

Contemporary American Protestant Attitudes Toward the War on Terror:  
Authority, Theology, and Political Beliefs

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Introduction  
Protestantism and Politics in Contemporary America

It's Thursday evening, five days before Midterm Election Day 2006. At Broad Street Presbyterian Church in downtown Columbus, Ohio, worshippers applaud as the Raise Mass Gospel Choir finishes a selection. Laughter ensues as the choir's director informs the mostly white audience that gospel music is a collective art, meant to be enjoyed by dancing and singing along, rather than polite applause. The next song is received with a little more enthusiasm.

As the last song fades away, two ministers ascend to the pulpit. They are the spokesmen of We Believe Ohio, a religious political organization based in Columbus. The two men introduce the agenda for the evening; prominent issues to be discussed include poverty, the status of ex-offenders, Ohio public education, and the reduction of personal bankruptcies—not exactly traditional Sunday morning topics. But tonight is the Spirit-Filled Gathering for Faith Voters, and the speakers are Christians who do not view faith as at all separate from these issues.

Jim Wallis, author of *God's Politics*, and Rich Nathan, pastor of the Columbus' Vineyard megachurch, are the keynote speakers. Their sermons focus on the broadening of the Christian political agenda—an agenda which they certainly believe exists. Wallis opines that God is neither Republican nor Democratic and that evangelicals must realize that Christians need neither a new left nor a new right; rather, they are “hungry for a moral center.” Nathan agrees that evangelicals must avoid being enslaved to the Republican Party and that the list of important issues must expand to include issues beyond abortion and gay marriage. Both men's words are met with enthusiastic “Amen”s and fervent applause. As people file out after the event, they are handed stacks of “Voting God's Politics: An Issues Guide for Christians” to pass out to their friends.

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Three days later, World Harvest Church in Canal Winchester, Ohio, is alive with music and emotional worshippers. A purple-robed choir sings ecstatically on a balcony overlooking a glittering stage. Crane cameras swoop over the heads of the congregation to allow congregants far from the stage to see the action on big-screen monitors. People dance, clap, and pray aloud; a boy standing next to me begins speaking in tongues. Amidst this religious fervor, pastor Rod Parsley strolls onstage, also bearing a nontraditional message.

The screens display an image of a newspaper from the year 2029. Headlines read: “Couple petitions court to reinstate heterosexual marriage.” “Supreme Court rules that punishment of criminals violates their civil rights.” “This,” says Pastor Parsley, “is where we’re headed if we don’t turn this thing around!” Congregants are encouraged to “give a hallelujah for November 7!” Ohio’s Republican gubernatorial candidate, seated in the front row, is introduced to wild applause. “On November 7, how will we vote on Issue 3?” Parsley asks. The congregation’s resounding “no” on the proposal to allow slot-machine gambling in Ohio brings a smile to his face.

Parsley’s sermon is strikingly similar to those of Wallis and Nathan—centered entirely on a political issue. He begins with a video that gives a graphic description of the procedure of late-term or partial-birth abortion. Throughout his sermon, images from ultrasounds and photographs of infants appear on the screen as he states that a person’s “ethic on life,” the term he uses to describe an individual’s attitude toward abortion, is enough to understand his or her entire worldview. In stark contrast to Nathan’s promotion of a broader agenda, Parsley declares that only two other issues come close to sharing the importance of abortion: marriage and religious liberty. Ushers come around to pass out surveys which will be sent to the Supreme Court declaring the congregation’s desire that the Court uphold the ban on partial-birth abortion, and

worshippers are sent home with a packet of information on the issue as well as an “Ohio Christian Alliance Voters’ Guide.”

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These two events send a very clear message: Christianity and politics are inextricably linked in the United States, and this is particularly true in Central Ohio. The similarity in the attendees’ commitments to political issues is made more interesting because of the extreme diversity of their political opinions. While the audience at the Faith Voters night was largely liberal politically, the congregants at World Harvest Church are much more likely to label themselves political conservatives. Clearly, knowing someone is a Christian is not enough to predict his or her political views.

This paper will explore the diversity of political attitudes within American Protestant Christianity by using one issue as a case study. A Protestant’s attitude toward war is a good sample issue to explore this problem because it is timely and also because opinions on this issue are indeed quite diverse. In this paper, I will explain the great diversity of beliefs about war within one religion, Protestant Christianity, and one place, central Ohio, by showing that these beliefs are related to and informed by beliefs on other theological questions. Understanding a Christian’s theological worldview is the best way to predict his or her attitude toward war.

For the purposes of this paper, I have focused my questioning of central Ohioans on a specific war: the war in Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. While interviewing and surveying respondents, I emphasized that I was asking about this particular war. Of course, by the time I performed by interviews and surveys, the war in Iraq had been going on for well over three years, and public opposition to the war was high. Therefore, while I have tried to differentiate between the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, I

acknowledge the possibility and the real likelihood that at least some respondents have likely conflated the two, and that their responses about the war in Afghanistan may be influenced, to some degree, by their attitudes toward the war in Iraq. Throughout this paper, I refer to the war in Afghanistan both specifically and also more generally as the “War on Terror,” reflecting the name for this conflict which has been popularized in public discourse and the media. Though I use such terminology in the paper itself, my questions for respondents were much more specific.

My ethnographic research has taken place solely in central Ohio. I have chosen this location not only for its proximity but also for its unique ability to provide data which could be easily extrapolated nationwide. Ohio has long been noted as “America’s heartland,” as a place where people of almost every demographic live, go to church, and vote. In Ohio there are farms and factories and national corporate headquarters. There are Democrats and Republicans, rich and poor, urbanites and rural dwellers. Columbus is often used as a test market for new products and stores because of its residents’ ability to predict the tastes of Americans as a whole. Ohio is also a great place to study this particular issue of religion and politics. It has been one of the deciding states in each of the past two presidential elections—elections in which, polls show, religion and religious values played an extremely important role. Just a few days following the events described above, Ohioans voted in the 2006 midterm elections and elected a Democratic governor and U.S. Senator as well as several new Democratic U.S. Representatives in what was widely described as a referendum on the Republican administration’s decision to continue the war in Iraq. War is thus an issue of particular importance in contemporary Ohioan religion and politics.

I have gathered my data from various sources of information in addition to this ethnography, and this data will be presented in four chapters. Chapter One will focus on

historical and scholarly texts dealing with the issues presented by the intersection of war and Christianity. As my work will show, these traditional texts present a comprehensive overview of the different opinions. However, they lack the crucial explanation of why these different opinions exist, and what other beliefs relate to them. This paper will begin to fill in those gaps. Chapters Two through Four are based largely on my fieldwork, described in more detail in my “Methodology” section. These three chapters will demonstrate that churchgoing Christians’ attitudes toward war are strongly related to specific theological attitudes. I have chosen to use the War on Terror as a specific, timely example. As I explained to the subjects I interviewed and surveyed, I am focusing specifically on the war in Afghanistan, which began in October 2001 as a response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Chapter Two focuses on theological attitudes about God and Jesus. This includes perceptions of God’s involvement in government; Christians who see government as acting in God’s stead are more likely to support war because they see political leaders as arbiters of God’s justice. I also explore varying perceptions of the figure of Jesus Christ. Christians who see Jesus as a pacifist are more likely to be pacifist themselves, while those who see him as a forceful warrior are more likely to support the War on Terror.

Chapter Three is about different approaches to the Bible. Protestants have varying methods of interpreting the Bible, but they all agree that the Bible is the ultimate source of authority in their churches. Christians who are less likely to support war often focus their biblical reading on the New Testament, which is more peaceful in nature than the Old Testament, which is filled with stories of holy war. Christians who call themselves biblical literalists are more likely to support war, and I argue that this is due to their focus on literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation and the promise of a violent end times. These Christians are more likely

to support war partially because they see contemporary wars as precursors to the violent Armageddon.

Finally, Chapter Four describes various common perceptions of evil among contemporary Protestants. This chapter explains that Christians who perceive evil in traditional ways (as hell, the devil, or sin) are much more likely to support war because they see earthly wars as part of a larger cosmic battle between good and evil. On the other hand, Protestants who perceive evil in less traditional ways (as poverty, racial injustice, or classism) are less likely to support war because they fight earthly battles in their own communities rather than overarching and unwinnable ones.

These chapters will show that Protestant Christians' attitudes toward the War on Terror are significantly tied to their perceptions of God's attitude toward the war, to their style of biblical interpretation, and to their definitions of evil. In addition to presenting data gathered in fieldwork, these chapters will consist of an examination of scholarly and religious articles and books produced in the months and years following September 11 which help to explain the relationships which have emerged.

By showing which aspects of Protestant Christian theology have the strongest ties to Christians' attitudes toward war, I will help to clarify these issues and to explain popular Christian responses to the wars being fought by the U.S. today. I will show that contemporary Protestant religious communities are greatly influenced by contemporary politics, even as these communities exert a tremendous influence on their members' attitudes toward political issues, including war. Different religious communities and churches teach theology differently, because the distinguishing characteristic of Protestantism is its focus on biblical interpretation rather than the authority of a person or institution. These different theological systems each fit well with



certain attitudes toward war, and so strong relationships emerge between some specific theological beliefs and some specific attitudes toward the War on Terror.

## Methodology

I will begin with a brief discussion of the methodology used in the undertaking of this project, along with the limitations and scope of this paper. This paper will provide, in addition to a basic description of the various attitudes toward war, an explanation of the aspects of Christian theology which appear to be most closely related to attitudes toward war. These influential aspects have been determined through fieldwork with Central Ohio Christians.

As stated in the Introduction, I have chosen to focus on Columbus, Ohio, due to its extreme usefulness as an example of the strong relationship between religion and politics in the contemporary United States. During 2006, I visited five churches in Central Ohio, which are identified here solely by their denomination: United Methodist, Congregational, Alliance, Nondenominational and Mennonite. These churches were chosen for a twofold reason: first, because they were churches who agreed to allow me to come study there; second, because I believed the congregation represented either an example of a popular demographic or a specifically interesting stance on war.

For example, the United Methodist Church is the church to which President George W. Bush officially belongs. This mainline Protestant denomination has been outspoken on issues of war; its bishops even publicly condemned the war in Iraq, and were disappointed by Bush's decision to go ahead with the invasion regardless. The United Methodist Church which I visited is located near the campus of Ohio State, and its small congregation is a diverse mix of students, young professionals and families who travel to the church from Columbus suburbs, and elderly members. The church's website describes it as an "inclusive congregation" open to people of any age, race, ability, social class, or sexual orientation. This language is indicative of the church's desire to fight discrimination which is further detailed in Chapter Four. The stated

purpose of the church is to help members “who are moved by the Holy Spirit to seek to commune with, and grow from the experience of God revealed through Jesus Christ,” and members take a nonliteral, liberal approach to the interpretation of scripture.<sup>1</sup>

The much larger Congregational Church is part of another mainline denomination, the United Church of Christ. Congregational Church was founded by abolitionists during the Civil War, and is a huge cathedral-like building located in downtown Columbus. Fitting with its very traditional sanctuary, this church is much more ritualistic than United Methodist Church in its largest Sunday morning worship service, which is performed according to specific tradition. The membership is extremely diverse in terms of age and political background, though, as with each of the churches I visited, not in terms of racial or ethnic identity. Its traditional service format does not equate to a more conservative theology, however; in fact, the church is very similar to United Methodist Church theologically. Its website self-description also focuses on inclusiveness, stating that “we place great emphasis on diversity, inclusion, freedom of conscience in belief, and justice and mission activities.” Also using a nonliteral scriptural interpretation of scripture, members of this church “affirm [their] oneness in Christ and recognize a spiritual interdependence with each other.”<sup>2</sup>

Alliance Church invites worshippers to “come discover Jesus with us.” The church is part of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, an evangelical denomination which focuses on the importance of testimony and missionary work. The significance of spreading Christianity around the globe is represented by the world flags which hang from the beams in the sanctuary of the church. Skits and videos presented during the worship service also emphasize the importance of spreading the gospel, providing examples of how to talk with coworkers about Christ and how to invite friends to church. While the sanctuary is very traditional with rows of

padded wooden pews, the service is more contemporary, as large monitors display PowerPoint presentations of hymn lyrics. This church is much more racially diverse, but is more uniform in age, with most members appearing to be in their fifties or older. Alliance Church's doctrinal statement emphasizes the literal truth of the Old and New Testaments, the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ as a prerequisite for salvation, the naturally sinful state of human beings, and the imminence of Jesus' premillennial return to earth to establish a divine kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

Nondenominational Church, founded by two Ohio State students in the 1970s, is also evangelical, but is less traditional and rather falls under the umbrella of contemporary megachurches, a phenomenon which continues to gain ground in contemporary America. Every seat in the huge sanctuary is full, and the people sitting there drink cappuccinos and sodas purchased from the café in the hall. The congregants wear jeans and take a casual approach to the service, which is low intensity and resembles a Bible study more than a typical Protestant worship service. Members are mostly white and the vast majority of this young congregation are in their twenties, thirties or forties. As congregants mill around after the service, eating pizza and chatting with one another, ESPN plays quietly on the large projection screens. Members have informed me that the Sunday service is not even attended by many of Nondenominational's members, as the focus is rather on home Bible study groups that meet once weekly, bringing congregants into intimate conversation with one another. The conservative theology taught at Nondenominational is extremely similar to that of Alliance Church, although a few additional elements are mentioned in Nondenominational Church's doctrinal statement: the recognition of Satan as a personal spiritual adversary of all humans, and the urgency to evangelize that comes with the realization that accepting Jesus Christ is a matter of one's eternal judgment.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, Mennonite Church belongs to the group of historic peace churches, and the church's official doctrine has always been strictly pacifist. Mennonite Church is located in Clintonville, a Columbus neighborhood populated by middle class families and retirees. Again, the church has a mostly white membership of medium size. A very traditional sanctuary is the setting for a calm Sunday worship service in which traditional hymns are sung and one of the husband-and-wife pastor team deliver a sermon which focuses on the application of some New Testament story to daily life. The congregation is close-knit and friendly, with many members belonging to larger extended families. After the Sunday service, almost everyone stays for lunch and an afternoon Bible study. Mennonite Church's doctrinal statement states that scripture is the inspired word of God and that it should be interpreted "in harmony with Jesus Christ." The statement also emphasizes the awaited return of Jesus Christ to establish a peaceful kingdom, the sinful nature of humans which can be cleansed away through baptism in Jesus Christ, and the importance of imitating Jesus through humility and peace.<sup>5</sup>

At each church, I sat in on a Sunday's worth of worship services. At these services, I passed out a questionnaire for congregants to voluntarily complete.<sup>6</sup> The survey data presented in the following chapters come entirely from these voluntary responses. The survey asked congregants their opinions on the war in Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001, attacks. It additionally asked their opinions on various theological attitudes. At some churches, I was given the opportunity to engage with congregants in other ways, either through speaking to members informally or through formal interviews of ministers. In one case, I was even invited to a home Bible study. Each of these experiences lent human voice to the statistics gathered from my survey collection.

As is obvious from the list of churches presented above, I am by no means representing the entirety of American Protestantism. The statistics which I have gathered and present within this paper should not be interpreted as applying to Protestantism as a whole. However, I do think these figures reflect general trends within American Protestantism and are useful as a tool to illustrate the importance of these popular trends. Another basic limitation to the scope of this project is the ethnic and racial diversity of my respondent pool. Churches today continue to be largely segregated. I did not visit any African American, Hispanic American, or Asian American churches, mostly because I was unable to find churches willing to host me. Thus, the responses I present should be read with the understanding that they come largely, though not exclusively, from white Americans.<sup>7</sup> Another limitation presented by my survey is that it was merely a one-page, five-minute exercise. Many questions which certainly would have had fascinating responses were not included. The questions which I did choose to ask certainly influenced the responses which I received, and the reader should bear in mind that different questions may have produced very different answers.

The other major source of information for this paper has come from reading. I have focused on both historical and contemporary texts in order to present a balanced view of the development of contemporary attitudes toward war with specific attitudes toward the present war in Afghanistan. My sources come from both the academic and Christian spheres. These sources are used to help explain the trends which become evident from my ethnographic data.

### **Other limitations of my project**

One thing I quickly discovered when first attempting to review the data I had gathered is that theology is by no means the only influence on American Christians as they formulate their views on war. Several other factors emerged as particularly important, in addition to theological

attitudes. I would like to present some of these other factors briefly here, but will not go into further detail about them as they do not relate to the central question of my research, which is the role that theology in particular plays in shaping attitudes toward war.

One factor which appears to be very important in relation to attitudes toward war is gender. In my study, for example, women were much less likely to support war than men, and other studies have noted a similar trend. Several hypotheses have been put forth to explain this trend, and these range from biologically based arguments to social constructivist arguments to the argument that women face more consequences from modern wars.<sup>8</sup> I will not attempt to explain this trend here but rather just remind the reader that gender is a non-religious factor which appears to have a significant influence.

