

RESISTING THE EMPIRE & PRACTICING NONVIOLENCE IN A POST-9/11 WORLD:
UNMASKING THE MYTH OF REDEMPTIVE VIOLENCE & EXPOSING THE DOMINATION SYSTEM

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PREFACE

THE CONJUNCTION OF AN IMMENSE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AND A LARGE ARMS INDUSTRY IS NEW IN THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE.... IN THE COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENT, WE MUST GUARD AGAINST THE ACQUISITION OF UNWARRANTED INFLUENCE, WHETHER SOUGHT OR UNSOUGHT, BY THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. THE POTENTIAL FOR THE DISASTROUS RISE OF MISPLACED POWER EXISTS AND WILL PERSIST. WE MUST NEVER LET THE WEIGHT OF THIS COMBINATION ENDANGER OUR LIBERTIES OR DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES. WE SHOULD TAKE NOTHING FOR GRANTED.

-PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER IN HIS
FAREWELL ADDRESS GIVEN JANUARY 17 1961.¹

I distinctly remember exactly what I was doing the morning of September 11, 2001. It was fall of my sophomore year in high school and my entire graduating class had gathered in the cafeteria to order our class rings, when the principal walked in and told us that a commercial airplane had just crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers—the symbol of American empire and the representation of global capitalism. The room fell still for what seemed like an eternity and then, as quickly as we had become silent we went right back to our task. The room was re-filled with the excitement and anticipation of finally having a class ring. Less than five minutes later the principal reentered the room and told us that not only was the first plane hijacked by terrorists, but another aircraft had crashed into the other trade center tower and another hijacked plane was heading toward Washington DC.

The remainder of that day was and still is a blur to me. I remember going to my classes and watching every major news station replay over and over the horrific scene that is still engraved in so many of our minds: the scene of those planes crashing into the twin towers. In the weeks and months following that horrific day I, like most Americans I suspect, remained glued to the television trying to see or hear every bit of information we could about the attacks. I remember President Bush declaring a global war on ‘terror,’ and Congress voting to give him all the power necessary to carry that war out in whatever means he saw fit. Most of all I remember almost every developed nation in the world standing behind the United States as we tried to painfully move forward. The US had the world in the palm of its hands and with the whole world watching we collectively chose to return evil for evil. That was our moment, a moment when we could have chosen a higher path. We chose not to, and now our integrity and reputation throughout the rest of the world have been severely damaged.

In 2004, I was able to participate in a rite of passage. For the first time I exercised my right as an American citizen to vote, not just in any election, but in a presidential election. Had I known then what I know now, I would not have voted the way did. Like many Americans, I found myself caught in the middle of all the debate, all the rhetorical smoke screens and all the ‘layers of the onion.’ Frankly, I’m still quite upset at the federal government for exploiting my fearful emotions after 9/11 and using them to justify a preemptive war against a sovereign nation. The American people were not told the truth; we were led to believe justice would be served while behind closed doors our leaders hatched a grand plan to exercise and secure global American power. My trust in our government has been broken—and I’m not sure it will ever be restored.

This essay is the product of my reflection upon our country’s actions following the tragic events that transpired on September 11, 2001. The United States’ claims to be a Christian

¹ “Eisenhower's Farewell Address to the Nation,” (<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/ike.htm>), accessed September 2007.

nation, founded on Christian principles, thus this essay is my reflection as an American Christian—no, as a Christian who happens to be an American citizen—who is trying the best he can to follow Jesus despite the circumstances and despite what the governing body of his country might tell him is ‘just.’ How can a follower of Jesus’ Way build God’s peaceable kingdom in a time of war?

Over the course of the last 3-4 years my studies have among other things lead me to believe that Jesus cannot be understood outside of his context. Jesus cannot be placed in the cultural vacuum of Western culture and be simultaneously worshipped as Lord. Of all the travesties committed in the name of Christianity perhaps the most despicable is the domestication of Jesus. I am reminded of C.S. Lewis’s classic *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*² wherein Aslan—the Christ-figure of the story—is described not as being safe, but as being good. Likewise, Jesus and his gospel, his good news, his *evangelion*—a term Jesus took directly from the Roman imperial lexicon and intentionally turned inside out—are not safe, but they are good. Too often in the Western world and especially in the United States we opt to tone down Jesus and his gospel to make them safer. As theologian and lecturer Tony Campolo puts it, we “neuter the gospel”³ in order to make it easier to teach, easier to preach and easier to put into action, assuming we ever get that far. By doing so we’ve created Jesus and his gospel in our image to serve our purposes at the expense and exploitation of anyone who happens to stand in our way.

Most people are taken aback when I tell them that Jesus probably looked more like Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden than paintings on display in their churches or homes. We tend to forget that here in America, which is tragic because it is part of Jesus’ context. The Jesus of history was a Palestinian peasant living under the rule of an oppressive empire, an empire that wanted nothing more than to expand its borders and exercise its military might throughout the world. And the most astonishing thing about Jesus—or at least what should be the most astonishing thing for United States as the sole superpower in world—is that he subverted and actively resisted the tyrannical rule of the Roman empire. As Walter Wink puts it, “Almost every sentence Jesus uttered was an indictment of the empire and the domination system of his day.”⁴

Given this fact about Jesus and his gospel, what is a person living in the ‘New Rome’ to do? Furthermore, how should the ‘New Rome’—that claims to be a Christian nation, indeed a nation that follows Jesus and his gospel—conduct itself in the world? These are tough questions, questions of which there are no easy answers, but they must be asked nonetheless. My hope is to provide an effective and prophetic framework—as painful as that may be for the citizens of the ‘New Rome’—from which to ask these questions, a starting place from which audacious Christians can as Micah once stated, “. . .do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.”⁵

² While I have read C.S. Lewis’ entire corpus, I first heard this juxtaposition from Christian music artist Derek Webb (<http://derekwebb.musiccitynetworks.com/>). I hesitate to even label Webb as ‘Christian’ although he doesn’t deny that nomenclature. Suffice it to say his music isn’t mainstream Christian by any means, but rather radically prophetic. For this particular quote see “Intro. to Wedding Dress” on the record *The House Show*.

³ Again, this phrase was borrowed from Webb who was quoting Campolo. See “Intro. to Wedding Dress” on the record *The House Show*.

⁴ Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York, New York: Galilee-Doubleday, 1998), 64.

⁵ Cf. Micah 6:8; “[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” From this point forward all biblical texts will be quoted from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

INTRODUCTION: THE DAWN OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM & AMERICA'S WAR ON TERROR

EVERY NATION IN EVERY REGION NOW HAS A DECISION TO MAKE. EITHER YOU ARE WITH US, OR YOU ARE WITH THE TERRORISTS.

-PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH⁶

September 11, 2001 was a watershed moment in American history; indeed, it was a watershed moment in Christian history. On that tragic and horrific day the citizens United States witnessed something not experienced in over fifty years—a carefully planned and executed attack on its home soil, an act of terrorism no less. That morning, at approximately 8:46 and 9:02 two domestic commercial airplanes, hijacked by nineteen known al-Qaeda terrorists, were deliberately flown into the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York City in an act blatant and public terrorism. Over 2900 people were killed.⁷ In that moment, as a Christian nation, *the United States could have chose to reject the myth of redemptive violence*, the myth of ‘might makes right.’ But rather the US government chose to perpetuate the spiral of violence not for the sake of ‘freedom,’ ‘liberty,’ or ‘peace,’ not even for the sake of democracy, but for the lust of power and domination and the sole purpose of building a global American empire, a ‘new Rome,’ rivaled by no one and accountable to no one, an empire beyond challenge and beyond all other authority. With the dawn of a new millennium came a new war, a new enemy, a new militarism, and new aspirations for American imperialism.

Only nine days after the 9/11⁸ attacks, President George W. Bush declared a global war on ‘terror’ and announced the creation of a new cabinet level agency—the Department of Homeland Security.⁹ Two days prior to Bush’s announcement the United States Congress voted without hesitation or debate to give the president authority to:

use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.¹⁰

⁶ “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,”
(<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>).

⁷ According to the latest counts by CNN,
(<http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/09/11/911.anniversary.ap/index.html?iref=newssearch>), the number of casualties from September 11, 2001 is, as of this writing, 2974, including those killed in New York, at the Pentagon, and those on board United Flight 93. Ironically this number *does not include* the 19 terrorists. This author includes the terrorists as victims bringing the total number of casualties up to 2993 as of this writing. Twenty-four victims are still listed as missing. For our purposes these numbers should be carefully and critically contrasted with the number of US troops killed in Iraq since 2003—3798 as of this writing (<http://icasualties.org/oif/default.aspx>)—and the staggering number of Iraqi civilians killed since the beginning of the war. Tragically, the exact number of civilian casualties is unknown due to the lack of initiative on part of the US Department of Defense. Retired US General Tommy Franks of Oklahoma and initial commander of the Iraq War in 2003, has oft been quoted as saying, “We don’t do body counts,” Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (New York, New York: Verso Publishers, imprint of New Left Books, 2005), 228. Thus the number of human lives lost may never be known; however, *estimates of documented Iraqi deaths range from 73,446-80,062* (<http://www.iraqbodycount.org/>), *over 25 times those on 9/11*. Again, these are only documented casualties; actual numbers are expected to be much higher.

⁸ From this point forward September 11, 2001 will simply be referred to as 9/11.

⁹ “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” September 20, 2001,
(<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>).

¹⁰ “Authorization for Use of Military Force,”
(<http://news.findlaw.com/hdocs/docs/terrorism/sjres23.enr.html>).

The Senate's decision was unanimous, in the House only one Representative (Barbara Lee D-CA) voted no on the bill.¹¹ Two weeks later, on October 7, Bush announced the beginning of US military strikes against the al-Qaeda terrorist network harbored in Afghanistan.¹² The new millennium had begun and the United States chose to ring it in with the sounds of unilateral bombardment.

It did not take long for the Bush administration¹³ to turn its attention toward Iraq. Many scholars, this author included, argue that the invasion of Iraq was always the ultimate goal of the administration, 9/11 only served as a *plausible pretext* for their imperial agenda.¹⁴ At any rate, by late 2001 and early 2002 the case was already being made for an invasion and prolonged war in Iraq. Detailed examination of the events leading up to the March 2003 invasion lie outside our purposes; for now we will only briefly mention a few major events directly pertaining to our theses.

