

Bruce Springsteen's "Land of Hope and Dreams": Towards Articulating and Assessing Its Inclusiveness

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Abstract

I focus on two things that are well known about Bruce Springsteen's song, "Land of Hope and Dreams." First, it has decisive roots in earlier American songs employing 'the moving train' as analogue to God's Church and His eternal plan for humanity. In this respect, 'the moving train' carries its passengers, who prominently embrace a normative moral imperative, from an imperfectly happy place in this world to a completely happy destination beyond this world. The influencing songs apparently include: "People Get Ready" by Curtis Mayfield, "This Train"/"This Train Is Bound For Glory" by each of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Big Bill Broonzy, and Woody Guthrie, Johnny Cash's "This Train is Bound For Glory" (a.k.a. "The Bible Train") and Bob Dylan's "Slow Train Coming." Secondly, and more importantly, it is also agreed that *LOHAD* is distinguished from its influences by presenting an 'inclusive' message. This has two principal components. In the first place, it is that God's Love ultimately guides all persons towards, within, and to the end goal of his eternal community of Love, to the 'Land of Hope and Dreams,' that is formally established in the afterworld. Secondly, everyone in this world (both 'saints and sinners' and 'whores and gamblers') shares in this goal. Therefore, Springsteen's train, unlike his predecessors' trains', proclaims the redemption and redeeming of all rather than the redemption and redeeming of some. According to *LOHAD*, everyone, whether they know it or not, is on God's train.

Introduction.

The goal of this essay is to articulate and assess the inclusive character of Bruce Springsteen's song "Land of Hope and Dreams"

(*Lohad*: 1998/9, 2012)¹ from his *Wrecking Ball* album.² Towards this end, my essay focuses on two things that are well known about "Land of Hope and Dreams." First, it has decisive roots in earlier American songs employing 'the moving train' as analogue to God's church and eternal plan for humanity.³ In this respect, the train carries its passengers from an imperfectly happy communal life in this world to a blissful communal life in an afterworld, *and* these passengers prominently embrace a moral imperative that distinguishes their community. Second, and more important, it is also agreed that *Lohad* is distinguished from its influences by presenting an unequivocal 'inclusive' message.⁴

¹ I use *Lohad* to signify Springsteen's song and I employ *LOHAD* when referring to Springsteen's notion of God's gift, to humanity, of heaven (and therefore of a heavenly community).

² According to Springsteen Lyrics, *Lohad* was originally written in late 1998-early 1999 and developed until finally recorded on *Wrecking Ball* in 2012. "Bruce Springsteen Lyrics". 2018. *Springsteenlyrics.com*. Accessed January 29. <http://www.springsteenlyrics.com/lyrics.php?song=landofhopeanddreams>; Springsteen, Bruce. 2017. *Born to Run*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.;

In this essay, I rely on the lyrics from the *Wrecking Ball* recording presented. *Springsteenlyrics.com*. <https://www.springsteenlyrics.com/> For general discussion of the protest element in Springsteen's music, including some study of of *Lohad* (77-9), see Vaernewyck, Michiel. 2014. "Meet Me In The Land Of Hope And Dreams: Influences Of The Protest Song Tradition On The Recent Work Of Bruce Springsteen (1995-2012)". Master's, Ghent University.

³ See, for example; "Land of Hope And Dreams". 2019. *Revolve.Com*. Accessed January 29. https://www.revolvy.com/topic/Land%20of%20Hope%20and%20Dreams&item_type=topic. and "Land of Hope And Dreams". 2018. *En.Wikipedia.Org*. Accessed January 19. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_of_Hope_and_Dreams.

⁴ This is well noticed by Sheehy, "This Train: Bruce Springsteen as Public Artist," in *Long Walk Home: Reflections on Bruce Springsteen*, (edd.) Jonathan D. Cohen and June Skinner Sawyers (NJ.; Rutgers University Press, 2019;

In the first instance, I consider *Lohad's* musical inheritance to include: "This Train" / "This Train Is Bound For Glory" (1939-58) by each of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Big Bill Broonzy, and Woody Guthrie; "People Get Ready" (1965) by Curtis Mayfield, Johnny Cash's "This Train is Bound For Glory," a.k.a. "The Bible Train" (1977); and 2016 Nobel laureate Bob Dylan's "Slow Train Coming" (1979). Using this as my springboard, I then claim that *Lohad's* inclusiveness has two principal components that provide the song with a significant measure of philosophical support. On the one hand, it is that God's love, the ultimate motive behind God's plan and betterment of contemporary community, guides all persons towards, within, and to the goal of God's eternal community – to the heavenly, metaphoric "Land of Hope and Dreams (*LOHAD*)", formally established in an afterworld. On the other hand, everyone in this world (both 'saints and sinners') shares in and is being prepared for the eternal goal by participating in earthly community. Hence, "You don't need no ticket ... You just thank the Lord"

Therefore, Springsteen's train, unlike his predecessors' trains, explicitly proclaims the redemption and redeeming of all,

"Land of Hope & Dreams, This Train, And People Get Ready".

2018. *Chimesfreedom*. Accessed January 29.

[http://www.chimesfreedom.com/2012/03/06/land-of-hope-dreams-this-train-and-people-get-ready/;](http://www.chimesfreedom.com/2012/03/06/land-of-hope-dreams-this-train-and-people-get-ready/)

Symynkywicz, Jeffrey. 2008. *The Gospel According To Bruce Springsteen*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press.

Yadin-Israel, Azzan. 2016. *The Grace Of God And The Grace Of Man; The Theologies Of Bruce Springsteen*. Highland Park, NJ: Lingua. 131.

Gardner, Andrew. 2016. "The Theological Virtues According To Bruce Springsteen". *The Biannual Online-Journal Of Springsteen Studies* 2 (1): 63-90. doi:10.26443/boss.v2i1.31.

rather than the perfection and perfecting of some, *and* includes the imperative to work for a better community in the here-and-now. According to *Lohad*, then, each person, whether they know it or not, is on God's train insofar as each is a social being. Finally, if God's love establishes His perfect (and therefore universal) community in the hereafter, it follows not only that participating in contemporary community but also, especially, that conscious effort to improve community – notably signified by Springsteen's concluding refrain "Come on this train, people get ready" – are preparatory to that end. Hence, *Lohad* advocates hope for all. Those upholding contemporary community or otherwise, and/or the community's advantaged and disadvantaged, will ultimately attain *LOHAD*, but also each will ultimately work to improve contemporary community.

Lohad's Musical Inheritance.

This section traces *LOHAD's* musical background by considering earlier American songs employing 'the moving train' as analogue to God's church and His eternal plan for humanity. In particular, it analyzes "This Train"/"This Train Is Bound For Glory" by each of Broonzy, Tharpe, and Guthrie; Cash's "This Train Is Bound For Glory" (a.k.a. "The Bible Train"); Dylan's "Slow Train Coming"; and Mayfield's "People Get Ready."⁵ Although these songs have significant differences, they agree on several matters. This is not only, as stated before, that 'the moving train' carries its passengers from an imperfectly happy place in this world

⁵ Since I assess *Lohad's* inclusivism, I analyze its musical predecessors in light of my understanding of their inclusivism and influence on *Lohad* rather than in strictly chronological order.

to a completely happy destination beyond this world⁶ but also that the destination and train both mandate a moral imperative that can benefit contemporary society and are, in various ways, inclusive. On the one hand, each song considers God's eternal plan in terms of what ultimately results in the afterlife for those who, by God's gift, behave well in the here-and-now – that is, embrace the gift's normative moral imperative – and how embracing that imperative can better structure contemporary community. On the other hand, each song holds that while the train's passengers are being guided to heaven, those on the outside are not. As such, both the afterworld and this world are divided between the train's passengers and non-passengers. Yet each song implies, albeit in various ways, that the makeup of those travelling on the train is, to some extent, inclusive rather than exclusive. In this respect, each of these musical predecessors advocate that both the train and heaven encompass more of humanity than what belongs to any single institutional Christian confession and, in some instances, to any form of institutional Christianity at all.

