

**BE ALL YOU CAN BE:**  
**Military Advertising, Evangelism and**  
**Christian Identity in America**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

If the trivia game show *Jeopardy* were to ever have a category “Famous Advertising Slogans”, the following answer would invariably be among the first to appear: “Be All You Can Be”. It is a long-running and pervasive advertising campaign, so much so that any American, male or female, who could not answer this question correctly might have the terrible misfortune indeed of being labeled “un-American” by an overzealous segment of their countrymen. And so ubiquitous is this slogan that for all practical purposes it has come to embody the distillate ethos of American culture. In proper *Jeopardy*-speak, the question is: “What is “The United States Army””.<sup>1</sup> In the Army’s television commercials, the viewer is bombarded by a series of very polished action sequences of a multi-cultural group of camouflage-clad young men and women driving tanks, flying helicopters, and using highly advanced computer and communications technology. At the end of this barrage of stimulating visual imagery, the viewer sees the soldiers’ all-American faces glowing with the satisfaction of accomplishment. They are exciting commercials to watch and it is easy to see why they might indeed be very motivating to join the Army, which is of course, the primary reason for their existence.

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<sup>1</sup> For those who have never seen *Jeopardy*, “answers” are offered to which the contestant must reply in question format, “What is...”

In the movie *The Rock*, the embodiment of another equally pervasive American ethos,<sup>2</sup> this campaign gets smartingly parodied when a group of Marines-turned-mercenaries motivated by warped patriotism steal some highly lethal VX poison gas rockets and threaten San Francisco with them, demanding a *mea culpa* and some cash from the government in a fairly unrealistic plot line that is, I must admit, otherwise fairly entertaining. It is during a tense moment on the precipice of their last stand against the FBI that one of the Marine-mutineers says to his commanding General: “C’mon General, let’s be all we can be.” Because of its obvious irony, this line usually elicits a healthy chorus of laughter from the audience. What I find even more ironic, however, is that the writers of this film apparently forgot that the Marine Corps has its own fairly well-known consumer ad campaign: “The Few, The Proud, The Marines”. Being the more tireless and brazen self-promoters among the four branches of the U.S. armed forces, I am sure that scene vehemently inflamed the passions of many a Marine who saw the film, if not for the crass violation of their ennobled ethos that deifies honor and loyalty to one’s country above all else, then at least for the fact that no *real* Marine would ever be found quoting an Army advertising campaign! Of course, the latter reaction might seem to be a bit churlish (they are only commercials, after all), however, in American culture, “image is everything” as the saying goes, and for the military these slogans represent the very visage of their respective ideologies, and of which the Marine Corps is especially protective.

With this in mind then, it is the differences found between the consumer propaganda approaches of the Army and the Marine Corps that forms the basis of this examination of the two main Christian evangelism<sup>3</sup> paradigms in America. I have

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<sup>2</sup> i.e., gratuitous violence.

<sup>3</sup> The terms “evangelism”, “proselytizing”, and “witnessing” shall be used interchangeably throughout this paper, although I prefer the term “witnessing” as it seems to be the most descriptive of the three, even though it originates in the very proprietary *langue* of the American Protestant, fundamentalist, evangelical tradition. It is noted, however, that in the end they are all surprisingly cumbersome terms.

specifically chosen the Army and the Marine Corps as a base of comparison, because within the U.S. military they are the only direct competitors among the four branches of services, each one vying for the limited pool of potential recruits<sup>4</sup> inclined towards employment in ground combat positions. Furthermore, the two pairs of propagandas, that of the military and that of the Church,<sup>5</sup> mirror one another almost exactly in many very important respects, and reveal a great deal about each one's sense of their own corporate identity, both in relation to themselves, and in relation to the culture at-large. Lastly, as the potential recruit base is small relative to the population of the country on the whole, the methods of advertising they employ necessarily affects the kind of recruit they garner, and hence, the quality of soldier they produce.

However, it is important to first understand that any propaganda method is largely a *reflection* of a set of ideologies, not the cause of them. As such, an examination of these evangelistic methods must necessarily originate in the ethos that initiate their use. Thus, I will examine the structure of both Army and Marine Corps ideology and culture respectively, as well as contemporary American Protestantism's various streams of belief and expressions of culture, in order to put these witnessing methods in a meaningful context. In this regard, the study of Christian evangelism closely resembles the study of eschatology, in that one's eschatology and one's preferred method for evangelism both are conclusions of a great many theological presuppositions. Furthermore, as many of the issues raised by this study are as complex as those of the study of eschatology, some questions may remain unanswered in the present form of this work.

Finally, it is noted that while the effete sensibilities of contemporary American society have caused military imagery within Christianity to go out of fashion in recent years, scripture nevertheless abounds with such imagery, and thus the implications from military advertising to the Church and its witnessing methods will be readily shown to

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<sup>4</sup> The "potential recruit" refers to those in a particular demographic who have a pre-existing inclination to join the military. See also footnote #17.

<sup>5</sup> i.e., American Protestantism.

have great importance to the future of the Church as a competitor, willing or unwilling, in the metaphysical marketplace.

## II. PROPAGANDA AND CONSUMER ADVERTISING

Like all other forms of propaganda, consumer advertising is a tool designed to incite a specific action in the propagandee. It is not, as most people mistakenly believe, a great manipulator, victimizing the helpless masses, robbing them of their cherished ideologies. In his seminal work on the subject, the great French sociologist Jacques Ellul writes: “To view propaganda as still being what it was in 1850 is to cling to an obsolete concept of man and of the means to influence him... The aim of modern propaganda is no longer to modify ideas, but to provoke action....”<sup>6</sup> But in order for propaganda to accomplish this, it must be based fundamentally upon some preexistent need(s) within the propagandee. In other words, it must entice pre-existing passions in order to incite action.

One of the most greatest underlying existential needs of humanity, the need which consumer advertising very attentively and unceasingly massages, is the need for self-actualization. That is, the self is ever engaged in the quest of becoming what it desires to be. Although the final aim of consumer propaganda is to provoke consumers to purchase widgets, the means by which it entices the consumer to do so is through this need for self-actualization. This is not to say that consumers are un-concerned with product quality and features, but from a psychological perspective, they purchase widgets more for whom they perceive they will become by association with a product, and less for the actual qualities of the product itself. The evidence of this may be seen in one form or

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 25. See also p. 61.

another in every commercial on television.<sup>7</sup> Why should you buy this shampoo? Because “...you deserve to look good”, meaning, “You deserve/will be able to look as good as the model displaying this shampoo.” Why should you purchase this automobile? If the buyer is a male, for example (and I answer as one): to establish one’s place among other males in their extremely competitive socio-economic hierarchy (viz., I will be viewed by other men as a wise investor, or a man of superior financial means). Or, the decidedly less complex but equally true: to be desired by numerous gorgeous women. These are merely a few representative examples out of the endless permutations of the human psychological need for self-fulfillment, and which consumer advertising is ever engaged in capitalizing upon.

To the conspiracy theorist, then, consumer advertising can appear to be quite a sinister tool used by the “Unseen-But-Malefic-and-Ubiquitous-*Über*capitalist-Power-Structure” for the purpose of coercing the otherwise hapless consumer into purchasing products out of their own inherent human weaknesses for self-gratification. Indeed many dissidents against consumer culture detest consumer advertising precisely because of these methods which it considers shameless and opportunist in catalyzing upon human weakness. But, what most of these dissenters choose not to recognize is that consumer advertising is little more than a highly efficient mirror of the actual nature of human self-interest, reflecting back to the consumer their own wants and needs. An economic demand curve, which is the seedling of the entire study of economics, is merely a curve of a particular set of wants of an aggregate of individuals. Though advertising can and frequently does coalesce, redirect, or redefine the individual wants that comprise a demand curve, it does not and cannot manufacture them *ex nihilo*. Ellul states:

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<sup>7</sup> The details of which are beyond the scope of this essay in its present form. This psychological appeal may also be seen in other advertising media, such as print or radio, etc., but to a less obvious degree because the nature of those other media limits the development of such psychological appeals to the making of impressions, unlike television which can make a more overt and well-explained appeal. It might be argued, however, that the other media (esp. print) are therefore, more sinister, because the motives at work in such media are not as readily apparent.

The third important conclusion, drawn from experiments chiefly in the United States, is that propaganda cannot create something out of nothing. It must attach itself to a feeling, and idea; it must build on a foundation already present in the individual. The conditioned reflex can be established only on an innate reflex or a prior conditioned reflex...Propaganda is confined to utilizing existing material; it does not create it.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, it is also not generally recognized by those not involved in the advertising industry that an incredibly disproportionate amount of time, money and effort is spent conducting interviews with groups of consumers (focus-groups) determining which products and features consumers want most. Before *any* advertising campaign is launched, hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of hours are spent by advertising agencies conducting focus-group sessions with consumers, observing and videotaping those sessions, re-editing the sessions down to the salient points, preparing these analyses for their clients, and suggesting changes to the product design in response. And not only do advertisers conduct focus-groups on the products themselves, but they also conduct entirely separate focus-groups on what advertising campaign styles and methods are the most effective in motivating the consumer to purchase various classes and sub-classes of products. Those who participate in these studies are even paid for their time. So then, if those who object to consumer advertising decry that modern products are of low quality or are made to be obsolescent (like spark plugs, for example), it is ultimately because consumers prefer an inexpensive product over a quality (and usually more expensive) one. If computer technology advances at such a dizzying rate that Western culture is left feeling somewhat detached from nature and literal reality by these advances, then it is because Western culture ultimately desires to have faster computers more than it desires to be in touch with nature and non-virtual reality. The extrusion of consumer society's endless heaps of widgets may sometimes spiral out of control, and the application of these

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<sup>8</sup> Ellul, 36.

products may sometimes venture far beyond their original intent, but all of so-called evil tentacles of consumerism originate in human beings themselves, and not in an foreign and malevolent Force seeking to repress an innocent humanity. So, rather than being the unwilling victims of consumer propaganda, as most people believe, consumers are actually very eager co-conspirators in their own propagandization. They want *exactly* what it is they want, and are generally more than happy to facilitate the filling of their innumerable urges for self-gratification. And far from being a helpless, voiceless plebiscite, they are in fact, the most powerful special-interest group in a consumer-driven culture such as America, and hardly any of them recognize it.

