SACRIFICE AND U.S. WAR-CULTURE

Kelly Denton-Borhaug
Moravian College, USA

Abstract

What would we say about the losses associated with war if we did not describe them as sacrifices? What would we say about Jesus' life and death if we did not associate the gospel narratives with a cosmic framework of sacrificial self-giving? The "the necessity of sacrifice" operates as an electrical exchange between the institutionalization of "war-culture" in the United States and the understandings and practices of popular Christianity. This leads to an important and difficult question: is there any way to rehabilitate understandings of sacrifice for Christianity without at the same time aiding and abetting war?

Introduction

Anyone who has tried to debate the virtues of war with an eager cadet or loyal Marine knows what it must feel like to dispute the Resurrection with a priest. Warriors are intransigent on the advisability of war, and their resistance springs not from bullheadedness but from a kind of religiosity. Theirs is the hymn of the true believer.[1]

On the eve of the 2008 Democratic Convention in Denver, Colorado, more than 1,000 anti-war protesters took to the streets, led by Ron Kovic, the paralyzed Vietnam Veteran made famous by the Hollywood film, *Born on the Fourth of July*, and Cindy Sheehan, mother of Casey Sheehan, a soldier killed in the Iraq war. Carrying signs decrying the use of torture and calling for an end to the war in Iraq, along the way of their march they encountered about 50 counter-protesters. Among them was Nancy Hecker of Colorado Springs, mother of yet another young man

killed in Iraq, Major Bill Hecker. "Why are you here for this counter-protest?" she was asked by journalists. Mrs. Hecker replied, "'I'm here to honor our son and the sacrifice he made for our country and to support the troops and the families who give so much".[2]

What would we say about the losses associated with war if we did not describe them as sacrifices? Moreover, in a nation still dominantly shaped by Christian religious understandings and practices, how is the same sacrificial language influenced by religious frameworks that emphasize Jesus' sacrificial self-giving life and death? In the United States, language about "the necessity of sacrifice" operates as an electrical conduit between the institutionalization of "war-culture" and the understandings and practices of popular Christianity. At the same time, this conduit is entirely naturalized and mostly unquestioned in U.S. culture at large. As a result, the hinge of sacrifice between nationalism and Christianity remains largely invisible to many if not most U.S. citizens, and the sacred sheen to war-culture contributed by sacrificial language and understandings goes unchallenged. This article's first task is to explore and make more visible the facets and inner workings of "war-culture" in the United States. Once this reality has become more of a conscious reality in our minds, we can then move on to a second task, analysis of the rhetoric and practices of sacrifice that sacramentalize and mask war-culture, and that silence protest against it.

"U.S. War-culture" is the normalized interpenetration of the institutions, ethos and practices of war with ever-increasing facets of daily human life, economy, institutions and imagination in the United States. If "militarism" is a traditional term that refers to the dominance of the military over civilian authority and the prevalence of warlike values in society, contemporary scholars now utilize "militarization" to refer to what I describe as "war-culture". Catherine Lutz' definition is particularly apt:

> Militarization is a discursive process, involving a shift in general societal beliefs and values in ways necessary to legitimate the use of force, the organization of large standing armies and their leaders, and the higher taxes or tribute used to pay for them. . . [It is] an intensification of the labor and resources allocated to military purposes includ-

ing *the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals* (italics mine).[3]

Lutz' insight regarding the way militarization *shapes* other institutions, perceptions and identities is important here. Militarization does not stand apart as an isolated element in U.S. culture. On the contrary, in the post-9/11 world of the United States, militarization is a powerful force that shapes the dynamics of collective power, life, memory and daily experience. "War-culture" describes how this force has become a driving influence in U.S. culture at large. As Andrew Bacevich says, "the global military supremacy that the United States presently enjoys – and is bent on perpetuating – has become central to our national identity". He continues,

> More than America's matchless material abundance or even the effusions of its pop culture, the nation's arsenal of high tech weaponry and the soldiers who employ that arsenal have come to signify who we are and what we stand for. . . Americans in our own time have fallen prey to militarization, manifesting in a romanticized view of soldiers, a tendency to see military power as the truest measure of national greatness, and outsized expectations regarding the efficacy of force.[4]

While many scholars and activists have explored and criticized the growth of empire in the post-9/11 United States, less attention has been paid to the significance of the rhetoric and cognitive framework of sacrifice that energizes and enables war-culture and that simultaneously is deeply tied to experiences and practices of Christianity in the U.S. Sacrificial constructions, exactly like the formulation drawn upon by Mrs. Hecker in this article's introduction, are the focus of this investigation. Specifically, I explore the way sacrificial language and frameworks electrically draw together Christianity and war-culture. At the same time, however, not only does the cognitive framework of sacrifice act as an internal engine for war-culture, it also provides a sacred canopy over the institutions, culture and practices of war and thus is one important mechanism through which the reality of war-culture is thrust out of conscious view; in other words, not only does the framework of sacrifice energize

war-culture, it also plays a decisive role in the normalization of war-culture to the extent that it becomes invisible, and simply part of the expected fabric of life in the U.S.

Facets of U.S. War-Culture

In his final speech to the American people before returning to private life, President Dwight Eisenhower in 1961 spoke about a new development in American experience that emerged during his time of military and presidential leadership. He coined the term, "the military-industrial complex", to describe the new "conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry". The influence of this complex, he warned, had economic, political and even spiritual impact, and while Eisenhower allowed that the need for this development was unarguable, nevertheless, he emphasized, it was imperative that Americans "not fail to comprehend its grave implications".

