

**THE BEST SIN TO COMMIT: A THEOLOGICAL STRATEGY  
OF NIEBUHRIAN CLASSICAL REALISM TO CHALLENGE  
THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT AND NEOCONSERVATIVE  
ADVANCEMENT OF MANIFEST DESTINY IN AMERICAN  
FOREIGN POLICY**

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**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



University of  
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## ABSTRACT

While few would deny America is the most powerful nation on earth, there is considerable debate, and controversy, over how America uses its foreign policy power. This is even truer since the “unipolar moment,” when America gained sole superpower status with the end of the Soviet Union and the Cold War. In the Cold War Reinhold Niebuhr was the main theological voice speaking to American power. In the Unipolar world, the Religious right emerged as the main theological voice, but instead of seeking to curb American power the Religious right embraced Neoconservatism in what I will call “Totemic Conservatism” to support use of America’s power in the world and to triumph Manifest destiny in American foreign policy, which is the notion that America is a chosen nation, and this legitimizes its use of power and underpins its moral claims. I critique the Niebuhrian and Religious right legacies, and offer a classical realist strategy for theology to speak to America power and foreign policy, which avoids the neoconservative and religious conservative error of totemism, while avoiding the jettisoning of Niebuhr’s theology by political liberals, and, the political ghettoizing of theology by his chief critics. This strategy is based on embracing the understanding of classical realism, but not taking the next step, which both Niebuhr and neoconservatism ultimately do, of moving from a prescriptive to a predictive strategy for American foreign policy. In this thesis, I argue that in the wake of the unipolar moment the embrace of the Religious right of Neoconservatism to triumph Manifest destiny in American foreign policy is a problematic commingling of faith and politics, and what is needed instead is a strategy of speaking to power rooted in classical realism but one which refines Niebuhrian realism to avoid the risk of progressing a Constantinian theology.

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David Cowan

Cluny, France

*"I'll wait for you. Should I fall behind, wait for me."*

- Bruce Springsteen

*"Would a man go up to the kirk of a sabbath to sit down and hear himself insulted? You went to kirk to hear a bit sermon about Paul and the things he wrote the Corinthians, all them folk that were safely dead; but Kinraddie's minister would try to make out that you yourself, that was born in Fordoun of honest folk, were a kind of Corinthian... No, no, you were hardly so daft as take that... You wouldn't bother your head on the kirk, to hell with ministers of the kind of Colquhoun."*

- Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Cloud Howe

*"Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chink, while thousands of great cattle chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field or that, after all, they are other than the little shrivelled, meagre, hopping, though troublesome insects of the hour."*

- Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*



## Chapter One

### Introduction

While few would deny America is the most powerful nation on earth, there is considerable debate, and controversy, over how America uses its foreign policy power. This is even truer since the “unipolar moment,”<sup>1</sup> when America gained sole superpower status with the end of the Soviet Union and the Cold War. For a greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a major theological voice questioning the limits of American power was Reinhold Niebuhr.<sup>2</sup> Writing in the context of two world wars, the seemingly real threat of a nuclear catastrophe, the Cold War and mostly Democratic Party presidencies,<sup>3</sup> Niebuhr spoke to American power and called for a curb on its power. All this was to change following his death. Starting with President Nixon’s naming of the “Silent Majority,” the Republican Party came to be the dominant political party, the Cold War ended, America became the sole superpower and the threat of nuclear catastrophe receded. In place of Niebuhr, the Religious Right has emerged as an influential theological voice, but instead of seeking to curb its power the Religious Right has joined with Neoconservatism in what I will call “Totemic Conservatism” to support use of America’s power in the world. I argue that this support of America’s power is based on a renewed sense of “Manifest Destiny,”<sup>4</sup> the notion that America is a chosen nation and this legitimizes its use of power and underpins its moral claims.

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<sup>1</sup> Term coined to define the change from Cold War to America as the sole Superpower by Charles Krauthammer, The Unipolar Moment, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1, America and the World 1990/91 (1990/1991), pp. 23-33.

<sup>2</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) Major biographies of Niebuhr include June Bingham, *Courage to Change: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1961, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 1972], Richard W. Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: a Biography* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986], Scott Nathan, jr., *The Legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975], Ronald H. Stone, *Professor Reinhold Niebuhr* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992]. See also, Ursula M. Niebuhr, *Remembering Reinhold Niebuhr: Letters of Reinhold and Ursula M. Niebuhr* [San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991]. The main collection of Niebuhr’s papers are held at the Library of Congress, initially by gift of Reinhold Niebuhr in 1996 and supplemented by his widow Ursula with a large addition in 1990. Other material held at Elmhurst College, Eden Theological Seminary, Yale University & Union Theological Seminary.

<sup>3</sup> During Niebuhr’s career, he engaged with the Democratic administrations of Roosevelt, Truman, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B Johnson. The only Republican president he had to engage with was Dwight Eisenhower. Although he died shortly after the inauguration of Nixon, and fired off a couple of missives, his main dealings with Nixon were when he was vice-president to Eisenhower.

<sup>4</sup> The term “Manifest Destiny” emerged from the 1840s, referring to America’s geographic expansion westwards. I will argue the term has broader application, and sits alongside other terminology seeking to encapsulate America’s uniqueness, such as American Exceptionalism or a Shining City on a Hill. Core texts are Weinberg [1935], Merk [1978]

This thesis will critique the Niebuhrian and Religious Right legacies up to the administration of George W. Bush,<sup>5</sup> and ask is there a new Niebuhrian strategy for speaking to power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century or would Niebuhr himself have become a Neocon? In this thesis, I argue that in the wake of the unipolar moment the embrace of the Religious Right of Neoconservatism to triumph Manifest Destiny in American foreign policy is a problematic commingling of faith and politics, and what is needed instead is a strategy of speaking to power rooted in classical realism, but one which refines Niebuhrian realism to avoid the risk of progressing a Constantinian theology.

In the remainder of this chapter I will introduce three strands essential to answering my thesis, namely Neoconservatism, the Religious Right, and Manifest Destiny. In Chapter 2, I provide an explanation and critique of Niebuhr and address the considerable criticisms of two of his major theological critics, Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank, and the charge of Constantinianism. In Chapters 3 to 5, I will trace the notion of Manifest Destiny through four phases, moving from being geographical to ideological. As an idea directing American foreign policy it is inherently flawed, though this does not prevent it being utilized. In Chapter 3, I will outline the first two historic phases, and then explain the third phase which coincides with Niebuhr's period and his "Christian Realism."<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 4, I will explore the final phase of Manifest Destiny at the end of what was called the "American Century", which coincides with the rise of the Religious Right, which has been likened to a third Great Awakening, and its embrace of Neoconservatism. I will break down the constituency of this Religious Right and how its support of Neocon foreign policy represents a further republicanization<sup>7</sup> of religion in America. In Chapter 5, I will show how Manifest Destiny featured in the rhetoric of all the American presidents since Nixon, and how it

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and Stephanson [1995]. Geoffrey Hodgson [2009], however, argues that America is not as exceptional as it likes to think, and such an attitude has led to complacency and dangerous isolationist foreign policy.

<sup>5</sup> This is when Neocons hit their high point.

<sup>6</sup> As Robin Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.1ff explains in his introductory chapter, Niebuhr was not the first member of the "Christian realism" movement, early proponents were his teacher D.C. Macintosh and Walter Marshall Horton, and the term itself belongs as much to John C. Bennett. See also, S. Mark Heim, *Prodigal Sons: D. C. Macintosh and the Brothers Niebuhr*, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Jul., 1985), pp. 336-358; George Hammar, *Christian realism in Contemporary American Theology. A study of Reinhold Niebuhr, W. M. Horton and H. P. van Dusen, preceded by a general and historical survey* (Uppsala: A.-b. Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1940); and, Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity: 1950-2005* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), pp.459f.

<sup>7</sup> By which I mean commingling religion and politics in support of changing government to a republican form rather than the Republican Party. The other term much used is "secularization," but I select republicanization because it more closely reflects an American form of secularization. A useful historical discussion of this secularization, first published in 1963, is offered by Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (London: Heinemann, 1963) chapter 4, p.140f.

became a focal point for religious conservatives in the formation of “Totemic Conservatism” drawing on a coalition of religious conservatives. In drawing my conclusions in Chapter 6, I will offer a strategy for theology to speak to power, which avoids the neoconservative and religious conservative error of totemism, while avoiding the jettisoning of Niebuhr’s theology by political liberals, and, the political ghettoizing of theology by his chief critics. I will argue that in some respects Niebuhr may well have gravitated toward Neoconservatism himself without becoming a fully “paid-up” member. The strategy I will offer is based on embracing the insights of classical realism, but not taking the next step, which both Niebuhr and neoconservatism do, of moving from a prescriptive to a predictive strategy for American foreign policy. Such a strategy will allow theological clarity to be evident, rather than ghettoized, while also avoiding becoming a constantinian theology.

Theology as a discipline can be said to be promiscuous, and I have drawn together in this thesis a hybrid of Theology and International Relations, which may also be said to be somewhat promiscuous. This thesis is a study in political theology, and in my analysis I have sought to engage these two disciplines whilst also drawing on historical perspectives, primarily American history, to understand where American foreign policy is located today and how we may reflect theologically on this location informed by the theories and findings of International Relations. I have made use of interviews with a number of political direct participants in the area under study, including members of Congress, former members of the Republican administrations dating back to the Nixon White House, think tanks, lobbyists and activists on the Religious Right. I have also consulted specific policy documents, a range of voting and opinion data, and the archives of the Reinhold Niebuhr collection held in the Library of Congress. The argument made in this thesis rests in part on my focus on the president, as the primary actor in American foreign policy and as the nation’s public theologian. I have focused on the rhetoric and language of the presidents, as well as Religious Right voices, to understand the American mind, since policy documents arguably have less effect on the popular imagination than their authors would hope for, and they are also the outcome of a process of considerable compromise involving many and diverse groups. It is also because the vast majority of hearers are not engaged by the detail of policy work, but rather at the level of ideas and by the sentiment of rhetoric which resonates with faith. As I will suggest in the conclusion, the religious impact does not truly reach the point at which the political rubber hits the foreign policy road, but it does at least inform, if not directly influence, the various actors

involved in a general sense and has some influence where various religious bodies are directly represented in the policy process. However, as I will argue, this process of influence is somewhat overstated by critics to suit their case, while religious actors in the process also overstate their case to present themselves as having more influence than they can properly claim.

### **The Neocon Cometh: The “Silent Majority” Finds its voice**

In an interview with the Editor of the London Times, Henry Kissinger argued “American exceptionalism is missionary. It holds that the United States has an obligation to spread its values to every part of the world.”<sup>8</sup> The question is how we are to understand this exceptionalism, which has been at the heart of America since its founding, which I will do in my study of Manifest Destiny. The other question the Kissinger quote raises is one of whose values, and who defines them? In recent decades, the question of values has erupted in an aggressive contemporary political debate in America, which is widely seen as divided between “conservatives” and “liberals.” The “conservatives” see “liberals” as secularists undermining the culture of America, while “liberals” see “conservatives” as hijacking the culture, with a special emphasis on religion. Few would contest that the 1960s saw the triumph of liberalization, while the 1970s saw the emergence of a conservative movement reacting against what they saw as an over-liberalization, which gave rise to the “culture wars” and the “values debate” domestically. Though I will reference this domestic concern for values, in this thesis I am primarily concerned with how this plays out in foreign policy. This is because, if America is using its power to spread its values globally, then what values are they and how should theologians and people of faith speak to this power?

While Niebuhr was looking for ways to embrace liberal change, there was a growing number of Americans troubled by it, what President Nixon articulated as the “silent majority,”<sup>9</sup> by which he intended a particular conservative moral voice in America which arguably aligns its own progress with progress of the world. Historically, the idea of America has always been a mix of, and a

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Henry Kissinger, *The Times Magazine* (14 May 2011) 33. Kissinger was the 56<sup>th</sup> Secretary of State, and his voice resonates (in more ways than one) throughout the period under study.

<sup>9</sup> Nixon's Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam, November 3, 1969, full text: <http://watergate.info/nixon/silent-majority-speech-1969.shtml>. The term was originally a synonym for the dead, according to philologists James Bradstreet Greenough & George Lyman Kittredge, *Words and their ways in English speech*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920, p.302

tension between, enlightenment ideals with its classical undertones, and, Calvinist Christianity.<sup>10</sup> Despite America being the paradigm liberal state of the modern world, and the most powerful, it remains profoundly, and to some confusingly, religious. Kissinger, states:

No other society has so conceived itself to be the product of a uniquely moral vision as America's. Freed by geography from the necessities of geopolitics as well as from its temptations, the United States has been permeated by the conviction that political issues – especially with respect to foreign policy – could be equated with choices between good and evil.<sup>11</sup>

Now this tension is being played out in a battle for the mind of America between “conservatives” and “liberals”, which has implications for its foreign policy and activities abroad. However, the terms “conservative” and “liberal” are themselves contested. In context, modern conservatism can be seen as a response to the perceived onslaught of liberalism and secularism erupting out of the 1960s, with secular humanism and progressivism being the core targets of concern for conservatives. For many conservatives, the change brought about by the end of the Cold War was the replacement of the threat of godless Communism with godless secularism. They see the destined role of America in the world being undermined by liberals, and believe there has to be a return to America's ideals as they understand them to be. In part, this is a story about claims to the historic roots of America, and in part a call to maintain standards of being a good citizen or a “Good American”. In short, they are in a battle for control of America's Manifest Destiny.

Yet, classically understood, liberalism is the dominant political ideology of modernity shared by “conservatives” and “liberals” alike.<sup>12</sup> This liberalism divides broadly into ‘laissez-faire’ and

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<sup>10</sup> Calvinism being the dominant theology of the Pilgrims and first Americans fleeing the religious persecution of state churches, which themselves may have had Calvinist foundations but were different since Calvinism in a state church is a different proposition from a theology set free from the state, especially one that is then transplanted in a foreign and new land.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), p.33

<sup>12</sup> The acknowledged founder of liberalism is John Locke, and provides material common to conservative and liberal thought. One way of distinguishing the two strands is their view of what is normative, with conservatives claiming normative and operative principles, in dogmatic terms, for all time, as I discuss in the next section drawing on Edmund Burke and Russell Kirk. Bertrand Russell suggested “The essence of the Liberal outlook lies not in *what* opinions are held, but in *how* they are held; instead of being held dogmatically, they are held tentatively, and with a consciousness that new evidence may at any moment lead to their abandonment.” Bertrand Russell, *Philosophy and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947) p.22. The reference to dogma is often used as an insult by

‘social welfare’ liberalism. The former is a conservative reading while the latter is what American conservatives, and the Religious Right, are referring to when they use the term “liberal.” The “liberals” tagged in debates by “conservatives” range from being anyone who disagrees with them through to those advocates of progressive change or specific policies which contradict conservative policies, such as abortion or the intractable issue of welfare reform. While there are many ‘liberalisms’ they are often conflated, hence though there is a trend in contemporary political liberalism towards social welfare there remains distinctions between this liberalism and notions of progressivism.<sup>13</sup> Liberalism is a range of responses concerned with freedom, negatively free from authority and positively in the assertion of rights, underpinned by a third concern for democratic participation to extend and to protect these rights and freedoms. To confuse matters a little further, theological liberalism is something different to this debate; with its own “liberals” versus “conservatives” in an ongoing theological battle, differing in their treatment of scripture and interpretation of revelation. To make matters a little clearer in this thesis, from this point on when I use the term “liberal” I am usually using it in the sense of social welfare liberalism, and will note when I use it in other political senses or in the theological sense as occasion arises.

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both sides, but in this proper form it is a helpful word. In recent decades the death of liberalism, and the rise of an even more tentative way of thinking in the form of postmodernism, is a well-worn seam of political debate. This often becomes a debate on the source of authority, which according to Christian conservative dogma is the Bible, but is an area explored across the spectrum of political thought, most importantly by Michael Oakeshott in *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), and by Hannah Arendt in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press 1961), particularly in the chapter “What is Authority?”. Notions of authority, rights and freedom are at the heart of the debate, whether one is discussing them from a conservative and secular view, such as Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Robert Nozick and Milton Friedman, or liberal secularists such as John Dewey, Isaiah Berlin, John Rawls and Noam Chomsky. I have drawn my understanding of liberalism and conservatism from these theorists, but I suspect that in any extended discussion of this, I would venture they are all members of the same club arguing over the club rules of social contract.

<sup>13</sup> Progressive causes have found homes in both liberal and conservative camps, some of which I discuss further, though briefly, in Chapter 2 in relation to slavery, women’s rights and the civil rights movement. One illustrative example will suffice at this point, the Progressive Party was founded by Republican president Teddy Roosevelt in 1912, a connection discussed approvingly by President Barack Obama in 2011: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/07/full-text-barack-obama-speech>, last accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2012. Friedrich von Hayek, a leading inspiration for the American and British conservatism of the 1980s, offered the view in his essay ‘Why I am not a Conservative’ that conservatism by its very nature:

“... cannot offer an alternative to the direction in which we are moving. It may succeed by its resistance to current tendencies in slowing down undesirable developments, but, since it does not indicate another direction, it cannot prevent their continuance. It has, for this reason, invariably been the fate of conservatism to be dragged along a path not of its own choosing. The tug of war between conservatives and progressives can only affect the speed, not the direction, of contemporary developments.”

The essay was a postscript in Frederich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.398. Two leading lights of the Thatcher years in Britain retorted with “Why F A Hayek is a Conservative” Eamonn Butler and Madsen Pirie (eds) *Hayek on the Fabric of Human Society* (London: Adam Smith Institute, 1987).

Since Nixon named the silent majority there have been two significant conservative movements, the Religious Right and Neoconservatism,<sup>14</sup> both of which may be linked to a new conservatism commentators have traced further back. Critics see this contemporary conservatism in America as something new, a change rather than continuity within the conservative movement as a whole. As Michael J. Thompson explains:

Conservatism has always been associated with reaction, with tradition, with stability. But the new conservatism is something different in this regard: it has been able to assert itself as a locator of crisis, as an ideology that points to the cultural and political situation of the present and claims that it has broken down and that it, alone, has the power and the insight to fix it, to make the crooked straight. What the new conservatism has done is not look simply to the past but look toward postwar liberalism and social democracy as serious distortions of social policy and public morality. It argues that liberalism as a public philosophy has led to cultural and moral decay due to its emphasis on the liberty of the

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<sup>14</sup> The literature on Neoconservatism is extensive, with the high point, like the Religious Right, being the Bush II era, and a selective list includes: *The Neocon Reader*, ed. Irwin Stelzer, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), provides a collection of essays outlining Neocon ideas from a range of American and British sources, both on the political left and right; Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy*, (New Haven Conn: Yale University Press, 2006) & The Neoconservative Moment, *The National Interest*, (Summer 76:2004) 57–68, by a leading Neocon thinker who reversed his thinking; Jacob Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), and, Len Colodny and Tom Schachtman, *The Forty Years War: The Rise and Fall of the Neocons from Nixon to Obama* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), offer a critical overview of the history and ideas of the movement. Other major texts, taking a broader sweep of the history, include: William Bennett, *Morality, Character, and American Foreign Policy*, William Kristol and Robert Kagan (eds) *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy* (San Francisco CA: Encounter Books, 2000) 289–305; Max Boot *Think Again: Neocons*, *Foreign Policy* (83:1, 2004) 20–8; Christopher DeMuth and William Kristol (eds) *The Neoconservative Imagination*, (Washington DC: AEI Press 1995). John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs 1945–1994* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1995); Mark Gerson, *The Neo-Conservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (Lanham: Madison, 1996); Stefan Halper & Jonathan Clarke *America alone : the neoconservatives and the global order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); John B. Judis, *Trotskyism to Anachronism: The Neoconservative Revolution*, *Foreign Affairs* (74:4, 1995) 123–9; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Neoconservatism: Myth and Reality*, *Society* (25:5, 1988) 29–37; Joshua Muravchik, *The Neoconservative Cabal*, *Commentary* (September 2004) 18–21; Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979); Jennifer Welsh, “‘I’ is for Ideology: Conservatism in International Affairs”, *Global Society* (17:2, 2003) 165–85; and, Michael C. Williams (ed.) *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Brandon High, *The Recent Historiography of American Neoconservatism*, *Historical Journal* (Jun 2009, Vol. 52 Issue 2) p475–491, provides a comprehensive survey of the literature.

individual and the separation between public and private, which has starved the public sphere of morality and the guidance of tradition and authority.<sup>15</sup>

Two critical aspects of the “new conservatism” Thompson points to are a renewed respect for the tradition of authority, by which he means religion, and a “crude brand of nationalism”.<sup>16</sup> Thompson places religion at the heart of this new form of conservatism, which is tied closely in America to nationalism or patriotism. He argues that this new conservatism is more than a reaction to Progressives and anti-liberal in its understanding, but is in fact grounded in the assumptions of American liberalism itself, such as individualism, private property, free markets and limited state control. He offers the thesis that new conservatism is a reworking of classical liberalism hooked to the engine of Capitalism, particularly after the demise of Communism and the resulting ideological vacuum. Thompson concludes with this warning:

The new conservatism is therefore not simply a disposition; it is a concrete set of policy objectives that seek out affinities with different groups and with the broader public, much of the time unwittingly against other interests they might possess, and it is one that will continue to shape American political life unless and until another public philosophy is forged.<sup>17</sup>

The rise of this new conservatism, or Neoconservatism<sup>18</sup>, is for Thompson a proto-totalitarian moment, which is partly on the ascendency because of what fellow contributor Philip Green calls “a mass mobilization of voters and activists galvanized by the ideological doctrines of authoritarian populism and patriarchal Christian theocracy.”<sup>19</sup> While conservatism has undergone a change, Thompson clearly offers his assessment with disapproval. However, his objections are seen as positives by contemporary political and religious conservatives. The contentious element

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<sup>15</sup> Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America* (New York, New York University Press, 2007), p.3

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, *Ibid.*, p.25

<sup>18</sup> There is a tendency again to conflate terms, and some contributors in Thompson’s book and elsewhere simply equate new conservatism with Neoconservatism. The former arguably points us in the direction of a broader camp than the latter, which is a specific conservative movement. I will argue they are two different constituencies which are part of a broader coalition in which Neoconservatism, in terms of American foreign policy, has to an extent won the battle of ideas.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, *Ibid.*, p.31



of Thompson's deliberation is whether this is indeed a "new" negative conservatism, and whether "negative" is something terribly wrong or simply a sense of realism. This may just be a case of conservative tradition reinterpreting traditional concerns for a new era, and conservatives will argue this is about more than the mere reaction, tradition and stability that Thompson locates.

However, I suggest we can take a step back from this critique and see Conservatism more as a set of instincts and principles guiding decisions, which vary according to historical context.<sup>20</sup> Today's conservatives may discuss different situations and policy options than an 18<sup>th</sup> Century conservative, but they also adhere to some broad principles as if there were no intervening centuries. The conservative central to understanding American conservatism is Edmund Burke, and he spelled out some core conservative elements of thought:

- (1) People are basically religious, and religion is the foundation of civil society. A divine sanction infuses the legitimate, existing, social order.
- (2) Society is the natural, organic product of slow historical growth, with institutions drawing on the wisdom of previous generations.
- (3) People are creatures of instinct and emotion as well as reason. Prudence, prejudice, experience, and habit are better guides than reason, logic, abstractions, and metaphysics. Truth exists not in universal propositions but in concrete experiences.
- (4) The community is superior to the individual. Rights derive from duties. Evil is rooted in human nature, not in any particular social institutions.

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<sup>20</sup> A useful intellectual history of American conservatism is provided by Patrick Allit, *The Conservatives: Ideas & Personalities Throughout American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), while Allan J. Lichtman provides a thematic history of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Conservatism in *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Grove Press, 2008). Paul Edward Gottfried, *Conservatism in America: Making Sense of the American Right* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) makes the claim that the current conservative movement does not have deep roots. George H. Nash's *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington: ISI, 1996), Gregory L. Schneider, *Conservatism in America Since 1930* (New York: New York University Press, 2003) assess the movement within the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Shadia B. Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1997) and Grant Havers, *Leo Strauss, Willmoore Kendall, and the Meaning of Conservatism, Humanitas* (Washington, D.C.) 18.1-2 (Spring 2005) 5, tie modern conservatism to the political philosopher Leo Strauss (1899-1973). Others have linked the movement to contemporary circumstances, such as Dan Carter, *The politics of rage: George Wallace, the origins of the new conservatism, and the transformation of American politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

(5) Apart from an ultimate moral sense, people are unequal. Social organization is a complex of classes, orders, and groups. Hence, differentiation, hierarchy and leadership are the inevitable characteristics of any civil society.

(6) A presumption exists "in favor of any settled scheme of government against any untried project. Man's hopes are high, but his vision is short." Thus, efforts to remedy existing evils usually result in even greater ones.<sup>21</sup>

We find echoes of these elements in the influential 1953 essay "The Conservative Mind", where Russell Kirk<sup>22</sup> offered what he called "six canons of conservative thought". Like Burke, the divine plays a foundational role:

1. Belief that a divine intent rules society as well as conscience
2. Affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life
3. Conviction that civilized society requires orders and classes
4. Persuasion that property and freedom are inseparably connected and that economic leveling is not economic progress
5. Faith in prescription and distrust of "sophisters and calculators"
6. Recognition that change and reform are not identical

In his 1957 defense of liberalism against the conservatism of Russell Kirk, and what he called the "New Conservatives" of the 1950s, Samuel Huntington<sup>23</sup> suggested there are at least three deficiencies in this conservative movement, which remain at the heart of the criticism today. First, he argued many New Conservatives appear uncertain as to what they wish to defend. Secondly, many New Conservatives are astonishingly vague as to the nature and source of the threat to what

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<sup>21</sup> *Reflections on the Revolution in France. A Critical Edition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), J. C. D. Clark (ed.), to which I am indebted in this précis of Burke's thought.

<sup>22</sup> Essay published in *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, Russell Kirk, ed. (Washington DC: Regnery, 2001). Patrick Allitt, in *The Conservatives: Ideas & Personalities Throughout American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), explains that Kirk wrote much of *The Conservative Mind* in Scotland, as it was his doctoral thesis at the University of St Andrews, p.168.

<sup>23</sup> *Conservatism as an Ideology*, Samuel P. Huntington, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Jun., 1957), pp. 454-473

they wish to conserve. A third deficiency of this new conservatism is the effort to uncover a conservative intellectual tradition in America, which is a liberal nation. If we apply these concerns to contemporary American conservatism they look less convincing, leaving aside how convincing they were at the time the comments were first made. First, contemporary conservatism is very clear about what they wish to defend, seeking an America less attuned to internationalism, less committed to social “welfarism”, and which leaves God at the heart of America. One may dispute, and many liberals do, how real or undesirable these threats are, but conservatives are clear on what they wish to defend against, which leads into the second point. One chief source of the threat conservatives see is internationally, through the United Nations and other nations pushing for internationalism.<sup>24</sup> The domestic source of threat is the progressive element which they believe has taken over the Democratic Party and is undermining American values and public life. Another source of threat are the chattering classes of the mainstream media and academia, which conservatives see as controlling the message, what is taught to children and what is explained on television news and in cultural programming.

While Niebuhr may not have followed the trajectory of these conservative reactions, he would have seen disagreement with Huntingdon’s three-pronged attack. Niebuhr had a desire to regain some of the conservative creed, that part which is Burkean in the sense of a reliance on experience,<sup>25</sup> which is the sum of all the parts of the collective life of humanity, not just the economic concerns that he saw as central to the conservative creed of the America he wished to confront.<sup>26</sup> Writing in the wake of Eisenhower’s victory in 1952, and a return to political power of the Republicans after two decades out of office, there is an element of conservatism Niebuhr argued it was essential for America to keep in order to sustain its political hegemony in the free world, which:

...is the product of Christian rather than ‘idealistic’ approaches to the perennial facts of human nature. Whether we win it or not therefore depends upon the addition of Christian

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<sup>24</sup> This view is mirrored on the Religious Right, see Stephen Rock, *Faith and Foreign Policy: The Views and Influence of U.S. Christians and Christian Organizations* (New York: Continuum, 2011), especially Chapter 6, while Markku Ruotsila, *The Origins of Christian Anti-internationalism: Conservative Evangelicals and the League of Nations* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007) takes an historical look at the relationship.

<sup>25</sup> I am not, however, suggesting that Niebuhr was a Burkean conservative.

<sup>26</sup> Niebuhr sets out his argument in *The Foreign Policy of American Conservatism and Liberalism*, Chapter 6 of *Christian realism and Political Problems*, London: Faber & Faber, 1953

humility to the compound which must serve us as wisdom. Naturally we will be the more successful if we are not too anxious about the exact political source of this wisdom, whether from the traditional right or the traditional left.<sup>27</sup>

However, the conservatism of the Eisenhower era does have significant differences with the conservatism of today, and likewise the religious constituency was different. Eisenhower, who wrote in the *New York Times* “I am the most religious person I know,”<sup>28</sup> was addressing a much more uniform WASP nation than Bush II<sup>29</sup> addressed on 9/11, and conservatives Niebuhr had in mind were perhaps a different breed to the Religious Right that rallied at the ballot box for Bush II and the neocons who formulated his policies. Like Niebuhr, the neocons have their roots in Wilsonianism. However, Max Boot while agreeing that Neocons are Wilsonian, divides Wilsonians into “soft Wilsonians” who are “hopelessly naive” like Jimmy Carter and Wilson himself, and, “hard Wilsonians” like Teddy Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan, explaining:

Neocons believe the United States should use force when necessary to champion its ideals as well as interests, not only out of sheer humanitarianism but also because the spread of liberal democracy improves U.S. security, while crimes against humanity inevitably make the world a more dangerous place.<sup>30</sup>

Like the Religious Right and Bush II, Neocons attract considerable attacks, often distorting the valid grounds of criticism. Gary Dorrien, whose assault on Neoconservatism is spread over two books<sup>31</sup> and various essays, however offers a fair assessment and useful history in a 2005 essay,<sup>32</sup> though he does conclude with an emotional rush. Dorrien gives a typical critical summary:

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<sup>27</sup> Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p.74f

<sup>28</sup> *New York Times*, May 4, 1948

<sup>29</sup> George W. Bush. To avoid confusion between George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush, I will use Bush I for the father and Bush II for the son.

<sup>30</sup> Stelzer, Irwin (ed.) *The Neocon Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p.49

<sup>31</sup> Gary Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture and the War of Ideology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993) and *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York and Woodstock: Routledge, 2004)

<sup>32</sup> Gary Dorrien, Consolidating the empire: Neoconservatism and the politics of American dominion, *Political Theory* [2005:4, 409-428]

Neoconservatism is a peculiar movement. It is so American that nothing like it exists anywhere else. Neocons don't run for office; they don't have self-referential organizations in the manner of the libertarians and communitarians; and they lack the popular base of the Christian right and Buchanan's Old Right. But at the level of policymaking, think tanks, and media outlets the neocons are the strongest force in the Republican Party.<sup>33</sup>

To which Dorrien adds:

The neoconservatives have two defining ambitions: to extend America's unrivaled global dominance and to complete the transformation of American conservatism. Fulfilling the first objective, they clearly perceive, will require a significantly larger military force for a nation that already outspends the next twenty nations combined. Fulfilling the second objective will allow them to retire the word "neoconservative," making American conservatism synonymous with their brand of it."<sup>34</sup>

Another argument that Neoconservatism is simply a rebirth of conservatism rather than a perversion of it is made by Corey Robin in *The Reactionary Mind*.<sup>35</sup> As I have done, Robin traces conservatism back to its roots yet comes to a diametrically opposed view to the argument I pursue. Robin makes the claim that neocons are truly conservatives, an argument I reject in this thesis. He assumes that all conservative, or right-wing ideologies, are defenses of power which in a reactionary move see themselves under threat and seek to wrestle control in their favor against emancipating forces. I can accept in Robin's argument that political elites try to hold on to power, but this is not the preserve of right wing ideologies. If one looks at the extreme examples of the Communism of Stalin or the National Socialism of Hitler, then we have to see that all manner of power groups seek to hold on to power. Closer to home, we can look at the impeachment processes of Nixon and Clinton and see the individual's desire to hold on to the reins of power. Robin's argument also overlooks the notion of principles seen as timeless by Burke and Kirk, which conservatives seek to see advanced in all eras to maintain a sense of civilized standards in life, and yes sometimes against progressivism and emancipation of those things they see as militating against standards. Conservatives will doubtless argue that Robin falls into the liberal trap that there

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<sup>33</sup> Dorrien, p.426

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.410

<sup>35</sup> Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011)

is nothing as intolerant as a tolerant liberal, since he is assuming all progressive emancipation is right, whereas conservatives see some forms of emancipation as timelessly regrettable. He also assumes all emancipation is of a left-wing nature, which is debatable. As we shall see when I discuss Manifest Destiny, conservative Christians advanced liberty in antebellum America, while the Democratic Party opposed the Republican Party on the abolition of slavery. The world is a more complicated place than the world Robin's argument lays claim to.

I draw attention to the Neocon agenda of asserting a quest rooted in thwarted Wilsonian liberalism,<sup>36</sup> though perhaps not the Wilsonianism Robin wants. Aside from protecting American interests, Neocons seek to spread democracy in the Middle East, yet it is a claim for emancipation that Robin wants to ignore because it is not the form of emancipation he wants. While accepting that Neocons share a desire for democratization in the region and share the objectives of American foreign policy, they reject, Robin argues, the liberal mechanisms available and do not share the means championed by liberalism. This is not entirely true, since there was an attempt by the Bush administration, supported by Neocons, to get international support but ended with a coalition of the willing instead. The difference lies in the threshold for working with liberal mechanisms and choosing when to go to war, to which it may be added many liberals supported going to war with Iraq, withdrawing their support when the reasons were seen, after the fact, to be flawed. Wilsonians and Neocons alike share a desire to foster liberal values abroad and for America to show moral leadership, but I contend that this Wilsonian and Neocon pursuit is not one that the conservatism of Burke and Kirk heartily embrace. Lastly, the power grab that is fundamental to Robin's thesis is ultimately just that, a power grab, and arguments for principle, whether left or right, will ultimately draw the distinction between what is right and what is prudent or advantageous in the pursuit of power.

This all said, the Neocons did however find a fertile home in the conservative Republican Party and the Religious Right. Irving Kristol writes that Neocons, traditional conservatives and religious conservatives gravitated towards each other because of a shared concern over the decline of democratic culture (a concern not shared by libertarians who lack the social conservatism), with the GOP squaring the circle. Kristol writes:

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<sup>36</sup> There is an interesting debate to be had as to whether Neocons are Wilsonian

The upshot is a quite unexpected alliance between neocons, who include a fair proportion of secular intellectuals, and religious traditionalists. They are united on [social] issues....And since the Republican Party now has a substantial base among the religious, this gives neocons a certain influence and even power.<sup>37</sup>

This power and influence is given to them not simply because the Religious Right has embraced and blessed Neocon policy, but because it is part of the same conservative movement, a silent majority that had found its' voice and knew its faith.

### **The Rise and Fall of the Religious Right**

David Hume argued that only religious fanatics believe they have the knowledge to make judgments as to how the world best works and in this they provide a threat to political stability.<sup>38</sup>

Given this, we can ask whether the conservative movement labelled as the Religious Right, which critics<sup>39</sup> have consistently portrayed as confrontational, comprises religious fanatics or

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<sup>37</sup> Irwin Stelzer, (ed.) *The Neocon Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p.35

<sup>38</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

<sup>39</sup> Works specifically critical of the Religious Right and the Christian Right are various and often linked to specific subjects. In particular, the Bush II administration gave rise to an array of literature, such as: the purported role of Christian fundamentalists in Bush administration, Esther Kaplan, *With God on their Side* (New York: The New Press, 2004); the Christian Right in American foreign policy, Lee Marsden, *For God's Sake: The Christian Right & US Foreign Policy* (London: Zed Books, 2008); the values debate and the negative influence on the Republican Party, Senator John Danforth, *Faith and Politics* (New York: Penguin, 2006). A broader sweep of the terrain includes: Jason C. Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Frank Lambert, *Religion in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America": a History of the Religious Right* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002), Martin Durham, *The Christian Right: the far right and the boundaries of American conservatism* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), Kenneth J. Heineman, *God Is a Conservative: Religion, Politics and Morality in Contemporary America* (New York: NYU Press 2005), Michael Lerner, *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), Ronald E. Hopson & Donald R. Smith, *Changing Fortunes: An Analysis of Christian Right Ascendance within American Political Discourse*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (Mar., 1999, Vol. 38 Issue 1) 1-13. Mark Lewis Taylor, *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right: Post-9/11 Powers and American Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), Daniel K. Williams, *God's own party: the making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). As I note in Chapter 2, the literature unhelpfully makes interchangeable use of the terms "Religious Right", "Christian Right" and "Christian fundamentalists." Invaluable work has been undertaken, separately and jointly, by a trio of writers John C. Green, Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, and their work is indispensable to creating an anatomy of the Christian Right and Religious Right in America in recent decades, in addition to works cited in the bibliography see: John C. Green, Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *The Christian right in American politics : marching to the millennium* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003); Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian soldiers? The Religious Right in American*

constructive dialog partners. After all, there are a lot of religious believers in America, indeed more than non-believers or secularists. Gallup research<sup>40</sup> suggests that America remains a religious country, based on the stated beliefs of Americans rather than their religious identification. According to the report, 70% of Americans believe in a personal God, roughly 12% of Americans are atheist or agnostic, and another 12% are deistic. They are also greatly churched, as Wes Pruden, the Washington Times emeritus editor, summarizes:

Three of four Americans tell pollsters they pray, a majority attend religious services at least occasionally, and many are there every time the church doors swing open. We've got two dozen kinds of Baptists, millions of Roman Catholics, nine kinds of Methodists and Presbyterians, seven brands of Mennonites, five flavors of Quakers, a dozen denominations of Orthodox Christians from the east (some not necessarily very orthodox), 10 Lutheran bodies, four organized varieties of Jews, enough Muslims, an assortment of two dozen kinds of Pentecostals, and there's even the Bill Keller Ministries, Inc., which advertises itself as the "the world's Online Church."<sup>41</sup>

As a very large and vocal constituency in the values debate, the Religious Right needs to be viewed in contested terms. Naturally, writers on this subject are coming from different directions to assess the Religious Right and Christian Right, and they have different ways of defining just what the composition of these groups comprises. Yet often in debate, critics employ or conflate a variety of terms at best with the assumption that all are agreed on meaning, and at worse as epithets. Like Humpty Dumpty, there are many academic and popular writers using terms like "Religious Right",

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*Politics* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1996); Mark J. Rozell in Philip Benedict & Irena Backus (eds.), *The Christian Right and Contemporary Politics, Crisis of Conservatism?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), p114129; Mark J. Rozell & Gleaves Whitney, *Religion and the Bush Presidency (Evolving American Presidency)* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and, Clyde Wilcox, America's Radical Right Revisited. A Comparison of the Activists in Christian Right Organizations from the 1960s and the 1980s, *Sociological Analysis* (Spring, 1987, Vol. 48 Issue 1) 46-57. A sample of some of the more specific issues addressed include: Dennis R. Hoover & , Kevin R. den Dulk, Christian Conservatives Go to Court: Religion and Legal Mobilization in the United States and Canada, *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique* (Jan., 2004, Vol. 25 Issue 1) 934; Robert Fisher & Sally Tamarkin, Right-Wing Organizers Do This Too: The Case of the Christian Coalition, *Journal of Community Practice* (Oct-Dec2011, Vol. 19 Issue 4) 403-421; Russell D. Moore, Who will reclaim the Religious Right: conservative Christians or Christian conservatives? *Criswell Theological Review* (6:1 Fall 2008) 7179; and, Joseph L. Conn, Dominionism and democracy: Religious Right radicals' growing role in the presidential election sparks a debate over what kind of America they want *Church & State* (64:9, 2011) 202-204.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/20242/Another-Look-Evangelicals-America-Today.aspx>. See also:

<http://www.adherents.com/misc/BarnaPoll.html>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/sep/2/pruden-a-religious-test-for-a-president/>, last accessed 3 September 2011



“Christian Right” and others interchangeably, choosing it to mean what they mean, neither more nor less, with critics usually choosing terminology to mean something that exists on the Right that they find unpalatable. There are also allied terms needing definition, such as “fundamentalist” and “evangelical.” The broad definition I employ is that the Religious Right is essentially a loose coalition of faith organizations that puts doctrinal differences aside to join forces for the voice of a conservative religion, and seeks to rally a base of conservative Christians who agree wholly or in part. Not all religious conservatives in America have become part of this coalition, yet still share a desire to rebut liberal culture and triumph a religiously conservative American mind. Hence, it is essential to break down the definition further, but this can wait for Chapter Four.

Although diverse, contemporary conservatism is a shared reaction to a perceived decaying set of values in America in the form of liberal culture, as noted above, which it is conventionally argued was sparked into life in the mid-1970s by the decision in the abortion case of *Roe v Wade*.<sup>42</sup> Whatever the cause, or its constituency, the Religious Right was an awakening of a sleeping giant on the political landscape, since many Christian conservatives, mostly fundamentalists, had up to this decision largely stayed out of the public square since the Creationism case in Dayton,

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<sup>42</sup> *Roe v Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973). The case represented the liberalization of culture generally, and raised the profile of abortion. To this point, evangelicals were against abortion but it was a practice that was not approved by society until this decision signalled that abortion was now acceptable. Conventional wisdom is that this case was the spark for the Religious Right movement, and has certainly since become a litmus test for purposes of identification. For religious conservatives, the issue of abortion is problematic in part because of a commitment to the specific moral issue of abortion itself as the killing of a life, and the social moral issue that it reflects a challenge to conservative ideas of family life, suggesting promiscuous behaviour and wrongness of children outside of marriage. As law professor Kristin Luker, in *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p.127, explains “Abortion was no longer a technical, medical matter controlled by professionals; it was now emphatically a public and moral issue of nationwide concern.” On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the decision, Ronald Reagan wrote the case was “a continuing prod to the conscience of the nation,” in *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984). However, in *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), Randall Balmer, a self-described “jilted lover” of the Religious Right, disputes this narrative and argues the origins lie in *Green v. Connally*, 330 F. Supp. 1150 (DDC 1971), a case on the tax exempt status of segregated schools. Balmer argues “The abortion myth serves as a convenient fiction because it suggests noble and altruistic motives behind the formation of the Religious Right. But it is highly disingenuous and renders absurd the argument of the leaders of Religious Right that, in defending the rights of the unborn, they are the “new abolitionists.” And “The Religious Right arose as a political movement for the purpose, effectively, of defending racial discrimination at Bob Jones University and at other segregated schools.” p.17. Similarly, Jon A. Shields, Framing the Christian Right: How Progressives and Post-War Liberals Constructed the Religious Right. *Journal of Church & State*, (Dec 2011, Vol. 53 Issue 4) 635-655, and Clyde Wilcox & Leopoldo Gomez, The Christian Right and the Pro-Life Movement: An Analysis of the Sources of Political Support, *Review of Religious Research* (Jun 1990, Vol. 31 Issue 4) 380-389 link the emergence of Christian right in relation to sexual ethics.

Tennessee, known as the Scopes “Monkey Trial.”<sup>43</sup> Religious conservatives were now rallied and have, in various forms, become a focal point of US domestic politics ever since. Each candidate for president in order to win the White House needs to have what David Domke and Kevin Coe call a “God Strategy.”<sup>44</sup> Religion in the Public Square has become a contested issue at a time when liberal political wisdom had long accepted the secularization thesis<sup>45</sup> as gospel and assumed religion was privatized, perhaps irrelevant to public life. Given the rise of the Religious Right, along with other religious movements globally (chiefly Islam), many in the Social Sciences, including the disciplines of Politics and International Relations, have been playing catch-up in the last decade or so, seeking a greater understanding of religion.<sup>46</sup>

While there is much of interest to study on the Religious Right, it does beg the question Ari Fleischer, the White House Press Spokesman in the first Bush II administration, asked of the White House Press Corps as to why there is such a heavy critical focus on this particular group of activists, which appear to be not unlike other activist groups in politics:

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<sup>43</sup> The trial was a landmark case in Religion in American legal and religious history. In 1925, John Scopes, a high school science teacher was accused of violating Tennessee’s Butler Act which made it unlawful to teach evolution. The case attracted national figures to the cause, principally William Jennings Bryan, three-time Democratic presidential candidate, and, leading civil rights lawyer Clarence Darrow. The events were later dramatised for stage and screen, as “Inherit the Wind” and a major motion picture starring Spencer Tracy. The event and the publicity gave rise to the widespread ridiculing of Creationism, a subject which has once again come to the fore on the Religious Right.

<sup>44</sup> Domke, David & Coe, Kevin, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became A Political Weapon In America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

<sup>45</sup> The secularization thesis argued that modernity and progress would make society free of religion. Building on the work of Max Weber, the thesis was chiefly advanced by sociologists Bryan Wilson in *Religion in a Secular Society* (London: Watts, 1966), and, Peter Berger in *The Social Reality of Religion* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1973). We have to question whether secularization is a case of excluding religion altogether or making religion independent, and thus all religions being equal in a secular society; while this is an intriguing question, it lies beyond the scope of this work.

<sup>46</sup> A selection of texts exploring the new role of religion in international relations include: John D. Carlson, Erik C. Owens, Joshua Mitchell, Jean Bethke Elshtain (eds.), *The Sacred and the Sovereign: Religion and International Politics* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press 2003), Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby & Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World [The Fundamentalism Project]* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2003), John Anderson. Ed., *Religion, Democracy and Democratization* (London: Routledge, 2008) & John Anderson. Ed., *Religious Liberty in Transitional Societies: The Politics of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, Timothy Samuel Shah, *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), Jack Snyder, *Religion and International Relations Theory [Religion, Culture, and Public Life]* (New York: Columbia University Press 2011). While William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) explores the question in historical context, drawing on Niebuhr.

The press often writes about the political influence of the “Religious Right” or “evangelical Christians”. How often do they write about the “religious left”? Seldom. There are liberal religious leaders who play important roles and have great political influence in the Democratic Party.<sup>47</sup>

To answer Fleischer’s point, there is a sense in the literature that the Religious Right comes around like Halley’s Comet, and it seems that the criticism largely applies to periods when there is a Republican in the White House and hence passes through their critical orbit as opponents scramble around for ammunition to launch their attack on a conservative administration. In seeking to understand the Religious Right many critics have portrayed its influence in the shape of a “rise and fall” narrative<sup>48</sup> based first on the Reagan and then the Bush II White House. Although the Religious Right has become wedded to the Republican Party, ironically, to use a Niebuhrian term, it was the Democratic Party which put the nation’s first “born-again” president<sup>49</sup> into the White House. The Nixon to Carter years draws our attention to the presence in America of a constituency troubled by the liberalization of culture, the “silent majority” out of which emerged a new political movement, the Moral Majority and others collectively labelled the “Religious Right.”. These conservative voices, however, initially gravitated towards the Democrat Carter, as a self-identified born-again Christian able to carry with him the hopes of religious conservatives who thought they had their man in the White House and signaled a new era of faith restored after Nixon and

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<sup>47</sup> Fleischer, Ari. *Taking Heat* (New York: William Morrow, 2005), p.107

<sup>48</sup> “Rise and fall” titles include Steve Bruce, *The rise and fall of the new Christian right: conservative Protestant politics in America, 1978-1988*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), and, Joel D. Vaughan, *The Rise and Fall of the Christian Coalition: The Inside Story* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers 2009). Online opinions include Jim Wallis writing on beliefnet, Oct 30, 2000, The Rise and Fall of the Religious Right:

<http://www.beliefnet.com/News/Politics/2000/10/The-Rise-And-Fall-Of-The-Religious-Right.aspx>, last accessed 26/4/12. John W. Whitehead Rutherford Foundation, on June 21, 1999, The Rise and Fall of the Christian Right: [https://www.rutherford.org/publications\\_resources/john\\_whiteheads\\_commentary/the\\_rise\\_and\\_fall\\_of\\_the\\_christian\\_right](https://www.rutherford.org/publications_resources/john_whiteheads_commentary/the_rise_and_fall_of_the_christian_right), last accessed 26/4/12. More specific targets have been individuals, such as James Carney’s *Time* magazine article of 23 July 2006, The Rise and Fall of Ralph Reed: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1218060,00.html#ixzz1t9VEaB18>, last accessed 26/4/12. In addition, there are numerous books and articles on the “rise of” and the “end of.”

<sup>49</sup> Although it is commonplace to call Carter the first born-again president, this may depend on one’s criteria. Paul F. Boller Jr., Religion and the U.S. Presidency, *Journal of Church & State* (21:1, Spring 1979) p5, sketches four predecessors defined as born-again Christians: James A. Garfield, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley, and Woodrow Wilson.

Watergate.<sup>50</sup> However, his liberal politics led to this constituency being disappointed and Carter subsequently alienated these religious conservatives, as Andrew Flint & Joy Porter offer a potted history:

Back in 1976, Carter's profile as a man of sincere and serious faith held great currency for the growing American evangelical community. His candidacy and presidency had galvanized the political mobilization of evangelical Christians through articulation of his own deeply held religious faith and his interjection of openly spiritual themes into the body politic. He had tapped into the rapidly expanding evangelical constituency, acting as a catalyst for their widespread re-entry into politics for the first time since the 1920s. Unfortunately for Carter, after having drawn them into politics, he failed to retain evangelicals' support. It became apparent that Carter's understanding of the relationship between Christianity and politics bore little resemblance to their own. By 1980 it was obvious to Christian conservatives that a Democratic president, whether a fellow evangelical or not, was not enough to ensure promotion of their agenda on the national political stage. The more the Carter administration had refused to reverse the liberal advances of the previous decade, the more the Christian Right as an organized force mustered political strength.<sup>51</sup>

Although more associated with Reagan, Carter traces the roots of the “Moral Majority” to his own time in office, arguing that the bipartisanship he enjoyed has been destroyed and American politics is now much more divisive, suggesting:

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<sup>50</sup> It is an intriguing question which I cannot pursue here, but what trajectory could Carter, the Democrats and religious conservatives have gone through had Carter not lost them? Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, The Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011) makes the case that if liberals regarded Carter's religion with less scepticism and seen it as legitimating liberal politics, it could have prevented the alliance of religious conservatism and the Republicans. Robert Freedman, *The Religious Right and the Carter Administration*, *The Historical Journal* (48:1, March 2005), p260, concludes “The need for a more considered approach to the Religious Right is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that a movement often depicted as theocratic in intention rejected the religious, conservative Jimmy Carter for the essentially nonreligious and libertarian Ronald Reagan.”

<sup>51</sup> Andrew R. Flint and Joy Porter, *Jimmy Carter: the re-emergence of faith-based politics and the abortion rights issue*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. (35:1, Mar. 2005), p28.

A significant cause of this rift is the melding of politics and religion, and the roots of the “Moral Majority” can be traced to the period when I was elected president.... The alignment of more conservative Christians with the Republican Party has strengthened both political and religious schisms.<sup>52</sup>

What had happened was that the dashed hopes of the Religious Right left the door open for the Republican Party to offer solace, and to offer a vision of an America far from the “malaise”<sup>53</sup> of the Carter years. Religious conservatives were receptive to a Republican Party that was to become more successful in reaching out and aligning itself with this emerging constituency and its new champion Ronald Reagan, who was to court religious conservatives as never before.<sup>54</sup> Tracing the roots back to the Nixon and the Carter years provides us with a better key to understanding this evolution than the rise and fall narratives, since as Gary Wills puts it the Religious Right is much more of a constant. What is odd, as Wills points out, is not the apparent recurring appearances of the Religious Right, but the fact that it is ignored in much of the serious literature on American politics. What is needed is a more informed and nuanced debate, which brings religious conservatives and liberals alike into a space for negotiation, which is where a Niebuhrian strategy can be of value.

