

MY PEACE I GIVE UNTO YOU:
CHRISTIANITY'S CRITIQUE OF ROMAN AND
AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

by

RYAN G. TINDALL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major program in Humanities
in the College of Arts and Humanities
and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term 2012

Thesis Chair: Dr. Harry S. Coverston

ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of the United States, its inhabitants have looked upon their nation as a special place. In some cases, this has exceeded the natural and simple love of home and country and taken a more extreme form. Important to this bent is the tendency to see the nation, its beliefs, and its actions around the world as divinely sanctioned and inspired in some regard. This is a generally necessary component to the idea of American Exceptionalism, which views the United States as a nation with a divinely imposed mission to spread civilization, freedom, and democracy to the ends of the earth.

In many ways, the Roman Empire shared these pretensions of being the bearers of civilization to the rest of the world and of being a divinely chosen nation with that vocation. Voices within Christianity, as it developed, provided a potent antithesis to this aspect of Roman imperial ideology, critiquing Roman ideas of their own exceptionalism. By comparing the ideological basis of Roman and American concepts of exceptionalism, this thesis will attempt to apply the critique made by people like Jesus, Paul and Augustine to the United States today.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I must thank my professors from within the philosophy and history departments at UCF, without whose influence and help little of this could be possible. This is especially true of those on my thesis committee, and especially my chair, without whose compassionate guidance over the last three years my experience at the university would have been left comparatively impoverished.

Second, I wish to thank my parents, who have given me the freedom to study and think over these last four years, and who have given me the support and encouragement that I have needed during my time here, and through the first twenty-two years of my life. I love you both.

Last, I thank the friends I have made within the UCF community. Without your love, community, and camaraderie, my experience here would have never been as enjoyable as it has been. I appreciate you all.

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of American Exceptionalism is an important one. If anyone doubted this before, the simple anecdotal evidence of an election season can offer ample support of this proposition. Politicians take extraordinary measures to appear the most patriotic, the most in tune with the ideals of American democracy. Conventions and debates occur that would make one wonder whether indeed the color spectrum extended beyond red, white and blue. Candidates give speeches arguing not only that their opponent's policies and ideals are not simply wrong, irrational, or even immoral: the traditional realm of political discourse. Instead, one's opponents are un-American, out of step with an ideal conception of the nation seemingly shared by all.

As I will explain it, American Exceptionalism is the idea that America is a unique country, possessing unique virtues and strengths that, due to its divinely given vocation, give it a responsibility to spread those virtues to the rest of the world through militaristic means. The roots of this idea go back to even the colonial period, as Americans have always thought of themselves as a rather special people. These early examples, however, do not have either the force or ideological backing that the idea would acquire in more modern history, yet throughout the country's history an expansionist impulse was present for which this idea provided the impetus. For a great time this expansionist impulse was confined due to a capacity for self-critique or simple geography, yet within the Twentieth century, and especially after end of the Cold War, any theoretical way of slowing or stopping this militaristic expansion has been lost, as without the counterbalancing Soviet influence, the American superpower has become more and more a hegemonic empire.

In this vision, American ideology and self-conception provided the basis for America's dealings with the rest of the world. These ideals are inherently religious concepts that have been introduced into the realm of politics, whether God explicitly or implicitly provides the justification. I will use Robert Bellah's idea of an American civil religion and expand it to argue for a religious conception of Americanism. This is, for Americans, a strange combination of the remnants of Christian doctrine and Enlightenment political philosophy and of Puritanism and Liberalism that becomes the civil religion. Secular America is then the sacred object of veneration for every American.

Empires throughout the scope of history are rather common, and points of comparison between the simple socio-economic politics of the United States in this day are rather easily made. Rome looms large upon the horizon, however, as perhaps the greatest of all empires, and if not that then certainly the ideal at which subsequent western ones aim. The reasons for this are clear: it combined an incredible physical reach with astounding longevity, lasting in an immediately recognizable form for a millennium, its immediate ancestor falling to the Ottomans as late as the 1400s, and even maintaining some semblance of authority in the Vatican to this day. Rome truly is the eternal city. The United States seems an obvious modern heir of this ideal in pure worldwide power, though that power has not been tested as long as Rome's. Yet it also has a point of comparison that is perhaps unique: a religiously grounded exceptionalist ideal.

Rome, like America, saw itself as an exceptional place with a divinely appointed *raison d'être* and vocation. The gods had provided the basis of Roman expansion, as her pious people spread their way of life throughout the world, civilizing the barbarians and bringing the Roman way of life to the Greeks. Such is the advice that Anchises gives the archetypal Roman Aeneas:

But you, Roman, remember, rule with all your power
the peoples of the earth – these will be your arts:
to put your stamp on the works and ways of peace,
to spare the defeated, break the proud in war. (Virgil 210)

This is Rome's wisdom and her calling. Under the same Augustus that Virgil wrote his epic poem for was the *pax Romana* founded.

This same period of the *pax Romana* saw another figure spring into the historical narrative: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus brought his message of the kingdom of God in some form of opposition to the kingdom that Caesar claimed, one based on a community of mutual love and forgiveness and contrary to the Roman gospel built on envy and militaristic expansion. This message was carried throughout the Mediterranean world by the most influential of the apostles who would follow him: Paul. Through Paul's efforts, Jesus' message, previously confined to Palestine, was spread throughout the eastern Roman Empire. Paul's gospel proclaimed a new way to be human – politically, morally, religiously – and was brought everywhere from Syrian Antioch to Rome itself. This gospel, literally the *euongalion* or good news, was presented in parallel ways to those issued by Roman emperors, creating a critique of the good news offered by Rome. Paul set up in many important cities of the eastern empire new assemblies or *ekklisiai* that maintained as their core message the lordship of a God who loved, suffered, and died to conquer these worldly powers. This gospel was a great paradox, in that the true savior of the world was not Caesar but Christ; that though he was defeated by those powers, in the same act he triumphed over them, showing through his death and resurrection the facade that they were.

For all this, however, it must be recognized that Christianity, as it developed through Paul and eventually the Church Fathers, was not anarchistic. Though Pauline politics present a radical critique of these worldly powers – seen in the particular instance of Rome – they do not point to the end of all state power. Perhaps the greatest summation of the political ideal that emerges from this is Augustine’s *City of God*, which explicitly acknowledges the legitimacy of the state while maintaining Paul’s fundamental critique. In Augustine, the idea of the city of God emerges explicitly, a sacred community that organizes itself on the same concepts of love and forgiveness, and its oft contrary partner the city of man, based upon rivalry, envy, and vain ambition.

This, I will show, is the original divide between the sacred and the secular. The two cities represent two ultimately separate ways of organizing and conducting human affairs. The flaw that Paul critiqued then in Rome was the confusing of these two ideas. This can be seen most clearly in Rome’s idea of its own exceptionalism: that it was a unique people with a divine calling that had a mission to spread their version of civilization to the world, that they were more moral than other peoples, and eventually that their state and their sovereign emperor himself were divine.

If a reasonable connection between Roman and American exceptionalist conceptions of themselves can be made, then it is very reasonable to apply these same critiques of Paul and Augustine to the United States today. Even more, however, the strange paradox must be realized, that the Christian idea presented earlier in history to critique Rome is now being used in a way to legitimate this Americanism in some extent from its founding to today.

To sum up then: the intent of my thesis is to relate together the notions of Roman and American exceptionalism by comparison, to seek out a political reading of Paul and the philosophic expression of him in Augustine, and then to understand how this Christian tradition that critiqued Rome does not serve the same purpose in the United States today. Ultimately I will argue that Christianity, in succumbing to the ideology of the state in modern America, has lost this distinctive element from its early history, and argue that it should be recovered.

METHODOLOGY

In order to do this, I have divided my work into three chapters, each examining the three different voices that I am attempting to reconcile and understand. The first will be the foundation of the work, laying out in as succinct a fashion as possible the Roman ideology that I seek to critique. This is found in a number of sources, including primary ones like Virgil and Cicero. The counterpoint to this I will then present in chapter two, where I provide the critique that the New Testament writers and Augustine present. In large part, this has been derived from sources engaged in the debate over the New Perspective on Paul, as I see that this scholarly trend has recovered some of this part of the essential message of the Pauline epistles. In Augustine however this is more philosophically displayed, and his work more readily conforms to the genre of political philosophy.

Once these ancient sources have been dealt with I will proceed to my third chapter that will seek to understand the American situation today. This will appear as a genealogy of the idea, from its foundations in Puritanism and through the Revolution and Civil War to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This must be a historical chapter, for the idea must be traced historically, as I believe that, though present in earlier American history, the capacity to

temper American Exceptionalism has been gradually lost, resulting in the predicament of today. I shall then shortly give my opinion on what must be done in order to recover this capacity.

Ultimately I believe any call to action must be from the religious sphere and not the political, and thus the way forward that I will point to centers around the role of the church, though it is perhaps equally valid for peoples of all faiths. It is my belief that this is how any critique must come, for it seems very unlikely that the political would suddenly become capable of critiquing itself; critique must come from outside.

A word must be said of my own stance, however, before beginning. I freely admit that realities are much more complicated and nuanced than my knowledge and experience can grasp, and thus anything I see as problem or solution is provisional. Also, I write against Rome as one who loves Rome, using the *Aeneid* in this manner though I believe it to be one of the greatest poems of mankind, and one of my personal favorites. So too I write against this American ideology as an American. I fear that this could easily be understood as a lack of patriotism or gratitude for the freedoms experienced, but ultimately I must argue that this is not so. I wish instead to display the same spirit as Chesterton, writing in his *Defense of Patriotism*:

My country, right or wrong,' is a thing that no patriot would think of saying except in a desperate case. It is like saying, 'My mother, drunk or sober.' No doubt if a decent man's mother took to drink he would share her troubles to the last; but to talk as if he would be in a state of gay indifference as to whether his mother took to drink or not is certainly not the language of men who know the great mystery. (166)

Love of country should be tied to love of land and neighbor, not idealized conceptions of a popular sovereign who can do no wrong. Nations cannot exist autonomously and for their own

sake. When a nation relies on its people to upset their proper order of loves like this, taking over the realm of the religious, it steps over a line, a line marked by what the Jews called idolatry and the Greeks called hubris. It is against these things that I argue, for indeed it would seem that to love a state improperly destroys that proper love of country called patriotism.

CHAPTER 1: ROMAN IMPERIALISM

Roman imperialism was based on a number of foundational aspects both pragmatic and ideological. Practical reasons included the various reasons for empire that many empires throughout history have faced – the seemingly mundane reasons of defense and economy – though in the Roman case these were included with unique emphases to the Roman context. The more pertinent, however, are the ideological reasons that appear truly unique to Rome, supported by her literature, philosophy, and political ideals. These ideals have been very influential throughout history, though their particular realization may have proven difficult to repeat.

PRACTICAL

There were many reasons for Roman expansion that could be seen as inherently practical. These included the demands of defense, economic expansion, and the accumulation of glory for the ruling elite. Though these are relatively common, and in some cases arguably benign reasons, in Rome they found particular expressions that had profound consequences for the entire Mediterranean world.

Economic drive was the simplest reason for Rome to expand. As the republic expanded through Italy and into the rest of the known world, it acquired plunder from its wars, slaves, and land to farm. All this was seen as necessary for the maintenance of the burgeoning empire itself, but it was especially necessary for the display of power by the Patricians. This was, as one scholar writes, “an expensive business at Rome.” He continues:

Senators' main holdings were in land, and that produced only a low percentage return on capital. [...] Regular shots of 'windfall' capital were required. In the Republic these came in two ways: more or less corrupt provincial governorships, and booty from war (including civil war in the last century BC). There had to be enough successful wars to cater for the financial needs and desires of a host of competing senators, and the superstructure of a handful of competing dynasts which was added in the last century BC. [...] Greed, to put it bluntly, was a strong expansion-bearing structure in Republican Rome. (Sidebottom 320-321)

These financial needs both bolstered the power of the elites, by adding to their prestige and increasing the amount they could afford to give to those under them, bringing with them their increased loyalty. Thus glory was something practical, which would be ascribed to individual members of the elite – senators, equestrians, and later members of the imperial family.

This glory, however, also extended to the idea of the empire itself. Affronts to Roman glory were easily felt, as uncouth barbarians or Greeks could readily supply. Such was the case with the myriad of Rome's consequent wars of expansion. As P. A. Brunt explains in reference to Cicero's political career:

Much of Cicero's programme can have had no appeal to the poor either in Rome or in the country, but the urban plebs at least could apparently be moved by the glamour of imperial glory; in his speech for the Manilian law Cicero enlarges on the dishonour Rome had suffered from the pirates and from Mithridates and on the necessity of entrusting the eastern command to Pompey in order to restore 'the prestige of the Roman people which has been transmitted to you by our ancestors and whose greatness appears in every way

and above all in the military domain' No other people, he says there, had ever had such an appetite for glory, and we know that in his own judgment this had been a dominant motive for the old Romans. (163)

The masses of Rome had an unquenchable appetite for the glory that conquest could bring that those in power were more than happy to attempt to sate.

Fear can be attributed as a cause for Roman expansion as well. This would have had a great influence on the people at large. The memory of Hannibal in Italy would have loomed large. Rich elaborates:

Why did senators so frequently judge that justice and the public interest required Rome to embark on yet another war? [...] The Romans' possession of a magnificent fighting machine, their habituation to war and their extraordinary record of success in it, the benefits that success brought them and the continuing demand for more of the same that it generated – it is these factors, above all, which made the Romans so ready to discern and take up occasions for war. However, other factors played their part, and there is one in particular which must not be neglected. The Romans were not always successful in their wars and some enemies – the Gauls, Pyrrhus, Hannibal – threatened the very survival of the Republic. Memories of those dangers were real enough, and in my judgment the fear of powerful neighbors, although not, as used to be supposed, the key to Roman imperialism, must remain an important factor in accounting for it. (61)

Even mighty empires are beset by occasional failure and enemies beyond their control. Such was the case with Hannibal and the Gauls, whom on separate occasions the Romans failed to keep out of Italy and out of easy reach of their capital. This ever-present threat could have been

generically seen in the Germans across the Rhine or barbarians of the east, giving the elite an easy recourse to war.