Among those implications, Eisenhower outlined four inherent dangers: 1) the intrusion of unwarranted influence into government by the complex; 2) the potential dangers to civil liberties and democratic processes; 3) the danger to the free university if government contracts "substitute for intellectual curiosity" and the nations' scholars become dominated by Federal employment and allocations and the power of money; 4) the potential for public policy to become captive to a scientific-technological elite. He closed by warning, "We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together".[5]

Eisenhower's initial description of the military-industrial complex and his concerns about it may be compared to the proverbial pebble dropped into a pond. Since his time, the depth and breadth of the ripples of war-culture extending out into the water of U.S. culture have grown exponentially and have been analyzed by many scholars. What follows is a brief foray into some of the major facets comprising these connected waves.

Military Buildups and Decreasing Boundaries

According to political scientist Chalmers Johnson, between 1950 and 2003, the U.S. experienced four periods of "intense military mobilization" and concomitant increases in weapons purchases. These included the Korean War, the buildups during the Vietnam War and under Ronald Reagan, and the boon overseen by the second Bush administration following the attacks of 9/11.[6] At the same time, these military expansions have been accompanied by diminishment of the boundaries between strictly military institutions, actions, purposes and supposed "civilian" institutions, culture and life. If Eisenhower was concerned about the influence of the increasingly permeable boundaries between Congress, the arms industry and the military, Johnson adds a fourth institution playing an influential role in the spread of militarization: think tanks, described by him as "modern patriotic monasteries".[7]

A revolving employment door between military and civilian institutions further complicates matters. The "circulation of elites", with high ranking retiring defense contractors receiving appointments as officials in the Pentagon, undercuts attempts by the Congress to enforce accountability with respect to military spending. And in addition to expansion of military mobilization and slippage of military/civilian boundaries, war-culture's financial accounting increasingly is shielded from public view. The Manhattan Project to build the atomic bomb was the beginning of the development of so-called "black budgets" enabling the Department of Defense to shield itself from public scrutiny. "Special Access Programs", including weapons research and acquisition, operations and support (including funds for Special Forces), and intelligence, all are "black budget" programs whose expenses are shared with only a few members of Congress. Such screening from public view is exacerbated by the increase in the number and influence of private military companies, such as Vinnell Corporation of Fairfax, Virginia, a subsidiary of the defense conglomerate Northrop Grumman, authorized and funded by the U.S. government for ever wider purposes.[8] For instance, among a growing host of military contractors, The Blackwater "Worldwide Security Firm" is building a 61,000 square foot facility on the San Diego border to operationalize a

contract with the Navy to train U.S. sailors on tactics to use at sea against insurgents.[9] It is estimated that by 2010 the revenue of such companies will exceed $202 billion. Additionally, the military increasingly contracts out base construction, maintenance and security. During the five years of Dick Cheney's role as CEO of Halliburton (1995-2000), the Halliburton subsidiary, Brown and Root, was the beneficiary of $2.3 billion in government contracts, advancing from 73 to 18 on the Pentagon's list of top contractors.[10]

All this is made worse by what scholars describe as the weakening of constitutional government, especially in the post-9/11 period. Johnson writes, "When it comes to the deliberate dismantling of the Constitution, the events that followed the Supreme Court's intervention in the election of 2000 that named George W. Bush the forty-third president have proved unprecedented". Some of this dismantling may be seen in a) the post-9/11 fiat by President Bush to veto requests to see presidential records; b) proposals such as the infamous "torture memo" which utilized "commander in chief" power to override US law on torture; c) the weakening and eventually the dismissal of FISA oversight of government wiretapping; and d) "signing statements", presidential add-ons to approved legislation that in effect, provide a loophole to protect executive power from legislative constraint.[11] War-culture has everything to do with the intermingling of all the distinct facets discussed thus far. These include the expanding of the military, slippage of appropriate boundaries of authority, increasing secrecy, and constitutional weakening. Yet all this constitutes only part of the inner dynamics of war-culture in the U.S.

War-Culture and Economics

According to economists Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, the Afghanistan and Iraq wars will cost at least three trillion dollars when all is said and done. In 2008, the U.S. spent approximately $16 billion per month to fund these wars, or what amounts to the annual budget of the United Nations. This monthly figure *does not* include the $500 billion per year that the U.S. already spends on "regular expenses" of the Defense Department.[12] Also, because the U.S. government uses "cash account-

ing", that is, only accounting for what is actually spent today, and ignoring future obligations and costs, the full expenditures for war are hidden from view. To make things worse, faulty accounting practices of the Department of Defense further shield or muddle war-culture's true costs. The year 2007 was the tenth in a row that the Department of Defense "flunked its financial audit".[13] In order to obtain a more accurate accounting for the war, these economists track expenses in four discreet categories: 1) the amount of money already spent to conduct the wars; 2) future costs for waging these wars; 3) "hidden costs", such as increases in the core defense budget and expanding the size of the military; and 4) the interest costs on borrowed money.[14] Not only the Veterans Administration, but other health care institutions and the Social Security Administration will be called upon to cover expenses associated with Iraq and Afghanistan veterans' health care, social security and disability needs. These costs will run somewhere between $422 billion (in a best case scenario) and $717 billion (in a realistic-moderately conceived scenario).[15] Yet these figures don't begin to account for many other grievances incurred, such as the economic value of the loss of a productive young life, difficulties and deficits due to mental health disabilities such as PTDS and traumatic brain injury, the costs of "quality of life" impairments to veterans, their family, friends and communities, and more.

