

PRESIDENTIAL EVANGELIST FOR WAR

Francis X. Kroncke

America, land of the evil ones

America, Land of the Evil Ones.” Sounds like a bin Laden rant. Yet, it should be a common image for national self-reflection. That it is not is a prophetic charge laid against America’s presidents. “America, Land of the Good Ones” marks their bully-pulpit evangelism. It is a homiletic theme oft orated by American presidents when drumming for wars, domestic and foreign.

The striking spiritual characteristic of Americans is that we claim to have no dark Shadow side, no demonic traits, that evil is something which non-Americans do. This characteristic is not trivial. It is not superficial. Truly, we believe that Americans can never be Evil Ones. As Bush-43, “The Appointee,” (George Walker Bush, 43rd President of the United States) claimed, we Americans are the Light to the world. Heed his homily.

During the Vietnam War, the image of Good Ones was tarnished. However, broad cultural acceptance of America’s evilness is always kept in check by recalling the World War II generation who still remain convinced that their Good War was morally unsullied. This has become a dogma of Cold War theology. Such is held notwithstanding The Atomic Bomb which—for the first time ever—vaporized humans, “Poof!” . . . yet to come, again?

The Appointee represents those who aggressively proclaimed the rightness of the Vietnam War—as an extension of the Good War, fought against godless Communism. Yet, few Americans, then or now, grasp why

all presidents *must* go to war. Why it is their commanding spiritual as well as political altar call. Why warring is the bedrock American ritual, part of our cultural and spiritual DNA.

For all presidents, “America, Land of the Good Ones,” has been a self-conscious prophetic charge, in that the President believes he is authoritatively foretelling the future of his People. He continually reasserts that as Good Ones we Americans are moral models, and ours, the framework for every other culture’s development.

Civil religion

The President is a prophet of a religion about which most Americans are not formally educated. It is a hybrid, theologically secular “Civil Religion”—and it is the mightiest, most evangelical, conquering creed of all times. Yet, its lack of clerical ceremony and classical religious imagery leads most to the conclusion that it is more a loose collection of patriotic, nationalistic, and holiday hoopla than a religion: the Flag, “one nation under God,” “in God we trust,” the Declaration of Independence, and holidays such as July 4 and Memorial Day. Nevertheless, it is a religion because it defines and determines how the individual and the group understand and value sacrificial bloodshed.

The fundament of this Civil Religion is that America is a Chosen People—a covenanted People journeying through a Frontier land of promise. On this Frontier horizon Good slays and conquers Evil. This story of origin reveals a People set upon a Manifest Destiny. One set apart from “the Old World”—in parallel to St. Paul’s Old Man/New Man imagery. All other cultures are judged fallen, lost, depraved. America, in contrast, is “exceptional” and seen as “A nation with the soul of a Church.”

Ritual and liturgized bloodshed is a core religious belief and practice. Animals for the Hebrews. Jesus for the Christians. Although its ceremonial garb is solely militaristic and no longer clerical, Civil Religion sheds the blood of the “un-American *Other*.”

Denial of biblical fundamentals

Civil Religion has clear Biblical roots. Yet, it is the *denial* of Biblical fundamentals which defines its essential beliefs and doctrines. Doctrinally, Original Sin gives way to a belief in the Perfectibility of Man. Americans are no longer judged unfaithful and in need of prophets to call them

back to Righteousness. Rather, Divine Providence has granted them a Manifest Destiny—a companion to the British “White Man’s Burden.”

This denial differentiates the Civil Religion from mainstream Christianity. It is a splinter sect of the broader Protestant movement—for whom faithfulness to God is fully expressed through faithfulness to civil authority, here, the Democratic State. There is a transfer of power from the clerical, sacral realm to the civil realm of the institutions and agents of Democracy.

Notably, bloodshed no longer is ritualized in a church or temple rather it is transferred as a Right, namely, to bear arms. This Right expands to gird not only the eventual establishment of a Standing Army but to effect the transfer of the clerical and priestly right to sacrifice to each individual citizen. The ultimate sacrifice for one’s country is to slay the un-American Other.

Puritan vision

“America, Land of the Evil Ones” primary historical and cultural roots are set within America’s Puritan vision. The “New World,” with its numerous News: York, Haven, Jersey, Hampshire—*New England*, was understood more in respect to the Biblical tradition than to a matter of political definition. In its time, it was a newness as numinous as cyberspace is today. The old algebraic equations could not define this New World. America was in no way measured by Europe. Such is still doctrine—“American exceptionalism.”

From this baptismal newness, a purified national soul emerged. Yet, the Puritans knew their dark side and were simultaneously “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” The redeemed Puritan soul was wary of demonic temptations. Verily, salvation was assured, but nothing grasped as if a treasure about which the purified soul could gloat! God was still a Righteous Judge.

