



"I HAVE READ A FIERY GOSPEL WRIT IN BURNISHED ROWS OF STEEL": HORACE  
BUSHNELL'S WAR THEOLOGY AND THE MEANING OF NATION

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## Prologue

### Horace Bushnell and the American Civil War A Historiographical Sketch

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The eminent British historian John Keegan wrote that the American Civil War was a cruel war, but unlike the Great War in the early years of the twentieth century, it was not an unnecessary one. Like other historians who lament the manner in which the American nation tore itself asunder, Keegan concluded that the war was not inevitable. Had reason calmed and righted emotion, had South Carolinians placed more trust in the spirit and ability of the democracy their forefathers established in the Revolution—a democracy that allowed the constitutional and legal removal of a president, even one who promised no harm to their peculiar institution, every four years—had politics and diplomacy prevailed (Americans, after all, “were great compromisers”), war might not have come.<sup>1</sup> Yet these considerations exclude perhaps the most potent source of sectional tension: the schism exacerbated by American clergymen. The question of religion and the Civil War evaded the American historical consciousness until the last decade of the twentieth century. Not until a group of historians convened in Louisville and posed the question, “What, if anything, did religion have to do with the Civil War?” did scholarship examining religion and America’s “Ordeal by Fire” (with the thoroughness that merited the creation of an historical genre) launch into high gear.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Keegan, *The American Civil War: A Military History* (New York: Knopf, 2009), xi, xii.

<sup>2</sup> The conference in Louisville provided the intellectual fodder for Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles R. Wilson ed., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3. It stands as the genesis of major scholarship on religion in the American Civil War; James M. McPherson, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009).

And even then, no historian pondered in extensive length the role of northern clergymen in conjunction with the cause and execution of the war.

In 1861, an essay commenting on the sectional tensions in the United States and the theological fragmentation wrought by those tensions appeared in Europe in the Jesuit publication *Civiltà Cattolica*. The Americans, its author wrote, seemed particularly adept in matters concerning Biblical hermeneutics except for one problem: the absence of ecclesiastical and institutional authority made Biblical hermeneutics painfully problematic. Intellectuals and politicians in the North and the South had “become theologians, the one side quoting the Pentateuch to justify slavery, the other side quoting the gospel to condemn it: ...the people of the thirty-three United States, who are eminently and essentially political, cannot discuss a political matter without quoting the Old and the New Testaments!”<sup>3</sup> Much in the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville, Europeans casting an intent gaze on the American situation thirty years later observed that little seemed to change from 1830: America remained a devoutly Christian nation, one that explained the world in largely republican and Protestant terms in the same ways those who founded the nation did in the Age of Revolution and the early Republic.<sup>4</sup> In 1854, Philipp Schaff, a German emigrant and theologian, commented that Christianity possessed as much power over the American mind as the civil law. The piety of believers in America set them apart from the rest of the world: “Americans,” Schaff

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<sup>3</sup> “La Disunione negli stati uniti,” *Civiltà Cattolica* 4 (23 January 1861), 317 in Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 154.

<sup>4</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville and Arthur Goldhammer ed., *Democracy in America* (New York: Library of America, 2004), 335; in his definitive history of the young American nation, Gordon Wood observes that “Nearly all common and middling people in the early Republic still made sense of the world through religion.” *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 576.

wrote, “are already in advance of most of the old Christian nations of Europe.” The German also observed that the diversity of the Christian faith in America (evinced by the multiplicity of Protestant denominations that existed in the Antebellum Era)—and its separation from the state—increased religious fervor because it meant that contending religious sects needed to outdo their neighbors. Such zeal made America home to “more awakened souls...than any other country in the world, Scotland perhaps excepted.”<sup>5</sup> Protestant denominational schisms in the 1840s exposed the great extent to which Americans appealed to religion for authority and cultural stability and intensified the severity of the Sectional Crisis confronting the nation. “For a people as strongly religious as nineteenth century Americans,” historian Steven E. Woodworth writes, “[denominational schisms] carried more weight in many ways than the doings of Congress. Religion touched on people’s most deeply held convictions about fundamental questions of right and wrong.”<sup>6</sup> When religion failed to produce a clear and resounding answer to the nation’s most challenging questions, it endangered the viability of the republic.

It has become all too cliché to suggest, as Civil War scholars and enthusiasts do, that clergymen in the North and the South read the same Bible and prayed to the same

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<sup>5</sup> Philip Schaff, *America: A Sketch of the Political, Social, and Religious Character of the United States of North America, In Two Lectures* (New York: C. Scribner, 1855), 91, 118. Dr. Schaff delivered these lectures in Berlin before the German Church Diet at Frankfurt am Main, September, 1854.

<sup>6</sup> Steven E. Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies: America’s Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 53; for other studies of piety in America and the ubiquitous nature of the faith, see Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to Civil War* (Lanham, MD: Ivan R. Dee, 1993) and Richard Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997); for a comprehensive study of church denominations in the history of the United States, see Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, ed., *The Churaching of America: 1776-2005: Winners and Losers In Our Religious Economy* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).



God for deliverance and divine blessing in their bloody war. But it remains true, and it exposes what historian Mark Noll considers a “theological crisis”: the Bible, which wove together the cultural and political fabric of the nation, offered seemingly divergent opinions on the slave question—the central question of the Civil War—relative to time and place.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the Bible spoke very differently even to clergymen in the same regions who opened the scriptures to condemn or sanction the nation’s “peculiar institution.” A cultural and political tradition that placed the individual at the source of all power turned messy when intellectuals and religious figures brought those same suppositions to bear on questions of religious interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Yet this very thing occurred en masse by 1861. Clergymen in the North and the South sought vehemently to interpret God’s design for the American nation. They preached with certitude the righteousness of their cause. With a firm belief in the legibility of Providence, many claimed, as Julia Ward Howe did in 1862, to see “the glory of the coming of the Lord.”<sup>9</sup>

The question of clergy in the Civil War transcends mere interpretations of Providence. Clergymen deepened the sectional chasm because they made the war a holy one. Citizens and soldiers in the North and South alike viewed the war as a contest for righteousness in which God used his chosen people, his new Israel, to purge and

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<sup>7</sup> Noll, “The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776-1865” in Nathan O. Hatch and Noll, ed., *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 39-51; Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 8, 29.

<sup>8</sup> For a superb treatment of the American democratic character and its fusion with progressive evangelical Christianity, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Julia Ward Howe, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” *The Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Politics*, February 1862, IX No. LII.

sanctify the nation.<sup>10</sup> To Christians who harbored millennial eschatological views, social, cultural, and moral ills impeded Christ's Second Coming and the establishment of his kingdom on Earth. By waging a war for national sanctification the United States might be readied for redemption on a total scale. A sense of urgency inevitably accompanied such a worldview. Moral reform movements acquired greater potency because, infused with a righteous impetus, they could conceivably accelerate the coming of Christ's New Heaven and New Earth.<sup>11</sup> Such views afforded little room to religious moderation or temperance; in times of heightened political tension, this proved particularly calamitous. In *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation*, historian David Goldfield argues more forcefully than any previous historian that evangelical Christianity caused the war. "The political system could not contain the passions stoked by the infusion of evangelical Christianity into the political process," Goldfield writes. "The elevation of political issues into moral causes poisoned the democratic process...In a crusade, the enemy is the infidel, and eventually both sides viewed the other as apostates to God and the Constitution."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This research acknowledges the assistance and guidance of Dr. Richard Gamble, Anna Margaret Ross Alexander Chair in History and Political Science and Associate Professor of History at Hillsdale College, whose thoughts on warfare, Christianity, and Progressivism produced *War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, The Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003), whence the phrase "contest for righteousness" comes.

<sup>11</sup> For studies of millennialism in American thought, see Richard H. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937); Ernest Lee Tuveson opens his opus on the subject with a statement that cuts to the core of Christian activism and the purpose of moral reform: "Christianity is a religion of expectation...The Gospels are permeated by eager anticipation of the blessed day, shortly to arrive, when the 'Kingdom of God and His Christ' will be all in all: the final triumph of good over evil, the end of all the sorrows and fears of this life...To expect to make the world's City truly righteous is, indeed, an egregious manifestation of pride" in *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 1-90; James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978).

<sup>12</sup> David Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 1-3.

Other historians record similar observations. In their introduction to the work that sparked and shaped the entirety of the historiography of religion and the American Civil War, Randall M. Miller, Harry Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson comment in their eponymously titled work, “Religious values drove reform throughout the antebellum period ...The Puritans’ ‘city upon a hill’ had become the American ‘redeemer nation.’ And by casting the slavery issue in moral terms of good and evil, Americans made it nonnegotiable.”<sup>13</sup> A collection of essays from the field’s finest scholars, *Religion and the American Civil War* addresses a variety of themes. Mark Noll handles the issue of Biblical hermeneutics and the question of slavery. Eugene Genovese examines understandings of denominational orthodoxy in the North and the South. In an essay that bears great import for this research, George Frederick assesses northern clergymen and the establishment of an American civil religion.

The thrust of historian Harry Stout’s study on the Civil War calls into question the inherent goodness of an American civil religion by examining the killing that resulted from sensational patriotism. Placing America’s struggle within the context of Western just war theory, Stout argues that only after both sides “descended into moral misconduct” did the right side win “*in spite of itself*.” Stout contends that a moral history of slavery poses different questions than a moral history of the war, and that the just conduct of that war—regardless of what it accomplished—remains fair game for moral and intellectual inquiry. While affirming that “The justness of abolition and the freedom of four million dictates that any moral history of slavery unconditionally conclude that the right side won no matter what the casualties and sacrifices,” Stout manages to

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<sup>13</sup> Miller, Stout and Wilson ed., *Religion and the American Civil War*, 7.

isolate this question from the issue of just war, where matters of “proportionality and discrimination continue to remain in play.”<sup>14</sup>

Historian Donald J. Stoker remarks in his study on strategy in the American conflict that “The American Civil War does not lack for stories, nor for books that tell them.”<sup>15</sup> At the time of its publication in 1987, James McPherson posited in *Battle Cry of Freedom* that fifty thousand works on America’s “Ordeal by Fire” existed in print.<sup>16</sup> One historian estimated in 2002 that the number of works on the American Civil War increased by ten thousand to a total of sixty thousand, more than enough to supply one book on the subject daily to the reading world for the total duration of time since Robert E. Lee’s surrender.<sup>17</sup> In his treatment of religion and the American Civil War, historian George Rable acknowledges that *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* marks but one contribution to a field of research that merits further and deeper study. Rable’s magisterial synthesis, a “broad narrative that shows how all sorts of people used faith to interpret the course of the Civil War and its impact on their lives, families, churches, communities, and ‘nations,’” represents perhaps the most comprehensive study of religion and the Civil War to date. But the

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<sup>14</sup> Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006), xvi.

<sup>15</sup> Donald J. Stoker, *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>16</sup> James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), ix.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Holden Reid, “The Civil War, 1861-5,” in James C. Bradford ed., *A Companion to American Military History* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), Vol. I, 99.

author, admittedly, committed to a study much larger than theologians and the ideas they propagated during the era of the war.<sup>18</sup>

While this project cannot purport to provide a new angle to Civil War Era scholarship, it certainly tells an underdeveloped, if not new story. It turns an unflinching eye to a northern clergyman who, perhaps more than any other minister or theologian, contributed to the religious and theological mayhem during the Civil War Era that resulted in horrific casualties on an unprecedented scale. A Congregationalist from Connecticut, Horace Bushnell enjoyed casting his influence about New England during the years leading up, and into, the Civil War. Yet Bushnell has managed somehow to remain a rather nebulous figure in Civil War Era studies. In *America Aflame*, where Goldfield casts blame for the war at the feet of American evangelicalism, Bushnell fails to receive any mention. Though he surfaces consistently in conversations surrounding religion and the war—indeed, Bushnell garners brief treatment in nearly all the aforementioned works—and though research into his life has spawned a short list of biographies, his views on that war and the American nation it forged have heretofore eluded a thorough and detailed examination.<sup>19</sup>

This research purposes to shed some light on that historiographical void.

Bushnell, like many of his time, believed that the United States occupied a special place

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<sup>18</sup> George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 5-9. A good portion of the historiography referenced in this initial segment of research concerning religion in the American Civil War was duly noted, directly and indirectly, in *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*.

<sup>19</sup> For a concise, ten page study of Bushnell and other eminent theologians of the era and their interpretations of the Civil War, see William A. Clebsch, "Christian Interpretations of the Civil War" *Church History*, 30, No. 2 (June 1961): 212-22. Clebsch's analysis is the most penetrating study of Bushnell's views on the war and its purpose in the past fifty years.

in the redemptive history of the world, but in order to fulfill its billing as God's chosen nation, the states of the American republic needed to attain a purer nationhood.

"Purer," to Bushnell, held a twofold meaning: the nation needed to purge itself of the moral ills hindering its standing before God. It also meant that the United States needed to become, in actuality, a nation. The Age of Revolution, indeed the War of Revolution, did not in itself seal the promise of the American state. "Bushnell," historian William A. Clebsch observed, "came to understand the war in its deepest meaning as the episode of creation of a true American nation. The nation he understood not as a positive, hypostasized concept, but as *an organism called into being by God* for the people even before the Declaration of Independence."<sup>20</sup> In an age of heightened nationalism at home and abroad, America's struggle for unity came as a welcome trial to Bushnell, who in 1864 regarded the war as a great struggle after which the United States would exist, "no more a compact, or a confederation, or a composition made up by the temporary surrender of powers, but a nation—*God's own nation*."<sup>21</sup>

If a more perfect nation seemed to Bushnell the chief end of America's war and an altogether glorious occurrence, then the process of acquiring nationhood needed to refract a glory worthy of that end. Bushnell's search for the meaning of the American Civil War resulted in the formulation and expression of a very different gospel: a war theology centered on killing and a redemptive, millennial understanding of America's place in world history. It seems paradoxical to a contemporary mind that a minister of

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<sup>20</sup> Clebsch, "Christian Interpretations of the Civil War," 216.

<sup>21</sup> Horace Bushnell, "The Doctrine of Loyalty," *Work and Play* (London: Alexander Strahan & Co., 1864), 282.

the Christian faith should preach a message of bloodshed; Christ's fulfillment and internalization of the law recorded in St. Matthew stands, in a very real sense, in direct opposition to the war cries of emotionally charged clergy.<sup>22</sup> Yet to Bushnell these things presented no inherent conflict. By fusing the word of God and notions of Providential history with America's struggle for national identity, Bushnell imbued the war with a certain holiness and righteousness that necessitated killing. For President Lincoln and the politicians, the war represented the practical working out of questions left unanswered by the American Founding; for generals the war represented questions of loyalty, allegiance, and duty. Bushnell viewed the events from 1861 to 1865 through the lens of his war theology. That clergymen appealed to Providence to understand the war comes as little surprise to scholars familiar with the religious historiography of the Civil War Era, but the manner in which Bushnell conflated the war with the Divine sets his story apart from others. Bushnell wedded the story of Christ's redemptive plan for mankind, indeed the world, with the purpose of the Civil War. An understanding of Christ's atonement—of his sacrifice upon the cross for the sins of man—gave deeper meaning to the sacrifices of Union men upon their nation's altar of freedom. The Cross at Golgotha permeated history to the fields of Manassas, Antietam, Gettysburg, and other grounds hallowed by the sacrifices of Union troops. Through Christ it became possible for the war to attain a holy status because, in a manner Bushnell believed to be similar to the Christ, men died for their nation's sins and for the creation of God's New Israel, a nation that might inaugurate Christ's New Heaven and New Earth. Prior to

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew 5:1-48, ESV. The "Sermon on the Mount" contains that phrase reintroduced to the Puritan, and later American, consciousness by John Winthrop in "A Modell of Christian Charity": "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matt. 5:14).

1861, Bushnell earned his reputation in Connecticut as a theologian and as a minister. During it, he solidified his place in history by propagating a war theology that attempted to validate what he hoped the war might create: an exceptional nation in the religious sense of the term, a Christ-nation, one meant to preserve and perpetuate the American redemptive mission as a “Citty [*sic*] upon a Hill.”