### III. MILITARY ADVERTISING

Because the United States military is a very large organization comprised exclusively of volunteers, it occupies in a very unique position in American society as an advertiser of a consumer product. It operates simultaneously as a service provider to the government, and as a service provider to the recruit, both of whom are simultaneously a customer of, and a vendor to, the military. The primary service the military sells to the consumer is a means to self-actualization, and it entices potential recruits (the objects of its propaganda) with this service in order to garner enlistees. Once the enlistee has been convinced to provide the product of manpower to the military, the military then “sells” the service of national defense to the government. But, because national defense is a profession that includes a high likelihood of death or grave injury, and since its attractiveness to potential volunteers is greatly affected by the most ephemeral wants of the youth culled from a consumer culture, the advertising the military employs has to be tailored very cleverly if it wants to attract any recruits at all. Consumer culture is, by definition, completely subject to the whimsy of self-interest, and so the potential recruit

needs to be genuinely convinced that the benefits of employment by the military outweigh the substantial risks of that employment.<sup>9</sup>

Referring back to the Army and Marine Corps advertising campaigns then, we find that the important difference between the two is the grammatical subject of each of their respective propagandas. Although the aim of the advertising of both branches of service is to meet their respective yearly enlistment goals, they differ from each other in their appeals to the potential recruit using a subtle but very significant linguistic shift.

The “Be All You Can Be” advertising campaign the Army employs appeals directly to the self, the metaphysical consumer. Here, the self is offered the idea that it can become something better than it is presently, the Army acting as the means by which that self-improvement will be accomplished. The associations used in their commercials of striking visual stimuli with the satisfaction seen on the faces of Army personnel very powerfully convey indeed the message of the Army’s ability to provide the potential recruit with genuine and fulfilling self-actualization. Since American consumer culture is directed towards the satisfaction of every visceral urge an individual may possess, the language of the Army’s campaign naturally resonates with the essence of the American consumer psyche. However, as a method based in consumerism, this method is largely passive in nature, appealing only to the propagandee’s “longing to be one’s self”. It creates only a weak imperative for action by giving the propagandee intellectual room to consider other self-actualization models—leeway which good propaganda is precisely *not* supposed to do.<sup>10</sup> “Perhaps I can be all I can be without the Army,” they may easily say. Or, “Perhaps I like who I am already without the Army?” Furthermore, it inherently limits

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<sup>9</sup> Or, they must not be informed about the true nature of those risks, therefore making their decision to enlist in the military an uninformed one. The selective use of misinformation is also a tool by which propaganda accomplishes its goal to incite action. Indeed, none of the military’s commercials show the risks inherent in a military career. The potential recruit never sees the true realities of war—killing, death, fear, and horror—only that they get to play with very expensive “toys” and feel good about themselves as a result.

<sup>10</sup> Ellul, 46-47, 87.

the pool of potential recruits from the whole of youths possibly inclined to join the military, to those within that demographic who recognize to some degree that longing, and wish to improve their level of self-actualization. Additionally, it constructs a weak foundation for the recruit to *remain* in the Army after their initial term of service, because their desire to re-enlist is directly tied to their desire to “Be All [They] Can Be”. Among modern recruits, this desire often wanes in the face of the difficulty of military life in general,<sup>11</sup> resulting in a high turnover rate, and in the long-term, a diminished core of experienced career military personnel. This has created a growing problem for the Army because, as the largest branch of the U.S. military, it has a fairly large enlistment quota to meet in order to maintain adequate operational readiness (approx. 40,000 new soldiers per year), and which, for the reasons aforementioned, it increasingly does not meet. More importantly, since it is a primary ideology of Army doctrine to adapt military life to modern culture as much as it will possibly allow,<sup>12</sup> and since the Army is an institution animated *entirely* by its doctrine, its advertising campaign is therefore a natural projection of TRADOC<sup>13</sup> policy. This fact will take on much greater significance later in this essay.

The Marine Corps’ campaign, by contrast, appeals *indirectly* to the self by elevating the supremacy of Marine Corps as a collective over the individual—“The Few, The Proud, *The Marines*”<sup>14</sup> (italics mine). There is no mention of a singular “you” in its campaign, but rather the collective “we” of the Marine Corps. Instead of the passive appeal to the “longing to be one’s self”, this campaign involves the active antagonism of

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<sup>11</sup> One of the officers in charge of training at the Army’s Ft. Benning states: “Eighty percent of them don’t want to be here: ‘This wasn’t in the commercial.’ [they say]” Rick, 175.

<sup>12</sup> The military on the whole is an organization that is subject to great socio-political pressures to conform to modern culture. Because it is one of the last examples available in American society of a true meritocracy, many in government believe that the military serves as a readily available sociological petri dish whose purpose is to provide them the venue to prove their own world view and disprove the world view of those on the other side of the political aisle. Of the four branches of military service, the Army has been the most aggressive in embracing the prevailing political mandate to conform to modern culture, making it a part of their very doctrine. See Thomas E. Ricks, *Making the Corps* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 174.

<sup>13</sup> Training & Doctrine Command, the Army’s “Mt. Sinai” from which all of its ideology is disseminated.

<sup>14</sup> It also has other slogans in this vein: “A Few Good Men”, and “Maybe You Can Be One Of Us”.

the ego/self-concept. It creates a strong internal imperative within the psyche of the propagandee by implying that they might not have the so-called “right stuff” to be a Marine, thus evoking a more primitive impulse: the self-defense of the self. By elevating itself as a higher quality organization with exclusive membership, the Marine Corps subordinates the appeal to self-actualization in favor of capitalizing upon the seminal human need for inclusion in the group, and the hubris catalyzed by an appeal to elitism. And the goading of the Achillean weakness of human hubris causes the potential recruit to react strongly to being denied inclusion in this elite group. It is true, of course, that not everyone who desires a military career necessarily desires to join the Marine Corps,<sup>15</sup> but by advertising in this manner the Marine Corps forces the potential recruit to have a distinct opinion about enlistment in the Marine Corps itself, whether a positive one or a negative one, whereas the potential recruit might simply ignore the other branches of service. In fact, it is not an uncommon occurrence that recruits will either join another branch of service by virtue of a strong aversion to joining the Marine Corps, or conversely, they will join the Marine Corps knowingly to join “the best”. In both cases, however, it is Marine Corps’ advertising that frequently has more influence in defining the dialogue with the potential recruit by the perception of the image of itself that it has created.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, the Marine Corps’ campaign both forces dialogue with the full spectrum of the demographic pool of potential recruits, and more importantly, attracts a higher quality individual out of that pool than the Army; a fact which the Army readily acknowledges.<sup>17</sup> In his recent book, *Making The Corps*, Thomas E. Ricks interviews one

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<sup>15</sup> Sometimes because their standards are very high, and sometimes simply because the Marine Corps does not offer the kind of long-term employment they desire. The latter is, of course, not relevant to the nature of the discussion presented in this essay. The former shall be examined in due course.

<sup>16</sup> The general perception among Americans is that the Marine Corps is the unquestionably the best fighting force out of all the branches of the U.S. military. Ricks, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Though it is understood that there is only a certain percentage of people within any demographic pool that will actually respond to consumer propaganda and take the course of action that is desired by the manufacturer or service provider. According to Ricks, in 1989 the Defense Dept. conducted a youth

senior Army NCO who supervises the training of its infantry, and who said: “They [the Marines] get the cream of the crop. We get the left-overs. When you’re small, you can produce quality. We produce quantity.”<sup>18</sup> Since the Army is so large, needing to train nearly twice as many soldiers as does the Marine Corps every year, and since by its own admission it does not obtain the best possible recruits available, it is forced to choose among the remainder of potential recruits inclined towards ground combat employment who have specifically opted *not* to enlist in the Marine Corps. This quantitative distraction from quality, coupled with a potential recruit base that is less motivated to be the highest quality combat soldier possible, necessarily compromises the Army’s overall effectiveness as a military organization.<sup>19</sup>

The Marine Corps, on the other hand, less distracted by quantitative matters, is intentionally very selective, not wishing to jeopardize the fulfillment of their purpose by recruiting individuals without the qualities they are seeking. It is looking for recruits who are ready and willing to be ready and willing at all times to fulfill its mission. This mission, which has changed very little since its establishment in 1775,<sup>20</sup> revolves around its primary use as a “quick-strike” force,<sup>21</sup> i.e., it is used in selective circumstances to rapidly overwhelm its enemy with superior firepower and *esprit*, usually in order to pave the way for the Army’s large-scale assault.<sup>22</sup> Now, because the Marine Corps gets the best

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survey and found that 17 percent of those asked were inclined to enlist in the Army. In 1995, this number dwindled to 12 percent, a figure the Marine Corps has held for almost a decade. Ricks, 178.

<sup>18</sup> Ricks, 176.

<sup>19</sup> But I am not implying that the U.S. Army is not effective at all because of its these issues. The Army does a very good job with the materials it has been given, and indeed it is, in general, one of the most well-trained military organizations in the world. However, the Marine Corps is a far superior fighting force on almost every level, and is acknowledged to be so by all military analysts.

<sup>20</sup> Making it the oldest branch of the U.S. military.

<sup>21</sup> Its other uses are as a guard for U.S. embassies around the world, as protection for the Navy, and as the guardians of the President. In the latter regard, it serves a very Praetorian function—a fact which will take on greater significance later.

<sup>22</sup> However, in the postmodern world, increasing micronationalist political and social trends (i.e., sociological balkanization) throughout the world have begun to alter the missions of the Army, Navy, and Air Force as well from a Cold War behemoth military machine to one more closely resembling that of the Marine Corps. Wars are increasingly being fought on a smaller, more localized level, rather than on a theater-wide scale, and the need for a “small wars” force has reinvigorated the importance of the

possible recruits available, and because they have developed very effective training techniques keeping with the essence of and ensuring the success of their mission, they currently produce among the finest soldiers the world has ever seen, ranking them with a very small number of former luminaries that spans in time from the Roman army of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Centuries, to most recently, the German Wehrmacht of 1939-45.