In this category as well can be placed the defense of the empire. Rome's claims to an empire built by defense – a defensive imperialism – are well known. Wars were waged to right wrongs and remedy injustices, at least as the Romans saw them. Examples of this abound in popular history. Rome saw fit to level Carthage and add North Africa to her empire because Hannibal first attempted to in Italy. So too was it right for war to be brought to Epirus, after Pyrrhus nearly brought the early Republic to her knees. To note that territory may be added to a state's holdings is a rather quotidian observation. Yet, when one uses the excuse as much as the Romans did, it is easy to grow suspicious of motives. This suspicion naturally increases when somehow an empire must take over the entire known world in order to defend herself. While the concept of defensive imperialism has been subject to a great deal of scholarly debate in recent years, even discredited by some scholars (Sidebottom 316), nonetheless, the concept is easy to see in plain history.

IDEOLOGICAL

A developed ideology buttressed Roman use of power throughout the Mediterranean. Whether the ideological components that supported the idea of Roman expansionism created the expansionist impulse or simply sustained it is beside the point: by the late republic and the emergence of the empire, Romans had good reasons to support their imperialist agenda. These were contained in political philosophy supported by some of Rome's greatest thinkers and literary works by some of its greatest poets. In this too a concept of the ideological underpinnings of emperor worship will be searched out, beginning in the more philosophic

underpinnings of Virgil and Cicero, and culminating in the worship that actually occurred, especially in the East and the city of Rome itself.

This is also the point of greatest importance for understanding the critique of empire contained within this work. In using works like those of Cicero or Virgil, I seek an understanding of the general attitude and ideology of Roman imperial power. This is the backdrop to the critique that Christianity is capable of providing, not necessarily because Paul had read Cicero or Virgil – the fact that they were originally written in the tongue of the Western empire, Latin, rather than Greek would probably discount the possibility – but because the general attitudes contained therein would have provided the self-understanding for many within the empire, with whom Paul would have had dealings on a daily basis and written letters.

CICERO – DE RE PUBLICA

Perhaps chief among Roman politicians in the history books and in the literature that has come down through the generations is Cicero. Cicero's influence has been felt greatly throughout history, and his influence during his day was not small by any means. Perhaps the best summary of his ideal of the Roman state is found in his work *De Re Publica*. This work was lost for sometime, only recently found again in the Vatican archives, and despite the work's consequent inability to reach the generations in between (including the founders of the United States), it perhaps provides the best single volume overview of Cicero's political ideology, and provides a possible interesting point of contrast considering how Augustine draws from it in the *City of God*.

Cicero presents his work in the form of a dialog between various Roman elites concerning the constitution of the ideal state. This is a self-conscious effort to mimic Plato's

enduring work of the same name, yet in this case the effort is singularly different. Whereas Plato's work described an ideal that was in all probability unattainable and only an ideal, Cicero locates the ideal state in history, namely in the Roman state itself: "Using our own government as my pattern, I will fit to it, if I can, all I have to say about the ideal State" (107). For Cicero, the ideal state is not something to be sought but something that has been achieved: in Rome, civilization has arrived.

Throughout his entire work, Cicero's *De Re Publica* serves to catalog the myriad perfections of the Roman experiment, building on the thoughts of the ancient greats along the way. Whereas Aristotle famously claimed that man was a political animal, Cicero builds, saying of politics that "there is really no other occupation in which human virtue approaches more closely the august function of the gods than in the founding of new States or preserving those already in existence" (29). Politics, especially Roman politics then, is a divine action.

The power that Rome exerted around the world plays an important role as well, according to Cicero. Few men, claims Cicero, are able to think of worldly goods in such disregard as they are to be thought, and thus many esteem them too greatly and consequently rob and pillage their neighbor. Yet this is where the Roman state steps in to rule the masses, as a wise man will know, "that our military commands and consulships are to be classed among things necessary rather than things desirable, and that they are to be undertaken from a sense of duty and not sought for profit or glory" (49). Roman rule then enforces this "common law of Nature," (49) creating a world safe for man to inhabit, in seemingly Hobbesian fashion, preventing the war of all against all. This is fit for the men in Cicero's dialog to understand and assent to, as they all

take part “in the administration of the greatest of all States” (63). Rome, according to Cicero, is the end of the discussion on how people are to be governed. Rome is the end of politics.

In Cicero’s account, this is not simply because of the nature of the world at the time he writes, but is indeed accounted for in particular methods with which Rome was itself founded. The idea of Rome cannot be ascribed to one man in particular, such as a sovereign monarch, Athenian lawgiver, or tyrant. Instead, the particular genius of Rome is found in the diversity of its founding: Rome is the original *e pluribus unum*. As Cicero says: “Our own common wealth was based upon the genius, not of one man but of many; it was founded, not in one generation, but in a long period of several centuries and many ages of men” (113). Roman greatness is then due to its ability to constantly change, as the state becomes a living thing.

Yet this is not to deny any special genius in the founders of Rome. Chief among these is the legendary Romulus, seemingly wise and virtuous despite his sins of fratricide and abduction. His choice for settling Rome was due to a “divine intimation,” so that Rome could be positioned in a geologically advantaged manner. Rome was positioned in a way that it would not experience the degeneracy of a strictly maritime city, as Corinth and Carthage, yet due to its position close to the sea and commanding the Tiber, it could still gain all the economic benefit of trade. Rome too, within a hilled portion of Italy and away from all the tumult of the east, was easily defensible, a position from which to establish a secure empire (121, 117).

Romulus also sets the example for future Roman action. Romulus is the first to engage in war for economic reasons, against the Latins for property and the Sabines for women: “he waged many wars against his neighbors with the greatest good fortune, and, though he never brought none [*sic*] of the booty to his own home, he never ceased enriching his people” (125). Romulus

is the first of divine Roman rulers as well, as Cicero describes. This is due to his supposed disappearance during an eclipse, which caused the people of Rome to surmise that “he had been added to the number of the gods” – a “remarkable” feat, considering:

All other men who are said to become gods lived in ruder ages which there was a great Inclination to the invention of fabulous tales [...] but we know that Romulus lived less than six hundred years ago, at a period when writing and education had long been in existence, and all those mistaken primitive ideas which grew up under uncivilized conditions had been done away with. (127)

Indeed, if the enlightened people of Romulus’s day could ascribe divine honors to him, what then would prevent those living shortly after Cicero from ascribing the same to Julius Caesar’s nephew?

Cicero maintains, however, no fault with Romulus. To be sure, he closes his account of Romulus with ringing praise. Romulus “implanted [in the Roman people] a love for peace and tranquility, which enable justice and good faith to flourish most easily, and under whose protection the cultivation of the land and the enjoyment of its products are most secure” (135). Besides this, Romulus provided the example of Roman religious piety, creating the particular way in which all Romans could worship the gods in a manner which would demand attention but not great resources: “Thus he made the performance of religious duties laborious but not costly” (135). Romulus, in spite of all that is known of him, appears as a form of the ideal Roman. He, like Rome itself, is peace loving, pious, and devout, in spite of any actual evidence to the contrary.

Cicero then presents in the words of political discourse a picture of a Rome that is important to understand. In *De Re Publica*, a glimpse is gained of important precedents for the late Republic and the Empire that was beginning to emerge. This was a state that, in its republican guise, provided the ideal of a state, and though the empire would have been a degeneration of that idea for Cicero, the same ideal could be carried forward under Augustus. It seems that Cicero, as an archetypical Roman politician, sees it an impossible task to improve on the Roman political system. Rome in its founding and actualization appears as the end of a political discourse that had been occurring for hundreds of years, through figures like Plato, Aristotle, and Thucydides. With Rome, the work of politics is finished, and only bureaucratic managing and governing remains. With Rome, history has reached its end.

VIRGIL - AENEID

What Cicero's work is to politics, Virgil's *Aeneid* is to literature, though more so. Virgil's great epic, detailing the escape of Aeneas from Troy put to torch by Agamemnon's Greeks, tells the founding story of Rome, before even the mythologized Romulus and Remus. Aeneas is the ideal, first Roman, possessing in abounding measure the virtues that Romans praised, and possessing himself the divine vocation that Romans felt, virtues and callings that naturally would have been imputed to the Roman people as well. Through all Aeneas' travels, Virgil presents an apology for Roman imperialism in a particularly beautiful manner. Aeneas represents most clearly the civilizing mission to which the Romans felt themselves called.

The work itself begins atop Mount Olympus, where Venus is worried about the rage of Juno that has toppled Troy, afraid that the Trojans and her beloved son Aeneas will forever

perish from the earth. Jupiter reassures her, delivering the first of many prophesies concerning the greatness of Aeneas' line and his eventual revenge on the treacherous Greeks:

This is my pleasure, my decree. Indeed, an age will come,
as the long years slip by, when Assaracus' royal house
will quell Achilles' homeland, brilliant Mycenae too,
and enslave their people, rule defeated Argos.
From that noble blood will arise a Trojan Caesar,
his empire bound by the Ocean, his glory by the stars[
...]

And you, in years to come, will welcome him to the skies,
you rest assured – laden with plunder of the East,
and he will Aeneas will be invoked in prayer.

Then will the violent centuries, battles set aside,
grow gentle, kind. [...] (57)

Here Virgil places many of the themes that will be expounded in his work in the mouth of Jupiter, and gives *causus belli* for many of the wars that will be fought against the east. In the case of wars against the Greeks in the Peloponnesus and Asia Minor, Roman violence can be justified as just retribution against treacherous Greeks for the sack of Troy. Jupiter prophesizes too that this action will also bring divine recognition to Aeneas' line, culminating in Julius Caesar and Octavian, who will finally bring an everlasting peace to the world.

The treachery of the Greeks is displayed foremost in the person of Achilles and the actions of those who sacked Troy itself. Achilles' rage is infamous, the main topic that Homer

invoked the Muse to sing upon at the beginning of his *Iliad*. Yet even Achilles is appealed to as an example of virtue by Priam when a soldier comes to slaughter the king of Troy on an altar: “Achilles/ never treated his enemy Priam so. No, He honored/ a suppliant’s rights, he blushed to betray my trust, / he restored my Hector’s bloodless corpse for burial, / sent me safely home to the land I rule!” This is Priam’s supplication to the Greek soldier – Pyrrhus, in a peculiar foreshadowing of the future harasser of Italy – before he slays Priam on the shrine, perhaps a shadow of barbarous human sacrifice (Virgil 93).

This is the nature of the Greeks, a comparatively civilized people compared to the barbarians of further north in the Roman mindset. Yet even their barbarity provides a reason for rational, virtuous Romans to rule over them. This is the calling delivered to Aeneas and all Romans by Anchises: “But you Roman, remember, rule with all your power / the peoples of the earth – these will be your arts: / to put your stamp on the works and ways of peace, / to spare the defeated, break the proud in war” (210). This itself is curiously close to something recorded of God, who it is said “opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5 ESV), a connection that Augustine will make.

That Rome is to be a moderating, virtuous influence on the rest of the world is seen over and over again in Virgil’s epic. In the person of Aeneas himself the reason for this is Aeneas’ – and thus Rome’s – virtue. Aeneas’ calling to rule the world is just because Aeneas is a just man, QED. This is seen foremost in his dealings with Dido, when he gives up her love and rule of Carthage for his calling:

But Aeneas
is driven by duty now. Strongly as he longs

to ease and allay her sorrow, speak to her,
turn away her anguish with reassurance, still,
moaning deeply, heart shattered by his great love,
in spite of all he obeys the gods' commands,
and back he goes to his ships. (141)

Aeneas resists the temptation that love offers, even prompting the exclamation from Virgil of “Love, you tyrant! / To what extremes won't you compel our hearts?” (142), for the calling that the gods and fates placed before him. Aeneas is stoic and pious towards the gods and the memory of his ancestors, not a victim of uncontrollable *eros* like Dido, Achilles, and the later example of Turnus, the legitimate heir of the Latin kingdom which Aeneas claims. Turnus is driven by his “hot fury” and “mad lust for carnage,” even claiming to be the reincarnation of Achilles himself (291, 290). In the face of these extremes, Aeneas must rule – all that is moral demands it.

All these elements would simply provide an interesting story told in the beautiful verse of Virgil, if not given the real world consequences. For those who may not see what is concealed in Virgil's poetry, he provides the meaning of what he is talking about explicitly in multiple cases, providing up front explanations for the legitimacy of Roman rule in the first century and the legitimacy of its new emperors. Specifically, this takes place in the praise of Augustus, Virgil's patron, throughout the work. One of these occurs from the mouth of Anchises, again in Aeneas' voyage to the underworld. Anchises prophesies that Caesar Augustus “Son of a god, he will bring back the Age of Gold” (208). Besides providing divine status for Augustus, Virgil claims that he has reversed the course of history itself, returning the world to its first, golden age – as

recorded by Hesiod and later Ovid. Augustus' rule has returned the world to a time before the fall. It is hard to avoid the association that Augustus' rule has then brought about the end of history.

Indeed, this is the role that Rome itself plays, in a section whose resemblance to Judeo-Christian eschatological literature is difficult to ignore. Here, in Virgil's account of the shield forged by the god Vulcan for Aeneas, is found Rome, seemingly the capital of the world. Caesar sits enthroned as he "reviews the gifts brought on by the nations of the earth / and he mounts them high on the lofty temple doors / as the vanquished people move in a long file, / their dress, their arms as motley as their tongues" (265). Virgil then proceeds to provide a list of those who will bring their riches to Rome, a list that encompasses the farthest corners of the earth. To use a different idiom: Caesar sits high and enthroned among the cherubim, as the kings of the world bring all their riches to him in supplication, he who not only unites them in a seeming political association but unites their motley tongues, maintaining a new tongue for the entire world to speak, reversing their confusion and political disunity.

Virgil provides perhaps the greatest example of Roman imperial pride and is perhaps the empire's greatest apologist. While it is easy to find sections of the book that are objectionable in view of this critique, it is very easy to get swept away in the grandeur of the verse and the empire itself. This is indeed a great struggle, for, in reading Virgil, one gains the sense that not all is wrong with his imperial picture, that indeed there is something very right with it, if only the hubris, pride, and avarice of the Romans could be accounted for.

IMPERIAL CULT – WEST AND EAST

With the sense of Roman pride that was so common in the late republic, the emergence of a sole individual upon whom all that glory and pride could be focused would prove to have interesting consequences. Cicero, for all his praise of Julius Caesar, could hardly have been expected to heap divine honors upon a single man. Virgil provides the basis, making Augustus a very great man indeed, but at most it would seem only a demigod, the son of a god – something equivalent to a Hercules or Aeneas himself.

