESLEY AND MOHAMMED: A CONTEMPORARY INQUIRY CONCERNING ISLAM

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TONY RICHIE

## INTRODUCTION

September 11, 2001 not only changed the geographical landscape and visual skyline of New York City but also altered forever the political landscape and spiritual skyline of the world. A few days after the terrorist attack on the WTC by radical Muslim extremists, with a rent heart and a reeling mind, I signed onto the Internet and entered a Muslim website. I was looking for answers, for at least some level of understanding. Previous to 9/11 I had visited the Middle East, including areas with heavy Muslim populations. I met many Muslims who were helpful and even friendly. Some were more distant and distrustful. As a pastor in the USA I also had had opportunity to become acquainted with a few Muslims. One Egyptian gentleman even began attending our church occasionally, though he remained Muslim. I remembered meeting an Arab man in seminary who had been a Muslim but had converted to Christ and was training for missionary work among Muslim peoples. None of this, however, had prepared me for the events of September 11. Three factors have helped inform my present attitude concerning Islam in the wake of that event. First, that day on the Internet a Muslim clergyman taught me Islamic radicals such as Osama bin Laden are comparable to Ku Klux Klan members who claim to be Christians doing their duty by terrorizing other races and religions. Secondly, I did some personal research into who Muslims really are and what they really believe. Thirdly, and most importantly, I discovered that more than 200 years ago John Wesley had a lot to say about Mohammed and the religion he founded.<sup>1</sup> As a Wesleyan Pentecostal involved in pastoral ministry I am intensely interested in Mr. Wesley's guidance on this matter and its application to the contemporary context.<sup>2</sup> Much of what he said concerning Islam is as up to date as today's news.

Wesley's discussions of Islam, or "Mahometanism" as it was called in 18th centu-

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*Tony Lee Richie received his D.Min. degree from Asbury Theological Seminary. He currently pastors the New Harvest Church of God in Knoxville, Tenn., and teaches Pastoral Leadership at the Church of God South American Seminary in Quito, Ecuador.*

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ry, fall naturally into a several broad categories. His writing includes references that are comparative in nature as well as polemical, analytical, soteriological-theological, and, finally, evangelistic. Wesley compares elements of Islam and Christianity, uses the Islamic religion to make points in debate, muses on the origin and nature of Islam, addresses the issue of salvation for Muslims, explores the status of Islam in the context of his broader understanding of religions in general, and offers suggestions for converting Muslims to Christ.

### COMPARISONS WITH CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTIANS

Wesley frequently compares or contrasts elements of Muslim life and thought with those of Christians. Underlying these comparisons seem to be a set of assumptions and an observation that together issue in a startling application. Wesley assumes the superiority of Christianity *vis-à-vis* Islam. On the basis of his commitment to the biblical revelation as “the book of God”<sup>3</sup> and in alignment with his classical evangelical Arminianism<sup>4</sup>, Wesley understands Jesus Christ to be the supreme revelation of God and the Christian religion to be the supreme revelation of how God is to be worshiped. He further assumes that the daily lives of Christians ought to be superior to the lives of the adherents of other religions, including Islam. He candidly observes, however, that in actual practice the lives of many who are called Christians are not much better, if any, than the lives of Muslims. Shockingly, some Christians actually appear to live less righteously than some Muslims! In his tireless efforts to “spread scriptural holiness throughout the land”<sup>5</sup>, Wesley often compares the lifestyles of Muslims and Christians as an “ox goad” to prick the collective Christian conscience (cf. Acts 9:5).

Examples of Wesley’s comparisons of the moral and ethical beliefs and behavior of Christians and Muslims abound. Lamenting the sad history of Church councils, a journal entry exclaims, “Surely Mahometanism was let loose to reform the Christians! I know not but Constantinople has gained by the change.”<sup>6</sup> Commenting on the spiritual disposition of a certain Christian man he observes, “One so full of himself might turn Papist or Mahometan”.<sup>7</sup> Wesley sarcastically describes Queen Elizabeth, in the context of the maltreatment of Mary Queen of Scots, as being “As just and merciful as Nero, and as good a Christian as Mahomet.”<sup>8</sup> Always critical of the organized commercial enslavement of Africans by “Christian” nations, Wesley writes that this treatment “infinitely exceeds, in every instance of barbarity” that of Christian slaves in Muslim countries.<sup>9</sup> On another occasion, Wesley complains that a certain bishop treated him in “a way that a Jew, a Mahometan, yea, an honest Heathen, would be ashamed of.”<sup>10</sup> Describing the lovelessness and worldliness among contemporary Christians, he cries out, “Wherein are they preferable to Turks and Pagans? What abomination can be found among Mahometans or Heathens which is not found among Christians also?”<sup>11</sup> Wesley fears some Christians “do not appear to have any more religion than either the Mahometans or Pagans.”<sup>12</sup>

In language that certainly seems especially relevant today John Wesley bemoans the fanatical religious zeal that has too often led to persecution and terrorism by major religions, including both Islam and Christianity.

THERE are few subjects in the whole compass of religion, that are of greater importance than this. For without zeal it is impossible, either to make any consid-

erable progress in religion ourselves, or to do any considerable service to our neighbor, whether in temporal or spiritual things. And yet nothing has done more disservice to religion, or more mischief to mankind, than a sort of zeal which has for several ages prevailed, both in Pagan, Mahometan, and Christian nations. In so much that it may truly be said, pride, covetousness, ambition, revenge, have in all parts of the world slain their thousands; but zeal its ten thousands.<sup>13</sup>

In notable fashion Wesley lumps together Christianity, which is supposed to be superior, with Islam and Paganism as guilty parties in religious persecution<sup>14</sup>. He observes that every atrocity and immorality that has occurred among Mohammed's followers has also occurred among Christians, involving both laity and clergy.<sup>15</sup>

Many more examples could be cited of Wesley's uncomplimentary comparisons of Christians and Muslims.<sup>16</sup> Mr. Wesley is far from approving Islam over and above Christianity, however—or even placing the two religions on an even keel. In his comparisons Wesley is noting the lamentable condition of a complacent Christianity living below its privileged status and longing for a revival, a restoration, of what it really means to be Christian. Accordingly, he writes:

But why is it that so little advantage is derived from it to the Christian world? Are Christians any better than other men? Are they better than Mahometans or Heathens? To say the truth, it is well if they are not worse; worse than either Mahometans or Heathens. In many respects they are abundantly worse; that then they are not properly Christians. The generality of these, though they bear the Christian name, do not know what Christianity is.<sup>17</sup>

### **A POLEMICAL WEAPON**

Throughout his long and illustrious career Wesley was often embroiled in controversy and debate. In addition, he frequently voiced his opinions concerning a wide variety of issues and authors. An exceptionally skilled polemicist, who actually authored a compendium on logic,<sup>18</sup> he occasionally used analogical or descriptive references to Islam to expose errors of thought in opponents or authors with whom he disagreed or illustrate his own positions. In a published journal entry he critiques an author who had published a wild account of his visions of heaven and hell, saying, "his ideas of heaven are low, grovelling, just suiting a Mahometan paradise; and his account of it has a natural tendency to sink our conceptions, both of the glory of heaven, and of the inhabitants of it."<sup>19</sup> He expressed his doubt about another writer's works by saying they "are as credible as Mahomet's journey through seventy thousand heavens."<sup>20</sup> In a sermon asserting the universal depravity of humanity Wesley challenges his audience to "Survey any one kingdom, any single country, or city, or town" including not only those that "are still over spread with Mahometan or Pagan darkness" but even those "which profess to see the light of his glorious Gospel,"<sup>21</sup> and they will see evidence of original and universal sin. Elsewhere Mr. Wesley unstintingly, and somewhat stingingly, relates that all the abominations of Heathen and Muslim nations are also found in abundance in so-called Christian kingdoms, inescapable evidence of human sinfulness.<sup>22</sup> The violence of war is

particular proof of the vileness of humanity, Christian as well as Islamic or Pagan.<sup>23</sup>

