

God on Our Side?

The Religion of Patriotism:

And investigation into the ethical contradiction in rhetoric and religion.

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God on Our Side?

The Religion of Patriotism:

An Investigation of Political Rhetoric and Religion.

Most social destructiveness is done by people who feel they have some kind of permission for what they do, even to the point of feeling righteous, and who commonly regard their victims as less than human or otherwise beyond the pale.¹

When an individual feels another person is somehow less valuable as a person, he loses a sense of moral obligation towards him. This self-righteousness has been the result of religious differences, social structure, race, or other stereotyping. When this feeling of righteousness happens at a national level, (and as we will see, is sometimes even justified by religious reasoning), the result can and has been disastrous. At a national level, the concept of superiority leads to the dehumanization of entire races, nations, and cultures. In this time of modern technology and growing warfare power, the level of gravity in war times is higher than ever before. What is most troubling about trying to reverse this issue is that political leaders use religious rhetoric to justify and even honor their actions of violence. A feeling of righteousness and superiority over another body leaves little room for ethical consciousness of the other body's personhood. Without that moral responsibility (due to religion or otherwise) the problem of unjust violence won't change.

This thesis will argue that the use of religious rhetoric (particularly in my examples of predominantly Christian ideas), to aid the execution of political violence fails to regard the concept of "sin". Understanding sin is a crucial piece of Christian

¹William Henry, Nevitt Sanford, *Sanctions for Evil* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1971), ix.

doctrine. Many Christians recognize sin as disobedience towards God.² Thus, what is good is God's will, and everything else must be evil. Even among theologians, the connotation of sin is not agreed upon, but still the discussion of good and evil is a cornerstone for the Christian tradition. There are distinct boundaries of right and wrong, and for a Christian, these are important distinctions (even if the boundaries vary among individual Christians). Without understanding the importance of considering sin, the "Christian religion, which is a primary source of moral behavioral guidelines for many people, is no longer a reliable source. "Sin" must remain in religious rhetoric, so it continues to be remembered as a fundamental Christian idea. Therefore, when using religious rhetoric to justify or explain secular politics, a discussion of sin must still be included.

If they are going to use religious rhetoric, then it is crucial that political leaders respect the moral authority of religious bodies. Though I will not argue whether using religious rhetoric in the political world is wrong, I will argue that politicians using such rhetoric should reconcile religious values with political goals, and be careful that the two remain distinct. The responsibility of the political leaders is to uphold nationalistic and political goals. Yet when politicians use the rhetoric of a faith, many seem to claim that they have a sort of religious authority or special knowledge. There is a unification of nationalism and religious thought meant to motivate citizens towards a new level of patriotism. As a result, patriotism almost becomes religion in itself. This is known as civil religion—a set of beliefs and practices that tends to encompass an entire society, or

² Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932, 67.

at least the leaders within the society, both politically and religiously.³ Historically, civil religion seems to have a stronger presence in the national culture than any strictly religious, spiritual practices. Civil religion can erase religious denomination differences in an all-inclusive (or exclusive) set of beliefs. An example we will see is Germany's civil religion during WWII, which will be discussed further in the body.

Outside of this trend of civil religion, religious faith is not related to being dedicated to one's country. This nationalistic idolatry is what results when the lines blur between religion and nation, and consequently, a specific religious teaching becomes a part of a nation's fervor—what was religious becomes political. As a result, the nation loses one of the sources for analyzing societal morality. The most dangerous outcome is the sense of otherness and superiority that the country adopts.

As the opening quote projects, an attitude of superiority causes a sense of "us" versus "them." When this becomes entwined religious rhetoric, it becomes difficult for the public to question. A nation's moral code, such as the United States' Bill of Rights, is crucial in setting boundaries that nobody- citizen or politician- can break. We have become a pluralistic society designed to encourage diversity while conserving tradition. The United States citizens develop our moral ideas using doctrines such as the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. We also have guidance from our country's mainstream religions.

One recent phenomenon has appeared to occur in this country, according to professor Kenneth Wald⁴—the government power has controlled more than it has so far

³ Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States* (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1997), 59.

⁴ Kenneth D. Wald is a professor of political science at the University of Florida, Gainesville. He is the author of several other political and religious books.

in modern time.⁵ That, Wald supposes, could be causing churches to feel pressure to be more politically involved so they don't lose their rights or become more controlled by the government. For example, religious beliefs have directly affected domestic matters in the last four years. Issues like abortion and homosexual marriage have reached the Supreme Court⁶ and have made it onto ballots to change policies because of religious morals. Big issues such as these are central discussions in the country between religions and the government. As a result, there is a cycle of the political world and churches interceding each other. This is not necessarily always a negative result, however it is one that needs to be closely examined. One of the dangers of losing the arrangement of a more pure separation is that there is no critical consideration to whether or not either side offers truth, because the secular voice has become the religious authority as well, and the religious voice then, gets sold out or manipulated (or vice versa). There is no balance of power when the two different entities collie. The fundamental nature of politics and religion are incompatible when used within the context of each other.

The Moral Obligation of Political Leaders

If political leaders justify decisions based on or in terms of religious convictions, they must also be restricted to the use of recognized practices and theories within those religions. Ethics are based at least partly on the customs of the culture—traditional practices and concepts of right and wrong are set in place by ancestors. If a nation, founded by those ancestors, continues to base its understanding of truth and virtue on the teachings of their forefathers, then the nation may remain consistent in how it treats that

⁵ Wald 29.

⁶ It is important to note that these issues are not new in the supreme court, but are being revisited in such a way that entire policies result, having the potential to drastically change the very nature of some fundamental laws and practices in this country.

understanding. The moral tradition that is already set in place cannot be ignored, even if considering it is only for the sake of questioning it. There is always a possibility for legitimate changes to be made. However, change should be the result of careful reflection, and a nation that has separated church and state should also be careful when crossing those lines made to protect each institution. The two institutions must resolve causes so that both are upheld in times of change.

An example of this can be seen in many wars, which often boil down to a religious cause or claim. Consider the Nazis and Japanese Buddhists in World War II, the Christian Crusades, or the two opposing Christian sides of the Civil War—clearly the phenomenon of fighting because of nationalistic idolatry and civil religion is not a new concept or an exception in history. Spanning from the extreme to moderate nations and even to entire continents, this twisting of religious doctrine has been a reality since the beginnings of organized church and structured government. It is something that has continued to happen in the modern world, and there are numerous examples that could be considered—the example I will discuss is of the Germans.

The Germans of WWI and the Nazis of WWII will be examined in this thesis as an example of a civil religion taken to its extreme. There must be a simple understanding of the history and ideology of the German state leading to WWI in order to comprehend what had happened by the end of the following war. The reasoning after the loss of the first war and the motives behind the religious cleansing of WWII are the most glaring examples of pseudo-Christian rhetoric and war aims combined. It is convenient for us to associate military atrocities with the Nazis and Adolph Hitler because of the extreme picture that history has painted.

After outlining the mentality of the Germans, I will explain the Christian principles related to war, all of which have been reexamined and revisited for moral guidance throughout their history, especially after the consequences of WWII. Dietrich Bonhoeffer will be discussed as an example of a Christian driven by morals rather than political or secular goals—his personal convictions could not be swayed by political religious rhetoric conveyed by the Nazis. He believed that sin is still sin, even as an entire nation's actions. A nation's actions cannot be justified simply for the sake of their own consciousness—that is not true justness. That idea of constant critical examination of self and government is the overall conclusion I want to draw from the example of Bonhoeffer and WWII.

