

WAR
AND THE
AMERICAN
DIFFERENCE

*Theological Reflections
on Violence and National Identity*

STANLEY HAUERWAS


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Contents

Preface ix

Introduction xi

Part 1 America and War

1. War and the American Difference: A Theological Assessment 3
2. America's God 13
3. Why War Is a Moral Necessity for America: Or, How Realistic Is Realism? 21

Part 2 The Liturgy of War

4. Reflections on the "Appeal to Abolish War": Or, What Being a Friend of Enda's Got Me Into 37
5. Sacrificing the Sacrifices of War 53
6. C. S. Lewis and Violence 71
7. Martin Luther King Jr. and Christian Nonviolence 83

Part 3 The Ecclesial Difference

8. Jesus, the Justice of God 99
9. Pentecost: Learning the Languages of Peace 117
10. A Worldly Church: Politics, Theology, and the Common Good 135
11. A Particular Place: The Future of Parish Ministry 151
12. Beyond the Boundaries: The Church Is Mission 167

Index 183

Preface

Ten years and counting. America has been at war for ten years and counting. It is almost difficult to recall a time when America was not at war. The Cold War may not have seemed like war, but there can be no doubt that it was appropriately named “war.” For those of us who have lived long enough to remember it, in some ways the Cold War seemed more real than the wars that ensued after September 11, 2001. The Cold War impinged on the daily lives of Americans, whereas the wars after September 11, 2001, have been fought without the general American population having to make any sacrifices. They go on, and so do we. Yet people are dying and people are killing. These wars are real.

Most Americans do not seem to be terribly bothered by the reality of the current wars. It is as if they have become but another video game. In truth, the wars themselves are increasingly shaped by technologies that make them seem gamelike. Young men and women can kill people around the world while sitting in comfortable chairs in underground bunkers in Colorado. At the end of the work day, they can go home and watch Little League baseball. I find it hard to imagine what it means to live this way.

The wars America has been fighting for ten years and counting seem so distant and vague that it is hard for any of us to deal with the reality of war. We celebrate and praise the heroism of those who fight, and we are saddened that some must make the “ultimate sacrifice” to preserve our “freedom.” Those so honored, however, do not necessarily think, given the reality of war, that they should be regarded as heroes. To be sure, those who are actually engaged in combat—those who see the maimed bodies and mourning mothers—struggle more than the rest of us to make sense of the reality of war.

It is my hope that this book will in some small way help us, Christian and non-Christian alike, to confront the reality of war. I write as one committed to Christian nonviolence, but I hope that what I have written here will be an

invitation for those who do not share my commitments to nevertheless join me in thinking through what a world without war might look like.

The world, for good reason, may well think it does not need another book by me, but I make no apology for putting this book together. In the face of ongoing wars it is hard to know what to say, but I am determined to continue trying to articulate what it might mean to be faithful to the gospel. Like most of my work this book is exploratory, but I hope readers will find my attempt to reframe theologically how we think about war fruitful for their own reflection. Indeed, I hope I have said some of what needs to be said if we are to have an alternative to “ten years and counting.”

I’m thankful that Rodney Clapp thought these essays to be important and worthwhile. When I sent them to Rodney I did so knowing he had the editorial imagination to envision them as a whole; and he did. As usual, I am in Rodney’s debt, not only for making this book possible, but for suggesting that I have some Johnny Cash in my soul.

I’m grateful to Adam Hollowell and Nathaniel Jung-Chul Lee, who proved invaluable in getting these essays ready for publication. Early on, when I first began thinking of this collection, Adam spent time reading and making insightful suggestions. That Adam has now completed his PhD and is currently a colleague at Duke is a great gift. Nate has helped with final revisions, which entailed his making substantive suggestions for the text as a whole. His determination to be a priest in the Episcopal Church is a gift to the church. Both of these young scholars are examples of what it means for the academy and the church to take seriously the realism of Christ’s sacrifice.

Carole Baker was the first reader of these essays. Without her none of the chapters in this book would have been ready to be read by others. She has read and reread what I have written for so long, she is now able to say what I should have said better than me. I continue to worry that having her work for me means she cannot pursue her work as an artist as fully as I think she should. But hopefully that day is not far off.

I have dedicated this book to the Ekklesia Project because though it is a quirky group of people—and that includes me—I think it may be the kind of gathering that helps us see what it could mean for Christians to love one another.

By the time this book appears I will be seventy years old. How strange. What a wonderful life I have been given. I have been loved by many friends and I am extremely grateful. But Paula’s love for me has made all the difference.

Introduction

This is a modest book with an immodest purpose: to convince Christians that war has been abolished. The grammar of that sentence is very important: the past tense is deliberate. I do not want to convince Christians to work for the abolition of war, but rather I want us to live recognizing that in the cross of Christ war has already been abolished. So I am not asking Christians to work to create a world free of war. The world has already been saved from war. The question is how Christians can and should live in a world of war as a people who believe that war has been abolished.

I am well aware that the claim that Jesus has abolished war will strike many as absurd. We live, as I just acknowledged, in a world of war. So what could it possibly mean to say that through his death and resurrection Jesus has brought an end to war? To live as if war has been abolished surely is a fool's game. Philip Bobbitt must be right to argue that we cannot and, more importantly, should not try to imagine a world without war. Rather, we ought to think hard about the wars we should have fought for political reasons so to avoid wars that lack political purpose.¹

Bobbitt's presumption that there is no alternative to war reflects a humane and profound understanding of our common lot. He is no lover of war. He is not a cynic or a nihilist. He does not believe when all is said and done that we must live as if the bottom line is to kill or be killed. Bobbitt simply accepts the world as he finds it, that is, a world in which war, like birth and death, is simply a fact of life. He sees his task, a moral task, as helping us to understand the possibilities as well as the limits of such a world.

1. Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Anchor, 2003), 780. Although Bobbitt does not use just war categories in *The Shield of Achilles*, his analysis of war might invite a just war response if, as Paul Ramsey argued, the point of just war is to subject war to a political purpose.

The problem with Bobbitt's defense of what he considers the real world of war is that there is another world that is more real than a world determined by war: the world that has been redeemed by Christ. The world that has been redeemed by Christ has an alternative politics to the constitutional orders that Bobbitt thinks are established by war. The name for that alternative politics is "church."

The statement that there is a world without war in a war-determined world is an eschatological remark. Christians live in two ages in which, as Oliver O'Donovan puts it, "the passing age of the principalities and powers has overlapped with the coming age of God's kingdom."² O'Donovan calls this the "doctrine of the Two" because it expresses the Christian conviction that Christ has triumphed over the rulers of this age by making the rule of God triumphantly present through the mission of the church.³ Accordingly the church is not at liberty to withdraw from the world but must undertake its mission in the confident hope of success.⁴

My appeal to O'Donovan's understanding of the "doctrine of the Two" may seem quite strange given my pacifism, his defense of just war, and his nuanced support of some of what we call Christendom. From O'Donovan's perspective the establishment of the church in law and practice and the development of just war reflection were appropriate expressions of the rule of Christ. One of the justifications for bringing these essays together is to suggest that my (and John Howard Yoder's) understanding of the "doctrine of the Two" shares more in common with O'Donovan than many might suspect.

My claim that Christians are called to live nonviolently, not because we think nonviolence is a strategy to rid the world of war, but rather because as faithful followers of Christ in a world of war we cannot imagine not living nonviolently, might seem quite antithetical to O'Donovan's understanding of the "doctrine of the Two." But I do not think that to be the case. Like O'Donovan, I believe that after the ascension, everything, including those who rule, cannot avoid being a witness to the rule of Christ.⁵ Even the rejection of Christ's lordship cannot help but testify to him.

The church simply names those whom God has called to live faithfully according to the redemption wrought through Christ. The difference between church and world is not an ontological difference, but rather a difference of agency. The world, by being the world, is not condemned to live violently, but rather the violence that grips it is the result of sin. This understanding of

2. Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 211.

3. *Ibid.*, 193.

4. *Ibid.*, 212.

5. By calling attention to the ascension I am not suggesting that O'Donovan isolates the ascension from the crucifixion and resurrection. Rather he sees the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension as bound together "in a knot of mutual intelligibility" (*Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 14).

church and world is, therefore, a “duality without dualism” because Christians believe that the church is what the world can be.⁶

Because Christians believe we are what the world can be, we can act in the hope that the world can and will positively respond to a witness of peace.⁷ That witness begins with Christians refusing to kill one another in the name of lesser loyalties and goods. Such a refusal creates the necessity for Christians to imagine what it might mean to live in a world in which war has been abolished. That is no easy task given the way war shapes our habits of speech, our fundamental explanatory accounts of the way things are, and the way we see the world. The challenge for those who would worship Christ, therefore, is to allow what we do in prayer to confront the habits that seem to make war inevitable.

John Howard Yoder observes that to imagine a world in which war has been abolished requires that we live in a community that celebrates and shares a language that helps us see an alternative world. According to Yoder, because the church is that kind of alternative community, Christians can see things that other people cannot see, we can notice what others fail to notice, and we can make connections that otherwise would be overlooked. Such a community, moreover, “enables perseverance, it motivates, it protects us from the erratic and the impulsive, because the stance we take is a shared and celebrated stance. We live with one another the maintenance of the language that gives meaning to our countercultural identity.”⁸

The heart of this book is my attempt to imagine what it means for the church to be an alternative to war. Those concerned with the fragmented character of our lives might interpret my suggestion that the church is an alternative to war as a reactionary response. Many long for a universal ethic that promises the means to secure agreements between diverse people as an alternative to war.⁹ To emphasize the church as an alternative to war will seem from such a perspective to introduce the kind of particularistic commitment that is the source of the problem. Too often, however, those who presume they are representatives of a

6. John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life, 1964), 31.

7. John Howard Yoder observes that “peace” is not an accurate description of what has happened to those who have identified with “Historic Peace Churches.” Nor does Christian pacifism guarantee a warless world. Rather “‘peace’ describes the pacifist’s hope, the goal in the light of which he acts, the character of his action, the ultimate divine certainty which lets his position make sense; it does not describe the external appearance or the observable results of his behavior. This is what we mean by eschatology: a hope which, defying present frustration, defines a present position in terms of the yet unseen goal which gives it meaning” (*The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* [Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2003], 53).

8. John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 153. For an extremely important essay on Yoder’s work that highlights this quotation, see Mark Thiessen Nation, “The Politics of Yoder Regarding *The Politics of Jesus*,” in *Radical Ecumenicity: Pursuing Unity and Continuity after John Howard Yoder*, ed. John Nugent (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2010), 37–56.

9. For an insightful account of the main characteristics of universal ethics as a “type,” see Samuel Wells and Ben Quash, *Introducing Christian Ethics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 115–45.

universal ethic find it difficult to place a limit on war. For example, if a war is fought “to be a war to end all wars” or “to make the world safe for democracy” or as “a war against terrorism,” then war cannot come to an end.

By beginning with the church, and in particular with the liturgy, I have tried to develop a perspective on the character of war that helps us see why we find it so hard to imagine a world without war. By doing so I hope, as one committed to Christian nonviolence, to give an account of war that acknowledges the real sacrifices of those who have participated in war. One of the reasons I think it is difficult for many to think of themselves as pacifist is that such a position seems to dishonor those who have gone to war. Defenders of war may say that they respect those who are pacifist, but they continue to assume that there are times when war is a necessity. That assumption seems justified because if, as most rightly think, good people fought in past wars, then it may be necessary to fight in future wars so that those who fought in past wars are not forgotten or dishonored. From this perspective the pacifist disavowal of war seems to suggest that those who have fought in past wars are morally culpable.