Other demographic factors which appear to have played a role in my study include education level and family history. Generally, respondents with high school education only were much more likely to support the war in Afghanistan than were those with a college education, and even more likely to than those with a graduate education. Additionally, respondents whose families had been engaged in military service in some way were more likely to support the war, although not to the significant degree that might be expected. Again, I will not attempt to explain these factors but merely wish to bring them up for the reader's consideration.

Finally, other political attitudes certainly have some correlation with attitudes toward war. For example, members of the Republican Party are more likely to support the War on Terror, if only because their party was in control when the war was initiated while the Democratic Party was not. Also, my survey showed that respondents who identified themselves as "patriots" were significantly more likely to support the war, so attitudes toward the United States in general also play an important role.

As outlined in my Introduction, the rest of this paper will focus specifically on theological attitudes and the influences these attitudes have had on contemporary Protestant attitudes toward war (and vice versa). The other factors mentioned here will be largely overlooked in favor of my focus on theology.



Chapter One  
Historical Christian Attitudes Toward War

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

-- Isaiah 2:3-4\*

Proclaim this among the nations:  
Prepare war,  
stir up the warriors.  
Let all the soldiers draw near,  
let them come up.  
Beat your plowshares into swords,  
and your pruning hooks into spears;  
let the weakling say, "I am a warrior."

-- Joel 3:9-10

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

-- Matthew 10:34

Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

-- Matthew 26:52

With statements as seemingly contradictory as these found throughout the Christian Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, the raging debate within Christianity over the morality of the use of force is no surprise. This paper focuses specifically on contemporary American Protestant Christianity. However, this particular form (or forms) of Christianity has been deeply influenced by historical developments in thinking about the ethics of war. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the most important developments within Christian thinking in shaping contemporary American Protestant thought. These include the writings of

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\* All Scriptural quotations are taken from Oxford University Press's New Oxford Annotated Bible, Third Edition (New Revised Standard Version).

early Catholic theologians including St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, and the teachings of the Anabaptist movements of the sixteenth century and later. These important early developments have been adopted by today's American Christians as two major schools of thought on the use of war: the just war theory and Christian pacifism.

### **A Brief History of Christian Thought on War**

Most modern theologians trace the genesis of today's thinking about Christianity and war to the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo, particularly his fourth-century masterpiece *The City of God*. Augustine's teachings there are seen as the first formulation of just-war theory. This continues to be the dominant theory in Christian attitudes toward war, though it has grown immensely in its complexity since the first simple paragraphs in Augustine's work. Augustine's central thesis remains the most important aspect of today's just war theory: just war is necessary due to provocation from some other evil. As Augustine writes in Book XIX of *The City of God*, "it is the wrong-doing of the opposing party which compels the wise man to wage just wars."<sup>9</sup> This basic thought is the central theme of just war theory.

In the medieval period Augustine's theory was considerably refined by St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, written from 1265 to 1274, lists three major criteria necessary for the declaration of a just war. First on his list is that just war is waged by a sovereign government and not by an individual. Secondly, just war is the result of just cause. This criterion is a faithful repetition of Augustine's central criterion; namely, that just war is waged against governments who have done something wrong to deserve being attacked. Finally, a just war must be waged with right intention. Right intention includes an intention to advance good or to avoid evil.<sup>10</sup> In addition to providing additional criteria for just war, Aquinas also addresses some issues of execution of a just war. For example, he instructs clergy to refrain

from fighting in wars, says that just war fighting need not cease on holy days, and that surprise ambushes are allowable so long as they are not the result of direct deception.<sup>11</sup>

The third of these three major contributions to the Christian ethic of war came two hundred years later as part of the Protestant Reformation. Dale W. Brown, a prominent pacifist theologian, traces the rise of the Anabaptists. They were the first of the historic peace churches which emerged in the sixteenth century as part of the Radical wing of the Reformation. They shared the Lutherans' and others' urge to fight the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, but they felt that these other groups were equally corrupt. The Anabaptists saw the Reformation chiefly as a way to end what they saw as the church's disturbing habit of accommodating the state.<sup>12</sup> One of the major pieces of evidence for their argument was that the church submitted to war when the state wanted it, regardless of the fact that, in their interpretation, Jesus Christ had taught nonresistance. The Anabaptists thus adopted a stance of Christian pacifism, and this stance continues today to be a defining characteristic of many of their denominations. Luther's *95 Theses* were published in 1517, and the Anabaptists began speaking on pacifism as early as 1527, a fact which indicates the centrality of this doctrine to their overall worldview.

However, the pacifist stance was not transferred to other denominations arising out of the Reformation. Today, most Protestant theologians continue to cite the earlier Catholic teachings on just war theory. There are many possible explanations for this. First is the fact that pacifism was the central doctrine of the groups which constituted the Radical Reformation, and thus was seen as a radical doctrine. This characterization made it much less attractive to mainstream Protestants. Secondly, both at the time of the birth of Christian pacifism and today, war is an accepted fact in the world, and few people consider pacifism to be a practical alternative.

Pacifism is therefore destined to be the belief of only a few, barring some major paradigm shift in which peace comes to be seen as a practical solution to conflict.

### **Contemporary Just War Thinking**

The majority of contemporary American Protestant thought on war is firmly rooted in the just war tradition of Augustine and Aquinas. There are some variations between denominations and individuals, which center on the questions of whether pre-emptive war and nuclear war could be just. In spite of these differences, today's just war thinking can be described relatively uniformly. Again, the just war theory has been adopted by almost all Protestant denominations. The only strictly pacifist churches are the Anabaptist churches, including the Mennonites, the Quakers, and the Church of the Brethren, as well as some New Thought churches. Just war thought today has been strongly influenced by contemporary events including 9/11 and the war in Iraq, and the particular concerns and debates of today's just war theorists reflect a preoccupation with problems unique to this time period: how to justly fight non-state enemies such as terrorist networks, and whether pre-emptive wars, such as the one pursued in Iraq, can ever be considered just.

A prominent author on Christian and biblical ethics, J. Daryl Charles published *Between Pacifism and Jihad: Just War and Christian Tradition*, his explanation of the contemporary just war position, in 2005. Charles' book provides a detailed exploration of the theological and ethical issues surrounding just war theory and is an accurate reflection of the stance held by most Protestants today.<sup>13</sup> I have chosen to use his text as a central source for two major reasons: it was written post-September 11 and thus deals with the issue of war in the context in which I am interested, and it is a popular text marketed at average Christian readers, so it is the type of text from which my respondents are formulating their views. From a more academic perspective,

Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Just War Against Terror*, published in 2003, also deals with the particular issue of the contemporary war and how it fits into a just war worldview.

One of the foundations of today's just war argument is the idea that the government gets its power to fight evil directly from God. Charles' basic argument here is that the New Testament teaches that governments "function foremost to restrain evil" and that "those with governing power receive authority to perform this function from the sovereign God."<sup>14</sup> Elshtain focuses less on where the authority comes from and instead emphasizes that regardless of who gave the power, governments have the responsibility to keep their citizens safe—and that is indeed their primary responsibility.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, force will always be necessary because there will always be evil to be restrained. Stemming from the doctrine of original sin, this belief makes war a necessity rather than a choice. "World peace is impossible," Charles writes, "due to the human condition."<sup>16</sup> Because humanity is inherently evil, the use of force will always be needed to fight that evil.

Another important aspect of the just war theory is the prerequisite that a just war be based on justice (which comes from God) rather than revenge (which comes from humans). As Elshtain writes, "The presupposition of just war thinking is that war can sometimes be an instrument of justice; that, indeed, war can help to put right a massive injustice."<sup>17</sup> Delivering justice is seen as one of the primary functions of the state, which has been given the authority to mete out justice from God. Charles writes that Jesus calls on individuals to be forgiving toward other individuals; however, "while persons receive mercy from other persons, the role of the magistrate is not to forgive and issue mercy where justice is due."<sup>18</sup> Charles characterizes true justice as retribution rather than revenge, the goal of which is to create something better rather

than to take pleasure in punishment of something bad.<sup>19</sup> This speaks to Aquinas' requirement that a just war be based on right intention.

This justice aspect of the just war theory makes clear that just war theorists are not operating under the assumption that church and state must be completely separated. In fact, according to the theological argument laid out above, the state is supported and even chosen by God, and God acts through the state. This argument is supported scripturally in Romans 13:1-8, a passage which states in part that "there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God... [T]he authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer." Just war theorists thus see just war as an implementation of God's holy justice. This argument will be explored further in Chapter Two.

Finally Charles and Elshtain, like Aquinas, present some criteria for just war execution, answering the inevitable question of how one decides what constitutes a "just" war. Charles first addresses the potential provocations for a just war, noting that offensive or pre-emptive war could in some cases be considered just. "Although all defensive wars are just, not all just wars need be defensive."<sup>20</sup> He does draw a distinction, however, between offensive war and militarism or war based on the Christian faith, which he believes is unacceptable. Additionally, justice within war is just as important as a just cause for war. Elshtain addresses this issue, called *jus in bello* ("justice in war") and names "noncombatant immunity" as the most important aspect of justice within war.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, there is much left to interpretation when it comes to determining exactly what is just or unjust.

As stated above, while Charles' description of the contemporary just war argument is fairly accurate for most just war adherents, there are some divisions within the just war school over specific issues. Two of these are especially important. The first, which became especially

important leading up to and in the wake of the United States' 2003 invasion of Iraq, is whether pre-emptive war meets the just war criteria. J. Daryl Charles believes it does, and so does Harold Brown in his essay "The Crusade or Preventive War," part of a book on four different Christian views toward war. Brown sums up this argument by stating simply, "No one would expect to wait until a gun-brandishing pursuer had fired the first shot and perhaps scored a hit before shooting at him."<sup>22</sup> As Brown puts it, a just war theory which allows only for defensive war does not apply to real-life situations in which a nation may be clearly threatening but has yet to actually strike. Arthur Holmes responds in "A Just War Response" that the only way such a war could be just is if it were clearly limited by rules which as of now do not exist.<sup>23</sup> Other Christians, including many of those with whom I talked in my fieldwork, say that preventive war could never be just and that the Iraq war is clearly outside the traditional definition of a just war. This debate continues to rage in response to the invasion.

The second object of debate is the characterization of war. When asked about war, most Christians today will respond that it is evil but necessary in order to restrain even greater evil. Charles writes that Martin Luther was right to characterize just war as "a small misfortune that prevents a great misfortune," akin to a doctor amputating a foot to save the rest of the body from infection.<sup>24</sup> Darrell Cole, a leading proponent of contemporary just war theory, takes issue with this characterization. In his essay "Good Wars," Cole makes the argument that war is not necessarily evil and can in fact be considered good in addition to being considered just. He cites numerous examples of the "modern ethos of war" as a necessary evil, including even Army recruitment commercials which focus on the all the benefits soldiering will have on a young man's life after he leaves the Army, rather than on the good he could do fighting.<sup>25</sup> In Cole's opinion, war need not be seen as the lesser of two evils. Rather, war can be a way to produce

good by getting rid of evil. After all, God wants evil to be restrained. Soldiers in a just war therefore fulfill God's wishes and bring themselves into closer relationship with him. Just war is an act of Christian love and charity. "The use of force becomes an act of love when it seeks to resemble God's use of force;" therefore, "Christians who willingly and knowingly refuse to engage in a just war do a vicious thing: they fail to show love toward their neighbor as well as toward God."<sup>26</sup> In Cole's view, using war to protect someone can be a way of showing that person love. Therefore, Christians who fail to support such a war are neglecting to share Christian love. The question of whether just war is good or evil will continue to be debated, but it has relatively little impact on opinions about whether a war is just and so does not greatly affect the implementation of just war theory today.

### **Contemporary Christian Pacifist Thinking**

Christian pacifism is certainly the minority view within American Protestantism, and yet it is the official doctrine of many important denominations, including all of the historic peace churches. Pacifism is rooted in a relatively uncomplicated argument—Jesus taught peace and we must follow Jesus—and has therefore been criticized by just war theorists as too simplistic to apply to real-life situations. However, there is detailed theology backing up the pacifist view.

If one passage in the Bible is the impetus behind the pacifist movement, it is certainly the Sermon on the Mount, from the Gospel of Matthew. Specifically, the following passage is crucial to the pacifist argument:

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good,



and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

--Matthew 5:38-48

Dale Brown presents this argument in his book, *Biblical Pacifism*. In this book, Brown dedicates many pages to the explication of the Sermon on the Mount and its various possible interpretations. In his view, the passage is fairly simple: Jesus is instructing his followers to abstain from the use of force, even when force has been used against them. Others, particularly those in the just war tradition, do not interpret Jesus' words the same way.

Martin Luther, along with many other just war advocates, interpreted the Sermon on the Mount as a guide for personal relationships. Brown writes that this "personal ethic" interpretation teaches that Christians should ultimately be peaceful and forgiving in their personal relationships, but that Jesus was speaking to a crowd of individuals and not to government leaders, so the same rules do not apply for states.<sup>27</sup> Brown also describes a "law ethic" interpretation in which the laws presented in the Sermon on the Mount are intended to "let us know how miserably we fail in living up to it."<sup>28</sup> In this way, the Sermon can be seen as a reminder of how we would live if we were Christ-like, but how we cannot live due to our sinful nature.

Brown endorses a third interpretation, that the Sermon on the Mount teaches an "ethic to be obeyed." In his opinion, Jesus' words were instructive and were intended to be a guide for the lives of Christians, both in their personal affairs and in affairs of state. Brown backs up his interpretation by citing the concluding verse of the Sermon, which reads, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall,

because it had been founded on rock,<sup>29</sup> seeming to imply that Jesus did in fact intend his teachings to be literally followed. Therefore, the peace churches have taken up the Sermon on the Mount as “literally the life style for Christians.”<sup>30</sup> Pacifism is an important aspect of their interpretation of this passage.

The second major part of the pacifist argument is that Christians ought to emulate Jesus, who was himself nonviolent. Brown argues that Jesus himself said that Christians should try to follow and imitate his way of life, “taking up the cross” of nonconformity to stand up for what Jesus taught.<sup>31</sup> For Christian pacifists, the thematic constant throughout the New Testament is love, and they do not agree with Darrell Cole’s assessment that just war is an act of love. Rather, they see themselves as emulating Christ’s love by resisting violence and practicing forgiveness.<sup>32</sup> Brown thus responds to the just war argument that nonviolence is ineffective by stating that its purported ineffectiveness does not make it wrong; after all, Jesus’ nonviolence was ineffective (he was executed), and yet he always stood by it. In Brown’s view, even when asked the common “what if” question about how to deal with someone as evil as Hitler, pacifists must answer that the way of Christ may or may not be effective, but that is the right way. “In the long run, just means are more likely to gain just ends.”<sup>33</sup> For Christian pacifists, just means do not include war in any form. Pacifists have often argued that their method of dealing with conflict is held to an unfair standard. They are criticized for the perceived ineffectiveness of nonviolence in preventing the deaths of innocent people, and yet, they argue, just wars certainly result in unnecessary casualties.

Like the just war tradition, the pacifist movement does have its share of disagreement, although again the essential argument is very similar. The major source of dissension within Christian pacifism is whether pacifism applies only to individuals’ violent actions (i.e., I refuse

to become a soldier), or includes individuals' support of violent actions (i.e., I refuse to pay taxes to a state which is engaged in war). The two sides of this issue are outlined in Clouse's book, in Herman Hoyt's essay "Nonresistance" and Myron Augsberger's "Christian Pacifism."

Hoyt calls his version of Christian pacifism nonresistance, and differentiates between the two by criticizing pacifists who fail to distinguish between wars waged by the state and individuals going to war. In his opinion, the New Testament teaching of the separation between the church and the state, and of the citizen's duty to submit to governing authorities, mean that although Christians should not fight in nor start wars, the state has a right to do so.<sup>34</sup> He is still very much against the use of force, but he believes that Christians should separate their personal opposition to force from the state's. This interpretation, in his view, helps to clarify the ancient debate about the Old Testament's many instances of horrific violence. Christians should be nonviolent regardless of Old Testament violence because that violence was committed by Israel, a worldly nation, not by the church.<sup>35</sup> This separation of church and state is interpreted differently by other pacifists.