Debunking the rationalistic impression that bare intellectual or doctrinal assent is sufficient to be called Christian faith, Wesley argues unless the faith of Christians exceeds dogma it will not "avail any more before God, than the faith of a Mahometan or a Heathen."<sup>24</sup> Wesley defends himself and his movement against the oft-repeated charge of syncretism by satirically exposing the contradictory and unsubstantiated allegations of his opponents. When they accused Wesleyans, as they would later be termed, of numerous and contradictory errors "There might as well have been added, Judaism, Mahometanism, Paganism," for "It would have made the period rounder, and been full as easily proved; I mean asserted. For no other proof is yet produced."<sup>25</sup> Again, Wesley shows his opponents have overstated their case against him and might as well have charged him with being "a Mahometan, or infidel, or the devil himself" rather than merely a Christian who dissented from their particular opinions.<sup>26</sup> Yet again, he overturns attempts to make him appear guilty by association with "Papists," or Roman Catholics, by throwing in "Mahometans or Pagans" too.<sup>27</sup>

Wesley was repeatedly maligned as an "enthusiast" or fanatic. He was accused of following the secret impulses of his own inner emotions and whims into religious subjectivity. He refuted the charge in uncompromising tones, insisting "I make the word of God the rule of all my actions; and that I no more follow any secret impulse instead thereof, than I follow Mahomet or Confucius."<sup>28</sup> Wesley also accuses those who adhere to the fatalistic determinism of Augustinian Calvinism of adopting a doctrine of Mohammed.<sup>29</sup> He counters the charge of schism by noting his work is among "real Christians" rather than Muslims.<sup>30</sup> He suggests even Islamic nations have a right to be suspicious in dealings with the Roman Catholic Church because of their expressed contempt for fidelity to them.<sup>31</sup> When a heretical writer denies the Trinity and attributes to Trinitarian faith the atheism of the world, Wesley charges he has gone beyond even the "Arian, Socinian, or Mahometan" heresies in his rabid excess.<sup>32</sup>

Wesley's use of "Mahometanism" as a polemical weapon in debate, or in critique of adversaries, evidences his assumption that Christianity is superior to Islam. The references are only effective if Islam is adjudged inferior. His tendency toward satire, and even sarcasm, is evident also, although he uses biting wit for logical purposes. Religious prejudice, however, should not be read into his approach, especially in the light of other, more complete statements. More likely, Wesley in these instances is drawing on a collective cultural conception of Islam among Christians in the eighteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, he does esteem Islam as a less excellent religion than Christianity though, as will become evident, it is in turn superior to some other religions.

### **ANALYTICAL SKETCHES**

On occasion Wesley's perennially inquisitive mind grapples with the intrinsic nature of Islam. He believes the origin of Islam is wrapped up in the ancient Christian heresy of Arianism, which denied the Trinity and viewed Christ as an exalted creature, the precise position of Islam, and which is described by Wesley as the "the inlet to all heresies and calamities, and at length to Mahometanism itself."<sup>34</sup> Often his quest for deeper understanding arises out of his prolific reading. He is a demanding and critical reader as the

following comments from his journal somewhat humorously indicate.

I went to Canterbury. Here I met with the *Life of Mahomet*, wrote, I suppose, by the Count de Boulanvilliers. Whoever the author is, he is a very pert, shallow, self-conceited coxcomb, remarkable for nothing but his immense assurance and thorough contempt of Christianity. And the book is a dull, ill-digested romance, supported by no authorities at all.<sup>35</sup>

Wesley's survey of the sinfulness of humankind, which included Christian nations, did not exclude the Muslim world, either. He saw much in their history to verify his belief that all humanity is under the bondage of original sin as he "calmly and impartially" considers "what manner of men the Mahometans in general are."<sup>36</sup> To begin with, Wesley sees the arrogant attitude of extreme Muslims toward the Koran with its, to him, obvious shortcomings as indicative of a distorted understanding.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the violent history of Islam witnesses to Wesley of a skewed spirituality referring to "the rage, the fury, the revenge, of these destroyers of human kind."<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, Wesley attempts to expose the utter vileness of the slave trade by describing the orderly and pious lives of Africans, many of whom are "rigid Mahometans,"<sup>39</sup> prior to their enslavement. His description of their industry and morality is exceedingly complimentary.<sup>40</sup>

Mr. Wesley's tendency toward hyperbole is evident in these excerpts of analyses of Islam. When he is painting a picture of original and universal sin, he paints a dark and ugly portrait. When he is painting a picture of inhuman treatment and exploitation of Africans, his portrait shines brightly. What does seem evident is that Wesley sees serious flaws in the theology and spirituality of Islam but honestly recognizes that it sometimes produces moral and ethical people who should be treated humanely, that is, with compassion and consideration.

#### **THEOLOGICAL-SOTERIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF FAITH<sup>41</sup>**

John Wesley, especially later in his life and ministry, thought and wrote more precisely concerning the relations of other religions, such as Islam, to Christianity.<sup>42</sup> Issues concerning the character of God and the nature of revelation and providence, as well as the nature of man and salvation become of primary significance in the discussion of religions. Wesley criticized those who have too narrow a definition of religion, saying that, broadly speaking, "a religion is, a method of worshipping God, whether in a right or a wrong manner."<sup>43</sup> However, in a telling statement, significant in its embrace of other religions, Wesley defines genuine religion differently.

We conclude from the whole, (and it can never be too much inculcated, because all the world votes on the other side,) that true religion, in the very essence of it, is nothing short of holy tempers. Consequently all other religion, whatever name it bears, whether Pagan, Mahometan, Jewish, or Christian; and whether Popish or Protestant, Lutheran or Reformed; without these, is lighter than vanity itself.<sup>44</sup>

Wesley adamantly affirmed the unique importance of the scriptural revelation of God in Christ.<sup>45</sup> Wesley also, however, understood the divine decrees recorded in Scripture to

be especially binding only as “touching all that have the written word.”<sup>46</sup> In an eloquent statement from a sermon on 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 he elaborates thus:

But it may be asked, “If there be no true love of our neighbor but that which springs from the love of God; and if the love of God flows from no other fountain than faith in the Son of God; does it not follow, that the whole heathen world is excluded from all possibility of salvation? Seeing they are cut off from faith; for faith cometh by hearing; and how shall they hear without a preacher?” I answer, St. Paul’s words, spoken on another occasion, are applicable to this: “What the law speaketh, it speaketh to them that are under the law.” Accordingly, that sentence, “He that believeth not shall be damned,” is spoken of them to whom the Gospel is preached. Others it does not concern; and we are not required to determine any thing touching their final state. How it will please God, the Judge of all, to deal with *them*, we may leave to God himself. But this we know, that he is not the God of the Christians only, but the God of the Heathens also; that he is “rich in mercy to all that call upon him,” according to the light they have; and that “in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.”<sup>47</sup>