## **A Global Power: Manifest Destiny in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State in the administration of President Bill Clinton, said we live history forwards but read history backwards.<sup>55</sup> Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century theorists spent

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<sup>52</sup> James Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), p.531f

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 3 for explanation

<sup>54</sup> There is not scope here to consider all the presidents in this period, but if there were I would propose a connected narrative of an evolution in three phases represented by three Republican presidents: Nixon (1969-74), Reagan (1981-89) and Bush II (2001-09), with Ford (1974-1977) and Bush I (1989-93) playing more the role of “night watchmen” in this respect. In between the Republican presidents we had Democrats Jimmy Carter (1977-81) and Bill Clinton (1993-2001). Though there was never a strong connection Clinton attracted some of the evangelical vote, but what good will there was soon dissipated in the midst of the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

<sup>55</sup> Madeleine Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs* (New York: HarperLargePrint, 2006). Albright is drawing from a quote from the Lutheran Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, a famous aphorism that appears in various forms in his works, but is usually cited as "Life is lived forward but understood backward." She drew on the same saying to tell the 9/11 commission, “We all know that history is lived forward and examined backward. Much seems obvious now that was perceived less clearly prior to September 11.” [http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/hearings/hearing8/albright\\_statement.pdf](http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/hearings/hearing8/albright_statement.pdf), March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2004, last accessed

a lot of time trying to make sense of global history and framed America as at “the end of history”<sup>56</sup> or embroiled in a “clash of civilizations”<sup>57</sup> and other secular crises, as Americans sought to understand the soul of a nation<sup>58</sup>. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, I venture the notion of Manifest Destiny is one that carries the nation forward, and we can read its various interpretations backward in history. Manifest Destiny has evolved from being a justification for continental geographic expansion, the traditional teaching in American schools, into being the global spread of an idea, the heart of which is the power to advance an American conception of freedom politically and economically. The current phase of Manifest Destiny is a mixture of religious faith in the form of American evangelicalism, and, a political faith in the form of Neoconservatism, sharing a common belief in the forward movement of history and America’s historic role as the chosen nation.

Niebuhr and the Religious Right have spoken to this chosen nation and its power in different ways, and both have aligned themselves with secular foreign policy actors: Niebuhr the individual establishment Cold Warrior and the Religious Right the movement Neocons. In speaking to American power theologically it is important not to capitulate on theological assumptions in order to advance a secular political agenda or pursue a constantinian theology, as Niebuhr is accused of doing. Likewise, it is important not to place the theological assumptions uncompromisingly in the foreground and lose the connection to the understanding of non-theologians and nonbelievers, as the Religious Right and some of Niebuhr’s critics do. In addressing contemporary use of American power, we can only extrapolate “What Would Niebuhr Do?” and attempts have been made in the

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3/2/12. Her successor in the Bush II administration, Condoleezza Rice, references the same in memoirs of her years in Washington, quoting the English historian C.V. Wedgwood, “History is lived forwards but it is written in retrospect.” *No Higher Honor* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), p.xiv.

<sup>56</sup> A term, and a prediction since retracted by its author, coined by Francis Fukuyama in an essay in *Foreign Affairs* and published as a book *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992)

<sup>57</sup> Samuel Huntington, Huntington, Samuel. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003) argues a thesis of a clash of civilizations, rather than religions. He points us to the rise of Islam, and its opposition to the individualism and arrogance of Western civilization. To Muslims, he argues, the secularism of the West is of greater concern than the Christianity of the West. Just as America saw itself in conflict with godless communism, Muslims see themselves in conflict with “the godless West.” His argument was originally published in *Foreign Affairs* (summer, 1993). Jim Sciutto, *Against Us: The New Face of America’s Enemies in the Muslim World* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2008) offers an insightful study, based on his journalistic work in the Middle East for ABC news, illustrating anti-American attitudes in the region but suggesting there is scope for rebuilding relationships.

<sup>58</sup> A phrase coined by G.K. Chesterton in his essay What I Saw in America, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton, Vol. 21: What I Saw in America, the Resurrection of Rome and Side Lights* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990)

intervening years to do just that.<sup>59</sup> I do not wish to make any such prediction, though I will address in my conclusion whether Niebuhr himself would have joined the Neocon cause as a disillusioned hawkish Democrat concerned by the drift leftwards. Instead, I intend to construct a strategy utilizing Niebuhr's insights, while seriously addressing legitimate concerns raised by the Religious Right, and thereby offer a direction for public theology to speak to power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The key to unlocking this debate, I contend, is Manifest Destiny, a notion legitimizing power that combines a sense of action and direction, faith and nation. However, before exploring the four phases of Manifest Destiny, I will look more deeply at Niebuhr.

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<sup>59</sup> See especially the volumes by Lovin, Harries and Rice in the bibliography.

## Chapter 2

### The Rise and Fall and Rise Again of Reinhold Niebuhr

Reinhold Niebuhr<sup>60</sup> was a pastor and theologian whose work uniquely straddles the disciplines of Theology and International Relations. In this chapter, I provide an explanation and critique of Niebuhr and address the considerable criticisms of two of his major theological critics, Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank, and the charge of Constantinianism. In Chapter 6, I will address specifically whether Niebuhr may have gravitated toward Neoconservatism himself without becoming a fully “paid-up” member.

Niebuhr died in 1971, two years into the Nixon presidency. A giant for much of his career, he fell out of favor with liberals who became critical of his compromise with power and his apparent ignorance of the issues of race and feminism.<sup>61</sup> He never completely disappeared and a number of

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<sup>60</sup> There is an extensive body of work on Niebuhr cited hereafter and in the bibliography. One of the most extensive and helpful studies is the symposium of essays in Charles W. Kegley (ed.), *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social and Political Thought* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1984). I highlight this text because it tackles the breadth of Niebuhr’s thought, and offers a chapter of Niebuhr’s responses to the analysis and criticism. It also contains an excellent bibliography of primary sources cited by year. Charles C. Brown, *Niebuhr and His Age* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992) offers a useful bibliographical essay on secondary sources, p.255f

<sup>61</sup> I use the term “ignorant” not in the pejorative but descriptive sense. Various theologians, including black and feminist theologians, have criticized him for being part of a WASP status quo. In his Birks lectures, published in Gary A. Gaudin and Douglas John Hall (eds.), *Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) A Centenary Appraisal*, (Montreal: McGill University, 1992), Larry Rasmussen explains that Niebuhr “while [he] knows plenty about power as power-to, much too consistently ‘tilts’ his treatment of power towards the doctrine of sin. This is the reason he is vulnerable not only to accusations of a certain profound pessimism, but to the criticism of feminists, African-Americans and other minorities in the U.S., as well as ‘Third World’ people who detect in him a subtle cultural imperialism of power-as-controlling-order and power-on-behalf-of.” p.182. However, Therese L. DeLisio, Did Reinhold Niebuhr Care About Racism in America? *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* [61:3-4 2008] pp. 1-16, argues that although he did write on the race issue it was never a central issue for him, and if Niebuhr “were to be charged with not caring enough, he would probably acknowledge he could have done better” p.16. Daphne Hampson [Harries, ed. 1986] provides a feminist appraisal of Niebuhr and sin, citing other feminist works. These criticisms are largely merited, but it could be argued Niebuhr was responding to the issues of the day whilst also being a creature of his age, as Rasmussen, *ibid*, suggests “Niebuhr’s experience and perspectives, and the circles in which he came to move with real influence, were the circles of North Atlantic, largely white and male, shakers and movers in the worlds of academy, religion, culture and public policy.” p.175.



attempts have been made to reassign Niebuhr in recent decades, both on the Left and the Right.<sup>62</sup> Most recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in Niebuhr in the wake of the Iraq War, with President Barack Obama calling him “One of my favorite philosophers.” Niebuhr is the one theologian mentioned by all three of the Democratic presidents since Niebuhr’s death.<sup>63</sup> Bill Clinton listed *The Irony of American History* amongst his 21 most favorite books; the only theologian he listed. In a letter dated January 8<sup>th</sup> 1976 to Niebuhr’s wife Ursula, Jimmy Carter wrote:

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<sup>62</sup> The fight over the Niebuhr legacy is an intriguing one, which is captured by Paul Elie, A Man for all Reasons, *The Atlantic Monthly* (November 2007) 83-96. Elie provides a good synopsis of recent debate between the left and right. The main engagement I will be looking at is the connection between Niebuhr and neoconservatism (neocons). Michael Novak is a key voice on this point. Novak has offered thoughtful commentary from a neocon perspective and discusses a “neocon Niebuhrism” though he does not claim Niebuhr as a neocon, see his book *Choosing Our King: Powerful Symbols on Presidential Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1974) and his two major essays, Needing Niebuhr Again, *Commentary*, 54:3, (1972: Sept), 52-62; Reinhold Niebuhr: Model for Neoconservatives, *The Christian Century*, January 22, 1986. Novak joins Richard John Neuhaus, and George Weigel as leading lights in what was subsequently called the “Theocons,” for their linking of faith (largely Roman Catholic, which connected to Jewish thinkers as I will explain below) to neoconservative political thought, see Damon Linker, *The Theocons: Secular America Under Siege* (New York: Anchor, 2007). On the religious left, Bill Kellerman, Apologist of power: The Long Shadow of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Christian realism, *Sojourners* (16 March, 1987) 15-20, called Niebuhr an apologist of American power. Robin Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), sounds appropriate caution when he writes “Both the Christian neo-conservatives who find in Niebuhr a prophet of triumphant liberal democracy and the Christian radicals who dismiss him as an “apologist for power” need to recover the penetrating insight that discovers the taint of self-interest in every moral position, including one’s own.” p.31. See also, Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (London: Routledge, 2004) and, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993, 1994); the first foreshadowed the Bush II presidency and the latter rooted neocon power firmly in the Bush II administration. Gary Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009] provides an in-depth historical study of the Social Gospel movement and features, at time almost like gossip, background to many the voices in the Niebuhr theological space. Though excellent, the study features a less focussed final chapter rallying against the Iraq war; for my review of Dorrien, see David Cowan, *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* By Gary Dorrien, *Journal of Theological Studies* [61:1, 2010] 467-470. Michael C. Williams, What is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in IR Theory, *European Journal of International Relations* (11: 307, 2005), offers an account of the theoretical foundations of Neoconservatism, arguing a renewed relevance of classical realism, including Niebuhr and Morgenthau, who “provided prescient warnings of the dangerous directions in which neoconservative understandings of the national interest could lead.” Robin Lovin, Reinhold Niebuhr in Contemporary Scholarship: A Review Essay, *The Journal of Religious Ethics* (31:3, Winter 2003) p487-505 provides an overview of recent scholarship, tracking the increased popularity of Niebuhr. Kenneth Durkin, Reinhold Niebuhr (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989) assesses the relationship between Niebuhr’s evolving theology and its relationship to changing political circumstances, which provide opportunities for various parties to claim him for their own. A point also made by Ruurd Veldhuis, *Realism versus Utopianism: Reinhold Niebuhr’s Christian realism and the Relevance of Utopian Thought for Social Ethics* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1975), arguing maybe “this is the irony of Niebuhr’s development: the more he comes to discard the initial partiality of his social thought and to strip it of its ideological one-sidedness, the more his ‘mature’ thought becomes suited for ideological misuse by others.” p.126

<sup>63</sup> The 2008 Republican candidate John McCain has also praised Niebuhr in his book *John McCain with Mark Salter, Hard Call* (New York: Hachette, 2007)

When I heard of your husband's death in 1971, mine was a selfish sorrow - because I had always wanted to meet him. He contributed to my private education more than you could know. In my acceptance speech at the convention I used one of Dr. Niebuhr's ideas. That love must be translated into justice in order to be effective.<sup>64</sup>

This resurgence of interest in Niebuhr coincides with the fact that religion itself has made “a comeback” in understanding International Relations, as the discipline seeks resources to interpret the shift in religious influence on the contemporary political scene.

Niebuhr was a liberal, whose politics were always left of the center, firstly becoming radically left and Marxist before swinging back to settle left of center.<sup>65</sup> His politics, and his belief in political action, were forged in his time working as a pastor in Detroit, especially engaging with car workers at the Henry T. Ford factory from 1915 to 1928. His classic work *Moral Man and Immoral Society* was written in the summer of 1932, and has remained in print ever since, though it owes rather more to Karl Marx than to Scripture; the New York Times review at the time headlined it “Doctrine of Christ and Marxism Linked.”<sup>66</sup> His politics remained Socialist, joining the Socialist third party in New York until the 1940s and then aligning himself with the Socialist wing of the Democratic Party, founding the Union for Democratic Action in 1941. This was the anvil on which Niebuhr hammered home his criticisms of liberal illusions.

Niebuhr was critical of the optimism in liberalism and the progressive view of history, offering what Robert Song calls a “chastened progressivism.”<sup>67</sup> He argued liberals were too optimistic about common humanity, because they ignored the reality that humanity is riddled with sin. Meanwhile conservatives were too stoically<sup>68</sup> trusting of authority as a means of controlling sinful

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<sup>64</sup> Box 46, Reinhold Niebuhr Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>65</sup> Ronald H. Stone tells the political biography of Niebuhr, interlacing a study of Niebuhr’s theological and political views in *Professor Reinhold Niebuhr: A Mentor to the Twentieth century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992). See also, Richard W. Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: a Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row,;

<sup>66</sup> Rasmussen, *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>67</sup> Robert Song, *Christianity and Liberal Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) p.70. Michael Novak, *Choosing Our King* (New York: MacMillan, 1974) called Niebuhr the “greatest moral teacher....he established a vocabulary for criticizing the innocence, pretension and moral arrogance that have marred American life in every generation.” p.94

<sup>68</sup> Milbank accuses Niebuhr equally of stoicism, see his criticism in Ch.5

humanity, believing everyone has to be accountable. In the liberal case humanity needs to recognize God's love, not human love. In the conservative case, humanity is capable of transcending sinful nature by reaching out for God. Perhaps for this reason, it has been easy for different voices, liberal and conservative alike, to claim Niebuhr for their own. Whereas conservatives criticize both the institutions and theories of liberalism, Niebuhr is critical of elements of liberal theory but endorses its institutions. He denounced all theories that do not situate the problem of human misery in sin or shift the problem of sin from the self to social or institutional processes. He understood democracy to be the result of the bourgeois revolution and as such an ideology of particular class interest, believing there is a bourgeois optimism of democratic life which Niebuhr argued "represents the typical illusion of an advancing class which mistook its own progress for the progress of the world."<sup>69</sup>

Niebuhr's approach provides a means of unpacking faith and foreign policy. In contrast to the Religious Right as a movement, it was Niebuhr the individual theologian, who pioneered theological engagement with foreign policy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. However, the America Niebuhr addressed was different. It was theologically simpler, with an operative public theology in terms of American foreign policy that essentially contrasted Christian America to godless Communism, a picture with a high level of assent in the nation.<sup>70</sup> The enemy was clear, the tension self-supporting and the vast majority of conservative Christians did not move beyond this dichotomy. Niebuhr brought a more sophisticated approach, seeing politics as a place where power and morality meet with some ambiguity. He sought to find another path, and to prick the consciences of all sides in order to have them face what he called Christian Realism. His Christian Realism informed and resonated with Classical Realism, the dominant theory of International Relations, which in fact seeks to exclude religion as a guide, although it does not dispense with morality altogether.<sup>71</sup> Niebuhr bridged the gap between the two disciplines and was able to speak to power

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<sup>69</sup> Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Children of Light and The Children of Darkness* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1945), p.2

<sup>70</sup> This is not to say there was not a range of theological opinion or a lack of sophisticated opinion, but I venture that what there was was overshadowed by this overarching paradigm

<sup>71</sup> The realist E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), explained "The realist cannot logically accept any standard value save that of fact. In his view, the absolute standard of the utopian is conditioned and dictated by the social order, and is therefore political. Morality can only be relative, not universal. Ethics must be interpreted in terms of politics; and the search for an ethical norm outside politics is doomed to frustration. The identification of the supreme reality with the supreme good, which Christianity achieves by a bold stroke of dogmatism, is achieved by the realist through the assumption that there is no good other than the acceptance and understanding of reality." p.19. While Hans Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest. A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1982), stated "The

in a way the powerful could understand, achieving what is possible in the ultimate art of the possible: politics. His efforts did not go without criticism, particularly from the discipline of Theology. The main line of criticism was that Niebuhr allowed secular liberals and the powerful to embrace his moral argument without buying into the theological assumptions he made and resulted in a constantinian theology.

### **Niebuhr's America: Doing a Power of Good?**

Central to Niebuhr's understanding is that behind every ideal there lies self-interest, and the advantage of democracy is that it creates conditions for a society and government which allows interplay between self-interested groups. However, Stanley Hauerwas argues that Niebuhr was vague about exactly what democracy looks like, because he assumed American democracy was fairly normative, to the extent he was an apologist for the Cold War as a foreign policy "insider" who lost his objectivity on the matter.<sup>72</sup> If he was vague about the meaning of democracy, he lived with a very clear idea of its nemesis. Niebuhr was writing in an era witnessing the rise of collectivist and totalitarian regimes threatening the stability of democratic nations, and he responded to this historical shift. A dramatic instance of his responsiveness was his answer to his brother's article on Japan's invasion of Manchuria, where H. Richard Niebuhr argued for accepting helplessness as the essential moral response.<sup>73</sup> Reinhold argued to the contrary that Christians must act to limit by state means aggressive actions by other states, before there were more dire consequences.<sup>74</sup> However, despite seeing democracy as the political space where humanity can cooperate and realize a better society, he also sought to navigate a path between utopianism and illusion. Niebuhr explained:

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equation of political moralizing with morality and of political realism with immorality is itself untenable. The choice is not between moral principles and the national interest, devoid of moral dignity, but between one set of moral principles divorced from political reality, and another set of moral principles derived from political reality." p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, in his Gifford Lectures at St Andrews University published as Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001); see Hauerwas discussion below. Veldhuis, *Ibid*, says Niebuhr "has not been very precise in defining what democracy means e.g. on the institutional level. It is clear that much of the specific American and British traditions is presupposed." p.119

<sup>73</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, The Grace of Doing Nothing, *Christian Century*, 49 (March 23, 1932), 378-380

<sup>74</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, Must We Do Nothing?, *Christian Century*, 49 (March 30, 1932), 415-417

...a healthy society must seek to achieve the greatest possible equilibrium of power, the greatest possible number of centers of power, the greatest possible social check upon the administration of power, and the greatest possible inner moral check on human ambition, as well as the most effective use of forms of power in which consent and coercion are compounded.<sup>75</sup>

Niebuhr was working with many of the themes I have discussed so far, and turned these themes of democracy, freedom and balance of power into a warning for America, and a caution in respect to ideals and the outcomes of history.<sup>76</sup> After all, it is a commonplace in executing foreign policy that nations offer ideals and virtue as justification for acts beyond their borders. As noted, America sees democratic ideals and the virtue of freedom as satisfactory reasons for action, which are at the center of America's Manifest Destiny. Niebuhr saw a need to limit this view, so he did not take the same view as Truman, Eisenhower or Billy Graham that Christian America stood in some eschatological conflict with Communism. He believed America's foreign policy at times reveals a lack of political and moral maturity and gives America illusions that it is the world's savior. This was something he picked up on early in his writings. In the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1930, Niebuhr wrote of the American tendency towards Puritan oversimplification:

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<sup>75</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, Coercion, Self-Interest and Love, in Kenneth Boulding (ed.), *The Organizational Revolution* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), pp. 242-44

<sup>76</sup> Veldhuis, *Ibid* suggests "There are probably very few people who have so consistently criticized their own country and exposed its hypocrisy as Niebuhr. Nevertheless, there are many passages in his books and articles which make the foreigner feel uneasy because of Niebuhr's way of identifying himself with the American cause." p.126. Novak, *ibid*, explained Niebuhr "established a vocabulary for criticizing the innocence, pretension, and moral arrogance that have marred American life in every generation." p.94. This is related to the influence of European thinking on Niebuhr, as John C. Bennett, *Christian Realism* [London: SCM Press, 1941], writes "More effectively than anyone else in America he mediates to us insights that are common assumptions in European theology, and he does so without moderation." p.65. Douglas Hall, *The Cross and Contemporary Culture* in Richard Harries (ed.), *Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of Our Time* (Oxford: Mowbray, 1986), p.183f, offers valuable insight into the Lutheranism of Niebuhr's thought (distinct from being a Lutheran, which he was not), which was at "loggerheads with the whole of the American experiment" and which in historical terms saw Lutherans largely set themselves apart from American culture, while the vast majority of American (Calvinist) Christians and "the spirit of an evolving 'Americanism'" could co-opt Calvin, p.183f. Emil Brunner, *Reinhold Niebuhr's Work as a Christian Thinking* in Charles W. Kegley (ed.), *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social and Political Thought* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1984) praised Niebuhr's assault "It is greatly to this theologian's credit that he aimed his guns at the optimistic American progress-philosophy at a time when on the whole it was still largely unchallenged. With Niebuhr, this assault was made from two positions: first of all from his widened Christian understanding of sin, but then also from the standpoint of Biblical eschatology." p.85

The conscious and unconscious insincerities of statesmen and nations have always resulted in a measure of cynicism in international relations. If the world is growing particularly cynical about our moral pretensions, that may be partly due, not to our hypocrisy, but to our momentary eminence. Yet it does seem that our puritan background has made us more than ordinarily naïve in dealing with the complexities of modern international life. We make simple moral judgments, remain unconscious of the self-interest which colors them, support them with an enthusiasm which derives from our waning but still influential evangelical piety, and are surprised that our contemporaries will not accept us as saviors of the world.<sup>77</sup>

Writing in the context of McCarthyism for the *Partisan Review* in 1952, Niebuhr believed this Puritanism was as much a threat as external forces, criticizing this ethos of American foreign policy:

...we are almost in greater peril from the foes within than from the foe without. The foes within are the spirits of hysteria, hatred, mistrust, and pride. We are engaged in such a perpetual liturgy of self-congratulations about the virtues and achievements of the “American Way of life” that we not only make ourselves odious to the world, but also rob ourselves of the political wisdom required to wield power in a world which refuses to be made over into the image of America. Furthermore...public discussion of foreign policy has practically ceased, the foreign policy has been frozen into inflexible rigidity, and our cherished liberties are being engulfed. History has not revealed a deeper irony than the destruction of the spirit of democratic liberty in the name of devotion to it, which we have witnessed in this nation these past five years.<sup>78, 79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, Awkward Imperialists, *Atlantic Monthly* (vol. 145, May 1930), p.5

<sup>78</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, Our Country and Our Nation, *Partisan Review* (May-June 1952), p.302

<sup>79</sup> The five year period falls during the Truman administration, 1945-1953. Lovin, *Ibid*, points out “What modern Christian realists understand better than their Reformation-era forbears is that rulers need advice as well as power, and constitutional limits as well as legitimate authority. So the theologian cannot avoid going beyond the general prophetic condemnation of all unrighteousness to some specific advice about how imperfect and not altogether virtuous leaders ought to use the power that is placed in their hands.” p.30. See also, Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and The Children of Darkness* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1945), p.44.

Things did not improve from there, Niebuhr writing seven years later saw danger for America because:

...we are tempted to the fanatic dogma that our form of community is not only more valid, ultimately, than any other but that it is more feasible for all communities on all continents. We have made our position the more unpalatable by overemphasizing our military power.<sup>80</sup>

Earlier, in 1938, Niebuhr had warned of the passing of national symbols, the felling of the Tower of Babel.<sup>81</sup> Just as the pyramids of Egypt signified the height of its civilization, along with the injustices of the slavery which built them, the Empire State Building was completed just as the Great Depression hit America, and the League of Nations building in Geneva completed just as it failed. In Niebuhr's view, America had yet to face the ultimate issues or be confronted by the inadequacy of its own credo. Hence, the problem for America is the constant need to attest to, and maintain, its innocence, as Niebuhr put it:

One of the most pathetic aspects of human history is that every civilization expresses itself most pretentiously, compounds its partial and universal values most convincingly, and claims immortality for its finite existence at the very moment when the decay which leads to death has already begun.<sup>82</sup>

Niebuhr held that America exudes a self-confident belief in the advance of civilization,<sup>83</sup> and bringing other nations into the light, or setting its face against the darkness of those opposed to civilization. In America, Niebuhr argues there is a contest between "realists" who fear actions exceed self-interest, and "idealists" who seek to preserve innocence by neutrality, but there is an implicit lure of imperialism in Manifest Destiny:

There are two ways of denying our responsibilities to our fellowmen. The one is the way of imperialism, expressed in seeking to dominate them by our power. The other is the way

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<sup>80</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Nations and Empires* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), p.295

<sup>81</sup> One can't help being reminded here of the symbols attacked on 9/11.

<sup>82</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1938), p.39

<sup>83</sup> Niebuhr put the point more bluntly in his essay *America the Smug*, *Saturday Evening Post*, 11/16/1963 (Vol. 236 Issue 40), p12-17. Arthur Schlesinger, jr. (Kegley, *Ibid.*) noted Niebuhr "was much concerned with finding means to discipline both American power and American emotion. Inordinate anti-communism seemed a particular threat."p.219.

of isolationism, expressed in seeking to withdraw from our responsibilities to them. Geographical circumstances and the myths of our youth rendered us more susceptible to the latter than the former temptation.<sup>84</sup>

This has made America the most reluctant power in history to acknowledge its role in the world and for Niebuhr America lacked moral consciousness of its own power, swinging between moods of “complete irresponsibility and cynicism.”<sup>85</sup> It swings from a “disavowal of the responsibilities of power”, in fear of its corruptions, to displays of “adolescent pride of power and a cynical disregard of its responsibilities.” He believed that interventionist moralists were more likely to cause problems than cynical realists.<sup>86</sup>

### **Not the End of History, but Beyond History**

Central to Niebuhr’s thought, and a major connection to classical realism, is the Augustinianism of his thought, or at least his critical account of Augustine’s political realism.<sup>87</sup> For Christian realism, the key to understanding the tension between pessimistic realism, which leads to cynicism, and optimistic liberalism, which leads to illusion, may be found in Augustine’s analysis of *civitas terrena* and *civitas dei*, allowing Niebuhr a sleight of hand to rescue realism from confinement to describing the way the world is without recourse to hope. Niebuhr explains:

The tension between the two cities is occasioned by the fact that, while egotism is ‘natural’ in the sense that it is universal, it is not natural in the sense that it does not conform to man’s nature who transcends himself indeterminately and can only have God rather than self for his end. A realism becomes morally cynical or nihilistic when it assumes that the universal characteristic in human behavior must also be regarded as normative. The

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<sup>84</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Godly and the Ungodly* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), p.37

<sup>85</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1938), p.125

<sup>86</sup> Schlesinger, (Kegley, *Ibid.*) argues while Niebuhr “never abandoned his realist analysis of foreign affairs, this analysis became the vehicle for ever-sharpening criticisms of messianic delusion in American foreign policy; in fact, such delusions were more vulnerable to questions about national interest than to questions about national ideals.” p.218.

<sup>87</sup> Niebuhr offered his most sustained appraisal in his Frances Carroll Memorial Lecture delivered at Columbia University, published in Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954)



biblical account of human behavior, upon which Augustine bases his thought, can escape both illusion and cynicism because it recognizes that the corruption of human freedom may make a behavior pattern universal without making it normative.<sup>88</sup>

For Augustine, love and not self-love is the law of man's existence. Augustine takes into account the power and persistence of egotism in seeking to set the problem within the context of human sin. It is in understanding the tension between love which has God as its object, and, self-love which has egotism as its object that we come to see Augustine's political realism as a powerful guide. Niebuhr highlights love may not be as realistic as notions of justice, and hence Augustine suffers from "several grave errors."<sup>89</sup> One of which, he argues, is that Augustine does not take into account the conflict between love and self-love in every soul, as Luther's phrase puts it *simul justus et peccator*, both justified and a sinner. His view is also, Niebuhr suggests, more classical than biblical, more indebted to Plotinus than to New Testament notions of *agape*. Despite such errors, however, Niebuhr commends Augustine to the modern realist as far superior to others, in part

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<sup>88</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p.123f

<sup>89</sup> Niebuhr, 1954, *ibid* p.123. In much of the literature, the Augustinianism of Niebuhr is taken as a given, but there have been challenges to his interpretation of Augustine and suggestions Niebuhr himself suffers from grave errors. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) writes, "Niebuhr does not grasp Augustine's vision of the ontological primacy of perfection for life here on earth. And because he associates the social with finitude and constraint, he is never able, as is Augustine, to see love as the original law of human *social* being." fn.10, p.252. Geoffrey Rees, *The Anxiety of Inheritance: Reinhold Niebuhr and the Literal Truth of Sin*, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, [31:1], pp.75-99, argues that in seeking to "correct" Augustine on original sin and remove "literalistic errors", Niebuhr has highlighted the truth of original sin, but his reading requires some refinement. Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) provides an account which contradicts Niebuhr's understanding. Charles T. Matthews, *Reading Reinhold Niebuhr Against Himself*, *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (9:1999), pp.69-94 provides an in-depth look at Niebuhr and Augustine, especially in relation to sin and cynicism, and, responsibility. Matthews challenges the notion that Niebuhr essentially took a negative lead from Augustine, arguing instead that he also took a positive view in understanding of the role of love. Michael Loriaux, *The Realists and Saint Augustine: Skepticism, Psychology, and Moral Action in International Relations Thought*, *International Studies Quarterly* [36:4, Dec 1992] pp. 401-420, offers an insightful study of Augustine, realism and Niebuhr, concluding "The encounter with Augustine suggests two directions. First, it should examine more thoroughly the sources of realism's foundational skepticism. The modern realist has tried to ground his skepticism regarding the progressive power of reason in assumptions of rational behavior. The effort is, to say the least, counterintuitive. It has weakened the realist's claims to be a skeptic by making him a believer in rational strategic interaction. Thus the realist is dismissive of projects that aim at global reform through international cooperation because they require unwarranted assumptions regarding the behavior of other nations. Yet the realist embraces the doctrine of mutual deterrence though it requires the same assumptions... Second, our exploration should delve more deeply into the moral ramifications of realism's foundational skepticism. Modern realist literature either assumes uncritically that the defense of the nation is the highest good that can be achieved in international politics, or it assumes that what is good for the United States is good for the world because it is stabilizing for the world. Uncritical patriotism, however, is not the most obvious implication of moral skepticism. Augustine explores another implication: we cannot cure the world's ills, but we can care for the ailing-by promoting and protecting a kind of civic virtue." p.418

because he relied on biblical notions of selfhood, negotiating his way through biblical norms and human values. While arguing we need to take into account some of their condemnation of human nature, Niebuhr<sup>90</sup> is critical of Luther and Hobbes for stating a purely pessimistic view of human nature, and for believing that the human character is devoid of inner checks upon expansive desires. Democratic theorists, on the other hand, are overly optimistic about human nature. In *The Children of Light and The Children of Darkness*, Niebuhr suggested the individual and the community are related to each other on many levels. The highest individual consciousness and awareness, rooted in social experience, finds ultimate meaning in relation to the community. The individual, as a product of the whole socio-historical process, may yet reach a level of uniqueness apparently transcending his social history completely, but individual decisions and achievements grow into, and out of, the community, finding final meaning in the community.

Perhaps anticipating an era of globalization, Niebuhr concluded:

The world community, toward which all historical forces seem to be driving us, is mankind's final possibility and impossibility. The task of achieving it must be interpreted from the standpoint of faith which understands the fragmentary and broken character of all historic achievements and yet has confidence in their meaning, because it knows their completion to be in the hands of a Divine Power, whose resources are greater than those of men, and whose suffering love can overcome the corruptions of man's achievements without negating the significance of our striving.<sup>91</sup>

Politics, as the art of the possible, is the horizon of here and now, while the divine horizon, the not yet, is the test of this present horizon. Niebuhr argued we can transcend politics by appeal to the far divine horizon of love, and he sought to reconcile our understanding of the human condition with the divine potential, but given that we live in tension between the two, has Niebuhr successfully offered an answer to understanding international relations?

Niebuhr sought a more nuanced foreign policy, vindicating democracy whilst offering a critique of its traditional defense, which he saw as too idealistic and ignorant of the harsh realities posited by Augustine and Hobbes. The famous aphorism Niebuhr writes in his introduction to *The*

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<sup>90</sup> Niebuhr, 1945, Ibid., p.36

<sup>91</sup> Niebuhr, 1945, Ibid., p.128

*Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* sums up his realistic appreciation of democracy, “Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.”<sup>92</sup> In this publication of 1944 lectures at Leland Stanford University, he again sought to navigate a tension, this time a Christian path between the historical optimism of democracy and the moral cynicism that has led human communities into tyrannical political strategies. Niebuhr offered a critique that democracy is a bourgeois, middle class ideology, advanced through economics and suffrage, which mistakes their own progress for the progress of the world. In *Beyond Tragedy*, Niebuhr stated “Bourgeois society imagines itself free of prejudices.”<sup>93</sup> Yet, there is no such freedom, because there is no historical reality which “is not involved in the flux and relativity of human existence.”<sup>94</sup>

For Niebuhr the individual transcends community, which presents modern democratic theory with a problem:

Though the individual is organically related to the community, there is a point in human freedom where the individual transcends both his own community and the total historical process. Modern democratic theory has been too secular to understand or measure this full height of human transcendence. That is why it tends to oscillate between an individualism which makes the individual his own end, and a collectivism which regards the community as the end of the individual.<sup>95</sup>

The individual sense of destiny and self-sufficiency underpins the “Social Contract” theory, which is seen as the best organizing principle of society. This contract assumes that human will and fiat is the origin of community and government. While Marxism is usually dismissed as collectivist and anti-individualist, Niebuhr suggests Marxism “really desires a perfect harmony between the individual and the community.”<sup>96</sup> It falls short because it does not appreciate “the greater depths and tensions” of human life. The difficulty lies in balancing groups and centers of power within society, and Niebuhr explains that:

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<sup>92</sup> Niebuhr, 1945, *Ibid.*, p.vi.

<sup>93</sup> Niebuhr, 1938, *Ibid.*, p.34

<sup>94</sup> Niebuhr, 1945, *Ibid.*, p.53

<sup>95</sup> Niebuhr, 1945, *Ibid.*, p.58

<sup>96</sup> Niebuhr, 1945, *Ibid.*, p.45

...the power which organizes society is wielded by a particular group; and in as far as it rests upon that group it will not be as unequivocally interested in the general welfare as it claims to be...Jesus regarded the political aspect of messianism as such a terrible temptation because illusions about politics lead to the most baneful consequences. They lead to the religious sanctification of the inevitable injustices of a particular power.<sup>97</sup>

At this point, in looking at organizing society and the world, we can turn to the Niebuhrian solution to the level of analysis problem to offer a theological explanation for behavior in international relations. For Niebuhr, the meaning of history is revealed in the Christ Event and grasped only by faith.<sup>98</sup> Niebuhr writes that we “are living in a world which falls short of the Kingdom of God even though the law of the Kingdom has been revealed to it.”<sup>99</sup> To understand this, he offers the insight of the suffering servant model. For those who put faith in nations and leaders, they ought to recall, as Niebuhr does, who put Jesus to death:

The Savior of the world is not crucified by criminals or obviously evil people; he is crucified with criminals by the “princes of this world,” to use the Pauline phrase. Love is the law of life; but when it enters the world of relative justice and balanced egotism it is destroyed in it. The suffering servant dies on the cross. This paradox is perfectly expressed in the Johannine Gospel: “He was in the world and the world was made through him...he

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<sup>97</sup> Niebuhr, 1938, *Ibid.*, p.179f

<sup>98</sup> Niebuhr's Christology is assessed by Paul Lehmann, *The Christology of Reinhold Niebuhr* [Kegley, *Ibid.*] highlights that while Niebuhr is not a systematic thinker, by his own admission Christology is the passion and purpose of his work. However, “Despite its insistence upon the Cross as the standpoint from which it is possible to make sense out of the manifold and complex dynamic of history, Niebuhr's Christological thinking does not sufficiently stress “the mighty acts of God” as transforming events which, having actually occurred, serve as beacon lights in a sea of historical relativity whereby the channel to the fulfilment of human destiny is charted.” p.355. Paul R. Kolbet, Rethinking the Christological Foundations of Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism, *Modern Theology* [26:3, July 2010], pp.437-465, argues Niebuhr “rejected the entire development of classical Christology,” but “rather than undermining the classical Christological tradition, Niebuhr's thought provides substantive ethical insight for any contemporary appropriation of it.” p.442. See also, J. M. Lochman, The Problem of Realism in R. Niebuhr's Christology, *Scottish Journal of Theology* [11, 1958] pp 253-264. Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), discussed below in more detail, is also critical of his Christology, but as Scott Paeth, Being wrong and being right: a response to Larry Rasmussen and Robin Lovin, *Political Theology* [6:4, Oct 2005] p 473-486 notes, “Hauerwas's selective reading of the literature allows him to cherry-pick those passages most favorable to his own reading, while ignoring the great portion of Niebuhr's work that stands against it. Hauerwas's strategy of reading the entirety of Niebuhr's theological career through the lens of his B.D. thesis gives him ammunition for conflating Niebuhr with James, yet completely ignores the major transformations that Niebuhr underwent throughout his career.” p.481

<sup>99</sup> Niebuhr, 1938, *Ibid.*, p.181f

came unto his own and his own received him not.” The implication is that human nature has deviated from the law of its existence, that man is estranged from his essential nature. Christ is the essential nature of man, or as St. Paul expresses it, the “Second Adam...”<sup>100</sup>

This Second Adam, Niebuhr notes, is crucified by the first Adam, who is trying to build up the world in government and church. Jesus is destroyed by the princes of the world, and his chief opponents are the best of people, the Pharisees.<sup>101</sup> The kingdom of God, in entering the world, is judged by the world, but also reveals the world for what it is measured against, the commandment of love which is manifestly the pattern of life shown by Christ. Christ comes also as the “son of man” in history, and brings the Kingdom of God into history. Yet, Niebuhr explains:

...when it comes, it is the end of history. Ultimate salvation is not a moral possibility. The sinful self-contradiction in the human spirit cannot be overcome by moral action, since every moral action, even the highest and purest, expresses it. The world cannot live by the laws of Christ, not only because (as Luther put it) there are not enough Christians but because no one is Christlike enough. Human society may continue to develop from primitive innocence to maturity; but there is no final conquest of good over evil in this development. Both good and evil develops. Both the city of God and the city of the world grow, as Augustine observed. History consequently presents a problem which points beyond history.<sup>102</sup>

Niebuhr concludes his argument:

The Kingdom of God thus lies beyond history. But the Kingdom of God is not some realm of eternity which negates time. It is a realm of eternity which fulfils time. Therefore it is not impossible for the eternal to set up a symbol in time. That is Christ and the Kingdom of the suffering servant. But it is also possible that the defeat of this suffering servant should have within itself the symbol of an ultimate victory. The basic plan of life cannot

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<sup>100</sup> Niebuhr, 1938, *Ibid.*, p.182

<sup>101</sup> We ought to bear in mind here other interpretations of the how and why of the arrest, trial and condemnation of Jesus. Cullman explains how Jesus, while not a Zealot, was put to death as part of a clampdown on the Zealots, who were also numbered among his disciples. It is noteworthy, as Cullman points out, that the Christian creeds include Pontius Pilate as the one who condemns Jesus, rather than, say, the Pharisees.

<sup>102</sup> Niebuhr, 1938, *Ibid.*, p.190f

be finally defeated. The will of God prevails even when the Son of God is crucified. In that very crucifixion God has absorbed the contradictions of historic existence into Himself. Thus Christianity transmutes the tragedy of history into something which is not tragedy. God is revealed as not only the ground but the goal of human existence and man's rebellion against God is proved to be an abortive effort which cannot finally prevail. The suffering servant is the son of man.<sup>103</sup>

Niebuhr sets politics apart from other forms of human endeavor. He saw politics as that process of democracy which ensures a balance of freedom and order. Politics is where power and morality meet, but, as Kenneth W. Thompson points out it is also where coercion is as present as cooperation.<sup>104</sup> In this, Niebuhr is assuming democracy, chiefly America as a liberal state, is the reality we must participate in individually and collectively to confront evil in the world. The religious and secular alternatives are not acceptable to him, since they either pave a way to hell littered with liberal illusions, or they result in quietism and leave us as bystanders to evil. We can question, if these positions are correct, whether Niebuhr offers the only and the best alternative, and will do so on two fronts. First, it appears that Niebuhr is accepting democracy, specifically American democracy, on its own terms, and it is the process of negotiating cooperation and coercion which drives the engine of realism, which is why ultimate political and human power are accepted, even to the extent of justifying use of force. We can question whether this is Christian realism, or just classical realism with a smile on its face. Second, in making his assessment, Niebuhr draws heavily on Augustine, so we can also ask whether Niebuhr has successfully expounded an Augustinian political theology, as discussed above. While Augustinian pessimism is at work here, Wilken offers a succinct outline of Augustine's position which is less pessimistic than realists and Niebuhr suggest:

Augustine's argument rests on a theological conviction and an experiential truth. The theological conviction is that happiness can only be found in fellowship with God and with each other in God, for God is the final good toward which human life tends and for whom human beings were created. Because we are made in the image of God our destiny is to live in fellowship with God. The experiential truth is that human life offers no certain and

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<sup>103</sup> Niebuhr, 1938, *Ibid.*, p.192

<sup>104</sup> Kenneth W. Thompson, Niebuhr and the Foreign Policy Realists in Daniel F. Rice (ed.), *Reinhold Niebuhr Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), p.141

enduring peace, whether it be peace among nations, peace within the city, peace in the home, or peace in the inner chambers of the soul. It is an illusion to think that one can achieve perfect happiness in this life, and it is vain to imagine that human beings can create institutions that will ensure durable peace and stability.<sup>105</sup>

Herein lies the difficulty of Niebuhr, that perhaps he was a man of his time, able to pit his defense of democracy against the apparently clear enemies of Nazism and Communism. If a new Niebuhrian strategy is needed today it may be because, at the end of this history, we need a political theology or realism that turns its light on democracy itself, in a world where the pride of democracy stands alone, which is the basis of the political theology advanced by totemic conservatives. In this, Augustine then stands out in showing the dissonance between our true security in God and the false promise of security in democracy. I turn now to Niebuhr's two major theological critics since there are theological concerns which need to be addressed in Niebuhr's approach if we are to understand how theology can speak to power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **Looking for the Best Sin to Commit: Criticism of Niebuhr**

Niebuhr produced much and widely, and I have touched on some of the theological and political criticisms hitherto, but in this section I will address the criticism aimed specifically at the relationship between the theological and political realms in his work, as they pertain to my overall thesis. I will focus on the criticisms made by Hauerwas (following Yoder) and Milbank, but some preliminary comments are in order. A note of caution is that Niebuhr revised his views in a world undergoing major changes, an approach lauded in his Serenity Prayer<sup>106</sup> by the phrase "courage to change."<sup>107</sup> Davis and Good have pointed out:

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<sup>105</sup> Robert L. Wilken, Augustine's City of God Today in Carl E. Braaten & Robert W. Jenson, *The Two Cities of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p.33

<sup>106</sup> Original version of Serenity Prayer and correspondence confirming Niebuhr as author are found in the Niebuhr Collection, Library of Congress, Box 37, 1966-1972, 1975 & Box 54, 1944-1987, undated

<sup>107</sup> Niebuhr's career is widely recognized as one in flux, responding to changes in the world he addressed, which Ronald H Stone, *Reinhold Niebuhr, Prophet To Politicians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), divides into four main periods: the liberal, the socialist, the Christian realist, and the pragmatic-liberal.

...the architecture of Niebuhr's political and ethical thought is anything but simple. It is full of dialectical cantilevers. The whole is suspended in marvelous tension like some Gothic cathedral that rises and is held fast only by the elaboration of opposing forces.<sup>108</sup>

The secular liberal critic Noam Chomsky, recalling Niebuhr's "triumphal British visit of 1939," offered an "inspired limerick":

At Swanwick, when Niebuhr had quit it  
A young man exclaimed 'I have hit it  
Since I cannot do right  
I must find out, tonight  
The right sin to commit - and commit it'<sup>109</sup>

In Chomsky's view, no rational person could find Niebuhr convincing, though he finds Niebuhr's legacy understandable:

The inescapable "taint of sin on all historical achievements," the necessity to make "conscious choices of evil for the sake of good" - these are soothing doctrines for those preparing to "face the responsibilities of power," or in plain English, to set forth on a life of crime, to "play hardball" in their efforts to "maintain this position of disparity" between our overwhelming wealth and the poverty of others, in George Kennan's trenchant phrase as he urged in a secret document of 1948 that we put aside "idealistic slogans" and prepare "to deal in straight power concepts." Herein lies the secret of Niebuhr's enormous influence and success.<sup>110</sup>

The implication of Chomsky's point is that Niebuhr is preaching to the converted, simply offering a moral justification for the actions of an unsavory foreign policy. The Constantianism and

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<sup>108</sup> Davis and Good, *Ibid.*, p.x

<sup>109</sup> Quoted from Reinhold Niebuhr, Noam Chomsky, *Grand Street*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Winter, 1987), p.212. However, it originates with the one-time Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple.

<sup>110</sup> Chomsky, *Ibid* p.212



Radical Orthodoxy charges set out below both highlight that Niebuhr is playing a utilitarian game of choosing the lesser evil. As John Howard Yoder defines the problem:

The choice or the tension which the Bible is concerned with is not between politics and something else which is not politics, but between right politics and wrong politics. Not between “spirit” and something else which is not spiritual, but between true and false spirits. Not between God and something else unrelated to God, but between the true God and false gods. Not between the politics of “men” and something else that would not be “of men,” but between men and women under God and men and women in rebellion against God’s rule.<sup>111</sup>

These two lines of criticism, however, go beyond the surface change to what they perceive as a structural defect in the cantilevered Niebuhrian construct.

### ***Critique I: Charges of Constantinianism - Hauerwas and Yoder***

Hauerwas offers his most sustained argument in *With the Grain of the Universe*,<sup>112</sup> a phrase taken from Yoder for his Gifford Lectures at the University of St Andrews, in which he makes the argument that his two predecessors as Gifford lectures, Niebuhr and William James, are but two sides of the same coin and that “Niebuhr’s Gifford Lectures are but a Christianized version of James’s account of religious experience.”<sup>113</sup> This in itself generated much critical comment against Hauerwas. Henry Samuel Levinson, argues Hauerwas “hates” Niebuhr’s works and “mangles” James’s works, and certainly overstates the negative case on both fronts.<sup>114</sup> Roger Gustavsson likewise takes Hauerwas to task for his handling of Niebuhr and natural theology. Gustavsson offers a detailed assessment of the lectures, arguing that Niebuhr is indebted to Paul and Augustine,

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<sup>111</sup> John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p.222. See also: John Howard Yoder, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism, a Church Peace Mission Pamphlet* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1968) a pamphlet which originally appeared as an article in the Mennonite Quarterly Review 29, 1955, pp.101f.

<sup>112</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001)

<sup>113</sup> Hauerwas, *Ibid.*, p.87

<sup>114</sup> Henry Samuel Levinson, Let Us Be Saints If We Can: A Reflection on Stanley Hauerwas's *With the Grain of the Universe*, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, (32.1:219-234)

not James.<sup>115</sup> Scott R. Paeth makes a helpful observation that “Hauerwas's strategy of reading the entirety of Niebuhr's theological career through the lens of his B.D. thesis gives him ammunition for conflating Niebuhr with James, yet completely ignores the major transformations that Niebuhr underwent throughout his career.”<sup>116</sup> Jewish theologian David Novak also seeks to correct Hauerwas, who while he appreciates a higher sense of orthodoxy shown by Hauerwas (as well as Barth), believes Niebuhr offers a better ethic, arguing:

I believe Niebuhr appealed to many nonreligious people because he treated idolatry as the root of the injustice they knew was so wrong. Niebuhr did not require them to make a theological commitment in order to be more coherently opposed to injustice. He did not require them to first affirm “the God of Justice” (Isaiah 30:18) in order to appreciate how injustice is not only an assault on humans, but on truth itself. Rather, Niebuhr worked to persuade them that their opposition to injustice would be more coherent if they understood that the injustice they opposed is not only human error at the epistemological level, but human deceit at the ontological level: substituting a false god for the true God. To affirm this Niebuhr needed his audience only to affirm the *possibility* that there is such a true God - and this is the beginning of hope.<sup>117</sup>

To which, Novak adds:

“I have learned more from Barth than I have learned from any other Christian theologian, ancient or modern. For that my mind owes him much. But as a Jew born in 1941, I might very well owe my life to Reinhold Niebuhr and those who were so influenced by his public theology.”<sup>118</sup>

According to Hauerwas,<sup>119</sup> we seek meaning in life and in addressing this search in *The Nature and Destiny of Man* Niebuhr offers a Jamesian deist theory in which he sought to naturalize

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<sup>115</sup> Roger Gustavsson, Hauerwas's With the Grain of the Universe and the Barthian Outlook: A Few Observations, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, (35.1:25–86)

<sup>116</sup> Scott R. Paeth, Being Wrong and Being Right: A Response to Larry Rasmussen and Robin Lovin, *Political Theology* (Oct 2005, Vol. 6 Issue 4, p473-486), p481

<sup>117</sup> David Novak Defending Niebuhr from Hauerwas, *Journal of Religious Ethics* (40:2, June 2012, 281–295), p.292

<sup>118</sup> Novak, *Ibid*, p.293

<sup>119</sup> Robert Song, *Ibid.*, p.78, agrees that Niebuhr uses Trinitarian language but the God of *The Nature and*

Theology to be acceptable to other human sciences. Hauerwas goes so far as to say that Niebuhr makes a Feuerbachian move to make God-talk a “disguised way to talk about humanity.”<sup>120</sup> Hauerwas argues:

Niebuhr’s project is to provide an account of the human condition that is so compelling that the more “absurd” aspects of “orthodox Christianity” – such as the beliefs that God exists and that God is love – might also receive a hearing.<sup>121</sup>

Equally, his Christian ethic of love is in effect a natural law ethic.<sup>122</sup> Hauerwas explains:

His ethics sought to make Christian belief intelligible and even useful within the presuppositions of political liberalism. Theological liberals after Niebuhr often want his theology without his ethics; and political conservatives, like the “atheists for Niebuhr,” often want his ethics without his theology. Yet Niebuhr, I think, rightly saw that you cannot have one without the other.<sup>123</sup>

Framed within his wish to make a case against those who would police Christian practices in the name of democracy, Hauerwas argues that Niebuhr’s justification of democracy is a form of “Constantinianism in a liberal key.”<sup>124</sup> Hauerwas, with Michael Broadway, argues that Niebuhr offers legitimacy for America’s political model which converged with American foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s, rather than a faithful or Bible-based political theology. Niebuhr was

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*Destiny of Man* is in truth Unitarian. Gustavsson, *Ibid*, challenges Hauerwas and Song on this reading, arguing in Niebuhr “One can construe the doctrine as a rule for avoiding reductive and excessive emphases on one or another of the modes or “persons” in Christian thinking and discourse about God and God’s way with the world.” p.34 Gary Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (Oxford: WileyBlackwell, 2009), provides the background to Hauerwas conversion from Niebuhrism to Yoder and virtue ethics, p.474f.

<sup>120</sup> Hauerwas, *Ibid.*, p.115. In assessing the mature stages of Niebuhr’s theology, and thus beyond the BD thesis preoccupying Hauerwas, Langdon Gilkey, *On Niebuhr* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2001) would refute Hauerwas by arguing “In Niebuhr’s theology, God cannot be a projection, a human idea shone outward into the cosmos, an ideal made transcendent by the creativity of human self-transcendence (though many of his statements in his early writings seemed to imply that view). Such a deity would for the mature Niebuhr be the creation of ordinary and all-too-common human idolatry, a product of a finite and so partial cultural imagination and so no more transcendent than any other cultural artifact. p.222

<sup>121</sup> Hauerwas, *Ibid.*, p.120

<sup>122</sup> Hauerwas, *Ibid.*, p.134. Hauerwas footnotes George Lindbeck was first to construe Niebuhr in natural law terms.

<sup>123</sup> Hauerwas, *Ibid.*, p.137

<sup>124</sup> Hauerwas, *Ibid.*, p.94

attempting to offer a theological language that connected to liberal assumptions about the human condition, and as Hauerwas points out liberals could accept his anthropology and social theory without accepting his theological assumptions,<sup>125</sup> suggesting Niebuhr “could not help but become the theologian of a domesticated god capable of doing no more than providing comfort to the anxious conscience of the bourgeoisie.”<sup>126</sup> Hauerwas, while expressing respect for Niebuhr doesn’t seem to like him or his thought very much, launching in his Gifford lectures a sustained assault on Niebuhr and the “thinness” of his theology.<sup>127</sup>

Hauerwas follows the line that Niebuhr was essentially a Protestant apologist<sup>128</sup> for America, asserting:

Niebuhr’s views prevailed for no other reason than that they were more in accord with the changing social and religious situation in America. American society was increasingly becoming a pluralist and secular society. As a result, Christian social ethicists felt it necessary to find ways in which their ethical conclusions could be separated from any theological framework. In the hope of securing societal good, the task of Christian ethics thus became the attempt to develop social strategies that people of good will could adopt even though they differed religiously and morally.<sup>129</sup>

In his Gifford Lectures, Hauerwas argued Niebuhr does not satisfy our search for meaning, because:

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<sup>125</sup> In a book review, Stanley Hauerwas, *The Search for the Historical Niebuhr*, Reinhold Niebuhr: A Political Account by Paul Merkley, *The Review of Politics* (38:3, July 1976), pp. 452-454, makes the accusation that “Niebuhr often appears to be trying to walk both sides of the street at the same time, e.g., he condemns violence but sees its necessity and justification” making him both insightful and frustrating.

