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**Responding Theologically in the Face of Torture:  
Re-Politicizing American Christianity in Light of the Interruptive Jesus**

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## Introduction

### *Subverting Torture*

This thesis first understands itself in relation to torture. While much of the thesis itself may not mention torture explicitly, and in fact could be used as the foundation for a political theology that engages more than just torture, the reader should not forget that each argumentative turn is made with torture in mind. The function of this thesis is unusual: instead of getting lost in a mire of case studies that use vague threats of danger to justify manipulative violence, I attempt to strike at the fundamental logic of torture by the state. Quite simply, I am subverting the whole discussion as I ask again and again, “Why should we torture?”

While this thesis is chiefly arguing at levels deeper than the specific action of torture, it is both deconstructive and constructive at the same time. I identify and argue against a few, important base assumptions, like innocence, while proposing a re-oriented economy – a different ontology, epistemology, etc. – all first grounded in the identity of a savior who suffered and the community of faith that follows suit. Therefore, the second question driving the argument is, “What should we look like if we are to be a people who refuses torture?”

Consequently, the problem this thesis seeks to address is the American Christians’ quiet acceptance of torture. Despite how little this thesis may actually mention torture, implicit in each move is the *subversion* of a theology that allows for current American theology to be either apathetic towards or blasé about torture (since most Christians do not seem to explicitly support torture) or, even worse, candidly pro-torture.

### *Assumptions*

This thesis has many presuppositions, but I shall touch on a few of the most important. I first assume that torture is morally and ethically wrong, and that torture should not be used. This is not a discussion on the justification of torture, for that is a whole other argument worthy of its own time; rather, this thesis understands torture as a form of *violent conversion* used by the state and, as such, is to be handled with considerable suspicion.

Secondly, I assume that Christianity is a deeper relationship than the citizenship in a nation-state or one's cultural-economic participation. Christianity is cosmically rooted. At the same time, Christians are defined by the culture they live in. Therefore, the politics of the body of Christ is a complex mixture of the existential situation in the present and the rule of God. In the end, however, the *basileia* informs the space and time of the here and now, resituating one's ontological understanding and praxis within the cultural milieu at hand.<sup>1</sup>

I also assume that Christianity does not naturally merge well with the nation-state or bourgeois market. In fact, Christianity can function as an antagonistic and an interrupting movement: "Christians are bearers of the subversive, dangerous memory of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Christianity critiques society through the church's formative discipleship rooted in the remembrance of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> In an effort to adapt to a gender neutral vocabulary called for by feminists, throughout this paper I will use the term *basileia* instead of kingdom when I am writing and not quoting or talking about "kingdom theology" by its name. I choose *basileia* because I find "kingdom" to lack certain necessary qualities. Specifically "kingdom" does not connote transcendence and cosmic. However, lacking a suitable English word, I have chosen to use the Greek so as to maintain faithfulness.

<sup>2</sup> Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 203.

Lastly, I assume that political theology, as Johann Baptist Metz asserts, must begin with engaging history, because historical consciousness regularly reforms our current identity and thus allows for the continual, interrupting praxis of solidarity.<sup>3</sup> As such, any engagement with or construction of a body politic must address the historical discussion of one's cultural genesis. In this case, the historical myths America asks its citizens to believe, in contrast to the example of Jesus and the political implications of his life and message, are no longer uncritically assumed canonical stories, but instead are now subject to suspicion. Such critical interrogation will shed light on the negative and oppressive nature of the American story.

I also speak in explicit Christian categories as I speak to Christians. Quite simply, I champion a way of acting and being for Christians in America; I promote an imagining of the *ecclesia* in the confluence of subversive relational/communal-being and visible, liberative action-speak.<sup>4</sup> After reviewing what torture actually is, I address deep assumptions, such as cultural amnesia and distraction, inherent in the American story that are counter to a Christological ecclesiology.

In light of the basic assumptions, the thesis will also cut both ways, against both theological liberals and conservatives, because I do not fault the Christian Right alone. Rather, I put forth William Cavanaugh's critique of the nation-state and Eugene

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<sup>3</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, translated by J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Herder and Herder, 2007), 150-155.

<sup>4</sup> American is used in this paper as a substitute for *citizens of the United States of America* and America for the *United States of America*; however, it could also extend to a broader understanding of the Western world to include Eurocentrism.

McCarragher's Catholic/Marxist critique of capitalism, both of whom take aim at the theological complicity and structural compromise of American Christianity as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

*Thesis*

As stated earlier, this thesis is a text on torture. More specifically, it develops a political theology which subverts any current American theology that seems apathetic to torture, blasé about torture, or worst of all, resolutely pro-torture. To be more precise, September 11, as a microcosm of the greater American story, is used by the privatizing nation-state as an identity-forming, eschatological event (a "Christological" event within a larger colonizing context) that supplants the life of Jesus and the cross and resurrection and works with the commodifying market to break down the Christian call and community of Christians in America. And, just as the Christian story of the cross does not end with death, so too the nation-state supplies a hope for a grand future. However, this future is an anthropocentric future, most vividly seen in Ronald Reagan's hope, which was wrapped around a perverted, humanly controlled and realized salvation of fear, anger, and violence. The state's story and justification for violence – to ensure "safety" (the status quo) in the face of threat and fear – has become the ruling meta-narrative.

The outcome is a breakdown and reversal of relationships and allegiance and the end result is a Christian public polity that is at least indifferent to torture by the state. Accordingly, the body of Christ is no longer forged by the memory and promise of the cross and resurrection, if it indeed continues to exist as a body. The solution to engaging

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term "American Christians" throughout this paper to denote the syncretism, for that is how they see themselves. I am aware that, for some, using the term "American Christians" may implicitly support the validity of the state, as it distinguishes between Christians. But that is not my intent. Rather, the term simply shows the divisive nature of the state.

American Christianity against torture, then, is to bring to bear Johann Metz's idea of "dangerous memory" – remembering the interruptive Jesus – and an explication on the political implications of church movement. Metz reorients Christians to the identity-forming memory of the Christological life, and therefore Christians can have a more cohesive community and act out, resulting in a politically prophetic movement by the church.

I will seek to pull away the layers of the Christology by a torturous people, moving from current circumstances to the foundation. First, I will expose torture for what it is, the systematic destruction of a human being. Second, I inspect three core societal influences and the pressure they wield on the church to conform to the state's Christological story. Third, I scrutinize the roots of societal pressure, found in the hagiographic myths of the state. Fourth, I will seek to lay bare an honest history of the modern nation-state and uncover the state and market for what they are, co-opting and commodifying forces. Fifth, as the American cultural milieu grasps for power to conquer, I will show the story of Jesus as it stands in stark contrast. Lastly, I will proceed to imagine, primarily through the work of Johann Baptist Metz, a political theology for the church that remembers an interruptive Jesus.

This political theology is an attempt to re-narrate, and therefore re-politicize, the church in America. Such an act will hopefully place the church on the margins, with the marginalized. Instead, both the theologically liberal and theologically conservative will be moved in the direction of a politically liberative praxis championed by a community formed through the remembrance of Christ.

## Chapter 1

### On Torture: The Destruction of a Human

What is torture? What is the structure of one human being doing destructive acts to a vulnerable, fellow human being? The question about torture – “Does it work?” – is not an appropriate question. Of course it works, but to what end does it work and what is it effective at doing?<sup>6</sup> Simply, what are the goals for torture and how are those achieved? What are the “whys” and the “hows?”

#### *The How of Torture*

The abstract “how” of torture, the grammar so to speak, is quite easy to cerebrally understand. Indeed, it is simple – the means of torture is overwhelming pain (physical or psychological) inflicted on a thoroughly vulnerable person by another human being to destroy the subject’s world.<sup>7</sup> Either way the end result is a writhing, shamed, terrorized bio-mass that was once a human being. As one inflicts massive amounts of pain on the other, there is a great gulf created between the torturer and tortured. The tortured has lost,

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<sup>6</sup> “Although the information sought in an interrogation is almost never credited with being a *just* motive for torture, it is repeatedly credited with being the motive for torture. But every instance in which someone with critical information is interrogated, there are hundreds interrogated who could know nothing of remote importance to the stability or self-image of the regime.” Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 28.

<sup>7</sup> This includes, but is not limited to, such tools and methods as: light, heat, sweat, air, water, whip, electric shock, pummeling instruments, mutilation, sleep deprivation, sensory deprivation, positional torture, exercise, restraints, noise/music, drugs, salts and spices, sexual humiliation/emasculaton or violation/rape (as opposed to using other methods for sexual violation, i.e. electro shock to the genitals), psychological torture and other “clean” or “stealth” torture methods that either lack physical wounds or scars or allow the tortured to heal before being released, as if nothing happened. The majority of this list comes from Darius Rejali’s *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 554-556. I also include in the list so-called “torture lite” and “enhanced interrogation” techniques (also sometimes called, “moderate physical pressure,” “highly coercive interrogation,” and “pushed interrogation” pg. 443).

while the torturer has forcibly taken control of the relationship resulting in one of the most sadistic, one-sided relational situations ever conceived: “Every weapon has two ends. In converting the other person’s pain into his own power, the torturer experiences the entire occurrence exclusively from the nonvulnerable end of the weapon.”<sup>8</sup> There is no gifting in such a relationship, only violation and impressment, for violence and blinding pain is the ruling language and defining experience.

### *The Isolation of Torture*

Torture is fundamentally an isolating relationship. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find a more isolating relationship than a torturous one; everyone and everything during the event of torture, and generally the accompanying captivity (which may or may not be solitary), becomes an adversary or weapon against the tortured. In such an environment, there is generally no unplanned or unmanipulative respite for the tortured. Even the simple things of life, like geography, everyday items, and the structure of civilization, are used as weapons on the tortured captive.