The complexity of Bushnell’s views on nationhood and atonement requires that any analysis attempting to comprehend them operate within a set of well-defined parameters. Bushnell, like many New Englanders of his time, held more than a subtle opinion on the question of slavery. But this analysis will not explore Bushnell’s views of slavery in the total sense; rather, only in so far as slavery *impeded* a more perfect nationhood does it factor into this conversation. Nor does this project purport to provide a narrative of the minister’s life. While portions of the work are, to be sure, biographical, this is no biography. As the subtitle of this project indicates, the years 1861 to 1866 serve as the focal point for a study of Bushnell’s war theology. This point requires little elaboration. While Bushnell published a voluminous literature of sermons and tracts before 1861, and though scholars have managed to preserve much of his personal correspondence written prior to that same date, the war sculpted—indeed sharpened and focused—the brunt of Bushnell’s gospel, articulated in no small measure through sermons, religious writings, and public discourse during that same era. This research will make effective use of those historic books, many of which remain available in digitized form on the Internet. Bushnell’s oration given at Yale College in July 1865, “Our Obligations to the Dead,” represents perhaps the fullest manifestation of his war theology in its most startling and explicit form. He delivered that address three



months after Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox. *The Vicarious Sacrifice, Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation*, which Bushnell authored in 1866, offers insight into Bushnell's heterodox understanding of the Christian atonement and the forgiveness of sins—the central theme of the Christian faith.<sup>23</sup>

On the eve of civil war, an Ohio newspaper reported that an English clergyman in Halloway, England, had been “detected in preaching the sermons of Rev. Dr. Busnell [*sic*], from the published volumes [in the United States].” Such practice cannot be considered atypical of the age, but it does give some indication of Bushnell's popularity, which by 1860, spanned an entire ocean. The New Englander's rhetoric and theology had not fallen on deaf ears. Bushnell's legacy and popularity endured beyond the war years. He was well received even in California (California College offered Bushnell its presidency in the minister's later and more infirm years), and an obituary appeared in the *Daily Evening Bulletin* of San Francisco praising Bushnell for his vast literary accomplishments and theological views “in advance of the theologians of his times.”<sup>24</sup> Bushnell, who like his contemporaries believed “with all his mind and heart in the doctrine of progress,” redefined the articulation of the traditional Christian message and succeeded to such a degree that scholars struggle to determine the validity of his evangelical label.<sup>25</sup> Like other persons of his day, Bushnell operated in “an age of

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<sup>23</sup> For a more dedicated study of Bushnell's views on slavery and race, see David Torbett, *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006); Horace Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice: Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1866).

<sup>24</sup> *The Daily Cleveland Herald* (Cleveland, OH), 28 July 1860, Issue 178, Col. C; Robert Lansing Edwards, *Of Singular Genius, Of Singular Grace: A Biography of Horace Bushnell* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1992), 196; *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), 18 February 1876, Issue 115, Col. B.

<sup>25</sup> *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, 495; Johnson, *Redeeming America*, 23.

increasing doubt.” Though the seeds for this doubt were sewn much earlier, the fruit of those seeds matured in full as the Sectional Crisis reached its high gear. During the Civil War Era—indeed, even more so than at the turn of the nineteenth century—“Self-consciousness became the oracle of religious truth,” and theologians sought relevant and dynamic theologies.<sup>26</sup> The first portion of this research will explore those currents that resulted in the creation and outworking of Bushnell’s dynamic war theology. Two ideas that formed the pillars of that belief—Bushnell’s understanding of America’s place as a “City Upon a Hill” in the eyes of God and man, indeed, its status as God’s chosen nation, and his complicated understanding of God’s incarnation and the meaning of Christ’s atonement—merit extensive coverage in their own right. One chapter will explore each theme.

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<sup>26</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” *Church History* 24, No. 3 (September, 1955): 268-9.

## Part I

### Bushnell and the New England Calvinist Tradition

*“He had sunk deep in the slough of skepticism, and when he emerged, he did not return to that which plunged him into it. He had been delivered by his heart, and henceforth he was to be guided by his heart...From the first he had been an alien to the star of Edwards. He was not born under its star, nor did he serve in its house except as by chance.”*

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Horace Bushnell was remembered by one observer at the turn of the twentieth century as the beau ideal of the New England temperament and as the greatest American theologian of the fifty years prior. He entered this world in 1802 in Litchfield County, Connecticut—“precisely that part of Connecticut in which one would choose to be born if he is to be born in Connecticut”—to parents who labored for their bread by carding and weaving wool. Bushnell’s youth, “the best kind of a New England youth, which [was] the best youth in the world,” offered an ideal setting for a budding giant but simultaneously failed to foreshadow, in totality, Bushnell’s future greatness.<sup>1</sup> His humble and pastoral origins offered a stark contrast to the influential career to which the Congregationalist theologian ascended in the most tumultuous years of the American republic.

Bushnell remembered fondly his days in Litchfield and delivered a beautiful defence of the rural, pastoral life at the Centennial Celebration of Litchfield County 14 August 1851. Invoking Homer and Moses, Bushnell painted the vocation of weaving and spinning as a noble undertaking, an art, and distinguished Litchfield as an heir of the

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin D. Mead, “Horace Bushnell: the Citizen,” reprint from the *New England Magazine*, December, 1899 (Boston, MA: 1990), 2, 3; Gary J. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 112.

very best of the New England tradition. Bushnell also reasoned that history offered grounding and meaning for a particular place. In a tenor that much resembled the address he would deliver at Yale College in 1865 to honor that college's fallen in the nation's Ordeal by Fire, Bushnell articulated a keen conviction of New England exceptionalism and the grand history that would ultimately correspond to Litchfield's hallowed soil. Place cultivated people, he reasoned, and Litchfield cultivated a grand history: "Around the honored few, here a Bellamy or a Day, sleeping in the midst of his flock, here a Wolcott or a Smith, an Allen or a Tracy, a Reeve or a Gould, all names of honor—round about these few and others like them, are lying multitudes of worthy men and women." Bushnell continued, "Under their humbler monuments, or in graves that are hidden by the monumental green that loves to freshen over their forgotten resting place; and in these, the humble but good many, we are to find the deepest, truest causes of our happy history."<sup>2</sup> From his earliest sermons and speeches, Bushnell displayed a tendency to look for meaning in history, to look for outcomes as a validation of the past. For a clergyman with romantic tendencies and one consciously descended from the Puritan tradition, this meant a very great deal, and it ultimately contributed to the manner in which Bushnell attached a moral premium to the narrative of redemptive and temporal history. When the Civil War came, God's intentions for the nation and his purposes for the war needed to mirror the scope of the conflict itself. Bushnell ultimately believed he could discern that purpose.

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<sup>2</sup> Horace Bushnell, "The Age of Homespun," delivered 14 August 1851 in Litchfield, CT, in *Work and Play: Or, Literary Varieties* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1864), 374.

In his early life he lacked education and any semblance of urban identity that might prepare him for the life of a New England intellectual. Bushnell's lack of linguistic mastery made this fact altogether obvious and painful. "I was brought up in a country family," Bushnell wrote to John T. Sewall, Professor of Homiletics at Bangor Theological Seminary later in his life, "ignorant of any but country society, where cultivated language in conversation was unknown...I had no language, and if I chanced to have an idea, nothing came to give it expression."<sup>3</sup> An education at Yale College sparked Bushnell's imagination and provided him with a keen wit and discerning mind, tools he harnessed to find fitting language for the articulation of his ideas. By the time he graduated from Yale at the top of his class in 1831, the aspiring lawyer possessed an acute awareness of his internal conflict between mind and heart concerning the nature and purpose of religion.<sup>4</sup>

"On the whole," Theodore Thornton Munger reminisced in 1899, "[Bushnell] made upon me the impression of a mind still in movement on the central theme of the Christian faith; not doubtful so far as he had discovered; yet not resting in ultimate convictions."<sup>5</sup> Munger's reflection of Bushnell casts the Congregationalist theologian in an appropriate light, for Bushnell seemed perfectly comfortable challenging the tradition of the evangelical faith in Connecticut at the acme of his career. His challenge to traditional tenets of the Christian faith came as much in the form of heterodox theological views as it did in its implicit assumption concerning the question of

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<sup>3</sup> "Horace Bushnell to John T. Sewall," in Horace Bushnell and Mary A. Bushnell Cheney ed., *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880), 208.

<sup>4</sup> Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 112-3.

<sup>5</sup> Munger, *Horace Bushnell, Preacher and Theologian*, 356.

knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Faith and theology, knowledge of the things of God, was not a static, ready-made phenomenon to which one conformed but something that could be molded and tailored to individual desire. Indeed, a mind “still in movement” and “not resting in ultimate convictions” refers not to a consistent or resolute mind or conceptualization of truth but one open to negotiating suppositions of eternal fact. Faith—and inevitably knowledge of God, or the desire for knowledge of God that faith required—seemed a fairly nebulous concept to Bushnell who, in a 1867, referred to faith as an “*explorative way of knowledge*” (emphasis added).<sup>7</sup>

The width and depth of the stream of nineteenth century evangelicalism and the spread of Enlightenment thought meant that Bushnell could harbor complex views of God and the world while assuming a mantle of cultural evangelicalism. Historians agree that most evangelicals affirmed the following ideas that sprung from the sixteenth century Reformation in Europe: the need for spiritual rebirth and a conscious decision to lead a morally upstanding life that outwardly manifested an internal transformation; the supremacy of Scripture—*sola Scriptura*—in matters of doctrinal and ecclesiastical authority; and the idea that man received his eternal salvation not by merit, but through the free gift of Divine grace, made possible by the crucifixion and resurrection of the Christ for the remission of sins.<sup>8</sup> Still, by 1861, this allowed for a rather diverse cast of

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<sup>6</sup> Bushnell’s heterodoxical view of the Atonement, outlined in *The Vicarious Sacrifice: Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation* (1866) will be explored later in this study.

<sup>7</sup> “Horace Bushnell to Unknown Recipient,” Hartford, CT, 18 April 1867 in Bushnell, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, 494.

<sup>8</sup> For an introduction into the major currents of Reformation theology, and for a concise summation of Luther’s doctrines of *sola Scriptura*, see David Bach and David C. Steinmetz ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

characters to take the evangelical stage. The Enlightenment called into question foundational theological tenets of historic Christianity. It told people not that they suffered from original sin, but that they were “possessed,” as Gordon Wood notes, “of an innate moral sense.” Such sentiments of enlightened liberalism “ate away the premises of Calvinism, indeed, of all orthodox Christian beliefs.” By 1861, America had also undergone two Great Awakenings, and each altered the complexion of religious orthodoxy in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Mark Noll regards early American evangelical thought as largely “pluralistic”: the “Augustinian piety of the Puritans” exerted forces that brought about nineteenth-century evangelicalism, but so too did Scottish philosophy. Considering the Puritan “repudiation of the natural moral sense,” these strands represented vastly disparate worldviews.<sup>10</sup> Historian Curtis Johnson identifies “formalist” and “anti-formalist” evangelicals as the dominant forces composing the movement, with Congregationalists a sub-sect of the former. Formalists, who comprised close to one-fifth of evangelical church members, tended to embrace decorous worship and an ordered ecclesiastical polity. Clergy were well-educated and represented the upper crust of white social elites.<sup>11</sup>

But the evangelicalism in New England in the antebellum years little resembled the tone of Calvinism that so dominated the Puritan cultural ethos in earlier eras.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 579. Wood offers extensive, lucid treatment on the Enlightenment and religion in the early republic from pages 576-619.

<sup>10</sup> Mark A. Noll, “Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought,” *American Quarterly* 37, No. 2 (Summer, 1985): 217-8.

<sup>11</sup> Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> “Calvinism,” for this research, refers to the Reformed tradition of John Calvin in the United States. Manifested most strongly in the Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, and orthodox Episcopalian

ends of religion to early New Englanders, a “worshipful” and “holy” life, were altogether different from the post Enlightenment understanding of religion as means to moral self-improvement. Enlightenment conceptualizations of morality exacted a price on the rigidity and overall tenor of traditional worship and faith, which believers understood as a worthy undertaking, something done for its own sake, and for the express purpose of glorifying God.<sup>13</sup> Ministers tired of the “fire and brimstone” rhetoric that so saturated Calvinist teachings sought new methods of conveying the faith to their congregations. A key figure to the Scottish Enlightenment, Hugh Blair remarked in 1783, “It is not to discuss some abstruse point, that [the minister] ascends to the pulpit; it is not to illustrate some metaphysical truth...The eloquence of the pulpit, then, must be popular eloquence.” And Harriet Beecher Stowe, like Bushnell a native of Connecticut, remarked shortly after the war that the diversification of the faith in the United States meant that good theology was good in so far as it was popular, that is, that it possessed great rhetorical appeal to the masses:

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churches, it is best defined by the articles of the Westminster Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, and the Original Thirty Nine Articles of the Anglican Church. For antiquated samples of such documents, see Marcus Dodds and Alexander Whyte ed., *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (New York: Scribner and Welford, 1881); *The Heidelberg Catechism: Containing The Principles of the Christian Religion, for which the Protestants in the Palatinate have been long persecuted by the Jesuits. Being a Summary of the same Orthodox Principles, which are taught by the Church of England, and by the Calvinists in the Churches and Schools of Prussia, Poland, Hungary, Transylvania, Holland, Swisserland, &c* (London: Corbett, 1720); Edward Harold Browne, *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles, Historical and Doctrinal* (London: John W. Parker, 1850).

<sup>13</sup> Richard Rabinowitz, *The Spiritual Self in Everyday Life: The Transformation of Personal Religious Experience in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 14; For further reflections on the relationship between the Enlightenment and moral reform, see James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 82-86.



We have Romanism and Protestantism, High Church and Low Church and no Church, contending with each other in serial stories, where each side converts the other, according to the faith of the narrator...Soon it will be necessary that every leading clergymen shall embody in his theology a serial story.<sup>14</sup>

Calvinism, to be sure, lacked the popularity common to other American ecclesiastical traditions that rejected notions of total depravity and limited atonement; its staying power in New England religious thought had, by the outbreak of war, waned considerably.

The impetus for that waning came in the years that preceded the American Revolution. Boston liberals, unsettled with the dogma of traditional Calvinism, offered a distinctly disparate articulation of New England religion by rejecting the Puritan emphasis on divine revelation and its separation from the human condition. Spearheaded by Ebenezer Gay and Jonathan Mayhew, many Bostonians came to believe, like their heterodox clergymen, in the seamless integration of the natural and the divine. "Although the christian revelation brings us acquainted with many truths besides those which the light of nature suggests," Mayhew wrote in 1749, "...the most important and fundamental duties required by Christianity are...the same which were enjoined as such under the legal dispensation; and the same which are dictated by the light of nature...God is the same in all times and places;...as mankind bear [*sic*] the same general relation to him in all times and places."<sup>15</sup> Boston liberals established a precedent

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<sup>14</sup> Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (New York: Evert Duyckinck, 1817), 288; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *My Wife and I* (New York: J.B. Ford & Company, 1871), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 139; Jonathan Mayhew, *Seven Sermons Upon the Following Subjects: Viz. The Difference Betwixt Truth and Falsehood, Right and Wrong. The Natural Abilities of Men for Discerning These Differences. The Right and Duty of Private Judgment. Objections Considered, the Love of God. The Love of Our Neighbor. The First and Great Commandment, etc...* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1748), 150.

of applying reason to revelation, a more rational worldview that afforded little room to divine encounter. As Mark Noll indicates, these theologians “exalted the human capacity for self-determination,” a tendency that earned them an Arminian label. Sydney Ahlstrom and Jonathan Carey, in their masterful history of Unitarianism, point out that these Bostonians’ “Opportunistic views about the human condition and prospects provided the most immediate point of departure from orthodoxy.”<sup>16</sup> By the turn of the nineteenth century, that departure from Calvinist orthodoxy and theological liberals’ commitment to Enlightened religion shone forth all too clearly when in 1819 William Ellery Channing spoke for ninety minutes at the ordination of Jared Sparks at Federal Street Church in Baltimore. Channing’s oration, centered on St. Paul’s exhortation to first century Romans in Thessalonica—“*Prove* all things; hold fast that which is good” (italics for emphasis)—reflected the Enlightenment commitment to reason and the expectation of an arrival at a perfect knowledge of nature and nature’s God. Channing’s sermon offered a defense for the marriage of science and Christian revelation: God “never contradicts in revelation what He teaches in his works.”<sup>17</sup> Channing’s sermon, which ultimately rejected the doctrine of the Triune God, resonated with educated Americans and emerged as progressive, Enlightened, Christian scholarship. When printed it sold more copies than any other work on the general subject since Thomas

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<sup>16</sup> Noll, *America’s God*, 139; Sydney Ahlstrom and Jonathan S. Carey, eds., introduction to *An American Reformation: A Documentary History of Unitarian Christianity* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 35.

<sup>17</sup> William Ellery Channing, “Unitarian Christianity: Discourse at the Ordination of Rev. Jared Sparks,” delivered in Baltimore, 1819, in *The Works of William E. Channing*, Vol. III (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1841), 64.