<sup>126</sup> Hauerwas, *Ibid.*, p.138

<sup>127</sup> Hauerwas, *Ibid.*, p.138

<sup>128</sup> “Always working within the ‘givens’ of Protestant liberalism” as he states it, (Hauerwas, *Ibid.*) p.87. In Stanley Hauerwas, *The Democratic Policing of Christianity*, *Pro Ecclesia* (III:2), 215-231, he writes “God is killing Protestantism in America and we deserve it” citing approvingly Harold Bloom’s comment that American Religion “masks itself as Protestant Christianity yet has ceased to be Christian.” p.215

<sup>129</sup> Hauerwas, *Ibid.*, p.61

Niebuhr's work now represents the worst of two worlds: most secular people do not find his theological arguments convincing; yet his theology is not sufficient to provide the means for Christians to sustain their lives. If Niebuhr's account of Christian theology is no longer persuasive, it is surely bad news for those who believe that the future of Christianity depends on a concordat with liberal social and political arrangements. On the other hand, for those who believe, as I do, that the truth of Christian convictions requires a recovery of the confident use of Christian speech about God, speech that cannot help but put us at odds with Niebuhr-like accounts of ethics, then the newfound intelligibility of Barth's theology is surely good news.<sup>130</sup>

Nor do we find a place of meaning as church according to Hauerwas in his appraisal of Niebuhr's ecclesiology, or lack of it.<sup>131</sup> Niebuhr's failure to offer a role for church in his thought is set out by Hauerwas most concisely in a book review:

I am suggesting that in the absence of any clear understanding of the relationship between his sense of Christianity and its particular social ethical implications, Niebuhr's own position could not escape becoming an ideology for the development of interest group democracy. Ironically Niebuhr's failure to provide a significant place for the church in his social ethic left him with no place to stand except in that social system he earlier had exposed so brilliantly as morally destructive of human community and values.<sup>132</sup>

Christians have another problem with society identified by Hauerwas, in a statement that would certainly be openly embraced by the Christian Right, even if for different reasons:

Christians have learned to police their convictions in the name of sustaining such social orders. They cannot appear in public using explicit Christian language, since that would

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<sup>130</sup> Hauerwas, *Ibid.*, p.139

<sup>131</sup> Gabriel Fackre "Was Reinhold Niebuhr a Christian?" *First Things* 126 (October 2002, pp. 25-27), to the contrary finds the best evidence of Niebuhr's ecclesial identity in the collection of sermons and prayers gathered by Ursula Niebuhr after his death, and argues that Niebuhr only makes sense within his ecclesial context.

<sup>132</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The Search for the Historical Niebuhr*, Reinhold Niebuhr: A Political Account by Paul Merkley Review by: Stanley Hauerwas, *The Review of Politics* (38:3, July 1976), pp. 452-454. This is a criticism echoed in Milbank.

offend other actors in our alleged pluralist polity. But if this is genuinely a "pluralist" society, why should Christians not be able to express their most cherished convictions in public? If we are in an age of "identity politics," why does the identity of Christians need to be suppressed? "Pluralism" turns out to be a code word by mainstream Christians meaning that everyone gets to participate in the democratic exchange on their own terms except Christians themselves.<sup>133</sup>

Hauerwas has a problem with democracy, and Niebuhr's assumed defense of it, but he also says he does not know what democracy is in fact, and to ask the question "what should Christians want?" is a Constantinian question. Hauerwas states his alternative that "I would like Christians to recapture the posture of the peasant. The peasant seeks not to become the master but rather to know how to survive under the power of the master."<sup>134</sup> To which he adds:

The problem with democracy is quite simply the American people, who believe, after two centuries of instruction, that at least in the realm of politics their task is to pursue their own interests. We are finding it hard to restrict that lesson to "politics" as now people increasingly live it out in church and family.<sup>135</sup>

Hauerwas, in taking inspiration for the title of *With the Grain of the Universe* from John Howard Yoder, sought to extend the argument of Constantinianism beyond Yoder, who addressed principally the aspects of Just War theory and non-violent resistance in Niebuhr. In *For the Nations*, Yoder felt he had to answer the Niebuhrian charge that "Christians who embrace the nonviolent ethic of Jesus might be getting Jesus right, but thus render themselves politically irrelevant and socially irresponsible."<sup>136</sup> Reflecting on Diaspora Judaism, he noted Jeremiah made clear that living in exile without political sovereignty was an opportunity for mission and was a constructive contribution to the good of other cultures. This allowed the Diaspora to be both counter-cultural and pro-cultural, and acting "for the nations" did not depend on gaining access to power or being understood by the host culture. In his 1954 essay *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian*

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<sup>133</sup> Hauerwas, *Pro Ecclesia*, *Ibid.*, p.218.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p.230

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p.230

<sup>136</sup> Yoder (1997), *Ibid.*, p.415

*Pacifism*, he argued that although Niebuhr's recovery of an orthodox doctrine of sin biblically diagnosed the human predicament, it "consistently slighted" all "those Christian doctrines which relate to [God's] redemption" and point to the Bible's answer to our deepest human need adding that "the common denominator of the above-mentioned doctrines of resurrection, the church, and regeneration is that all are works of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is likewise neglected in Niebuhr's ethics."<sup>137</sup>

As an apologist for American foreign policy, Yoder took Niebuhr to task for his defense of a realist understanding of war:

"Realism" is clearly another type of war theory, undeniably different from both "just" and "holy" in qualitative way. It is not without its own kind of inherent logic and honesty, but this theory explicitly denies that other parties' rights can be fully respected... The logic of "realism" is the same from Machiavelli to Morgenthau, insofar as it overtly and honestly denies any accountability to or for other loci of value (communities, persons, tribunals, criteria, virtues) outside one's own nation.<sup>138</sup>

Yoder accepts there is some difference between the prince of Machiavelli and the democratic rule of Morgenthau, which at least extends recognition to other loci of values, though on the basis that they embrace the democratic ideal. However, this still leaves the moral basis of realism which is most tested under conditions of war. Yoder argues:

Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr, among others, would argue that "realism" is morally proper. At least this is a morally accountable position, albeit a paradoxical one. The paradox was well rendered in the phrase once used to describe Niebuhr: [it is] "the best sin to commit." This moral theory of realism on war holds that it is right that "wrong" should be done in the particular case or set of cases. For this theory, the inevitable (moral) evil of compromise with (material) evil can be mitigated by maintaining humility (appealing to an Augustinian or Lutheran doctrine of grace) and self-criticism.

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<sup>137</sup> Yoder (1968), *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.

<sup>138</sup> John Howard Yoder, How Many Ways Are There to Think Morally about War? *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1994 - 1995), pp. 83-107

Paradoxically, then, the most moral position in international relations is one which explicitly denies the directly binding relevance of ideal moral judgments, and makes only pragmatic judgments about self-interest. That position is more honest, and more likely to succeed, than its "idealistic" alternatives. To inject moral claims in any other way leads to self-righteousness and to imprudent (i.e. counterproductive and therefore immoral) wars.<sup>139</sup>

For Yoder, in considering Niebuhr's position on pacifism, there is a problem of Niebuhr basing the rationale for resistance on effectiveness, since in the view of Hauerwas and Yoder the true option is one of obedience to the way of Jesus. Niebuhr, in his Constantinianism, fails to take the Gospel into the world and indulges in an unacceptable compromise.

### ***Critique II: The Poverty of Niebuhrianism - Radical orthodoxy***

Radical Orthodoxy has launched an assault on Niebuhrian ethics from a different, but equally challenging, direction. In what John Milbank calls 'The Poverty of Niebuhrianism,' Niebuhr's realism is for Milbank an "unholy alliance" between Kant and utilitarianism. In his critique of Niebuhr and Christian realism, Milbank argues:

...the 'realities' to which it appeals are not the realities of history, nor the realities of which Christian theology speaks, but simply things generated by its own assumptions, its own language and rhetoric... 'Christian realism' has a tendency to become the opposite of what it claims to be - that its pessimism turns into over-optimism, its pragmatism into idealism, its anti-liberalism into liberalism, its confidence in God into confidence in humanity.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> John Howard Yoder, How Many Ways Are There to Think Morally about War? *Journal of Law and Religion* [11:1, 1994 – 1995] pp. 83-107

<sup>140</sup> John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p.233



Milbank would agree with Niebuhr if his realism had stopped at “pointing out the way in which our given historical circumstances limit the chances we have of behaving ethically.”<sup>141</sup> However, since Niebuhr does go beyond this point, Milbank has a quarrel with him in “certain notions of human nature” and “a particular version of the theology of original sin.” Milbank challenges the Augustinian understanding of Niebuhr, offering a different direction for understanding original sin and human action. The notion that “human finitude is an impassable barrier to the actualizing of the good life in the human world” is stoic in Milbank’s view,<sup>142</sup> which is also detectable in his attempt to recast a ‘two-kingdoms’ political theology. Robert Benne argued in *The Paradoxical Vision — A Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century*, in part as a response to Mark Noll’s suggestion that American public theology needed a dose of Lutheran thinking,<sup>143</sup> that “Niebuhr was the best American practitioner of Lutheran two-kingdoms thinking with his sharp distinction between what the Gospel does from God’s side and what we can do politically and socially from ours.”<sup>144</sup> Milbank, however, portrays this distinction in Niebuhr’s thought somewhat differently, “the basic focus of stoic ethics is on the encounter between an absolute spiritual ideal and a ‘chaotic’ finite world which it does its best to regulate.”<sup>145</sup>

In respect to original sin, Milbank argues Christian realism “appears to think of it as standing in some immediate, but non-historical relation to every individual.”<sup>146</sup> Milbank’s assessment is that:

The idea of original sin as individual and ahistorical here merges with the notion of government as a technical manipulation of chaotic human forces. Thus organized political

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<sup>141</sup> Milbank, *Ibid.*, pp.234-35

<sup>142</sup> John K. Burk, Moral Law, Privative Evil and Christian realism: Reconsidering Milbank’s ‘The Poverty of Niebuhrism’ *Studies in Christian Ethics* (22:2, 2009) 211–228, is not convinced Milbank correctly interprets the foundations of Niebuhr’s realism, and on his stoicism specifically argues “The reason Milbank characterizes Niebuhr’s realism as Stoic is because he thinks Niebuhr is committed to the Stoic idea that there are ‘natural barriers’ between the essential nature of love and the realities of human existence. These putative boundaries result in a division between ideal and real life. Milbank is right that Niebuhr does emphasize a distance between the foundation of love and the realities of human existence, and he rightly points to Niebuhr’s discussion of Stoicism in *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* as instructive for understanding Niebuhr’s realism. However, he misreads Niebuhr’s criticisms of Stoicism as adaptations of that law for Christian realism.” p.215

<sup>143</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Lutheran Difference*, First Things, February 1992, p.38

<sup>144</sup> Benne offered this précis of his argument in Reinhold Niebuhr as a Perennial Resource for Public Theology, *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (November 2010, Volume 10, Issue 11)

<sup>145</sup> John Milbank, *Nuclear realism and Christian reality: The Poverty of Niebuhrism* (Jubilee Group: London, 1986), p.6

<sup>146</sup> Milbank, *Ibid.*, p.245

power is strangely seen as itself immune from this taint, and it is absurdly imagined that it can keep the effects of this ‘taint’ under control’. This is precisely *not* to have a doctrine of original sin.<sup>147</sup>

Niebuhrian reality ultimately fails, in Milbank’s view, because it supposes there is some neutral ‘reality’ Christians can give some insights into, yet Christians see a different historical reality, which means it is not simply another value amongst others. Milbank argues:

Truth and persuasion are circularly related. We should only be convinced by rhetoric where it persuades us of the truth, but on the other hand truth *is* what is persuasive, namely what attracts and does not compel. And Christians only see this *entire* attraction in the figure on the cross, a specific and compelling refusal to return evil for evil...<sup>148</sup>

While the gospel denies evil can be contained, it can be rooted out amongst those in fellowship following the ways of Christ, reading reality under the sign of the cross; in other words, by “the persuasive Church, rather than any withdrawing from a realm of self-sufficient political life... When confronting Leviathan, we have to invoke the true power of the cross; otherwise have we not abandoned the reality which we serve?” Radical orthodoxy is, as Ben Quash notes, advances an “ecclesially centered ethic”:

It is robustly confident that Church exists as the embodiment of a uniquely counter-cultural and divinely informed sociality in the face of the modern West’s catastrophic embrace of various secular ideologies.<sup>149</sup>

The difficulty in Milbank’s assessment, while there is much to commend it, is that the Religious Right may say they are precisely doing this: following the ways of Christ. As a lobby, the Religious Right will argue they are attempting to be the persuasive church, in the absence of traditional churches which seem to shy away from taking awareness of sin into the public square, choosing instead simply to bless secular morality. We are left to ponder then, whose church? In a religious consumer market like America this may be a little harder than those used to an established church

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<sup>147</sup> Milbank, *Ibid.*, p.246

<sup>148</sup> Milbank, *Ibid.*, p.250

<sup>149</sup> Ben Quash, *Radical Orthodoxy’s Critique of Niebuhr* (Harries, 2012, *Ibid.*) p.58

paradigm. Perhaps I am being a little harsh, but it seems that in the world of Radical orthodoxy, shared by the world in Yoder and Hauerwas, there is no salvation outside of the church, or at least if there is there is no shared language to explain why those outside of the church are saved. A final note of, perhaps Niebuhrian, irony in Milbank's criticism is the notion we need to confront the Leviathan, suggesting there is a reality with which we cannot negotiate.

### **Conclusion: Niebuhrianism at the Crossroads**

What Niebuhr tried to do was to mount a sustained attack on the commingling of faith and nation, which is what the totemic conservatism I discuss does, but without offering a quietist alternative, which is the accusation Niebuhr would likely return to the two theological critiques set out above. Mixing religion in politics is dangerous, he argued, because it introduces absolutes into a relativist realm. In *Beyond Tragedy*, Niebuhr argues the thesis that the biblical view of life is dialectical, between affirming man's history and natural existence, and, insisting fulfillment lies beyond history. Niebuhr suggested "True religion is a profound uneasiness about our highest social values."<sup>150</sup> In *The Godly and the Ungodly*, taking Jeremiah 17:5-9 as his text,<sup>151</sup> Niebuhr writes:

Wherever religion is mixed with power and wherever the religious man achieves power, whether inside or outside the church, he is in danger of claiming divine sanction for the very human and frequently sinful actions, which he takes and must take. Cursed be the man that trusteth in man's church.<sup>152</sup>

Whilst seeking to avoid being overly other-worldly, Niebuhr warns of Christians becoming tied not just to a sinful nature but anchored too much in the here and now:

In the middle ages the clergy spoke of nothing but the future state. They hardly cared to prove that Christians may be happy here below. But American preachers are constantly referring to the earth... To touch their congregations they always show them how favorable religious opinion is to freedom and public tranquility; and it is often difficult to ascertain

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<sup>150</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1938), p.28

<sup>151</sup> "Cursed is the man who trusts in man," Jeremiah 17:5

<sup>152</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Godly and the Ungodly* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), p.122

from their discourses whether the principal object of religion is to obtain eternal felicity or prosperity in this world.<sup>153</sup>

In transitioning into being a faith of the here and now, Niebuhr argues that pure secularism thus regards religious loyalties as outmoded forms of culture which will gradually disappear with the general extension of enlightened good-will; in other words, the secularization thesis. It looks forward to the cultural unification of the community upon the basis of a “common faith” embodied not in a god but in the characteristic credos of bourgeois liberalism. Niebuhr argues that:

Religiously we are at the end of an era in which both Christians and secularists ...regarded virtue as a simple possibility...Now we know that we cannot do good without all doing evil; that we cannot defend what is dearest to us without running the risk of destroying what is even more precious than our life; that we cannot find moral peace in any of our virtues even as we can have no security in the ramparts of our boasted civilization. The whole human enterprise is morally more precarious than we realized.<sup>154</sup>

Modernity had, according to Niebuhr, created a humanistic optimism that had in recent decades placed its trust in the intelligent/educated man (eliminates religious superstition and injustices that flow from it), the youthful man (brings heroism and a fresh conscience to the world) and the poor man (Marxism, he has nothing to lose).<sup>155</sup> In contrast, Niebuhr notes that while these modern schools of thought had rejected the Christian doctrine of original sin, Christianity continues to insist on recognizing the limits of human nature. The human objective remains subordinated and often in opposition to the divine will and objective.

Niebuhr offers a positive vision in response:

Without the ultrarational hopes and passions of religion, no society will have the courage to conquer despair and attempt the impossible; for the vision of a just society is an impossible one, which can be approximated only by those who do not regard it as

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<sup>153</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p.53

<sup>154</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “Ten Fateful Years,” *Christianity and Crisis* (Vol.10, May 1, 1944), p.4

<sup>155</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Godly and the Ungodly* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), p.124f

impossible. The truest visions of religion are illusions, which may be partly realized by being resolutely believed.<sup>156</sup>

In approaching international relations, turning to a commingling of church and state or turning quietist are not options for faith, nor is a rejection of religion as illusion an option for society. In 1980, Kenneth W. Thompson argued that Niebuhr:

...came to see that compromise had its own moral content particularly through the need for respecting the aspirations and interests of others. Political reformers and self-righteous nations were likely to go wrong when they claimed to have discovered what was absolutely right and therefore beyond compromise, an error to which his own country was not immune... Niebuhr provided intellectuals and some policy-makers with an alternative to universal moral principles as the practical moral basis for foreign policy.<sup>157</sup>

Almost three decades on, Thompson attempts to bring Niebuhr's critique up to date, suggesting:

If Niebuhr's judgment in the 1940s and 1950s singled out communism as dangerous, though not uniquely evil, as he puts it, his concern at present might be directed at new threats in which absolute ends were invoked to justify the use of any means, whether constitutional or not. It takes little imagination to suppose that Niebuhr would have criticized the Reagan and George W. Bush administrations. When any leader or group considers its cause wholly virtuous, the subordination of every possible means, however amoral or illegal, to that end is deemed morally justified.<sup>158</sup>

If one accepts Thompson's analysis, then these mood swings detected by Niebuhr remain firmly in place, though Niebuhr may be less inclined merely to single out the Reagan and Bush II administrations. To understand fully the implications of the Niebuhrian program we need to look

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<sup>156</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p.81

<sup>157</sup> Kenneth Thompson, The Ethics of Major American Foreign Policies, *British Journal of International Studies* (Vol. 6, No. 2, Jul., 1980), p.124

<sup>158</sup> Thompson, Michael J (ed.) *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America* (New York, New York University Press, 2007), p.152

beyond history, starting with a look at human nature itself. Robin Lovin also suggests an approach to bringing Niebuhr up to date:

Coming to terms with Niebuhr's Christian realism thus requires us to ask whether his theologically formed way of looking at the world might help us with the new realities, rather than trying to force our world back into the historical realities that he knew. Stanley Hauerwas is right, in a way, that 21st-century Christianity needs to be set free from the grip of Niebuhr's highly successful 20th-century formulations of Christian realism. The question is whether Niebuhr's theology has a role in that task of moving us beyond the specifics of Niebuhr's politics. Can Niebuhr's way of thinking help us avoid the dogmas of previous versions of realism and give us the capacity to respond theologically to present-day events on their own terms? Theological ideas about creation, judgment, and grace are central to Niebuhr's realism. His political choices, however, are not deduced from the theology. Theology forms habits of judgment and observation. It supports a certain way of attending to people and their interests. It sustains an attitude of hope that does not depend on success.<sup>159</sup>

In the criticism of Milbank, Yoder and Hauerwas they try to construct a theological political framework which challenges American foreign policy, but they ghettoize theology. In both attempts to make theology distinctive, theology is instead marginalized and achieves little more than those who merely conflate the two. Where Niebuhr is accused of failing for theological reasons, his critics may be accused of failing for political reasons. Niebuhr, although a creature of his age, was able to connect theological concerns to the political challenges of his time in understandable language. What is important in Niebuhr is not to attack his political solutions or undermine his theological credibility, but to pay attention to his strategy. International politics and American foreign policy are too critical for Christians to stay out of them.

It seems the difference between the religious and secular conservatives and their religious accusers is that their accusers find their debate noisy and divisive, while the accusers go largely unheard beyond the intellectual walls of their catacombs and without drawing a crowd to divide. Niebuhr

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<sup>159</sup> Robin Lovin, Reinhold Niebuhr: impact and implications, *Political Theology* (6:4 Oct 2005, pp. 459-471), p.465

understood this, and he sought a crowd, an audience, to negotiate a bridge between theology/faith and international relations, to illuminate the moral problems we face together. All Hauerwas/Milbank and the Religious Right/Left do is to throw down pontoons of salvation, which while perhaps solid and well-made in themselves make for a precarious link from one side of the river to the other. It seems they are equally in danger of creating different spheres, even if for different theological reasons. If we stay in the ghetto we will not be heard for fact of being out of the public square. Equally, if we seek to enforce our doctrinal purity on those of other denominations or faith then we will not be heard above the cacophony of the public square. If all we do is offer a veneer of faith to our search for political solutions then we end up with the false witness Hauerwas and Milbank identify, but they misplace their criticism. We do not need to embrace Niebuhr's politics or his doctrine, but we can endorse his strategy.

## Chapter Three<sup>160</sup>

### Manifest Destiny:<sup>161</sup> America's Geographic Predestination<sup>162</sup>

In this Chapter, I will outline the first two historic phases, and then explain the third phase which coincides with Niebuhr's period and his Christian realism. A major theme running through the rhetoric of modern American conservatism and the Religious Right is a sense of America's calling with all its religious resonance, and, the roots of America's founding with its resonance of enlightenment ideals. The twin set of Calvinist religion and Enlightenment thought have popularly been called the American mind, which gives the nation its self-understanding, but this has come under strain in the last forty years with challenges from the liberalization of culture and globalization. Religious conservatives feel that the American mind is threatened by these cultural shifts, and they are defending a tradition dating back to the founding fathers of the nation. This conservative understanding I argue is best explained in terms of Manifest Destiny, which I break down into four phases. In this chapter, I will provide an historical overview of the first three phases of Manifest Destiny, namely its first articulation in the 1840s as justification for geographic expansion, through to its transformation into ideas of exceptionalism and Wilsonian internationalism. I will then test the idea against realist thinking. This chapter will frame the discussion for Chapter Three, where I will look then at the fourth and current phase of Manifest Destiny maintained by the Religious Right and Neoconservatism. The concept of Manifest Destiny will also be tied to specific presidents, because they articulated this destiny as the nation's public theologians.

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<sup>160</sup> I am indebted to Professor Mark Noll for his review of my material on Manifest Destiny and America's religious history contained in this chapter and Chapter Three, and the generous time he spent discussing with me in person; any shortcomings in the material remain mine.

<sup>161</sup> Key texts I have relied upon to explore the meaning of Manifest Destiny are Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1935), William Appleman Williams, *Empire As A Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America's Present Predicament Along with a Few Thoughts about an Alternative* (New York: Ig Publishing, 2006); Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002); N. Graebner ed., *Manifest Destiny*, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co, 1968). The origin of the term was outlined by Julius W. Pratt, *The Origin of Manifest Destiny*, *American Historical Review* (XXXII, 1927) 795-8.

<sup>162</sup> A helpful term introduced Albert K. Weinberg *Manifest Destiny: a Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1935) pp.1-2, 43.



It is hardly surprising that President Ronald Reagan should draw on the imagery of the “City on a hill,” invoked by John Winthrop in 1630,<sup>163</sup> to popularize American aspirations in the 1980s, but I suggest a more descriptive and useful term to apply to America’s self-understanding of its place in the world is Manifest Destiny, which was articulated in the expansionist period of the 1840s. Where Winthrop’s utterance, given that it was delivered at sea on the way to soil he had yet to set foot on, was one of aspiration for a nation being born, the latter term was applied to an America coming of age. I argue that Manifest Destiny goes beyond the historical moment, is essentially missionary in character, and, has shifted from being a description of a physical policy to an abstract policy, both of which encompass the use of power to advance American interests.<sup>164</sup> In the course of this work, the historical background specific to the use of the term will be put in context. The first pioneers to America arrived on its eastern shore not just to escape feudalism and religious control but to improve upon the Old World, and create a New World. The continent of America was a seemingly blank canvas to fulfill the promise of a New Israel, and new covenants, or compacts, would be forged to this end. The presence of existing elements, whether it was inhospitable geography or the native Indians, were elements to be overcome in service to this end. In order to grasp this history, we need to look at the source of Manifest Destiny, which draws on the notion of the foundation of America as a watershed moment in history, an experiment in the making.

## **The Great Experiment**

At the dawn of Enlightenment America was something new, albeit begotten by Europe, which attracted the description of the ‘Great Experiment’<sup>165</sup>. As something new and experimental, the nation had need of a unifying sense of destiny, a direction for the nation to take. This was not

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<sup>163</sup> “Wee shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when term of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when he shall make us a prayse and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantacions: the lord make it like that of New England: for wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us.” Cited in Loren Baritz, *City on a Hill: A History of Ideas and Myths in America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964)

<sup>164</sup> Hietala and Merk, along with C.L. Sanford, *Manifest Destiny and the Imperialism Question* (New York: John Wiley, 1974) and S.S. Zwelling, *Expansion and Imperialism* (Chicago: Loyola University press, 1970) expand the meaning of Manifest Destiny, and relate it to imperialism, a more popular term for America’s action abroad, which J. D. Bass & R. Chervitz, Imperial Mission and Manifest Destiny: A Case Study of Political Myth in Rhetorical Discourse, *The Southern Speech Communication Journal* (45, 1978) 213-232, argue is coterminous with Manifest Destiny

<sup>165</sup> A term introduced by Alexis de Tocqueville *Democracy in America* (New York: Library of America, 2004)

arbitrarily determined, but evolved from the religious origins of the founding fathers and the first American communities. From the beginning, Americans have understood themselves to be a gifted civilization, with a special mission and role in the world. By the time of his first Inauguration in 1801, Thomas Jefferson was able to state confidently:

I know, indeed, that some honest men fear that a republican government cannot be strong, that this Government is not strong enough; but would the honest patriot, in the full tide of successful experiment, abandon a government which has so far kept us free and firm on the theoretic and visionary fear that this Government, *the world's best hope*,<sup>166</sup> may by possibility want energy to preserve itself? I trust not. I believe this, on the contrary, the strongest Government on earth.<sup>167</sup>

In his second inauguration speech, he told his audience “I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our forefathers, as Israel of old,”<sup>168</sup> and at one point included (besides Canada) Cuba and Florida in America’s “empire for liberty.”<sup>169</sup> Because it has always been so, the nation has sought to understand how it relates as a chosen nation to other nations. America was founded by those who defined themselves by what they had left behind in Europe, especially Britain and its state religion. America’s emerging political status as a nation was defined by conflict amongst the British, French and Spanish powers over the goodness of the land. Its faith was defined by persecution of faith in Europe, and a desire to separate church and state in opposition to state churches in Europe. How then was America to define itself *in re*?

Commentators in the ensuing centuries have sought to answer this, and there has been a battle of ideas for the meaning of America, in part because America besides being a nation is also an idea in itself. As historian Richard Hofstadter quipped: “it has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies but to be one.”<sup>170</sup> In contrast to the old monarchical Europe and the revolutions it would beget, America was a different project. America was an idea that all humanity could look

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<sup>166</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>167</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. & Fred L. Israel (eds.) *My Fellow Citizens: The Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States 1789-2005* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2007), P.16f

<sup>168</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, ed. *Ibid.*, P.25. In 1785, Thomas Jefferson proposed that the official U.S. seal depict the children of Israel being led out of Egypt by the pillar of fire, as recounted in Exodus 13:21

<sup>169</sup> *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. HA Washington (Washington DC: Taylor & Maury, 1854), volume V, p.444

<sup>170</sup> Quoted in Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) p.27

up to; an historically contingent society rather than one that evolved out of tyranny and land ownership, as Anders Stephanson explains:

Visions of the United States as a sacred space providentially selected for divine purposes found a counterpart in the secular idea of the new nation of liberty as a privileged “stage” (to use a popular metaphor of the time) for the exhibition of a new world order, a great “experiment” for the benefit of humankind as a whole.<sup>171</sup>

This experiment is strongly rooted in enlightenment soil, especially the Scottish Enlightenment and its common sense philosophers Francis Hutcheson and Thomas Reid, along with the writings on civil government by John Locke.<sup>172</sup> It was these ideas which were used extensively to frame the founding documents. If America was new, the well that Americans drew from was not sourced in their own landscape. They drank from European wisdom, and sought to universalize and instantiate the ideas of the enlightenment humanity in the new world, as Godfrey Hodgson outlines:

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<sup>171</sup> Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), p.5

<sup>172</sup> The traditional understanding of the intellectual roots of America is that John Locke, often portrayed as a “prophet” of the American revolution, influenced Jefferson and the thus the Declaration of Independence. The most influential theory of state legitimacy is John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*, published around 1690. America is rooted in the empiricism of Locke (1632-1704) and Hume (1711-1776), but also the commonsense philosophy of Reid (1710-1796) and the ideas of Paine (1737-1809). When the first Scots landed on American soil they brought with them a dichotomy of ideas. While it is commonplace to talk about the dichotomy of Scottish enlightenment and Calvinism, there is a more poignant dichotomy pertaining to the argument of my thesis. This is the dichotomy within the Scottish Enlightenment itself, between the ideas of David Hume and Thomas Reid. Hume’s ideas would influence Madison and Woodrow Wilson and Niebuhr, leading to an accommodation of enlightenment ideas. While of influence, Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* (1748) was rejected by Madison, who preferred Hume’s *The Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth*. Madison’s notes on the confederacy in the 10<sup>th</sup> Federalist, were metaphorically, if not essentially, “written” by Hume, dripping in the skepticism of human motive. Reid’s ideas would influence James Wilson and others. Reid’s commonsense philosophy speaks to a democratic ideal and, I suggest, finds expression in the Religious Right of the tail end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and the Tea Party in the present; an argument I put forward during my research for this thesis in a feature article David Cowan, *The Tea Party's roots are in Aberdeen, not Boston*, *The Scotsman* (30/9/2010). I should also note that the Ulster Scots were the major representatives of traditional Presbyterian Scots culture, and at the forefront of expansion, as Arthur Herman Herman, Arthur, *The Scottish Enlightenment* (London: Harper Perrenial, 2006) explains, they had a “fierce Calvinist faith” and a “fierce individualism” p.222f. Andrew Jackson, James Polk, John C. Calhoun and Patrick Henry would be prominent names in this line. It is also argued that Locke’s view of the power of the people and resistance to authority is similar to Calvin, though it has been argued that Locke himself drew more heavily on Hooker, whom he quotes severally in his *Two Treatises on Civil Government*. These points are contested, and beyond the scope of this thesis, but is important to note in understanding conservative thought.

The political ideas of Benjamin Franklin, Tom Paine, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson were hardly American ideas, even if the founders of the American republic were both compelled by the revolutionary conflict to announce those ideas with clarity and enabled by their military success to explore their implications as they could not have done with impunity in Europe...They were the intellectual heirs of the “commonwealthmen” and radical whigs who had kept alive the principles of the English Revolution. They were also the children of the English, Scots, and French Enlightenment, of John Locke, David Hume, and Adam Smith, and of Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Diderot.<sup>173</sup>

Enlightenment religion and politics were in the mix from the outset of America, but there remains some debate over the relationship between them in these foundational years, and in particular just what the religious intentions of the first Americans were once they got off the boat and had established their new communities freed from the yoke of European church and state. The romance of the religious shining city was giving way to the political expansionist claims of destiny. Revisionist<sup>174</sup> writers have focused more on the ideological claims of the early founders, and also suggest the major figures of the foundation were a mix of Deists and lukewarm Christians. In this view, the founding fathers, including Jefferson, Franklin, Adams and Washington, inspired by the Enlightenment and a burgeoning scientific knowledge, were more Deist than Christian<sup>175</sup>. Bruce Kuklick [2009:58] painted just such a portrait clearly:

The religion of the Founders had little time for a Jesus who was the son of God and who at one time walked the earth performing miracles. Deism was spoken of as “providential.”

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<sup>173</sup> Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) p.19

<sup>174</sup> From the 1950s until 1980, William Appleman Williams wrote revisionist histories of the Westwards expansion, as well as the one of the major texts on Manifest Destiny. Carl Becker was an early proponent of the new history and wrote a revisionist account of the Declaration of Independence as long ago as 1922, so it is no recent phenomenon. In his address to the American Historical Association in 1931, Becker stated he saw History as the artificial extension of the social memory, [http://www.historians.org/info/AHA\\_history/clbecker.htm](http://www.historians.org/info/AHA_history/clbecker.htm), last accessed 27th December 2001. John Lukacs in an article *Revising the Twentieth Century*, *American Heritage*, September 1994, Vol 45, Issue 5, offers a useful summary of a revisionist view of American history which is archived at <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/revising-twentieth-century>

<sup>175</sup> David L. Holmes offers a view that, given various gradations, the founding fathers were enlightenment products and deists, in *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), a contrary portrait, suggesting secular writers are in error, is offered by Michael and Jana Novak in *Washington's God: Religion, Liberty, and the Father of Our Country* (New York: Basic Books, 2007)

Matters somehow downgraded the other-worldly concerns of Christianity. Deism heightened moral impulses directed to man's relations with his fellows and in some instances had a strain that accentuated human perfection. Thinkers often promoted Jesus as the greatest example of human nature, the ideal of a human being. Yet even when leaders took up with optimism and hesitated less about the possible goodness of human society, Calvinist certainty lay upon them. This group had few self-doubts.<sup>176</sup>

Writing on the Scottish Calvinism which influenced American thought, Donald McLeod explains it:

...built its political theology on Calvin's foundation, but developed it in a much more radical direction. Knox joined battle with authority almost immediately.... For the following century-and-a-half Scottish history was dominated by the determination of the crown to dominate the church... The struggle for spiritual independence then became a struggle against political tyranny; the end-product would be the defeat of absolutism and the introduction of constitutional monarchy.<sup>177</sup>

It was this dogged Scots battle with authority and struggle for spiritual independence which became the hallmark of American Protestantism, and continues down to the present day. The certainty of Calvinist faith and enlightenment ideals proved to be a strong mixture, for a zeal took hold that it was now the task of America in the world to advance what is best in the world, and to offer an example of how a good nation should behave. Yet, America established itself by revolution, which by its very nature posed a threat to existing morality and faith, the former a concern for enlightened patriots and the latter a concern for the churches. In Europe, religion and power mixed and revolution was as much against church as against state. Indeed, the French Revolution (1789-99) illustrated the abstract secularism and anti-religious nature of revolution, just as the Russian Revolution (1917) would also later show. However, as Robert Kagan notes, there was no Robespierre or Lenin to embody bloody revolution in America, instead there were the founding fathers portrayed as humble servants of a greater idea at work. This was not just a

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<sup>176</sup> Bruce Kuklick, *A Political History of the USA: One Nation Under God* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) p.58

<sup>177</sup> Donald MacLeod, *The Influence of Calvinism on Politics, Theology in Scotland*, Vol XVI No 2, Autumn 2009, p.7

revolution about national independence for America; it was a revolution about an idea and a moral direction for the world. As Kagan explains:

...Americans had no ancient myths to glory in, no monarch or church to serve as the symbol of national spirit. American nationalism derived more from a common commitment to certain liberal, democratic, and republican ideals than from historic attachments to the land or to an individual personification of the nation. This meant that American nationalism possessed a moral component. It also gave American nationalism a supranational, universalistic quality. For Americans, the unifying theme of the nation was that they were to be the vanguard of human progress. Their nationalism naturally led them to look beyond the national boundary.<sup>178</sup>

If a moral shift led by America was taking place in the world, then the key to understanding it is the American conception of liberty as the object of being, expressed not merely in the abstract but in the concrete realities of economic life and the expansion of markets in these developmental years of American Capitalism. Notions of freedom and progress were guiding principles, and this made America an exemplar in the eyes of its founders and the first Americans. Alexis de Tocqueville<sup>179</sup> offered a picture of this process:

The emigrants who colonized the shores of America in the beginning of the seventeenth century somehow separated the democratic principle from all the principles that it had to contend in the old communities of Europe, and transplanted it alone to the New World. It has there been able to spread in perfect freedom and peaceably to determine the character of the laws by influencing the manners of the country.<sup>180</sup>

These universalizing ideas of liberty, Tocqueville predicted, would draw the Europeans, sooner or later, to join the Americans in achieving “an almost complete equality of conditions” in the

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<sup>178</sup> Kagan, Robert. *Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World, from it's Earliest Days to the Dawn of the 20th Century* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1st edition, 2006), p.153

<sup>179</sup> Joshua Mitchell, *The Fragility of Freedom: Tocqueville on Religion, Democracy, and the American Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) offers an insightful study of Tocqueville on America, partly studied through the lens of Augustine, seeing this as a basis for resolution of the present oppositional debate between liberals and conservatives and as a warning against conflating politics and religion.

<sup>180</sup> Tocqueville, *Ibid.*, p.13

world.<sup>181</sup> This was an intersection where faith and freedom don't just coexist, they co-operate. Gary Wills states the uniqueness of the faith and freedom origins of America:

No other government in history had launched itself without the help of officially recognized gods and their state-connected ministers. It is no wonder that, in so novel an undertaking, it should have taken a while to sift the dangers and the blessings of the new arrangement, to learn how best to live with it, to complete the logic of its workings. We are still grappling with its meaning for us. But, at least, its meaning has been one of freedom...<sup>182</sup>

Freedom ensured that things were different in America where religion and liberty were intimately intertwined. Tocqueville observed, discovering this through his travelling conversations with the faithful, religion prevailed because:

Americans so completely confound Christianity with liberty that it is almost impossible to induce them to think of one without the other. For them, moreover, this is by no means a sterile belief, a legacy of the past that lies mouldering in the depths of the soul, but a vital article of faith.<sup>183</sup>

However, as we will see below with the cases of native Indians and slavery, liberty is in the eye of the beholder. Both of these internal policy concerns were fundamental in the material advancement of America, since the sectional politics of North and South threatened unity and expansionism. They also contradicted both the cherished ideals of enlightenment and Christian faith held by the first Americans. The question arises as to what extent America was an idea or ideology used spiritually to bind people with different roots brought together in the formation of a new political and economic power, borne out of enlightenment liberalism, religion or a combination of the two in a new American civil religion.<sup>184</sup> For Kagan the answer clearly lies with the use of enlightenment ideology to forge ahead with a new political and economic powerhouse:

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<sup>181</sup> Tocqueville, *Ibid.*, p.14

<sup>182</sup> Garry Wills, *Under God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), p.383

<sup>183</sup> Tocqueville, *Ibid.*, p.338

<sup>184</sup> A term developed by sociologist Robert N. Bellah in his essay *Civil Religion in America*, *Dædalus*, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, issue entitled, "Religion in America," Winter 1967, Vol. 96, No. 1, pp. 1-21.

The society and culture that took root in the Chesapeake Bay region had a far greater influence on the evolution of American society, and therefore on American foreign policy, than did Puritanism. This colonial America was characterized not by isolationism and utopianism, not by cities upon hills and covenants with God, but by aggressive expansionism, acquisitive materialism, and an overarching ideology of civilization that encouraged and justified both.<sup>185</sup>

Hence, before the Manifest Destiny entered the political language of America, there was always a sense of a new definition of liberty expressed in terms of moral mission and destiny. The notion of America being providentially privileged among nations is to be seen widely in the early literature of the nation, and this notion serves to explain the imposition of American self-interest over the interest of others, be they foreign nations or indigenous Indians.

Weinberg argued that America's destiny was tied both to nationalism and a geographic expansion by natural right. Americans sought to define their God-given and natural boundaries, starting out from the eastern seaboard to the Mississippi as a natural geographic border, and then on to seaboard of the West and the south and into Mexico,<sup>186</sup> based on what Weinberg called "geographic predestination." With this expansion came a self-aware nationalism, and it was not a stretch for the religious Americans to understand themselves constituted as the "new Israel". This expansionist vision, be it religious or idealist, if it was not to be seen as European-style naked self-interest or imperialism, needed an underpinning moral argument. Weinberg argued America had indeed forged its own moral defense:

Moral ideology, which made of nationalism a fervid prepossession, also enabled the nationalist to pursue expansion without a sense of heresy to his original ideal. For

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See also, Robert N. Bellah & Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980). I will explore this term more fully in Chapter 2.

<sup>185</sup> Kagan, *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>186</sup> Some of the expansion was undertaken by individual expeditions known as filibustering, what Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) called "criminals from Manifest Destiny's underworld." This, May argues, is foundational for anti-Americanism in Latin America.



expansion was so rationalized that it seemed at the outset a right, and soon, long before the famous phrase itself was coined, a Manifest Destiny. Moral ideology was the partner of self-interest in the intimate alliance of which expansionism was the offspring.<sup>187</sup>

To which Weinberg added "...the doctrine of America's mission developed rather quickly into the dogma of special delegation."<sup>188</sup> The question we will tackle here is how one defines the boundaries of this destiny or "special delegation" when it moves from the geographic predestination to the abstracted or idealist predestination. To do this, we turn to the four phases of Manifest Destiny.

### **Phase One: Manifest Destiny Articulated**

The first phase is when the term Manifest Destiny was coined during the expansive period of the 1840s, and was tied to the geographic spread as Americans headed westward. The provenance of the term is not clear cut. It was popularly used in political conversation, but its commitment to the written page is attributed to a journalist and Democratic Party supporter, one John Louis O'Sullivan<sup>189</sup>, who also used the term "Great Experiment". He was a promoter of American Romanticism, who published the works of many of the great writers of the era, most notably Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Edgar Allan Poe. Writing in the July issue of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in 1845, in the context of the debate over the annexation of Texas, O'Sullivan is quoted by Weinberg as saying:

Why, were other reasons wanting, in favor of now elevating this question of the reception of Texas into the Union, out of the lower region of our past party dissensions, up to its proper level of a high and broad nationality, it surely is to be found, found abundantly, in the manner in which other nations have undertaken to intrude themselves into it, between

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<sup>187</sup> Weinberg, *Ibid.*, p.12

<sup>188</sup> Weinberg, *Ibid.*, p.39

<sup>189</sup> The term Manifest Destiny was not in fact attributed to O'Sullivan until 1927. Anders Stephanson has pointed out that O'Sullivan was something of a failure, who died in obscurity in 1895, just as the term he coined was about to enjoy a revival in the form of "Exceptionalism". O'Sullivan also used the term "Manifest Design," but it was the term under discussion which entered into popular discourse.

us and the proper parties to the case, in a spirit of hostile interference against us, for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our Manifest Destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.<sup>190</sup>

Later in the year, on December 27, 1845, this time in the context of the more problematic question of Oregon, O'Sullivan employed the term again in the Jacksonian publication *Morning Star*, explaining that America had:

The right of our Manifest Destiny to overspread and to possess the whole continent which providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government.<sup>191</sup>

The Jacksonian connection is significant because it was during the early Jackson era that the words were first commonly used. President Andrew Jackson, popularly called "Old Hickory" because he was regarded as 'tough as hickory' when fighting in the War of 1812, served as president from 1829 to 1837. Notably, Jackson was not from one of the Virginia families or one of the Massachusetts Adams. More significantly, he was the first president born in a log cabin, to Irish farming stock, thus representing frontier America. As a general he had also helped to deter the Spanish and defeat the Indians, and as president accelerated the sale of Indian lands and promoted minimal government and the freedom of the individual to pursue opportunity wherever one may. With his personal history in dealing with the European powers and the Indians, his presidency set the scene for the expansionism of the 1840s.

Manifest Destiny emerged as the chief narrative of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as America reached out across the continent and beyond. The term O'Sullivan coined was not a conscious effort to promote the idea of expansive destiny; simply he had offered a phrase seeking to explain what was already apparent: America's providential, and Anglo-Saxon, belief that there was something special about the nation. The term, however, denoted from the start more than mere acquisition of more territory,

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<sup>190</sup> Weinberg, *Ibid.*, p.112

<sup>191</sup> Quote from Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), p.42

though often it is defined by later writers in that narrower application. As Robert W. Johannsen writes:

Because O’Sullivan employed *Manifest Destiny* with reference to the annexation of Texas and the adjustment of the Oregon boundary dispute, the phrase has been narrowly applied to territorial expansion alone. The operative word, however, was *Destiny*. By adding the adjective, O’Sullivan was simply saying that the nation’s destiny was “obvious to the understanding.” The belief that the United States was guided by a providential destiny, in other words, that the nation had a preordained, God-sanctioned mission to fulfill, formed a significant element in American Romantic thought. O’Sullivan’s words reflected the boundlessness, the rejection of limits on national as well as individual development, and an impatience with anything that restrained or inhibited progress that characterized what Romantics called the “spirit of the age”...It was destiny, moreover, that tied territorial expansion to the American mission. Mission and expansion were inseparably linked by Manifest Destiny.<sup>192</sup>

In the 1840s, the term passed into popular vocabulary as the nation spread across the geographic expanse of North America. Weinberg explains:

The central implication of “Manifest Destiny” in the ‘forties, however, was less a matter of the scope of expansion than of its purpose. The conception of expansion was a destiny meant primarily that it was a means to the fulfillment of a certain social ideal the preservation and perfection of which was America’s providential mission or destiny. This ideal, conceived as “the last best revelation of human thought,” was a democracy – a theory of mass sovereignty but in a more important aspect a complex of individualistic values which, despite Fisher Ames’s<sup>193</sup> observation that America was too democratic for liberty, Americans most frequently summarized by the inspiring word “freedom.” It was because

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<sup>192</sup> Johannsen, Robert W. (ed.) *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.10

<sup>193</sup> Fisher Ames (1758-1808) Representative in United States Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District of Massachusetts

of the association of expansion and freedom in a means-end relationship that expansion now came to seem most manifestly as destiny.<sup>194</sup>

For all the romantic overtones, there was a dark side to Manifest Destiny. Merk, Williams and others have argued Manifest Destiny was a term of propaganda used to unite Americans in a process that did not have overall consent, with objections over what the nation had the right or the capacity to do in this expansion. Hence, it was by no means a natural process, nor did the term allude to the *means* of achieving success. Lest we should romanticize the age of Manifest Destiny, Thomas R. Hietala argues for more realism:

To attribute the unprecedented expansion of the United States to Manifest Destiny obscures more than it clarifies. It fails to convey the impatience and anxiety of U.S. leaders. Nor does it explain their willingness to resort to war to enlarge the union. Their concerns were commercial as well as territorial; their ambitions global, not just continental or hemispheric.<sup>195</sup>

Far from being a romantic idea of exploring and taming new land in a Daniel Boone sense, American expansion was forged in large part out of the chains of foreign affairs. The previous decade had been less expansionist, and Weinberg argued that the 'forties was a reaction to Europe:

The expansionism of the 'forties arise as a defensive effort to forestall the encroachment of Europe in North America. So too, as one can see in the most numerous utterances, the conception of an "extension of the area of freedom" became general as an ideal of preventing absolutistic Europe from lessening the area open to American democracy; extension of the area of "freedom" was the defiant answer to extension of the area of "absolutism."<sup>196</sup>

The British, French and Spanish made the ceding of territory to America possible by seeking their own advantage in granting such title, whilst America also benefitted from British and European

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<sup>194</sup> Weinberg, *Ibid.*, p.100

<sup>195</sup> Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 51

<sup>196</sup> Weinberg, *Ibid.*, p.109

capital to finance a burgeoning infrastructure. These foreign powers saw America as a theater for contesting their own interrelationship of power on the one hand, and as a place of new natural resources and expanding markets to exploit on the other. In the face of this, as a new diplomatic force, America had to play a canny game with the old diplomatic powers of Europe. However, the Monroe Doctrine,<sup>197</sup> written in a statement by President James Monroe to Congress on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1823, drew a line in the sand by stating that the American continents were to be no longer considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers. America had been on a trajectory from the Louisiana Purchase (1803), further expansion in taking Florida from Spain in an 1819 treaty, and then setting its gaze on Texas, Cuba, New Mexico and even Canada. All were victories in the relentless expansion of America and the hinterlands, though Canada eluded the American expansionists.

After the Monroe Doctrine, the expansionist impulse that started under Jackson reached its feverish apotheosis as James K. Polk, who was called both an imperialist and a patriot, took up office in 1845; the same year O'Sullivan committed Manifest Destiny to print.<sup>198</sup> Expansion in a three year period from 1845 to 1848 alone, during Polk's presidency, saw America increase in size from 1.8 million square miles to around 3 million square miles. The European powers could not contain America for long, and a new global power was born. Sam W. Haynes explains that Polk was:

...in many ways a fitting representative of this expansionist impulse. While the new president did not defend his administration's territorial goals on racial grounds, he never questioned the superiority of Anglo-American institutions, nor harbored the slightest doubt that these institutions were destined to spread inexorably across the continent. In 1845, for both President Polk and the public at large, Manifest Destiny remained inchoate, undefined; an effusive, bumptious spirit rather than a clearly articulated agenda for

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<sup>197</sup> Stephanson points out that the Monroe doctrine has a sentence using the words "destiny" and "manifestation", p.59. The Monroe doctrine is not central to Manifest Destiny, though it is indicative.

<sup>198</sup> Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and nation in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011) argues the doctrine was a mythic means for subsequent generations of politicians to pursue expansionist foreign policy, noting that while O'Sullivan sought ideological and territorial expansion, beating the Manifest Destiny drum, "Polk made the case for an imperialist foreign policy on the hardheaded grounds of preemptive expansion justified by national security. The President enlisted what he called "Monroe's doctrine" to achieve his expansionist objectives." Polk subscribed to the tents of Manifest Destiny, though he never used the term.

empire... Polk owed his sudden and unexpected return to national prominence to those who dreamed of a larger continental role for the United States. Advocates of the new imperialism now looked to Polk to enlarge the national domain. Most would not be disappointed. The new president immediately placed himself at the head of the expansionist crusade; henceforth he would chart its course and set its objectives. With characteristic resolve, the goal-oriented and methodical chief executive strove to make the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny a reality.<sup>199</sup>

Polk's presidency saw a redrawing of America. Texas<sup>200</sup> was annexed, the Oregon boundary was settled, and Mexico was ceded, all of which created an extra 1.2 million square miles. The nation had expanded by 60% by the time Polk left office, but he left a more mixed legacy for the Manifest Destiny movement. Haynes observes:

In the years after Polk's death, Manifest Destiny would become sectionalized; the South's expansionist appetite would become an addiction. In the end, the drive to extend the national domain had not strengthened the Union, as Polk had hoped; it had aggravated the tensions that would sunder it.<sup>201</sup>

However, there were new internal tensions for the Americans to deal with. Just as we can forget the Boone romance, we can forget the enlightenment romance. Two matters serve to illustrate tensions in the idea of America in this expansive period, namely the confrontation with native Indians and slavery. These were occasions where the enlightenment ideal of America and *realpolitik*, to employ a term of later coinage, came into conflict.

Apart from the foreign powers, Americans had to confront the territorial claims of the native Indians in their process of expansion. Arguments for dispossessing the Indians made by politicians at the time fell into one of three categories, or a mixture of the three, namely: religious, utilitarian

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<sup>199</sup> Haynes, Sam W. *James K. Polk and the Expansionist Impulse* (London: Longman, 2 edn, 2001), p.112

<sup>200</sup> Lyon Rathbun, The Debate over Annexing Texas and the Emergence of Manifest Destiny, *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* (4:3, Fall 2001) 459-493, outlines an argument based on the transformation in public rhetoric accompanying the 1845 annexation of Texas that from the 1820's to annexation opponents of US expansion from "a nation to an empire" appealed to classical republican and Montesquieuian principles, but such principles were overwhelmed by a theological vision of Manifest Destiny in 1845.