He therefore quotes with approval “a pious writer” who outlined a “three-fold circle of providence.”<sup>48</sup> He contended for a “superintending providence”<sup>49</sup> over the whole of humanity including, not only Christians but Jews, Muslims, and even Heathens. The loving concern and compassion of God extends to all. Wesley is compelled to conclude: “And so we may say, Is he the God of the Christians, and not of the Mahometans and Heathens? Yea, doubtless of the Mahometans and Heathens also. His love is not confined.”<sup>50</sup> According to this scheme, the “*outermost* circle” of divine providence includes Heathen, Muslims, and Jews; the “*interior* circle” includes the visible Church; and the “*innermost* circle” includes the invisible Church or all true Christians.<sup>51</sup>

In a decisive discussion of faith Wesley asserts that there are degrees or levels of faith beginning with Heathen and Mahometans and continuing through Jews and then Christians.<sup>52</sup> Not all nations and peoples have the Holy Scriptures but some faithfully live according to the understanding that they do have; consequently God, Wesley believes, will take that into account when he judges them and that “No more therefore will be expected of them, than the living up to the light they had.”<sup>53</sup>

God, through general revelation and the inner voice of the human conscience, communicates the essentials of genuine religion to all people everywhere.<sup>54</sup> Some are faithful to the revelation they have and others are not; all will be judged according to their faithfulness to what God has made known to them. God graciously places within all those created in his image an affinity for himself and spiritual realities as well a moral sense of right and wrong.<sup>55</sup> Wesley insists that no one “has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation” but suggests it is “far better to leave them to Him that made them, and who is ‘the Father of the spirits of all flesh;’ who is the God of the Heathens as well as the Christians, and who hateth nothing that he hath made.”<sup>56</sup> He reminds us, however, that those who are “under the Christian dispensation” will be judged by a higher standard.<sup>57</sup> Wesley is optimistic about the possibility of some of the

unevangelized responding positively to general revelation of God to the extent they may partake of a measure of the blessings of God; but he is somewhat pessimistic about how far any can go in reality without the specific revelation of Scripture and of Christ.<sup>58</sup> While some may attain unto God in a genuine sense through the witness of creation and conscience, limits exist that cannot be overcome apart from special revelation in Scripture and personal redemption in Christ.

An important caveat may be necessary. In no way is Wesley moving toward universalism or pluralism.<sup>59</sup> He unequivocally denounces any idea of a Church that counts "every child of man," and "consequently, Turks, Deists, and Pagans" "as real members as the most pious Christian under the sun."<sup>60</sup> Mr. Wesley is not suggesting that those of other religions are "anonymous Christians."<sup>61</sup> The idea that Christ's saving presence is somehow secretly within all people repulses him.<sup>62</sup> He sarcastically retorts to such an idea, "So Jews, Mahometans, Deists, Heathens, are all members of the Church of Christ! Should we not add devils too, seeing these also are to dwell with us in heaven?"<sup>63</sup> Only those who personally believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and obey his Gospel are in the special saving relationship made possible thereby. Wesley is only contending that those who do not have the Scriptures or know the Gospel may respond positively to the revelation of God in creation and conscience in order to know God in some limited way. God, according to his justice and mercy, will judge such according to their faithfulness to walk in the light they do have, not according to their unfaithfulness to not walk in the light they do not have. Consequently, they may enjoy a measure of divine acceptance and blessing but not the fullness that is in Christ alone.

Wesley's beliefs concerning the unevangelized and devout non-Christians flow out of his beliefs concerning the character of God and the nature of humankind, especially in regard to human responsibility and divine judgment.<sup>64</sup> In stark contrast to the fatalistic determinism of Augustinian Calvinism, he simply cannot conceive that a good and just God would damn multitudes to everlasting punishment without so much as a shot at salvation. Wesley espouses a strong doctrine of original sin coupled with "prevenient" or preceding grace for every human being.<sup>65</sup> Even before conversion God graciously gives to all light to understand something of him and ability that they might freely respond. Every person, not merely those born or reared in a "Christian" country or culture, may be recipients of God's love and mercy if they choose to respond positively. Wesley's optimism is grounded in the doctrine of the atonement.<sup>66</sup> Original sin means God's wrath was directed toward all humankind but the atonement of Jesus Christ means his wrath toward all humankind has been averted. Christ has radically reversed the effects of the fall that occurred in the first Adam as "In the fullness of time he was made Man, another common Head of mankind, a second general Parent and Representative of the whole human race."<sup>67</sup> All humankind was negatively affected by the fall of Adam so all humankind is positively affected by the atonement of Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ expressed in a life of obedient love is nonetheless the essential element of justification before God in the Christian sense.<sup>68</sup>

Certain formative and, perhaps, confirming influences on Wesley's understanding of non-Christian religions such as Islam are noteworthy. The Scriptures are always foremost in Wesley followed by patristic and theological mentors or peers.

## THE SCRIPTURES

John Wesley exclaimed, "Let me be *homo unius libri*."<sup>69</sup> Indeed, his entire life was in large measure an effort to live out his commitment to the revealed truths of one book, the Bible. Not surprisingly, he labors to think and speak biblically concerning the religions, Christian, Islam, and otherwise. Wesley's comments on Matthew 2:1-2 concerning the non-Jewish "wise men" from the East who came seeking the King of the Jews indicate he thought "Probably they were Gentile philosophers, who, through the Divine assistance, had improved their knowledge of nature, as a means of leading to the knowledge of the one true God," adding "Nor is it unreasonable to suppose, that God had favoured them with some extraordinary revelations of himself, as he did" in the examples of "Melchisedec, Job, and several others, who were not of the family of Abraham; to which he never intended absolutely to confine his favours."<sup>70</sup> The light of every man in John 1:9 witnesses to Wesley of "what is vulgarly termed natural conscience, pointing out at least the general lines of good and evil," suggesting that "this light, if man did not hinder, would shine more and more to the perfect day."<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Psalm 19:1-4 testifies of creation as "a legible book" enabling all who read it to serve God by giving "a clear knowledge or discovery of God their author."<sup>72</sup> Cornelius is evidence for him that God reveals himself to those who are unbelievers in the Christian sense.<sup>73</sup> His comments on Acts 10:35 are particularly revealing.

But in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness—He that, first, reverences God, as great, wise, good, the cause, end, and governor of all things; and secondly, from this awful regard to him, not only avoids all known evil, but endeavours, according to the best light he has, to do all things well; is accepted of him—Through Christ, though he knows him not. The assertion is express, and admits of no exception. He is in the favour of God, whether enjoying his written word and ordinances or not. Nevertheless the addition of these is an unspeakable blessing to those who were before in some measure accepted. Otherwise God would never have sent an angel from heaven to direct Cornelius to St. Peter.<sup>74</sup>

Paul's address to the Greeks in the Areopagus was to Wesley "a lecture of natural divinity, with admirable wisdom, acuteness, fullness, and courtesy" by which "the apostle showed them in the most unaffected manner, that though he was a Jew, he was not enslaved to any narrow views, but looked on all mankind as his brethren."<sup>75</sup> In addition, Wesley's comments on Romans 1:19-21 and 2:12-16 demonstrate the exegetical base of his understanding of general revelation and human conscience in relation to non-Christian religions.<sup>76</sup> His exegesis of Galatians 4:1-6 is foundational for his distinction between "the faith of a servant," one that feared God and worked righteousness without knowledge of Christ (cf. Acts 10:35), and "the faith of a son," or a Christian.<sup>77</sup>

The above examples serve to illustrate that John Wesley's theology of non-Christian religions, such as Islam, has its roots deep in the Sacred Text.<sup>78</sup> The Bible testifies to Wesley of the wide embrace of a loving and holy God who is concerned and involved in the present state and eternal fate of every human being. The God who has most fully revealed himself in the Bible has, therefore, also revealed himself to some extent in gener-

al revelation and human conscience. Those who respond positively, that is, in faith and obedience, to God's self revelation in creation and conscience will be judged accordingly.