Paine's *Common Sense*. By the mid nineteenth century, "learned theological reflection" permeated American religious culture and seemed very much in vogue.<sup>18</sup>

Bushnell's own view of the Trinity did not reach such extremes, but it did challenge the boundaries of accepted orthodoxy. Biographer Howard Barnes observes that Bushnell's theological development occurred in three distinct phases, wherein he morphed from naturalism, to "soft" dualism, and, finally, to "hard" dualism. Each phase possessed a certain appeal to the disparate theological groups in New England: naturalism, of course, to Unitarians; soft dualism to the transcendentalists; and hard dualism to more conservative Calvinists.<sup>19</sup> Bushnell's personal development reflects a soul and a mind constantly in search of answers yet never contented when faced with potential solutions, a fact perhaps encouraged by his parents' early rejection of religious orthodoxy within their Methodist and Episcopalian denominations. Bushnell, who viewed church membership in his early adulthood as a merely social affair, reminisced of his youthful, intellectual restlessness thus: "I had been a church-going, thoughtful man. My very difficulty was that I was too thoughtful, substituting thought for everything else, and expecting so intently to dig out a religion by my head that I was pushing it all the while practically away. Unbelief, in fact, had come to be my element."<sup>20</sup> Not even Bushnell, who enjoyed an upbringing on a Connecticut farm and a weighty

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<sup>18</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 614.

<sup>19</sup> Howard A. Barnes, *Horace Bushnell and the Virtuous Republic* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1991), 63.

<sup>20</sup> Horace Bushnell and Mary A. Bushnell Cheney ed., *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, 32-33.

dose of Congregationalism and “much warm Christian nurture,” could escape the advancing tide of rationalism.<sup>21</sup>

From his early years Bushnell displayed a zealous distaste for Calvinist soteriology, and that intellectual dissatisfaction with Calvin’s five-fold soteriological philosophy later permeated his own theology. Remarkd one of Bushnell’s biographers, “He had sunk deep in the slough of skepticism, and when he emerged, he did not return to that which plunged him into it. He had been delivered by his heart, and henceforth he was to be guided by his heart...From the first he had been an alien to the star of Edwards. He was not born under its star, nor did he serve in its house except as by chance.”<sup>22</sup> Another biographer observes that even in the waning years of his life, Bushnell could recall listening to his father complain around the dinner table of Calvinist doctrine.<sup>23</sup> Bushnell even tended toward mysticism, a force on which he drew to further distance himself from the tradition of Jonathan Edwards.<sup>24</sup> In an effort to see beyond the doctrine of Limited Atonement, Bushnell controverted Edwards and those who believed in God’s Elect and held, enthusiastically, that Christ existed for all of mankind: One possessed the agency to “receive the very spirit and beauty of Christ himself.” “The main difficulty with us,” Bushnell told his North Church congregation in February 1848, “is to entertain a thought so high as that he is concerned to have Christ

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<sup>21</sup> Barnes, *Horace Bushnell and the Virtuous Republic*, 63.

<sup>22</sup> Munger, *Horace Bushnell, Preacher and Theologian*, 42.

<sup>23</sup> Barbara M. Cross, *Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900*, 142.

formed in us. Inspiring and glorious thought, if only we can receive it and believe in it! Open your soul to it and give it welcome,” Bushnell exhorted his congregants, “He comes to impart the divine.”<sup>25</sup> Bushnell’s new religion offered refreshment to some clergymen whose enthusiasm for the Gospel message waned with age and increasing doubt. Washington Gladden—a prolific Congregationalist minister and Social Gospel clergymen of the nineteenth century and much disheartened by the twofold emphasis on human depravity and the idea of a God who would not extend eternal joy to *all* His children—hailed the salvific effect of Bushnell’s doctrine to him, personally, when he remarked that Bushnell opened his eyes to a “moral theology” and “helped [him] to believe in the justice of God.”<sup>26</sup>

New England’s inability to come to terms on the goodness of Calvinist doctrine produced theological schism never before experienced in a region that bore such intimate cultural commonality. From 1790 to the time of the American Civil War, American Calvinism suffered multiple splits that produced a hodgepodge of diverse Protestant denominations. Yale Divinity School, opened in 1822, emerged as a citadel of Reformed thought for a “mediating revisionist orthodoxy”: the ideas that sprung from Yale forged the belief of The New Divinity, New School Protestantism, New Light Calvinism, and the New Haven Theology—similar theological strands but with diverse labels.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the years from 1822 to 1850 witnessed a New England culture reluctant

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<sup>25</sup> Horace Bushnell and Mary Bushnell Cheney, ed., *The Spirit in Man: Sermons and Selections* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 47, 43.

<sup>26</sup> American Unitarian Association, *The Unitarian Register*, Vol. 81 (Boston, MA: 1902): 1000.

<sup>27</sup> Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900*, 114.

to explore new modes of religious thinking but perfectly content to redefine and negotiate dogma. Calvinists “got down to the serious business of beating up on each other.” Boston liberalism gave way to full blown Unitarianism. The extent to which New England intellectualism ought to influence the church split New School and Old School Presbyterians.<sup>28</sup> Romantics like Horace Bushnell, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Henry Ward Beecher sought somehow to embrace a “middle way” that might rectify the Unitarian and Congregational schism. In an 1847 letter to the Boston Unitarian and Rev. Cyrus A. Bartol, Bushnell expressed his belief that one could hold to orthodoxy and, simultaneously, embrace Unitarian elements of the faith: “I consider myself to be an orthodox man, and yet I think I can state my orthodox faith in such a way that no serious Unitarian will conflict with me, or feel that I am beyond the terms of reason.”<sup>29</sup>

Onlookers doubted Bushnell’s ability to fancy evangelical orthodoxy and trendy intellectualism in equal doses; one could not, it seemed, remain Congregationalist and embrace Unitarianism outright. This did not stop Bushnell from trying more seriously to blur theological boundaries. In 1848, Bushnell published *God in Christ* much to the horror of orthodox New England Christians. While he did not explicitly reject the Trinity altogether, Bushnell did not shy away from renegotiating its idea. Drawing from his discourse delivered at Yale College in that same year, Bushnell reasoned that, in a manner similar to the way God offered miracles and the Holy Scriptures to humanity much in need of redemption, so he offered means of grasping that truth in ways that accommodated the finite condition of the human mind. Bushnell depicted the Trinity as

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<sup>28</sup> Noll, *America’s God*, 262.

<sup>29</sup> “Horace Bushnell to C. A. Bartol,” Hartford, CT, 19 July 1847 in *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, 184.

an Absolute God that existed in three disparate, *formless*, conditions. Because, as Bushnell reasoned, the human mind could not grasp the essence of any one thing sans a form with which to associate it.<sup>30</sup>

Contemporaries quickly discerned the profundity and importance of Bushnell's ideas to New England theological discourse; much like *God in Christ*, "Discourse on the Divinity of Christ" enjoyed a wide circulation and became the subject of much opinion and debate in religious journals. In April 1849, *The Monthly Religious Magazine* opined that Bushnell "reject[ed], in terms, the common Trinitarian theory, of three distinct metaphysical persons in one God." Furthermore, he rejected the theory of "Social Unity," "in which three persons covenant, consult, co-operate." The editor drew attention to yet another glaring departure from received tradition and orthodoxy in Bushnell's discourse: the theologian's perceived rejection of Christ's status as the God-man, of His divinity expressed in dual forms. In perhaps the most egregious breach of the evangelical and confessional Christian traditions, Bushnell's theory "denie[d] the received orthodox dogma of two natures in Christ, a divine and a human, one passible and the other impassible; and reduces to its intrinsic absurdity the popular fallacy that Christ suffered in his human nature, and yet wrought atonement in his divine nature."<sup>31</sup>

*The New Englander* offered another damning take on "Discourse" when it identified the work and its author as alien to the tradition of Edwards and Reformed thought in New England:

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<sup>30</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 460.

<sup>31</sup> "Dr. Bushnell's Discourse on the Divinity of Christ, Or the Incarnation," in Frederick Dan Huntington, ed., *The Monthly Religious Magazine*, IV Vol. XI (Boston, MA: Leonard C. Bowles, 1849): 183.

The most serious defect of [Bushnell's] exposition, if we understand it, is that the author does not seem to recognize the life and death of Christ in this world as having any other than the most incidental relations to the universal government of God...in seeking for a more comprehensive view, [Bushnell] has not sufficiently regarded that aspect of the atonement which the New England theory contemplates. The mission of Christ into this world had a high relation to the glory of God and to other orders in his creation. But this, in the volume before us, is not merely overlooked but treated slightly, and is spoken of as a lingering effect of astronomical theories that have disappeared from the almanacs. Thus there are many passages that are painful to the devout and not unintelligent reader.<sup>32</sup>

Religious publications aptly identified the heterodoxy of Bushnell's work, but so too did contemporary theologians. Charles Hodge, regarded by one historian as the "Guardian of American Orthodoxy," considered *God in Christ* severely problematic, effectually an "incomprehensible theological muddle" by which Bushnell "has been able to emancipate himself more completely from the teachings of the nursery, the Bible, and the Spirit."<sup>33</sup> For traditionalists like Hodge, Bushnell's flirtation with Mysticism in matters concerning revelation distanced God from his creation because it presupposed a certain ejection from human reality, calling into question the efficacy of rationality to discern real truths through the written word of God. According to Hodge, "The divine influence or operation, assumed in Mysticism, differs from the scriptural doctrine concerning the work of the Spirit...The scriptures do indeed teach that, in the moment of regeneration, the Spirit of God acts directly on the soul, but they do not inculcate any such continued direct operation as mysticism supposes." But after regeneration, Hodge continued, the Spirit worked out on humanity his sanctification through reason in

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<sup>32</sup> Timothy Dwight et al., ed., *The New Englander* VII No. XXVI (New Haven, CT: May 1849): 325.

<sup>33</sup> Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 249; Charles Hodge, *Essays and Reviews* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), 436.



connection with the Word—not, merely, through an appeal to “the esthetic principles of our nature.”<sup>34</sup> To Hodge, the end result was not a “vague ecstasy of feeling, or spiritual inebriation...but a form of life in which the illuminated intellect informs and controls the affections.”<sup>35</sup> Representative of two disparate intellectual trends in nineteenth century religious thought, Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell offer clear windows through which to view distinct branches of the Calvinist theological tradition.

After 1850, “a significant segment of traditionally Calvinist thinkers gave up on the Baconian methods that had dominated American theology through the preceding two generations in favor of more self-consciously romantic accounts of Christian belief.”<sup>36</sup> Historian Hirlie Shelton Smith observes that Bushnell set forth a theory of religious knowledge predicated largely upon German romantic idealism.<sup>37</sup> Robert Baird observes, “In constructing religion as Life, Bushnell means that the essence of religion is experiential—the experience of the Life of God in the life of man...By making religion the experience of the Life of God in the life of man, Bushnell places the locus of religion in the heart. Religion involves feeling, emotion, sentiments, experience. True religion is mystical.”<sup>38</sup> Religion, as a product purely of the will, became an outpouring of human

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<sup>34</sup> In the preface to their review of *God in Christ*, the editors speak to the importance of Bushnell’s work to the New England religious consciousness: “[Bushnell’s] ‘Three Discourses’ have excited no small attention in America, and are at present the source of much trouble to the New England Churches.” James Oswald Dykes et al., ed., *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review and Quarterly Record of Christian Literature*, Vol. II (Edinburgh and London: Johnstone and Hunter, Robert Theobald, 1853), 103.

<sup>35</sup> Hodge, *Essays and Reviews*, 447.

<sup>36</sup> Noll, *America’s God*, 263.

<sup>37</sup> Hirlie Shelton Smith ed., *Horace Bushnell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 27.

<sup>38</sup> Robert D. Baird, “Horace Bushnell: A Romantic Approach to the Nature of Theology,” *Journal of Bible and Religion*, 33 No. 3 (July, 1965): 229.

agency and desire, a manifestation and expression of the self. Thus exalted Walt Whitman, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself," in *Leaves of Grass*.<sup>39</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, the romantic impulse of self had, in no small measure, transcended a worldview and become a religion.

Bushnell, according to philosophers Henry Nelson Weiman and Bernard Eugene Meland, "gave force to the intuitive approach to religious truths."<sup>40</sup> Bushnell gave force to intuition through his high esteem of imagination, a faculty of the mind which he considered as essential to sound theology as the method of rationality. Imagination complemented and superseded rationality because, as in the case of a rational assertion of the metaphysical Trinity, for example, assertions were difficult to prove. In light of these profound metaphysical questions, Bushnell reasoned that God offered the Gospel message purely as a gift to the "Human Imagination." In a passage that illuminates Bushnell's towering intellect in matters related to, but not purely theological, the preacher comments:

[The Gospel] offers itself first of all and principally to the interpretative imaginings and discernings of faith, never, save in that manner, to the constructive processes of logic and speculative opinion. It is, in one sense, pictorial; its every line or lineament is traced in some image or metaphor, and by no possible ingenuity can it be gotten away from metaphor; for as certainly as one metaphoric image is escaped by a definition, another will be taken up, and must be, to fill its place in the definition itself.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia, PA: Rees Welsh & Co., 1882), 29.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Nelson Weiman and Bernard Eugene Meland, *American Philosophies of Religion* (New York: Willett, Clark and Company, 1936), 43.

<sup>41</sup> Baird, "Horace Bushnell: A Romantic Approach to the Nature of Theology," 230; Bushnell, "Our Gospel a Gift to the Imagination," in *Building Eras of Religion* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1881), 252; for various dissertations concerning Horace Bushnell and romanticism, see Mildred Kitto Billings, "The Theology of Horace Bushnell Considered in Relation to that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge" (unpublished PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1960); Irving Henry Bartlett, "The Romantic Theology of Horace Bushnell" (unpublished PhD diss., Brown University, 1952); and Tzu-Lun Tsai, "Preaching as

Bushnell's discourse on the meaning of language, a theme prevalent in *God in Christ*, did little to place him in the safety net of theological orthodoxy but established him as a theological dreamer who questioned the literalness and inerrancy of Scripture. As a "man in the middle," Bushnell held (albeit loosely) to vestiges of orthodoxy while pioneering a new romantic theology for nineteenth century America Christians who "began to speak the language of metaphysics."<sup>42</sup> With the emphasis Bushnell placed on imagination, his mode of discovery and experience more closely resembled the transcendentalist, who believed he could understand all that *is* by receiving the direct breath of God, and believed that only when one understood God free and apart from the shackles of traditional religious form could the soul experience liberation.<sup>43</sup>

### \*\*\* Taking Stock \*\*\*

Not surprisingly, the Congregationalist Church thought much of its chief spokesman as it reflected upon Bushnell's contribution to Civil War Era evangelical thought in 1920. In delineating the very things that made Bushnell revolutionary, the Fourth International Congregational Council reveals the nineteenth-century church's discontinuities from orthodox thought common to that age. Bushnell seemed to them and to his contemporaries "the original and constructive mind in whom the New Theology took shape. He was the pioneer of the new era, daring, vital, spontaneous,

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"Testimony, Publication, Prophesying": A Study of Horace Bushnell's Preaching and Homiletics in Light of His Religious Experience, 1833-1876" (PhD diss., Drew University, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Catherine L. Albanese, "Horace Bushnell Among the Metaphysicians," *Church History*, 79 Vol. 3 (September, 2010): 619, 620.

<sup>43</sup> Conrad Cherry, *Nature and Religious Imagination: From Edwards to Bushnell* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1980), 179-80.

mystical yet rational...next to Edwards our greatest theologian.”<sup>44</sup> Biographer Theodore Munger took up a similar cry when he marveled at Bushnell’s desire to prove all things, even theological tenets held by most New England churches as fundamental to religious conviction. Busnell “questioned the prevailing orthodoxy at all points—inspiration, regeneration, trinity, atonement, miracles,” to such an extent that he found himself in danger of heresy charges in 1850.<sup>45</sup> Though Hartford Congregationalists never condemned Bushnell as a heretic in the church, his legacy of theological heterodoxy endures to such a degree that a recent historian of American thought considers Bushnell a transcendentalist minister.<sup>46</sup>

A loosened and popular theology reflected the toll exacted on orthodox Christianity by growing unbelief, Enlightenment thought, and a growing discontent with the Calvinist tradition of Puritan New England. A nineteenth-century, enlightened, United States—one bent on rooting the Christian tradition and the authority of the Church in the innate goodness of human reason and science—created a culture in which, according to one historian, “intellectual doctrine gave way to a simpler affectionism” and manifested itself “in evangelical religion, in liberal sentimentalism, and in mass revivalism.” “It is scarcely an exaggeration to say,” historian Henry Steele Commager wrote in 1950, “that during the nineteenth century...religion prospered

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<sup>44</sup> Truman J. Spencer ed., *Volume of Proceedings of the Fourth International Congregational Council: Held in Boston, Massachusetts, June 29-July 6, 1920* (New York: the National Council of the Congregational Churches of the United States, 1921), 254.