I will again discuss the meaning and dangers of civil religion, including the United States' own situation. This country's civil religion will be an important issue to consider at the conclusion of this thesis. The rhetoric of presidents past and present has always continued to perpetuate the religious tones within their public display. I will draw from examples of public speeches, and address a problem with the saying of "God bless America." Human desires cannot be worded as the will of God, as nobody has authority to declare just what the will of God might be. Perhaps the idea of claiming our will as God's is a conflict that needs to be resolved in the United States, which is what I will examine in the final chapter of this paper.

The Power of Religious rhetoric in the context of War:
"God is with us"

The German Politics leading to the new German Identity

During World War I, more than one nation believed that they had God on their side and considered their religion to be a part of their nation's identity. However, it seems that the Germans had more religious conviction invested in the war and in their new nationalistic ideas than anyone of that time.⁷ A strong indication of that is the ease Hitler would have years later, in generating a new national church. One tangible example of the country's conviction is the German belt buckles soldiers wore, which read, "*Gott Mit Uns*" (God is With Us).⁸ This motto belonged to the original Prussian State, and then was adopted by the German Army in 1910, as a symbol of the peoples' sentiment—what they stood for was the will of God. This belief stood for over a decade before the war had even begun.⁹ The second war that would ensue decades later, as outlined in John A. Moses' examination, would prove to be one of the most devastating events of human history.

After German failure in the revolutions of 1848, the country divided themselves from the rest of Western Europe. While other countries were adopting the Western model that allowed for more pluralism, Germany continued a quasi-feudal system that ultimately contributed to the political power of the Nazis at the dawn of World War I. Since they were not a democratic state, the people were not in a protected position to publicly question what Hitler and the Nazis would do. The government, because of no

⁷ John A. Moses, "Justifying War as the Will of God: German Theology on the Eve of the First World War", in *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review*, Vol 31, no 1, May 1999, 4.

⁸ Iwanone, Mike. *Trenches on the Web*. 15. January, 2000. <http://www.worldwar1.com/stgeruni.htm>

⁹ Moses, "Justifying War as the Will of God", 4.

modernization (like the rest of Europe) towards popular sovereignty, held complete power while the masses had no way to analyze the government's use of power. Thus, Germany was very self-involved, nationalistic, and conscious of their position in Europe as a nation different than their neighbors. They saw themselves as advanced beyond the other nations, as the Germans had not given into a pluralistic governmental system that would undermine their traditional values. This helped set the stage for the idea of God's special protection over their nation. The ultimate belief was drastic- seeing themselves as the chosen ones, as "God's Nation."¹⁰

How the Germans became "the Chosen"¹¹

The idea of chosenness brought with it the task of defending "Christian" values, and believing that it was their responsibility to punish those nations that did not. The Germans were most proud of their military and naval strength, justifying their focus on defense and military status with the argument that only strength can protect peace. The newly founded Pan-German League was based on planning for Germany's imperial future, and on planning to make Germany so strong militarily that other countries would be almost forced into alliance.¹²

The Church leaders supported the Pan-German League, further strengthening the public's belief in its cause. (The continuing support of defense and nationalism from the religious leaders throughout this history needs to be remembered as a key factor in just how hard it would be for even educated citizens to doubt the actions of their government). Even when pacifist protest was voiced, the Protestant church press would suppress it. The government preached practically unquestioned to the masses the idea

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹¹ Ibid., 7.

that peace is purely idealistic and Utopian, and that God had intended to create separate nations on earth that would inevitably struggle with each other. Sermons were published in support of these ideas. The public was almost forced (unwittingly) to abandon the central Christian message of "peace on earth," as emphasized by Jesus in the Gospels. They were to believe only in the nation's destiny, guided by God.¹³

In a pamphlet Ferdinand Kattenbush wrote,¹⁴ he explained to the German public that war is practically demanded in the Bible. He essentially ignored key New Testament passages about neighborly love and peace among people and nations. He preached about a coercive love- one that would force everyone to meet demands of the center of power. His interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount on the surface left people with a duty to love each other by serving one's neighbor. However, to Kattenbush, to do that meant war, killing, and violent control over the neighbor being "helped".¹⁵

By the time WWI had begun, many believed that war was an expression of God's love. This militarization of religion and thought had an effect on German consciousness, and the preparation and enthusiasm about war stemmed from the Christian ideas that war is inevitable. These thoughts were deeply rooted and taught in Christian circles. The Iron Cross from the Prussian state was also reinstated, as a medal of honor. The new Christian faith suggested that soldiers ready to die for their country were offering the highest service to God and Germany, which made it even easier for the government to push the connection of the two with the Christian honor.

The Berlin court preacher, Ernst von Dryander, explained what the general German mentality was as a result of who and what led them into the war, when he stated:

¹³ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴ Ferdinand Kattenbush was a respected German Liberal Theologian at the time.

¹⁵ Ibid., 12.

Looking into the state that reared us, to the Fatherland wherein lie the roots of our strength we know that we are going into battle for our culture against the uncultured, for German civilization against barbarism, for the free German personality bound to God against the instincts of the undisciplined masses. And God will be with our just weapons! For German faith and German piety are ultimately bound up with German faith and civilization.¹⁶

Post WWI Pride and Blaming

After the German's catastrophic defeat in WWI, the mentality that had become so central was not reevaluated. Instead of reconsidering their conviction of absolute supremacy, the Germans grew more avid in it, perhaps because of their anger and shame in their defeat. They decided they had lost the war because of bad leadership, and because of the independent groups in the country that had unpatriotically opposed the war. These groups of Communists, Social Democrats, Trade Unionists, and Jews, had deserted God's cause and God's people. It certainly could not have been that God deserted his own people. This belief, and their resentment at the embarrassing Treaty of Versailles in 1919, set the stage for Adolf Hitler to enter almost seen as sent by God himself to rescue the people and reverse the horrible and unjust situation the Germans had been put in.

With demagogic virtuosity, Hitler played on national resentments, feelings of revolt and the desire for strong leadership, using the most influential techniques of mass persuasion to present himself as Germany's redeemer and messianic savior. All he had to do was convince the Protestants that his ideas were the same as theirs- especially national renewal. He could have justified almost anything to them- and did. He and his party of National Socialists began their quest of domination by pushing values of race, military

¹⁶ Quoted after Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, Vol. I (Philadelphia: 1988) 6; Wilhelm Pressel, *Die Kriegspredigt 1914-1918 in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands* (Göttingen: 1967), 84.

strength and authoritative government.¹⁷ The Nazis convinced the citizens of their Arian supremacy, and promised a stronger race by forbidding mixed procreation. They even created a historical myth to support these ideas. Arian Germans were superior descendents from Noble Knights, and their ancestors were uniquely advanced, cultured people. They even “dug up” bogus artifacts to prove the myth to the public.¹⁸

The messages perpetuated Hitler’s ideals in every aspect of German life. Religious schooling was taken over by the Nazis in 1933, and young students were taught just what Hitler wanted them to think. Hitler and several aids, with the job of forming the new German Nazi religion, destroyed Christian values, but did so nearly undetected. Pictures on the wall of Jesus were slowly removed and replaced by pictures of Hitler. He veiled changes with strong religious rhetoric, playing on the pride of the German people—for example, honoring tall, blonde, “ideal” Germans and giving special funding for their procreation.¹⁹ Physical fitness and beauty were emphasized, again using the example of their advanced genes to show the importance of those ideals.

