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THE CIVIL WAR -
WHOSE SIDE WAS GOD ON?

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It has been said that at the end of the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg, God passed over the battlefield to see that the right side was victorious, just as He had done nearly fifty years before after the Battle of Waterloo. Throughout the ages, religion and war have been inextricably related with many wars being fought in the name of religion or being conflicts in which one or both sides believed their cause was righteous with God firmly on their side.

In this paper, the issues of "Whose side was God on?" and "Is God only on the winning side?" are discussed with reference to America's Civil War of 1861-1865. In addressing these issues, consideration will be given, first, to the place of religion, in particular, the Christian tradition, in Antebellum America noting both the differences and the common features of the Northern and Southern sub-cultures. In addition, the impact is noted of the breakdown of a number of the social institutions, including the established churches, resulting from differences to the issues of slavery and the effect this had in setting a scene for the forthcoming War. Next, the religious practices throughout the War of troops on both sides of the conflict are discussed together with the impact that these practices had on the outcome of some of the critical battles. The importance of religious beliefs after the War is then examined both from the perspective of the North and, importantly, from the defeated South where the powerful and persuasive "Lost Cause" mythology took hold of American history for over a century.

The final part of the paper raises briefly a number of philosophical issues associated with the Christian religion and warfare. In this regard, the paper seeks to address the inherent conflict between the commandment – 'Thou shalt not kill' – and the imperative of destroying an evil menace that might threaten your life, that of your family and fellow countrymen or your way of life. From the position established for this sixth commandment, the related issue of war and adherence to other biblical commandments is discussed. With these positions established, the paper then addresses the "thorny" question of whether there are positive societal values that are more evident in times of war than in peacetime and, if such values exist, should we as a free society be searching for a "moral alternative to war".

This paper is not likely to be without controversy and readers might well find their values and beliefs being challenged by what is asserted in the following pages. Such an approach is quite intentional, however, for it is considered that without such challenges to values and beliefs, their worthiness remains untested and problematic. The issues raised in the paper have an application, also, to the present world situation and may help clarify one's personal position to the crises of recent times that have brought the world to the brink of war.

It is my hope that in reading this paper you will be challenged to examine not only the situation that existed during the Civil War but be able to clarify and articulate your position in today's times of crisis.

John Cook

Religion in Antebellum America

Religion was an important aspect of life in Antebellum America and was to play a critical role in the social reform and cultural change of the period. America was overwhelmingly Protestant during the antebellum period with its major denominations and their numerous sectional offshoots. During this time, however, membership of the Catholic Church increased significantly due, at least in part, to Irish and German immigration and by the Civil War was one of the largest Christian denominations in the country[1].

There was a rich diversity of religious practices throughout the country with New England's Puritan heritage and its Calvinist principles evident in the Congregational and Unitarian churches, whilst the Dutch Reformed Church had a strong influence in both New York and New Jersey. The Episcopalian Church, part of the Anglican Communion, had a strong presence amongst the upper classes in New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and South Carolina. The Lutherans had spread to the South from New York, New Jersey and Delaware and by the early 19th Century were settling in the Midwest. The Baptist and the Methodist Churches with their evangelical traditions were located throughout the country and were particularly strong in the South where, by 1860, 80% of churchgoers belonged to one or other of these denominations.

For both the free blacks and slaves, maintaining their traditional religious practices from Africa was particularly difficult. The break-up of family and tribal groups militated against any continuance of their former practices and the influence of evangelical Christianity essentially redefined their form of worship. Over time, African Americans merged their former beliefs and folklore with the established Christian religion to form a distinctive African American tradition. Many both free and slave, found comfort in the Christian beliefs of salvation and an after-life in "paradise" through Christ. Moses and exodus themes were also popular black religious teachings[2].

Observance of Sunday as the Sabbath was strictly observed by all of the Christian churches and rigorously enforced by law and community pressure. There were significant differences, however, in the approaches to religion in the North and the South, differences that would ultimately result in a schism within the various denominations over the institution of slavery. In the North, "Yankee Protestantism", emphasised both the need for social reform and an inherent sound relationship between the use of one's labour and the creation of personal wealth. Reform movements flourished in the North with the Temperance, Women's Rights and Public Education movements each receiving widespread support. With its roots in the "free labour" concept, Abolitionism was to become the most important reform movement of the antebellum period and provided the major catalyst for the sectional breakdown that would lead ultimately to war.