#### IV. MILITARY TRAINING AND CULTURE

In the last few decades, the Army has distinguished itself by making a very significant effort to adapt itself to a radically changing society. Much to its credit, and with begrudging praise by many sociologists, the Army has more effectively addressed America's cultural problems involving race and gender that seem to have continually eluded civilian attempts in both the public and private sectors. Ricks notes that its nearly 10,000 African-American officers "form the largest group of black executives in the country".<sup>23</sup> In response to many progressive large-scale cultural shifts in society over the last thirty years, the Army has adapted itself to American consumer culture as a more "user-friendly" military, with college grants, special service contracts, mixed gender training, *and* the promise of self-actualization. It has successfully made these changes, all

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Marine Corps, as that has been their traditional purpose. Until 1992, the U.S. military had been deployed 10 times since WWII. Since the Gulf War, during the Clinton Administration the military has been deployed, on average, four times per year, and with 800,000 less soldiers than during the Gulf War. In each case, the Marine Corps has been in the vanguard of each deployment. In light of the changing geopolitical landscape, the other branches of military service have been forced to re-examine their identity and their mission, which is causing no small amount of consternation on their part.

In a similar manner, the Church faces a metaphysical landscape of belief in the secular world that is increasingly philosophically and sociologically localized, but is itself suffering from a type of internal theological and sociological balkanization. Whereas the Catholic Church once reigned as the most visible expression of Christianity in the world, the Protestant Reformation split the Church's dissenters into many smaller theological movements very soon after the Reformation had taken hold. American Protestantism has even further balkanized Christianity, especially after the great revivalist movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, into microtheological enclaves so small that now they are scarcely larger than the individual believer.

<sup>23</sup> Ricks, 177.

the while attempting to preserve its essential function, which, as a few comedic pundits have noted, is to kill people and to break things. Because it is an all-volunteer organization, it must incessantly question how to meet its quota for enlistees in a society that is increasingly distrustful of government and progressively inclined towards pacifism. Army Basic Training (henceforth referred to as ABT) is less physically severe than at any time in American history, partly in response to society's progressive mollification. It is also shorter—a mere eight weeks—down from thirteen weeks during the Vietnam era for mostly the same reason. There is very little shouting in ABT, and absolutely no singling out or denigration of an individual trainee is allowed. Trainees are even allowed quite a few freedoms after a period of weeks. While it can often be serious, it is never a severe or antagonistic environment.

Marine Corps training, however, is an entirely different experience. Marine Recruit Training (henceforth referred to as MRT) is three weeks longer than ABT and far more rigorous both physically and psychologically. Yet, it is interesting to note that the Marine recruit<sup>24</sup> receives less combat infantry training by comparison.<sup>25</sup> MRT is largely an indoctrination procedure that is designed to break down individualistic behavior and replace it with a distinct sense of collective identity and unity among the recruits, which is intended to transfer with them once they enter into regular Marine Corps life.<sup>26</sup> This is accomplished through physical training, continual repetition of close-order drill (marching, holding rifles, etc.), and a variety of regular daily routines, such as making one's bunk or cleaning of the barracks, that cannot be completed by an individual alone in the time allotted. There are other similar routines, such as the putting on of one's

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<sup>24</sup> Recruits are not called "Marines" until they complete MRT, whereas Army recruits are called "soldier-trainees". This further reinforces the exclusionary presentation of the Marine Corps as implied in its advertising, which then makes being called a "Marine" a more tangible reward. In some cases this results in very significant displays of emotion. See James B. Woulfe, *Into the Crucible: Making Marines for the 21st Century* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1998), 172, 175.

<sup>25</sup> However, in both the Army and the Marine Corps, after their respective basic trainings, combat soldiers go on to additional infantry training.

<sup>26</sup> Ricks, 37, 175.

clothes, which must be done as a group in unison. There are also various rites of passage that the recruits must pass during their eleven weeks in training, and if an individual fails, s/he is “recycled” into another training platoon and must start over again. One of the first structures of individuality that is removed from the recruits is their personal identity. When referring to themselves, recruits must use the third-person format: “Recruit (last name)” —they are not allowed to use the first person or their first names. And unlike the other branches of service which have gender-integrated basic training, the Marine Corps is the only branch that still trains and houses men and women separately. The Marine Corps believes this separation keeps the recruits focused during this crucial formation process when they are rendered very vulnerable, both emotionally and psychologically. Because most of these youths were previously accustomed to seeking solace in sexual relationships, drug use, and other similar escape mechanisms when confronted with stressful situations, and the Marine Corps cuts off all of these channels of escape in order to psychologically prepare them for the stress of the battlefield, where indulgence in those same escape mechanisms would undermine individual and corporate operational readiness. Therefore, the sexes are separated during training, and any evidence of drug use is grounds for expulsion from MRT. Furthermore, the fear of death, which is much more readily perceivable in a military career than in civilian life, is assuaged in the Marine Corps largely through an Asian-culture-like form of ancestor worship. Recruits are catechized that living or dead, once they become a Marine, they will forever be part of the pantheon of Marines and will live and be remembered as long as the Marine Corps lives. They are also made to memorize Marine Corps’ history—its great battles as well as former Marines of distinction, both honorable and dishonorable—in order to remind them of the standards they are required to live up to, and to give them a sense of existential continuity by grounding them in their (new) past.<sup>27</sup> This collective daily

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<sup>27</sup> Gen. Al Gray, former Commandant of the Marine Corps and its overarching ideological father says: “History is the glue that holds this together. A lot of people have worn the title ‘Marine’, and you don’t

existence is consciously culminated in a non-stop, fifty-four hour final phase of MRT called “The Crucible”.<sup>28</sup> During this phase, which is designed so that the numerous tasks assigned may be completed *only* through team effort, the recruits are deprived of sleep, meals, and most importantly, any sense of what lies ahead for them, so that they are forced to use what they have learned about collective cooperation in a simulated battlefield environment. Immediately after (and only after) the successful completion of The Crucible, the physically and psychologically depleted recruits are pinned with the Eagle, Globe and Anchor pendant of the Marine Corps, officially according them the status of “Marine”.

To subliminally reiterate the pre-eminence of this collective identity, Marine officers don’t wear name tags (Army officers do), and Marines don’t wear service patches (Army soldiers do).<sup>29</sup> Marines are taught to dislike anything (besides rank) that distinguishes one Marine over another—they believe it is anathema to the cohesion of the group. And interestingly, it is the only branch of the military where the name of the lowest soldier—the Marine—is the name of the organization itself.<sup>30</sup> Ricks writes:

Ask an American soldier to identify himself, and he probably will say he is “in the Army”. By contrast, a Marine—especially if he is one of the better ones—is likely to say, “I’m a Marine.” The small linguistic difference is significant: The first is a matter of membership or occupation; the second speaks to identity....To be in the Corps is to be in a state of mind that dictates one’s relationship to the rest of the world.<sup>31</sup> (Ricks, 238)

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want to let them down.” Ricks, 66; also 195.

<sup>28</sup> See Woulfe. Also, Ricks, 261-263.

<sup>29</sup> Service patches show what conflicts, if any, a soldier has fought in, etc.

<sup>30</sup> That is, the name “Marine Corps” really signifies “The Corps of Marines”. “Corps” is a derivation from the Latin *corpus*, which not only means a literal “body” (*hoc est corpus meum* - I Co. 11:23), but also a metaphorical one, a “collective” (*estis Corpus Christi* - I Co. 12:22).

<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in his recent biography of Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., Carlo d’Este reports that when asked in what unit they served, most WWII veterans will usually reply: “X Army, X Division, X Regiment”, etc. When a former member of Patton’s Third Army was asked the same question, for the majority the reply was: “I was with Patton”, revealing the same awareness of a collective identity as the Marine Corps possesses. Through his personality, Patton generated an *esprit de Corps* in his men that no matter what

Lastly, like many other religions the Marine Corps has its own creed—“The Rifleman’s Creed”—which every recruit must memorize. To the uninitiated, the force of this creed might remain inaccessible if not for Stanley Kubrick, who depicted it in one of the most powerful scenes in his war film, *Full Metal Jacket*. Lying stiffly on top of their bunks, the recruits, commanded to “pray” and with rifles in hand, chant in unison:

This is my rifle. There are many like it but this one is mine. My rifle is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I master my life.

My rifle, without me is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than any enemy who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me. I will...

My rifle and myself know that what counts in this war is not the rounds we fire, the noise of or burst, nor the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count. We will hit...

My rifle is human, even as I, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weakness, its strength, its parts, its accessories, its sights and its barrel. I will keep my rifle clean and ready, even as I am clean and ready. We will become part of each other. We will...

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they personally felt about him (many hated him), they felt like they belonged to something larger than themselves. His very Marine-like insistence of discipline, training, and honor in his men was renowned throughout the Allied armies, and it is widely credited that his Third Army made some of the most stunning accomplishments ever recorded in military history because of his methods. He was the only American general the Germans were genuinely terrified of, because he could get his men to do anything he wanted them to do, no matter how “impossible” from a military perspective. In an ironic gesture perfectly expressing this Army general’s “Marine-ness”, Patton’s nephew described that when he was informed of his uncle’s death, a young Marine officer sitting with him who was moved to tears at the unfortunate news, stood and toasted the fallen general saying: “There died best g--damn Marine the Army ever bred.” Carlo d’Este, *Patton: A Genius For War* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 799, 813.

Before God I swear this creed. My rifle and myself are the defenders of my country. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life.

So be it, until victory is America's and there is no enemy, but Peace.<sup>32</sup>

It should come as no surprise then that Marines command a highly fearsome presence on the battlefield. They exhibit discipline and composure under pressure that have been noted by friend, foe, and even reluctantly by their most fierce rivals in the other branches of service. Within the last decade, the Army has even reluctantly tipped its helmet in respect by incorporating portions of Marine Corps training methods into ABT, because of the Marines' indisputable effectiveness in training quality soldiers. And in cases where new Army recruits have prior service records in another branch of military service, only former Marines are allowed to skip ABT altogether and proceed directly to Infantry Training.

However, the foundation of the Marine Corps is ultimately not the assemblage of the training techniques it employs, or from any single doctrinal theory that it adheres to, but is rather a consciously formulated *culture* that is defined by three simple words: Honor, Courage, Commitment.<sup>33</sup> These words are the animating essence of Marine

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<sup>32</sup> Authored by Maj. Gen. W.H. Rupertus, USMC. Full text acquired from an auxiliary Marine Corps website: "<http://www.pos.net/Marine/rifle.html>" as of 5/12/99. It is also irresistible to note that if the word "rifle" is substituted with "Bible", the result is a mantra that would, in spirit, probably pique the interest many a theological conservative.