The advent of the imperial cult appears then, for the Romans at least, to be a true innovation. The precedent for this is set in remembrance of Julius Caesar and Augustus after their deaths, as Tacitus records that after Augustus' death he was deified along with "Divine Julius," in a ceremony that included prayers to the new leader of the empire Tiberius. The situation surrounding the ascension of Tiberius and the funerary remembrance of Augustus is said, in the particular rational melancholy so typical of Tacitus, to have revolutionized the state (8-10, 5).

Yet for all the divine honors heaped upon the first two lifelong dictators of the decaying empire, Augustus' sense of self-importance, and the importance of his own office, surely serve the purpose of puffing up his subjects' opinions of him. Besides the pomp of assuming a name such as Augustus, literally the august or majestic one, a good written example of this is the *Deeds of the Divine Augustus*, published in the year of his death, CE 14. Here Augustus gives an account of his actions throughout his long reign, where in "he subjected the whole wide earth to the rule of the Roman people," acting as dictator, yet still operating under the auspices of republican popular sovereignty.

Augustus records his actions that “set free the state” and increased over and again the scope of Roman rule. He describes his power over these “foreign nations,” deciding in the wake of the civil war between him and Antony which he “was able to safely forgive” rather “than to destroy.” He maintains his great piety, claiming, “I restored many traditions of the ancestors, which were falling into disuse in our age, and [I myself] handed on precedents of many things to be imitated in later generations.” He records his great contributions to the plebs and the state, feeding the hungry when needed and making up for deficits when tax income did not prove sufficient. He does all of this, bringing peace to the state full of discord, so that the Senate even proclaims upon him the title “Father of the country.”

Yet Augustus’ greatest claim to glory is what he did in the wider world. Augustus records that he “restored peace to the sea from the pirates,” making safe common body of water which all men shared and thus making the world safe for trade. He “extended the borders of all the provinces of the Roman people,” and brought peace back to those provinces full of discord, like Gaul and Spain. Through his skill in diplomacy and war, he “added Egypt to the rule of the Roman people,” and placed garrisons in military colonies in “Africa, Sicily, Macedonia, [...] Spain, Greece, Asia, Syria, Narbonian Gaul, and Pisidia” and established military garrisons throughout Italy herself. Augustus brought peace to the entire civilized earth, bringing about the famous *pax Romana*. And in gratitude for all this, supplications are sent from the kings of the ends of the earth, including the kings of the Parthians, Medes, and Britons – kings outside the purview of Roman control, but who would have to deal with Roman might in the years to come.

For all of these things, the Senate gave Augustus honor upon honor, giving him the title of Augustus. He records that they “publicly clothed with a laurel and a civic crown” the doors of

his temple – without any hint that it might be strange for him to have a temple. Besides this, the Senate inscribed these acts themselves on two bronze pillars, and set before his temple a golden shield “testif[ying] to the virtue, mercy, justice, and piety for which the senate and Roman people gave it to me.” Whatever the actualities of Augustus’ rule – and he surely was a great man, as history has recorded – it is rather easy to see that an elevation of the man and his office was in the works as soon as the end of his reign. After his death, this elevation to even greater heights could easily continue.

Indeed, this would be the case, especially in the eastern empire, which had a longer tradition of elevating its rulers to divine status. Such was the long tradition of rulers of the ancient near east: the divinity ascribed to the pharaohs or rulers of Babylon is well known. So too is the elevation of Alexander after his conquest of the east, as he brought back conceptions of a divine ruler to the rational politics of the Greeks. Hellenism was, in many ways, a two way street, and as Greek philosophy and art filtered into the east’s conquered lands, some political ideals could surely have filtered back, an idea readily present in even Roman histories of the Hellenistic period, like Arian’s biography of Alexander.

So too could the Greeks have been ready for a ruler who was something more than the rulers they experienced. At the time Greece came under Roman control, in the middle to late second century BCE, it had been wracked by internal conflict stretching back to the end of the Persian Wars, was humiliated by the overwhelming force of Alexander’s Macedonian phalanxes, and saw resplendent Corinth utterly destroyed by Roman might. The golden age of philosophy and politics was long over: the Greeks, it would seem, were relatively prepared to accept a ruler who would simply bring peace. Such is the observation that the ability to deify rulers appeared

with the disappearance of the *polis*: “Ruler cult arose in the Greek world with the imposition of monarchy over the flourishing and proudly autonomous Greek city” (Price, “Between Man and God” 39). Something otherworldly was needed to explain the inability of the Greeks to rule themselves rationally and democratically it would seem.

Roman religion had always been a grand display of syncretism and what Charles King calls “polymorphism” (245). In this age after Christendom, where religion is still somewhat bound to more absolutist conceptions of Christian dogma, it becomes somewhat difficult to properly understand religion in these terms (though throughout this work it will hopefully become apparent that our situation is closer to their situation than many conceive). The Christian community from its inception defined itself against outsiders by dogmatic statements such as “‘Jesus is the son of God’ [... which] is a Christian dogma because it is a belief essential to membership in the category ‘Christian’” (283). Thus the concept of orthodoxy, literally right belief, while foreign to Roman ears, becomes essential to Christian self identity, and becomes something that Christendom would pass down to its Enlightenment heirs.

The Romans, however, operated on a different system when encountering foreign peoples. While not known as the kindest and gentlest peoples to walk the earth, Romans would never force their polytheistic religious views on the conquered peoples. As King explains:

When the Romans encountered foreign peoples, they likewise did not erect firm barriers between their gods and beliefs and those they encountered elsewhere. If anything, Roman religious history is the history of assimilating and adapting the religious concepts of their neighbors. Romans frequently worshipped local gods when they entered foreign

areas, identified Roman gods with the gods of other peoples, and imported the worship of certain outside cults to Rome. (285)

This is most certainly the case throughout history, especially with the gods of the east. Roman conceptions of their own gods were open to change, and their pantheon could expand and contract as needed. Such was the case so that in the later empire an imported gods from Persia like Mithras and Sol Invictus would become deities more important even than the Olympians in the West.

This rule was not without exceptions. The Jews provide the most startling contrast to this, because their monotheism could not be reconciled with a state that demanded absolute loyalty. This is peculiar to Jewish history, for though Jews had prospered under foreign empires before, mass revolts only seem to have happened with rulers who could not tolerate the challenge that Jewish monotheism provided, such as the infamous example of Antiochus Epiphanes, the powerful ruler of the Seleucids who defiled the temple in order to punish rebellious Jews, creating the opportunity of remembering Hanukah.

Thus, Jewish resistance to Roman rule should come as some surprise to one who would think that the Romans were simple polytheists like their Greek progenitors. Indeed, popular history tells us that this was not the case, as Pompey famously walked into the Holy of Holies unscathed and Caligula did his best to erect a statue of himself in the same place years later. The Jewish mindset proved a stumbling block to something within Roman ideology, and that seems to be focused in the necessity that Roman subjects provide their first loyalty to the state and its maintenance, something that would have proved difficult for Jewish monotheism.

The most egregious example of this Roman mindset can be found in the imperial cult that sprung up in the east, especially in the years following the death of Augustus. In many cases, cults to the emperor would spring up aside more traditional religions, where in a worship ceremony “libations or ritual cakes” were laid out, with animal sacrifice at larger, public ceremonies (Price, “Between Man and God” 29). Temples to Augustus, as the office of emperor was termed, were widely built in the eastern empire, along with “widely attested” to “priests of the emperor” (31). Greek and Roman ways of viewing the divinity of the emperor were somewhat divided. Whereas the Romans attributed much of the imperial glory and pomp to the office itself, the Greeks directed their worship toward the emperor who was holding the office (34). This seems to have continued something that had become popular in the Greek world after the Hellenistic period, when even the Athenians began to refer to their rulers as *soteres* – saviors – a word that would come to have some great deal of significance in the Christian era (38).

Besides *sōter*, other linguistic terms emerged in the Greek world which are of interest in a comparison. Whereas we have already seen the emperor referred to as *divi filius* – son of a god – in Virgil, a similar term *theou huios* emerged in the Greek world. The emperor would both be referred to as *theou huios* – son of god – and as simple *theos* in the Greek system (Price, “Gods and Emperors” 79). This does not seem uncommon or even unnatural for the Greeks of this period. Indeed, human manifestations of the divine were common in Greek mythology, as anyone with a cursory knowledge of the subject will know of Zeus’ frequent earthly exploits (87). What seems to be important to realize is the capacity to recognize a human being as an actual member of the divine pantheon was already present within the Greek cosmological

system, something that would come into conflict with the Christianity that Paul would seek to spread throughout the Mediterranean.

CONCLUSION

In this argument, various particularities of Roman imperialism in its practical and more ideological components have been laid out. Roman empire was a simple state of affairs within the Mediterranean world, as Roman power spread from Italy into the far reaches of the known world. This was accompanied by standard reasons for empire: greed, envy, pride and the like, as well as the day-to-day necessities of maintaining an imperial power. When one has a great deal to lose one has a great deal to fear, and Roman fear produced a great motivation for conquest of neighbor.

What legitimated power for Rome was its theoretical underpinning. These can be seen in the political writings of Cicero, who makes the claim that Rome was the best of all states, thereby seemingly ending the discussion of politics, as the ideal that Aristotle and the like were looking for came to fruition in Rome. This is found too in the work of Virgil, who displays the glory and pomp of Rome, and provides some theological basis for Roman empire. Rome's empire spread because it was the will of the gods and fates; Rome is called to empire, and her virtues attest to this calling and provide justification for it.

This culminates in a civic religion that in the west is seen in the example of the deification of the office of emperor and the state itself. Augustus provides the paradigm of this, as the contemporary incarnation of Aeneas and the idea Rome itself, bringing peace to the entire earth and glory to the emperor. To combine this with the eastern ideology of rulers seems to

result in a strong imperial cult in Greece and Asia Minor, complete with worship and sacrifice of the emperor.

This then is the world that the Apostle Paul finds himself in as he goes throughout the cities of Greece and Asia Minor. Famously converted from Judaism on the Damascus Road, Paul the former Pharisee becomes Christianity's most prominent missionary, and it would seem almost singlehandedly brings about the evangelization of important cities throughout the Eastern Empire, and even reaches Rome itself toward the end of his life. This is the world that the Apostle inhabited, and the one that, perhaps, he argues against in his letters.

CHAPTER 2: CHRISTIAN CRITIQUE

Christianity, as it developed, provided a potent critique to the ideology and power of Rome. Triumphant Christianity would point back to Apostle Paul as its progenitor, who traveled throughout the Mediterranean world, especially that of the eastern Roman Empire, preaching, teaching, and writing his famous epistles to churches he visited or intended to visit. The Pauline element is essential to Christianity as it came to be known in the fourth century, as orthodoxy was consolidated, and essential to the definition of the religion even until today.

Whereas Paul articulated his doctrine from a place alternatively of duress or obscurity, Augustine developed much of Paul's thought from a place of prominence and security. Augustine's *City of God* brings to fruition a fully developed Christian politics in the first era where Christianity was able to flex its political muscle from a place of official power and not from subversion. Augustine's narrative of the two cities, founded at the foundation of the world and providing a hermeneutic with which to understand history, serves to offer a place from which Roman imperial pride can be critiqued philosophically, and gives an alternative founded on something approaching a Christian type of secularism.

BACKGROUND

Neither Paul nor Augustine write from a vacuum politically or theologically. The Christian tradition finds its foundation in the gospel accounts of Jesus and the writings of the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, the story is told of Jewish dealings with greater powers, which in turn would subjugate, release, and subjugate the Jewish peoples – out of Egypt and into Babylon over and again. A way to understanding this strange place and relation of the

Jews is provided in Genesis, where this relationship is explained in the first generations of mankind, in the persons of Cain and Abel and their progeny.

OLD TESTAMENT COSMOLOGY

The Jewish people have perhaps more experience than any other living under empire. The very notion of Judaism in a medieval and modern context would seem to necessitate living in diaspora, as the way of life tied to the nation of Israel shifts to a Rabbinic religion after 70CE. From the destruction of Jerusalem under the Romans in the first century CE until the founding of the modern nation-state of Israel in the early twentieth century, there was no present political entity to which Jews could point as home.

These two thousand years could not even be pointed to as something revolutionary. The whole of Jewish history is surrounded by narratives of exile and captivity, with which any Jews in the first century would have been readily familiar. These include the well known journey to later slavery in Egypt, the capture and exile of the divided kingdoms by the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires, the return to the land under the Persian Cyrus, and the myriad dealings with Seleucids and Romans in the second temple period.

It is not surprising then that these hardships would be reflected in the literature of the nation, the law, history, and prophets, collectively known to Christians in the West as the Old Testament. Dealing with empire and the various attempts at it begins to be dealt with even as early as the Genesis account. Immediately following expulsion from the Garden, Genesis recounts the story of the first two brothers, Cain and Abel. The story is well known to many, but in it Genesis recounts history's first fratricide, born of the envy that Cain felt toward his brother after his sacrifice was rejected by God. God places a curse on him and condemns him to wander

the earth, a command that Cain will flout, going off to build a city for him and his descendants (Genesis 4). This city will serve as the archetypical antithesis to the community that Israel sought to see itself as, as heirs of God's covenants, and proves the foundation of what Augustine will call the city of man. This is the prototypical empire, built on vice of envy, envy that results in fratricide.

The other foundational aspect of this dichotomy is given shortly after in the story of the Tower of Babel. The story of Babel and its apparent cognate Babylon (whether real or imagined) becomes crucial to the history of Israel and the reworking of it made by Paul in the first century. In the account, the descendants of Noah, the generation descended from those who survived the worldwide flood, assemble themselves to create a great tower in order to make a great name for themselves so that they will not be scattered across the face of the earth. In order to frustrate these attempts, the story recounts that God descends from heaven and scatters them across the face of the earth, creating the division of languages commonly experienced even today and the diffusion of the human race across the earth (Genesis 11). Here we see another of the imperial ideologies that will be so important to empire. This is something like pride or what the Greeks commonly called hubris, which will become, in the parlance of the Hebrew Scriptures, idolatry, at least of a political sort. Just as the Greeks saw this sentiment's eventual destruction by Nemesis, the Genesis account gives a Hebraic account of the same type of phenomenon.