Southern religion differed in a number of ways from that prevailing in the North. As a consequence of its strong evangelical tradition, Southern religion was more personal emphasising personal salvation and was much less interested in societal reform. The temperance and education reform movements did not thrive in the South and the abolitionist cause was to be the *cause célèbre* for the sectional breakdown that was to lead ultimately to war. Thus, in 1837 the Presbyterian Church divided into two groups - the New School Churches, mostly in the North, who considered slavery as a sin and the Old School Churches in the South who declared it was not. This was followed in the 1840s, by the split of the

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[1] Members of the Catholic Church had accounted for only 1% of the population at the time of the American Revolution. Catholicism was predominantly in the North as a result of immigration although it spread nationally with a presence in Louisiana as a consequence of its French territorial origins and in California and the south-west territories traceable to the times of Spanish and Mexican rule.

[2] Interestingly, although African Americans were members of the mainstream Protestant denominations, they often prevented from fully participating in the church services. Such discrimination included their being seated separately from whites and black preachers not always being welcomed by white congregations. Thus, the establishment of "black churches" not only offered relevant spiritual comfort to their needs but, also, an alternative to the discrimination of a racist society. This problem/hardship associated with the white population's racist values applied in both the North and the South!

Methodist and Baptist denominations and the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the Southern Baptist Church separate from the established Northern branches of these denominations. These newly established Southern branches either supported or were not prepared to condemn the institution of slavery whilst the Northern branches were generally aligned to the abolitionist cause. Essentially, this schism of these churches arose from the different views of churches' responsibility to society[3]. In the North, reform, morality and decency were considered to be part of this responsibility, whilst in the South, the church were generally considered as "… a spiritual body whose purposes are only the dispensation of eternal salvation".

It was not only the established churches that suffered sectional breakdowns around this time. The second system of national political parties broke down with the Whig Party dying out in 1852, the Democratic Party becoming a Southern dominated party and, in 1856, the Republican Party being founded as a sectional (Northern) party. In 1857, the Supreme Court, thought to be above sectional politics, delivered the infamous *Dred Scott* decision[4] that alienated a large part of the North by seemingly to guarantee the spread of slavery throughout the country. Thus, all of the major institutions that might be expected to provide a measure of political and social stability for the fledgling nation were failing or had failed and with the result of the election of 1860 set the seal for the secession crisis and the terrible conflict to come.

Genocide in the Name of Religion?

It is considered worthwhile at this point to examine what were essentially acts of genocide carried out during this period by two "men of the cloth" as acts against slavery and presumably in the name of religion. These are the slave revolt in Virginia in 1831 led by Nat Turner and the series of acts by the anti-slavery zealot, John Brown in the 1850s. Brown was involved in what has become known as the Pottawatomie Creek massacre in Kansas in 1856 as retribution for the sacking of the town of Lawrence and, in 1859, led an attack on the Federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry in the hope of inciting a slave revolt. Whilst both men were captured by authorities and executed, their acts were most significant in increasing sectional tensions in the antebellum period.

More importantly for the purposes of this paper, is the issue of how Turner and Brown, as Christian preachers, could justify their actions in murdering the people they did. One could hypothesise a number of scenarios for such a justification (or rationalisation thereof):

- They were administering God's justice on the evil people they murdered;
- They had received some divine revelation to do what they did;
- Their act of killing was part of a greater plan for the American society;
- With the act of murder they carried out, the end justified the means;
- The killings were not murders as such and are justified as being the destruction of an enemy in war;
- If they had not killed those they did, they would themselves have been killed;
- They had a "brain explosion" and ,by their actions, broke the sixth commandment;
- They saw themselves on a crusade and that the significance of the righteous cause for which they fought forced them to suspend obedience to the normally mandatory biblical exhortations to live in peace with one another;[5] or
- Some other reason.

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[3] In recent times, some historians have presented an alternative view of the sectional differences over slavery. These historians argue that both the abolitionists in the North and Southern apologists believed they lived in a society in which their material wealth was evidence of God's favour. Thus, any attempt to change or interfere with the societal institutions was a challenge to the will of God's Providence. The North perceived *slavery* as an artificial system that interfered with the workings of a successful free economy whilst to Southerners *abolitionism* was the same!

[4] Essentially this decision delivered by Chief Justice, Roger B Taney declared that slaves were not citizens of the US, the Missouri Compromise violated the 5th Amendment prohibition against governmental "taking" and Congress had a responsibility to protect slaves as "property".