All of this propaganda flattered the Germans and gave them a sense of responsibility to keep their superior genetics alive. A deep sense of moral obligation was induced in the citizens.²⁰ This feeling was out of fear of their leader, and out of fear of being like those outcasts that had stood out before. They felt obligated to join the force towards the unification of the country. From there, they were even more vehement about ultimate triumph.²¹ The main political motivation for many Germans was racial

¹⁷ Master Race: Nazism Overtakes Germany. Dir. Jonathan Lewis. 1933. Videocassette. WGBH Boston and BBC Home Video, 1997.

¹⁸ Master Race: Nazism Overtakes Germany.

¹⁹ Master Race: Nazism Overtakes Germany.

²⁰ Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* 36.

²¹ Moses “Justifying War as the Will of God” 12.

supremacy and genocide, and the expelling of those who had caused the loss the first war for Germany by their objection to the German state unification.²² The Jews became their main focus, as Hitler drew on old hatred and old jealousies towards the race. Jews had always been known as particularly intelligent, holding many professional positions and being very talented in many areas. So, he accused the Jews of taking jobs from worthy Arian citizens. As the Jews were pushed out of jobs and cities, the Arians could move in on those roles.

The Power and Result of Adolph Hitler

It was twenty-one years after the start of World War I that the German military led by Hitler began ripping Europe apart. They started by forcing Jews into Ghettos, and in 1938, they occupied Austria. Hitler planned on taking over all of Europe, to "make more room for Arian comfortable living."²³ In 1939, Hitler's forces took over Czechoslovakia and prepared for World War. Hitler blamed any coming wartime on the Jews, foreshadowing their destiny, saying they deserved what they would get. From there, he needed only to justify himself with the religious rhetoric that had already been laid out for him, to bring the country in to a chain of events that led to the Holocaust. "The young were especially excited by the propaganda, but overall, at least ninety percent of the Germans were behind Hitler."²⁴ He was obviously one of the most loved leaders in history at that time.

In September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and the war officially began. The German Concentration camps, Auschwitz in Southern Poland being the largest one, were on their way to succeeding in the extermination of over six million Jews, half a million

²² Ibid., 3.

²³ Master Race: Nazism Overtakes Germany.

²⁴ Ibid., Friedle Sonnenberg, German citizen.

gypsies, as well as handicapped people, political leftists, and others. As for the Arian Germans, not only were the events inside camps realized by German neighbors, but by their silence and their own programs of racial strengthening, they encouraged such events.

An example of Hitler's statements that spurred motivation behind for WWII was directed to the Nazi party in 1941:

The conception of the new Movement, whose fundamentals can be expressed in a single sentence: "The Lord helps those who help themselves," opposed this. That is not only a very pious phrase, but a very just one. For one cannot assume that God exists to help people who are too cowardly and too lazy to help themselves and think that God exists only to make up for the weakness of mankind. He does not exist for that purpose. He has always, at all times, blessed only those who were prepared to fight their own battles.²⁵

He reasoned that the Germans could not assume God would still help them after their failure in WWI. The German country had to step up and defend themselves first, before God would assist them. As Hitler knew, religion is potentially the most powerful force, and religious ideas one of the most powerful sources of commitment and motivation. The idea that people must meet God, must work first before God works, would stir citizens to think counter intuitively- before God show himself, "God's will" must be done. Hitler continued to blame the Jewish people for anything that was stopping the German nation's quest for the top. Most glaring about this statement is the logical fallacy we can clearly see in it.

The German Reich and its allies represent militarily, economically and also morally, a power superior to any possible coalition in the world. The German armed forces will always and everywhere intervene when and wherever it is necessary. The German nation will accompany its soldiers on their way with its confidence. It knows that the war is the consequence

²⁵ Master Race: Nazism Overtakes Germany.

of the greed of a few international warmongers, and of the hatred of the Jewish democracies standing behind them. These criminals have refused every German offer of peace because it was contrary to their capitalist interests. But he who dares to use the word "God" for such devilish activity blasphemes against Providence and, according to our belief; he cannot end except in destruction.²⁶

Today we would use a similar argument to explain what was so terribly wrong with Hitler's regime. Of course, we can also look back and realize that there really is no factual basis on Hitler's claims that the Nazis had offered anything peaceful to anybody, and of course his claims of anti-Semitism are anything but accurate. However, at the time, this was a powerful use of religious rhetoric, not only believed, but also thrived on by the German people. As his popularity grew, his rhetoric became even more extreme and blatant.

"My feelings as a Christian points me to my Lord and Savior as a fighter. It points me to the man who once in loneliness, surrounded by a few followers, recognized these Jews for what they were and summoned men to fight against them and who, God's truth! was greatest not as a sufferer but as a fighter. In boundless love as a Christian and as a man I read through the passage which tells us how the Lord at last rose in His might and seized the scourge to drive out of the Temple the brood of vipers and adders. How terrific was His fight for the world against the Jewish poison. Today, after two thousand years, with deepest emotion I recognize more profoundly than ever before the fact that it was for this that He had to shed His blood upon the Cross. As a Christian I have no duty to allow myself to be cheated, but I have the duty to be a fighter for truth and justice... And if there is anything which could demonstrate that we are acting rightly it is the distress that daily grows. For as a Christian I have also a duty to my own people."²⁷

²⁶ Address by Chancellor Adolph Hitler to the Reichstag (May 4, 1941) as recorded by the Jewish Virtual Library of the American Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. 2004.
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/hitler050441.html>

²⁷ Adolph Hitler, in a speech on 12 April 1922 Norman H. Baynes, ed. *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, April 1922-August 1939, Vol. 1 of 2, pp. 19-20, Oxford University Press, 1942.
<http://www.nobeliefs.com/hitler.htm>

Even after the war, after many Germans toured the concentration camps and realized just how gruesome the acts had been, several still held that they had been right. It was as if they were still too proud to admit their mistake. After the war, Heinrich Himmler stated, "we have performed this very difficult task out of love for our people, and we have suffered no damage to ourselves, to our souls or our characters." Though many individuals did feel a sense of guilt, still, the country refused to acknowledge their terrible wrong doings.²⁸

This drastic example demonstrates the power of religious and political rhetoric- true or false as rhetoric may be- in convincing masses to allow or assist in committing horrible acts. Not much is said in this example though, of the caution taken by many in the church throughout history when considering war, and the nature of sin in war. Many have never stepped back to understand the principles behind religious reasoning of war. What would seem to be the case is that those that do are suppressed. We will see this when we discuss Dietrich Bonhoeffer's role in World War II.

Many conclude that the sin of war is something that requires guidelines across religious and cultural boundaries. Christians specifically have developed premises and theories that have been used. Christians have always tried restraining sin with the guilt of killing. This is apparent especially in the writings of spiritual leaders such as St. Thomas Aquinas, who played an instrumental role in forming our modern day Just War Theory. This attempt of restraint and moderation is still a very imperative concept to many contemporary religious philosophers. The goal to minimize the worst aspects of war has been a driving force in creating guidelines and forming international goals (perpetuated by the United Nations) to promote peace.

²⁸ Master Race: Nazism Overtakes Germany.

Christian perspectives on War

Three Common Principles

The basic assumption made by many Christians educated in religion is that war is rarely (if ever) justifiable by religious principles.²⁹ However, Christians as a group are not now, if they ever have been, completely against war. There are rules, suggested guidelines, theories, and strategies that Christians have turned to in their decision-making about war. These strategies can be used by nations for the same purpose; they are meant to provide a set of principles to help guide different countries in coming to a safe conclusion. That is why it is so crucial to continue to recognize all perspectives. I will first discuss Pacifism and Realism, as two conflicting principles. Just War theory is the third well-known Christian principle addressing war, which will be discussed in detail in the third chapter.