Bush began laying the groundwork for the invasion of Iraq in his 2002 State of the Union Address when he dubbed Iraq, Iran and North Korea an “axis of evil” actively seeking and developing “weapons of mass destruction” and thus presenting an imminent threat to the US, its allies and its geo-political ‘interests.’¹⁵ Over the course of that year, the administration began fabricating and aggressively constructing an elaborate case for war with Iraq and the disarmament of Saddam Hussein’s government. Scare tactics were employed and many addresses and speeches were given by many different officials, all with impressive and persuasive rhetoric and the purpose of channeling the public’s post-9/11 emotions, building a spirit of nationalism, and projecting the anger and lust for vengeance onto a visible—and quite convenient—enemy, the ultimate and complete personification of evil.¹⁶ The argument for military intervention and invasion was very simple, albeit speculative: *it was believed* that Saddam Hussein was actively pursuing weapons of mass destruction. Numerous United Nations inspections had not shown any weapons nor any threatening weapons programs, but the administration remained firm in their assertion that it was *very likely* such weapons were being developed and obviously if they were being developed they *might* be used against the US or they *might* end up in the hands of terrorists who *might* use them as a means to carry out acts of terrorism on US soil. After all, as then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice stated,

¹¹ Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (New York, New York: Anchor Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 2002), 5. Hedges notes that Rep. Lee, and African-American woman prophetically warned, “...that military action will not guarantee the safety of the country...” and that “...as we act, let us not become the evil we deplore.”

¹² It should be noted that even as early as the initial military strikes in Afghanistan—which were and still are widely supported by many—Bush’s rhetoric was extremely divisive, setting up many false dichotomies. In his address to the nation on October 7, 2001, Bush stated, “Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict, *there is no neutral ground.*” Bush’s rhetoric has become even more polarizing since then. The text of his speech can be found at (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011007-8.html>).

¹³ Unless otherwise noted, all references to the ‘Bush administration’ will refer to the administration of George W. Bush, not his father George H.W. Bush.

¹⁴ See Noam Chomsky, *Interventions* (San Francisco: City Light, 2007), 8. Chomsky states, “The September 11 atrocities... provided an opportunity and a pretext to implement long standing plans to control Iraq’s immense oil wealth...[c]ontrol of energy fuels U.S. economic power and military might...translat[ing] to a lever of world control.”

¹⁵ “President Delivers State of the Union Address,” (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>).

¹⁶ This phenomenon, which we will call the scapegoating mechanism, will be discussed at length in later section. See page 28ff.

“...we [wouldn’t] want the smoking gun to become a mushroom cloud.”¹⁷ As we now know, there was never a smoking gun nor was there a mushroom cloud—except 9/11 of course, which many believe could have been avoided had the administration handled intelligence more efficiently and effectively.¹⁸

In 2002, the administration produced a document entitled “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America” wherein the idea of preemptive war—against any nation—and the imperial foreign policy were further reinforced:

The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction—and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.¹⁹

Later the Strategy asserts:

The United States must and will maintain the capability to defeat any attempt by an enemy—whether a state or non-state actor—to impose its will on the United States.... We will maintain the forces sufficient to support our obligations, and to defend freedom. *Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling the power of the United States.*²⁰

The document as been rightly labeled the United States’ “Imperial Grand Strategy” by some because of its “...fundamental commitment to maintaining a unipolar world in which the United States has no peer competitor...a condition that is to be permanent so that no state or coalition could ever challenge the US as global leader, protector and enforcer.”²¹ One should immediately begin to notice the dangerous slippery slope. The security strategy implies that only threats to the security of the United States are worthy of being considered for preemptive war—if one even considers preemptive doctrine a useful and viable option—not to mention the reckless absence of acknowledging the burden of proof, and evidently only the United States, in all its integrity and benevolence, can be trusted with weapons of mass destruction to defend itself, which is ironic

¹⁷ “Search for the ‘Smoking Gun.’” (<http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/01/10/wbr.smoking.gun/>). President Bush himself even stated, “America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof, the smoking gun that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.” “Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat,” (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html>). See also Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance* (New York, New York: Henry Holt Company, 2003), 18. Chomsky notes, “As the time approached to demonstrate the new norm of preventative war...Rice warned that the next evidence of Saddam Hussein’s intentions might be a mushroom cloud...Hussein’s neighbors, including Israeli intelligence dismissed the allegations....” Citing John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, two leading international relations scholars, Chomsky later adds, “[the administration’s] claims about Iraqi threats ‘should be viewed as transparent attempts to scare Americans into supporting a war.’”

¹⁸ Process theologian David Ray Griffin has been leading the way in this area though he has recently begun endorsing some of the so-called 9/11 conspiracy theories, which will not be discussed here due to their lack of evidence and likelihood (<http://www.stj911.com/>). Nonetheless, see Griffin’s work *The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions About the Bush Administration and 9/11* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing Group, 2004) for an analysis of the administration’s misuse of intelligence.

¹⁹ United States Security Council, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” (Washington DC: GPO, 2002), 15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30. Emphasis mine.

²¹ Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance* (New York, New York: Henry Holt Company, 2003), 11.

since the US is the only country in history to have ever used such weapons (i.e., Nagasaki, Hiroshima).²² The underlying bias toward American hegemony and jingoism is very clear; indeed, the latter quote from the security strategy is almost a textbook description of imperialism. In his 2003 State of the Union Address, President Bush made the United States' position even more explicit:

Some have said we must not act until the threat is imminent. Since when have terrorists and tyrants announced their intentions, politely putting us on notice before they strike? If this threat is permitted to fully and suddenly emerge, all actions, all words, and all recriminations would come too late. Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option...if Saddam Hussein does not fully disarm, for the safety of our people and for the peace of the world we will lead a coalition to disarm him...We seek peace. We strive for peace. And sometimes peace must be defended...we will fight with the full force and might of the United States military -- and we will prevail...we go forward with confidence, because this call of history has come to the right country.²³

Again, the justification for war can be simply put: Saddam Hussein and his regime *may* be developing weapons of mass destruction, they *may* be planning to use them on American soil and they *may* be planning to provide terrorists with such weapons; therefore, the US must attack immediately and unilaterally if need be, to demonstrate not only our 'hard line on terror,' but to show the world the capacity and the strength of the American military-industrial complex and to further solidify aspirations for American imperialism just as the aforementioned National Security Strategy prescribed. *This is not an oversimplification.* Perhaps—at least in a so-called “Christian” country where we pledge to be “...one nation under God...”—speculation and hypothetical threats aren't the most useful justifications for such harrowing atrocities as war, especially when war is spoken of as a 'last resort' and certainly when innocent lives, both American and Iraqi, hang in the balance.

The case for war reached its climax on February 5, 2003 when then Secretary of the State and former general Colin Powell, after publicly criticizing a strategy for war with Iraq in 2002,²⁴ presented the Bush administration's argument before the only quasi-check the American government can be said to have—the United Nations. In his presentation, Powell suggested that the United States was in possession of 'secret,' 'definitive' evidence proving the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. At one point he stated:

[T]he United States knows about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction as well as Iraq's involvement in terrorism...the facts and Iraq's behavior show that Saddam Hussein and his regime are concealing their efforts to produce more weapons of mass destruction...my colleagues, every statement I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources. These are not assertions. What we're giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence.²⁵

²² Rodrigue Tremblay, *The New American Empire* (West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, 2004), 10. Over 230,000 innocent civilians lost their lives in what Tremblay calls “...two of the most monstrous acts of the 20th century.”

²³ “President Delivers State of the Union [sic],” (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html>).

²⁴ Rodrigue Tremblay, *The New American Empire* (West Conshocken, Pennsylvania: Infinity Press, 2004), 97. Tremblay also states, “A cabinet that can't convince the only general in its midst of the soundness of its military policy must really be out of good arguments.” Of course, Powell was eventually heeled to the side of Bush serving as his mouthpiece at the United Nations Security Council assembly.

²⁵ “Secretary of State Address the U.N. Security Council,” (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030205-1.html>).

He closed his remarks by stating:

We know that Saddam Hussein is determined to keep his weapons of mass destruction; he's determined to make more. Given Saddam Hussein's history of aggression, given what we know of his grandiose plans, given what we know of his terrorist associations and given his determination to exact revenge on those who oppose him, should we take the risk that he will not some day use these weapons at a time and the place and in the manner of his choosing at a time when the world is in a much weaker position to respond?...The United States will not and cannot run that risk to the American people. Leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction for a few more months or years is not an option, not in a post-September 11th world.²⁶

During his presentation, Powell provided *computer generated images* of the alleged weapons and *cited unverifiable, unreliable, and downright incorrect articles*²⁷ to prove their existence, all the while drawing very loose associations with Saddam Hussein's regime and al-Qaeda, none of which could be documented or confirmed outside the so-called 'secret' US intelligence. Ultimately, the UN Security Council rejected Powell's testimony and rejected a strategy of war in Iraq; indeed, every diplomatic effort had not been completely exhausted.

However, as the National Security Strategy of 2002 asserted, the United States didn't need the approval of the United Nations or any other authority for that matter. President Bush and the other "chicken-hawks"²⁸ in the White House had already made their decision; indeed their collective de facto decision had been made for quite some time.²⁹ On March 19, 2003 President Bush announced the beginning of "Operation Iraqi Freedom" and the bombing of Baghdad reinforcing his rationale:

The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder. We will meet that threat now, with

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Chalmers Johnson *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy and the End of the Republic* (New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 303-304. According to Johnson, Powell cited an article from the United Kingdom that allegedly described Iraqi deception activities in exquisite detail. Johnson states:

Two days after Powell spoke, the British press, acting on a tip from Rangwala of Cambridge University, reported that the document Powell praised had been plagiarized from articles published in *Jane's Intelligence Review*, one of them six years old, and from a paper written by Ibrahim al-Marashi, an American student of Iraqi Shi'ite ancestry at the Monterey Institute for International Affairs, a small graduate school in California. Marashi published the article in the September 2002 issue of the *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, an Israeli scholarly journal. British intelligence not only quoted verbatim from these previously published sources, without attribution, but also even repeated typographic and punctuation mistakes in the originals.

²⁸ This caricature is borrowed from Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (New York, New York: Verso Publishers, imprint of New Left Books, 2005). On page 4 of his volume Mann describes Bush and the other main war proponents (e.g. Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, etc.) with the exception of Colin Powell as, "chicken-hawks, hawks [who have] never seen military action or its terrible consequences." Specifically referring to President Bush Mann declares, "...he [is] a desk killer, giving orders resulting in the deaths of thousands from the security of his office."