The geography of torture is usually defined by solitary conditions.<sup>9</sup> Alone in a drab room within the tall, stone walls of Villa Grimaldi, one might be strapped to a “grill” made for electroshock, while being beaten with sticks.<sup>10</sup> Or alone one might suffer torture in a cheaply built, plywood cabin lacking any natural lighting, like some of the torture

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<sup>8</sup> Scarry, 59.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 40. Michael Ratner and Ellen Ray. *Guantánamo: What the World Should Know* (White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green, 2004), 52.

<sup>10</sup> William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 26. Phillip E. Berryman, trans., *Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), vol. II/II, Part Three, Chapter Two (A.1.e through A.1.h), 483-505. And available from [http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/chile/chile\\_1993\\_pt3\\_ch2\\_a1\\_e-h.html](http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/chile/chile_1993_pt3_ch2_a1_e-h.html); Internet; accessed March 31, 2008.

rooms at Guantanamo Bay.<sup>11</sup> Or, hooded and confined to a chain-link cage at the mercy of the guards and the elements, and beaten when vocal.<sup>12</sup> All in all, the geography of torture is isolation: to deprive someone of any uncontrolled relationship where solidarity may be generated or a sense of identity maintained.<sup>13</sup> To isolate someone, especially with violence, is to make them vulnerable.

However, despite how much one might feel alone in a torture room or confinement cell, the victim does not lack relationships: “Paradoxically the isolation experienced is accompanied by a feeling of *having lost one’s sense of privacy*.”<sup>14</sup> The illusion of being alone is reinforced when one lacks any positive or healthy relationships; but the loss of privacy is felt when one cannot control the abuse that is heaped upon them, when one cannot flee, particularly because the abuse is highly invasive and unrestricted. Simply, the victim is strapped down and another human has their way with the victim – the act of rape is particularly close to such an event. Indeed, rape is not uncommon as a torture method.<sup>15</sup> There are still many more invasive procedures, like the sexual

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Kirk and Jim Gilmore, prod., “The Torture Question,” #2401 *Frontline*, (2005), documentary. And available from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/programs/info/2401.html>; Internet; accessed March 31, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Mat Whitecross and Michael Winterbottom, dir., *Road to Guantanamo* (London: A Revolution Films Production, 2006), documentary/reenactment.

<sup>13</sup> Geography can even abstractly extend to communication, or lack thereof: “I was told of one detainee who spoke only English and was put next to Arabic-speaking prisoners, so that he was truly isolated as a way of putting more pressure on him or simply making his life uncomfortable.” Ratner and Ray, 61.

<sup>14</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 47.

<sup>15</sup> “Torture methods were different from those elsewhere since the emphasis was on sexual humiliation. Rape and other sexual abuses by the guards and agents were common practice. The male prisoners were also subject to such abuses. The grill and the use of electrical current were common practice at this site. Periods of torture were often alternated with periods of relaxation, when the agents even acted friendly in order to obtain the information they wanted.” Berryman, 483- 505. Available from [http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/chile/chile\\_1993\\_pt3\\_ch2\\_a1\\_e-h.html](http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/chile/chile_1993_pt3_ch2_a1_e-h.html); Internet; accessed March 31, 2008.

humiliation of Abu Ghraib. But one particularly revolting and invasive method, called the “grill,” was used by Pinochet’s DINA at Villa Grimaldi:

The most common form of torture was the "grill," which was a set of bedsprings to which the prisoner, naked, was tied and then given electrical shocks on various parts of the body, especially the more sensitive parts such as the lips or the genitals, or on wounds or artificial metal limbs. A particularly cruel variation of this method was to use a metal bunk bed; the person being interrogated was put on the bottom bunk, and on the top bunk a relative or friend was tortured in order to increase the pressure even more.<sup>16</sup>

Yet, despite the cost and the effort to control the victim’s environment, torture is not dependent on technology or massive resources. In fact, it can easily be implemented by anyone, because it uses just about anything at hand.<sup>17</sup> The loss of privacy by invasive means has been attained by the use of: phonebooks, paddling, force feeding gallons of water called “pumping,” the use of spices or cleaning supplies, and stress positions, to name a few cheap, “clean” tortures (that which purposely does not leave visible scarring).<sup>18</sup>

While the act of torture can be cheaply managed, it is more often than not accompanied with the weight of civilization thrown against the victim: the use of the law, medicine, and technology are wielded as weapons.<sup>19</sup> Torture turns human institutions on their head, the process of trial is reversed using: “punishment to generate evidence;” drugs and doctors are used to harm and control instead of heal and free; and technology make pain instead of solving problems.<sup>20</sup> Quite simply, the torturer collapses human

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<sup>16</sup> Berryman, 483- 505. Available from [http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/chile/chile\\_1993\\_pt3\\_ch2\\_a1\\_e-h.html](http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/chile/chile_1993_pt3_ch2_a1_e-h.html); Internet; accessed March 31, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Scarry, 40-41.

<sup>18</sup> Rejali, 272, 273, 280, 288, 294-296.

<sup>19</sup> Scarry, 41-45.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-44. Ratner and Ray, 42, 44, 45, 71.

institutions all around the tortured, stripping the victim of all friendly legacy and turning even the very environment of human association against the victim.<sup>21</sup>

Because torture wields the weight of civilization's tools on a human being, the distinctive aspects of a torturous relationship are predicated on intent, on the person behind the tools. More specifically, a torturous relationship is built on duration, control and purpose – the duration is long, control becomes absolute (absolutely lost for the tortured and absolutely total for the torturer), and the purpose is to tear a human apart.<sup>22</sup>

Quite simply put, torture violently and/or coercively executes the intent to place victims “into a different socio-political drama, recreated as abused, bastard children of the regime.”<sup>23</sup> There are multiple ways of achieving this end, but I shall choose one aspect of torture that Elaine Scarry writes about so well: pain.<sup>24</sup>

### *The Silence of Pain*

The first observation of intense pain that one might make is that it is an intensely negative feeling. It is, in essence, a feeling of negation or “blinding.”<sup>25</sup> Pain is deconstructive by overwhelming the subject, by thoroughly holding the victim's complete attention.<sup>26</sup> Even psychological pain is overpowered by physical pain.<sup>27</sup> “It is

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<sup>21</sup> Scarry, 44.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>23</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 42.

<sup>24</sup> It should also be mentioned that physical pain may not always accompany torture, or that it will be the primary tool: “pain is neither necessary for torture to be world destroying, nor is it sufficient for torture to be world destroying” (Rejali, 441-444). Rejali argues that some victims may dissociate from themselves in the face of torture, holding to their ideology in resistance, while other victims may not need physical pain inflicted to terrorize and torture: “isolation, mock executions, screams from other cells, and threats against one's family” (442). This is documented in *Guantánamo: What the World Should Know* (Ratner and Ray, 62). Still, pain must be addressed, as should the ultimate affect of pain – destroying one's ability to communicate through language.

<sup>25</sup> Scarry, 34-36.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

the intense pain that destroys a person's self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the universe."<sup>28</sup> In torturous pain, the person cannot see beyond pain; indeed, the victim can only see the blinding white light.<sup>29</sup> Like the gasp of suddenly falling into subzero water, pain drives out from the mind of the victim everything but itself.

Secondly, pain collapses the private and public. Indeed, when one is tortured, he or she are fully exposed in an abusive relationship, lacking security: "It brings with it all the solitude of absolute privacy with none of its safety."<sup>30</sup> This pain, only experienced by the victim, puts a person in the most vulnerable state.<sup>31</sup> Instead of protecting herself or himself, or fleeing, a victim being tortured has no recourse but to feel pain; he or she have little choice in his or her destruction as he or she writhes under the tools of the torturer. A tortured person is exposed in such a way that she or he must "take it" without any of the protective boundaries that occur in society, like the division between public and private spheres.

Thirdly, as much as intense pain is deconstructive, it is also constructive. Torture cuts sharply in two manners: a knife pierces the skin and leaves a sharp sensation because of both the knife and the victim's own body. It is "a rendering of the 'something' that is against, a something at once internal and external."<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, when an external force is enacted on the victim, there occurs the distinct feeling of one's own body, that one's own body is hurting one's self. On the other hand, when there lacks an external

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

actuality, the language used to describe pain is done so with the imagery of an external cause or tool. “In physical pain, then, suicide and murder converge, for one feels acted upon, annihilated, by inside and outside alike.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, the victim feels as if his or her body has betrayed his or her self, whether it is physical or psychological pain, and yet, at the same time, everything external that the torturer knows comes funneled through the knife-edge or electrical nodes. Everything the victim knows is lost in the face of deconstruction and the imprint from the stamp that the torturer desires to leave.

The result of pain is breaking the voice of the victim. As intense pain deconstructs a person, it destroys language and consciousness.<sup>34</sup> “[A]s the content of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of one’s language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject.”<sup>35</sup> The victim’s pleas are ignored, and protests unheeded. Eventually, pleading becomes cries of pain, followed by moans and gasps. Quite simply, the victim is forcefully driven back into an infantile state, clamoring for basic needs without coherence.

There is no help for the voiceless in torture. In fact, everything is against the voiceless, leaving the victim a hollow, deconstructed shell of a person soon ready to be filled with the voice of the torturer: “Torture inflicts bodily pain that is itself language-destroying, but torture also mimes (objectifies in the external environment) this language-destroying capacity in its interrogation, the purpose of which is not to elicit needed information but visibly to deconstruct the prisoner’s voice.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

*Conclusion*

In sum, torture does not merely leave its mark by the disillusion of one's world through the mind and body. It also leaves an imprint – a constructed structure designed by the torturer. “In torture, it is in part the obsessive display of agency that permits one person's body to be translated into another person's voice, that allows real human pain to be converted into a regime's fiction of power.”<sup>37</sup> Like a brand searing into flesh, torture obliterates the established cellular structure as it also leaves a sign of ownership – a reconstituted structure predicated on the structure of the brand, or in this case, the state who tortures. Simply put, the tortured is re-made in the image of the torturer.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 18.