Pacifism

Pacifism is the belief that war is always wrong to take part in, even in self-defense. Nothing can justify killing a human being deliberately, and the nature of war demands killing by someone taking part in it, and it is just as wrong to support war efforts. This position is difficult to remain consistent in, and is virtually impossible to attempt to live by. For example, it would be unethical for someone to help protect a person being attacked and killed by attacking the aggressor. This goes against the similar principle of loving the neighbor and even the Golden Rule, of giving others what one would want for themselves. The main idea though, that absolute pacifists could argue effectively, is that violence *always* leads to something worse than non-violence does.

²⁹ "Ethcis: The Ethics of War." 20, October, 2004.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/ethics/war/christianity.shtml>

Many pacifists are active pacifists. This principle involves either refusing to take part in a war at all, actively opposing it, or refusing to participate in efforts to help defray the effects of the war, including something like helping the Red Cross in peaceful efforts to help the victims. Many countries now recognize that individuals have the right of conscientious objection to military service, but they usually expect the objector to undertake some form of public service as an alternative. However, this has not always been the accepted practice. In many cases, those who could choose to refuse military assignment in war would face criminal punishment and even death.

Jesus the Pacifist

The Sermon on the Mount is the first place that Christians have elicited teachings from Jesus about war and violence. Jesus was an extreme figure in his time, and a pacifist. The authorized concept of pacifism as a word came out of the 10th International Peace Conference in 1902. So, the word pacifism is only a century old, but the idea is ancient, traced back thousands of years, before Jesus. Jesus was very clear in his expectations about our treatment of violence. In accounts of his Sermon on the Mount, he is quoted in Matthew about the individual requirement to promote peace.

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, you're your cloak as well; and if anyone forced you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.³⁰

³⁰ Matthew 5:38-42, The HarperCollins Study Bible. New Revised Standard Version. Ed. Wayne Meeks. HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.

Jesus demands actions almost unheard of and against conventional reasoning then, and it remains so now. He considered seeking justice to be wrong, as a type of revenge. There should be no enemies, so nobody can be justly fought against.

You have heard that it was said, "you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?³¹

For the pacifist, this entire passage forbids any actions of revenge or hatred or even justice. There are a few Christian dominations, including the Quaker religion, that are officially pacifist. It is not necessarily a religious belief.

Though I will discuss it as one, people can believe in pacifism because of non-religious belief in the sanctity of life, and the practical belief that violence or war is wasteful and ineffective.

Pacifism Applied in History

Pacifism became widespread as a reaction to the First World War and the use of universal male conscription, terrible death tolls, and repercussions. The principle gained further support after the creation of nuclear weapons.³² However, as a national principle, it is basically undisputed that it would not work. All countries would have to agree to live by the principle, and even if they all were to claim to agree, it makes a country very vulnerable to being rapidly conquered. One of a few logical arguments against pacifism considers Nazi Germany. Had the entire world besides Germany been pacifist, Hitler potentially could have taken over the world.

³¹ Matthew 5:43-46, The HarperCollins Study Bible.

³² "Ethics: The Ethics of War."

Still, the idea of striving to resolve disputes peacefully is a principle that is significant in international politics, particularly for the United Nations. Two independent groups, working most notably in Great Britain, were active during WWI, attempting to convince the public not to support the war effort. After that colossal mess, many were swayed to agree to try and avoid further international strife. In WWII, the Oxford Campus held a debate that ended in the resolve that stated, 'this House will in no circumstances fight for King and Country'.³³ There were 59,000 other British conscientious objectors during that war.

Moral Realism

Moral realism is a philosophical view that nothing is ever black and white, or absolute. While a pacifist will insist that war is always wrong, a realist will never stake a definite claim one way or the other. Moral realists recognize different social customs, and believe that much of a culture's morality is culture specific. The main reason why for a realist, nothing can be absolute, is because every situation is unique deserving a unique solution. It is not necessarily a Christian belief, though many realists do support their case with evidence in Christian doctrine.

Moral realism is very utilitarian in thought. As a utilitarian principle, it is the bad results and immense loss of life and material goods that make a war so bad. These realists believe that in principle, war and violence is always wrong. They will accept though, that sometimes the result of a war is 'less bad' than the alternative. However, to meet the criteria of a war being 'less bad' takes a tremendous amount of consideration in even the most extreme cases (as we will see in the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

³³ "Ethics: The Ethics of War."

Some realists believe that it is a matter of degree, that the type and extent of the war is what is really significant. This idea is that only wars involving weapons of mass destruction- nuclear or chemical and biological weapons - are really bad; either because of the uniquely devastating consequences of such weapons, or because a war that uses such weapons is not 'winnable'.³⁴ Weapons of mass destruction bring about colossal loss.

To this point in history, the greatest example of nuclear weapons comes from WWII when America bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These cities both lost over fifty percent of their human life and the monetary cost was incalculable.³⁵ The possibility of that happening again is what the United Nations has wanted to avoid. The chance of something worse- even total world destruction- is what is very perceivable and plausible should any nation or group plan to use means of massive destruction. This is why a war of this sort is not considered to be "winnable". Many realists will agree that in the event of a nuclear attack threat, a country cannot be passive.

Martin Luther offered a very realistic set of war ethics to Christian non-pacifists. For Luther, rules against killing are made more for non-Christians to follow, as Christians are the people who are meant to keep order on earth. For that reason, Christians supersede messages in the Bible against killing. It is a Christian's job to protect their neighbor from the bad people in the world that aren't Christian.³⁶ The most reasonable justification that Luther offers is the protection of one's neighbor. We will see that this concept would be applied after Luther's time.

³⁴ "Ethics: The Ethics of War."

³⁵ Hanson, David C. *Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, 1997. Virginia Western Community College. October 19th, 2004.
<http://www.vw.cc.va.us/vwhansd/HIS122/Hiroshima.html>

³⁶ Martin Luther *Luther's Works: The Christian in Society III, Volume 46*. Ed. Robert C. Schultz, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 89.

Moral Realism Applied: Bonhoeffer's Life and Activism

The best person to consider when discussing moral realism is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was born into a large, educated family in 1906, and grew up with a psychiatry professor as a father. Karl Bonhoeffer was the country's leading empirical psychologist. Dietrich himself received his doctorate at the age of twenty-one, and from there began lecturing in the theological faculty at Berlin University. He became ordained a few years later, and served to parishes as a Lutheran pastor. He was a well-known leader in the opposition to National Socialism under Hitler, and part of a small but substantial number of religious leaders against the rise of the Nazi party.

In 1934, at least 2000 pastors formed an alliance called the Pastors' Emergency League, against the state church that the Nazis had founded and regulated. The pastors wanted something independent of the Nazi affiliated German Christians, and their plan evolved into the Confessing Church. This did not last long, as the Nazis shut down the Church's five seminaries and all but outlawed any of the Church's activity. This would be only the beginning of Bonhoeffer's opposition to Hitler and Hitler's goal of domination. From there, Bonhoeffer's life, and his study of ethics during his mission to overthrow or eventually assassinate Hitler, would become the best living example of moral realism tested.