The pacifists represented by Augsberger agree with Hoyt that there is a separation of church and state, and that Jesus taught submission to the state. However, they believe that the state's authority can be taken away if the state does something un-Christian, such as going to war. As Augsberger writes, "we cannot assume that since God ordains government we are always obeying God in our obedience to it... We also cannot disobey a divine law to obey a contrary law by the government."<sup>36</sup> Brown agrees with this interpretation, writing that even Romans 13, the major biblical text used to support the notion of Christian obedience to government, is sandwiched between two chapters on love. This suggests, he argues, that the government's authority is legitimate only when it is being used to promote love.<sup>37</sup> Pacifists from

this school may express their opposition to the government in various ways. Some simply disavow wars, stating that the government has no more right to wage a war than a Christian has to fight in it. Others engage in civil disobedience including refusal to pay taxes which might support the war effort. However, activism this extreme is usually rare, and as in the just war tradition, people who disagree on this issue are still relatively united as a Christian pacifist movement.

### **Key themes in contemporary Christian thought about war**

For the remainder of this paper, several recurring themes will become obviously important to the overall discussion of contemporary Protestant attitudes toward war. Many of these themes are interrelated and most center around the central theme of good and evil. Chapter Four in particular will deal with this theme and the different definitions of good and evil that contemporary Christians hold. Physical warfare is interpreted by many Christians as one battle in a greater fight of good versus evil, and this physical warfare can take different forms for different groups of Christians: as Chapter Four will show, some focus on wars such as the War on Terror, and others focus on wars against evils within a community, such as poverty.

The theme of good versus evil is an essential part of a larger set of themes which I will refer to as cosmic war and earthly war. Mark Juergensmeyer first presented the term “cosmic war” in his book *Terror in the Mind of God*. Cosmic war is what happens when Christians place “religious images of divine struggle—cosmic war—in the service of worldly political battles.”<sup>38</sup> The divine cosmic battle between good and evil thus comes to be represented by a battle between nations. Participants in the war assign to themselves the label of “good” and the understanding that they are fighting for God, while the enemy receives the label of “evil.” As this paper will show, many Christians have equated the war in Afghanistan with a neverending cosmic war

between good and evil, God and Satan. Many have not, however. Chapter Four will explain how different definitions of evil affect whether Protestants see the War on Terror as a cosmic war, and will also explain that those Christians who are not fighting a cosmic war against Afghanistan are still fighting a war against evil. However, their war is against a different kind of evil: evil within their own communities, manifest through racism, social injustices and poverty. Christians with these definitions of evil fight earthly, winnable battles against these evils.

One theme has already found prominence in this chapter: the issue of separation of church and state. Many contemporary Protestant attitudes toward this issue seem to be somewhat paradoxical: every Christian I talked to in my fieldwork, no matter how they felt about the war, agreed that the separation of church and state is vital and important. Both seemed to use this stance to discredit their opponents: a pacifist might say, we should not go to war because war is merely a physical manifestation of someone's cosmic war religious views; a just war thinker might say, we should not avoid going to war merely because some other Christian says Jesus said not to. Yet each side also obviously uses religious language and theology to support their own views on war, and each wants the government to agree with their stances. This paradox is not lost on Christians themselves, and so both sides use a similar tactic of justifying their stances both religiously and otherwise. That is, when a Christian pacifist presents her views to the general public or to the government, she mentions Jesus and his calls for peace, but she also points out pragmatic reasons to avoid war: saving money, avoiding loss of life, maintaining strong international alliances, etc. Just war theorists make a similar presentation of their views, blending their religious justifications for war with practical concerns such as the lack of apparent alternatives and the need to keep Americans safe. While in this paper I will focus on the

religious aspects of these justifications, it is important to note that these are not the only arguments Protestants make.

A final important theme is that of authority. As this paper will argue, there are two competing sources of authority demanding the attention of American Protestants. The first of these is religious authority. As will be discussed at length in Chapter Three, Protestantism separates itself from Catholicism by placing ultimate religious authority in a text (the Bible) rather than in an institution. Every Protestant group, denomination or individual therefore has the responsibility of interpreting the text for itself, thus leading to many very different interpretations and therefore many different theologies. As the Methodology section explained, even the five Central Ohio churches used in my study interpreted the Bible in extremely different ways and taught vastly different theologies to their congregations. As evidenced by the discussion of the separation of church and state, each side of the conflict over war's permissibility appeals to this religious authority of the text and their interpretations of the voices within it as a justification for their opinion.

Religious authority is not the only source of authority with which Protestants are coping, however. Political authority is extremely important as well. Bruce Lincoln's discussion of political authority and its influence on religion will be explained in more detail in the Conclusion. As his framework explains, religious groups with a significant amount of political authority are likely to support maintenance of the status quo, that they might maintain their political power, and so are likely to interpret the religious authority in a way which suggests that the current political authority is just and should not be changed. Conversely, religious groups with relatively less political authority are likely to resist the status quo, interpreting the religious authority in a way which encourages questioning of and resistance to the current political

authority. How these relationships play out in contemporary America with regard to the issue of war will become evident over the rest of this paper.

### **How is Christianity related to violence today?**

This is certainly a complicated question, and not one I will fully answer here. However, I think it is worth exploring, at least superficially, some of the important developments in this relationship over the past thirty years, particularly in the evangelical Protestant denominations (and “nondenominations”) of American Christianity.

Melani McAlister writes that contemporary evangelicals are more apt to support acts of war because of their preoccupation with the end times. While many scholars contend that the Book of Revelation was written as a metaphor for the political environment in which John existed, McAlister writes that fifty-nine percent of Americans believe the events depicted in Revelation are going to come literally true at some future date.<sup>39</sup> In other words, a majority of Americans are expecting a violent reckoning between good and evil. Many of these people do not anticipate this battle to occur during their lifetimes, but one group of people which does largely await the end times within the next few decades is evangelical Christians. McAlister cites the hugely popular *Left Behind* series as evidence of this. The *Left Behind* series, coauthored by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye, depicts in gory detail the end of the world as it could occur in contemporary surroundings, and has sold millions of volumes. One of the key plotlines of the novels centers on an Antichrist figure who builds a world capital—in Iraq. Naturally, then, the invasion of Iraq has been interpreted by many evangelicals as a sign that the events in Revelation are coming true and that the end of the world is coming soon.<sup>40</sup> This belief is becoming even more pervasive as young children are raised on it; the *Left Behind* series has a complimentary series for teens as well as a violent video game.<sup>41</sup>

Martin Marty adds another element to this evangelical belief in imminent, world-ending violence by discussing the new conception of Jesus. In “Rambo Jesus,” Marty writes that with the new emphasis on the end times, the peaceful Jesus so beloved by the Christian pacifists is forced to coexist with the violent Jesus of the Second Coming. He quotes Ted Haggard, then president of the National Association of Evangelicals, who criticizes the popular image of a “marshmallowy, Santa Claus Jesus.”<sup>42</sup> In Marty’s opinion, the rise of warrior Jesus has quickened considerably since the attacks of September 11, 2001. “These days, because our opponents have an Allah, seen by our Christian militants only as a warrior God who inspires jihad, we evidently need a warrior Jesus.”<sup>43</sup> In the War on Terror, Christians and Americans want to have a god who looks just as big and bad as they believe the Islamists’ to be.

### **Implications for my study**

For the remainder of this paper, I will focus on the results of my ethnographic study of Protestant Christians in central Ohio. The impact of the history of Christian thought on war, as outlined above, will be clearly evident in the responses I present. Christians in America today still cite the works of historic church fathers as they justify their positions on war, and that influence is coupled with the impact of contemporary political and religious events. Almost every Christian I describe fits easily into one of the two camps I described above: the just war tradition or Christian pacifism. However, the rest of my work will focus more specifically on explaining why Christians believe what they do about war, and how beliefs about war fit into a larger theological worldview.



## Chapter Two God and Jesus

As stated in the Introduction, various theological beliefs have strong relationships to different attitudes toward war. Beliefs about God and Jesus are some of the most important of these theological beliefs. Christians' attitudes toward and ideas about God and the figure of Jesus Christ have a strong relationship to their attitudes about the war in Afghanistan. As I will explain in this chapter, most American Protestants do not formulate their opinions entirely on their own; they do so with God's help, or at least with the intention of aligning their opinions with those of God. And God certainly has strong opinions, especially about politics. In a religion in which God is experienced as intensely personal, especially in light of his human incarnation, Jesus, this attitude of seeking God's guidance and opinion makes sense. As this chapter will show, Protestants believe that their opinions on the War on Terror mirror those of God and Jesus. Many Christians believe that God works through the American government and that political leaders' decisions should be respected because God has given them authority. Attitudes toward war are also heavily influenced by perceptions of Jesus Christ. Christians who see Jesus as manly and forceful are much more likely to support the war in Afghanistan, while those who interpret him as a gentle Prince of Peace are typically more pacifist. Ideas about God and Jesus play an important role in shaping American Protestants' attitudes toward war.

### **God on our side**

As followers of Jesus Christ, Christians' attitudes toward war are, naturally, shaped by Jesus' attitude. However, as with many of Jesus' teachings, there is enough ambiguity in his preaching on the subject that Christians are divided over exactly what Jesus (and therefore God) really does think about war. According to the results of my survey of Protestants in Central Ohio, how a Christian perceives God's attitude toward war was the single biggest factor in

determining one's own attitude. Of those who agreed that God supported the military response in Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, ninety-four percent themselves supported this action. On the other hand, only twenty-eight percent of those who responded that God did not support the war in Afghanistan supported it themselves.<sup>44</sup>

When examining the survey responses to this particular question, it is important to note that many respondents left it blank. Various notes were left explaining this tendency to reticence, and each of these explained that, in the words of one particular man, it would be “presumptuous to say what God supports”; as another put it, “I can't speak for God.” Of the fifty percent of respondents who did feel comfortable answering, however, the connection between God's perceived attitude toward the war and the respondent's own is undeniable.

Of course, this relationship works in both directions. A Christian might have no opinion on the war until careful prayer has assured her of God's opinion, which she then takes for herself. Conversely, Christians who previously supported or did not support the war may be attributing this position to God after the fact, in an attempt to justify their beliefs for themselves and others. In reality, the influences are probably going both ways. As Colman McCarthy notes in “God On Our Side,” people engaged in any conflict—on either side—tend to believe they have the power and blessing of God. He quotes Taliban leader Mohammed Hasan Akhund, speaking a few days after September 11: “God is on our side, and if the world's people set fire to Afghanistan, God will protect us and help us.” Just a few days later, McCarthy writes, President George W. Bush stated in his address to Congress that “Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them...May God grant us wisdom and may He watch over the United States.”<sup>45</sup> Some of those answering my survey made clear that Akhund and Bush were not both correct, leaving notes that emphatically stated that

God's support for the invasion did not extend to both sides of the conflict. One young woman wrote that God is on our side, but that our side is not the United States specifically; rather, our side is the greater good of "justice." Of course, this lines up perfectly with President Bush's rhetoric of "justice versus cruelty," and though it is not explicitly "United States versus the Taliban," it is clear on which side of this dichotomy the U.S. falls.

The idea that God supports wars which create justice is shared by many American Protestants (see the discussion of Darrell Cole and "good wars" in Chapter One). Daniel Bell writes that just war theory should not be seen merely as a list of criteria to which governments are required to live up. Rather, it should be seen as Christian discipleship, a way for Christians to exhibit virtues such as courage and justice. "Indeed, just war is driven neither by hatred nor by a desire for the death and destruction of the enemy but by the love that desires to bestow the benefits of a just peace upon the enemy."<sup>46</sup> Christians who take this view thus know that God is on their side because their acts of war are actually acts of discipleship, of living out Jesus' injunction to "love your enemy." In this view, just war is, as Bell says, "an embodiment of the Christian life."<sup>47</sup> Such a view of war as a necessary route to justice enables Christians to more easily claim that God supports their actions.

### **God in our churches and our government**

McCarthy's article explores the connections between churches and the war that emerged in the months following September 11. He speaks of flags being displayed in churches and of the fervent prayers for American victory that filled many sanctuaries.<sup>48</sup> The pastor of Congregational Church, which I visited in July of 2006, led the congregation in a prayer not for victory, but rather for an end to the war: "We pray for our church, our country, our world. We pray for an end to violence in the world and we pray for countries torn by war, especially Iraq,

Afghanistan, and the Congo... We pray, O God, for our President, and for all entrusted with political power. Strengthen them to take the risks of enlightened leadership.” Though this particular church took a more dove-like stance, praying for those on both sides of the conflict, it still exhibited many of the traits which McCarthy found disturbing. It was the closest Sunday to the July 4 holiday, and the cover of the congregational bulletin displayed a Clip-Art image of Thomas Jefferson penning the U.S. Declaration of Independence. Similarly, the congregational litany prayer was devoted to beseeching God to help Americans uphold the standards of the Declaration. This example shows that McCarthy’s warning that churches are taking an active interest in government and political issues is a justifiable one, and that this trend is not limited to hawkish congregations.

Protestants in Central Ohio certainly believe that God is taking an active interest in the political sphere, and this may explain their churches’ tendency to do the same. On the issue of war, God has a clear opinion. In fact, each of the three ministers I interviewed was able to tell me exactly what God’s opinion was. Rev. Mary Saunders of Mennonite Church and Rev. Dennis Anderson of Congregational Church both agreed that God did not support the U.S. War on Terror, and that God preferred other options for dealing with this conflict. Rev. Steven Collins, of Nondenominational Church, maintained that God fully supported the war insofar as it was used to bring justice to the earth.\* In response to a question I posed about Christians called to serve as soldiers, Rev. Saunders even stated that “being a soldier and being a Christian are fairly incompatible.”<sup>49</sup> In her view, God’s opinion on the issue of war is so firm that true Christians cannot disagree. The other ministers appeared to believe that God’s position was more nuanced, as will be discussed in further detail.

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\* The names of the ministers have been changed. Churches have been identified only by their denomination.

I attended a home Bible study for a small group of Nondenominational Church members, and after their study they were kind enough to host a focus group dealing with their perspectives on war. Their responses to my questions indicated that they too felt that God was strongly opinionated about and involved in war. One young man, who had previously served in the U.S. Army in Iraq, said to me that people misunderstood the reason for the war; wars were not human-initiated but rather were a product of God's will. He was disappointed that everyone was trying to figure out why President Bush had invaded Iraq; "I was there for almost a year and I still don't know why Bush sent us there. But from a Christian perspective, God has sent people to war before. I don't see anything in this war that goes against his word." Christians with this worldview see war as not only allowable by God, but in some way directed by God. Not only is God, rather than an earthly leader, responsible for sending the troops to war, but "God chooses who to send," the soldier's wife told me, adding, "I'm in the service and he didn't send me." Their opinion was echoed by others participating in the discussion. One man added that "human leaders are making these decisions that God used to make. But God created the earth and he really has the authority."<sup>50</sup>

For some Christians, then, human leaders are acting in God's stead, and in some way God is influencing their actions. This fits into the theme of cosmic war mentioned in Chapter One, a framework which suggests that worldly battles like the War on Terror are physical manifestations of cosmic battles between God and evil. This attitude is supported by the famous lines of Romans 13:1-8, which suggest that God has chosen political leaders. This belief is prevalent today in opinions of President George W. Bush. As Hugh B. Urban notes, not only did Bush himself declare that God had called him to the presidency, but others confirmed it; as Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition said, God knew that George Bush would be the perfect

leader for America after September 11.<sup>51</sup> Divine intervention or direction is not evident only in God's influence on political leaders, however; normal Christian followers are led by God as well. One focus group participant summed it up by stating that "As Christians, we are God's soldiers every day." Many American Christians seem to share this mentality that they are constantly engaged in a war in which they are fighting for God, and this idea will be further explained in Chapter Four. For now, however, the important piece to take away is that the general consensus of the focus group was that wars on earth are highly influenced by intervention from God, and that humans at all levels of power are directed by God in their daily activities as well as in war.<sup>52</sup> This is just one example of the greater trend noted above, namely, that Protestants in America today believe that God does have an opinion about war, and that God's opinion lines up with their own.

### **What would Jesus do?**

American Protestants today typically understand the Trinity in the traditional fashion: that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are one and the same and yet are also in some way different. However, in spite of their unity, Jesus has come to achieve a special status among many Protestants. American Christians, seeking to avoid the negative connotations that many associate with the term "Christian," often rather refer to themselves as "followers of Jesus." They speak of having close, personal relationships with Jesus as their "personal savior." As Stephen Prothero puts it in *American Jesus*, "In the United States today, virtually all Christians are Jesus people."<sup>53</sup> Perceptions of Jesus' attitude toward war therefore have an extremely strong impact on personal attitudes toward the invasion of Afghanistan following September 11, 2001.

Two survey questions dealing with perceptions of Jesus' attitude toward the use of force also had strong relationships to respondents' opinions about the war in Afghanistan. When

asked whether they believed that there could ever be a situation in which Jesus would sanction the use of force, seventy-eight percent of those who agreed also supported the Afghanistan war, while only thirty-two percent of those who disagreed did.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, people who agreed that “Jesus was a pacifist” had a largely negative attitude toward the war; forty-six percent of those who believed Jesus was a pacifist supported the war, while eighty-seven percent of respondents who said Jesus was not a pacifist did.<sup>55</sup> Clearly, there is a strong correlation between what a Christian thinks Jesus thinks about war and what he or she personally thinks. Respondents justified their responses to these questions in various ways.

