HOLY WARS TWO MILLENNIA APART:
RELIGIOUS RHETORIC, OPPOSITIONAL POLITICS, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Geoff Berry

The war on terror initiated by the Bush administration following the World Trade Center terrorist attack in September 2001 promised to ‘rid the world of evil’.¹ This apocalyptic religious rhetoric insinuated that a great battle loomed, which would be fought by real enemies with physical consequences, but which would also represent abstract forces of good and evil. With such rhetoric the Bush administration perpetuated for their modern audience a religious scenario steeped in ancient history and violence. Startling similarities can be seen between President Bush’s divisive ideologies and a remarkably parallel set of claims made by a small and fanatical sect, who recorded their beliefs on Dead Sea Scroll 1QM: otherwise (and more mythopoeically) known as the War Between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness. Analysis and comparison of these texts illustrate the ubiquity, flexibility, and danger of apocalyptic rhetoric, which collapses cultural complexities into simplistic oppositionalities, whether it is designed to consolidate hegemonic political power or rebel against it. The common factor shared on either side of such sabre-rattling is revealed to be the metaphysical drive towards a state of *tabula rasa*; or, as it became chillingly known in the late twentieth century, the clean slate that results from ethnic or religious cleansing.

This paper is driven by the question of why President Bush’s words, designed to bolster support for a contemporary superpower’s campaign against an amorphous insurgency, employed the same kinds of polarities and metaphors as were chosen by the kind of browbeaten minorities represented in the scroll.² How can two examples from across a broad temporal and cultural chasm—so distant in place and political positioning—display such comparable patterns? Analysis of the way loyalties are composed (and enemy forces identified) in both examples reveals the blunt edge, common to dualistic structures, which simplifies complex tensions in the forge of violent aggression. Such rhetoric can be targeted towards widely divergent and in fact antagonistic audiences: in this case, the ancient one is a small minority presumably drawn together by their shared oppression, while the modern one is a large and diverse populace (upon whom the rhetoric does not always work) who form part of the kind of ‘empire’ against whom the first group seems particularly threatening. The ubiquity of the rhetoric makes this question both more interesting and

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¹ Bush (2001): ‘Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.’ This paper concentrates mainly on the Presidential Addresses made at the Washington National Cathedral, Mount St Alban, in September 2001, and the Spirit of Freedom address given at Ellis Island, New York, on the first anniversary of the attacks.

² Although scholarly research into the Dead Sea Scrolls continues to unearth intricate details concerning their inscription, we still don’t know exactly who the authors were, and it is ‘rather unlikely that the entire archive could have come from one tiny community, despite what many scholars initially thought’ (Davies, Brooke and Calloway [2002], 7). We do know that their content reflects ‘a great variety of issues facing Jews in the period of the Second Temple (6th century BCE-1st century CE)’, however, and ‘almost the whole spectrum of religious ideas that have exercised the minds of later Jewish and Christian believers are to be found here’ (*ibid.*).
more compelling. If an ancient text can illuminate themes still prominent in modern mythologising, it is by demonstrating that antagonisms between ‘us’ and ‘them’ can quickly be turned to violence, with the authority of metaphysical branding. In modern America, as in ancient Judea, a population or group can have their critical faculties suppressed by such dualising propensities, so that leaders seem to speak for their people in simplistic terms that would otherwise (for instance under more pluralistically-inclined leadership) not be tolerated. In order to respond to this question this paper investigates the mythic history shared by both texts as well as the cultural differences experienced by the authors and their intended audiences. In doing so it seeks to communicate the power of religiously-inspired rhetoric to sway public opinion such that a mass and modern populace like the American people can be seen to support, even if implicitly, a war of aggression, begun with pre-emptive strikes, against a supposedly evil enemy (in this case Iraq).