Bonhoeffer and Hitler claimed to worship the same God, to believe in the same savior, and both claimed to read and follow the Bible. It is even more fitting then, that all of Bonhoeffer's ethics are based on Jesus' teachings in the Bible. Bonhoeffer's concept of ethical behavior was based on how the reality of the world and the reality of God are

reconciled in the reality of Christ.³⁷ To understand that reconciliation, to live in Christ, is to be a morally capable person. These morally capable people can best understand what may be the will of God. For this, there are two guidelines. One is the need of one's neighbor, and the other is the example of Jesus Christ. These are the only ways to begin to understand the will of God. It is impossible for humans to have knowledge of morality, only guidance.³⁸ Because we can have no moral certainty, we must selflessly consider what we do, and hope for Grace from God. He states, "Before God self-justification is quite simply sin."³⁹

Bonhoeffer's ideas are not new, he simply applies them to a strong life experience. As much of Christian philosophy seems to draw from Aristotle, Bonhoeffer is no exception that his ideals are similar to Aristotle's. Aristotle believed that every act from each person should be done to contribute some level of good, and that the ultimate goal for human kind is to establish goodness. This is just like Bonhoeffer's developed concept of ethical realism. Bonhoeffer was also like Luther, in considering the important values of human life, like protecting neighbors rather than obeying previously set rules.

When considering ethical decisions, Bonhoeffer looks only at those decisions in the face of vicious behavior, usually in situations of life and death. This is contrary to other ethics philosophers like Emmanuel Kant, who looks at daily decisions when considering ethical behavior. This is an important distinction about Bonhoeffer, as he has already stepped deep into the concept of realism. In other words, to him there is a measure of importance in an ethical decision. If a decision really matters- if it's life or

³⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*. Macmillan, Inc: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1955, 198.

³⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* 231.

³⁹ Bonhoeffer *Ethics* 167

death, or if it's concerning a serious evil in the world- then it is important enough to strongly consider in depth, whereas other decisions are basically a waste of time.

Bonhoeffer's own life serves as an example of his ethics. He began his work on ethics when the first signs of what would become the mess of WWII and the Holocaust became apparent, and dedicated his life to it until his death. He was careful to do what he decided to be an ethical action, and was careful not to be hypocritical. This is what made his life such an important case study. Even when he faced death, he remained consistent. "When it comes to ethics," he noted, "it is not only what is said that matters, but also the man who says it."⁴⁰

Bonhoeffer remained in constant evaluation of the action of making moral decisions. Each situation is unique, despite sometimes even several similarities to a past experience. Each situation then, will have its own set of options and ultimately should have its own result. This is very much a realist position, as, as we can point out in the previous section, that guidelines cannot be strict since no two precincts in different situations are completely alike. Each individual must make a decision based on his or her specific situation, so past decisions by other people cannot be followed as if it were the same situation. At the same time, different situations require different levels of attention. Bonhoeffer is careful not to require the same ethical decision making of something like a haircut, as trying a murderer. Theories such as the utilitarian greatest happiness theory should only be applied when the decision is of great gravity.

Bonhoeffer (here, the most like Aristotle) focuses on the character of a person more than the action. What is most important is to have a disposition for right action. He who acts justly out of habit will be much less likely to make an unjust decision.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 267.

Therefore, to ever make an unjust decision is corrupting your own soul. Here he is also much like Socrates, who dies for the main reason that it would be corrupting his soul to act out of injustice. So, Bonhoeffer is concluding this with detailed background support from the writings of both Aristotle and Socrates. From there, he concludes that the lover of truth must always seek the truth. "What is worse than doing evil is being evil,"⁴¹ and furthermore, he reasons that to focus on the lie and not on the liar is a failure to confront evil.

From here, the main question for Bonhoeffer remains, what is right conduct? Actions cannot be justified in advance without criteria for what is good and evil, and preemptive justification is not possible. A moral action cannot be justified by its future consequences, or by present or past motives.⁴² Therefore, he would conclude, one cannot- or a nation cannot- justify their actions before it is done, or even while they are doing it just based on its consequences or their motives. We will re-explore this concept in the next chapter, but in Bonhoeffer's case, it is important to remember this—even in the face of the evils of the Nazis, he did not consider his actions just.

No sin is equal, and no action can receive the same attention. Bonhoeffer reasoned that it is these aforesaid ethical postures that ultimately are the best measure, regardless of what other theories they may incorporate. Bonhoeffer used the six basic strategies individuals use when accounting for actions. The strategies are reason, moral fanaticism, conscience, duty, freedom, and private virtue.⁴³ Not all strategies can offer equal results when considering sin and action.

⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* 67.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 231.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 69.

Reason, first of all, is not necessarily a strong strategy. Bonhoeffer concluded that, "one is distressed" by the failure of reasonable people to perceive either the depths of evil or the depths of the holy. With the best of intentions they believe that a little reason will be sufficient for them to clamp together the parting timbers of the building.⁴⁴ Clearly by what Bonhoeffer observed about reasonable people in situations, he did not support ethical decisions based on reason alone. Reason does not account for the extremes in extreme situations, and stops at unreasonableness without trying to conquer it. (He states, these people give in to the unreasonable in power and yield therefore, making their fight futile from the beginning. From reason, Bonhoeffer considered fanaticism. Fanaticism to him is more dangerous, as the fanatic, even if just in his cause, focuses so much on a sin and not on a sinner. Religious extremists make good examples of fanatics. The person with a conscience resides amid irresolvable conflicts. He can neither hold reason to avoid guilt about extreme situations, or focus only on certain situations like a fanatic.

The strategy of sense of duty holds a problem unique from the others. Duty takes away guilt of conscience, and narrowness of reason or fanaticism. It also requires one to fulfill obligations from another body. Duty assumes assignment, which, as Bonhoeffer concluded, must be fulfilled, even presumably from the Devil himself. This is seen easily in soldiers at war. Contrary to that is a decision out of absolute freedom. Freedom is no better, as one makes his own decisions with no other source of truth. If mistaken, it is the individual that is fully responsible. Finally, private virtuousness takes one out of the public practice of ethics and decision-making. Privately, this person does not do wrong,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 68.

within the bounds he can control. However, his influence then, stops in his private life. He has nothing to offer society, regardless of how virtuous he may be.

There is then, a problem with these strategies, which is what Bonhoeffer was explaining. These strategies, the ways in which people make conclusions, cannot stand on their own. They all, for one reason or more, are fundamentally flawed. That is a reason why Bonhoeffer had trouble with government. The Government could reason or excite people into thinking something, and there are no moral grounds to the thought. Only the privately virtuous people could recognize sin in what the government would say, but they aren't helpful in exposing that. This is where the concept of individual guilt comes in.

Bonhoeffer said, "The antitype to the man who is taken up into the form of Christ is the man who is his own creator, his own judge and his own restorer, the man whose life misses the mark of his own human existence, and who, therefore, sooner or later destroys himself."⁴⁵ What he meant by this, as he explained before and beyond the quote, is that one cannot justify what he does himself. One cannot be his or her own moral judge. Sin, therefore, cannot be justified by one's self, or by a political leader. What was going on in Germany was the fault of everyone who knew, by act, by association, and by failure to act.

What we can begin to understand from Bonhoeffer then is the absence of anything clear and absolute in war. The moral realist does not have the absolute conflicts that the pacifist has when in situations such as Bonhoeffer's. Bonhoeffer suggested that he had no choice but to act. Though, Bonhoeffer never suggested that he was just in his actions.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 110.

This is what will be reexamined in the following chapter—the idea that sin, even when necessary, or as a last resort, is still sin.