<sup>201</sup> Haynes, *Ibid.*, p.208

and enlightenment. The religious argument centered on the biblical command to till the earth, which the Indians as hunter-gatherers did not. The utilitarian argument was that the land was going to waste under Indian control, and in an era of economic expansion American settler farmers believed they could make better use of the land. The enlightenment argument proposed the need to extend civilization and reclaim the earth from the vagaries of nature, and the Indians. In principle, enlightened ideals suggested the Indians had rights, but some dealt with this by merely dismissing the Indians as uncivilized or vermin. However, American leaders dating back to Washington, Jefferson and Adams, saw them as human beings deserving of rights. In reality, the issue for American leaders became one of reconciling this core liberal belief and their Christian duty with the policy of expansionism and the taking of Indian lands. The solution, as Kagan argues, was to see the Indians as peoples in need of civilization:

Given the American's ambition for land, an ambition they had no real intention of restraining, and given the impossibility of the Indians preserving their ancestral customs side by side with the new commercial empire, there seemed only one way for Americans to assume their "responsibility" and to fulfill the moral obligations they believed their power imposed upon them. That was to turn the conquest of Indian land into something of positive benefit to the Indians, to bring them what Washington and other Americans unashamedly called the "blessings of civilization"...instead of conquering the Indians, they would be liberating them.<sup>202</sup>

Whatever the argument used, the outcome was the same. Indians were dispossessed of land by whichever means available, chiefly legal innovation, bribery and cruelty. This problem was put in stark contrast around the time Andrew Jackson became president in 1829, with the most tragic part of this story being the handling of the Cherokee Indians of Georgia and neighboring states.<sup>203</sup> While many Indians and their tribes remained somewhat transient, the Cherokees had embraced many of the new ways. Having successfully converted many Cherokees, missionaries had to stand aside and give way to their violent treatment as Cherokees were forcibly removed to make way for white settlers and gold speculators. Ironically, in American terms they had become civilized, having established organized agriculture, schools, churches and even printing presses, but still the

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<sup>202</sup> Kagan, *ibid.*, p.89f.

<sup>203</sup> The removal became known as the Cherokee Trail of Tears, Prentice T. Chandler, *Manifest Destiny and Competing Voices on the Eve of the Cherokee*, *Social Education* (75:3, May-Jun 2011) 153-157.

Cherokees found their legal rights, land and dignity expunged. The idealized notion of America as a chosen nation and a Christian civilization somewhat buckles under the strain, as Americans marginalized and oppressed the Indian peoples.

The other tension threatening expansion, by threatening internal cohesion, was slavery. Black slaves had not fared particularly well in practical terms under the Founders, indeed many saw greater opportunity in siding with the British than the first Americans, because the rights of men did not in reality extend to them, and many southern Democrats beat back Republican calls to end the practice.<sup>204</sup> By the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the nation was in danger of fragmentation, illustrated by the Missouri Compromise in 1820 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, out of which emerged the Republican Party as a coalition of northern Whigs, anti-slavery Democrats and other fringe groups opposed to slavery. The first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, would lure the South into a Civil War with the north over the issue. As Lincoln argued it in his “House divided” speech on June 16, 1858, the nation could not stand if divided, and his government could not endure a half-free and half-slave state of affairs; either all were free states or all slave states, and the latter was unpalatable. Lincoln had stated four years earlier in his 1854 Peoria speech that he hated slavery because it deprived the American republic as an example to have influence in the world, and gave foes just cause to accuse America of being a nation of hypocrites and had led friends to doubt their sincerity. This was simply not good enough for an exceptional nation.

## **Phase Two: Manifest Destiny as Exceptionalism**

The sense of unity, democracy and freedom which Manifest Destiny pointed to thus yielded the second phase, which is the sense of “American Exceptionalism.”<sup>205</sup> This phase represents a uniting

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<sup>204</sup> Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: the eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) studies how slavery and territorial expansion intersected as causes of the Civil War. Manifest Destiny promised the literal enlargement of freedom through the extension of American institutions all the way to the Pacific, and at each step entailed confronting the issue of slavery.

<sup>205</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *American exceptionalism: a double-edged sword* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997) gives a comprehensive overview of the idea, including the effect of religious beliefs. However, Stephen M. Walt, The Myth of American Exceptionalism, *Foreign Policy*, (189, Nov 2011) 72-75, suggests there are five myths: There Is Something Exceptional, About American Exceptionalism, The United States Behaves Better Than Other Nations Do, America's Success is Due to Its Special Genius, The United States Is Responsible for Most of the Good in the World, and, God Is on Our Side. Walt concludes that the U.S. has pursued self-interests internationally and that American exceptionalism is a myth. K.J. Holsti, Exceptionalism in American Foreign Policy: Is It Exceptional? *European Journal*



America, maturing as a nation.<sup>206</sup> Like Manifest Destiny, Exceptionalism has deep roots. Where Manifest Destiny had echoes of Israel, Exceptionalism echoed English roots. The first Americans, as Kagan argues, acted in the belief they had a higher purpose, an AngloSaxon destiny and that American Exceptionalism was in truth English Exceptionalism taking civilization and humanity into a new future. This notion that America was exceptional was first highlighted by Tocqueville, who wrote:

The position of the Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one. Their strictly Puritanical origin, their exclusively commercial habits, even the country they inhabit, which seems to divert their minds from the pursuit of science, literature, and the arts, the proximity of Europe, which allows them to neglect these pursuits without relapsing into barbarism, a thousand special causes, of which I have only been able to point out the most important, In His passions, his wants, his education, and everything about him seem to unite in drawing the native of the United States earthward; his religion alone bids him turn, from time to time, a transient and distracted glance to heaven. Let us cease, then, to view all democratic nations under the example of the American people.<sup>207</sup>

While Manifest Destiny was in part wrought in reaction to European powers and led to a greater Union and nation-building, the issue of slavery created an undercurrent that threatened to breach the Union shored up by American idealism and patriotism. The exceptional nation was not so exceptional when it came to the treatment of slaves in the nation, and the sectional politics of north and south, Whig and Democrat, slave-state and free-state was set on a course to a war that would be an exceptional war. This was to be an American war, a watershed moment for a watershed nation, as Hodgson explains:

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*of International Relations* (17:3, September 2011) 381-404, argues that exceptionalism is a type of foreign policy not exclusive to the United States, and is comparable to postRevolutionary France and the Soviet Union. McCrisken TB (2003) *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam: US Foreign Policy since 1974* [London: Palgrave Macmillan], examines the influence of American exceptionalism in the period covered by this thesis, specifically arguing that exceptionalism consistently provided the framework for foreign policy discourse but that the conduct of foreign affairs was limited by the Vietnam syndrome.

<sup>206</sup> Steven E. Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies: America's Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 2011) offers a political and military history of the period and tensions in Manifest Destiny as the Civil War loomed.

<sup>207</sup> Tocqueville, *Ibid.*, p.36

...the American civil war was indeed an exceptional event. It was the biggest and most lethal war the world had yet seen...It was even more an exceptional war in that it was fought not over territory or dynastic ambition or national pride, but over principle, or rather two distinct though related principles: over whether the Union could endure “half-slave and half-free,” and over the issue of human bondage itself. At Gettysburg, Abraham Lincoln anointed the war in a speech that lives with the noblest passages in the English language. Those earlier masterpieces, from the King James Bible and *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, coming from the seventeenth century, drew their power from religious belief. Lincoln, as a man of the nineteenth century, was evoking the emotional power of what amounted to a political and nationalist religion.<sup>208</sup>

Hence, America went to war fighting for both a nation and an idea. In Lincoln’s case, this was an idea increasingly rooted in a sense of the divine. However, his opposition to slavery owed more to his sense of nationalism than it did to a moral or theological imperative about slavery, since the latter concern undermined the former mission. His nationalism was exceptionalist, as historian Dorothy Ross writes:

Some recent interpreters of Lincoln have been uneasy about this romantic nationalism and tried to absolve him of belief in American exceptionalism. His reading of American exceptionalism certainly lacked the arrogance shown by patriots who unquestioningly claimed that Americans were the chosen people of God and that their own version of national purpose was God’s will. Lincoln had begun his career as a fatalist who rejected the need for a deity, but by the 1850s he increasingly ascribed the chain of historical cause and effect to divine providence. For Lincoln, America’s exceptionalism was the product of a providential history in which God’s ultimate purposes could not be known; America’s vanguard role was part of a worldwide progress of liberal principle whose outcome could not be certain. But that America had a special role to play in the outcome he did not doubt. The story he told about the United States was an exceptionalist one.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Hodgson, *Ibid.*, p.69

<sup>209</sup> Dorothy Ross, *Lincoln and the Ethics of Emancipation: Universalism, Nationalism, Exceptionalism* *Journal of American History*, 96 (Sept. 2009), 379–99

Lincoln addressing the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, on January 27, 1838, articulated the "political religion of the nation", which every American and lover of liberty, swearing by the blood of the Revolution, could sacrifice "unceasingly upon its altars". The experiment, a term Lincoln used, was successful and America could advance the "noblest of cause – that of establishing and maintaining civil and religious liberty." Among the targets for Lincoln's critical comments were the Democratic Party leadership, Senator Stephen A Douglas and President Polk, and the Young America Movement, an expansionist faction of the Democratic Party which attracted popular support in the 1840s. Addressing an academic gathering at Illinois College in Jacksonville, Lincoln stated that Expansionists believed America:

...owns a large part of the world, by right of possessing it; and all the rest by right of wanting it, and *intending* to have it...Young America has a "pleasing hope – a fond pleasure – a longing after" territory[*sic*]. He has a great passion – a perfect rage – for the "new."...He is a great friend of humanity; and his desire for land is not selfish, but merely an impulse to extend the area of freedom...He knows all that can possibly be known; inclines to believe in spiritual rappings, and is unquestioned inventor of "Manifest Destiny."<sup>210</sup>

However, there was not exactly a huge chasm between Lincoln and the expansionists. Separately there was more a difference in their degrees of hubris; but together they shared a sense of America's Manifest Destiny. Commenting on this attack on Young America's concept of Manifest Destiny, Johannsen states Lincoln:

...was at that very moment embracing notions of destiny and mission that bore a striking resemblance to those of Manifest Destiny's spokesmen. Convinced that the United States was in danger of being converted into a slave empire, Lincoln issued an urgent call to heed the nation's destiny as a bastion of freedom and its mission to extend the promise of the Declaration of Independence, elevating Manifest Destiny to a lofty plane of republican virtue and morality...Lincoln's embrace of Manifest Destiny and mission sustained his efforts to preserve the Union through the darkest days of the Civil War and offered hope to beleaguered people and those beyond our borders who saw in the Union's cause the

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<sup>210</sup> Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 8 Vols., 1953-55), ed. by Roy P. Basler.

promise of freedom for all mankind. It takes no great leap of the imagination to recognize that the most enduring statement of America's Manifest Destiny and mission was contained in those 272 words Lincoln uttered on the battlefield of Gettysburg on November 19, 1863.<sup>211</sup>

Lincoln, as Wills argues, had redefined this exceptional nation in the Gettysburg address when he concluded his address:

...the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom; and that Governments of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.<sup>212</sup>

Lincoln had united the nation and made it conscious of being a united nation, but also in the tradition of Manifest Destiny he had articulated America as a true union making progress under God. It was only a matter of time until another president, Woodrow Wilson, would take up the cause of Manifest Destiny and lead the Union into a new phase of American history and Manifest Destiny. In so doing, Wilson set the nation on a new mission for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in an international context.

### **Phase Three: Wilsonian Internationalism and Realism**

The third phase of Manifest Destiny was Wilsonianism built on Exceptionalism. President Woodrow Wilson<sup>213</sup> saw America beyond exceptionalism and framed the nation in terms of

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<sup>211</sup> Johannsen, *Ibid.*, p.18f.

<sup>212</sup> In the *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, the phrase "under God" does not appear in what is recorded as the original written version, but is in the newspaper reports and other copies of the address, suggesting that Lincoln decided to add this at the time of speaking rather than in his prepared version.

<sup>213</sup> What I set out here is not a detailed assessment of Wilson or Wilsonianism, merely an outline to illustrate his grasp of exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny. There is an abundance of literature on Wilson, a select list of biography and outline of his thought would include L.E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), H. W. Brands, *Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Times Books, 2003), K.A. Clements, *The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), J.M. Cooper jr., *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Knopf Books, 2009), A. Heckscher, *Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991), A.S. Link, *The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson and Other Essays* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971), D. Steigerwald, *Wilsonian Idealism in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), N.A. Thorsen, *The Political Thought of Woodrow Wilson, 1875-1910* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

universalist values, professing that American values and leadership were good for the world and what the world needed was Americanism. Globally, he advocated an America playing the lead role in a League of Nations that would govern for a better world, whilst domestically establishing the doctrine that America foreign policy resided with the president. His progressive outlook was informed by the Social Gospel and social Darwinism, giving every appearance of being the natural heir to the founding fathers, Manifest Destiny and Lincolnian nationalism.<sup>214</sup> As Wilson explained, a united America had to continue moving forward because as:

A Union full of new States, themselves a new creation; a people recruited out of almost every civilized nation of the world, bound together by railway and telegraph, busy with enterprises which no state or section could imprison within local boundaries...now at last conscious of its unity and its organic integrity, could not turn back to a particularistic creed which might make every jar of politics threaten to break its joints asunder.<sup>215</sup>

Wilson believed that now America was to pursue its Manifest Destiny on the international stage. This phase took the expansion from a physical continental spread and national unification into the realms of the abstract, as America promoted its ideals globally. Lloyd E. Ambrosius explains the Wilson approach and his legacy:

During and after the Great War, Wilson offered his vision of a new world order, identified, in retrospect, as Wilsonianism. His liberal internationalism embraced the principles of (1) national self-determination, which affirmed both national sovereignty and democratic self-government; (2) Open Door economic globalization, which favored a competitive marketplace for trade and financial investments across national borders; (3) collective security, which found expression in the postwar League of Nations; and (4) progressive history, which undergirded the Wilsonian vision of a better future for the world. These principles – the legacy of Wilsonianism – profoundly influenced the thinking and behavior

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<sup>214</sup> Richard M. Gamble, *The United States as World Savior: Costs and Consequences*, *Political Science Review* (38, 2009) 106-124, discusses Manifest Destiny and the social gospel, and contrasts what he sees as the messianic ideals of presidents such as Woodrow Wilson and the more limited and pragmatic aims of the Founding Fathers.

<sup>215</sup> Wilson, Woodrow. *A History of the American People - In Five Volumes, Vol. IV: Critical Changes and Civil War* (New York: Cosimo Inc, 2008), p.202

of Americans in the twentieth century. They provided the dominant ideology for the United States during this so-called American Century.<sup>216</sup>

A belief in progressive history led Wilson to use the term Manifest Destiny a quarter of a century after it was first coined, in a speech to Congress in 1920, after the end of World War I. Wilson was seeking to establish America's role as an agent for creating a better world, and the Democratic president told Congress:

Democracy is an assertion of the right of the individual to live and to be treated justly as against any attempt on the part of any combination of individuals to make laws which will overburden him or which will destroy his equality among his fellows in the matter of right or privilege; and I think we all realize that the day has come when Democracy is being put upon its final test. The Old World is just now suffering from a wanton rejection of the principle of democracy and a substitution of the principle of autocracy as asserted in the name, but without the authority and sanction, of the multitude. This is the time of all others when Democracy should prove its purity and its spiritual power to prevail. It is surely *the Manifest Destiny*<sup>217</sup> of the United States to lead in the attempt to make this spirit prevail.<sup>218</sup>

This is the only time the phrase has been used in a presidential address, but in Wilson's use he signaled the providential role of America as missionaries of the democratic age. Wilson had a clear sense of America's destiny, and only the year before he had stressed the nation could not turn back. In presenting the Treaty of Paris, Wilson had told the US Senate:

The stage is set, the destiny disclosed. It has come about by no plan of our conceiving, but by the hand of God who led us into this way. We cannot turn back. We can only go forward, with lifted eyes and freshened spirit, to follow the vision. It was of this that we dreamed at

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<sup>216</sup> Ambrosius, Lloyd E. *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and his legacy in American foreign relations* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002, p.2

<sup>217</sup> My emphasis

<sup>218</sup> Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library, Washington DC, <http://wwl2.dataformat.com/PDF/D04393.pdf>, last accessed 28<sup>th</sup> December 2011

our birth. America shall in truth show the way. The light streams upon the path ahead, and nowhere else.<sup>219</sup>

Wilson believed that America was born a Christian nation, and its devotion to righteousness derived its inspiration from the revelations of Holy Scripture<sup>220</sup>. For him Christianity, America and patriotism are all intertwined. America had a crusade in international affairs derived from God's righteousness for the world, and this was the universalism that America embodied. Wilson clearly built on the foundation of Manifest Destiny, as Weinberg explains:

...Wilson summoned America to an objective antithetic to expansion by appealing to the pride, the morals, and the metaphysics of expansionism. He presented America's entrance into the League as world leadership; so too O'Sullivan, author of the phrase "Manifest Destiny", once envisaged a great future in which America would "lead our race." He depicted this leadership as "moral"; so too O'Sullivan once prophesied that America's hemispheric republic would "manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles." Wilson called America's leadership "destiny," the very word which O'Sullivan had brought into intimate relation with expansion.<sup>221</sup>

Manifest Destiny was at a turning point in this Wilsonian phase, as exceptional moved from exemplar to participant. Anders Stephanson unpacks the meaning of the duty of the Manifest Destiny:

There was a duty to develop and spread to full potential under the blessings of the most perfect principles imaginable. This vision has been a constant throughout American history, but historically it has led to two quite different ways of being toward the outside world. The first was to unfold into an exemplary state *separate* from the corrupt and fallen world, letting others emulate as best it can. The second, Wilson's position, was to push the world along by means of regenerative *intervention*. Separation, however, has been the more dominant of the two.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library, Washington DC, <http://wwl2.dataformat.com/PDF/D04386.pdf>, last accessed 28<sup>th</sup> December 2011

<sup>220</sup> The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, Volume 12: 1900-1901, p.474f

<sup>221</sup> Weinberg, *Ibid.*, p.470

<sup>222</sup> Stephanson, *Ibid.* p. xii

Wilson was making a break from separation, or America as exemplar. Exceptionalism suggests there is a choice in the matter, but Manifest Destiny demands action and a spreading of spheres of interest. His notion of America's Manifest Destiny was essentially interventionist, seeking to influence and change rather than simply offering up exemplary morals for those who chose to follow or imitate. It is this sense of destiny and intervention that went to the heart of America, and American foreign policy. Wilson essentially globalized Manifest Destiny, and set the tone for American foreign policy for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and beyond. With the growth of market economics, the theme of liberty became particularized and the economy a vehicle for the spread of American values in the 20th Century, as Hodgson defines American Exceptionalism:

The core of that belief is the idea that the United States is not just the richest and most powerful of the world's more than two hundred states but is also politically and morally exceptional. Exceptionalists minimize the contributions of other nations and cultures to the rule of law and to the evolution of political democracy. Especially since Woodrow Wilson, exceptionalists have proclaimed that the United States has a destiny and a duty to expand its power and influence of its institutions and its beliefs until they dominate the world. In recent decades an economic dimension has been added to this traditional faith in the American Constitution and in the principle of government with the consent of the governed. For many American leaders and publicists today, capitalism, in the particular form it has taken in the United States, must be spread alongside freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.<sup>223</sup>

With almost Lutheran clarity, the Presbyterian<sup>224</sup> President Woodrow Wilson told the United States Congress on April 2, 1917, in a speech that inaugurated America's entry into the Great War, that:

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<sup>223</sup> Hodgson, *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>224</sup> Malcolm Magee, Woodrow Wilson, Wilsonianism, and the Idealism of Faith, *Review of Faith & International Affairs* (9:4, Dec 2011) 29-38, argues an understanding of Wilson's Presbyterian faith as being a foundational influence to him is crucial to making sense of his ideas and policy decisions during his presidency. On his Presbyterian upbringing and his intellectual development, see also Niels Aage Thorsen, *The Political Thought of Woodrow Wilson, 1875–1910* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) 3–16, and, John M. Mulder, *Woodrow Wilson: The Years of Preparation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) 2–58.



America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace that she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other.<sup>225</sup>

In the same address, Wilson said he could see:

...the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states.<sup>226</sup>

This was voiced by Wilson at the pinnacle of the shift in America from isolationism to liberal interventionism and internationalism, and clearly illustrates the Wilsonianism which was to greatly influence the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Wilson went on to outline his 14 Points plan<sup>227</sup> the following year, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1918, which set out his program for peace in the world. The plan, in the first five parts called for an end to secret agreements, the free navigation of the seas, an end to economic barriers between countries, a reduction in arms, and impartiality in decisions regarding the colonies. The next six parts dealt with specific situations in Europe, and then concluded with a twelfth, which was a call for the setting up of a League of Nations to guarantee the political and territorial independence of all nations. Wilson explained the rationale of his plan:

An evident principle runs through the whole program I have outlined. It is the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities, and their right to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another, whether they be strong or weak. Unless this principle be made its foundation no part of the structure of international justice can stand. The people of the United States could act upon no other principle; and to the vindication of this principle they are ready to devote their lives, their honor, and everything they possess. The moral climax of this the culminating and final war for human liberty has come, and they are ready

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<sup>225</sup> Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library, Washington DC, <http://wwl2.dataformat.com/PDF/D04363.pdf>, last accessed 28<sup>th</sup> December 2011

<sup>226</sup> Wilson, *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> The 14 points are dealt with extensively in the literature listed, to which I add J. R. Bullington, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points And the Long Debate in U.S. Foreign Policy "Justice to All Peoples" President Woodrow Wilson, *American Diplomacy* (1/8/2008) 1-2, and, Trygve Throntveit, The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination, *Diplomatic History* (35:3, Jun 2011) 445-481

to put their own strength, their own highest purpose, their own integrity and devotion to the test.<sup>228</sup>

In one stroke, Wilson defined internationalism and America's leadership role, calling on America to ensure such a world of democracy made in its own image.<sup>229</sup> The exceptionalism of America was turned from isolationist to internationalist, from exemplar to actor. However, this idealism failed as the League of Nations disintegrated, but it has never gone too far away from the debate and we continue to see aspects of Wilsonianism in American foreign policy.

Wilson defined a Manifest Destiny for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that has had enduring appeal up to the present day. Wilson died the same year as Lenin and when the Nazi Party entered the Reichstag for the first time. These secular ideologies would tear the world apart in a second World War and a Cold War. The Realism of Niebuhr and others came to the fore against the backdrop of Wilson's failure, Communism and the Nazis. Before turning to the fourth phase of Manifest Destiny in the next chapter, I will look at the intervening period of Realism and Niebuhr's contribution, which gave every appearance that Manifest Destiny had been laid to rest.

### **Keeping Manifest Destiny at Bay: The Realist Takeover of American Foreign Policy**

The classical realist Hans Morgenthau warned against a utopianism that identifies "the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe."<sup>230</sup> Both

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<sup>228</sup> Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library, Washington DC, <http://wwl2.dataformat.com/PDF/D04373.pdf>, last accessed 28<sup>th</sup> December 2011

<sup>229</sup> Tony Smith, From Woodrow Wilson in 1902 to the Bush doctrine in 2002: Democracy promotion as imperialism, *International Politics* (48: 2/3, Mar-May2011) 229-250, argues that the hallmark of American foreign policy for a century comprises democracy promotion (associated with open markets economically and multilateralism) reflecting America's cultural superiority (inherited from racial thinking), as well as its mission to help others (descended from its religious background). Smith concludes that in Wilson's hands an enduring framework for American foreign policy was born, one that remains with us to this day. See also, See also, L.E. Ambrosius, Woodrow Wilson and George W. Bush: Historical Comparisons of Ends and Means in Their Foreign Policies, *Diplomatic History* (30:2006) 509–543, Knock, T.J., *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), R. McNamara & J.G. Blight, *Wilson's Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing, and Catastrophe in the 21st Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), T. Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), and S.J. Stedman, The New Interventionists. *Foreign Affairs* (72:1993) 1–16.

<sup>230</sup> Morgenthau, Hans J. *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1946), p.11.

Wilsonianism and Manifest Destiny had a tendency to make just such identification. Realism<sup>231</sup> came to dominance in the 1930s to 1950s, dismissing the utopian liberalism apparent in Wilsonianism and other schools of thought. Realism is an attempt to avoid confusion of national moral aspirations with universal moral norms by establishing an amoral basis on which to view the nation in the context of an anarchic international system.<sup>232</sup> This does not mean wild anarchy but the absence of an overarching authority, suggesting there are no rules governing internationally, only nation states interacting with each other resulting in a balance of power through states checking concentration of power by building up their own capabilities independently or by alliance with other states. It should be noted that realism is at once both a theory and a practice of statecraft.

Niebuhr's political writings sought to be pragmatic, and responded to events in the world. He supported the war effort in World War I, and Wilson's decision to enter the war, including the rationale. However, the resulting Versailles conference led him to believe Wilsonian and liberal diplomacy were inadequate. Although starting out a Wilsonian, he felt he had to confront what he saw as the illusion of liberal optimism and develop a sustained critique of liberalism from within. While he took issue with Wilsonianism and liberal illusions on the one hand, he was also later troubled by what he saw as the deference shown by the deputy in the US Embassy in Moscow, later to be US Ambassador to the Soviet Union, George Kennan in his famous realist text "The Long Telegram"<sup>233</sup> and the authoritarianism of conservatives on the other. Niebuhr had a formative influence on the work of major realists, being widely quoted in Morgenthau's *Scientific Man* and in Carr's *Twenty Years*, while Kennan purportedly once quipped "Niebuhr is the father of us all."<sup>234</sup> Niebuhr had sought to address the strengths and weaknesses of classical realism, and it is useful to make some introductory comments about the theory here.

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<sup>231</sup> For key realist and Morgenthau texts see bibliography.

<sup>232</sup> Morgenthau, *Ibid* p.10, "Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation." In Michael C. Williams (ed.) *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), Anthony F. Lang, jr., writes "Realists are either amoral analysts of the international system who focus only on power or immoral Machiavellians who see nothing wrong with using violence and deception to advance the national interest." p18, explaining at least this is the caricature.

<sup>233</sup> See discussion below.

<sup>234</sup> Apparently Kennan did not recall saying this, but Kenneth W. Thompson recalls the remark in essay in Rice [2009], p.139. I raised this with biographer John Lewis Gaddis, asking if he was aware of anything to contradict this version, he replied in an e-mail to me "Not that I'm aware of. The problem is that because their thinking was parallel,

In the field of International Relations, the realist school is very diverse, but all realist theories share roots in ideas about human nature and power. They all agree that power, and nations competing for power, lie at the heart of understanding international relations within this anarchic system of nations. Critics suggest there is a pessimism and cynicism to the classical realists; illustrated by the term “Machiavellian” as defining a cynical and manipulative use of power. Indeed Machiavelli is a member of the Realist Hall of Fame, alongside an historical range of thinkers: Thucydides, Hobbes, Luther, Max Weber and EH Carr. Realists would respond that it is just being realistic about people and organizations, ‘telling it like it is.’ In other words, realists would argue that they deal with the world as it is rather than as they would like it to be; the latter is left to liberalism. Although a school of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it is a way of thinking about international relations that draws deep from history, going as far back as the ancient Greeks, in particular the realist writings on power by Thucydides (c.460-400). Thucydides drew attention to the natural existence of unequal power between states, and the need to act realistically and prudently in order to survive by recognizing these limitations.

Realists also agree on a somewhat pessimistic assumption about the limitations of human nature, often portrayed as the Augustinian view of humanity, which draws from general negative views expressed both by the classical writers and the more specific Augustinianism of Niebuhr, though we will have cause to question his evaluation in due course.<sup>235</sup> Augustinian or not, they share a pessimistic view of what humanity is truly capable of achieving. Niebuhr highlighted that Augustine subjugated human togetherness to the divine relationship, and articulated original sin as the limiter of what humanity can achieve. Lest one should think realists are taking here a step in the direction of moralism or endorsing a theological view, given their Augustinian view of human nature, it is important to note that this sense of the negativity of human nature plays out in a non-theological sense. We are social beings paradoxically acting in our self-interest, which in politics results in the assertion of power. The ontological assumption is that we are at heart egoists, and this trumps altruism.

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theorists assume that cooperation must have taken place in constructing "realist" theory. I've found no solid evidence that it did." E-mail of April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012.

<sup>235</sup> discussion in Chapter 5

In other words, the Realists have their own form of “original sin.” Kenneth Waltz<sup>236</sup> sums this view rather neatly when he writes:

The web of social and political life is spun out of inclinations and incentives, deterrent threats and punishments. Eliminate the latter two, and the ordering of society depends entirely on the former – a utopian thought impractical this side of Eden.<sup>237</sup>

This is most clearly spelled out by Machiavelli in his 1532 work *The Prince*. To act morally or on the basis of Christian ethics is not the task of the Prince, because necessity in politics will on occasion demand using evil means to achieve the ends of national interests. The responsibility of statesmen is to defend and advance the national interest, and to be instrumental rather than judgmental. This, again, places a limitation on the goals of international relations, ruling out many progressive and interventionist actions, because they are not seen by realists in the long-term national interest due to interference in the running of another state. Political and personal morality need to operate on different planes. Another assumption is that power and conflict are part of the natural order of things; we are in a Hobbesian state of nature. In *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes argued that people are by nature in conflict, and far from warfare being abnormal we in fact live in a natural state of continual warfare. His famous dictum was the “life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” The reason for society is not to make the world a better place; rather we create society out of self-interest. We do not cooperate out of the goodness of a liberal heart; rather we make a social contract with “a power to keep all in awe.”

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<sup>236</sup> Kenneth Waltz, whose major work is *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), put forward Neorealism. Waltz dismisses the normative concerns of classical realism and proposes a scientific theory. Waltz argued that the bipolar state of The Cold War created greater stability, offering a guarantee of peace that a multipolar world could not. Waltz accepted the core realist assumptions of international anarchy, centrality of the nation-state, state security and survival, and the role of power politics. What Waltz posits is the structure of the system, thus avoiding discussion of the role of human nature and foreign policymaking outside of the system. On p.117, Waltz explains:

The ruler’s, and later the state’s, interest provides the spring of action; the necessities of policy arise from the un-regulated competition of states; calculation based on these necessities can discover the policies that will best serve the state’s interests; success is the ultimate test of policy, and success is defined as preserving and strengthening the state... structural constraints explain why the methods are repeatedly used despite differences in the persons and states who use them.

In arguing his Neorealism, Waltz by advocating the need for a stable international order arguably still leaves the door open for normative questions, and thus his scientific approach may be largely a difference of style with classical realism in tackling the need for international stability, as he clearly wants this stability, which surely leads to a normative discussion about why he should want it.

<sup>237</sup> Waltz, *Ibid.*, p.186

This necessarily brief historical note serves to illustrate the deep intellectual roots of the shared assumptions about human nature and social engagement that we find in the classical realist school that came to dominate international relations thinking in the 20th Century. Drawing on these shared ideas, Realism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was first articulated by E.H. Carr, in his 1939 work *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. Carr was critical of the utopian thought which had captivated International Relations thinking in the preceding inter-war years. He argued that the discipline had to approach the world as it is (nasty, brutish and short), rather than as it might be (utopia). This means turning to acceptance of facts as they present themselves, and analyzing causes and consequences of events. Realism, Carr argued, is based on three foundational points:

- 1) History is a sequence of cause and effect which can be intellectually grasped;
- 2) Theory is created by practice; and,
- 3) Ethics is the product of power.

Human lust for power, and asserting human rule over divine rule, is another correlation. The limited state, as opposed to the internationalism of liberalism, establishes a curtailment of human power. It places limits on what we can achieve together, as godless states. Again, this is suggestive of another biblical warning, namely the Tower of Babel; though in making this point one has to be cautious not to slide simply into a theological slipstream, for realism does not accept such a moral basis for its analysis. The nature of the debate is one of power, as Morgenthau wrote:

Politics is a struggle for power over men, and whatever its ultimate aim may be, power is its immediate goal and the modes of acquiring, maintaining, and demonstrating it determine the technique of political action.<sup>238</sup>

In this scheme of things, echoing Machiavelli, there is one morality for the public sphere, and another for the private sphere. More than this, there are actions acceptable to political ethics that would not be so to private ethics.<sup>239</sup> In this view, ethical attempts to root political action in

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<sup>238</sup> Morgenthau, *Ibid.*, p.195

<sup>239</sup> An example of this would be the controversy surrounding the sexual scandals of President Clinton, which has been assessed in terms of moral issues and use of religion in the scandal by a range of authors, including Jean Bethke

morality, such as Wilsonianism are to be rejected. Instead, Morgenthau outlined “six principles of political realism”, which essentially stated politics is rooted in:

1. unchanging human nature
2. being autonomous and not reducible to economics (Marxism) or Morals (Kantian, liberalism)
3. human nature as self-interested
4. situational ethics quite distinct from private morality
5. a recognition that nations cannot impose their ideology on others
6. plain and sober diplomacy<sup>240</sup>

Morgenthau distinguished two ways of assessing politics. The first stresses that a rational and moral order can be created from a universally valid set of moral principles, premised on the essential goodness of human nature. The second sees events as the result of forces inherent in human nature, which we need to work with rather than against. Morgenthau maintains Carr’s stance that universal moral principles do not apply:

Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place. The individual may say for himself: ‘*fiat justitia, pereat mundus* (let justice be done even if the world perish)’, but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care.<sup>241</sup>

Many realists also exclude the motives of individual statesmen as helpful to our understanding.<sup>242</sup> Hence, we are to exclude the role of faith in the life of the President and their motivating moral assumptions. Morgenthau, who was deeply influenced by psychological theory, argued:

To search for the clue to foreign policy exclusively in the motives of statesmen is both futile and deceptive. It is futile because motives are the most illusive of psychological data,

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Elshtain, Stanley Hauerwas and Max Stackhouse in Gabriel Fackre (ed.), *Judgment Day in the White House* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999)

<sup>240</sup> Morgenthau, *Ibid.*, pp.4-17

<sup>241</sup> Morgenthau, *Ibid.*, p.12

<sup>242</sup> Neorealism and Waltz

distorted as they are, frequently beyond recognition, by the interests and emotions of actor and observer alike. Do we really know what our own motives are? And what do we know of the motives of others?<sup>243</sup>

Another concern is whether policy is largely driven by external systemic factors or internal domestic factors. It is what David Singer called ‘The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations,’<sup>244</sup> which is the problem of deciphering whether we account for the behavior of the international system in terms of the nation states comprising it, or vice-versa. Theories of International Relations all try to explain this critical relationship.

In external theories, the role of power is crucial, with two theories of Defensive Realism and Offensive Realism sharing certain assumptions but differing on the distribution of power. Each agrees that the international system is anarchic insofar as there is no over-arching authority over sovereign states, which are the key actors holding the highest authority and governing domestic affairs. Each sovereign state acts to ensure its own survival, and hence power is the currency and each state has a relative store of this currency. According to this theory, the United States has the greatest store of power and acts both to preserve and increase this power. Defensive Realism differs in saying that states are “security maximizers,” so America needs to act to preserve the necessary amount of power, no more and no less, since an expansionist foreign policy risks upsetting the balance of power. In the wake of 9/11 American policy is witnessing other states seeking to redress the resulting imbalance of power. Offensive Realism, on the other hand, argues that states are “power maximizers,” since there is uncertainty in the world which means America must maximize its relative power vis-à-vis other states, such as China and Russia.

John Mearsheimer makes the point that global hegemony is the highest goal of every state, but the ‘stopping power of water’ means there are geographic limitations set by oceans as to what is possible.<sup>245</sup> What is thus possible is regional hegemony, which is precisely what America has achieved. The goal of policy, Mearsheimer argues, is to prevent the emergence of a hegemon in other regions of the world. Realism seems to emphasize positively the hegemonic role of America in the world, whilst also explaining the emergence of the twin evils of Communism and Fascism

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<sup>243</sup> Morgenthau, *Ibid.*, pp.5-6

<sup>244</sup> J. David Singer, The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations, *World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1, The International System: Theoretical Essays, Oct. 1961, pp. 77-92.

<sup>245</sup> John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: WW Norton, 2001) pp. 114–128



in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The context for much of 20<sup>th</sup> Century American foreign policy was the contest between America and Communism. This contest was primarily in the shape of the Soviet Union, but took in China as well. It transformed into the Cold War, and culminated in the demise of this enmity.<sup>246</sup> There are many reasons to do with security, balance of power and ideology that can be put to good use to explain the causes of the Cold War, but what is clear is the principle that for American foreign policy Godless Communism was a challenge to America's divine calling, its 'Manifest Destiny.'<sup>247</sup> A typical comment came in 1951, when President Harry Truman condemned the International Communist movement as fanatical and Godless, stating that God has fashioned America for a great purpose.<sup>248</sup> Like Truman, his successor Dwight D. Eisenhower saw religion in opposition to Communism, and even engaged with Islamic political leaders as allies against Godless Communism.

The *modus operandi* of America for much of the Cold War was the policy of containment, spelled out by George Kennan in the Long Telegram, comprising some eight thousand words, on the

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<sup>246</sup> As a pivotal 20th Century event and the key to understanding the foreign policy background to this thesis, the literature on the causes of the Cold War and the reasons for its demise is vast. An accessible overview of the subject is John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (New York: Penguin: 2005). Other selected readings: Graham Allison and Gregory F. Treverton (eds.) *Rethinking America's Security: Beyond the Cold War to the New World Order* (New York: Norton, 1992); Mike Bowker and Robin Brown (eds.), *From Cold War to Collapse: Theory and World Politics in the 1980s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Michael Cox, 'Rethinking the End of the Cold War', *Review of International Studies* (20:2, April 1994), pp. 199; Robert Dallek, *The American Style of Foreign Policy: Cultural Politics and Foreign Affairs* (New York: Mentor Books, 1984); a trilogy of books by John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War: 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsideration, Provocations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); two essays by John Mearsheimer, Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War, *International Security* (15:1, Summer 1990) pp. 5-56, and, Why We Will Soon Miss The Cold War *The Atlantic Monthly* (August 1990) pp. 35-50; Lloyd C. Gardner, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Hans J. Morgenthau, *The Origins of the Cold War*. (Waltham, Ginn-Blaisdell, 1970); Michael J. Hogan (ed), *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Charles W. Kegley and Eugene R. Wittkopf (eds.), *The Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Don Oberdorfer, *The Turn: From the Cold War to a New Era* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1991), Robert G. Patman, Reagan, Gorbachev and the Emergence of 'New Political Thinking,' *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), pp. 577-601; Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr. "The Origins of the Cold War." *Foreign Affairs* (Oct. 1967); and, Stephen Sestanovich, 'Did the West Undo the East?', *The National Interest* (Spring 1993) p. 27.

<sup>247</sup> Angela M. Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) assesses the political ascent of American evangelicalism in light of the Cold War, offering argument that evangelicals discovered a unique opportunity for political engagement in the Cold War; though it seems she largely addresses primarily premillennial and dispensational premillennial evangelicalism.

<sup>248</sup> Truman address to New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, April 3, 1951. Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman 1951 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1965), 210-213.

evening of 22 February, 1946.<sup>249, 250</sup> Kennan highlights the link between the theory and practice of realism. He explained that Soviet policy sought to advance the relative strength of the Soviet Union in international society and to influence capitalist powers. He argued that the Soviets aimed to deepen and exploit differences and conflicts between capitalist powers, and if these “eventually deepen into an "imperialist" war, this war must be turned into revolutionary upheavals within the various capitalist countries.” Also, “"Democratic progressive" elements abroad were to be used to pressure capitalist governments “along lines agreeable to Soviet interests.” The final element of Soviet policy he stated was that a “relentless battle must be waged against socialist and social-democratic leaders abroad,” whom Lenin had labelled “false friends.” In short, there was no room for peaceful coexistence between the Soviet Union and America, and this would lead to support of Communist forces elsewhere in the world. However, Kennan also offered that Soviet power, unlike Hitler’s Germany, was “neither schematic nor adventuristic.” The Soviets were still by far the weaker force and the success of Soviet system, as a form of internal power, was not yet finally proven. As a result, the first step for the Americans was to understand the realities of the situation and educate the public.

Much also depended on the health and vigor of America, which needed to offer to “other nations a much more positive and constructive picture of the sort of world we would like to see than we have put forward in the past...and have courage and self-confidence to cling to our own methods and conceptions of human society.” In short, Western and American life was superior and the Soviet Union ultimately vulnerable to this superiority. A year later Kennan penned an article under the name Mr. X in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs*,<sup>251</sup> based on the ideas explored in the Long telegram and the Clark-Elsey Report, submitted to president Truman on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1946.<sup>252</sup> In the article, which it was common knowledge he had authored, Kennan spelled out more clearly the policy of containment, a term Kennan employed on four occasions in the article. Kennan’s viewpoint became the foundation of American policy towards the Soviet Union and

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<sup>249</sup> Telegram, George Kennan to James Byrnes ["Long Telegram"], February 22, 1946. Harry S. Truman Administration File, Elsey Papers. The following quotes are from the telegram.

[http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/coldwar/documents/index.php?documentdate=1-02-22&documentid=6-6&studycollectionid=&pagenumber=1](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/index.php?documentdate=1-02-22&documentid=6-6&studycollectionid=&pagenumber=1), last accessed 8/3/12

<sup>251</sup> <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/23331/x/the-sources-of-soviet-conduct>, last accessed 16 May 2011

<sup>252</sup> *American Relations With The Soviet Union*, September 24, 1946; Report by Clark Clifford, *American Relations With The Soviet Union*; Subject File; Conway Files; Truman Papers. <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/4-1.pdf>, last accessed 16 May 2011

evolved into Nixon's détente.<sup>253</sup> Kennan noted the vulnerability of the Soviet Union as the weaker nation, which came true in the 1980s implosion, though how much this was down to American or Western superiority is highly debatable.<sup>254</sup> There are contesting views as to why The Cold War ended, just as there is debate over why it had started in the first place, but we can see the trajectory of the relationship of the Soviet Union in terms of America's Manifest Destiny, whereby the Soviet Union as the enemy or nemesis essentially defines the exceptional nature and destiny of America as the premier and controlling liberal democracy.

Kennan offered a view maintaining Manifest Destiny by suggesting America, as an exceptional nation, would ultimately defeat the inferior nature of the Soviet Union, and its people would want to be like the West, drawing on America as the paragon of Western freedom. America would encroach upon the land occupied by Communists not by means of war but by containment, until the internal contradictions strained their ideology to its maximum and broke asunder. At the same time, Kennan opposed anticommunism and its identification with American patriotism, seeing such anticommunism as a substitute religion. Kennan warned of the potential danger of American power in lectures to businessmen at the University of Virginia in 1946, saying "I deplore the hysterical sort of anti-communism which it seems to me is gaining currency in our country."<sup>255</sup> What was to follow was McCarthyism, and the coming into focus of Richard Nixon as a prominent anticommunist. Containment was more about keeping a distance from the Soviet Union, in a political maneuver of allowing them enough rope to hang themselves. In this sense, America is a beacon of hope to those in an imploding Soviet Union rather than an invading force. Manifest Destiny in this context means the idea will impress itself upon the consciousness of persons and succeed, rather than crossing waters to expand geographically.

The policy of containment was to give way to more interventionist policies, with the war in Vietnam becoming the defining event in late 20th Century America, testing the limits of America's

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<sup>253</sup> A useful discussion is offered by David Allan Mayers, *George Kennan and the dilemmas of US foreign policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) especially on Vietnam in Chapter 12 "War and Protest" p.275f. Also, John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011)

<sup>254</sup> Despite popular conservative claims to the contrary it was not all due to Reagan

<sup>255</sup> George F. Kennan, *University of Virginia lecture, Russian-American Relations, February 20, 1947* Kennan Papers, Seeley Mudd Library, Princeton University, Box 16.

Manifest Destiny. Just as Lincoln had asked why God would allow the Civil War, which undermined the notion of Manifest Destiny as a geographic spread of the continent, the American people were questioning the idea of America and its Manifest Destiny beyond Mearsheimer's 'stopping power of water.' Vietnam challenged America's military and moral superiority; as Kissinger noted, all the hopeful assumptions of Wilsonianism had been "ground down in the stark mountains and lush rice paddies of Vietnam."<sup>256</sup> Started by President Kennedy, expanded by President Johnson, Vietnam was to overshadow the Nixon presidency before Watergate. Wilsonianism was dead and the prevalent approach in the Nixon administration was realism, with the policy of détente the means of managing competitive power in a new global arena. This undermined the idea of a superior America and its Manifest Destiny, placing America on the same plane of significance as the Soviet Union and China. At best, America was now first among equals. To conservative Americans, this was a strange move to make; it was doing business with the devil. Nixon, however, was able to carry it off because of his hard line anti-communist record, dating back to his earliest days as a senator. The Nixon presidency was ushering in a new way of doing business, that of détente and a different realism.

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<sup>256</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal: The Concluding Volume of His Classic Memoirs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), p.33

## Chapter Four

### Manifest Destiny at the End of the American Century

In this chapter, I will explore the final phase of Manifest Destiny at the end of what was called the “American Century”, which coincides with the rise of the Religious Right, which has been likened to a third Great Awakening,<sup>257</sup> and its embrace of Neoconservatism. I will break down the constituency of this Religious Right and how its support of Neocon foreign policy represents a further republicanization of religion in America.

The assumption of the four phases of Manifest Destiny is that firstly America is chosen to fulfill this role, and that history has a purpose that, at least in part, is unfolding in the actions of America. The three phases I have considered so far sets the scene for the fourth phase of the Religious Right as it seeks to define the role and actions of America. In this chapter I undertake two tasks. I will first discuss the Religious Right as a period of awakening, just as the first phase of Manifest Destiny followed an awakening. I will then provide a necessarily episodic overview of the sources of the constituent parts of the Religious Right debate, which is not to say all the denominations mentioned are “card carrying” Religious Right organizations, but to say these are the denominations from whence Religious Right support has come. The purpose being to highlight the diversity of a coalition which I conclude has emerged out of the identification of a “silent majority” united over cultural and political concerns. The cultural question will be raised briefly, but as more of an issue for domestic politics I will leave it at the point of simple identification before tackling the political coalition in the next chapter.

#### **Phase Four: Manifest Destiny and the Religious Right**

In an allusion to the Great Awakening, Bush II told a group of reporters in 2006 that he believed America was undergoing a third awakening. The Washington Post’s report of the meeting has Bush II stating, “I don’t know...I’m not giving you a definitive statement, it seems like to me

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<sup>257</sup> There is insufficient space to examine here if we are currently witnessing a third Great Awakening, and I merely reference it as part of the conversation and an intriguing question; see footnote 261.

there's a Third Awakening with a cultural change."<sup>258</sup> One of his most vocal evangelical opponents Jim Wallis seemed to agree, but not perhaps in the way Bush II intended. Wallis discussing the Great Awakening in the context of a post-Religious Right America, argues evangelicals are deserting the Religious Right in a new awakening of social justice.<sup>259</sup> Robert William Fogel also saw a link between religious awakenings and social reform, as well as economic development, which he says drives America towards greater egalitarianism.<sup>260</sup> The Great Awakening was the series of religious revivals which swept through the American Colonies from the mid-1700s into the early 1800s, with the first awakening taking place in the 1730s and 1740s, and the second from around 1795 to 1810.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> 180 Report in <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/12/AR2006091201594.html>, also <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/218718/w-not-wobble/rich-lowry#>, both last accessed 17/5/2012

<sup>259</sup> Jim Wallis, *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith & Politics in a Post-Religious right America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008)

<sup>260</sup> Robert William Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2000)

<sup>261</sup> There has been much historiographical dispute on the number, nature and meaning of the Great Awakening. Jon Butler argued that the label of Great Awakening "distorts the extent, nature, and cohesion of the revivals that did exist in the eighteenth-century colonies, encourages unwarranted claims for their effects on colonial society, and exaggerates their influence on the coming and character of the American Revolution." Adding that it had a "slim, peculiar historiography" that lacked "even one comprehensive general history" since Joseph Tracy wrote *The Great Awakening* in 1842. Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction," *Journal of American History* 69 (1982–1983): 307-322. See also, Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). This characterization is disputed by Thomas S. Kidd. *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). He responds that the Great Awakening was great, not because it transformed colonial society and brought on the American Revolution, but because it "began a major alteration of global Christian history" by helping to give birth to "an enormously important religious movement, evangelicalism, which shows no sign of disappearing today" (p. xvii). In the first Great Awakening Kidd believes the notion of liberty of conscience was most important for the radical egalitarianism and trajectory of social reconciliation produced by the awakenings, especially in looking at the southern territories where slaves became itinerant preachers and formed their own churches. For the link to social reform, see also Donald G. Mathews, The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis, *American Quarterly* [21:1, Mar 1969] p23-43, and, R C. Gordon-McCutchan, The Irony of evangelical history, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* [20:4, 1981], p 309-326. For documentary sources see, Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007) and Richard L. Bushman (ed.), *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740–1745* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989). Other key studies on the religious aspects include Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006) and Mark A. Noll, *Christians in the American Revolution* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2006), see also Mark Noll, From the Great Awakening to the war for independence: Christian values in the American Revolution. *Christian Scholar's Review*, 12 no 2 1983, pp. 99-110, and Edwin Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (Chicago: quadrangle paperbacks, 1969). The term remains a signature for discussion of religion in public life to this day, see William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).

The first, or the Great Awakening, had itself followed a period of expansion and material progress. Yet, as David S. Lovejoy writes of the Great Awakening:

For all its apparent success, America had fallen short of its promise. Indeed, the Awakening was partly a reaction to the reason and rationalism which epitomized the Enlightenment. But it was not the Enlightenment itself which signaled a decline in religion as much as the complacency and smugness which had crept into eighteenth century life along with it. In 1740 many people suspected that America was not worthy of its earlier promise, that it was degenerating like England and the Old World into materialism and self-satisfaction. Most notably, danger seemed to lurk in a rational approach to religion, tending to Arminianism and even Deism, which was offensive to most colonists whose theology and world view were essentially Calvinist.<sup>262</sup>

At the time O'Sullivan had coined the term Manifest Destiny, America had undergone a second Great Awakening. Awakenings combine religious sentiment, political and social action, and periods of expansion, and they are times to recall the nation's purpose. If America is a record of God's providence and action in the world, then revivals are evidence of America responding to God's plan and the extraordinary work of God in America, as Lovejoy explains of Jonathan Edwards, he had a conception of:

...America's peculiar Providence in God's over-all scheme for redemption and "enlargement of his kingdom." His lucid explanation of conviction and conversion of grace and true virtue, were laced with a millennialism, a Manifest Destiny which, he claimed, the Awakening foreshadowed. God would work with extraordinary means in America, and the Awakening was His sign.<sup>263</sup>

The awakenings were seen to have their reward, and it seemed the improving status of America in the world and its economic and material progress went hand in hand with spiritual improvement and renewal. This was not simply religion shining through; it was evidence of a struggle over the roles of religion and enlightenment ideals. Some argue this is a process of republicanization (not

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<sup>262</sup> David S. Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm and the Great Awakening* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1969), p.6

<sup>263</sup> Lovejoy, *Ibid.*, p.21

to be confused with the Republican Party) of religion and an ongoing struggle over secular and religious authority, as Gordon S. Wood explains:

The American Revolution accelerated the challenges to religious authority that had begun with the First Great Awakening. Just as people were taking over their governments, so, it was said, they should take over their churches. Christianity had to be republicanized. The people were their own theologians and had no need to rely on others to tell them what to believe.<sup>264</sup>

Mark Noll agrees, explaining that the Revolutionary era saw parallels between Christian values and republican principles, which then commingled:

In the first place, they both held to a view of human nature that recognized the human capacity for evil as well as for good. Puritans dwelt at length on the natural tendency toward evil that arose as a consequence of Adam's fall. Republicans dwelt at length on the natural tendency to abuse official power as a consequence of the corrupting nature of power itself. Puritans and republicans also defined virtue, freedom, and social wellbeing in very similar terms. Both saw virtue primarily as a negative quality: Puritans as the absence of sin, republicans as the absence of corrupt and arbitrary power. Puritans looked on freedom as liberation from sin, republicans as liberation from tyranny... With similar views on virtue, freedom, and social well-being, it is not surprising that republican and Christian points of view began to merge during the Revolution.<sup>265</sup>

This was not simply a struggle over religion *or* enlightenment, it was a struggle over religion *and* enlightenment and how they were to cooperate. Hence, it was not the Enlightenment faith of the founding fathers and the founding documents, but the Protestantism of the Second Awakening which drove slavery out of America. It was not about the enlightened rights of men for these Protestants, it was about slavery being a sin. This Second Awakening faith, more impactful than the first Awakening, also promoted equality, women's role in the church, reform movements and restrictions on alcohol. Whatever the influence of Enlightenment thought and Deism, as Tocqueville had rightly observed, the Christian religion seemed to him to retain a greater hold on

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<sup>264</sup> Gordon S. Woods, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1993) p.332

<sup>265</sup> Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) p.116f



the souls of America than in any other country. He did not take this at theological face value, but instead identified an emerging American theology which was a blend of democratic and republican religion.

Why was there so much religion flowing through America's veins? Gary Wills<sup>266</sup> believes religion is a fertile and enduring force in American politics, and agrees there has been a tension between enlightenment thought and evangelism which has led to a recurring pattern of periods of religious coolness and fervor. Wills would also agree with Bush II, again for different reasons, that there is a third awakening, and identifies the three eras of religious fervor in America as the two Great Awakenings and the third period of the new Religious Right. Although the movement termed the "Religious Right" currently stands within the politically conservative Republican Party, it is rarely pointed out that religious conservatives while being certainly theologically conservative are not necessarily politically conservative.