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When the Biblical God creates life, the universe and everything in the Book of Genesis, ‘His’ modus operandi shares many similarities with the creation stories of other traditions that combine pastoralist and agriculturalist mythic frameworks. The stabilising standard of form is raised over the raging seas of chaos, as light is shed upon the land, so that we are all illumined as to the nature of the cosmos. All cultures have some kind of origin myth that reflects the way they think and live, and whether we accept religious or scientific theories we soon strike the point where certitude falters and speculation steps in. It is at this point that group loyalties are most commonly composed, collective identities forged, and the Other, or enemy, named. Across human history the most reliable methods whereby tribal loyalties are ensured has involved imagining figures with, and against which, we identify. Although such figures attain a great variety of shadings, in order to guarantee identification across a wide range of individual characteristics, they act as a flexible duality wherein we are moved to ‘take sides’. The characterisation we seem ‘naturally’ to identify with is generally shaded with light, which is almost instinctively associated with order, law, security, truth, justice and benevolence, while the enemy Other is cloaked in the shades of darkness and tainted with aspects of chaos, a threatening visage, malevolent perfidy and senseless violence. This drama of identity unfolds along a disposition towards duality that is shared by the intertestamental Judaic authors of a particular Dead Sea Scroll, the contemporary US administration and its current President George W. Bush, and Al-Qaeda terrorist leader Osama Bin Laden.

These three sets of protagonists all share the world-view perpetuated within the three great religions of the book that centre on the Holy Lands around what Westerners call the Near East, so a brief discursion into this shared history may help to place the commonalities shared by our tactics in regards to the forging of cultural identity. Northrop Frye pointed out the way that Biblical origin myth relies upon a heroic dragon-slaying that was shared by all religious ideologies that named Abraham, originally of Ur, as an early ancestor. Frye notes that ‘the Hebrew authors of the Old Testament were quite familiar’ with the story of ‘creation beginning with [a] dragon-killing’, although unlike their ancient Mesopotamian neighbours ‘they used it as poetic imagery, not as a matter of belief’. In some ways this difference becomes the bridge between Mesopotamian civi-

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3 Frye (2004), 34.
lisation and the Greeks who are our scientific and philosophical forebears: Semitic thought, as it migrates west and out of the Mesopotamian basin, develops mythopoeically towards abstract monotheism in place of an animistic universe of spiritual powers at battle. Hebrew dragon-slaying poetically culls an ordered universe out of chaos rather than pitting ancient culture heroes against each other at the groundwork of its world-view; the weapon of choice, however, remains a double-edged sword. When darkness was upon the face of the deep for the early patriarchs, it was over the *tehom*, a Hebrew word etymologically connected to Tiamat, the mythic Mesopotamian image of a feminine and salty sea and the bitter waters of chaos.4 Catherine Keller states that the relationship formed out of a parallel ‘tehomophobia’ on the part of religious patriarchs in both places, and that a task of demonisation had been undertaken in Mesopotamia across the passage from early Sumerian to later Babylonian thought. According to her analysis, the mythic figure of Tiamat is transformed from a depth of chaos out of which life is birthed, to ‘the Great Horror of Babylon’ within the epic and influential poetics of the *Enuma Elish*.5 Keller’s recent in-depth analysis of the *tehom* made famous in Genesis 1:1-2 points out the way that an earlier mythic image of procreativity is transformed into an ‘unfriendly’ metaphor for chaos.6 The Hebraic text itself, although deriving from a prevalent Near Eastern tradition of theomachy (creation by battle), replaces the divine warrior in the way it ‘betrays no fear of the dark, no demonisation of the deep’.7 Her argument reflects upon the way such symbols are both coined and transformed, then, according to circumstantial cultural concerns. As mythic images they are eminently transportable yet stable, maintaining a thematic as fundamental as light/order over dark/chaos, while offering a seemingly endless variety of ways in which such a binary code can be deployed. And as from Mesopotamian mythopoetic to Hebraic metaphor, so from one kind of metaphor (or form of social organisation) to another. President Bush and the sectarian minorities of the Scrolls employ the same gambit in vastly different circumstances because it works; it is as simple, and as dangerous, as associating one’s own group with the light or order while the enemy are tainted with its contrary and chaotic darkness.