The Just War Theory and the United States

Our Country After September 11th

Since the September 11th attacks, the notion of justice has been used a lot by the public, the media, and the politicians. The concepts of seeking justice, or America's righteousness, and terrorists' evil are common in rhetoric about the attack, and the ensuing war that has followed it. Many of us can agree that the attackers did an evil thing. However, not everyone will agree that the war that has come out of it is the right and just way to combat that evil; nor that the war was God's will, as we will see has been suggested. Whether or not the war has been or can be considered just will not be discussed further, but what it does bring up for discussion now is another important Christian approach to war—Just War Theory.

The most widely known Christian theory of war is the Just War Theory. Just War is associated with Roman Catholicism, and the concepts are seen in the Catholic Catechism.⁴⁶ Just War Theory begins with the presupposition that sin and war are unavoidable in this world that is not yet fully redeemed. Much more widely accepted than pacifism, and unlike moral realism, Just War theory argues that it is even sometimes right to engage in war—a moral obligation. Just war is specifically and solely about war, in contrast to realism and pacifism, and presents a clear set of specific moral guidelines, with room for more “right” possibilities than realism.

The first precursor to the theory's establishment came around 313 CE when the Christian Church became a state religion under the emperor Constantine. One of the

⁴⁶ There are several examples of statements in the Catechism that would suggest the same message as Just War Theory, though the two are not correlated beyond that.

sources that justified war came out of the Christian Old Testament.⁴⁷ God had called the Israelites into war, so those wars, and any other declared by the God-chosen authorities, were understood to be holy. As God's will, holy wars have a righteous defender and therefore, those defenders must be just.

St. Augustine, in his book, *The City of God*, explained that leaders, since they were chosen by God, make decisions that are consequently directed by God, hence, war is God's will.⁴⁸ However, he spoke of war and violence with much sadness and bitterness.⁴⁹ Augustine struggled with the concept of war, and recognized the fall of man as the reason behind them. No time had ever been without war, and he said wars are inevitable until the end-times. As long as societies are moved by avarice, greed, and lust for power, the drives of sinful men, war will remain. Therefore, since war is unavoidable, there can be a less wrong side in a war. To bring about justice against an unjust country, with such characteristics as avarice, greed, and lust for power, may be considered a just fight.

Augustine's just war theory involves several principal elements. The war must be waged with the intention to correct something, to overturn an injustice of some sort. Second, the evil of war must be evaluated by those making the decision to wage war. Leaders cannot overlook the wrongness of their actions at a fundamental level. Leaders should have support for the use of violence—for example, having the United Nations' support. Augustine used a dualistic epistemology, which gives priority to spiritual goods,

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Olen, Julie C. Van Camp, Vincent Barry. *Applying Ethics, 8th Edition*. Wadsworth: Belmont, CA, 2005, 302.

⁴⁸ Olen, Van Camp, Barry, *Applying Ethics* 304.

⁴⁹ Berbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, Columbia University Press: New York, 1963, 154.

and also the use of Biblical texts to legitimate participation in war. Finally, there must be an analogical conception of peace.⁵⁰

Further Development of the Theory

Thomas Aquinas adopted Augustine's ideas in his 12th century work, *Summa Theologica*, and expands on the concept of just intentions. In order for a war to be justified under Thomas' proposition, it had to be the last resort. All other attempts to peaceful resolution must have been exhausted before the start of a war. Then, in waging the war, the use of arms could not produce evils graver than the evil being eliminated. Finally, there had to be a likelihood of success. As with Augustine's guidelines, only those in proper authority had the right to declare war. Most importantly for Thomas, intentions for going to war must be right.⁵¹

As Luther also thought, right intentions, regardless of the presence of Just War theory, are still a redeeming factor in decisions about war.⁵² A problem for Christians if there are not right intentions in mind is the guilt that would ensue. Therefore, self-interest should not be a motivation for war. War should not happen at all unless it is necessary for the greater good of a majority of people. This idea is what disqualifies religious events such as the Crusades, as the Crusades were definitely out of self-interest.

Just War has not been strongly considered in any war. However, after WWII there was a revisiting of the basic concepts of the theory. Events like the Holocaust, the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the Atomic Bomb dropped in Japan caused many to think about how future catastrophic events like that could be avoided. For Christians, this meant a

⁵⁰ John Langan, S.J. "The Elements of St. Augustine's Just War Theory", September 2001. 1, October, 2004. <http://www.fsu.edu/~religion/jre/arc/12-1/19.html>

⁵² Luther *Luther's Works* 100.

more serious consideration of wartime ethics and their religious position. Christians could not turn to the Gospels for justification. Pacifism grew more attractive to many, as Christ had been such a clear example of that practice. Yet it was also growing more and more impractical.

Though not a perfect solution, the Just War theory offers ethical guidelines that are valuable for nations- Christian and otherwise- when weighing the possibility of war. Realism cannot offer such guidelines, and pacifism refuses the possibility of them. To make decisions about war, a widely accepted set of principles like Just War does could offer some sort of validation or for a nation's actions in war.

Before the usage of the term "just war" is discussed with regard to the current "War on Terrorism", religious rhetoric itself needs to be examined. I will first discuss where such rhetoric begins in the United States, and its development here. In a time when religion and world politics are clearly as entwined as ever, it is important to reflect on what that entails. Our aforementioned civil religion is based on this connection of religion and politics.

Defining our Civil Religion

Civil religion does not require a citizen to be a part of a specific religious community - passion and pride and dedication to the country is what becomes a religion in itself. America is a pluralist society including many different religions, so civil religion survives by resting on the few common threads- the thickest one being they are all American. Patriotism is included in the connotation of civil religion, though civil religion takes patriotism further by increasing the value to something religious. Religion is at the core of a person. If a person's civil religion is their ultimate concern, they will

be dedicated to their country regardless of the situation. Nationalism, therefore, is also included in civil religion. Beyond a passion for one's government, civil religion implies that that government is somehow sanctified with religious significance.

America's civil religion includes myths, such as stories of our forefathers, which have evolved into historical 'fact,' so that leaders are immortalized by the legends of their acts and service. For example, a story about Abe Lincoln walking miles to return a penny or George Washington cutting down a cherry tree are familiar to most Americans. America also has rituals. Taking the oath of office over the Holy Bible is a ritual that began in 1789 and has continued since then.⁵³ Singing the National Anthem before sporting events is also a popular and expected ritual. A big element of a civil religion is the code of moral conduct. The western world is very strong in their support of autonomy and individualism. This ethical code is followed within a country, and while functioning within other countries as well.⁵⁴ A country's culture- their music and entertainment and art style, all are integral part of civil religion. A country's very fabric is in its cultural aesthetics. Everything is important, including the symbolic architecture of a building as well as the correct display of a flag. The country must stand on a consistent and common word of law. The Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence are America's word of law. Finally, social patterns are a big part of an individual's role and experience within a civil religion.

Social trends in America, including religious trends, have drastically changed the political world. Notice that each decade has distinctly different social environments. A

⁵³ This ritual began with the first Congress, and the oath being taken by each president at inauguration has been a practice since then. The current oath dates back to the 1860's. Information from U.S. Senate, "Oath of Office." Accessed 21, November 2004.

http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Oath_Office.htm

⁵⁴ This is apparent in current American attempts to spread freedom.

big part of our changing culture has been our changing perceptions of religion. As time has gone on, the separation of church and state has grown in importance for more than just the reasons laid out by our founding fathers. Despite the official separation, religion continues to have obvious influence on rhetoric.