They have periodically been more situated on what might have been termed the "left" or "progressive" in times past, and even today there is a sizeable conservative evangelical group that sides more with the Democrats.<sup>267</sup> Historically, conservative Christians were actively engaged in labor rights and anti-slavery groups in Antebellum America, and more recently in the Democratic Party when Jimmy Carter was elected the first self-proclaimed born-again president. Black evangelicals, who are largely theologically and socially conservative, tend to vote Democrat. These divergences, as the Wallis comment confirms, suggest two things. Firstly that the republicanization and politicization of religion is ever present, as Seymour Martin Lipset explains it democratic and religious values have grown together, so:

...on the one hand, Americans see religion as essential to the support of the democratic institutions they cherish, and therefore feel that all Americans should profess some sort of religious faith; on the other, hand, American denominations stress the ethical side of

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<sup>266</sup> Garry Wills, *Under God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990)

<sup>267</sup> Statistics consistently show that apart from bloc groups such as black conservative evangelicals many conservative Roman Catholics vote Democrat. There is also an argument to be made that the connection between Republicans and conservative Christians is not so straight forward, see Greeley, Andrew and Michael Hout. *The Truth about Conservative Christians: What They Think and What They Believe* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006), and the series on books on religion and elections by Green, Rozell & Wilcox listed in the bibliography, as well as the regular statistics published by the Pew Research Center.

religion which they all have in common (and which is closely associated with other democratic values) rather than stressing transcendental beliefs wherein they differ.<sup>268</sup>

Secondly, that while the current alliance is to the Republican Party this may be subject to change.

### **The Religious Right Coalition: Naming the Different Constituents**

Faith and patriotism are important to religious conservatives (which is not to say it doesn't matter to others), and American religion has become increasingly inclusive. Where once a WASP nation fought over the outsider status of Roman Catholicism, resulting in acceptance of President John F Kennedy, the argument is now one of the outsider status of Mormonism, resulting in acceptance of 2012 presidential candidate Mitt Romney.<sup>269</sup> The Religious Right has broadened into a coalition of people who share faith in God, but also share faith in America as a chosen nation; an American religion rather than a religious America. The task of this section is to break down this coalition into its various distinct parts, in order to demonstrate the nature of this coalition. The coalition has been forged to mold and direct this 21<sup>st</sup> Century Manifest Destiny, and, perhaps appropriately in our economic age, in the process has forsaken theological and doctrinal purity in the supermarket of religion.<sup>270</sup> The Gallup finding was confirmed by the Aris Report<sup>271</sup>, which found 34% of American adults considered themselves "Born Again or Evangelical Christians" in 2008. America also remains a religious country, according to the report, based on the stated beliefs of Americans rather than their religious identification. According to the report, 70% of Americans believe in a personal God, roughly 12% of Americans are atheist or agnostic, and another 12% are deistic.

Before breaking down the constituent parts of this Religious Right coalition, a few clarifications can be made here briefly. First, the Christian Right is the largest group, but it draws support from

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<sup>268</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (London: Heinemann, 1963), p.169.

<sup>269</sup> R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), provides a good outline of the role of religious outsiders in historical context.

<sup>270</sup> John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, of *The Economist* magazine argue the case of America's supermarket religion in *The Right Nation* (London: Penguin, 2005), and *God is Back* (London: Penguin, 2009).

<sup>271</sup> <http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/>, last accessed September 11, 2012

a wide range of denominations, though the activists tend to come from a narrower range of denominations, chiefly the newer and house churches. Organizationally the Religious Right has Christian conservatives as the loudest voices, but they are part of a broader constituency of conservative religious voice which I break down into the following groups:

- Christian Right, with its various denominations
- Jewish
- The Israel lobby
- Other Religions, chiefly Muslims

Second, there is a significant largely liberal Jewish constituency, against whom the accusation has been launched that they are the chief driving force behind secular attacks on Christianity, though this is based on an attempt to defend Jewry in society by making the nation religiously neutral.<sup>272</sup> Third, the political commitment on the Right to Israel needs to be treated in the context that the Israel lobby is a mixture of Jews, conservative and pre-millennialist Christians and others, with many other Jews opposed to the creation and policies of Israel.<sup>273</sup> Fourth, there are many conservative Christians who vote Republican who would not consider themselves part of the Religious Right. Finally, Muslims largely supported Bush II in 2000, but then voted against him in a different climate four years later and for Barack Obama in 2008.<sup>274</sup> One might add to these specific religious points that conservatives generally share a revulsion towards Communism, Fascism and Nazism, which they see as products of secular enlightenment and destructive of the *imago deo*.

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<sup>272</sup> “French Jewish involvement in secularization in the second part of the nineteenth century seems to have been imitated by contemporary American Jews since the 1960s. Still, there is a difference in means: While French Jews used Parliament and the state bureaucracy to expand the secularism initiated by atheists and deists at the beginning of the Third Republic, American Jews with their allies used the Supreme Court to dismantle the Christian institutions that had been more or less shaping the public realm since the American Revolution.” Pierre Birnbaum, *On the Secularization of the Public square: Jews in France and in the United States*, *Cardozo Law Review*, Vol 30, June 2009, No.6, pp.2431-43. L. Scott Smith, *The Secularization of America's Public Culture: Jews and the Establishment Clause*, *University La Verne Law Review* (32:2, 2010-2011) 257 offers a legal and historical overview of the question.

<sup>273</sup> See discussion below.

<sup>274</sup> *American Muslim Voters and the 2008 Election: A Demographic Profile and Survey of Attitudes*, published by Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), [http://www.cair.com/portals/0/pdf/american\\_muslim\\_voter\\_survey\\_2008.pdf](http://www.cair.com/portals/0/pdf/american_muslim_voter_survey_2008.pdf), last accessed 21 December 2011

## 1. The Christian Right

The critical literature points to the pivotal role of the Christian Right in a new conservatism that has shifted from a defender of stability to an agent of change, and which generates a sense of crisis in culture.<sup>275</sup> Conservative Christians of all stripes will at base recognize that the Gospel is a message of change, demanding that people change their heart and follow in discipleship, transforming the world and effecting God's will, which is often contrary to the prevailing will of humanity. Stability, the support of the status quo, is thus inherently problematic. This may be interpreted as a call to social action, but whose social action? The new conservatism is active and an agent of change, and defenders will argue this comes closer to the Gospel demand than the notion of "stability" suggests. The believer or the convert is facing a crisis that calls for decision, a decision for God. Likewise, the nation is called to its divine mission and destiny. The Gospel, they will say, is a locator, in this respect, of crisis. Conservative Christians believe that the Gospel is the only true path, the one and only way to make straight and crooked humanity straight with God, popularly citing John 14:6. This is the crisis they point to, which finds expression in a social and cultural crisis in secular society. As will be discussed below, change and reform are not the same things, and modern culture has inspired a conservative repudiation of a desire for stability and given voice to an objection to the type of change taking place. It was time for action, as James Robison expressed the indignation felt by many on the Religious Right:

I'm sick and tired of hearing about all the radicals, the perverts, and the liberals, and the leftists, and the communists coming out of the closet. It's time for God's people to come out of the closet, out of the churches, and change America.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> David E. Campbell, Religious "Threat" in Contemporary Presidential Elections, *Journal of Politics* (Feb 2006, 68:1) 104-115, explores white evangelical Christians within the Republicans' base, who see themselves in tension with a secular society and under threat. The more secularists in their community, the more likely white evangelical Christians were to vote for Republican presidential candidates in 2000 and 1996. See also, Jeff Manza & Clem Brooks, The changing political fortunes of mainline Protestants. Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans (eds.) *The quiet hand of God: Faith-based activism and the public role of mainline Protestantism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), and, Jerry Park & Samuel Reimer, Revisiting the social sources of American Christianity, 1972-1998, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (41:735-48).

<sup>276</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=so44kJNv9HE>, last accessed 16<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

The true location of change for Christian conservatives is in the individual orientation toward Jesus. If we change in our relationship to Jesus, then we will change in our relationship to the world around us. In other words, we need to be born again in Jesus Christ. Lee Marsden suggests being born-again is the minimum requirement, in a definition which arguably would command assent of the majority of critics:

...conservative evangelicals and right-wing Roman Catholics within the Republican Party whose religious persuasion determines their attitudes to political questions. The movement is evangelical in both religious and political contexts, commissioned to evangelize and convert believers of other faiths or none to a narrow version of Christianity in which a conversion experience, being born again, is the minimum requirement for entry.<sup>277</sup>

However, while Marsden is right in the first sentence quoted, the reference to being “born again” has to be contested. The “born-again” aspect, which is especially crucial to the critique of Bush II, appears to exclude Roman Catholics at this point, and, other Christian conservatives, who are not of the “born-again” variety. Again, the reference to “within the Republican Party” is at odds with the fact it was a Democrat liberal who was the first “born again” president. What then are we to say of this coalition? It would be fairer to say that evangelicals and Roman Catholics share faith as being primary in their life, what Marsden puts under the umbrella of “conversion experience”, and a commitment to putting this faith into practice, which Marsden calls “evangelism”. Whether this is a narrow version of Christianity, as Marsden undoubtedly believes it to be, is surely a matter of theological dispute.

As noted, Green, Rozell & Wilcox have edited a number of useful and in-depth studies on American presidential elections since 1995, and they counsel another reason for caution on drawing conclusions about the Christian Right:

The Christian Right activist corps is difficult to study. Because political activists make up only small portion of the mass public – and Christian Right activists are only a small

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<sup>277</sup> Lee Marsden, *For God's Sake: The Christian Right & US Foreign Policy* (London: Zed Books, 2008), pp.3-5

portion of the activist corps – surveys of the citizenry do not generate samples large enough for analysis. Thus, special studies of activists are required.<sup>278</sup>

At the risk of hugely over-simplifying the trajectory, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the Christian Right as the prime mover, with an expansion later into the broader Religious Right, pass through three eras. First, the Christian Right of the 1920s focused primarily on evolution and was anticommunist. This period marked an end to many Christian conservatives engaging with politics after the Scopes Trial, which although the case was won by fundamentalists created a theological split between fundamentalists and evangelicals for decades after. In this period, the Jews and Israel lobby was active on the Palestine question, but little more than that. Roman Catholics were very much outsiders, and so very much outside the camp of mainstream American politics. These groups would have to wait later to come into the big tent of the Religious Right and mainstream politics. The second era was the 1950s, a primarily anticommunist period of revivals and the emergence of Billy Graham as the “nation’s pastor.”<sup>279</sup> The third period emerged in the 1970s. The legacy of the Sixties for the conservative movement was a clash of values, and a generational shift in attitudes. Conservatives in 1970s America believed they were witnessing their values being washed away by the 1960s cultural change, and it was out of this cultural milieu that the new Christian Right emerged in the 1970s, focusing advocacy on domestic political issues:

1. pro-family, opposing sex education, the provision of contraception in schools and the extending of rights to gay relationships;
2. pro-life, opposed to abortion, embryonic stem cell research and euthanasia; and,
3. defensive, seeing evangelicals, Christianity and traditional values as under attack, responding with a need for Christian schooling and placing the Bible and faith firmly in the public square.

It is outside the scope of this study to look in any depth at the domestic policy issues of the Christian Right, but useful at this stage to note the expanded range of issues around which the

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<sup>278</sup> Green, Rozell & Clyde Wilcox (eds.) *The Values Campaign? The Christian Right and the 2004 Elections* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006), p.23

<sup>279</sup> This specific role is comprehensively covered by Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham in the White House* (New York: Center Street, 2007)

Christian Right is gathered with other religious conservatives to support a raft of conservative agendas, with the main domestic issues,<sup>280</sup> not in any particular order, being:

- Support for the faith-based initiative: this was actually an initiative signed in by President Bill Clinton, and developed by the Bush II administration. The objective was to make it easier for faith-based organizations to get federal funding and compete with secular care organizations.
- Abortion: the Christian Right takes a very strong pro-life stance, and object to the notion that abortion should be a pro-choice option for women. They would like to see *Roe v Wade*, the abortion ruling in the United States, overturned.
- Eugenics: They oppose stem-cell research and other such research that impinges on the rights of an embryo.
- Homosexuality and same-sex marriage: A biblical condemnation of homosexuality is adhered to, and the state sanctioning of same-sex marriage seen as a challenge to the sanctity of marriage and as an affront to traditional values.
- Creationism: The call is made for Creationism to be taught alongside Darwinian Evolutionism in schools. This was the issue that came afloat in the 1920s and has come back in modern form as scientific evidence as changed.
- Home-schooling: with perceived bias against Christianity and the pushing of progressive values, many evangelicals home-school their children and promote the right to do so.
- Prayer in schools: one of the attacks on Christianity is the banning of prayer in schools, an act removed by the Supreme Court in 1961. Many evangelicals argue this signaled social decay, and they advocate a return of prayer in schools.
- Public display of Christian symbols: the display of the Ten Commandments in court houses and government buildings has been banned in many places, as has the display of Christmas trees, to distance government from defense of one religion. The oddity of this is that on the Ellipse, the area just behind the White House, there has been controversy over the

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<sup>280</sup> I outline the foreign policy issues separately in Chapter 4.

Christmas tree on display but nobody complained about the giant Menorah just yards away from it.

Underpinning this list is the overwhelming sense among conservatives that post-9/11 American values are constantly under attack, not just from international terrorists but also from within America in the form of “liberals” and progressive values. In the Bush II years these issues and the underpinning concern were called in shorthand “the Values Debate”, bringing into play other conservative groups and Republicans who may not have selfidentified with the Christian Right. We can break the Christian Right down to another level.

### *Conservative evangelicals*

If the Christian Right is the largest component part of the Religious Right, then conservative evangelicals<sup>281</sup> are the largest component part of the Christian Right. D. Michael Lindsay offers the following definition of evangelicals in America:

Evangelicals are Christians who hold a particular regard for the Bible, embrace a personal relationship with God through a “conversion” to Jesus Christ, and seek to lead others on a similar spiritual journey. I define an evangelical as someone who believes (1) that the Bible is the supreme authority for religious belief and practice (2) that he or she has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and (3) that one should take a transforming, activist approach to faith.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Denominations which house conservative evangelicals include Assemblies of God, Southern Baptists, Independent Baptists, Black Protestants, African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion; Church of Christ, Churches of God in Christ, National Baptist Church, National Progressive Baptist Church, Nondenominational, Pentecostal denominations, and the Presbyterian Church in America, but also include other more traditional denominations such as Episcopal Church, USA, the Presbyterian Church (USA), United Methodist Church, and the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) provides an historical overview of conservative evangelicals in politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>282</sup> Lindsay, D. Michael. *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals joined the American Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.4



Since 1991, Gallup research<sup>283</sup> suggests that the potential constituency of evangelical or “born-again” Christians the Christian Right reaches out to is quite steady, ranging from 32% up to the mid-forties, with an average 35% of the national population. The Gallup research also offers some useful conclusions about the specific features, based on self-definition,<sup>284</sup> of evangelicals in America:

- slightly more likely to be female and aged 50 and older than the overall national adult population;
- somewhat less likely to be college graduates than the total population, but have an income structure that generally mirrors the national population;
- overrepresented in the South, and are underrepresented in the East and, to a lesser degree, in the West compared with the basic U.S. population distribution;
- skew strongly Republican in terms of their political orientation. More than half (54%) identify themselves as Republicans, compared with 35% of the total population. On the other hand, 22% identify as Democrats, compared with 33% of the total population; and,
- almost 6 in 10 are conservatives, compared with just about 4 in 10 national adults, and they are less likely to identify themselves as moderates or liberals.

Evangelical Christians, both Left and Right,<sup>285</sup> will share Lindsay’s three points, as would many other conservative Christians. It is the last point that becomes the centre of the problem.

What does it mean to “take a transforming, activist approach to faith”? One answer ventured by critics is that the approach taken by evangelicals gives rise to evangelical elites fearmongering, according to Jason C. Bivins:

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<sup>283</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/20242/Another-Look-Evangelicals-America-Today.aspx> and Uwe Siemen-Netto: <http://www.adherents.com/misc/BarnaPoll.html>, last accessed 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2012

<sup>284</sup> Interestingly, Roman Catholics so self-identify, according to Frank Newport & Joseph Carroll, *Another Look at Evangelicals in America Today: Gallup Poll Tuesday Briefing*, (12/20/2005) 11-15, about 3 in 10 white, nonCatholic Christians describe themselves as "evangelical,"

<sup>285</sup> Marcia Pally, *The New Evangelicals: Expanding the Vision of the Common Good*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), suggests there is a gradual shift to the left in recent years, with a broader political agenda than the evangelicals traditionally discussed.

...God's moral order is without ambiguity and thereby more resilient. This situates moral agency in a context where behavioral and doxological norms are irrevocable and absolute; they cannot be altered via interpretation, nuance, or partial convictions. While evangelicalism is not necessarily unique in the way it privileges certitude, fixity, and commitment over ambiguity, fluidity, and multiplicity, the shapes of this tradition's darkness and its combativeness have often been distinct.<sup>286</sup>

Apart from fear-mongering, evangelicals are charged with being intellectually deficient, and certainly the evangelical cause has possibly not been aided by the lack of intellectual spadework done in relation to the challenge of modernity. As Mark Noll posits in his 1994 book "The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind," the scandal of the evangelical mind is there is not much of a mind. What ought to be kept in mind is that this group is the grouping which has changed direction back and forth, and many supported Carter. It is this group that may find itself drifting politically leftwards, joining other religious conservative who have become what is often called "freestyle evangelicals."<sup>287</sup> The freestyle evangelicals lay claim to the political middle ground, but effectively support the Democrats. Calling for social action, they comprise the "left wing" of evangelicalism,<sup>288</sup> headlined by the Sojourners and theologians such as Jim Wallis, Ronald Sider, and Tony Campolo. While Wallis<sup>289</sup> advocates that both parties get it wrong, his positions are very much aligned with the Democrat Party, suggesting that if the Democratic Party embraced faith more it would be the natural party of choice for Christians. This grouping appeals to a younger generation of evangelicals, who are less concerned by the sexual issues their parents vote on and more concerned about issues such as poverty and the environment. This may well indeed be a generational shift as David Frum writes:

The Republican Party has become increasingly identified with conservative Christianity. Younger Americans are becoming more secular and more permissive. In particular, young Americans have become increasingly tolerant of homosexuality and increasingly willing

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<sup>286</sup> Jason C. Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.30

<sup>287</sup> Ayelish McGarvey, Preaching to the Choir, So all Christians are right wing? Meet the 'freestyle evangelicals.' *American Prospect* (15:4, 2004) 41-44

<sup>288</sup> David R. Swartz, , Identity Politics and the Fragmenting of the 1970s Evangelical Left, *Religion and American Culture* ( 21:1, Winter 2011) 81-120, outlines how the 1970s evangelicals fragmented along gender, racial, and theological lines.

<sup>289</sup> Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005)

to have children outside marriage. While unmarried births have dropped among teenagers since the welfare reform of 1995, unmarried births have actually been rising among women in their 20s.<sup>290</sup>

This shift is reflected in the 2008 election result, when 30% of young evangelicals under thirty voted for candidate Barack Obama. As issues such as poverty and environmentalism gain prominence amongst evangelicals, as with the population generally, there has been advocacy of a variant or possible third way, promoted by key figures like Pastor Rick Warren and the publication “Christianity Today”, which is finding traction amongst the young evangelicals. This may appeal to those who do not want to see any alignment with either political party. However, we need to make a further refinement, which Bivins glosses over in the quote, as his charges are more often leveled at the next subset of the Religious Right, namely fundamentalists.

### ***Fundamentalists***

If evangelicals are considered as intellectually challenged, then fundamentalists<sup>291</sup> are considered as anti-intellectual in their approach. This may be contradicted by the fact that the term derives from the major work at the heart of fundamentalism, a multi-volume set of some 100 essays in twelve volumes published from 1910 to 1915 called “The Fundamentals” authored by leading scholars at the time, including James Orr, Charles Erdman, HCG Moule and Bishop Ryle. The roots go deeper into the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the building opposition to an emerging liberal

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<sup>290</sup> <http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2008/04/why-the-gop-l-1.html>, last accessed 30th November 2011.

<sup>291</sup> Denominations which house fundamentalists include Apostolic Christian Church of America, Baptist Bible Fellowship International, Christian Israelite Church, Fellowship of Fundamental Bible Churches, Fundamental Baptist Fellowship Association, Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International, Gloriavale Christian Community, Independent Baptist, Independent Baptist Fellowship International, Independent Baptist Fellowship of North America, Independent Fundamental Churches of America, International Churches of Christ, Southwide Baptist Fellowship, Wealthy Street Baptist Church, Wisconsin Fellowship of Baptist Churches and World Baptist Fellowship; and again, may be found in other broader denominations. An authoritative view is provided by George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Steve Bruce, *Modernity and fundamentalism: the new Christian right in America*, *British Journal of Sociology* (41:4, 1990) 477-496, argues fundamentalism fails in its engagement and remains sectarian. James Barr probed theologically, and controversially, into fundamentalism in his two major works James Barr, *Fundamentalism* London: SCM Press, 2nd Revised edition, (1981), and, *Escaping Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1984). Martin E. Marty led the Fundamentalism Project from 1987 to 1995, culminating in five volumes published by University of Chicago Press from 1994 to 2003, see <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/series/FP.html>, last accessed 28th April 2012.

theology and the new higher biblical criticism; though “higher than what?” Canon Dyson Hague, one of the authors, asked. Matters came to an historical nexus during the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial in Dayton Tennessee, as fundamentalists were derided as anti-scientific and set against the modern world. The fundamentalists won the trial battle, maintaining a legal ban on teaching of evolution in schools, but lost the public opinion war. Chided by the experience, fundamentalists retreated from the public square, and remained apart from it until the 1980s, when Jerry Falwell, a fundamentalist who broadened the message, created the Moral Majority.<sup>292</sup> The intervening period was one of institution building and creating parallel organizations to the mainstream churches and liberal coalitions, such as the National Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) as well as Bible institutes and schools. The parallel network was tapped into by Falwell and other Christian activists to great effect. George Marsden jokes that fundamentalists are “evangelicals who are angry about something”, and after many decades of political quietism fundamentalists have been getting a lot angrier since Nixon identified the “silent majority”.

Martin E. Marty argues that the tenor of fundamentalism is “opponentist,”<sup>293</sup> perhaps echoing the charge that the Republicans are the party of “No”. It seems that in some ways fundamentalists define their position in opposition, as Ernest Sandeen argues:

Fundamentalism lives in symbiotic relationship with other forms of religion and with cultural trends, leading the Fundamentalist, paradoxically, to affirm both his despair over the world and his identification with much of the world's culture. He has resolved this tension through the creation of innumerable parallel institutions which, though completely Fundamentalist, affirm essentially worldly values. Fundamentalism represents a relatively rare example of an authentic conservative tradition in American history.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> The Falwell story is told in a number of volumes, including Michael Sean Winters, *God's Right Hand: How Jerry Falwell Made God a Republican and Baptized the American Right* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), and, Dirk Smillie, *Falwell Inc.: Inside a Religious, Political, Educational, and Business Empire* (London: St. Martin's Press, 2008). Falwell himself has also published widely on the subject.

<sup>293</sup> Marty expresses this view in the various volumes of ‘The Fundamentalism Project’, especially relevant is one of the most recent volume Martin E. Martin & R. Scott Appleby (eds.) *Fundamentalisms Comprehended (The Fundamentalism Project)*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004)

<sup>294</sup> Ernest R. Sandeen, *Fundamentalism and American Identity*, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and*

However, in denying the world, Sandeen adds that “...the fundamentalist has become trapped. He does not want to hate his country.” Yet, if there is one defining trait of fundamentalists it is patriotism, where to be a good American means being a good Christian, and vice-versa. This was a position well defined during the anti-Communist era and the crusades of Billy Graham. Anti-Communism was the one political issue that did interest fundamentalists. Today the agenda is greatly enhanced, ranging from opposition to abortion and pornography to opposition to big government and Islamism. It does stand within the conservative tradition, though whether it is a rare example as Sandeen suggests may be disputed. Sandeen explains this conservatism as:

Conservative traditions seem to flourish best where the leaders' memories are selective or faulty, and no probing historical inquiries interrupt the defense of the cause. This was certainly true of the Roman, Papal, and British traditions. Fundamentalism appears to possess every other requisite of a viable conservative tradition as well. The movement has been built out of grass-roots support, its values and truths are well articulated and consistently maintained, the connection with an appealing and vital past is never forgotten, and it survives.<sup>217</sup>

There are elements in common with conservatism, but while historical memory is important to conservatism and certain periods are highlighted, they are not merely selective as Sandeen argues. Besides this objection, it might be said that all political debates operate on the basis of selective memory, and all movements are built from grass roots, from Marxist base communities to Falwell's Moral Majority. Certainly fundamentalists have articulated their case well, but this is not on the basis of slick spin but on the basis of fundamental beliefs and an attendant fideism, which does give it a confidence that seems to thrive from age to age. This is the group that formed the major part of those who stayed out of the public square in the wake of the Scopes trial, and who can be expected to resist any drift leftwards.

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*Social Science*, Vol. 387, The Sixties: Radical Change in American Religion (Jan., 1970), pp. 56-65 <sup>217</sup>  
Sandeen, *Ibid*, pp.56-65

## *Pentecostals*

Emerging out of the holiness movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Pentecostalism<sup>295</sup> represents a huge growth in modern Christianity, often interpreted to be an American phenomena dating back to 1906 and Suza Street in Los Angeles, though Mark Noll suggests this is only partly true.<sup>296</sup> Pentecostalism in America spread rapidly during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, so by 1972 there were over two hundred Pentecostal denominations in the United States and between 25 and 35 million adherents.<sup>297</sup> The appeal was in particular to the lower strata of society, and from the beginning was regarded as a contribution from the black community to the white community, maintaining a mistrust of the worldliness and wealth of the mainstream churches. Walter Hollenweger suggests this was not simply a case of prejudice by white Pentecostals, but reflected the traditional churches disdain for Pentecostalism's humble black beginnings.<sup>298</sup> Today, the movement has over 250 million adherents.

While deeply conservative in their theology, Pentecostals are committed to social care. Sociologist David Martin<sup>299</sup> suggests that while Fundamentalists aim to remake the political sphere according to their religious convictions, Pentecostals and Charismatics tend towards quietism in politics and a firm demarcation of church and state. This leads to fundamentalists reacting to modernity, while Pentecostals and Charismatics work with it and seek to transform the culture around them. Yet, Pentecostalism, alongside Evangelicalism, is seen by critics as part of the pervasive and growing individualism and atomism of American Christianity. As Walter Russell Mead explains it:

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<sup>295</sup> The major denominations are *The Assemblies of God*, *The Church of God*, *The United Pentecostal Church International*, *The Apostolic Restoration*, *Church of God in Christ*, *International Church of the Foursquare Gospel* and *International Pentecostal Holiness Church*, but there are several thousand others nationally and globally. R. G. Robins, *Pentecostalism in America* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010) offers an excellent overview, both of the history and the contemporary challenges faced and posed by the movement. See also, Walter J. Hollenweger, An Introduction to Pentecostalism, *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, (25:2, 2004) 125-137.

<sup>296</sup> Mark A. Noll, *A New Shape of World Christianity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), p.76

<sup>297</sup> Noll, *Ibid.*, p.22

<sup>298</sup> W. J. Hollenweger, A Black Pentecostal Concept: A Forgotten Chapter of Black History-The Black Pentecostals' Contribution, *Concept*, No. 30, June, 1970, Geneva, Department on Studies in Evangelism, World Council of Churches, 4-5, 18, p.9

<sup>299</sup> David Martin, *On Secularization: Toward a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005)

The belief that every Christian must have a personal experience of God's call has for more than three centuries been strengthening its hold in American life. The series of religious revivals and awakenings from the eighteenth century through the present day, the rise of Pentecostal religion in the twentieth century and the evangelical renewal of the last generation stress the importance of a personal decision for Christ and a personal relationship with God. Christianity in the American context is less and less a matter of family or ethnic identity, more and more a matter of personal choice. We must all be Abraham now.<sup>300</sup>

In Mead's view, this feeds into the "American dream" and the American version of Weber's Protestant work ethic. Pentecostalism is another wave in the evangelical tide that has swept across American Christianity, and as the fastest growing religion Mead sees Pentecostalism as representative of the mood in America and Europe which is turning its back on the Enlightenment and Modernity in an age of grand narratives, of which Pentecostalism is one such grand narrative. The Pentecostals have seized on the decline of mainstream Christianity, and seek a renewal of active faith in America and across the world, as Hollenweger explains:

The Pentecostal critique focused not so much on diluted theology as upon withered piety. The problem, to Pentecostals, lay not in wrong thinking so much as in collapsed feeling. Not the decline of orthodoxy but the decay of devotion lay at the root of the problem. It was not that the church was *liberal*, but that it was *lifeless*. What was needed was not a new argument for heads but a new experience for hearts. Fundamentalists and the neo-orthodox mounted arguments. Pentecostals gave testimony.<sup>301</sup>

Pentecostalism precedes fundamentalism, and shares many of the same conservative theological assumptions, but Hollenweger points out that they stayed out of the Scopes debate and the fundamentalist camp; perhaps unsurprisingly deterred by one of the contributors to "The Fundamentals" G. Campbell Morgan referring to the Pentecostal movement as "the last vomit of

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<sup>300</sup> Walter Russell Mead, *God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Vintage, 2008)

<sup>301</sup> W. J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), p.190

Satan”. Vomit or not, this is the largest and growing group, and they take a more neutral stance and favour social action, and could also contribute to a leftward drift.

### ***Roman Catholics***

Until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, Roman Catholics were a very small minority in America, but all that changed with successive waves of immigration. The denomination grew in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and in the early post-war years, a period where the church was greatly concerned by Communism and Secularism. The Roman Catholic Church in America in the 1960s reached a stable level.<sup>302</sup> According to the Pew Forum “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey”<sup>303</sup>, while Protestants have seen decline, Roman Catholicism in America has held steady around the 25% mark. Paradoxically, they have lost more adherents but gained converts and immigrants to compensate. Where Roman Catholicism has grown rapidly it has largely done so in tandem with the Charismatic movement.<sup>304</sup> They are also the dominant religious group on the current United States Supreme Court, which is now two-thirds Roman Catholic and one-third Jewish, with judges stretching back through the presidents to Reagan.<sup>305</sup>

Yet, for many years, while Roman Catholics were political outsiders and supporters of the Democrat Party, they produced three US presidential nominees, all Democrats: Alfred E Smith in 1926, John F Kennedy in 1960 and John Kerry in 2004. While most people will recall JFK’s statement that he was not running as a Roman Catholic, it was Smith who did the hard work of showing that Roman Catholics were a force to be reckoned with in America, though it ultimately lost him the race to Herbert Hoover. JFK changed this by defeating Richard Nixon, and crowned

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<sup>302</sup> A comprehensive overview of Roman Catholic voting behavior is provided in *Catholics and American Politics*, Mary T. Hanna (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), and, William B. Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter in American Politics: The Passing of the Democratic Monolith*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999).

<sup>303</sup> Pew Forum, Ibid p.19

<sup>304</sup> Mark A. Noll, Ibid., p.115

<sup>305</sup> The Supreme Court currently has only Roman Catholics and Jews and, for the first time, no Protestants. Justices Samuel Alito, Anthony Kennedy, John Roberts, Antonin Scalia, Sonia Sotomayor, and Clarence Thomas are Roman Catholic. Stephen Breyer, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, and Elena Kagan are Jewish.



the achievement of Roman Catholic Americanization, putting to bed historic Protestant fears that the President would be deferential to the Pope.

While Roman Catholics remain more aligned with the Democrat Party, the Republican Party<sup>306</sup> has forged an alliance with a Roman Catholic caucus and a group of influential commentators and politicians, culminating in Roman Catholics and evangelicals joining forces in recent decades to advance orthodox and traditional Christianity, and a specific social agenda.<sup>307</sup> An early leading voice was William F. Buckley Jr, who founded the *National Review* in 1955. In May 1994, a group of prominent evangelicals and Roman Catholics published a declaration in the conservative journal *First Things* entitled “Evangelicals and Roman Catholics Together: The Christian Mission for the Third Millennium”<sup>308</sup>. This group included Richard John Neuhaus (Lutheran-turned-Roman, editor of *First Things*), George Weigel, Avery Dulles, Michael Novak (Roman Catholic), Charles Colson, Bill Bright and Pat Roberston (Evangelical).

Starting with Reagan, the Republicans managed to attract greater numbers of Roman Catholic voters, but they have not necessarily stayed.<sup>309</sup> In the first Bush II election of 2000, Bush II got 47% compared to Gore’s 50%, but this was reversed in 2004 when Bush II gained 52% over the pro-choice Roman Catholic candidate John Kerry.<sup>310</sup> However, this reversed again in the 2006 midterm elections when Roman Catholics voted 55% for Democrat candidates and 45% for

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<sup>306</sup> Monika L. McDermott, Voting for Catholic Candidates: The Evolution of a Stereotype, *Social Science Quarterly* (Dec 2007, 88:4) 953-69, challenges traditional inquiry and argues that Roman Catholic candidates appear to start any political campaign facing a partisan bias among voters, and at the time of writing Republicans were positively predisposed toward voting for Catholic candidates, while Democrats are less so.

<sup>307</sup> Michael W. Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) offers a nuanced approach to the many tensions in American Roman Catholicism and its relationship with Rome, as well as its conservative elements and various coalitions with other groups, especially on the issue of abortion. His book serves as a reminder as well not to treat Roman Catholicism as monolithic.

<sup>308</sup> <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9405/articles/mission.html>, last accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2012

<sup>309</sup> Henry C. Kenski & William Lockwood, The Catholic Vote from 1980 to 1986: Continuity or Change? in *Religion and Political Behavior in the United States*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 1989), Ted Jelen, ed., assess voting in the Reagan elections.

<sup>310</sup> Kerry’s views on abortion were at odds with official church teaching, causing many Roman Catholics to turn to Bush. See analysis provided by Stephen T. Mockabee, The Political Behavior of American Catholics: Change and Continuity in *From Pews to Polling Places: Political Mobilization in the American Religious Mosaic* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007), ed. J. Matthew Wilson, 81-104, and Paul Kengor: <http://spectator.org/archives/2004/11/05/kerry-loses-his-faith>, last accessed 4 March 2012

Republican candidates. George Marlin, writing in the year of the 2004 election, explains this significance of the Roman Catholic vote:

I argue that for most of our country's history, the Catholic bloc has been a pivotal swing vote that determined outcomes in numerous national, state, and local elections...I subscribe to the belief that most Catholic voters, who were loyal to family, church, and neighborhood, cast their ballots according to cultural standards determined by their faith.<sup>311</sup>

Marlin also offers the case that Roman Catholic voting behavior was determined in the early years by anti-Catholic prejudice and more latterly by cultural conservatism of the Roman Catholics. There may be some truth in this depiction, but this does not fully support the notion that this cultural conservatism sits comfortably with political conservatism. As Andrew Greeley has often stated,<sup>312</sup> much of Roman Catholic social teaching is somewhat liberal on the American political spectrum. The key uniting point, and this was demonstrated clearly in the 2004 presidential election, is the pro-choice debate. The Roman Catholic Church in America tends to look different from the church in Rome, and often finds itself at odds. It has, however, done a lot of intellectual spadework for religious conservatives in the public square, and is likely to continue to do so, though much will depend on the future direction of issues in the area of sexual ethics, which has in recent decades been the link in the coalition between Roman Catholics and evangelicals.<sup>313</sup>

### ***Mormons***

It is worth noting briefly the Mormons, because one of the key religious issues in the 2008 presidential election was the fact that one of the front-runners Massachusetts Governor Mitt

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<sup>311</sup> George Marlin, *The American Catholic Voter: 200 Years of Political Impact* (South Bend: St Augustine's Press, 2004), p.ix

<sup>312</sup> Andrew Greeley, *Religious Change in America (Social Trends in the United States)*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), and *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)

<sup>313</sup> One major initiative was Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT), a discussion group launched by Chuck Colson, the former Nixon aide, with Richard John Neuhaus, but negative reaction from some Religious Right quarters cost Colson's Prison Fellowship ministry over \$1 million in lost donor income, see Jonathan Aitken, *Charles W. Colson: A Life redeemed* (New York: Continuum, 2005), p.378-88; I remain grateful to Jonathan Aitken for the copy he presented to me, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2009.

Romney is a Mormon, which alienated a much of the conservative Christian base.<sup>314</sup> This had echoes of the Roman Catholicism of John F. Kennedy, also hailing from Massachusetts, as Romney sought to separate his denominational faith from his suitability to be the Republican candidate. The appeal fell on deaf ears, as many conservative Christians reject the notion that Mormons are the true people of God, with some denying their Christian basis altogether. The Book of Mormon was, after all, supposedly an addition to the Judeo-Christian scriptures, and its adherents were a re-formed community of followers of Jesus Christ. Their exodus to Utah, after the death of founder Joseph Smith, symbolized both their unique mission and their outsider status. Yet, Mormons have been key organizers on conservative issues. For instance, in states with concentrations of Mormons the Equal Rights Amendment passed by Congress in 1972 was defeated, as church leaders and groups rallied against it as a denial of family values.<sup>315</sup> However, like the Kennedy case, the Republican Party finally overcame the Mormon question and nominated Mitt Romney as their 2012 presidential candidate.

### ***Other Conservative Christians***

A key dynamic in understanding the spectrum of the Christian Right is that, as scholarly consensus suggests based on a variety of survey data, the large mainline Protestant denominations have declined significantly in recent decades, in contrast to some of the large evangelical denominations which have seen significant growth.<sup>316</sup> Part of this shift in growth can be attributed to the vigor of

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<sup>314</sup> Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, A Mormon president? The LDS difference, *Christian Century*,(124:17, Aug 21 2007) 20-25.

<sup>315</sup> Jeremiah John, The Site of Mormon Political Theology, *Perspectives on Political Science* (Apr-Jun 2011, 40:2) 87-96, provides an overview to Mormon political theology. Matt Homer, Latter Days: Mormons in Politics, *Kennedy School Review* (2009:9) 38-43, argues that demographic changes are affecting Mormon politics, and Hispanic Mormonism is increasing and will inch the church further to the left. David E. Campbell & Joseph Quin Monson, Dry kindling: a political profile of American Mormons, *From Pews to Polling Places: Faith and Politics in the American Religious Mosaic*, J. Matthew Wilson ed. (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 105-129, examines Mormon voting patterns.

<sup>316</sup> Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), and, Why conservative churches are still growing, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17: 165-172. Reginald Wayne Bibby, Why conservative churches really are growing: Kelley revisited, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (17:2, 1978) 129-137. Roger J. Nemeth & Donald A. Luidens, The New Christian Right and Mainline Protestantism: The Case of the Reformed Church in America, *Sociological Analysis* (Winter1989, 49:4) 343-352 undertakes a systematic analysis of how the New Christian Right (NCR) has impacted mainline Protestant denominations, and examine the penetration of the NCR social and political agenda on one mainline Protestant denomination, notably the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Their findings indicate that the influence is relatively small and not heavily concentrated in any particular social or demographic group.

the “religious marketplace” in America, but partly it is a result of a frustration felt amongst conservative members that the mainline church leadership has capitulated to secularism,<sup>317</sup> causing some, but not all, to leave for new and emergent churches. This means there are many conservative Christians that would not count themselves as being part of the Christian Right, and the two main blocs can be briefly noted here.

The first major bloc is black evangelicals.<sup>318</sup> Traditionally, as stated above, black evangelicals politically vote overwhelmingly Democrat, but they also hold many of the theological and social

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<sup>317</sup> Clifford Orwin, The unravelling of Christianity in America, *Public Interest*, (Spring 2004, Issue 155) 20-36, notes conservative Christian fear of “the deadly alternative of secularism.” At the very outset of the period covered by this thesis there was fear that Christianity had declined in the 1960s, but in Bradley R. Hertel & Hart M. Nelsen, Are we entering a post-Christian era : religious belief and attendance in America, 1957-1968, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (13:4, 1974) 409-419, the authors observed that “in recent years some scholars of religion have observed that religious belief in the United States is declining so rapidly that a post-Christian era seems both inevitable and imminent. Gallup data for national samples of Americans suggest, however, that there has been no appreciable decline in levels of religious belief between 1957 and 1968; these data on belief in afterlife and the devil show that there is need to distinguish between decline in belief and increase in disbelief.” Robert D. Linder, Christianity, politics, and secular government in the United States, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* (26:2, Spring 1984) 42-67, argues the modern version of this “new nation” of America appears more “secular” than in the past because the nation has become more diverse. A vigorous defense of secularism is made by Susan Jacoby, In Praise of Secularism, *Nation*, (278:15, 4/19/2004) 14-18, see also *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2004). A landmark study of secularism is offered by Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>318</sup> Lauren Smith, Religion, Voter Turnout and Issue Mobilization: Religion or Issues as a Mobilizing Factor in National Elections, *Conference Papers, Midwestern Political Science Association* (2009) reveals research suggesting that while there is a mobilizing difference between evangelical and mainline Protestants, this difference disappears when looking at evangelical and mainline African Americans, pointing to the significance of the black church as an entity in mobilizing its members to vote. See also, Frederick C. Harris, Something Within: Religion as a Mobilizer of African-American Political Activism, *Journal of Politics* (56:1, 1994) 42-68. A Carin Robinson, From Every Tribe and Nation? Blacks and the Christian Right, *Social Science Quarterly* (Oxford: Blackwell, Sep 2006, 87:3) 591-601, study finds that social conservatism does not predict support for the Christian Right from blacks as with whites black women are more likely to support the movement than black men. Carin Larson, Divided Under the Divine? Black Evangelicals’ Relationship with the Christian Right, *Conference Papers, American Political Science Association*, (2004 Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL) 1-34, posits that African-Americans support and involvement in Christian Right organizations remains minimal. Race was a key factor in the 2008 election, and the victory by Barack Obama, see: Pamela D. Reed, Introduction: Barack Obama’s improbable election and the question of race and racism in contemporary America, *Journal of Black Studies*, (40:3, Jan, 2010) 373-379, and, Thierry Devos , The role of race in American politics: Lessons learned from the 2008 presidential election, in G.S. Parks, & M.W. Hughey (eds.), *The Obamas and a (post) racial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 218-242. The argument is made by William E. Pannell, Barbara L. Faulkner, Irving Luscombe, N. S. Tjernagel & Richard L. Troutman, The Evangelical Christian and Black History, *Fides et Historia* (Jan 1970, 2:2) 4-14, that evangelicals generally did too little for blacks because of a rejection of social activism. See also: Peter Goodwin Heltzel, *Jesus and Justice: Evangelicals, Race, and American Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), and, two books in the “The Politics of Race and Ethnicity” series, Eric L. McDaniel, *Politics in the Pews: The Political Mobilization of Black Churches* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008) and

values of their brethren evangelicals, and also tend towards social conservatism. On issues such as same-sex marriage, gay rights and abortion, they are conservative. On economic, education, crime and welfare issues they are liberal. This divide is rooted in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, when white fundamentalists and conservatives were seen as part of the problem, not the solution. Democrat candidates appeared more embracing of the black struggle than Republican candidates, and so the Democrats captured the black vote. In recent decades the Republicans have been able to attract black votes, but not to the extent they have made big inroads. George W. Bush succeeded in attracting more black voters generally, and conservative evangelicals specifically in 2004, though his approval ratings were lower than the national average.<sup>319</sup> This apparent paradox was also well illustrated in the 2008 presidential election, when black evangelicals were solidly behind candidate Barack Obama, but voted in the state elections against same-sex marriage amendments. Secondly, there are many conservatives in the mainline or traditional Protestant denominations such as the Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists and Lutherans. In the last instance, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) is biblically-based theologically but evangelical in the German sense, with the majority voting Republican, but they would not consider themselves as part of the Christian Right. Many conservatives in the mainline denominations will identify with many Christian Right concerns but would not consider themselves as part of the Christian Right, thus remaining at odds with their denominational leadership which is more likely to identify with the Christian Left.

## **2. The Non-Christian Religious Right**

If we take the 2004 election as an indicator of religious views, Pew data suggests the non-Christian Religious Right comprises around a quarter of those who voted for Bush II. Jews were 27% for Bush II and 73% for Kerry, while other faiths voted 23% for Bush II and 77% for Kerry. This was

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Tasha Philpot, *Race, Republicans, and the Return of the Party of Lincoln* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

<sup>319</sup> Statistics on the 2004 elections, which also show the opinion patterns on social issues is well illustrated in the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (a center for the study of African American & color issues) survey: [http://www.jointcenter.org/index.php/current\\_research\\_and\\_policy\\_activities/political\\_participation/2004\\_general\\_campaign\\_election\\_republican\\_and\\_democrats/nop\\_politics\\_and\\_the\\_2004\\_elections](http://www.jointcenter.org/index.php/current_research_and_policy_activities/political_participation/2004_general_campaign_election_republican_and_democrats/nop_politics_and_the_2004_elections), last accessed 31st March, 2010.

much the same picture in the 2000 election, with no change in the Jewish vote and a 5% decline in other faiths voting for Bush II, representing mostly Muslims deserting Bush II.

### *Jews*<sup>320</sup>

Judaism, according to the Pew Forum,<sup>321</sup> comprises 1.7% of the overall adult population of America. Some 43% describe themselves as Reform Jews, 31% conservative Jews and 10% Orthodox Jews. Around a third of the Jewish population has post-graduate education, compared to a national average of one-in-ten. They are also older, roughly half the Jewish population is aged 50 and over, compared to a national average of four-in-ten American adults. After American blacks, Jews are the second largest constituency committed to the Democrat Party, with about three-quarters voting Democrat, and they have consistently voted for Democratic Party candidates.<sup>322</sup> Ira Forman argues this has not always been the case; from Lincoln to Harding they were Republican supporters.<sup>323</sup> The support for Lincoln was due to his stance on slavery and his revocation of Grant's Order 11 in the Civil War, which instructed the expulsion of Jews in Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee to tackle illegal cotton trading.

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<sup>320</sup> Two useful volumes of essays exploring Jews in the public square are Mittleman, Alan, Jonathan D. Sarna & Robert Licht, *Jews and the American Public Square* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) and Mittleman, Alan, Jonathan D. Sarna & Robert Licht, *Jewish Polity and American Civil Society* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) <sup>244</sup> Pew Forum U.S. Religious Survey Landscape <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscapestudy-full.pdf>, p.21, last accessed 22 December 2011.

<sup>321</sup> Pew Forum U.S. Religious Survey Landscape <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>, p.21, last accessed 22 December 2011.

<sup>322</sup> Greenberg and Wald provide an authoritative analysis of Jewish voting patterns in *Jews in American Politics: Essays* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), edited by Maisel and Forman, pp.162-193. A record of the Jewish vote in presidential elections since 1919 can be found at:

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/jewvote.html>, last accessed 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011. Alan M. Fisher, Realignment of the Jewish Vote? *Political Science Quarterly* (94:1, 1979) 97-116, rebuts theories of increasing conservatism or erosion of Jewish liberalism.

<sup>323</sup> The support by Jews for Lincoln is explored in Ira N. Forman, in *Jews in American Politics: Essays* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), edited by Maisel and Forman, pp.147-9; Tina Levitan, *First Facts in American Jewish History: From 1492 to the Present* (New York Jason Aronson, 1996); and, Lee Levinger, *A History of the Jews in the United States* (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1931)

The irrevocable turn to the Democrats started with Woodrow Wilson and his vision for internationalism, and his support for the Balfour Declaration and Zionism.<sup>324</sup> In Roosevelt's case, it was due to his reaching out to Jews in putting together a coalition for the New Deal, and his support for the Jews in the fight against Nazism. The Democrats were seen to be a party in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that embraced outsiders, and so Jews were able to assimilate into mainstream America and public life via the Democrats. The Republicans may have been viewed with a suspicion of autocracy or authoritarianism, and many Jews had fled from Europe for that reason. Since Roosevelt, the Republicans have only attracted around 18% to 25% of the Jewish vote on average, up to the last election when Obama took 77% of the Jewish vote. Reagan had bucked the trend by attracting 38% of the Jewish vote in the 1980 election<sup>325</sup>, because there was suspicion among Jews that Carter was too pro-Arab. Support for Israel remains the major factor in determining the Jewish vote; though another issue defining the Jewish vote is their commitment to the separation of Church and State in America, which is seen to be more respected by Democrats than Republicans.

Many ethnic groups emerging in America have turned Republican as their earnings rise and they become mainstream, not so the Jews. In the 1950s the Jewish scholar Milton Himmelfarb ventured that American Jews earned the income of Episcopalians, the wealthiest, and voted like Puerto Ricans, the poorest. On welfare, big government and business, Jews have remained consistently liberal. Norman Podheretz, editor for 35 years and writer for 58 years of the conservative Jewish journal *Commentary*, asked the question in the book of the same name "Why are Jews Liberals?" He observed that American Jews are caught in a "Tertullian-like grip of the Torah of liberalism". In a *Commentary* symposium, Jonathan Sarna sees two aspects of why American Jews are liberals, and how they differ from elsewhere in the world:

I would point to two factors that distinguish the American situation from what obtains elsewhere. First, Reform Judaism is much stronger in the United States than in any other

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<sup>324</sup> Woodrow Wilson and the Balfour Declaration, Richard Ned Lebow, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1968), pp. 501-523

<sup>325</sup> Many turned to Mondale in 1984, believing him to be the more pro-Israel of the two candidates. Bush I won them back and with 35% of the Jewish vote compared to Reagan's 31% in 1984. Bush then lost the Jewish vote in 1988, in part due to an impression post after Desert Storm that he was no friend of Israel, and it was reported in an Israeli newspaper that Secretary of State James Baker dismissed the Jewish lobby with the offensive comment "Fuck the Jews, they don't vote for us anyway", though Baker has never publicly denied or confirmed the report. This story is recounted by Norman Podheretz [2009], pp222-3. Consequently, Bush won only 11% of the Jewish vote, the second lowest percentage since the elections of FDR.

country, and adherence to Reform Judaism strongly correlates with liberal voting behavior. Reform today is the largest of America's Jewish religious movements, and all surveys agree that Reform Jews vote Democratic more reliably than any other large body of Jews. There is no need to seek out the "Torah of liberalism," for Reform Judaism is the engine that drives the liberal train in the United States; additional explanations are unnecessary. Second, the rightward move in all Diaspora countries outside the United States was propelled primarily by repulsion. Jews became disaffected with liberal politicians, usually because of their anti-Israel animus, and shifted to the opposition. So it was in England, Australia, and Canada. In the United States, however, pro-Israel sentiment has always been much more powerful than elsewhere, thanks largely to evangelical support for Israel, and prudent liberals have therefore been as supportive of Israel as have their conservative opponents.<sup>326</sup>

The latter point Sarna makes explains why conservative Jews have sided with the Republican Party, but there is little presently to suggest that the tide is turning, as some had thought back when Reagan got 28% or even as some advocate now as they point to some disappointment over President Obama's handling of Israel.

### ***The "Israel Lobby"***

Part of the Religious Right landscape is the Israel lobby, which includes an overlap of Jews, Christians and secular Gentiles and is worthy of separate mention because the overlap of conservative views on the status of Israel.<sup>327</sup> The lobby exists for the purpose of promoting pro-

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<sup>326</sup> Transcript of symposium online at <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/why-are-jews-liberals-asymposium/>, last accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012

<sup>327</sup> Thomas A Kolsky, *Jews against Zionism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); Evyatar Friesel, On the complexities of modern Jewish identity: contemporary Jews against Israel, *Israel Affairs*, (Oct 2011, 17:4) 504519; Steven M. Cohen, Relationship of American Jews with Israel: What We Know and What We Need to Know, *Contemporary Jewry* (Jan 2002, 23:1) 132-155; John C. Green, The American Public and Sympathy for Israel: Present and Future, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, (Winter 2009, 44:1) 107-121; Michael J. Koplow, Value Judgment: Why Do Americans Support Israel? *Security Studies* (Apr-Jun 2011, 20:2) 266-302; A. Horowitz & P. Weiss, American Jews Rethink Israel A new generation, and a new lobby, challenge old attitudes, *Nation* (2009, 289:14) 13-17; R. C. Lieberman, The 'Israel Lobby' and American Politics, *Perspectives on Politics* (2009, 7:2) pp.235-258; and, Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby : Jewish political power and American foreign policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).



Israel policies in U.S. foreign policy. Mearsheimer & Walt define the “Israel lobby” as being much like the “Arab” or “Oil” lobbies:

...a convenient shorthand term for the loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively work to shape U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. The lobby is not a single, unified movement with a central leadership, however, and the individuals and groups that make up this broad coalition sometimes disagree on specific policy issues. Nor is it some sort of cabal or conspiracy. On the contrary, the organizations and individuals who make up the lobby operate out in the open and in the same way that other interest groups do.<sup>328</sup>

Jewish lobbies were highly influential in Woodrow Wilson’s support for the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and Truman’s decision to back the creation of Israel.