<sup>33</sup> The Army also has a similar motto: "Duty, Honor, Country". However, its motto is more adjunct to its culture, rather than the express image of its culture as is the Marine Corps motto. As the Army is an organization of doctrine, and since this doctrine sometimes changes radically and/or frequently, depending upon the civilian socio-political environment, its motto necessarily has less long-term influence upon the Army soldier. The Marine Corps motto, on the other hand, is the very embodiment of the whole of the Marine Corps ethos, and it is by this motto that all Marines are taught to measure, not only their job performance as soldiers, but their very humanity against. Whether on-duty or off-duty, they are always Marines, and must represent the Corps in a fashion that is commensurate with its ethos. A perfect example of this is found in their very strict dress and behavior codes for off-duty personnel. The following is a brief excerpt from "Marine Corps Uniform Regulations - Marine Corps Order P1020.34" section 1005 entitled "Civilian Clothing": "Marines are associated and identified with the

Corps culture from which all of its training and doctrine gains its meaning, and to which all conditions are to be subservient. As briefly illustrated previously, every phase of Marine Corps life from the initial advertising slogan on television, through MRT, and ultimate assignment into the Fleet, very purposefully revolves around the crucifying of the pre-Marine self and the subsequent resurrection into the brotherhood of Marines. This “born-again” metaphor is no accident, and is definitely not lost among those recruits of a Christian-based religious upbringing.<sup>34</sup> By the completion of their rebirth into this culture, the recruits have been infused with a thorough sense of collective identity that is surprisingly reminiscent of Eastern cultures, especially the Japanese. Ricks even calls Marines the “American samurai”.<sup>35</sup> The continual reinforcement of this insular culture creates a very high degree of unit cohesion (the *sine qua non* of battlefield success) from the fire-team (4-6 men) to the division (15,000 men), and also helps steele the individual soldier against the horrific reality that on the battlefield, their lives are as a vapor. As the vanguard of any major ground assault, a Marine infantryman making a beach landing against a well-trained and fortified enemy has a life expectancy of less than eight seconds.

So thorough is this indoctrination that the Marine Corps, it has been criticized, has in recent years taken a Praetorian view of themselves in the wake of moral decline of American society. Although they consider themselves to be the front-line defenders of the American way of life, many Marines believe they are morally and culturally superior to it, and they will say so in no uncertain terms. Marine Corps culture is so different from that of contemporary society, and is so much more absolutist especially with regard to

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Marine Corps in and out of uniform, and when on or off duty. Therefore, when civilian clothing is worn, Marines will ensure that their dress and personal appearance are conservative and commensurate with the high standards traditionally associated with the Marine Corps. No eccentricities of dress will be permitted.” This is followed by a list of clothing deemed inappropriate, among which are t-shirts, sweats, and other very common items worn regularly in public by most Americans. See the heading “Marine Corps Uniform Regulations” at the main Marine Corps website “[www.usmc.mil/info.nsf/info](http://www.usmc.mil/info.nsf/info)” as of 6/15/99.

<sup>34</sup> Ricks, 116-119.

<sup>35</sup> Ricks, 199-201.

morality, that the Marine Corps reluctantly feels it have little choice but to retreat from “decadent” American culture, or risk losing its own culture, which is the very source of its identity and the substance of its effectiveness.

#### V. EVANGELISM IN AMERICA

Whether they are comfortable admitting it or not, Christians are also propagandists. They have a metaphysical widget to “sell” that they are not only commanded to advertise but become internally compelled to advertise because they are convinced of its veracity. Keeping with Ellul, Christians also generally believe that aim of Christianity is to fulfill a preexistent need within the human being—the need to be unified with their Creator.<sup>36</sup> So then, in broad philosophical terms, the goal of the Christian witness is to elucidate and offer the non-believer a cure for the unknown and/or sublimated anxiety caused by a divided self supposedly present in all human beings—a self that wants to be itself through union with God, but is separated from God through sin. And the Gospel is, in fact, the efficacious promise of the attainability of true self-actualization and restoration of the divided self by association and reconciliation with this God-widget. What I have noticed among most American Christians, especially Evangelicals, is that they use the Army’s “Be All You Can Be” method to convey the Gospel to the non-believer, only it sounds more like this: “God loves you and He has got a plan for your life.

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<sup>36</sup> However, I mention that Ellul would decry the use of propaganda as such by Christianity, because he believed propaganda suspended authentic independent thought and genuine political dialogue, replacing it with a reactionary and un-reasoned method of decision-making. From a sociological perspective his criticism is valid, however, postmodern commentators would respond that language itself is a form of propaganda, similarly suspending genuine thought and dialogue among peoples no matter what form it takes. My inquiry takes for granted the transcendental necessity of the Great Commission, and the potential authenticity of conversion and subsequent communion with the Divine available to those who have been the object of Christian propaganda, i.e., that in spite of the inherent politicization of language, propaganda’s effects are not necessarily as detrimental to Christianity as Ellul might have believed, as they are an inevitable result of the use of language itself. And furthermore, that God’s grace also extends to humanity’s entanglement in subjectivity and intellectual imprecision in understanding truth.

He wants to fill you and heal you and make you what you were meant to be. Just choose Him, and He will come into your life and help you be what you were meant to be.” The object of that propaganda? The self: “God has got a plan for *your* life.” Using this model, the Christian “recruiter” attempts convince the non-believer that God has got a special technique for self-actualization that is more effective than the one they currently possess. And, if they simply choose Him and adopt His “training regimen”, they will fulfill their self in a more authentic manner.

This approach, while understandably appealing because of its inclusive and non-threatening presentation, does not address the necessity, if any, for a foundational change in the soul. It is a passive appeal, soliciting only to the limited number of people who are dissatisfied with the current progress or level of their self-actualization, and who are seeking (on a conscious or unconscious level) to replace their current methods for self-actualization. At best, it conjures a weak imperative, assuming that all people actively and genuinely desire to appropriate the most effectual methods for self-actualization, or that they are decidedly looking to be loved by a deity. Furthermore, it presents Christianity as just one more ideological widget among the thousands competing for the allegiance of the human soul, with no entreaty to any of the many unique claims of Christianity, and no elucidation of the entirely superior and transcendent character of God. And at its worst, this method can exhibit Christianity as something from which to pick and choose partitively, permitting the non-believer to freely syncretize aspects of God that are most alluring, easiest to digest, or most symbiotic with one’s current self-actualization methods.<sup>37</sup> And so, to this witness the non-believer simply has to declare (and often does), “I like my life as it is. Thanks, but no thanks,” and the opportunity for evangelism

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<sup>37</sup> The latter is, in fact, a common criticism of evangelicalism within orthodoxy. It is also true that theologians with progressively Pelagian views are more likely to be accommodating to this sort of syncretism, because belief in the authentic freedom of volition lends itself to a belief in the authentic possibility of self-determination. Historically, Christianity has been susceptible to a syncretic inclination throughout its history, beginning almost immediately after Christ’s death with both Jewish and Roman culture. See also Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson, 1996), 64.

is ended because the gift of salvation is presented as a thing to choose or not to choose at one's leisure, not as a thing of immediate necessity. Having been inherently trivialized through this consumer appeal, the Gospel can thus be ignored by the non-believer without further discussion. The radical truth-claims of Christianity, if even discussed, are never established in the mind of the non-believer as having any relevance, primarily because the issue of original sin is not addressed. Without the concept of original sin, however, there is no imminent need for redemption. And without the necessity for redemption, there is no need for a Redeemer.

The Marine Corps' approach to Christian proselytizing (or "recruitment"), however, sounds something like this: "God is all things perfectly good. Qualitatively, you (and me), by contrast, are precisely the opposite. We have inherited a will inclined towards that which is everything unlike this God. This moral dissonance between ourselves and God prevents us from having communion with Him. But, since He genuinely cares about this problem we have, He has created a provision for it. The requirement, however, is unconditional surrender to Him, without which we will choose to spend eternity separated from Him." Though merely a generic representation of the Marine Corps approach, it should be obvious that this paradigm is deliberately threatening to the unregenerate self on its face, and therefore, not appealing on a consumer level. It presents a warrant precisely for the elimination of the self-as-we-know-it, demanding in exchange an identity that is completely rooted in God's existence, not its own. As such, it elicits a very strong reaction on the part of the propagandee precisely because of its existential antagonism towards the unregenerate self, creating a powerful imperative for this self to defend itself against its own conceptual destruction actuated by the truth-claim of original sin. Furthermore, this method widens the demographic pool of propagandees from the limited pool of dissatisfied metaphysical consumers addressed by the Army method, to the whole of the human community. It engages all people because all people believe in their own inherent goodness on some level

no matter how minute a quantity that may actually entail.<sup>38</sup> From a reverse Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, however, this belief may easily be observed as a defense mechanism against the overarching terror of the potential reality that the self-concept is not ethically sound, but fragmented and corrupt through the sin of Adam. Hence, this method demands a response from the non-believer because it appears to exclude the whole of humanity from something universally deemed a seminal human right: access to or resonance with things Divine; just as Marine Corps advertising appears to exclude the potential recruit from inclusion in an elite fraternity. Since, for the purpose of maintaining the integrity of its self-concept, the unregenerate self needs to both believe it is morally good, and also that it may, in its current unregenerate state, nevertheless meaningfully participate with the Divine, a evangelism campaign that denies the unregenerate self these assumed existential properties and rights is a campaign that will engage every human being on both a practical and philosophical level, challenging them to examine the truth-claims presented by Christianity. While not everyone who hears the Gospel message in this manner will necessarily incline themselves to become Christians as a result,<sup>39</sup> the non-believer will necessarily be forced to triangulate their identity in relation to this message. Because God declares His own holiness to be infinitely superlative to any human ethical standard, no matter how ennobled, and if one is to accept God's own self-description as valid, then the presentation of the Gospel must

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<sup>38</sup> Otherwise, the self is left with the insoluble reality of its own inherent evil, having no means to correct this reality. The self must resolve the cognitive dissonance created by this reality, either by accepting its own inherent evil, or denying it. If it accepts it, it must find a means to end this dissonance between the existential need to be good, and the utter inability to affect a change towards the good, which results in either a psychological retreat towards a god, or a retreat towards nihilism. If the self denies this truth (as most selves do), however, then it must, in a very Freudian manner, concoct a (meta)narrative to perfume the harsh reality of inherited sin. Most often the (meta)narrative created by the self is a belief in its own goodness. In Romans 7, we find the quintessential example of this philosophical struggle within the self. Paul's response is, of course, a retreat towards God. And while I am not attempting to deny that humanity is indeed *imago Dei*, I propose that a Marine Corps method of witnessing denies the unregenerate self the ability to claim *substantia Dei* (in the "essence" of God), which it is often wont to do.