“This Train,” Bill Broonzy (1893-1958).⁷

According to Broonzy's 1956 recording of “This Train,” the train, which signifies God's church or community, “is bound for glory,” for the ultimate governance or ordering of humanity *in the afterlife* (“When you go there you don't come back”); moves at a

⁶ Dylan's “Slow Train Coming” differs, to some extent, from the other songs since its primary concentration on the welfare of contemporary community in relation to an impending divine judgement makes its focus on God's kingdom constituting the afterlife implicit.

⁷ For study of his life and contributions see: Greene, Kevin D. 2018. *The Invention And Reinvention Of Big Bill Broonzy*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. and Riesman, Bob. 2012. *I Feel So Good: The Life And Times Of Big Bill Broonzy*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press.

very rapid speed ("This train is built for speed ... Fastest train you ever did see"); is the only way to the glorious destination ("This train don't fit no transportation"); and is colored black ("This train is solid black").⁸ Taken altogether, this description of the train suggests that God's victory is assured and is now occurring, and gives the color black a kind of pride. It is possible that Broonzy, an Afro-American, wants 'whites' and 'blacks' alike to see that the black color, a nonessential train characteristic, is fine with and even favored by God. Therefore, white people who discriminate against black people on the basis of color act against common sense (and consequently against God) by setting something non-essential (color) over something essential (personhood). Although Broonzy appears to favor the color black, his message entails that no person should discriminate against another on the basis of color: ("No Jim Crow and no discrimination on This train ... This train don't care if you white or black ... Everybody's treat'd just like a man.").

Who is on the train? And how do they behave? According to Broonzy, the decisive characteristic is neither race nor vocation but a righteous and holy lifestyle, by which he strongly implies some kind of explicit religious affiliation: "This train ... Don't carry nothing but the righteous an' holy." To his mind, this lifestyle excludes: "gamblers ... whiskey drinkers ... high flyers [those who are sinfully ambitious] ... liars" and, as stated before, those discriminating on the basis of skin color. Thus, Broonzy maintains that the train's passengers share the common characteristic of

⁸ I use the lyrics reported at Big Bill Broonzy, "This Train," accessed at "This Train Lyrics - BIG BILL BROONZY". 2017. *Oldielyrics.com*. Accessed 7 December.
https://www.oldielyrics.com/lyrics/big_bill_broonzy/this_train.html.

embracing a religiously grounded moral code or imperative that respects persons, viewing others as ends-in-themselves rather than as means to ends. While the train's passengers, probably churchgoers, uphold the value of persons, those on the outside exploit others, using them as means to the end of achieving some kind of personal satisfaction within a presumably good human community. Broonzy implies, therefore, that contemporary community would be improved if more people adhered to the moral imperative, but whether that happens or not, things will be rightly ordered when the train finishes its journey. At that time, the holy and righteous shall be vindicated and rewarded whereas (presumably) the unholy and unrighteous are condemned and punished.

Based on our principal focus, it is interesting to note that Broonzy's teaching is inclusive to a degree. Although only some persons share in the train's ultimate glory, these are united by adhering to a religion-grounded moral imperative rather than by a specific religious confession. In other words, the train's passengers likely adhere to Christianity, but some might adhere to a non-Christian confession. Broonzy implies, therefore, that the decisive factor determining membership on the train consists in embracing a religion-grounded moral imperative which both upholds the welfare of contemporary community and brings its adherent to heaven.

“This Train,” Sister Rosetta Tharpe (1915-73).⁹

Tharpe’s “This Train” (1939/1942)¹⁰ shares Broonzy’s identification of the train with God’s community and concern with a moral imperative. Although it makes no obvious mention of ‘racial’ discrimination, it is less inclusive on account of identifying the moral imperative with membership in the Christian church. According to Tharpe, the train “bound for glory” “has left the station,” “takes on every nation,” and is “the prettiest train... ever ... seen.” In this respect she holds, with Broonzy, that the train represents God’s church or community, is the standard by which the nations of the world are judged, and is well on its way to being formally established in the afterlife. There, humanity will be rightly ordered so that the train’s passengers will be vindicated and rewarded while those on the outside will be condemned and punished. However, unlike Broonzy’s concentration on the train’s black color, Tharpe claims only that the train is pretty. This characterization shows a concern with the train’s attractiveness to all persons, implying a universal focus.

As noted above, Tharpe shares with Broonzy a strong emphasis on a moral imperative but she explicitly identifies this with being redeemed by Jesus (note the evangelical aspect to her song). On the one hand, she maintains that “This is a clean train” (an oft repeated refrain) which prohibits “jokers,” “tobacco

⁹ Her life and contributions are considered by Wald, Gayle. 2007. *Sister, Shout! The Untold Story Of Rock-And-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe*. Lee's Summit, MO: Beacon.;

Cosby, James A. 2016. *Devil'S Music Holy Rollers and Hillbillies: How America Gave Birth to Rock And Roll*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co.;

and Heilbut, Anthony. 1997. *The Gospel Sound*. NJ: Limelight Editions.

¹⁰ I rely on the lyrics reported at "Sister Rosetta Tharpe - This Train Lyrics | Songmeanings". 2017. *Songmeanings*. Accessed 9 December.
<http://songmeanings.com/songs/view/3530822107858979849/>

chewers," "cigar smokers," "pop shooter[s]," and "whiskey drinker[s]." On the other hand, however, she maintains that those wanting passage on the train "better get redeemed" since the train's passengers are "riding in Jesus' name" and therefore "must be holy." In this respect, Tharpe equates the moral imperative with right relationship with Jesus. While she agrees with Broonzy, then, that people ought to treat each other as ends-in-themselves rather than as means-to-ends and that contemporary community would be better off if more people adhered to that dictum, she explicitly holds that the ability to behave as such is determined by being related to/redeemed by Jesus Christ. In this respect, Tharpe is less inclusive than Broonzy. While both share the view that only those embracing a moral imperative grounded in religious practice shall enjoy the train's ultimate glory and contemporary community would benefit by practicing that imperative, Tharpe holds that that imperative belongs exclusively to a Christian mindset. Her teaching is inclusive since it encompasses a wide variety of Christian denominations. But, all things considered, it is less so than Broonzy since, although he shares the view that the moral imperative is based in religious commitment, he implies that the imperative can be accessed by theists external to institutional Christianity. Therefore, while Broonzy infers that the moral is available to Christian and to non-Christian alike, Tharpe limits the imperative to Christians.

"This Train is Bound for Glory," Woody Guthrie (1912-67)¹¹

Guthrie's "This Train is Bound for Glory" stands in the tradition of Broonzy.¹² According to Guthrie, the train "bound for glory" is "streamlined and a midnight flyer." In this respect, he asserts the traditional view that the train represents God's community, travelling through this world to be formally established in the afterlife; includes some portion of humanity rather than all (hence the train is "streamlined"); and is fast-moving and consequently assured of reaching its destination. God's plan shall be accomplished, and a portion of humanity will enjoy it, the song suggests. Guthrie also joins with Broonzy and Tharpe by upholding a rigorous moral imperative that both guides its adherents to heaven and can improve contemporary community. But, as Guthrie does not explicitly identify the imperative with Christianity, his outlook is more akin to Broonzy's inclusivism than to Tharpe's. How so? Guthrie asserts that the train excludes "gamblers," "big shot rambler," "liars," "smokers," "small time jokers," "con men," "wheeler dealers," "rustlers," and "two bit hustlers," since it carries "nothing but the righteous and the holy." Yet, unlike Tharpe, Guthrie does not specifically identify "the righteous and the holy" with membership in the Christian church. Therefore, while Guthrie shares Broonzy's and Tharpe's view that only some persons share in the train's ultimate glory, his lyrics

¹¹ For study of his life and contributions see: Stadler, Gustavus. 2020. *Woody Guthrie: An Intimate Life*. Summit, MO: Beacon Press;
Cray, Ed. 2006. *Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie*. New York: W.W. Norton.;
Klein, Joe. 1999. *Woody Guthrie: A Life*. New York: Delta Publishing;
and Guthrie, Woody. 1983. *Bound for Glory: The Hard-Driving, Truth Telling, Autobiography Of America's Great Poet-Folk Singer*. New York: Plume Publishing.
¹² "This Train Is Bound for Glory". 2017. *Woodyguthrie.Org*.
http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/This_Train_Is_Bound_For_Glory.html.

suggest an agreement with Broonzy that membership on the train, and consequently adherence to the moral imperative, is determined by membership in some religious confession—which may or may not be Christian. As with Broonzy, however, it is unclear whether Guthrie's inclusivism is ultimately rooted in Christ or if Christ is rooted in something superior governing a variety of religious confessions.