Christian groups do play a role as part of the lobby,<sup>329</sup> as Mearsheimer & Walt highlight, but it is “the specific political agenda that defines the lobby, not the religious or ethnic identity of those pushing it.”<sup>330</sup> The Christian lobby is defined by faith, which drives a political agenda. If we contrast this to the “Christian lobby”, there is likewise a broad coalition and a pro-Christian drive on policy, but the latter point is arguably more difficult to define as neatly as the interests of a physical nation state. Mearsheimer & Walt also highlight that Christian Zionists, as they term the pro-Israel Christian lobby, did not stop the Wye Agreement on Israeli redeployment from the West Bank in 1998, the two-state solution at Camp David led by Clinton in 2000, or most tellingly the support for a Palestinian state given by Bush II in 2001. Mearsheimer & Walt suggest:

Supporting Israel is only one of many issues that evangelicals like Robertson, Bauer, and Falwell have been concerned with, and it may not even be the most important. Leaders of the Christian Right often claim to speak on behalf of forty million or more professed

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<sup>328</sup> John J. Mearsheimer & Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), p.112

<sup>329</sup> Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) suggests reasons for evangelical support are more complicated than usually presented and offers an in depth study to its influence on American foreign policy, particular in the Bush II White House.

<sup>330</sup> Mearsheimer & Stephen M. Walt, *Ibid.*, p.115

evangelical Christians, but the number of followers who care deeply about Israel is undoubtedly smaller.<sup>331</sup>

Mearsheimer & Walt argue that the Israeli lobby lacks a significant opposition, and Arab lobbies are not effective enough and because they:

...come from a variety of countries and backgrounds, and include Christians as well as Muslims, they are unlikely to speak with a unified voice on Middle East issues. Indeed, they sometimes hold sharply opposing views.<sup>332</sup>

Arabs are also viewed, they argue, as being somewhat more culturally alien to the US than Israelis. The Israel issue is one of the most important foreign policy issues, but the pro-Israeli lobby and the role of Religious Right and Jews in the debate need to be clearly defined in any policy analysis, and not simply lumped together.

### *Muslims*

Muslims in America comprise 0.6% of the adult population, according to the Pew Survey<sup>333</sup>, though they note other surveys done solely in English show a figure of 0.5%. They have larger families and are younger, with 29% aged under 30. Half of the Muslims in America identify themselves as Sunni and 16% Shia, but one-in-three say they are either “just Muslim” or unaffiliated. Research by Zogby International and Georgetown University<sup>334</sup> evidenced that in the 2000 election Bush II won 42% of the Muslim vote running as a social conservative, against 31% for Gore, but this was dramatically reversed in 2004 when Bush II only gained 7% of the vote against 68% for Kerry. The main reason was the response to 9/11, which was initially favorable but turned negative as policy unfolded and the Patriot Act took effect, interpreted by Muslims as being anti-Islam. The pattern continued in the 2008 election, Muslims voted overwhelmingly for

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<sup>331</sup> Mearsheimer & Stephen M. Walt, *Ibid.*, p.138

<sup>332</sup> Mearsheimer & Stephen M. Walt, *Ibid.*, p.142

<sup>333</sup> <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>, last accessed 22 December 2011, pp.3 & 21

<sup>334</sup> <http://www.zogby.com/News/readnews.cfm?ID=869>

candidate Obama. This may suggest that Muslims, while socially conservative, may vote according to what is best for their Muslim identity as Americans.<sup>335</sup>

### **The Religious Right: Republican or Republicanized?**

The term “Religious Right” is confusing because the landscape seems confusing, especially to commentators used to ignoring religion or just plainly ignorant of the subtleties within religious tradition. In terms of the language being used with a better understanding of the diversity of constituents we might now better define the landscape of the “Religious Right” and seek to extricate the relevant strands so as to arrive at a workable definition, though we may pause to ponder whether Religious Right is in fact a useful term at all, such is the pejorative use of the term. In an interview with Christianity Today Gary Bauer, president of American Values, stated:

There is an ongoing battle for the vocabulary of our debate. It amazes me how often in public discourse really pejorative phrases are used, like the 'American Taliban,' 'fundamentalists,' 'Christian fascists,' and 'extreme Religious Right.'<sup>336</sup>

In terms of tone of voice and organization, the movement crosses many theological and cultural boundaries, as outlined in the previous section, which makes religious conservatives too diverse to be easily lumped together, as critics often do, and too disconnected to be truly effective. Categorizing the “Religious Right” in a catch-all term is further problematized by their not being simply denominationally based. Within the different Christian denominations there is a liberal to conservative spectrum, where leadership in the traditional or mainstream denominations is currently seen as liberal, and many in the pews may well also be liberal. However, there are also many conservatives who remain within these denominations for reasons of family history, commitment to doctrinal ideas or preferences in practice. The critics are most likely fixated on a few noisy groups on the Religious Right which claim support and influence they do not have, and

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<sup>335</sup> Jamal, Amaney, The Political Participation and Engagement of Muslim Americans, *American Politics Research*, (33:4, 2005) 521-544, offers a full discussion. John W. Ayers, Changing Sides: 9/11 and the American Muslim Voter, *Review of Religious Research*, (49:2, Dec 2007) 187-198, provides analysis of voting changes between the 2000 and 2004 elections.

<sup>336</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/februaryweb-only/106-42.0.html?start=1>, last accessed 20th December 2011

the only time there is a significant degree of cohesion in this grouping is during the election cycle.<sup>337</sup> Even as a voting bloc, it is an act of excessive generalization to attribute the various criticisms made of the Religious Right to all the groups and individuals making their voice heard

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<sup>337</sup> The Pew Forum offers extensive election data, including *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. 2004. How the faithful voted* <http://www.pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/How-the-Faithful-Voted.aspx>, and, *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2003. The 2004 Political Landscape: Evenly divided and increasingly polarized*, <http://www.people-press.org/2003/11/05/the-2004-political-landscape>, both last accessed 28th April, 2012. Using the 2004 election as his prism, John Green defines the “Old Religion Gap,” based on divisions along denominational lines of certain religious groups (Jews, black Protestants, etc.) gravitating toward the Democrats and others (Southern Baptists, Mormons, etc.) toward Republicans. He then defines the “New Religion Gap,” by contrast, focuses on political divisions *within* religious groups, as the more observant and orthodox in virtually all traditions are more Republican. Green examines how these groups influenced party coalitions and mobilization strategies. Green refutes negative accounts of a “fundamentalist” takeover of American politics, suggesting the term “carries with it negative connotations, especially among self-consciously modern people, including many scholars and journalists, who feel threatened by fundamentalists (and who often display their own brand of anger, zealotry, and intolerance in return)” A study which takes a specific look at fundamentalism in elections is Bolce, Louis, and Gerald DeMaio. 1999. “The Anti-Christian Fundamentalist Factor in Contemporary Politics.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 63(4):508–42. John C. Green, *The Faith Factor: How Religion Influences American Elections* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2010) 30. See also, John Green, *Faith-based politics in American presidential elections: trends and possibilities, Future of religion in American politics* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009) 209-227. Green was part of two studies which take a different tack on the 2004 election, authored by John C. Green, , Corwin E. Smidt, James L. Guth, & Lyman A. Kellstedt, *The American religious landscape and the 2004 presidential vote*, <http://www.uakron.edu/bliss/research/archives/2004/TheAmericanReligiousLand.pdf>, last accessed 28th April 2012, argues that findings further illustrate the polarization of the religious landscape in the 2004 presidential vote, and James L. Guth, Lyman A. Kellstedt, Corwin E. Smidt & John C. Green, *Religious Influences in the 2004 Presidential Election, Presidential Studies Quarterly* (Jun 2006, 36:2) 223-242, which finds religious factors had an important role in the Republican victory, especially in the so-called battleground states. Geoffrey Layman offers a survey across the period covered by this theses, see Geoffrey C. Layman & John C. Green, *The Changing Religious Voter: Belonging, Behaving, and Believing in the 1990s and 1960s, Paper presented to Midwest Political Science Association Convention, 1996*, and, Geoffrey Layman, *Religion and Political Behavior in the United States: The Impact of Beliefs, Affiliations, and Commitment from 1980 to 1994, Public Opinion Quarterly* (1997, 61:288-316). Religion also impacted presidential approval ratings, according to Laura Olson & Adam Warber. Using data from the 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 American National Election Studies, they explain that operationalizing religion as a rudimentary Protestant-Catholic affiliation dichotomy masks its influence on presidential approval. They find that religious affiliation, even when measured more precisely than with a Protestant-Catholic dichotomy, contributes less to models of presidential approval than do measures of religious commitment and (especially) orthodoxy of religious belief, Laura R. Olson & Adam L. Warber, *Belonging, Behaving, and Believing: Assessing the Role of Religion on Presidential Approval, Political Research Quarterly*; Jun., 2008, Vol. 61 Issue 2, p192-204. Richard V. Pierard, *Religion and the 1984 Election Campaign, Review of Religious Research* (Vol. 27:2 Dec 1985) 98-114 assesses the Reagan election. A longer historical timeframe is offered by Mark A. Noll, *Protestant Evangelicals and Recent American Politics, Journal of American & Canadian Studies* (2007:25) 3-18, analyzes the role of evangelicals in presidential elections since 1936.

at the ballot box.<sup>338</sup> Putting aside some of the emotional attacks, the Religious Right activists have much in common with their liberal counterparts, as Green, Rozell & Wilcox explain while:

...scholars have found considerable diversity among them, such as differences among self-identified fundamentalists, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and “plain vanilla” evangelicals...In demographic terms, Christian Right activists have looked much like other activists: white, older, well-educated, affluent, and with high status occupations.<sup>339</sup>

This all makes political categorization somewhat hazardous. At best, we have something akin to a set of Russian dolls, and at worse a set of definitions that are helpful to the point of meaninglessness. What is important to note is that religious conservatives, along with other conservatives, do share a certain focus which is what Nixon was identifying when he spoke of the “silent majority.”

Amongst the key uniting theological concerns at work in conservative Christian circles the most commonly cited are biblical authority, accepting Christ as the only savior and the need for conversion. There are other themes that are more contested and do not unite a large segment of Christian conservatives, such as Christian Zionism, Millennialism and Dispensationalism. On the fringe of this new Christian right there are the uniting, but more heavily contested, themes of Dominion theology and Reconstructionism. It seems that what really unites Christian and religious conservatives are aspects which lie on the cultural front of what it means to be American, shared moral values and a support for Capitalism as an expression of freedom. On this level, doctrinal differences, which are rather more starkly present between evangelicals and Roman Catholics, are either overcome or put to one side to support a particular conservative united agenda; likewise, between faiths. What is unique in the Religious Right era is the extent to which this diversity of different faiths, denominations and lobbies on the Religious Right, is the sharing of an agenda as a coalition of theologies which agree on areas of politics and public morality, despite being

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<sup>338</sup> Shields, Jon A. *The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) advances the thesis that the Christian Right has in fact improved democratic participation by raising a sense of civic duty.

<sup>339</sup> John C. Green, Mark J. Rozell & Clyde Wilcox (eds.) *The Values Campaign? The Christian Right and the 2004 Elections* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006), pp.23-24.

opposed in matters of doctrine and practice. It is a republicanization, a coming together of religious conservatives on cultural and political fronts.

On the cultural front, the problem is identified in some findings of the Pew Forum in their report “U.S. Religious Survey Landscape”<sup>340</sup>. Two key contextual findings are that, firstly “one quarter of all American adults (28%) have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion – or no religion at all”, and secondly “people who say they are unaffiliated with any particular faith today (16.1%) is more than double the number who say they were not affiliated with any particular religion as children”. They conclude that the religious landscape of today is “very diverse and extremely fluid, and that for the first time America is on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country, and Protestantism is itself “characterized by significant internal diversity and fragmentation.”<sup>341</sup> This may fuel a sense that the values conservative Christians hold are under threat from secularization, but it may also reveal the dislocation of American Christianity and traditional doctrinal Christianity. However, the main concern is how this republicanization is a coalition on the political front to advance Manifest Destiny, and it is to this task that I now turn in the next chapter.

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<sup>340</sup> <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>, last accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2011

<sup>341</sup> All quotes in this paragraph are taken from page 5 of the report

## Chapter Five

### The Religious Right: A Serpent's Kiss?

The notion of Manifest Destiny may have been dormant or in the background in the period when Niebuhr was writing, but it has since been reinvigorated in the fourth phase of the Religious Right. In this chapter I will first highlight the problem critics have with the Religious Right. I will then trace how Manifest Destiny has been consistently articulated by the presidents since Niebuhr's death. I will then define the formation of "Totemic Conservatism," drawn from a coalition of religious conservatives and Neoconservatives to advance a republicanized agenda rooted in the soil of Manifest Destiny.

The Religious Right is viewed by critics as authoritarian, harnessing what critics see as a characteristic common theme across a religious and conservative bloc. This is problematic for liberals, after all it was this that the 1960s was escaping from. The worry is that this group, as a coalition of conservative groups, has gained influence and seeks to exercise authoritarian power. According to Philip Green:

We must remember that Christianity, after all, is not inherently authoritarian. But along with the power-seeking leaders of religious revolt, the neoconservative intellectuals, Jews and non-Jews alike, also have done everything in their power to turn it in that direction. In this respect, their tacit – sometimes explicit – embrace of the Christian Right has been a serpent's kiss.<sup>342</sup>

Walter Russell Mead suggests that what has happened is that the various religions in America have been in part hijacked by a reversal of the liberalization of religion that typified the 20th Century:

The last third of the twentieth century saw a dramatic reversal...Mainline Protestantism struggled and shrank; evangelical and Pentecostal churches exploded. The liberal Catholicism that struggled to emerge after the Second Vatican Council increasingly fell

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<sup>342</sup> Philip Green, Cultural Rage and the Right-Wing Intellectual in Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America* (New York, New York University Press, 2007), p.51

victim to the disciplined and determined efforts of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to assert closer Roman control over the American church. In Judaism the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox movements appeared to be growing – through demographics as well as through religious renewal – while more liberal forms of Judaism struggled to hold their ground against trends like secularization and intermarriage. Muslim immigrants, as in Britain though on a smaller scale, added their voices to those wanting American politics to be responsive to the laws of God rather than to the traditions and ratiocinations of human beings.<sup>343</sup>

The declining traditional churches,<sup>344</sup> dominated by more liberal theology, have become less politically effective, reversing the work done by religious groups in securing civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s and protesting war and Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. Religiously political activity has been overshadowed by the rise of the Religious Right, which critics complain has been joined at the hip to the Republican Party. What has really excited recent literature on the Religious Right influence is the last decade, more than ever, is the close relationship the Religious Right has forged with Bush II, thereby exerting considerable sectarian influence on the administration and policies of the years 2000 to 2008. Critics condemn the way the movement has organized and manipulated to gain insidious influence, often to the point of implying a Christian conspiracy to make America “holy” or even a theocracy.

The concerns centre on what critics see as the narrowness and certainty of the Religious Right position and belief. Esther Kaplan argues that the Christian Right specifically provided Bush II

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<sup>343</sup> Walter Russell Mead, *God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Vintage, 2008), p.258

<sup>344</sup> Various reports have attested to this decline, including:

[http://www.christianchronicle.org/article2158685~Church\\_in\\_America\\_marked\\_by\\_decline](http://www.christianchronicle.org/article2158685~Church_in_America_marked_by_decline) offers a good set of graphs based on a 2009 survey, statistics from the 2011 report from the National Council of Churches survey <http://www.nccusa.org/news/110210yearbook2011.html>, last accessed 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2012. This popularly accepted view is usefully qualified by Mark Chaves, Religious trends in America, *Social Work & Christianity* (38:2, Summer, 2011) 119-132. Chaves describes 13 religions trends, using the General Social Survey and National Congregations Study: increasing religious diversity, fewer liberal Protestants, softening involvement in religious congregations, declining belief in an inerrant Bible, declining confidence in religious leaders, tighter connection between religiosity and political conservatism, more disapproval of religious leaders' political involvement, increasing diffuse spirituality, more technology use by congregations, more informal worship services, aging clergy and congregations, increasing ethnic diversity within congregations, and increasing concentration of people in the largest churches. One summary conclusion is that there is no indicator of traditional religious belief or practice is going up.



with a grass roots organization that got him elected, they were his base; a criticism which seems to ignore the fact that all presidents have a base. Kaplan argues that President Bush in this way governed from the “far right” and that the Christian Right had gained more political power than at any other point in its history. Her contention is that the administration embraced rightwing fundamentalism and gave access and positions to Christian activists in key areas of interest, such as on scientific advisory councils where they could push their anti-abortion measures and other agenda items. She then contends that this religious caucus silenced secular critics. In Kaplan’s view, this is mirrored by the White House operation:

This politically driven White House employs a carefully managed set of themes and messages to shape the president’s national image, while delivering to favored constituencies cherished agenda items, unvarnished, and, when possible, below the public radar, avoiding the rough and tumble of public debate and legislative compromise through the use of private meetings, executive orders, and discretionary funds.<sup>345</sup>

Apart from the obvious fact that all administrations are politically-driven, the same accusations again could be aimed at all presidents. In his study of, again specifically, the Christian Right and American foreign policy, Lee Marsden’s opening salvo is “In less than three decades rightwing Christians have become major players in domestic politics to such an extent that no politician, Republican or Democrat, can afford to overlook their influence.”<sup>346</sup> Again, we need perspective. There are many influencers in any government, and depending on their political orientation and agenda some will get a better listen than others, and some may appear as less attractive than others.

The crescendo of objections raises the question whether the composition or the tenor (or both) of the Religious Right has changed over time. Is this the real objection: that there is unacceptable certainty and intolerance exhibited by the Religious Right, which has had undue influence in Republican presidencies, especially in the Bush II years? In a conversation with Senator John Danforth,<sup>347</sup> he insisted that religion had always been around during his years in Congress, but it was not until the Bush II administration that it had become so divisive a presence, which he blamed on Karl Rove rather than Bush II. Rove, Danforth complained, used the Religious Right to get the

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<sup>345</sup> Esther Kaplan, *With God on their Side* (New York: The New Press, 2004), p.77

<sup>346</sup> Lee Marsden, *For God’s Sake: The Christian Right & US Foreign Policy* (London: Zed Books, 2008), p.1

<sup>347</sup> Conversation with the author on 26 October 2009

grassroots active and secure a campaign victory.<sup>348</sup> Objections that the Religious Right is divisive include criticism from other insiders like former speechwriters David Frum and David Kuo. Having also been deputy director of the FaithBased Initiative, Kuo believes the administration he served in was theocratic and antidemocratic. To illustrate the religious atmosphere surrounding the Bush administration, Frum, Kuo and Kaplan reference the role and frequency of Bible Study groups<sup>349</sup> in the Bush White House, a wrong compounded by the large number of evangelicals in his administration. Kaplan saw this religiosity as deeply divisive, suggesting that “The gulf that separates fundamentalists and religious social moderates is now so extreme that it often eclipses differences between religions”.<sup>350</sup> By which she means the coalitions of evangelicals, Roman Catholics and Jews formed around shared concerns like abortion and Israel.

I contend that these criticisms, while they may have some validity, are exaggerated, but even then they have not truly located the problem. In order to do that, we have to examine Manifest Destiny and how it has been reinvigorated since the death of Niebuhr. Frederick Merk, writing in 1963, concluded that Manifest Destiny vanished in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, dying while America’s mission stayed alive. Merk was keen to stress his reliance on facts, and yet the facts since he was writing seem to suggest he was premature in writing the obituary of Manifest Destiny. He may have been right that it had become dormant in the decades up to when he was writing, but a decade after his prognosis, Manifest Destiny comes once more into the foreground of American political thinking. Merk may have been confusing his disagreement with what he saw as the odious catalog of Manifest Destiny’s sins with the stubbornness of Manifest Destiny as an idea. At the end of the American Century the term remained in currency and the idea, however one might oppose it, remained operative, as we can see by a survey of presidential rhetoric since the decade after Merk pronounced its demise, and since the death of Niebuhr.

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<sup>348</sup> In his autobiography, *Courage and Consequence* Simon & Schuster, NY 2010, Rove makes little of religion. He gives some insight when he explains the Bush comment about Jesus being his favorite philosopher, “Many in the media just didn’t get it and saw it as a cynical and raw appeal to evangelical voters. But it struck lots of ordinary people who said grace before a meal, went to church on Sunday, and turned to their Maker in times of need as being sincere and revealing of who Bush really was. And that’s what it really was. It was not the kind of answer you would draw up in advance.” Critics may say this shows how Rove seized this opportunity to connect cynically with the base, but it may also be interpreted as more of a question of identification of common views, as Rove implies.

<sup>349</sup> I personally attended the main White House Christian Fellowship on two occasions, one of which was addressed by Mike Gerson, the President’s speechwriter, and I have to say these were not charismatic or revival meetings. They involved serious questions, and staffers who were struggling to balance the expectations of public office with the demands of private faith. This is not to deny influence; it is simply to suggest that reports are exaggerated.

<sup>350</sup> Kaplan, *Ibid.*, p.74

## Manifest Destiny and the Presidents: Nixon to Bush II

Richard Nixon<sup>351</sup> was inaugurated president at a time when the Vietnam War had pricked the American conscience. President Kennedy had taken America into a war expanded by President Johnson, and Nixon inherited the war and its discontents. Manifest Destiny was at a low ebb at the start of the Nixon administration but it was on the verge of a comeback. Though Nixon's favorite president was Woodrow Wilson,<sup>352</sup> the Nixon White House heralded the end of Wilsonian idealism, at least for the time being, and replaced it with an amoral Realism. This did not mean the end of America's Manifest Destiny; rather it ushered in a new meaning, with Nixon holding to the notion that the world needed America. But it was not a strong America. Nixon inherited a weakened America embroiled in Vietnam and not particularly economically strong, so its power was eroded. The Cold War was still in full swing, and Nixon, together with his foreign policy

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<sup>351</sup> There are many biographies and studies of Nixon, often premised on a flawed and secretive character. Those by Jonathan Aitken, *Nixon: A Life* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 1993) and Conrad Black, *Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007) seek to offer some level of defense, and oddly both authors have been imprisoned. The three volume work by Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987-1991) and Roger Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise of an American Politician* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1991) offer detailed accounts. More complex character studies include Don Fulsom, *Nixon's Darkest Secrets: The Inside Story of America's Most Troubled President* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2012), David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow: The History of the Image* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2004), Charles P. Henderson, *The Nixon Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), Earl Mazo, *Richard Nixon: A Political and Personal Portrait*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), Earl Mazo & Stephen Hess, *Nixon: A Political Portrait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008), Anthony Summers & Swan Robbyn, *The Arrogance of Power: The Secret World of Richard Nixon* (New York: Viking, 2000), and, Wills, Garry. *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man*. (New York: New American Library, 1979). Nixon himself authored a number of books throughout his career, particularly after he left office, including *Beyond Peace*. (New York: Random House, 1994), *The Challenges We Face* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), *Leaders* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), *1999: Victory without War*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), *Real Peace: No More Vietnams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), *The Real War* (New York: Random House, 1980), *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), *Seize the Moment: America's Challenge in a One-Superpower World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), and *Six Crises* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990).

<sup>352</sup> Fredrik Logevall & Andrew Preston, (eds.), *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.48-49

advisor Henry Kissinger,<sup>353</sup> launched a ‘Grand Design’ to halt the decline of American power and maintain its role as a Superpower.<sup>354</sup> As Kissinger explained the challenge:

Simultaneously we had to end a war, manage a global rivalry with the Soviet Union in the shadow of nuclear weapons, reinvigorate our alliance with industrial democracies, and integrate the new nations into a new world equilibrium.<sup>355</sup>

In his book *Beyond Peace*, Nixon offered his own later thoughts on why the Cold War ended in terms of the providence central to Manifest Destiny:

The Soviet Union began by banishing God. The United States began as a community of people who wanted to worship God as they chose. Many factors contributed to the outcome

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<sup>353</sup> Much is written on the role of the two men, their relationship, and the notable ego of Kissinger, including Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), Seymour M. Hersh, *Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), David Landau, *Kissinger: The Uses of Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), Roger Morris, *Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Harper & Row: NY (1977), Phyllis Schlafly and Chester Ward, *Kissinger on the Couch* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1975), Asaf Siniver, *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making: The Machinery of Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Richard C. Thornton, *Nixon-Kissinger Years: The Reshaping of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Paragon House, 2001). In Joan Hoff, *A Revisionist View of Nixon's Foreign Policy, Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, *The Nixon Presidency* (Winter, 1996), pp. 107-129, the proposal is made that Nixon's fatal error was to appoint the "bastard feudalist" Kissinger to the key role rather than keeping him as a more distant advisor. Kissinger's own account of these years are recounted in three volumes listed in the bibliography, Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (1979), covering November 1968 to January 1973; *Years of Upheaval* (1982), covering January 1973 to August 1974; and, *Years of Renewal* (1999), covering August 1974 to January 1977. Kissinger also has many numerous books and articles on foreign policy, though Hoff draws attention to the fact that his early major works were as editor or part of a group, but he claimed these for his own.

<sup>353</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), p.33

<sup>354</sup> Dan Caldwell, *American-Soviet Relations: From 1947 to the Nixon-Kissinger Grand Design* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981) provides a comprehensive description of the grand design, which he defines as comprising three principal elements: (1) the acceptance of the emergence of a tripolar configuration of power among the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China; (2) the development of a moderate international system supported by these three powers; and (3) halting the spread of communism to areas of the world in the traditional Western sphere of influence while avoiding direct military confrontation with the USSR. See also, Dan Caldwell, *The Legitimation of the Nixon-Kissinger Grand Design and Grand Strategy*, *Diplomatic History* (33:4, pages 633–652, September 2009, where he concludes "Their grand design and grand strategy reflected more of a continental European *Realpolitik* approach than the traditional, moralistic American approach to foreign policy. The Congress, the American public, and many members of the executive branch were unwilling to grant their support to a foreign policy focused on the maximization of power rather than the promotion of principles and ideals and the maintenance of stability rather than upon peace." p.652. See also, Franz Schurmann, *The Foreign Politics of Nixon: The Grand Design* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1987). Stephen A. Garrett, *Nixonian Foreign Policy: A New Balance of Power, or a Revived Concert?* *Polity* (8:3, Spring, 1976), pp. 389-421, offers a helpful discussion of the various terms of balance of power, alliance and concert system in the context of Nixon's approach, which he argues was a concert undertaking.

<sup>355</sup> Logevall & Preston, *Ibid.*, p.40

of the Cold War. One crucial but underrated factor was that a system that attempted to blunt, deny, and even punish the spiritual aspirations of its people could not survive because it was fundamentally at odds with human nature. Man does not live by bread alone. Those in the United States whose desire to create a strictly secular society as strong as Lenin's was should study this Cold War lesson closely. Communism was defeated by an alliance spearheaded by "one nation under God."<sup>356</sup>

Interestingly, Nixon refers to an "alliance" rather than just the one nation under God, even if America took the lead. Détente may have been the policy used to manage the Cold War in the Nixon era, but Nixon knew all along what he believed he was up against. Writing in the twilight of Communism, Nixon linked faith and freedom:

America was founded by individuals who sought religious freedom, who wanted the right to worship God in their own way and to look for meaning in life on their own terms. We must not lose sight of this animating principle of our country... The communists deny there is a God, but no one can deny that communism is a faith. We believe it is a false faith, but the answer to a false faith can never be no faith. When America was weak and poor two hundred years ago we were sustained by our faith. As we enter our third century and the next millennium, we must rediscover and reinvigorate our faith.<sup>357</sup>

However, in respect to Nixon's grasp of faith, the dominant narrative which emerges is that Nixon simply saw religion as instrumental to his own political needs, and it played no ideological role in his foreign policy.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Richard M. Nixon. *Beyond Peace* (New York: Random House, 1995), p.21

<sup>357</sup> Richard M. Nixon. *Beyond Peace* (New York: Random House, 1995), p.16

<sup>358</sup> As one of his biographers Jonathan Aitken quipped to me in an interview, "Nixon had a complicated relationship with everyone, including God;" at the home of Jonathan Aitken, 10th December, 2009. Niebuhr made a blistering and controversial attack on Nixon and his relationship with Billy Graham in one of his last published articles *The King's Chapel and the King's Court*, *Christianity & Crisis* (4th August, 1969), pp.211-212. The attack led to the White House demanding to review FBI files on Niebuhr. Ralph Luther Moellering, *Civil religion, the Nixon theology and the Watergate scandal*, *Christian Century* (90:34, 1973) p.951, concluded "Richard Nixon continually appropriates the vocabulary of the church - faith, trust, belief, spirit -and applies this sacred terminology not to a transcendent God but to his own country - its traditions and aspirations - and, worse, to his own personal policies and visions. The tragedy of this President is that his "theology" has become either self-delusion or a camouflage for the moral authority which he exerts in his office for ends that are amoral if not immoral" p.951. Charles Henderson, *The Nixon Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) sees Nixon as the archetypical true believer in American civil religion, a 20th century high priest mixing patriotism and piety to manipulate the malleable "national spirit" to his own political ends. See also, Richard Nixon and American religion, *Christian Century* (111:16 May 11, 1994), p.488-489, and,

The Nixon policy continued under Gerald Ford, who kept Kissinger in situ, providing a certain degree of continuity and perpetuating détente. Ford, perhaps a reflection of being a Ford rather than a Lincoln<sup>359</sup> or offering succor to a nation recovering from “a long national nightmare,”<sup>360</sup> did however offer lofty goals in a humbler way than Nixon:

We have an unwritten compact of respect for the convictions of others and faith in the decency of others that allows Americans the luxury of rugged political and economic competition without the savage scenes we see so often in less fortunate lands. Our challenges today, as they have been from our humble but heaven-blessed beginnings as one nation, must be to banish war from our shrinking world and hate from our expanding hearts.<sup>361</sup>

Ford’s comment sets the scene for Jimmy Carter, a president seen in some quarters as more interested in doing what was right than what was politically expedient.<sup>362</sup> He saw America in a difficult place and bipartisan support was required to correct the nation’s course, hence the famous “malaise” speech.<sup>363</sup> Any consideration of Carter and Manifest Destiny has to confront this famous

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Ronald C. Wimberley, Civil Religion and the Choice for President: Nixon in '72, *Social Forces* (59:1, Sep 1980), p.44-61. Robert S. Alley, *So Help Me God: Religion and the Presidency, Wilson to Nixon* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1972) provides a picture of faith in the presidencies from Wilson to Nixon, disputing Bellah’s civil religion as too Weberian and narrow to provide us with a full view. A point also questioned by a contemporary set of essays in Elwyn A. Smith Ed., *The Religion of the Republic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). Nixon’s use of religion earlier in his political career is examined by Shaun A. Casey, *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>359</sup> Ford Library, “Inauguration Remarks, December 6, 1973” Box 127 of the Gerald R. Ford Vice Presidential Papers Ford Library, available online <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/speeches/731206.htm>, last accessed 29 December 2011.

<sup>360</sup> Ford Library, Box 1 of the White House Press Releases at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, available online <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/whpr/whpr19740809-001.pdf>, last accessed 29 December 2011

<sup>361</sup> Quoted in Anderson, Annelise & Bark, Dennis L. (Eds), *Thinking about America*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1988, p.543

<sup>362</sup> Kaufman [2006] outlines this argument, p.2. Kenneth E. Morris, Jimmy Carter, American moralist (*University of Georgia Press*: Athens, GA, 1996) offers some insight into Carter’s personality, morality and faith connected to policy (though reviewers point out the author shows an inadequate grasp of policy and theology).

<sup>363</sup> *Energy and national goals, Address to the nation, July 12*. Public papers, Jimmy Carter, 1977. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1979. It should be noted that Carter never used the word “malaise” and the speech was initially well-received, as Carter himself notes in his diaries, but cabinet firings a few days later changed the atmosphere, and according to the original Carter speechwriter malaise became “encrusted in myth,” Kevin Mattson, *What the heck Are You Up to Mr. President?* (Bloomsbury USA: NY, 2009), p.xiv. Mattson provides a detailed insider account of the speech. Mattson argues “The speech served as a turning point away from Carter’s humility and toward Reagan’s dreams, from Carter’s Niebuhr to Reagan’s Ralph Waldo Emerson,” and seeks to “show how critics

statement of America's position in the world. Michael H. Hunt suggests that Carter did not enter office with any sense of the malaise ahead, to the contrary he was confident of his idealistic cause:

...it fell to Jimmy Carter to maintain the resistance to Cold War assumptions. He would continue the arms-control effort and maintain the opening to China. But his outlook, shaped by his Baptist faith and the values of the small-town South, cast him in the mold of those other two Southern Democrats, Woodrow Wilson and Harry Truman....Carter entered the White House committed, as Jefferson had been long before him, to a restrained, just, populist foreign policy, confident that the world was becoming an ever more hospitable place for American values.<sup>364</sup>

After a number of problematic presidencies,<sup>365</sup> there was perhaps room for a breath of fresh air with Carter as an outsider seeking to offer a more moral vision for the presidency.<sup>366</sup> John Dumbrell explains the Niebuhrianism of Carter's vision:

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twisted Carter's words against him and how Carter himself destroyed the possibility that his speech offered." p.205. A full copy of the speech text is published therein. Carter's approval levels were low even before the speech and only rose above 50 percent twice after January 1978: 51 percent in December 1978 after the recognition of the People's Republic of China and reached a post-1977 peak of 61 percent in December 1979 resulting from a temporary effect of Iranian hostage outcome (see Gallup Opinion Index, August 1980, 26, no. 180, December 1980, 56-57, no. 183).

<sup>364</sup> Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2 edition, 2009), p.184

<sup>365</sup> The office of President as occupied by the immediate predecessors of President Carter is the story of an office associated with problems of one sort or another. John F. Kennedy had been assassinated. Lyndon B. Johnson retreated from seeking re-election. Richard Nixon had resigned in disgrace. Gerald Ford had never been elected to the post. John Dumbrell, *American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996) suggests, "The Carter Presidency was both response to, and expression of, the crisis of American liberalism. In its post-1945 form, US liberalism rested on three principal foundations: the strong presidency, an internationalist foreign policy driven by anti-communist containment and social reform funded by economic growth. By the early 1970s, all three were teetering." p.17.

<sup>366</sup> There have been a number of books on Carter's faith and the presidency, including Dan Ariail & Cheryl Heckler-Feltz, *The carpenter's apprentice: The spiritual biography of Jimmy Carter* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), James & Marti Hefly, *The church that produced a president* (New York: Wyman Books, 1977), Niels C.Nielsen Jr., *The religion of President Carter* (New York: Thomas C. Nelson, 1977), Howard Norton & Bob Slosser, *The miracle of Jimmy Carter* (Plainfield, Logos International, 1976), and Leo P. Ribuffo, *God and Jimmy Carter, in Transforming faith: The sacred and secular in modern American history*, (Greenwood Press: Westport,, 1989), edited by Myles L. Bradbury and James B. Gilbert, pp. 141-59. See also, Ronald B. Flowers, *President Jimmy Carter, Evangelicalism, Church-State Relations, and Civil Religion*, *Journal of Church & State*. (25:113, 1983). Wesley G. Pippert, *The spiritual journal of Jimmy Carter: In his own words* (New York: Macmillan, 1978) is a selection of essays and interviews by Carter. Also using interviews, Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., *God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency* (New York: Collier Books, 1988) assesses both Carter and Reagan, calling them "religious presidencies."

Jimmy Carter's religious position is perhaps best described as a kind of optimistic Niebuhrism. Attempts to portray him as a dogmatic fundamentalist were misconceived and mischievous. He frequently quoted Paul Tillich: 'Religion is a search.' Yes, man was fallen. But alleviation is possible, even if perfectibility is not.<sup>367</sup>

However, moral vigor appears to be the holy grail of the presidential office, and Carter turned out to be as constrained as any of his immediate predecessors by the buffeting winds of domestic and global politics, and he has since had a mixed critical reception.<sup>368</sup> Betty Glad explains:

In part, Carter was vulnerable because he did not have a well-developed strategic vision. Embracing the traditional idea that the United States had a special moral mission to perform in the world, he failed to appreciate the subtle play between power and the ability to attain what is good. In attributing the opposition of adversaries to bad motives, he failed to see that adversaries also have interests and that a successful diplomacy must be based on an appreciation of the relative power of the contenders and an accommodation of competing interests in terms of that power balance. Indeed, as his dealings with the Soviet Union suggest, Carter failed to see that his moral abstractions were actually complicating

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He argues that Carter's policies were a direct result of his religious convictions, p.4 and that he reawakened political action amongst evangelicals.

<sup>367</sup> John Dumbrell, *The Carter presidency: a re-evaluation* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.19

<sup>368</sup> Much has been written reassessing Carter, see: Douglas Brinkley, "The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The 'Hands On' Legacy of Our Thirty-Ninth President," *Diplomatic History*, (20:4 (Fall 1996), pp. 505–529; John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: A Re-evaluation* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995); Erwin Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President: Leadership and the Politics of the Public Good* (Baton Rouge: Miller Center Series on the American Presidency, Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Burton Ira Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr. American Presidency*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006); Joshua Muravchik, *The Uncertain Crusade: Jimmy Carter and the Dilemmas of Human Rights Policy* (Latham: University Press of America, 1986); David F. Schmitz and Vanessa Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights: The Development of a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (January 2004), pp. 113–143; Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), pp.274–75; and, William Stueck, Placing Jimmy Carter's Foreign Policy in *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), edited by Gary M. Fink and Hugh Davis Graham, p.247f. Popular media and political rhetoric comparing President Obama to Carter abounds, *Democrats deny parallels between Presidents Obama and Carter*, Alexander Bolton, The Hill, 7th April, 2012: <http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/220405-democrats-deny-parallels-between-obama-and-carter>, last accessed 21st May, 2012. Hargrove, *ibid*, argues Carter was unable to fashion a consistent relationship between "purpose, politics and process" p. xxiv, and offers a useful insight into the Carter White House through a wealth of former insider interviews.



relations with that state and thus inhibiting his ability to secure the national security goals he sought.<sup>369</sup>

After the national disgrace of Nixon and the malaise of Carter a new optimism came breaking through in the form of Ronald Reagan,<sup>370</sup> who also started his political journey as a Wilsonian, but established a reputation for sparking a more unilateral “Reagan Revolution” which restored America to its pre-eminence as a world power and encouraged a return to “traditional values”. Reagan took America’s Manifest Destiny to new heights, and asserted an American ideology on a global scale. Reagan led his rhetoric with the notion of a “shining city on a hill.” In speeches throughout his career, Reagan talked of America as a blessed nation and a promised land.<sup>371</sup> While presidents before had articulated the chosen status of America, Reagan directed this towards ending the Cold War. As Paul Kengor writes:

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<sup>369</sup> Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), p.1

<sup>370</sup> Reagan is arguably the most iconic president since Kennedy and mentioned in the same breath as Lincoln. On the 100th anniversary of his birth the question was posed by a conservative think-tank *What Would Reagan Do?* <http://www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2011/01/what-would-reagan-do>, last accessed 22nd May, 2012. There have been numerous biographies and assessments of Reagan’s legacy, which shows little sign of slowing since his death and his rise as a conservative icon. Selected readings include Larry Berman, ed. *Looking Back on the Reagan Presidency* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), Sidney Blumenthal, and Thomas Byrne Edsall, eds. *The Reagan Legacy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988) Bill Boyarsky, *Ronald Reagan: His Life and Rise to the Presidency* (New York: Random House, 1981), Matthew Dallek, *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), Edmund Morris, *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan*, (New York: Random House, 1999), David Mervin, *Ronald Reagan and the American Presidency* (Harlow: Longman, 1990), John O’Sullivan, *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister: Three Who Changed the World*, (Washington DC: Regnery, 2006), Deborah H. Strober, and Gerald S. Strober. *Reagan: The Man and His Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), and Garry Wills, *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1987). Aside from former administration member memoirs, insider accounts include Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), *Reagan* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1982), Edwin Meese, *With Reagan: The Inside Story* (Washington DC: Regnery Gateway, 1992), and speechwriter Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era*, (New York: Random House: NY, 1990), and, *When Character Was King: A Story of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Viking, 2001). Robert J. McMahon, 'Making Sense of American Foreign Policy during the Reagan Years', *Diplomatic History* (19:2, Spring 1995) reviews some of the memoirs of leading Reagan appointees. For a biography predating his presidency see Lee Edwards, *Reagan: A Political Biography* (San Diego: Viewpoint, 1967). In addition, Reagan authored and co-authored a number himself, the key ones being Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), *The Reagan Diaries*, Edited by Douglas Brinkley. (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), *Speaking My Mind*, (New York: Simon & Schuster: NY, 1989), and, *A Time for Choosing: The Speeches of Ronald Reagan 1961-1982*, edited by Alfred Balitzer, (Washington DC: Regnery Gateway, 1983).

<sup>371</sup> In one of Reagan’s oldest speeches in June 1952, a commencement address *America the Beautiful* at Williams Woods College, he stated "I, in my own mind, have always thought of America as a place in the divine scheme of things that was set aside as a promised land." *Echoes From the Woods* (Fulton: Williams Woods College, 1952)

Ronald Reagan, then, was not alone in viewing America as specially chosen, as a nation with a divine mandate. He was alone in the single-minded passion with which he harnessed and implemented that view in the Cold war.<sup>372</sup>

Reagan saw the Cold War in Manichean terms, and believed God was on America's side. More radically, however, he also saw his war as winnable. In a Commencement Speech to Notre Dame University, Reagan said:

The years ahead are great ones for this country, for the cause of freedom and the spread of civilization. The West won't contain communism, it will transcend communism...It will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written...For the West, for America, the time has come to dare to show the world that our civilized ideas, our traditions, our values, are not - like the ideology and war machine of totalitarian societies - just a façade of strength. It is time for the world to know our intellectual and spiritual values are rooted in the source of all strength, a belief in a Supreme Being, and a law higher than our own.<sup>373</sup>

This was very much a challenge to orthodoxy, as critics, diplomats and academics were all working on the assumption the Cold War dichotomy was for good, or at least for the foreseeable future. An important aspect, in Reagan's mind, was that America was stronger than Americans thought, and the Soviet Union was weaker than many in the West presumed.<sup>374</sup> The issue hitherto was not how to defeat Communism but how to work with it or around it. The Reagan approach was to put this dichotomy on to a large historical and theological canvas, where God would guide America to conquer and tame this evil, just as the early Americans had conquered and tamed the Wild West.<sup>375</sup> This was the Reagan version of the Manifest Destiny.

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<sup>372</sup> Kengor, Paul. *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life* (2005), p.99

<sup>373</sup> Reagan Presidential Library Archive, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/51781a.htm>, last accessed 30 December 2011

<sup>374</sup> Kim R. Holmes & John Hillen, *Misreading Reagan's Legacy*, *Foreign Affairs* (75:5, Sep/Oct96) p162-167 argue that Reagan offered a new and comprehensive vision of American strength and leadership in 1980, but it was driven by the twin specters of Soviet expansionism and American weakness.

<sup>375</sup> Mark P. Lagon, *The International System and the Reagan Doctrine: Can Realism Explain Aid to 'Freedom Fighters'?* *British Journal of Political Science* (22:1, Jan., 1992), pp. 39-70 explains "The Reagan Doctrine represents a rich empirical case. It was a moralistic declaratory statement of policy for a group of similar situations, a foreign aid

The Cold War had since the end of World War II effectively been the organizing principle for American foreign policy. For religionists and conservatives, the Cold War fitted in well with a Manichean model, and the bellicose rhetoric in the speeches of Ronald Reagan resonated with this constituency. Triumphant exceptionalism, Reagan re-articulated the old Cold War orthodoxy in his speeches, but turned the Cold War away from the Nixon/Ford détente and the Carter human rights fall-out into a battle scenario against “The Evil Empire”. Where Nixon/Ford tried to negotiate arms deals with a sense of equality, and where Carter held them hostage to human rights principles, Reagan used aggressive tactics and his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) to take a combative stance aimed at bringing the enemy down. The ultimate fall of Communism seemed the end to justify this approach to the extent that supporters of Reagan claimed he had led the nation into victory over the evil empire. However, an alternative picture can be offered that while evil had often triumphed under Communism, especially under Stalin, in the Reagan era it was not so much an evil empire as a decrepit nation imploding.<sup>376</sup>

What Reagan had done, in the minds of conservatives, was to restore confidence in the national “myth.” After Nixon’s even-handed détente and Carter’s malaise, Reagan seemed to offer a nation strong again.<sup>377</sup> Kissinger offers an intriguing explanation of how Reagan achieved this by connecting to different American traditions:

The Reagan administration produced a synthesis of all three strands of American thought: the Wilsonian rhetoric of America’s exceptionalism; a crusading attack against a hostile ideology (“the Evil Empire”) to rally the Jacksonians; and the Hamiltonian tactics of

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doctrine based on values and institutions the American state sought to promote abroad, and a strategy for a new phase and dimension of the Cold War competition with the other superpower.” Reagan policy was a political-military perspective known as ‘containment plus’ the plus being American objectives, See also George Shultz, in Oberdorfer *ibid*, p. 36, also Stanley J. Michalak, Jr (ed.), *Competing Conceptions of American Foreign Policy: Worldviews in Conflict* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 59.

<sup>376</sup> The autobiographies of Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence* (New York: Random Books, 1995) and Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (London, Doubleday, 1996) offer invaluable insights from the “dark side” of the evil empire. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (New York: Penguin, 2005), dedicated to the memory of George F. Kennan, offers a very readable narrative of the Cold War and the end of the Soviet empire, which he describes as “a sandpile ready to slide.” p.238.

<sup>377</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *The Election & The Evangelicals*, *Commentary* (71:3, 01/02/1981) makes the argument that Americans who turned right did so not because of the Moral Majority but because they wanted a president who reflected their mood, and the religious argument is exaggerated. Gary Wills, *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), argues the nation sought optimism after the Carter years.

Nixon. Evocations of America's unique moral obligation became fused with a hardheaded assessment of the national interest.<sup>378</sup>

Bush I<sup>379</sup> had the job of managing the end of the process Reagan had started. His first act as President came in his Inaugural speech, when he asked the listeners to bow their heads as he led them in prayer. He then explained that with the fall of Communism, he believed there was a new breeze blowing and a new nation was being refreshed by freedom. Democracy was on the move, and freedom was working. Bush I explained:

America is never wholly herself unless she is engaged in high moral principle. We as a people have such a purpose today. It is to make kinder the face of the Nation and gentler the face of the world.<sup>380</sup>

The unipolar moment was for Bush I a blank slate, and he believed that without American leadership there would be no leadership. Though Bush I eschewed triumphalism, he retained the

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<sup>378</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), p.250.

<sup>379</sup> While less than Reagan or Bush II, there is a considerable body of work on Bush I which avoids much of the emotional coverage of these other two presidents. Ryan Barilleaux and Mark Rozell, *Power and Prudence: The Presidency of George H.W. Bush* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), Colin Campbell and Bert Rockman, *The Bush Presidency: First Appraisals* (Chatham: Chatham House Pub, 1991); Richard Ben Cramer, *What It Takes* (New York: Vintage, 1993), Michael Duffy and Dan Goodgame, *Marching in Place: The Status Quo Presidency of George Bush* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) is a critical assault on the Bush presidency; John Robert Greene, *The Presidency of George Bush* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000); Christopher Maynard, *Out of the Shadow: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (College Station Texas A&M University Press, 2008), Martin J. Medhurst, ed., *The Rhetorical Presidency of George H.W. Bush* (College Station Texas A&M University Press, 2006), David Mervin, *George Bush and the Guardianship Presidency* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Timothy Naftali, *George H.W. Bush* (New York: Times Books, 2007), Herbert Parmet, *George Bush: The Life of a Lone Star Yankee* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2000), Richard Rose, *The Postmodern President: George Bush Meets the World* (Chatham: Chatham House Publishing, 1991); Tom Wicker, *George Herbert Walker Bush* (New York: Viking, 2004), and, Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991). Meena Bose and Rosanna Perotti, *From Cold War to New World Order: the Foreign Policy of George H.W. Bush* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), William Levantrosser & Rosanna Perotti (eds.), *A Noble Calling: Character and the George H. W. Bush Presidency* (Westport: Praeger, 2004) are two volumes of four which record a conference participants as well as foreign policy scholars and journalists on "George Bush: Leading in a New World," held at Hofstra University on April 17-19, 1997. The other volumes cover domestic policy and White House politics. Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (New York: Little Brown & Co, 1994) assesses the relationship between Bush and Gorbachev. Bush also authored works, the most notable being George H. W. Bush, Jeffrey A. Engel (ed.) *China Diary of George H.W. Bush: The Making of a Global President* (Princeton University Press: Princeton NJ, 2008), *All the Best,: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (New York: Scribner, 1999). George H.W. Bush & Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage, 1999) is an exchange of insightful views on foreign policy issues. For a family history, see Peter Schweizer & Rochelle Schweizer, *The Bushes: Portrait if a Dynasty* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

<sup>380</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, ed. *Ibid.*, P.384

notion of America as the exceptional nation and assumed at least this empire would stand while its nemesis had fallen. God, at least in a deist sense, and liberty, in the American sense, had prevailed. Looking at America in a post-Cold War world, Bush I essentially restated America's Manifest Destiny<sup>381</sup> in the following terms:

As I look to the future, I feel strongly about the role the United States should play in the new world before us. We have the political and economic influence and strength to pursue our own goals, but as the leading democracy and the beacon of liberty, and given our blessings of freedom, of resources, and of geography, we have a disproportionate responsibility to use that power in pursuit of a common good. We also have an obligation to lead. Yet our leadership does not rest solely on the economic strength and military muscle of a superpower: much of the world trusts and asks for our involvement. The United States is mostly perceived as benign, without territorial ambitions, uncomfortable with exercising our considerable power.<sup>382</sup>

In his inaugural address, Bill Clinton<sup>383</sup> also seemed to recast America's Manifest Destiny and align it to the needs of the world:

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<sup>381</sup> Roberta L. Coles, Manifest Destiny adapted for 1990s' war discourse: mission and destiny intertwined, *Sociology of Religion* (63:4, Winter 2002) p 403-426, discusses both Bush and Clinton, noting "The discourses of President George Bush as he prepared for and executed the 1991 Persian Gulf War and President Bill Clinton as he approached and implemented a military campaign in Kosovo were replete with the tenets of Manifest Destiny though neither ever invoked the term itself." p.405

<sup>382</sup> George H.W. Bush & Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage, 1999), p.565

<sup>383</sup> Colin Campbell and Bert A. Rockman (eds), *The Clinton Legacy* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000) and *The Clinton Presidency: First Appraisals* (Chatham: Chatham House Publishers, 1996) offer insights at the outset and conclusion of his presidency. Nigel Hamilton, *Bill Clinton: Mastering the Presidency* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007) focuses on 1993-96, while John F. Harris, *The Survivor: Bill Clinton in the White House*. (New York: Random House, 2005) covers the major policy issues. Bob Woodward, *The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994) takes an insider look, and among other insider accounts are George Stephanopoulos, *All Too Human: A Political Education* (London: Hutchinson, 1999), and, Richard Morris, *Behind the Oval Office: Winning the Presidency in the 1990's* (New York: Random House, 1997), *Partners in Power* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996). Peter L. Goldman et al, *Quest for the Presidency, 1992* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1994) looks at the 1992 campaign and David Maraniss, *First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton* (New York: Simon & Schuster: NY, 1996) offer insight into the early Clinton. See also, William C. Berman, *From the Center to the Edge: The Politics and Policies of the Clinton Presidency* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Sidney Blumenthal, *The Clinton Wars* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003); John Hohenberg, *The Bill Clinton story: Winning the Presidency* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994); Joe Klein, *The Natural: The Misunderstood Presidency of Bill Clinton* (London: Coronet, 2002); Peter Levy, *Encyclopedia of the Clinton Presidency* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002); and, Steven E. Schier, *The Postmodern Presidency: Bill Clinton's Legacy in U.S. Politics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). For Clinton's "Boswell, see Taylor Branch, *The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), and for autobiography, see Bill Clinton, *My Life* (London: Hutchinson, 2004).