<sup>39</sup> That is, purely from a human vantage point. The operation of the Holy Spirit in matters of salvation is beyond the nature of this discussion.

include the unequivocal truth of His transcendence and ethical superiority. Otherwise, the Christian evangel will not actively participate in catalyzing the non-believer to the action of radical self-examination, which is the principal scriptural and philosophical means by which a self can begin the process of reconciliation to God.

It does need iterating, however, that Christianity is not elitist as is the Marine Corps with regard to membership. Furthermore, depending upon how Augustinian one's theology is, the true believer has no place to feel pride in being a member of "The Chosen" because the believer had nothing to do with the conversion process. Both Marine Corps advertising and Christian proselytizing in a Marine Corps paradigm purposefully antagonizes the self and its hubris in order to provoke a reaction on the part of the propagandee. But whereas the Marine Corps offers hubris satisfaction through inclusion in the fraternity of Marines, Christianity does not offer hubris a like reward. Christianity merely offers unconditional surrender to God on the part of the hubris of the propagandee, which without Divine enlightenment on the matter will seem neither enticing nor much of a "choice", as most people who are not Jonathan Edwards tend to define that word. This does not mean that there is no reward at all for the potential believer, just not one that is readily apprehensible to the unregenerate mind. And while Christianity may appear exclusionary in that God deems human efforts towards acts of holiness utterly unacceptable to merit salvation, it is thoroughly inclusive in that the Gospel is offered to all to whom it is preached without regard to anthropological hierarchies of status or power. God must always be the subject of the salvation experience, the self always the object; and so it is the Marine Corps' specific denigration of individual self-supremacy and self-reflexive elevation of its culture in its advertising that is of great interest here, and proffered as the most effective model for Christian evangelism for a series of lengthy but very important reasonings that follow.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> It is also noted that while the both the Marine Corps and the Church Ideal indeed have several important traits in common (at least in theory), there is not necessarily a thorough one-to-one correspondence between the two cultures. In an interesting note, however, the Marine Corps is organized around an

## VI. OBSERVATIONS IN POST/MODERNITY

Communism—one eschatological extreme of the modernist project and also the religion of the political Left for many years—failed on a purely visible level in the Soviet Union because of a variety of political and economic reasons which have been much written about and celebrated by the democracies of the world.<sup>41</sup> However, it could be argued that the visible factors only hastened an already crumbling philosophical fundament. As a philosophy based only in things tangible, Soviet-style Marxism does not have a transcendent metanarrative in and of itself that gives its people existential purpose in their labor.<sup>42</sup> That is, it does not recognize that humanity inherently “does not live by bread alone” and that human existence is more than the availability and distribution of material goods “each according to his needs.” Technopoly,<sup>43</sup> however, communism’s political antipode and the most virile scion of capitalism, is also failing for this same reason (and others), progressively leaving its people both dehumanized and bereft of any transcendence measurable with the modern scientific equipment it values so highly. This spectrum-wide philosophical failure of the modernist enterprise has paved the way for postmodernism to have great intellectual credibility in the academic world, and pervasive acceptance in popular culture. But the germinal cause for the postmodern rebellion has roots in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, when King Charles V of France robbed the clock from the

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overtly trinitarian structure: three fire teams per squad, three squads per platoon, three platoons per company, three companies per battalion, three battalions per regiment, three infantry regiments per division, and three divisions in the active-duty Marine Corps (Ricks, 150).

<sup>41</sup> Chinese communism and other Asian forms of communism, though they have their growing problems, are proving to be much more resilient, partly because their societies were highly communal in nature to begin with, and also because they are not thoroughly atheistic like Soviet-style Marxism.

<sup>42</sup> Meaning, a metanarrative that is commensurate with unregenerate human nature, not necessarily one that possesses authentic transcendental qualities. Capitalism is more resonant with the pervasive self-interest found in unregenerate human nature, and therefore is more efficacious as an economic system on the whole in a fallen world. Neither shares much with transcendent “righteousness”, however.

<sup>43</sup> Of which America is the first and most clarion example. See Neil Postman’s *Technopoly* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

monastery, turning a tool to aid humanity's appropriation of the transcendent into a means to regulate economic efficiency by initiating the what is now the modern workday.<sup>44</sup> Repeated in spirit during the Enlightenment with the deification of the scientific method, this age of progress gave birth to modernism, whose various philosophical, political and sociological progeny have virulently subordinated transcendence in favor of measured exactitude in all realms of experience. And so, Western culture, having finally grown tired of being gradually dehumanized and robbed of access to transcendental experience, has since reacted fiercely in the form of postmodernism.

From a certain perspective, I do agree with an important basic tenet of postmodernism, viz., that humanity is inescapably enslaved to subjectivity.<sup>45</sup> But in a post-Nietzschean world where God is dead in the heart of humanity, and where any linguistically consistent or meaningful notion of God has been philosophically eradicated, postmodernists must create their own local transcendental authenticity(ies) in place of this dead God. Otherwise, they leave the soul bereft of authentic transcendental possibility as did their modernist forebears. Postmodern theorists indeed affirm the need for ritual in human life, but postmodern ritual is marked by the participant's supplying of meaning to the ritual of its choosing. This is in opposition to the traditional religious model where the ritual provides the participants transcendent meaning and a collective identity through the sharing of that ritual.<sup>46</sup> But is the postmodern illusion of self-

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<sup>44</sup> See Jean Gimpel, *The Medieval Machine* (New York: Penguin, 1976).

<sup>45</sup> Assuming, as it does, that there is no external absolute reference point of truth, a transcendental 'divinity'/truth beyond local cultural interpretations.

<sup>46</sup> Which, I attest, makes postmodern ritual ultimately more superficial in meaning. Because human beings are forever changing their opinions, the postmodern mode of ritual does not allow the subject to have their relationship to the ritual repeatedly pass through the growth/death cycle necessary for the development of all mature life, and thus, for ritual to have mature and genuine transcendental power over the subject. In postmodern ritual, as soon as the ascribed meaning no longer has relevance or loses meaning to the subject (usu. through a change of opinion), the ritual is given a new meaning, or if it is no longer convenient, is abandoned altogether. Hence, the meaning and community found in the ritual(s) never develops beyond the larval stage within the psyche of the subject, and thus, is more superficial in its long-term effect upon that subject.

supplied meaning sustainable over the course of the life of a postmodern “believer”? While it is perfectly natural for a human being to worship a religion of their own choosing, is it possible to authentically garner genuine existential fulfillment by worshipping and believing in a religion of one’s own conscious creation? If meaning is inherited in the local group (or the individual) as the postmoderns would posit, then why do human beings strive to find existential meaning in things that are essentially *inhumanus*—“not human”, meaning “divine”—such as nature, the universe, or extra-terrestrial life? Is it possible that contemporary society is so vacant of meaning because humanity sees its own reflection in the creation of its hands—buildings, roads, and other technological achievements? Perhaps the world is indeed dualistic, with humanity and its creations, and nature itself on opposite sides of the dualist structure. And therefore it is in the natural world, a world that is precisely *inhumanus*, that humanity seeks (and often finds) genuine solace. Perhaps Groucho Marks did not realize he was also speaking of the metaphysical when he said: “I would never belong to a club that would have me as a member.”

In Genesis, humanity raised up a great tower—the work of its hands—in an attempt to ascend to the throne of God. In the modernist enterprise, it was technology—the tools used to make the tower—that was raised in its stead. And now, in the postmodern project, it is humanity itself—the hands that made the tools—that vies for ascendancy over God; needing first to successfully trivialize God into insignificance before it could muster the bold courage to claim the right to the throne it has vehemently sought after since the Fall. But, unwilling to succumb to the existential suicide of total nihilism, postmodern philosophers instead offer society what is essentially a philosophical form of Logotherapy<sup>47</sup> as a means to make sense out of the barbarism of the twentieth century—modernism’s true cotillion.<sup>48</sup> And although I believe postmodernists have

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<sup>47</sup> Victor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York: Mass Market Paperbacks, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> This is especially true of the Richard Rorty’s New Pragmatist variety of postmodern philosophy.

brought a significant measure of philosophical clarity to some very important truths that an otherwise modernist American Protestant tradition has forgotten,<sup>49</sup> I believe that postmodernism as a general philosophical theory will eventually find itself unable to maintain its present façade over its essentially nihilist foundation, and thus, in the long-run will remain a largely uninhabited philosophical structure. Furthermore, just like all aesthetic shifts in the arts, what is presently proffered as the aesthetic zeitgeist of style, is in later generations invariably reduced to technique to be used in the service of craft. Impressionist painting, serial music, and minimalist architecture, to cite just a few examples, were once forward-thinking all-encompassing aesthetic styles that have since been relegated to mere artistic technique. Presently touted as the philosophical style of choice, postmodernism will, in a future generation not afar off I suspect, have its share of intellectual chaff winnowed from the grain of truth it possesses, and will be reduced to a mere technique in the creation of humanity's *Gesamtkunstwerk* of knowledge.

But where has the Church been during the philosophical failure of modernism and the ascendancy of postmodernism? Many academic theologians, in a rush to keep pace with philosophy's cyclical pied-piper have fully embraced postmodernism in the attempt to remain relevant, affirming mysticism and transcendence *in the local community*, but denying the possibility of humanity's access to overarching transcendence beyond those subjective, local interpretations. Some even impose upon this self-declared omniscient God the anthropomorphic subjectivity shared by his creation. Conservative churches have reacted to this capitulation of the orthodox creeds by retreating from the dialogue with contemporary culture and academia altogether, hiding in either unreasoned or over-reasoned orthodoxy. Many mainline denominations have contrarily made church primarily a social organization—out of touch with the reality of God's imminence.

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<sup>49</sup> Such as, the seminal importance of community within human existence and the significant role it plays in the development of individual identity; the labyrinthine nature human subjectivity, its relationship to Biblical hermeneutics, especially historical critical methods; and many other important subjects which modernism has dissolved in contemporary Christian thought.