## Chapter 2

### **Peeling Away American Myths: Societal Pressure, American Myths, and the Stories of the State and the Market**

While torture, as Scarry states, “aspires to the totality of pain,” it does so with the specific aim of destroying a human being. It is the literal beating down of a human being into nothing: “Torture is a condensation of the act of ‘overcoming’ the body present in benign forms of power.”<sup>38</sup> Torture is the violent, systematic deconstruction of a human being by another human being. “Apart from its ineffectiveness and illegality, torture is one of the cruelest, and most dangerous things that the United States can be doing. The claim that torture should somehow be justified is really an attack on the very dignity of humanity. It sinks us all to an inhuman and uncivilized level. It debases the victim and the torturer. In the end, torture destroys everything we value as human beings.”<sup>39</sup> The anthropology of torture is thoroughly counter to any conception of humanity by Christianity. In fact, to move Christians in America towards accepting this kind of vision for humanity is an attack on the Christian story and the community that claims to be the body of Christ.

However, American Christianity seems to care so little about torture.<sup>40</sup> Torture is meant to isolate and break down other human beings and it is done in an incredibly violent and/or coercive manner, as I have argued. Torture results in victims who “are scripted into a different socio-political drama, recreated as abused, bastard children of the

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<sup>38</sup> Scarry, 57.

<sup>39</sup> Ratner and Ray, 35.

<sup>40</sup> I do acknowledge several movements by Christians in America against torture, and they are addressed in the appendix.

regime,” and yet comparatively, so little is said about torture.<sup>41</sup> Some Christians have no answer when challenged, others are simply indifferent, while still others are resolutely pro-torture.<sup>42</sup> In my mind, this is a gigantic theological leap from and a blatant contradiction of the kerygma; to be indifferent to or for torture is not based on the Christological event of Jesus – the one who was *tortured*. So how might such a leap be made and justified? What is it that turns these Christians into the *torturer*?

This leap to being the torturer is not theologically acceptable; nevertheless, it is done. The justification for torture can find less opposition outside of Christianity; torture can find acceptance within society, and is even advocated by the powers behind the status quo – the state, with its *raison d'état*, and the capitalistic market. Therefore, this next section of the paper will focus on identifying and critiquing the powers that have “converted” or re-made American Christianity into their likeness. This section, then, will also level a critique of American Christianity as well, as it has accepted outside pressures to conform to a differing story and way of life.<sup>43</sup>

### *Societal Pressures*

There are a myriad of Societal pressures that influence American Christianity. However, I will address three: pop-culture imagination constructed by Hollywood,

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<sup>41</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> From a discussion with Randall Balmer. Also found in his book, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the faith and Threatens America*, (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 172-173.. “Following the revelations that the U.S. government exported prisoners to nations that have no scruples about the use of torture, I wrote to several prominent religious-right organizations. Please send me, I asked, a copy of your organization's position on the administration's use of torture. ... Of the eight religious-right organizations I contacted, only two, the Family Research Council and the Institute on Religion and Democracy, answered my query. Both were eager to defend administration policies.”

<sup>43</sup> Lee Griffith, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 271-278.

America's self understanding of its activity as innocent, and the Christology of America that results from a combination of pop-culture and the myth of national innocence.

To say that pop-culture's imagination is violent is an understatement. We have a culture that relishes imaginative situations, which demand the good hero resort to gladiatorial violence and Machiavellian means.<sup>44</sup> The beauty is in the blood that flies.<sup>45</sup> "Through the safe distance of the media, we become death-watchers, voyeurs of what has become culturally obscene."<sup>46</sup> This warped view of aesthetics is based on a milieu of voyeuristic entertainment: "Entertainment is the supra-ideology of all discourse on television. No matter what is depicted or from what point of view, the overarching presumption is that it is there for our amusement and pleasure."<sup>47</sup> Comedian, and arguably social critic, Jon Stewart made this same point when he visited the political show "Crossfire."<sup>48</sup> Even the "news shows" that make space for pundit "discussion" are primarily oriented towards entertainment. What is more, Stewart went on to lament, such entertainment is violent, as indicated by the name of the show and the argumentative action of the participants.

However, television is not simply voyeurism for a few; rather, it functions as a nation-wide, visual bacchanal of violence that forms society's identity. "Television is our culture's principal mode of knowing itself. Therefore—and this is the critical point—how television stages the world becomes the model for how the world is properly to be

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<sup>44</sup> The television show "24" is one of many examples.

<sup>45</sup> An example is the movie *300*.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 97.

<sup>47</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 87.

<sup>48</sup> CNN's "Crossfire," October 15, 2004. A rough transcript may be obtained here: <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0410/15/cf.01.html>; Internet; accessed March 31, 2008.

staged.”<sup>49</sup> Quite simply, the visual storytelling of Hollywood, imaginative and adrenaline-filled, defines culture’s categories and the primary category is the unquestioned use of violence and Machiavellian means.

Indeed the primary category of violence rules over much of the culture’s mind. Such influence has come as a surprise to some naïve television show creators and writers.<sup>50</sup>

I was surprised, perhaps even stunned, to find out that actual interrogation methods that are taking place in the real world were being driven by what we had created out of our fevered brains in an effort to create the most immediate, visceral entertainment. We came up with these crazy torture methods... what would be really scary if it was being done to you? What would be really effective in a thirty-five second, forty-five second scene?<sup>51</sup>

Now, thankfully, some have acknowledged the incredible amount of sway that television holds and the need to write ethically responsible stories.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, while television content may not be entirely static, it is, for all intents and purposes, created to entertain and it does so often through our lust for violence.

While television alters the communication process, America’s conception of itself is defined by a more primal identity, an identity based on purity and innocence. This is not to deny positive actions that have come out of America. Be that as it may, the primal identity of innocence is something sinister. It is the urge or selfish inclination towards

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<sup>49</sup> Postman, 92.

<sup>50</sup> Marc Kusnetz, dir., *Primetime Torture: Ticking time Bombs, Torture, and TV*. And is available here [http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/us\\_law/etn/primetime/video\\_ptt.html](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/us_law/etn/primetime/video_ptt.html); Internet; accessed March 31, 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Jeff Pinkner, Executive Producer of “LOST,” in *Primetime Torture*, 6:21-6:55.

<sup>52</sup> *Primetime Torture*, 9:29.

willful ignorance or self-blinding about a history of depraved acts.<sup>53</sup> Theologically, the penchant to assert humanity's core innocence is the very definition of pride.<sup>54</sup>

If America were in fact innocent, circumstances would be different, however. America has a long history of acts of great evil. There is a long litany of abuses: ethnic abuses, starting with the Puritans' genocide of Native Americans and the kidnapping and slavery of Africans; the sexist suppression of women; and the derisive treatment of immigrants, like the Irish. However, the early age of America is not alone in its treatment of creation.

Indeed, America and its political leaders still maintain America's innocence, even amid the current spectacle of violence and domination.<sup>55</sup> The ruling narrative of post-9/11 America was, and continues to be, based on two points. First, America had done nothing to deserve the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In fact, the President claimed that "America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world."<sup>56</sup> Second, America, with its justified anger, had, and may still have, the moral high ground in pursuing any and all attackers or perceived threats: "we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world."<sup>57</sup> America was a victim and

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<sup>53</sup> Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 59.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 53. Also as Niebuhrian as this may sound, this is *socially* constituted pride subject to a Jesus ethic, not strictly *individual* pride.

<sup>55</sup> Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>56</sup> President George W. Bush's "Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation" on September 11, 2001. Available here <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html>; Internet; accessed March 31, 2008. While President Bush is now arguably not the voice for the nation (i.e. his low poll rating and his contention with the now Democratic House and Senate), in the aftermath of September 11, there was a general unification that saw both Republicans and Democrats uniting under one general story of American nationalism.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, "Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation" on September 11, 2001. Available here <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html>; Internet; accessed March 31, 2008.

retaliated with the military doctrine of rapid dominance, or “shock and awe,” and torture.<sup>58</sup>

The pre-9/11 narrative was no different. America saw itself as justified in action necessary for the prosperity of the United States of America at the expense of other people. For instance, consider the fusion of America’s foreign policy around the School of Americas/Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (SOA/WHINSC) and neoliberal economic theory.<sup>59</sup>

WHINSC is the arm of the American military that seeks to educate other countries’ military in the use of American tactics and arms. Originally designed as a way for supporting Latin and South American countries particularly friendly to America, it was named “The School of the Americas” for much of its existence. However, WHINSC and the students it teaches are not so simple. Instead of merely training militaries, WHINSC exists, first and foremost, to empower for American interests. “The events in the United States [9/11] and [Pinochet’s coup to seize control of] Chile, so different in

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<sup>58</sup> Harlan Ullman, James Wade Jr., et. al. *Shock & Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*, (Defense Group Inc. for The National Defense University, 1996). Available here [http://www.dodccrp.org/files/Ullman\\_Shock.pdf](http://www.dodccrp.org/files/Ullman_Shock.pdf); Internet; accessed March 31, 2008.