If we hope to avoid the unhappy characterizations pacifists and nonpacifists make of one another, it is crucial that those of us committed to Christian nonviolence make clear that we do not understand our disavowal of war to be a position of “purity.” A commitment to nonviolence rightly requires those who are so committed to recognize that we are as implicated in war as those who have gone to war or those who have supported war. The moral challenge of war is too important for us to play the game of who is and who is not guilty for past or future wars. We are all, pacifist and nonpacifist alike, guilty. Guilt, however, is not helpful. What can be helpful is a cooperative effort to make war less likely.

Many have assumed that the best way to begin that task is to develop increasingly sophisticated accounts of the classical moral alternatives of the crusade, pacifism, and just war.¹⁰ I am deeply respectful of the work done by those who have tried to clarify these ways of thinking about war.¹¹ However,

10. John Howard Yoder rightly argues that these “types” can blind us to the fact that the dominant response of Christians to war has been what Yoder calls the “blank check.” The blank check assumes that we should go kill whoever our leader says we should go kill. Though often associated with kings, this type is particularly powerful in alleged democracies because it is assumed that those who make the decision to go to war represent the interests of “the people.” Yoder’s account of the types is to be found in his *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, ed. Theodore Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 27–41.

11. I am particularly impressed by Daniel Bell’s recent book *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church Rather Than the State* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009). Bell provides an important argument to suggest that the just war tradition is best understood as a means for those who are to go or have been to war to test their conscience as followers of Christ. As Bell puts it, “with regard to just war, if in the last analysis just war is a compromise between Jesus’s nonviolent ideal and the demands of a violent reality, if it is something other than following Jesus, then it cannot be a faithful form of discipleship” (36). Bell accordingly draws on Augustine to argue that just war as an act of love can be a form of discipleship.

I am not persuaded that attempts to gain clarity about the ethics of war do justice to the moral reality of war. I am not suggesting (though I am in some sympathy with the suggestion) that just war considerations have little effect on decisions to go to war or the actual conduct of war. I am rather suggesting that this way of approaching war as a moral reality fails to do justice to the morally compelling character of war.

For in spite of the horror of war, I think war, particularly in our times, is a sacrificial system that is crucial for the renewal of the moral commitments that constitute our lives.¹² That is why, as Jonathan Tran argues, memory is a crucial constituent of the moral reality that makes war seem unavoidable. We ask soldiers to kill and be killed, and in order to make sense of what they have done we identify them with those patriotic stories that enable us to remember the dead.¹³

Tran observes that most soldiers cannot “long live with the memory of killing if the nation does not provide both narratives and narratival enactments that circumscribe those memories within the national myth, engrafting killers into the lore of patriots.”¹⁴ That, of course, is what did not happen for those who fought in Vietnam. And lacking any culminating liturgies, the Vietnam war seems to have never ended—particularly for those who fought in it. This means, according to Tran, “for the first time in American history, soldiers came home killers” because they were not given the means to return to “normality.”¹⁵

Ivan Strenski complements Tran’s analysis of the liturgical character of war by suggesting that the sacrifices demanded of war cause certain effects in the society for which the war has been fought. The sacrifice of war, that is, that a society must receive the giving up of self by those who have fought and died, “authorizes conceptions of an ideal community, it energizes a society to flourish, it inspires it to resist extermination, it weaves the networks of obligation that make societies cohere.”¹⁶ Those who die in war make those for whom they have died feel obligated to accept the gift of their death and, more importantly, “be obliged to repay this gift of their heroic deaths in some appropriate way.”¹⁷

The 2010 Supreme Court decision concerning the cross erected on public lands to remember the casualties of WWI reinforces Tran’s and Strenski’s account of war as a liturgical event. In defense of the cross, Justice Kennedy observed that “a Latin cross is not merely a reaffirmation of Christian beliefs.

12. I hesitate to use the phrase “particularly in our times” because I am convinced that war has always had a sacrificial character in diverse societies and times. I do think, however, that the language of sacrifice became particularly prominent in the American Civil War and WWI. I am also hesitant to generalize about the sacrificial character of war because I am hesitant to generalize about war.

13. Jonathan Tran, *The Vietnam War and Theologies of Memory* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 176–80.

14. *Ibid.*, 198.

15. *Ibid.*, 184.

16. Ivan Strenski, *Why Politics Can’t Be Freed from Religion* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 176.

17. *Ibid.*, 181.

It is a symbol often used to honor and respect those whose heroic acts, noble contributions, and patient striving help secure an honored place in history for this Nation and its people.”¹⁸ Kennedy continues by suggesting that the meaning of this cross cannot be limited to the cross of Christ. In Kennedy’s words, “Here, one Latin cross in the desert evokes far more than religion. It evokes thousands of small crosses in foreign fields marking the graves of Americans who fell in battles, battles whose tragedies are compounded if the fallen are forgotten.”¹⁹

Interestingly, in dissent, Justice Stevens gave voice to what I think Christians should say in response to Kennedy’s decision. Justice Stevens said he could not agree that this bare cross was nonsectarian simply because crosses are often used to commemorate heroic acts of fallen soldiers. Stevens contended that “the cross is not a universal symbol of sacrifice. It is the symbol of one particular sacrifice, and that sacrifice carries deeply significant meaning for those who adhere to the Christian faith.”²⁰ Justice Stevens acknowledges that the cross has sometimes been used to represent the sacrifice of an individual, but even then the cross carries a religious meaning. Stevens observes, “the use of the cross in such circumstances is linked to, and shows respect for, the individual honoree’s faith and beliefs. I too would consider it tragic if the Nation’s fallen veterans were forgotten. But there are countless different ways, consistent with the Constitution, that such an outcome can be averted.”²¹

Justice Kennedy’s decision makes clear what I mean by “the American difference.” I am not suggesting that the sacrificial character of war is unique to America. For as I make clear in chapter 5, “Sacrificing the Sacrifices of War,” the Germans, French, and English often understood WWI in similar terms. Yet war has a role in the American story that is quite unique. For even if it is true (and I think it is), as Michael Howard contends, that the state as we know it is the creature of war, America is a society and a state that cannot live without war.²² Though a particular war may be divisive, war is the glue that gives Americans a common story.

My focus on the liturgical character of war has shaped the organization of this book. I begin with chapters on the American difference. As is true of all the chapters in the book, these essays touch on matters that are not strictly about war. Yet, as is my wont, I think everything is related to everything else. In the first part I try to show that war as a moral and liturgical enterprise is shaped by a death-denying politics that is an affront to the Christian passion for life. War is a theological challenge to the very intelligibility of Christian

18. Salazar, Secretary of the Interior, et al. v. Buono, 599 U.S. 08–472 (2010), available at <http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/09pdf/08-472.pdf>.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Sir Michael Howard, foreword to Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, xvi.

practice. That many insist on the incoherence of Christianity, I believe, has its roots in the Christian legitimization of war.

The essays in part two, “The Liturgy of War,” are meant to sharpen the focus on violence and war. I would not pretend that these essays do all the work that needs to be done, or say all that needs to be said about war. Indeed I would not pretend that the book as a whole adequately defends the suggestions I am trying to make for how we might understand the church as an alternative to war. I am well aware that this book is “suggestive.” I hope, however, that the reader will find the suggestiveness of the book rewarding enough to follow up on some of its suggestions.

C. S. Lewis was obviously not an American, but I have included the essay on Lewis because Lewis, as was his habit, gave voice to the assumptions many have about the problematic character of a pacifist stance. By including this essay on Lewis I hope to address some of the worries many have about the viability of Christian nonviolence. The chapter on King is my attempt to challenge the assumption that those committed to Christian nonviolence are not or cannot be politically relevant.

The chapters that make up the last part, entitled “The Ecclesial Difference,” are my attempt to develop an account of church as an alternative to war. In these essays I try to avoid the dualism that many assume is a given, that is, that between the universal and the particular.²³ The Christian word for universal is “catholic,” but “catholic” does not name a proposition that can be recognized by just anyone to be true. Rather, “catholic” names a people whose worship of God means they must recognize others who may well worship God in strikingly different ways. I do not pretend that process is easy. In fact, it is because of this immense difficulty that the commitment not to kill is constitutive of those who claim to follow Christ.

I have written often on the ethics of war and peace, but this is the first book that has those motifs as its primary focus. I have avoided focusing on war and peace because to do so might give some the impression that nonviolence is all that Christianity is about. If nonviolence becomes an abstraction, an ideal Christians pursue that can be separated from our convictions about the cross and resurrection, nonviolence threatens to become another manipulative form of human behavior. I hope, therefore, that my attempt to (re)describe war as an alternative to the sacrifice of the cross at once illumines why war is so morally compelling and why the church is an alternative to war.

23. For a fascinating analysis of the issues in relation to Pauline literature in contemporary political theology, see Derek Woodard-Lehman’s “One in Christ Who Lives Within: Dispersive Universality and Pnuema-Somatics of Identity,” in *The Bible and Critical Theory* 3, no. 3 (2007): 39.1–7.

Part 1

AMERICA AND WAR

1

War and the American Difference

A Theological Assessment

America is assumed to be different, because Christianity is still thought to thrive in the United States. Whereas Christianity is allegedly dying in Europe, it seems alive and well here, which confirms for many the contention that there is an inherent link between Christianity and democracy. For it is assumed not only that America is a Christian nation, but also that it is the paradigmatic exemplification of democracy.

In *A Secular Age* Charles Taylor tries to explain this presumed difference between America and Europe. At least one of the reasons that may account for the difference, Taylor suggests, is that America never had an *ancien régime* in which the church legitimized a hierarchical social order. Also at work may be the different role that elites play in determining general attitudes toward belief and unbelief. For example, the skepticism of academic elites in British society had more effect in England because elites have more prestige in British society than elites in America.

The primary reason for the American difference, according to Taylor, is the development of a common civil religion that allowed Americans, as well as immigrants in America, to understand their faiths as contributing to a consensus summed up by the motto “E pluribus unum.” This is in marked contrast to Europe, where religious identities have been the source of division either between dissenters and the national church, or between church and lay forces. In America, religious difference, which is even more varied

than in Europe, is subordinated to “one nation under God.” Religious people may find they are in deep disagreement about abortion or gay marriage, but those disagreements are subordinated to their common loyalty to America.¹ Their subordination also includes their faith in God; that is, whatever kind of Christian (or non-Christian) they may or may not be, their faith should be in harmony with what it means to be an American.

Taylor observes that this difference also accounts for the respective attitudes Europeans and Americans have toward national identities. Europeans generally are quite reticent about national identity, which Taylor attributes to the European memory of the First and Second World Wars. He observes that war, even wars that seem “righteous,” now make most Europeans uneasy. Yet that is not the case with Americans. Americans’ lack of unease with war may stem from their (incorrect) belief that there are fewer skeletons in the American closet than in the European closet. But Taylor thinks the reason for the American support of war is simpler. “It is easier,” Taylor observes, “to be unreservedly confident in your own righteousness when you are the hegemonic power.”²

Taylor is right to recognize that America’s unrivaled power in the world gives Americans a sense of confidence about our role as the “world’s policeman,” but he does not *articulate*—to use one of his favorite words—how American civil religion (our assumption that we are a “religious nation”) relates to the fact that war for most Americans is unproblematic.³ War is a moral necessity for America because it provides the experience of the “unum” that makes the “pluribus” possible. War is America’s central liturgical act necessary to renew our sense that we are a nation unlike other nations.⁴ World War I was the decisive moment because it was that war that finally healed the wounds caused by the American Civil War.