While the history of the Jewish people provides example upon example of the interaction between their elect nation and the gentile empires, to begin in Genesis provides an ideological underpinning to the history that will be told. The kings, prophets, and priests of Israel's history were certainly on the minds of the first century writers, but to recount their history here would

prove impossible. Yet the presence of these ideas early in Jewish self-understanding can allow us here to jump forward to their eventual confrontation with Rome in the first century.

JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Out of this context and within the more specific context of Second Temple Judaism came Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus reinterprets and reapplies the critique of empire expressed throughout the Old Testament within his context of the day, namely that of a Judaism operating under the governance of Rome's far reaching empire. This part of Jesus' message can be seen throughout all of the gospel writers' accounts in various examples, but can be seen most strongly perhaps in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount is essential to the Matthean account of Jesus' ministry and teaching. In it, Jesus pronounces an ethic based upon the Mosaic Law that intensifies it. Jesus cuts to the core of the prohibitions contained in the law, specifically the Ten Commandments, by prohibiting the underlying desire behind the illicit action. Besides the various prohibitions that undercut the reigning social system of Rome, Jesus provides the basis of the new community that he calls the kingdom of God.

The sermon begins with the famous Beatitudes, and proceeds to describe a way of life antithetical to any imperial grandiosity. The Beatitudes tell that the those who are blessed are not those who take and strive in greedy ambition, but rather those what are "poor in spirit," meek, and "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (5:3, 5, 6). Jesus then proceeds to prohibit not only the actions that the law prohibits, but also the desires that lead to them. Thus he expands the prohibition against murder, making it include anyone who is angry or insults his brother (5:22), cutting off the immoral action at the source. The new kingdom of God will not

experience the hatred that leads to homicidal strife, as in the archetypical examples of Cain and Abel and Romulus and Remus. Jesus, as Rene Girard would say, cuts off the power of the founding murder. This is not to say that the kingdom of God Jesus establishes is free of some sort of foundational murder, and thus completely heavenly and not at all possessing temporal authority.

Before the act of violence that establishes Jesus' new community, however, it is important to look at the various ways in which Jesus does take some aim at Rome itself. Rome was not something that could be ignored in the late second temple period, and Jesus probably would have experienced or known of some Roman brutality in his upbringing, as John Dominic Crossan points out (109-10). Ultimately though, Jesus does not take the side of more zealous anti-Rome groups acting within Judea at the time, like the violent zealots or the isolationist Essenes. Jesus' critique is pointed toward the Sadducees in some respects, the upper class group that had most directly allied itself with Rome, but also pointed toward the more moderate Pharisees. Jesus seems to be concerned with any group that may be comfortable with the powers of the world: in some cases Rome itself, but in many more cases the powers that Rome represents.

An example of Jesus' Roman critique is evident in the well-known story of the denarius, found in Mark 12:13-17. In it, the Pharisees attempt to trap Jesus by posing the question of whether they are to pay taxes to Caesar. If Jesus answers the question wrongly, he can expect problems with the Roman authorities. Yet Jesus famously holds up a denarius and proclaims the dictum that one should render unto Caesar what is Caesars and render unto God what is God's, thus escaping the Pharisees' trap for another day.

Two things reveal themselves upon further inspection. The first of these is a fact that would have been known by Mark's audience, but not by us today. Though the story tells that Caesar's image was upon the coin, it does not inform the text that appeared on it, namely, as Martin Rist explains, "TI CAESAR DIVI AUG FILIUS AUGUSTUS," namely Tiberius Caesar, Divine Augustus, son of Augustus (317). All talk of the imperial cult aside, what Jesus provides is a fundamental rejection of Caesar's presence in the category of God. This does not somehow provide for some separate realm of secular economics, as one might imagine. Jesus fundamentally undermines the emperor's claim, and inserts his own criticism of that realm over which Caesar claims sovereignty. In the language of later political philosophy, he establishes a sacred/secular divide, but then proceeds to critique the secular from his position within the sacred. The two are distinct, but not completely walled off from each other.

The other thing that the story exposes is the fundamental critique of the Pharisees present in Jesus' message. This is a critique based upon collusion that occurs between the Pharisees and Rome (see Crossan 132). While this alliance is not explicit in any of the Pharisees' action in the narrative, except for the trial and crucifixion itself, Jesus hones in during his ministry on an ideological based complicity. Fundamentally, Jesus identifies the Pharisees as children, not of Abraham but of Satan. This appears most explicitly in John's gospel, where the Pharisees seemingly put Jesus on trial (8:39-47).

This appears to be a fundamental mission of Jesus' ministry. As a part of bringing his kingdom of God to earth, he seeks to unmask the powers of the world. The alliance between Rome and the Pharisees need not be a political one; according to Jesus they have the same father: Satan. This is something that Rene Girard explains:

Though not identical with Satan, the powers are all his tributaries because they are all servants of the false gods that are the offspring of Satan, that is, the offspring of the founding murder. So here it is not a matter of religion for the individual or belief in a purely individual sense, as modern people tend to hold. What we are talking about here are rather the social phenomena that the founding murder created. (96)

Jesus' kingdom is one that rejects this violent contagion present within the various kingdoms of the world, one based on the different ethic found within the Sermon on the Mount, and exemplified throughout Jesus' ministry.

Ultimately though, even the kingdom that Jesus aims to bring cannot but be established through some murder. Within the gospel accounts, the leaders of Israel, with special attention given to the Pharisees, bring Jesus before the magistrate to be tried. This should not be cause for anti-Semitism in the least, as has commonly been the charge, but instead is endemic of the collaboration between the two parties, reflective of their common antipathy toward Jesus and his kingdom. Though Jesus' death on the cross is a murder, none involved are more or less guilty of his death than any other of parties. Jesus' death serves, according to the collective witness of the New Testament writers, as a fundamental unmasking of the powers and principalities of the world, intent upon working their will though violent means.

Though Jesus does not take violent measures against the state, as indeed he could have given the presents of the Zealot faction within Roman Palestine, he fundamentally calls into question the authority and autonomy of the state through his ministry and shameful death. Simultaneously, he lays the foundation for a new community based upon an entirely new ethical system than the kingdoms of the world could have imagined. The shame of mankind that he

bears on the cross serves to open mankind up to renewed source of desire, not rooted in the foundational envious fratricide of Cain and Abel, and thus in line with the actions of the satan, literally the accuser. The new community will instead be based on gracious participation with the Spirit, in Greek the *parakletos*, or advocate. These ideas will be elaborated upon greatly by Paul.

PAULINE CRITIQUE

Paul, as a religious figure, is one of the most influential of history. By many popular accounts he invented Christianity, creating a religion from the spiritual teachings of the itinerant teacher Jesus. Many who see things in this manner will echo the sentiments of a *Newsweek* article that John Dominic Crossan quotes from as an example of anti-Paul fervor – claiming that Paul was “pro-slavery, anti-Semitic, misogynistic, and homophobic” (143). Whether these charges are true or not is imminently debatable, as it is hard to believe that a man whose letters were constantly begun with the phrase “grace and peace” would be able to sustain that kind of hypocrisy. Nevertheless, it is possible for many to see Paul as the anti-Jesus apostle, the one that turned the Jesus Movement into Christianity, and brought with it all the baggage that moderns find contemptible.

Others see Paul as the great apostle of justification by faith alone, a major theme of the Protestant Reformation, particularly from the ever anxious and guilt-ridden Martin Luther. This is, in many cases, the Paul devoid of historical and cultural context, and the one perhaps most prevalent in American evangelicalism. This is sometimes the Paul of a somewhat gnostic, solely heavenly salvation, the one that has little if anything to say about the political and social beyond

the morality of an individual's life: the Paul who seems equally ambivalent about the Rome that surrounds him and the Israel in which he was raised.

Both Pauls should, to some degree or another, be rejected as at the very least overly simplistic. Paul was not out of line with Jesus' essential message or with his preached Kingdom of God. Instead, Paul carried this message forward, bringing the idea of the Kingdom of God into its full fruition in the *ekklesia* of his epistles, and bringing that idea into direct conflict with Rome's conceptions of its role in the world and in history. Equally so, I will argue here that Paul did not simply concern himself with the individual morality of the individual believer, but brought forth the idea (and, in many cases, the practice) of a profound new ethical community, organized as a competitor and antithesis to the practices of the world he lived in.

THE MODERN QUEST FOR PAUL

Modern Pauline scholarship has taken up the question of Paul's context with a great deal of excitement. To understand Paul in his context is *en vogue* in contemporary scholarship, whatever context one would look to understand him in. One could be looking for post-colonial interpretations that explain Paul with respect to his imperial context using the tools of the postmodern world. Another could look to a Paul drawn to carefully fit within his world as a First Century Jew and his setting as a member of Second Temple Judaism in a new perspective. Perhaps one could look to a Paul that is classically educated, familiar with the political structures of Aristotle and Hellenism, and seeking to contribute to that discussion like a Renaissance prince. All of these Pauls have something important to say to our modern understanding of the man and are, to various extents, essential to my work here.

PAUL AND EMPIRE

Paul carries forward the critique lived out by Jesus that the gospels account in a different manner. Paul travels throughout the eastern Roman Empire visiting important cities and attempting to begin new churches in these cities. All the while, however, Paul provides a potent ideological underpinning in his numerous epistles that he sends to these churches. By his actions, Paul sets up a network of new communities that undermine imperial power throughout the eastern Mediterranean. To examine this, we will first look at some of the language that Paul uses throughout his epistles that accomplish this, and then examine how those concepts work out in specific contexts.

Paul's language consists of many terms that were used heavily in imperial contexts. One of these is the Greek term *euangelion*, from which are derived *evangel* and its cognates, commonly translated as *gospel*. *Evangelion* was a politically fraught term for Paul to have used. This *gospel* would have been brought along by a messenger to various cities, bringing the good news of a grand imperial victory securing peace and security somewhere else in the empire. As Neil Elliott writes, these "aspects of Paul's theology echo the poetry and propaganda of the Augustan and Neronian eras. [...] By specifying that he proclaims Jesus as "the son of God"[...] Paul implicitly parodies the theological claims made on behalf of the Julio-Claudian dynasty" (Elliott, "Paul and the Politics" 24-5). Paul, by way of using this terminology, points to an apparent showdown between Caesar and Christ for supremacy. This is something that N. T. Wright places within Paul's context as a first century Jew:

For Paul "the gospel" is the announcement that the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth is Israel's Messiah and the world's Lord. It is, in other words, the thoroughly Jewish

(and indeed Isaianic) message that challenges the royal and imperial messages abroad in Paul's world. [For Paul...] Theologically, it belongs completely with Isaiah's ringing monotheistic affirmations that YHWH and YHWH alone is the true god, the only creator, the only sovereign of the world [...]. Politically, it cannot but have been heard as a summons to allegiance to "another king," which is of course precisely what Luke says Paul was accused of saying (Acts 17:7). Practically, this means that Paul, in preaching the gospel, was more like a royal herald than a religious preacher or theological teacher. ("Paul's Gospel" 165)

Paul's pronouncement then is in line with Jewish condemnations of imperial power, which seem to find their largest target in Rome.

This itself is mixed up with various terms for the man the *evangelion* would have been about: namely the *soter* or *kyrios*, the savior or lord. Here again explains Elliott in Roman context: "Paul's proclamation of Jesus as *kyrios*, the 'lord of God's empire,' relied heavily on Roman political concepts, and could 'easily be understood as violating the 'decrees of Caesar' in the most blatant manner" ("Paul and the Politics" 25). This indeed clashes with the supposed divinity of Caesar, given the meaning of *kyrios* in the wider Jewish tradition: it was the word used in the Septuagint (as in English bibles today) used to translate the tetragrammaton, the four Hebrew letters YHWH (Wright, *Paul* 73). Caesar was the lord of his empire and the savior of those who were in distress, both concepts that the language used by Paul challenge. This salvation that the savior brought was tied up with the ideas of peace and security made popular in the *pax Romana*. Indeed, " 'peace and security' is in fact almost a definition of the Romans' *sōtēria*, salvation. It functions as a kind of global protection racket. And Paul mocks it. It's a

hollow sham. What's more, at the very moment when they make the claim most strongly, then the destruction will come" (Wright 74). Paul critiques then the basis of Roman peace and security not only on the basis of arrogance but on the basis of its vaporous quality.

What then is the victorious message that Paul preaches? The answer to this question is the crucified Jesus, the public portrayal of which was the subject of his entire ministry (Galatians 3:1). Crucifixion was the ultimate signal of defeat that Rome placed on those who would rebel against it. This was a punishment only deserved by slaves, something that Roman citizens could only experience upon conviction of treason (Elliott "Anti-Imperial" 169). This is, notes Elliott, not for Paul

an instance of official misconduct, a miscarriage of Roman justice. It is an apocalyptic event. It reveals 'the rulers of this age,' indeed 'every rule and authority and power' – procurators, kings, emperors, as well as the supernatural 'powers' who stand behind them, as intractably hostile to God and as doomed to be destroyed by the Messiah at 'the end.' Jesus' crucifixion 'is the crux of God's plan for unmasking and overthrowing the powers of this world' (Elliot 176).

What was famously the last straw for rebellion somehow becomes a symbol of victory. This was not accidental, as Wright explains:

We are here witnessing the rebirth of a symbol. The cross [...] was already a powerful symbol in the ancient world. It spoke both of politics (the unstoppable military might of Rome) and of theology (the divinity of Caesar, whose power stood behind that of his armies). The early Christian use of the cross as a symbol was not simply a creation out of nothing. It took genius to see that the symbol which had spoken of Caesar's naked might

now spoke of God's naked love. And I think that the genius in question belonged to Paul. (*Paul 73*)

This then is the good news that Paul spread around the Mediterranean: that the powers that made claim to the world's loyalty and submission were ultimately illegitimate; that the true savior of the world had come and lived as a man in Jerusalem; and that he was crucified by the authorities, in a display of the world system's violence as it slew an innocent man, and a display of God's mercy in finally sending the promised Messiah to Israel.