²⁹ This point will be addressed in a later section. See page 21. The self proclaimed neo-conservative think-tank known as *The Project for a New American Century* (<http://www.newamericancentury.org/>) has long advocated the advancement of global American militarism and dominance. Several White House officials including Vice-president Cheney have been and still remain members of the organization. Oil is the most obvious geo-political factor, a huge "national interest," as is the geographical area, perfectly nestled in the heart of the Middle East, ideal for American military bases.

our Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, so that we do not have to meet it later with armies of fire fighters and police and doctors on the streets of our cities.³⁰

Consistent and strategic military strikes were carried out in Baghdad and throughout Iraq for several months. One month after the initial strikes Baghdad fell, and one month after that Bush made an appearance on board the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier giving his infamous “Mission Accomplished” speech announcing, “...the end of major combat operations...” and “...a...new...free Iraq.”³¹

Since that day in May 2003 the events that have transpired have shown that Iraq is anything but free and our ‘mission’³² is far from being accomplished. Many lives have been lost, both American and Iraqi, a new and now dysfunctional US constructed government has been forced upon the Iraqis, and a bloody religious civil war has been ignited spawning countless acts of terrorism, counter-terrorism, and sectarian violence. The president’s public position has varied from “stay the course,” to “we have a new strategy” to everything between. We have witnessed a failed and mismanaged war policy, a troop surge, and now a pre-surge troop drawback, all of which have proved to be nothing more than political red herrings and rhetorical smoke screens to buy the current administration more time to ensure and solidify their intention of strengthening the American empire and securing the United States’ ‘national interests’ in the area, no matter how many innocent lives—collateral damage as they would euphemize—hang in the balance. As for the alleged weapons of mass destruction that Hussein was surely creating and planning to use—as of this writing, they’ve yet to be found.

It has become very clear to many Americans that Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11 nor did the country pose an imminent threat to the US. September 11 was reduced to serve only as a convenient pretext, an isolated event from which the current Bush administration could draw great emotional leverage and support from the American public, indeed vengeful leverage and support that could be harnessed and projected onto just about anything which is exactly what they did, “...manipulat[ing] the fears and feelings of ‘patriotism’ caused by [the] terrorist incidents to garner support for further empire-building.”³³ Iraq needed to be ‘handled’ in order

³⁰ “President Bush Addresses the Nation,” (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030319-17.html>).

³¹ “President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended,” (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030501-15.html>).

³² Mission is used here to describe the public mission the administration poses, that being a free democratic Iraq. This author is not alone in believing there is a deeper more fundamental imperial mission the administration would never publicly announce. That being said the public mission has not been accomplish while the private mission is closer to being accomplished. For further detailed discussion of this imperial mission, see Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York, New York: Henry Holt Company, 2004), passim; Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Global Quest for Dominance* (New York, New York: Henry Holt Company, 2003), passim; Ivan Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed* (Oakland, California: The Independent Institute, 2004), passim; Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (New York, New York: Verso Publishers, imprint of New Left Books, 2005), passim; and Rodrigue Tremblay, *The New American Empire: Causes and Consequences for the United States and for the World* (West Conshocken, Pennsylvania: Infinity Publishing, 2004), passim.

³³ Ivan Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed* (Oakland, California: The Independent Institute, 2004), 204. On page 205 Eland asserts, “Instead of fighting only al-Qaeda...the Bush administration used the public fear and outrage after the September 11 attacks to obtain support for an expansive...global war on terror...[because] the administration hoped to perform a ‘bait and switch.’”

for the Empire to move forward, in the eyes of the American imperialists in the White House, 9/11 couldn't have happened at a more convenient time.³⁴

It is important to remember that many label the US as a “Christian” nation. Putting the labels aside perhaps one should ask, does the US act like a Christian nation? Is its foreign policy conducive to the following of the teachings of Jesus? Perhaps the questions should be narrowed as we are living in a pluralistic world where many, this author included, would argue that the US ought not be seen as an exclusively Christian nation. *Perhaps then one should ask, what is the proper Christian response to 9/11 and America's global war on terror? How would Jesus, the Prince of Peace, respond to the war, the scapegoat of Iraq, and the myth of redemptive violence?* And how would he, in the words of President Bush, “...go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world?”³⁵ Such questions require critical historical examination of Jesus and his socio-political context, a context not unlike our own, a context of imperial dominance, and hegemony—the context of the Roman Empire, the most dominant ruling power in Jesus day.

PAX ROMANA: THEN & NOW

THE GREATEST EMPIRE OF MODERN TIMES HAS COME INTO EXISTENCE WITHOUT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE EVEN NOTICING.
-NIALL FERGUSON³⁶

As is the case with any historical figure, Jesus cannot be understood outside the context in which he lived. For our purposes, the socio-political climate of Jesus' world is extremely important because our current situation strongly resembles that of Roman imperial Palestine—unredeemed history does indeed repeat itself. Jesus of Nazareth was born under, lived within, and was eventually executed by, one of the most compelling and successful imperial powers in history.³⁷ He was executed as a so-called terrorist, a threat to the political status quo. It is highly probable that if Jesus were living today he would be held prisoner at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib or some other ‘secret prison’ for disturbing and subverting the ‘peace’ of the empire with the peace of God's domination-free kingdom.³⁸

³⁴ This will be further addressed in a later section. See page 21. However, for now it should be noted that the self proclaimed neo-conservative think-tank, the *Project for a New American Century* formed in 1997, viewed the first Iraq war under George H.W. Bush as a massive failure, a severe blow to ‘American pride’ and the agenda of global US militarism and hegemony. Since then individuals such as Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, and Paul Wolfowitz, just to name a few, have been actively making the case for a regime change in Iraq—all they needed was a viable pretext. Chalmers Johnson notes in *The Sorrow of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 229, that what they were waiting for was “...a catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor—that would mobilize the public and allow them to put their theories and plans into action...September 11 was, of course, precisely what they were looking for.”

³⁵ Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (New York, New York: Anchor Books, a division of Random House, 2002), 4.

³⁶ Ivan Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed* (Oakland, California: The Independent Institute, 2004), 3.

³⁷ Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2007), 24. Rieger also notes that in the years preceding Jesus' birth Rome was moving from being a *republic* to an *empire*—not at all unlike our current situation—due to the rules of Gaius Julius Caesar and his adopted great-nephew Octavian Augustus Caesar who ruled during the lifetime of Jesus until he died in 14 CE.

³⁸ Ironically, Jesus wouldn't be imprisoned or executed today for acting violently, but for acting nonviolently and for using creative nonviolent tactics to resist the American empire.

Perhaps the most regrettable and paralyzing misstep of post-Constantinian Christianity is the domestication and depoliticization of Jesus.³⁹ With the turbulent and uneasy union of the church and the Roman Empire came the compromise of the gospel and the institutionalization of Jesus' countercultural, nonviolent resistance movement. This phenomenon has become even more popular and damaging in the Western world, particularly in the United States. Jesus has become nothing more than a detached religious figure irrelevant to politics, economics, and other social issues; in short, Jesus has become uninvolved in, and unrelated to the modern imperial world. Christians would rather lift the Jesus of the Bible out of his historical narrative, place him on an altar and worship him, oblivious to the demands of his gospel; to do so renders him un-influential, ineffective and, impotent. Jesus must be understood within his historical narrative and his socio-political context, lest we crucify him all over again.

THE ETHOS OF EMPIRE

The Roman Empire was the most powerful, oppressive and violent power in the ancient world. Since at least 539 BCE, the Hebrew people had been ruled and dominated by some sort of pagan imperial power;⁴⁰ the Romans were hardly the first overlords. They were however, the most potent, the most oppressive, and the most successful. By the time a Jewish peasant named Jesus was born in a small agrarian town on the fringes of the empire, the world⁴¹ was experiencing an age of 'peace' and 'security' it had never experienced.⁴² Augustus Caesar was emperor and he had ushered the empire into a golden age of prosperity and success. This peace had been brought into existence by means of unbridled war, grotesque violence, and imperial triumph—known as the *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome.⁴³ Roman imperial ideology, indeed Roman imperial theology was in essence peace through war and victory, peace through domination and conquest. The ethos of Rome, and the ethos of empire are just that, domination, absolute power and complete hegemony.

The *Pax Romana* was praised throughout the empire by means of political propaganda and actively resisted by Jewish commoners.⁴⁴ For example, at the age of sixty-six Augustus

³⁹ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2003), 5-9. Horsley lists four factors that have led to the depoliticization and subsequent domestication of Jesus: 1) the modern Western assumption that religion separate is from, and thus irrelevant to politics and economics, 2) the Western assumption individualism and autonomy of the self, 3) the modern scientific orientation of modern biblical scholars and interpreters, and 4) the elimination of anything uncomfortable or remotely judgmental from the database of Jesus' authentic sayings by some recent biblical scholars. Horsley emphasizes that all of these are all modern, Western factors that have been subsequently projected onto an ancient society and into an ancient individual.

⁴⁰ John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 1998), 177-78. Crossan dates the exile to the Persian Empire from 539-331 BCE. Following the Persians, the Hebrews were ruled by Alexander the Great, the Greco-Egyptians, the Greco-Syrians and finally the Romans. Crossan also notes, to demonstrate the oppressive nature of the Roman Empire, that Jewish revolts did not begin until the rule of the Romans.

⁴¹ 'World' is used here in a pre-modern context to described what was known at that particular time to be 'the world.'

⁴² Stephen J. Patterson, *Beyond the Passion: Rethinking the Death and Life of Jesus* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2004), 13.

⁴³ Patterson, 14.

⁴⁴ Further treatment of Jewish resistance will be covered later in our study. For now it is important to note that resistance to imperial domination was common among Jewish peasants during and before Jesus time; indeed

penned a 2,500-word eulogy wherein he listed all of his imperial accomplishments, down to the very last territory conquered. This document known as the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (*The Acts of the Divine Augustus*) was forged in bronze and circulated throughout the empire as means political propaganda, reinforcing the imperial theology of religion, war, victory, peace; put more succinctly, peace through victory.⁴⁵ This is just one example of many other instances of Roman imperial propaganda; others include a shrine and altar built in Rome honoring the Augustan peace, imperial currency, and various sculptures depicting ‘the divine Augustus.’⁴⁶

The assertion of the Emperor’s divinity cannot be overstated and will be of utmost importance later in our study.⁴⁷ According to Roman imperial theology, the emperor was the Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer, the Lord of all. *The Acts of the Divine Augustus* state:

The birthday of the most divine Caesar Augustus is...the day which we might justly set on a par with the beginning of everything, in practical terms at least, in that he restored order when everything was disintegrating and falling into chaos and gave a new look to the whole world...For this reason one might justly take this to be the beginning of life and living...All the communities should have one and the same New Year’s Day, the birthday of the most divine Caesar...[who] by his epiphany exceeded the hopes of those who prophesied Good New (εὐαγγέλιον, *evangelion*), not only outdoing benefactors of the past, but also allowing no hope of greater benefactions in the future; and since the birthday of the god first brought to the world the Good News (εὐαγγέλιον, *evangelion*) residing in him...the Greek of Asia have decided that the New Year in all the cities should begin on...the birthday of Augustus.⁴⁸

The new calendar was thus divided into “before Caesar Augustus” and “after Caesar Augustus,” making the emperor Lord not only of the empire, but of time.⁴⁹ Roman imperial theology elevated the emperor as god and praised ‘peace’ through victory and conquest, hence the domination system⁵⁰ of Jesus’ day, the system he and others actively and effectively resisted, subverted, and began to transform.

resistance was not limited to the lower social classes as some scribes and merchants participated in resistance. See Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1987) and Marcus Borg *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins publishers, 2006).