This is well documented by Richard Gamble in his book *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation*. Gamble provides ample evidence to show how liberal Protestants justified the First World War as redemptive for the nation and church. For example, Lyman Abbott, a well known progressive Protestant who had sought to reconcile Christianity with evolution, argued that America as a Christian nation must be willing to be self-sacrificial in service to other nations. Therefore America rightly opposed “pagan” Germany because Germany

1. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 522–27.

2. *Ibid.*, 528.

3. For Taylor’s emphasis on the significance of being articulate for locating our lives morally, see *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 92–107.

4. I develop this account of war in my essay “Sacrificing the Sacrifices of War,” first published in the *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 2 (2007): 77–96, but also included in part 2 of the present volume. The significance of the American Civil War is crucial in order to understand the liturgical significance of war in American life.

is a society in which “the poor serve the rich, the weak serve the strong, the ignorant serve the wise.” By contrast, America is a society of “organized Christianity” in which the “rich serve the poor, the strong serve the weak, the wise serve the ignorant.”⁵

Harry Emerson Fosdick, the exemplar of Protestant liberalism, even suggested that returning troops would present a special challenge to the nation and the churches since the soldiers would have learned the meaning of self-sacrifice through the experience of the war.⁶ They also would have experienced the potential of cooperative action through the regenerative power of devotion to a higher cause. Accordingly, the returning soldiers would challenge reactionary views of society and the church because they would expect to remake their world in accordance with the lessons they learned from the war.⁷ War, in short, was seen as the laboratory for the more egalitarian social policies that advocates of the Protestant social gospel so desperately desired.

Christianity and democracy in America were and continue to be, through the experience of war, inextricably linked. Arthur McGiffert, the president of Union Theological Seminary, argued that religion was necessary “to promote and sustain democracy.” Religion, according to McGiffert, had to dispose of its “egoistic and other-worldly character” by becoming socially responsible. “The religion of democracy,” he warned, “must cease to minister to selfishness by promising personal salvation, and must cease to impede human progress by turning the attention of religious men from the conditions here to rewards elsewhere.”⁸ Such was the lesson to be learned from war.

I call attention to how Americans understood the theological and moral significance of World War I because I think we fail to appreciate what Taylor identifies as the American civil religion if we do not take the American understanding of war into account. For example, Taylor observes that the traditional American synthesis of “civil religion,” associated with a non-denominational Christianity with a strong connection to civilized order, is still, unlike its British counterpart, in its “hot” phase. That it is so, however, has everything to do with the American experience of war as constitutive of the substance of our civil religion.

Even political theorists as insightful as C. B. Macpherson can miss the significance of war for American civil religion. Macpherson identified two versions of liberal democracy, which he argues shape American democracy but are in conflict with one another. In the first, a capitalist market society is assumed to be compatible with democratic processes. This form of democracy,

5. Richard Gamble quoting Abbott in *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2003), 155.

6. Harry Emerson Fosdick, “The Trenches and the Church at Home,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 1919.

7. Gamble, *War for Righteousness*, 211.

8. Quoted in *ibid.*, 214.

no matter how much the rise of the welfare state modifies it, remains dominant—particularly in America, and various balance-of-power models from American political science have given renewed theoretical legitimacy to it.

Macpherson associates the other version of liberal democracy with John Stuart Mill's attempt to moralize liberalism by arguing that a liberal society must be one in which all the members of the social order are equally free to realize their capabilities. From Macpherson's perspective liberal democracy, particularly the democracy of the United States, has tried to combine both forms of liberalism.⁹ Thus at times "liberal" means *the stronger can dominate the weak as long as they follow market rules*, while at other times it means *the attempt, usually through state agency, to achieve freedom for all to develop their capacity*. As a result, American politics cannot help but appear incoherent, as different and contradictory policy alternatives are put forward in the name of "freedom."¹⁰

For example, one defense for abortion is the right of an individual to have control over her body, but it is still assumed that laws against suicide make sense in the name of preventing harm. While some portions of the American society think it legitimate to appeal to their religious convictions to address such issues, others see this as a threat to the consensus that makes America work. Thus Taylor's observation that, even though the Protestant character of the original American civil religion has been broadened to include "all faiths" or "no faiths," there is still a strong "religious" character to American public life. That such is the case is confirmed by the very existence of secularist and liberal believers who seek a more secular America.¹¹

I agree with Macpherson that both forms of liberalism shape American life, but the tension between them can go unnoticed exactly because America is so wealthy and has the common moral experience of war. Of course wealth, as it turns out, makes war necessary; yet Americans assume that we never go to war to sustain our wealth, because they understand war as a moral enterprise commensurate with our being a democracy. From such a perspective, the military adventures prompted by September 11, 2001, were absolutely necessary for the moral health of the republic. That America must fight an unending war against terrorism means Americans have a common enemy that unites us.

If I am right about the place of war for sustaining the American difference, as a Christian I wish America as a nation was more "secular" and the Christianity of America was less American. Put differently, I wish America was more like Europe, for I fear that the American version of Christianity cannot

9. C. B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1.

10. Thus Alasdair MacIntyre's now classic description in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) of the inability in liberal societies to know what might count as an argument.

11. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 528.

provide a political challenge to what is done in the name of the American difference. In short, the great difficulty is how to keep America, in the proper sense, secular.

In order to elaborate this observation I think it helpful to call attention to Mark Lilla's important book *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West*. Lilla begins his book by giving voice to a sentiment raised after September 11, 2001, and occasioned by the Bush presidency. He (and many on the Left) had assumed that battles over revelation and reason, dogmatic purity and toleration, divine duty and common decency, had been relegated to the scrap heap of history. So people like Lilla "find it incomprehensible that theological ideas still inflame the minds of men, stirring up messianic passions that leave societies in ruin. We had assumed that this was no longer possible, that human beings had learned to separate religious questions from political ones, that fanaticism was dead. We were wrong."¹²

Lilla seeks, therefore, to defend "the great separation," that is, "to develop habits of thinking and talking about politics exclusively in human terms without appeals to divine revelation or cosmological speculation."¹³ Lilla understands this separation to be an extraordinary achievement because political theology is a "primordial form of thought" that for millennia provided the well of ideas and symbols for organizing society and shaping moral lives. In the West, Christianity was the source of political theology even though the political theology Christianity represented could not help but create political societies that were and are inherently unstable. The instability results from the Christian presumption that believers are in the world but not of it. For example, Christians have always had trouble making sense of an empire they accidentally acquired.¹⁴

12. Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 3.

13. *Ibid.*, 5. Charles Taylor, in a very interesting review of Lilla's book, argues that Lilla's understanding of political theology fails to do justice to the natural law justifications of early modern thought that did not appeal directly to revelation or to premises drawn from revelation. According to Taylor, Lilla's argument depends on his view of political theology (suggested later in his book) that a genuine secular politics presumes a mechanistic understanding of the cosmos. Taylor thus challenges Lilla's presumption that "the great separation" has ever been quite the achievement Lilla assumes. Taylor's review of *The Stillborn God* is available at <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/01/24/two-books-oddly-yoked-together/>.

14. Lilla, *Stillborn God*, 42–45. Lilla observes that although Christianity "is inescapably political, it proved incapable of integrating this fact into Christian theology. The political organization of medieval Europe, tottering on that theological ambivalence, could not have been more perfectly arranged to exacerbate the conflict inherent in all political life. . . . Perhaps if Christianity had seen itself as the political religion it really was, presenting the pope as an earthly sovereign with full authority over secular matters, some bloodshed could have been avoided. But living as a Christian means being in the world, including the political world, while somehow not being of it. It means living with a false consciousness" (86). Lilla associates this instability in Christian political theology with the dialectic between transcendence and immanence at the heart of the

Lilla argues it was Hobbes who found the way, after a millennium of Christian political theology, to discuss religion and the common good without making reference to the nexus between God, man, and the world. Hobbes was able to do so because he, anticipating Feuerbach, had the wisdom to turn questions about God into questions about human behavior; to reduce that behavior to psychological states; and then to portray those states as artifacts of desire, ignorance, and the material environment.¹⁵

For Hobbes the gods are born out of fear of death, poverty, and calamity; but Hobbes knew better than to try to deny such fear. Rather he focused fear on one figure alone, the sovereign. Such a sovereign—Hobbes called him an “earthly God”—could ensure that his subjects should fear no other sovereigns but him. No longer would there be a tension between church and crown because now the sovereign would make clear that salvation depended on obedience to himself.

Lilla thinks Hobbes’s great achievement, this great separation that is crucial for the art of living in a liberal democratic order, is secured by three developments. The first is the intellectual separation made possible by the scientific revolution, in which a now mute natural world is separated from its Creator. As a result, investigations into nature can be separated from thoughts about God. Second, the crucial distinction between the public and the private was developed, relegating religious convictions and practices to the latter. To be sure, Lilla acknowledges, Hobbes made the sovereign responsible for public worship, but not for actually mounting an inquisition to determine if citizens really believed “Jesus is the Christ.” Third, perhaps less obviously but equally consequential, is Hobbes’s argument for separating academic inquiry from ecclesiastical control. One of the achievements of Hobbes’s project can be seen in theology’s becoming, as it has in modernity, but another academic discipline relegated to divinity schools.¹⁶

Though Hobbes is often thought to legitimate a violent understanding of politics, that is, human existence as a war of all against all, Lilla argues that Hobbes is actually trying to limit the violence that is unleashed by political theology. For when war is undertaken in the name of God, there can be no limit to killing, because so much is allegedly at stake. That is why human beings who believe in God commit acts in war that no animal would even commit. Animals kill only to eat and reproduce, but humans fight to get into heaven.¹⁷ Hobbes, on Lilla’s reading, is the first great realist in international affairs. After Hobbes, war at least has the potential to be humanely limited because it can be fought for selfish reasons.

incarnation. For such an astute reader of Barth, it is surprising that Lilla fails to understand that what is meant by such a dialectic must be Christologically determined.

15. *Ibid.*, 88.

16. *Ibid.*, 89–91.

17. *Ibid.*, 84–85.

According to Lilla's argument, Locke and Hume provided softer accounts of Hobbes's Leviathan but nonetheless remained fundamentally Hobbesian. Like Hobbes, they wanted to protect modern man from the superstition and violence associated with political theology by developing liberal habits of mind. In particular Locke thought it possible and necessary to liberalize Christianity itself, which Lilla suggests bore fruit in the work of Rousseau, Kant, and Protestant liberals such as Schleiermacher and Troeltsch. Yet Lilla judges the attempt of Protestant liberals to ground religion in human experience to be a failure because

It failed to inspire conviction about the Christian faith among nominal Christians, or attachment to Jewish destiny among nominal Jews. Once liberal theologians succeeded, as they did, in portraying biblical faith as the highest expression of moral consciousness and the precondition of modern life, they were unable to explain why modern men and women should still consider themselves to be Christians and Jews rather than simply modern men and women.¹⁸

Such is the dilemma of Christians in America. To the extent that Christians try to be "political" by playing by the rules set down by "the great separation," they cannot help but become unintelligible not only to their neighbors but, more importantly, to themselves. I think this helps account for the strident rhetoric of the Religious Right in America. Though claiming to represent a conservative form of Christianity, the Religious Right is politically a form of Protestant liberalism. The Religious Right makes a fetish of this or that belief (e.g., the substitutionary account of the atonement they take to be the hallmark of Christianity), but by doing so they play the game determined by the great separation—that is, Christianity becomes primarily a matter of "belief."