War-Culture and Everyday Life

The tentacles of war-culture into everyday life are far-reaching, and affect every person living in the United States, though relatively little consciousness or concern is registered among U.S. citizens with respect to this reality. Through vast arrays of products we rely on in our everyday life, the realities in our workplaces and schools, the production of entertainment, in cultural sites and activities, at many more places and minutes during an average day of every person in the U.S. than we can begin to imagine, we are indelibly connected to what sociologist Nick Turse outlines as "this new military-industrial technological-entertainment-academic-scientific-media-intelligence-homeland security-surveillance-national security-corporate complex".[16] He writes,

The high level of military-civilian interpenetration in a heavily con-sumer-driven society means that almost every American is, at least passively, supporting the Complex every time he or she shops for groceries, sends a package, drives a car, or watches TV. . . The Complex is connected to everything you would expect, from the top arms manufacturers to big oil corporations – as well as nu-merous government agencies connected to the U.S. Department of Defense and allied entities such as the Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of Homeland Security. But it is also connected to the entertainment industry and the world's largest media conglomerates. It is in league with the nation's largest food suppliers and beverage companies. It supports the most presti-gious universities in America and is tied to the leading automakers.[17]

Over 47,000 contractors and over 100,000 subcontractors have business ties with the military. From Cheerios to Dawn dishwashing liquid, Nature Valley Granola Bars to Wolfgang Puck's gourmet pizza, house-hold appliances, home computers, video games, car manufacturers, sun-glasses, the list of items produced by defense-related mega corporations and manufacturers goes on and on.[18] For example, Special Operations troops and "armchair warriors" alike use Oakley high-end footwear, "the Elite Special Forces Standard-Issue Assault Boot". Wannabe soldiers purchased their own pairs in 2008 for about $225 a pair. The Oakley website features a sophisticated, high-tech commercial video with a series of rapidly flashing images, all featuring extreme athletes snowboarding, doing martial arts, motocross, and more, while utilizing various Oakley products in the pursuit of their sports. But if one pays close attention, one might notice that tucked in among the flashing images is a soldier with Oakley sunglasses. As Turse comments, "Behind all the civilian martial and macho hype lies a deepening relationship with the military".[19]

War-Culture and Education

For a bird's eye view into just one of many deeply significant, yet "everyday" facets of interpenetration between the military and U.S. life

and culture, consider U.S. practices of education. Over 150 military-educational institutions operate to inculcate "a youthful corps of tomorrow's military officers" in the values, militarized sets of knowledge and skills of the warfare state. By 2002, according to a report by the Association of American Universities, almost 350 colleges and universities conducted Pentagon-funded research.[20] In addition, Congressional earmarks funding college and university research reached an all-time high in 2008, representing a 25% increase from 2003. Over 920 institutions of higher education were granted these funds that are dispersed outside of any traditional process of open competition and peer review, with a total of 41% of said earmarks deriving from the Department of Defense, "a favorite spot for lawmakers to tuck in academic earmarks".[21]

   At the same time, in the post-9/11 period the United States entered a period of intense recruiting of ever younger actual and would-be citizens for participation in the military-industrial-academic complex. The No Child Left Behind Act includes provisions that require all public schools receiving federal funding to allow military recruitment on their campuses. Students may be recruited even as young as 14 years old for the "Delayed Entry Program" (DEP) that involves them in pre-military training, testing and culture while they finish high school in preparation to enter active duty.[22] Promises of citizenship by recruiters have proven to be especially powerful in a political climate of growing pressures on undocumented people, and have been criticized by immigrants' rights activists as a form of "blatant exploitation of a vulnerable population".[23] Meanwhile, the Pentagon, using a marketing company called BeNOW, compiled one of the largest private databases on young people in the country, 30 million 16 to 25-year-olds, their names, addresses, email addresses, cell phone numbers, ethnicity, social security numbers and areas of study.[24] While the DEP originally was created after the Vietnam draft ended, students who now sign up to become a part of the program

> are targeted, tested, gifted, video-gamed, recruitment-faired and career-counseled into enlisting before they turn 18. They are also paid $2,000 for every friend they talk into signing up with them and, until recently, were paid $50 for every name they brought in to a recruiter.[25]

The deep, naturalized and largely unexamined intertwining of the military with education at all levels is just one example of the interpenetration of war-culture with everyday life in the United States. Entertainment, telecommunications, youth culture, the oil industry, food production, car manufacturing, computer technology, the list of facets of interpenetration is seemingly endless. And such intertwining has deeply significant consequences that are questioned far too little in contemporary U.S. culture. If at least some of the results of the "militarized civilian university" include, as listed by Henry R. Giroux, the production of weapons, increase in the arms race, collusion with forces of secrecy and domination, subversion of or inadequate resources dedicated to scientific knowledge that could be peaceful and/or non-militarized, the imposition of the assumption that using civilian institutions to suit military desires and pursuits is the normal way of doing things – then key questions must be articulated by those whose commitment is to shape a different ethos in education. "What role do intellectuals play in the conditions that allow theory and knowledge to be appropriated by the military; and what can they do politically to prevent theory, knowledge and information from being militarized in the first place?"[26]

War-culture is an ever-present yet seemingly invisible reality in the United States. How can this be so? Scholars have suggested a variety of answers to the above puzzle. The very pervasiveness of war-culture makes it so ubiquitous as to be almost unrecognizable in everyday life. In addition, military institutions and powers successfully have utilized the latest and most sophisticated of market strategies to portray military institutions, culture and values as hip, savvy, powerful and fun. Thus American citizens are diverted from seeing and exploring war-culture's dangers.[27] Other scholars have suggested that our very way of life, especially in terms of the dominance of consumerism and insistent dependence on an oil economy despite the resulting dire consequences, presents an inherent crisis in the American republic that citizens are discouraged from acknowledging. Instead of looking within the nation and our own culture, government leaders (with citizens' tacit encouragement) direct our focus to external problems as the real source of any trouble we face. Instead of seriously addressing a failed U.S. energy policy, instead of facing the real-

ity of trade deficits at least since the 1960's combined with a growing and seemingly limitless lust for inexpensive consumer goods as "the American way of life", citizens are encouraged and themselves willingly believe that our problems all are the result of international issues that can and will be solved by a dominant, omnipotent American military.[28] Yet there is even more to say. Rhetoric and practices of sacrifice run like an electrical current between military institutions, values and culture and religious institutions, traditions, culture and practices. The language of sacrifice thus also plays a deeply important yet almost unrecognized role in the maintenance, pervasiveness and seemingly sacred nature of war-culture in the United States.