Presidents' language has evolved with the culture. George Washington spoke directly about Christianity and faith, and years later, Abraham Lincoln did as well. However, there was a difference in the men's language. Washington was more definite and more exclusive, with statements like, "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than those of the United States."⁵⁵ For Lincoln, it would seem that there is no conviction that God was on the side of any political party, state, or anything worldly. He was cautious with his messages about God. "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."⁵⁶ As time has continued and pluralism has become a larger part of our understanding and tolerance for each other, religious rhetoric should also be confined. To avoid further social separation, "political correctness" in this modern society of mixed religions has become crucial in the United States. For pluralism to be successful in the country, the idea needs to be encouraged through rhetoric rather than contradicted.

⁵⁵ 20th, June 2004. 2, November 2004. www.eadshome.com/QuotesoftheFounders.htm

⁵⁶ Lincoln's Cooper Institute Address, February 27th, 1860. 5, November 2004. <http://home.att.net/~rjnorton/Lincoln78.html>

History and Explanation Behind our Civil Religion

As we have seen, civil religion is growing in its presence despite what we know about pluralism in America. They are the unexamined, cultural ideals that have provided the opportunity for exclusive religious faith to be proclaimed in the presidents' rhetoric. This is civil religion— behind the secular procedure, effecting politics, not unlike that which we have been examining as it arose in Germany.

Growing out of the pilgrims' pursuit of religious freedom, basic rights for the faithful were installed as one of the central features of the United States Constitution. As it is the First Amendment in the constitution, it is clear that the balance between church and state was an important issue at that time. Backed vehemently throughout history, the Separation of Church and State was set in place to protect the church from the state.⁵⁷ This was the first step towards pluralistic tolerance in the United States. However, the ensuing trend would be set in place at the time of the Revolution. According to Robert Bellah,⁵⁸ America was then referred to as "God's first born nation".⁵⁹ The sentiment existed long before "civil religion" finally became an official term in 1967.⁶⁰

"The Battle Hymn of the Republic" was written during the Civil War. The imagery was drawn largely from the book of Revelations. Christian holiness and republican liberty are fully conjoined in each verse. For example, the line "As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,"⁶¹ links religious holiness with political freedom. Other examples, as in President Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address

⁵⁷ Steven L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993 105.

⁵⁸ Robert Bellah was a professor of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley.

⁵⁹ Bellah, Robert N. *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Free Press, 1992, 48.

⁶⁰ Bellah, *The Broken Covenant* 164.

⁶¹ Bellah, *The Broken Covenant* 53.

are equally clear, when he concluded with the phrase, "as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

Civil Religion and President Bush

Despite cultural changes in recent times and the obvious growing presence of non-Christian traditions, this Christian rhetoric has especially grown since September 11th. There was an obvious rekindling of interest in both spirituality and citizenship.⁶² People across the country listened to a very religious message in Bush's speeches following the 9/11 events. He spoke about a higher authority who has led him to battle "the evildoers;" and Time Magazine reported that privately Bush talked of being chosen by the grace of God to lead at that moment.⁶³ He drew straight from scripture in a September 14th speech when he concluded with,

As we have been assured, neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, can separate us from God's love. May He bless the souls of the departed. May He comfort our own. And may He always guide our country. God bless America."⁶⁴

President Bush has used a considerable amount of religious rhetoric since the beginning of his first term. Religious messages in presidential speeches are not only common, but even expected following tragedy. The messages are powerful rhetoric, as citizens are emotional and suggestive in such times of stress. We saw just how powerful religious statements are in Hitler's speeches, when he spoke about themes like supremacy, chosen-ness, and otherness. This exclusive and prejudicial civil religion was

⁶² Black, Koopman, Ryden, pg. 216.

⁶³ Alessandra Stanly, "Understanding the President and His God" The New York Times, April 29th, 2004. 29, October 2004.

⁶⁴ A speech given in The National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. on September 14, 2001. USA Patriotism. Accessed on 21, November, 2004.

a great influence on the German people. Now we can see that powerful rhetoric has the same influence on the United States citizens.

One cannot deny that religion is a power that will always be a factor in the political arena. It is important to remember that although some extreme examples suggest otherwise, religious influence on government is not necessarily negative. The goal is to find a healthy blend among moral and ethical convictions in our pluralist society of religions, and to continue to further define just what is religious and just what is political.

From the President's Faith to God Talk

George W. Bush has described God's divine power and humans' a leader's desire to do his will. This idea in itself, as I have discussed, is expected. There is however, a danger in combining one's own faith in God with obligations of the public office. What could result is the manipulation of the public's beliefs, and then unbalanced power over the country's affairs. Perhaps Bush has taken his rhetoric to a point beyond just expressing his personal convictions. Alessandra Stanly, author, and reporter for the *New York Times*, stated her opinion that many share, "this "faith-based" president has blurred the line between religion and state more than any of his recent predecessors."⁶⁵

Throughout this war, the ideas of America being the righteous power and God being on America's side, have taken the sentiment out of simple patriotism, and into a holy war. What has appeared to happen in this presidency is more of what is sometimes called *God-*

⁶⁵ Alessandra Stanly, "Understanding the President and His God" The New York Times, April 29th, 2004. 29, October 2004.
http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/kids-enfants/map-carte/map_e.htm

talk.⁶⁶ God-talk has become a big part of this war, for our commander-in-chief, for the terrorists, and for American citizens.

God-talk is public discussion in explicitly religious terms, which is different than talking about generally spiritual comments. For example, bumper stickers and signs that say 'God Bless our Troops,' is a more general comment that is not as religiously exclusive as, 'God is on our side, and it is his will that we the righteous will prevail.' It has not been uncommon to see both types of messages since 9/11. The recent God-talk in the United States has begun to promote the conservative views of the Republican Party.

Bruce Lincoln, religion professor at the University of Chicago, describes his impression Bush's God-talk in *The Christian Century*. To him, Bush is a born-again Christian, which Bush would say has changed his life, but to Lincoln, it has also changed his presidency. Bush has incorporated his faith into nearly every aspect of his job. He would suggest that he deeply considers his faith before he makes decision. In many of his speeches, he eludes to scripture, to further portray that his faith is a part of his policy. Yet, he does not cite the Bible in a way that would encourage cross-examination. For example, Lincoln explains, Bush has made statements using a particular Bible verse, while taking it out of the context of the passage, so it holds the meaning he wants it to. Bush uses 1 Corinthians 4:2, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." However, if one were to read the whole passage, Lincoln insists, they would see that the Biblical message is contradictory to what Bush is trying to say.⁶⁷

Certainly, Bush has a very rehearsed way of displaying his faith. Yet, even some of the president's closest allies say they are not sure when he is speaking from the pulpit,

⁶⁶ Stephen L. Carter, *Culture of Disbelief* 48.

⁶⁷ Lincoln, "Bush's God Talk". *The Christian Century* vol. 121 no. 20. (October 5th, 2004.) 22.

and when from the office of the presidency. "There is no question that the president's faith is calculated, and there is no question that the president's faith is real," Doug Wead, Central Assemblies of God minister, George Bush Senior campaign advisor, and Bush family friend says. "I would say that I don't know and George Bush doesn't know when he's operating out of a genuine sense of his own faith or when it's calculated."⁶⁸

Further Examination: the cause and repercussions of our Civil Religion

The decisions this administration has made concerning international affairs have had colossal consequences, as we can see in the current situations over seas. The decisions have not been carefully explained to or understood by much of the American public. What makes the gray matter of these decisions even grayer is the religious overtones set so many times by Bush and his administration and supporters. When the situation is explained, it is unfortunately clouded by religious talk.