<sup>45</sup> Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, 189, 190.

<sup>46</sup> William Goetzmann, *Beyond the Revolution: A History of American Thought from Paine to Pragmatism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 97.

while theology went slowly bankrupt.”<sup>47</sup> Bushnell, who like his contemporaries believed “with all his mind and heart in the doctrine of progress,” redefined the articulation of the traditional Christian message and succeeded to such a degree that scholars struggle to determine the validity of his evangelical label.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, like other persons of his day, Bushnell operated in “an age of increasing doubt.” Though the seeds for this doubt were sewn much earlier, the fruit of those seeds matured in full as the sectional crisis reached its high gear. During the Civil War Era—indeed, even more so than at the turn of the nineteenth century—“Self-consciousness became the oracle of religious truth,” and theologians like Bushnell sought relevant and dynamic theologies to discern the will of God in the carnage wrought by armies North and South.<sup>49</sup>

The dynamism of Bushnell’s theology in the years before the war created a romantic worldview that permeated his outlook on the political events of the mid nineteenth century and transcended matters theological and metaphysical. His conceptualization of progress held out for an eventual triumph of beauty, faith, and reason, a world in which a culmination of the arts and sciences might, in the words of one American Revolutionary character, “begin the world over again.”<sup>50</sup> He believed firmly that education possessed that distinct ability, and the tie that bound Bushnell’s

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<sup>47</sup> David S. Reynolds, “From Doctrine to Narrative: The Rise of Pulpit Storytelling in America,” *American Quarterly* 32, No. 5 (Winter, 1980): 480; Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950), 165.

<sup>48</sup> *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, 495; Johnson, *Redeeming America*, 23.

<sup>49</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” *Church History* 24, No. 3 (September, 1955): 268-9.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America* (Philadelphia: W. and T. Bradford, 1776), 87.

religious thought to his total understanding of progress and education proved so strong that Bushnell had the opportunity to deliver a series of lectures in San Francisco from 1856 to 1858. Ultimately, Bushnell enjoyed the privilege of choosing the location for what would become Berkeley University in the hills that overlook San Francisco Bay. He also received an invitation to serve as the university's first president, an offer he ultimately refused in order to be nearer his Hartford congregation.<sup>51</sup>

The views that Bushnell held of the American nation during the time of the Civil War—indeed, his understanding of the meaning of the war itself—bear an interesting relationship to his romanticized view of progress and the role of the United States in the world. The story about the founding of Berkeley College, a situation closely related to Bushnell, and the man for whom the college is named share an intimate intellectual thread: both George Berkeley and Bushnell believed in the idea of the West and in America's role in redemptive history. While Berkeley could not have envisioned the carnage of the American Civil War, he did nonetheless perceive a rising high culture in America. And for Bushnell, this high culture, from its arts and sciences to its religion and political institutions, represented the culmination of something grand. Though an unabashedly heterodox Congregationalist, Bushnell inherited a good deal of the Puritan intellectual tradition, and with that tradition, a firm belief in the United States' status as a shining "city on a hill." Like Berkeley, Bushnell seemed to revel in the idea of America

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<sup>51</sup> Mead, *Horace Bushnell: The Citizen*, 10-11.

as the culmination of the westward movement of empire: “Time’s noblest offspring” would be the American nation—even if to achieve such status it required a civil war.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> George Berkeley, “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America,” in Alexander Campbell Fraser ed., *The Works of George Berkeley*, Vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871), 232.

## Part II

### Imminatizing the Eschaton, God's Controversy with the United States, And the Coming of War

*"There will be less and less need of government, because the moral right of what we have is felt; and as what we do as right is always free, we shall grow more free as the centuries pass, till perhaps even government itself may lapse in the freedom of a righteousness consummated in God."*

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The troubling question of slavery, to be sure the primary cause of the war, went hand in hand with another fundamental—indeed, even religious—conviction: a belief that the United States stood, in the words of Scripture and one of Bushnell's Puritan forefathers John Winthrop, as a "City on a Hill." Bushnell's "constant refuge was in the Puritan spirit and in the companionship of the founders of New England and of the republic," and he exhibited much like his Puritan ancestors the tendency to understand moral initiatives in politics as essential to well-ordered society.<sup>1</sup> In the New England mind, a well ordered society purged of moral ills might accelerate the arrival of the millennium and Christ's Second Coming, which would signal the destruction of national sin and the triumph of progress.<sup>2</sup> "A day will come," Bushnell remarked in *A Discourse on the Moral Tendencies and Results of Human History*, "when the dominion of ignorance and physical force, when distinctions of blood and the accidents of fortune will cease to

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<sup>1</sup> Mead, *Horace Bushnell: the Citizen*, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Of Millennialism the fusion of Christian morality with matters political, Timothy L. Smith observes "Millennialism and perfectionism combined to make social radicals out of Christians reared in communities bitterly opposed to Jeffersonian republicanism. This is the broader religious context which makes understandable the Biblical and perfectionist basis of the thought of William Lloyd Garrison and the evangelicals associated with him in the early years of the abolitionist crusade." "Righteousness and Hope: Christian Holiness and the Millennial Vision in America, 1800-1900," *American Quarterly*, 31 No. 1 (Spring, 1979): 21-45; For a lucid and complex reconstruction of millennialism in nineteenth century America, see James Moorhead, "Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800-1880," *Journal of American History*, 71 (December, 1984): 524-542.



rule the world. Beauty, reason, science, personal worth and religion will come into their rightful supremacy, and moral forces will preside over physical as mind over the body.”<sup>3</sup> For Bushnell, that day also represented the final cessation of war and bloodshed.

A glance into life before the Civil War reveals that Bushnell was one of many American Protestants who got to work imbuing national meaning with religious significance. Even before the American Revolution, John Adams likened America’s war for independence against Britain to the Israelites’ struggle with “the man of sin, the whore of Babylon, the mystery of iniquity.”<sup>4</sup> Historian James Moorhead writes of one Protestant clergyman who in 1848 remarked that America held the honor of guiding the world to a “millennium of republicanism.”<sup>5</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, firmly entrenched in American history and consciousness as “the little woman who wrote the book that made [the Civil War],” authored a novel in 1878 depicting Bushnell’s native Connecticut in the prewar years.<sup>6</sup> In it, she portrayed a small town Fourth of July celebration. To honor New England’s debt to Puritan religious and intellectual culture, the service began with the reading of a Puritan psalm. Next, those present sang Puritan hymns.

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<sup>3</sup> Horace Bushnell, *A Discourse on the Moral Tendencies and Results of Human History*, delivered 16 August 1843 before the Society of Alumni at Yale College (New Haven, CT: T.H. Pease, 1843), 29.

<sup>4</sup> John Adams and Charles Francis Adams ed., *The Works of John Adams*, Vol. III (Boston: Charles Little & James Brown, 1851), 453.

<sup>5</sup> B.F. Telft, “Progress of Society,” *Ladies Repository*, 8 (June 1848): 186 in James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 5; Historian Nathan Hatch considers the Protestant millennial expectation of eminent importance to the New England republican tradition, and notes its religious—not merely ideological—influence in *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 139-75.

<sup>6</sup> Cindy Weinstein, *The Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

Worship culminated with a prayer, in which Dr. Cushing gave thanks to God for the peculiar and conspicuous mercy shown New England from the first. He prayed, also, for the “glorious future of the United States of America—that they might be chosen vessels, commissioned to bear the light of liberty and religion through all the earth and to bring in the great millennial day.” On that day, “wars [would] cease and the whole world, released from the thralldom of evil, [would] rejoice in the Light of the Lord.”<sup>7</sup>

Perspectives on the millennium inevitably affected how New England Protestants examined contemporary issues. It also affected their perspectives of history. Emphases on eschatological ideas wove together themes of national election, covenant with God, and the Old Testament jeremiad.<sup>8</sup>

The Puritan tradition inherited by Bushnell and other New England Evangelicals put a premium on moral immediacy and emphasized a monocultural nation in which individual responsibility before God became subjugated to corporate accountability. With the weakening of orthodox doctrine in New England mind came an emphasis on the idea that man could will salvation, that human choice affected matters eternal.<sup>9</sup> New

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<sup>7</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Pogonuc People: Their Lives and Loves* (New York: Fords, Howard & Hulbert, 1878), 196-7.

<sup>8</sup> Moorhead, *American Apocalypse*, xi; Moorhead effectively synthesizes a great deal of scholarly literature on Millennialism and the idea of America as a Redeemer Nation, but for individual studies on millennialism more generally and its effect on moral and social reforms, see Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role*; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973); Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Winthrop S. Hudson ed., *Nationalism and Religion in America: Concepts of American Identity and Mission* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970); Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (UK: Gollancz, 1966); and Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1957).

<sup>9</sup> In his essay on religion and the collapse of the Union, historian Eugene Genovese observes, “Christian orthodoxy remained strong in the North as well as in the South, but with an impressive difference. In the North, the orthodox were fighting a rear-guard action against a rising tide of theological

England fascination with moral reform meant, however, that individual piety lacked ultimate effectiveness. In the words of one historian, “to be active in one’s salvation meant also to be active in the world.”<sup>10</sup> The Puritans instilled in New England a profound sense of power and action, something that enabled abolitionists like Theodore Parker to speak of a New England moral exceptionalism and capacity of action “such as no people before our time ever had.”<sup>11</sup> With such a tradition came also a heightened expectation of immediate purity. The Christ, to whom the Puritan religious tradition pointed, exhorted his followers in his Sermon on the Mount to keep the law and bring about positive change. This represented a significant step in the redemptive Puritan narrative of history in America: while seventeenth-century New Englanders looked to the Old Testament to establish their mission and “errand into the wilderness,”—one historian observes, “No truth is more patent in American history than the fact that this nation is an Old Testament people”—their descendants of the nineteenth century hearkened to the New Testament and Christ’s exhortation—“Be ye perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”—as the consummation and fulfillment of national purpose.<sup>12</sup> Historian John L. Thomas’s observation, “the key doctrine of the moral

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and ecclesiastical liberalism.” Genovese also affirms that nearly every study of New England religious thought in the prewar years shows a precipitous retreat from Trinitarian thought. Eugene Genovese, “Religion and the Collapse of the American Union,” in Randall M. Miller et al. ed., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 77; see also Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

<sup>10</sup> George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 131.

<sup>11</sup> Theodore Parker quoted in Susan-Mary Grant, *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 54-5.

<sup>12</sup> Edward McNall Burns, *The American Idea of Mission: Concepts of National Purpose and Destiny* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1957), 11.

reformers was perfectionism—the belief in the ultimate perfectibility of man and society,” illuminates further the fervor with which New Englanders sought to ready the world for Christ’s Second Coming.<sup>13</sup>

Decades of westward expansion and the acquisition of vast territories kept questions of slavery, the millennium, and national destiny centered in the spotlight; in the words of one historian, “America’s manifest destiny to overspread the continent became its manifest destiny finally to face the issue of slavery.”<sup>14</sup> Put another way, the task of reconciling America’s awkward “Peculiar Institution” and its national identity as a nineteenth century Israel chosen by God to bring about human and moral progress predated the Secession Crisis. In its attempt to face the question of slavery and national identity the country looked consistently to evangelical Christians, a tradition begun even before the rise of Jacksonian Democracy. James Monroe, in his presidency, understood that the evangelical voice in the perceived “Era of Good Feelings” bore great influence on sentiments of sectional unity. Americans educated in the tradition of Montesquieu and the Scottish philosophers sensed the danger posed to a free and burgeoning republic by the expansion of slavery. The institution exposed to

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<sup>13</sup> John L. Thomas, “Antislavery and Utopia,” in Martin Duberman ed., *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 246-47; McKenna’s chapter entitled “The Holy War” is one of the finest stand-alone chapters on the Puritan millennial and religious impetus that moved New England towards civil war (McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism*, 128-63); Even more mainstream New England Protestants embraced a Unitarian understanding of perfectionism, moral reform, and the millennium articulated most forcefully by William Ellery Channing: the “One great principle” of Christianity was that God intended, “to perfect the human soul; to purify it from all sin...” William Ellery Channing, “The Essence of the Christian Religion,” in Channing, *The Perfect Life: In Twelve Discourses* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1888), 141. See Smith, “Righteousness and Hope: Christian Holiness and the Millennial Vision in America, 1800-1900”: 23 (“preachers...scattered from Maine to the Mississippi River, affirmed that the ethical renewal of persons was a prerequisite to social righteousness”).

<sup>14</sup> Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, xiv.

evangelicals and “to anyone not blinded by its power and profitability” an embarrassingly painful inconsistency with the founding principles of the United States. Slavery seemed to slip through the cracks of the national consciousness after the Missouri Compromise, only to reemerge in the Whig-Democrat schism of the 1840s and the controversy surrounding the Mexican War. But antislavery sentiment remained strong. By 1823, the currents of evangelicalism and anti-slavery reform that held sway in Britain garnered strength in the United States, too. Long before the United States’ war with Mexico, Northerners held to the belief that “all of history constituted a continuation of the biblical narrative, that God still acted in history, and that nations would be called to judgment for their sins just as individuals would, and that slavery constituted the nation’s most malignant and injurious sin.”<sup>15</sup>

During eras of political and social upheaval, and especially when moral questions as divisive as slavery became the subject of debate, Evangelical ministers exerted great influence on the young nation’s citizens and their conceptualizations of national purpose. In the South, ministers accounted for nearly half of all proslavery tracts published before the war.<sup>16</sup> Naturally, this did not occur independently of the voluminous literature and prolific preaching of antislavery doctrine in the North. Historian Daniel J. Boorstin observes that as a result of the Judeo-Christian world of the Colonial period, rhetoric and oratory possessed great power. “The spoken word...had a

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 27, 179, 233-4; for further reading on the forging of the American nation and Evangelical-American identity, see Lawrence J. Friedman, *Inventors of the Promised Land* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975).

<sup>16</sup> Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), xiii.

peculiarly prominent place in America. The Puritans had put the pulpit in place of the altar; their great utterances were sermons. As the nation struggled into self-consciousness, the orator...acquired a mythic role.”<sup>17</sup> In an age of heightened communications, the diffusion of political speeches and religious sermons allowed for a vast and diverse cast of orators to reveal God’s design for the young American nation. When oratory became imbued with religious meaning, it became a useful tool in revealing God’s will for the United States. By 1860, the public favored explicitly Christian and republican sentiments to such an extent that the boundary between church and state had become considerably blurred.<sup>18</sup>

Bushnell’s political preaching dates to 1835, when he delivered a pointed and acerbic sermon on the nature of slavery and its condition as a national sin. Bushnell, according to Dr. Theodore Thornton Munger, a pupil of Horace Bushnell and the clergyman’s leading biographer of the late nineteenth century, “held to the Puritan conception of the state as moral, and did not hesitate to use his pulpit to enforce this conception and to denounce any departure from it. The antislavery movement was so distinctly Christian that we would not keep it out of his pulpit.”<sup>19</sup> In 1844, Bushnell targeted the Missouri Compromise as a source of national transgression before the Almighty, but not before issuing a penitent declaration, of sorts, for all the nation’s sins.

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: the National Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 308.

<sup>18</sup> Since the Revolution, “the American denominations that expanded most rapidly were the ones that most successfully presented themselves as both traditionally Christian and faithfully republican.” After 1860, “between a third and two-fifths of Americans were members of churches”; the “rate of adherence—of people participating regularly in church life—was probably double the rate of membership.” Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 23, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, 60-1.

As a patron of the Missouri Compromise, Henry Clay incurred God's wrath and bore, in Bushnell's estimation, much of the nation's guilt.<sup>20</sup> In "Politics Under the Law of God," Bushnell forced listeners to examine more closely their government's conduct towards Native Americans. In recounting the nation's sins, Bushnell identified a common causation: "We violated," he asserted, "our most solemn treaties and pledges." With words that hearkened to the Puritanical conceptualization of the mystical relationship God chose to enjoy with New England (articulated most forcefully by Michael Wigglesworth who, after a seventeenth century New England drought and the region's ensuing plight for survival, wrote of God's "controversy with New England"), Bushnell declared that, in light of the nation's transgressions, "If there was a just God in heaven, he could not be with us."<sup>21</sup>

Slavery and government policy toward the Native Americans in Florida had upon the American nation a similar effect in the middle of the nineteenth century. Inevitably, national sins and perceived deficiencies of common grace called into question the strength, quality, and purpose of God's relationship with his people. Wigglesworth's words, "Our temp'rall blessings did abound: / But spirituall good things / Much more abounded, to the praise / Of that great King of Kings. / God's throne was here set up; here was / His tabernacle pight: / This was the place, and these the folk / In whom he

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<sup>20</sup> Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, 61.