A Segue: The Inevitable Interplay of War-Culture and Sacrifice

An ROTC student requests that the leaders of the small liberal arts college he attends allow an army Chinook helicopter to land in the central quad of the campus while classes are in session, in order to ferry him to a military training event about seventy miles away. Sound impossible? When this took place at the liberal arts college where I teach in the spring of 2008, I was in the midst of research and writing on this topic. In the immediate aftermath of the helicopter landing, I was fascinated and yet unsurprised to see sacrificial rhetoric emerge almost immediately as controversy regarding the event began to swirl. It all started with a campus-wide email sent by a political science professor on our campus, with just one line: "What is the purpose of this little stunt?"[29] Another professor, this one from the economics and business department, weighed in with another mass email:

> I can think of three worthy purposes, off hand: Those who *sacrifice* salaries and stable home lives, if nothing else, to the service of their country deserve our support. Until the lion lies down peaceably with the lamb, we must encourage young people to consider similar *sacrifices* (italics mine).[30]

In this and further emails from this same professor, sacrificial rhetoric dominated. He wrote about what he viewed as the need to "support those whose sacrifices make our freedoms, including the freedom to wave a peace flag". . . Moreover, it is just these "sacrifices [that] make the freedom of speech". Such "sacrifice . . . makes freedom possible" and is "required" if we, as a "privileged minority" in the world, wish to continue to enjoy freedom of speech and other freedoms. The economics professor thus smoothly aligned the presence of the military helicopter on our liberal arts college campus with a portrayal of war as necessary sacrifice. Moreover, his emails argued that the necessity of war as sacrifice is not something to be questioned; in fact, he claimed, its very necessity demands compliance – we are not to question or protest, for that is akin to belittling the central players (soldiers) in this drama. No one challenged the sacrificial theme in this narrative to my knowledge, and even those who disagreed with the same professor relied upon it, such as one student who suggested in his email that making sacrifices (including, he noted, the "ultimate sacrifice") only makes sense when one knows it's going to be "worth it and make a lasting positive impact".

The appearance of sacrificial rhetoric during "Chinook-gate" (as it came to be called by certain members of our campus community) was far from an aberration. In fact, it goes with the territory. Communication scholars have investigated why this is the case, and how such rhetoric operates. Sacrificial rhetoric in the purpose of war-culture has a way of inflating the measurement of real dangers and lifting the specter of peril to a transcendent level. This same over inflation disables critical thinking and pragmatic political critique. The rhetoric of sacrifice is ritualized speech, and channels and legitimates violence by covering the activities of killing with a sacred canopy made up of values such a loyalty and freedom. It "rationalizes war as in the service of the greater glory of God". Robert Ivies writes, "[The] secular quest for security [is converted] into a prayer for redemption and a sacrament of atonement through the sacrifice of a scapegoat in whom we have invested all the evil of the world". Safety becomes the equivalent of salvation in the rhetorical universe that is U.S. war-culture. Moreover, as also is evident from the same economic professor's emails, this rhetoric transforms the idea of "safety" into a feminized, risky and fragile undertaking, a reality that always is ". . . vulnerable

to the rape of the demonic and demented barbarian if left unprotected". Sacrificial rhetoric in the purpose of war-culture enables dehumanization of those considered the enemy, and depersonalizes those other real flesh-and-blood, complicated and multifaceted human beings who all too often are conflated into a one-dimensional portrait, "the troops". Ivie remarks, "In war culture, disembodied abstractions and stone monuments supplant living memories of loved ones sacrificed for country and cause . . . our own soldiers are dehumanized by reducing them to depersonalized heroes."[31]

We in the U.S. have become deeply enculturated to the rhetoric and logic of sacrificialism in war-culture. The predisposition toward sacrificial constructs deeply shapes U.S. citizens' perceptions and equally profoundly impacts our response to the realities of antagonism and conflict. If "the military-industrial-academic (and on and on) complex is a huge systemic behemoth that must be engaged by numerous groups from multiple sites of intervention",[32] it has become all the more important to take on the pedagogical and political challenge to investigate the site of war-culture's intertwined relationship with the rhetoric and cognitive framework of sacrifice. The same relationship electrifies, masks and sacramentalizes war and war-culture and holds at bay pragmatic critique, ethical discernment and the potential to imagine a different reality. War-culture affects everyone who lives in the United States, and many, many more who live in countries outside our borders. Once we become conscious of the deadly links between sacrifice and war-culture, there is no going back.

More on Sacrifice

Rituals and frameworks of blood sacrifice are central to the "religiosity" of war and war-culture. But investigating this relationship is a complicated undertaking. While cognitive frameworks and practices of sacrifice go back to extremely early human experiences and self definitions, pinning down exactly how sacrifice worked and how it was understood by early human communities is very difficult to do. In large part this has to do with the wide multivalent understandings and practices (still in

evidence today) of sacrifice across context and chronological time. Another complexity in understanding sacrifice has to do with the reality that practices and understandings of sacrifice, even ritual sacrifice, not only are specifically religious but also have strong ties to communal, social and political frameworks. This is a reality that has been too little reflected on in theology, but anthropologists have not missed the significance of sacrificial blood rites, values and representations cementing and promoting all kinds of social arrangements.[33] From very early times humans have been tempted by the notion that "violence will save", not only religiously, but socially and politically as well.