<sup>59</sup> Gill helpfully synthesizes the complexity involved here: “The political violence, and the impunity that made it possible, thus undermined the ability of people to take care of themselves and generated new kinds of insecurities. In many countries, it preceded the enactment of free-market economic reforms in the 1980s and 1990s that mandated lower tariff barriers, cut social services, privatized public utilities, aggravated unemployment, and increased the gap between rich and poor. These reforms were demanded by the International Monetary Fund to facilitate the payment of large foreign debts incurred during the dictatorships, and to make it easier for multinational corporations to penetrate domestic markets and exploit the land and labor of ordinary Latin Americans. Reforms were generally implemented by civilian politicians through executive decree and exposed peasants and working people to great manipulation by dominant group. ...Common crime exploded... The consolidation of what became known as neoliberal capitalism required broad impunity for the powerful, and it depended on the maintenance of strong security forces to maintain ‘order’ in the midst of increasing social decomposition and disorder that were themselves the result of the state’s own policies. Order and disorder were thus closely connected in the state-sponsored, political and economic violence that plagued Latin America.” Gill, 14-15.

many ways, shared two important features: the deaths of thousands of civilians and the involvement of the United States in training the terrorists.”<sup>60</sup> Overthrowing legitimate governments and causing chaos amongst citizens of other countries, the graduates of WHINSC spread out, sometimes going unchecked during times of civil war, sometimes becoming death squads for dictators amicable to American interests, and sometimes simply spreading their trade of violence, torture, and suppression. While some students of the school may have become untethered from their original military, circulating like surplus Kalashnikovs for hire, others were arms for oppressive regimes, be it dictators or governments who sold out their citizens for loan credit with the mind to buy more weapons to secure the established state.

Yet, WHINSC was not the only tool to achieve American interests in foreign countries. WHINSC had, and arguably still has, an intertwined sibling. Economic theorists sold their wares, proclaiming neoliberal economics as the solution. “In the neoliberal model, moral agency is equated with an individualism that is focused on providing for self-interest. In fact, self-interested human nature is what ultimately drives big business.”<sup>61</sup> Greed will drive the economy. In other words, greed is good. However, moving to an economy that allowed American corporations in would require readjustment to prepare the ground to make the country an exporter. “These structural adjustments were aimed toward making these economies more ‘efficient,’ which translated into cutting back on expenditures in the social service and educational sectors as a way to ‘trim fat’ out of budgets and promoting export-oriented programs of

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>61</sup> Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization*, (New York: Continuum, 2004), 59.

growth.”<sup>62</sup> Quite simply, for loans from those with money (the IMF), the country seeking to readjust would give up “unnecessary” or “costly” endeavors that seemed superfluous. In the eyes of economists, social projects could be cut.

The downsizing or outright elimination of desperately needed social projects or rights of protection did not sit well with citizens. The wealth being generated was not supposed to leave the general population impoverished. In reaction, some disagreed, others protested, and still others revolted; but all were condemned, and their own government turned against them: “virtually everywhere, so-called subversives included peasants, workers, students, and others who increasingly demanded real agrarian reforms, better wages and working conditions, improved education and health care. The United States and local elites branded them ‘communists’ during the cold war.”<sup>63</sup> In response to such unrest, which America found threatening, more support was funneled from America to the surviving pro-American governments, while other less attractive governments were overthrown. “The United States aided and abetted this process by arming preferred leaders, intervening militarily to prop them up when necessary, and using threats, loans, diplomatic pressure, and other techniques to control governments in power.”<sup>64</sup> Simply put, much of the unrest and violence in “our own backyard” is due to America’s attempt to subject other governments to what America wants, not what the majority of the citizens want. Much of the blood is on America’s hands.

Such ethically unchecked and monopolizing discourse, proclaimed innocence, and justified violence have led to a liturgically iconographic reminder of 9/11 that incites fear around the realities of evil and insecurity. “Before 9/11, Americans were supposed to be

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>63</sup> Gill, 61.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 60.

in Eden, idling in a warm bath of social autism,” but 9/11 struck like a “nightmare,” and the accompanying fear “restored to us the clarifying knowledge that evil exists, making moral, deliberate action possible once again.”<sup>65</sup> In the wake of the tragedy of 9/11, the salvation of the United States of America was answered by the government’s call not to return to the comfort of pre-9/11 life.<sup>66</sup> The American answer consisted of recruiting and enlisting strapping young men and women to bravely go into combat, to proselytize with bullets, and to preemptively destroy a great evil that seeks to destroy the American way of life.<sup>67</sup> America would not be conquered. America would rise again.

It is not a mistake that American ideology is called the American Creed, a theological term. However, such a creed trusts in the system rather than God.<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, “a vital though informal part of the American Creed has long been the belief that the United States epitomizes the triumph of modernity in economics, technology and culture as well as in its democratic arrangements.”<sup>69</sup> Quite simply, America is a kingdom, not unlike Rome, and professes a creed that believes most emphatically in itself – a creed of an empty shrine for any citizen’s idol.<sup>70</sup> However, fear is the unifying factor in the land of freedom. The remembrance of 9/11 is a remembrance of the gripping experience of fear: “Convinced that we lack moral or political principles to bind us together, we savor the experience of being afraid... for only fear, we believe,

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<sup>65</sup> Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>66</sup> Robin, 2.

<sup>67</sup> Lieven, 27.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-87.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>70</sup> William Cavanaugh, “The Empire of the Empty Shrine: American Imperialism and the Church,” *Cultural Encounters* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 7-19.

can turn us from isolated men and women into a united people.”<sup>71</sup> Fear, combined with the nation’s identity and abilities, produced a violent response. Such a synthesis results in a warped messianic vision of America, a Christology of fear and oppression.

In the nation-state’s myth, creed, and liturgy, 9/11 functions theologically as Christ’s cross, the death of the innocent were at the hand of a great monolithic, terrorist evil. This warped “messianic vision” and salvific story by the oppressor subverts the Christian story and the Christian cross.<sup>72</sup> In this distorted messianism, fear is the salvific grammar of the state and the clashing of political ideologies on the whole. “[Fear is] a political tool, an instrument of elite rule or insurgent advance, created and sustained by political leaders or activists who stand to gain something from it, either because fear helps them pursue a specific political goal, or because it reflects or lends support to their moral and political beliefs – or both.”<sup>73</sup> 9/11 did not herald a change in the way the world at large functioned; instead it became a rallying cry for American people who were partially disabused of their delusions, but wanted to fully abuse others. 9/11, as used by the nation-state, is a theological subversion of Jesus Christ, because 9/11 itself became a Christological event for the state, a simulacrum of the Jesus story. As America made its way in the world, the towers fell as victims. In response, America rose anew, grasping the flag and singing patriotic songs, eager to maintain a resurrection and a future of the status quo assured through violence and torture. As the Christian story of cross does not end with death, so to does the nation-state supply a hope of the grand future. However, this is an anthropocentric future.

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<sup>71</sup> Robin, 3.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Lewis Taylor, *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right: Post-9/11 Powers and American Empire*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 44.

<sup>73</sup> Robin, 16.

This Christological story of the state is fundamentally a contrary anthropology, a kingdom opposed to the rule of God. However, before juxtaposing the crucified God against the torturing state, I will spend time grounding the societal pressures of television, primal identity, and Christology of the state.

*A Multiplicity of Exceptional Stories*

Subsumed underneath societal pressures to conform to an American Christology are the underlying stories that America uses to flatter itself and argue for its importance. It is from these myths that the identity of America finds root, and therefore, torture's root cause is revealed. "Nationalisms exploit a social ontology; they give national drama to citizens' search for meaningful existence."<sup>74</sup> Quite simply, moving the stories that form the community changes the community. America achieves foundational superiority through the myths of innocent nation, nature's nation, Christian nation, chosen nation, and millennial nation.<sup>75</sup> In this case, indifferent or pro-torture Christians have conformed to American myths, or American hagiography, over and above the crucified and resurrected God.

As I intimated earlier, America, from its birth and at its core, is not an innocent nation.<sup>76</sup> It was built on the backs of slaves and their still largely marginalized descendents, found room to expand through forced migration and genocidal attacks on the indigenous populations, and treated neighbors, both near and far, as resources to be

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<sup>74</sup> Mark Lewis Taylor, 48.

<sup>75</sup> This list is derived from Richard T. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

<sup>76</sup> The myth of an innocent nation I have already partially covered, however, because this specific myth plays such a crucial role – as both an underlying assumption and the summation of the other myths – it is important to revisit, especially in its historical foundation. Also, I will address later, how the foundation of the modern nation-state is not itself innocent, but instead bathed in blood that the Enlightenment has blamed Christianity for, calling the conflict, the "Wars of Religion."

used, rather than as human beings. Reinhold Niebuhr wrote *The Irony of American History* to contend with the concept of innocence during his time, and Richard Hughes chooses to focus on the innocence claimed by America during the twentieth century.<sup>77</sup> However, because “many Americans live their lives in the eternal present, a present informed and shaped by not history but by those two golden epochs that bracket human time,” I want to address a circumstance that is immediately practical – terrorism.<sup>78</sup>

“Terrorist” is a slanderous accusation, one reserved for people without a state, but who still maintain an ideology. Terrorists are considered violent people, using underhanded means and unconventional weapons to fight with the tool of fear because they lack the resources to promote a “real” war. Terrorists do not have sufficient respect for the state and, thus, are named with derisive labels.<sup>79</sup>

However, the terrorist is not so simple. First, there exists a “lack of definitional agreement [on what a terrorist and terrorism is] among terrorism experts.”<sup>80</sup> The term “terrorists” is not the name of their own making. On the contrary, it is the opposing government that brands people “terrorists.” This is name-calling. This is propaganda. Such an act is an act of dehumanization and replaces the void with a demon. Such demonizing is virtually mandatory for visiting violence on a perceived enemy. The enemy must look bad to justify violence; otherwise, there is generally no need for war or other conflicts.