Yet secular people in America fear the Religious Right, because they think that the rise of the Religious Right and Islam threatens the "great separation." Thus Lilla ends his book by reminding those who, like him, are committed to Hobbes's great achievement that they are the exception. They cannot expect other civilizations to follow the path of the West. But according to Lilla, the West has made the choice to protect individuals from the harm they can inflict on one another in the name of religion. It has done so by securing fundamental liberties and by leaving the spiritual destinies of each person in their own hands. In short, Americans have chosen to keep our "politics unilluminated by the light of revelation. If our experiment is to work, we must rely on our own lucidity."¹⁹

But Lilla's account of the great separation does not explain how a country allegedly shaped by Hobbes and Locke is, particularly in reference to war,

18. *Ibid.*, 248.

19. *Ibid.*, 308–9.

nevertheless a nation that understands itself in religious terms.²⁰ Americans are said to be the beacon of hope for all people. They must be ready, therefore, to make sacrifices, for example, to go to war for the good of the world. In short, Lilla does not explain why it is very hard to keep the secular “secular” in America. Even though the church has been relegated to the “private” realm, the nation is still conceived and legitimated in salvific terms. It is not Christians and Muslims that challenge the great separation, but rather it is “America.”

Lilla’s sense that Hobbes’s achievement may be threatened is widely shared by others in America. For example, in his book *Education’s End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up On the Meaning of Life*, Anthony Kronman sounds themes very similar to Lilla’s. The university, as Lilla suggested, is the key agent for sustaining the great separation. Kronman acknowledges that Protestant piety had shaped the early universities in America, but he argues that after the Civil War, universities were organized to sustain a secular and humanistic account of life. Students would be initiated into secular humanism by reading the great texts of the Western tradition, and through such reading they would learn “that it is possible to explore the meaning of life in a deliberate and organized way even after its religious foundations have been called into doubt.”²¹

As a result of this humanistic emphasis in the universities, those in the humanities came to believe they had the competence and the authority to lead students in a disciplined study of the human condition, in order that students might pursue their own personal search for meaning. Their pedagogy assumed that no fixed conception of the end of human life or of a single right way to live could be sustained. For, according to Kronman, there simply is no “vantage point we can ever occupy from which our lives can be seen as a whole.”²² Secular humanism does not require that God be rejected or even thought to be irrelevant to life, as long as such judgments are left to the individual.

Kronman acknowledges that death is the most determinative challenge that confronts the secular humanist. “We all die, and know we will, and must adjust ourselves to the shadow which the foreknowledge of death casts over the whole of our lives.”²³ Yet death also forces us to recognize that whatever meaning life may have depends on us. Accordingly, for Kronman, life for the secular humanist is self-contradictory. The secular humanist seeks to abolish the limits that give their longings meaning; that is, they seek to be in control. Yet in the attempt to seize control, they come to recognize that without the limits they seek to overcome, the ends they seek could not exist.²⁴

20. See, for example, Michael Northcott, *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

21. Anthony Kronman, *Education’s End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 74.

22. *Ibid.*, 34.

23. *Ibid.*, 76.

24. *Ibid.*, 232.

Sounding very much like Lilla in his account of Hobbes, Kronman argues that religion, drawing on our fears, encourages us to revalue the limits of life by accepting those limits as an occasion for gratitude rather than rebellion. The smug cosmopolitan observers of this religious revival think this development to be shallow and mindless. Kronman thinks such an attitude fails to recognize that the problem is not the death of God but the death of man. The university's task is to preach the rebirth of a humanism that is more honest and honorable than anything religion can offer.²⁵

Kronman's understanding of secular humanism assumes what Lilla calls "the great separation," thus confirming Lilla's contention that the university is the crucial institution to sustain liberal social orders. Yet Kronman fears that the secular university has lost its way by becoming a research university beset by the demands of the politically correct. I certainly think the humanities have lost their centrality in the modern university, but I think that loss is due much more to the humanism Kronman advocates. For once the "great separation" is accepted, a Hobbesian world cannot be avoided—that is, a death-determined world committed to the defeat of death. In such a world, the university cannot help but become the home of technologies designed to increase our power over fate. In the process, we are fated by our creations.

Such a world, and the universities that serve it, must go to war in an effort to defeat those forces that threaten our security. Americans are determined to live in a world of safety even if we have to go to war to make the world safe. That project is often justified, according to Kronman, in the name of individual freedom and toleration; democratic government; respect for the rights of minorities and for human rights generally; a reliance on markets as a mechanism for the organization of economic life; and the acceptance of the truths of modern science and the ubiquitous employment of its technological products as aspirational goals all should want. According to Kronman, "To be openly opposed to any of these things is to be a reactionary, a zealot, an obscurantist who refuses to recognize the moral and intellectual authority of this ensemble of modern ideas and institutions."²⁶ I have little doubt that Kronman believes this, but that he does so means he simply cannot see what the rest of the world sees, namely, that this is an ideology for a culture of death.

Kronman and Lilla are to be commended for their willingness to advocate secular humanism as a moral, educational, and political project. They seem

25. *Ibid.*, 243. Kronman is more than ready to declare that any "religion" at some point must demand a sacrifice of the intellect because a religion finally insists that at some point thinking is not adequate to questions of life's meaning. So every religion in a basic sense must be fundamentalist because the answers it is prepared to give to life's questions are anchored in its own convictions (198–99). Kronman does not supply the necessary philosophical defense of his understanding of rationality.

26. *Ibid.*, 172–73.

to assume, however, that the secular humanist will be more peace loving, and I find it hard to locate any evidence that would support such a conclusion.

By calling attention to Lilla and Kronman I hope to have helped us see that if we as Christians are to reclaim the political theology required by the truthfulness of Christian convictions, we will need to begin by doing theology unapologetically. In particular that means Christians must reclaim theology as a knowledge central for the work of any university worthy of the name “university.” That will require, at least in America, a recovery of the church as a polity capable of challenging the presumption that the state is the agency of peace. In short, if my analysis concerning the American difference is close to being right, it should make clear that a commitment to Christian nonviolence is the presumption necessary for the church to reassert its political significance.

In *Veritatis Splendor* John Paul II claimed that there is an inseparable connection between truth and freedom, which, if broken, results in totalitarianism.²⁷ America is a society built on the assumption that freedom must precede truth. Therefore America is presumed to be the alternative to totalitarianism. However, if my account of the American difference is correct, I think this presumption needs to be reexamined, particularly in light of the way war sustains American political life.

27. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* 3.99, available at http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0222/_INDEX.HTM.

2

America's God

I am going to make some quite critical remarks about Protestantism and America, but I do not want to be misunderstood. Of course, to make critical remarks about America is a very American thing to do. To be an American often means you want the approval of people you assume are more sophisticated than you are, and Americans assume that Europeans are more sophisticated because they have all that “history.”¹

An American in Europe is rather like a Catholic in America. Catholics in America know they do not belong, but they are determined to show that they are more American than the Americans. Thus my observation that all you need to know to understand America is that the FBI is made up of Catholics and Southerners—because Catholics and Southerners have to show they are more loyal than most Americans, since Southerners have a history of disloyalty and Americans fear that Catholics may owe their allegiance to some guy in Rome. That is why the FBI is given the task of examining graduates of Harvard and Yale, that is, high-culture Protestants who of course no longer believe in God, to see if they are loyal enough to be operatives for the CIA.

1. I borrow this title of this chapter from Mark Noll who titled his book on the history of Christian theology in America from 1730 to 1860 *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). This chapter is a revised version of a paper presented at the meeting of *Communio et Liberatio* in Rimini, Italy, in 2007.

There is also the phenomenon of what I call the *New York Times* Catholics. These are the Catholics, usually clergy, that a *New York Times* reporter has learned to call after the Pope has issued an encyclical or given a speech that seems offensive to American sensibilities. They call a Catholic whom they have previously identified as a critic of the church to confirm that whatever the Pope has said, Catholics in America are not required to obey, or even if they are so required, will not take seriously. From the perspective of the *New York Times*, therefore, a good Catholic is one who would be regarded by the Vatican as a bad Catholic. In a similar fashion, it is quite tempting for an American in Europe to be a good American for Europeans by being a bad (i.e., disloyal) American.

The challenges facing Christians who are determined to reclaim the significance of the church in modernity are serious, and my hope in this chapter is to go beyond simply confirming European prejudices against America. I think America and Americans often deserve the prejudices of Europeans, but the problem with those prejudices is that too often, particularly when it comes to religion, they fail to appreciate the complexity of the place of religion in American life. For example, Europeans often think that the American people are, particularly in contrast to Europeans, deeply religious because they go to church. It will be the burden of my remarks, however, to suggest that American culture is more determinedly secular than most Europeans can imagine.

I will address the character of American Protestantism as well as the religious awareness of the American people and the impact that awareness has on society and politics—no small topic. But I think it first important to identify the perspective from which I speak. I am a Protestant, and I am a communicant at the Church of the Holy Family, an Episcopal church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. I teach in the Divinity School at Duke University, a very secular university. But before Duke I taught for fourteen years at the University of Notre Dame. I relate this history in order to inform you that I come from the Catholic side of Protestantism.

At the very least, to say I come from the Catholic side of Protestantism means that I do not think Christianity began with the Reformation. When I was interviewed for possible appointment to the faculty at Notre Dame I was asked what Protestant courses I would teach, and I responded that I did not teach Protestant theology because I thought the very notion was a mistake. Rather I would teach Thomas Aquinas, because his work was crucial for my attempt to recover the virtues for understanding the Christian life. I saw no reason that Aquinas should be assumed to be only a thinker for Roman Catholics.

But my presumption that I could claim Aquinas as a theologian in my tradition betrays a Protestant consciousness that may be distinctly American. It is an indication of the complexity I mentioned above, for even those of us who

would like to be identified as representing the Catholic side of Protestantism do so as a matter of *choice*.

This dilemma, I believe, is crucial for understanding the character of religious life in America. America is the first great experiment in Protestant social formation. Protestantism in Europe always assumed and depended on the cultural habits that had been created by Catholic Christianity. America is the first place Protestantism did not have to define itself over against a previous Catholic culture. So America is the exemplification of a constructive Protestant social imagination.

Again, these are very complex matters, but I believe—as Mark Noll rightly suggests in his magisterial book *America's God*—America is a synthesis of evangelical Protestantism, republican political ideology, and commonsense moral reasoning.² Americans were able to synthesize these antithetical traditions by making their faith in God indistinguishable from their loyalty to a country that ensured them that they had the right to choose which god they would or would not believe in. That is why Bonhoeffer accurately characterized American Protestantism as “Protestantism without Reformation.”³

American Protestants do not have to believe in God because they believe in belief. That is why we have never been able to produce interesting atheists in America. The god most Americans say they believe in is just not interesting enough to deny. Thus the only kind of atheism that counts in America is to call into question the proposition that everyone has a right to life, liberty, and happiness.⁴

So constituted, America did not need to have an established church because it was assumed that the church was virtually established by the everyday habits

2. Noll, *America's God*, 9.

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures, and Notes, 1928–1936*, trans. Edwin Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 92–93.