Civil religion in America poses substantial dangers, (as we have seen already in Germany). There are four themes of American Civil religion.⁶⁹ One is the idea of the "American Dream." Everybody has the right to pursue their own dreams of wealth, power, and social status. Individuality- in the sense of self-sufficiency is one of the obvious values in the United States. This idea is what has brought about the strong drive towards capitalism. Another goal is individualism, which in this case is closely related to self-sufficiency. People are proud, and crave recognition and distinction. Third, freedom and liberty are universal ideas that no one can oppose. America finds freedom and power to be the most valuable assets of the country. Therefore, freedom and liberty are worth

⁶⁸ Lincoln "Bush's God Talk" 23.

⁶⁹

fighting for. Finally, the theme of chosen-ness is the idea that the nation has somehow been chosen by God for a higher purpose.⁷⁰

So, in other words, Americans want to stand out, yet they want to be safe, and they want to have the freedom to do whatever they want to benefit themselves, at the cost of other nations or even other individual's freedom. In religious terms, Americans basically ask for everything from God, and use God as justification, yet take out the important Christian concept of considering what is required of them by God.

God is thanked for the success of an enterprise recently completed or asked to sanctify one not yet fully begun. God is asked to bless the nation, its people, and its leaders. But nobody, in the civil religion, is asked to do anything for God.⁷¹

Holy Justification and Otherness Our Preemptive Strike

Just War, though not necessarily directly acknowledged, has become one of the themes in President Bush's rhetoric since September 11th. He suggests the idea of a "just" war, though he does not apply the principle.

The cause we serve is right, because it is the cause of all mankind. The momentum of freedom in our world is unmistakable--and it is not carried forward by our power alone. We can trust in that greater power who guides the unfolding of the years. And in all that is to come, we can know that His purposes are just and true.⁷²

If this war can be considered "just", and our actions to be righteous, how do we explain the preempted strike against Iraq to begin our current war with Iraq? This is where, when considering Christianity and Bush's rhetoric, we see a conflict.

⁷⁰ Bruce Murray, "With God on our side?": How American Civil religion permeates society and manifests itself in public life." 25 September 2004. FACSNET.com

⁷¹ Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief* 52.

⁷² Bush, President George. W., State of the Union Address, January 20th, 2004.

Nowhere in any of the principles we have discussed is preemptive strike justified.

Yet, bush claims to consider his faith and the faith of the nation when making decisions.

The Public and the Messages of War

To announce that there must be no criticism of the president, or that we are to stand by the president, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public. -Theodore Roosevelt, 1918

Has Bush manipulated America's civil religion enough that we might be incapable of deciphering between Christian faith and American civil religion? Every citizen needs to be critically analyzing the messages we receive from the president to make sense of what is truth and what is personal conviction, what is subjective and objective. The Christian community in the country needs a basis to make the claim that this war can be justified and fought under the name of God. If it is a Christian that has led us into this war with fanfare and fireworks as according to his Christian convictions, how do Christians find a redeeming link to their own faith?

Conclusion

In the first Chapter, I described the events that led to Adolf Hitler's leadership, the Holocaust, and a final realization of the horrific actions done by the Nazis. All of that done, with Hitler's followers believing in self-righteousness he explained to them as God's will. With religious rhetoric, Hitler painted for the German people revenge after WWI, a continental domination, and a superior race; and a justification for any measures it may take to accomplish those goals. The Germans were practically brainwashed. As a whole, they seemed to believe anything Hitler said. His rhetoric affected their faith in God, and their discernment of right and wrong. They were so blinded by the attractions of Hitler's claims that they could not see reality. Even when it was obvious, like death camps in their back yards, they would not face the truth.

The important principles to combat the dangers of evil, pacifism and realism, were explained in the second chapter. Pacifism is a refusal to respond to or act in violence, regardless of the situation. Pacifists in the past have held rallies to object to wars, and have even taken punishment for their beliefs. Realists have responded to violence in violent ways of their own. The best example of a moral realist is Bonhoeffer's life and service in WWII. With much regret, Bonhoeffer acted on his conscience to fix a big social and political problem going on in his country in the last way he knew to try.

To citizens like Bonhoeffer, there is a strong sense of reality that is not dictated by the rhetoric and actions of their state. It is essential that citizens remember the importance of critical thought when listening to public leaders, political or otherwise. It is when people are swept away by rhetoric- regardless of whether it has any factual basis-

that they cannot see reality and cannot decipher what is wrong and right. In times of war, people can easily be convinced that for one reason or another, they are right and some other group is wrong.

Events like the Holocaust, the My Lai Massacre, several independent examples in both of the world wars, and the September 11th attacks all have a common theme—horrific and unjustified acts done by an aggressive party to a group that the party feels is inferior. We know from what was discussed about otherness, that superiority allows people to dehumanize other groups, and therefore, justify anything they do to them. Before even regarding religion, this idea is wrong on a secular level. There are basic universal human rights, as we saw in the Just War Theory (though Christian) and in the agreements of the United Nations. Over time, the examples of immense human mistakes in nations and states have not improved. Now that we are in a period with the ability to understand these historical accounts and learn from them, we need to do so.

From the beginning of the current war, we knew from the president's messages that we were either with the war, or against the country. That statement, "you are with us or against us", continued to add to an already big problem: the sense of otherness and "us versus them" in our country. Now is a time that we need to be more unified, and not unified in the sense that we will pull together in a time of war, like the political leaders expect of us. We need to pull together at a level where we are not against another party in order to be unified ourselves. By making an enemy anywhere else in the world, we are making enemies within our own borders.

People seem to need the feeling of safety that religion can offer. The question is not whether or not religion has a place in politics, or whether war is wrong or right under

a certain religious precept. Religion and war are inevitable aspects of human life, and a great influence on national and international affairs.

An Example to Follow

During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln said,

“Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict [slavery] might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has...”

Lincoln understood that both sides were praying to one in the same God, that both were equally as convinced that God was on their side. And Lincoln knew that neither really could judge the other, and know that they themselves were right. This is the perception that is crucial in times like today- Christian Americans, politicians or not, have no basis to state the claim that they are right, under God. Under who's God? And how will we ever know? Despite Biblical passages, divine inspiration, moral rules and Christian doctrine, God's view as we want to come by it will always be unknown. As Lincoln concluded in his war, and Bonhoeffer concluded in his, we can only hope that we are on God's side.

We live in a time when mass destruction of the world is a very real threat. No longer are attacks on groups or states limited to certain areas. No longer can anybody ignore what happens to their neighbors, because there will be a greater effect on more and more people. Chemical, biological, and nuclear warfare are likely possibilities in a coming attack or war. There is a potential for a leader to single-handedly destroy the

world. Clearly, this is not a time to allow the impact of religion on wartime to be trivialized. Civil religion and religious rhetoric by politicians are not bad by nature. However, they have the potential to manipulate religions and in turn, manipulate believers.

We have seen what can happen when a nation's actions are falsely justified by religious rhetoric. To stop it from happening again, it is important to understand our own faith, and understand what it really means to live that faith. As it has been seen, the selfishness of a state, and the selflessness of a religion combined can only form then, a self-serving religion, in the idea of civil religion.⁷³

Whether one decides to believe the religious rhetoric or not, is not the important decision we have to make. The important decision is to realize we have to look deeper than what we hear from the political podium, and even deeper than what we hear from the pulpit. Even if the messages are the same, that does not mean they are the truth. It is our civil duty to analyze the use of power, and to understand the repercussions of our nation's actions and decisions.

"One is not supposed to be so blind with patriotism that he cannot see reality. Wrong is Wrong no matter who does it."⁷⁴

⁷³ Nieburhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. 84.

⁷⁴ Quote from Malcolm X, during the Civil Rights movement.

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