Using the word “terrorist” does more than create a buffer between the state and the enemy; it also elevates the state in its own eyes and more importantly, in the eyes of

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<sup>77</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952) and Hughes, 163-186.

<sup>78</sup> Hughes, 156.

<sup>79</sup> Griffith, 12.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

the populous. The state is not underhanded. After all, it uses a conventional military and has rules of war. However, such a perception is false. The state, in fact, engages in equally violent acts that can be equally messy. Terrorists are not the only ones who use fear. The term “shock and awe” used to describe the recent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraqi are a nice way of saying that the United States inflicted terror on a broad scale, upon fighters and civilians alike, by tenderizing the entire country from the air. Even the threat of torture incorporates fear as a tool. Still, such indiscriminate, careless, and dehumanizing action is not limited to George W. Bush’s administration:

... the shelling of Muslim neighborhoods by the *New Jersey* did not differentiate between soldiers and civilians. While there were doubtless members of militia groups residing in these neighborhoods, the bombs could not set them apart from the children or the grandparents or the other women and men who were clearly noncombatants. If the defining feature of terrorism is the civilian identity of those who are targeted, then the “terrorists” in Beirut were not those who bombed military barracks but those who lobbed car-sized bombs into city neighborhoods.<sup>81</sup>

There is no way around it: the state is no more innocent than the “so-called terrorists” it pursues. The structure of the state does not make it innocent, nor do the other myths that I will address now.

The myth of nature’s nation is rooted in the English Enlightenment and English Deism, with the aim of “reduc[ing] religion to a set of self-evident essentials upon which all reasonable human beings could agree.”<sup>82</sup> Such a thought should appear familiar to any

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<sup>81</sup> Griffith, 5. Griffith continues: “... in Lebanon, the violence can be traced back to its sources. When we follow the trail and trace the violence back, we do not find God. We find a mad confluence of godlets. We find principalities and power, imperial nation states and barely organized guerilla fronts, all self-exalted, all petty, and all appealing to as much inhumanity as humans can muster. It is called Liberation and martyrdom. It is called defense and justice. Call it what you will. It is Terrorism.” Griffith, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Hughes, 48.

American, as Thomas Jefferson and his language of rights enshrined it.<sup>83</sup> More to the point, “the American Creed is rooted squarely in a Deistic worldview that was common to the eighteenth century.”<sup>84</sup>

The myth of a Christian nation is equally, if not more, robust and comes from a longer tradition than nature’s nation, finding an exemplar in Calvin’s Geneva.<sup>85</sup> While the founders built deistic beliefs into the core of America’s identity, protestant revivalism, like the first and second awakenings, and the white Christian claim of the land (a divinely ordained Manifest Destiny) has fed the notion that the country at large, and even the structure of a democratic government, come directly from God. By implication this myth fuses Christianity with the state.<sup>86</sup> Both the land and the nation are gifts from God. God chose the United States, first in the white, puritan colonial settlements, to be something of an ecclesial nation. “[T]he voice of the people is the voice of God.”<sup>87</sup> Tragically, such a commissioning by God simply reflected the then current white, patriarchal culture. It was not nor is the voice of God. The story about the divine choice of God turned out to reinforce the authority of certain powers rather than to prophetically move the nation. The

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<sup>83</sup> By implication, I do not mean to disparage rights language. But in my opinion, the step into rights language for Christian theological discussion is unnecessary. The doctrine of a creator God gives worth and value at a deeper, more fundamental level and, therefore, extends farther than rights language can. For instance, rights language did not seem to extend to slavery. However, a creator God was quite relevant for slaves and their descendents who fought for rights. Theologically, it is in a creator God that one’s humanness is established and transformed into gifting and hospitality.

<sup>84</sup> Hughes, 53.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 68. For a broader treatment, consult Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *In Search of Christian America* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard Publishers, 1989).

<sup>86</sup> Hughes, 67.

<sup>87</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 49.

appeal to God resulted in genocidal eradication and fed the pluralistic notion of chosenness while moving Christians into the state's narrative.<sup>88</sup>

The three myths, nature's nation, Christian nation, and chosen nation, share a great deal in common. Arguably, the real difference between the first two, nature and Christian, is to whom the authority of the state appeals, nature or God. Either way, both speak about America as chosen by some authority, and by implication, destined for glory. Indeed, "underlying the nationalism not only of the American Right, but of American culture in general is a belief that America has been specially 'chosen.'"<sup>89</sup> Quite simply, those subscribing to the American state as exceptional and chosen found their own means to justify such an assumption, be it God or a secular natural theology.

Chosen-ness, whether rooted in God or nature, speaks of a special past and present, while only hinting at a future. But it is the millennial myth that would fulfill the imagination of the future – in short, an eschatology of the state. Not only is the state chosen, but the "United States would illumine the globe with truth, justice, goodness, and democratic self-government and would thereby usher in a final golden age for all humankind."<sup>90</sup> The praxis of the abstract concept of a millennial nation was and is manifest destiny. America was chosen, so it steps out with authority and moves soteriologically into the future. However, the state's salvation is always for a few. The state gains its power to save through the coercion of other people. Such salvation is also tied in with the market, a market that seeks to commodify everything and everyone. The

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<sup>88</sup> This is not to say that pluralism is inherently bad, I am merely noting that the myth of chosenness is part of the states control over a pluralistic population. For the state to exist as it does, pluralism is forced into a myth that unifies under a larger meta-myth. For more, see William Cavanaugh's "The Empire of the Empty Shrine: American Imperialism and the Church" noted above.

<sup>89</sup> Lieven, 32

<sup>90</sup> Hughes, 91.

bright and future dawn is for the ones who live in power. The status quo is maintained, and the ones who truly profit are the American elite, whose interests have a future. Perhaps we seek to promote justice, but we allow the present structures to stay as they are. We claim to save through our exception because we are chosen and therefore law can be set aside, but in so doing, we detain, torture, and kill both purposefully and indiscriminately.<sup>91</sup> The reality of America is double-speak.

Fundamentally, these myths of innocence, nature, God, chosen-ness, and millennialism are stories that alter our identity in favor of a white-washed America. It is true that we are exceptional – we are exceptionally bad. We have a tragic past, as I have displayed, and a tragic future, as we maintain an innocence and exaggerated importance. “The American national mythos is messianic; it seeks to tell a story of freedom spread through self-sacrifice, not victories won through the spread of terror. To sustain the myth, Americans need to rewrite history just as surely as did Stalin to sustain his own version of communist orthodoxy.”<sup>92</sup> It is incredibly telling that, to confront the myths of America, Robert Hughes spoke of the prophetic, Black experience. The implication is that the American hagiographic myths are categorically racist, hiding the evil past, present injustice, and the future of malevolent violence. There is very little, if any, in the myths

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<sup>91</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), 3. Interestingly, Agamben notes that the Patriot Act’s exception concerning aliens that “radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being. Not only do the Taliban captured in Afghanistan not enjoy the status of POWs as defined by the Geneva Convention, they do not even have the status of persons charged with a crime according to American laws.... The only thing to which it could possibly be compared is the legal situation of the Jews in the Nazi *Lager* [camps], who, along with their citizenship, had lost every legal identity, but at least retained their identity as Jews.” Arguably, torture today seeks to erase any identity left over after legal identity is stripped, which is why Agamben agrees with Judith Butler, “in the detainee at Guantánamo, bare life reaches its maximum indeterminacy.” Agamben, 3-4.

<sup>92</sup> Griffith, 38.

that push America forward in a moral way.<sup>93</sup> Instead the myths make it possible for America to turn a blind eye to violence, to injustice, to torture, and inasmuch that Christians take in these myths, they take in the blindness as well. The simulacra of American messianism subverts the real Jesus, and therefore, it unsettles and divides the body of Christ. However, an analysis of torture, societal pressure, and American myths do not dig deep enough. In the next section, I will focus on the very grammar of our existence as Americans, analyzing the state and the market. Without first identifying the violently co-opting state and commodifying market, from which America's very being emanates, the praxis of torture could never be fully objected to or understood.

*The Colonizing State and Market*

Christian communities and their actions are radicalized and speak more urgently to the situations in the present crises when rooted in a modern story, specifically the church's current relationship to the state and market. However, some might question why begin with the birth of the modern nation-state. To the point, the story of the state and market is immediately practical and reaches deeper than American myths. The genesis story of the state and the market is also misconstrued; the state and the market are not saviors but enslavers, the opposite of the Enlightenment stories that they tell of themselves. They are colonizers still. It is within the colonial framework that American Christianity continues to exist and support torture. Simply put, focusing on a narrative more detailed and immediate to the current situation between the church, state and market reveals the plurality of present problems.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Hughes, 63.

<sup>94</sup> Political theology, Johann Baptist Metz asserts, must begin with engaging history because historical consciousness regularly reforms our current identity and thus allows for the continual, interrupting praxis of solidarity. (Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a*

In *Torture and Eucharist* and *Theopolitical Imagination*, William Cavanaugh posits an unconventional reading of the modern nation-state. He posits that the nation-state's narrative put forth to its citizens – that the nation-state is necessary for securing peace from warring religions – is false.<sup>95</sup> The state's narrative is fairly straightforward: There were “Wars of Religion” between Catholics and Protestants in the early modern period, and from within this chaos, the nation-state emerged to provide safety for the

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*Practical Fundamental Theology*, 150-155.) I have chosen, as argued in this section, a more modern and detailed story for a theopolity, as opposed to a Hauerwasian non-Constantinianism that attempts to span the cultural shift from ancient to modern (although I would argue at a more appropriate time that a non-Constantinian consciousness is necessary). I am obviously also arguing against the typical Enlightenment narrative concerning the genesis of the modern nation-state and a re-understanding of the market. For reference, Constantianism is well summarized in Cornel West's *Democracy Matters*: “Constantine himself seems to have converted to Christianity partly out of political strategy and imperial exigency, and then proceeded to use the cloak of Christianity for his own purposes of maintaining power. As the Christian church became increasingly corrupted by state power, religious rhetoric was often used to justify imperial aims and conceal the prophetic heritage of Christianity” (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 148.