Many of those who believed that Jesus would never sanction the use of force left notes explaining their responses. The common theme of these explanations was that Jesus differentiated between deadly force and other types of force. As one respondent explained, “I think Jesus did use strong leadership qualities which included force, but did he kill, no.” Another said that Jesus was a forceful person who would nevertheless not support “military force.” In this way, Jesus maintains the “Rambo Jesus” image explained by Marty Martin (see Chapter One), while still opposing the use of physical force.

Others stated that Jesus was in fact willing to use force, and cited as an example the story of Jesus and the money changers in the temple. This account is found in all four Gospels, and has long served as an example of Jesus’ willingness to be violent in the name of God. Here is the story as it appears in the Gospel of John:

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”<sup>56</sup>

Certainly, the Jesus of this story is more forceful, angry, and even violent than the Jesus of many others. Many Christians find that a Jesus who was willing to use force to overturn tables would be willing to use force to overturn unjust governments as well, while others say that the story involves no deadly force and thus is irrelevant to discussions of war.

One other potential response to the question “What would Jesus do?” is that he would forgive. Such an option leaves out all questions of force of any type and instead focuses on Jesus’ teachings of love. On the one-year anniversary of the September 11 attacks, the father of a young woman killed in the World Trade Center gave a speech in which he proposed the use of forgiveness as a response to the attacks. He quoted Jesus on the cross and spoke of the implications of Jesus’ words during his crucifixion:

“‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do.’ ...Forgiveness was not about sanctioning the deplorable acts that had been done, nor was it about excusing the injustice that was incurred; it was a divine gift that I must give myself in order to transcend this evil act and not let it destroy me also. Forgiveness meant letting go of the anger and the need for revenge... I knew that revenge wouldn’t bring my daughter back or resolve my pain and sadness.”<sup>57</sup>

While Titus’ speech was moving and meaningful, it was also unique. Forgiveness is often overlooked in the debate among Christians over war because it betrays the “Rambo Jesus” image which is so popular today. Most Christian pacifists emphasize that Jesus is still a forceful man and that his choice to avoid the use of physical force does not equate to any kind of mental or emotional weakness. Forgiveness seems to fall into the category of actions which would be prevented by this mental strength. The next section will further explain the importance of the image of Jesus and the impact it has on Christian attitudes toward war.

### **Who is Jesus?**

The image of Jesus gleaned from the story of the money changers is one of a man who uses force when necessary to honor his God and to ensure that others do the same. However, this



image is easily contradicted by other biblical stories. As noted in Chapter One, the principal text used to portray Jesus as a pacifist is his Sermon on the Mount. How one interprets this passage is based partially on how one views the Bible as a whole, and that aspect of interpretation will be explored in Chapter Three. The other important factor in interpreting the Sermon on the Mount is one's perception of Jesus Christ himself. If Jesus is seen as a forceful figure, even physically so—as the Jesus portrayed in the story of the money changers—then the Sermon on the Mount can easily be interpreted in a way that suggests Jesus would have in some cases allowed the use of force. If Jesus is seen as the “Prince of Peace,” the Sermon on the Mount is understood more as a prohibition of the use of physical force. American Protestants today hold both of these views.

During an episode of *Larry King Live* in the final days leading up to the invasion of Iraq, King hosted several prominent American Christian leaders who debated each other about the possibility of just war and whether war was ever justifiable for Christians. Bob Jones, a prominent evangelical and the president of Bob Jones University, presented one of the most common interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount's instruction to “turn the other cheek”: that Jesus is speaking only of personal relationships and not of relationships between governments.<sup>58</sup> In my interview with Rev. Steven Collins of Nondenominational Church, Collins expressed much the same view. “Jesus is not a pure pacifist because he never says anything about states using force. He told his followers not to use force, not states. In fact, he comes from an Old Testament background in which God often says that it is okay for legitimate authorities to use force, and Jesus would have reflected that viewpoint.”<sup>59</sup> For Christians with this view of Jesus and his directives, Jesus' rules apply only to individuals and not to states. States are governed not by the Sermon on the Mount, but rather by the church-state relationship guidelines outlined

in Romans 13, which states that political leaders are granted their authority by God and that Christians should therefore follow them.

In the classic essay “Why I Am Not a Pacifist,” delivered to a pacifist society during World War II, C.S. Lewis also deals with the question of interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount. He rejects several possible interpretations and settles on an interpretation in which the rule of turning the other cheek is understood to mean exactly what it says, but that certain exceptions are understood. For him, these exceptions are cases of protection and justice, and do not include revenge. He provides a classic example to illustrate his point: Jesus would not want Lewis to just step out of the way of a murderer and allow the violent person to kill someone else while Lewis offered no resistance.<sup>60</sup> In other words, Lewis reasons, Jesus was talking to a group of people about everyday life. He was not, however, referring to extraordinary situations up to and including war.<sup>61</sup> Lewis’ stance is understandable given that he was speaking in the time of an inarguably extraordinary situation: the Holocaust and Hitler’s attempt to dominate all of Europe. Some Christians have claimed that terrorists who senselessly kill thousands of innocents constitute another extraordinary situation meriting a forceful response.

Gregory Clapper, a National Guard chaplain writing in the contemporary context of the War on Terror, takes a similar stance on Jesus to Lewis’. He concedes that Jesus taught Christians to love one another, including their enemies, but he also maintains that in a world like ours today, someone is going to die no matter what. So for practical purposes, much like those outlined by C.S. Lewis, the Christian must make some hard decisions. “Sometimes...the world—this world that God created, but a world that is also broken and sinful—makes us choose whom we will love.”<sup>62</sup> In the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, that choice is easy;

Christians must choose to love the newly free citizens and the Americans who are now safer, while killing those who threaten them.

Other Christians who see Jesus as an essentially peaceful person interpret the Sermon on the Mount as applying to all situations. For Rev. Dennis Anderson of Congregational Church, there was no question whether Jesus was a pacifist: “Absolutely. Just look at Jesus’ words!”<sup>63</sup> Stanley Hauerwas is a well-known Christian pacifist writer. In “September 11, 2001: A Pacifist Response,” he deals with the very question I put to my interviewees and survey respondents: whether Christians could justify a retaliatory military action in Afghanistan. For Hauerwas, the answer is no. His words are reminiscent of Rev. Saunders, who in my interview with her said: “Yes, Jesus was a pacifist—he never fought back. Maybe it isn’t effective, but it’s still what Jesus taught.”<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Hauerwas writes that he has been questioned after September 11 by those who want to know what other alternative there is for the U.S. government besides war. He responds, “Such a question assumes that pacifists must have an alternative foreign policy. My only response is that I do not have a foreign policy. I have something better—a church constituted by people who would rather die than kill.”<sup>65</sup> Hauerwas accepts that pacifism may not serve to adequately protect Christians from violence, but because Jesus taught it, it is still preferable to violence. Ultimately, he too sees a division between church and state, though he views it differently than do the just war proponents. In Hauerwas’ perception of the world as it should be seen through Christian eyes, events of the state are unimportant compared to events of the church. As he puts it, the Christian response to September 11 is “to continue living in a manner that witnesses to our belief that the world was not changed on September 11, 2001. The world was changed during the celebration of Passover in A.D. 33,” when Jesus was resurrected.<sup>66</sup>

This tension between different images of Christ was mentioned in Chapter One. As Martin Marty argued, the image of Jesus as forceful and manly is one that has come into favor only relatively recently. Marty argues that the reason for this development is Christians' desire to have a warrior god to battle against Allah, whom they perceive to be Islam's warrior god.<sup>67</sup> Stephen Prothero explores this issue in his book as well. He writes that the Jesus of the nineteenth century was feminine in nature, and that this image came from the contemporary perception of the church as a whole as resting firmly in the woman's sphere.<sup>68</sup> Jesus thus came to be described in the same way that women of the Victorian era were described: "pious and pure, loving and merciful, meek and humble."<sup>69</sup> Prothero traces the steps of the changing image of Christ throughout American history, and shows that Jesus was being masculinized long before the War on Terror, beginning in 1925 with the publication of Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus*, which described a Jesus who was manly and strong.<sup>70</sup> The onset of the war in Afghanistan and the expanded War on Terror can only have reinforced this image, even as this image itself reinforces Christian attitudes toward the war.

### **Implications for American Protestant attitudes toward war**

These opposing portrayals of Jesus have much to do with how American Protestants today feel about war. As noted above, what a Christian thinks Jesus believed about war is a crucial factor in the formulation of his or her own beliefs on the subject. While all Christians read the same words that Jesus spoke, these words are interpreted differently based on differing interpretations of Christ himself. For those who view Jesus as a forceful and even, if necessary, violent figure, Jesus' teachings are understood as violently revolutionary ones that may require defending. As one of the participants in the Nondenominational Church Bible study said, "Christ

said he came to create conflict and bring a sword. It's not always going to be comfy-cozy and he recognized that."<sup>71</sup>

Other Christians see Jesus as a gentle and ultimately peaceful man who outlawed the use of violence for any purpose, even to save one's own life. Their position was summed up by Father Michael Manning during the interview with Larry King. Manning speaks of the Roman subjugation under which Christ lived, and of horrors perpetrated by them that included the execution of his great friend, John the Baptist, just to satisfy a girl's whim at a birthday party. "And in the midst of all of that and all of the terrible things, what did he do? He brings in Simon the Zealot who was a terrorist as one of his apostles. He also brings in Matthew who was a tax collector with Herod who was in cahoots with the Romans. He's bringing in all of these diverse people, bringing unity, bringing peace and bringing understanding."<sup>72</sup>

The most difficult part of understanding Jesus is that each of these stories, each of these quotations, is in the same Bible. In the face of such seemingly contradictory stories, American Protestants are forced to interpret Christ for themselves, and that results in wildly different images of Jesus and therefore very different attitudes toward war.

### Chapter Three The Bible

Approaches to the Bible are extremely important in determining attitudes toward war. Different images of God and Jesus are related to different beliefs about the permissibility of war under God's authority, and images of these two figures come almost entirely from the Bible. The Bible is, after all, the only place in which a Christian can read God's word. One of the major characteristics separating Protestantism from Catholicism is its reliance on the Bible as a source of authority rather than on an institutional structure or individual. As we saw in Chapter One, historical arguments about war have always been supported by Scripture. Protestant Christianity's reliance on scripture as authority means that different religious communities interpret the Bible differently and teach different theology. These different interpretations, and the theological beliefs they engender, are strongly related to different attitudes toward war. Today that trend continues. Just war Christians and Christian pacifists both cite the Bible as their ultimate authority and as the source of their beliefs about war.

The fact that two groups with such different beliefs justify their beliefs using the same text points out the obvious problem with the Bible as a source of authority on this issue: the Bible says many different and even contradictory things about war. Christians on both sides of the issue are able to justify their positions, and they need not rely on a single quote. The Bible is full of passages which celebrate violence or war, and is equally full of passages denouncing violence. This contradiction has led to centuries of debate which will likely never be resolved. Because Protestantism does rely on a text rather than a person or group of persons to provide authority, there is no one person with the legitimacy to interpret the text. Therefore, each individual or group has the task of interpreting the Bible for themselves, and this process leads to very different readings of the same book. One of the biggest problems individuals run into is the

contradiction found throughout the text, particularly on the issue of war and violence, which complicates interpretation even more.

### **Contradiction between the Old Testament and the New Testament**

One of the most significant sources of contradiction is the stark contrast between the Old and New Testaments. While Old Testament heroes such as King David are constantly engaged in wars sanctioned by God, the peaceful figure of Jesus Christ dominates the New Testament. One young man at the Nondenominational Church Bible study I attended said that, in his perception, the Old Testament is focused more on justice, while the New Testament is focused more on love. At the same discussion, his pastor, Rev. Steven Collins, characterized the major difference between the two as “whether the church should use the state to advance itself, like in the Old Testament, or if the church should work independently of the government, as Jesus says in the New Testament.”<sup>73</sup> All of these differences have made establishing a position on war difficult for Christians throughout the ages.

Not all Christians see the relationship between the Old and New Testaments in the same way. Some see them as equally important and essentially non-contradictory; others see the New Testament as superseding the Old. I asked survey respondents whether they personally valued the New Testament above the Old Testament. Of those who found the New Testament to be more valuable, sixty percent were in support of the war in Afghanistan. Those who valued the New Testament and Old Testament equally were ten percent more likely to support the war.<sup>74</sup>

Part of the reason for the decreased support of the war among those who value the New Testament above the Old is that many pacifists view the Bible this way. Rev. Mary Saunders of Mennonite Church, an historic peace church, explained the entire movement of the peace churches as growing out of a desire to separate church and state, which were inextricably

intertwined in the sixteenth century. She told me that the Mennonites today “emphasize the New Testament and the words of Jesus, and we emphasize the Sermon on the Mount, all of which say that war is wrong.”<sup>75</sup> Christian pacifists like the Mennonites, then, avoid the problem of contradiction within the Bible by focusing chiefly on the New Testament, which in their view is unambiguously pacifist.

C.S. Lewis, speaking during World War II, agrees that pacifism can be justified only by emphasis on the New Testament, and on the words of Jesus specifically. In his view, the church establishment, as exemplified by the church fathers, Augustine, Aquinas, and official statements of the Anglican and Presbyterian churches, is clearly not pacifist. All of Christian pacifism, he argues, rests on certain sayings of Jesus. He further states in “Why I Am Not a Pacifist” that he will not even bother to entertain debate on the issue of Christian pacifism unless he is dealing with someone who has followed every single one of Jesus’ directives, including paupering himself for the poor. Otherwise, he says, the pacifist is hypocritical in his unyielding defense of Jesus’ pacifist statements and not others, and Lewis refuses to deal with such a person.<sup>76</sup>

Mennonite Church tries to avoid such a problem by preaching on all of Jesus’ teachings and urging congregants to follow Jesus’ example in everyday life. For example, when I visited their service on August 27, 2006, Rev. Saunders’ husband gave a sermon which was reminiscent of a Bible study. He began by reading and explaining the context of a New Testament story in which a miraculous healing is performed “in the name of Jesus” (Acts 3:1-16). Upon concluding his explanation of what had happened, he addressed the congregation: “So that’s the story. That’s what Luke wrote for the people in his time. Now the question is, where does that intersect with our lives?” He went on to describe ways in which people today could become healers in the name of Jesus Christ. For example, he recommended that congregants call political candidates in



advance of the November midterm elections to stress the importance of the issues of health care and health insurance. He encouraged the worshippers to go home, reread the story, and “find your own intersections between the story and life today that you can apply.” For the Mennonites and other Christian pacifists like them, the Bible is approached chiefly as a way to learn the life and example of Jesus Christ, and to attempt to live that life.

Other Christians approach the Bible in very different ways. Rev. Dennis Anderson of Congregational Church says that the Old and New Testaments are both valuable. Of course, this approach forces him to address the contradictions within the Bible in a manner in which those who emphasize only the New Testament do not. Rather than attempting to explain the contradictions, Rev. Anderson accepts them, claiming that what is important is not why the inconsistencies exist but rather what to do about them. During our conversation, he explained, “In the scriptures there are justifications for both war and peace, and this is the same in Jewish and Muslim scriptures. The challenge for us is to find the better way. Violence is never the better way. Nothing stops violence except death or nonviolence.”<sup>77</sup> Christians who see the Bible this way acknowledge that its teachings are not always clear, and therefore see the Bible as a “challenge” to believers to discover for themselves what the right answer is.

A third response to the problem of contradiction within the Bible is to explain contradictions as merely superficial, while under the surface runs a continuous theme. This is the approach of Rev. Steven Collins of Nondenominational Church. During our focus group, he brought up an incident from the Gospel of Luke in which John the Baptist speaks to two soldiers who ask him what they should do to honor God, and his only reply is that they should be satisfied with their wages, extorting money from no one (Luke 3:14). In Rev. Collins’ view, John’s failure to instruct the soldiers to choose a new profession shows that Christians are not

strictly pacifist, not even in the New Testament. As he put it, “It’s very hard to use the Bible to prove a strictly pacifist position—there are just no black and white commands.”<sup>78</sup> The lack of anything “black and white” means that passages which seem to be contradictory are not.