An integral part in the evolution of this binary code of light over dark, as it has played out across the trajectory of Western and Near Eastern history, can be found in the confrontation between the two intellectual worlds of Judaic and Greek thought. Hans Blumenberg relates the way that Philo Judaeus recorded ‘the first fundamental’ moment in this collision while seeking to make the Hebrew Bible intelligible to Greek culture. In order to express the way that Logos manifests its nonverbal essence, Philo transposed ‘the Creation image of the Word calling out of the void...into an image of light emanating into the darkness of matter’.8 The Christian Bible, inherited as the most influential text across the vast and complex myriad of Western history and culture, retains this powerful hybrid image of divine Word and Light standing over a threatening and chaotic darkness. The religious framework of Islam likewise trades in antagonistic polarity, sharing many moments of historical import and influence with Christianity; both religions maintain

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4 Frye (2004), 33f.
6 Lerner (1986), Chapter Seven, outlines a similar ‘demotion of feminine deities’.
7 Keller (2003), 30.
8 Blumenberg (1993), 46f.
images of polarised loyalties alongside conceptions of universal Godhead. Such representations form the bedrock, in their cultural codifications, according to which order is imagined to depend. These foundations are of utmost importance when defining the core values of a social group or civilisation, especially when combined with other similarly fixed yet fluid narrative forms (such as the ‘free world’ or the ‘chosen people’) to create a narrative of cultural structure and identity. Any attack on such icons would commonly be assumed to have arisen, by definition, from an enemy camp. (This article puts aside, for the purposes of brevity, the associated problematic of attack from within.)

The divine entity assumed to be responsible for the initial and fundamental gift of order thereby becomes associated with the bounty that is shared by light and form, especially as they are imagined standing opposed to the chaotic, threatening, perfidious and irrational darkness ‘beneath’. A sense of the divine is, naturally enough, directed toward the harbinger of order and abundance and against the profaning forces that threaten the stability and endurance of this system. This kind of polarised duality is not unique to settlement life—an enemy or threatening force can always be cohered when a collective feels the need to unite or fight—but settlement societies such as ours, developed upon the profits of farming and herding technologies, will embody this tension in a certain kind of way. Although the comparative trajectories of Islamic and Christian cultures and societies differ in many respects, they both share the patriarchal assumption that nature is to be ordered on behalf of settled human communities (as opposed, say, to an indigenous or nomadic tribal group whose understanding may share many similar sentiments but contain an entirely different conception of their place in the natural environment). For any social group, however, the function of polarity remains the same in political terms; across the board, it frames a sense of cultural identity in accord with a way of life and against an imagined adversary. The absolute certainty provided by the kind of dualistic version of the world we are considering here leaves no room for debilitating doubts; the symbol of light assures victory to the righteous over the perfidy that afflicts them, while concomitantly ensuring tribal or territorial loyalty. Amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls the manuscript that employs this divisive rhetoric to its fullest extent has become known as Scroll 1QM, or the War between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness.

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9 Dualistic opposition inflicts ‘monotheistic’ religious thought from within, despite attempts to erase it (as ‘heretical’) from the canons, and it clearly continues to influence these religions. Thus James R. Robinson states that ‘Gnosticism seems not to have been in its essence just an alternate form of Christianity. Rather it was a radical trend of release from the dominion of evil or of inner transcendence that swept through late antiquity and emerged within Christianity, Judaism, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, and the like.’ Robinson (1990), 10.

10 Sean Kane explains that the kind of ‘hierarchical reasoning’ employed by non-agriculturalist peoples with an oral mythology works in levels of ‘a “both-and” logic of inclusion’ instead of ‘the oppositional drama of “either/or” choices and dilemmas’. For the agriculturalist, however, one set of values is privileged, one debased: ‘Light and dark are then restated as adversaries, with “the forces of light” friendly to the agriculturalist, “the forces of darkness” inimical.’ See Kane (1994), 167.