⁴⁵ John Dominic Crossan, *God & Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then & Now* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins publishers, 2007), 20-25. See also John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 2001), 275ff; and their *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’s Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 2004), 72, 73, 81-82.

⁴⁶ John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’s Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 2004), 90-104. Crossan and Reed’s entire volume engages in an in depth analysis of Augustus’ and Nero’s imperial propaganda and how Paul subverted the imperial status quo.

⁴⁷ See page 42.

⁴⁸ Marcus Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins publishers, 2006), 67-68.

⁴⁹ Borg, 68.

⁵⁰ Further treatment of the domination system will be set forth later in this section. See page 22. For now, we can define the domination system as “...a world encompassing system characterized by unjust economic relations, oppressive political relations, patriarchal gender relations, prejudiced racial or ethnic relations, hierarchical power relations, and the use of violence to maintain them,” see Walter Wink, *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of Man* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2002), 270. In short, this constitutes what one

This imperial ethos of peace through victory, hegemony through conquest, and domination through oppression has become a viable template for every successful empire since Rome, including the new American Empire. The *Pax Romana* that Jesus and his movement so vehemently opposed has now become the *Pax Americana* supported by the institutional church in the name of Jesus himself.

THE AMERICAN MONOMYTH:⁵¹ ZEALOUS NATIONALISM & GLOBAL DOMINANCE

Up unto this point we have nonchalantly referred to the US as an Empire—indeed the new Rome—and to its current leaders as imperialists, indeed imperialists in disguise. Let us now more readily define “Empire” and imperialism. There is some scholarly debate surrounding the assertion that the US actually has a formal empire and how one might define Empire and imperialism. It is not our intention to engage in such semantical debates.⁵² For now, we will broadly define Empire, in manner that seems to encompass both traditional empires (Rome) and new empires (the United States), as the state in which a particularly strong entity exercises its power, especially military, economic and political power, over other weaker entities resulting in its hegemonic dominion and indirect rule over them.⁵³ Let us now explore how the US has arrived at this imperial position.

Many Americans still prefer to use certain euphemisms such as ‘the lone superpower’ to describe the United States’ position and reputation in the world, but our actions since 9/11 have proven otherwise.⁵⁴ The United States’ is no longer a republic; like Rome the US has undergone a seismic shift,⁵⁵ transitioning from a democratic republic to an empire under the guise of

author has called the “normalcy of civilization.” See John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 2007), 37-48

⁵¹ This phrase “The American Monomyth” has been borrowed from Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *The American Monomyth* (Garden City, New York: Anchor/Doubleday Press, 1977) wherein they identify the American Monomyth as “...an archetypal plot pattern emerging in American popular culture in which a community threatened by evil is redeemed through super heroism,” pg. 249.

⁵² For detailed examination of this issue see Ivan Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed* (Oakland, California: The Independent Institute, 2004), passim. See especially p. 21 ff. Eland explains at great length the difference between imperialism, hegemony, and what he calls “formal imperialism” and “informal imperialism.” Critical engagement of such assertions, while worthwhile, lie outside our present purposes. We must therefore intentionally bypass such literature and opt for a much more simplistic definition of Empire.

⁵³ Eland, 23.

⁵⁴ Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York, New York: Henry Holy & Company, 2004), 4.

⁵⁵ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2003), 3-5. Horsley argues that since its conception, the leaders of the US have viewed America as God’s chosen nation a “New Israel,” and a “City on a Hill.” He also asserts that the founding fathers modeled the US after the Roman republic, the New Rome. Of course Rome did not remain a republic, neither has the US. See also Noam Chomsky, *Interventions* (San Francisco, California: City Light, 2007), 113. Chomsky observes:

The rationale for [imperialism] runs as deep as American history. The worldview...is based on the assumption of the unique moral virtue of the United States, the assertion of its mission to redeem the world by spreading its professed ideals and the ‘American way of life’, and the faith in the nation’s divinely ordained destiny. This theological framework reduces policy issues to a choice between Good and Evil, thus undercutting reasoned debated and fending off the threat of democracy.

A current example of this belief in God’s endorsement of American leadership would be Bush stating to, “I feel like God wants me to run for President.” See (<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1075950,00.html>).

democracy. In his important yet sobering volume *The Sorrows of Empire*, Chalmers Johnson states:

Americans like to say that the world changed as a result of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It would be more accurate to say that the attacks produced a dangerous change in thinking [sic] of some of our leaders, who began to see our republic as a genuine empire, a new Rome, the greatest colossus in history, no longer bound by international law, the concerns of allies, or any constraints on its use of military force.⁵⁶

Johnson's point should be taken very seriously; however, it should be understood that America's imperial aspirations didn't begin when George W. Bush was sworn into office. Many liberal and progressive Americans like to blame all the problems we're now experiencing on the current administration and on the president himself.⁵⁷ While a certain amount of responsibility does lie with Bush administration, American imperialism has been in the works for quite some time. Indeed, the New Rome has been in the making long before President Bush ever thought about running for president, even before the 20th century.

Some, this author not excluded, argue that American's imperial aspirations came across the Atlantic on the Mayflower some 300 years ago.⁵⁸ Although the colonists came to 'the New World' to pursue political freedom and diversity of religious expression, and while they established a democratic republic, the spirit of imperial monarchy—the normalcy of their lived experience under Great Britain—influenced, perhaps even unconsciously, their thought and action creating the collective American consciousness.⁵⁹ It did not take long for territorial imperial aspirations to surface in what is now praised as “westward expansion” and “manifest destiny” in most popular US history textbooks. Detailed examination of such history, while worth noting, lies outside our purposes;⁶⁰ to briefly summarize, beginning in 1803 with Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase, the US began to acquire large amounts of extra territory, with

⁵⁶ Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York, New York: Henry Holy & Company, 2004), 3. See also Ivan Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed* (Oakland, California: The Independent Institute, 2004), 227. Eland states, “...the September 11 attacks provided a winning horse on which [the Bush administration's] imperial policy goals could ride.”

⁵⁷ Indeed, even Clinton, who is almost always praised by Bush opponents as a better, more anti-imperial president, has contributed to our current situation, mostly under the guise of humanitarian relief. See Ivan Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed* (Oakland, California: The Independent Institute, 2004), 16-17 and Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York, New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2003), 643ff.

⁵⁸ See James C. Juhnke, “The War for Independence and the Myth of Redemptive Violence,” *Peace & Change* 27, no. 3 (2002): 437-450 and Robert T. Handy, “The American Messianic Consciousness: The Concept of the Chosen People and Manifest Destiny,” *Review & Expositor* 73, no. 1 (1976): 47-58. On page 47 Handy states, “The roots of American messianic consciousness, like so many of our roots, run back through the colonial period to England.”

⁵⁹ Ivan Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed* (Oakland California: The Independent Institute, 2004), 3. In his introduction, Eland provides an excellent and concise overview of the history of American imperialism.

⁶⁰ For an excellent and exhaustive source on American history that acknowledges and engages these imperial aspirations see Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States: 1492-present* (New York, New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2003), *passim*. Zinn explains the rationale behind his alternative view account of American history on pages 683-688. This author realizes that summarized abridgement of such history runs the risk of inadequately oversimplifying very complex and nuanced historical events; however, the reader should note that prophetic theological reflection and careful ethical investigation are the main foci of this essay, bland historical recapitulation and detached political examination are not. The former pair include, but are not limited to, the latter.

the intent of expanding its borders “...from sea to shining sea.”⁶¹ What Jefferson started President James K. Polk finished with the Oregon Treaty in 1846, expanding the US’s territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Canadian border to what is now the Mexican border, encompassing the contemporary continental US.⁶² In the process, the Native Americans’ land was stolen and they were colonized, war was fought with the British and the Spanish, and hundreds if not thousands of lives were lost and oppressed as America’s imperial aspirations slowly came to surface.

The imperial scheme was briefly interrupted during the Civil War and the reconstruction period, but became a priority again following the industrial revolution, the great depression, and FDR’s “New Deal.” Even before the turn of the century, in 1898, the US won the Spanish-American war and annexed a great amount of territory, resulting in what some have called the true inception of the American Empire.⁶³ By the end of World War II, the aspirations to actualize the new Rome were beginning to work their way into American foreign policy. In his concise and lucid volume *Saving Christianity from Empire*, Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer outlines five stages of US foreign policy spanning the 20th century and culminating with the current Bush administration and our contemporary situation of full-blown American imperialism.⁶⁴ For our purposes these stages will be summarized and consolidated into three. The first stage, from roughly 1946 to 1979 was marked by significant US military support and sponsorship of dictatorships in the so-called third-world. Nelson-Pallmeyer lists at least 6 US sponsored dictators in Asia alone, and over a dozen in Latin America, further contributing to American expansion and hegemony, creating non-continental political leverage from which American mandate could be enforced.⁶⁵ The second stage, from 1980-1991, under the supervision of the Reagan administration, saw the end of the Cold War and the US emerge as the world’s sole superpower, a polite euphemism for the sole imperial power in the global political arena. Indeed, America’s 20th century imperial muscles were initially flexed under the administration of George H.W. Bush in the first war in Iraq. The next seven years, from 1992-1997 were perhaps the most important in terms of contributing to our current imperial situation. While Clinton was president many of the so-called neo-conservative imperialists who planned and executed the first Iraq war were not serving in the White House, but were actively building an imperial agenda. Again, as Chalmers Johnson notes:

Ever since the first American war against Iraq, the Gulf War of 1991, a number of the key people who planned and executed it in the White House and the Pentagon have wanted to go back and finish what they started. They said so in reports written for then Secretary of Defense Cheney in the last years of the first Bush administration; and during the period from 1992 to 2000, when they were out of power, they drafted extensive plans for what should be done if the Republicans retook the White House. In spring of 1997, they organized themselves as the Project for the New

⁶¹ Zinn, 149ff.