“The Bible Train,” Johnny Cash (1932-2003).¹³

By contrast, Cash's inclusivism in “The Bible Train” is more limited since it is closer to Tharpe's than to Broonzy's and Guthrie's.¹⁴ To begin with, Cash's train, named “the Bible train,” is initially stationary, presumably because its journey includes various stops to allow people the opportunity to climb aboard (“The Bible train is in the yard now and it's waiting....”). Moreover, Cash joins Tharpe by maintaining that the train is attractive to all—suggesting that what the train represents, presumably the pathway to eternal life, is universally appealing. Cash also states that, after some people have boarded the train while others have departed,

¹³ For study of his life and contributions see *inter alia*: Laurie, Greg, and Marshall Terrill. 2019. *Johnny Cash*. Nashville, TN: Salem Books.; Light, Alan. 2018. *Johnny Cash*. NY: Smithsonian Books.; Streissguth, Michael. 2006. *The Biography*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press Inc., N.Y.; Urbanski, Dave. 2003. *The Man Comes Around: The Spiritual Journey Of Johnny Cash*. AK: Relevant Books.; Cash, Johnny. 2003. *Johnny Cash: The Autobiography*. CA: HarperOne. "Home". 2017. *Johnny Cash Official Site*. <http://www.johnnycash.com/>; and "Johnny Cash". 2017. *Biography*. <https://www.biography.com/people/johnny-cash-9240610>
¹⁴ “This Train is Bound For Glory”. “This Train Is Bound For Glory.” <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/johnnycash/thistrainisboundforglory.html>. Accessed 9 December.

the train leaves the station and “the man on the caboose with a long white beard says, ‘This train is bound for glory.’” This man represents wisdom born of experience and he sings the above (and more) for two reasons. On the one hand, his song benefits those on the train by reminding them of their good decision, and, on the other hand, his song reminds those left behind at the station of what they have rejected. Cash, therefore, shares the traditional view that the train represents God’s community, travelling through this world and to be formally established in the afterlife; includes some portion of humanity rather than all (“Some won’t ride ... Some ride but not all the way”); and is assured of reaching its destination (“This train is bound for glory”). So, God’s plan is being accomplished, and only a portion of humanity will enjoy it. Finally, since Cash’s song is hortatory, it finishes by asking the “children” if they want to ride the Bible train and exhorts them to “Get on board this holy train.”

Cash also joins with his predecessors by upholding a rigorous moral imperative that would benefit contemporary community, but unlike Broonzy and Guthrie, he explicitly identifies that imperative with membership in the Christian church. Therefore, Cash’s train excludes those who, being “bored and impatient” concerning the train’s nature and journey, practice drunkenness or adultery, and/or other vices (“but there’s a lot more to get off than different reasons”) as well as “liars,” “false pretenders,” and “backbiters” –since (as Tharpe had said) “This train is a clean train” that “nobody rides ... but the righteous and holy.” Moreover, Cash explicitly identifies the latter with membership in the Christian church. As noted before, he names his train “the Bible train” since its members are “in the church.” Hence, Cash sings that “Everybody rides it in Jesus’s name.” In this respect

Cash, like Tharpe before him, equates the moral imperative with the right relationship with Jesus. While he agrees with Broonzy and Guthrie that people ought to treat each other as ends-in-themselves rather than as means-to-ends and that contemporary communities would be better off if more people did so, he holds that the ability to embrace that principle is determined by having a relationship with Jesus Christ.

In this respect, Cash's teaching (like Tharpe's) is inclusive since it encompasses a wide variety of Christian denominations. But it is less inclusive than Broonzy and Guthrie's doctrine since the latter focuses on a moral imperative that (at least as far as this world goes) transcends institutional Christianity. Unlike Broonzy and Guthrie, Cash maintains unequivocally that the requisite moral imperative is somehow identical to Christ and, therefore, only those confessing Christ in this life can share in His "glory." Hence, while the train's passengers willingly receive Christ's gift, behave accordingly, and are ordained for "glory," all others, apparently rejecting Christ's gift and lifestyle, are ordained for condemnation.

"Slow Train Coming," Bob Dylan (1941 –)¹⁵

For its part, Dylan's train enlarges the inclusivism represented by Broonzy and Guthrie since it includes religious and non-religious persons alike.¹⁶ It is significant, I think, that Dylan's

¹⁵ For biographical materials see *inter alia*: Shelton, Robert, Patrick Humphries, and Elizabeth King. 2011. *No Direction Home; The Life and Music of Bob Dylan*. NY: Omnibus Press.

McDougal, Dennis. 2014. *Dylan: The Biography*. NY: Wiley.

¹⁶ "Slow Train Coming."

<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bobdylan/slowtrain.html>. Accessed 9 December.

train is both slow moving and unstoppable (hence the famous, oft-repeated chorus: “There’s [a] slow, slow train coming up around the bend.”). He claims, therefore, that God’s eternal kingdom, though somewhat hidden from view in this world, will ultimately be accomplished. But in something of a departure from the previously analyzed songs, Dylan’s slow-moving train implies that God is immensely patient, wanting to give *all people* ample opportunity to join God’s train. (I will return to this point later, since it bespeaks Dylan’s relatively greater inclusivism.)

Dylan also exhibits a resolute moral imperative that, if practiced, would benefit contemporary society. But, in a departure from his inheritance, this imperative is universally accessible because Dylan’s song emphasizes the responsibility each person has for the good of contemporary community. At the outset, Dylan asserts his concern with the moral welfare of his friends, country, and world at large—by which I take him to mean both religious and non-religious persons. Dylan worries that both parties embrace “earthly principles” to the effect that each, in some way, practices injustice to gain selfish enjoyment of some common good. Each party, in other words, exploits some members of the community for the sake of obtaining something for themselves that properly belongs to the welfare of the entire community. On the one hand, Dylan’s friends, whether “lost ... or found,” exhibit disordered behavior, concern with power, honor, fame, and wealth. On the other hand, Dylan’s country (the U.S.A.) is being controlled by Arab foreign oil powers who want power and wealth. In general, the problem is that man has supplanted God as the source of value, right and wrong, and, consequently, of reward and punishment. As Dylan sees it, the powerful, imitating and

employing Satan, have subordinated the moral imperative to their own wayward impulse to exercise power for the sake of personal advantage. In other words, they substitute the power of service with the service of power. Thus, Dylan sings that “Man’s ego is inflated, his laws are outdated, they don’t apply no more ... Fools glorifying themselves, trying to manipulate Satan.”¹⁷

What does this mindset entail? A culture of deceit, to Dylan’s mind, is pervaded by a variety of evil doers, including: “Big-time negotiators” (persons claiming that Truth is what people agree to, rather than something objective); “false healers,” like fake psychologists, claiming to heal, for the sake of money and power; “woman haters,” perhaps false feminists, claiming to uphold the welfare of women but actually denigrating them; and “Masters of the bluff and masters of the proposition” (persons wanting to get what they want by claiming to be true what they know is false). The worst evil doers, however, are those employing religion as means to satisfy their selfish desire. While these persons “talk about a life of brotherly love,” they instead line their pockets and/or help others do so by advocating starvation and thirst. “People starving and thirsting, grain elevators are bursting / Oh, you know it costs more to store the food than it do to give it”. According to Dylan, these use the veneer of a doctrine of good will to pursue social status. Instead of upholding human dignity, they propound doctrines catering to the false designs of the powerful and influential.