I believe this focus on recent history provides a more precise approach than the category of Constantinianism, while still maintaining that Christians and the church at large are called to serious, committed levels of engagement. Alongside the heuristic critique of the state and market can lie a kingdom theology and ethic with the body of Christ as an alternative social body. The story of the co-opting state and the commodifying market covers the concerns of non-Constantinianism, but working with kingdom theology, it also radicalizes the body of Christ. Interestingly, in the narrative shift from the emphasis beginning with Constantine, it is possible to retain a solid, communal ecclesiology. Critiques of the state and market can achieve and surpass conclusions by those who advocate a communal church, similar to Hauerwas' resident aliens or Gustavo Gutiérrez's base ecclesial communities. Instead of stunting the community, the story of the state and the market radicalizes the existing community against present structures of privatization and calls the church to speak loudly and visibly (for the black community around me continually calls me to do so). In other words, the kingdom theology and ethics – a communal church as the body of Christ, existing as an alternative to worldly structure – that John Howard Yoder and Hauerwas advocate are not actually lost during the narrative shift. Interestingly, the critique that Hauerwas has a non-liberative theology by Cornel West and Gary Dorrien can begin to be solved because there now exists room for a liberative theology rooted in the *ecclesia*, which will be argued later. Although the *ecclesia* in this solution rejects working within the humanist or “liberal” system, I do imagine West and Dorrien will appreciate an ecclesiology that moves toward the margins, instead of fortified garrisons awash within the state. See Gary Dorrien's *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 351-361 and *Democracy Matters*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 148.

<sup>95</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 4. Also see Cavanaugh's “‘A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House:’ The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State” *Modern Theology* 11, no. 4 (October 1995): 397-420.

population and continues to do so today. The state asserts its myth as true, necessary for the state's existence and the world's survival; however, in reality, the state uses this myth to justify its inherently aggressive existence through overwhelming power and violent coercion – its *raison d'état*.<sup>96</sup>

Contrary to the narrative of the nation-state, Catholics and Protestants were allying against other Catholics and Protestants during the Early Modern age.<sup>97</sup> In fact, many of the conflicts called the “Wars of Religion” were actually the modern nation-states' violent birthing.<sup>98</sup> Hence, the term “Wars of Religion” is a misnomer. For example, the make-up of Early Modern France was certainly not monolithic; rather, it existed in a constant tension. At one point, the ultra-Catholic *Guise*, the Catholic *Valois* and the *Huguenots* of *Navarre* vied for domestic power. In the end, the monarchs of the *île de France*, the Catholic *Valois*, united with the *Huguenots* of *Navarre* against the *Guise* so as to maintain a nation-state instead of a papal state. Foreign relations were also highly complex and violent. The Catholic Holy Roman Empire and its other Catholic and Protestant alliances sought to drive France, both Catholic and Protestant as one, into the Atlantic. To ensure the survival of the French state, it was France's goal to exacerbate the similar complex tensions within the Holy Roman Empire, a public enemy to France which was larger and more complex in nature.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> I use *raison d'état* throughout this paper to create a link to the Early Modern French absolutist monarchy, specifically with *L'Instruction du Chrétien* and the author Cardinal Richelieu in mind, who is credited with being the first to employ *raison d'état*.

<sup>97</sup> William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (New York, T&T Clark, 2002), 22.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 29.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. Later, under Louis XIV, France decisively changed tactics towards a more aggressive international stance, both economically through mercantilism and militarily through the constant, seasonal offensives upon the Holy Roman Empire.

This political solidification was not achieved merely because of nationalized forces like the Holy Roman Empire, England, France, and Rome, but it was the national state that coerced its subjects, soon to be titled citizens, into the state's centralizing of power through an individualizing social contract, like Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* or John Locke's *Second Treatise*. Eliminating the validity of social communities by monopolizing citizens' relationships, the nation-state achieved prominence and power via the eradication of alternative social space in the name of peace (through violence, if necessary).<sup>100</sup> Thus, the nation-state and its oppressive *raison d'état* emerged as a power unto itself. Coercive military force became a necessity because the state claimed it to be, but even more because the state first used force to birth itself and, in turn, created its own enemies. Simply stated, the "Wars of Religion" in Europe during the Early Modern Age were less about differing Christian traditions, and more about nation-states beginning to vie for power in both the domestic and international spheres.

Similar in many aspects to William Cavanaugh's theopolitical argument, Eugene McCarragher proes a convincing theoeconomic thesis:

The corporation parodies the *ecclesia*, and the trinkets of the market ape the delights of the heavenly city. The enchantments of capitalism pervert our longing for a sacramental way of being in the world. A fat, greasy, hoarding slob in ancient Babylonian lore, Mammon appears, in capitalist modernity, in a counterfeit angelic raiment.<sup>101</sup>

Simply stated, McCarragher argues that the secular market is not a demystification of humanity. It is, in fact, equally dependent on enchantment and the "sacred." Capitalism constitutes a "new form of enchantment" through "the *repression or*

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<sup>100</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 3-6.

<sup>101</sup> Eugene McCarragher, "The Enchantments of Mammon: Notes Toward a Theological History of Capitalism" in *Modern Theology*, July 2005, pg. 433. There is actually more than coincidental similarity between Cavanaugh and McCarragher. As he makes clear on page 450, McCarragher builds on the historical, ecclesial and sacramental argument of Cavanaugh.

*displacement of sacrament.*”<sup>102</sup> As the state attempts to demand first allegiance from its citizens by claiming control and marginalizing its competitors, so too does the market attempt to assert control over people by poorly mimicking and inverting the Christian emphasis on Christological gifting – meeting the needs of humanity by giving.<sup>103</sup> In the market, giving occurs through the likes of capitalism and materialism, which fabricate a perceived need and a false desire to satisfy it through one’s own means.<sup>104</sup>

McCarragher and Cavanaugh are not alone in their conclusion that the state and market are, using the language of a liberationist theologian, colonizers.<sup>105</sup> There are Muslim scholars reaching the same conclusions from their own marginalized perspectives. Khaled Abou El-Fadl’s writing on the chaos within Muslim communities, particularly in the Arab world, seems to parallel Cavanaugh’s theopolitical interpretation of the nation-state.<sup>106</sup> El-Fadl asserts that the state’s jealousy obliterates alternative social space, having “formally dismantled the traditional institutions of civil society... Muslims witnessed the emergence of highly centralized and despotic, and often corrupt, governments that nationalized the institutions of religious learning and brought the *awqaf*

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 443, 450.

<sup>103</sup> On Christian gifting, see Chris K. Heubner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 2006).

<sup>104</sup> Carl Schmitt makes an important link between the state, market and cultural identity/myth, that I only have time to mention in a footnote, but is still very important: “The modern state seems to have actually become what Max Weber envisioned: a huge industrial plant. Political ideas are generally recognized only when groups can be identified that have a plausible economic interest in turning them to their advantage. Whereas, on the one hand, the political vanishes into the economic or technical-organizational, on the other hand the political dissolves into the everlasting discussion of cultural and philosophical-historical commonplaces, which, by aesthetic characterization, identify and accept an epoch as classical, romantic, or baroque.” Schmitt, 65.

<sup>105</sup> Although Anabaptist-like theology has been accused of sectarianism, liberation theology provides a potential voice for communitarianism to speak beyond its own *ecclesial* community when the church understands itself as colonized. On the sectarian charge, see James M. Gustafson “The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church and the University.” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society* 40 (1985): 83-94.

<sup>106</sup> Khaled Abou El-Fadl, “The Ugly Modern and the Modern Ugly: Reclaiming the Beautiful in Islam,” *Progressive Muslims*, edited by Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 46.

under state control,” for the state always seeks to assert power over its citizens and justify its *raison d'état*.<sup>107</sup> El-Fadl also attributes the appearance of the state and its deconstruction of “traditional institutions of religious authority” to the rise of groups like the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The claim of the state for the necessity of the state and the need for violence to ensure the state’s survival became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Farid Esack seems to agree with McCarragher’s theoeconomic readings. Citing David Loy and Harvey Cox, Esack similarly asserts that, “Underpinned by its theology – economics – it has numerous temples in the form of shopping malls to which people are drawn by deeply unfilled inner needs, for which the temple, church or mosque are now perceived as inadequate.”<sup>108</sup> Esack continues to describe the force of the market as one that “seeks to convert all other cultures in its image, utilizing them for consolidating the system.”<sup>109</sup> This is, in a word, colonization.<sup>110</sup>

Theologically and sociologically, these Muslim scholars are reaching similar argumentative conclusions as some Christian theologians and historians, and this illuminates at least two important points. First, some Christians and Muslims have a similar understanding of nation-state and market power, which might result in a condemnation of the powers as they currently exist. This leads to the second point: while Muslims struggle against the encroachment of Western Imperialism, are Christians

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>108</sup> Farid Esack, “In Search of Progressive Islam beyond 9/11,” *Progressive Muslims*, edited by Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 89-90.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>110</sup> Interestingly, El-Fadl and Esack seem to function as liberationists within the Muslim world. However, El-Fadl and Esack criticize liberal Muslims for working within the systems that obliterate religious social space by colonizing their communities. A liberationist Muslim does not seem to be in agreement with liberationists like James Cone that take a great deal from Reinhold Niebuhr’s conception of power. Instead, these liberationist Muslims seem to parallel the Yoderian proposal of kingdom as alternative space.

working prophetically against the chaos causing state and market that attempt to influence us, or have we been co-opted by the religion of the state and the market?