Another participant in the focus group made a similar point about the Old Testament, which many see as unapologetically endorsing war. “Yes, there is war in the Old Testament. But in the Old Testament, wars weren’t about getting stuff, getting money. God directed the wars and he said not to take anything or get rich off the war. The wars were just to save and protect innocent people.”<sup>79</sup> In this approach, then, nothing is completely clear. The Bible is in a sense mysterious, and good Christians do their best to understand it. Rev. Collins noted that sincere, devout Christians had come to very different conclusions on this issue based on their biblical interpretation. In his opinion, however, the general theme of the Bible, with its failure to come down hard on either side of the issue, was that war is allowable in certain, prescribed circumstances. Clearly, different approaches to the Old and New Testaments and their perceived contradictions influence how Christians approach the problem of war.

### **The question of literal biblical interpretation**

In the United States, literal biblical interpretation has long been understood as part of the religious practice of the most conservative Christians. In Protestantism, the Bible is the ultimate authority, and so Christians who believe the Bible should be interpreted literally, without questioning, are more likely to believe other authorities should be treated much the same way. Therefore, they tend to be conservative not only in their theological beliefs, which they derive from a literal reading of the Bible. They are also often conservative politically, choosing not to question political authority, and therefore are much less likely to protest war. This is strongly related to the process described in Chapter Two whereby, many conservative Christians believe,

God transfers his authority on earth to political leaders. Christians who literally believe the teaching of Romans 13, which says that God has chosen state rulers, are much less likely to question their decisions. Combined with their literal and unquestioning attitude toward authority as a whole, this mindset renders them supportive of most military actions undertaken by the United States government.

According to my survey responses, this seems to be true in relation to the War on Terror. Eighty-two percent of respondents who indicated that they believed the Bible should be interpreted literally also supported the military response in Afghanistan. Conversely, of those who disagreed that the Bible should be interpreted literally, only forty-nine percent supported the military response.<sup>80</sup> This certainly points to some connection, but it is not as clear as it seems. Those who do not support the war in Afghanistan also largely do not support a literal reading of the Bible, and yet in many ways their opposition to the war is based on, as described above, a literal reading of the words of Jesus Christ. This is an interesting tension which should be explored. As I will explain further, the real difference between these two approaches lies in what parts of the Bible are read literally, and who claims to be a literal interpreter. Those who claim literal interpretation believe their focus must expand beyond the words of Christ, specifically to John's Revelation, and they are more likely to support war. Others who do not claim to be biblical literalists are content to focus on the words of Christ alone, and are less likely to support war. Literal biblical interpretation is thus an extremely nuanced question, though it may seem simple at first glance.

First of all, churches which espouse a literal interpretation of the Bible do not necessarily teach the Bible much differently than churches which do not. Only eleven percent of respondents from Mennonite Church believed the Bible should be read literally, while sixty-three

percent of Nondenominational Church's congregants did. Yet Nondenominational Church's service strongly resembled Mennonite's in its biblical teaching. I visited Nondenominational's service on November 12, 2006. Though the sanctuary was huge, and each of its chairs (over a thousand of them) was filled, it was unlike any megachurch I have ever visited. Just like at Mennonite Church, the service had the calm and studious atmosphere of a large Bible study. The implications of the teaching were also very similar. Rev. Steven Collins put a passage from Hebrews 13 on a projection screen and proceeded to spend the next hour explaining the passage in great detail. Like Rev. Saunders' had been, much of his sermon was devoted to how this Bible study could impact his congregants' daily lives. Hebrews 13, a New Testament text, instructs Christians to love brothers, strangers and the mistreated equally. Rev. Collins explained that the third group included "the majority of people in the world today," and named populations including human trafficking victims, inner-city African American men in prisons, victims of AIDS in Africa, falsely imprisoned Latin American men and women, and Darfur genocide victims. He too urged his congregants to become involved in these issues, to learn more and to be active, making the Bible work in today's everyday life.

This similarity, which comes in spite of a difference in how members of these churches perceive their interpretations of the Bible, may help to explain the paradox mentioned above. Additionally, the ambiguity with which "literal interpretation" is defined helps to explain what seems to be a contradiction. On the one hand, biblical literalists believe that, as Rev. Collins stated during the Sunday service I watched, "God literally dictated the Bible." On the other hand, they believe that literal dictation left enough unsure that individual Christians are required to do some of the interpreting on their own, and this interpretation can be achieved in various ways.

The most important rule when interpreting the Bible literally is to be aware of the larger themes within the Bible itself. If something is not explicitly stated, Christians can probably still predict what God would have said about it by examining any issue in light of these larger biblical themes. Sometimes, God himself speaks to a Christians, giving them the answers that are not written in the Bible itself. Rev. Collins provided instructions for cases such as these: “When God speaks to you, make sure it’s really him. Validate it by going to his Word.” In other words, Christians can validate what they perceive to be God’s will by comparing it to biblical themes. Rev. Collins explained to me in our interview how this process has informed his opinion on war. “My personal views on war are most shaped by my faith and by what the Bible says. The Bible gives me the principles—for example, the principle that the world is fallen—and I use those principles to make my own decisions on these difficult issues. Even though it gives me principles, though, it doesn’t give me formulas, so ultimately I have to do it on my own.”<sup>81</sup> This last sentence explains the most important part—that often literal interpretationists are left to do it on their own, because a literal interpretation of the Bible means that Christians have nothing to work with beyond what it actually says, so they are left to their own when it comes to issues not covered or not made clear.

The comments left on the surveys next to this question helped to explain how many Christians who literally interpret the Bible go about doing this personal aspect of interpretation. Several respondents left notes explaining that a crucial part of literal interpretation is understanding the context. These notes point out, again, the importance of these overarching biblical themes and principles, which provide the context in which individual verses are analyzed. One respondent wrote, “Don’t interpret the Bible in literal words, interpret the Bible in literal context.” Others who also supported a literal interpretation suggested that there could

be some limitations to this method: one said, “Interpret the Bible literally unless there is a compelling reason not to”; another said simply, “Interpret literally when possible”; a third wrote, “Literal interpretation to a point—other rules apply.” These other rules presumably include analyzing passages through the lens of greater biblical principles. This is, as one man wrote, how to literally interpret the Bible while “using the proper hermeneutics.” What these personal notes suggest is that even those who claim to interpret the Bible literally acknowledge some limitations to this approach, and so their reading of the Bible is more nuanced than the rhetoric of literalism suggests. This helps to explain why many do not take literally Jesus’ command to turn the other cheek, while nonliteralists do take that passage literally while not holding others to the same standard. In both cases, believers are taking a careful approach which allows for reading beyond the words to greater themes they see beneath. However, they claim different labels for these similar styles of interpretation. Some claim that they are literalists, while others deny this title. They also end up with very different readings of what the Bible teaches, and I think this is best explained by their differing eschatological beliefs, which come directly from their biblical interpretations. Those who claim to read the Bible literally are especially focused on the literal interpretation of the end times, while those who believe themselves to be more interpretive focus much less on the Book of Revelation and related texts.

### **The Book of Revelation and the violent return of Jesus Christ**

While biblical literalists may acknowledge some limitations to their approach, and therefore endorse the use of personal interpretation when necessary, they do read certain parts of the Bible much more literally than do other Christians. The most significant of these parts of scripture is the Book of Revelation, along with other passages related to the end of the world. As discussed in Chapter One, Melani McAlister has successfully argued that literal interpretation of

the events described in Revelation leads to increased support for the use of war as a foreign policy tool. This is due in large part to the violent nature of Christ's Second Coming as depicted in Revelation. For example, McAlister quotes a literalist Christian, writing on an online message board about the war in Iraq: "I do believe we are living in the end times and that this war with Iraq is the precursor war to Armageddon."<sup>82</sup> Some Christians who believe that Armageddon will literally occur are thus more inclined to be supportive of contemporary wars, especially if these wars are seen as fulfillment some biblical prophecy. In this sense, seeing the War on Terror as a cosmic war makes even more sense, as it is part of the ultimate cosmic war: Armageddon, the final, violent battle between the forces of good and evil.

Interest in the violent reckoning of the Second Coming has been high in the years following September 11, 2001, and I believe this interest has affected popular opinion toward the U.S. government's response to the terrorist attacks. One of the key indicators of the intense fascination with the end times is the continuing success of the *Left Behind* series of novels about the end times. Coauthored by prominent evangelist Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, these novels depict the events of Revelation as they might unfold in the contemporary world. Over sixty million copies of the books are currently in print. Part of their appeal to Americans is that the U.S. is intimately involved with the end times scenario in the series, and this is also part of what makes Americans who read the books more likely to support wars in which the U.S. is fighting. In a 2004 interview with *60 Minutes*, LaHaye said, "I think if you cut us, Jerry and I would bleed red, white and blue. We believe that God has raised up America to be a tool in these last days, to get the Gospel to the innermost parts of the earth."<sup>83</sup> This statement is especially revealing; Americans who are waiting for the events of Revelation to literally unfold

have reason to believe, after reading LaHaye's books, that the U.S. will be involved in this final violent confrontation between the forces of good and evil.

And violent it certainly will be. Hugh B. Urban describes the war led by Christ in the series' final volume, *Glorious Appearing*: "In the spectacularly violent final battle, the returning Christ mows down the Antichrist's massive armies in the most gory fashion, splitting bodies apart and spilling entrails across the earth with the sharp two-edged sword of his Word."<sup>84</sup> Violence depicted with such detail—and even enthusiasm—does not necessarily make the series' readers more violent themselves. However, it does give them the expectation that Armageddon will be horrifically violent and thus makes them more accepting of intense violence in the world now, which can be seen as a precursor to the battles to come. McAlistar is careful to point out this difference; reading something does not force the reader to believe it. But as she says, some of *Left Behind*'s most compelling characteristics render it more likely to be read as authoritative:

*Left Behind* is more than a collection of novels. It exists within an evangelical milieu both broad and deep. That universe is both highly interactive and intimately familiar to most of its readers, filled with stock apocalyptic imagery, detailed biblical exegesis and action-adventure realism that marries contemporary evangelical fascinations, conservative political values and popular-culture pleasures. This kind of thick context makes it much more likely that the *Left Behind* novels will be received as prophecy, not dismissed as fluff, by the evangelicals who form their core audience."<sup>85</sup>

I asked the ministers I interviewed whether they shared LaHaye and Jenkins' belief that Jesus would be returning as the leader of a violent war. Their responses lined up with what they had earlier told me about their interpretations of the Bible. Rev. Mary Saunders, who supports a nonliteral biblical interpretation focusing on the New Testament, said simply that "I don't understand Revelation to be a predictor of the future as much as a book for the people of its day."<sup>86</sup> As the pastor of a pacifist church, it makes sense that Saunders would not interpret Revelation as something which would come true violently. Rev. Dennis Anderson, who



promotes a balanced approach to the Old and New Testaments with an acknowledgment of their contradictions, does the same thing in his approach to Revelation. He agrees that the Second Coming is depicted violently there, but points out that other parts of the Bible predict a more peaceful return of Jesus. “The only place in the Bible where it says Jesus comes back with a sword is Revelation. The Gospels and Acts don’t mention this violent aspect of the Second Coming... This one book [Revelation] is not the definitive one out of twenty-seven books of the New Testament.”<sup>87</sup> Anderson’s Congregational Church had very mixed opinions over the issue of the Afghanistan war. Finally, Rev. Steven Collins, who teaches his congregants to interpret the Bible as a literal dictation of God himself, interprets the Book of Revelation as a literal prediction of the future. “Yes,” he said in our interview, “just like Revelation says, when Jesus comes back it will be violent. However, that violence is God’s son Jesus exercising perfect justice.”<sup>88</sup> Following this interpretation, his church was largely in support of the Afghanistan war.

The authors of the *Left Behind* series acknowledge that September 11 had an impact on the way people read the novels. But rather than seeing the event as a dangerous catalyst which encouraged people to support the war as a precursor to the more violent events of Revelation, they see it as a call to Christians to reinforce their faith in God as well as their intolerance of those who follow other religions—those who will be “left behind.” LaHaye said, “I think 9/11 was a wake-up call to America. Suddenly, our false sense of security was shaken. And we’re vulnerable. And that fear can lead many people to Christ. When Jesus shouts from heaven, there are going to be millions of people taken to heaven, and there will be millions of people who are left behind.”<sup>89</sup> LaHaye’s comments reinforce the idea that there is a division between the Christians of America and the non-Christians of the countries in which our current wars are

being fought, and that this division will necessarily result in violent conflicts like the War on Terror. In the same interview, Jenkins made this fact even more clear. “I realize that our message is inherently offensive and divisive, especially in this new age of tolerance. Especially since 9/11. I understand how that sounds.”<sup>90</sup> Jenkins and LaHaye thus acknowledge that their work creates animosity and division between Christian Americans and Muslims in Afghanistan and other countries, and they do not apologize for it. This sentiment, coupled with the desire to see the violent prophecy of the Book of Revelation fulfilled, leads to an increase in support of war among Christians who believe in a literal biblical interpretation.

This conclusion was backed up by the Central Ohio Christians with whom I spoke. I asked respondents whether they believed Christ was likely to return within the next 100 years. Sixty-two percent of respondents refused to answer, leaving notes that suggested that they could not predict when Jesus would be returning, that “only God knows,” as one respondent wrote. Of the thirty-eight percent who did feel comfortable responding, however, a clear trend was evident. Eighty-one percent of respondents who agreed that Christ is likely to return to Earth within the next century also supported the war in Afghanistan. Only fifty-four percent of those who said Jesus was unlikely to return in the next 100 years supported the war.<sup>91</sup>

This statistic shows that people who anticipate an imminent Second Coming are more likely to support war today. This relationship is explained by the two factors described above: the anticipation of the literal fulfillment of the violent events depicted in the Book of Revelation, and the divisiveness created between Christians and non-Christians as a result of the belief that with the Second Coming comes the eternal salvation of all Christians and the eternal damnation of all others.

**Implications of biblical interpretation on attitudes toward war**

This chapter has shown that attitudes toward war are greatly influenced by approaches to the Bible. Protestants on both sides of the debate over war cite the Bible as their source of authority, and are able to do so because the Bible as a whole is ambiguous on the issue of war. Those who focus on the New Testament are more likely to read the Bible as essentially peaceful, while those who see the Old and New Testaments as equally important find more support for the just war argument. Christians who interpret the Bible metaphorically rather than literally also are less likely to support war, as opposed to literalists who are much more open to the possibility of a just war. This is partially explained by the fact that literalists focus on literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation, which is seen as the prediction of a violent reckoning between the Christian forces of good and the non-Christian forces of evil. The relationship between the perceptions of this cosmic battle and opinions on war will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

## Chapter Four Evil

On September 12, 2001, George Bush addressed the nation, one of many similar speeches he gave on and in the ten days following the terrorist attacks of September 11. President Bush's speech, intended to give hope to Americans in the face of the tragic destruction, included a statement which sums up the way that many Christians (including, apparently, himself) view the war in Afghanistan. "This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil," the president said, "but good will prevail."<sup>92</sup> This chapter will show that the president is not alone in his perception of this conflict. For many Christians, the war in Afghanistan is not a war between the U.S. and the Taliban, but is rather a cosmic war between justice and terrorism, freedom and enslavement, good and evil.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Christian support of the just war doctrine appears to be tied to a belief in the impending end of the world through a destructive and violent war between the forces of good and evil. I would argue that this belief relates not only to the end of the world, but also to the present; that is, Christians who anticipate a decisive future war between good and evil believe that we are currently engaged in a battle in that same conflict. However, views of evil are important in shaping attitudes of anti-war Christians as well. President Bush's speech was vague in its definition of evil as the opposite of good. In American life, evil is perceived in many much more specific ways. In this chapter, I will explore some of the many ways in which evil is seen as manifesting itself in this world. These perceptions of evil are not shared by all Christians, and in fact some recognize none of them at all, but it is helpful to discuss each one to gain a better understanding of evil and its relationship to attitudes toward

war. The facets of evil which I will discuss are: the devil, hell, sin, the enemy, Islam as a particular enemy, and nontraditional forms of evil.

I will argue that many Christians see the world through a “battling mentality” in which they perceive themselves to be constantly at battle with evil, however they may define it. As I will demonstrate, different perceptions of what constitutes evil play a strong role in determining how Christians believe they can fight evil, and thus impact their attitudes toward war. I will describe two types of battles in which Christians may see themselves engaged: cosmic battle and worldly battle. Christians who see evil as the devil, sin, or Islam are much more likely to support war because they are engaged in a cosmic battle. This concept is helpfully defined by Mark Juergensmeyer, who explains that cosmic war—otherworldly war between good and evil, God and Satan—is absolute and neverending; “the absolutism of cosmic war makes compromise unlikely.”<sup>93</sup> This is exactly what makes this paradigm so powerful. Christians who view the War on Terror as one part of a much greater, eternal war of good and evil are much more likely to support it and even to find it inevitable. Bruce Lincoln suggests that the War on Terror is being presented to Americans in just such a framework, and argues this is a strategy intended to increase American support for the war. He demonstrates that President George W. Bush’s rhetoric, particularly in the speech he made when launching the military action in question here, presents this battle as precisely the cosmic war that Juergensmeyer describes.<sup>94</sup> Lincoln’s analysis of Bush’s rhetoric shows that the President sees the War on Terror through a dualistic view of the world in which *we* (Americans) are good and just, while *they* (terrorists/al Qaeda/the Taliban) are evil and cowardly.<sup>95</sup> This is exactly the framework Juergensmeyer lays out when he describes cosmic battles. On the other hand, some American Protestants who view evil in nontraditional ways see their battle with this force as an essentially earthly one. Thus, the battle

is situated in a particular temporal and geographical framework, and there is the possibility of a resolution. As I will show, these Christians are much less likely to accept Bush's rhetoric and to view the War on Terror as a war of good and evil, and therefore are much less likely to support the war itself.