Enlightenment vision

When this Puritan root was spliced with the Revolutionary root of Enlightenment Christianity, God, while still a Judge, became, in character and practice, Benevolent. This God removed Himself from *direct* involvement in the political sphere, which was handed over to mankind, and He withdrew to a realm of inspiration and unrelenting faithfulness. Whereas

laws in the Puritan theocratic society were seen as direct expressions of Biblical verses and commandments, in the new Democratic society laws were direct expressions of the Will of the People as *inspired* by the divine commandments. In time, “In God We Trust” has come to define—in largess and restriction—this relationship.

What happened during this rise of Democracy in religious terms? The Founders and Framers—though many were church-going Christians—when they acted in the political sphere felt that the institutions they were establishing were divinely inspired. They did not surrender the belief which, for millennia, anointed the King with Divine Right. Rather, they transferred that anointment to *We, the People*, and to themselves as the practical instruments of God’s will. These deistic Enlightenment Christians, whose values ruled the day even for those of Evangelical sway, had a very practical concept of the supernatural and Revelation.

Supernatural Revelation posited an abysmal divide between God the Father and His errant children. In rejecting this, these Founders asserted a veritable closeness to Divinity; a closeness in direction proportion to His distance from every day matters. The Creator had left the world like a tightly wound timepiece on the fireplace mantle. He was away since his children were of the Light, and directly revealed His will and intentions through their mundane actions. The supernatural was, itself, claimed by the natural. For American Transcendentalists, a sunset was beheld as rapturous and fully divine. The intricate accuracy of a multi-cog mechanical clock: unity so harmonious. The stark beauty of the Declaration of Independence: revealed word. The orderliness of the Constitution: fair and just. The exacting and proportional measure of punishment in the newly conceived penitentiary system: perfect balance. Each and all were kick-the-wheels proofs of the intimate harmony between the Father and His children of the Light.

In the Civil Religion, we are subservient to Democracy as process. The Bill of Rights, in the main, is the source for this process. For example, in the Revolutionary Era there was no Standing Army as in the corrupt Old World. Ironically, the Right to Bear Arms, which is oft cited as the right that makes America “America” and each citizen a free-man, has concretized into its opposite, namely the fact that every eighteen-year-old American male *must* register with the federal Selective Service. This creates a virtual Standing Army, mobilizable by a presidential fillip. Note

well: Registration is required regardless of one's physical state or mental condition, and despite the fact of the volunteer military. Registration is the only act which binds all males, all Y chromosomes. Males who resist the draft, even in "peacetime," are subject to prosecution and imprisonment.

We, the people

We, the People no longer seek prophetic insight from God's acts and judgments. We are not fallen. We are not evil.

Americans have become, self-consciously, the *We* who acts based upon inalienable rights—yes, bestowed by their Creator, but once so bestowed as such so "self-evident" that we look to our own experiences (personal and collective) for justification and insight; we do not heed external judgments and benedictions. Truly, we are a People of a Revolution, of a profoundly new vision. One that is most visibly political although it is simultaneously less-visibly, though equally, spiritual and theological—now expressed in secular images and words. It is a robust vision set into practice and preserved through the Democratic process of a Balance of Powers. Notably, this Balance of Powers is self-contained, self-regulating, and self-empowered—in practice, self-transcending. It makes no direct appeal—nor is it judged in such need—to other powers than those of its visible trinity: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. There can never be an appeal to a "higher law" within the Democratic process.

Historically, there is an evident continuity in the transfer of secular and sacral power from England and Europe into the Democratic process. There remains more of the Old World in the New than most Americans admit. Consider: the Democratic process was to proceed with the military under civilian authority, yet, failing to overcome the temptation to act kingly, the Presidents have defined being Commander-in-Chief as subordinating and fully expressing Executive power.

Stories of origin

We Americans tell our story of origin to the present as one of the actions of a Good People. Yet, others describe the same story as one of constant warfare by Evil Ones. Consider: Our first Total War against native "Red Devils," expelling them into internal exile. In tandem, waging a holy war

against peoples of color: defining them as children of Ham or with Cain's mark, rendering them subhuman, with animal souls.

"The Frontier" has served as the Promised Land toward which the People struggle, and to reach it we morally justify whatever we opt to do on our journey. What we do is wage endless war; *endlessly denied*. We claim ourselves as Chosen and Holy, never as massacring warriors. Ours is a story of self-inflicted blindness. Only The Appointee's predatory "pre-emptive war" in Iraq has shown us what we see in the dark, lightly.