11 Duhaime points out that amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls there all related War Scrolls and fragments ‘take 1QM as their starting point, since this manuscript is the only one to preserve an almost continuous text of a significant length’. That such a text is the product of a wider cultural and historical perspective is shown by the fact that comparative studies of other copies provides ‘another confirmation that 1QM is the product of a redactional process which involved the reworking of earlier sources’. See Duhaime (2004), 45 and 53.
It outlines the coming of a great battle, in which the chosen children of God must face and defeat the armies that represent the Lord of Darkness.

The Sons of Light in the War Scroll are members of the tribal groups descended from ‘Levi, Judah, and Benjamin, the exiles in the desert’. It is immediately recognisable from this language that we are reading from the annals of an oppressed people, and we need not look far into early Judaic history to see where this kind of language would have sprung from. The Sons of Darkness are known in the War Scroll as the Kittim, a catch-all phrase employed by the Hebrew peoples for whoever happens to be oppressing them at the time. The forthcoming war promises to free the children of God from mortal oppression and rid them of this mortal enemy of goodness:

This shall be a time of salvation for the people of God, an age of dominion for all the members of His company, and of everlasting destruction for all the company of Belial ...The dominion of the Kittim shall come to an end and iniquity shall be vanquished, leaving no remnant; [for the sons] of darkness there shall be no escape. [The seasons of righteous]ness shall shine over all the ends of the earth; they shall go on shining until all the seasons of darkness are consumed and, at the season appointed by God, His eternal greatness shall shine eternally to the peace, blessing, glory, joy, and long life of all the sons of light.

This rhetorical flourish is not far removed, in function, from speeches that support the war on terror and its promise to root out the perpetrators of evil. Both forms of religious language maintain that their people are led by a universally powerful God, and both carry vestiges of the same tabula rasa fantasy.

The theme of eternal salvation of course comes to characterise the underpinning hope of Christian eschatology, as we are advised according to this world-view to prepare throughout mortal life for everlasting heaven upon our expiry here. This otherworldly version of a teleological ‘clean slate’ ideal can also be interpreted as being a conveniently rationalised way of accepting our lot as ‘the meek’. As such it looks, from the point of view of political analysis, like a toothless capitulation to our superiors in authority. (It should be pointed out here that the idea of ‘the meek’ can also look, from the point of view of interpersonal psychology, like a radical manifestation of universal love.) But tabula rasa fantasies can also reflect an insidious danger in far more violently damaging terms, specifically when the idea of wiping out an enemy so that it will not infect the earth any longer becomes manifest in such terms as ‘ethnic cleansing’. The conflagration in Bosnia, in case we need reminding, re-introduced the ‘holy war’ to European soil not so long ago, as religiously inspired cultural groups fought over a shared claim to the land. Ultimate victory leaves a clean slate, with no need for further negotiation or discourse. It can even bring the vagaries of

12 Vermes (1997), 163.
13 Duhaime (2004), 77-81, gives an extended discussion to the variety of interpretations given to the term ‘Kittim’.
14 Vermes (1997), 163f. All grammatical signs within quoted references are original in this article unless otherwise stated. Text between square brackets indicates ‘hypothetical but likely reconstructions’ (ibid. 93). Belial is elsewhere translated as Satan and generally designates the spiritual lord of evil forces.
time as we know them to an end, according to the mainstream religious myth of eschatological proceedings from initial grace, through disastrous Fall, to eventual redemption.\textsuperscript{15}

Thus the myth of the Golden Age can work in both temporal directions concomitantly, as a \textit{memory} that holds out a promise of redemption for the \textit{future}; but the cost of this eternal atonement in the good comes at the price of eternal destruction of the evil. The seven formations of the Sons of Light must ‘pursue the enemy to destroy him in an everlasting destruction in the battle of God’.\textsuperscript{16} The messy difficulties and conflicts of life will finally be put to an end forever, and the identity of the enemy is never to be doubted while it can be tainted with the brush of darkness:

Cursed be Belial for his sinful purpose and may he be execrated for his wicked rule! Cursed be all the spirits of his company for their ungodly purpose and may they be execrated for all their service of uncleanness! Truly they are the company of Darkness, but the company of God is one of [eternal] light.\textsuperscript{17}

Although this Scroll is a work heavily influenced by a kind of Gnostic Manichaeism, the polarity it makes manifest runs all the way through the Judeo-Christian tradition, following a mythic history wherein war on earth follows a cosmic battle in heaven (see Duhaime’s discussion for the way the War Scroll quotes ‘almost every part of the Hebrew Bible, but especially from the books of Numbers, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Psalms’).\textsuperscript{18}

From my investigation it seems that a polar battle between gods of good and evil, such as the Christian God and Satan or Belial, is a later development of the kind of pantheon in which many deities battled for supremacy, as they did in Mesopotamian and Greek mythologies. Such shifts toward ‘monotheism’ retain an antagonism from the days of theomachy that is deeply inscribed and difficult to absolve. We cannot imagine that the New Testament ‘Good News’ of a universally loving God, let alone postmodern pluralism, has dissolved this cosmological model when examining the military, historical and political evidence to the contrary. We are living, after all, in a civilisation that has developed the same relationship with the world that was instilled in the pre-history of our civilisation—light ascends over the darkness, technology evolves to control the environment, and order quells the dangerous chaos as abstract mental ideals transform matter (and the Other) to our purposes. The laser and information technology age has not changed but exponentially developed this mindset; as a result, wars can still be fought on behalf of an abstract and distant ‘sky-god’, and against a real and near enemy.

Texts such as the War Scroll must be read as both military and theological expositions at once.\textsuperscript{19} They describe a war between ultimate qualities of good and evil that is manifestly real and of immediate material concern; but it is also symbolic in the sense that a momentous struggle of cosmic and spiritual import must be decided finally and for all time. In this religious language, the conflicts that destabilise our everyday lives are cast in terms that make them seemingly simple.

\textsuperscript{15} Frye (2004), 22, points out that this comedic ‘U-shaped narrative’—of beginning ensconced within God’s grace, only to lose it before finally having it restored—is typical of Biblical scripture.
\textsuperscript{16} Vermes (1997), 172.
\textsuperscript{17} Vermes (1997), 176f.
\textsuperscript{18} Duhaime (2004), 103.
\textsuperscript{19} Vermes (1962), 123.
to comprehend. Concomitantly, both our material and spiritual realities are confirmed, because
the ‘answer’ to which such arguments lead grant greater weight to our way of life by justifying
them with the authority of cosmic powers. Such traditions die hard, and often we (or our leaders)
perpetuate them without realising the symbolic import behind our allusions to unspoken forms of
authority. As Roland Barthes pointed out in *Mythologies*, mythic language confers ‘divine’
authority by masquerading history as the natural order (or, alternatively, by emptying cultural
images and narrative of their historical provenance). The War Scroll is openly explicit about
such matters in ways that are not always so self-evident otherwise, and this is why I find its com-
parison with President Bush’s war speeches so cogent and disturbing.

The War Scroll is addressed to ‘the Master of the Rule of War, on the *unleashing of the attack*
of the sons of light against the company of the sons of darkness, the army of Belial’ (my empha-
sis). Designed to rally an oppressed minority, this kind of rhetoric seems desperate, almost for-

lorn. But when similar logic is found in the speeches of a world superpower’s leader, advocating
for a pre-emptive strike on behalf of the agents of good, such strident militancy sounds desperate
in a very different, and more broadly damaging, way. With a US Administration committed to
pre-emptive attacks, especially the later one in Iraq that did not have the support of the UN, it
needed to be understood that the perpetrators of darkness stood in the way of world peace, that
their ‘weapons of mass destruction’ threatened our combined future, and that they aimed to bring
chaos to a world almost fretfully in need of order. The President justified pre-emptive strikes
against the perceived threat to order just days after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center:

> War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder. This nation is peaceful,
> but fierce when stirred to anger. This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others.
> It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing.\(^{22}\)

These terms were reiterated one year later:

> ...we have made a sacred promise to ourselves and to the world: we will not relent until ju
> stice is done and our nation is secure. What our enemies have begun, we will finish.\(^{23}\)

The President made no secret of his religious convictions during these times, which in some in-
stances perpetuate the dualistic aspects of War Scroll rhetoric:

> Our prayer tonight is that God will see us through and keep us worthy.... Hope still lights
> our way, and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.\(^{24}\)

These are comforting, banal words that unite one sect against another (while both inevitably claim
God’s light as inspiration in their war on darkness). In an article titled ‘War Cry From the Pulpit’

\(^{21}\) Vermes (1997), 163.
\(^{22}\) Bush (2001).
\(^{23}\) Bush (2002).
\(^{24}\) Bush (2002).
in the *Washington Post*, Bill Broadway reported on the religious symbolism of this speech and its setting: ‘The language was the rhetoric of war,’ he wrote, ‘and the speech came not from the Oval Office or Camp David, but from a sacred spot before the altar of a church.’

Although the President would soon reveal a shift in his language away from overtly religious rhetoric that would distance potential partners from his (non-)crusade, the tools of exclusivity and demonisation would never be far from his (speech writer’s) lexicon. Who the enemy actually was remained a matter of confusion, however, and it seems to be well established that Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, for instance, posed no marked threat to anyone outside their own (substantial) oppressed, just as Afghanistan never actually revealed any real Al-Qaeda agents. Reasoned diplomatic efforts should hardly give way to the kind of pre-emptive strikes against the darkness that have been employed by the Bush administration. Bruce Lincoln, in an article titled ‘The Rhetoric of Bush and Bin Laden’, points out the way both leaders have constructed ‘a Manichaean struggle, where Sons of Light confront Sons of Darkness, and all must enlist on one side or another, without possibility of neutrality, hesitation, or middle ground’. Lincoln reiterates the code of oppositional binaries in play but also points out that this argument is not merely, or even specifically, over religious definitions of ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’. For while ‘bin Laden aspired to mobilize all Muslims on the basis of their religion, ignoring their identities as citizens of different nation-states, Bush’s approach was precisely inverse. The prime group he sought to rally consisted of American citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations.’ This marking of cultural identity shows little difference to traditional religiously-inspired war-mongering, but can be spun to suit a variety of interests, including an American model that permits ‘Muslim nations to enlist—or at least, stay neutral—in a moral, but not religious campaign: one that pits civilization *per se* against all that is uncivilized, i.e., “terrorism,” “fanaticism” and “evil”’. This is the playing field *par excellence* of the binary code used in defence of (light) ‘order’ and against (dark) ‘savagery’. The Washington National Cathedral service concludes:

This is a unity of every faith, and every background.... Our unity is a kinship of grief, and a steadfast resolve to prevail against our enemies. And this unity against terror is now extending across the world.... [M]ay He always guide our country. God bless America.

Both leaders of the war around terror defend their aggression by courtesy of a supposed alignment with a merciful God; but they have different kinds of armed forces to commandeer, differing visions of what it is to be civilised or barbaric, and different callings to the light and hatreds of the darkness.

President Bush likewise differentiated his primary position from that of his General Boykin, whose fundamentalist claims for the right of the US to rule the world on behalf of its Judeo-
Christian heritage sounded strident at best. The former commander and 13-year veteran of the Army’s top-secret Delta Force is an outspoken evangelical Christian who declared that radical Islamists hated the United States ‘because we’re a Christian nation, because our foundation and our roots are Judeo-Christian...and the enemy is a guy named Satan’. Discussing the battle against a Muslim warlord in Somalia, Boykin told another audience, ‘I knew my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol.’ On at least one occasion, in Sandy, Oregon, Boykin said of President Bush: ‘He’s in the White House because God put him there.’