### **The Devil**

The relationship between beliefs about the devil and about war is a reflection of general ideas about evil and those ideas' influence on attitudes toward war. This similarity is due to the fact that what is called "the devil" is understood to be the personification of evil itself.

Therefore, for those who emphasize the existence and importance of evil, the devil is equally important. For Christians who place less emphasis on evil, the devil loses importance. This was clearly stated by a survey respondent who circled the word "devil" on his survey and replaced it with the word "evil." In many ways, the conflict between God and Satan was the genesis of all conflict and signified the birth of evil as the opposition to good.

Those Christians who emphasize the importance of evil speak of the devil in a very personal way. The devil, as evil personified, is a supernatural individual who exhibits immense control over most human's lives. The devil is the explanation for why humans do evil things; he tempts them to do so that they may be soldiers for evil in his battle with God and good. At Alliance Church, the devil was mentioned several times and was referred to as "the enemy of my soul." This title demonstrates the war-like nature of the relationship between Christians and the devil. Christians are constantly at war with the devil, and are engaged in an unending battle to perform good actions rather than succumbing to the devil's encouragement to commit evil. My discussion with members of Nondenominational Church reinforced this conclusion. One member said, "Jesus didn't really talk about human war. He talked about spiritual war between

good and evil, God and Satan...The church is an army against demonic forces.” Juergensmeyer argues that this concept of “spiritual warfare” is extremely common in Protestant churches; hymns and sermons are filled with reference to battle, war, and soldiers because of the utility of earthly war as a metaphor for the war between humans and the enemy of their souls.<sup>96</sup>

That the relationship between the devil and the individual is essentially a battle helps to explain why those who believe in the devil are more likely to support war in general. As the Nondenominational Church member’s statement suggests, the individual war with Satan is seen as part of a much greater war in which not only the church but good itself is also fighting. The data I gathered from surveys of Central Ohio churches support these conclusions. Seventy-one percent of respondents who agreed that “the devil exists and is active in the world today” also supported the U.S. military response in Afghanistan. Only forty percent of those who did not believe in the devil supported the war.<sup>97</sup> Clearly, those who do not see themselves as warriors in a lifelong battle with the devil are less likely to support other wars. Likely, this is due to the lack of a parallel; the U.S.’s war with Afghanistan cannot be equated to the self’s war with evil.

## **Hell**

Hell has been conceived of in wildly different fashions throughout the ages and among different groups. For the purposes of my study, I allowed respondents to define the term however they chose. For me, the important part of the question was not what type of hell they believed in, but rather whether they believed in hell at all. Certainly perceptions of hell in the traditional sense, as the home of Satan, would be closely tied to attitudes toward the devil himself. Yet in recent years hell has often been defined very differently—as a state of mind, as karmic consequences which occur during this lifetime. Some Christians have even denied that hell exists at all.<sup>98</sup> Others, with a more traditional theology, emphasize the importance of hell as

that which is in conflict with God and which has been conquered in some sense by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. As Billy Graham explained in his speech at the National Prayer Service on September 14, 2001, “Many of the people who died on Tuesday [September 11] are in heaven, and they wouldn’t want to come back... We have hope for eternal life because God on the cross has conquered evil and death and hell.”<sup>99</sup> Hell is thus an important part of the good versus evil war discussed above.

I decided to focus on perceptions of hell as it exists in any form (or not at all) after death. Specifically, I asked respondents whether they believed that after death, all people went to either heaven or hell. Of those who did believe in the heaven-or-hell afterlife, seventy-four percent supported the war in Afghanistan.<sup>100</sup> This relationship is rather easily explained; heaven and hell again represent a dichotomy of which the two sides fall cleanly on either side of the battle lines between good and evil, God and the devil. Those who believe that upon death humans are sent to one of these two places thus are firmly entrenched in the battling worldview which was discussed above.

Only forty-six percent of respondents who disagreed that all people go to heaven or hell after death supported the U.S.’s military response. These respondents made the reason for their disagreement very clear: they did not believe in hell. Several individuals crossed out the word “hell” where it was printed in the question. Others scribbled notes which specified their belief in heaven only; as one woman wrote, “Heaven—yes, hell—no.” Again, this relationship is clear. Christians who believe that all people go to heaven upon death do not see the afterlife as one more part of a cosmic struggle of good versus evil. They are thus left in a similar situation to those Christians who do not believe in an active devil; they have no parallel battle with which to line up the war in Afghanistan and therefore they have limited support for it.



### **Sin and this Broken World**

Christians who believe in evil as an active force which is engaged in a never-ending battle with good view the world as essentially “broken” and “fallen.” The world is broken because it is populated by human beings, who are constantly tempted by the devil and therefore are constantly sinning. This worldview is not consistent among all Christians, however. Of the three ministers I interviewed, only one mentioned sin in his discussion of war. The pastors of Mennonite Church and Congregational Church did not talk about sin, because sin is not an important part of their worldviews. This is not to say that these Christians do not believe that sin exists, but rather that they place relatively less importance on it when compared to other Christian churches, such as Nondenominational Church. In my opinion, the reason that churches like Nondenominational Church emphasize sin is because their members have had a similar life story: the evangelical life history, in which an individual lives in unrepentant sin for many years before one day being born again and recognizing that Jesus Christ as her savior has atoned for her sins that she may have eternal life in heaven. Sin is extremely important in this life story; sin is what makes Jesus necessary. Analyzing attitudes toward sin is thus important in analyzing these Christians’ political worldviews as well, even though sin is not nearly so influential for non-evangelical Christians.

Billy Graham, the prominent evangelical who was chosen to deliver the address at the post-September 11 National Prayer Service mentioned above, devotes much of one of his books, *World Aflame*, to the explanation of sin and its role in Christians’ lives. Graham describes sin as a “disease” with which all humans are afflicted, due to the original sin committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which has been inherited by all human beings.<sup>101</sup> He defines sin as any moment in which a person chooses himself over God. Because Jesus taught that the

punishment for sin is eternal death in hell, evangelical Christians are constantly battling sin.<sup>102</sup>

This is another aspect of their battling mentality described above, and provides yet another parallel for earthly wars to line up with. God, too, engages in battle with sin. “Moral law condemns and demands payment for sin. God as the moral judge of the universe cannot compromise and remain just. His holiness and His justice demand the penalty for a broken law.”<sup>103</sup> Wars with other nations can thus be seen as God’s punishment for sinners.

Remembering that in Chapter Two we saw that many Christians see human leaders as exercising God’s authority, it is easy to see how waging war on another country could be interpreting as acting out God’s punishment on a sinning nation.

This mindset was readily apparent when I spoke with members of Nondenominational Church, which is an evangelical congregation. As the leader of the home Bible study I attended said, “Christianity is hard because it doesn’t say, ‘You’re God’s child, you’re essentially good.’ It says, ‘You have a problem with God. You’re a sinner.’”<sup>104</sup> This statement illustrates many of the battling elements mentioned above. God is at battle with sinning humans. Humans are at battle with sin. Good is at battle with evil. When I asked the church’s pastor, Rev. Steven Collins, whether he supported the War on Terror, he responded that while he disagreed with the war as it was played out in Iraq, he supported its original intention in bringing justice to the Taliban and al Qaeda after September 11. “The world is broken and there is evil,” he explained, “so God authorizes the use of force by legitimate entities to deter mayhem and the devil.”<sup>105</sup> Again, here we see that for many Christians, the use of force is necessitated by the very fact of sin, which renders the world “broken.” Sin is also extremely important in defining the enemy whom the Americans are fighting.

## **Sin and the Enemy**

As hinted at above, however, sin is not self-generating. The battle against sin is not a battle against mere behaviors. Rather, sin is generated by evil and specifically by the devil. Juergensmeyer argues that for Christians with a cosmic war worldview, sin is a symptom “of a much greater conflict” in which the bad side is “a demonic force.”<sup>106</sup> Therefore, American war against sin is not merely against actions taken by sinners, but also against sinners themselves—in this case, terrorists. Religious Studies Professor Ira Chernus argues that the language of sin has been a crucial part of the U.S.’s characterization of the enemy in the War on Terror. The Enemy is a key ingredient in the battle between good and evil, and so gaining Christian support for war necessitates a clear definition of who that enemy is. Chernus argues that President Bush characterizes the enemy as a sinner so that Christians with a battling mentality will support the war against them. He writes that most American Christians see all evil in the world as a product of the sin within all humans; again, sin engenders a “broken” world. President Bush’s rhetoric about the enemy in the War on Terror clearly shows that for him and other Christians, the enemy is sin itself.

Chernus exposes this rhetorical strategy. He describes Bush’s speeches after September 11, in which Bush allied himself with Muslims around the world, claiming that what the terrorists had done made them imposters and their religion a counterfeit of real, peaceful Islam. “It was striking to hear an evangelical Protestant stating categorically what did and did not constitute genuine Islam, or genuine religiosity in any other faith. The US became the arbiter of true and false religion...If this were to be a global war of faith against sin, supporting US policies had to become the test of any religion’s virtue and truth. The logical corollary was the converse: All opposition to US policies had to constitute sin.”<sup>107</sup> Bush further characterized the

enemy as driven completely by a selfish urge for power—what Chernus calls “the essence of sin itself”—rather than by any coherent ideology.<sup>108</sup> By making the enemy a simple product of sin, Bush requires the support of Protestants for whom sin is the ultimate enemy in a never-ending battle. Because the War on Terror fights the evil of sin and shows compassion toward the victims of the enemy’s sin, “a willingness to go to war was the only way to prove oneself on the side of the good.”<sup>109</sup> This view seems to have been accepted by many of the American Christians who support the War on Terror, specifically in its response to September 11.

Bruce Lincoln’s analysis of Bush’s rhetoric supports Chernus’ conclusions. As Lincoln explains, Bush presents the conflict as one between freedom and terrorism—in other words, between a virtue and a sin. Lincoln points out that this characterization of Osama bin Laden as a simple terrorist is a way for Bush to deny bin Laden’s legitimacy, rather than addressing any of the real issues bin Laden brings up.<sup>110</sup> Juergensmeyer helps to explain this strategy when he speaks of the process he calls “satanization.” Painting the enemy as a sinner and only a sinner delegitimizes and dehumanizes him. This process allows for war against the enemy to be easily justified. The enemy is a sinner and a demon; therefore, fighting the enemy does not even run the risk of hurting a real human being.<sup>111</sup>

However, not all Christians agree with this approach. Many Christians are critical of the battling mentality because it encourages the identification and vilification of an enemy. In Stanley Hauerwas’ pacifist response to September 11, he criticizes Bush’s immediate response to the attacks, which was to declare that the U.S. was at war. Hauerwas sees that response as coming from a need to have an enemy on which to wreak revenge.<sup>112</sup> Harvey Cox’s response to September 11 is also critical. He argues that the real enemy is evil itself, which always exists, while the attacks simply give Americans another group to label as the enemy. Americans like to

have an enemy, because an enemy can be defeated, but “we all know that no war is going to vanquish [evil].”<sup>113</sup> He urges Christians to remember that for many decades before 2001, the U.S.S.R. was the enemy and the Evil which today is al Qaeda. Just as with the Soviets, when al Qaeda is defeated and dies out, evil “will still prowl among us.”<sup>114</sup> Cox thus encourages Christians to focus on the overarching problem—evil itself—rather than on the identification of a particular enemy. As I will demonstrate in the following section, his encouragement has not been heeded. Many (though certainly not all) Christians have, in fact, identified a singular enemy in this greater war on evil, and that evil is the religion of Islam itself.

### **Islam as the Enemy**

I have already touched on some of the greatest perceived differences between the two sides in the War on Terror: good versus evil, pure versus sinning, American versus Middle Eastern. However, many Christians emphasize another dichotomy as the most important of them all: Christian versus Muslim. This is certainly not a universal characteristic of Christian perceptions of this battle; as will be discussed below, Christians are increasingly calling for tolerance and interfaith cooperation. President Bush himself has been careful to avoid blaming Islam for terrorism and to articulate his belief that Islam is an essentially peaceful religion and that terrorism is committed only by fanatics.<sup>115</sup> However, there are some Christians who have explicitly made Islam the enemy.

One of the most extreme examples of this kind of vilification can be found right in Central Ohio, at Canal Winchester’s World Harvest Church. The pastor of this megachurch, Rod Parsley, devotes an entire chapter in his book *Silent No More* to the problems he perceives to be inherent in Islam. Among Parsley’s claims are that America was founded by Christopher Columbus as a result of Columbus’ dream of defeating Islam, and that the Qur’an promotes

violence against Christians both explicitly and implicitly.<sup>116</sup> He views Islam as a basically violent religion and calls the prophet Muhammad the “mouthpiece of a conspiracy of spiritual evil,” the victim to a demonic spirit which Muhammad misinterpreted as being Allah.<sup>117</sup> Parsley makes the connection between this type of attitude toward Islam and attitudes toward the War on Terror very clear. For Parsley, supporting the War on Terror is a non-issue, because the fight is not merely a battle against the terrorists who attacked on September 11, but also against Islamic beliefs themselves.<sup>118</sup>

As I said, Parsley is an extreme example, but as pastor of the largest church in Central Ohio, he speaks for thousands of Christians just in my area. However, figures who are much more nationally prominent have made similar statements. Esther Kaplan quotes Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, who announced his belief that Islam is “a very evil and wicked religion,” and cites a poll showing that Graham and Parsley are not alone: “70 percent of evangelical leaders consider Islam to be ‘a religion of violence.’”<sup>119</sup> Parsley cannot then be construed as being alone in his opinions.

Interestingly, other Christians whose words against Islam are not as extreme as Parsley or Graham’s still seem to share some of the same basic ideas. For example, during my interview with Rev. Steven Collins of Nondenominational Church, Collins promoted a War on Terror which would be fought not only through the military, but also through education. In concert with the physical war, he recommends “trying to understand Muslims and their world as well as the history of the relationship and the West. It’s naïve to think that the use of force alone will work.”<sup>120</sup> However, he follows these moderate words of understanding with a completely different language when it comes to how the war itself is playing out. Like Parsley, he sees the War on Terror as a necessity because of Islamic beliefs. He says, “The Middle East won’t work

until Christians go and die there; this approach is effective because Muslims understand martyrdom and that will speak to them—although, their martyrdom is a demonic counterfeit of the real thing.”<sup>121</sup> Collins is clearly operating on a misunderstanding of suicide terrorism and its relationship to the greater Islamic tradition.

Collins further demonstrates his belief that Islam is somehow fundamentally different from Christianity when asked about the potential for a nonviolent response to terrorism. “Nonviolence has worked before, with Martin Luther King and Gandhi...but they were both fighting against Christian governments. Would that work against someone without Christianity?... It probably wouldn’t be effective to someone who didn’t share those values.”<sup>122</sup> For Collins, then, Islam is so different from Christianity that nonviolent approaches which had proven effective would not work with Islamic governments. Islam speaks only in a language of violence and martyrdom, and that is why war is the only effective way to deal with conflict with Islamic nations. Just war theorist Jean Bethke Elshtain also sees some basic differences between Islam and Christianity. First of all, she writes that in Islam the desire to expand the territory of Islam is cause enough for a just war, while Christianity has more stringent requirements.<sup>123</sup> She also claims that Islam is different because of its lack of institutional central authority, which resulted in Islam’s failure to effectively condemn the September 11 attacks in a way that Christian institutions would have had the attackers been Christian fundamentalists.<sup>124</sup> Finally, she writes that while the separation of church and state is a fundamental feature of Christianity, the state and Islam have always been intertwined.<sup>125</sup> Christians who see a fundamental difference between their own religion and Islam are more likely to support war because they see less potential for peaceful mutual understanding.