4. John Haught rightly calls attention to the superficial character of that new atheism represented by Richard Dawkins, Samuel Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. But he suggests that their appeal to science to guarantee truth is a “faith” stance that like religious faith cannot be proved. He quotes the Hitchens contention that “if one must have faith in order to believe in something, then the likelihood of that something having any truth is considerably diminished.” He argues such a statement cannot be invalidated by science and, therefore, it “arises out of faith in things unseen.” I think Haught’s attempt to defend religious faith unfortunately replicates the strategy of liberal Protestants to “protect” Christian convictions by showing all belief is based on an irrational starting point. As a result, Christian convictions appear as superficial as the convictions of new atheists. Haught’s strategy has the unfortunate effect of making “faith” an epistemological strategy rather than naming the faithfulness constitutive of being a disciple of Jesus. The new atheists are quite right to protest against Haught-like strategies in the name of “reason,” but it is by no means clear they have developed an adequate account of rationality. From my perspective the claims of the Christian faith are rational just to the extent that they rightly claim this is the way things are. See John Haught, “Amateur Atheists,” *Christian Century*, February 26, 2008, 22–29. For the best available response to the new atheists see David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

of public life. For example, Noll calls attention to the 1833 amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution that did away with church establishment but nonetheless affirmed “the public worship of God, and the instructions in piety, religion, and morality,” and promoted “the happiness and prosperity of a people, and the security of republican government.” Noll points out that these words were written at the same time that Alexis de Tocqueville had just returned to France from his tour of North America. Tocqueville descriptively confirmed the normative point made in the Massachusetts Constitution, observing, “I do not know if all Americans have faith in their religion—for who can read to the bottom of hearts?—but I am sure that they believe it necessary to the maintenance of republican institutions. This opinion does not belong only to one class of citizens or to one party, but to the entire nation; one finds it in all ranks.”⁵

Protestantism came to the land we now call America to make America Protestant. It was assumed that being American and Protestant meant having faith in the reasonableness of the common man and the establishment of a democratic republic. But in the process, the church in America became American; or, as Noll puts it, “because the churches had done so much to make America, they could not escape living with what they had made.”⁶ As a result, Americans continue to maintain a stubborn belief in a god, but the god they believe in turns out to be the American god. To know or worship that god does not require that a church exist, because that god is known through the providential establishment of a free people. Religious people on both the Right and the Left share the presumption that America is the church.

Noll ends his account of these developments with the end of the Civil War, but the fundamental habits he identifies as decisive in the formation of the American religious and political consciousness continue to shape the way Christians, and in particular Protestant Christians, understand their place in America. Yet I think we are beginning to see a loss of confidence by Protestants in their ability to sustain themselves in America, just to the extent that the inevitable conflict between the church, republicanism, and common-sense morality has now worked its way out. America is the great experiment in Protestant social thought, but the world Protestants created now threatens to make Protestantism unintelligible to itself. It is to this subject that I now turn.

I believe we may be living at a time when we are watching Protestantism, at least the kind of Protestantism we have in America, come to an end. It is dying of its own success. Protestantism became identified with the republican presumption in liberty as an end reinforced by belief in the common

5. Noll, *America's God*, 10.

6. *Ibid.*, 194.

sense of the individual. As a result Protestant churches in America lost the ability to maintain the disciplines necessary to sustain a people capable of being an alternative to the world. Ironically, the feverish fervency of the Religious Right in America to sustain faith as a necessary condition for supporting democracy cannot help but ensure that the faith sustained is not the Christian faith.

More Americans may go to church than their counterparts in Europe, but the churches to which they go do little to challenge the secular presumptions that form their personal and communal lives. The church is expected to reinforce the presumption that those who come to church have done so freely. Its primary function, therefore, is to legitimate and sustain the assumption that America represents what all people would want to be if they had the benefit of American education and money.

Let me try to put this in a different register. America exemplifies what I call the project of modernity—the attempt to produce a people who believe that they should have no story except the story that they chose when they had no story. That is what Americans mean by freedom. The institutions that constitute the disciplinary forms of that project are liberal democracy and capitalism. Americans presume that they have exercised their freedom when they get to choose between a Sony or Panasonic television. The same presumption works for choosing a president, and once you have made your choice you have to learn to live with it. So freedom requires a kind of resignation.

I try to help Americans see that this narrative—that they should have no story except the story that they chose when they had no story—is their story by asking them this question: “Do you think you ought to be held accountable for decisions you made when you did not know what you were doing?” They answer negatively; that is, they do not think they should be held accountable for decisions they made when they did not know what they were doing, because it is assumed that you should only be held accountable when you acted *freely*. And to act freely, you had to know what you were doing.

One of the difficulties with such an account of responsibility, for example, is that it makes marriage unintelligible. How could you ever know what you were doing when you promised lifelong, monogamous fidelity? Since no one can fully know what this commitment will entail, the church insists that your vows be witnessed by the church and believes it has the duty to hold you responsible to promises you made when you did not know what you were doing. This narrative—that you should have no story but the story you chose when you had no story—also makes it unintelligible to try having children. You never get the ones you want. Of course Americans try to get the ones they want by only having children when they are “ready,” but this is a utopian desire that wreaks havoc on children so born, just to the extent they come to believe they can only be loved if they fulfill their parents’ desires.

Of course another problem with this narrative is that the narrative itself (that you should have no story except the story you chose when you had no story) is a story you have not chosen. But Americans do not have the ability to acknowledge that they have not chosen it. As a result they must learn to live with decisions they made when they thought they knew what they were doing, even if they later realized they did not know what they were doing. (Of course they have a remedy when it comes to marriage. It is called divorce. They also have a remedy regarding children. It is called abortion.)

The narrative that you should have no story except the story you chose when you had no story obviously has implications for how faith is understood. It produces people who say things such as, “I believe Jesus is Lord—but that is just my personal opinion.” The grammar of this kind of avowal obviously reveals a superficial person. But such people are the kind many think crucial for sustaining democracy. For in order to sustain a society that shares no goods in common other than the belief that there are no goods in common other than avoiding death, there must be people who will avoid any conflicts that might undermine the order, which is confused with peace. So an allegedly democratic society that styles itself as one made up of people of strong conviction in fact becomes the most conformist of social orders, because of the necessity to avoid conflicts that cannot be resolved.

Such a view has devastating effects on the church. For the church does not believe that you should have no story except the story you chose when you had no story. Rather the church believes that we are creatures of a good God who has storied us by engrafting us to the people of Israel through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Christians do not believe we get to choose our story, but rather we discover that God has called us to participate in a story not of our own making. That is why we are called into the church and why we are called “Christian.” A church so formed cannot help but challenge a social order built on the contrary presumption that I get to write my own life story.

But forming a church that is capable of challenging the reigning ethos that sustains America is no easy achievement. You may well think that the Catholic Church surely would be up to that task, but you need to remember that, as Archbishop George of Chicago often remarks, Catholicism in America has largely become a form of Protestant Christianity. Catholics in America, like their Protestant sisters and brothers, are likely to assume that there is no essential tension between being a Christian and being an American. As a result, Catholics in America think the distinction between the public and the private (and their “faith” clearly falls into the latter) is a given that cannot be questioned.

If I am right about the story that shapes the American self-understanding, I think we are in a position to better understand why since September 11, 2001, the self-proclaimed “most powerful nation in the world” runs on fear. It does so because the fear of death is necessary to ensure a level of cooperation

between people who otherwise share nothing in common. That is, they share nothing in common other than the presumption that death is to be avoided at all costs. That is why in America hospitals have become our cathedrals and physicians our priests. Medical schools are much more serious about the moral formation of their students than divinity schools. Americans do not believe that an inadequately trained priest may damage their salvation, but they do believe an inadequately trained doctor can hurt them.

The American desire to use medicine in an attempt to get out of life alive is but the domestic form of American foreign policy. September 11, 2001, gave America exactly what it so desperately needed after the end of the Cold War, for it is unclear if America can live without a war. Otherwise, what would give us a moral compass? So we got a “war against terrorism,” which is a war without end. That Americans are willing to die for America is indicative of their most basic conviction. As Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle observe in their book *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation*:

In an era of Western ascendancy, the triumph of Christianity clearly meant the triumph of the states of Christianity, among them the most powerful of modern states, the United States. Though religions have survived and flourished in persecution and powerlessness, supplicants nevertheless take manifestations of power as blessed evidence of the truth of faith. Still, in the religiously plural society of the United States, sectarian faith is optional for citizens, as everyone knows. Americans have rarely bled, sacrificed or died for Christianity or any other sectarian faith. Americans have often bled, sacrificed and died for their country. This fact is an important clue to its religious power. Though denominations are permitted to exist in the United States, they are not permitted to kill, for their beliefs are not officially true. What is really true in any society is what is worth killing for, and what citizens may be compelled to sacrifice their lives for.⁷

America is a culture of death because Americans cannot conceive of how life is possible in the face of death. “Freedom,” as understood in American culture, names the attempt to live as though we will not die, and lives lived as though death is only a theoretical possibility can only be sustained by a wealth otherwise unimaginable. But America is an extraordinarily wealthy society determined to remain so even if it requires our domination of the rest of the world. We are told that others hate us because they despise our freedoms, but it may be that others sense that what Americans call freedom is bought at the expense of the lives of others.

I love America and I love being an American.⁸ The energy of Americans—their ability to hew out their lives, often in unforgiving land, and their natural

7. Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9.

8. In his lovely book *A Gathering of Memories: Family, Nation, and Church in a Forgetful World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), Charlie Pinches notes he is happy enough to call himself

generosity—I cherish. But I am a Christian. I cannot avoid the reality that American Christianity has been less than it should have been just to the extent that the church has failed to distinguish America’s god from the God we worship as Christians. If I am right that we are now facing the end of Protestantism, hopefully that will leave the church in America in a position with nothing to lose. When you have nothing to lose, all you have left is the truth. God may yet make the church faithful—even in America.

an American patriot, but he does not think that is a name tag “Stanley Hauerwas will ever wear around his shoulders” (12). I suspect Charlie is right about that, though I am more than ready to support his understanding of memory and its relation to the land we call America.

3

Why War Is a Moral Necessity for America *Or, How Realistic Is Realism?*

The Idealism of Realism

Pacifists always bear the burden of proof for their ideology, because as attractive as nonviolence may be, most people assume pacifism just will not work. You may want to keep a few pacifists around for reminding those burdened with running the world that what they sometimes have to do is a lesser evil, but pacifism simply cannot and should not be, even for Christians, a normative stance. To call for the abolition of war, as Enda McDonagh and I have, is then viewed as an unrealistic proposal made possible by our isolation (as academics) from the real world. Nonviolence is unworkable, or to the extent that it works, it does so only because it is parasitic on more determinative forms of order secured by violence. Those committed to nonviolence, in short, are not realistic.