Paul brought this message to many of the important cities of the Eastern Roman empire, establishing alternative communities in places even where the imperial cult was simultaneously flourishing. For Paul, this took the shape of the *ekklesia*, the assembly, from which are derived words like ecclesiastical. This is a term with an ancient heritage, being used even back to the high days of Athenian democracy. For Greeks, the "primary meaning [...] was the citizen 'assembly' of the Greek *polis*. *Ekklesia* is thus a political term with certain religious overtones" (Horsley *Paul and Empire* 208). These communities would attempt to be alternate political communities, where one's citizenship was ultimately in heaven (Philippians 3:20), and where virtues like love, patience, kindness, and gentleness could be practiced here and now (Galatians 5:22-3), in contrast to the vice and greed of imperial Rome. Besides this, "the alternative society [...] is rooted in the history of Israel, in opposition to the *pax Romana*" (Horsley 209). Assemblies that Paul plants then provide a perceived threat to the common culture shared by subjects of Rome.

These ideas work themselves out numerous places within his letters. Philippians is a good example of these working together. Philippi was, as Wright notes, a somewhat recently

founded Roman colony, and its closeness with Rome meant that “they knew that if they were ever in difficulties, they could call on the emperor to come from the mother city and rescue them, because as savior and lord he had power to impose his will on the whole known world” (*Paul* 72). This is contrasted with the claims of Paul in 3:20: “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Wright offers commentary:

These are Caesar-titles. The whole verse says: Jesus is Lord, and Caesar isn't. Caesar's empire, of which Philippi is a colonial outpost, is the parody; Jesus' empire, of which the Philippian church is a colonial outpost, is the reality. And the point of having “citizenship in heaven” is not that one might eventually retire and go home to the mother city [...]. The point was that, if things were getting difficult in one's colonial setting, the emperor would come [...] to rescue and liberate his loyal subjects. (*“Paul's Gospel”* 173-4)

The peace and security offered by Rome was a deception, claims Paul. Ultimately, this peace and security could be gained only by allegiance to a different king who reigned in a different kingdom.

Another of Paul's letters to another Macedonian city directs his critique more pointedly toward emperor worship itself. The letter of I Thessalonians is generally thought to be one of his earliest, and Thessalonica was a particularly important city to the burgeoning worship of the emperor in the Greek east. This worship transformed from a relatively early cult focusing on the goddess Roma, which after Augustus culminated in the building of a fullblown temple to Caesar (Donfried 218). The worship of “Augustus [as] ‘son of god’ is appointed and now is given priority over other priesthods” (218). Newly converted Christians in this city would have had a

difficult time coping with the religious leanings of the city. Such is the case that some even believe a minor persecution occurred in Thessalonica after Paul's visit, the first to have occurred in a gentile context (220).

Paul must then stress the need for hope in waiting for the appearance of Christ for salvation. Here Paul uses another term popular in imperial language: *parousia*. In the Roman world, this was a generally known event where the inhabitants of a city would come out to greet and welcome in a visiting ruler. Paul encourages these inhabitants of Thessalonica to have hope in this over against any trouble that may have been caused for them in the city. This is then the same message found in Philippians: wait for the true emperor, who will truly bring peace and security.

Yet the question must be raised: is this a constant element of Paul's thought? The most potent counterexample exists in a letter overwhelmingly accepted as genuine: Romans. Here Paul seems to argue that the emperor has legitimate authority, that he does not wield his power unjustly or in defiance of God's dictates. This would seem to be directly contrary to all that has previously been discussed here. If the empire of Caesar is a sham that perpetrates vast injustices and serves as an arrogant affront to God, why is it to be obeyed? Indeed, how can it possibly be referred to as a servant of God?

This is such that, as Elliott notes, "'A persistent minority' of scholars have rejected Rom. 13:1-7 as a non-Pauline interpolation into the letter" ("Romans 13:1-7" 184). Yet to believe thus is to misunderstand the import of Paul's politics. Paul is not an anarchist, and indeed is not even against the Roman state in and of itself. Wright provides the best synopsis of Paul's *modus operandi*: "[Paul] is prepared to submit to the courts, but is also more than prepared to remind

them of their business and to call them to account when they overstep their duty. He uses his own Roman citizenship when it suits the demands of his mission. But at the same time he is fearless in announcing, and living by, a different allegiance” (“Gospel and Empire” 70). Paul’s ideology is hardly capable of overthrowing the state, or even the day-to-day operations of the Roman state, in a day. Indeed, he would not want to do that, for to do so would plunge the world into chaotic strife. Whatever the lies that surround it, imperialism does have a kernel of truth: unruly men will tend to be unruly.

Paul’s political side is best summed up thusly: Paul’s problem with Rome is not its imperial rule in and of itself, but rather the ideology that surrounds it. This ideology ensconces itself in arrogance and hubristic pride, covering over the greed and envy that support the regime. Paul’s problem is then that Rome does not behave as it should, operating in concert with the dictates of his humane religion. For Rome, religion and the state were synonymous. In Paul, we begin to see this differentiation between state and religion that will be so important to the history of the West. Ultimately the state has the authority to wield the sword and execute justice, as Paul says in Romans 13, but it does not have the authority to execute justice unjustly, nor to think itself the sole purpose of human life. The state must then operate knowing it is not an eschatological entity, but only a temporal one. Paul provides the basis of a sacred/secular divide.

AUGUSTINE AND THE CITY OF GOD

While Paul’s writings inform a nascent, unorganized Christianity that would take many years yet to grow through the wide geography of the empire and the official persecutions various emperors would institute, Augustine presents a political vision after the religion had coalesced into dogmatic maturity. Augustine’s context is about as different from Paul’s as can be

imagined. Though the empire in question is the same, the emperor is Christian, the official religion Christianity, and the capital's power has been split between Rome and Constantinople. The beginnings of the religion in Paul and the apostles have hardened into dogma supported by councils that crafted intricate theological definitions to protect against perceived heresies. Within Paul's time the greatest theological question seems to have been the role of gentiles in a Jewish way of life; now truth hangs in the balance over an iota, such as in the Athanasian controversy over *homooúsios* versus *homoioúsios*. Augustine is able then, according to Alasdair MacIntyre, to elucidate Paul "in that he is able to give an account of Paul's doctrine in *Romans*, for example, using a vocabulary of a kind which was not available to Paul himself. In so doing there is no doubt that he captures Paul's meaning; it is not a mistake [for example] to impute to Paul a conception of the will which he himself could not have spelled out" (157-8).

Yet Augustine's time and context offers proof of the old adage that the more things change the more they stay the same. Christianity had proven triumphant over Rome to a degree, but Rome had fallen to Germanic barbarians in the sack by Alaric in 410. Certainly then, declared the old guard religionists, Rome's fall was attributable to the neglect of the old religion. If Christ was the true god, why did the city fall? Certainly under Jupiter it would not have been so. In short, though the ascendant religion's position was more secure, Augustine found himself in the same place as Paul, having to articulate an idea for a Rome that stood opposed to him. Augustine accomplishes this in one of the great works of Western political philosophy *De Civitate Dei*. In the City of God, Augustine manages to refute those Romans who would argue against him, but more importantly rearticulates the Pauline political vision in a more philosophic manner for the generations to come.

Augustine begins his work with a short prologue discussing the purpose and method of his work. His short-term purpose is to defend the city of God against those who would attack it, namely those who would critique the Christian religion in the wake of Rome's sack. Yet his purpose is much more broad than that, for he seeks to create an apology for the city of God throughout history, to, as Milton, "justify the ways of God to men" (4). He immediately contrasts the two, one eternal yet with only fleeting glimpses gained within this life, the other fleeting and temporal, yet easily apprehended. One has citizens who gain glimpses of it by faith and live lives devoted to righteousness; the other is governed by arrogance, such that it would claim to do things only properly left to God's prerogative, as Augustine contrasts the verse of Virgil on showing mercy to the humble and crushing the proud with that of James and Peter. Ultimately though, Augustine points to the idea so prevalent in his work that the city of man is does not rule itself but is ruled by its "lust of rule" (3).

What proceeds is a critique both of empire itself and of the Roman empire in particular. Rome, it would seem, serves as the archetypal imperial power, displaying most prominently its glaring vices and admirable virtues as few other empires could claim to do. Yet this is the contradiction within Rome that is so important to understand. Rome has glaring pretensions that it is better than the rest of the kingdoms of the world, that it, as Augustine quotes Sallust, prefers "to spare the vanquished and subdue the proud [and] rather to forgive than to avenge an injury." The contradiction lies in the fact that though the Romans maintained this pretention, they still took numerous cities in conquest just as the rest of the kingdoms of the world did and have done throughout the ages (8). Rome considers itself unique and exceptional, but in consideration of its day-to-day actions it is just like any other kingdom or principality.

Augustine critiques even the Roman desire for peace as such, in words that could easily have applied to the *pax Romana* as much as the loss of peace after Alaric. He censures the Romans because their desire for peace and its accompaniments is “not prompted by any purpose of using these blessings honestly, that is to say, with moderation, sobriety, temperance, and piety; for your purpose is rather to run riot in an endless variety of sottish pleasures, and thus to generate from your prosperity a moral pestilence which will prove a thousandfold more disastrous than the fiercest enemies” (35). In short, the pagans desire peace not for peace but for violence: “what you desire in the restoration of a peaceful and secure state, is not the tranquility of the commonwealth, but the impunity of your own vicious luxury” (37). Romans desire a powerful state capable of ensuring peace so that they may avoid the difficulties of a virtuous life.

These critiques all occur in book one, and will serve as the two pillars, often again constructed, upon which Augustine will base the entirety of his critique: the paradox of Rome’s supposed exceptional status and the moral bankruptcy of the empire. In order to do this, Augustine will take a huge number of pages attempting to tell a typological history of the two cities, comparing and contrasting them through various important events and figures (O’Daly 81). Augustine over and over again presents both the virtue and vice of Rome, which both appear to be great to him. Yet the problem remains for the vast majority of Roman virtue: even the justice that Rome appears to exercise is motivated by evil, prideful desires, something that undercuts the claims to justice (MacIntyre 155). Unjust motivation destroys justice, making the state itself unjust, according even to Cicero, in one of Augustine’s typical uses of ancient sources (MacIntyre 155). Augustine’s use of Cicero in this way, along with Virgil, Sallust, and a myriad of classical authors heightens the paradox: that Rome’s pretensions to unique status are wrong,

yet Rome somehow legitimately has unique characteristics, unique in its virtue and in its vice, deserving both admiration and contempt.

Augustine's apology begins its more philosophic turn in book two. Augustine points out, in echoes of Paul in Romans, that citizens of the heavenly city "are enjoined to endure this earthly republic" (59) in hopes of reward from the other. Christians are then to live in accordance with all virtue, following the law of the state where it does not contradict conscience. This is contrasted with the pagans who "are nowise concerned that the republic be less depraved and licentious. Only let it remain undefeated, they say, [...] let it be glorious by its victories, or still better, secure in peace [...] this is our concern, that every man be able to increase his wealth as to supply his daily prodigalities, and so that the powerful may subject the weak for their own purposes" (59). Citizens of the city of God are then better citizens than those who only inhabit the city of man, according to Augustine. Their ultimate disloyalty increases temporal loyalty to a republic, as long as it is just.

Augustine proceeds to his most overtly political statements in book three. He provides a potent critique of imperial ambition. This argument is based on the premise that it is better to be small and of sound health than large and beset by many evils: "In this little world of man's body, is it not better to have a moderate stature, and health with it, than to attain the huge dimensions of a giant by unnatural torments, and when you attain it to find no rest, but to be pained the more in proportion to the size of your members?" (80). This Augustine ties in with a subtle critique of the idea of defensive empire advocated by the Romans. Augustine admits that the Romans may have a "plausible defence for undertaking and carrying on such disastrous wars – to wit, that the

pressure of their enemies forced them to resist, so that they were compelled to fight [...] by the necessity of protecting life and liberty” (81).

The rejoinder is then easily made: “For even if then Rome was harassed by wars, and yet did not meet force with force, the same means she then used to quiet her enemies without conquering them in war, or terrifying them with the onset of battle, she might have used always, and have reigned in peace with the gates of Janus shut” (81). This seems to be an appeal to defensive strength rather than defensive imperialism. This is certainly something that a moderate, virtuous citizenry could accomplish too, from something as small as Rome the city-state, or if Rome’s empire had stopped at any point in her conquests. The ability to peaceably maintain strength is something difficult to do but yet not impossible, as perhaps the modern example of the Swiss, who managed to avoid combat in both world wars, illustrates.

The violence that Rome projected to the world is not without basis within Rome itself, though, as Rome was inherently violent. Augustine points to numerous events in Roman history, beginning with the violent rape of the Sabines. Certainly the new Romans needed wives, but by what means? – “with what wounds on both sides, and with what sad slaughter of relatives and neighbours!” (83). Yet this will be the tone that Roman history sounds, as Rome is racked by internal violence from the fratricidal Romulus to the numerous civil wars, culminating seemingly in the unholy trinity of those between Caesar and Pompey, Antony and the Assassins, and Antony and Octavian.

Whatever peace and joy, Augustine argues, can be found in empire is to “be compared to glass in its fragile splendour, of which one is horrible afraid lest it should be suddenly broken into pieces” (111). Wherefore it is asked: is it better to have great riches and wracked by

constant violence or moderate and peaceful? Even more, is it better to be a good man and a slave, or a free man enslaved to many vices? (112) The toil of immoderate empire and greed is surely greater than anything moderation would ever produce, as Augustine seemingly echoes the Aristotelian ethic of virtue being found in moderation. Indeed he sums up the section with the story of Alexander and the pirate:

[It was] an apt and true reply which was given to Alexander the Great by a pirate who had been seized. For when that king had asked the man what he meant by keeping hostile possession of the sea, he answered with bold price, “What thou meanest by seizing the whole earth; but because I do it with a petty ship, I am called a robber, whilst thou who doest it with a great fleet are styled emperor.” (113)

It is better to be small and dwell among good neighbors than to trample down both your neighbors and the weak of your own city in order to gain avarice-laden peace.