However, other Christians seem to be more moderate both in their ideas for policy and in their perceptions of Islam itself. Rev. Dennis Anderson of Congregational Church took a stand opposite to Collins' when he told me that there was no fundamental moral divide between Christianity and Islam. A few months following the September 11 attacks, a Columbus mosque was severely vandalized. Anderson's church offered to house the mosque's Islamic school until the mosque was restored.<sup>126</sup> A *Christian Science Monitor* article about the incident notes Anderson's feeling that the Muslim schoolchildren who moved into his church were no different than the Christian children he usually taught. Anderson has since become the co-founder of an interfaith activism group called We Believe Ohio, which unites leaders of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths to fight for policy change to help the poor and work for peace. Anderson is thus a leader in the Central Ohio movement to find a different evil.

### **A different evil?**

Some Christians in Central Ohio have decided that terrorist camps are not the only place in the world where one can find great evil. Rather than focusing on evils discussed above, such as Satan, enemies in war, or other religions, they have decided to focus on what they perceive as great evils here within Central Ohio. The evil which they are most dedicated to fighting is poverty. We Believe Ohio is a prime example of this mentality, which has emerged largely as a response to the battling worldview described above. A We Believe Ohio brochure describes their mission in part as a way to say "YES to justice for all, NO to prosperity for only a few, YES to diverse religious expression." For this religious-political group, the most significant evil is injustice, particularly economic injustice. They reject the notion of Islam as evil, believing that interfaith cooperation will enable them to better combat the more serious evil of poverty.



Both Rev. Anderson and Rev. Mary Saunders, of Mennonite Church, expressed these sentiments in their conversations with me. Both were very critical of the rhetoric of evil as the enemy in war, and feared that others would perceive all Christians as agreeing with such rhetoric. Saunders said, “What’s labeled as Christian values—a lot of those aren’t my values.”<sup>127</sup> Anderson expressed his anger with what he perceived as a misuse of God’s name in politics, when really it was evil which was driving political policy which led to oppression of the poor.

These emotions are echoed in the writings of prominent evangelical and Sojourners founder Jim Wallis. In *God’s Politics*, Wallis too describes evil very differently. For Wallis, the chief evils with which Christians ought to be concerned are not al Qaeda or Satan or sin. Rather, his book focuses on entirely different evils, including racism, poverty and capital punishment.<sup>128</sup> According to the argument I have presented above, this focus on a different kind of evil should render Wallis less likely to support a military response to terrorism, and that is indeed the case. He promotes a middle ground between total pacifism and just war doctrine which he calls “Christian peacemaking.” Wallis says that an increase in the power and efficacy of international law is the best place to start, as a way of enforcing law on terrorists without endangering innocent lives.<sup>129</sup> Examples like Wallis, Anderson and Saunders show that Christians who define evil differently than do the Christians described in the larger part of this chapter are much less likely to support war as a response to terrorism.

### **Definitions of evil influence Christian attitudes toward war**

This chapter has demonstrated the extremely close relationship between a Christian’s definition and perception of evil and his or her attitude toward the war in Afghanistan. Evil is defined in very different ways for different Christians in America, and there seems to be no dominant paradigm when it comes to defining evil among American churches. However, some

clear relationships exist between these different definitions and different attitudes toward the war. Christians who emphasize sin as the most important form of evil are much more likely to support war because they have a battling mentality in which they envision themselves as constantly at battle with sin and with the evil that tempts them to sin. On the other hand, Christians who see social injustice as the most significant form of evil are less likely to support war, because they do not share the battling mentality and they see their war as taking place through policy change rather than through physical conflict with sinners themselves.

## Conclusion The Role of Authority

The events described in the Introduction to this paper are not anomalous. Protestant Christianity is deeply interested and active in politics in twenty-first century America. Religious beliefs influence the political beliefs of many Protestants in the United States today. This paper has shown how this influence is exercised. By using the case study of Central Ohio Protestant's attitudes toward the War on Terror, I have demonstrated that theology plays an extremely important part in shaping churchgoing Christians' political beliefs.

### **Religious authority and attitudes toward war**

Since the dawn of organized Christianity, the question of war has been a contested one. Early thinkers like St. Augustine of Hippo laid the groundwork for attitudes still held today. Most American Protestants can be classified into two broad categories of attitudes toward war: just war adherents and Christian pacifists. The contemporary War on Terror has brought the Christian tensions around this issue back to light. Focusing on the U.S. military response in Afghanistan following September 11 has allowed me to present opinions about war in their most basic form, about a conflict over which there has been relatively little political debate (especially when compared to the much more controversial war in Iraq). I have shown that Christians' views of this military response are indeed varied. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that these variations are related to variations in theological beliefs.

As Chapter Three explained, the major characteristic of Protestantism setting it apart from Catholicism is its investment of religious authority in a text (the Old and New Testaments) rather than in an institution. Because there is no institution providing an ultimate interpretation of the religious authority, Protestants are forced to individually interpret the Bible. This freedom leads to extreme differences in theology among different Protestant groups and individuals.

The theological beliefs which are most closely related to Columbus Protestants' attitudes toward the war in Afghanistan are beliefs about God and Jesus, the Bible, and evil. Christians who believe that God takes an active role in government are more likely to support war as a means of meting out God's holy justice. Christians who view Jesus as a forceful revolutionary rather than a feminine peacemaker are also more likely to support war. Those who read the Bible literally, focusing on a literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation, are more likely to support war, as it is seen as a precursor to the violent return of Jesus Christ. Finally, Christians who view evil in traditional ways (as Satan, sin, evil or hell) are more likely to support war and see it as part of a neverending cosmic battle than are Christians who perceive evil in nontraditional ways (as poverty, racial injustice or violence) and envision themselves fighting earthly, winnable battles in their own communities.

### **Theology and religious communities**

Theological beliefs must come from somewhere, and my fieldwork showed that they come, at least in part, from religious communities. Religious communities work together to produce an interpretation of the religious authority (the Bible) which is taught to all members of the community. Churches with similar theological beliefs have congregations with similar attitudes toward the War on Terror. For example, churches who teach that Jesus was above all a peacemaker, and that the peace-themed New Testament is more important than the Old Testament, have congregations who are largely opposed to the war in Afghanistan. Mennonite Church is a good example of this. On the other hand, churches like Nondenominational Church and Alliance Church teach literal biblical interpretation and that evil is rampant in the world in the forms of Satan and sin. These churches' congregations strongly support the War on Terror. Finally, so-called "mainline" churches like United Methodist Church and Congregational Church

have theological beliefs somewhere in between these other two groups: for example, they believe in the devil, but focus their teachings on evil on the importance of erasing evils in their own communities. Similarly, they encourage personal interpretation of the Bible and allow congregants to come to their own conclusions about which style of biblical interpretation is best. These congregations have mixed opinions which seem to mirror those of the general public.

### **The importance of political authority**

There are several potential explanations for the relationship between theology and attitudes toward war which is clearly demonstrated by the data in this paper. One is that the different theological beliefs held by different Christians leads directly to their different attitudes toward war. This was the explanation most commonly offered by Protestants themselves as I completed my fieldwork. As noted in the body of this paper, almost every Christian I spoke with cited the Bible and their personal faith as the biggest factors in determining their attitudes toward war. According to this model, different theological beliefs like those described above cause believers to embrace the attitude toward the War on Terror that they do.

Another approach is suspicious of the motivations named by Christians. This explanation is that Christians use theology to justify their political attitudes. This approach was exemplified in Chapter Four by Ira Chernus and Bruce Lincoln. Both of these scholars argue that Christians, and specifically President George W. Bush, use theology which supports their personal attitudes toward the War on Terror to justify their stances. According to this model, theological beliefs do not result in different attitudes toward war, but attitudes toward war rather influence which theology each Christian chooses for himself. Christians who support or oppose the war subscribe to theology which fits with these views.

My work has led me to a slightly more nuanced conclusion in which I see both of these explanations playing major roles. American Protestants' attitudes toward the War on Terror are indeed highly influenced by their theological beliefs, and this relationship is illustrated in detail by what Central Ohio Christians had to say when I spoke to them directly. At the same time, political forces and pre-existing political attitudes are certainly playing a role in shaping theology and in determining to what theology each Christian subscribes. In other words, this relationship is cyclical, and both theological and political elements reinforce each other. However, this relationship does work differently for different people and for different groups of Christians. In particular, the concept of political authority is extremely useful in explaining how this process manifests itself differently among different groups.

Bruce Lincoln provides an exceptionally helpful definition of authority within religion in another of his works, *Holy Terrors*. In this book, Lincoln explains that within any society there are likely to be at least two major religious ideologies. One of these, the ideology of the dominant fraction, he terms the "religion of the status quo," while the other ideology, of the subordinate fraction, is called the "religion of resistance."<sup>130</sup> As he explains, the dominant fraction uses the religion of the status quo, a religion which is interested in preserving the current state of society, as a tool to serve its own interests, interpreting the religious authority in a manner which suggests that the current political authority is just and ought not to be changed.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand, the religion of resistance is popularized in the lower strata (the poor and/or the disempowered) as a means of resisting the current state and rather pushing for change, and it teaches values which are purposefully different from those of the status quo in order to highlight this element of resistance, interpreting the religious authority as pushing for a change in the current political authority.<sup>132</sup>

Using Lincoln's model, this process is seen playing out currently in the United States, and is easily demonstrated by the case study of Protestant attitudes toward war. With the election of President George W. Bush, a self-avowed evangelical and champion of conservative Protestant Christianity, the Christian Right became America's religion of the status quo according to Lincoln's framework. This group embraces the theological attitudes outlined in this paper which have a strong correlation to support for the War on Terror. Furthermore, among these theological attitudes is a literal interpretation of the Bible, which again is the ultimate source of religious authority within Protestant Christianity. As explained in Chapter Three, this attitude toward religious authority extends to political authority, as literalists are more likely to accept authority without questioning or interpreting it in the way that nonliteralists might. Therefore, the religion of the status quo in America today is doubly likely to support the agenda of the political authority, embodied in President Bush. Not only are they persuaded by his theological explanations for the war, which mirror their own, but they are overall less inclined to resist authority and to thus dissent when it comes to action undertaken by the political authority, up to and including war.

"Mainstream" or "progressive" Protestantism has thus come to fit Lincoln's description of the religion of resistance in contemporary America. It does not have the same level of political authority that the religion of the status quo does because the dominant political authority does not support it, and thus it represents a lower strata in the power structure. Furthermore, this group's nonliteral interpretation of the scriptural religious authority engenders a nonliteral and questioning attitude toward the political authority. They are thus more likely to resist positions and actions taken by the government, including war. Lincoln argues that religions of resistance are identifiable by their values, which are purposely differentiated from those of the religion of

the status quo. Progressive Protestantism has clearly embraced values in opposition to those of evangelical or right-leaning Protestantism. This is evidenced by the recent rise of the Christian Left in the United States, with the growing prominence of progressive figures like Jim Wallis, as well as the founding of new progressive organizations such as the National Alliance for Christian Progress and even Ohio's own We Believe Ohio. All of these groups share in common the element of resistance, as they were founded solely for the purpose of refuting the religion of authority. Ministers I spoke with made this very clear, as they spoke of "reclaiming" Christian values from the conservative Christians organizations which have existed for decades.

Lincoln's framework of political authority is thus useful in explaining how the relationship between theology and attitudes toward war is mediated. His model, when applied to the example of American Protestant attitudes toward the war in Afghanistan, clearly shows that a group's level of political authority affects how it interprets religious authority. However, one major problem with his approach is the dichotomy it creates, a binary which is not readily apparent in Protestantism today. As this paper has demonstrated, opinions toward the war in Afghanistan are extremely varied and cannot be easily classified as either pro- or anti-war, just as Protestant denominations and churches cannot be simply grouped into either conservative or progressive. These general categories are, however, helpful in providing a basic explanation of the way in which political authority interacts with religious authority and the effect that differing levels of political authority can have on interpretations of religious authority.

Each of the Christian groups described in my study had theological beliefs in place long before George W. Bush was elected. Their theological systems were very different, because they each interpreted scriptural authority differently. They also each had different attitudes toward the subject of war and whether war could ever be considered just. The occurrence of a political



event, specifically the 2000 election, was still important in shaping their theology, because it cast the roles for which group was to be the religion of the status quo and thus the preserver, and which was to be the religion of resistance and thus the dissenter. A second event, the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the subsequent military retaliation in Afghanistan, also influenced theology. The religion of the status quo, conservative Christianity, emphasized theological beliefs which led to support for the war, because they sought to preserve the authority of the President and were unwilling to question that authority. The religion of resistance instead emphasized theological beliefs which promoted opposition to the war, or at least serious questioning of the authority that had initiated it. In this way, political concerns and particularly concerns of political authority shaped theology just as theology had shaped these political outcomes to begin with. Applying Lincoln's model to my study thus shows that the relationship of politics and theology is a cyclical one.

### **Concluding statements**

The issue of war will continue to be a subject for debate among Christians for many centuries to come; this paper cannot solve that dilemma. However, this paper does help to explain why this controversy exists. Protestant Christians' wildly different opinions of war are related to their wildly different theological beliefs. These differing beliefs result chiefly from the fact that Protestantism rests on a text as its ultimate religious authority. As long as no one institution or person is telling Protestants what to believe, each community's individual biblical exegesis will lead it to different theological conclusions. These differences in theology are strongly related to differences in attitudes toward the War on Terror. This relationship goes both ways, however; differences in political authority also influence theology. The religion of the status quo, a group of individuals and denominations which can loosely be labeled "conservative

Protestantism,” embraces theology which leads to support for the war because it wishes to maintain the present structure of authority. The religion of resistance, the loose grouping of Protestants called “progressive Protestantism,” embraces a different theology which leads to increased questioning of the War on Terror due to their desire to undermine the current political authority structure. Theology and politics in the United States are thus engaged in a cyclical relationship destined to continue unceasingly.

## Notes

Introduction

- <sup>1</sup> From the website of United Methodist Church (not given here for confidentiality reasons).  
<sup>2</sup> From the website of Congregational Church (not given here for confidentiality reasons).  
<sup>3</sup> From the website of Alliance Church (not given here for confidentiality reasons).  
<sup>4</sup> From the website of Nondenominational Church (not given here for confidentiality reasons).  
<sup>5</sup> From the website of Mennonite Church (not given here for confidentiality reasons).  
<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 1.  
<sup>7</sup> For complete demographics of my survey respondents, see Appendix 2.  
<sup>8</sup> Miroslav Nincic & Donna J. Nincic, "Race, Gender, and War," *Journal of Peace Research* 39.5 (September 2002) 547-68.

Chapter One

- <sup>9</sup> Marcus Dods, trans., *The City of God by Saint Augustine* (New York: The Modern Library, 1950) 19.7, 683.  
<sup>10</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1948) Vol. III: 1353-4.  
<sup>11</sup> Aquinas 1354-6.  
<sup>12</sup> Dale W. Brown, *Biblical Pacifism* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1986) xi.  
<sup>13</sup> Two major twentieth century theologians, Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, influenced much of Charles' writing and contemporary just war theory. See Tillich, *Theology of Peace and Systematic Theology*, and Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*.  
<sup>14</sup> J. Daryl Charles, *Between Pacifism and Jihad: Just War and Christian Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005) 86.  
<sup>15</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Just War Against Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2003) 46, 49.  
<sup>16</sup> Charles 26.  
<sup>17</sup> Elshtain 50.  
<sup>18</sup> Charles 111.  
<sup>19</sup> Charles 145.  
<sup>20</sup> Charles 115.  
<sup>21</sup> Elshtain 62.  
<sup>22</sup> Harold O.J. Brown, "The Crusade or Preventive War," from *War: 4 Christian Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981) 161.  
<sup>23</sup> Arthur F. Holmes, "A Just War Response," from *War: 4 Christian Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981) 185.  
<sup>24</sup> Charles 51.  
<sup>25</sup> Darrell Cole, "Good Wars," *First Things* 116 (October 2001) 29.  
<sup>26</sup> Cole 31.  
<sup>27</sup> D. Brown 73.  
<sup>28</sup> D. Brown 74.  
<sup>29</sup> Matthew 7:24-5.  
<sup>30</sup> D. Brown 72.  
<sup>31</sup> D. Brown 71.  
<sup>32</sup> D. Brown 72.  
<sup>33</sup> D. Brown 156.  
<sup>34</sup> Herman A. Hoyt, "Nonresistance," from *War: 4 Christian Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981) 47.  
<sup>35</sup> Hoyt 51.  
<sup>36</sup> Myron S. Augsberger, "Biblical Pacifism," from *War: 4 Christian Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981) 87.  
<sup>37</sup> D. Brown 75.  
<sup>38</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 149.  
<sup>39</sup> Melani McAlister, "An Empire of their Own," *The Nation* 277.8 (22 September 2003) 33.  
<sup>40</sup> McAlister 33.

<sup>41</sup> David Crary, "Critics say Christian game glorifies violence," (MSNBC: 13 December 2006) 15 December 2006 <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16175897>>.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Marty, "Rambo Jesus," *Christian Century* 121.9 (2004) 47.