[5] The author is indebted to Rev David Smith for articulating this option.

These justifications/rationalisations are not necessarily mutually exclusive and raise more issues than they answer. Probably the option that stands up best is the penultimate one, although many of contemporary society would assert what Turner and Brown did was similar to the actions of the terrorist attacks in recent times and cannot be justified in terms of any Christian/religious principles. But is it that simple, particularly having regard to the reactions to the horrific terrorist attacks against a number of nations including the United States and Australia? The issues associated with these 19th Century atrocities appear to be much simpler when examined with the wisdom of hindsight, although one might wonder what we would do today if similar situations were to arise.

The Civil War (1861 – 1865)

When war came, both Northerners and Southerners looked to God to help them in their cause and defeat the enemy. Sermons in both the North and the South highlighted the righteousness of their respective causes and prayers were offered to the Almighty exhorting Him to favour their cause. Interestingly, in the Confederacy the white preachers gave sermons to segregated congregations of blacks and whites that reinforced the system of slavery and the values associated with being submissive to one's masters with acceptable bible texts such as:

> *"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear"*[6] [7]

> *"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto
> God the things that are God's"*[8]

Unacceptable texts for these sermons included:

> *"You will know the truth and the truth shall make you free"*[9]

In the Southern churches with their evangelical tradition, it would be interesting to see how the clergy rationalised their position in categorising some biblical texts as "unacceptable" for their congregations.

Despite the firm belief on both sides of the conflict that God looked with favour on their respective causes, there was concern that those involved in the War would lapse into "…moral degeneration and religious apathy". Soldiers, particularly those from rural areas away from home for the first time, would be subject to "the evils of drink and wanton pleasures". To address this some 600 clergymen were appointed by the Confederates and 2300[10] by the Federals as chaplains to the troops in the field. These chaplains' duties involved the conduct of religious services including presiding over prayer meetings of troops particularly prior to battle. They helped, also, with the wounded, both at the frontline and in the rear echelons of the battlefield, provided comfort for the dying and wrote letters for the wounded and to the families of those killed in battle or who died through illness. They managed camp libraries of religious and secular publications, counselled the troubled and faint-hearted and served as unit postmasters. In the Union Armies, the Chaplain took on the role of teacher to the illiterate soldiers, both black and white, and to civilians attached to their unit. Of particular significance was the role that chaplains on both sides of the conflict played in being responsible for inspiring and guiding the troops in the Christian revivals that swept through the respective armies in throughout the War and particularly in 1863 and 1864. These revivals tended to coincide with critical times in the War when major victories/defeats had occurred that

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[6] Ephesians Chapter 6, Verse 5.

[7] Interestingly, a later verse in this Chapter of Ephesians (Verse 8) – *"And masters, treat your slaves the same way"* – did not rate a mention in the listing of "acceptable" texts.

[8] Matthew Chapter 22, Verse 21.

[9] John Chapter 8, Verse 32.

[10] Throughout the War, however, no more than 600 chaplains were on active duty with Federal units at any one time.

reinforced the perception of God's support for one side or indicated the need for more religious fervour to address apparent falls from grace.

Although chaplains had served with the American forces since the Revolution in the previous century, the Civil War brought with it controversy and debate about their status and role. In the North, this debate focused mainly on the extent of the conflict and the need for a vastly increased allocation of chaplains than the level already approved by Congress, which was a mere 30 chaplains for the 19 regiments and 128 companies of the 16,000 "Old Army". Nevertheless, legislators on both sides of the conflict found troubling the prospect of incorporating a large number of clergy into the armed forces raised. The Union endorsed an increased number of chaplains first with its *General Orders Nos. 15 and 16, of May 4, 1861,* which directed regimental commanding officers to appoint a chaplain. These appointments were then confirmed by regimental elections.[11]

Although chaplains were declared 'non-combatants' by the US War Department in 1863 and, as such, were to be released immediately on capture in battle, many were treated as ordinary POWs and when taken prisoner performed their duties in the prison camp to which they were sent. Both sides had chaplains who displayed remarkable courage under fire when they accompanied their regiments into battle where they were able to save the lives of troops wounded in the fighting. Three such Union chaplains[12] were awarded the Medal of Honor.