*Conclusion*

Christians are called to stand in condemnation of those who bring chaos and violence. This refers, in this case, to the state and the market and all that is included in their systems of repression by their powers and structures. Humanity, Muslim or Christian, cannot flourish if relationships are continually broken because bombs from planes obliterate terrorized people and fearful modern governments poison alternative social space as they have from their birth. As the state and the market privatize through colonization, the state and market forces rip apart social bodies much like the physical bodies of European victims that were drawn and quartered centuries ago. The effect of the state and the market has on the body of Christ is not unlike the effect torture has on a human being; however, our complicity blinds us to the unbalanced relationship. The radical and prophetic Christian spirit must be encouraged to aid the body of Christ and humanity at large. The state and market will not simply stop their bombing, their greed, or their torture. We must live together a Jesus who interrupts.

### Chapter 3

#### **The Interruptive Jesus and the Body of Christ: Visible, Liberative Action-Speak and the Subversive Communal-Being of the *Ecclesia***

I have sought to strip away the layers of the Christology by a torturous people, moving from recent situations to the old roots. First, I exposed torture itself for what it actually is, the systematic destruction of a human being. Second, I examined a few societal influences and the pressure it wields on the church to conform to the state's Christological story. Third, I examined the root of societal pressure, found in the hagiographic myths of the state. Fourth, I sought to lay bare an honest history of the modern nation-state and uncover the state and market for what they are, co-opting and commodifying forces. Next, I will show that as the American cultural milieu grasps for power to conquer, the story of Jesus stands in stark contrast. Following, I will proceed to imagine, primarily through the work of Johann Baptist Metz, a political theology for the church that remembers an interruptive Jesus.

*The Interruptive Jesus: "Who do you say I am?"*

Theologically, we are bound to a tragic past and we also have a tragic future as well. Save for the interruption of God, we live in evil and its consequences, tragedy. But such an idea does not play well in the state that says it is the agent of peace or the market that claims a monopoly on lifestyle. The state could not be the agent of peace if it did not claim the ability to achieve it, which necessitates power and the moral will to create this "peace." Likewise the market could not claim the ability to achieve happiness if it could not force humanity into a structure that gains wealth for some. Optimism, of a *Deus ex*

*Machina* nature – our self-made god by our constructed machine (i.e. social structure, technology, etc.), is a necessity for the state and the market. We will intervene and resurrect ourselves when it seems bleak. Faith in the American experiment is a must, or the false stories die and torture loses its foundation.

I have argued that the remembrance of 9/11, as remembered by the state and the market, is inherently an American memory and not a Christian memory. Allowing our memory to be altered by the matrix of culture's identity leads into a vindictive Christology by the Rome of our time, rather than allowing the challenge of Jesus – the scandal of Jesus' life – to wash over the body of Christ. Because “the image of Jesus...allows us to encounter him as the *revelation of God's open narrative*,” as opposed to the closed narrative of the state and market who seek to maintain power and control, quite simply, Jesus, and not the state or market, “can be described as *God's interrupter*.”<sup>111</sup>

The incarnation was an interruption. It validated and renewed creation while at the same time it opposed commodities. God came as a human, an impoverished human, and not a dollar sign. Jesus was not to be bought and sold, nor a price tag put on him – it was an evil act that sold him for thirty pieces of silver. Jesus was also born not into Roman citizenship or among the emperor's family, but into a “lowly” status. Jesus was not a commodity or human royalty, but God interrupting economic anthropologies with God's own economy of grace.

The preaching of the *basileia* was an interruption of the Emperor's rule, in both political and economic forms. The very words of Jesus interrupted the language and

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<sup>111</sup> Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context*, (Dudley, MA: Peeters Press, 2003), 145.

stories of the status quo – the *basileia* had come.<sup>112</sup> Jesus accompanied his words with actions, equally interruptive actions as the rule of God.<sup>113</sup> To name some praxis: there were healings, caring for the poor, miracles, and upsetting the established economic balance in the temple: “Jesus not only aroused the *amazement* of the bystanders, but at the same time he summoned the forces behind the hegemonic narratives against him *in their defense*.”<sup>114</sup>

The cross was an interruption – the death of God was and is a scandal. The idea that God would be the tortured and not the torturer, the criminal and not the emperor, and the one who died instead of lived on, was a scandal of the highest magnitude. “A crucified messiah, son of God or God must have seemed a contradiction in terms to anyone...and it will certainly have been thought offensive and foolish.”<sup>115</sup> Quite simply, Jesus suffered; Jesus was *tortured* and executed in political terms at the low social level of a slave and by Jesus’ own admission, forgotten.<sup>116</sup> The connection then of the cross, and the torture associated with it, to the oppressor yesterday and today is not a comfortable connection. “[T]he earliest Christian message of the crucified messiah demonstrated the ‘solidarity’ of the love of God with the unspeakable suffering of those who were tortured and put to death by human cruelty.”<sup>117</sup> The cross calls us to the

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<sup>112</sup> Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context*, 121-124, 127-131.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-127.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-127.

<sup>115</sup> Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 10.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 46, 51.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. Also see, “Jesus, the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi* both attest to God’s solidarity with all victims of suffering and oppression and assures the final, still unrealized deliverance of the victims. Christians thereby read history not in affirmation of conquest but in hope for the conquered.” Bruce Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*:

margins, where the people are tortured, and not to stay where we are as complicit with the *torturer*. This interrupts our entire life and lifestyle.

The resurrection was an interruption. The resurrection made clear that no oppressor will win forever and death lost its sting. For the Romans, and by implication, America today, “the suffering of a god soon had to be shown to be mere simulation, rapidly followed by punishment for those humans who had been so wicked to cause it.”<sup>118</sup> Indeed, the cross still ought to be a scandal that informs the body of Christ about those who suffer in society today – the cross was not followed by a war, but a resurrection and hope with solidarity. The resurrection pre-pictured the *parousia* and added an extra dimension of eschatological hope in the *basileia*, combined with the suffering of Jesus.

Christian suffering and hope are intertwined and together constitute the climax of Christian interruption, while the state’s continued torture shows the stark contrast between Jesus and the state.<sup>119</sup> 9/11 Christology leads to blindness, a subsumed racism, pride, (at least) partially undeserved wealth, and oppression – a bourgeois Christianity comfortable in its sloth. Opposite, Jesus forms a communal body that seeks to speak of God’s salvation in the world. “For Christians, professing Christ is then also the interruption *par excellence* of history.”<sup>120</sup>

#### *Anamnesis, Dangerous Memory, and Bourgeois Christianity*

Johann Baptist Metz puts forth a history-engaging political theology and a changing narrative and praxis. Understanding one’s social location within the Christian narrative and the body of Christ, and over against the colonizing state and market, is

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*Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 36.

<sup>118</sup> Hengel, 15.

<sup>119</sup> Kelly, 88.

<sup>120</sup> Boeve, *God in History*, 47.

essential for developing a political theology.<sup>121</sup> In addition to involving itself in history, Metz's theology incorporates a strong eschatology that encourages hope and a forward-looking orientation within the memory of suffering in the past and present. Christian historical consciousness is a reforming experience, pushing the church to change the surrounding world, not merely itself.

Metz argues that “the formation of [Christian] identity always begins with the awakening of memory.”<sup>122</sup> Stanley Hauerwas' emphasis on narrative can achieve the same end – the first Christ event and the promise of a brilliant future form a changed community, a fundamentally Christian community.<sup>123</sup> In other words, the materialized past and a Christian eschatological hope change who the community presently is, recalling a remembrance of Christ and envisioning the eschaton. The body of Christ is made responsive to past suffering through *anamnesis*, for it is the nature of Christianity to imitate the suffering Christ. “Remembrance is an act of *love*. ...In Christ, *we remember*. We become again beings open to love, and we *remember*. The Church in its separation from ‘this world,’ on its journey to heaven, *remembers* the world, remembers all men, remembers the whole of creation, takes it in love to God.”<sup>124</sup> The church thus functions as a community for the oppressed (i.e. tortured) and a challenge to the oppressor.<sup>125</sup> The

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<sup>121</sup> Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, 150-155.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, 172.

<sup>123</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Indiana: 2001). See both chapters, “A Story Formed Community” and “Jesus: The Story of the Kingdom.” “The social ethical task of the church, therefore, is to be the kind of community that tells and tells rightly the story of Jesus,” 52.

<sup>124</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 36. I do realize that Schmemmann had little love for liberation theology, however, remembering Jesus as the way which constitutes the body of Christ is still prevalent in sacramental theology and could lead towards using Schmemmann, despite some of his dislikes.

<sup>125</sup> Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 62-63, 79-80.

Christian vision interrupts one's conception of the present by offering an alternate vision of history; Christians are re-contextualized within a different story, an informative and liberating story that resists the colonization of the state and market. Christian praxis is then attuned to suffering shaped by the Christian story and consistently interrupts the apathetic world through solidarity with the helpless and suffering of the present.<sup>126</sup> This biblical story, therefore informs the church's identity and gives a new identity to practitioners of a social, Christian praxis.

As the church is more directly positioned to stand against the colonizing influence of the privatizing story of the state and market, Christians who take their faith seriously are dared to convert from a bourgeois Christianity to the Christian story made of memory and community. When Christians actively understand that the church in America is colonized, the church can begin to actively work against privatizing forces and with those who are suffering, including those who are suffering as a result of torture. Previously the church was not working with the colonizers, but now the church purposely seeks solidarity with the poor and oppressed through both the *newly visible, liberative action-speak and the already existing subversive communal-being of the ecclesia*.