In Australia Prime Minister John Howard followed a similarly exclusive attitude, but he could not employ the kind of overtly religious rhetoric that President Bush utilised as a populist call to arms. Instead Howard drew conservative support with more subtle techniques, proving once again that this issue is not necessarily about religion at all, but about political manoeuvring for power. In her book God Under Howard, Marion Maddox outlines the way Australia’s political leader manipulated an ‘us against them’ mentality during public moments of crisis such as the Tampa and ‘children overboard’ affairs, Lebanese gang rapes and ASIO raids on Muslim homes. Amartya Sen discusses many of the ways we are invited to identify ourselves with one social grouping and against another, in his Identity and Violence. Despite the fact that we are all complex individuals with a variety of competing loyalties (racially, sexually, emotionally, psychologically, and so on), these may all be folded into ‘some allegedly predominant identity that drowns other affiliations, and in a conveniently bellicose form can also overpower any human sympathy or natural kindness that we may normally have. The result can be homespun elemental violence, or globally artful violence and terrorism.’

We cannot ignore the symbolic gestures that were made by the US to promote their wars against supposed enemies. Regina Schwartz follows Rene Girard in analysing the way violence is employed on behalf of the sacred to authorise sacrificial killing both inside and outside the group. In seeking an outlet for the frustrations and tensions within a complex society, blood-letting rites take place as a way of appeasing a hazily identified God. In The Curse of Cain she points out the ways that national identities can be forged against ‘the Other’, as a secular development of religious logic in which sacrifices must be made from within in order to secure the rule of right. The War Scroll concurs, justifying its own appropriation of willing young men as cannon-fodder: ‘For this shall be a time of distress for Israel,’ it reads, when ‘the slain among the foot-soldiers begin to fall by the mysteries of God.’ The righteous are counselled, however, to remain ‘strong and valiant...for [the enemy] are a congregation of wickedness and all their works are in Darkness’. Soldiers have their resolve steeled in the knowledge that they fight on behalf of a righteous God.

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30 Arkin (2003), B-17. Boykin’s religious activities were first documented in detail by Arkin, a former military intelligence analyst who writes on defence issues for the LA Times Opinion section. Audio and videotapes of Boykin’s appearances before religious groups over the last two years were obtained by NBC News, which proceeded to report on them.
31 Arkin (2003), B-17.
32 Maddox (2005); see esp. Chapter 7, ‘People Like That’.
33 Sen (2006), xv.
34 Schwartz (1997).
35 Vermes (1997), 179f.
of ‘eternal succour,’ while the enemy follow ‘the Prince of the kingdom of wickedness’ in his ‘chaos and confusion’.  

For the members of America’s military, it had ‘been a year of sacrifice and service far from home’ by the time of the WTC attack’s first anniversary, but likewise intestinal fortitude is required on behalf of the collective, for

...we have made a sacred promise to ourselves and to the world: we will not relent until justice is done and our nation is secure. What our enemies have begun, we will finish.37

The sacrifices made by US soldiers will also gratify the conditions of a loving God and a stable world order of peace and prosperity, because just as the Judaic minority promised themselves that they walked in the light of divine prophecy two millennia ago, President Bush reminded his constituents, during the ‘Spirit of Freedom’ Presidential Address, that

...we resolved a year ago to honor every last person lost.... America has entered a great struggle that tests our strength, and even more our resolve. Our nation is patient and steadfast. We continue to pursue the terrorists in cities and camps and caves across the earth. We are joined by a great coalition of nations to rid the world of terror. And we will not allow any terrorist or tyrant to threaten civilization with weapons of mass murder.38

There will always be a price to pay for military aggression, and the trick to convincing those who are asked to be the sacrificial soldiers of any collective will remain similar; we are on the side of light and the enemy threaten that order.