Today, a generation raised in the shadows of the cold war assumes new responsibilities in a world warmed by the sunshine of freedom...Our hopes, our hearts and our hands are with those on every continent who are building democracy and freedom. Their cause is America's cause.<sup>384</sup>

Clinton employed Manifest Destiny through the notion of covenant. Over the last three months of 1991, in a series of monthly speeches at his alma mater Georgetown University, he set out his philosophy by referencing a New Covenant for responsibility, economic change and security. His appeal to American voters was an economic one, aimed at what he called the "forgotten" middle classes. This speech, although it gained a modest response at the time, is deserving of some attention, as it provides a holistic view of Clinton's thinking. In the first lecture he said:

America should be celebrating today. All around the world, the American dream is ascendant. Everybody wants political democracy and market economics, and national independence. Everything your grandparents and parents fought for, and stood for, from World War II on, is being rewarded and embraced. Yet today in America, we're not celebrating. Why? Because all of us fear down deep inside that even as the American dream reigns supreme abroad, it's dying here at home. We're losing jobs and wasting opportunities.... To turn America around, we've got to have a new approach, founded on our most sacred principles as a nation, with a vision for the future. We need a new covenant, a solemn agreement between the people and their government to provide opportunity for everybody, inspire responsibility throughout our society and restore a sense of community to our great nation. A new covenant to take government back from the powerful interests and the bureaucracy and give it back to the ordinary people of our country.<sup>385</sup>

In the second lecture, on his economic ideas, he connected his economic agenda to faith:

That is the spirit I seek to bring to the Presidency. The spirit of renewal of America. I believe with all my heart that the very future of our country is on the line. That is why these

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<sup>384</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, ed., *Ibid.*, P.392

<sup>385</sup> [http://www.dlc.org/ndol\\_ci.cfm?kaid=128&subid=174&contentid=2783](http://www.dlc.org/ndol_ci.cfm?kaid=128&subid=174&contentid=2783), last accessed 31st August, 2011

are not just economic proposals. They are the way to save the very soul of our nation. This is not just a campaign. This is a crusade to restore the forgotten middle class, give economic power back to ordinary people, and recapture the American Dream. It is a crusade not just for economic renewal, but for social and spiritual renewal as well. It is a crusade to build a new economic order of empowerment and opportunity that will preserve our social order and make it possible for our country once again to make the American Dream live at home and to be strong enough to triumph abroad.<sup>386</sup>

For Clinton, “the collapse of communism is not an isolated event; it's part of a worldwide march toward democracy whose outcome will shape the next century.”<sup>387</sup> The foreign policy priorities were to establish a post-Cold War security framework, to forge a new economic policy and “reinforce the powerful global movement toward democracy. U.S. foreign policy cannot be divorced from the moral principles most Americans share.”<sup>388</sup> Nor could U.S. foreign policy be divorced from an economically strong America or its leadership position in the world by “restoring America's greatness in the world.” This was America’s cause, and Clinton was the man to lead the cause. In an address to George Washington University on August 5, 1996, Clinton stated:

The fact is America remains the indispensable nation... There are times when America, and only America, can make a difference between war and peace, between freedom and repression, between hope and fear. Of course, we can't take on all the world's burdens. We cannot become its policeman. But where our interests and values demand it, and where we can make a difference, America must act – and lead.<sup>389</sup>

Clinton was a centrist who believed economic policy was now the dominant currency of future international relations.<sup>390</sup> His foreign policy was founded on economic prowess, liberal

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<sup>386</sup> [http://www.dlc.org/ndol\\_ci.cfm?contentid=250528&kaid=128&subid=174](http://www.dlc.org/ndol_ci.cfm?contentid=250528&kaid=128&subid=174), last accessed 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2011

<sup>387</sup> [http://www.dlc.org/ndol\\_ci.cfm?contentid=250537&kaid=128&subid=174](http://www.dlc.org/ndol_ci.cfm?contentid=250537&kaid=128&subid=174), last accessed 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2011

<sup>388</sup> [http://www.dlc.org/ndol\\_ci.cfm?contentid=250537&kaid=128&subid=174](http://www.dlc.org/ndol_ci.cfm?contentid=250537&kaid=128&subid=174), last accessed 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2011

<sup>389</sup> *Remarks on International Security Issues at George Washington University, August 5, 1996*, Government Printing Office, Administration of William J. Clinton, 1996/Aug.5, p.1257, <http://frwebgate2.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/PDFgate.cgi?WAISdocID=uinuP8/5/2/0&WAIAction=retrieve>, last accessed 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2012

<sup>390</sup> Aubrey W. Jewett, and Marc D. Turetzky, *Stability and Change in President Clinton's Foreign Policy Beliefs, 1993-96*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (28.3, Summer 1998) analyze the evolution in Clinton’s thought, concluding that “when it comes to foreign policy, President Clinton does seem to have a worldview, and that worldview evolved over his first term in office. In 1993, President Clinton had a unidimensional, simplistic image of the international system, summed up by the slightly altered campaign refrain, “It’s the global economy, stupid.” By 1996, Clinton’s

interventionism, and a repudiation of the power politics of old. The belief was that humanitarian goals were now the objective of foreign policy, which meant fostering freedom and the enlargement of democracies in the world. America's Manifest Destiny was now the drive toward democracy and freedom for all humanity, with human rights its beating heart.

Stephen Walt argues that in his presidency Clinton shifted from idealpolitik to realpolitik, arguing that what Clinton wanted in fact was 'hegemony on the cheap':

President Clinton's handling of international institutions and multilateralism illustrates the central irony in his handling of foreign policy, namely, the degree to which he departed from his initial idealism and embraced realpolitik. In 1992, candidate Clinton declared that "the cynical calculus of pure power politics is ill-suited to a new era," but his policies as president have shown an ample appreciation for the realities of power. ..Clinton may cloak U.S. policy in the rhetoric of "world order" and general global interests, but its defining essence remains the unilateral exercise of sovereign power. This tendency to disguise power calculations is hardly surprising. Americans do not like to think of themselves as practicing realpolitik, but they do like being number one. At the same time, Americans do not want to expend blood and treasure if they don't have to. Perhaps Clinton's greatest achievement is that he has done so well at so modest a cost to the United States. Clinton's strategy is hegemony on the cheap, because that is the only strategy the American people are likely to support. In this sense, Clinton's presidency illustrates the temptations and constraints likely to bedevil his successors. The foreign policy of the Clinton administration has been well suited to an era when there is little to gain in foreign policy and much to lose. The American people recognize this and have made it clear they want neither isolationism nor costly international crusades. Bill Clinton is nothing if not sensitive to the vox populi, so he has given his fellow citizens the foreign policy they wanted.<sup>391</sup>

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worldview became more complex, reflecting a multidimensional outlook on issues and actors. This evolution in beliefs is attributable to changes in the international environment, domestic political situation, and behavior of world leaders, which interacted with the president's personality characteristics and are reflected in his words and deeds." p.660.

<sup>391</sup> Stephen Walt, *Two Cheers for Clinton's Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, 2000, Vol.79, pp.78-79



Ultimately, the outcome of Clinton's foreign policy was that America's leadership was undermined by doubts about moral authority, as Hyland states:

The influence of the United States declined under Clinton, but it was bound to decline from the high point of 1989-1991 and the end of communism in Europe. The decline was neither precipitous nor fatal; for the foreseeable future America will remain the only superpower. More serious than the loss of influence was the erosion of the president's moral authority, a decline that undermined American leadership in foreign affairs.<sup>392</sup>

To which, Hyland concludes:

In 1993, Clinton was the leader of an unrivaled superpower; six years later he was a badly crippled lame duck, and the opportunity to mold a new world order had closed. The post-Cold War period was over. The new global order that was emerging was in many ways antagonistic to American interests and designs. A magnificent historical opportunity to shape the international system had been missed.<sup>393</sup>

In an interview<sup>394</sup> with the *New York Review of Books* in 1999, at the time of Clinton's war in Kosovo, Kennan urged the American government to withdraw from its public advocacy of democracy and human rights, and cease portraying the nation as the center of political enlightenment, with presidents and politicians as teachers to the rest of the world, which struck him as lacking thought and "vainglorious and undesirable." He called for governments to deal with governments, and avoid "unnecessary involvement, particularly personal involvement, with their leaders." The problem was soon to be not, however, simply one of dealing with governments.

The new global order was to produce a new shock on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, when terrorists struck on America's own soil only months into the presidency of Bill Clinton's successor, Bush II.<sup>395</sup> His

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<sup>392</sup> William G. Hyland, *Clinton's World: Remaking American Foreign Policy* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), p.201

<sup>393</sup> Hyland, *Ibid.*, p.204

<sup>394</sup> Richard Ullman, The US and the World: An Interview with George Kennan, *New York Review of Books*, August 12, 1999:

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1999/aug/12/the-us-and-the-world-an-interview-with-georgekenn/>, last accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2012

<sup>395</sup> Books on Bush are the most polarized of all presidents, even Nixon. As with Nixon, we may have to wait for a calm set of assessments from both liberal and conservative commentators on this presidency. John B. Judis, *The Folly of*

presidency had started divided, causing Bush II in his Inauguration Speech on 17 January 20th 2001, to tell the nation he pledged to bring unity to a nation divided, caused in part by the divisive counting of votes in Florida which gave him office, and thought this could happen because “we are guided by a power larger than ourselves who creates us equal in His image.”<sup>396</sup> Bush II also believed “America, at its best, is compassionate.”<sup>397</sup> After 9/11 the notion of Manifest Destiny as the American mission was at the heart of the Bush II presidency, as he sought to touch the core faith of Americans and connect this to an idea of the enlightenment truth of America. As Bush II stated in his second Inauguration:

Americans move forward in every generation by reaffirming all that is good and true that came before – ideals of justice and conduct that are the same yesterday, today, and forever.<sup>398</sup>

Like Clinton, Bush II was a great advocate of freedom, though perhaps within a different framework than Clinton or his critics. The core of Bush II’s foreign policy thinking was a

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*Empire: What George W. Bush Could Learn From Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) argues Bush ignored past lessons and created a quagmire of terror and ethnic conflict. Kevin Phillips, *American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune, and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush* (New York: Penguin, 2004) is another look at the Bush dynasty, saving his most heinous charges for Bush II. Eric Alterman, Mark Green, *The Book on Bush: How George W. (Mis)leads America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004) seeks to show how Bush promoted the interests of the religious right, big business and neoconservative radicals. John W. Dean, *Worse than Watergate: the Secret Presidency of George W. Bush* (New York: Little Brown, 2005) is an indictment of the Bush presidency by former Nixon counsel. George C Edwards III & Desmond King (eds), *The Polarized Presidency of George W. Bush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) is a series of essay looking at the most controversial decisions and how the exercise of power divide public opinion. James Moore, Wayne Slater, *Bush's Brain: How Karl Rove Made George W. Bush Presidential* (New York: Wiley, 2004) assesses negatively the role of Karl Rove. Craig Unger, *House of Bush, House of Saud: The Secret Relationship Between the World's Two Most Powerful Dynasties* (New York: Scribner, 2004) raises the charge of corruption and oil, repeated many other books. Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (2002), *Plan of Attack* (2004), *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III* ( 2007)*The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008* (2009), all published by Simon & Schuster of New York, is Woodward’s quartet of books on the Bush years. A contrary defense is offered by John Podhoretz, *Bush Country: How Dubya Became a Great President While Driving Liberals Insane* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004) and Bill Sammon, *Misunderestimated: The President Battles Terrorism, Media Bias, and the Bush Haters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004). Peter Singer, *The President of Good and Evil* (New York: Dutton, 2004) is the ethicist’s critique on Bush as the nation’s then most “prominent moralist.” Positive portrayals of Bush’s faith and character are offered by Paul Kengor, *God and George W. Bush: A Spiritual Life* (New York: Regan Books, 2004); David Aikman, *A Man of Faith: The Spiritual Journey of George W. Bush* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2004); Ronald Kessler, *A Matter of Character: Inside the White House of George W. Bush* (New York: Sentinel, 2004); and, Timothy S. Goeglein, *The Man in the Middle: An Inside Account of Faith and Politics in the George W. Bush Era* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2011)

<sup>396</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, ed., *Ibid.*, p.408

<sup>397</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, ed., *Ibid.*, p.409

<sup>398</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, ed., *Ibid.*, p.417

Wilsonian idea of freedom.<sup>399</sup> In his post-presidency book *Decision Points*, Bush II explained his freedom agenda:

...was both idealistic and realistic. It was idealistic in that freedom is a universal gift from Almighty God. It was realistic because freedom is the most practical way to protect our country in the long run...Critics charged that the freedom agenda was a way for America to impose our values on others. But freedom is not an American value; it is a universal value. Freedom cannot be imposed; it must be chosen. And when people are given the choice, they choose freedom.<sup>400</sup>

He saw the advancement of freedom as part of his and America's responsibility. Bush II explained in *Decision Points* that he did not see this as an attempt to impose American values, as he understood freedom to be a universal value. A key inspiration was "The Case for democracy: The Power and Freedom to Overcome Tyranny & Terror", by Natan Sharansky, a former Soviet dissident. Sharansky called for moral clarity in the search for freedom:

A lack of moral clarity is why an Israeli journalist compared a kippah to a prison. It is why people living in free societies cannot distinguish between religious fundamentalists in democratic states and religious terrorists in fundamentalist states. It is why people living in free societies can come to see their fellow citizens as their enemies, and foreign dictators as their friends.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Jan Hancock, , Woodrow Wilson revisited: Human rights discourse in the foreign policy of the George W. Bush Administration, *European Journal of International Relations* (16:1, Mar 2010) p.57-76, argues Bush can indeed be an inheritor of the Wilsonian legacy but not because the administrations were characterized by the naive advocacy of idealistic values. Instead, human rights have been discursively co-opted by both Presidents as a technique of governance in the sense of producing reality by insisting on one specific interpretation of identities and intents. Joan Hoff, *A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush: Dreams of Perfectibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) critiques U.S. foreign policy during this period by showing how moralistic diplomacy has increasingly assumed Faustian overtones, especially during the Cold War and following September 11.

<sup>400</sup> George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), p.397

<sup>401</sup> Sharansky, Natan. *The Case for Democracy: The Power to Overcome Tyranny & Terror* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p.xviii

Bush II understood himself to have the moral clarity of which Sharansky writes, and urged people to read the book.<sup>402</sup> Part of this moral clarity was a sense of believing what was right for America and what America's obligation is, and in this sense Bush II believed that America was doing God's work.

Realists, liberals and Europeans all eventually mounted an assault on the Bush II "War on Terror."<sup>403</sup> Kennan, remaining an unrepentant classical realist, was critical of American intervention in the affairs of other nations. During the Bush II presidency, in an interview in 2005, Kennan assessed the plans to attack Iraq, arguing:

Anyone who has ever studied the history of American diplomacy, especially military diplomacy, knows that you might start in a war with certain things on your mind as a purpose of what you are doing, but in the end, you found yourself fighting for entirely different things that you had never thought of before....In other words, war has a momentum of its own and it carries you away from all thoughtful intentions when you get into it. Today, if we went into Iraq, like the president would like us to do, you know where you begin. You never know where you are going to end.<sup>404</sup>

Realists like John Mearsheimer also attacked Bush II on grounds of over-reach, since it did not marry aims with means, and states will not cascade into democracy because America wills it. Another concern is the outbreak of anti-Americanism Bush II engendered. For liberals, somewhat hamstrung by the Bush II objective of overthrowing a vicious dictator to be replaced by a free government, the challenge was more difficult. As Lynch and Singh explain it, "liberal opinion has sought refuge in a moral and cultural relativism," which revolves around antipathy towards America's dominant place in the world, and, objections based on the War on Terror as a violation of due process and fomenter of instability.<sup>405</sup> Finally, the European response was that America exaggerated the threat and presence of their 9/11 foe.

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<sup>402</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4195303.stm>, last accessed 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2012

<sup>403</sup> The following assessment draws extensively from Timothy J. Lynch & Robert S. Singh, *After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

<sup>404</sup> *George Kennan Speaks Out About Iraq*, <http://hnn.us/articles/997.html>, last accessed 16<sup>th</sup> May 2011

<sup>405</sup> Timothy J. Lynch & Robert S. Singh, *After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.96

Writing in 1993, Kennan warned against America playing such a messianic role in the world:

I am wholly and emphatically rejecting any and all messianic concepts of America's role in the world: rejecting, that is, the image of ourselves as teachers and redeemers to the rest of humanity, rejecting the illusions of unique and superior virtue on our part, the prattle about Manifest Destiny or the 'American Century' – all those visions that have so richly commended themselves to Americans of all generations since, and even before, the foundation of our country...no divine hand has ever reached down to make us, as a national community, anything more than what we are, or to elevate us in that capacity over the reminder of mankind.<sup>406</sup>

The Religious Right and Neoconservatism, the new powerhouse of American foreign policy, did not agree.

### **Locating Totemic Conservatism**

Manifest Destiny may have been at best implicit, at worse dormant, during Niebuhr's career, hence the reason Merk pronounced it dead. Writing in 1996, Stephanson<sup>407</sup> questions whether we are instead on the verge of something new, a postmodern world where destiny cannot be manifest, and certainly not managed. The question remains valid, but perhaps answered in part that the vibrancy of the Religious Right and Neoconservatism suggests there is still some distance yet to go before we can agree with Merk that it is done with. During this fourth phase the presidents have all reasserted America's Manifest Destiny, which appeals across the political spectrum, best articulated by Kissinger:

Coinciding with the end of the Cold War, the combination of self-satisfaction and prosperity has engendered a sense of American destiny that expresses itself in a dual myth. On the left, many see the United States as the ultimate arbitrator of domestic evolutions all

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<sup>406</sup> George F. Kennan, *Around the Cragged Hill* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), p.182

<sup>407</sup> Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), p.129

over the world. They act as if America has the appropriate democratic solution for every other society regardless of cultural and historical differences. For this school of thought, foreign policy equates with social policy. It deprecates the significance of victory in the Cold War because, in its view, history and the inevitable trend toward democracy would have by themselves brought about the disintegration of the Communist system. On the right, some imagine that the Soviet Union's collapse came about more or less automatically as a result of a new American assertiveness expressed in the change in rhetoric ("the Evil Empire") rather than from bipartisan exertions spanning nine administrations over almost half a century. And they believe, based on this interpretation of history, that the solution to the world's ills is American hegemony – the imposition of American solutions on the world's trouble spots by the unabashed affirmation of its preeminence. Either interpretation makes it difficult to elaborate a long-range approach to a world in transition.<sup>408</sup>

American hegemony and mission, underpinned by a religious commitment to freedom and morality is at the heart of contemporary American foreign policy. Manifest Destiny is still guiding America's actions.

Manifest Destiny continues to resonate because it is an idea about boundaries that transgresses these boundaries. The Religious Right wants to keep a Christian ideal at the core and align American interests with the interests of God, but it need not necessarily be a Christian ideal, as the coalition with other religious conservatives and Neoconservatism suggests. As America's theater of action has spread beyond the "stopping power of water," it has maintained a general sense of America as a chosen nation, the world's best hope, or whatever expression of exceptionalism phrase you wish to pick from the presidential quotes above. To survive as an idea it need not place the purpose of God and America on the same unacceptable plane, as the Religious Right does, there are other options. Manifest Destiny outlives these phrases, and can be applied to America's interests as it relates to the mission of America as something beyond its core, moving from geographical constraints to an ideal of human action and power. In past ages, in a largely WASP

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<sup>408</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), p.19

and globally myopic America, this was not so clear. In a globalized and more diverse America it becomes clearer that Manifest Destiny is an idea of a republicanized religion.

This sense of Manifest Destiny is what holds the vast, and well supported, array of faith groups together. This coalition in Christian terms is one where doctrine, theology and practice are quite different. Include other religious groups, then we have an even broader difference. Yet, they may be classified together when it comes to politics and international relations, because they are organized to unite behind a shared political agenda. It is not that the Religious Right is taking over American conservatism, rather there is an American conservatism that has attracted many religious conservatives, though not all of them, as well as many secular conservatives and libertarians. As Richard John Neuhaus argued in *The Naked Public Square* in 1984, there was a new conservatism which emerged before the new Religious Right, to which he added it was a surprise to the left that this new religious movement occurred and objectionable that they should be so well organized, as a large swathe of Christian conservatives were brought into the democratic political process by this new conservative movement. Much of the religious conservative agenda has been in the domestic arena, but increasingly, with globalization, there has been increasing focus on foreign policy. There are five key areas in which religious conservatives have been active in foreign policy terms:

1. Iraq War: They tended to support the war in Iraq as a necessary response to 9/11 and the actions of Saddam Hussein, and as part of a strategy to democratize the Middle East.
2. Islamism: There is a strong sense that the rise of Islam in the West is a threat to Christianity and to Western civilization.
3. Israel: The state of Israel is supported for theological and practical reasons, and arguably even more so with the rise of Islamism.
4. Religious Rights and freedom to practice one's faith, particularly in the Middle East and China, where stripping China of its Most Favored nation (MFN) status is widely called for by conservatives.
5. Foreign aid, including sexual health, abortion and aids programs

Younger conservative evangelicals have become more engaged in the last two of these issues, along with the “Green Bible” and the “Poverty and Justice Bible,”<sup>409</sup> and whilst religiously conservative they are more politically liberal or progressive. Indeed, some 70 percent of evangelicals do not identify themselves with the Religious Right, what Christian Smith<sup>410</sup> identified after extensive interviewing of Christian conservatives as an attitude of ambivalence rather than the stereotypical intolerance often suggested. This may lend credence to the thesis that the dynamics of conservative Christians is more complex than critics make out when labeling their attacks on Republican administrations. While it is true that Republicans have successfully courted the evangelical vote, at the same time the Democrats have alienated this base while attracting a more radical leftist and secularist base. The recent shift in attitudes among younger evangelicals, appealed to by Tony Campolo, Ron Sider and Jim Wallis as leaders of a very vocal Christian Left, suggests it is possible to reach out to this evangelical base and bring them into a social evangelism paradigm, refuting the individualism that they believe has typified conservative evangelicalism in recent decades. This would bring theologically conservative evangelicals within a camp that arguably existed in antebellum America and in the early Carter years, making them more swing voters than joined at the hip with Republicans and political conservatives. This begs the question, will critics of the Religious Right become more accepting, even supportive, if theologically conservative Christians simply swing to the Left?

To date this has not yet happened, so the charge remains that the Religious Right, especially Christian, influence is a bad thing for America. This influence was particularly pernicious in the Bush II administration, underpinned by a Republican Congress, as Garry Wills [2007:498] puts it:

Bush promised his Evangelical followers faith-based social services, which he called “compassionate conservatism.” He went beyond that to give them a faith-based war, faith-based law enforcement, faith-based education, faith-based medicine, and faith-based science. He could deliver on his promises because the agencies handling all these problems were stocked, in large degree, with born-again Christians of his own variety.

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<sup>409</sup> *The Green Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, ed. by Michael G. Maudlin and Marlene Baer. (New York: Harper Collins, 2008); *Poverty and Justice Bible* (New York: American Bible Society, 2009)

<sup>410</sup> Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals really want* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2002)



However, we can legitimately ask whether the various Religious Right lobbies were really all that influential. Michael D. Lindsay suggests not, and what influence there was consisted of fellow believers in the White House seeking a common purpose:

When it comes to actual policy decisions, the most powerful evangelical voices come from those working inside an administration. This is the difference a presidential appointment can make and explains, in part, why the Carter administration had a much less evangelical tenor than that of George W. Bush. Bush has surrounded himself with more evangelicals than any U.S. president in the last fifty years.<sup>411</sup>

The extensive Lindsay research suggests that the wider influence is somewhat exaggerated, both by conservatives and their critics. Likewise, Jacques Berlinerblau offers a helpful précis of what he calls the hyperbole surrounding the critical attack on the Religious Right, and argues that the criticism of the Religious Right and Bush II is over-egged, and that like all presidents:

Bush has successfully incorporated very broad religious convictions into his statecraft. He seems, for example, to be obsessed with the idea of evil. He has come to the conclusion that America's mission is synonymous with God's mission. Perhaps it is true, as Robert Bellah suggests, that his unilateralism is an expression of his radical Protestant individualism.<sup>412</sup>

In assessing the power of lobbies, we should not confuse an organization's reasons for articulating a message with a constituency's reasons for embracing it. All coalitions have a range of views within them, but find equilibrium or a convenient point of agreement. Lindsay uses the term "elastic orthodoxy"<sup>413</sup>, when he assesses what thus binds individuals and groups together as evangelicals and as right-wingers, since there does appear to be a conservative view common to secular and religionist conservatives. However, I contend this is not so much an elastic orthodoxy as a common idea that they all gaze upon whilst rooted in their own different traditions or orthodoxies. Perhaps like trees in a garden, some of the branches may hang over into the neighboring property. I call this "Totemic Conservatism", and propose it as a better term than

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<sup>411</sup> Lindsay, *Ibid.*, p.26

<sup>412</sup> Jacques Berlinerblau, *Thumpin' it: the Use and Abuse of the Bible in Today's Presidential Politics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p.73

<sup>413</sup> Lindsay, *Ibid.*, p.216

“Religious Right” to locate the conservative response to America’s engagement with the globalization of the world since the 1970s and the perceived threat to the identity of America as a Western civilization. This totem is the sense of Manifest Destiny, and totemic conservatives are united in their commitment to faith and to America. They may not all cling to their guns, but they do all cling to God and government.

The real problem with totemic conservatism is not their shared agenda. It is a legitimate political agenda, whether one agrees with it or not. Equally, it is not a problem that they are organized, for in this they are very much like their competitors in the political field. Again, they are not a problem of undue influence, because it may be argued, as Lindsay and Berlinerblau do, the case is overstated. Indeed, I would go as far to say it is a case overstated essentially as a strategy for attacking Republican presidents. All of these points can be argued about. No, the real issue this totemic conservatism raises is theological. How do theology and church speak to power? This is not simply a negative question of separation of church and state; it is the affirmative question of the proper relationship between the church and state. In clinging to God and government, America has long advocated controls in both the religious and secular spheres. In respect to government, the separation of powers is a legal and political doctrine that acknowledges limits to state power. In respect to God, the first Americans wanted religious freedom and the famous Jeffersonian “Wall of Separation” was recognition that they got it.

Nixon highlighted a cultural and political tectonic shift that the Moral Majority and a host of other totemic conservative groups have since laid claim to represent, namely the sense of decline in America, which includes a decline of moral values, decline of power and speculation of the end of American empire. This declinism was at a peak in Vietnam and Nixon’s “silent majority” may be taken as an identification of an America standing on the precipice of change in an era of globalization, with its Manifest Destiny under threat. The end of Nixon in the Watergate scandal and the Carter years reinforced the sense of decline. However, Reagan onwards saw a restoration of confidence in American power, until the Bush II years raised the specter again by virtue of the way in which American power was being used to advance Manifest Destiny. This ongoing struggle of confidence is for the totemic conservatives Custer’s last stand, as the forces of multiculturalism and pluralism look set to take hold on America and lead it down the same road as Europe. The advocates of the “Christian Left” and young evangelicals’ interests and support of the Democrats and President Barack Obama ultimately signal that they are happy to go down that road, and see

how their theology can interact with a pluralist modernity to further social interests focused on global issues of poverty and environmentalism. For totemic conservatives such a conclusion will suggest the shining city on a hill has been trashed once and for all. Yet it may just be a new chapter which lies ahead in the pursuit of Manifest Destiny in America.

This sense of Manifest Destiny has been the unifying hope of the religious conservatives, but it is also its theological undoing. As Oscar Cullman reminds us:

...the genuine State of the Christians, the “politeuma,” is in heaven, as Paul says in Phil. 3:20; but the earthly State is God’s servant so long as it remains in the order which is willed by God. The State does not have to be Christian.<sup>414</sup>

The totemic conservative agenda assumes God’s will and America’s destiny need to be as one, a notion of statehood which suggests America’s power is God’s power. In speaking of America’s power one is speaking of God’s power, and so this power is supported rather than questioned. The notion of what God has expanded beyond the WASP God to engage a broader coalition in working for a Godly state, for America with its religious supermarket is arguably no longer a Christian state (if indeed it ever truly was). This situation calls for a new Christian approach for speaking to its power, and Cullman’s argument helpfully frames the contest between Niebuhr and the totemic conservatives. The struggle over the Niebuhr legacy is one of deciding how theology should speak to power. Niebuhr would see totemic conservatism and Manifest Destiny as representing between them an unacceptable commingling of the two. However, Niebuhr’s opponents in accusing him of being a travelling troubadour of power appear to ghettoize their theology. If we do not condone totemic conservatism and Manifest Destiny for Niebuhrian reasons, but take seriously his opponents’ objections without accepting their own ghettoization, then where does this leave us? This is the crossroads that I contend my research has brought me to, and like Thompson and Lovin I would like to arrive at an understanding of how Niebuhr applies today, and if he can be used to help us develop a new strategy for speaking to power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which I will now address in my concluding chapter.

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<sup>414</sup> Oscar Cullman, *The State in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1975)

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion: The Best Sin to Commit

In this thesis, I am arguing that in the wake of the unipolar moment the embrace of the Religious Right of Neoconservatism to triumph Manifest Destiny in American foreign policy is a problematic commingling of faith and politics, and what is needed instead is a strategy of speaking to power rooted in classical realism, but one which refines Niebuhrian realism to avoid the risk of progressing a Constantinian theology. In setting out my proposal, I will go back to the essentials of classical realism and recover the elements of Niebuhr that we can make use of, given that Niebuhr was very much a contingent thinker, whose contingency was the paradigm of a Cold War theology somewhat simpler than the complex challenges posed by the unipolar world which emerged some years after his death. In offering such a strategy for theology to speak to power, I seek to avoid the neoconservative and religious conservative error of totemism, while avoiding the jettisoning of Niebuhr's theology by political liberals, and, the political ghettoizing of theology by his chief critics. This strategy is based on embracing an understanding of classical realism which avoids taking a further step, which both Niebuhr and neoconservatism do, of advancing a predictive strategy for American foreign policy. Such a strategy will allow theological clarity to be evident, rather than ghettoized, while also avoiding becoming a constantinian theology.

Theories that seek to move beyond classical realism, or seek to oppose it, take us from the world of "is" to the world of "ought."<sup>415</sup> In seeking to move beyond the "is" of realism and offer a predictive direction Niebuhr falls into the trap of taking us in a liberal political direction of "ought" and thus, while rooted in a realist understanding, merely offers a road out of the dilemma based on his liberal politics. It is significant that his vast journalistic output, demonstrating the contingency of this thinking and desire to influence contemporary issues, was published in a handful of liberal or leftist journals, suggesting he was preaching to the converted in order to make them better liberals; but should he not have broadened his audience? The risk in taking the step Niebuhr takes

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<sup>415</sup> Explained by David Hume in his *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). The point here is not to remove absolutely any "oughts" or moral assumptions from realism, rather it is to draw a stark distinction between the outcomes sought by different schools of thought.

is finding one is merely offering the reverse side of the coin to totemic conservatism. Classical realism would part ways with Niebuhr, just as Burke would part company from totemic conservatism, at this point.

### **Totemic Conservatism and Manifest Destiny**

There is at the heart of American foreign policy a spiritual center, which I have identified as Manifest Destiny. Other ideas have been used, and used interchangeably, all with their place, but in American foreign policy I suggest Manifest Destiny points to both the spiritual sense of exceptionalism and to the political sense of space. As such, Manifest Destiny names a reality in the minds of many Americans. The Religious Right and neocons may have different faiths or philosophical beliefs, but they share the same totem of Manifest Destiny. This feeds their sense of nationalism and patriotism as “one nation under God,” for which America is famed. However, I cannot say I accept the idea that God has chosen America, which is not to say it is not part of God’s plan. It is to say there is no Manifest Destiny, only American religion and American foreign policy, which have coalesced in different ways over the course of America’s existence. Since the Nixon years, the two have combined in the articulation of neoconservative policy and the support of religious conservatives, a combination which stepped into the vacuum of the unipolar moment and replaced the Cold War theology of ‘faithful America against godless Communism.’ So long as this commingling remains the case, Manifest Destiny will remain implicit in American foreign policy, though it is difficult to imagine an American foreign policy that does not have some belief in a divine principle behind it.

In the continuing battle for America’s soul, totemic conservatism emerged out of a transition from a conflict with godless communism to a perceived threat of godless secularism. This transition in the American Century began when America entered onto the world stage with Wilsonianism, which appealed to American ideals, but this was quickly stopped in its tracks by the failure of the League of Nations. Two World Wars, and opposition to the secular ideologies of Communism and Nazism, gave focus to America. The Cold War gave a new focus in the battle against godless communism. For religious conservatives it was enough that presidents, Democrat and Republican, articulated the public theology of condemning what is godless in the world. The amorality of Nixon and the malaise of Carter indicated a more nebulous godless environment for foreign policy,

and the various religiously conservative organizations arose out of the uncertainty of a new globalized world where the lines of engagement had become blurred, and the politics more sectarian. In times of uncertainty and identity crisis it is a natural human reaction to pick sides, and Ronald Reagan invited religious conservatives to choose and they chose the Republican Party, and once aligned they took a second step towards Neoconservatism.

In foreign policy terms, the religious conservative agenda cooperated<sup>416</sup> with Neoconservatism on four levels, evolving in the years since Reagan. On one level, they supported strong economic and military policies, which had a less direct theological connection but was a buy-in to the neocon strategy of keeping America strong by promoting democracy abroad. On a second level they lobbied for support of Israel, based in part on a particular theological understanding of the status of Israel, and again based in part on the neocon strategy that Israel is an island of democracy in the Middle East. On a third level was a call for America to reflect their domestic concerns on the international stage, especially sexual ethics. This entailed seeking to block United Nations initiatives and IMF funding that promoted abortion practices and undermined family values. Again, this is linked to the neocon strategy of doubting the validity and effectiveness of international organizations, which they argue usurps the role of nations and gives an over-represented voice to weaker and corrupted nations. On a final level there was a direct call for action for America to defend the freedoms of Christians in other lands, and so they lobbied for China to lose its Most Favored Nation (MFN) status, called for intervention in Sudan, lobbied on imposing sanctions on countries found guilty of violating Religious Rights and supported Congress passing the International Religious Freedoms Act.<sup>417</sup> This links to the freedom agenda, as Bush II called it, of the neocons and a belief in Christianity as the most effective religion in promoting ideals of freedom. Together religious conservatives and neocons saw themselves as advancing Manifest Destiny by spreading the American ideal of democracy and freedom.

However, as I have argued, the problem with Neoconservatism is that the “conservatism” element is questionable, if we accept the Burkean and Kirkean principles as normative for conservatives

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<sup>416</sup> To clarify, I am not suggesting they are one and the same, simply there was a shared interest in the goal of American foreign policy, where some religious conservatives were neocons, some were not, and still others probably never even thought about whether they were or not.

<sup>417</sup> This Act created a White House office to report religious persecution globally and provides measures for the President to punish offending nations.

(and most conservatives do). These principles are used to attack “liberals” for the same reasons which apply to neoconservatives. I will briefly focus on Burke as the more foundational of the two thinkers, though there is not room here for the kind of sustained critique that the following assuredly deserves. In respect to Burke’s first principle,<sup>418</sup> religious conservatives and neocons share the assumption that people are basically religious and social order is by divine sanction, though where this is a matter of confession for the Religious Right it is utilitarian for neocons, believing society needs some notion of a higher moral order. However, the remaining principles are contradicted by totemic conservatives and the neocon policy which seeks to impose change and institutions that have grown organically in America and plant it on foreign soil. In this, it shares more with liberal interventionism and Socialism than conservatism. For Burke, prudence and experience are better guides than reason in action, and truth lies in concrete experience not universal propositions, yet neocons advance an abstract and universal ideal. For Burke the community is superior to the individual, and evil is rooted in human nature not in any particular social institutions, yet neocons seek to create what they believe is right through institution building, though the institutions differ from liberal thinking. For Burke, apart from an ultimate moral sense, people are unequal, which seems to set realistic limits on freedom and democracy which contrasts with the idealism of the neocons. Finally, Burke states a presumption exists "in favor of any settled scheme of government against any untried project. Man's hopes are high, but his vision is short."<sup>419</sup> Thus, efforts to remedy existing evils usually result in even greater ones, precisely the accusation levelled by critics at the neocons. In short, and I accept the above is a very rough sketch that presents many analytical challenges, neocons are more progressive than Burkean, but this may be because many of the neocon thinkers have come out of a progressive and leftist formation; their mugging was more like having their pockets picked than a full physical assault, which brings me back to Niebuhr.

### **A Niebuhrian View on America’s Manifest Destiny**

In the center of Prague one can find the Museum of Communism, built not long after the Velvet Revolution as a way of teaching Czech citizens about the way of life they had left behind. As one

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<sup>418</sup> Listed on p.xx, 2001

<sup>419</sup> See discussion of Burke in Chapter 1.

leaves a reconstructed interrogation room the view from the corridor overlooks the largest McDonalds in the country. Directions to the museum are given according to McDonalds, find that and you find the museum. The juxtaposition is an irony that would not be lost on Niebuhr had he ever had the opportunity to visit. America has grown into empire, not becoming wealthy by imperialism but imperial because of wealth. It is also an empire established not by military power, but via economic and soft power, as Niebuhr expressed it in an article for *Atlantic Monthly* “we are the first empire of the world to establish our sway without legions. Our legions are dollars.”<sup>420</sup> The wealth finds its origins in the founding of America and in the geographic spread of Manifest Destiny, as Niebuhr wrote:

We had a virgin continent to exploit. Energetic and vigorous stocks of the European population came to our shores to supply the energy for its exploitation. The fact that the steam engine and the telegraph were invented before we had fully conquered the continent made it possible to bring the whole of a vast geographic expanse under a central political authority which would prevent political boundaries, irrelevant to the economic unity of the continent, from impeding the flow of economic life and retarding economic progress. Every circumstance conspired to give us our present economic eminence. Perhaps, if Weber and Tawney are right, even our religion contributed to our prosperity. In America a puritan religion, unhampered by classical or medieval contempt for the man of toil and glorification of the man of leisure, could add moral self-respect to the more obvious incentives of commercial and industrial energy.<sup>421</sup>

My research has not unearthed commentary specifically looking at Niebuhr’s understanding of Manifest Destiny, and what follows is how I have gathered his thoughts on the subject. In 1943 and the midst of the Nazi conflict, he revisited the historical roots of Manifest Destiny, arguing that the beneficial or fortuitous elements a nation historically inherits are either by accident or divine providence, and thus Niebuhr wrote:

If they are purely accidental, then history itself has no meaning; for in that case it would be the fruit of caprice. That is why secularists usually obscure these factors; for it is not possible for man to live in a completely capricious world. But if they are obscured, the

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<sup>420</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “Awkward Imperialists,” *Atlantic Monthly* (145:5, May 1930)

<sup>421</sup> *Atlantic Monthly*, *ibid*



sense of destiny becomes purely a vehicle of pride. Those who achieve a special position in history claim a right to it either by virtue of their power or by virtue of their goodness. The Nazi sense of destiny is completely amoral because it regards power as the sole source of eminence. This amoral sense of destiny has been developed more explicitly by the Nazis than by any other modern nation; but no powerful nation is completely free of the pretension that its power is the sole source of its right to rule. Ideas of “Manifest Destiny” in our own history have this same source.<sup>422</sup>

After the war,<sup>423</sup> Niebuhr restated Manifest Destiny as a will-to-power:

The surge of our infant strength over a continent, which claimed Oregon, California, Florida and Texas against any sovereignty which may have stood in our way, was not innocent. It was the expression of a will-to-power of a new community in which the land-hunger of hardy pioneers and settlers furnished the force of imperial expansion.<sup>424</sup>

Hence, for Niebuhr we have to treat with caution the notion that America’s belief in God marks a new beginning in history, with America cast as the new Israel. Niebuhr argues that the irony of America is that it could not be virtuous if it was really as innocent as Americans pretend it to be:

It is particularly remarkable that the two great religious-moral traditions which informed our early life – New England Calvinism and Virginian Deism and Jeffersonianism – arrive at remarkably similar conclusions about the meaning of our national character and destiny. Calvinism may have held too pessimistic views of human nature, and too mechanical views of the providential ordering of human life. But when it assessed the significance of the American experiment both its conceptions of American destiny and its appreciation of American virtue finally arrived at conclusions strikingly similar to those of Deism. Whether our nation interprets its spiritual heritage through Massachusetts or Virginia, we

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<sup>422</sup> *Christianity and Crisis*, 4 October, 1943 in Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992) edited by D. B. Robertson, p.186

<sup>423</sup> One could speculate that Niebuhr’s following statement could not have been made while the forces of Nazism were at their height.

<sup>424</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p.35

came into existence with the sense of being a “separated” nation, which God was using to make a new beginning for mankind.<sup>425</sup>

This faith in election continued, even the nation’s darkest hours, as Abraham Lincoln stated in his second Inaugural address “the Almighty has His own purposes.” Niebuhr compared Lincoln’s balancing of slavery with civil war to America’s view toward the communist foe in his own time, concluding *The Irony of American History* with a warning:

Even the most “Christian” civilization and even the most pious church must be reminded that the true God can be known only where there is some awareness of a contradiction between divine and human purposes, even on the highest level of human aspirations...Strangely enough, none of these insights derived from this faith are finally contradictory to our purpose and duty of preserving our civilization. They are, in fact, prerequisites for saving it. For if we should perish, the ruthlessness of the foe would be only the secondary cause of the disaster. The primary cause would be that the strength of a giant nation was directed by eyes too blind to see all the hazards of the struggle; and the blindness would be induced not by some accident of nature or history but by hatred and vainglory.<sup>426</sup>

In a biting reference, Niebuhr attacked what he saw as the simplistic and trivialized American version of the gospel as “little more than eighteenth-century rationalism and optimism, compounded with a little perfectionism, derived from the sanctificationist illusions of sectarian Christianity.”<sup>427</sup> Niebuhr warned of the tendency of Protestantism in America to sanctify the self-idolatry of the nation, a central concern in the public theology of America. He saw the difficulty of mixing politics and religion together, the position of protestant liberal theology, and, the danger of eschewing political engagement altogether, the position of protestant conservative theology until the period after his death. Niebuhr exposes the illusion:

Christianity is reluctant to identify its piety with any particular political program for the very reasons which make such an identification so dangerous in communism. As politics

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<sup>425</sup> Niebuhr, *Ibid.*, p.23f

<sup>426</sup> Niebuhr, *Ibid.* pp.173,174

<sup>427</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Moralism in America, Radical Religion*, Winter 1939, p.19

deals with the proximate ends of life, and religion with ultimate ones, it is always a source of illusion if the one is simply invested with the sanctity of the other.<sup>428</sup>

While there is a self-belief in the righteousness of their cause, America's motives are often doubted, as James H. Smylie, linking Weinberg, a major authority on Manifest Destiny, to Niebuhr, explains:

As A. K. Weinberg and Reinhold Niebuhr have demonstrated in different ways, America's self-image as an empire-servant was an invitation to continental imperialism, accumulation and manipulation of power often sanctified by the most specious of reasons behind a mask of innocence.<sup>429</sup>

Despite Niebuhr's provocation on the subject of Manifest Destiny, there is a line of criticism that Niebuhr himself buys into the American foundational myth, as Jace Weaver argues:

Although Niebuhr is aware of slavery and racism, he ignores the indigenous population of the continent almost entirely. The only mention of it, in either *The Irony of American History* or *A Nation So Conceived*, is on the first page of the latter. He and Heimert,<sup>430</sup> in fact, employ the term "native American" in nativist fashion to refer to those whites who were born here, as opposed to immigrants. They refer to Manifest Destiny, that process by which the United States spread over an entire continent, as a means of "replenish[ing] America's stock of available opportunity". In this sense, it becomes a sort of nineteenth-century *Lebensraum*.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Niebuhr, *Ibid.*, p.120

<sup>429</sup> James H. Smylie, Protestant Clergymen and American Destiny: I. Promise and Judgment, 1781-1800, *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Jul., 1963), p. 231

<sup>430</sup> Alan Heimert, co-author with Niebuhr of *A Nation So Conceived* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964)

<sup>431</sup> Jace Weaver, Original Simplicities and Present Complexities: Reinhold Niebuhr, Ethnocentrism, and the Myth of American Exceptionalism, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), p.237. Weaver offers a substantial critique of Niebuhr beyond the specifics of Manifest Destiny.

This self-delusion, argues Weaver, drawing on Richard Reinitz,<sup>432</sup> shifted in response to the Vietnam War at the end of Niebuhr's life. Weaver suggests:

...never again after Vietnam would the myth of American exceptionalism be accepted so uncritically by so many. Reinhold Niebuhr could only have written *The Irony of American History* and *A Nation So Conceived* at the precise historical moments when they were written, at the zenith of the American Century. Perhaps only then could he be seduced by the very myths he sought to expose.<sup>433</sup>

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the forces of Fascism and Communism followed by the Cold War dominated American foreign policy, but as the century was drawing to a close all that had changed. In conjunction with this change emerged a fourth phase of Manifest Destiny, that of the Religious Right and the attempted moral reform of a world that has rejected the last of the great revolutions, namely Communism. The seeming victory of Western-style Capitalism, essentially the American variety, suggested that the American vision was the right one and America is indeed a nation of Manifest Destiny. To the Religious Right, and other Americans, the narrative is that America has succeeded because of its God-given blessings and moral strength. It remains, for all its faults, the best nation on earth and now has the sole Superpower status, with its president "the leader of the free world", because godless Communism could never last. There are new threats, particularly terrorism, as well as old problems, such as the Middle East. However, the Religious Right was to join forces with Neoconservatism in the belief there is a further need to build up a world that that can embrace the highest value of freedom; a world made in its own image.

### **Niebuhr and the Neocons: the best sin to commit?**

At the end of Chapter 2, I stated I would like to arrive at an understanding of how Niebuhr applies today, and if he can be used to help us develop a new strategy for speaking to power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. American power presents two challenges for theology to speak to power. First, this ideal assumes America's power is both divinely legitimated and therefore potentially limitless, as the

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<sup>432</sup> Richard Reinitz, *Irony and Consciousness: American Historiography and Reinhold Niebuhr's Vision*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980)

<sup>433</sup> Weaver, *Ibid* p.244

discussion of Manifest Destiny suggests. Second, this is a problematic confusion of the politics and the theology, ridding us of the option to speak to power, since it is essentially an endorsement. Drawing specifically on Classical realism and Niebuhr I want to offer a critique and understand American power. Niebuhr's project was aimed at limiting American power, while Classical realism is a limitation on morality in the use of power. While the discipline of International Relations (IR) emerged out of the First World War and fostered idealism, it is Realism, in different evolutions, which became the dominant IR theory of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Historically it is the theory for which Reinhold Niebuhr was a formative influence, and as a theory it has become a subject of renewed importance in IR.<sup>434</sup> Niebuhr both deeply influenced realist thinking while offering his own variant of Christian realism.<sup>435</sup> The problem is that Niebuhr assumes American-style democracy as both normative and desirable. As discussed in Chapter Two, there are many points in this multifaceted thinker we can criticize, but here I will specifically address the question of whether Niebuhr himself would have become a Neocon.

A curious twist in this tale is that it was many of Niebuhr's Jewish and secular contemporaries that formed the Neoconservative movement, which emerged in tandem with the religious conservatives to dominate GOP thinking. Neoconservatism, with its roots in the 1930s, is both a product of the 1930s and the Reagan/Bush II era. Labeled in some quarters as the "Neocon Cabal," Neocons used outlets such as the Project for a New American Century, the *Weekly Standard* and the American Enterprise Institute to further their agenda. Neo-Conservatism is composed of former disillusioned radical leftists "mugged by reality", as neocon Irwin Stelzer commented. Jeane Kirkpatrick, the former UN ambassador appointed by Reagan, explained it was in part a reaction to the 1960s counter-culture and its assault on America, in Stelzer's *The Neocon Reader*:

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<sup>434</sup> See especially Michael C. Williams (ed.), *Realism Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). William Bain, Deconfusing Morgenthau: Moral Inquiry and Classical realism Reconsidered, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Jul., 2000), pp. 445-464, explains "That theorists employing scientific methods failed to forecast the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the character of the post-Cold War world has inspired postmodernists, poststructuralists, critical theorists, and feminists to re examine how we think about world politics by emancipating and privileging 'silenced,' 'marginalized,' and 'oppressed,' voices and by concomitantly subverting traditional theory. It is believed that by subverting the realism of 'foundational' figures like Hans Morgenthau, one casts doubt upon the entire canon of twentieth century realist thought." p.445

<sup>435</sup> It is important to note Niebuhr was not the only Christian Realist, but the only one I will discuss here. The ideas of Christian realism are more broadly spelled out by Jon C. Bennett, *Christian realism* [London: SCM Press, 1941], who was co- founder with Niebuhr of the journal *Christianity and Crisis*, to which Niebuhr contributed numerous articles during his career.

The extremes of this counter-culture had disappeared by 1976, but the residue was more lasting. Its effects on what has been called liberal politics were profound. The counter-culture was much broader than the anti-war movement with which it was associated and, I believe, constituted a sweeping rejection of American attitudes, values, and goals. The counter-culture subjected virtually all aspects of American life and culture to criticism and repudiation.<sup>436</sup>

Although neoconservatives were highly influential in the Reagan and Bush II administrations, there has been some considerable debate as to whether it was a movement, a cabal, an instinct or something else. While there are Neocons who are religious, the majority is not highly religious, yet the charge is that this was a secular movement led by former left-wing Jewish intellectuals, to the point that critics have argued that the neoconservative movement is a Jewish cabal formed by dissident individuals reacting, or reactionary, to Jewish intellectuals aligning themselves to liberalism and the Democrats. Stelzer argued that Neoconservatism was rooted in American and British history, and was not a “cabal,” and certainly not a “Jewish cabal,” but an attitude shared by a diverse group of writers. Like the Israel lobby, the Neocons are defined by their political agenda, and whilst Jews are very much at the heart of the movement, Neoconservatism is not simply “American Jewish conservatism”, for many gentiles are, or have been, active and prominent neocons, as well as leading Roman Catholic voices such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Michael Novak, George Weigel and William J. Bennett.<sup>437</sup> In fact, the Neocons were essentially allies, joining with the Religious Right in a joint effort to support Israel and traditional values. Norman Podhoretz<sup>438</sup> wrote an impassioned plea in *Commentary* magazine in August 1995 calling on Jews to realize that secular humanism was a far greater danger than Christian fundamentalism and Christian anti-Semitism, as problematic as these attitudes are.

The high point of Neoconservatism came in the Bush II administration, though Andrew Bacevich disputes the notion of a cabal therein. Instead he detected the emergence of an affinity between Bush II and the neocons post-9/11 with Bush II’s religious worldview “coinciding neatly” with the

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<sup>436</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, Neoconservatism as a Response to the Counter-Culture in Irwin Stelzer, (ed.) *The Neocon Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p.235

<sup>437</sup> Much is made of Neocon Jewish intellectuals inspiring Bush II and Religious Right, but beyond the scope of this dissertation. The topic is extensively examined by Jacob Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York: Doubleday, 2008)

<sup>438</sup> Norman Podhoretz, In the Matter of Pat Robertson, *Commentary* (August 1995), pp. 27–32

neocon secular worldview. He argued the latter were “secular fundamentalists” seeing the world as “us against them” or democracy versus dictatorship, a secular version of Bush’s Manicheanism. Yet, Bush II entered the White House with a quite different social conservative agenda, but was (out) flanked by Neocons and pragmatists.

Bacevich writes that post-9/11 the war on terror changed Bush II:

Fired by a quasi-religious fervor to win that war, during the months that followed the president intervened decisively to resolve an ongoing dispute between competing camps within his own administration, a dispute that 9/11 brought to a head. There ensued a marriage of the president’s no-nonsense evangelicalism with the muscular, highly militarized utopianism of the neoconservatives (and largely secular) right. The union imported a particular twist to US grand strategy, creating an American variant of “liberation theology.”<sup>439</sup>

Bacevich, back in 2004, argued the legacy of this strategy would be that of the instrumentalization of religion, a continued moral underpinning to expansion of the American empire, and, the further militarization of American foreign policy by linking use of force to liberation and the overthrow of evil. Bacevich concluded:

While it may be theoretically possible that a successor could bring to office religious convictions comparable to Bush’s, that is an unlikely prospect, if only because such individuals tend not to find their way to the front rank of national politics. And one hopes and prays that there will be no future shocks of comparable magnitude to 9/11, which is what brought religion into President Bush’s thinking about statecraft.<sup>440</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 1, Max Boot<sup>441</sup> presents an alternative view, suggesting neocons are (hard) Wilsonian idealists, but differently rooted in a strong commitment to US power. Boot refutes many

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<sup>439</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp.47-48

<sup>440</sup> Bacevich, *Ibid.*, p.54

<sup>441</sup> Max Boot, *Myths about Neoconservatism* in Stelzer, *Ibid.*, p.49

of the charges critics leveled at Neoconservatism, helpfully offering a list of Neocon principles which includes:

- Bush II only partly followed a Neocon foreign policy, as he did not pursue Iran or North Korea (a distinction his critics in various ways accept)
- Neocons are no longer liberals mugged by reality, many of them are simply disillusioned hawkish Democrats, like Jeane Kirkpatrick, who thought the Democrats had drifted further to the Left
- Neocons do not serve the interest of Israel, and include many secularists as well as Christian Right voices, who share not their religion but liberal democratic values.
- Multilateralism is not opposed, rather it is qualified. “Coalitions of the willing” are certainly agreeable, but so are international institutions like the United Nations so long as they are reformed. The key is to ensure U.S. global leadership.