Finally, Dylan recognizes his own limited power in the battle against moral relativism and/or indifference insofar as

¹⁷ Augustine. 412-425. *The City of God*. 4.27, 10.27-29, 30, 32.

Dylan’s indictment of religious hypocrisy in his era echoes Augustine’s indictment of religious hypocrisy in his era.

someone he loves is in a bad relationship that he cannot persuade her to leave. Dylan writes, "Well, my baby went to Illinois with some bad-talking boy she could destroy / A real suicide case, but there was nothing I could do to stop it." In this respect, Dylan recognizes the reality of personal responsibility. On the one hand, it is beyond his power to prevent that bad relationship (since his loved one has chosen it). On the other hand, Dylan is upset by seeing, both in this instance and elsewhere, his "loved ones turning into puppets," denying their personal responsibility, properly grounded in the moral imperative, by subjecting themselves to some person-denying dogma or ideology. Hence, Dylan underscores his disapproving disposition by exclaiming disdain for the popular ideologies of "economy" and "astronomy" What is meant by this? Each ideology denies the primacy of personhood. On the one hand, those speaking of the 'economy's welfare' might propound a self-justifying rationalization to subject the welfare of some to others. On the other hand, those speaking of 'astronomy' might deny human dignity by maintaining that human events are not determined by responsible choice-making but by impersonal forces beyond human control, by the movements of the stars and planets. Both ideologies, then, countenance injustice by maintaining that some impersonal force governs human affairs. But since the train is moving, Dylan implies hope that, as his own spiritual awakening and disapproval of injustice show, God will somehow supply what human action lacks. In other words, Dylan hopes that his loved ones might eventually be awakened to the truth.

What, then, is Dylan's antidote to the moral relativism spoiling contemporary community, to the "earthly principles they're gonna have to abandon"? The second verse of "Slow Train

Coming” suggests that the antidote consists in some kind of a spiritual awakening. In this respect, Dylan certainly has in mind his own conversion to Christ whereby his spiritual awakening occurred. Concerning the latter, Dylan writes, “I had a woman down in Alabama / She was a backwoods girl, but she sure was realistic / She said, Boy, without a doubt, have to quit your mess and straighten out / You could die down here, be just another accident statistic.”¹⁸ But I think Dylan does not mention conversion to Christ as such because he grounds the moral imperative within spiritual values, brought about by a spiritual awakening, generally conceived. Dylan’s patriotic concern with the U.S.A. gives evidence for this since his prominent mention of Thomas Jefferson in verse four, after indicting moral relativism, underscores the view that America is founded on and embraces common spiritual values rather than a specific religion.¹⁹ In other words, the American republic is pluralist concerning religion. It welcomes many

¹⁸ Apparently, this refers to Dylan’s girlfriend at that time. She had a conversion to Christ while they were a couple and inspired Dylan towards his conversion. Dylan sings of her influence in *Slow Train’s* “Precious Angel.” See “Bob Dylan Finds God – A Classic Article From The Vaults”. 2017. *The Guardian*. Accessed December 9.

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/sep/11/bob-dylan-classic-article>. “The turning point for Dylan came when the girl he’d been living with became a committed Christian. She promptly moved out on him as she’d attained a new set of values. The depth of this commitment caused him to set about investigating for himself. She is now immortalized as the Precious Angel who was “the one/ To show me I was blinded/ To show me I was gone.”

¹⁹ As a Deist, Jefferson rejected claims concerning the divinity of Christ but esteemed his moral teachings and, on the supposition that the American people would be theistic in their private lives, he famously advocated for the separation of State administration from Church administration. For study of Jefferson’s religious convictions see: Muñoz, Vincent Phillip. 2009. *God and The Founders: Madison, Washington, Jefferson*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 70-116; and Frazer, Gregg L. 2012. *The Religious Beliefs of America's Founders: Reason, Revelation, And Revolution*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press.

religions, but is united concerning certain spiritual and moral values that those religions, and consequently the American citizen, should uphold.

Hence, "Slow Train Coming" maintains that everyone, whether religious-minded or otherwise, acknowledges and can embrace the moral imperative. But "Slow Train Coming" also holds that a secure grounding requires some kind of spiritual awakening that likely includes, at minimum, recognition of personal immortality, moral responsibility, and God's establishing an eschatological community whose members ultimately instantiate the fullness of moral responsibility. Dylan, I think, makes a Jeffersonian view of private religion function as a kind of standard and filter, on the one hand, for religious practice and, on the other, for citizenship. To his mind, non-religious persons can uphold the imperative but only religious persons can firmly embrace it. The former can and should strive to adhere to the imperative, but they are probably more likely to veer away from it, towards moral relativism, since they lack a spiritual awakening setting them into a religious tradition wherein both they and the imperative are securely grounded. Hence, religious persons properly embrace the moral imperative by recognizing that it is grounded in authentic religion and universal in scope. Nevertheless, Dylan holds that both religious and non-religious persons share the responsibility of improving contemporary community by conforming it to the imperative to the degree it is known.

It is obvious, therefore, that Dylan joins each of his predecessors by upholding a rigorous moral imperative, but he is distinguished by claiming that the imperative is universally accessible and, consequently, that each person is responsible for improving the human community. On the one hand, Dylan agrees

that people ought to follow the moral imperative and, consequently, treat each other as ends-in-themselves rather than as means-to ends; that contemporary community would be better off if people did so, and that people will ultimately be rewarded for embracing the imperative and punished for forsaking it. On the other hand, however, he does not claim (with Tharpe and Cash) that the ability to embrace the imperative is determined by having *an explicit relationship* with Jesus Christ. In this respect, Dylan's teaching is akin to that of Broonzy and Guthrie since it distinguishes an imperative that transcends institutional Christianity. But Dylan's teaching exceeds Broonzy and Guthrie's by maintaining that the imperative is accessible to all persons, including the non-religious. Dylan positively claims that passage on the train is determined by embracing a moral law that is best accessed *via* a variety of religious confessions available to everyone. Moreover, Dylan implies that the imperative is ultimately grounded in Christ. So, what unifies Dylan's outlook? The key distinction is likely the supposition that Christ, and consequently the moral imperative, is present to each. Additionally, the breadth of Dylan's approach is underscored by the fact that his train is slow-moving. For this implies the notion that God exercises patience towards all persons, giving each the opportunity to climb aboard God's train.

It is well known that Dylan's album *Slow Train Coming* celebrates his conversion to Christianity.²⁰ But the song "Slow Train Coming" implies a significant distinction between embracing Christ explicitly and embracing Him implicitly. Dylan recognizes

²⁰ See, for example, the characterization of *Slow Train* in "Slow Train Coming". 2017. *En.Wikipedia.Org*. Accessed December 9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slow_Train_Coming.

that his personal spiritual awakening and espousal of the moral imperative is rooted in his conversion to Christ. However, in agreement with Thomas Jefferson, Dylan also claims that *in this life* spiritual awakening and loyalty to the moral imperative are available to people through some religious mediums that are not Christian. Moreover, Dylan appears to move beyond Jefferson and others by claiming that the moral imperative is accessible to everyone, even to the non-religious. Therefore, since Dylan teaches that anyone who, in this life, embraces the moral imperative is loyal to Christ, he implies that Christ makes Himself accessible to a variety of religious and non-religious or secular traditions. Dylan's overall doctrine, then, differs from his predecessors for two closely related reasons. First, it focuses principally on the welfare of contemporary communities and second, it is more inclusive since, while grounded in Christ, it includes many forms of institutional Christianity, many non-Christian religions, and non-religious persons. Dylan's view of Christ allows him to take an unprecedented view of the scope of the moral imperative.