<sup>21</sup> Bushnell, "Politics Under the Law of God," in Mead, *Horace Bushnell: the Citizen*, 15; Michael Wigglesworth, *The Day of Doom: Or, A Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment, With Other Poems* (New York: American News Company, 1867), 9; Wigglesworth, "God's Controversy With New England," in Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel*, 42-53; for further reading on the Puritan intellectual tradition and the idea of New England as a "City on a Hill," see Larry Witham, *A City Upon a Hill: How Sermons Changed the Course of American History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008); and Richard Gamble, *In Search of the City on a Hill: the Making and Unmaking of an American Myth* (London: Continuum, 2012 [forthcoming]).

took delight,” spoke to the love and mission to which God had called New England (and, in the eyes of New Englanders, the United States). The result, fittingly, was prosperity and security: “Our morning starrs shone all day long: / Their beams gave forth such light, / As did the noon-day sun abash, / And’s glory dazzle quite. / Our day continued many yeers, / And had not night at all: / Yea many thought the light would last, / And be perpetuall.” But slavery, like the plague, challenged the ability of God’s people to perceive and discern the meaning of God’s work, and “The air became tempestuous; / The wilderness gan [*sic*] quake: / And from above with awfull voice / Th’ Almighty thundering spake.”<sup>22</sup> Because the Congregationalist minister and theologian interpreted America’s relationship with the Almighty as a rather open-ended and organic one—in the words of one historian, “the national covenant with God was never for Bushnell a *fait accompli*. It was an ideal that had been only partially realized”<sup>23</sup>—the “quaking wilderness” and the “thundering” voice of God in the turbulent sectional crisis held even greater power, for they meant that the age-old covenant between the nation and their Jehovah hung by a thread.

To Bushnell and evangelicals of the age, a fusion of Christianity and republicanism held the power to save the nation from impending disaster and redeem the world. Ministers bore special responsibility to ensure that the nation returned to God and that morality and virtue flowed from political discourse. “It is the solemn duty of the ministers of religion to make their people feel the presence of God’s law

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<sup>22</sup> Wigglesworth, “God’s Controversy With New England,” in Cherry, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Conrad Cherry, “The Structure of Organic Thinking: Horace Bushnell’s Approach to Language, Nature, and Nation,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 40 No. 1 (March, 1972): 14.



everywhere,” Bushnell declared in 1844, “and especially where the dearest interests of life, the interests of virtue and religion, are themselves at stake. This is the manner of the Bible. There is no one subject on which it is more full than it is in reference to the moral duties of rulers and citizens.”<sup>24</sup> Despite the admonitions of early Church fathers to adherents to refrain from political activism, and despite the fact that Christ himself essentially created the Church-state problem of which St. Augustine of Hippo wrote in 413 AD—“render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s”—evangelical churches in America, North and South, were by the nineteenth century eminently political.<sup>25</sup> Historian George M. Frederickson observes, “the conflict over slavery and the Union in the 1850s and 1860s gave the clergy and the churches a new opening for the extension of an ecumenical Protestant influence into the affairs of state.”<sup>26</sup> Slavery, a corporate sin, required atonement and penance because, in the nineteenth century Evangelical mind, God’s work in the world required the work of nations—and of the United States God required a pure and blameless national character.

On Thanksgiving Day, 24 November 1861, Bushnell delivered a sermon that crystallized his views of government by divine appointment. Bushnell selected the words of Jeremiah chapter thirty, verse twenty-one, to preach to his congregants: “And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of

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<sup>24</sup> Bushnell, “Politics,” in Mead, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Saint Augustine of Hippo, Vernon J. Bourke, and Etienne Gilson, *The City of God* (New York: Random House, 1958), 20; for a fine biography of St. Augustine, see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); Matthew 22:21.

<sup>26</sup> George M. Frederickson, “The Coming of the Lord: Northern Protestant Clergy and the Civil War Crisis,” in Miller et al, ed., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 98.

them and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord." Bushnell took the occasion to acknowledge the issuing of the nation's first coin with a religious motto—"In God We Trust"—and those delegates who met in Philadelphia, that very day, for the express purpose of drafting an amendment to the United States Constitution that would allow for a direct mention of God. A reading of the Jeremiah passage reveals how literally Bushnell and other Yankees applied Biblical Old Testament language to their circumstance. The words of Jeremiah thirty, verse twenty-one formed for New England a kind of "American scripture," which proved all too clearly God's willingness to draw toward His people if they sought his will. It constructed a connection between American Federalism and Old Testament Hebrew government, and it presupposed an intimate relationship between God and His will and the practical working-out of human affairs. Implied from Bushnell's use of the Jeremiah passage is the reality that God would draw near to New England—perhaps even the nation's leader, Abraham Lincoln—just as He honored His covenant with His Old Testament people. The great tragedy wrought on the nation through civil war provided evidence to Bushnell of the crowning of popular government with divine grace: "we are now come to the final establishment of our government in those religious sentiments and ideas," Bushnell declared, "which are at once the deepest bases and highest summits of a genuine state authority." The establishment of a religious government revealed, the Connecticut theologian and preacher claimed, "the true meaning" of the horrible war. In the historical trajectory of the American nation, the Civil War represented the full consummation of religious sentiment and political institutions. Through the selection of Jeremiah thirty and the

use of the Old Testament biblical metaphor, Bushnell arrived at conclusions that made the United States a preeminent people before God on a crusade for righteousness.

The coming of civil war also offered to Americans, Bushnell opined, a window into the process of history through which the hand of God was sure to reveal itself. This process began in the American Revolution, when patriots felt the God-inflicted sting of British oppression—a sense that a mother nation hundreds of miles away held the power to deprive them of a national destiny.<sup>27</sup> Throughout this historical process Bushnell looked for American identity in the form of nationalism. What Bushnell sought in his imagined “historical process” he manifested daily: a “passionate,” even “fanatical” zeal for a distinctly New England brand of American identity.<sup>28</sup> Because God worked to suffuse government with morality and grace, citizens bore the responsibility to conform their affairs to an eternal standard. This idea, with its emphasis on mutual covenanting and compact, formed the thrust of Bushnell’s interpretation of the Jeremiah passage and informed his conviction that political inquiry revolved around a continual search for the true, the good, and the beautiful; government did not exist merely to order life, liberty, and political economy. Through war, the nation might, in the language of Jeremiah thirty, “draw near” in a blessed relationship with Providence and better effect His purposes.

Bushnell would ultimately proclaim the triumph and glory of American republicanism. In his estimation the war forged a Union so strong it could help usher in

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<sup>27</sup> Horace Bushnell, “Popular Government by Divine Right,” 286-95.

<sup>28</sup> Niven, *Connecticut for the Union*, 275.

the millennium. The new American nation, the product of a great and holy war, provided a profound hope for the future of governments and mankind:

There will...be a great and sublime progress in character begun. There will be less and less need of government, because the moral right of what we have is felt; and as what we do as right is always free, we shall grow more free as the centuries pass, till perhaps even government itself may lapse in the freedom of a righteousness consummated in God.<sup>29</sup>

With confidence he articulated, albeit implicitly, his power to discern the deeper meaning of America's crisis. Bushnell exclaimed, "*Nothing can be so evident* as that we are now in a way to have our free institutions crowned and consummated" (italics for emphasis). Historian William Clebsch observes, "Bushnell came to understand the war in its deepest meaning as the episode of creation of a true American nation...an organism called into being by God for the people even before the Declaration of Independence." Yet the American "nation" needed "actualization": Americans North and South needed to formulate a "collective response to the vocation, response cherishing a national tradition as a gift of God and response exemplifying itself in law, literature, government and other organically interrelated forms."<sup>30</sup> The American path to nationhood contained, in Bushnell's estimation, certain road marks where the will of God for the American people had been made manifest but not honored. Before the American Revolution, in the issuing of the *Declaration of Independence*, colonists "heard the call to nationality" but failed to deliver on its promise: "The going was grand, but the doctrine of the doing was eminently crude." The glaring inconsistency of the South's insistence on the totality and perpetuity of slave doctrine—manifested chiefly in the life

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<sup>29</sup> Bushnell, "Popular Government by Divine Right," 318.

<sup>30</sup> Clebsch, "Christian Interpretations of the Civil War": 216.

of the Sage of Monticello—hindered the creation of a true American state at the time of the Revolution.<sup>31</sup> It was a remarkable fact of the Revolution, Bushnell pointed out, that after the war ended and Britain recognized American independence, the independent American states adapted not a constitution but the Articles of Confederation, which served merely to harness the states and encourage cooperation, not forge a national character.<sup>32</sup>

By 1864, Bushnell viewed the prospect of true nationhood as more attainable than in previous points of the country's history. The Philadelphia Convention did not, in Bushnell's estimation, achieve nationhood. And slavery—which went hand in hand with states' rights doctrine—had prevented true national unification. After devoting nearly two pages of his exhortation to trashing the states' rights doctrine perpetuated by John C. Calhoun, Bushnell extolled in "Popular Government by Divine Right" the grand and God-filled history of the American people: "There was never a finer way of government for a people than God has given us...the whole shaping of the fabric is Providential. God, God is in it, everywhere. He is the Founder before the founders..."<sup>33</sup> America's status in the world, Bushnell prophesied, would endure because of the special favor God bestowed on the American nation through a sanctified republican government: "Our whole civil order is the ordinance of God saturated all through with flavors of historic religion, sanctioned every way by the sanction, and sanctified by the indwelling concourse of God." Bushnell sensed that God intended "to give us finally the most

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<sup>31</sup> Clebsch, "Christian Interpretations of the Civil War": 216; Bushnell, "Popular Government by Divine Right," 295.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>33</sup> "Popular Government by Divine Right," 310.

sacredly binding, the most indissoluble government in the world,” and that the thunder of the republic would “roll its reverberations through all [America’s] future history,” that it would be felt, “a hundred fold more deeply, long ages hence,” that Americans possessed the “strongest, firmest government in the world.”<sup>34</sup> The American government was, and always would be, an “Ordinance of God”—the nations future, glorious: “How bright,” Bushnell exclaimed at the climax of his patriotic gospel, “is the future now of such a government and nation! Hallowed by so many battle-fields [*sic*], and these by the tribute of so many histories, and sung by so many songs of the great poets of the future, how *dear*, and *sacred*, and glorious it will be!”<sup>35</sup> To Bushnell and many who endured it, the war purchased for Americans a history as remarkable as the mission to which God called their Puritan forefathers. Sanctified by fire, New England could further the legacy of the American “Errand into the Wilderness.”<sup>36</sup> Through his sermons, Bushnell furnished a framework of self-understanding by which New Englanders could conceive of their providential history, identity, and future as a Christian republic.

In January 1861, Horace Bushnell dispatched a letter to his daughter Mary Bushnell in which he welcomed the looming war. The conflict, Bushnell believed, would vindicate New England’s standing before God as morally pure and without blemish. He

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<sup>34</sup> “Popular Government by Divine Right,” 310; *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>36</sup> For a lucid and thorough backdrop on the “Errand into the Wilderness” metaphor, see Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 1-16. Miller attributes the phrase to Samuel Danforth (1626-1674), who made much of the theme in an election sermon delivered in 1650. For a brief sketch of Danforth’s life, see William Buell Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit; Or, Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of Various Denominations, From the Settlement of the Country to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-Five*, Vol. I (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1857), 138-141.

further reasoned that the war would help “to see it proved that our government is made stronger and more consolidated.”<sup>37</sup> Months later, Unionists in Connecticut wed the cause of the nation to the cause of the Union. New England intellectuals blamed the weed of secession on seeds sown by Thomas Jefferson’s distrust of a constitution that bound, in the eyes of southerners, too much power in the northern states. As Federalists, Bushnell and other outspoken Congregationalist clergymen took the opportunity to frame the secession crisis in a manner that depicted the North, “a champion of law and order and Christian civilization” as a great crusader out to conquer delinquent anarchists. Theodore Dwight Woolsey, president of Yale College at the time of the Civil War, opined that the South could not secede from the United States and maintain its honor and national morality. Significantly, Woolsey also blamed Thomas Jefferson for the problem of secession. Perhaps more importantly, however, Woolsey claimed that secession transcended treason and bore religious significance: it was *evil*.<sup>38</sup>

### **\*\*\* Taking Stock \*\*\***

Secession Winter ended and with the spring came a flourishing of Southern nationalism and a prevailing optimism for the future of the young republic, now the purer heir of the first American Revolution. But in April 1861, the newly formed government of the Confederate States of America faced an awkward and rather embarrassing problem: Confederate autonomy and nationhood seemed artificial and incomplete, rendered so by the presence of an American garrison in Charleston harbor.

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<sup>37</sup> Horace Bushnell to Mary Bushnell, 5 January 1861, in Mary Bushnell Cheney ed., *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, 443.

<sup>38</sup> Theodore D. Woolsey, “The Southern Apology for Secession,” *New Englander*, 19 (1861): 731-56; John Niven, *Connecticut for the Union: The Role of the State in the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 270-1.

Fort Sumter “stood on a man-made granite island four miles from downtown Charleston at the entrance to the bay.” Its walls measured some forty feet in height and eight to twelve feet in breadth, though this varied by location along the ramparts.<sup>39</sup> As the heart and soul of this newfound Southern patriotism, Charleston loathed the Stars and Stripes flying high atop the fort, still very much under construction and under the command of Major Robert Anderson. With the potential to hold some one hundred sixty eight cannon, the fort posed a formidable threat to Confederate commerce and naval superiority. Lincoln’s plan to resupply Sumter produced, while perhaps not an intended effect, an outcome that cast the southern states as aggressors: notified of Lincoln’s move, the Confederate cabinet convened in Montgomery, Alabama, on 9 April 1861 and reinforced Davis’s order to reduce Sumter to rubble. Before sunrise on 12 April, Confederate batteries under the command of PGT Beauregard executed Davis’s order and secured the surrender of the fort.

The fall of Sumter produced a “*rage militaire*” in the northern and southern states; cries for war swept the nation and “cut across social classes, creating a heady sense of solidarity.”<sup>40</sup> In *The Dogs of War*, historian Emory Thomas observes that at the time of the bombardment at Fort Sumter there existed citizens in the North who believed that the coming of war might be a good thing. And so the war erupted, Thomas argues, because no one man North or South had any clue as to what he was doing, and

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<sup>39</sup> Shearer Davis Bowman, *At the Precipice: Americans North and South During the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 7; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 264.

<sup>40</sup> Bowman, *At the Precipice*, 7; Joseph P. Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South: Central Georgia, 1800-1880* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 111; for a detailed synthesis of the Sumter narrative, see Steven E. Woodworth, *This Great Struggle: America’s Civil War* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 30-6; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1976), 555-83.



because those who could sense the coming national nightmare pursued a course of action at a price they thought themselves willing to pay. Newspapers North and South clamored for war. "Public and private discourse," Thomas comments, "was loud and long and wrong about what might happen if war broke out."<sup>41</sup> Few could predict the horrors of the coming years, but many proved eager to meet those horrors.

Men and women along both sides of the Mason Dixon line hastened to mete out judgment on their adversaries. Not two months following the attack on Fort Sumter, Charles Darwin wrote to Asa Gray of his desire to see the North "proclaim a crusade against slavery," even at the loss of millions of lives.<sup>42</sup> While Charles Darwin could not foresee the rivers of blood that would bathe the country in the coming years, his sentiments do validate one historian's assessment that the Civil War proved just how violent a people could become when the issue they fought over possessed significant moral value. For northerners descended of the Puritan tradition the bombardment of Fort Sumter proved calamitous because it dashed the prospect of an exceptional America, an "undivided American destiny," the "City on a Hill," against rocks.<sup>43</sup> Evangelicals who understood their Christian and American identities in purely temporal terms needed to make sense of the war's purpose and how that purpose affected their chosenness before God.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Emory Thomas, *The Dogs of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), ix.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Darwin to Asa Gray, 5 June 1861, in Francis Darwin ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin: Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, Vol. II (London: John Murray, 1887), 374.

<sup>43</sup> Cherry, *God's New Israel*, 163.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), xi.