In modern times, the indelible link between sacrifice and war-culture solidified in the rise of the nation-state. "The modern nation at its birth was a nation in arms."[34] One only need look as far as dominant national symbols, such as the flag, anthems, festivals, memorials, etc., to see that waging war and the rise of the nation state in modern times are intimately intertwined, to such a degree that it becomes extremely difficult to envision the modern state without war-culture as an essential ingredient in national self-identity and representation. Sacrifice functions as the hinge between war-culture and national self-identity. The wars leading to the birth of the modern state still are explained and justified by making sacred the death of the soldier for the nation, exemplified in national anthems like The "Marseillaise", which proudly proclaims that when its young heroes fall the sacred soil of France will reproduce them all.[35] Likewise, "My country, 'tis of thee/ Sweet land of liberty/ Of Thee I sing. / Land where my fathers died", are the words of the American anthem learned by every generation of school children. The words of the anthem are paralleled by the famous dictum of Thomas Jefferson, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.[36] Not only a religious artifact, sacrificial self-identity shares an intimate relationship with national identity and representation.

The intensity of this relationship between sacrifice and the nation state reaches its apotheosis in the development of what scholars term "total war".[37] The difference between this kind of war and earlier wars largely has to do with the entry of new and more extensively deadly forms of technology, and mass participants and victims in war. Total war's targets expand far beyond the enemy soldier. Technological development

widens the target focus to include centers of the production of weaponry and also civilian support; as a result, the dead include larger and larger ratios of civilians to each soldier killed (one must also mention in this regard the increasing destruction of the natural world and resulting environmental degradation, accelerating especially in 20th century war).

The first total war in modern times identified by scholars is the American Civil War, which relied on the mass armies first constructed by Napoleon with the added destructive power of new rifled muskets that multiplied target range by five times that of earlier wars.[38] The number of American U.S. soldiers killed in the Civil War amounted to more than in both World Wars, plus the Korean and Vietnam wars. In the American Civil War alone, 622,000 soldiers died. Moreover, historians of religion note that it is *precisely* at the point of America's first total war that we discover language entering into American political discourse that compares the sacrifice of the soldier for his country to the sacrifice of Christ.[39] Perhaps, scholars muse, it was the search to find some cognitive framework large enough to encompass such devastating loss in the first U.S. modern total war that led to this specific link. By the end of America's first total war, the Civil War, the Christian sacrificial archetype became fully merged into American civil religion. Both the martyred president and the war dead with whom he was indelibly linked, were understood as those whose sacrificial deaths were "... the last full measure of devotion", making possible "a new birth of freedom". The mythic symbolism connecting a cosmic interpretation of Abraham Lincoln's untimely death with the sacrifice of Jesus for salvation entered the nation's bloodstream, as the words from Lincoln's own law partner, Herndon, demonstrated:

> For fifty years God rolled Abraham Lincoln through his fiery furnace. He did it to try Abraham and to purify him for his purpose... making him the noblest and loveliest character since Jesus Christ.[40]

Christian proclamation and theological doctrines claiming the sacred sacrifice of Jesus support, justify and provide a model for the sacrifice of the soldier. Both deaths are "necessary" sacrifices in some way, serve a larger social/political or cosmic purpose, provide an ethical blue-

print for followers' imitation, and in both cases, the one(s) dying do so as surrogates for others. In the face of losses of many different types, individuals and communities return again and again to sacrificial cognitive frameworks. At the same time, the sacrificial cognitive framework impedes deeper questioning and analysis about the true nature and causes of the losses being experienced. In light of this connection, we must face the ethical question: how can Christians talk about the sacrifice of Jesus without it in some way contributing to the problem of war and war-culture, without the sacrifice of Jesus adding to a sacred canopy that glorifies and mystifies the realities of war? Additionally, once we become more deeply aware of the role that sacrificial language and understandings play vis a vis the glorification and mystification of war and war-culture, what must this same awareness mean for Christian theology and practice?

People who sit in the pews each week and sing hymns, respond to the liturgy, and hear sermons that focus on sacrifice largely are unaware of the ongoing debate among Christian theologians and ethicists regarding how best to respond to this conundrum. Moreover, even in the theological world of trained clergy and academics, far too often, when dangerous practices of sacrificialism *are* acknowledged, such recognition merely precedes a reinscription of the centrality of sacrifice for Christian understanding and practice. A recent devotion printed in the popular publication, *The Lutheran*, is a case in point. A pastor writes about the way the "traditional emphasis on atonement" has blocked out the "subversive" element of Jesus' death as a religious leader who was silenced because of the threat he posed to the established order. This pastor seems to be quite aware of the sacrificial scapegoating mechanism in the gospels that more and more mainstream theologians criticize. "We can't avoid reading that Jesus was considered a threat to society by those who felt responsible to maintain peace and security", he writes. Jesus was killed (sacrificed) by the state for just this perceived threat. But such awareness does little to affect this author's simultaneous emphasis on the necessity of Jesus' sacrifice as part of a cosmic plan. He continues,

> When I was young, I was taught that God loves me and that Jesus died for me. I was reminded to be thankful that God sent Jesus to die for my sins. . . during Lent and into Holy Week we lift up the

death of Jesus as something he didn't deserve. He was innocent of all charges. . . He died so we might be saved. He paid the ransom. God was pleased with Jesus' sacrifice.[41]

Language such as this is far too captive to manipulation for the purpose of aiding and abetting U.S. war-culture, as we have seen all too well in the speeches of President George W. Bush, such as this one from Easter, 2008:

This morning, families across America are coming together to celebrate Easter. . . during this special and holy time each year, millions of Americans pause to remember a sacrifice that transcended the grave and redeemed the world. . . On Easter we hold in our hearts those who will be spending this holiday far from home – our troops. . . I deeply appreciate the sacrifices that they and their families are making. . . On Easter, we especially remember those who have given their lives for the cause of freedom. These brave individuals have lived out the words of the Gospel: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. . ."[42]

U.S. war-culture rests upon a sea bed of cultural assumptions that are reified, naturalized and sacralized by way of religious frameworks. Indeed, the "necessity" of war and the "inevitable" suffering that ensues (and in addition the positioning of such suffering as a "necessary sacrifice" that leads to "salvation"), not to mention the assumed "nobility" associated with the ability to wage war and become formed as a warrior, are cultural givens that the majority of the population assume to be natural, "just the way things are." Moreover, these assumptions not only are unquestioned, they have achieved a kind of sacred status in contemporary U.S. culture that prevents citizens from more profound examination of the realities of the war-culture in which we live. What has gone largely unexamined in the U.S. is the dominance of Christian sacrificial rhetoric that underlies and undergirds these same "givens".