In the first part of this chapter I will explore the evidence for “just war” theory. In contrast to pacifism it is often assumed that just war reflection is “realistic.” It is by no means clear, however, whether advocates of just war have provided an adequate account of what kind of conditions would be necessary for just war to be a realistic alternative for the military policy of a nation. In the second part I will explore the American understanding of war as sacrifice in order to raise questions about how realistic it is to think war can be limited. The understanding of war as sacrifice, I believe, was forged in the American Civil War and continues to shape how Americans morally comprehend war. War is necessary for America’s moral well being, which means it is by no means clear what it would mean for Americans to have a realistic understanding of war.¹

1. WWI is equally important for the American sacralization of war as sacrifice. Jonathan Ebel has recovered how the American soldiers understood their participation in the war as redemptive in his *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* (Princeton: Princeton

In Christian tradition, realism is often thought to have begun with Augustine's account of the two cities, hardened into doctrine with Luther's two kingdoms, and given its most distinctive formulation in the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr. Thus Augustine is often identified as the Christian theologian who set the stage for the development of just war reflection, which enables Christians to use violence in a limited way in order to secure tolerable order.² It is assumed, therefore, that just war is set within the larger framework of a realist view of the world.

With his customary rhetorical brilliance, Luther gave expression to the realist perspective, asking:

If anyone attempted to rule the world by the gospel and to abolish all temporal law and the sword on the plea that all are baptized and Christian, and that, according to the gospel, there shall be among them no law or sword—or the need for either—pray tell me friend, what would he be doing? He would be loosing the ropes and chains of the savage wild beasts and letting them bite and mangle everyone, meanwhile insisting that they were harmless, tame, and gentle creatures; but I would have the proof in my wounds. Just so would the wicked under the name of Christian abuse evangelical freedom, carry on their rascality, and insist that they were Christians subject neither to law nor sword as some are already raving and ranting.³

Luther is under no illusions. War is a plague, but it prevents a greater one. Of course slaying and robbing do not seem the work of love, but “in truth even

University Press, 2010). Drawing on letters and poetry written by those who fought in the war, he documents that participants “believed that by involving themselves in the war, assenting to its demands, and achieving victory, they would attain at least this more general redemption of the world and of America. By exposing themselves to the mysterious and powerful forces of combat, many believed they would achieve a personal redemption of great metaphysical consequence” (27). The significance of WWI for underwriting the sacrificial character of war cannot be overestimated. See, for example, Richard Koenigsberg's *Nations Have the Right to Kill: Hitler, Holocaust, and War* (New York: Library of Social Science, 2009) for the effect WWI had on Hitler's understanding of the sacrificial character of war. Koenigsberg argues that Hitler understood war as a sacrifice necessary for the renewal of the German people. “The Aryan” was therefore understood as someone willing to sacrifice himself or herself for the nation. The Jew, in contrast, was individualistic and selfish. Accordingly, the Jew could be sacrificed for the good of the nation (7). The destructive character of war is crucial for the moral purpose war should serve, from Hitler's perspective. For war is a form of sacrifice “whereby human beings give over their bodies and possessions to the objects of worship with names like France, Germany, Japan, America, etc.” (xv). War, in short, is the human activity in which “human bodies are sacrificed in the name of perpetuating a magical entity, the body politic” (42).

2. Needless to say, I think Niebuhr's use of Augustine to justify war in the name of “realism” to be a simplification of Augustine. Robert Dodaro provides a much more complex understanding of the two cities in his *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

3. Martin Luther, “On Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed,” in *Luther: Selected Political Writings*, ed. J. M. Porter (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 56.

this is the work of love.”⁴ Christians do not fight for themselves, but for their neighbor. So if they see that there is a lack of hangmen, constables, judges, lords, or princes, and find they are qualified, they should offer their services and assume these positions.⁵ That “small lack of peace called war,” according to Luther, “must set a limit to this universal, worldwide lack of peace which would destroy everyone.”⁶

Reinhold Niebuhr understood himself to stand in this “realist” tradition. In 1940 in his “Open Letter (to Richard Roberts),” Niebuhr explains why he left the Fellowship of Reconciliation: he did not believe that “war is merely an ‘incident’ in history” but rather that it “is a final revelation of the very character of human history.”⁷ According to Niebuhr the incarnation is not “redemption” from history as conflict because sinful egoism continues to express itself at every level of human life, making it impossible to overcome the contradictions of human history. Niebuhr, therefore, accuses pacifists of failing to understand the Reformation doctrine of “justification by faith.” From Niebuhr’s perspective, pacifists are captured by a perfectionism that is more “deeply engulfed in illusion about human nature than the Catholic pretensions, against which the Reformation was a protest.”⁸

“Just war” proponents argue that war is justified because our task as Christians and as citizens is first and foremost to seek justice. Paul Ramsey understood his attempt to recover just war as a theory of statecraft to be “an extension within the Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr.”⁹ Ramsey saw, however, that there was more to be said about “justice in war than was articulated in Niebuhr’s sense of the ambiguities of politics and his greater/lesser evil doctrine of the use of force.”¹⁰ That “something more,” Ramsey asserted, is the principle of discrimination, which requires that war be subject to political purpose through which war might be limited and conducted justly, that is, that noncombatants be protected.

Yet it is by no means clear if just war reflection can be yoked consistently to a Niebuhrian realism. Augustine’s and Luther’s “realism” presupposed there was another city that at least could call into question state powers. For Niebuhr,

4. Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved,” in Porter, *Luther*, 103.

5. Luther, “Temporal Authority,” 58.

6. Luther, “Whether Soldiers,” 103. For a fuller account of Luther on the ethics of war, see Joel Lehenbauer, “The Christological and Ecclesial Pacifism of Stanley Hauerwas: A Lutheran Analysis and Appraisal” (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2004). Lehenbauer’s dissertation is an extremely fair account of my (and Yoder’s) work in comparison to Luther’s thought on war.

7. Reinhold Niebuhr, “An Open Letter (to Richard Roberts),” in *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. D. B. Robertson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1957), 268.

8. *Ibid.*, 269.

9. Paul Ramsey, *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 260.

10. Ramsey, *Just War*, 260.

realism names the development of states and an international nation-state system that cannot be challenged. Niebuhrian realism assumes that war is a permanent reality for the relation between states because no overriding authority exists that might make war analogous to the police function of the state.¹¹ Therefore each political society has the right to wage war because it is assumed that doing so is part of its divinely ordained work of preservation. “Realism,” therefore, names the reality that at the end of the day in the world of international relations, the nations with the largest army get to determine what counts for “justice.” To use Augustine or Luther to justify this understanding of “realism” is in effect to turn a description into a recommendation.

In an article entitled “Just War Theory and the Problem of International Politics,” David Baer and Joseph Capizzi admirably try to show how just war requirements, as developed by Ramsey, can be reconciled with a realistic understanding of international relations. They argue that even though a certain pessimism surrounds a realistic account of international politics, that does not mean such a view of the world is necessarily amoral. To be sure, governments have the right to wage war because of their responsibility to a particular group of neighbors, but that does not mean that governments have a *carte blanche* to pursue every kind of interest. “The same conception that permits government to wage war also restricts the conditions of legitimate war making. . . . Because each government is responsible for only a limited set of political goods, it must respect the legitimate jurisdiction of other governments.”¹²

Yet who is going to enforce the presumption that a government “must respect the legitimate jurisdiction of other governments”? Baer and Capizzi argue

11. For the best defense of this view, see Philip Bobbitt’s *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Anchor, 2003). Bobbitt puts it starkly by observing, “War is not a pathology that with proper hygiene and treatment can be wholly prevented. War is a natural condition of the State, which was organized in order to be an effective instrument of violence on behalf of society. Wars are like death, which, while they can be postponed, will come when they will come and cannot finally be avoided” (819). I admire Bobbitt’s analysis of the development of constitutional orders that war makes possible, as well as his account of the transition from nation-states to market states. I do not think, however, that he shows how the latter can sustain the ethos necessary to produce people capable of sustaining the kind of military he admires. Why should consumers care about honor?

12. Helmut David Baer and Joseph E. Capizzi, “Just War Theory and the Problem of International Politics: On the Central Role of Just Intention,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 26, no. 1 (2006): 167–68. George Weigel argues in a similar fashion in his article “World Order: What Catholics Forgot,” *First Things* 143 (May 2004): 31–38. Weigel argues the Catholic tradition insists that “politics is an arena of rationality and moral responsibility. Unlike those theories of international relations which insisted that world politics is amoral or immoral, classic Catholic thinking about international relations taught that every human activity, including politics, takes place within the horizon of moral judgment, precisely because politics is a human activity and moral judgment is a defining characteristic of the human person. That is true of politics among nations, the Catholic tradition insisted, even if there are distinctive aspects to the moral dimension of world politics” (31). I could not agree more, but it is one thing to make such a claim and quite another to suggest that is the way the world works.

that Ramsey's understanding of just war as the expression of Christian love by a third party in defense of the innocent requires that advocates of just war favor the establishment of international law and institutions to better regulate the conduct of states in pursuit of their self-interest.¹³ Yet Baer and Capizzi recognize that international agencies cannot be relied on because there is no way that such an agency can judge an individual government's understanding of just cause. As they put it, "absent effective international institutions, warring governments are like Augustine's individual pondering self-defense, moved by the temptation of inordinate self-love."¹⁴

Baer and Capizzi argue that a more adequate understanding of just war will combine a realist understanding of international politics with a commitment to international order by emphasizing the importance of just intention.¹⁵ This means that a war can be undertaken only if peace, which is understood as a concept for a more "embracing and stable order," be the reason a state gives for going to war. The requirement that the intention for going to war be so understood is an expression of love for the enemy just to the extent that the lasting order be one that encompasses the interests of the enemy.¹⁶

And pacifists are said to be unrealistic? The idealism of such realist justifications of just war is nowhere better seen than in these attempts to fit just war considerations into the realist presuppositions that shape the behavior of state actors.¹⁷ Ramsey, Baer and Capizzi, and Oliver O'Donovan are to

13. Baer and Capizzi, "Just War Theory," 164–66.

14. *Ibid.*, 168.

15. Baer and Capizzi argue that this means going to war requires increasing reliance on international agencies. Weigel, in the article mentioned above, argues exactly the opposite. Indeed, Weigel wrote his article in response to the Vatican's deferral to the United Nations concerning the legitimacy of the war against Iraq. Weigel defends the preemptive war strategy of the Bush administration in the name of preserving a more nearly just world order.

16. Martha Nussbaum argues that the very idea of a world state is not desirable because it is very unlikely that such a state could be held accountable. Moreover, such a state would be dangerous. "If a nation becomes unjust, pressure from other nations may prevent it from committing heinous crimes (whether against its citizens or against other nations). If the world state should become unjust, there would be no corresponding recourse; the only hope would be for rebellion from within" (Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006], 313).

17. Baer and Capizzi, "Just War Theory," 170–71. One wonders what empirical tests might exist to test this requirement of enemy love. Would the "enemy" need to say after being defeated that they were glad to lose the war?

17. It would be quite interesting, for example, for Baer and Capizzi to address Bobbitt's claim that the deepest immorality is to be found in those who attempt to avoid war. To make going to war "a last resort" would only make the world more dangerous. Bobbitt argues the issue is never whether we ought to avoid war, but rather "we must choose what sort of war we will fight, regardless of what are its causes, to set the terms of the peace we want." The avoidance of war, therefore, cannot and should not be an objective because such a policy "counsels against the preparations for war that might avert massive, carefully planned, large-scale attacks by one state on another." Such a view rightly rejects those who assume war is a pathology of the state.

be commended for trying to recover just war as a theory of statecraft rather than as a checklist to judge whether a particular war satisfies enough of the criteria to be judged just.¹⁸ Yet by doing so they have made apparent the tensions between the institutions necessary for just war to be a reality and the presumptions that shape international affairs.