Augustine must however give an account of how Rome managed to gain so much prestige while maintaining such vice. His original reader might ask then, why has God waited so long to see Rome downfallen, considering the ubiquity of evil? Augustine maintains the virtue of the republic, even pointing back to the oft quoted verse of the *Aeneid*, claiming that the pretensions Rome maintained were “exercised with the more skill the less they gave themselves up to pleasures,[...] amassing riches, and [...] corrupting morals” (160). Indeed, he points back to Cato as quoted by Sallust, which deserves quotation at length:

I do not think [...] that it was by arms that our ancestors made the republic great from being small. Had that been the case, the republic of our day would have been by far more flourishing than that of their times, for the number of our allies and citizens is far greater;

and, besides, we possess a far greater abundance of armour and of horses than they did. But it was other things than these that made them great, and we have none of them: industry at home, just government without, a mind free in deliberation, addicted neither to crime nor to lust. Instead of these, we have luxury and avarice, poverty in the state, opulence among citizens; we laud riches, we follow laziness ; there is no difference made between the good and the bad; all the rewards of virtue are got possession of by intrigue. And no wonder, when every individual consults only for his own good, when ye are the slaves of pleasure at home, and, in public affairs, of money and favour no wonder that an onslaught is made upon the unprotected republic. (161-2)

Augustine is ready to admit, in line with Cato, that while Rome was smaller and younger, namely the infant republic, it displayed some degree of justice unknown, seemingly, in either its birth or adulthood. Whatever the case, this is another example of the strange paradox that Rome presents, as one cannot fully despise or esteem it.

The defense and explanation of the city of God is begun much later in the work. The origins are rooted in the Genesis account, in the story of Cain and Abel, Cain the father of the city of man, Abel of the city of God: “When these two cities began to run their course by a series of deaths and births, the citizen of this world was first-born, and after him the stranger in this world, the citizen of the city of God, predestinated by grace, elected by grace, by grace a stranger below, and by grace a citizen above” (479). This contrast is made more explicit in the direct comparison: “It is recorded of Cain that he built a city, but Abel, being a sojourner, built none. For the city of the saints is above, although below it begets citizens, in whom it sojourns till the

time of its reign arrives, when it shall gather together all in the day of the resurrection” (479). Cain and Abel serve then as the prototype for the relationship between these two spheres of life.

The violence inherent in the fratricidal act of Cain, and the violence boasted of by his ancestors like Lamech (Gen 4:23), becomes endemic of the city of man. It is constantly in conflict, as conquerors are always attempting to bring peace by their conquest, but can never finally accomplish it (481). Rome becomes archetypical of this, as, though neither can be pointed to as a child of promise, Romulus and Remus stain its founding with the blood of fratricide (483). The city of man is then doomed to continual conflict and strife, to conquer and be conquered, to kill and be killed.

Yet in the midst of all this, a solution is offered approaching something Pauline. Augustine recognizes that the purpose of all these wars is peace, though a peace which is both vaporous and fraught with dangers. Peace after conquering can bring pride, then making victory “life-destroying,” or it can be short lived. “But the things this city desires,” namely peace, “cannot justly be said to be evil, for it is itself, in its own kind, better than all other human good” (481). He continues:

These things, then, are good things, and without a doubt the gifts of God. But if they neglect the better things of the heavenly city, which are secured by eternal victory and peace never-ending, and so inordinately covet these present good things that they believe them to be the only desirable things, or love them better than those things which are believed to be better – if this be so, then it is necessary that misery follow and ever increase. (482)

The answer then is that if the state pursues good things wrongly or for the wrong reasons, if the state pursues peace in a manner fundamentally unpeaceful, if it pursues justice unjustly, if it pursues prosperity greedily, it cannot be said to prosper. If it is wracked by pride and hubris, not submitting itself under ultimate claims that it does not control, it will be an evil state. If the state is the end of history and the goal of mankind, then it cannot help but be an unjust state.

CONCLUSION

Paul and Augustine set up a system of what will come to be called church and state which, if nothing else, serves as a check on the power of the state and imperial ambition. This indeed would anecdotally be the condition of the Medieval and Renaissance West, though of course it may be argued that at times during this period the pendulum swung to the other direction and the Church possessed undue authority over the state. Whatever the case is, Christianity manages to break the stranglehold the Roman state had on ideological belief that supported and legitimated the illegitimate authority it attempted to wield in its empire. Augustine's political influence will be felt for some time, although the seeming complete abandonment of it is the subject of my next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: AMERICAN APPLICATION

Comparisons between the Roman Empire and whatever burgeoning empire the United States might hold today are rather common. And indeed there is a great deal of surface similarity. Both were born out of the culture of their predecessor cultures – the Romans with the Greeks, and the Americans with the Europeans – and both stepped into the power vacuum that was left after they had torn themselves apart by internecine warfare, such as the aftereffects of Alexander’s conquest or the conflagration of the great wars of the twentieth century. Whatever physical similarities exist though, it must be ultimately admitted that the correspondence is not one-to-one. The United States does not have the direct governing power over the far reaches of the world that Rome maintained through her empire, at least not yet.

What comparison bears the most fruit is the ideological one, the one that I seek to draw out. Just as Rome saw herself as an exceptional nation with a vocation to spread civilization around the world, so does the United States see itself as an exceptional nation that has a vocation to spread the new bywords of civilization, freedom and democracy, to the four corners of the world. Just as Rome consolidated her religion and state into one entity, breaching the separation that Augustine would claim should naturally exist, so the United States has done, or has begun to do. America’s conception of itself is perilously close to Rome’s, especially in the context of how the sources I have presented here critique Rome. This, then, is the cause and goal of this critique. In order to show the similarities, I will approach American ideology and history in two distinct phases. The first will lay the bedrock for the second, as much of the ideology from the colonial and revolutionary periods seems to have remained unrealized, at least in the form that it

would take in the twentieth and is taking in the early twenty first centuries. The second will look at the period in the wake of the Civil War, but especially in the wake of World War One, and the way that America's ideological conception of itself in the world has worked its way into the world at large.

FOUNDATIONS: ISOLATIONIST EXCEPTIONALISM

America, as G. K. Chesterton has famously observed, is a "nation with the soul of a church," (45) a singular nation founded not upon common identity but a creed. Indeed, for Chesterton, this creed is expressed in the Declaration of Independence, something that, he writes, "is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity," and the basis of the American Constitution (41). Chesterton made this observation upon his first visit to the United States in the early twentieth century. It contained a great deal of truth then, as the whimsical Englishman observed America and reflected upon its past, and perhaps bears even more truth since the passing of Chesterton's Victorian Age.

Chesterton observed the symbiotic relationship between religion and politics in America that had taken a completely different turn than that of Europe. "The crucial change came," as writes Ernest Lee Tuveson, "with the reversal of the Augustinian interpretation of history, which had prevailed during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" (viii-ix). While a great deal of this Augustinian historical and political arrangement that I have shown previously began to topple in Europe during the Reformation and Enlightenment, as European history and politics began to become more tied to the Hobbesian sovereign instead of the Holy Father, formally the different spheres were maintained, whether in Catholic France or Lutheran Germany. Though the prince was sovereign, he had to at least pay deference to another power. Augustine's influence in these

matters seems, however, to have been completely lost in Puritan America following the theocratic impulse of the Protestant Reformation, as church and state were often conflated into one entity, as even de Tocqueville recognizes as late as the early 1800s: “Puritanism [...] was almost as much a political theory as it was a religious doctrine” (39).

During this early period of American history, roughly the colonial to the dawn of the twentieth century, the isolationist impulse of American exceptionalism reigned, a side of the ideology quite different from that of the post-world war period. In many ways, this was due to the nature of the American experiment as it began. Many of the first Europeans to come to the New World were religious exiles, seeking an escape from the political and religious turmoil on the continent that had for so long engulfed it in wars that brought about the modern nation-state and, in the protestant countries at least, their corresponding state churches. This was certainly the impulse in two of America’s most famous colonial experiences, that of the Plymouth Colony and the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the examples of which show an ideal that will become more important in later American history.

COLONIAL

John Winthrop was a leader of that Massachusetts Bay Colony, one of the many Puritans who came to the new colonies escaping the perceived tyranny of the Church of England. In Winthrop and his community, one can easily see themes that will reemerge again and again in American thought and history. Winthrop famously declares that their new political experiment will be as a “citty upon a hill” (43), but the context of this declaration is tremendously important.

For Winthrop, this was an essentially democratic attempt at self-governance. This is due to a theological claim that God, “this great King will have many Stewards, counting himselfe

more honoured in dispenicing his gifts to man by man, than if hee did it by his owne immediate hand” (39). This is ultimately the democratic priesthood of Luther and the Reformers, as much as the Reformation destroyed the theoretical distinction between clergy and laity, writ upon the political sphere. The Puritan community would seek to have tyranny neither from pope nor king. In order to complete this democratization of government, it was extended to be “Government both civill and ecclesiasticall” (41). In the Puritan attempt, church and state were one, as the same authorities that would govern the populace in temporal matters would govern it in those eternal. “Thus,” observes Sidney Mead, “the gathered church was co-extensive with the actual state, the laws of which, it was supposed, coincided with the laws of God” (267).

The famous city on a hill remark is often called upon to highlight this early feeling of divine vocation in the Puritan establishments, as a recalling of Jesus’ words speaking of a city upon a hill that shall not be hidden (Matt. 5:14). Indeed this is the case, but with an important distinction that will be lost in later American history. Winthrop recollects the history of Israel, and ultimately draws the connection between this new chosen people and God’s chosen people of old. This is a position fraught with danger for a number of reasons.

First of all, Winthrop reminds his community that “wee must Consider that [...] the eyes of all people are upon us; soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall shame the faces of many of gods worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into Curses upon us” (43). Within Winthrop’s framework, sin is continually crouching at the door looking to devour (Gen. 4:6-7), and the curses placed in the law of Israel are just as present as the blessings and just as much a threat for the Puritan community as they were for the wilderness generation. As Ross

Douthat says with different emphasis, “‘The flip side of the boast of Excpetionalism was a warning’ - a caution against arrogance and folly, lest America follow the path of “Israel and Judah and Athens and Rome’ and succumb ‘to decadence, hubris, even self-hatred, and enter its decline and fall’” (251).

Yet this postmillennial framework, thinking that God was in their community doing a fundamentally new work to usher in a new age for mankind, is certainly present within this theological hermeneutic. Perhaps no better example exists of this thought than in Jonathan Edwards. This is seen clearly in Edwards’ published sermon “The Latter-Day Glory is Probably to Begin in America.” In it, Edwards lays out his expectation that the great revival he was witnessing, now known to history as the First Great Awakening, would bring in the millennium and bring to bear the kingdom of God. As he says,

If we consider how long since the things foretold as what should precede this great event, have been accomplished; and how long this event has been expected by the church of God, and thought to be nigh by the most eminent men of God, in the church; and withal consider what the state of things is now, and for a considerable time been, in the church of God, and the world of mankind; we cannot reasonably think otherwise, than that the beginning of this great work of God must be near. And there are many things that make it probable that this work will begin in America[.] (55)

In order to prove this thesis, Edwards recalls many biblical prophecies that point to this new order being established in a far off land. This culminates in the observation that the new world had been left hitherto as though uncreated, a dark expanse perhaps with only the Spirit hovering over the waters, “wholly the possession of Satan, the church of God having never been in it”

(56). This is the foundation of Edwards' hope: that now that this land has been established and inhabited by Christian men, "God might in it begin a new world in a spiritual respect, when he creates the *new heavens* and *new earth*" (56).

Ultimately though he goes to what will become a reoccurring theme in American ideology: the corruption of Europe. For Edwards, the old world represents the elder brother of the biblical motif, and the younger brother of America the child of promise. He writes:

The old continent has been the source and original of mankind in several respects. The first parents of mankind dwelt there; and there dwelt Noah and his sons; there the second Adam was born, and crucified, and raised again: And it is probably that, in some measure to balance these things, the most glorious renovation of the world shall originate from the new continent. (57).

Edwards even gives credit for the crucifixion to European civilization at large in this section, seemingly in a deviation from the all too common anti-Semitism of the Continent. But in this respect, Edwards seems to make the crucifixion not as much a crime as an unfortunate necessity, seemingly drawing upon the story of David and Solomon, where David wished to build the temple but was prohibited from doing so because of the blood upon his hands. This is not explicit in Edwards, but seems to lurk behind, influencing him when he says, "Inasmuch as that Continent has crucified Christ, they shall not have the honour of communicating religion in its most glorious state to us, but we to them" (57). The religion that was carried over will be brought back; the new world will have to reevangelize the old.

Edwards and Winthrop serve as examples of this idea that appears as at least a forerunner to the idea of American exceptionalism. Both are convinced that in the founding of the

American Colonies, God is accomplishing a novel work that will bring to fruition his kingdom. This was married to the ability to rapidly expand that could solve all problems for the colonials, as William A. Williams writes: “From the outset, [...] colonial Americans had viewed the acquisition of more land as a primary way of solving their problems and fulfilling their purposes. That perpetual force for expansion (along with a more narrow possessiveness) contributed much to the campaign to drive the Indians ever further west” (23). These ideas combined would lead to an ever-present drive into the wilderness of the west, bringing civilization to the wilderness whether through evangelism or war, a drive west many know by the name of Manifest Destiny.

REVOLUTION

Yet before this drive west would occur in force, the nature of this new American state and its separation from the Old World would have to be achieved. Ultimately, this decision would be made in the American Revolution and the following foundation of the new country, a time during which many of the ideas already presented were crystallized into dogma with nearly official status. During this time, much of the ideology of the early American Puritans would be brought from New England to the nation as a whole and tied to the emerging nation without a national church, attaching much of the devotion previously reserved for the church to the state itself. In so doing, the Revolutionary generation severed the doctrine of American Exceptionalism from the critique present within Puritan thought, leaving it open to dangerous abuse in future generations.

Much as the United States could come forth as the first country, born of a Protestantism without a history of establishment Christianity, so could it come forth as the first country founded on Enlightenment principles through the first modern revolution. In step with the

Enlightenment's principles of reason and empiricism, the Founders ultimately sought to order the new United States through a Constitution that, contrary to the wishes of many in their time, omitted mention of God. Debates raged and continue to rage over whether in so doing the Founders intended to create a secular republic or, under the ideal of federalism, to leave the question of religion to the states (Fea 150). Given the context of the time, the latter seems very likely: most of the new states had established churches. Ultimately, however, the Constitution takes a something of a deistic or secular stance for the nation as a whole. One must realize that this fact might not have meant much, given that debates still occurred between federalists and anti-federalists, but nonetheless the foundation was laid for more developments to come.