### **PATRISTICS**

Wesley has high regard for the Christians closest to Christ and the apostles in time and terrain. He meticulously mines patristic sources, especially the early and Eastern fathers, for insights into faith and practice.<sup>79</sup> Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria illustrate Wesley's conscious affinity with the early Church fathers in the development of his theological-soteriological emphases concerning non-Christian religions such as Islam.<sup>80</sup> Wesley notes with approval "that great man whom Justin Martyr scruples not to call 'a Christian before Christ', adding "For who that was not favored with the written word of God, ever excelled, yea, or equaled, Socrates? In what other Heathen can we find so strong an understanding, joined with so consummate virtue?"<sup>81</sup> Justin suggests that Christ the Logos indwelt and revealed himself that he might be "partially known" to Socrates and others before the Incarnation and even apart from the Scriptures.<sup>82</sup> An especially high regard for Clement of Alexandria exists in Wesley.<sup>83</sup> One of Clement's analogies for doing theology is of a bee as it gathers pollen from many flowers to make a single honeycomb. The mature Christian thinker gathers truth from all sources, including other religions, since all genuine truth is from God, and puts it in the service of Christ, God's ultimate revelation of himself and his truth.<sup>84</sup> Clement asserts that, "the most excellent among the Greeks worshipped the same God as we" but is quick to add "that they had not learned by perfect knowledge that which was delivered by the Son."<sup>85</sup> Obviously, both Justin and Clement believe non-Christians are able to receive some degree of divine revelation, albeit inferior to biblical revelation. Of course, Islam arose after the patristic period so what the fathers' specific attitude might have been toward it is indeterminable. Affinities with Wesley's general scheme of religions seem apparent nonetheless.

### **MENTORS AND PEERS**

James (or Jacobus) Arminius and John Fletcher are indicative of pious evangelical thinkers with whom John Wesley interacts and draws on, and who embrace a similarly inclusive view of Islam and non-Christian religions.<sup>86</sup> The difference between both Jews and Muslims with Christians, Arminius opines, is comparable to the difference between opinion and knowledge.<sup>87</sup> Christians, of course, have certain knowledge. Islam arose out of the historical "dissensions which arose between the Jews and the Christians, and from the disputes into which the Orthodox entered with" various heresies.<sup>88</sup> Mohammed is to be criticized for prohibiting religious dialogue in order to silence controversies against his opinions.<sup>89</sup> Arminius is no pluralist; he insists it is a "figment" to think, "that every one may be saved in his own religion," specifically referencing Muslims.<sup>90</sup> Affinities of faith, however, exist between Jews, Muslims, and Christians.<sup>91</sup> Interestingly, Arminius refuses to classify Muslims as "enemies" of Christianity, but says they have "embraced the dregs of a religion which is compounded of a corruption of Judaism, Christianity and Paganism."<sup>92</sup> In a provocative query he asks whether the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy, those "deceived by them," Jews, and Muslims are acknowledged by God as his in any way.<sup>93</sup> Arminius unquestionably argues for the necessity of the Christian religion and of faith in

Christ, although with guarded nuances.<sup>94</sup> He also seems to admit of varying degrees or levels of religion and salvation, however, as attention to superlatives in the following suggests.

4. This religion, with regard to all those things which we have mentioned as coming under consideration in it, is, of all religions, *the most excellent*; or, rather, it is *the most excellent* mode of religion. Because, in it, the object is proposed in a manner *the most excellent*; so that there is nothing about this object which the human mind is capable of perceiving, that is not exhibited in the doctrine of the Christian religion. For God has with it disclosed all his own goodness, and has given it to be viewed in Christ.

5. The cause, on account of which, religion may and ought to be performed to this object, is, in every way, *the most efficacious*; so that nothing can be imagined, why religion may and ought to be performed to any other deity. that is not comprehended in the efficacy of this cause, in a pre-eminent manner.

6. The very act of faith and worship is required, and must be performed, in a manner *the most signal and particular*; and the salvation which arises from this act, is *the greatest and most glorious*, both because God will afford *a fuller and more perfect* sight of himself, than if salvation had been obtained through another form of religion, and because those who will become partakers of this salvation, will have Christ eternally as their head, who is the brother of men, and they will always behold him. On this account, in the attainment and possession of salvation, we shall hereafter become, in some measure, superior to the angels themselves.<sup>95</sup>

Arminius apparently intends to affirm the essentiality of the revelation of God in Christ without abrogating any affinity at all concerning revelation in at least the best elements of other religions. Accordingly, he quotes Socrates as “that wisest of the Gentiles” but explains “the *dearest* revelation” has been given to those who have the Scriptures.<sup>96</sup> His position seems best summed up in the statement that “The wisdom, mercy and power of God, have, therefore, been revealed and displayed *most copiously* in Christ Jesus.”<sup>97</sup> The latent potential for a degree of revelation and salvation for at least some non-Christians juxtaposed with the ultimate revelation of God in Christ through the Scriptures that exists in James Arminius is adopted and extended by John Wesley.<sup>98</sup>

John Fletcher is crystal clear in his stance toward Islam and other religions.<sup>99</sup> He acknowledges the obvious shortcomings of Mohammed, calling him “an imposter” and noting his carnality and violence,<sup>100</sup> but notes that at least he avoided the antinomianism of so many Christians.<sup>101</sup> While Christians enjoy the biblical revelation, Heathen and Muslims at least have the God-given light of conscience by which they may in some measure discern right and wrong.<sup>102</sup> He distinguishes between “the bright and direct beams of Gospel light” enjoyed by Christians and “the external light of it only” that others, including Muslims, have received.<sup>103</sup> In an interesting note, he categorizes various major religions.

*Calvinism* is Christianity obscured by mists of Pharisaic election and reprobation, and by a cloud of stoical fatalism. *Poperly* is Christianity under a cloud of Pharisaic

bigotry, and under thick fogs of heathenish superstition. *Judaism* is Christianity under the veil of Moses. *Mohammedanism* is a jumble of Christianity, Judaism, Gentilism, and imposture. And *Gentilism* is the religion of Cain and Abel; or, if you please, of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, under a cloud of false and dark tradition. Some call it the *religion of nature*: I have no objection to the name, if they understand by it the religion of our *nature* in its present state of initial recovery, through Christ, from its *total* fall in Adam.<sup>104</sup>

Christians are comparable to those who have received several “talents” from the Lord while “the poor Mohammedan” has received only one.<sup>105</sup> Essential differences exist between Christians and Muslims, and the tendency of many in Islam to “confine truth to [their] own party” is a notable obstacle.<sup>106</sup> Jews, Muslims, and Christians share belief in the Old Testament, in monotheism, and in at least the historical reality of Christ, but true Christians are unique in their “spirit of universal love.”<sup>107</sup> Muslims should be given their just due for virtues such as honesty.<sup>108</sup> In an especially informative statement deriving from a discussion of the shared faith and hope of truly pious peoples, Fletcher insists:

Such is the faith by which those Jews, Mohammedans, and Pagans, whose hearts are principled with humility, candour, and the fear of God, have been, and still continue to be, saved in every part of the world. For the Father of mercies, who knoweth whereof we are made, will no more absolutely condemn such worshippers, on account of the extraordinary respect they have discovered for Moses, Mohammed, and Confucius, than he will finally reject some pious Christians, for the sake of that excessive veneration which they manifest for particular saints and reformers. Nor will he punish either because their guides have mingled prejudice with truth, and legendary fables with the doctrines of theology.<sup>109</sup>

Revelatory methods during the “dispensation of the Father,” that is, prior to or apart from the biblical revelation of Christ, include the works of creation, providence, and conscience, and are available to Muslims and others as limited mediums of divine truth.<sup>110</sup> The following is a logical and coherent statement summarizing Fletcher’s conclusions on revelation, redemption, and religions.