The enduring sense that the United States held a special place in history molded questions concerning the nature of the American Union and the meaning of war. This belief seemed to garner greater strength in 1863; the deflection of Robert E. Lee's first invasion into Maryland in 1862 and the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg in July 1863 no doubt fueled New England confidence in their monocultural perception of national identity. In 1863, the president of Brown University, Barnas Sears, looked back in history beyond the Pilgrim fathers (Americans in the nineteenth century often conflated the Pilgrim and the Puritan traditions) to more distant origins of the American nation. According to Sears, the Civil War stood as a perilous and nearly immovable force in the trajectory of Protestant, national history, a trajectory that bestowed upon the United States a grand mission and purpose: "Our present remarkable condition," Sears wrote, "is owing more to the great laws of historical development than to the designs of men. The force of the accumulated wisdom and experience which moves the great mass of humanity in its progress, advances also individual nations in their career." The American government, "which may be regarded politically as the purest and truest exponent of what is peculiar to modern civilization," manifested the flourishing of Reformation Christianity and the Greco-Roman political traditions.<sup>45</sup> One Connecticut minister, with whom—according to one biographer—Bushnell stands comparison, spoke of the United States in 1863 as "a golden braid, each age furnishing its test strand, and all together combining what is best and excluding what is worst, in the experience of man." The United States of America symbolized for the rest of the world a national

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<sup>45</sup> Barnas Sears, "The Moral and Religious Value of our National Union," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 20 (January, 1863): 124-52.

seal, a sacred covenant, and its government and institutions represented the “pledge of those principles which are dearest to the heart of man.”<sup>46</sup> As Moorhead puts it, “[the New England] conception of history converted the Civil War into a crusade for Protestants.” If, under the Biblical metaphors of Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church, the United States failed to live up to its billing as the grandest nation in the history of nations, then God’s covenant with America would cease to exist, and the nation would plunge into the heart of darkness, sinking the democratic and republican aspirations of the world—whose eyes remained fixed on the “City on a Hill”—with it.<sup>47</sup>

The significance of Bushnell’s views concerning the American nation lies in the way they deviated from much of New England impulse that presupposed a national identity in the first place. While Bushnell inherited the Puritan notions of government by divine right and the need for morally pure institutions, he seems less consistent on the question of nationhood itself. In a tangled and convoluted paradox, Bushnell affirmed a monoculturally, New Englandocentric (and distinctly Puritan) view of the war and what the war meant while he simultaneously conceded to the conflict a sense of totality and agency, holding in its power the ability to forge a complete nation through physical conflict that wrought tremendous intellectual and religious strife. This shifty position enabled Bushnell in 1844, with a distinctly Puritan sense of corporate accountability to God for the progress of history, to speak of slavery as “the great curse

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<sup>46</sup> Albert Henry Currier, *The Life of Constance L. Goodell* (New York: Adison D. F. Randolph & Company, 1887), 307; C. L. Goodell, *Thanksgiving Sermon*, “Preached at the Union Service of the First and South Congregational Churches, New Britain, Conn., 26 November 1863,” pp. 5, 13 in Moorhead, *American Apocalypse*, 55.

<sup>47</sup> Moorhead, *American Apocalypse*, 55.

of this *nation*,” (italics for emphasis) but in 1865 announce that the American *nation* did not exist before the attack on Fort Sumter and the coming of war.<sup>48</sup> In the process of history, in the attempt of government to ascertain the will of God and purge society of its ills, societies might attain varying degrees of national identity. The highest form of such identity required bloodshed, and to the killology of Bushnell’s philosophy of war and nation making I now turn.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Bushnell, “Politics,” in Mead, 16.

<sup>49</sup> I here acknowledge my colleague, Mr. Jonathan Steplyk, whose research focuses primarily on Civil War soldiers’ views on killing. He helped to introduce me to “killology” as a mode of knowledge pertaining to Civil War Era study; for the origin of the concept, see Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Physiological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Backbay Books, an Imprint of Little, Brown Co., 1995).

### Part III

#### **“Without Shedding of Blood There Can Be No Remission”: Blood, the Philosophy of Killing, and the Doctrine of Atonement in Horace Bushnell’s War Theology**

*“Without the shedding of blood there is no such grace prepared. There must be reverses and losses and times of deep concern. There must be tears in the houses as well as blood in the fields; the fathers and mothers, the wives and dear children, coming into the woe to fight in hard bewailings”*

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In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah told of the wrath and fury the Lord would unleash against his enemies on the Day of Judgment: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments...For the day of vengeance is in mine heart...”<sup>1</sup> Julia Ward Howe’s conspicuous use of the passage in the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” changed the meaning of American religious history in the Civil War Era and beyond, and the five dollars she reportedly acquired for publishing her battle hymn with the *Atlantic Monthly* hardly equals the patriotic tune’s monumental effect on the American national identity.<sup>2</sup> In 1918, what proved to be the final year of the “war to end all wars,” there appeared a textbook for intermediate grades filled with the histories of various patriotic tunes. It purposed to narrate for children in schools across the nation the grand and noble tradition of their country. The “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” its authors wrote, proved

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 63: 3,4, KJV.

<sup>2</sup> “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord: / He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; / He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword: His truth is marching on.”

a great source of inspiration for Union armies throughout the war. Moreover, its legacy would endure for posterity because the great patriotism espoused by the hymn had its roots in a Protestant history of the nation that accommodated a divinely appointed national destiny: “[The Battle Hymn] justifies war when the cause is for freedom, and thus it has become a song that can never perish, being the war song of a Christian nation.”<sup>3</sup>

Howe’s “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” which drew heavily from the leitmotif of America as God’s New Israel, helped to make the war total because its language, rooted in the Old Testament narratives of covenant and judgment, reduced a complex and convoluted war to a clean war between good and evil in which one side stood arrayed for battle fortified by the moral right and the will of God.<sup>4</sup> “[It’s] words,” the philosopher and cultural critic Wendell Berry writes, “are perfectly insane. Suppose, if you doubt me, that an adult member of your family said to you, without the music but with the same triumphal conviction, ‘Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord’—would you not, out of fear and compassion, try to find help?” To Berry and many other southerners (Berry hails from Louisville, Kentucky), the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” permeated American patriotic sentiment to such an extent that it now renders, across

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<sup>3</sup> Norman Helen Deming and Katherine Isabel Bemis ed., *Stories of Patriotism: A Reader for the Intermediate Grades* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), 109.

<sup>4</sup> I reference here the oft made argument that the Civil War was a contest between a monolithic North and a monolithic South, and that each region, holding fast to common heritages and causes, could not separate the cause of its nation from individual and local interests. This resulted in a contest waged for self-evident causes and principles that compelled, in totality, the nation and its individual citizens. Wendell Berry observes, quite insightfully, “The North was not uniformly abolitionist; the South was not uniformly proslavery or even prosecession. Theirs was not a conflict of pure good and pure evil” “American Imagination and the Civil War,” in *Imagination and Place* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 28; for more detailed analyses of the divided South see William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1764-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

the nation and regardless of region, “a sort of official judgment of our history. It renders our ordeal of civil war into a truly terrifying simplemindedness, in which we can still identify Christ with military power and conflate ‘the American way of life’ with the will of God.”<sup>5</sup> This same idea flowed through the lyrics sung by zealous patriots at the dedication of the chapel of the Fifth Regiment of Wisconsin volunteers in 1864. In a manner that assumed privileged knowledge of God’s will for the war and associated the northern cause with the cause of the Christian religion, the battle cry “May we be freedom’s soldiers true, / Nor less true soldiers of the Cross” rose from the chapel.<sup>6</sup> Patriotic music of the era more generally, but the “Battle Hymn” particularly, remains one of the nation’s most enduring examples of the New England, wartime conviction that Providence, perhaps more explicitly the will of God, manifested itself in external phenomena and that, moreover, onlookers possessed the ability to discern that will and participate actively in it.

While Bushnell and his New England contemporaries looked to Christ as a model of perfection and moral immediatism, they nonetheless inherited the Jeremiad narrative of the Old Testament (as adapted by Puritan preachers of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and applied it to their religious conceptualization of history. By 1861 and the eruption of the American Civil War, New England clung to its metaphorical identity as God’s New Israel, charged with the destruction of its pagan enemies who practiced such heinous evils as human bondage. When Julia Ward Howe

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<sup>5</sup> Berry, “American Imagination and the Civil War,” 28.

<sup>6</sup> Lemuel Moss, *Annals of the United States Christian Commission* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1868), 179.

penned the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” she did not simply reinvigorate an old Biblical image for its own sake; rather, the battle hymn lent itself quite conveniently to America’s dangerous ideological divide: the North would, most assuredly, unleash its vengeance upon the South. In this process, American blood flowed through the land in amounts unmatched by any war since 1865.

The tragic origin of the American Civil War began to reveal itself in full in July of 1861, when Union forces under the command of Irvin McDowell advanced onto Virginia soil to take the war to Confederacy. Civilians gathered to witness from a distance the grand and romantic spectacle of massive armies forming and advancing in the fields around Manassas Junction, spurred on in their romantic conceptualizations of war by Christian newspapers and the press. “An army is a truly great machine,” wrote an author in the *Christian Instructor* in 1861. “A locomotive; all its varying parts, living, intelligent, and working in harmony with one another...Never has it been my lot to witness so general a display of order and strength, beauty and romance, as to-day.”<sup>7</sup> When the grand locomotive that was the Union Army fled the field at Manassas on 21 July 1861, Yankees cast their eyes to God and intensified their theological speculation on the meaning of the defeat. Because Americans of the nineteenth century largely believed that divine intervention dictated human history—observed historian Ernest Lee Tuveson “We think of the nineteenth century as the period of the triumph of natural science; but it was also the last time in history when many responsible thinkers thought of human life and history as dominated or at least strongly affected by angels and

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<sup>7</sup> *Christian Instructor and Western United Presbyterian*, 3 July 1861 in Harry Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the American Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006), 63-4.



demons”—“northerners and southerners anxiously looked for early signs of the Lord’s favor.”<sup>8</sup> Of course, Bushnell stood ready to offer his interpretation of the defeat at Bull Run. One historian considers Bushnell’s exceptionally theological statement about the meaning of the battle as “by far the most penetrating” of any contemporary explanation offered for the Union defeat.<sup>9</sup>

Just as the Christian worldview taught that adversity and trial ultimately effected sanctification in Christ, Bushnell interpreted Union defeat at Manassas as a national hiccup that, as time healed the nation’s wounds, would prove efficacious in fulfilling America’s destiny as God’s chosen nation. For his sermon, “Reverses Needed,”—delivered the Sunday following the Union’s tragic defeat—Bushnell chose a text from the book of Proverbs: “If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.”<sup>10</sup> In the opening lines of his sermon Bushnell applied the Proverbs text quite literally to national circumstance: “And the proverb holds good of all sorts of strength...that which is moral and that which is religious, that which is personal and that which is national...”<sup>11</sup> With unflinching confidence, Bushnell dismissed the defeat and the Union retreat to Washington that ensued as less calamitous than initially reported, and he further dismissed the potential political and diplomatic fall-out that might result from defeat. England and France, he reasoned, dared not interfere with the Union blockade of

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<sup>8</sup> Ernest L. Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, in McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism*, 128; George C. Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 74.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>10</sup> Proverbs 24:10, KJV.

<sup>11</sup> Bushnell, “Reverses Needed,” delivered the Sunday following the Union disaster at Bull Run, July, 1861 in Horace Bushnell and Mary Bushnell Cheney ed., *The Spirit in Man: Sermons and Selections* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 159.

southern ports. But more importantly, Bushnell spoke of the spirit with which Northerners resolved, in view of the battle's outcome, to dedicate themselves more firmly to sacrifice. The North needed to ready itself for the "grand struggle" of the coming war. Already, however, the blood shed at Bull Run served to "fuse" the North into a "complete unity." Bushnell extolled this unity jubilantly: "I know of nothing in the whole compass of human history at all comparable to it in sublimity."<sup>12</sup> Continuing in the Puritan tradition of attempting "to read a righteous sentence" in the working-out of history, Bushnell reasoned that the war came about as a result of moral and religious deficiencies in American institutions. Not unlike the Old Testament Israelites who incurred God's displeasure, Americans "[had] never been a properly loyal people," and struggled to work out the true meaning of Jefferson's language in the Declaration of Independence. Two factions struggled—like Jacob and Esau—to perpetuate their version of the American Founding. Prior to the war and throughout the great sectional controversy, Americans stripped their government of moral and religious value. In Bushnell's terms, the nation had not obeyed but speculated, "speculated almost everything away," and in the process forced the issue of whether or not a national identity existed at all. The war, for Bushnell, represented a moral struggle over religious ideas: the American people needed to decide "whether [they would] go to pieces in the godless platitudes or stand fast and live under laws and institutions sanctified by a providential history."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bushnell, "Reverses Needed," 162-3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

It seems hardly plausible that Bushnell could know in 1861 the extent to which the North and the South would “go to pieces”—quite literally—in deciding the issue of nationhood. In the process of going to pieces the nation spilt a sea of blood, and while this cannot be considered a peculiar process of war, it merits observation that Bushnell stood ready, more than willing, after the Union defeat at Bull Run to spill that blood. Bushnell viewed secession as a moral evil because he considered secession from divinely appointed government illegitimate in the eyes of God. Thus, to ensure national resolution and an eternal binding together of the nation’s regions and institutions, citizens of the United States needed to espouse a true loyalty. But such loyalty, according to Bushnell, came about only through trial—the central theme of “Reverses Needed”—and bloodshed:

True loyalty is never reached till the laws and the nation are made to appear sacred...And that *will not* be done till we have made long, weary, terrible sacrifices for it. *Without the shedding of blood* there is no such grace prepared. *There must* be reverses and losses and times of deep concern. *There must* be tears in the houses as well as blood in the fields; the fathers and mothers, the wives and dear children, coming into the woe to fight in hard bewailings. Desolated fields, prostrations of trade, discouragements of all kinds, *must be accepted* with unfaltering, unsubduable patience. Religion *must* send up her cry out of houses, temples, closets, where faith groans heavily before God.<sup>14</sup>

Bushnell possessed a shocking calm about the coming war. While many tossed aside notions of a brief and decisive war after Bull Run, rhetoric seldom tended toward total destruction. Yet to Bushnell, several fundamental points about American destiny and the Christian religion seemed self-evident: First, the doctrine of the Atonement—traditionally, the belief that Christ, being fully God and fully man, bore upon Himself the transgressions of those He came to save and imputed to those believers His

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<sup>14</sup> Bushnell, “Reverses Needed,” 179-180.

righteousness through worldly sanctification and eternal glorification—bore an intimate relationship to the war itself. To Bushnell, Christ remained the focal point of the Gospel message, but only in as much as he imparted to history an example of how mankind ought to serve others. As Christ shed his blood, so then, in 1861, it became necessary for northerners to shed theirs out of love and service and to atone for national sins.

Secondly, Bushnell's remarks illuminate the confidence with which he claimed the ability to discern the working-out of providence and history in the affairs of men. Bushnell wrote and spoke with certainty and conviction: language that makes frequent use of imperatives, i.e., "that will not be done," "there must," and "must be accepted" are religious statements in the sense that they confidently insist on the totality and assurance of a particular claim. Bushnell's undying confidence in the ability of man to discern the will of God featured in many of his addresses and sermons, and it continued in 1865 at the end of the war.