In uniting the nation this way though, something in common had to be found to which all Americans could subscribe, at least in theory. In this time, the beginning of an American civil religion is seen. Though not necessarily something held by the general public, the Founders maintained this in common, writes Sidney Mead, interspersed with quotes from Chesterton:

The "deism" exhibited in the Declaration was a positive religious teaching with [...] a lucid and even dogmatic theology. It was a cosmopolitan, inclusive, universal theology. The founders, typical eighteenth century intellectuals oriented to the actualities of the American scene, were cosmopolitans nationally and religiously. They were cosmopolitans nationally in the sense that Franklin meant when he said, '.... a Philosopher may set his foot on [the world's] surface, and say, 'this is my country.' So such a Philosopher might have entered any church, as Franklin symbolically did by contributing his mite to each, and declare, "This is my church." (270)

Though the general population probably would not have agreed with this sentiment to a man, this dogma was necessary in order to unite the diverse population of the new nation.

Indeed, how could it be otherwise? In attempting to unite these thirteen colonies into a new United States, the Founders sought to unite peoples as diverse as Congregationalists in Massachusetts, Catholics in Maryland, Episcopalians in Virginia, Methodists and Baptists in Georgia, complete with the Quakers, Unitarians, and any number of other denominations that made up the religious scene of the emerging United States. Besides this, there were the various nationalities of immigrants, the growing divide between North and South over the issue of slavery and their radically divergent ways of life, and the host of other problems that any other nation would have to deal with. Whatever the result, the problems encountered by the Founding generation do appear exceptional; few countries are founded out of a situation such as this. The result of this dilemma was to seek, as Mead terms it, a “synergistic core, [the conception of which] enabled them to distinguish between the substance of religion, and the forms of the religious sects exemplified in sectarian tenants and observances” (270). Whether one agrees that this is virtuous or at all possible, this appears to be the method used by the Founders in creating union from these radically disparate parts.

These foundations of an American religion, as Robert Bellah will later call it in references to 1960s America, played an interesting role for the American people, and one that would increase in the years to come. Paul Kahn, Professor at Yale Law, makes the observation that the modern “state creates and maintains its own sacred space and history,” that the modern state must have a political theology (19). As much as the United States is an archetypical modern state, this certainly remains true. He continues:

Freeing the state from the church did not banish the sacred from the political. It might have, but it did not. The French revolutionaries attacked the church, but they found it necessary to invent their own rituals of the sacred. [...] The American Revolution practiced the same double forms of the sacred, worshiping “self-evident truths” set forth in the name of “We the People.” The framers separated church and state but spoke the language of the sacred when pledging their lives to each other in their revolutionary mission. (21)

Though not necessarily incarnated in the practice of the average Georgian or New Yorker of the day, this religious core serves as the foundational idea behind the Declaration and the Constitution, the documents that serve to provide the legal and spiritual basis between the diverse people of the nation to this day.

This was the role of the sacred symbols of the revolution and the new country. The Constitution and Declaration’s role in founding the nation have already been discussed, but as Catherine Albanese points out, they both quickly assumed the aura of sacrality which that understanding elicited. These documents, fusing event with memorialization, pointed to a human past grounded on human acts rather than either divine events in the lives of the gods or divine events occasioned by a God who acted in history. The twin texts bent their Christian past to an affirmation of the *novus ordo saeculorum* in which the novelty came from the primacy of human action. (184)

Both of these documents existed as a written testimony to the particular toil of their framers.

Yet the founding generation also produced a hero who typified all the virtues that the new Americans wished to encourage and esteem. This man was George Washington, who rose even into near veneration even within his lifetime. Washington was, according to Albanese, the “collective representation of American personhood, [...] a kind of superbeing who summarized the ideals of character and consciousness which patriots together understood as best, in the old Greek sense of *arete*” (144). Washington then serves as almost a hybrid of Romulus and Aeneas, accomplishing the founding act like Romulus, though possessing of abounding virtue in politics and war, like Aeneas.

Albanese speaks at length of the unique quality of Americans feeling the need to point to one founder. She writes:

Thus, George Washington, founder, was a curious anomaly in at least one respect: other time and other places had seen only founded religions with founders. Now though, a founder would be linked by popular acclaim to an act of mythic foundation and a sacred story of origins, historicized and self-conscious, yet, paradoxically, to a large extent unconscious of its religious import. [...] Yet, in the subtle democracy of myth, when Americans acknowledged that George Washington had founded their nation, in effect they were saying that they had founded themselves. (146)

Hardly could a better example of the emerging American civil religion be found than this. In the founding, Americans looked to a single individual to typify their experience and provide an example for living, not only Aeneas but Christlike. Washington and the founding documents belong to a mythic and removed age, revered like the age of Troy from which came not only Aeneas, but virtuous Hector and wily Odysseus. Yet these documents were by the people, and

Washington though extraordinary was also just an ordinary citizen, a first among equals. By doing so, the new myths simultaneously draw on the American desire for democracy and the need for sacred images to unite the American people: the true revolution.

This new civil religion even in its infancy served to unite the nation in ways never dreamt of in old Europe. Stanley Hauerwas explains, “The development of a common civil religion [...] allowed Americans, as well as immigrants in America, to understand their faiths as contributing to a consensus summed up by the motto ‘E pluribus unum.’ This is in marked contrast to Europe, where religious identities have been the source of division [. . .] In America, religious difference, which is even more varied than in Europe, is subordinated to “one nation under God” (3-4). Here then, to echo the words of Peter, is a holy nation, a new people that were once not a people, made up of every nation on earth.

THE INTERLUDE

In any attempt to construct an understanding of the history of the United States, it would often seem foolish to summarily deal with the nineteenth century. Yet this is what I intend to do here, in concluding this early period of American history. In many ways, this period continued many of the trends began in the Revolutionary period, though it exposed a glaring weakness in the system that the Founders designed.

During this period, the process of expansion proceeded quickly, with large acquisitions from France and Britain, and a war with Mexico. This is also the period of the Monroe Doctrine, where the United States staked its isolationist claim in a more expansive manner, largely prohibiting European powers from meddling in the western hemisphere. This combined with the

spirit of Manifest Destiny, the idea giving justification for westward expansion that, claims Williams,

Symbolized the assertion that God was on America's side rather than the more modest claim that the country had joined the legions of the Lord. As that logic implied, the argument was that America was the "most progressive" society whose citizen made "proper use of the soil." For these and similar reasons, it was added, the laws of "political gravitation would bring many minor peoples into the American system. (60)

This spirit allowed Americans to push Indians off the land through forceful methods, and also gave the Americans "responsibility to extend its authority over 'semi-barbarous people,'" a phrase used to justify the Mexican-American War in the mid-1840s (60).

This period also brought a major theological change to the character of the nation. The Second Great Awakening brought a plethora of new revivals, though this was one of the few things that it had in common with the first. Characterized by people like Charles Finney, this awakening brought a new theology to counter the old Calvinism of the Puritans: that of Arminianism. Whereas before Calvinism provided a strong emphasis on original sin and a strong divine hand to determine the affairs of men, contributing some possible critique to the growing ambition of the republic, the Arminian vision downplayed sin, especially on a societal level, and preached "one only had to will [to] change and make a determined effort to reform one's life" (Hughes 154), the perfect theology for the archetypical can-do American spirit.

Ultimately however, this period shows the glaring weakness of the Constitutional creation by the Founders: it fails if people do not believe in it, or at least in the established interpretation of it. Such was the case in the break up that occurred during the Civil War, where

the moral issue of slavery and the constitutional issue of federalism were up for grabs. Due to the sacred nature of the Constitution, the American Civil War appears not just as a civil war between opposing sides in a nation state, but as a war of religion – a theological crisis, to use Mark Noll’s phrase. Noll contests that the Civil War was a theological crisis in that it was fundamentally a clash over “interpretations of God’s written Word, the Scriptures” (7). The division was great during this time, such that Lincoln could hold up the paradox in his Second Inaugural Address that “both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other” (196). Yet just as much as this it can be said that the war was over the meaning of the Constitution, as indeed the still continuing debate over the role of states’ rights in the war can attest. Though the Union won the war, it was won through bloody conquest: hardly a conciliatory measure. The divide remained in Reconstruction, and at least temporarily it seems, the spirit of unity within the nation was broken.

MODERN: IMPERIAL EXCEPTIONALISM

In order to reverse the damage done to the union during the Civil War and Reconstruction, something would have to occur to rally the nation together, though in some ways the United States was able to continue as before. The old ideas that spread the United States’ influence over the continent and barred European powers from their holdings in the Americas came back with a vengeance in the Spanish-American War, where the US effectively asserted its growing imperial power against that of a waning Spain. In the wake of this as well, the US was able to gain its first overseas holding, and put down its first overseas colonial rebellion, in the Philippine-American War.

The divide within the nation had still not been bridged, though something was soon on the horizon that would take strides toward that national healing and set the tone for the rest of American history until contemporary times. This would come from Europe, in the event of the First World War. This is an argument advanced by Stanley Hauerwas, who claims in reference to the American religion, “War is America’s central liturgical act necessary to renew our sense that we are a nation unlike other nations. World War I was the decisive moment because it was that war that finally healed the wounds caused by the American Civil War” (4). World War I, and America’s intervention in it, presents the moment when American destiny as it has come to be in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries was seemingly inevitable, seen first in the ideology of President Woodrow Wilson.

WILSON AND THE COSMOPOLITAN IMPULSE

Wilson’s gospel of a cosmopolitan, American Protestantism that would save the world from the ills of Europe, what Ross Douthat calls “messianic Americanism,” begins now to be the norm. As he writes, “Piggybacking on the parallels between American universalism and Christian universalism, messianic Americanism turns liberal democracy into a religion unto itself, capable of carrying out the kind of redemptive work that orthodoxy reserves for Christ and his Church” (255). Late within World War I, however, the United States first received an opportunity to exercise its messianic muscle, and Wilson took the first steps in creating a cosmopolitan, internationally concerned America, radically opposed to any earlier pretenses of isolationism.

After the United States steps into Europe’s great war, tipping the stalemated scales in favor of the Allied Powers, Wilson was in a unique position to press America’s will in Europe.

Wilson's vision consisted, as Andrew Bacevich says, of "a world remade in America's image and therefore permanently at peace" (*New American* 10). This is the idealized America of the Founders, creating a world devoted the ideals of freedom, democracy, and self-determination, and not plagued by the scourge of internecine war.

Wilson's vision was presented with incredible certainty and confidence. This was encouraged by the perceived fact that "God Himself willed the universal embrace of American principles" and that the United States had a role "in bringing history to its predetermined destination" (11). Wilson then sought the end of history through military and diplomatic means, as America found itself playing savior to a world besot by the sin of brother killing brother, one apparently that America had been absolved from. Wilson's tradition in its pretensions is certainly an explicit rejection of Augustinianism, and displays what Reinhold Niebuhr calls the prototypical modern "rejection of the Christian doctrine of original sin" (17). Here we catch the first glimpse of America as the innocent nation, as Niebuhr will term it.

Yet this is somehow the role that the United States attempts to step into after World War I. The United States knows the "direction in which history is headed," and becomes, even to Europe, the answer to Europe's problems (Pfaff 10, 35). Wilsonianism is embraced in Europe with great exuberance in the passing the Versailles Treaty and founding the League of Nations. In these acts, Wilson attempts to redefine the old idea of Manifest Destiny. Partly this may be due to the fact that the continent had been taken over and the American expansionist impulse needed to be turned somewhere, but with Wilson, Manifest Destiny is released from its mission to take over the continent and assumes an evangelistic mission to humanity.

With Wilson, however, this is not a complete change. The presumed isolationist impulse still maintained strength, and upon Wilson's return from Europe the US did not join the League of Nations and did not ratify the peace of Versailles. After the war, the pendulum swung back in favor of isolationism, as the United States followed its traditional action of disbanding its standing army when the threat was removed and keeping itself unstained from the evil of the world. This goes back to the old tradition glimpsed in the first generations of colonials and revolutionaries, and provides some justification for the idea that after the Great War the old breaks were still maintained. It would take the work of another war and the emergence of a perennial enemy to destroy this American hesitancy.

WORLD WAR II AND THE INNOCENT NATION

In World War II, the United States found its war to define its modern place in the world. Though at first the isolationist impulse was strong enough to resist entry into another of Europe's wars, eventually fighting was seen as necessary in response to aggression in the Atlantic and Pacific. This provided an easy entry into the war. In the Pacific, the United States could definitively exercise its traditional naval might against an enemy that had attacked first at Pearl Harbor. In Europe, however, the war was particularly ideological. Hitler's Third Reich presented a real and incarnated evil. Those that went off to war could, in a legitimate sense, be said to have made "the world safe for democracy" in an age when "great evil and great good faced each other" (Hughes 153). In World War II, there was something that needed to be saved, and the United States stepped into the role of savior.

At the end of the war the United States appeared solely triumphant, over not only its enemies but also its allies. Germany had been crushed between the eastern and western front,

and as a sovereign nation for some time ceased to exist. Britain and France, formerly the strongest powers of Western Europe, were crushed from years of occupation or the bombs of the Luftwaffe. The United States stood materially unscathed and economically strengthened, solely able to stand against Stalin's evil empire that took the place of Hitler's. The world was left with two superpowers that would trade blows throughout the world for much of the twentieth century's remainder.

This stand off provides the great paradox of a writer like Reinhold Niebuhr's work. Niebuhr emerged as the great advocate of Christian realism within Cold War America, providing some glimpse at a possible critique, contrary to the constant trajectory of American civil religion. But this was a fraught position, as he himself admits, for "these reservations of Christian realism in our culture cannot obscure the fact that, next to the Russian pretensions, we are [...] the most innocent nation on earth" (23). This reflects the tension of great powers like the United States and to a great extent of its predecessor Rome. Compared to German Nazism and Soviet Communism, the United States was a source of great good in the world, and its power was greatly necessary and beneficial. Yet devoid of the introspective ability to critique, of a prophetic voice that can operate simultaneously from within the system and from outside it, this is a situation fraught with danger. This is the warning of Niebuhr at the height of the Cold War:

Our moral perils are not those of conscious malice or the explicit lust for power. They are the perils which can be understood only if we realize the ironic tendency of virtues to turn into vices when too complacently relied upon; and of power to become vexatious if the wisdom which directs it is trusted too confidently. The ironic elements in American history can be overcome, in short, only if American idealism comes to terms with the

limits of all human striving, the fragmentariness of all human wisdom, the precariousness of all historic configurations of power, and the mixture of good and evil in all human virtue. (133)

In this fight against evil, it becomes far too easy to confidently rest on our own virtue, uncritical of our motives, and unable to see the vice within our own nation.