Frontier wars are both physical and spiritual. Heathens are always some version of ungodly not-white-skins who must suffer the wrath of our Benevolent God. Savages, who are always obstacles to the commercial and cultural development of the Frontier, bear the wrath of God. It is not for We, the People to be so chastised. His Benevolent Love for us is magnificently manifested through the sufferings of these un-American Others. We rejoice like Joshua at Ai who massacred everyone—*Take No Prisoners!*

The Puritans waged spiritual war against their fellow colonists. Quakers and other dissidents had their ears cropped and bodies branded. However, in Revolutionary society dissent could be tolerated since the mechanism which balanced the powers was itself a manifestation of God's grace bestowed upon the Framers. It was a process which balanced the dissents of religious sects by declaring Freedom of Religion. All were free to say what they wanted, not because God had directly spoken through a prophet but, because *God had prophetically inspired a governing process* to which all religious dissents must bow. The shift is from revering the Good Book to that of the Democratic Process as source. This is one reason why Christian Fundamentalist are so confused and confounded as they read the Biblical words of the Founders, yet fail to grasp the meaning of their acts.

The Revolutionists merged into the Frontiersmen who waged war against the indigenous people by defining them as the un-American Other—the prophetically original Red Menace. This was a secular rendition of the Biblical tradition where claiming oneself Chosen necessitates that someone be not-Chosen.

The Puritans were in constant warfare against Satan. The Frontiersmen were in constant warfare against the un-American Other. Each was inspired by God, one directly by their Judge, the other indirectly by their Benevolent deity. The story of origin of the Biblical Puritans merges via

the Democratic Revolution into the story of the Frontiersmen's Civil Religion.

Theological secularism

The difficulty in elucidating the theological secularism of America's Civil Religion—the rites and rituals of the Democratic society's institutions and processes—is that the spiritual and theological language of the Revolution's documents was more assumed than expounded. That the Benevolent God blessed their every act and would deliver upon every promise was as scarlet and public as Hester Prynne's sin. The unfolding American Story was undoubtedly not Christian in terms of sectarian cant, but remained undeniably Biblical in its Call and intent. The Land was to be cleansed of the heathen devils, worked by field hands of the Sons of Ham, and delivered to the world as Light by secular saviors—Presidents. Henceforth, domestic wars were continually waged against “foreign devils within”—from Red Commies to *Eye-talians* of the Palmer Raids to the Border Wars presently raging from San Diego to Texas.

The warrior's bloodlust sates America's spiritual hunger. Warrior language is theological language covered with secular sauce. Re: *The War to End All Wars* is its finest moment of self-revelation and self-deception. For we Americans cannot cease warring—not until the Final Day when the end to earthly wars is accomplished as the Benevolent God returns, triumphantly, as Warrior King. In the broader Christian theological tradition this is “Christus victor” and Christ the King. Biblically, it is the Son of Man returned to Earth, foreshadowing the Apocalypse. The warrior's bloodlust reveals itself as that which ensures the Benevolent God's return.

When America dropped The Atomic Bomb, we proclaimed ourself ready and prepared for the Lord's Return as The Bomb indicated that we now possessed an instrument of destruction which was by stature and power to be wielded only by He who judges. We had sated our global bloodlust—and the End of Days began! The presidents signed a pact of “Mutual Assured Destruction”—madness.

Current times

President Truman brought the Civil Religion's story of origin into the Nuclear Age by dropping the Atomic Bomb on yellow-skinned innocents.

He also established the personnel supply line for the endless war machine by instituting the “peacetime draft.” Eisenhower warned against the rise of the military-industrial complex, which now funds just about every academic research project and innovative technology venture. America sits on over 5,000- nuclear warheads and maintains a military empire with over 700 bases around the world, on every continent except Antarctica by treaty. Kennedy inherited this and faithfully re-directed the vision and promise outward to the moon. Yet he teetered on the apocalyptic brink, pondering dropping The Bomb on Cuba. LBJ waited patiently as he relentlessly “wasted” a gook enemy. Nixon, finding no new Frontiers, turned inward and destroyed his own soul. Soon, the focus went narcissistic, driven by the bloodless bloodlust of The Market as we entered Reagan’s “Greed is Good” era. It is 2017 and yet while the presidential names change. . .they are one in spiritual soul.

Sadly, our first multi-racial president, with the blood of oppressors and the oppressed coursing through his heart, fails to call the nation to examine its shadowy chapters. Rather, Obama fathers drone soldiers—a priestly *ensouling* of our machines!—and reasserts the fundamentalist Civil Religion tenet that there is only America, the Good Ones.

Is all lost? If we follow the Civil Religion, yes. No, if we foster a global vision and faith, one where everyone is held as precious and beloved. Where non-violence is the first and last option when confronting differences and disputes. Where we cease to live in dreadful fear of the Other. Where we embody the whole human race as our Earth family. If we dream as Martin Luther King dreamed,

This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one’s tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all mankind. . . . Out of one blood, God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth. What a marvelous foundation for any home! What a glorious and healthy place to inhabit.