Finally, the willingness with which Bushnell welcomed the horrors of war foreshadowed long years of bloodshed and destruction. Such rhetoric trickled from religious teachings to actual battlefields, where soldiers donning both blue and grey descended into ruthless killing and atrocities.<sup>15</sup> Bushnell anticipated what numerous eminent historians of America's Civil War and warfare more generally now affirm—the

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<sup>15</sup> Stout observes, "As the war descended into a killing horror, the grounds of justification underwent a transformation from a just defensive war fought out of sheer necessity to preserve home and nation to a moral crusade for 'freedom' that would involve nothing less than a national 'rebirth,' a spiritual 'revival.' And in that blood and transformation a national religion was born." *Upon the Altar of the Nation*, xxi; for a fascinating yet horrific study of atrocities in the war, see George S. Burkhardt, *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath: No Quarter in the Civil War* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007).

war's totality, scope and destructive power, theretofore unmatched in much of western history.<sup>16</sup> While the romantic optimist might argue that the American Revolution (and perhaps even all wars that predated it) possessed elements of totality,—American patriots in the Revolution, for instance, melted pewter household items for musket balls—the totality with which the Civil War consumed the North and South reached entirely new and rather personal levels when women in the South saved family urine for the production of gunpowder. The Civil War forced upon its participants the realization of a modern, industrial age.<sup>17</sup> Bushnell's language in "Reverses Needed" called for a destructive war in both the physical and emotive senses: blood needed to

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<sup>16</sup> The bulk of Civil War military history now interprets the conflict as "limited," and not total, in its scope and overall destructive power. Historian Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh recently attempted to dispel and debunk the totality and intensity of the American Civil War, arguing that "while both the Napoleonic Wars and the American Civil War resounded in bloodcurdling rhetoric, historians have not always found actions commensurate with such grim pronouncements." "Total War and the American Civil War Reconsidered: The End of an Outdated 'Master Narrative,'" *The Journal of the Civil War Era* (September, 2011): 394-408. I opt, however, for the minority but nonetheless well evidenced view that holds the American Civil War as total, destructive, and largely industrial. Stout argues, quite convincingly, that scale and proportionality have little bearing on the quality—or *essence*—of totality, which is something that can be experienced by combatants and noncombatants regardless of era or circumstance. Total war may very well have been less *severe* in the nineteenth century—there existed no equivalents of Verdun, the Somme, Dresden, Tokyo, or Hiroshima—but citizens of the age nevertheless "experienced their war as total...If, God forbid, a total war in the twenty-first century were to claim hundreds of millions of casualties that dwarfed losses of World Wars I and II, it would not mean that the wars of the twentieth century were no longer 'total.'" Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation*, xv, xvi; James McPherson observes, "In the experience of Americans, especially Southerners...the war *seemed* total. Thus, the concept and label of total war remains apt. It is what the sociologist Max Weber called an "ideal type"—a theoretical model used to measure a reality that never fully conforms to the model." McPherson, "From Limited to Total War: Missouri and the Nation, 1861-1865," *Gateway Heritage: The Magazine of the Missouri Historical Society* (September, 1995): 4-17; see also C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 165; and David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare As We Know It* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 8, 9, 6; Drew Gilpin Faust argues forcefully that the carnage of the American Civil War foreshadowed a grim twentieth century. The war meant that "individuals threatened to disappear into the bureaucracy and mass slaughter of modern warfare." Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2009), 271.

<sup>17</sup> The Confederate use of urine in gunpowder production on the homefront features in Ken Burns, Ric Burns, and Geogfrey C. Ward, *The Civil War* (New York: Random House, 1994) and John Keegan, *The American Civil War: A Military History* (New York: Random House, 2009), 45; Berry, "Imagination and the American Civil War," 28.

cleanse fields, and not even domesticities, women and children, could remain safe from tears and the hardship of war. “Prostrations of trade,” “desolated fields,” and “discouragements of all kinds” drive home a complete and full understanding of war, taken to yet another level of totality through the pangs of “religious moanings”—by definition, grief of the heart and soul, something that possesses a distinctly spiritual dimension—which in their nature reflect man’s deepest convictions about the fundamental nature of things. Only after blood soaked the fields and the nation appeared “sacred” could citizens return to peace.

Bushnell traditionally made much of bloodshed and its use in forging a true nationhood. In 1864, he spoke of the Civil War as a crisis in which America’s government received a direct infusion of divine grace, which helped to sanctify the conflict and bring about a more perfect union, one bound together by a morally righteous government. To reach true nationhood, the country needed to endure something so calamitous as the American Civil War. By 1864, the United States had, “at last, come to the point where only blood, much blood, long years of bleeding,” could “resanctify” what the people of the United States “held so loosely” and “so badly desecrated”—a perfect, righteous, and pure national identity.<sup>18</sup> The totality and comprehensiveness with which Bushnell’s model American nation required bloodshed remains breathtaking and ghastly. To Bushnell, the extent to which Americans willingly sacrificed for national purity made the United States an *exceptional* nation in the religious sense of the term: “How certainly, again, last of all, do we consecrate or hallow any thing that we make sacrifices for! And what people of the world ever made such

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<sup>18</sup> Bushnell, “Popular Government by Divine Right,” 311.

sacrifices of labor, and money, and life, *as we have made* for the quality of our institutions?"<sup>19</sup> According to the preacher and theologian, the United States paid a price in the war worthy of its future and past glories. Blood flowed from the American treasury to purchase something eternally grand and beautiful. "Blood, blood, rivers of blood have bathed our hundred battle-fields and sprinkled the horns of our altars! Without this shedding of blood, how could the violated order be sanctified?"<sup>20</sup> Not only did bloodshed atone for the national sin of slavery—just as Christ, in the words of Howe's battle hymn, shed his blood and "died to make men holy"—it purchased a nationhood for the American people that contained a common history, common literature, common institutions, and a sense of popular unity. In the words of one historian, "...the war measurably transformed an inchoate nation, individualistic in temper and wedded to improvisation, into a shaped and disciplined nation, increasingly aware of the importance of plan and control."<sup>21</sup>

The *New Haven Palladium* proclaimed confidently on the morning of 26 July 1865 that the events of the day to come would be remembered as some of the greatest of Yale College. Roughly seven hundred Yale men who perished in the war for the cause of the Union deserved honor and reverence, and for that express purpose "Numbers of the most distinguished men of the land" received invitations for the event. The newspaper encouraged New Haven citizens to fly flags from their windows as an

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<sup>19</sup> Bushnell, "Popular Government by Divine Right," 316.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Clebsch, "Christian Interpretations of the Civil War," 217; Allan Nevins, *The War for the Union*, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1959), v; Phillip Shaw Pauladan, "Religion and the American Civil War," in Randall M. Miller et al., ed. *Religion and the American Civil War*, 28.

“eminently appropriate” gesture of New England patriotism, a hearty patriotism and perhaps the staunchest in the land. Among the day’s numerous festivities, cited the newspaper, would be an oration from the Rev. Horace Bushnell of Hartford.<sup>22</sup>

The annual meeting of the alumni of the college began at nine o’ clock in the morning on 26 July 1865. Rev. Dr. Wickham opened with a benediction, whereupon the secretary proceeded to read the roll of those Yale sons who died that year. Class members conferred upon their officers the duties and responsibilities particular to each office for yet another year (effectively extending their terms), and the meeting concluded. A procession formed in front of Graduates’ Hall, and military and naval alumni followed Noll’s Band of New York to the Centre Church, which stood so packed with spectators that even the gallery filled from end to end.<sup>23</sup> And then Horace Bushnell ascended the pulpit to honor Yale’s fallen and speak to “the fact that, according to the true economy of the world, so many of its grandest and most noble benefits [had] and [would] have a tragic origin, and [would] come as outgrowths only of blood.”<sup>24</sup>

In 1865, then, when Bushnell spoke at the campus of Yale College to honor the Yale men who fell in the war, he intensified his doctrine of bloodletting by emphasizing its importance in the creation of an epic history. This American history, indeed the theodicy of the American narrative, because of its exceptional religious significance, merited comparison only to the most significant moment in the history of the

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<sup>22</sup> “Yale Commemorative Celebration,” *New Haven Daily Palladium* (New Haven, CT), 26 July 1865.

<sup>23</sup> “Yale College Commencement: Meeting of the Alumni,” *Boston Daily Advertiser* (Boston, MA), 27 July 1865.

<sup>24</sup> Horace Bushnell, “Our Obligations to the Dead,” delivered 26 July 1865, New Haven, CT in Bushnell, *Building Eras in Religion*, 325.



Protestant tradition. Bushnell could not imagine a world or a created order that did not play a role in some grand, redemptive purpose. America needed a heroic, indeed even messianic role, because history pitted real forces of good and evil against one another; the historical trajectory pointed ultimately toward God, but along the way contained moral struggles and providential manifestations in the world of men:

God could not plan a Peace-Society world, to live in the sweet amenities, and grow great and happy by simply thriving and feeding. There must be bleeding also. Sentiments must be born that are children of thunder: there must be heroes and heroic nationalities, and martyr testimonies, else there will be only mediocrities, insipidities, common-place men, and common-place writings—a sordid and mean peace, liberties without a pulse, and *epics* that are only eclogues.<sup>25</sup>

The confidence with which Bushnell expresses his knowledge of God's will, "*God could not plan,*"—as if Bushnell actually knew whether God possessed the capability or desire to ordain something or not—reflects New England's larger confidence that the God of Israel stood by the Union cause. New England represented the "heroic nationality" in the great struggle of American redemptive history. Lest the history of the American nation be one of mediocrity and broken covenants before God, Bushnell wrote a framework of history that could accommodate an exceptional America, and an exceptional New England. And the struggles of nations, also accommodated by Bushnell's conceptual framework, allowed for a sacrament, of sorts: baptism by blood.

Not only did Bushnell require a terrible ordeal to assist his framework of an epic religious history, he understood the Civil War as a sacrament that fulfilled the American constitution and American institutions. To provide yet another layer of analysis to Bushnell's conceptualization of a bloody baptism, questions of scale and proportionality

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<sup>25</sup> Bushnell, "Our Obligations to the Dead," 326.

inevitably must also bear scrutiny. If previous national wars and sectional differences represented for the United States a baptism by the sprinkling of water—the traditional mode of baptism in most Confessional churches North and South—the Civil War offered a baptism by *total immersion*: up to the Civil War, “Our battles,” Bushnell claimed, “*had not been upon a scale* to thoroughly mass our feeling, or gulf us in a common cause and life.” The American nation, held in the arms of God, descended in baptism into the bloody Jordan—totally immersed—and surfaced again, made new and total. So powerful was the sacrament of baptism as it pertained to American nationality that the Civil War rendered, in Bushnell’s estimation, a righteous and even sacred government:

In these rivers of blood we have now bathed our institutions and they are henceforth to be *hallowed* in our sight. Government is now become *Providential*—no more a creature of our human will, but a grandly moral affair. The awful stains of sacrifice are upon it, as upon the fields where our dead battled for it, and it is *sacred* for their sakes. The stamp of God’s sovereignty is also upon it; for he has beheld their blood upon its gate-posts and made it the sign of his Passover. Henceforth we are not to be manufacturing government, and defying in turn its sovereignty because we have made it ourselves; but we are to revere its sacred rights, rest in its sacred immunities...<sup>26</sup>

While praising flawed political and social institutions as “grandly moral,” “hallowed” and “sacred,” seems nothing short of an excessive use of exceptionally religious language, through his oration Bushnell demonstrated a great mastery of the Old and New Testament narratives. Bushnell fused his motif of bloodshed with the Biblical symbols of atonement: Israelites stained the doorposts of their homes in Egypt and the Angel of Death spared their homes (hence the Jewish celebration of Passover—note the etymology of word), and Christ shed his blood for the remission of sins. Made perfect through the sacrament, this religion of nationality demanded total loyalty from its

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<sup>26</sup> Bushnell, “Our Obligations to the Dead,” 341.

citizens.<sup>27</sup> With a spirit that affirmed the victor's right to determine moral ills, Bushnell exhorted his congregation, "Have we not also proved, written it down for all the ages to come, that the most horrible, God-defying crime of this world is unnecessary rebellion?"<sup>28</sup>

Bushnell's sentiment expressed at the ceremony, the idea of a "great new history," one "sanctified" by warfare and bloodletting—indeed, even his language—mirrors the thrust of historians' interpretations of the Yale oration. Historian William Clebsch offers a penetrating view into Bushnell's blood motif and the idea of nationhood in his 1965 analysis but only echoes Bushnell by advancing the clergyman's own interpretation of the war: through fire and blood, America "bought a really stupendous chapter of history."<sup>29</sup> Wrote Clebsch, "The shedding of blood in tragedy as transmuting enstrangement into atonement was for Bushnell *the* great motif of Christian theology and faith. In explaining the Civil War, he saw tragic bloodshed as purchasing and symbolizing a proper and great history."<sup>30</sup> While this view cannot be considered incorrect, it tells only a partial truth, for it portrays a purer American nationhood as an accident, in the Aristotelian sense of the term, of the Civil War. That is, nationhood sprung from, or came about as a consequence of, the bloody ordeal between North and South. Bushnell seemed to embrace a more *positivist* notion of bloodshed: while a purer, sanctified, and exceptional nation that might finally live up to its billing satisfied the

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<sup>27</sup> Bushnell, "Our Obligations to the Dead," 327, 329.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>30</sup> Clebsch, "Christian Interpretations of the Civil War," 218.

theologian greatly, so too did the idea of killing off the “state-rights doctrine.” Thus, for Bushnell and other New Englanders, the crusade against the South meant much more than nationhood: it meant bleeding away disloyalty and institutionalized immorality.

In his address at Yale College Bushnell in 1865 made much of bloodshed, but perhaps most intriguingly he nuanced bloodletting and established *kinds* of bleeding that held disparate moral values. Bloodshed, for its own sake, could only prove insufficient. After all, the colonies bled profusely in the American Revolution, but not sufficiently to create a national identity: “*We had not bled enough*, as yet, to merge our colonial distinctions and make us a proper nation.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, in 1865, Bushnell viewed bloodshed and nationhood both in qualitative *and* quantitative terms. In keeping with the spirit of Howe’s “Battle Hymn,” he attached a moral premium to northern bloodshed and, conversely, possessed no small level of dispassion—perhaps even a shocking level of excitement—for the spilling of southern blood.<sup>32</sup> With religious and nearly apocalyptic language, Bushnell declared that the Civil War provided “a scale large enough to meet our necessity. True it is blood on one side, and blood on the other,—all the better for that; for bad bleeding kills, and righteous bleeding *sanctifies* and quickens.” In 1865, “The state-rights doctrine [was] now fairly bled away.” The price for true nationhood paid in full, the promise of the American nation was “forever sealed and glorified.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Bushnell, “Our Obligations to the Dead,” 327.

<sup>32</sup> Clebsch, 218..

<sup>33</sup> Bushnell, “Our Obligations to the Dead,” 327-8.

### \*\*\* Taking Stock \*\*\*

In Bushnell's view of an exceptional America—the idea of America as a “City on a Hill”—and in the framework of a religious history bent on discerning Providential meaning and the arrival of Christ's Kingdom, killing transcended the mere elimination of one's enemies on the field of battle: it meant actively participating in a crusade that might purge, or “bleed away,” moral ills that threatened a national mission. While the few historians who have published studies of Bushnell tend to interpret the theologian's blood motif in conjunction with the achievement of nationhood, they lose sight of the positivist dimension to Bushnell's war theology. While skeptics may read Bushnell's sermons on nationhood and bloodletting and eschew the rhetoric as sensational, there exists an incident that lends great credence to the sincerity and urgency with which Bushnell articulated a need for bloodshed. In 1863, not long after the battle of Chancellorsville, Bushnell encountered a member of his former congregation. Lieutenant George Metcalf, member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Light Battery found himself home in Hartford, CT on a short leave. Bushnell asked Metcalf if he had killed any Confederates in battle, to which the artillery officer replied he had not. “Time you had,” answered Bushnell. “That's what you went out for.”<sup>34</sup>

Bushnell's health forced his retirement from the ministry in 1859. When the war broke out in 1861, he had reached the age of 59. The American Civil War intensified the bond Bushnell created between the state and religion. It shaped how he understood the purpose of the nation state in a religious framework of history that revolved around a Puritan conceptualization of America's chosenness before God. Because the Civil War

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<sup>34</sup> Niven, *Connecticut for the Union*, 277.

posed a threat to national destiny and American exceptionalism, Bushnell believed that duty rested with Northerners to combat secession with zeal and religious fervor.

Bushnell, like Julia Ward Howe and numerous northern Evangelicals, claimed to discern quite readily the will of God in the war, which resulted in an articulation of a northern war effort that little resembled the rhetoric of a rational moderate.<sup>35</sup> Bushnell's gospel, his war theology, was fiery. It required "burnished rows of steel," polished bayonets—meant for disemboweling an enemy—to achieve its twofold purpose: the killing of state-rights doctrine and those who sought to preserve it and the creation of a sacred America. Bushnell's rhetoric from 1861 to 1865 bordered on the theological extreme.

The Yankee tendency to politicize preaching and inaugurate holy war in Civil War New England ironed out subtleties that held great moral significance. Theological conservatives like Charles Hodge, for instance, did not enjoy the prestige of a figure like Bushnell. Conservative theological rhetoric—because it did not call for the immediate destruction of the South or, necessarily, the immediate abolition of slavery—did not make headlines. Apolitical sermons in churches that differed little from one week to the next, and differed even less from year to year, did not tend to excite newspaper editors. Thus, men like Hodge who openly and unabashedly considered slavery a moral evil but questioned, also, the morality of waging war on a largely Christian region of the country fell into a rather silent minority of theological commentary in the North.<sup>36</sup> For Bushnell

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<sup>35</sup> Historian George C. Rable twice refers to Bushnell as a theological moderate in *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 15, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Miller, "Religion and the American Civil War," 28; for more insight on the religiosity of the Civil War Era South, see Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Religious Ideals of Southern Slave Society," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 70 (1986): 1-16; Ministers North and South got busy condemning and defending slavery. Few had little to say on the subject. Eugene Genovese, "Religion in the Collapse of the American Union," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, 75.

and other Yankee Evangelicals, God required of the nation penance and the shedding of blood for national sins—not merely institutional problems that contained moral evils. This differentiation matters, first because “sin,” by its very nature, implies a divergence from the will of God and a direct transgression of God’s law, an aberration from a universal order to which humanity needed to confirm. Christian men, since the founding of the republic in the eighteenth century, affirmed the immorality of slavery as an institution. By 1861, the emphasis on slavery as a national sin attached to the problem a need for immediate rectification and sanctification.