<sup>43</sup> Marty 47.

### Chapter Two

<sup>44</sup> See Appendix 3-1.

<sup>45</sup> Colman McCarthy, "God On Our Side," *The Progressive* 65.11 (November 2001) 34.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel M. Bell, Jr., "Can a War Against Terror Be Just?" *Crosscurrents* 56.1 (Spring 2006) 41.

<sup>47</sup> Bell 44.

<sup>48</sup> McCarthy 35.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Saunders, personal interview, 22 August 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Nondenominational Church home Bible study and focus group, 29 October 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Hugh B. Urban, "America, Left Behind: Bush, the Neoconservatives, and Evangelical Christian Fiction," *Journal of Religion & Society* 8 (2006) 8-9.

<sup>52</sup> Nondenominational Church home Bible study and focus group, 29 October 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003) 43.

<sup>54</sup> See Appendix 3-2.

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix 3-3.

<sup>56</sup> John 2:13-16. See also: Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48.

<sup>57</sup> John Titus, "Inter-faith Religious Service for the Department of Peace Conference," speech delivered 11 September 2002: <http://www.peacefultomorrow.org/article.php?id=608>. Titus is a member of September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, a group of families of 9/11 victims who advocate for peaceful reconciliation between the U.S. and Islamist terrorists.

<sup>58</sup> "Panel of Christians speaks out on War with Iraq," CNN *Larry King Live* (11 March 2003): <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/030311/lkl.00.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Steven Collins, personal interview, 14 July 2006.

<sup>60</sup> C.S. Lewis, "Why I Am Not a Pacifist," from *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001) 85.

<sup>61</sup> Lewis 86.

<sup>62</sup> Gregory S. Clapper, "Wounds of war," *Christian Century* 122.13 (28 June 2005) 11.

<sup>63</sup> Dennis Anderson, personal interview, 21 June 2006.

<sup>64</sup> Mary Saunders, personal interview, 22 August 2006.

<sup>65</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "September 11, 2001: A Pacifist Response," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.2 (Spring 2002) 430.

<sup>66</sup> Hauerwas 432.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Marty, "Rambo Jesus," *Christian Century* 121.9 (2004) 47.

<sup>68</sup> Prothero 57.

<sup>69</sup> Prothero 59.

<sup>70</sup> Prothero 98.

<sup>71</sup> Nondenominational Church home Bible study and focus group, 29 October 2006.

<sup>72</sup> "Panel of Christians speaks out on War with Iraq."

### Chapter Three

<sup>73</sup> Nondenominational Church home Bible study and focus group, 29 October 2006.

<sup>74</sup> See Appendix 3-4.

<sup>75</sup> Mary Saunders, personal interview, 22 August 2006.

<sup>76</sup> C.S. Lewis, "Why I Am Not a Pacifist," from *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001) 83-4.

<sup>77</sup> Dennis Anderson, personal interview, 21 June 2006.

<sup>78</sup> Nondenominational Church home Bible study and focus group, 29 October 2006.

<sup>79</sup> Nondenominational Church home Bible study and focus group, 29 October 2006.

<sup>80</sup> See Appendix 3-5.

<sup>81</sup> Steven Collins, personal interview, 14 July 2006.

<sup>82</sup> Melani McAlister, "An Empire of their Own," *The Nation* 277.8 (22 September 2003) 31.

- <sup>83</sup> “Rise of the Righteous Army: Evangelical Movement Shapes Culture With 'Left Behind' Series ,” CBS News (8 February 2004): <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/02/05/60minutes/main598218.shtml>.
- <sup>84</sup> Hugh B. Urban, “America, Left Behind: Bush, the Neoconservatives, and Evangelical Christian Fiction,” *Journal of Religion & Society* 8 (2006) 4.
- <sup>85</sup> McAlister 35.
- <sup>86</sup> Mary Saunders, personal interview, 22 August 2006.
- <sup>87</sup> Dennis Anderson, personal interview, 21 June 2006.
- <sup>88</sup> Steven Collins, personal interview, 14 July 2006.
- <sup>89</sup> “Rise of the Righteous Army: Evangelical Movement Shapes Culture With 'Left Behind' Series.”
- <sup>90</sup> “Rise of the Righteous Army: Evangelical Movement Shapes Culture With 'Left Behind' Series.”
- <sup>91</sup> See Appendix 3-6.

#### Chapter Four

- <sup>92</sup> Juan Stam, “Bush’s Religious Language,” *The Nation* 277.21 (22 December 2003) 27.
- <sup>93</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 157.
- <sup>94</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 21.
- <sup>95</sup> Bruce Lincoln, “Bush’s God Talk: Analyzing the President’s Theology,” *Christian Century* 121.20 (5 October 2004) 25.
- <sup>96</sup> Juergensmeyer 160.
- <sup>97</sup> See Appendix 3-7.
- <sup>98</sup> For example, see: Phillip Gulley & James Mulholland, *If Grace is True: Why God Will Save Every Person* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004).
- <sup>99</sup> Billy Graham, Address at National Prayer Service (14 September 2001): <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/mp3clips/religiousaddresses/billygraham911memorialservice634734.mp3>.
- <sup>100</sup> See Appendix 3-8.
- <sup>101</sup> Billy Graham, *World Aflame* (New York: Doubleday, 1965) 65.
- <sup>102</sup> Graham 75.
- <sup>103</sup> Graham 121.
- <sup>104</sup> Nondenominational Church home Bible study and focus group, 29 October 2006.
- <sup>105</sup> Steven Collins, personal interview, 14 July 2006.
- <sup>106</sup> Juergensmeyer 153.
- <sup>107</sup> Ira Chernus, “George W. Bush’s War on Terrorism and Sin,” *Political Theology* 5.4 (2004) 418.
- <sup>108</sup> Chernus 419.
- <sup>109</sup> Chernus 427.
- <sup>110</sup> Lincoln (2006) 27.
- <sup>111</sup> Juergensmeyer 176-9, 86.
- <sup>112</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, “September 11, 2001: A Pacifist Response,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.2 (Spring 2002) 426.
- <sup>113</sup> Harvey Cox, “Religion and the War Against Evil,” *The Nation* 273.21 (24 December 2001) 30.
- <sup>114</sup> Cox 31.
- <sup>115</sup> Lincoln (2004) 26.
- <sup>116</sup> Rod Parsley, *Silent No More* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2005) 91, 110, 112.
- <sup>117</sup> Parsley 100.
- <sup>118</sup> Parsley 116.
- <sup>119</sup> Esther Kaplan, *With God on Their Side: How Christian Fundamentalists Trampled Science, Policy and Democracy in George W. Bush’s White House* (New York: The New Press, 2004) 13.
- <sup>120</sup> Steven Collins, personal interview, 14 July 2006.
- <sup>121</sup> Nondenominational Church home Bible study and focus group, 29 October 2006.
- <sup>122</sup> Nondenominational Church home Bible study and focus group, 29 October 2006.
- <sup>123</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Just War Against Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2003) 131.
- <sup>124</sup> Elshtain 136.
- <sup>125</sup> Elshtain 159.

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<sup>126</sup> Dave Ghose, "Tides of support buoy a city's displaced Muslims," *Christian Science Monitor* 94.36 (15 January 2002) 2.

<sup>127</sup> Mary Saunders, personal interview, 22 August 2006.

<sup>128</sup> Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

<sup>129</sup> Wallis 163.

### Conclusion

<sup>130</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006) 79, 82.

<sup>131</sup> Lincoln 79.

<sup>132</sup> Lincoln 82, 83.

## Appendix 1: Survey Instrument

**Figure 1-1.** Survey instrument.

Sex: M \_\_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Racial/Ethnic Identity:

_____ African American	_____ Asian	_____ White
_____ American Indian	_____ Hispanic	_____ Other

Highest Education Level Completed:

_____ High School	Graduated?	Y	N
_____ College		Y	N
_____ Graduate School		Y	N

**Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling the appropriate response.**

**SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral/Don't Know, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree**

I consider myself a Christian.	SD	D	N	A	SA
The Bible should be interpreted literally.	SD	D	N	A	SA
I value the New Testament above the Old Testament.	SD	D	N	A	SA
Some of Jesus' teachings are impractical in daily life.	SD	D	N	A	SA
Christ is likely to return to Earth in the next 100 years.	SD	D	N	A	SA
I am a pacifist.	SD	D	N	A	SA
Jesus was a pacifist.	SD	D	N	A	SA
I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following Sept. 11.	SD	D	N	A	SA
Jesus/God supported the US military response following Sept. 11.	SD	D	N	A	SA
I support the ongoing War on Terror.	SD	D	N	A	SA
Jesus/God supports the ongoing War on Terror.	SD	D	N	A	SA
There are situations in which Jesus would sanction the use of force.	SD	D	N	A	SA
My religious beliefs have a strong impact on my political views.	SD	D	N	A	SA
American leaders should use their religious faith to help them make foreign policy decisions.	SD	D	N	A	SA
I am a patriot.	SD	D	N	A	SA
I have a loved one in the military.	SD	D	N	A	SA
According to the Bible, killing another person is always wrong.	SD	D	N	A	SA

I believe that after death, every individual goes to heaven or hell.

SD D N A SA

When people sin, God sometimes punishes them while they are still on Earth.

SD D N A SA

There is no sin that cannot be forgiven.

SD D N A SA

The devil exists and is active in the world today.

SD D N A SA



## Appendix 2: Demographics of Survey Respondents

**Figure 2-1.** Respondent sex.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	155	46.4	46.8	46.8
	Female	176	52.7	53.2	100.0
	Total	331	99.1	100.0	
Missing	0	3	.9		
Total		334	100.0		

**Figure 2-2.** Respondent age.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-25	14	4.2	4.4	4.4
	26-35	49	14.7	15.3	19.7
	36-45	85	25.4	26.6	46.3
	46-55	89	26.6	27.8	74.1
	56-65	35	10.5	10.9	85.0
	66=75	29	8.7	9.1	94.1
	76 and above	19	5.7	5.9	100.0
	Total	320	95.8	100.0	
Missing	0	14	4.2		
Total		334	100.0		

**Figure 2-3.** Respondent race.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	African American	6	1.8	1.8	1.8
	American Indian	3	.9	.9	2.7
	Asian American	11	3.3	3.3	6.1
	Hispanic	3	.9	.9	7.0
	White	303	90.7	91.8	98.8
	Other	4	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	330	98.8	100.0	
Missing	0	4	1.2		
Total		334	100.0		

**Figure 2-4.** Respondent education level.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High school, did not graduate	3	.9	.9	.9
	High school, graduated	26	7.8	7.8	8.7
	College, did not graduate	34	10.2	10.2	18.9
	College, graduated	120	35.9	36.0	55.0
	Graduate school, did not graduate	26	7.8	7.8	62.8
	Graduate school, graduated	124	37.1	37.2	100.0
	Total	333	99.7	100.0	
Missing	0	1	.3		
Total		334	100.0		

Appendix 3: Survey Results

**Figure 3-1.** I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11. vs. Jesus/God supported the US military response following September 11.

			Jesus/God supported the US military response following September 11.			
			Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral or no response	Strongly Agree or Agree	Total
I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11.	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Count	76	12	2	90
		% within Jesus/God supported the US military response following September 11.	64.4%	7.2%	4.1%	26.9%
	Neutral or no response	Count	9	21	1	31
		% within Jesus/God supported the US military response following September 11.	7.6%	12.6%	2.0%	9.3%
	Strongly Agree or Agree	Count	33	134	46	213
		% within Jesus/God supported the US military response following September 11.	28.0%	80.2%	93.9%	63.8%
Total		Count	118	167	49	334
		% within Jesus/God supported the US military response following September 11.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Figure 3-2.** I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11. vs. There are situations in which Jesus would sanction the use of force.

			There are situations in which Jesus would sanction the use of force.			Total
			Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral or no response	Strongly Agree or Agree	
I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11.	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Count % within There are situations in which Jesus would sanction the use of force.	38 58.5%	24 31.2%	28 14.6%	90 26.9%
	Neutral or no response	Count % within There are situations in which Jesus would sanction the use of force.	6 9.2%	11 14.3%	14 7.3%	31 9.3%
	Strongly Agree or Agree	Count % within There are situations in which Jesus would sanction the use of force.	21 32.3%	42 54.5%	150 78.1%	213 63.8%
Total		Count % within There are situations in which Jesus would sanction the use of force.	65 100.0%	77 100.0%	192 100.0%	334 100.0%

**Figure 3-3.** I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11. vs. Jesus was a pacifist.

			Jesus was a pacifist.			
			Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral or no response	Strongly Agree or Agree	Total
I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11.	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Count	9	12	69	90
		% within Jesus was a pacifist.	7.1%	22.2%	44.8%	26.9%
	Neutral or no response	Count	8	8	15	31
		% within Jesus was a pacifist.	6.3%	14.8%	9.7%	9.3%
	Strongly Agree or Agree	Count	109	34	70	213
		% within Jesus was a pacifist.	86.5%	63.0%	45.5%	63.8%
Total		Count	126	54	154	334
		% within Jesus was a pacifist.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Figure 3-4.** I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11. vs. I value the New Testament above the Old Testament.

			I value the New Testament above the Old Testament.			Total
			Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral or no response	Strongly Agree or Agree	
I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11.	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Count	20	20	50	90
		% within I value the New Testament above the Old Testament.	20.6%	23.8%	32.7%	26.9%
	Neutral or no response	Count	9	10	12	31
		% within I value the New Testament above the Old Testament.	9.3%	11.9%	7.8%	9.3%
	Strongly Agree or Agree	Count	68	54	91	213
		% within I value the New Testament above the Old Testament.	70.1%	64.3%	59.5%	63.8%
Total		Count	97	84	153	334
		% within I value the New Testament above the Old Testament.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Figure 3-5.** I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11. vs. The Bible should be interpreted literally.

			The Bible should be interpreted literally.			Total
			Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral or no response	Strongly Agree or Agree	
I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11.	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Count	69	8	13	90
		% within The Bible should be interpreted literally.	41.6%	19.0%	10.3%	26.9%
	Neutral or no response	Count	15	6	10	31
		% within The Bible should be interpreted literally.	9.0%	14.3%	7.9%	9.3%
	Strongly Agree or Agree	Count	82	28	103	213
		% within The Bible should be interpreted literally.	49.4%	66.7%	81.7%	63.8%
Total	Count	166	42	126	334	
	% within The Bible should be interpreted literally.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

**Figure 3-6.** I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11. vs. Christ is likely to return to Earth in the next 100 years.

			Christ is likely to return to Earth in the next 100 years.			Total
			Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral or no response	Strongly Agree or Agree	
I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11.	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Count	27	58	4	89
		% within Christ is likely to return to Earth in the next 100 years.	38.6%	28.2%	7.0%	26.7%
	Neutral or no response	Count	5	19	7	31
		% within Christ is likely to return to Earth in the next 100 years.	7.1%	9.2%	12.3%	9.3%
	Strongly Agree or Agree	Count	38	129	46	213
		% within Christ is likely to return to Earth in the next 100 years.	54.3%	62.6%	80.7%	64.0%
Total		Count	70	206	57	333
		% within Christ is likely to return to Earth in the next 100 years.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%



**Figure 3-7.** I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11. vs. The devil exists and is active in the world today.

			The devil exists and is active in the world today.			Total
			Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral or no response	Strongly Agree or Agree	
I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11.	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Count	24	21	45	90
		% within The devil exists and is active in the world today.	53.3%	47.7%	18.4%	26.9%
	Neutral or no response	Count	3	1	27	31
		% within The devil exists and is active in the world today.	6.7%	2.3%	11.0%	9.3%
	Strongly Agree or Agree	Count	18	22	173	213
		% within The devil exists and is active in the world today.	40.0%	50.0%	70.6%	63.8%
Total		Count	45	44	245	334
		% within The devil exists and is active in the world today.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Figure 3-8.** I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11. vs. I believe that after death, every individual goes to heaven or hell.

			I believe that after death, every individual goes to heaven or hell.			
			Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral or no response	Strongly Agree or Agree	Total
I supported the US military response in Afghanistan following September 11.	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Count	28	29	33	90
		% within I believe that after death, every individual goes to heaven or hell.	47.5%	44.6%	15.7%	26.9%
	Neutral or no response	Count	4	5	22	31
		% within I believe that after death, every individual goes to heaven or hell.	6.8%	7.7%	10.5%	9.3%
	Strongly Agree or Agree	Count	27	31	155	213
		% within I believe that after death, every individual goes to heaven or hell.	45.8%	47.7%	73.8%	63.8%
Total		Count	59	65	210	334
		% within I believe that after death, every individual goes to heaven or hell.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

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