Theological Responses to Sacrificialism

Can sacrificial (re)constructions continued to be relied upon in a Christianity that is aware of the destructive links between sacrifice and war-culture? Here I briefly outline three different responses from theologians to the problems posed by the link of sacrifice between Christianity and contemporary social structures and practices. First, I examine theological analysis that demonstrates awareness and critique of the dangers of sacrificialism, but nevertheless gives way to a reinscription of sacrifice as the central way of Christian salvation and formative of Christian following. Second, I compare and contrast two Womanist theologians whose disagreement about the possibility of rehabilitating sacrifice is constructive and illuminating. Finally, third, I discuss the analysis of a representative from a school of Latin American Liberation theologians who have explored the dangers of sacrificialism with respect to Christianity and neoliberal economics.[43]

Theologian Mark Heim, on the one hand, acknowledges and criticizes the social dangers of sacrificialism (and scapegoating), and on the other hand, attempts to redefine Jesus' sacrifice as somehow different. Utilizing the theory of social scapegoating from the work of Rene Girard, Heim outlines a central conflict at the heart of the passion story in Christianity: the paradox at the center of the narrative of the crucifixion of Jesus, "God's plan and an evil act, a good bad thing".[44] The difficulty with understanding and faithfully embracing the narratives of Jesus' death have to do with multiple story lines (the "stereophonic" quality, according to Heim) included in the gospel accounts. On the one hand, these stories are emphatic about Jesus' sacrificial death as unjust and wrong. He is a victim of social sacrificial scapegoating. On the other hand, however, Jesus is supposed to die and sets his face to go to Jerusalem, the place of his coming torture and death. His death is part of a divine plan for salvation. How can such seemingly contradictory story lines be adjudicated?

The "sacrificial crisis" reflected in the gospels and theorized by Girard continues well into our own time, according to Heim, though in our own age, dominated by the rise of technology and (supposedly) advanced society, many if not most individuals mistakenly believe that sacrifice is a

long-passed, "primitive" stage we moderns and post-moderns have abandoned. Such thinking actually works well with Girard's insight that scapegoating sacrifice is most effective when it is most invisible and unrecognized. Institutions humans have developed to try to deal with social conflict, such as our legal and police systems, (and one might say, though Heim does not, the branches of the military as the coercive/defensive arm of the legislative and executive branches of U.S. government), are human communal attempts to deal with mimetic rivalry and its consequence, the escalation of social violence. But Heim notes that all too often, such legal, political and military systems are consumed by the very sacrificial crisis they were designed to otherwise control. He mentions the Stalinist terror, the National Socialist terror in Germany, the U.S. red scare after World War I, the practice of racial segregation and more, all as examples of contemporary scapegoating violence. If anything, scapegoating sacrifice is more a danger than ever, given that "mimetic contagion" has only increased with more sophisticated technological developments in human societies in media and advertising. Nevertheless, Heim argues, even as Jesus' ministry demonstrates unmasking of the violence against innocent victims, Jesus' role is to be *sine qua non* of scapegoats, *in order*, Heim claims, to repeal scapegoating. This is where Heim attempts to clarify distinctions between the "stereophonic" multiple narrative lines of the New Testament. According to Heim, sacrificial systems demand that something be given up in order for peace to be achieved. You ransom something in order to get something back. In other words, sacrifice is a dynamic of exchange. However, when God steps into the breach, Heim claims, the entire process is disrupted:

> God offers a ransom not only to get the captives out of
> the place of the scapegoat, but to act from that place, the
> place of utter abandonment. . . When God, who cannot
> be silenced and who will not take vengeance, stands in
> that place, the web of sacrifice collapses.[45]

Heim himself acknowledges the slipperiness of the interpretation of the cross he has claimed. It is exceedingly difficult for the ancient dynamics of scapegoating sacrifice *not* to be immediately reinscribed into

the system that Heim describes as "victory". He writes, "One could look at representations of Christian glory on the cross and see this as a representation not of victory over sacrifice, but of the sacrifice itself. God's victory is the dying".[46]

Though Heim would have us believe that Jesus' death on the cross is God's way of disrupting sacrificial scapegoating dynamics, ultimately his analysis in my judgment results in a reinscription of the very process he hoped would be overcome. As Christine Gudorf has noted, God "stepping into the breach" of sacrifice doesn't *cure* sacrifice. If anything, the violence of sacrifice is like a narcotic, anesthetizing and distracting us from examining and growing in awareness regarding the true roots of the conflict. Sacrifices should be averted in favor of digging into the realities behind the frustration giving rise to conflict in the first place; the key is not additional sacrifice, but deeper examination and greater awareness.[47] The notion that sacrificial scapegoating systems only may be overcome through *bearing* the pain, loss and destructiveness they create is deeply embedded in sacrificial systems themselves, those in war-culture *and* in Christianity (as well as other religions). To say as much is to glorify and mystify sacrificial dynamics as "necessary", cosmically approved and effective. This same cognitive framework is centrally entrenched in the U.S.