All of the aspects seem to combine during this time in American history to coalesce into what Robert Bellah calls “the generalized religion of ‘the American Way of Life’” (168). To illustrate this, Bellah quotes President Kennedy’s inaugural address, perhaps *the* iconic Cold War president. Kennedy concludes his remarks with important language:

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or of the world, ask of us the same standards of strength and sacrifice that we shall ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here *on earth God’s work must truly be our own*. (169, emphasis own)

Kennedy displays this final conflation of the aims of church and state, in this case the subsuming of the goals of religion with those of politics. Whatever may be said about the goodness of American aims and actions in the world during this time, this is the sin of idolatry in the Judeo-Christian tradition, of hubris in the Greek. As Paul Kahn notes in reflection on the great wars of the twentieth century, this century was by no means secular (*Putting Liberalism* 92). The United States during this period is no exception.

THE WAR ON EVIL

As the Soviet Empire came apart in the late 1980s, a new paradigm had been reached in America's role on the international stage. The United States emerged from the conflict with Soviet Russia as the sole superpower, by many claims the new hyperpower. This was enough to cause many to wax apocalyptic, a clear example of which is Francis Fukuyama's infamous essay "The End of History?" in which he suggests that the end of history is upon us, that liberal democracy has emerged victorious with no political ideologies left that can challenge it an idea even he since has reconsidered (n.pag). Even according to conservative columnist Ross Douthat, Regan's policies take the brakes off conservatism, depriving it of its natural tragic element that could at least constrain the ambition of the state (267). Neoconservatism under Regan and his followers deviates from the older, more isolationist conservatism, as it encourages the proactive and extensive use of American power overseas. In this move it still maintains the American exceptionalist rhetoric that encouraged isolationism, but uses it instead for a more imperialist agenda, something largely unchallenged by the vast majority of American political participants.

Rhetoric on the new self-awareness of American's role in the historical narrative abounds during this time. Bill Clinton declared in the 90s that it was now apparent that America was on the right side of history, sentiments echoed by Condoleezza Rice and Newt Gingrich on the right (Bacevich, *American Empire* 32, 34, 51). This is something bipartisan on the modern American political spectrum with Regan, two Bushes, Clinton, and Obama to back up the policy. Such is the case that Bacevich writes, "When it comes to fundamentals undergirding U.S. foreign policy, consensus reigns on all but the extreme left and right. That consensus is so deep-seated that its terms have become all but self-evident, its premises asserted rather than demonstrated"

(*American Empire* 33). The American way of life was seen as triumphant, and nothing can argue with this perceived victory.

Much of this is in opposition to a great deal of even recent history and tradition. Indeed, American military might was seen to be cosmic justification for American exceptionalism: “The providential judgment seems indisputable: the nation charged with the responsibility for guiding history to its predetermined destination has been endowed with the raw power needed to do just that” (Bacevich, *New American* 32). This in spite of the fact that the history of the twentieth century with its empires that tried to reach to the heavens and destroyed themselves and their neighbors in the process teaches one thing: that hubris leads to catastrophe (9). Yet this lesson is forgotten, even in concert with forgetfulness about American traditions themselves. This is to such an extent that George H. W. Bush could claim that the American tradition of isolationism was the reason for the Pearl Harbor attacks (76). Instead, America exports violence to the four corners of the earth, as its military actively seeks this end of history (Pfaff 86). Our militarism makes us a people set apart, unconstrained by any history or limits (Bacevich, *New American* 34). America may be the end of history, but that history seems largely invented, while the actual history of the world is forgotten, left irrelevant.

Religiously, this derailed American civil religion has co-opted the political expression of much of American Christianity. Neoconservatism sees America as the one, catholic church, and American messianism presents itself as the new ecumenical faith (Bacevich *New American* 78; Douthat 261). Someone like Jerry Falwell can claim that “A political leader, as a minister of God, is a revenger to execute wrath upon those who do evil. Our government has the right to use its armaments to bring wrath upon those who would do evil by hurting other people” (qtd.

Bacevich, *New American* 128-9). This is a largely alarming alliance between evangelical Christianity and the powers that exist intent on spreading America's hegemony around the world.

This is not a Christianity capable of providing a critique or prophetic voice to a nation with as much power as the United States. This is not the Christian thought of Jesus, Paul, or Augustine. In this combination the idea of just war is thrown off by simply saying that America is good without critique; Nicea is thrown off simply by its denial of the real universal church, and Romans 13 is carried to such tortured exegetical extremes that it hardly becomes recognizable as part of Paul's thought. America is politically, to use Ross Douthat's phrasing, a nation of heretics, and this loss of traditional Christianity in a nation with supposedly Christian roots has led to a religious sphere that is impotent and a political one that is omnipotent.

Throughout the 1990s this led to a strange paradigm in American politics. The evil that the nation fought was defeated, and nothing remained. Yet this was quickly replaced at the beginning of the twenty-first century, with the attacks of September 11th. The military, never having been disbanded in the wake of the Cold War, was unleashed against a completely non-traditional enemy. Yet for all the non-traditional status of the Taliban or al-Qaeda, what becomes even more non-traditional in this war is its stated objective. The war that the United States currently engages in is the War on Terror. This might as well be called a war on evil, a war on death, or, to use more ancient language, a war on barbarism. This is ultimately a war on an idea, an idea that has existed from the foundations of the world, an idea that has, throughout much of history, been the domain of religion or philosophy, definitively not of the state.

Ultimately then, in the words of Stanley Hauerwas, "We got a 'war against terrorism,' which is a war without end" (19). This is an eschatological war. This is reflected in the original

name of the War on Terror: “Operation Infinite Justice” (Hughes 156). While some may have prematurely described the triumph of liberal democracy as the end of history, proponents of the war on terror seeks to actively bring in the eschaton, the final realization of the kingdom of God, and the millennium of peace. The current ideology in the United States results in an intrusion by the state upon the realm of the church, of the secular upon the sacred. This is a breakdown in the paradigm presented most strongly by Paul and Augustine that has dangerous results.

CONCLUSION

Whether the United States physically resembles the Roman Empire or not is ultimately irrelevant because in many of the ideological ways that Christian thinkers critiqued Rome the resemblance is uncanny. The United States perceives itself as a divinely called nation to spread its version of civilization over the world in a hegemonic empire of influence. Indeed, it is very possible that with the nature of communication and transportation in this age, this is preferable, as it allows one to maintain the same powerful grip over far off lands in a manner that proves the least dangerous for the mother country’s citizens. In addition, the US sees itself as holding the keys to history, indeed, in many cases, as the final stage in that history. And though the concentration of the sacred nature of the state has not brought itself to the divinization of one man, the amount of adoration due the state in so many ways surpasses the natural bounds of patriotism and love of one’s place. In many ways then, the United States has assumed the ideological and theological mantel of the Roman Empire.

CONCLUSION

The Roman gospel was thus: that the empire of Rome had come to bring peace and prosperity to the world. All that Rome and Caesar required was submission to its dictates, its laws, and its ideology. Caesar was lord, savior, protector, and a son of god. Indeed, the gods had ordained Caesar and Rome's place in the world, so to offer rebellion, whether violent or ideological, was rebellion not only against Caesar but also against the natural order.

Yet for all its pomp, glory, and power, Rome was weak. A single individual could bring it to its knees. Thus the crucifixion, not only of Jesus, but of any who could oppose it, including small slave rebellions like that of Spartacus. Rome built its powerful empire on avarice, envy, and intrigue. But it was vulnerable to a single martyr, to a single witness to the truth that its power was transitory and its glory vaporous.

This is the Christian critique for which I have argued. Jesus, through his life and message, shows the corruption of the kingdom of man and promotes a different lifestyle based not on the envy and one-upmanship that characterized all kingdoms of men and perhaps Rome particularly, but on love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus' message was humility, not hubris; generosity, not greed; peace, not strife. Yet in his message, he unmasked the illusionary power of Rome and the kingdoms of man, and for it was silenced in a shameful death on a cross.

Paul would then pick this up, and point to the way that the cross destroyed the authority of Rome, as Rome saw fit to execute a man unjustly. Paul then spread Jesus' message from Judea and Galilee throughout the Mediterranean world, setting up communities based on Jesus' message that looked back to his blood shed as the foundation for a new humanity. In many

ways, Paul's success is immeasurable, as within a few hundred years even the emperor would find it necessary to convert to the very influential religion, and one of the brightest philosophic minds of the Western world would articulate his political vision in the paradigm of the two cities.

Augustine did this, but not to a world completely unfamiliar with this message, as Paul was required to do. Augustine could write from the perspective of a Christianity triumphant, now even holding political power. He then could articulate the basic political foundation of the pre-modern period, where church and state exist alongside each other, ideally neither co-opting the other's natural power, but pushing each other to their independent missions: the state, of ensuring temporal peace and justice, and the church, of ensuring eternal peace and justice, and prophetically reminding the state of its transitory nature.

In many ways modernity breaks this ideal schema, but the greatest display of the break up of the Augustinian ideal is in the United States. In the US, the earliest attempts at self-government are attempts at theocracy, breaking down the Augustinian separation, given the Puritan expectation of seeing God's kingdom come to fruition in the New World. Yet this theocratic impulse is flipped, as instead of the church subsuming the state, as the Puritans hoped, the state subsumed the church into its nature, taking within itself claims to the sacred and to ultimate meaning. Throughout early American history the full import of this is in many ways held back, as the isolationist leanings of many keep the US from bringing its new gospel to the entire world. But under the influence of Wilson, the great victory won in the Second World War, and the necessity of vigilance against the Soviet Empire, American ideology becomes free of its constraints and becomes a global, and cosmopolitan gospel, which it declares is good for all people.

Indeed, if anything the essential message in my work it is this: empires of the type of Rome and America subsume the global nature of the message of a religion like Christianity. Much of the New Testament points to this as the nature of the new church that was springing up. The gospel as Paul saw it was for all peoples, nations, tribes, and tongues. The Church was to be the undoing of Babel. This is the point of Luke's Pentecost narrative in Acts 2: the Spirit comes and allows the early apostles to speak in tongues that all can understand, reversing the curse of confusion that Genesis says occurred at Babel. Throughout Paul's epistles, this new gospel is of unity, not based on the coercion of the state, but based on participation in the Spirit of God, in the love of neighbor that was so key to Jesus message. If America is an empire like Rome, it is because it has found a fundamental way to subvert this good news. In this thesis, I have offered evidence of this assessment and pointed to some of the causes, yet much more is being and must be done to explore the context and consequences of this.

Much of the response to this inquiry must, I feel, be done in the church, or more broadly defined, the religious realm. A power like America, just as a power like Rome or any other great empire, is unlikely to contribute to a discussion that puts reins on its power. In some ways, I have pointed to this occurring, as some theological confluences come together in ways that attempt to reframe the essential Christian message in ways that would have been more familiar to Paul or Augustine. Postliberal theology is one of these streams, and the narrative theology of someone like Stanley Hauerwas has been important to my understanding of this subject.

This is also because of the nature of the divide between the church and state that has occurred within the United States from its founding until today. The city on a hill that the Puritans sought was something simultaneously political and religious, where religion seems to

have driven the politics. The subtle difference in American politics today is that while the ideal American state is still simultaneously political and religious, the only side of this that is admitted explicitly is the political, seemingly creating the necessity of the political subsuming the religious sphere. The critique that I argue for here is a return to religion's ability to critique politics. It is a return to Augustine, but not to Winthrop or Edwards. Part of any way forward is to realize that, and of course this opens up the door to more research into how these ideals changed between my two points in history. Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin seem integral to this conversation, no less than Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. In particular, it is my feeling that research along these lines regarding Reformation political thought in particular would prove fruitful, especially considering Calvin's unique influence on early American religion in the enduring example of theocratic Geneva.

The Christian religion itself has a power as well that has been subverted within an American Christianity that has become too cozy with its relation to American displays of power, and in many ways has become the legitimating factor in those displays. Ultimately, as Paul Kahn, points out, Christianity has a power through its understanding of sacrifice: "The Western state actually exists [...] under the very real threat of Christian martyrdom: a threat to expose the state and its claim to power as nothing at all. In the end, sacrifice is always stronger than murder. The martyr wields a power to defeat his murderer, which cannot be answered on the field of battle" (*Putting Liberalism* 82). This is language fraught with difficulty, and a call to action on these lines is certainly not the vocation of an academic paper like this. Yet the power of Christianity must be recovered, founded as it is on the fundamental martyrdom of Jesus and of many members of his early church, and the unmasking of the power of the state that occurs in

those deaths. Martin Luther King Jr. is an excellent example of this, as one whose message has spread in increasing power since his unjust killing. The United States in its contemporary state and in this respect is certainly different from Rome – the State itself is not in the habit of making martyrs of its rivals.

Part of the recovery of this voice would mean going to the prophetic portions of the Christian cannon that may offer insight into it. I have purposefully stayed away from these parts, as the more descriptive expressions of Paul are easier to theorize with than the apocalypticism of John or Isaiah. Yet the Jewish prophets and the message they brought to a community exiled under the greatest empires history had yet seen must be important to this. So too can be the early history of Israel – the stinging critique of anarchy in Judges, Samuel’s warnings against monarchy, and the decline of the monarchy after David – all of these are essential to forming a broader critique of the realm of politics. Christianity must again learn how to read its scriptures politically, and not because the scriptures are only political, but because politics are necessary. The religion is not platonic Gnosticism: it deals with the whole of man, and man is a political animal as Aristotle famously said.

All of these things point to one thing: the western church must recover its prophetic voice. The ability to call into question the power of the state is essential. But this is an ecumenical and multireligious call as well. Whether Muslim or Jew, Protestant or Catholic, Baptist or Presbyterian, all living within the West and indeed the world have an interest in curtailing this ideological power. Ultimately Rome’s message of freedom creates bondage. True temporal freedom can only be found when the political life of men is properly ordered, and for it to be properly order the state cannot make claim on ultimate and final things.

Finally, I write as a Christian, an American evangelical no less, who is pained by the way that my brothers view politics. Politics is more than what Americans view as a simple right/left dichotomy. History has not come to an end, and the American experiment is not the last word on political arrangements. Ultimately, I argue that a reassessment of the classical, western, political tradition beginning in Augustine (and even Paul) is necessary for the continued health and prosperity of Western civilization, and a renewed understanding of the political message of the Scriptures is necessary for the continued mission of the Church, and for the well being of the United States and the other nations of the world.

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