"People Get Ready," Curtis Mayfield (1942-1990)²¹

In "People Get Ready"²² Mayfield presents an inclusive teaching, but it is not as broad as Dylan's (or, for that matter, as

²¹ For study of his life and contributions see: Mayfield, Todd, and Travis Atria. 2016. *Traveling Soul: The Life of Curtis Mayfield*. IL: Chicago Review Press. and Werner, Craig Hansen. 2004. *Higher Ground: Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Curtis Mayfield, and the Rise and Fall Of American Soul*. New York: Crown Publishing.

²² I rely on the lyrics from "Curtis Mayfield - People Get Ready Lyrics".

2017. *Azlyrics.Com*. Accessed December 7.

<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/curtismayfield/peoplegetready.html>.

For helpful discussion of this song see: "People Get Ready".

Broonzy's and Guthrie's) since Mayfield seems to claim, with Tharpe and Cash, that passage on the train is determined by having an explicit relationship with Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, although Mayfield's song pre-dates Cash's and Dylan's, I analyze it now because, as Springsteen's *Lohad* will suggest, its focus on the gratuitous nature of God's gift together with the human response thereto of gratitude implies a more robust inclusiveness than Mayfield advances.²³

Mayfield's train has a traditional character; the train is moving towards its destination ("There's a train a comin'"); its journey and destination includes baptism ("There's a train to Jordan"); it is picking up passengers all across the U.S.A. ("Picking up passengers coast to coast"); and its ultimate meaning will be manifested to all ("There's no hiding place / Against the Kingdom's Throne"). Mayfield, therefore, shares the commonplace view that the train represents God's community, travelling through this world and to be formally established in the afterlife, includes some portion of humanity rather than all, and is assured of reaching its destination. So, God's plan is being accomplished and only a portion of humanity will enjoy it. Like his predecessors, Mayfield also upholds a moral imperative that is beneficial to contemporary communities. But, in this instance, community is divided between those who are *grateful* to the Lord and those who, like "the hopeless sinner who would hurt all mankind / Just to save

2017. *En.Wikipedia.Org*. Accessed December 9.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People_Get_Ready.

²³ It is commonly agreed that this aspect of Mayfield's "People Get Ready" strongly influences Springsteen's inclusivism in *Lohad*. See, for example: "Chimesfreedom - Pophistory: Music, Movies, History, And Life.". 2018. *Chimesfreedom*. Accessed January 29. <http://www.chimesfreedom.com>. and "Land". 2018. *En.Wikipedia.Org*. Accessed January 29, and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land>.

his own," use or exploit others to attain some particular goal or subordinate the common good.

In this respect, Mayfield, like Tharpe before him and Cash later, equates the moral imperative with right relationship with Jesus. While Mayfield agrees that people ought to treat each other as ends-in-themselves rather than as means-to-ends, and that contemporary community would be better off if more people did so, he holds that the ability to embrace that principle is determined by having an explicit relationship with Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, there is something novel within Mayfield's claim that membership on the train is determined by embracing Christ's moral imperative. This is because Mayfield focuses on an aspect of the imperative (also noticed, but not concentrated on, by Cash pertaining to gratitude towards the Lord. "Don't need no ticket / You just thank the Lord.") In this respect, Mayfield emphasizes that God freely gives the gift of faith that causes passengers to be on the train in the first place. In other words, the passengers are such because they have received an unmerited gift from God, which, logically, causes their gratitude as well. On this basis, the train's passengers are encouraged to love their enemies, to "Have pity on those whose / Chances grow thinner." Presumably, this is because the passengers should recognize that what distinguishes them from the sinner is not something that is ultimately in human power. It is neither their "baggage" nor "ticket," but God's unmerited gift of grace. So those 'in' the Lord ("Among those loved the most") are strongly encouraged to have a disposition of gratitude toward the One who gives them the gifts of faith, baptism, and, finally, eternal bliss. And this gratitude should motivate them to love both friends and enemies. We note, however, that Mayfield's focus on God's unmerited gift is not only

novel but implies something more profound. This is because Mayfield's notion of the primacy of God's unmerited gift promises something more than his song delivers. For if, by Mayfield's principle, God is self-sufficient and humankind is fundamentally receptive to God's gift, it should follow that God ultimately gives His gift to each and that each gratefully attains membership in God's kingdom.

That said, it is obvious that Mayfield—like Tharpe, Cash, and Dylan (in a way)—embraces a form of Christian inclusivism. Together with Tharpe and Cash, Mayfield makes it evident that the train's passengers practice Christianity, and his train is open to a wide number of Christian confessions. However, unlike what we encountered in Broonzy, Guthrie, and Dylan, Mayfield identifies the moral imperative with membership in the Christian church. Hence, the difference between being a train passenger or otherwise is not determined by loyalty to a universally accessible imperative but by embracing Christian gratitude and exhibiting the specific religious acts and moral activity this entails. In one respect, then, Mayfield's inclusivism is expansive since it includes a wide variety of Christians. In another respect, however, it is restrictive since it leaves no place for those without an explicit relationship with Christ and/or the moral imperative. In this respect, Mayfield's message falls short of Broonzy and Guthrie's message—and it is especially distant from Dylan's "Slow Train Coming." Yet, as stated before, Mayfield's song *implies* a more inclusive doctrine than each of the above. For by focusing on the free and unmerited nature of God's gift, it is suggested that the latter can ultimately be applied to all persons, not only to those within institutional Christianity but also, in some manner, to everyone on the outside.

Analyzing “Land of Hope and Dreams” by Bruce Springsteen²⁴

This section studies Springsteen’s *Lohad* by considering its relationship with the aforementioned songs constituting its musical inheritance. On this basis, we notice *Lohad*’s unparalleled inclusivism since, unlike any of its predecessors, this song instantiates the concept of a self-sufficient God, in particular God’s goodness, into the entire human race so that the latter’s orientation towards *LOHAD* causes it to participate in, but especially to augment, contemporary community.

The inclusivism Springsteen advances in *Lohad* is more expansive than its predecessors due to its unique claim that *God is*

²⁴ Recent studies of Springsteen’s life and contributions include: Springsteen (2017), Cohen, J.D. and J. Skinner Sawyers, 2019, *Long Walk Home: Reflections on Bruce Springsteen*. Rutgers University Press.;

Hiatt, Brian. 2019. *Bruce Springsteen*. 2019: Harry N. Abrams.;

Carlin, P.A. 2012. *Bruce*. NY: Atria Books.;

and "Bruce Springsteen". 2017. *En.Wikipedia.Org*. Accessed December 9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Springsteen.

Fine bibliographies are also provided by P. Symynkywicz (Symynkywicz 2008: 194-197)

and Yadin-Israel, (Yadin-Israel 2016: 189-98). Welcome study of the spiritual dimension within Springsteen’s music is given by Yadin-Israel (Yadin-Israel 2016: 181), writing that “the biblical and theological themes in Springsteen’s songs are elements—alongside memories, thoughts, imaginings—that he has assimilated in his mind and artistically reworked in lyrics.... all these are more the result of intuitive artistry than bookish erudition... And so, it falls to the scholar of Scripture and theology to provide an account of the ways Springsteen has woven these elements into his work, thereby revealing a hitherto unappreciated dimension of his artistry.” But see also Symynkywicz, (Symynkywicz 2008: 185), who gives a general account of Springsteen’s theology, writing that: “The essence of Springsteen’s good news is not just that there is a power which moves through human history transcending differences, liberating that which lies captive, and healing all wounds. His even better news is that this divine power lives and moves through indisputably common, fallible, imperfect people like us.” My interpretation agrees both with Yadin-Israel that Springsteen’s spiritual claims are principally intuitive and with Symynkywicz concerning their meaning.