The concern for the spiritual welfare of the troops was addressed, also, by the provision of religious reading materials to them. The extent of this form of support may be judged by the distribution by the U.S. Christian Commission of "…about 1.5 million Bibles, a million hymnals and 39 million tracts to Northern troops, and organised 300 portable libraries to circulate 30,000 volumes of uplifting reading matter".[13] A similar but smaller scale effort was initiated for Southern troops by the Confederate Bible Society and the South Carolina Tract Society.

Religion figured largely in the lives of both Federal and Confederate troops throughout the War although the nature of religious observance differed on the two sides as a consequence of their respective religious traditions prior to the War. Furthermore, religious practice and observance tended to become more flexible with time and exposure to camp life and battle. The differences between the two sides is illustrated below with the order from General George B McClellan early in the War after he had experienced a religious "conversion" and the recollections of campaigning by a Confederate soldier in 1864:

> *"The major general commanding desires and requests that in future the may be more perfect respect for the Sabbath on the part of his command. We are fighting in a holy cause, and should endeavour the benign favor* (sic) *of the Creator. Unless in the case of an attack by the enemy, or some other extreme military necessity, it is commended to commanding officers that all work shall be suspended on the Sabbath; that no unnecessary movements shall be made on that day; that the men shall, as far as possible, be permitted to rest from their labors* (sic)*; that they shall attend divine service after the customary Sunday morning inspection, and that officers and men shall alike use their influence to insure* (sic) *the utmost decorum and quiet on that day…the observance of the holy day of the God of Mercy and of Battles is our sacred duty.*
> *Major General George B McClellan,*
> *General Orders No. 7, September 6, 1861"[14]*

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[11] As an aside, it is worth noting that Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, countermanded at least one of these appointments when he refused to recognise the unanimous election of Rev. Ella Gibson, a pastor of the Relgio-Philosphical Society of St. Charles, Illinois by the troops of the First Wisconsin Heavy Artillery. Thus ended the short career of the only known female chaplain of the Civil War.

[12] These were Francis B Hall, Milton L Haney and John M Whitehead.

[13] Wagner M E, Gallagher G W and Finkelman P (Editors) *The Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference*: New York, Grand Central Press/Simon and Schuster, 2002. p. 686.

[14] *Ibid*, p 480-481.

*"…every evening, about sunset, whenever it was at all possible, we would keep our, and such of us as could get together, wherever we might be, should gather for prayer…Sometimes a few of the fellows would gather in prayer, while the rest of us fought the guns, Several times… we met under fire…we held that prayer hour every day, at sunset, during the entire campaign. And some of us thought, and think that the strange exception our Battery experienced, our little loss, in the midst of unnumbered perils, and incessant service…was an answer to our prayers, "the God of battles covered our heads in the day of battle" and was merciful to us, because we "called on Him". If any of you think this is a "fond fancy" **we don't**.[15]* (emphasis in original)

William M Dame, Richmond Howitzers, CSA
Recollection of Campaigning in 1864

The Effect of Religion on Battle and the Effect of Battle on Religion

As previously noted in this paper, a significant victory or defeat in battle had the effect of initiating a religious revival amongst the troops involved. These religious revivals were particularly significant during the critical campaigns of 1863 and 1864. Religious beliefs provided, also, a strong motivation for individual soldiers and units/formations of troops to display and sustain extraordinary levels of courage in their performance in battle. Furthermore, there are numerous examples of officers and soldiers facing combat with the possibility of violent death displaying both courage and resolution, which appear to be based on their firm religious beliefs. Extracts from letters home written by two officers, one Confederate, the other a Federal, clearly illustrates these displays of courage and resolution:

"There is a reality in Religion…I am able to look death in the face without fear…Sometimes when I think of you at home it is hard to be entirely willing never to see you and the boys again, but…we will meet again in the better land…Kiss the boys for me. Goodbye, my dearest. God Bless you.

Captain Thaddeus J Hyatt, Unit unknown, USA
- Letters to his wife, August 4& 31,1864"[16]

"Now, after all, Love, I think it best to trouble myself little with fears of danger, and to find happiness in the hope that you and I and our children will live together again happily and in peace. It may be, dearest, this hope will never be realized (sic) *yet I will cherish it as my greatest source of happiness, to be abandoned only when flowing blood and failing breath shall teach me I have seen the last of earth. All yet may be well with us.*

Major Elisha Franklin Paxton, Twenty-Seventh Virginia, CSA
- A letter to his wife, January 19, 1862"[17]

Whilst both of these officers may have been "putting on a brave face" for their wives, each of the letters displays an acceptance of their fate in the coming battles, maybe even a premonition of death and certainly a lack of fear of death, if it should occur. It is this latter interpretation of the sentiments expressed in the letters that is considered to be the more probable. It is interesting to note, also, that Captain Hyatt was killed three weeks after writing the letter in the third battle of Winchester and Major Paxton was promoted brigadier general and killed at Chancellorsville on May 3, 1863.