For example, what would an American foreign policy determined by just war principles look like? What would a just war Pentagon look like? What kind of virtues would the people of America have to have to sustain a just war foreign policy and Pentagon? What kind of training do those in the military have to undergo in order to be willing to take casualties rather than conduct the war unjustly?¹⁹ How would those with the patience necessary to ensure that a war be a last resort be elected to office? Those are the kind of questions that advocates of just war must address before they accuse pacifists of being “unrealistic.”

To put the challenge more concretely, we could ask, why was it possible for the United States to conduct the second war against Iraq? The answer is very simple. America had a military left over from the Cold War, a war that was fought according to an amoral realism, and therefore America could go to war in Iraq because nothing prevented America from going to war in Iraq—a war that is, moreover, justified as part of a “war against terrorism.” Yet, in spite of the title of Jean Bethke Elshtain’s book, *Just War against Terror*, it is by no means clear that you can fight a just war against terrorism.²⁰ If one of the crucial conditions of a just war is for the war to have an end, then the war against terrorism clearly cannot be just because it is a war without end.

I think the lack of realism about realism by American just war advocates has everything to do with their being American. In particular, American advocates of just war seem to presume that democratic societies place an inherent

Rather war is understood as that which gives birth to the state and is necessary for sustaining the state’s existence (Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, 780).

18. O’Donovan’s account of just war can be found in his *The Just War Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

19. There is a complex relation between the public reasons given for war and the reasons that actually shape those who fight the war. This is explored in fine detail by Nancy Sherman in her book *The Untold War: Inside the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of Our Soldiers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010). She begins the book with an observation from Anthony Miller, who warned, as he was preparing to write a Hollywood movie in 1940 about G. I. Joe, that soldiers abhor an ideological vacuum. Miller accordingly argued that “unless the American people can explain and justify this war, they are going to injure and sometimes destroy the minds of a host of their returning veterans” (39). There are no doubt many reasons for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but one cannot help but think part of the problem for many who return from combat so affected is due to the failure of American soldiers’ ability to match the reality of war with the reasons for which the war is being fought. One cannot help but wonder, moreover, if the tension is not endemic to a just war position.

20. Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Just War against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (New York: Basic Books, 2003). The subtitle of Elshtain’s book is revealing just to the extent the subtitle suggests that America’s role in the world, a role shaped by a realistic foreign policy shaped by American self-interest, is the necessary condition for fighting a just war.

limit on war that more authoritarian societies are unable to do. While such a view is quite understandable, I want to suggest that democratic societies, or at least the American version of democracy, are unable to set limits on war because they are democratic.²¹ Put even more strongly, for Americans, war is necessary to sustain our belief that we are worthy to be recipients of the sacrifices made on our behalf in past wars. Americans are a people born of and in war, particularly the Civil War, and only war can sustain our belief that we are a people set apart.

Upon the Altar of the Nation²²

In his extraordinary book *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War*, Harry Stout tells the story of how the Civil War began as a limited war but ended as total war. He is well aware that the language of total war did not exist at the time of the Civil War, but he argues that by 1864 the *spirit* of total war emerged and “prepared Americans for the even more devastating total wars they would pursue in the twentieth century” (xv). Stout’s story of the transformation of the Civil War from limited to total war is also the story of how America became the nation we call America. According to Stout,

Neither Puritans’ talk of a “city upon a hill” or Thomas Jefferson’s invocation of “inalienable rights” is adequate to create a religious loyalty sufficiently powerful to claim the lives of its adherents. In 1860 no coherent nation commanded the

21. In his article “Authority, Lies, and War: Democracy and the Development of Just War Theory” (*Theological Studies* 67 [2006]: 378–94), David DeCosse argues that Catholic deference to political authority has inadequately integrated democratic ideas into just war theory as is evident by the lying that justified the Iraq war. Though I am sympathetic with DeCosse’s claim that lying is analogous to the use of physical force, I am not at all convinced that paying more attention “to the rights, responsibilities, and virtues of democratic citizens in time of war” (393) means we will ensure more truthful speech about war.

22. The following account is dependent on Harry S. Stout’s *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006). (Page references will appear in the text.) Stout is to be commended for his courage as a historian to make candid that he is writing a “moral history” of the Civil War. He does not elaborate in this book what it means methodologically for him to assume a moral stance other than to accept just war as normative for the story he tells. One can only hope in the future he might tell us more about what it means for a historian to acknowledge that history is a moral endeavor. Though he ends his book making clear that he does not regard the Civil War to justify pacifism, he nonetheless remains deeply ambiguous about the reality of war. It remains true for him that “at its most elemental, war is evil. War is killing. War is destroying. War may be a necessary evil, and in that sense ‘right,’ but it is nevertheless lethally destructive” (xii). Stout dedicates his book to his father, who he says fought in a “just war,” but if that was WWII, there are very real questions if in fact WWII was fought justly. Of course it does not mean that those who fought in that war were unjust. I am hesitant to call attention to Stout’s regard for his father’s military service, but I think his ambiguity about war reflects the tendency we all have to justify war because of our love of those who fought in past wars.

sacred allegiance of all Americans over and against their states and regions. For the citizenry to embrace the idea of a nation-state that *must* have a messianic destiny and command one's highest loyalty would require a massive sacrifice—a blood sacrifice. . . . As the war descended into a killing horror, the grounds of justification underwent a transformation from a just defensive war fought out of sheer necessity to preserve home and nation to a moral crusade for “freedom” that would involve nothing less than a national “rebirth,” a spiritual “revival.” And in that blood and transformation a national religion was born. Only as casualties rose to unimaginable levels did it dawn on some people that something mystically religious was taking place, a sort of massive sacrifice on the national altar. The Civil War taught Americans that they were a Union, and it absolutely required a baptism of blood to unveil transcendent dimensions of that union. (xxi)²³

The generals on both sides of the Civil War had not only been trained at West Point to embody American might and power; they were also taught to be gentlemen. The title of “gentlemen” not only carried with it expectations that the bearers of the title would be honorable, but that they would also pursue their profession justly. They “imbibed” the code of limited war, which demanded that they protect innocent lives and minimize destructive aspects of war. According to Stout they were even taught by Dennis Mahan, a professor of civil engineering, to use position and to maneuver interior lines of operations against armies rather than engaging in crushing overland campaigns that would involve civilian populations (21).

Stout argues that Lincoln, as early as 1862, and prior to his generals, realized that the West Point Code of War would have to be abandoned. After Bull Run,

23. Stout documents how during the Civil War the flag became the central symbol of American patriotism. Prior to 1860 the flag was barely visible, flying primarily on ships, but after 1861 the flag was flown on churches, storefronts, homes, and government buildings to signify loyalty and support (28). The title of Stout's book, as well as his understanding of the flag as a totem, is supported by Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle in their book *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). They argue “that violent blood sacrifice makes enduring groups cohere, even though such a claim challenges our most deeply held notions of civilized behavior. The sacrificial system that binds American citizens has a sacred flag at its center. Patriotic rituals revere it as the embodiment of a bloodthirsty totem god who organizes killing energy” (1).

In *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), Ernest Tuveson traces the background of millennial theological categories for shaping American national identity. Accordingly he observes “that the apocalyptic vision of the Civil War was far more than a spontaneous response to a great crisis by a nation of Bible-readers, who naturally saw it as a moral conflict. It seemed to fit exactly into a pattern long established, and seemed to confirm the validity of that pattern. Thus it was more than just another war about a moral issue, even if a great one; it was *the* crisis of mankind, even if only one nation was involved” (196). Tuveson's book is essential reading if we are to understand the rhetoric that shapes American foreign policy after September 11, 2001. For an astute and informative analysis of that rhetoric, see Michael Northcott, *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

and frustrated by McClellan's timidity, Lincoln understood that if the Union was to be preserved, the war would need to escalate into a war against both citizens and soldiers. In response to Unionists in New Orleans who protested Lincoln's war policy, Lincoln replied,

What would you do in my position? Would you drop the war where it is? Or would you prosecute it in future with elder-stalk squirts charged with rose water? Would you deal lighter blows than heavier ones? I am in no boastful mood. I shall not do more than I can, and I shall do all I can, to save the government, which is my sworn duty as well as my personal inclination. I shall do nothing in malice. (139)²⁴

Crucial to Lincoln's strategy for the prosecution of the war against the population of the South was the Emancipation Proclamation, which Lincoln signed on September 22, 1862. Lincoln's primary concern was always the preservation of the Union, but the Emancipation Proclamation made clear to both sides that a way of life was at issue, requiring a total war on all fronts.²⁵ Emancipation blocked any attempt to reconcile the North and South, because now the war by necessity stood for moral aims that could not be compromised. Stout quotes Massachusetts's abolitionist senator Charles Sumner, who supported the Emancipation Proclamation as a "war measure" in these terms:

But, fellow-citizens, the war which we wage is not merely for ourselves; it is for all mankind. . . . In ending slavery here we open its gates all over the world, and let the oppressed go free. Nor is this all. In saving the republic we shall save civilization. . . . In such a cause no effort can be too great, no faith can be

24. Grant and Sherman are, of course, those who are most associated with pursuing a brutal strategy in the war, but Stout makes clear each was in quite different ways doing Lincoln's bidding. In a letter to General Halleck about his destruction of Atlanta, Sherman concluded, "If the people raise a howl against my barbarity and cruelty, I will answer that war is war, and not popularity-seeking. If they want peace, they and their relatives must stop the war" (369). Stout provides a very illuminating account of how the generals, and in particular Stonewall Jackson, in the Civil War were seen as "saviors." Indeed he notes that Jackson became a "messianic figure" who could "never die" because he incarnated the Confederate civil religion through a violent atonement (229). For a depiction of the complex character of Sherman, see E. L. Doctorow's *The March* (New York: Random House, 2006). *The March* is a novel, but it may give us a better sense of the anarchy of Sherman's march across the South than many of the histories on the same subject.

25. On August 22, 1862, Lincoln sent a letter to Horace Greeley that was printed in the *New York Tribune* in which he made clear his primary purpose in pursuing the war:

My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* slaves I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do *not* believe it would help to save the Union. . . . I have here stated my purpose according to my view of *official* duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed *personal* wish that all men every where could be free. (184)

too determined. To die for country is pleasant and honorable. But all who die for country now die also for humanity. Wherever they lie, in bloody fields, they will be remembered as the heroes through whom the republic was saved and civilization established forever. (174–75)²⁶

Stout's book is distinguished from other books on the Civil War by his close attention to what religious figures on both sides were saying about the war. It was ministers of the gospel who supplied the rhetoric necessary for the war to achieve its mythic status. To be sure, the South represented a more conservative form of Christianity than the North, as Christianity was recognized as the established religion in the Confederacy's Constitution, but for both sides "Christianity offered the only terms out of which national identity could be constructed and a violent war pursued" (43).