Whatever they were, the neocons were interventionists, and raise the question as to how much conservatives want to intervene to change the world, which the canons outlined by Burke and Kirk suggest is not the orthodox conservative approach.

Like his neocon contemporaries, Niebuhr started out as a man of the Left and a Socialist, but turned anti-communist, seemingly mugged by reality in the same period, and for the same reasons, as those who became neoconservatives. This raises the question of whether Niebuhr would have become a Neocon, and if not, why not?<sup>442</sup> Michael Novak, writing in 1986, framed the question broadly when he asked what a neoconservative is, and answered there are two foundational elements: an initial sympathy for the Left and a criticism of it.<sup>443</sup> Niebuhr meets these two criteria, and Novak builds on these to suggest a Niebuhrian strategy is needed for three reasons: 1) Neo-

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<sup>442</sup> To the extent that neocons took Niebuhr as one of their own, as a liberal to the end this was much to his anger, extrapolates Roger L. Shinn in Rice, *Ibid.*, p.8. Niebuhr also complained about the ineptness of American conservatism on foreign policy issues, argue Harry R. Davis and Robert C. Good (eds.), *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics* (New York: Scribners, 1960), Chapter XXIV. Robert McAfee Brown, *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Theology in the 1980s*, *The Christian Century* (103:3, 1986) noted “I will say only in passing – since it is a comment on a passing fad – that recent attempts to make Niebuhr into the guru of Neoconservatism leave me both sad and angry, for I believe they betray both the man and his thought, p.68. Ronald Preston (Harries, 1986, *Ibid.*) also offers an assessment of what he views as a misplaced legacy of Niebuhr on the right, p.88f.

<sup>443</sup> Michael Novak, *Reinhold Niebuhr: model for neoconservatives*, *Christian Century* (103:3, Jan 22, 1986), p. 69-71.



orthodoxy and a return to Christian orthodoxy; 2) Biblical realism, which teaches the limitations of human nature; and, 3) Self-criticism by the new class, which includes the Christian left that “remains largely blind to its own class interests.”<sup>444</sup> On this last point, Novak ponders whether the Christian left<sup>445</sup> is as critically consistent of the left as Niebuhr was. Our task, Novak argues, is the same as that set out by Niebuhr, which is to analyze our moral resources and limitations, and then to understand its effect on human groups and political strategies. Niebuhr may have remained an antagonist Novak concludes, but:

I think he would have enjoyed the neoconservative assault on the “children of light” in the present generation, as a father looks with pleasure on an independent child, to whom plainly he had taught a thing or two.<sup>446</sup>

Any pleasure Niebuhr may have found in the neoconservative assault on liberals, however, is a point hard to defend in the heated debate that shrouded the Bush II administration (and which continues to excite opinion) and its links to the Religious Right, which suggested to critics there was a new, and unacceptable, (neo)conservatism at work. The evidence suggests that Niebuhr can be ruled out as a Neocon because he wanted to curtail American power, and because he repudiated the notion of Manifest Destiny as the spreading of an ideal to other parts of the world, but it is a fine line to tread, since he did regard American democracy as normative and thus good for others. However, as we see from his views on Vietnam, up to the end he remained critical of American power:

Our power had cured us of irresponsible neutralism, but not of self-righteousness. We now act as the self-appointed guardians of democracy against the Communist peril in all parts of the world.... Our military presence is obviously necessary in Asia. But it was certainly an error of inadvertence to become involved in South Vietnam by gradually increasing commitments, so that our prestige is involved in the pretense that we are helping a small

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<sup>444</sup> Novak, *Ibid.*, p.71

<sup>445</sup> Charles F. Hall, *The Christian Left: Who Are They and How Are They Different from the Christian Right?* *Review of Religious Research* (Sep., 1997, Vol. 39 Issue 1) pp. 27-45, offers a helpful survey on the emergence of the Christian Left in this context. A broader view is offered by Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>446</sup> Novak, *Ibid.*, p.71

nation to preserve its independence. There are indications that this small sliver of a nation with a peasant culture is incapable of either the democracy or integral nationhood which our dogmas attribute to it.<sup>447</sup>

This criticism goes to the heart of a central neocon tenet of regime change, and I venture that Niebuhr would have been critical of such dogma in the Bush II era, though with the proviso that he would not have been wholeheartedly on the side of many critics either. I will now discern a Niebuhrian strategy for our times

As a general comment in answer to the question “What would Niebuhr do?” I venture that he would make a realist appraisal of the theological and political ramifications of the particular “messy, historically contingent, and political”<sup>448</sup> problems we face, and then offer a utilitarian solution to it which would largely be aligned with liberal policies, as his theological critics suggest. I propose a strategy that allows us to agree on the first leg of his strategy but part company on the second. The criticism that Niebuhr was a man of his time is not a criticism at all from the perspective of the first point, since he was rightly focused on the contingent. Instead, we can address Niebuhr on three fronts: firstly, his understanding of humanity and its relation to God; secondly, the utilitarian function of politics in human organization; and thirdly, would Niebuhr have become a neocon, given that he came out of the same milieu as the leading neocon thinkers? This last point I will address in a more challenging way, since in some respects this question is less helpful than it first appears; because of the contingency of his thought it is difficult to discern what he would think given the many variables in today’s American foreign policy compared to the relative simplicity of the Cold War paradigm. I will put this question in a narrower and more relevant way, would Niebuhr in his utilitarianism have decided that the neoconservative approach is the best sin and to commit it?

At risk of a tautology, Niebuhr identified with realism because it comes closest to reality, explaining how things are and the reasoning behind the actions of states and political actors. Niebuhr’s realism and classical realism both share a similar sense of human nature, namely that there are limitations on nature. They both assume the problem poetically put by Robert Burns,

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<sup>447</sup> <http://www.tnr.com/article/reinhold-niebuhr-discusses-the-war-vietnam>, article originally published in *The New Republic* January 29, 1966, and reprinted January 1, 1970; last accessed, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>448</sup> See discussion below, p.174f

“The best-laid schemes o' mice an 'men gang aft agley.” His theological critics may be missing an element highlighted by Jean Bethke Elshtain, that many of the assumptions about human nature Niebuhr makes go unspoken. This made his political points easier to grasp, but leads to the deeper human and theological meaning being lost. Elshtain is critical of the lack of attention given in international relations to understanding human nature, despite Hobbes starting out with a discussion ‘Of Man’ before he takes us into the realms of social contract and creating a Leviathan. In this comment, she provides a clue to the problem theologians may have with Niebuhr, on the one hand, and why secular liberals could ignore his theological assumptions, on the other. She suggests the assumptions were there, but they often remained unarticulated by necessity.<sup>449</sup> In which case, perhaps the issue is not Niebuhr but the reception of Niebuhr, which allowed secular liberals to be theologically myopic, while his theological critics could remain with a political plank in their eye.

The outcome remains the same that while his fellow secular and liberal critics argue Niebuhr may have spoken theological truth to political liberals, the theology was jettisoned and the politics accepted. In this view, Niebuhr’s greatest impact on American foreign policy has been the facilitation of a liberal disengagement of Christianity from the enlightenment ideal of America, which Niebuhr himself essentially articulated in full but in effect offered a sacred exit door for liberal secularists.<sup>450</sup> He gave them a moral basis without the need for adherence to Christian doctrine or practice. However, such a strategy as Niebuhr’s remains theologically problematic, as Ronald Thiemann warns, “too often, theologies that seek to address a broad secular culture lose touch with the distinctive beliefs and practices of the Christian tradition,”<sup>451</sup> such is the zeal to engage a culture less used to, or unfamiliar, with theological categories or basic Christian ideas. Did Niebuhr go as far as losing touch? No, but the assumptions in Niebuhr’s work are sometimes too obscured, and so the effect is the same.

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<sup>449</sup> I would add to this that in Niebuhr’s *Nature and Destiny of Man* he sets out his theological assumptions with some degree of clarity, much in the same way as Hobbes starts with “Of Man.”

<sup>450</sup> The so-called “Atheists for Niebuhr”

<sup>451</sup> Ronald F. Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p.19

Niebuhr's concern with liberalism was rooted in his belief in the power of the individual in the public sphere, which led him to warn against the actions of large collectives driven by self interest rather than moral considerations. In this he is more Burkean than neocon. He argued that individuals have the capacity for self-transcendence and self-criticism, something collectives do not possess. In this, Niebuhr is repudiating a foundation stone of his earlier Marxist thinking, and again appears more Burkean than neocon. Niebuhr connected Christian theology to liberal political policy, in the hope of forging a utilitarian approach with a firm moral base in what was becoming more and more a purely secular art. He highlighted that American foreign policy was often defined by the presence of the enlightenment characteristic of liberal arrogance, which he argued was best tempered by Christian humility, and so he attempted to temper the American zeal. Again, this is more Burkean than neocon. The failure in Niebuhr was that he retained the liberal political framework as normative while ghettoizing his theology, and thus his greatest misstep lies with his political views, because he has mixed his theology with his liberal politics without clearly stating this is what he is doing. It is almost like a shell game, where he moves the pieces and we have to guess under which shell the pea is hidden, and it is always the liberal policy hidden under the theological shell. This is not to contest any particular political view he held or action he proposed, nor is it to dispute the rectitude of any of his political views, this is beside the point as I will explain in the next section. It is to contest that in moving from the theological to the political utility he risks identification of a specific theological stance with a specific political stance, which is just the problem identified in totemic conservatism. We cannot excuse Niebuhr and castigate totemic conservatism, or vice-versa, because it matches our own politics.

Robert Benne suggests that the Niebuhrian approach is more subtle, by arguing “against either separating or fusing religion and politics in favor of a much more complicated, dialectical approach in which the religious factor is a necessary but not sufficient element in shaping public policy.”<sup>452</sup> This points us to an intriguing element of Niebuhr's thought, the point that his work does not restrict itself to narrow political interests and it is classically utilitarian, providing a route to Neoconservatism, and the creation of a “Niebuhrian left” and a “Niebuhrian right.” The point is well illustrated by Benne:

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<sup>452</sup> Robert Benne, Reinhold Niebuhr as a Perennial Resource for Public Theology, *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (November 2010, Volume 10, Issue 11), published online at <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/SocialIssues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/November-2010/Reinhold-Niebuhr-as-a-Perennial-Resource-forPublic-Theology.aspx>, last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

His writing ... was taken up enthusiastically by a number of neo-conservative writers who found that his work was amenable to conservative public theology. Michael Novak, Richard Neuhaus, George Weigel, James Neuchterlein, and yours truly were some of those who employed Niebuhrian realism in the ongoing arguments of the Cold War as well as in the ongoing quest for justice in America. Even some Jewish neo-conservatives appropriated Niebuhr's arguments. This, of course, infuriated those on the left who believed that Niebuhr's thought could never be used for conservative purposes; that violated the spirit of the great man, if not his theology. So then we had a Niebuhrian left and Niebuhrian right.<sup>453</sup>

Niebuhr was making connections, and even if he connected his ideas to his own political actions and beliefs, his thought had enough resilience to connect to other political viewpoints, creating a left and right Niebuhrianism as Benne indicates.

Niebuhr's dispute with political liberals and his somewhat conservative theology made him an outsider in his own time, both politically and theologically. Would he then have found a home in the neoconservative movement? Neoconservatism draws from a range of moral sources, though as noted chiefly from disaffected neo-bolshevik secular and liberal Jewish leftists. The neocons through were a broad church, who shared many of the instincts of liberal interventionists, perhaps because many of them have originally come from the left, having, like Niebuhr, lost faith in Wilsonianism and collectivist ideology. However, Irwin Stelzer notes:

But Neoconservatism is Wilsonianism with a very big difference. Wilson believed that his goal could be achieved by relying on the persuasive powers of multinational institutions such as the League of Nations. Neocons disagree. They would make democracy possible by deposing dictatorial regimes that threaten American security and world order – using military forces if all else fails; they would follow regime change with nation-building; and they would rely on varying 'coalitions of the willing', rather than on the United Nations.<sup>454</sup>

On the Iraq issue the Neocons did build a coalition of the willing, the most significant ally being the British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Although he championed international organizations and

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<sup>453</sup> Benne, *ibid*

<sup>454</sup> Irwin Stelzer, (ed.) *The Neocon Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p.9

the United Nations, when it came to concrete action it was the ‘coalition of the willing’ he joined in with Bush II, rather than accepting the seemingly glacial pace of United Nations diplomacy. Blair is also a committed Christian, and like Niebuhr started his political activism in the Christian Socialist Movement. That Blair and Bush II were Christian bedfellows on politically traditional opposite sides of the aisle is intriguing and beyond the scope of this thesis, but valuable to mention. This example provides a practical illustration of the Niebuhrian left and right referred to by Benne.

I noted Niebuhr’s shell game above. The game I will set out, based on classical realism, will doubtless be less satisfying to those who hunger for action, for my proposal means you will never know under what shell the right policy is hidden, or indeed if the right policy is even under any of the shells. This makes for a frustrating game, but such is this dissonance that we need to face. It is a common enough experience in life that everybody loves it when you can explain the problem to them, but then get frustrated if you can’t give the solution, or merely keep harping on about the problem. We live in an age, and perhaps we always have, of problem-solving, with the added element of impatience.

### **A Return to Classical realism**

An essay by Samuel Barkin<sup>455</sup> is a useful framing of how I understand the value of classical realism for theology, although Barkin does not deal with theology himself. As I stated at the outset, the key understanding of classical realism is that we need to look at the world as it is rather than as we think it should be. If we stick to this, then we can understand the world. The difficulty is that competitors to this theory, as well as many realists and other realist schools, including Niebuhr and Christian realism, take the first proposition “the world as it is” to make policies and predictions about the way they “think it should be.” It is the old Humean conundrum of sorting out the “is” from the “ought.” The world, Barkin explains, “according to those seminal realists, is messy, historically contingent, and political.”<sup>456</sup> In Barkin’s essay, he explains that classical realism is focused on policy prescription, grounded in “a current policy issue or problem rather than in general patterns of behavior or outcome.”<sup>457</sup> In his conclusion, Barkin states “Marrying realism as

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<sup>455</sup> Samuel Barkin, Realism, Prediction, and Foreign Policy, *Foreign Policy Analysis* [5:2009, 233-246]

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid*, p.235

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid*, p.238

foreign policy prescription with the demands of predictive social science can create internal contradictions that the proponents of such a move ultimately cannot work out or finesse.” I suggest a similar internal contradiction occurs with “predictive theology.” There is a tendency in Niebuhr and amongst religious conservatives, perhaps in an understandable frustration to “do the right thing” (i.e. to be predictive), of attempting to predict the calculus that is in fact God’s action. As individual political actors in concrete political situations we can make our own calculus, decide what we think is right, but we are limited on an institutional level, and we cannot know if it is the will of God.

Barkin sets out a three point plan, which I want to adapt:

Classical realism argued in order to most effectively promote our political morality through our foreign policy, we need to be cognizant of the constraints of power in an anarchical world. And we need to allow for agency in our interactions with other countries – we must not assume that we can predict accurately how others will respond to our foreign policy. Finally, we need to be cognizant that political morality is not universal.<sup>458</sup>

For theology to speak to power it needs to return to this original classical realism, and to hold up a mirror to society. We can take Barkin’s threefold solution to frame my proposal:

1. Recognize the constraints of power in an anarchical world
2. Allow for agency, we cannot predict response of others
3. Political morality is not universal

How does Niebuhr measure up to this? The first point to make is that his approach offers a challenge for liberals who accepted his political thought without the theological assumptions.

Chomsky doesn’t believe liberals can accept his political thought without the theology, and is incredulous as to how Niebuhr can argue plausible conceptions about human possibilities and limits embedded in a version of Christian faith, and:

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<sup>458</sup> Barkin, *Ibid.*, p.245

...that his conclusions can only be grounded or comprehended in these terms is mere conceit. That he has "proven" any of this, as he often claims, is - to use his favored polemical term - "absurd."<sup>459</sup>

There are, however, more twists and turns in Niebuhr than Chomsky's absurdity allows, which we can see if we turn to the three legs as they apply to Niebuhr.

Niebuhr is strong on the first leg. He argues because God is acting in the world, human power is ultimately constrained. Looking at the first leg, liberals need not accept that God limits us and so they may choose to attribute this to other causes. The unshakeable assumption is that humanity is limited, and classical realism affirms this by pointing at human nature. Liberals, thus, can accept this leg in the Niebuhrian sense. On the second leg, his model of servanthood suggests an understanding of agency that we cannot predict the response of others or impose certain outcomes on them, but his support of American foreign policy on occasion transgresses this. Niebuhr proposes servanthood, but again one could posit other reasons, such as the liberal notion of service or the postmodern recognition of the "other." The point is not to assert oneself or nation over another, except Niebuhr seems to transgress this on occasion when American self-interest, in the guise of democratic ideals, dictates. The weakest ground for Niebuhr is the third leg, and perhaps that is where critics may squarely take aim. Chomsky and other secular liberal critics believe Niebuhr imposes a universal Christian morality, while his theological critics attack Niebuhr for assuming American democratic ideals as universal. On the third leg, his faith in American democracy as normative is akin to the Calvinist desire for conversion of others, except the conversion is to democracy. In all, leaving the first leg aside, we find in Niebuhr's support for entry into World War II, Cold War policies and even his qualified acceptance of the Atom Bomb,<sup>460</sup> a negation of servanthood and a utilitarian foreign policy in service of American

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<sup>459</sup> Noam Chomsky, Reinhold Niebuhr, *Grand Street* (Vol. 6, No. 2, Winter, 1987), p.200

<sup>460</sup> Niebuhr, as he did on many issues, changed his stance on the atom bomb. Although a signatory to a Federal Council of Churches statement in April 1946 which condemned the bomb being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Niebuhr qualified his response that he objected more to the surprise nature and extent of the bombing, rather than the idea of dropping the bomb itself. He later became more opposed to the bomb, but again on more realist than moral grounds. Fox's biography covers this extensively, pp224f. See also David Joseph Wellman, Niebuhrian Realism and the Formation of US Foreign Policy, *Political theology* [10:1 Jan 2009, 11-29], and, Robert E. Williams, Christian realism and "The bomb": Reinhold Niebuhr on the Dilemmas of the Nuclear Age, *Journal of Church & State* [28:1986, 289-304] for a discussion on his attitudes towards the bomb and his change on other issues, such as Korea and Vietnam.



interests; even though he changed his mind on issues, which suggests a willingness to break his own rules.

If we then apply these to the areas of this thesis then we can see how totemic conservatism fails on all three points:

1. They behaved as if their power is not constrained, because they assumed God was on their side (instead of on all sides or none);
2. they assumed their idea of democracy would fit “off the shelf” and ignored the agency of the other participants; and,
3. they assume American democratic ideals are universal, but as Hofstadter said America is an ideology (which is not to make a judgment on whether it is good or bad).

In the religious conservative worldview the need to accept certain theological assumptions is all the clearer, but they do not strictly apply these to their coalition partners. Like Niebuhr they root the first leg in a general divine principle. However, they differ from him theologically more than politically on the second leg, because their view of agency is rooted in the belief that if people convert one at a time then more good will be done. In other words, if one is good then one will have a propensity to do good things. Again like Niebuhr, on the third leg totemic conservatism turns away from the theological to a more general principle to embrace an idea of American democracy as normative. However, where the tipping point for criticism of Niebuhr is on the third leg, for totemic conservatism the tipping point is the second leg of agency.

A narrower form of classical realism would take issue with this religious conservative view of agency, since there are an awful lot of people who do not act in this way or would not agree on what being good in fact means. In this, a theological grasp of classical realism can draw on Luther’s realism on what being good means, which places constraints on both the first leg of constraint on power and the second leg of agency. Luther believed that what is truly good is based on faith and the gospel, but he warned that to try to rule the world with the gospel would be:

...like a shepherd who should put together in one fold wolves, lions, eagles, sheep, and let them mingle freely with one another, saying, ‘help yourselves, and be good and peaceful toward one another. The fold is open, there is plenty of food. You need have no fear of

dogs and cubs.’ The sheep would doubtless keep the peace and allow themselves to be fed and governed peacefully, but they would not live long, nor would one beast survive another.<sup>461</sup>

If this were a truly Christian world obedient to God then we would have no need for the sword; this is the realism Luther instructs, which would find its secular mirror in Machiavelli.

Luther stated:

If all the world were composed of real Christians, that is, true believers, there would be no need for or benefits from prince, king, lord, sword or law... Where there is nothing but the unadulterated doing of right and bearing of wrong, there is no need for any suit, litigation, court, judge, penalty, law, or sword.<sup>462</sup>

Luther’s point is a realist point about limitations for Christianity and agency in the political world, which is why, in his view, we need the law to ensure that right is done and order maintained; Luther refers us to Paul’s letter, 1 Timothy 1:9, “The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless.” The true Christian needs no such external compulsion since obedience comes from the heart, and so if the world were filled with “real” Christians<sup>463</sup> there would be no need for magistrates or government. The world is not so ordered, thus God has ordained two governments, the spiritual and the temporal, and the gospel cannot be used to exercise rule in the temporal world and the world cannot be ruled by the gospel. In addition, our faith does not necessarily mean we will succeed in our attempts to be good or even try to do the right thing, for we too are sinful though our faith demands that we at least try, and so we all need authority and law to restrain our actions. For this reason God has ordained secular rule, bearing in mind that those who exercise this rule also have a fallen nature, a point which Luther’s critics are only too happy to point out he misses. This suggests an important role for government, but this does not guide us in deciding on

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<sup>461</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians [1535]*, Luther’s Works: Volume 26, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), p.92

<sup>462</sup> Martin Luther, *Ibid.*, p.89

<sup>463</sup> Hume perhaps strikes a chord with Luther here in his skepticism about what people really believe.

the *extent* of control to be exercised by government, or what *kind* of government is best, and thus does not provide justification for imposing any particular form of government.

## Speaking to Power

Niebuhr is criticized for having a view of power that is too instrumental and individualistic.<sup>464</sup> Naturally, critics draw from a variety of competing theories of power ranging from Weber to Hannah Arendt, but there is not room to explore these here. However, for my purposes, it is important to understand how Niebuhr understands power and how this might inform the strategy I propose. Niebuhr was criticized for being a “Cold War theologian,”<sup>465</sup> and being too cozy with the power players, as Hauerwas stated it, Niebuhr:

...could not help but become the theologian of a domesticated god capable of doing no more than providing comfort to the anxious conscience of the bourgeoisie.<sup>466</sup>

It is difficult to support his view. In the first instance, Niebuhr spoke to power by speaking to the powerful in terms they understood and could relate to. To speak any other way would be, Niebuhr would suggest, speaking past them. In the second instance, Niebuhr himself was critical of the bourgeoisie and pricked the conscience of America, the most comfortable of bourgeois nations. He was, as Rasmussen states it, “an unmasker without peer of the reigning ideology of power and the power of any reigning ideology.”<sup>467</sup> He was not, I contend, naïve in his approach. He spoke in real terms to power, and was listened to; his fault being, as I have argued, that he did not pursue those liberals who cherry-picked his ideas and jettisoned the faith that informed his views. In terms of his individualism, Niebuhr was not ignorant of the social dimension, instead he was looking through the lens of original sin where he saw social power as problematic as individual power. He saw the self-interestedness of individuals as amplified in group dynamics and social relations, as Niebuhr wrote:

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<sup>464</sup> Larry Rasmussen sets out these criticisms skillfully in Gary A. Gaudin and Douglas John Hall, eds., *Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) A Centenary Appraisal*; McGill Studies in Religion, Vol3, Arvind Sharma, ed. (Scholars Press, Atlanta: 199')

<sup>465</sup> Bill Kellerman, *Apologist for Power*, *Sojourners* (16:5, 1987), pp.14-20

<sup>466</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Brazos Press: 2001), p.138

<sup>467</sup> Rasmussen, *ibid.* p.175.

Politics must, as David Hume asserted, assume the self-interest of man. It must certainly assume the selfishness of collective man.”<sup>468</sup>

Social power is regulated by all groups having power to protect its self-interest but not so that power is concentrated in the hands of a few. Niebuhr understood power as instrumental, competitive and conflictual. How then does Niebuhr regulate power? He sees power as regulated by a balance of power. To tackle, and to regulate it, Niebuhr employs a strategy with a mediating principle, resulting in a justice that is an approximation of justice. The trouble with direct power advocated by religious activists is that by joining in the power struggle one becomes part of the very conflict that requires resolution. It is ironically to be too worldly. In pursuing such a Niebuhrian strategy there will always be a tendency to jump into the fray, and there do come points at which it will become obvious when to do so, but for the most part there is a considerable degree of grey about when to act by direct intervention and when to act by facilitation of dialogue and a balance of power. The latter, in the Niebuhrian strategy I will now set out, ought to be the default position. The critical question for Niebuhr is how and why is America using its power? The pursuit of this question bring this discussion to a contextual point, and to explore an answer I will briefly assess two American foreign policies of the Bush II era: the so-called War on Terror and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The treatment of these two policies is for illustrative purposes only. The former is more in line with traditional thinking on foreign policy, namely conflict with foreign enemies, in this case a perceived set of enemies comprising both state and non-state actors. It was also a policy that developed in conflict with the United Nations. The latter is a “soft” policy,<sup>469</sup> an approach championed by Joseph Nye, which is not simply policy as persuasion but one tied to a sense of “attraction” which leads other nations to be attracted to American ways. The “War on Terror” was the most highly criticized of the Bush II administration policies, while PEPFAR the most underrated and greatly overshadowed by the former. Together, they suggest a contradiction between the image of Bush II as aggressor in pursuit of a war on terror and a compassionate or subtler Bush II seeking a way out of poverty. This is captured well in a *Time* magazine article by poverty activist and opponent of the War Bob Geldof, “The Bush regime has been divisive - but not in Africa. I read it has been incompetent - but not in

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<sup>468</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “Hazards and Resources,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* (25: 1949), p.201

<sup>469</sup> On soft power, see Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004)

Africa. It has created bitterness - but not here in Africa. Here, his administration has saved millions of lives.<sup>470</sup> I will take PEPFAR first.

### ***Foreign Policy I: Soft power and a War on AIDS***

Bush II introduced PEPFAR in 2003,<sup>471</sup> and it was expanded in 2008<sup>472</sup> for the plan to reach some 120 countries,<sup>473</sup> with increasing contributions each year meaning the American people were on track to meeting or exceeding their commitment to the United Nation's goals. PEPFAR was a complex negotiation of certain beliefs, values and dispositions with conflicting claims about what works and what does not work. The religious questions here are not set in stone. The introduction of PEPFAR came under fire for being too influenced by groups drawing on their religious and moral beliefs, rather than on the needs of a public health agenda. There were a number of controversial measures, including disagreements over healthcare providers and drug approvals, but I want to highlight certain measures only. These are threefold: a third of the PEPFAR budget under the Bush administration was mandated for programs advocating abstinence before marriage,

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<sup>470</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1717934,00.html>, last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

<sup>471</sup> <http://www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2003/pr030528.html>, last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

<sup>472</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/07/30/us-aids-usa-idUSN3029275220080730>, last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

<sup>473</sup> Recent results released by the US Government state:

- The U.S. directly supported life-saving antiretroviral treatment for more than 3.2 million men, women and children worldwide as of September 30, 2010, up from less than 2.5 million in 2009.
- PEPFAR directly supported antiretroviral prophylaxis to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission for more than 600,000 HIV-positive pregnant women in fiscal year 2010, allowing more than 114,000 infants to be born HIV-free.
- Through its partnerships with more than 30 countries, PEPFAR directly supported 11 million people with care and support, including nearly 3.8 million orphans and vulnerable children, in fiscal year 2010 alone.
- PEPFAR directly supported HIV counseling and testing for nearly 33 million people in fiscal year 2010, providing a critical entry point to prevention, treatment, and care.
- The U.S. is the first and largest donor to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and has made an historic multi-year pledge of \$4 billion for 2011-2013, a 38 percent increase in U.S. support. To date, the U.S. has provided more than \$5.1 billion to the Fund. Of the estimated 5.2 million individuals in low- and middle-income countries who currently receive treatment, nearly 4.7 million receive support through PEPFAR bilateral programs, the Global Fund, or both.

Results published at <http://www.pepfar.gov/results/index.htm>. Last accessed 10th September 2011

all funded organizations were required to sign an anti-prostitution pledge, and needle-exchange programs were not funded.<sup>474</sup>

At the same time as reminding Bush II in 2004 on the Vatican view of the war on terror, the Pope acknowledged the administration's commitment to the issue of poverty and the numerous humanitarian agencies involved, telling Bush II:

...particularly those of Catholic inspiration, to overcoming the increasingly intolerable conditions in various African countries, where the suffering caused by fratricidal conflicts, pandemic illnesses and a degrading poverty can no longer be overlooked...I also continue to follow with great appreciation your commitment to the promotion of moral values in American society, particularly with regard to respect for life and the family.<sup>475</sup>

There are many ways that religious and moral arguments may be assessed in looking at this policy, but highlighting two will be sufficient for my purposes. One way is to look at the abstinence approach, which is promoted widely in evangelical circles, based on a belief that sex before marriage is wrong and fidelity is the faithful way of marriage. They promote the "ABC" approach, which is A for Abstain, B for Be faithful and C for Condomize. Critics see the ABC approach as ineffective and unrealistic. This debate should also be seen in the context of a religious constituency that had traditionally looked at AIDS as a "gay disease" and thus concentrated on what it saw as the ills of homosexuality. Another way is to look at the issue of contraception, which is opposed by Roman Catholic teaching, though it was altered by Pope Benedict in 2010 when he said it was acceptable to use a prophylactic when the sole intention was to "reduce the risk of infection" from Aids.<sup>476</sup> The *New York Times* reported:

Though Benedict did not endorse the general use of condoms or change official church teaching - which still strongly opposes contraceptives - his words ricocheted around the

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<sup>474</sup> Changes were made in 2008 reducing some of these requirements, see:  
<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/110385.pdf>, last accessed 10th September 2011

<sup>475</sup>  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2003/january/documents/hf\\_jpii\\_spe\\_20030113\\_diplo-matic-corps\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2003/january/documents/hf_jpii_spe_20030113_diplo-matic-corps_en.html) Last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

<sup>476</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/the-pope/8148944/The-Pope-drops-Catholic-ban-on-condomsin-historic-shift.html>, last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

globe, greeted with anger from some conservative Catholics and enthusiasm from clerics and health workers in Africa, where the AIDS problem is worst. The pope also considers the continent to be a major area of growth for the church.<sup>477</sup>

It seems, even where a strong idea exist in the mix, there is room for negotiation. Here was an instance where the Roman Catholic teaching was modified in support of an objective, while the strong evangelical message encouraged debate on a subject that was previously shunned by that constituency. Both instances suggest the presence of flexibility mixed with concerns of what is morally correct. The religious groups involved impact the policy area, while at the same time the policy impacts the religious ideas involved. There is participation and negotiation in the actual foreign policy process that is much more complex than the rhetoric often heard in noisy political debate. There is in this policy space room for negotiation with various agents, secular and religious, governmental and nongovernmental.

The foreign policy work done by Bush II on PEPFAR and Africa attracted considerably less media attention, partly encouraged by Bush himself, who did not want to distract attention from his core foreign policy objective. As Geldof asked in his *Time* article:

So why doesn't America know about this? "I tried to tell them. But the press weren't much interested," says Bush. It's half true. There are always a couple of lines in the State of the Union, but not enough so that anyone noticed, and the press really isn't interested. For them, like America itself, Africa is a continent of which little is known save the odd horror.<sup>478</sup>

Perhaps Geldof's point should alert us to one of the most important spheres of power, the media. While "conservatives" in America are keen to lambast the "liberal" media, and "liberals" demonize the "conservative" Fox News, questions do need to be asked in all quarters of the media about bias, news as entertainment and the moral values they convey. People will watch the media, commentators and entertainers who reinforce their own prejudices. Is the tragedy not that people are uninterested, and that little is known of life elsewhere, making understanding the problem of

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<sup>477</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/24/world/europe/24pope.html>, last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

<sup>478</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1717934,00.html>, last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

agency all the more difficult? If all religious people do is jump on the same partisan bandwagons then they are not helping to negotiate the Leviathan, they are championing their own Leviathan.

In this section, the dialectical tension between faith and policy is illustrated, but can the same be said of the “War on Terror” as a foreign policy area?

### ***Foreign Policy 2: Hard power and a War on Terror***

The “War on Terror” is often critiqued through a lens of anti-Americanism, and Niebuhr has been drawn into this critique of American foreign policy. To outline the moral case for and against the Bush II foreign policy is a thesis or more in itself, but it is sufficient here to highlight some core arguments as illustrative of my main point. As a word of caution, Elshtain warns that anyone making a Christian argument does not need to bring “the full panoply of his or her beliefs to bear when endorsing any specific policy question or programme possibility,” as Elshtain continues:

Christian realism does not guarantee any sort of consensus on policy questions, although highly politicized Niebuhrians seem to think so. This came out clearly during the Iraq War. I recall listening to Niebuhr papers that offered the most extraordinary demonization of the Bush administration, the effect of which was an excessive moralism and idealism attached to their anti-Iraq War accounts. Points of view that differed from their own were trivialized and even demonized. That is surely not the Niebuhrian way.<sup>479</sup>

The Bush II administration was attacked on the grounds that the declaration of war was unconstitutional, created global division, ignored international cooperation, and violated human rights, particularly in its policy on torture. In respect to the constitutional point, Dick Cheney, Vice-President in the Bush II years, defended the war on the eve of leaving office:

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<sup>479</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Niebuhr's 'Nature of Man' and Christian realism*, (Harries 2010, *Ibid.*) p.55



In my mind, the foremost obligation we had from a moral or an ethical standpoint was to the oath of office we took when we were sworn in, on January 20 of 2001, to protect and defend against all enemies foreign and domestic. And that's what we've done.<sup>480</sup>

Bush was regarded as divisive, and charged with ignoring international cooperation. When he stated on November 6 of 2001, "You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror,"<sup>481</sup> he seemed to be carving the world in two. It suggests also that America is naturally on the side of right, not uncommon in times of war.<sup>482</sup> I have already highlighted the approach of building a coalition of the willing as a result of the UN not being seen to be effective. This was attacked on many grounds, and the Bush II administration drew considerable international rhetorical fire, often in personalized attacks on Bush II and his motives. Two British examples suffice to illustrate this. First, writing in *The Independent*, Robert Fisk argued:

No, the attacks on 11 September have nothing to do with Iraq. Neither did 11 September change the world. President Bush cruelly manipulated the grief of the American people - and the sympathy of the rest of the world - to introduce a "world order" dreamed up by a clutch of fantasists advising the Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld.<sup>483, 484</sup>

The second comes from Baroness Shirley Williams, writing in *The Guardian* in 2003:

We were urged into war on a misleading prospectus and we surrendered the sovereignty of our foreign policy decisions to President Bush's neo-conservative cabal in Washington.<sup>485</sup>

Critics argued that in this policy the Bush II administration offended many nations, as well as many Americans; this was made clear when a Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to President Barack Obama, largely for not being Bush II, even though it has been argued his foreign policies have to

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<sup>480</sup> <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/dec/18/chene-defends-morality-of-war-on-terror/>, last accessed 10th September 2011

<sup>481</sup> [http://articles.cnn.com/2001-11-06/us/ret.bush.coalition\\_1\\_fight-terror-international-coalition-afghanistan?\\_s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2001-11-06/us/ret.bush.coalition_1_fight-terror-international-coalition-afghanistan?_s=PM:US), last accessed 10th September 2011

<sup>482</sup> There was not complete agreement on whether the nation was in fact at war, while references were made to this being World War III and World War IV, see special issue on World War IV, *Wilson Quarterly*, Winter 2005

<sup>483</sup> <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article4679.htm>, last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

<sup>484</sup> In contrast to the picture presented by Fisk, Rumsfeld explains in a BBC interview he advised against the use of the term "War on Terror" <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newspnight/9585769.stm> Last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

<sup>485</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/oct/28/iraq.politics> last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

a large extent been a continuation.<sup>486</sup> Yet, when the Pew Forum asked people in 2007 who had an unfavorable view of the U.S. whether this is mostly because of Bush II or a more general problem with America, the report found:

In most countries they have tended to say it is President Bush – but less so since his reelection, according to our 2005 poll. Clearly, President Bush and his administration’s policies have been lightning rods for U.S. criticism. At the same time, however, it is clear that this problem seems bigger than the feelings people may have about President Bush and his administration. Underlying much of the anti-Americanism we are witnessing is a broad discomfort with unrivaled American power.<sup>487</sup>

It is essential for future research, as the emotion surrounding the Bush II presidency recedes, to make the distinction between the policy and the rhetoric or style of Bush II. As Madeleine Albright’s comments on Bush II suggest, when she praised him for placing America at the forefront of promoting democracy and acknowledging political freedom, but erred through mistakes and errors which made “many countries less eager to stand with America.”<sup>488</sup> It appears, from her analysis, that Bush II is not to be faulted so much for his ideas, but for his tactical strategy and his use of rhetoric which has “come close to justifying U.S. policy in explicitly religious terms” which is “like waving a red flag in front of a bull.”<sup>489</sup>

Are the moral concerns over the “War on Terror” any clearer than the PEPFAR questions? Without going deeply into the obvious need for a debate over the Just War theory in relation to the War on Terror, it is useful to note the statement made in January 2003 by Pope John Paul II when he said:

And what are we to say of the threat of a war which could strike the people of Iraq, the land of the Prophets, a people already sorely tried by more than twelve years of embargo? War is never just another means that one can choose to employ for settling differences between nations. As the Charter of the United Nations Organization and international law

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<sup>486</sup> An extensive study on this point is made by Timothy J. Lynch & Robert S. Singh, *After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

<sup>487</sup> <http://www.pewglobal.org/2007/03/14/americas-image-in-the-world-findings-from-the-pew-globalattitudes-project/> Last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

<sup>488</sup> Madeleine Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs* (New York: HarperLargePrint, 2006), p.287

<sup>489</sup> Albright, *Ibid.*, p.160

itself remind us, war cannot be decided upon, even when it is a matter of ensuring the common good, except as the very last option and in accordance with very strict conditions, without ignoring the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations.<sup>490</sup>

In an address to Bush II on 4 June 2004, the Pope reminded him “You are very familiar with the unequivocal position of the Holy See in this regard, expressed in numerous documents, through direct and indirect contacts, and in the many diplomatic efforts which have been made since you visited me,” and went on to state:

The threat of international terrorism remains a source of constant concern. It has seriously affected normal and peaceful relations between States and peoples since the tragic date of 11 September 2001, which I have not hesitated to call "a dark day in the history of humanity". In the past few weeks other deplorable events have come to light which have troubled the civic and religious conscience of all, and made more difficult a serene and resolute commitment to shared human values: in the absence of such a commitment neither war nor terrorism will ever be overcome. May God grant strength and success to all those who do not cease to hope and work for understanding between peoples, in respect for the security and rights of all nations and of every man and woman.

When asked if the coalition war on Iraq came within the just war theory, the current Pope, while Cardinal, stated that sufficient reason for “unleashing a war in Iraq did not exist” and:

...it was very clear from the beginning proportion between the possible positive consequences and the sure negative effect of the conflict was not guaranteed. On the contrary, it seems clear that the negative consequences will be greater than anything positive that might be obtained.<sup>491</sup>

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[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2003/january/documents/hf\\_jpii\\_spe\\_20030113\\_diplo-matic-corps\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2003/january/documents/hf_jpii_spe_20030113_diplo-matic-corps_en.html) Last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

<sup>491</sup> [http://www.30giorni.it/articoli\\_id\\_775\\_l3.htm?id=775#](http://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_775_l3.htm?id=775#) Last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

This just war argument led into a more strategic argument against the war, namely that the Bush II administration had not determined an exit strategy. In modern warfare, and against terrorist organizations as well as states, these calculations may be more difficult to make. Bush stated in *Decision Points* that the fact no major threat materialized for the remainder of his administration justified his policies and the use of force.<sup>492</sup> Christian pacifists and anti-war protesters have made clear their objections, but Elshtain, who has defended the Bush II policy on the basis of human rights and gender, explains the issue in Augustinian terms:

For Augustine, the issue of use of force is tethered to an understanding of statecraft and of God's providence. The exercise of political power, what we would now call 'legitimate authority', is one of the ways that God cares for the world. When Christians became responsible for that exercise, just war, or the application of force, is a central feature of that exercise of power. You cannot have social life without political authority because, Augustine insisted, without a 'tranquility of order', people would be victimized by a world in which they were "devoured like fishes." Private use of force is condemned because it jeopardizes this order. The public exercise of coercive force can be undertaken at the behest of a tranquility of order of which justice is a central feature. This Augustinian moment, if you will, is part of a political theory or political philosophy that has to do with questions of prudential judgment on the parts of statesmen (statepersons) in a world that is fallen.<sup>493</sup>

Much controversy surrounded the prominent subject of torture, as Lance Morrow, writing a book review in the *New York Times*, states the moral narrative which emerged:

New reality trumps old morality. Out of a new emergency of history, one particularly menacing narrative took shape, darkened by the prestige of apocalypse - the ticking bomb. A script emerged, along these lines: The Qaeda terrorist breaks under aggressive questioning. (The waterboard worked. He came up spluttering and talking.) The interrogator relays information that, just in time, snips the wire on the dirty nuke hidden in

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<sup>492</sup> George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), p.181

<sup>493</sup> <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Book-Reviews/Just-War-against-Terror-by-Jean-Bethke-Elshtain/Response-to-Reviews-of-Just-War-against-Terror.aspx>, Last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

the heart of an American city. The interrogator - "torturer," if you insist - is actually a hero. Thousands of lives are saved.<sup>494</sup>

In spite of evangelicals generally supporting the War on Terror, in 2007 the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) issued a condemnation of the torture practices, contradicting the "at all costs" narratives offered by liberal critics,<sup>495</sup> again suggesting room for negotiation. What is problematic is the partisan behavior of many agents, including religious individuals and groups, unable to nuance their negotiation with other viewpoints. However, the Pope shows us a legitimate approach, aside from whether one conclusively agrees with him or not, of stating points of disagreement and agreement in the same address; likewise the statement of the NAE is indicative. One lesson we can learn from this is a religious respect for different viewpoints and agency, and some modesty in the way in which such remarks are addressed to those whom one opposes. However noisy the debate, there is still room for God's still small voice.<sup>496</sup>

In respect to both these policy areas, it is difficult to venture a simple answer to "what would Niebuhr do?" since his thought was contingent, as noted above. What we can detect, especially if one looks at the example of Bush II and Blair, is a Niebuhrian right and left presence, and so it would depend on the elements of Niebuhr's thought one wants to foreground in offering a Niebuhrian policy, which may not be what Niebuhr himself would offer. That said, my task has not been to outline Niebuhrian policy, but to offer a strategy which recovers from the contingent thought of Niebuhr a classical realist strategy to help theology to address an era where American foreign policy has Manifest Destiny at its heart.

## **Conclusion**

In 2010, a survey of American public opinion by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that more than 8 out of 10 Americans think it's either "very desirable" or "somewhat desirable"

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<sup>494</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/29/books/review/29morrow.html> Last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

<sup>495</sup> <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/17713/evangelicals-slam-torture-in-war-on-terrorism> Last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011

<sup>496</sup> I Kings 19:12

for the United States to “exert strong leadership in world affairs.”<sup>497</sup> While there is considerable support for American leadership in the world, there is less agreement on how this leadership should be exerted. Totemic conservatives believed they were advancing a policy of leadership, which benefits America and the rest of the world in an act of Manifest Destiny. There is confusion here due to the universalizing tendency of Niebuhr’s third leg,<sup>498</sup> added to which there is a concern over the hubris of this position. Niebuhr offered a way for us to understand how this leadership, as an exercise in power, should be exerted. The accusation made by Stanley Hauerwas that Niebuhr’s thought was more or less a gloss on Americanism is both fanciful and unhelpful, but the point that Niebuhr is also taking a step towards a universalizing tendency which confuses America notions of freedom and democracy with universal ideas is well taken. There is certainly a danger that America can do an evil or sinful thing while Pastor Niebuhr absolves the nation by allowing the president to choose the lesser of two evils, the best sin to commit.

We need to recognize limitations on personal, organizational, national and international levels. The American tragedy is to believe that to change government, alternatively Congress and administration, is also to carry out God’s work as the “New Israel” advancing its Manifest Destiny. This is the pitfall for both liberal and conservative Christians in politics, who represent two sides of the same counterfeit coin.<sup>499</sup> America’s politics and its foreign policy remains evangelical as ever, even if its gospel is changing, because religious doctrine has from the start always been in dialog with the enlightenment notion of America, which today translates into freedom, humanity’s freedom. In history the emphasis has tended to shift from the religious to the secular and then back again, the awakenings being evidence of this, always vying in a dialectical battle for the soul of America. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Niebuhr sought to bring the two closer to a unity on the left and found a voice, and religious conservatives achieved the same on the right. The difference being that in effect in totemic conservatism religious groups have formed alliances with other religious and secular groups for cultural reasons rooted in shared cultural assumptions of the American faith. What triumphs is America, not God. This is the problem of contemporary religious conservatism in America, for they are not witnesses to theological truth but a cultural construct of America,

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<sup>497</sup> Full report available online:

[http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/POS\\_Topline%20Reports/POS%202010/Global%20Views%202010.pdf](http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/POS_Topline%20Reports/POS%202010/Global%20Views%202010.pdf), last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2012

<sup>498</sup> Discussed above, p.176

<sup>499</sup> One can think here of the coin that Jesus refers to in Matthew 22:19-22

politics and faith which shifts the ground of truth, in which case they follow a constantinian theology.

The same is also true of the religious left, and may be said of Niebuhr to an extent, and this is where his strategy needs work. His political solutions remained welded to the left, remaining a political liberal, and he did not do enough to draw distinctions between his theology and policy choices. This is where the criticism of Niebuhr needs to focus, for we can question whether he used his theology effectively enough to illumine the human act of choice that lies at the center of the art of the possible which is politics. His policy solutions were realistic in pragmatically facing the political challenges, but if all he does is endorse the policy decisions of the powerful then he gets their attention without getting their interest. That said, what distinguishes Niebuhr's strategy from totemic conservatives is that he does speak *to* power, rather than these other theological voices which merely speak, or preach, *for* power. I contend that Niebuhr goes deeper than the argument that Pastor Niebuhr absolves American political power suggests, but the constantinian charge remains.

However, if these same religious conservatives shift politically to the left again or were simply to join the Niebuhrian left, then I contend they will make the same error. They may not become as controversial, and certainly they will not attract the same ire of many on the left, but they will make the same error of commingling the foreign policy action of America with their theology. It will not be a neoconservative foreign policy, but whatever it is it will be shrouded by Manifest Destiny. It will become a religious sanctification of American power, for this is the nature of America's Manifest Destiny, the belief that the American cause is wholly virtuous.

In this scheme of things, doctrine is jettisoned in favor of a secular ideology. The two groups are not arguing about faith, they are arguing about cultural ideology set on the shifting political and cultural sands of a nation and its sense of destiny. In so doing, religious conservatives in America take the aspects of Calvinist theology with an upside, namely the desire to work and lifestyle aspirations, without accepting the downside of his theology, namely depravity and damnation. They understand everyone else to be under judgment except themselves. Those who attack them are doing the same, seeking a good life while failing to see their culpability in what is going wrong. The "liberals" and "conservatives" of America share the same nation, many of the same

aspirations, and they are principally arguing nuances of classical enlightenment liberalism rather than matters of faith.

In conclusion, the normative point I am making is that we cannot behave assuming God is on our side and against others, we cannot ignore the agency of others and we cannot impose a cultural value on the assumption that it is universal. We live in a tension or dissonance between the two kingdoms, between the now and the not-yet, which should curb our hubris and check our enthusiasms. In Christ the believer embraces both God and the world, being for our neighbor in God's creation. In being for our neighbor, choosing negotiation with the Leviathan over confrontation or quietism, perhaps our action of faith speaks louder than our words of doctrine. However, these actions of faith need to be securely rooted in doctrine. For the Christian, it is one thing to do a good act and understand how one is serving God in so doing, it is quite another to do the same act oblivious of how one is serving God. For those outside of the faith, their good actions may be serving God while they are oblivious to the fact, but that is for God to know, and the religious conservatives ought to have more faith in God's work.<sup>500</sup> By loosening our moorings from doctrine, we take steps towards constantinianism, because it is doctrine which steadfastly sets out the dissonance of the combat between the old and the new Adam, human against divine, the same dialectical dissonance that Niebuhr rightly triumphs in his realism.

In helping theology to speak to power, classical realism can be effective in helping theologians and people of faith to understand the actions taken by the powerful. It may clarify for individual Christians in power what policy options are open to them, and may open negotiation for those on opposite sides of the aisle to find common ground on an issue. There are then a host of cultural and political assumptions which individual actors will make in appraising those options, and they will affect individuals or agents who do not share those assumptions but are affected by the policy decisions, and subsequent events will arise affecting the trajectory of any policy action, all of which cannot be easily predicted. The individual Christian can only seek to act rooted in service to God, knowing their personal limitations and the limitations of humanity. In this service, the

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<sup>500</sup> This is the direction Robin Lovin, *Christian Realism and the New Realities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), in particular takes, and draws in Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a Christian Realist, offering an interesting direction for research beyond the steps I wish to take in this thesis. Lovin reminds us of Bonhoeffer's realism, quoting "The world stands in relationship to Christ whether the world knows it or not" and argues Bonhoeffer saw "The reality of God's ultimate judgment renders all human judgments partial and provisional" which "put the unity of human good beyond the reach of the ideologies and revolutionary movements of his time." P.198. <sup>489</sup> I Kings 19:13



strategy I propose calls on us to act with a desire to negotiate the Leviathan, being of service to one's neighbor, and able to answer God's question "What doest thou there Elijah?"<sup>489</sup>

Religious conservatives in addressing American foreign policy have to contend with the problem noted in the earlier Cullman comment<sup>501</sup> that the genuine State of Christians is in heaven, and the earthly State is God's servant so long as it remains in the order which is willed by God, but the State does not have to be Christian. In the alignment with Neoconservatism and the Totemic conservatism I have identified, there is a problem of commingling these states. A conservative theology can adequately adjust this problem. America is indeed a nation, among all nations, under God. As such it is part of the divine order, as God wills all in history. Some states in the world are less Christian or have only a small Christian presence, but are still part of God's order. If "one nation under God" means being the chosen nation and a nation doing God's work as the lead nation, then I would want to contest the matter. If America is "one nation among all nations under God" then I am happy to live with that. The state of America does not have to be Christian, and indeed as a "Christian nation" it fails for the fact of being Constantianian, an American religion rather than a religious America

If individual Christians and church organizations can act in servanthood, as Niebuhr proposes, then they will be living out their faith and this will shine through. This individual action, not the action of the state, will be the theology in action which those of other faiths or no faith will see and respond to, rather than seeing the barrier of state or nation erected before them in the name of Jesus. The divisive debate in America between left and right will rage on, but the first step Christians in this debate can take is to put down their arms, step into a space of negotiation with classical realist assumptions and see what they can achieve together in the service of all. This would be a powerful step in theology speaking to power, but the step has to be taken on both sides of the divide. As I wrote in a book review while researching this thesis,

"In this debate, perhaps the Christian 'left' and Christian 'right' need to engage with each other to seek a better Christianity before trying to teach the body politic a better secularity."<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> P.155

<sup>502</sup> Cowan, *Journal of Theological Studies* [2012], doi: 10.1093/jts/fls009, first published online: February 29, 2012, for April 2012 issue.

Such a strategy I suggest will also provide greater spiritual strength in America, placing it where it should be placed rather than dividing Americans and alienating the world. America is the most powerful nation, and it can do much good in the world, but not if it relies on notions of Manifest Destiny to legitimize its actions and impose its own universalizing values. There is a Niebuhrian classical realist strategy that can provide the basis for discussion on how this might be achieved, but it requires the Niebuhrian left and right, and totemic conservatives, to take distance from their policies rooted in other cultural and political assumptions and set their gaze on the classical realism that is at the heart of Niebuhr's project, which though he himself at times transgressed is a legacy that can be used to address how America uses its foreign policy power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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