Bushnell’s understanding of the Christian atonement, which crystalized in 1866 with the publication of “The Vicarious Sacrifice,” sheds greater light on the way he distinguished national sin and moral evil. Because, according to Bushnell, Christ’s sacrifice at Golgotha did not effect a *substitutionary atonement*—the orthodox Protestant position that Christ mysteriously bore upon himself the actual weight of worldly sin and, by rising after death, conquered that sin for humanity—Christ effectively established, instead, a model *for* mankind. But, as the editors of the *North American Review* observed in April 1866, Bushnell looks to manipulate the language of the doctrine of atonement in a manner that could not effect his own purposes: the etymology of the word “vicarious” “[implies] some kind of deputed or delegated office.” Christ’s sacrifice, therefore, needed to be *for*—or effect eternal change—in someone else, not stand as the “act of a principle,” but a real act in the redemptive moment of history, an act that possessed potent agency.<sup>37</sup> Bushnell constructed a theory of atonement that drew from Biblical language but emphasized the power of the divine

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<sup>37</sup> “Bushnell’s Vicarious Sacrifice,” *The North American Review*, 102 No. 211 (April, 1866): 556-571.

manifested throughout *all* of human history, which included the war. This minimalized the power of the incarnation of Christ and his resurrection and came close to ignoring the profound mystery of the Christian view that Christ possessed the nature of God and man—in their fullest forms—simultaneously.<sup>38</sup> Bushnell’s understanding of the atonement in 1866 however, when refracted back into the war, helps to explain the profundity with which the theologian beheld Union sacrifice. He argued that the war revealed to the Union, in retrospect, the power of Christ and his will for the nation in an eternal sense: “What now do we see, in the sacrifice of Christ, but that He, only in a vastly higher and more grandly heroic devotion of His life, is doing for all the violated honor and broken sovereignty of law.” Christ intended to save men, Bushnell reasoned, but also American institutions. For through bloodshed and the example of atonement, “Heaven’s original order” would be restored in America, made “solid and glorious.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Holifield, *Theology in America*, 463-4.

<sup>39</sup> Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice: Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation* (London: Richard D. Dickinson, 1880), 248.



## Epilogue

### Triangulating the Meaning of the War: Horace Bushnell, Charles Darwin, and Abraham Lincoln

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Historian Harry Stout opens his recent opus on the Civil War by declaring his work a “moral history.” In the spirit of that claim, this piece takes a similar, though an eminently more subtle, approach in examining a complex religious intellectual. Wars entail killing. And the wanton taking of a human life is, at its center, a very moral affair condemned by world religions and legal codes. By extension, such logic makes proclamations for killing, for crusades, and especially rosy, theologically-grounded interpretations of war (all questions fundamental to this research) complicated moral issues. Four months before Bushnell’s Yale oration—in which the Congregationalist praised bloodshed and its ability to sanctify the nation, America’s Redeemer President delivered his Second Inaugural Address to listeners in Washington D.C. Most stood weary of the war that consumed their nation for four long years. Unlike Bushnell, Lincoln held a more solemn view of the conflict that engulfed the nation and in humility publicly acknowledged, albeit implicitly, his own inability to discern the will of God in the war:

Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Allen C. Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003); Abraham Lincoln, Roy Prentice Basler and Carl Sandburg ed., *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 793.

Historians and scholars of America's Civil War can purport to understand, but cannot truly know, in full, the meaning of Lincoln's words. A war that resulted in fifty thousand civilian casualties claimed, even more horrifically, six hundred and twenty thousand of its sons in battle from 1861 to 1865.<sup>2</sup> The Civil War illumined, as one historian put it in describing Sherman's conquest of the South in 1864, a crude and modern morality, in which civilians' care for property seemed to triumph over their concern for the sanctity of human life.<sup>3</sup> The brilliance and horror of the Union military effort in the final months of the war lay in its undoing of that paradigm, of threatening and, in many cases destroying, property *and* life. By March of 1865, Americans in the North and South were all too acquainted with blood and the violence that severed the nation's "mystic chords of memory" and so brutally tore it asunder.<sup>4</sup>

Horace Bushnell and Abraham Lincoln shared the conviction that the Civil War wrought a transformative change on the national character. But when one juxtaposes Bushnell with Lincoln a harsh but telling truth comes into clear view: a clergyman and theologian who possessed a formal, theological and philosophical education pursued and claimed knowledge of a more elusive understanding of God's will. He perceived the workings of God in the affairs of men and claimed to know the true meaning of the war. But the president, who lacked formal theological training (and a seemingly

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<sup>2</sup> Figures taken from McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 854, 619.

<sup>3</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, *The Soul of Battle: From Ancient Times to the Present Day, How Three Great Liberators Vanquished Tyranny* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 138.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address," in *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*, 589.

uncommitted Christian at best), seemed more in tune with God's purposes for the nation, even if he sensed that the Lord's purpose for the war could not be discerned in the human mind or the human heart. The confidence and religiosity of Bushnell's language led him to grandiose conclusions about the war, and his commentary on battles—specifically his claim after the fall of Fort Donelson on 16 February 1862, that “the beginning of the end is heaving in sight”—did not always prove accurate or insightful.<sup>5</sup> To Lincoln, the war represented a “mighty scourge” at the time of his second inaugural address and, in 1862, a perplexing moral dilemma in which the work of God would not reveal itself:

The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both *may* be, and one *must* be wrong. God can not [*sic*] be *for*, and *against* the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party—and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect His purpose. I am almost ready to say this is probably true—that God wills this contest, and wills that it should not end yet. By his mere quiet power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either *saved* or *destroyed* the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds.<sup>6</sup>

The depth of Lincoln's insightful utterance, which one historian considers the most profound theological statement of the war, jars with the clarity of purpose and meaning that Bushnell impressed upon the events from 1861 to 1865. “Despite the forcefulness of Lincoln's vision,” observes Noll, “there were few Americans who, in the end, could actually agree both that God was in control and that human observers might not know

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<sup>5</sup> Bushnell, quoted in Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 154.

<sup>6</sup> Lincoln, “Meditation on the Divine Will,” in Sean A. Scott, *A Visitation of God: Northern Civilians Interpret the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 62-3.

what he was doing.”<sup>7</sup> The outcome of the war and the travails of Reconstruction prove Bushnell’s inability to discern the “glory of the Coming of the Lord” from 1861 to 1865. The holy and sanctified government Bushnell foresaw did not come to fruition, just as the nation’s “new birth of freedom” did not prove entirely seamless. In fact, the rapid expansion of the federal government from the Progressive Era onward renders Bushnell’s anticipation of the decline of government—indeed, even the prophecy that human moral progress would render government superfluous and unnecessary—hollow and remarkably daft.<sup>8</sup>

To those who viewed the war in Providential terms and understood it—much as Lincoln seemed to in early 1865—as penance for corporate sins, the deep rivers of blood flowing through the land meant the nation’s transgressions ran deep. They ran so deep, apparently, that when war broke in 1861, Charles Darwin believed that the North ought to proclaim a “crusade” against slavery, even at the cost of *millions* of men.<sup>9</sup> In the views of Northern Evangelicals, such a sacrifice upon the altar of the nation might atone for the sins “God’s New Israel” had committed against its Father. And the outcome, because it preserved the nation, justified the cost of the struggle. “The victory we sighed for, and the salvation we sought,” Bushnell wrote in 1866, “were summed up in the victory and salvation of the law. Failing in this everything would be lost. Succeeding in this all sacrifice was cheap, even that of our first born.”<sup>10</sup> Here, again, the positivism of

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<sup>7</sup> Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 89, 90.

<sup>8</sup> Bushnell, “Popular Government by Divine Right,” 318.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Darwin to Asa Gray, 5 June 1861, in Francis Darwin ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin: Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, Vol. II (London: John Murray, 1887), 374.

<sup>10</sup> Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice*, 248.

Bushnell's war theology rears its head. While to many warfare held tragic dimensions, the Civil War seemed in Bushnell's estimation a very good war, for it sanctified the nation and made America more aware of its special calling before God. Note, especially, the effect Bushnell believed the war had on American law—a *salvific* one—and note the etymology of that word. It seemed such a good war that the eternal and glorious end of a sanctified and holy government would assuredly outweigh the “cheap” sacrifice of America's firstborns.

The power of Bushnell's war theology illuminates the ability of war to excite in the human heart irrational and dangerous emotions. The fact that, prior to the outbreak of war in 1861, Bushnell could not be considered an outspoken abolitionist shows that even moderate intentions for war can evolve into extreme outcries for the execution of it. In 1865, Bushnell boasted of the North's victory over the most depraved sin of all: secession and national disloyalty. In Bushnell's estimation, the righteous shedding of blood would most assuredly atone for national sins, but an equally significant occurrence—the bleeding away of southern nationalism—imbued the war with deeper meaning and enabled both he and Charles Darwin to praise crusades and killing. For Horace Bushnell, the war offered an opportunity to interpret the events and purposes of war in messianic terms that bore great influence on national meaning and validated the nation's exceptional calling before God.

Historical interpretations of the Civil War have become fused with the history of twentieth century American race relations.<sup>11</sup> The result, inevitably, is a national verdict

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<sup>11</sup> For a study of the Civil War through the lens of the twentieth century, see David Blight, *American Oracle: The Civil War in the Civil Rights Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

on the Civil War. The verdict reads thusly: the American Civil War was fought for slavery. Because institutionalized slavery ended with the outcome of the American Civil War, and because slavery defies all conventions of morality, the Civil War, inevitably, was a good war. The North battled the South, and the South seceded from the North, *because* of slavery. This much is true. But such a verdict reduces the war, as Berry puts it, to a “terrifying simplemindedness”; it creates a false picture by portraying the war as a *good* war, no matter its cost. It may seem poor form to question the idealism behind Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address. It seems, most likely, poorer form—even politically incorrect, racist, and radical—to ponder whether the American Civil War was, at its most basic colloquial level, “worth it.” It does not seem altogether irrational or controversial to observe, in a manner similar to historian David Goldfield, that the fulfillment of Lincoln’s Gettysburg prophecy—a national rebirth of liberty and opportunity for all men created equally in the image of God, “endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights”—did not come about for many years.<sup>12</sup> The luxury of hindsight, of standing beyond an event on the historical trajectory and seeing through it, enables historians now to look upon what the Civil War accomplished as grand and noble, when in 2008, the election of an African American to the office of U.S. President marked the triumph of the African American spirit and gave proof positive that ability and ambition can transcend race. But still human prejudice mars American race relations, and true liberty and equality seems elusive.

Historians must nuance the claim that the American Civil War was a “good” war—in terms of how participants articulated the meaning of the war and ensured its

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<sup>12</sup> David Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 4-16.

prosecution—from the war’s *outcome*: the noble and just eradication of slavery; an institution which, to be sure, was heinous. I believe that few Americans, had they been able to foresee in 1861 the bloodshed and carnage ultimately wrought by the Civil War, and had they known the grim reality that lay behind Lincoln’s beautiful and eloquent language toward the end of the war—

Yet, if God wills that [the war] continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until *every drop of blood* drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.”<sup>13</sup>

—would have clamored for it in the first place. And I do not doubt that after the war ended, as the widows, parents, children, and siblings endured the losses of loved ones killed in battle, North and South, that many of those men, women, and children questioned whether the deaths of as many as 750,000 (mostly white) American sons could justify the abolition of slavery.<sup>14</sup>

The reader must not manufacture an argument from this thesis that the piece itself does not actually make. This research does not purport to suggest that evangelicals erred in pronouncing slavery an evil, which it was. Nor does it associate all evangelical ministers in the North with the politicization and millennial impulse that sprung from the Puritan tradition and the Second Great Awakening of the nineteenth

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<sup>13</sup> Second Inaugural Address, in *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 793. *Emphasis added.*

<sup>14</sup> For a fascinating statistical study of Civil War casualties that sheds light on killing in the war and challenges the traditional figure of 620,000 Civil War deaths, see J. David Hacker, “A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead,” *Civil War History* (December, 2011): 307-348. Relying exclusively on public microdata census samples from the 1850s to 1880, Hacker contends that a more accurate count of Civil War dead nears 750,000—which, adjusted to the population of the nation today, equals 7.5 million Americans.

century. It does not question the *noble outcome* of the Civil War—the liberation of millions from human bondage. It does, however, question the widely embraced historical judgment of the Civil War as the grand and vindictive “Central Event” in the American narrative (much as Bushnell saw and understood it in the nineteenth century), as the event that holds total claim to the culmination of the American Founding and exists as *the* lens through which to view much of modern American history.<sup>15</sup> The author hopes a study of Bushnell’s enthusiasm for war and the war’s meaning does question, even if implicitly, the enthusiasm with which so many Civil War devotees approach their subject, and the eagerness with which they eschew the idea of the American Civil War as a “total war.” The Civil War created a new and modern nation, but as one historian comments, it also, because of its scope and brutality, scarred generations of Americans: As Lincoln hoped, the Civil War

was a validation...of the American experiment. Except for one thing, which is that people who live in democratic societies are not supposed to settle their disagreements by killing one another. For the generation that lived through it, the Civil War was a terrible and traumatic experience. It tore a hole in their lives. To some of them, the war seemed not just a failure of democracy, but a failure of culture, a failure of ideas. As traumatic wars do—as the First World War would do for many Europeans sixty, and as the Vietnam War would do for many Americans a hundred years later—the Civil War discredited the beliefs and assumptions of the era that preceded it. Those beliefs had not prevented the country from going to war; they had not prepared it for the astonishing violence the war unleashed...<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> James Marten writes of the American Civil War, “[It] was a central event—for some, *the* central event—in the history of the United States in *The Children’s Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 28; see also the introduction to Brooks Simpson, *America’s Civil War* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1996); Steven E. Woodworth, *Six Armies in the Tennessee: The Chickamauga and Chattanooga Campaigns* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), xi.

<sup>16</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002), x.



The startling reality of Bushnell's life is the degree to which the Civil War did not seem to bother his moral conscience. Like many, he welcomed war when it came in 1861. In some sense, then, Bushnell does not emerge from this study as altogether different from other Yankees who viewed the war as a threat to a religiously exceptional, monocultural, national destiny. But Bushnell's eagerness for bloodshed, and the complexity of a war theology centered on killing, death, and a heterodox understanding of the Christian doctrine of atonement separates Bushnell from his contemporaries. Bushnell did not interpret the Civil War as a traumatic experience; rather, as a glorious occurrence that offered national affirmation and glorified American ideals and institutions. By tracing the consistency with which Bushnell praised American government and American institutions during the Civil War, and by combining those consistencies with the exceptionally blood-conscious language of his Yale oration in 1865, I contend that Bushnell actually *meant* what he said, and that historical anachronism cannot account for his sensational rhetoric that worked so desperately to imbue the war and events from 1861 to 1865 with religious meaning.

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## ABSTRACT

### “I HAVE READ A FIERY GOSPEL WRIT IN BURNISHED ROWS OF STEEL”: HORACE BUSHNELL’S WAR THEOLOGY AND THE MEANING OF NATION

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This work examines the nineteenth century Connecticut Congregationalist minister, Horace Bushnell, and his attempts to discern God’s purpose for the American Civil War and the nation it tore asunder from 1861 to 1865. A theologian and metaphysician who rejected the Puritanical strand of New England Calvinism, Bushnell came to understand the American struggle over slavery as an opportunity to achieve a glorious nationhood and position before God. For Bushnell, the heinous institution of slavery and the act of secession threatened the ideal that held America as a “City on a Hill.” It also threatened the nation’s Providential calling to an illustrious history. Thus, while many who endured the Civil War interpreted the event as tragic (many still do), Bushnell seemed to understand the war as vindictive—a validation, of sorts, of national mission—and therefore viewed it as a wondrous occurrence. With rhetoric filled with images of bloodshed, Bushnell came to understand the Civil War as a grand and noble sacrifice, an atonement not unlike Christ’s death for the sins of man. Such a worldview accommodated for a distinctly positivist understanding of killing and bloodshed as means for a national baptism and an arrival at glory.