⁶² Zinn, 158.

⁶³ Ivan Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed* (Oakland, California: The Independent Institute, 2004), 3.

⁶⁴ Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Saving Christianity from Empire* (New York, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 83-101.

⁶⁵ In Asia, Pallmeyer lists: Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Indonesia. He only notes that there were 12 Latin America. He does not list their names.

American Century (PNAC) and began to lobby vigorously for aggression against Iraq and the remaking of the Middle East.⁶⁶

In 1998, this self-proclaimed neo-conservative think tank drafted several letters to the Clinton administration calling for “the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime from power” and the need to “establish and maintain a strong US military presence in the region, and be prepared to use that force to protect our vital geo-political interests in the Persian gulf—and, if necessary, to help remove Saddam from power”⁶⁷—‘vital interests’ of course meaning the convenience of the geographical area and most importantly the natural resources in the area, namely fossil fuels. Known members of PNAC included, among others, now Vice-President Dick Cheney, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, former deputy Secretary of Defense and World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz, former US ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton, and former Chairman of the Defense Policy board Richard Perle,⁶⁸ all of whom assumed White House leadership directly under George W. Bush in 2001, the beginning of the third and final imperial stage. Bush became a mere figurehead and mouthpiece of a grand imperial strategy long in the making. The aspirations for American empire were beginning to reach their climax.

Like Rome before it, the US fully embodies the ethos of empire, dominating the world through its unrivaled military and economic might. Hegemony and militarism are no longer under wraps in collective American consciousness; indeed, the imperial cat has been let out of the bag. An empire long in the making is now being realized, unfolding right before our eyes. *Pax Americana* is driving force in the world, working toward building a new world order of absolute power, and supreme militarism leading to global dominance; it is supported not only by the US government—that of course should be expected—but by the Christian church, the institution claiming to follow Jesus in building God’s peaceable kingdom.

THE DOMINATION SYSTEM

The ethos of empire and spirit of imperialism are both encompassed by a larger entity known as the domination system,⁶⁹ characterized by an overarching network of Powers and systemic structures. In his revolutionary and groundbreaking works, theologian Walter Wink

⁶⁶ Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York, New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2004), 227-28. See also Ivan Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed* (Oakland, California: The Independent Institute, 2004), 1-2. In his introduction, Eland notes that “In a 2003 vice-presidential Christmas card, Dick Cheney quoted Ben Franklin to imply God was watching over and aiding the U.S. Empire: ‘And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, it is probable that an empire can rise without His aid?’”

⁶⁷ Johnson, 228.

⁶⁸ Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (New York, New York: Verso Publishers, 2005), 3; Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy and the End of the Republic* (New York, New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2004), 228.

⁶⁹ Walter Wink has done some very extensive research in this area specifically concerning the domination system and the language of power in the New Testament. For a concise abridgment of his work see *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York, New York: Galilee-Doubleday Publishers, a division of Random House, 1998). For a more detailed and extensive examination of ‘the Powers,’ the domination system, and what Wink calls the myth of redemptive violence see his trilogy, *The Powers, Vol. I, Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1984); *The Powers, Vol. II, Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1986); *The Powers, Vol. III, Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992).

reinterprets the New Testament concept of “principalities and Powers,”⁷⁰ especially found in the Pauline corpus, within a post-modern worldview.⁷¹ In his view, the “the Powers” are not the invisible, personal, heavenly beings (e.g. angels, demons, spirits, etc.) of the pre-modern worldview; nor are they to be completely disregarded and demythologized as irrelevant to modern social and systemic power structures in the modern worldview. Rather, in this post-modern worldview both the modern and the pre-modern are taken into account; hence, the Powers are the “...inner, spiritual aspect of material or tangible manifestations of power.”⁷² Every systemic power structure and every institutional authority has an actual spiritual ethos guiding its behavior and its actions. These—the institution and the spiritual ethos—are the inner and outer aspects of a single reality.⁷³

The Powers—the systems and structures that guide our daily lives—remain part of the domination system, a system of oppression and coercion, constituting the “normalcy of civilization” and including imperial ideologies,⁷⁴ but normalcy is not inevitability. The Powers are not inherently bad, they are part of God’s good created order,⁷⁵ but they have fallen and remain unaware of God’s domination-free ideal. Thus, “...the Powers are good, the Powers have fallen, [and] the Powers *must* be redeemed.”⁷⁶ These three statements must be held together, none can stand-alone. The goodness of the Powers cannot be affirmed unless one recognizes they are fallen; their oppressiveness cannot be confronted unless one remembers they are part of God’s good creation; reflection on their fallen nature will blast any hope for change unless one reasserts that they can be transformed and redeemed; and sole focus on redemption and

⁷⁰ From this point forward the broader phrase “the Powers” will be used in its broadest sense to encompass the “principalities and Powers.”

⁷¹ See his article “The New Worldview: Spirit at the Core of Everything,” in *Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice and the Domination System*, ed. Ray Gingerich and Ted Grimsrud (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2006), 17-28; and *The Powers Vol. I, Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1984), 99-140; *The Powers Vol. III, Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 3-10.

⁷² Wink, *The Powers, Vol. I, Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1984), 104.

⁷³ Wink, *The Powers, Vol. III, Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 6-7. Although there is some scholarly debate as to what Paul actually meant when speaking of the “principalities and Powers” and what that might mean for biblical exegesis, Wink is not alone in his assertions. See Reid Daniel G. “Principalities and Powers” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 746-752; Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. by John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1977), 16-26; John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 134-161; John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’s Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 2004), passim; and Ray Gingerich and Ted Grimsrud eds. *Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice and the Domination System* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2006), passim. For an dissenting view, including a critique of Wink see Clinton E. Arnold *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul’s Letters* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), passim, see esp. 167-209; and Susan R. Garrett “Christ and the Present Evil Age” *Interpretation* 57, no. 4 (2003): 370-383.

⁷⁴ The phrase “normalcy of civilization” is taken from John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (San Francisco, California: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 2007), 37-48.

⁷⁵ Cf. Genesis 1:1ff. and Romans 13.

⁷⁶ These theses are the linchpin of Wink’s work and are found in virtually all of his works, put mostly lucidly in *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York, New York: Galilee-Doubleday Publishers, a division of Random House, 1998), 31-36. Emphasis mine.

transformation leads to idealistic utopia unless one recognizes and acknowledges their transformation and redemption takes place within the limits of their finite and fallen nature. As Wink states:

This theological framework is of utmost importance for understanding the nature of the Powers. They are good by virtue of their creation to serve the humanizing purposes of God. They are fallen, without exception, because they put their own interests above the interests of the whole. And they can be redeemed, because what fell in time can be redeemed in time. We must view this schema as both temporal and simultaneous, in sequence all at once. Temporally: the Powers *were* created, they *are* fallen, and they *shall* be redeemed. This can be asserted as belief in the final triumph of God over the forces of evil. But this schema is also simultaneous: God at once and the same time *upholds* a given political or economic system, since some such system is required to support human life; *condemns* that system insofar as it is destructive of fully human life; and *presses for its transformation* into a more humane order. Conservatives stress the first, revolutionaries the second, reformers the third. The Christian is expected to hold together all three.⁷⁷

These assertions must be handled very carefully. To say that God created the Powers is not to say that God endorses a particular system at a particular time. Some systems and ideologies that perpetuate the domination system—imperialism included—can only be redeemed and transformed by being abandoned or destroyed.⁷⁸ God’s ideal is one without domination; it is one of radical equity. Nothing lies outside the scope of redemption, not even the Powers. The task of the church and of the Christian involves joining in God’s endeavor to bend the Powers back toward their divine purposes through interactive participation in God’s redemptive action in history. Thus, the ethos of empire and of the *Pax Americana* must be transformed.

THE MYTH OF REDEMPTIVE VIOLENCE AND THE SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM

TO ACHIEVE DOMINATION, VIOLENCE CAN SUCCEED, BUT AT TREMENDOUS COST. IT CAN ALSO PROVOKE GREATER VIOLENCE IN RESPONSE.
-NOAM CHOMSKY⁷⁹

In the above section we examined the ethos of empire, the *Pax Romana* and what has now become the *Pax Americana*. We concluded our analysis with a brief discussion of the domination system and the Powers and the assertion that the ideology of imperialism perpetuates the domination system. It is only fitting that a domination system have a domination myth, a founding narrative explaining its ethos and defining its existence. We shall now turn our attention to this founding narrative, a myth known as the Myth of Redemptive Violence and its relative the scapegoat mechanism.

VIOLENCE AS THE FOUNDATION OF CREATION

Again, Walter Wink has been a pioneer in this area. He defines the myth of redemptive violence as “...the conviction that only violence can save us...” and states that “...this belief

⁷⁷ Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York, New York: Galilee-Doubleday Publishers, a division of Random House, 1998), 32. Emphases in original.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷⁹ Noam Chomsky, *Interventions* (San Francisco, California: City Light, 2007), 87.

under girds American popular culture, civil religion, nationalism, and foreign policy....”⁸⁰ In short the myth of redemptive violence, the myth of ‘might makes right,’ is an imperial myth embodying the *Pax Romana* and the *Pax Americana*, leading society to believe that war makes peace and violence ultimately brings order—again, this can also be called the “normalcy of civilization,” but again one must remember, normalcy is not inevitability.⁸¹

This myth is as old as civilization itself. Its roots can be traced back to ancient Babylonian religion and the creation myth known as the *Enuma Elish* dated roughly around 1250 BCE, although it is likely based on oral traditions much earlier.⁸² In this myth the cosmos is created from the bloody corpse of an assassinated goddess. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur notes that in this myth order is established by means of disorder; creation itself is an act of violence and victory over an enemy older than creation; evil is primordial possessing ontological priority over good.⁸³ The origin of evil precedes the origin of things; chaos is prior to order, evil prior to good. Violence is inherent in the godhead and evil is an ineradicable constituent of ultimate reality. Thus, existential reality is defined by chaos, violence, and domination.

Conversely, the biblical creation myth is diametrically opposed to the Babylonian myth.⁸⁴ In Genesis a good God creates a good creation. Good is ontologically prior to evil and order is created through goodness. Evil is not part of creation nor is it primordial; it exists as result of human choice and finitude—demanding the need for a nuanced theodicy, a problem we cannot begin to discuss here. Creation is not an act of violence, victory or domination, but of goodness, peace, and responsibility. Indeed in the biblical myth there is no requirement of death or creative sacrifice as in the Babylonian myth. Existential reality is defined by order, peace, and equity. This biblical myth is the history of the Hebrews and is thus the heritage of the people called Christians.