A second trajectory of thinking with respect to the possibility of reclaiming or rehabilitating sacrifice involves the theological tension between Womanist theologians Dolores S. Williams and Joanne Marie Terrell.[48] For Williams, Jesus' "ministerial vision" captured in his language about the Kingdom of God *does not* point to death; in other words, the Kingdom of God does not require one's death in order to become actualized. The primary significance of the cross for Williams is its power to reveal the depth of sin "in its most desecrated form". In her excavation of the institution of surrogacy in the Pre-Civil War period, the antebellum period and beyond, Williams powerfully highlights the way that social arrangements may be deeply ingrained and reified by way of theological assumptions. Whether as the field slave, the mammy or the sexual slave, Black women's social experiences of surrogacy collided with traditional Christian soteriological models, especially *penal substitution*. According to Williams, the theological framework of Jesus standing in for sinful humanity and receiving in their place the righteous punishment meted out

by a wrathful God, supports the unjust social situations African American women have endured from the time of slavery in the United States into the present. The argument I make is similar: war-culture rests upon a sea bed of cultural assumptions that are naturalized and sacralized by way of religious assumptions. The "necessity" of war and concomitant "inevitable" suffering are cultural givens that are assumed to be natural, "just the way things are". I argue that religious assumptions have played a strong role in the process of just such reification, naturalization, sacralization.

In contrast to Williams, however, for Joanne Marie Terrell the key component to analyze in sacrificial stories and schemes is the *possibility* of agency. The problem is imposed sacrifice, not sacrifice that is *chosen* for the sake of a higher good. In fact, the conscious choosing of sacrifice may even be "sacramental". Furthermore, a sacramental notion of sacrifice has saving significance for African American women and helps them to channel pain into service for the community. Yet, in a culture such as ours that has such deeply embedded cognitive frameworks as the heroic nature of self sacrifice and the sacred tenor of suffering which follows, not to mention the necessity of sacrifice for the payment of sin, to what degree is such agency truly possible? How will we distinguish between sacrifice that is enacted as a result of capitulation to such schemes and sacrifice that is "freely chosen?" Second, the idea of "sacramentalism" associated with sacrifice also is problematic. For such "sacramentalism" is exactly akin to the problem of absolutizing or divinizing the "necessary sacrifices" through which war and war-culture are justified and rationalized.

Christian theology has not yet fully come to grips with the problematic nature of sacrificialism in Christianity and its impact on Western life and thought generally speaking. The depth of embedded sacrificial cognitive frameworks and their resulting subconscious existence in our lives makes them exceedingly difficult to unearth and examine, much less criticize. Analyses of power, class, race, gender and more are required in order that we shine a light on the way dominating actors utilize sacrificial logic to demand and/or justify the sacrifice of the dominated. A school of Latin American Liberation theologians has been working on the problem of sacrificial cognitive frameworks with respect to "economic religion" and "its fascination both with its promises and its demands for sacrifices". I turn to Brazilian theologian Jung Mo Sung, who explores neoliberal eco-

nomics and the problem of sacrificialism in Christianity and society.[49]

　　Sung describes two sides of one economic coin. On the one side is the "redeeming progress" of the free market coming fully into being, making possible "the American way of life". Commodities go to where there are a greater number of votes or dollars. On the other side of the coin, however, are the suffering and death of millions of people, the "necessary sacrifices" for this same progress. These sacrifices may take the form of employment cuts, higher costs of living, austerity programs and more, all of which supposedly promise a better future, greater competitiveness and freedom for the flow of capital. In the place of a strong collective awareness of social responsibility for the welfare of all, the social owners of capital put forth an argument to justify the lopsided economic reality from which they benefit: sacrifices in the long run are good and healthy for the general public. This is a "shame-blame game that hides a shifting of burdens from the strong to the weak", ". . . an undeniable sign that rationalizing ideologies are actively at work".[50] The tie between this "economic religion" and war further is undergirded by belief that war brings economic benefits. Yet even in the case of World War II, which many people assume was the economic engine that ended the Great Depression in the United States, economists warn us against such na?ve thinking. While economic gains did come in the early stages of the war, when the United States was still selling goods but was not yet a combatant, the situation changed significantly once the United States entered the war. As one economist sums it up,

> While overall economic output was rising, and the military draft lowered unemployment, the war years were generally not prosperous ones. As for today, we shouldn't think that fighting a war is the way to restore economic health.[51]

　　Thus, Sung concludes, theologians must grapple much more seriously with the sacrificial constructions at the heart of Western Christianity itself. "Sacrificial logic underlies the sacralization of a social system of human works and institutions; this logic has the capacity to reverse the notion of good and evil".[52]

　　Not only the U.S., but the world cannot afford lack of awareness

and examination with respect to the dangerous and destructive links between Christianity, sacrifice and U.S. war-culture. If we have learned anything from the post-9/11 history of the U.S., surely it must be regarding the depth and breadth of the human, environmental and cultural damage wreaked in this period through a program of war that has been rationalized, justified and sacralized with the help of sacrificial formulations in a nation still shaped and dominated by Christian language, practice and understanding. At the very least, a more incisive set of distinctions needs to be outlined by those who would continue to uphold Christian sacrificial frameworks, including a clear demonstration regarding just how and why a Christian understanding of sacrifice is different from those sacrificial frameworks that electrify and naturalize war-culture. I remain dubious as to whether such a project is possible, ethically viable, or central to meaningful Christian commitment and following. In the meantime, peeling back the layers of sacrificial constructions wherever we find them, and examining honestly just how they function, is of utmost importance if citizens in the U.S. are to confront in any meaningful way the reality of war-culture in which we live and that is so destructive not only to the U.S. but to all people and the natural world at large. We need wise citizens, church members, clergy, theologians and politicians who strive to develop the kind of hearing that can pick up on sacrificialism, and hear it with a new level of suspicion and perception, if we are to challenge the impenetrable, persistent and ever-more-damaging dynamics of war-culture in the United States.

Endnotes

[1]Susan Faludi, "Let Us Prey", *The Nation*, May 12, 1997, 24.

[2]Judith Kohler and Colleen Slevin, "Will War Protesters 'Recreate 68'?" *Associated Press*, August 25, 2008, http://www.mcall.com/news/local/all-a1_cvnprotests.6560317aug25,0,1932893.story, accessed 08/28/08.