Pentecostal churches have further splintered Protestant Christianity by their over-emphasis of subjective experience, rejecting out-of-hand the intellectual disciplines that boundary such experience. It is relatively plain that these are the machinations of a house divided. And so, I believe Seneca's observation may indeed be applied to contemporary American Protestantism: "When a man does not know what harbor he is making for, no wind is the right wind."<sup>50</sup>

#### VII. CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND AMERICAN CULTURE

However, postmodernity and the various sociological pilot fish that accompany it are not American Protestantism's only problems, and maybe not even its most pressing ones. Although I have included in this discussion the issues raised by postmodernism because theologica is presently consumed with addressing this philosophical movement, it has been included primarily so that the subordinate relationship of postmodernism to what I hold is the primary crisis that faces the Church in America might be clearly manifest.

The American Church's overshadowing problem, from which nearly *all* of its other problems derive, is that it has capitulated its historically distinct identity to modernist American culture, and so naturally it has lost a clear and universal sense of purpose apart from that culture. The aggregate of individual crises within the Church raised by postmodernism has merely exacerbated this imbroglio, which was initiated in America primarily during the revivalist movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Whereas modernism at least had a goal to strive for, however dehumanizing the result of that goal might have been, postmodernism is intrinsically a pastiche, pointillistic philosophy,<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, Epis. LXXI, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Almost exactly like America's military strategy in Vietnam. See Col. Harry Summers, Jr. *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982). Essentially, this work is a Clausewitzian critique of the Vietnam war, which briefly put, describes the loss in Vietnam in terms of

purposefully lacking any vectoral motion whatsoever. This random-access philosophical approach will, I affirm, ultimately result in the total inability of postmodern society or a postmodern Church to travel to any of the ethical or communal ideals it claims are necessary for healthy and balanced human existence.<sup>52</sup> Once again, Seneca's observation rings true. Furthermore, it is very instructive to consider the following analysis of successful military structures. Carl H. Builder, in a RAND corporation analysis of the U.S. military, writes:

From the analysis of high-performing groups...one of the most consistent attributes is a shared sense of identity and purpose. 'HPSs [High Performing Systems] are clear on their broad purposes. They know why they exist and what they are trying to do. Members have pictures in their heads that are strikingly congruent.' Thus...a clear, shared sense of identity and purpose may lead to high performance because it facilitates decision making that would otherwise be difficult, perhaps so difficult as to be deferred, to the group's detriment.<sup>53</sup>

At its inception, America was a very unique country because it was the first country to be defined by a political ideal that appealed to transcendent truth over the will

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an abandonment of basic military principles, one of the most important ones being the capturing and holding of property. American strategy during the Vietnam war was only to engage the enemy, to which it never lost a single battle, but not to hold the property once victory was achieved. This pointillistic strategy led to battles being fought over and over again on the exact same piece of land. Ultimately, the war in Vietnam was won conventionally after the American pullout, resulting in the capture of Saigon. Similarly, postmoderns claim to have the clearest answer(s) to the malaise generated by modernism, but the pastiche approach of postmodernism to generating meaning is little more than a sampling of nostalgic elements culled from the flower of formerly meaningful experience. It does not appropriate the essence or "property" of the deeper roots of meaningful experience, and therefore, I believe it will fail in its attempt, just like America in Vietnam.

<sup>52</sup> On the surface this may appear to be a highly modernist solution, in that it is an appeal to linearity or progress to a certain degree. Modernism, however, upheld the supremacy of progress for its own sake. Postmodernism, as a reactionary movement, naturally advocates the complete abandonment of any linearity whatsoever. What I am proposing is a middle ground between the two.

<sup>53</sup> Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (A RAND Corporation research study) (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1989), 36. In this quote he cites Peter B. Vaill "The Purposing of High-Performance Systems," in *Organizational Dynamics* (Autumn 1982), 23-29.

of earthly kings, and whose diverse people were, in theory, unified by this ideal and less by ethnic, cultural, or political heritage. This exalted notion is visibly represented in the Constitution, which still functions, however weakly, as scripture for the American political system. The Marine Corps was birthed out of the same philosophical dynamic, having been founded at the same time as the American nation, and it has managed to maintain a meaningful identity for over two hundred years because it consciously refuses to dismantle the bulwarks established by its original credenda, which it shares with the great American founders. The modern Marine Corps remains a highly successful organization because its present identity is based in perpetual homage to its historical identity.<sup>54</sup> But what is ironic is that the very culture that gave birth to the Marine Corps' ideology is rapidly abandoning those same footings in favor of a sophistic political and philosophical egalitarianism, and is subsequently losing its sense of identity as a nation in the process. The fact that the American Church has in large part adopted the Army's "Be All You Can Be" approach to evangelism merely evidences that it has mimicked the same course of action as that of American culture at-large, similarly capitulating its history and ideological fundament to an arbitrary theological egalitarianism, and/or independence from any tradition. This has caused the Church as a corps from the local level to the global level to completely lose sense of its collective selfhood, creating a loss of a larger sense of purpose. In turn, this has resulted in its present mediocrity as an "army", of which few in the Church have not readily observed. As Proverbs instructs us much like Seneca, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."<sup>55</sup>

Additionally, the physical isolation of the American continent which fueled its traditional political isolationism, and which has protected it from the ill effects of the wars that have plagued most of the globe, is also mirrored in the conscious cultural isolationism hitherto of the American Church. This is most acutely evidenced, especially

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<sup>54</sup> Much like the creative arts did in the Classical tradition.

<sup>55</sup> Pr. 29:18

among Evangelicals, by a highly proprietary *langue* that is completely alien to the surrounding culture. While all cultural sub-groups have their own technical or proprietary terminology, the one(s) used by many American Protestants in connection with their culture appears to the non-believer as highly artificial and generally repulsive. Thus, facing an identity crisis similar to that of the post Cold-War U.S. Army, the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Church is finally awakening from its Rip-van-Winkle-like slumber and is being forced to radically re-examine its identity to a vastly changed cultural climate that it is, in large part, unprepared to reckon with. And because the American Church is presently plagued by massive theological balkanization, Church leaders are, and will continue to be ultimately hampered in their attempts to initiate an effective redoubt against the attacks of secularism and postmodernism on the Church. In this regard, the state of the Church resembles the state of the late Roman Empire, besieged from all sides by “barbarians”, and unable to repel their siege works because of internal conflicts too numerous to unify it against external aggression. Thus, lacking an overall collective identity and possessing an officer class (local pastors/presbyters) generally befuddled by these battlefield conditions, it is no surprise that the Church primarily employs the weak Army evangelistic appeal to the non-believer—one that is in the end only slightly elevated above begging—in its quest to fill its houses of worship.

#### VIII. WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The first question in search of a solution to these issues is not therefore, “Does a Marine Corps method for Christian witnessing work?”, but rather, “What is the goal and purpose of the Church?” Since the end goal desired determines the effectiveness of the methods to reach that goal, the question needs to be asked, Does the Church Universal exist to snatch away the teeming unsaved hordes from inauthentic self-actualization? Or,

does the Church exist to provide an environment for the reconciliation of His creation to Himself, yielding a body of believers bound together by a common ethos, which in turn gives the individual believer the means convey the authenticity of the God-self relationship to those not yet reconciled? Should the Church be more like the Army, forced by “self”-defined doctrinal constraints to fill a quota, or should it be more like the Marine Corps, seeking to fill its mission above all other considerations? If Christianity is simply another metaphysical widget vying for market share among the other world religions, then no, the Marine Corps’ method of evangelism does not “work”. For the evangelistic bean-counters, the number of converts made is definitely the animus of the Gospel. And it is readily apparent that the number of conversions, whether authentic and permanent or not, fuels most of American evangelistic efforts, for it is these statistics that are proffered by most church and para-church organizations in an attempt to validate the effectiveness of their evangelical enterprises. But, this kind of thinking is of a purely statistical, modernist model—the same kind of thinking that measures time spent with God in the quantitative terms of minutes and hours, numbers of verses read, or line items prayed about on a list. While not *prima facie* evils, as stand-alone modes of thought they are not a guaranteed means to transcendence, nor are they conclusive evidence of life in the Spirit.

Furthermore, it is difficult indeed to show from any Biblical texts that Christianity countenances a primary concern for the number of believers in its ranks, or that its effectiveness as a religion is related to those numbers. Although as Christians we might earnestly desire for great numbers to be saved because of the advisable fright of the netherworld, Christ Himself denies this eventuality.<sup>56</sup> Even from a military analysis, Old Testament narrative repeatedly attests that military victory belonged to the realm of God’s will and not the number of soldiers in the Israelite army, God punishing those who

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<sup>56</sup> Mt. 7:14, and 20:16; Lu. 13:24.

would dare to think otherwise.<sup>57</sup> And the fact that contemporary American Christendom is currently more concerned with the quantity of believers over the quality of them shows how structurally reliant the spires of American Evangelical theology are upon the edifice of modernity.

If the purpose of the Church is the latter one previously mentioned, however, then the Marine Corps approach is indeed more effective, because the standard of effectiveness is qualitative, not statistical, in nature. This method helps create a psychological and theological climate suitable to the development of both a quality believer and a quality evangel/propagandist because it immediately upholds the necessity for a change in the soul in relation to the infinite holiness of God. It elevates the radical nature of the Otherness of God, demanding therefore a radical alteration of the unregenerate self in relation to this Other. For those who remain unconvinced, however, insisting that numbers propel or significantly accompany the animus of the Great Commission, military history itself is replete with the overwhelming proof that a few well-trained soldiers are much more useful and effective than masses of poorly trained ones. To cite just a few examples, the Roman army at the height of its power maintained rule over the whole of the Empire for two centuries with a force almost exactly the same size as the modern Marine Corps—approximately 174,000 soldiers.<sup>58</sup> The German Wehrmacht of World War II repeatedly inflicted very heavy casualties on the Allies, even while retreating, entirely due a variety of then-unique training techniques that have since that time been specifically adopted by the Marine Corps.<sup>59</sup> During the Korean War, in

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<sup>57</sup> I Sa. 24:1-25.

<sup>58</sup> With an average of 5,500 soldiers per legion, and at its largest size of thirty legions during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries, this yielded a total force of approximately 171,000 soldiers. Although the legions only comprised about 50% of the armed forces as a whole, they were however, the bulk of the expeditionary and garrison forces along the frontiers. The remaining percentage was made of auxiliary units (cavalry, etc.) formed from conquered peoples, and Praetorians, the elite guard stationed mostly in and around Rome. The security of the Empire, then, fell almost exclusively upon the shoulders of the legions, and thus, I count their numbers as the primary reference point of comparison.