*accessible to all and ultimately received by all, and man's proper disposition towards God consists in a kind of gratitude that issues in community building.*²⁵ In one way, Springsteen integrates and develops both Mayfield's emphasis on the primacy of a grateful disposition for God's unmerited gift and Dylan's emphasis on God's universal accessibility or omnipresence in the human community. This is because Springsteen's unparalleled focus on the primacy of God's unmerited gift allows him to link together Dylan's teaching on divine omnipresence in the human community

²⁵ Springsteen seems to trace his inclusivism to friendship with Jesus Christ. In his words (Springsteen 2017: 17): "As funny as its sounds, I have a "personal" relationship with Jesus. ... I believe deeply in his [i.e. in Jesus'] love, his ability to save ... but not to damn ... enough of that." Springsteen maintains that his affiliation with Christ derives from his Catholic upbringing, and that his Catholic roots run deep. In his words (Springsteen 2017: 17): "as I grew older, there were certain things about the way I thought, reacted, behaved. I came to ruefully and bemusedly understand that once you're a Catholic, you're always a Catholic. So I stopped kidding myself. I don't often participate in my religion but I know somewhere ... deep inside ... I'm still on the team." For discussion of Springsteen's relationship with Catholicism see: "Andrew Greeley On The Catholic Imagination Of Bruce Springsteen". 1988. *America Magazine*.

<https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/100/catholic-imagination-bruce-springsteen>. Accessed 13 February, 2018.

"Andrew Greeley On The Catholic Imagination Of Bruce Springsteen".

2018. *America Magazine*. Accessed February 13.

<https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/100/catholic-imagination-bruce-springsteen> Accessed 13 February 2018; and, with helpful bibliographies, (Gardner 2016: 64-72, 89-90, and Yadin-Israel 2016: 10-14.)

While Greely (1) maintains that Springsteen "perhaps without knowing or understanding it, is a Catholic *meistersinger*," and Gardner's study of *Wrecking Ball* concurs (70-1), Yadin-Israel holds otherwise. To his mind (12), "Springsteen's Catholic upbringing informs his writing ... But it is analytically inadequate to reduce his artistic expression to biographical terms." This analysis of *Lohad* suggests that while Springsteen identifies himself as Catholic, and his experience of Catholicism influences his music, his teaching is, as Yadin-Israel implies, unique.

with Mayfield's teaching on gratitude. In this regard, then, Springsteen places "new wine in skins." His principal point is neither that God is present to all humans by their participation in community (Dylan's emphasis), nor is it that Christians owe gratitude to God (Mayfield's teaching). Rather, standing beyond Dylan and Mayfield, Springsteen claims that God establishes all persons in the community *and* disposes them towards gratitude for it because (beyond Dylan and Mayfield) God's unmerited gift entails that the entire race is structured for and will ultimately receive God's unmerited gift of *LOHAD*. Hence, Springsteen claims, against Dylan, that God ultimately establishes in God's eternal community all persons, that any gratitude towards community represents gratitude towards God and that all persons will *ultimately*, in *LOHAD*, be grateful to God. Moreover, Springsteen asserts, against Mayfield, that God is present to all persons in contemporary community, that gratitude for community represents gratitude towards God and, as above, that God ultimately establishes the entire race in God's blissful afterlife community. Put differently, Springsteen promulgates a moral imperative, mandating the augmentation of contemporary community, which is accessible to all, ultimately received by all, and governed by an eschatological claim. It is evident, therefore, that Springsteen's cardinal assertion concerning *LOHAD* both integrates and develops his inheritances so that *Lohad's* inclusivism surpasses what is found within its kindred musical ancestors.

What lies beneath Springsteen's unique vision? And how is it signified by the song's title, "Land of Hope and Dreams"? To begin with, Springsteen holds that since everyone, whether they know it or not, is structured by the innate desire for *LOHAD*, for

membership in an entirely perfect community,²⁶ and since everyone is intrinsically communal, then everyone—whether upholding community or (*contra* Dylan) subordinating it to some private good—implies the good of community. At minimum, each enjoys and/or establishes what, at least for him/her, is a better community.²⁷ (As we will see below, this pursuit of community begins with merely human communities but both implies and ultimately terminates in *LOHAD*, in a divine-centered community constituting the afterlife.) In any event, Springsteen claims that since everyone belongs to a community, everyone has access to God and his moral imperative. Moreover, since man's proper response to experiencing and enjoying community—both human-centered and divine-centered—consists in gratitude, that disposition must prevail to progress on the train and ultimately attain “the land of hope and dreams.” Springsteen maintains, then, that God is accessed by sharing and working to improve the community. Hence, “land of hope and dreams” has two related meanings: the community one presently belongs to and properly augments, and the universal eschatological community (*LOHAD*) God establishes in the afterlife. According to Springsteen's song, the former participates in and leads to the latter.

²⁶ Cf. Augustine's, *Confessions* 1.1.1: 'the human heart is restless until it rests in God'; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, 2.1, *obj.* 1 and *ad* 1 concerning man's innate orientation towards happiness, identified ultimately with God; and U2's song, 'I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For' (U2, "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," Track #2 on *The Joshua Tree* Island Records, 1987)

²⁷ Symynkywicz (Symynkywicz 2016), writes: "We may never see this land of hope and dreams with human eyes within this lifetime. But we know that it truly abides, as an almost heavenly vision, out on the horizon's edge. It is toward that vision—toward realization of these deeper hopes and dreams—that all our actions in this world must be pointed."

Springsteen maintains that all members of contemporary community, whether presently grateful or otherwise, are destined to attain God's "land of hope and dreams."²⁸ But it can be hard to square this claim with what is stated above. For if Springsteen asserts that persons can have a positive or negative attitude towards community ("This train / Carries saints and sinners"), why does he assert that the "land of hope and dreams," and, consequently God's moral imperative, is ultimately received by all? Does Springsteen deny personal responsibility? Part of the answer is found in recognizing Springsteen's unprecedented emphasis on divine eschatology and allied claim that God's gift permeates the human journey from beginning to end. Springsteen's principal claim is not that God's gift structures persons to have *the opportunity* to attain to and enjoy the 'land of hope and dreams' – for this suggests that humanity's *telos* of God's gift might be definitively accepted or rejected. Rather, it is that God's gift to each person of *LOHAD* that structures each person and governs his/her journey to *LOHAD*. Therefore, God's gift of *LOHAD* entails helping people to become grateful. This refers both to those who, in this life, are grateful to a degree and those who, in this life, are more ungrateful than grateful—for example, the song's "losers, gamblers, thieves, and lost souls," who subordinate the good of community to some private good. In short, Springsteen suggests that God's gift entails developing and/or correcting everyone

²⁸ As Symynkywicz, (Symynkywicz 2016: 137), writes: "The honored and despised, the foolish and the wise—all people are welcome on board this train as it proceeds on its journey. All people are needed to complete the full panorama of human being. All must be saved if there is to be any hope for any of us." Camus, Albert, and translated by Herbert Read. 1956. *The Rebel*. New York: Vintage Books.: 304, who writes: "if all are not saved, what good is the salvation of one only?" To Camus' mind, the teaching that man has a blissful end beyond this world implies universal salvation.

(whether in this life or, it is implied, in an afterlife) so that each attains *LOHAD*. Thus, insofar as Springsteen envisions it, the nature of God's gift is both accessible to all and finally received by all, so that everyone will ultimately embrace God's moral imperative.