Stout provides plenty of examples of how Christians narrated the bloody sacrifice of the war, but Horace Bushnell's contribution is particularly noteworthy for no other reason than that his Christianity was liberal. Early in the war Bushnell suggested that morally and religiously a nation was being created by the bloodshed required by the war. According to Bushnell, through the shed blood of soldiers, soldiers of both sides, a vicarious atonement was being made for the developing Christian nation.²⁷ Such an atonement was not simply a metaphor, "but quite literally a blood sacrifice required by God for sinners North and South if they were to inherit their providential destiny" (249).²⁸ Shortly after Gettysburg, Bushnell identified those who gave their lives in the war with the martyrs, writing,

26. Tuveson calls attention to the significance of Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" for giving the war its apocalyptic cast. What makes Howe's hymn so significant is her identification with such liberal thinkers as Theodore Parker, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Tuveson observes that though Howe had no use for faith in a special revelation, she could still write lines such as the following:

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:
His day is marching on. (Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, 197–98)

27. Lincoln shared Bushnell-like sentiments most clearly articulated in the Second Inaugural. Yet as early as 1862 Stout quotes Lincoln reflecting on the imponderable purpose of God in relation to the war. Lincoln says, "In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party—and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect this purpose. I am almost ready to say this is probably true—that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet." Stout observes that Lincoln's sense of destiny "provided for Lincoln a Christlike compassion for his foes; in death, it would render him a Christlike messiah for the reconstituted American nation" (146).

28. Stout quotes from a sermon concerning the flag, preached after Lincoln's assassination by N. H. Chamberlain. Chamberlain said:

Henceforth that flag is the legend which we bequeath to future generations, of the severe and solemn struggle for the nation's life. . . . Henceforth the red on it is deeper, for the crimson

How far the loyal sentiment reaches and how much it carries with it, or after it, must also be noted. It yields up willingly husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons, consenting to the fearful chance of a home always desolate. It offers body and blood, and life on the altar of devotion. It is a fact, a political worship, offering to seal itself by martyrdom in the field. (251)²⁹

As the toll of the war mounted, the most strident voices calling for blood revenge came from the clergy. Thus Robert Dabney, at the funeral of his friend Lieutenant Carrington, CSA, told his listeners that Carrington's blood "seals upon you the obligation to fill their places in your country's host, and 'play the men for your people and the cities of your God,' to complete the vindication of their rights" (201). One Confederate chaplain even prayed, "We should add to the prayer for peace, let this war continue, if we are not yet so humbled and disciplined by its trials, as to be prepared for those glorious moral and spiritual gifts, which Thou deignest it should confer upon us as a people" (197). Such a prayer makes clear that the war had become for both sides a ritual they had come to need in order to make sense of their lives.

Stout's account of the religious character of the Civil War, perhaps, is best illustrated by the most celebrated speech ever given by an American: the Gettysburg Address. Stout observes that something "emerged from Gettysburg that would become forever etched in the American imagination. A sacralization of this particular battlefield would mark it forever after as the preeminent sacred ground of the Civil War—and American wars thereafter" (269). Stout is surely right, making these words all the more chilling:

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored

with which the blood of countless martyrs has colored it; the white on it is purer, for the pure sacrifice and self-surrender of those who went up to their graves bearing it; the blue on it is heavenlier, for the great constancy of those dead heroes, whose memory becomes henceforth as the immutable upper skies that canopy our land, gleaming with stars wherein we read their glory and our duty. (454–55)

29. The language of laying lives on the altar is repeated often in sentiments expressed by wives on hearing of their husbands' deaths (200) as well as soldiers reflecting on the deaths of their friends (340). Stout quotes a pastor at a funeral for two soldiers crying out: "We must be ready to give up our sons, brothers, friends—if we cannot go ourselves—to hardships, sufferings, dangers and death if need be, for the preservation of our government and the freedom of the nation. We should lay them, willing sacrifices, upon the altar" (341). Drew Gilpin Faust observes that the way of death in the Civil War transformed not only the individuals directly affected by the loss, but the entire American nation. The war created, in the words of Frederick Law Olmstead, a veritable "republic of suffering." As a result, "sacrifice and the state became inextricably intertwined. . . . Death created the modern American union—not just by ensuring national survival, but by shaping enduring national structures and commitments" (*The Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008], xiii–xiv).

dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

A nation determined by such words, such elegant and powerful words, simply does not have the capacity to keep war limited.³⁰ A just war that can only be fought for limited political purposes cannot and should not be understood in terms shaped by the Gettysburg Address.³¹ Yet after the Civil War, Americans think they must go to war to ensure that those who died in our past wars did not die in vain.³² Thus American wars are justified as a “war to end all wars” or “to make the world safe for democracy” or for “unconditional surrender” or “freedom.” Whatever may be the realist presuppositions of those who lead America to war, those presuppositions cannot be used as the reasons given to justify the war. To do so would betray the tradition of war established in the Civil War. Wars, American wars, must be wars in which the sacrifices of those doing the dying and the killing have redemptive purpose and justification.

30. Charlie Pinches rightly argues that the Lincoln Memorial is the proper place for the Gettysburg Address to be read, because there it is complemented and qualified by Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address. The rousing end of Gettysburg, according to Pinches, is enabled by the appeal that we “cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations” (*A Gathering of Memories: Family, Nation, and America in a Forgetful World* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006], 103–4).

31. In essay after essay, Paul Ramsey insists that at the heart of the just war is the requirement that a war have a recognizable political purpose. Indeed, from Ramsey’s perspective, a failed nation is one unable to fight a “good war,” that is, “a war in which force begins and ends in subordination to national purpose and policy, even the purpose of the arbitrament of a civil war waged to determine what a national purpose shall be” (*Just War*, 15). Accordingly, Ramsey thought a nation’s “self-interest” should be constitutive of any reason given for going to war, and therefore he argued that the goal of American foreign policy should be the creation of a system of free and independent nations (8). Yet in a “democracy” it proves quite difficult to convince civilians they should go to war to maintain a reasonable balance of power in Asia.

32. Ramsey recognizes that war has a sacral quality. On the same page he argues that war can only be fought by nations capable of disciplining war to a national purpose; “but who can deny that there is a strong feeling for the sacred in the temporal person at work delaying and weakening political resolve until a more inclusive entity is vitally challenged—the nation which is felt to be immortal and transcendent over the individual in value and in the perdurance of its life? Thus the nation affords a provisional solution of the ambiguity of finite sacrifice, and only if this is the case does the nation or any other political entity become the ‘subject’ of political agency capable of legitimating finite sacrifice” (*Just War*, 15). But Ramsey does not tell us what keeps finite sacrifice finite. Interestingly enough I suspect you can only keep the sacrifice of war finite if you have a church strong enough to discipline a nation’s ambition, which presents an interesting challenge to just war thinkers; that is, do they think the church in America has the strength to keep the finite finite? Critical though I may be of Constantinianism, at least the Constantinian churches at one time had the power to keep the finite finite by reminding those who ruled that they were destined to die. Once “the people” are said to rule themselves, the church, at least the church in America, seems to have lost that ability.

War is America's altar. Confronted by such a tradition of war, the attempts to justify war using just war considerations, no matter how sincerely done, cannot help but be ideological mystifications.³³

In his book, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, Mark Noll asks why the Civil War, in contrast to past wars, produced no "deep theological insights from either elites or the masses."³⁴ At least one of the reasons may be, as Noll amply documents, that religious thinkers in America assumed the people of America had a covenantal relationship with God.³⁵ America was identified with the tribes of Israel in which it was assumed that the federal union "created a higher bond than the bond constituted by the unity of all Christian believers in the church."³⁶ This was combined with the confidence of the Enlightenment that the common man was capable of reading Scripture without guidance from any other authority, which meant that it was a simple matter to read God's providential will for political events.³⁷ The war did not force American Christians to deeper theological insights because the war was, for America, our church.³⁸

33. In an essay on Martin Luther King, Timothy Jackson distances himself from King's pacifism, observing that "in a fallen world, at any rate, I believe that protecting the innocent may move some Christians, properly, to take up the sword against evil, as in the American Civil War" ("Martin Luther King," in *The Teaching of Modern Christianity on Law, Politics, and Human Nature: Volume 1*, ed. John Witte and Frank Alexander [New York: Columbia University Press, 2006], 456). One would like to know what "evil" Jackson assumes the sword was taken up against in the Civil War. Was it the "evil" of secession? Was it the "evil" of slavery? Does the reality of the "cause" of the war matter for Jackson-like appeals to the Civil War to justify the use of the sword? I think Jackson's appeal to the Civil War to justify Christian participation in war exemplifies the presumption that finally "pacifism" just will not do. Yet show me how, in the light of Stout's history of the Civil War, the Civil War can be used as a justification for just war reasoning. Of course I think slavery should have been brought to an end. I think, moreover, pacifists should have been more prominent in that struggle. We can point to the example of John Woolman and other Friends who tirelessly worked to convince slaveholders of the evil of slavery, but obviously slavery was and is a judgment on Christians. But to say war is the alternative form of faithfulness is surely a mistake.

34. Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 15.

35. *Ibid.*, 18.

36. *Ibid.*, 61.

37. *Ibid.*, 19. I argued a similar case in *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

38. One of the great virtues of Noll's study is his chapter on Catholic viewpoints on the Civil War and, in particular, French and Italian Catholic responses to the war. Noll thinks conservative Catholics rightly assessed American inability to disentangle race from slavery or to free the Bible from the certainties of "common sense" because they saw that American culture was characterized by a set of elective affinities: "fundamental principles of the Protestant Reformation linked to a liberal economic order linked to unfettered access to the Bible linked to liberal democracy linked to practical materialism linked to a bloated and dangerous republican government linked to theological confusion" (Noll, *Civil War*, 157).

Pacifism as Realism

Where has all this gotten us? I think it helps us recognize that we live in the worst of all worlds. Realism is used to dismiss pacifism and to underwrite some version of just war. But it is not at all clear that the conditions for the possibility of just war are compatible with realism. At least it is not clear that just war considerations can be constitutive of the decision-making processes of governments that must assume that might makes right. Attempts to justify wars begun and fought on realist grounds in the name of just war only serve to hide the reality of war.

Yet war remains a reality. War not only remains a reality, but if Stout's account of the ongoing significance of the Civil War is even close to being right, war remains for Americans our most determinative moral reality. How do you get people who are taught they are free to follow their own interest to sacrifice themselves and their children in war? Democracies by their very nature seem to require that wars be fought in the name of ideals, which makes war self-justifying. Realists in the State Department and Pentagon may have no illusions about why American self-interest requires that a war be fought, but Americans cannot fight a war as cynics. It may be that those who actually have to fight a war will have no illusions about the reality of war, but the rest of the nation justifies war, using categories that necessitate a "next war."

Pacifists are realists. We have no reason to deny that the "realism" associated with Augustine, Luther, and Niebuhr has much to teach us about how the world works, but that is why we do not trust those who would have us make sacrifices in the name of preserving a world at war. We believe a sacrifice has been made that has brought an end to the sacrifice of war. Augustine and Luther thought Christians might go to war because they assumed a church existed that provided an alternative to the sacrificial system war always threatens to become. If the Civil War teaches us anything, it is that when Christians no longer believe that Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for the salvation of the world, we will find other forms of sacrificial behaviors that are as compelling as they are idolatrous. In the process, Christians confuse the sacrifice of war with the sacrifice of Christ.

If a people does not exist that continually makes Christ present in the world, war will always threaten to become a sacrificial system. War is a counter church. It is the most determinative moral experience many people have. That is why Christian realism requires the disavowal of war. Christians do not renounce war because it is often so horrible, but because war, in spite of its horror, or perhaps because it is so horrible, can be so morally compelling. That is why the church does not have an alternative to war. The church *is* the alternative to war. When Christians no longer see the reality of the church as an alternative to the world's reality, we abandon the world to war.