From these observations we conclude, *First*, That the Gospel has been more or less clearly announced ever since the time in which a Redeemer became necessary to man. *Secondly*, That Jesus Christ openly manifested himself in a time most proper for such a discovery. *Thirdly*, That the work of redemption is as necessary to mankind as the assistance of medicine is necessary to those who are struggling under some dangerous disease. *Fourthly*, That an explicit knowledge of the Redeemer and his salvation is as desirable to those who feel themselves ruined by sin, as the certain knowledge of a physician, possessed of sovereign remedies, is consoling to the patient who apprehends his life in imminent danger. *Fifthly*, As languishing infants may be restored by the medicines of a physician with whom they are totally unacquainted, so Jews, Mohammedans, and heathens, provided they

walk according to the light they enjoy, are undoubtedly saved by Jesus Christ, though they have no clear conception of the astonishing means employed to secure them from perdition.<sup>111</sup>

While allowing that, "in every age salvation has been extended to all the true worshippers of God," including ancient and modern Jews, Muslims, Christians and even Heathens, Fletcher unflinchingly warns against the danger of denying deeper truth and brighter light when confronted with it in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>112</sup> Jews and Muslims, along with some Christians, err in seeking divine favor by their own merits and failing to recognize the human need of the expiatory sacrifice of Christ.<sup>113</sup> The Jewish and Islamic rejection of the Holy Trinity fails to give honor to the richness and fullness of the Divine Being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>114</sup> Numerous positive references to Christ and the Gospel in the Islamic Scriptures, the Koran, however, merit the designation of Muslims as "semi-Christians" and provide hope for inter-faith dialogue and a basis for evangelization.<sup>115</sup>

Fletcher holds together his unflinching commitment to the uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus Christ with an acknowledgement of revelation and salvation in the truly pious and ethical of the unevangelized of other religions through a schema suggesting a hierarchy of salvation.

The salvation of virtuous heathens will differ as greatly from the salvation of faithful Christians, as the brilliancy of an agate is different from that of a diamond. "Many mansions," and different degrees of glory, are prepared "in the house of our Father," John 14:1. "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also will it be in the resurrection of the dead, when God will render unto every man according to his works," 1 Corinthians 15:41.

The highest degrees of glory are reserved by the righteous Judge of all the earth for the most faithful of his servants. The honourable privilege of being seated at the right hand of Christ will be conferred upon those who have trodden in their Master's footsteps, through the narrowest and most difficult paths of resignation and obedience.<sup>116</sup>

Fletcher's teaching on Islam and other non-Christian religions is substantially a systematic presentation of the essential elements of Wesley on the same. John Wesley's own doctrine of religions may be best understood in dialogue with his biblical hermeneutics, patristic emphasis, and interaction with theological mentors and peers.

### **EVANGELISTIC INTERACTION WITH ISLAM**

Mr. Wesley is very much concerned with winning the world to and for the Lord Jesus Christ. He bemoans bitterly the fact that so much of the world population of his day is Heathen, Jewish, or Muslim and that Christian missions have made so little global progress.<sup>117</sup> He lays the blame for that sad fact squarely at the door of Christians themselves. In fact, perhaps "Mahometanism was let loose to reform the Christians!"<sup>118</sup> The

hypocrisy and immorality of so many Christians hinders Muslims from authentically hearing the Gospel. When that "grand stumbling-block" is "happily removed out of the way," then "the Mahometans will look upon them with other eyes, and begin to give attention to their words."<sup>119</sup> High hopes may be entertained that when sincere Muslims meet Christians whose lives genuinely radiate the vitality and power of the Holy Spirit in words and in works they will respond by honoring the Son as they do the Father (cf. John 5:23). Consequently, a Christianity that recommends itself to Jews, Muslims, and Heathens will necessarily consist of people who truly "have 'the mind which was in Christ,' and who 'walk as he also walked,' whose inmost soul is renewed after the image of God; and who are outwardly holy, as He who hath called them is holy".<sup>120</sup> Obviously, issues relative to life in the Holy Spirit and to holiness are dominant considerations for any disciples of Christ interested in evangelizing members of Islam.

Wesley's approach to the evangelism of Muslims and adherents of other religions seems to arise out of a number of convictions: he is convinced of the inestimable advantage to absolutely everyone for receiving Jesus Christ in personal faith and obedience; he is convinced anyone sincerely walking in the light he or she has will recognize and respond positively to the fuller or more complete light of God in Christ when it is authentically presented; and he is convinced that the greatest witness to the world of the truth in Christ is a life transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit from the guilt and bondage of sin to a life of holiness and freedom.

## **CONCLUSION**<sup>121</sup>

Currently, in the wake of September 11, 2001, the need for Christians, especially American Christians, to understand how we might best relate to our Muslim neighbors is much more than academic; it is practical and essential, a matter of survival. John Wesley speaks across the centuries with rare piety and clarity about Mohammed and Muslims.<sup>122</sup> Significant signs exist indicating Wesley's spiritual heirs, such as my own Pentecostal-Charismatic faith family, are beginning to show serious interest in extending his insights to the contemporary context.<sup>123</sup> Several suggestions concerning a Christian view of Islam and other religions from a Wesleyan perspective may be offered even now.

One of the main lessons we learn from Wesley on the religions has to do with balance. Wesley does not hesitate to point out dissimilarities between Christianity and Islam that affirm his own commitment to the incomparable uniqueness and superiority of Christ and authentic Christianity. He is not reluctant to be straightforwardly polemical in discussing Islam and other religions. Yet Wesley is willing to acknowledge true piety and morality among Muslims when he sees it. Inter-religious exchange today needs to imbibe the spirit of balance. Pluralists naively label all religions essentially the same, which is not only untrue but also unfair, while exclusivists narrowly consign everyone unlike themselves to an automatic eternity in hell, denying any truth or piety in other religions. A balanced approach to the religions will be neither naïve or narrow. Christians must accept the strengths of others before asserting the superiority of our own faith.

Another lesson we learn from Wesley concerning Islam has to do with understanding. Wesley made an effort to examine the origins, history, beliefs, and practices of Islam. He acquainted himself somewhat with the Muslim Scriptures, the Koran. Contemporary

interaction between Christianity and Islam, as well as other religions, calls for mutual understanding and knowledge. Ignorance is the haven of prejudice, and prejudice is the forerunner of violence—as is all too evident. Misinformation tends to misunderstanding which leads to maltreatment. While real awareness of one another's religion will not eradicate differences at least it will isolate the real issues and facilitate real dialogue.

Wesley teaches us honesty and humility in dealing with Islam. He admits Christians have made mistakes and that Muslims have often been acquainted with inauthentic or anemic Christianity. Becoming defensive is beneficial to no one. Confession and repentance should occupy a major role in relations between rival religions. Radical reformation of attitudes and actions by Christians in religious interchange is called for in our time. Either reception or rejection of Christianity by other religions should at least be on the grounds of the genuine article.