VIOLENCE AS WESTERN CIVIL RELIGION

This Babylonian myth—the myth of redemptive violence—is hardly defunct; indeed it is alive and well in the Western world, particularly in imperial America. It is “...the dominant myth in contemporary America...it enshrines a cult of violence at the very heart of public life and...even those who seek to oppose its oppressive violence often do so by the very same means.”⁸⁵ Indeed, violence has become the American ethos; it has become our civil religion inundating us from every angle.

⁸⁰ Walter Wink, “The Myth of Redemptive Violence,” in *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Vol. III, *Models and Cases of Violence in Religion*, ed. J. Harold Ellens (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, an imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 266.

⁸¹ John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 2007), 45.

⁸² Walter Wink, *The Powers* Vol. III, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 13-17.

⁸³ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1967), 177-182.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* It is also worth noting that the biblical creation myth was developed—likely by the Priestly writers—while the Hebrews were exiled in Babylon, *in response to the Babylonian creation myth*. See Bruce C. Birch and Walter Brueggemann et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2005), 31-46.

⁸⁵ Wink, *The Powers* Vol. III, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 17.

Nowhere is the myth of redemptive violence more prevalent than in American popular culture. We see it in our movies, in our literature, in our media and in our television programming. For example:

Few cartoon shows have run longer or been more influential than Popeye and Bluto. In a typical segment, Bluto abducts a screaming and kicking Olive Oyl, Popeye's girlfriend. When Popeye attempts to rescue her, the massive Bluto beats his diminutive opponent to a pulp, while Olive Oyl helplessly wrings her hands. At the last moment, as our hero oozes to the floor, and Bluto is trying, in effect to rape Olive Oyl, a can of spinach pops from Popeye's pocket and spills into his mouth. Transformed by this gracious infusion of power, he easily demolishes the villain and rescues his beloved. The format never varies. Neither party ever gains any insight or learns from these encounters. Violence does not teach Bluto to honor Olive Oyl's humanity, and repeated plummelings do not teach Popeye to swallow his spinach *before* the fight.⁸⁶

Indeed, only the names have changed; we live, watch, and participate in the *Enuma Elish*—the myth of redemptive violence—everyday and in everyway. Unbridled and unrestrained acceptance of this myth in popular culture and religious life eventually leads to its influence on political action and foreign policy ultimately leading to overly zealous nationalism, oppressive hegemony, and in due time, imperialism. As Walter Wink lucidly asserts:

An even more significant aspect of the myth of redemptive violence is its contribution to international conflict. In this myth, the survival and welfare of that nation becomes the highest earthly and heavenly good. Here, Power is made absolute. There can be no other gods before the nation. Not only does this myth establish a patriotic religion at the heart of the state, it gives divine sanction to that nation's imperialism. The myth of redemptive violence thus serves as the spirituality of militarism. By divine right the state has power to demand that its citizens sacrifice their lives to maintain the privileges enjoyed by the few. By divine decree it utilizes violence to cleanse the world of the enemies of the state. Wealth and prosperity are the right of those who rule in such a state. And the name of God—any god, the Christian God included—can be invoked as having specially blessed and favored the supremacy of the chosen nation and its ruling caste.⁸⁷

Those words were written prior to 9/11 and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but are no less relevant now than when they were initially written. The myth of redemptive violence has become the civil religion of imperial America and is complicit in realizing America's imperial aspirations, further perpetuating the domination system and undermining the message Jesus. We have learned to trust in and have been seduced by the 'redemptive' nature of violence and rely on war to grant us 'peace.'

⁸⁶ Wink, *The Powers Vol. III, Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 18. Other cartoon examples would include, "Tom and Jerry," "Wylie Coyote," and "Bugs Bunny." John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett have done some extensive research in this area concerning the myth of redemptive violence and the myth of the American superhero. See their *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003) and *Captain American and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003).

⁸⁷ Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York, New York: Galilee-Doubleday, a division of Random House, 1998), 56-57.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001: MYTHIC VIOLENCE & THE DISGUISED SCAPEGOAT

The reaction of the American public to the horrific events of 9/11 is a perfect example of blind trust in the myth of redemptive violence; moreover, it is an example of the perversion of justice. In response to 9/11, many Americans spoke of wanting ‘justice to be served.’ What they really meant was they wanted revenge, to retaliate in fear and rage, repaying acts of senseless violence with more acts of senseless violence.⁸⁸ In imperial America, justice has become synonymous with revenge and retaliation; indeed the maxim ‘an eye for an eye’ rules our behavior, which is ironic considering Jesus’ rejection of such destructive rules.⁸⁹ We have become so enamored with ‘payback’ and vengeance that we have forgotten the true gospel of peace and equitable justice. Rather, we have replaced the gospel with the myth of redemptive violence and the intoxication of revenge and retaliation.

If for the American public the myth of redemptive violence manifests itself in revenge and retaliation under the guise of justice, then for the American government it manifests itself not only in the aspirations of imperialism, but in the doctrine of preemptive war and what is called the scapegoat mechanism, also under the guise of justice. Up unto this point we have spoken exclusively of the myth of redemptive violence. We must now add another element into the equation—the scapegoat mechanism.

In this area, we are forever indebted to René Girard and Gil Bailie who have developed an elaborate schema all future work on sacred violence and scapegoating must build upon.⁹⁰ Detailed analyses of Girard and Bailie’s offerings, while worthwhile, lie outside our immediate purposes; we must therefore regrettably recapitulate.

The biblical institution of the scapegoat can be dated back to the time of the ancient Hebrew people under the leadership of Moses and Aaron.⁹¹ As part of the ceremonies surrounding what is now called Yom Kippur—the day of atonement—two goats were selected, lots cast among them to determine which one will be dedicated to Yahweh—sacrificed in

⁸⁸ French thinker René Girard speaks of this vengeful, retaliatory perversion of “the administration of justice” as byproduct of mimetic desire in his *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins Press, 1977), 16-19.

⁸⁹ It is also worth noting that the ‘eye for an eye’ rule, also known as the *lex talionis* (Latin for ‘the law of retaliation’) was used during the time of the ancient Hebrews not as an excuse for retaliation, but as a means of reducing retaliatory violence. See Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins, Publishers, 2006), 248; P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., “Exodus” in *The Harper-Collins Bible Commentary*, revised ed., ed. James L. Hays, et al. (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 2000), 138; and Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1987), 264.

⁹⁰ See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1977) and Gil Bailie *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1995); see also Girard’s *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁹¹ Cf. Leviticus 16:1ff. It should be noted that here we speaking strictly of the *biblical* institution of the scapegoat. Girard would argue that the “Generative Mimetic Scapegoating Mechanism” has implicitly pervaded human interaction and behavior since “the foundation of the world.” See Gil Bailie *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1995), 201 and Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), *passim*; and *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), *passim*.

atonement for sin—and which will be ‘sent out,’⁹² the sins of the community placed upon it, into the wilderness or driven off a cliff.⁹³ In essence, the scapegoat mechanism consisted in projecting the evils of a community onto a usually innocent “surrogate victim”⁹⁴ resulting in the atonement and justification of that particular community.

Even further, for Girard the “scapegoat mechanism,” which includes, but is not limited to the aforementioned biblical institution, consists of the process by which a particular community seeks to mimetically purge itself of the stains of iniquity by collective killing an innocent victim. As Girard states:

[A]ny community that has fallen prey to violence or has been stricken by some overwhelming catastrophe hurls itself blindly into the search for a scapegoat. Its members instinctively seek an immediate violent cure for the onslaught of unbearable violence and strive desperately to convince themselves that all their ills are the fault of a lone individual who can be easily disposed of.⁹⁵

In his work *The Scapegoat*, Girard speaks of two different types of “text” related to the scapegoat, a group wherein the victim is not spoken of as a scapegoat, but fits the typology, and a group wherein the victim is explicitly labeled a scapegoat.⁹⁶ The former template fits perfectly within contemporary imperial America and its collective response after 9/11. This is a common occurrence on an individual level, but following 9/11 the American government fabricated an elaborate scheme ending in the collective mimetic scapegoating of Iraq and the regime of Saddam Hussein. We mentioned the pretext needed to aid the Bush administrations’ imperial ambitions earlier; the scapegoat mechanism would another way of describing that phenomenon. President Bush and many other administration officials rhetorically projected all the emotion and anger of the American public on Iraq, making it a convenient collective scapegoat to not only further advance their imperial agenda, but to also atone for the events of 9/11—the war in Iraq became a collective act of American ‘mob violence,’ an act of fearful revenge and retaliation.

Both the scapegoat mechanism used by the American government and the law of retaliation and fearful revenge obeyed by the American public remain complicit in the myth of redemptive violence and its assertion that violence saves. Both pervert justice for the sake imperialism, opting to kill rather than restore, further embedding society within the domination system and the normalcy of civilization. *Again, normalcy is not inevitability, the domination system does not have the last word nor does the myth of redemptive violence remain comfortably unchallenged*

THE VIOLENCE OF THE CROSS: UNMASKING THE MYTH & EXPOSING THE SCAPEGOAT

Earlier, we mentioned that the most regrettable and paralyzing misstep of post-Constantinian Christianity was the depoliticization and domestication of Jesus.⁹⁷ Perhaps the

⁹² Or ‘(e)scaped,’ later shortened to simply ‘scape.’ Thus, the (e)scape goat and later the scapegoat.

⁹³ Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1995), 151-152.

⁹⁴ The credit for ‘surrogate victim’ phrase is owed again to René Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), passim.

⁹⁵ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 79-80.

⁹⁶ René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 117.

⁹⁷ Cf. page 13.

unfortunate shift in the church's view of the atonement should be listed alongside the aforementioned mistake; indeed, the shift in atonement theology has aided in the depoliticization and domestication of Jesus. Most Western Christians, particularly American Christians remain oblivious to the different theories of the atonement; furthermore, they continue to be unaware of the atonement theology of the early church *prior to Constantine and the Edict of Milan*.

Before the legalization and institutionalization of Christianity, the church lived as a countercultural resistance movement in conflict with the empire and the dominant or 'orthodox' theory of atonement was what is now called 'classic Christus victor.'⁹⁸ In this view God and Satan—allegorical to the empire as some have argued⁹⁹—were engaged in a cosmic struggle, which culminated in the death and resurrection of Jesus and God's victory over 'the Powers' and the domination system.