In the War Scroll, righteous Israelites are implored to fight on behalf of their God of everlasting light and convinced that their war is one of divine sanction:

We are the people of Thine [inheritance]; Thou didst make a covenant with our fathers, and wilt establish it with their children throughout eternal ages.... Thou hast decreed for us a destiny of Light according to Thy truth. And the Prince of Light Thou hast appointed from ancient times to come to our support; [all the sons of righteousness are in his hand], and all the spirits of truth are under his dominion. But Belial, the Angel of Malevolence, Thou hast created for the Pit; his [rule] is in Darkness and his purpose is to bring about wickedness and iniquity.39

President Bush reflects a similar faith, that a just God is on the side of the United States, in another address, delivered at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, 2003:

We can also be confident in the ways of Providence, even when they are far from our understanding. Events aren’t moved by blind change and chance. Behind all of life and all

36 Vermes (1997), 181.
37 Bush (2002).
38 Bush (2002).
39 Vermes (1997), 177.
of history, there’s a dedication and purpose, set by the hand of a just and faithful God. And that hope will never be shaken.\(^{40}\)

The reference to a destiny decreed long before compounds the insinuation that the forthcoming battle is divinely inspired and planned. As such, the place within its scheme of the Scroll’s audience is divinely sanctioned; success is ensured, and the *tabula rasa* fantasy of complete victory is reiterated. This is the idea of destiny Sen writes against in *Identity and Violence*; the kind that recognises that the idea of God is a powerful ally in times of war and does not hesitate to co-opt it. He reiterates the problems involved in a single categorisation of people under the rubric of exclusive ‘religious partitioning’ on behalf of battle-lines, for example in the conflagrations of today’s ‘holy wars’.\(^{41}\) When religious rhetoric is conjoined with mythic language and symbol, divine authority can be brought to bear in a way that coins it with the imprint of destiny. God always stands for right and promises to destroy the enemy in some imagined successful conflict, and the same logic applies on behalf of both oppressed minorities and superpowers, as a threatened worldview struggles to overcome any destabilising force.

The conviction with which such rhetoric is delivered reflects the seriousness of the threat. Without a doubt, Israelites of all sects were up against formidable odds during the intertestamental period, and within decades of the War Scroll being inked into parchment in the desert caves around Qumran its people were devastated by Roman armed forces at the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Likewise suicidal terrorists represent a real peril to life and limb where they are active today. However, it is hard to believe that pre-emptive strikes by today’s ‘sons of light’ against the questionable target of Iraq would have wiped their destructiveness from the face of the earth, if that was ever the true design of such aggression. Such military gambits seem to issue forth more as an example of symbolic assays against imagined enemies than well-reasoned attacks on forces of calculated aggression.

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that there are historical similarities in regards to the instabilities of the intertestamental period, in which the Scrolls were inscribed by a Hebraic sect near Jerusalem, and today’s climate of widespread global insecurity. In both periods, widely differentiated social forces collide and must learn to commingle, or battle, in close circumstances. The relatively small territory around Jerusalem that concerned the authors of the War Scroll was their world, and it was threatened by an invasive force that has since been compared by many to today’s American empire. Although the nature of the protagonists and geographical terrain has changed (albeit with a consistent flashpoint in the Middle East), the political implications, in brief terms, remain familiar: increased complexity seems to engender a willingness on behalf of a public to accept simplistic solutions. The ideal of a ‘new world order’ is imagined as an answer to the confusion created by complex conflicts and to the need felt for stabilisation in our organisational structures and political and territorial boundaries. Polarising arguments offer the simplistic solutions that seem to be craved in times of intense difficulty, and such dualistic patterns persist in the composition of these kinds of rhetorical gambits. So what help does pointing out this out offer

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41 Sen (2006), 76.
here? In denying the sacrificial aspects of our ritual violence, we may become, as Girard intimated, prisoners of the theology we have not really analysed.\(^\text{42}\) There is a creative solution to this seeming impasse, as well as a critical analysis of its roots and contemporary outbreaks, that could flourish if our leaders chose to ensure their survival thanks to dialogue and polymorphous diversity, rather than condemnation and its attendant polar duality.

_Monash University and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology_

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\(^{42}\) Girard (1972).