We also learn from Wesley the importance of foundations in relating to other religions such as Islam. John Wesley worked out a subtle and sophisticated theology of religions based on biblical, historical, rational, and ethical considerations. Consequently, his views on Islam are not reactionary or simplistic but flow out of the solid foundations of his overall theology. Similarly, Christians today, especially in relations with Muslims, need to beware of reacting to Islam based on current political atmosphere. Rather, we should build on the foundation of a systematic exposition and articulation of a carefully constructed theology of religions that is faithful to the Scriptures, Christian thought, and experience.

Wesley teaches us the significance of providence in our relations with those of other religions. He believes that God exercises oversight over all that he has created, that he hates no one he had made, that he loves and cares for all people, and that all are ultimately accountable to him. Therefore, in some manner God has guided and developed the history of humanity in such a way as to witness of himself to all. If we really believe that divine providence extends to all creation we ought to acknowledge his inclusive embrace of every human being, especially those who faithfully walk in the light of their existing knowledge of God. This view on religions has been called "inclusivism" as it intends to include under the umbrella of divine providence all that God has created. An appreciation for the inclusive nature of divine providence is a powerful tool in today's religious milieu. Inclusivism is the *via media* that does not sacrifice the uniqueness of Christ on the altar of interaction with other religious revelation but firmly maintains both verities.

From Wesley we learn that both God and salvation may be broader and deeper than many of us had previously imagined. Yet the absolute necessity of avoiding idolatry and immorality are accentuated unambiguously. Regardless of our perception of various religious systems, including our own, judgment concerning the eternal state of individual souls is appropriately placed with the Sovereign Creator and Judge of all. Interaction with adherents of Islam and other religions by Christians will be much more effective if it is approached as exchange among friends and family rather than combat with enemies or even competition with rivals.

Finally, we learn from Wesley, who is after all best known as a great evangelist and revivalist, concerning conversion of other faith members to Christ. With all his willingness to recognize divine revelation in the unevangelized and human piety in other religions, he is adamantly assured that personal faith in Christ is of inestimable benefit to all people.

His life and ministry belie the belief that any affirmation at all of non-Christians undermines evangelism. Yet he did not propose doctrinal or dogmatic dialogue as the best route to reaching Muslims. He was convinced that authentic Christian living is the key to helping them see the brighter light of Christ. Christians will not win the world's Muslims—or Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, or others for that matter—to Christ until we demonstrate in our deeds the superiority of our faith. The emphasis today tends to be on dialogue when it ought to be on deeds. When we show Muslims how much we love them perhaps they will believe us when we tell them how much Christ loves them.

A few summary observations concerning contemporary Christian relations with Muslims, as well as members of other faiths, might include:

Openness and tolerance toward other religions need not sacrifice a staunch commitment to the ultimate supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ, his Gospel, or the Holy Scriptures.

A deeper and fuller awareness of the significance of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world embracing the holy love of God for all humanity may be needed.

Real differences and disagreements with others may need to be aired honestly in humility without compromise or condescension.

Dependence on God to judge and reward or punish accordingly good and evil in humans and in religions by wise and just standards could be helpful.

Commitment to development of our own authentic Christianity on personal and ecclesial levels may be a first priority in relation to other religions.

Energetically sharing the good news of faith, hope, and love in Christ will witness to all the world of the reality of divine truth and love.

#### **NOTES:**

1. Gerald R. McDermott (*Can Evangelicals Learn From World Religions: Jesus, Revelation & Religious Traditions*. IVP: Downers' Grove, IL, 2000) lists Wesley with Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield as the 18<sup>th</sup> century revivalists who helped found modern Evangelicalism with its emphases on "the authority of Scripture, the work of Christ in salvation and the New Birth" (26, 32).

2. Regarding his theology of non-Christian religions, or natural theology, Thomas C. Oden in *The Living God: Systematic Theology: Volume One* identifies Wesley as part of what he refers to as "a central ecumenical stream" that includes Irenaeus, Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine (Prince: Peabody, MA, 2001), 6.

3. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 5:62.

4. *Ibid.*, 10:386-89. Cf. *The Works of James Arminius* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 2:24-27.

5. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc.

Rio, WI: 2002), 8:299.

6. Ibid., 2:356.
7. Ibid., 2:437. Cf. 2:489.
8. Ibid., 3:309.
9. Ibid., 3:447-48; cf. 11:94; 11:166.
10. Ibid., 4:3.
11. Ibid., 6:33.
12. Ibid., 6:229.
13. Ibid., 7:68. Cf. John Fletcher's remarks against religious persecution in *The Works of John Fletcher* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 3:4:14-15.
14. Cf. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 9:97-98.
15. Ibid., 7:195-96.
16. Cf. Ibid., 7:202-03; 7:220; 7:321; 8:185-86; 8:204; 9:251; 9:257; 11:48; 11:169; 11:182; 13:244; 14:411-12.
17. Ibid., 7:303-04.
18. Ibid., 14:249 ff.
19. Ibid., 4:158; cf. 13:535.
20. Ibid., 4:335-36.
21. Ibid., 5:478; cf. 7:195-96; 14:411-12.
22. Ibid., 7:363; cf. 11:73.
23. Ibid., 9:239-40.
24. Ibid., 7:217.
25. Ibid., 8:415.
26. Ibid., 8:553; cf. 9:56.
27. Ibid., 9:5; cf. 9:25-26; 9:65; 10:474.
28. Ibid., 8:450-51; cf. 8:493-94; 8:534; 9:199.
29. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 10:283. Cf. Thomas C. Oden's contrast of Augustine and Wesley and the "notion of absolute divine omnicausal determination ... found in Islamic piety" in *The Living God: Systematic Theology: Volume One* (Prince: Peabody, MA. 2001), 284.
30. Ibid., 10:380.
31. Ibid., 10:171.
32. Ibid., 13:516.
33. Cf. Randy L. Maddox in "Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation in Other Religions" (*Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 1992), 9-29.
34. *The Wesleyan Heritage Library Commentary Notes on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians-Revelation* by John Wesley (Wesleyan Heritage Publications: 2002), 485. Modern scholarship tends to confirm that Islam's historical rise was deeply affected by Mohammed's contact with heretical forms of Christianity and that it adversely affected his views on Christianity and key doctrines such as the Trinity and Christology. See Timothy C. Tennet in *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Baker, Grand Rapids: 2002), 142-144, 154; also James A. Beverley's "Muhammed and the Faiths" in *Christian History* (Issue 74, vol. XXI, no. 2, 2002): 10-15.
35. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 3:298-99. Cf. 4:495.
36. Ibid., 9:233.
37. Ibid., 9:233. Elsewhere Wesley disapprovingly alludes to an English translation of the "Koran of Mahomet" that sought to affirm its superiority *vis-à-vis* the Bible (13:484). He also cri-

tiques a translation of the Hindu Scriptures that apparently had the same purpose (13:484-89). Comparatively, Martin Luther considered the Koran to be a book of human wisdom and reasoning and law but not divinely inspired. See "From Crusades to Homeland Defense" by Gregory Miller (*Christian History* Issue 74 (Vol. XXI, no. 2, 2002): 31-34.

38. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 9:233-34. In all fairness, as Wesley demonstrates the depth and scope of sin in the world, his preceding and succeeding comments convict the Pagan/Heathen and Christian nations of serious sin as well.