Once Christianity became the religion of the empire, its success was inextricably linked to the success of the empire and the preservation of the empire became the decisive criterion for ethical behavior, at least among the ruling elites. The church ceased to be a dissident minority group and came to identify with the social and institutional order; before this union Christians rejected the sword, indeed they abhorred it, following the union they wielded the sword in the name of Christ.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, Christus victor—an indictment of the empire, the domination system, and the myth of redemptive violence—had to be replaced; hence the construction of a more violent and empire-friendly version of the atonement.

Enter the substitutionary and satisfactory theory of atonement developed by Anselm and praised by contemporary American Christians within the Empire. In this view, God is portrayed as either a bloodthirsty Being demanding violent sacrifice and compensation for the debt of human finitude, or a cruel parent sanctioning divine child-abuse as a ransom for humanity. God requires violence and Jesus 'takes the place' of every human, thus taking the punishment and paying the debt and appeasing the so-called wrath of God. This imperial atonement theory remains complicit in and further perpetuates the myth of redemptive violence, the scapegoat mechanism and the ethos of the domination system. Jesus is nothing more than a huge surrogate victim, the final scapegoat to end scapegoating as God "...feeds a bigger and better victim into the [machine] to get a bigger payoff."¹⁰¹ The only problem is the machine still exists.

A much better alternative lies in what J. Denny Weaver calls "narrative Christus victor."¹⁰² In this view, salvation and ethics are not divorced as in the aforementioned theory; indeed, ethics—with an emphasis on the nonviolence of Jesus—play an integral part in the participatory and interactive narrative of salvation, which begins in, but is not limited to, the historical arena in which we live. The difference between *classical* Christus victor and *narrative* Christus victor should be noted. First, the important qualifier—narrative; hyper-emphasis solely on the death of

⁹⁸ J. Denny Weaver, "Violence in Christian Theology," *Cross Currents* 51, no. 2 (2001): 159-160, 164.

⁹⁹ Weaver, "Violence in Christian Theology," 164-167.

¹⁰⁰ It is worth noting here that the early church, up unto the time of Constantine, was strictly pacifist. Christians were not allowed to serve in the military or engage in any sort of violent action, as it was incompatible with the teachings of Jesus. For detailed examination of this see Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Press, 1961), passim.

¹⁰¹ S. Mark Heim, "No More Scapegoats: How Jesus Put an End to Sacrifice" *Christian Century* 123, no. 18 (2006): 25.

¹⁰² J. Denny Weaver, "Violence in Christian Theology" *Cross Currents* 51, no. 2 (2001): 164ff. For a detailed overview of narrative Christus victor see Weaver's *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Press, 2001).

Jesus is problematic. The cross and the resurrection must be viewed together as a single event, the climax of Jesus' entire life and teaching. Focus solely on the death of Jesus misses the vindication of the resurrection; indeed, it misses the huge influence of Jesus' life and action. Second, as we covered earlier, 'the Powers' must be reinterpreted within a post-modern worldview.¹⁰³ Hence the Powers become symbols for, among other things, the domination system, the myth of redemptive violence, and imperialism—all of which God has unmasked and exposed through Jesus. Finally, all imagery and elements of classic atonement theories are avoided. Jesus is not a passive surrogate victim, but rather a nonviolent activist who exposes the entire system and is vindicated through resurrection. Restoration, not retribution is the ultimate goal: restoration of the system and the Powers—which were part of God's good created order—and restoration, indeed liberation, of human beings from the cycles of sacrifice and violence. God is not a cruel bloodthirsty avenger, but a Being that *kenotically* participates in suffering, effectively unmasking the injustice of the system, indeed turning the system against itself,¹⁰⁴ a Being who chooses to suffer violence rather than sponsor it.¹⁰⁵

Through Jesus the scapegoat mechanism and the myth of redemptive violence are exposed and the spiral of violence is broken. Through the cross *and the resurrection* Jesus laid bare the true nature of the domination system and the myth of redemptive violence.¹⁰⁶ He was much more than an innocent victim, indeed he gave his life voluntarily, freely and deliberately; he *kenotically* emptied himself and took on the violence of the entire system.¹⁰⁷ Jesus' nonviolent submission to the authority of the Powers—because they are good—acknowledged their necessity, but at the same time rejected and unmasked the legitimacy of their de facto ethos—because they have fallen—and realized the need for the transformation of the Powers themselves—they must be redeemed. The words of Walter Wink are appropriate:

If Jesus had never lived, we would not have been able to invent him. There is, in the integrity of his teaching and living, an exposé and repudiation of the domination system that no one trapped within the system could possibly have achieved.... What Jesus distilled from the long experience of his people in violent and nonviolent resistance was a way of opposing evil without becoming evil in the process. He advocated means consistent with the desired end: a society of justice, peace, and equality free of authoritarianism, oppression and ranking. His method and his goal were domination-free. Here at last is a full-blown alternative to the politics of "redemptive" violence.¹⁰⁸

Through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus exposed and unmasked the myth of redemptive violence and the domination system and he did so within the context of Empire. He demonstrated God's justice, not revenge or retaliation, but sacrificial love and equity, not domination and oppression, but peace and nonviolence.

¹⁰³ Cf. page 22.

¹⁰⁴ Heim, "No More Scapegoats," 29.

¹⁰⁵ Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at a Crossroads* (New York, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1995), 66.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1995), 225ff.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Philippians 2:6-11.

¹⁰⁸ Walter Wink, *The Powers* Vol. III, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 136, 127.

We have discussed how Jesus' death and resurrection unmasked the myth of redemptive violence and the domination system. Now let us turn to some decisive examples taken from his teachings that oppose imperialism and advocate nonviolent resistance.

JESUS' THIRD WAY: ACTIVE NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE & SUBVERTING THE EMPIRE

JESUS' GOSPEL IS THE MOST POWERFUL ANTIDOTE TO THE MYTH OF REDEMPTIVE VIOLENCE THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN.
 -WALTER WINK¹⁰⁹

In Jesus' day, there were two alternatives to imperial domination: fight or flight. One could fight fire with fire and engage in violent revolution against the empire—which had been proven to be futile—or one could do nothing and passively submit to imperial oppression. Jesus rejects both these alternatives and offers a viable third way, a way of active nonviolent resistance. This third way avoids resorting to violence and repudiates passivism. It is the only feasible alternative to violence; indeed, it is perhaps the only remedy to American imperialism and the perpetuation of domination. Now let us turn to the Sermon on the Mount and the concrete examples Jesus provided his followers.

DO NOT RESIST EVIL & LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Jesus taught the unconditional love of enemies, but he did not advocate passivism as many are inclined to believe. Biblical translation has not helped the matter. Matthew 5:39 states "...do not resist an evildoer" which seems to support submission to violence and domination, but our translation is flawed:

When the court translators working in the hire of King James chose to translate *antistênai* as "Resist not evil," they were doing something more than rendering Greek into English. They were translating nonviolent resistance into docility. Jesus did *not* tell his oppressed hearers not to resist evil. That would have been absurd. His entire ministry is utterly at odds with such a preposterous idea.¹¹⁰

The word *ἀντιστῆναι* (*antistênai*; anti-, against; -statis, violent rebellion) was a military term used in the Greek New Testament 44 out of 71 times¹¹¹ to describe armed conflict or insurrection. Thus, what is translated to mean 'resist' in English literally meant 'resist with violence' or 'armed resistance' in Greek. *Jesus is not commanding his followers to simply do nothing when faced with violence; conversely he is commanding them to resist, but without violence.* 'Do not resist an evildoer with violence' is a better translation. *Resistance is commanded; indeed militant resistance is commanded, but it must be nonviolent.*

Jesus goes even further. He provides three consecutive creative examples that when not understood within their context can be misconstrued as passivism, but when properly interpreted are nothing short of revolutionary. First, Jesus says, "...if anyone strikes you on the *right* cheek,

¹⁰⁹ Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology For a New Millennium* (New York, New York: Galilee-Double Day, a division of Random House, 1998), 62.

¹¹⁰ Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2003), 10-11. Emphasis original. See also Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1987), 264; and Jack Nelson Pall-Meyer, *Jesus Against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2001), 324-25.

¹¹¹ Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2003), 11.

turn the other also.”¹¹² Why the *right* cheek? Did Jesus arbitrarily pick a cheek or is something larger at work here? In Jesus’ world only the right hand was used to strike another person as the left hand was reviled.¹¹³ Therefore, in order to strike someone on the right cheek, the perpetrator must be using the back of his right hand—a backhand slap as an act of dehumanization and oppression. The perpetrator—likely a Roman—in the act of backhanding is admonishing an inferior, asserting his higher position in the hierarchy and reminding the victim of his subordinate position. Only equals would strike one another with a closed fist.¹¹⁴ Thus, in the act of turning the left cheek the ‘inferior’ is resisting the domination system. He is reasserting his humanity and subverting the status quo. Of course the beating may continue, but if it does the perpetrator will have no choice but to treat the victim as an equal and strike with a closed fist on the left cheek. The oppressor is robbed of the power to humiliate.

Second, Jesus states, “...if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well....”¹¹⁵ Again, social context is imperative. Here a person is being sued for his outer garment because of a debt—and only a poor person would be sued for his outer garment.¹¹⁶ In first century Palestine the poor and the peasants wore two garments, an outer and an inner. Thus, upon giving up his outer garment the person would be naked and the shame of nakedness in that world fell not on the naked person, but on the person viewing the nakedness,¹¹⁷ which in this case would be the plaintiff, the judge, and the entire court. The tables have in essence been turned on the plaintiff and the exploitive law; once again, the victim refuses to be humiliated and reasserted his humanity. Not only has the domination system been opposed nonviolently and the humanity of the victim reasserted, but the enemy’s humanity has not been degraded; he is offered a chance to change. He may or he may not, but the integrity of each’s humanity remains intact; either way evil and violence do not rule. The normalcy of civilization has been interrupted.

Finally Jesus declares, “...if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.”¹¹⁸ Again, this must be understood within the imperial context. This example draws on the Roman military practice of limiting the amount of forced labor soldiers could levy on their subjects.¹¹⁹ Mile markers were placed alongside the imperial roads and according to military law a soldier could enlist a civilian to carry his pack one mile only, to force a person to go farther carried severe corporal, military punishment. Prior to this law, soldiers were in the habit of abusing civilians—more than deemed necessary—by forcing them to carry their packs days on end. Thus, the law was enacted to prevent excessive abuse and to limit the anger of the occupied peoples.¹²⁰ Again, this is a situation wherein the victim is encouraged to seize the initiative and reassert his/her humanity, using the Powers against themselves. Once again, the enemy is given the opportunity to nonviolently reject domination and expose exploitation without resorting to

¹¹² Cf. Matt. 5:39. Emphasis mine.