<sup>59</sup> See Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Pub. Co, 1982), for a thorough analysis of the training techniques and performance of the German Wehrmacht.

the hasty winter retreat from the Chosin Reservoir, the Marine Corps greatly distinguished itself by fully evacuating all of its wounded and materiel down treacherous mountain roads with almost no rest, while an Army regiment that was fighting on the opposite side of the reservoir but isolated from the Marine units and having almost the same sized force of about 3,300 soldiers, lost all of its materiel and nearly 90% of its men.<sup>60</sup> Even the Vikings understood well the value of training, noting that the above all its enemies the English House-carl<sup>61</sup> was worth two of any of its other enemies' warriors.<sup>62</sup> High praise indeed from a largely inebriated rabble whose genuinely terrifying fighting methods gave the English-speaking world the word "berserk".

So then, straddling the fence of cultural relevancy and socio-political respectability, it seems that the Church must decide if its goal is to train quality disciples or simply win a herd of barely-converted cattle to itself at any cost. Presently it appears to be doing precisely the latter, spending much more time making people feel accepted through seeker sensitive structures and non-threatening self-actualization sermonizing rather than confronting the issues of unregenerate humanity's offensive state of being in relation to God's holiness. But by trying to make Christianity user-friendly, the Church has robbed Christianity of its power to continually transform those within and without its walls from non-believers into believers, civilians into spiritual soldiers; because the

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<sup>60</sup> This is a very well-known and well-studied battle in the annals of American military history, and all Marine recruits are taught the lessons learned from this battle. The failure of the Army units against that of the Marine units was primarily due to the disintegration of the command structure in the Army units. The Army units were staffed mostly by officers with no previous combat experience, whereas in the Marine Corps, it is a standing doctrine not to promote any officer to a battlefield command who has not had a previous battlefield command experience at his current rank or lower. So, Marine Corps units who are thrust into battle, whether or not the common soldier within those units has any battlefield experience, is commanded by and trained by officers who have had battlefield experience. See Ricks; Joseph R. Owen, *Colder Than Hell: A Marine Rifle Company at the Chosin Reservoir* (New York: IVP Books, 1996); and Martin Russ, *Breakout: The Chosin Reservoir Campaign, Korea 1950* (New York: Fromm International, 1991).

<sup>61</sup> A well-trained, heavily armed and armored professional (paid) soldier active until the time of William the Conqueror. They were essentially a gradually Anglicized Roman soldier, using generally the same training and tactics as that of the Roman legion, and as such, were well-feared throughout their history.

<sup>62</sup> David Howarth, *1066: The Year of the Conquest* (New York, Penguin, 1981), 80.

necessity for radical change in the soul is not addressed by the avoidance of the discussion of sin.<sup>63</sup> By appealing to the potential believer on a consumer level, as is most blatantly seen in the Megachurch phenomenon, the consumer-believer becomes empowered as *the* decision-maker in ecclesiastical and theological policy, necessarily forcing the Church to accommodate itself to the whimsy of their metaphysical and social wants. And by its over-zealousness to be a part of the secular philosophical and cultural zeitgeist, the Church has caused the individual Christian to be turned into a Frankenstein of belief—a patchwork of theological flesh whereby humanity itself is permitted to usurp the creative dominion from God, in that individuals are granted the divine power to theologially recreate themselves in their own image as they see fit. And thus, having subsequently forgotten the how to speak in the “grammar of love”<sup>64</sup> and willingly soothed by the velveteen of an advanced “technological”<sup>65</sup> society, believers have too often become either conceptual technicians who have high knowledge yet do not genuinely believe, or yet have little knowledge of the things they do believe.

And so, I affirm that the tenets upon which Christianity was originally established must be reintroduced to Christendom. I do not hold the impression that this particular claim is highly original on my part, especially since the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard passionately called for precisely the same thing in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and was preceded by many others in Europe before him. However, the similar capitulation in Kierkegaard’s time of a culture once actuated by creed in favor of dispositionless philosophy uncannily mirrors that of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century America. While the dispositionless and pastiche construction of postmodernism is a perfectly acceptable method for creating works of art, as a philosophical construct by which to be enlightened

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<sup>63</sup> In this regard, even Gadamer upholds the superiority of “transformation” over “alteration” in his discussion of the hermeneutic of aesthetics. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 111.

<sup>64</sup> See Robert C. Roberts’ essay “Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein” in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*. Martin Matustik and Merold Westphal, eds. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 142-165.

<sup>65</sup> I am coining this from Postman.

in the art of living, postmodernism is existentially vacant beyond its superfluousness and, in the end, not conducive to the inherence of meaning.<sup>66</sup> So then, just like the Marine Corps that has a culture that is ideologically set apart from larger society it protects, I believe Christianity must also return to its roots as a distinct culture with a transcendent ethos consciously set apart from secular culture, one that elevates the necessity and supremacy of its own community. It is admittedly a paradoxical enterprise to engage culture honestly without being significantly influenced by it, and I am not by any means offering the traditional isolationist call of orthodoxy for Christians to retreat from the otherwise crucial dialogue with the secular culture that surrounds them. This course of action does not require any exercising of the delicate craft of spiritual maturity, and I believe Christianity simply cannot afford any more Luddite rejections of contemporaneous culture in its history. Rather, the Church needs to expend the extra effort required to surgically excise the current ethos it holds that advocates or permits wholesale syncretism with secular ideology.

Finally, although I am inextricably biased by my own theological presuppositions and culturally validated linguistic norms (as the postmodern pundits would say), I nonetheless posit that the Church needs to return to its primary role as a teaching institution, “indoctrinating” the believer in the strict sense of the word.<sup>67</sup> The purpose of this instruction would be several-fold: to (re)introduce the grammar of the language of love, to assist in breaking the hearty streak of individualism within the modern person, to

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<sup>66</sup> “Someone might speak Mandarin, Hebrew, and Spanish off and on throughout the day. But a person who switched back and forth, at short intervals, among Christianity, Stoicism, and Nietzscheanism, is impossible because such a ‘person’ would be involved in existential contradictions that would undermine the unity of his personality.” Roberts, 160.

<sup>67</sup> By this word, I do not mean mind or behavior control in any sense, simply “training in doctrine”, as one would train a child in the “rules of the house”, or, in a more advanced state, as one would train a soldier. Christianity is inescapably a religion of doctrine, and one’s understanding of doctrine *directly* affects one’s understanding of God, and how this God should be served, worshipped, loved, obeyed, and so forth. Inconsistent or poor training in doctrine is one of the greatest sources of the individual believer’s malaise, inconsistent Christian behavior, and moral failure(s), which in turn directly affect one’s self-esteem, level of hope, and ability to fulfill the call of every believer to live sacrificially for their neighbor.

provide the believer a sense of existential continuity through history by reminding them of people and events past who distinguished themselves in the great Christian “battles”, and to elevate and reinforce the obvious standards of behavior plainly set forth in scripture.<sup>68</sup> All this so that the believer might engage the future with a sense of identity and purpose which might be called distinctly “Christian”.

Now, at this point it need not take a terribly clever reader to immediately question the nature of such an “indoctrination”: what would be the theological content of these standards, and whether any standard of any kind (no matter how accurate) may ultimately peer out from inescapable gravitational pull of human subjectivity. These complaints have a high degree of relevance to the issue at hand, as on the surface it could be implied that I advocate a cultic institution. While this deserves more lengthy attention, suffice it to say that it is more important to note that whatever the actual methodology or doctrinal locus involved in the training of the Christian believer, I believe the anthropomorphizing of theology, a subroutine of the Church’s syncretism with culture, to be the most overweening and negative influence of modernism within contemporary theological thought. And so, I am of the opinion that such influences should be thoroughly re-examined and excised. This will assist in helping the modern Church to rediscover its historical identity, and thus, assist in formulating a meaningful present identity. Modernism’s current intellectual stranglehold must be sloughed, because the Church is obviously suffocating in its grasp. However, the Church cannot afford to allow the pendulum to swing so far in the other direction that it cannot resist the inescapable subjectivity of postmodernism, making all appeals to a universal transcendent truth a laughable proposition.

Consequently, in view of what I believe to be an overt theater-wide cultural civil war that is all but upon America, I am greatly persuaded that it is not only erroneous, but dangerous to the future health of the Church to employ an Army approach to witnessing.

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<sup>68</sup> I Ti. 3:2-7, 8-12; I Co. 13:1-14:1, Phil. 1:10-11, 2:4; Tit. 2:1-10, to cite a few examples.

While the Church's primary problem is one of identity, the methods for evangelism it employs are seminal to the inculcation of an accurate perception of Christianity within the potential believer. And since, as popular wisdom holds, "perception is reality" and that the first impression is the most important one and lasting one, I believe the Army method introduces the potential believer to an essentially individualistic and consumerist view of Christianity that is difficult to alter once imprinted, and one which I affirm eventually compromises the quality of individual believer, subsequent cohesion within each local Christian organization, and ultimate unity of the Body of Christ as a whole. To wit, if each believer only partitively appropriates God according to their desire for self-actualization, defined by their own cultural linguistic preferences and awareness of the transcendent, then each believer has less existential necessity (and ability) to bind themselves to other believers as protection against the hostility of the secular world, as the world is less hostile to those less influenced by it. A people only partially bound together by a common belief, necessarily create only a weak culture that is subject to great external influence; the dangers of which scripture clearly cautions against. This easily explains why in spite of great shifts in denominational allegiance within the United States (esp. towards Eastern Orthodoxy), too many believers in American churches still have wildly insistent problems with personal responsibility and personal holiness. Since their introduction to Christianity was frequently based in a self-actualization evangelistic method, it is only natural that their subsequent Christian development would remain largely in that mindset no matter what tradition they choose to adopt. And because within American Protestantism there is presently no clearly defined and generally accepted culture that may be labeled distinctly "Christian" to displace the secular one they enter the Church with, believers end up adapting Christianity, which is the recent addition, to the pre-existent and well-developed aesthetic of the secular edifice of their lives they already possess. Now it could be argued that certainly there have always been "tares among the wheat" from the days of ancient Israel until now, but I believe the

combination of factors all present in contemporary American culture have created a climate that makes the Church's present and future virility in a postmodern culture highly dubious.