39. *Ibid.*, 11:76-77. Martin Luther also criticized Islam for its shortcomings while candidly confessing their piety and discipline but argued Muslims were lost without Christ (cf. Gregory Miller's "From Crusades to Homeland Defense" in *Christian History* Issue 74 (Vol. XXI, no. 2, 2002): 31-34.

40. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 11:76-77. Gerald R. McDermott (*Can Evangelicals Learn From World Religions: Jesus, Revelation & Religious Traditions*. IVP: Downers' Grove, IL, 2000) suggests many Christians would be surprised at how much they share in common with Muslims, adding that while very real differences do exist Christians may still learn something from Muslims (185-205).

41. This aspect of Wesley's thought has been discussed by, among others, Randy L. Maddox in "Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation in Other Religions" (*Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 1992), 9-29; Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (InterVarsity Press: Downers' Grove, IL, 1994), 179, 199, 203, 239, 251; Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God: Wesleyan Theology and Biblical Narrative* (Beacon Hill: Kansas City; 1994), 227-33. Cf. Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids; 2002), 178-192.

42. Randy L. Maddox in "Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation in Other Religions" (*Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 1992), 9-29 discusses the progression and maturation of Wesley's thought on religions through his "early," "middle," and "late" periods.

43. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 1:577.

44. *Ibid.*, 7:67.

45. *Ibid.*, 4:495.

46. *Ibid.*, 10:388. Wesley evidently assumes this to be the general or usual Arminian position.

47. *Ibid.*, 7:58. In *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology of Religions* Amos Yong characterizes Wesley's view, along with others such as Gregory of Nazianzan and Thomas Aquinas, as "on the whole more optimistic about the salvation of the unevangelized" than some Christian traditions (*Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series*. Sheffield: Sheffield, England; 2000), 38.

48. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 6:340-41. Interestingly, Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* also speaks of "certain of the Gentiles" who call God "Father," who "from the beginning, according to their capacity... both feared and loved God," and lived according to "moral discipline" in a context of divine providence (*Ante Nicene Fathers*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999 ed.), 1:459, 494.

49. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 6:340-41.

50. *Ibid.*, 6:340-41. As biblical support Wesley quotes Psalm 145:9.

51. *Ibid.*, 6:345. Original italics.

52. *Ibid.*, 7:216. John Wesley acknowledges his indebtedness to John Fletcher for this paradigm (cf. 1:482; 3:253; 3:335-36; 1:482; in *The Works of John Fletcher*. The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002).

53. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc.

Rio, WI: 2002), 7:216.

54. Similarly Thomas C. Oden in *The Living God: Systematic Theology: Volume One* (Prince: Peabody, MA, 2001), asserts that a “universal religious consciousness” is shared by Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other world religions (373) though the accent of Christian faith is on “the biblical understanding of God” (374).

55. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 7:368.

56. *Ibid.*, 7:377.

57. *Ibid.*, 7:377.

58. *Ibid.*, 9:25-26; cf. 9:311.

59. Many Christian books today on the subject of the religions are really addressing pluralism, universalism, and/or syncretism (e.g., Michael Green’s *“But Don’t All Religions Lead to God?” Navigating the Multi-Faith Maze* [Baker: Grand Rapids, 2002]; Ravi Zacharias’ *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message* [Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 2001; John H. Berthrong’s *The Divine Deli: Religious Identity in the North American Cultural Mosaic* [Orbis: NY, 1999]). None of these categories apply to Wesley’s thought on the unevangelized or non-Christian religions.

60. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 9:541.

61. A designation that has become popular today in description of those of non-Christian religions who are held to have “implicit” faith in Christ based on ontological relation apart from any epistemological relation. Timothy C. Tennet suggests such labeling has problems for Christians and Jews, Muslims, or Hindus (*Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam*. Baker, Grand Rapids: 2002), 24-25 (see also n. 12, 178). Carefully qualified, however, implicit and explicit faith categories may be useful. For example, OT saints and Gentile saints prior to the Incarnation may be described in a sense as having “implicit faith” and NT saints and Christians as having “explicit faith” (See *The Wesleyan Heritage Library Commentary Notes on the Old Testament: Genesis-Ruth*. Wesleyan Heritage Publications: 2002; 70, 290. Cf. Thomas C. Oden in *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology: Volume Three*. Prince: Peabody, MA, 2001; 134-136).

62. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 9:547.

63. *Ibid.*, 9:547.

64. Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God: Wesleyan Theology and Biblical Narrative* (Beacon Hill: Kansas City; 1994), 227-33 and Randy L. Maddox in “Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation in Other Religions” (*Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 1992), 9-29.

65. Cf. Colin W. Williams in *John Wesley’s Theology Today: A Study of The Wesleyan Tradition in the Light of Current Theological Dialogue* (Abingdon: Grand Rapids, 1960), 39-46. Cf. Harold Lindstrom in *Wesley and Sanctification* (Asbury: Wilmore, 1946), 46-50.

66. *Ibid.*, 74-75 and *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 10:192-193. Cf. Thomas C. Oden in *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology: Volume Two* (Prince: Peabody, MA, 2001), 389-92.

67. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 5:115.

68. *Ibid.*, 5:120-21. Cf. Harold Lindstrom in *Wesley and Sanctification* (Asbury: Wilmore, 1946), 58-59 and Thomas C. Oden in *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology: Volume Three* (Prince: Peabody, MA, 2001) 81, 85 ff., 108 ff.

69. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 5:62. In “Whither Theological Inclusivism? The Development and Critique of an Evangelical Theology of Religions,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 71:4 (October 1999): 327-48. Amos Yong asserts that for evangelicals the primary issue in a theology of religions

is authentic alignment with the biblical data.

70. *The Wesleyan Heritage Library Commentary Notes on the New Testament: Matthew-Romans* by John Wesley (Wesleyan Heritage Publications: 2002), 15.

71. *Ibid.*, 265. See also Wesley on Acts 14:17 (*Ibid.*, 405) and cf. Thomas C. Oden in *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology: Volume Two* (Prince: Peabody, MA, 2001), 54, 108.

72. *The Wesleyan Heritage Library Commentary Notes on the Old Testament: 1 Samuel-Psalms*. Wesleyan Heritage Publications: 2002), 644.

73. *The Wesleyan Heritage Library Commentary Notes on the New Testament: Matthew-Romans* by John Wesley (Wesleyan Heritage Publications: 2002), 388.

74. *Ibid.*, 390.

75. *Ibid.*, 417. Cf. 14:273.

76. *Ibid.*, 472, 477-78.

77. *The Wesleyan Heritage Library Commentary Notes on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians-Revelation* by John Wesley (Wesleyan Heritage Publications: 2002), 131-32. Cf. the sermon "On the Discoveries of Faith" on Hebrews 11:1 in *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 7:255.

78. Wesley's comments on significant OT passages are also suggestive of the same conclusion. See for an example Genesis 20:1-16 (*The Wesleyan Heritage Library Commentary Notes on the Old Testament: Genesis-Ruth*. Wesleyan Heritage Publications: 2002). Cf. also his introductory notes on Job wherein he praises "primitive theology" and "Gentile piety" (*The Wesleyan Heritage Library Commentary Notes on the Old Testament: 1 Samuel-Psalms*. Wesleyan Heritage Publications: 2002), 487.

79. Ted A. Campbell in *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991) posits the paradigmatic nature of Wesley's reliance on Christian antiquity.