Individually, "the Christian has the responsibility to develop his [or her] faith's relationship to the world as a relationship of hope, and to explicate his theology as eschatology."<sup>127</sup> Still, the single Christian is not alone in either his or her relationship with the world or the future Christian hope; instead, the body of Christ that develops a Christian's identity is grounded in a "horizon of eschatology," and more specifically, in

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 67-68, 208.

<sup>127</sup> Johannes B. Metz, *Theology for the World*, trans. by William Glen-Doepel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 90.

an eschatological foundation that is primarily creative and zealous.<sup>128</sup> This eschatology envisions the church as capable of revealing the Christian hope to the world. The revelatory eschatology is inherently political, as it shapes the church according to the mission of Christ and empowers it to declare in the present an eschatological hope of the *basileia* to this world.<sup>129</sup>

Therefore, it is the body of Christ that stands in the *basileia* and proclaims its mission, continually interrupting the world's attempts at self-redemption or self-production through love, sacrifice, and solidarity.<sup>130</sup> The church acts as the in-breaking of the *basileia* to the present by visibly solidifying the intensifying nature of the Christological sacrifice on the cross.<sup>131</sup> The church points from the suffering and resurrected past to the future hope for the world. Simply put, the church interrupts the world by proclaiming the hope of the future in a revolutionary, subversive, and imaginative way. Rightly remembering Jesus leads to, in a word, interruption.

### *Conclusion*

Far from living by the church's mission, the church in America is crippled in its American-ness as it accepts the narratives of the state and the market. The bourgeois religion that Christianity in America has imbibed is dependent on privatization. The Constitution, as the American social contract, is an Enlightenment document that privatizes citizens; this country's foundational anthropological lens is individualistic. The state coerces the individual into a discussion between the individual and the state as its primary relationship. American Christians must realize the influences of the Constitution

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 90, 94.

<sup>129</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 330, 337, 338.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 338. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 156-158.

<sup>131</sup> Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 87-88.

and understand that the church, as the body of Christ, is fundamentally a social institution contrary to the state and market.<sup>132</sup> In response, American Christians must understand the necessity of a social Christianity and reject privatization before they can accept a full Christology and ecclesiology; in order to envision the Messianic nature of Christianity, Christians must first understand who they are.<sup>133</sup> Their call is only accessible when Christians get past the American dream, humanist hopes of anthropocentrism, and other enticements by the state and market.<sup>134</sup>

Like Metz's own German culture years ago, American culture has become increasingly hominized.<sup>135</sup> While it seems as though society may be shifting back towards a more cosmological view due to scientific discoveries, these breakthroughs have had little effect on some aspects of secularization, namely ideological, secularized hopes that humanity will overcome, thrive amid, and conquer future frontiers. Secularized and nationalistic hope provided by Ronald Reagan (one example among many) became the controlling ideology that Metz warns against.<sup>136</sup> This ideology of nationalistic hope has taken hold of American Christians by usurping liberating, eschatological hope and trapping the globe in Americana's oppressive custody.<sup>137</sup> Thus, American Christians no longer remember the atrocities of Auschwitz that Metz so actively addressed because of the blinding nature of the promise of American hope.

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<sup>132</sup> Metz, *Theology of the World*, 133.

<sup>133</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*, translated by Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 12.

<sup>134</sup> Metz, *Theology of the World*, 146.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>137</sup> Johann-Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995), 55.

I am not calling for the burning of the Constitution, total anarchy, or a theocracy. Rather I am envisioning the awakening of a new conscience in American Christians in the hopes that they will understand that the current relationship with the government is unhealthy for the body of Christ. The government's social contract, instead of Christ and his mission, has been allowed to define the church. Christians must first realize that the anthropocentrism given to Americans by the government is not a Christian anthropology. Insisting on being the body of Christ, a cohesive social body that inherently has a politic, reclaims the Christian memory of suffering and solidarity. No longer would the memory of events such as Auschwitz or Guantánamo be supplanted in the church by a secularized American hope. "Christians are obliged to interrupt on behalf of God the 'Interrupter.'"<sup>138</sup> It is no wonder that the church has largely ignored Darfur, Guantánamo, and torture in general, for American Christians have instead continued to place their hope in the bright, anthropocentric destiny (with masculine emphasis) preached by Reagan. We live in a country that has diverted attention away from torture in order to focus on national interests, like Middle Eastern oil and "safety." We have lost the "messianic praxis" of "discipleship, conversion, love, and suffering," because we have accepted the secularized sacrament of a nationalistic hope.<sup>139</sup> Consequently, the church has held to theologies that remain unchanged and unresponsive in the face of suffering: genocidal civil wars, starvation, drought, and even torture. Failing to recall Christian suffering, American Christians do not act as prophets in the world. We do not interrupt. In the process of becoming secularized by a form of enchanted, secular hominization, the American

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<sup>138</sup> Boeve, *God in History*, 48.

<sup>139</sup> Metz, *The Emergent Church*, 27.

Christians have not only lost the mandate to suffer with and for others; it has also lost itself.

We will go the way of the German church in the face of Nazi Germany – namely into a fragmented, torturous death, followed by generations of condemnation – if we do not enter into solidarity *with* the hopeless and raise the interruptive hope of the crucified God as a community. The church, the body of Christ, must embrace the consequence of living the interruptive Jesus, even unto death, or it will find a true death without resurrection.<sup>140</sup> Jesus was *tortured*, and we should therefore seek out the tortured and oppose the torturers. This may mean the death of the church at the hands of the oppressor, but this death is a death that disseminates within the community and ironically empowers the community's voice exponentially. Even in the face of torture, the interruptive community sees a resurrection, unlike the traitor or coward who dies a thousand times.

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<sup>140</sup> Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 104, 110, 113.

## Appendix: Critique and Future

### *Anticipated Critique*

I anticipate two critiques that I feel would be unfair, but I have heard before, and so I will address them here to at least let the reader know that I am aware of such critique. First, I anticipate for some, that this work could be understood as an unfair critique of the state and market – that I ignore the positives. However, I know of the positives. I, more than a majority of Americans, *know* the positives of such a system. Nevertheless, the state and market at their core have different interests than Jesus, and therefore the church. Salvation by the interruptive Jesus does not limit itself to only a spiritual salvation, nor does it subordinate physical needs to a spiritual salvation; the salvation of the interruptive Jesus mixes both. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy become one in the same thing, while still maintaining a tension between the two. The church becomes liberative and liberative action gains the church, without confusing one for the other.

I also anticipate a second critique; one that calls this thesis is a sectarian work. It is quite obvious that I maintain some Anabaptist sympathies, however, I do not believe this makes me irrelevant or disengaged from discussion. In fact I believe it makes me more relevant as the mere presence of such sympathies alters the discussion. The ecclesial response I seek is “radical” (from what the status quo considers the current norm) and demands quite a lot. Nevertheless, if this imagination were to take hold, such a movement is grounded in conversation with the world. The church could not be an interruptive church without something to interrupt. This is, quite simply, not a sectarian work.

*Future: Imagining the Rest*

I also want to acknowledge that I am indebted to those American Christians who have taken positive steps against torture. I am certainly not alone in this attempt and such an endeavor would not be possible without a great deal of work already done. The National Religious Campaign Against Torture, and organizations like it, have helped voice opposition to torture. However, I find in some ways that these non-governmental organizations lack a driving force. Simply, they lack the church as they have tried to fit into the state's categories. This thesis, in its own way, is meant to argue towards gaining such a force and to where American Christians as a whole would be galvanized against torture, rather than Christianity in America being split.

However, this thesis, for length, was sharpened. In order to fully flesh out an argument against torture, I mostly focused on torture and its underlying causes. The argument roughly sketches a different ecclesiology, but in some ways, it may lack an equally constructive balance. I can see the reader finishing the argument and feeling a lack of direction. To answer such a question, I would ask the question, "How might the church look under an interruptive Jesus?"

First, the "Church must stop praying *for* the poor and the outcast and start praying *with* them."<sup>141</sup> And I would raise Oscar Romero as an example and a hero of the faith. Even in his orthodoxy he maintained a liberative praxis. He is an example of one who embodied the direction I imagine. I would also hold up the Catholic base, ecclesial

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<sup>141</sup> Morrill, 56.

communities, the New Monasticism movement in the United States, and other “intentional communities” as creative and imaginative ways for envisioning church.

Second, I would address liturgy reform and sacramental theology. I would primarily focus on the Eucharist and the lack of imagination we seem to have around the political implications of the Eucharist. It is in the Eucharist that the entirety of the church and interruption is played out: “Interruption refers to that ‘moment,’ that ‘instance,’ which cannot occur without the narrative, and yet cannot be captured by the narrative.”<sup>142</sup> The value of liturgy and action has been underestimated. William Cavanaugh begins this work of reconsidering in *Torture and Eucharist*, however, I would want to pursue it farther as to match with a more “radical” ecclesiology.

I have seen, and participated in, an intentional community’s re-envisioning of the Eucharist that was thoroughly communal and incredibly powerful. The act of giving the elements to one another and at the same time receiving and giving encouragement has outpaced any other liturgy I have ever been a part of. Everyone was empowered, but no one sought power over another. The economy of God ruled that Eucharist of giving and receiving, rather than capitalism’s taking and buying or the state’s fragmentation of relationships. Merely in the intentional community’s living the divine economy of cohesion and gifting, the political nature of such an act calls into question the state and the market. The community did not ground their action in the categories of the status quo, but such an action and mode of being does not seem to be rethought in the wider church at a fundamental level. It is along this vein that I would continue this project of interruption.

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<sup>142</sup> Boeve, *God in History*, 42.

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