¹¹³ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 2006), 249.

¹¹⁴ Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Jesus Against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2001), 326.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Matt. 5:40.

¹¹⁶ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 2006), 249.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Gen. 9:20-27.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Matt. 5:41.

¹¹⁹ Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2003), 22-23.

¹²⁰ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of Harper-Collins Publishers, 2006), 250.

harming the perpetrator and without mimicking evil. Jesus emphasizes this point once more in the conclusion of his teaching. He tells his hearers to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecute them. Again, the idea is not passivism, but nonviolent resistance. Resisters should not resort to the tools of their enemies, but should rather find creative ways to resist violence and domination without usurping the humanity of the enemy. The enemy too is a victim, oppressed and lured by the spiral of violence and the domination system, but the enemy is still a human being of intrinsic value and sacred worth. Even the worst oppressors and the most violent persecutor remain within the scope of God's grace and redemption. *It is the task of the Christian to reject the system of domination and violence that holds their enemy captive, while affirming the humanity of the enemy and acknowledging the image of God that lies within their being.* It would be easy for one to use Jesus' examples vindictively; that is why they must never be separate from the command to love one's enemies.

Jesus' aforementioned examples should never be elevated to the status of being timeless. Such nonviolent tactics must constantly be formulated. Jesus was surely aware that the Roman Empire would likely pass new laws: prohibiting carrying a pack longer than one mile and public nakedness. Creative nonviolent tactics must constantly be improvised and re-imagined in order to keep the powers that be off-balance. Jesus' examples aren't lasting, but his third way—of creative nonviolent resistance—is perhaps the greatest gift ever given to humanity.

It is important for nonviolent resisters to remember Jesus' teachings and his creative examples. First, never resort to using violence as a means to fight violence as doing so only perpetuates the myth of redemptive violence. Second, in everything, one must always remember to love one's enemies; resorting to hatred and revenge is to become what one hates. Finally, new tactics must constantly be created. Tactics wherein the resister seizes the moral initiative reasserts her humanity and uses the system against itself as a means of exposing and unmasking the myth of redemptive violence and the domination system.

BEYOND PACIFICISM AND JUST WAR

Jesus' teachings are often disregarded in the modern imperial and military driven world as noble yet unrealistic idealism. *We have reached a crucial point in our study where we must ask, how, if at all, can Jesus' teachings on nonviolence be applied within the American Empire?* Such questions must be handled carefully. First, we must declare that nonviolence is the most ideal—indeed the most Christian—tactic for conflict resolution and whatever action is ultimately taken its purpose should be as close to absolute nonviolence as possible. Second, it is helpful to differentiate between an ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility. The task of the church and of the Christian is to operate under an ethics of conviction, following the example set forth by Jesus. Conversely, the task of the state and the councils of government are to act under an ethics of responsibility, which at times sanctions violence. As Chris Hedges succinctly states:

The poison that is war does not free us from the ethics of responsibility. There are times when we must take this poison—just a person with cancer accepts chemotherapy to live. We cannot succumb to despair. Force is and I suspect will always be a part of the human condition. There are times when the force wielded by one immoral faction must be countered by a faction that, while never moral, is perhaps less moral.¹²¹

¹²¹ Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (New York, New York: Anchor Books, a division of Random House, 2002), 16.

As a Christian, one must therefore grudgingly accept that state sanctioned violence, in its finest hour can only ever be amoral. We have noted several times that the myth of redemptive violence and the domination system constitute the normalcy of civilization; indeed, we have asserted that normalcy is not inevitability. While these claims are true we must realize that normalcy—is normalcy. Bad habits are not broken overnight and in the case of redemptive violence—a bad habit plaguing civilization since the beginning of time—we must exercise patience. *But patience must not be misconstrued for apathy and compromise. Our patience must be tempered with fervent indignation channeled into active nonviolent resistance and vigorous peace building.* This does not mean a Christian cannot effectively participate in the activity of the state. Indeed, perhaps a Christian who is aware of both an ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility and seeks to intentionally create situation where both ethics can be equally articulated and heard is just what the increasingly polarized and divided political arena in the 21st century needs. However, some Christians, because of their deep commitment to an ethics of conviction will not be able to participate in the activity of the state. Neither group is wrong. Both are right and both must always be mindful of the other.

Furthermore, an ethics of conviction must remain in constant dialogical tension with an ethics of responsibility. The church and the state, while not organically united, must engage in intentional dialogue, realizing that neither will completely reconcile with other, nor should they, but each may catch a closer glimpse of the truth with the aid of the other. Unbridled violence, and imperial domination within the state must be confronted and condemned by God's domination-free order—which is hopefully found within the church. *Jesus' example must never be forgotten: respect for the rule of law is imperative as order is required to maintain civilization, but the legitimacy of the unredeemed Powers must always be resisted and consequently transformed when they undermine God's purposes.* Through this dialogical tension we are enabled to participate in God's redemptive action in history and the restoration, renewal, and re-creation of all things.

Since the middle ages, Christians and politics have spoken of just-war theory as a means to reduce violence, but just-war theory itself has fallen victim to the myth of redemptive violence. As Walter Wink observes, "It is not the [just war] criteria themselves that are problematic, but the fact they have been subordinated to the myth of redemptive violence."¹²² When subordinated to the church's vocation of nonviolence the just-war criteria become very demanding. Perhaps it would be better to rename just-war theory "violence-reduction criteria,"¹²³ or "justified defense theory"¹²⁴ requiring a prior commitment to nonviolence and a goal not of justifying or legitimizing certain wars, but of stopping warfare before it starts. When freed from the myth of redemptive violence, "violence-reduction criteria" and "justified defense theory" can become a liberating strategies eliminating unnecessary war and violence.

But what of those extreme instances, those outlying cases where no other viable option can be conceived of other than violence? First, one must remain firm in resisting the myth of redemptive violence. Even when one speaks of war and violence as a 'last resort' one is still

¹²² Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York, New York: Galilee-Doubleday, a division of Random House, 1998), 133.

¹²³ Cf. Walter Wink, *The Powers*, Vol. III, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 220ff; and *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York, New York: Galilee-Doubleday, a division of Random House, 1998), 136ff.

¹²⁴ Credit for this phrase is owed to Dr. John Starkey, professor of theology at Oklahoma City University.

enmeshed in the belief that violence saves.¹²⁵ Second, the difference between non-lethal force and violence should be more readily defined. In our modern age of extraordinary technological advancement, more efforts should be directed toward creating better non-lethal alternatives to violence rather than rigorously developing more lethal alternatives, such as nuclear weapons, that do nothing more than further the spiral of redemptive violence and perpetuate the imperial domination system. This must become a priority in the future lest civilization destroys itself.

CONCLUSION: PROCLAIMING JESUS AS LORD

THE CHRISTIAN WHO IS NOT A REVOLUTIONARY IS LIVING IN MORTAL SIN.
-CAMILO TORRES¹²⁶

One might recall that earlier in our study we mentioned the Roman assertion of the emperor's divinity.¹²⁷ Let us revisit. We know that the Romans viewed the emperor as the divine 'Son of God,' the 'Savior,' the 'Redeemer,' and the Lord who brought the whole world under his 'peace.' What then, did it mean for early Christians to declare, "Jesus is Lord?" Better yet, what does it mean to say, "Jesus is Lord" within the American empire? Many modern American Christians utter this phrase nonchalantly taking it to mean Jesus "saves me," indicating one has a "personal relationship" with Jesus or God—although that phrasing is never mentioned in the Bible. The title of 'Lord' has been perverted in the American imperial context and has been individualized becoming solely synonymous with evangelical catch-phrases and buzz words such as "personal salvation" and has contributed to the depoliticization and domestication of Jesus we spoke of earlier. Indeed, many American Christians in service to the empire would likely refuse to utter the phrase were they to discover what the statement "Jesus is Lord" originally meant.

*To declare Jesus as Lord was to overtly and directly challenge the lordship of the emperor.*¹²⁸ The title of lord, in Rome was a political categorization as well as a title of respect. Thus, to declare Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior and the Redeemer is to rival the imperial authority. For the early church, prior to Constantine, declaring lordship of Jesus deliberately and intentionally subverted and opposed the domination of the empire. *Hence, to be a Christian was to be a countercultural revolutionary who pledged one's allegiance to Jesus and God's kingdom rather than earthly Powers.* What might this mean in our current imperial situation? Perhaps it might be better and more true to the original meaning to declare, "Jesus is President" challenging the presidency of George W. Bush and the authority of American imperialism.¹²⁹ That is exactly what the early Christians were doing in their context. As singer/songwriter Derek Webb states in his song "A King and A Kingdom," "...my first allegiance is not to a flag, a country, or a man...my first allegiance is not to democracy, or blood...it's to a king and a kingdom."¹³⁰ The entire system, the domination system, the myth of redemptive violence, imperialism—everything that constitutes the normalcy of civilization—belongs to God and is subject to God's purposes in

¹²⁵ Walter Wink *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York, New York: Galilee-Doubleday, a division of Random House, 1998), 8.

¹²⁶ The original source of this quote is unknown. Credit here is due to friend and colleague Kevin Hall.

¹²⁷ Cf. page 14ff.

¹²⁸ Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2007), 34-54.

¹²⁹ Not only George Bush, but any other President past, present, or future who undermines God's purposes by perpetuating the domination system and the myth of redemptive violence.

¹³⁰ Cf. "A King & A Kingdom," on the record *Mockingbird*.

God's nonviolent, equitable, domination-free ideal. To be a Christian is to make these claims; anything less is idolatry.

As Christians who happen to be citizens of the American empire we must actively resist and oppose imperial domination and proclaim as loudly as possible that normalcy is not inevitability. The myth of redemptive violence and the scapegoat mechanism were unmasked and exposed through Jesus; we must now live as though they have, actively subverting imperial violence with creative nonviolent tactics. We must continue to proclaim Jesus as Lord, realizing God's domination-order and building God's kingdom, "...on earth as it is in heaven." Above all, we must remember, "The Powers are good, the Powers are fallen, [and] the Powers *must* be redeemed." We live in between the "already" and the "not yet" in a process of transformation and restoration; we must never lose hope in our endeavors. In April 1995, following the tragic bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City a group of rescue workers left this statement in spray paint on one of the surviving walls, "We search for the truth. We seek justice. The courts require it. The victims cry for it. GOD demands it!" As Christians seeking to follow in the footsteps of Jesus we seek truth, we seek justice, and we seek peace. Let us never lose hope and let us never deter from our task, we are the ones we've been waiting for—it starts now.

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