80. Clark Pinnock in *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 35, and John Sanders in *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 267-80, name numerous fathers who espoused inclusivism, as it has come to be called, in some form. George R. McDermott defines an inclusivist as one who says "Jesus is ontologically but not epistemologically necessary for salvation" and lists Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, John Wesley, C. S. Lewis, Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, J. N. D. Anderson, and Millard Erickson as representatives (*Can Evangelicals Learn From World Religions: Jesus, Revelation & Religious Traditions*. IVP: Downers' Grove, IL, 2000, 40-41).

81. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 6:381. He immediately acknowledges, however, the shortcomings of religion built on reason apart from the Scriptures for giving a firm hope of immortality.

82. *Ante Nicene Fathers*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999 ed.), 1:191. Augustine argues in *City of God* that some individuals outside the race of Israel belonged to the fellowship of the heavenly city through divine revelation that was ultimately from Christ as the one Mediator between God and man (XVIII. 47, *Nicene PostNicene Fathers 1*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999 ed. 2:389-90).

83. Ted A. Campbell in *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 49.

84. *Ante Nicene Fathers*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999 ed.), 2:301.

85. *Ibid.*, 2:489.

86. Norman Geisler notes in *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* that the names of Arminius and Wesley have become so intertwined that most references to Arminianism today are actually synonymous with Wesleyanism (Bethany House Publishers: Minneapolis, 2001), 47. Methodism, the Holiness Movement, and the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements have been

significantly Arminian in the tradition of Wesley (Ibid., 106). *The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism: Rediscovering John Fletcher as John Wesley's Vindicator and Designated Successor* demonstrates that Wesley and Fletcher worked in intimate cooperation for years (Pietist and Wesleyan Studies, 15. 2002) by Laurence W. Wood, J. Steven O'Malley, David Bundy.

87. *The Works of James Arminius* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 1:119-20.

88. Ibid., 1:138, 1:145, 146.

89. Ibid., 1:150.

90. Ibid., 1:150.

91. Ibid., 1:286.

92. Ibid., 1:350.

93. Ibid., 2:479.

94. Ibid., 1:160-64.

95. Ibid., 2:26-27 (italics added) "On the Christian Religion, With Regard to the Matter Generally."

96. 1:40 (italics added). In 1:45 Arminius also says, "Therefore, it was rightly said by the ancient heathen ..."—an obvious acknowledgement of divine knowledge.

97. Ibid., 1:101 (italics added).

98. An overview of the unique nature of Wesley's Arminianism by Luke L. Keefer, Jr. entitled "Characteristics of Wesley's Arminianism" may be found online at wesley.nnu.edu by the **Wesley Center for Applied Theology** at Northwest Nazarene University © Copyright 2000.

99. *The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism: Rediscovering John Fletcher as John Wesley's Vindicator and Designated Successor* (Pietist and Wesleyan Studies, 15. 2002) by Laurence W. Wood, J. Steven O'Malley, and David Bundy is a study of the intimate and agreeable spiritual and theological relationship between Wesley and Fletcher.

100. *The Works of John Fletcher* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 3:428-29.

101. Ibid., 1:342. In the 8th century John of Damascus, a Christian theologian who had "held a position of honor in the local Muslim government", viewed Islam "not as a new religion but as a heretical schism from Christianity" and as a threat to Christians. He does, however, "credit Mohammed with leading his people from idolatry to monotheism," but notes that vastly differing Christologies is the major disagreement ("Divided By Christ" by Samuel Hugh Moffett in *Christian History* Issue 74 (Vol. XXI, no 2): 39-40.

102. *The Works of John Fletcher* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 1:482.

103. Ibid., 1:516.

104. Ibid., 1:744-45 (n 58). Cf. 2:331-32.

105. Ibid., 2:375-76. Cf. 2:379.

106. Ibid., 2:431. Cf. 2:434.

107. Ibid., 2:755 and 3:59. Cf. 3:433, 4:297; 4:299-300. Muslims are offended by Christian claims concerning the deity of Christ. Mushaf Al-Madinah calls the doctrine "a relic of pagan and anthropomorphic materialistic superstitions" in *The Holy Qur-an: English Translation and the Meanings and Commentary*. (Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qu'ran, n.d.), 862 n. 2487. Timothy C. Tennet observes, however, in *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* that "Mohammed saw himself in continuity with, not opposition to, Jesus Christ" (Baker, Grand Rapids: 2002), 174. He further suggests that "virtually everything that is said in the thirty-five references to Jesus in the Qu'ran" are attempts to strike a balance that honors Jesus as a true and unique prophet while denying him the honor of deity that Muslims view as a violation of strict monotheism (175).

108. *The Works of John Fletcher* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 3:207. In "Imperial Evasion" Andrew F. Walls notes that Islam has often raised the moral standards of pagan peoples it conquered, providing other genuine practical and spiritual benefits as well (*Christian History* Issue 74 vol. XXI, no. 2): 41-42.

109. *The Works of John Fletcher* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 3:253.

110. *Ibid.*, 3:257.

111. *Ibid.*, 3:334.

112. *Ibid.*, 3:335-36. Fletcher reasons that those who are faithfully walking in the light they already have demonstrate they would receive Christ if they only knew to do so, while those who intentionally reject Christ demonstrate they are resistant even to the light they already have and will be judged accordingly. Therefore, the Gospel serves to expose the inner contents of the heart with its love for or hatred of the light of divine truth (3:338; John 3:18, 36).

113. *Ibid.*, 3:453.

114. *The Works of John Fletcher* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 3:529-30. Cf. 3:535 and 3:537. Cf. Timothy C. Tennet's objection that "the Muslim doctrine of momotheism (*tawhid*) protects God's otherness at the high cost of sacrificing the relational aspect of God's nature as expressed in the Trinity" (*Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam*. Baker, Grand Rapids: 2002), 153.

115. *The Works of John Fletcher* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 4:299-300. When Mohammed's uncle, Abu Talib, explained Islam to a Christian king, Negus, the king reportedly picked up a stick, drew a line in the sand and said, "As God is my witness, the difference between your position and ours is not as wide as this line" (Suwar min Hayat Muhammed. *Images from the Life of Muhammed*. Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt: Amin Duwaidar, n.d. 185.).

116. *The Works of John Fletcher* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 3:336.

117. *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (The Wesleyan Heritage Collection; Ages Software, Inc. Rio, WI: 2002), 6:298-99. Cf. 7:303-04; 9:169; 9:180.

118. *Ibid.*, 2:356.

119. *Ibid.*, 6:305. Cf. 9:34; 10:190.

120. *Ibid.*, 8:521 and 9:180.

121. I am grateful to Amos Yong for valuable advice concerning the concluding section of this paper.

122. For Thomas C. Oden in *The Living God: Systematic Theology: Volume One* (Princeton: Peabody, MA, 2001) Thomas Aquinas and John Wesley are representative of "the best Christian teaching" which is not "contemptuous of other religions" but rather "views each history of religious struggle as a statement of the presence of the Holy Spirit in all of human history" (374).

123. In *Fire From Heaven* (Addison-Wesley: Reading, MA, 1995) Harvey Cox describes Wesley as an important predecessor of Pentecostalism (90-91) and suggests the "primal spirituality" of Pentecostalism is by very nature somewhat eclectic and inclusive (101-105). For an excellent overview of Pentecostalism and the religions see *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology of Religions* by Amos Yong (*Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series*. Sheffield: Sheffield, England, 2000), 183-219. The same author has also written *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2003). Even books by Classical Pentecostals on the popular level stressing Christian superiority tend today to be more tolerant in tone and optimistic about interaction with other religions (cf. David. C. Cooper in *Faith Under Fire: How Christians Respond to Islam and Other Religions*. Pathway: Cleveland, TN, 2001).