Springsteen's Train

How, then, does Springsteen describe his train? And what does it mean? From beginning to end, Springsteen asserts that his train is moving towards the 'land of hope and dreams,' i.e. towards manifesting the meaning of human life. What evidence is given at the outset that everyone pursues "the land of hope and dreams"? Springsteen claims that everyone seeks friendship and companionship ("Well darlin' if you're weary / Lay your head upon my chest"). In this respect, Springsteen joins the implicit to the explicit. For if "the land of hope and dreams' is friendship par excellence, then pursuing friendship means that one implicitly pursues the "land of hope and dreams." Unlike earlier musicians, Springsteen does not describe the train's speed but instead mentions that the train is noisy ("Thunder's rollin' down this track"). Presumably, this is because Springsteen's train is both making known to all the meaning of life and is the way to realize it. It seems, moreover, that noting the train's speed would be irrelevant since, as everyone will attain "the land of hope and dreams," no one will finally miss the train. None are left behind because the train is omnipresent. Why does the train have "big wheels"? Because it carries the whole of humanity to its destination. It is also possible that the train's "rolling through fields" represents travelling through places that are either not yet or are incompletely civilized, on its way to what civilization really

is “the land of hope and dreams.” Here too, then, Springsteen seems to ally the implicit with the explicit.

Springsteen also mentions how “sunlight streams.” This can mean that the sun of our hopes and dreams is partly hidden in this world: hence, again, “Well you don’t know where you’re goin now / But you know you won’t be back.” However, as “Tomorrow there’ll be sunshine / And all this darkness past,” it follows that the passengers ultimately arrive at “the land of hope and dreams.” In the end, therefore, the train’s destination, and therefore its meaning, will be entirely visible since it is entirely accomplished. Springsteen also states that the train’s “steel wheels” sing and “Bells of freedom” ring. What can this mean? To begin with, it is probably that the train’s wheels are well built, and their singing signifies the happy destination towards which the train is travelling. Moreover, “Bells of freedom ring’n” tells people to board the train to attain complete freedom by building community in the here-and-now and journeying to *LOHAD*. We see, therefore, that Springsteen agrees with his predecessors that the train represents God’s community, travelling through this world to be formally established in the afterlife, and is assured of reaching its destination. To Springsteen’s mind, the train represents the accomplishment of God’s plan. However, as noted before, Springsteen stands apart from his predecessors by maintaining that God’s plan is that *everyone* ultimately boards the train since everyone really desires and finally attains “the land of hope and dreams.”

Springsteen’s Moral Imperative

In conjunction with each of his predecessors, Springsteen upholds a moral imperative, but, like Dylan alone, he judges that the latter is universally accessible insofar as it properly consists in

community building. His song maintains, however, that this attitude is *developmental*, growing to fullness by stages. Since it is unclear to those standing at the beginning what community building ultimately entails, Springsteen writes, "Well you don't know where you're goin now / But you know you won't be back." To my mind, Springsteen distinguishes four stages in community building having the common foundation of cultivating some kind of friendship, i.e. recognition that others are properly embraced as ends or as irreducible (rather than as means to ends or as reducible),²⁹ that surpasses, but should include, one's immediate family, and for which one is properly grateful.³⁰

The first kind of friendship or community-building (verse 2) pertains to adolescence. It is built on the discovery that life so far lived, in conjunction with one's immediate community is not "the land of hope and dreams" or "the promised land" but that the latter might be found or established somewhere else in this world. Although these friends wrongly think *LOHAD* can be established here, their friendship is authentic insofar as each value the other as irreducible, and they rightly seek to establish a better community. Springsteen writes, "Well darlin' if you're weary / Lay your head upon my chest / We'll take what we can carry / And we'll leave the rest." So, the friends join together and perhaps move elsewhere in pursuit of "the land of hope and dreams" because they think it can be found or established elsewhere. (This mindset is found in

²⁹ Although this view of friendship is developed through the Western tradition, it is initially set forth by philosophers like Aristotle (384-322 B.C). He considers friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics*, books 8-9 (Aristotle. ~340 BC *Nicomachean Ethics*).

³⁰ Marsh's view of Springsteen's account of friendship in *Lohad* in "To Set Our Souls Free: A different view of Bruce Springsteen's *Wrecking Ball*." While Marsh maintains that Springsteen's account of friendship in *Lohad* is of one sort, I argue above that it consists in several related sorts.

Springsteen's songs, "Thunder Road," "Born to Run," and "The Promised Land.")

The second kind of friendship or community-building (verse 4) seems akin to marriage, whereby people pledge loyalty and fidelity to each other for the remainder of their lives. It presupposes key aspects of the previous kind of friendship, but is based on a more balanced view of "the land of hope and dreams." In the latter regard, it is mutually recognized that no merely human community is *LOHAD* but that one's immediate community, and communities in general, can share in that ideal through upholding human dignity. So, while living with the common hope of enjoying *LOHAD*, the partners promise to help each other cultivate and enjoy the goods that share in *LOHAD*, and console one another concerning what is experienced here that disappoints.

The third kind of friendship, or community-building (verses 6-8), presupposes the second but is more universal in scope, since the sharing in *LOHAD* one wants for one's native community is also wanted for *community at large*. The love one has for members of a preferred community is now transposed onto community at large, though it is immensely complex. It includes "saints," that is, those upholding community with gratitude and acting to improve it—whether they are theists ("Faith will be rewarded") or persons of good will ("sweet-souls departed"); those who have been wounded by communities (including the "broken-hearted" and perhaps "losers" and "whores");³¹ and "sinners," (those subordinating community to the welfare of some particular

³¹ I interpret this group to include those who have been treated by others as means, things, or as reducible. It may include what Springsteen means by "losers" and "whores" to the extent that they have been treated by others as things.

community). It is recognized that since everyone in community is, in fact, pursuing *LOHAD*, then everything done and/or suffered in community is done and/or suffered on that account. What ethic or imperative governs this kind of friendship? Based on the second friendship's recognition that this life participates in *LOHAD*, it is that one strives to build a community that cultivates and enjoys what this life shares in *LOHAD*. So, by embracing others as ends, one works for a "land of hope and dreams" that participates in *LOHAD*. (This mindset is found in the songs "The Ghost of Tom Joad," and "Jack of All Trades.")

Finally, the fourth kind of friendship, eschatological at heart (verses 9-11), is centered in gratitude towards God, since it is recognized that God's gift governs all. It is because God gives the gift of *LOHAD* to all that each seeks *LOHAD* and community. Hence, gratitude towards God and the goal of contemporary community is humanity's right disposition since we recognize God's *unconditional love* for those building, suffering, and subordinating community. Springsteen writes,

Come on this train
People get ready
You don't need no ticket
All you gotta do is, just get on board
On board this train

What ethic does this imply? It includes everything belonging to the third form of friendship but is centered on a disposition of gratitude towards God, recognizing that God will help build contemporary communities and ultimately supply (in an afterlife) whatever is lacking in the community/communities of this world. On the one hand, its adherents strive to build a community which cultivates and enjoys what in this life shares in *LOHAD*. On the

other hand, its adherents recognize that God somehow uses all communities and attitudes thereto, both the good and the bad, as means to establish *LOHAD*. (This outlook is also found in “Jacob’s Ladder.”) Therefore, as previously stated, Springsteen’s goal in distinguishing the third and fourth kinds of friendship is not to whitewash human evildoing, but to show that it can be limited in the here-and-now by human effort, and is ultimately defeated by God’s gift of *LOHAD*. Hence, Springsteen sings “people get ready” so that, in light of and to prepare for God’s gift, people will do their best to improve their community.