Furthermore, I believe the Army method to be primarily a reflection of an American ethos, and not a Christian one. It is a decidedly Western concept that the self is a thing which can be an object of "progress" as is technology, for example, and America is in particular animated by this notion. One merely needs to visit any bookstore in America, whereupon one will invariably find a very large section revealingly entitled "self-help" or "self-improvement". Furthermore, Americans also possess a unique Manifest Destiny world view which they neither see as abnormal among the world's peoples, nor having potentially very negative effects if applied to other realms of existence or belief. That is, they see their environment, tangible or intangible, as something that can eventually be subdued by the idea of progress, and they also view it as their divine right to impose that progressive aesthetic upon not only themselves, but upon the rest of the world. Human nature, however, is not always readily manipulable by such linear thinking, and frequently foils the attempts of the would-be architects of new societies and philosophies who try to impose their own behavioral aesthetic upon the self. The failure of the Soviet Union is a pristine example of this. Human self-interest undermined Marxism in the Soviet Union, and is beginning to undermine the closely held beliefs of modernist America as well. So then, by viewing the self in this thoroughly modernist fashion, America's "Be All You Can Be" ethos denies the self its true identity as a synthesis/relation.<sup>69</sup> It deifies the supremacy of the individual in all matters, whereas the culture generated by a less modernistic Christian teaching elevates the collective of believers—The Body of Christ. And American Protestantism, having long-since imbibed this secular ethos and mistaking it for godliness, further reiterates these modernist errors through the Army method of witnessing it presently employs so often.

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<sup>69</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* (New York: Penguin, 1989).

What is the most disturbing potential result of this vastly complicated identity problem is that American culture, bland and generic in its present manifest, has until recently been generously imported by both and third world countries with few, if any, “cultural trade tariffs” to protect themselves. And a distinctly modernist American form of Christianity, which is not remotely Christian in any historical doctrinal sense, has spread along with it to many of these countries’ church organizations, resulting in the infection or sublimation of their own legitimate Christian traditions and subsequently robbing them of their cultural uniqueness. In short, the identity disease the American Church possesses has been and still remains a communicable one. So then, while in this paper I have been mostly discussing the state of Protestantism in America, it is evident these problems have potentially global ramifications in that American culture, both secular and religious, continues to have significant influence upon the cultures of many countries around the world.<sup>70</sup>

But I do not believe this is the end of the matter. If the Church can effectively navigate these overlapping and difficult shoals in search of identity and purpose,<sup>71</sup> the result will be a vibrant social organism manifested through the many points of intersection each believer has with one another—through love, mutual deference, and

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<sup>70</sup> This can be seen in a variety of doctrines that have spread throughout the world as a result of American culture, e.g., the “Word-Faith” movement, “Prosperity” movements, etc., as well as the artificial adoption of various American preaching styles by foreign nationals. While I do not advocate an ethnically segregated or otherwise balkanized Christianity, there is much to be said about affirming and insulating local ethnicities and cultures from this cultural “Wal-Mart” effect. See Kai Mander and Alex Boston “Wal-Mart: Global Retailer” in *The Case Against the Global Economy* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996), 335-343. But, fortunately this trend is also changing. Many societies throughout the world are overtly rejecting American cultural influence, which many sociologists have noted is evidenced by the repeated attacks on various American fast food chains in foreign countries, as they are often the most visible representations of American culture.

<sup>71</sup> Which hopefully will not require the aid of persecution to catalyze it, and which has traditionally and unfortunately been the most effective galvanizing influence upon the Church. Persecution has always given the Church a reason to fight, a singular “enemy”, and a reason for genuine community, which the peacetime that believers always seek seems not to. “People change their ways by being constrained...by trauma...by gaining an understanding of themselves or by associations with people who do understand them...If institutions have identities and personalities, as they have been characterized here, then perhaps, like people, they may be changed by something other than constraints or trauma.” Builder, 205.

personal holiness informed by theological reflection; true evidence of authentic transcendence. Once there is a well-defined, non-anthropomorphic culture of belief, supplying meaning and history through ritual and instruction to believers, believers themselves will then find meaningful voice in every aspect of outreach and personal self-expression, naturally leading them to elucidate this culture to the non-believer. After this, it is possible that the postmodern mind, embalmed in an inescapable “tail-chasing of meaning” and generally antithetical to truth-claims, might respond to propositional-truth-based Christian evangelism once it sees the evidence of Christ—the radical injection of the Eternal into the temporal—evidence that this Cloud of Unknowing, shading the world from the light of the Absolute, is indeed pierceable in the life of the individual, as manifested in the community of the Church. The Christian evangel must address postmodern culture very intelligently, and as postmodernism increases its influence in contemporary society, it is clear that a truth-claim based propaganda technique will not be effective without the evidence of a pre-existent transcendent and vibrant culture of belief. Yet, a purely self-actualization based propaganda technique will also fail to convince the non-believer because it ultimately does not antagonize the self to metaphysical self-examination. Furthermore, those who adopt the Army approach to Christian witnessing assume (whether they realize it or not) that all human beings genuinely desire the most effective self-actualization methods available, and are in a state whereby they are ready and/or willing to change from one method to another.<sup>72</sup> But that assumption carries with it the more seminal belief in humanity’s sympathetic resonance with Absolute Good; which is, at best, a contentious theological debate that in all likelihood will remain until the Parousia. Those who adopt the Marine Corps’ approach, however, implicitly assume (from a human perspective) that the self must be antagonized out of its metaphysical inertia in order to incite it to the action of radical self-

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<sup>72</sup> It is also true that persons who use this method generally tend to have a more Arminian or Pelagian theology of the human will (but not categorically so), and though this is a very important corollary to the topic at hand, it is also beyond the scope of this paper in its present form.

examination. While not appealing on a consumer level, this evangelism paradigm is more reflective of the truth of the infinite qualitative opposition between the unregenerate self and a supremely transcendent and holy God.

#### IX. EPILOGUE

I find it surprising that although the need for community in the Body of Christ is incessantly debated within academic and non-academic circles alike, almost no one has really looked closely at military culture, which is one of the largest and most readily apparent communal structures in American society. The intangibility and invisibility of the Church Universal, of course, makes identifying the problem harder to discern, and initiating a proper course of action more difficult to implement than for the military, which is a highly tangible (and visible) organization. And so, as I have expressed previously, I unfortunately believe that most of the Church's attempts to establish non-superficial community beyond the local level, if it can even accomplish that, will probably end up failing. Because it has no contemporary models of community from which it may draw an example (or so it thinks), then it must arbitrarily generate it amidst a mess of differing theologies, ecclesiologies, missiologies, and the respective cultures generated by such divisions. Additionally, most American Protestant sects have very little history of their own to which they might appeal, just like that of American society in general, which causes whatever appeal to tradition they may make thoroughly impotent beyond their own walls.

So then, I offer that the Church would benefit immensely by looking very closely at the model the Marine Corps provides in principle, firstly because it is evident that the Marine Corps conceptually understands what the Church has forgotten regarding its identity, and secondly because it is a visible entity from which the Church may readily appropriate a variety of "training" methods that are cognate with the essential structure

and mission of Christianity. The Marine Corps recognizes in the clearest possible way that without its culture fueled by its ideology, it is completely useless, just like an individual Marine is without his rifle; and hence, everything it does, both internal and external training and propagandization, is for the perpetuation and maintenance of that culture. And it is apparent the Marine Corps is doing a very good job of it, because of all the branches of the U.S. military, it has the highest retention rate among its soldiers, and is the only branch to meet its recruitment goals every year. Does it have its problems? Of course—it is an organization made of human beings. There are some Marines who lie, cheat, steal, and commit other acts considered to be grave violations of the Marine Corps' ethical code, just like people do in the rest of society. But in general, most of those who join the Marine Corps like it there. The reason: the Marine Corps offers modern American society's wandering and disappointed youth an alternative to the pervasive anomie in contemporary society through a clear-cut moral structure continually reinforced by a close-knit familial community, and which is doing a better job than the Church seems to be doing of meeting people's seminal human needs for structure, existential continuity, and a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves.

I also believe the philosophical underpinnings of the basic tenets of Christianity are the quintessential answer to the protest against modernism presented by postmodernism, without losing its moorings from the possibility of supracultural/-linguistic truth. In the incarnation of Christ is the response to postmodernism's fascination with the transcendence of art.<sup>73</sup> In prayer is the response to the cognitive linearity demanded by the modernist enterprise, replacing it with a more non-linear appropriation of the Divine, and providing the soul a medium for exchange in the economy of the Eternal. In the operation of the Holy Spirit (both controversial and non-controversial) is the response to everyone from Wittgenstein to Kristeva and their

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<sup>73</sup> As well as to ultra-orthodoxy's reactionary deification of the Biblical texts. Also, in *Truth and Method* Gadamer deals extensively with the subject of the Incarnation and its relation to a hermeneutic of aesthetics and language.

emphasis on immersion in radical language media and extra-cultural experiences to minimize linguistic and cultural subjectivism. The supremacy of Christ over the philosophical turbulence of the temporal world is already present; it needs only be applied by its adherents in a way that makes itself visible as does a light on a hill.

In summation, only by accurately portraying this Christ, He Himself being the subject of Christian propaganda, not the self, will the Church initiate the creation of disciples that will be capable of effectively transmitting that culture to a world that is, in the absence of God and just as postmodernism so correctly asserts, completely devoid of absolute meaning. Because the Marine Corps method of evangelism is less appealing to the consumer self, every church across the country may very well lose members if it is implemented. But through this method, the Church will more accurately introduce the non-believer to a culture that can enable the individual to truly and completely actualize the self by being, as Kierkegaard put it, “grounded transparently in the power that established it.”<sup>74</sup> And though the Church may subsequently be smaller in number, it will be a well-trained organization, fully capable of performing its often difficult duty as the visible Arm of Divine Will in the earth.

I conclude with a hymn, the beginning of which is familiar to many: “From the halls of Montezuma/To the shores of Tripoli....” It is, however, the end of the last verse that in light of this inquiry, might one day be considered something of an ironic “prophecy”: “If the Army and the Navy/Ever look on heaven’s scenes/They will find the streets are guarded/By United States Marines.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Kierkegaard, 44.

<sup>75</sup> The Marine Corps’ Hymn.

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