[3]As quoted in Henry A. Giroux, *University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex*, Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007, 31. See Catherine Lutz, "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis", *American Anthropologist* 104: 3 (September 2002), 723.

[4]Quoted In Giroux, 36. See Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 14.

[5]"Eisenhower's Farewell Address to the Nation", Jan. 17, 1961, *Eisenhower*

Archives, http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/speeches/farewell_address.html, accessed 08/16/08.

[6]Chalmers Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004, 55-56.

[7]Johnson 26.

[8]Johnson 135.

[9]Tony Perry, "Judge Allows Blackwater to Resume Work on San Diego Facility", *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 2008, http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2008/06/05/9432/, accessed, 06/06/08.

[10]Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire*, 144.

[11]Chalmers Johnson, Nemesis: *The Last Days of the American Republic*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006, 253-255.

[12]Joseph E. Stiglitz and Linda J. Bilmes, *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2008.

[13]Stiglitz and Bilmes 19.

[14]Stiglitz and Bilmes 34.

[15]Stiglitz and Bilmes 87.

[16]Nick Turse, *The Complex: How The Military Invades our Everyday Lives*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008, 16.

[17]Turse 16-18.

[18]Turse 5 ff.

[19]Turse 67-70. See the Oakley website, http://oakley.com/innovation, accessed 08/24/08.

[20]Turse 32.

[21]Jeffrey Brainard and JJ Hermes, "Colleges' Earmarks Grow, Amid Criticism", *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 28, 2008, http://chronicle.com/free/v54/i29/29a00101.htm., accessed 06/12/08.

[22]Deborah David, "Yo Soy El Army: If You're an Immigrant, at Least Uncle Sam Wants You", *Metroactive*, 09/19/07, http://www.metroactive.com/metro/09.19.07/news-0738.html, accessed 06/05/08.

[23]David, "Yo Soy El Army".

[24]Giroux 45.

[25]David, "Yo soy El Army".

[26]Giroux 57.

[27]Nick Turse writes about both of these rationales in the book cited above.

[28]See Andrew Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End to American Exceptionalism*, Metropolitan Books, 2008.

[29]Gary L Olson, "Re: FYI-Chinook helicopter to land in Quad Thursday/Transport LV ROTC Cadets to Training". Email to All-College and Seminary. Moravian College. 4/23/2008.

[30]George D Brower, "Re: FYI-Chinook helicopter to land I Quad Thursday/Transport LV ROTC Cadets to Training". Email to All-College and Seminary. Moravian College. 4/23/2008.

[31]Robert L. Ivie, *Dissent from War*, Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2007, 56, 61, 79.

[32]Giroux 79.

[33]See Jeffrey Carter, Ed., *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: a Reader*, New York: Continuum, 2003, for a very helpful and expansive anthology of scholarly exploration of sacrifice, spanning thinkers from the early nineteenth century through the twentieth. Nancy Jay's work represents one example of exploring the dynamic interplay of sacrifice as a cementing element in forms of religious, political and social power. *See Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Also see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War*, Holt, 1998.

[34]See George L. Mosse, *Confronting the Nation: Jewish and Western Nationalism*, Hanover, NY: Brandeis University Press, 1993.

[35]Mosse 16.

[36]Excerpted from Thomas Jefferson's letter to William Smith, Nov. 13, 1787. Jefferson writes, "What country before ever existed a century and a half without a rebellion? And what country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon and pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure". *The Atlantic Magazine Online*, http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/96oct/obrien/blood.htm, accessed 08/25/08.

[37]See Chapter 4, "Reductio Ad Absurdum: Total War", in Gwynne Dyer, *War*, New York: Crown Publishers, 1985.

[38]Dyer 77.

[39]Discussion from History of Christianity Section and North American Religions Section: War and Religion in North America, American Academy of Religion, San Diego, November 2007.

[40]Quoted in Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America", *American Civil Religion*, Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, eds., New York, Harper and Row, 1974, 32. For an in depth case study that delves into the development of sacrificial constructions during the Civil War period, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, Vintage, 2009.

[41]George S. Johnson, "Was Jesus Subversive? Considering the 'other' Reason Jesus Died on the Cross", *The Lutheran, March*, 2008, 28-29.

[42]"President's Radio Address, Easter, 2008", The *White House*, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/03/20080322.html. Accessed 04/02/08.

[43]Here I only provide a brief outline and analysis of these theological responses, all of which I explore more thoroughly in a book in progress, The *"Ultimate Sacrifice": Christianity and U.S. War-Culture*.

[44]Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006, 108. See also Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin, Eds.,

Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans , 2007, for an anthology of essays written by thinkers working on questions related to nonviolent soteriological constructions.

[45]Heim 162.

[46]Heim 310.

[47]See Christine Gudorf, *Victimization: Examining Christian Complicity*, Philadelphia, Trinity Press International, 1992.

[48]Dolores S. Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption", *Cross Examinations*, Ed. Marit Trelstad, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006; and also Dolores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Orbis, 1995. Joanne Marie Terrell, "Our Mothers' Gardens: Rethinking Sacrifice", Cross Examinations. Also, Joanne Marie Terrell, Power in the Blood? *The Cross in African American Experience*, Wipf and Stock, 2005.

[49]Jung Mo Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, SCM Press, 2007. Other theologians who are working on these issues include Franz Hinkelammert, Ivone Gebara, Elsa Tamez and more.

[50]"Bob Goudzwaard with Julio de Santa Ana, "The Modern Roots of Economic Globalization", *Beyond Idealism: A Way Ahead for Ecumenical Social Ethics*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006, 118.

[51]Tyler Cowen, "The New Deal Didn't Always Work, Either", *New York Times*, Economic View, November 23, 2008. See also Robert Higgs, *Depression, War and the Cold War*, Oakland, CA: Independent Institute, 2006, and Ronald L. Friesen, "War and Peace in Economic Terms", *Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

[52]Sung 72.