Comparing *LOHAD*’s Moral Imperative

While Springsteen, therefore, joins with his predecessors by upholding a moral imperative ordered to augment contemporary community, his account of the latter’s nature and ultimate role is significantly different. This might be explained in the following related reasons. Unlike those identifying the imperative with membership in the institutional Christian church (Tharpe, Cash, and Mayfield) or in the latter together with some similar religious institution (Broonzy and Guthrie), Springsteen (like Dylan, but differently) anchors it in his notion of a God who stands both beyond and in all communities (ecclesial or otherwise), and governs and is accessible within each community. So, Springsteen’s divinely grounded moral imperative is accessed by everyone because, as God has structured each by and for *LOHAD*, each intrinsically belongs to and, in some manner recognizes the good of the community. Therefore, while Springsteen claims with every predecessor that only some in this life adhere positively to the imperative, he also maintains (contrary to every predecessor) that everyone adheres to it in some way. Why is that? On the one hand, everyone engages in community; on the other hand, God’s will to

establish *LOHAD* is why community (and therefore humanity) exists, and is what those striving to improve community aim at. Finally, while Springsteen agrees with Mayfield and Cash that God's gift is unmerited and, with Mayfield, that man's proper response to His gift consists in grateful adherence to God's imperative; he maintains, contrary to *Lohad's* entire musical inheritance, that God will ultimately establish the entire race in gratitude. Hence, the scope of Springsteen's moral imperative is unprecedented since it encompasses all persons, including Christians and non-Christians alike, properly motivates its adherents to improve their native community, and is ultimately embraced by all. (I believe this outlook is found in Springsteen's songs, "I Wanna Marry You" and "If I Should Fall Behind.")

Conclusion

Studying Bruce Springsteen's *Lohad* in conjunction with its kindred musical inheritance discloses that *Lohad's* inclusivism is both unique and defensible. In the first place, it is obvious that *Lohad's* message contains, in many ways, what is found in the song's rich predecessors. *Lohad* agrees with claims by Tharpe, Broonzy, Guthrie, Cash, Dylan, and Mayfield that God has established a train, a community in this world leading to God's blissful community constituting the afterlife, and that the train's passengers embrace a moral imperative leading them heavenward and that properly improves their contemporary community. In addition, Springsteen concurs, especially with Dylan, that the moral imperative is accessible to everyone. Moreover, the moral imperative's principal object is community in general rather than some particular church or religious affiliation (suggested by Tharpe, Cash, and Mayfield); those embracing it positively exhibit

gratitude (Mayfield); and it is ultimately grounded in upholding God as Lord (Tharpe, Cash, Dylan, and Mayfield).

How does *Lohad* depart from its inheritance? Because of its *twofold claim* that all persons by recognizing, even implicitly, the good of community stand in immediate relationship with God and pursue *LOHAD*, and enjoy it in the afterlife. *LOHAD*, therefore, is not distinguished by the claim that the moral imperative is universally accessible within contemporary community—that doctrine is shared with Dylan’s “Slow Train Coming.” The moral imperative is coupled with the assertion that *all* pursue and ultimately enjoy *LOHAD*. Therefore, unlike any of its predecessors, Springsteen’s train includes “saints and sinners, winners and losers, whores and gamblers, and lost souls.”

The latter claim, however, can prompt some to wonder if Springsteen unwittingly upholds a doctrine of moral relativism. For if, in his view, each traveler *eventually* embraces God’s will, has human responsibility been negated? Is Springsteen, in the end, instructing people to behave however they please? Does his account of *LOHAD* undercut emphasis on improving one’s native community? Although we touched on this matter before, it requires recapitulation and further explanation, since it is obviously the chief objection to the vision Springsteen articulates in *Lohad*. My response here will consider the matter first on the theoretical level and secondly in terms of human activity. In the former regard, our study of *LOHAD* discloses that its doctrine contains, rather than denies, a universal moral imperative. *Lohad*’s distinction between forms of friendship, however interpreted, recognizes the difference between approaching one’s community well or badly, between embracing and augmenting the common good (thereby recognizing and cultivating universal human dignity), or

subordinating the common good to some particular good (thereby denying human dignity). Indeed, as our analysis of *LOHAD*'s identification of both the first, second, third, and fourth forms of friendship shows, Springsteen holds unequivocally that people should embrace the good of community according to the moral imperative since this would benefit themselves as well as their community. Above all else, all people should be embraced as ends instead of as means.

More important, though, our analysis shows that Springsteen views the train and its destination from a pronounced eschatological perspective that sets therein the moral imperative, identified with pursuing the common good. As noted above, *Lohad* does not ignore the importance of the moral imperative, and therefore improving contemporary community, but considers it from the perspective of God's goal for humanity. Springsteen's determining view implies that God's purpose, the perspective from which *Lohad* is written, entails that each person in the here-and-now, to some extent, embraces the moral imperative, and will *ultimately* embrace the moral imperative in an afterlife. That process, to Springsteen's mind, *begins* here insofar as some explicitly embrace the moral law while others do so implicitly – including negatively (that is, the “lost souls” who subordinate the common to some particular good)³² but *finishes* in an afterlife. The train he writes about, which is capable of holding the whole of humanity, is moving towards its destination, *LOHAD*. It is true, then, that Springsteen places more emphasis on divine purpose, on

³² As suggested before, Springsteen's teaching implies that an afterlife entails human development. For if, on his view, each eventually embraces *LOHAD*, then an afterlife governed directly by God must entail bringing people to the full relationship with *LOHAD* that He deems appropriate.

what he thinks God ultimately brings about, than on the moral imperative. However, Springsteen's emphasis on humanity's intrinsic pursuit of community (and, by that fact, of *LOHAD*) is necessarily allied with some affinity for the moral imperative. If we are social beings, we are also moral beings—even if, somewhere along the way, we require help to see and/or embrace that.

Hence, it is probably because some do not recognize *Lohad's* over-arching eschatological perspective that the issue of moral relativism arises. Springsteen is less concerned with considering the formal mechanics structuring the interplay between God and humankind, than with God's reason for that relationship in the first place. In the overall scheme of things, human conformity to the moral imperative, and therefore improving the welfare of contemporary community, has paramount importance. But these are secondary, since they are *included* within Springsteen's notion of God's ultimate purpose. Looked at from a theoretical perspective, therefore, Springsteen's vision holds, since it is composed of more significant and less significant parts.

What about the strictly practical aspect of Springsteen's vision? For tension remains since, by Springsteen's principles, it is obviously humankind, rather than God, who needs to embrace the moral imperative. Since we, moreover, are in *process* towards *LOHAD*, it is better for us in the here-and-now to augment rather than negate authentic community. Thus, human cooperation with God in the here-and-now requires significant emphasis.

Springsteen seems to think that this requirement can be upheld. How so? Not by theory but by practice. As mentioned before, *Lohad* presents accounts of friendship. But this is not for strictly theoretical purposes; Springsteen's examples obviously intend to encourage his audience to participate *positively* in God's

plan. However, if that is not enough, one can look elsewhere in Springsteen's *corpus* to find emphasis on good practice. For example, in *The Rising's* "Into the Fire" Springsteen calls his audience to embrace, through God, faith, hope, and love. By this manner, Springsteen asks God to give people what they need so they can participate *positively* in God's plan and consequently build community in the here-and-now. In agreement with *Lohad's* doctrine, this musical prayer aims to bring together the divine, as principal cause, and the human, as God's dependent. Hence, Springsteen confesses his dependence on God by asking God's help to do God's will.

All told, *Lohad's* inclusiveness implies profound theoretical and practical validation. Springsteen exhorts his audience to work for the improvement of their native community so it can align itself with enjoyment of God's blissful community in the afterlife. As he sees it, what is genuinely good for one is genuinely good for all.³³

³³ This essay has benefitted from *BOSS's* anonymous reviewers and editorial staff. I am grateful for their helpful comments and editorial work. Perhaps a subsequent essay of mine will consider the relationship between *Lohad's* inclusivism and certain relevant contemporary, religious and/or non-religious, forms of inclusivism. This might help to explain both some of the underlying causes and the profound significance of Springsteen's vision.