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[15] *Ibid*, p 481.

[16] *Ibid*, p 483.

[17] *Ibid*, p 483

After the War

The end of the War in 1865 brought with it a major problem for the defeated South in explaining how the righteous Confederate cause, blessed by their God, could fail. To address this issue, former Confederates devoted themselves to creating a memory of the conflict as an intensely nostalgic form of worship of its dead heroes. Thus, "Stonewall" Jackson and JEB Stuart became the first two martyrs in what has become known as the mythology of the "Lost Cause". Robert E Lee joined them only after his death in 1870 in a deification process[18] that was to hold sway for over a hundred years. Essentially, the "Lost Cause" myth involved exaggerating the positive features of the antebellum period in the South, focusing on the prowess of Confederate soldiers and raising the images to god-like status of certain, albeit talented, Confederate commanders, who had made the supreme sacrifice or who had since died. So successful were the peddlers of the myth that it was not difficult for Confederate veterans to accept the notion that their participation in the War revealed a trait of honour that outshone their defeat. In this way, they made defeat seem honourable and this had the effect of heightening the South's already high concept of honour. Given this situation, it was easy, therefore, for Confederate veterans conclude after the surrender at Appomattox that they had been overwhelmed, not really beaten and that Reconstruction was a continuation of the same struggle but in a different form.

The "Lost Cause" was as successful as it was unprincipled and devious. Indeed, one must wonder about the justification of the lies that were told in presenting the case of the "Lost Cause" since, with Jubal Early, two of its leading proponents were ordained "Christian" ministers.[19] Could it be that these men of the cloth were counting on God's infinite forgiveness for these unscrupulous acts of lying? At best, the "Lost Cause" mythology might be seen to represent for individual Southerners a spiritual justification for their losing the War. Whilst the Northerners would assert that with the outcome of the War, God had proven himself to be true to the cause of justice, the Southerners could see in the defeat themselves as the humbled and righteous remnant of what was once God's own people.

Some Philosophical Issues

Before addressing the question of whose side was God on during the Civil War, it is necessary to consider what appears to be an inherent conflict for those of the Christian religion.[20] On the one hand there are the Old Testament commandment – *'Thou shalt not kill'* - and the new Testament exhortation of Jesus to *"…turn the other cheek"*, whilst on the other hand, there is the imperative of destroying an evil menace that might threaten your life, that of your family and fellow countrymen or your way of life in time of war. Given what might be described as a pacifist position of these biblical quotes, it is hard to reconcile this with the numerous examples of violence recorded in the Old Testament. For example, Samson's slaying of the thousand Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass,[21] David's killing of Goliath, not to mention Esther's track record of killings whilst she was Queen of Persia! Indeed, Christ is even recorded as resorting to violence when, using a whip, he threw the merchants and money-changers out of the Temple.[22]

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[18] Unfortunately, this deification process of some required a denigration of others from both sides of the conflict. In this regard, James Longstreet presents an excellent illustration of the systematic denigration used by some of his fellow Confederates when he "went over to the enemy" by joining the Republican Party after the War. In this regard, Longstreet was his own worst enemy when, in responding to criticism by the "Lost Cause" devotees, he criticised Lee.

[19] These were J William Jones, a former chaplain of the 13th Virginia Infantry and William N Pendleton, Lee's Chief of Artillery.

[20] Given the religious affiliations of the 19th Century American population with more than two-thirds being regular church-goers (and Protestant), this discussion will focus on the Christian religion only.

[21] Judges, Chapter15, Verse 15.

[22] John, Chapter 2, Verse 14.

The question must be posed as to whether these biblical pronouncements are absolute or whether they apply only to a defined domain of contexts and may be suspended under certain circumstances. In addressing this issue in an earlier presentation on this subject, Smith[23] made a useful distinction between *violence* and *vengeance.* He suggests that *violence*, for which there are many biblical examples, can be justified whilst *vengeance* cannot. Such a view is consistent with the *Just War* tradition, which is probably as old as warfare itself. St Augustine (354 - 430 AD) wrote of it and St Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) provided the first systematic exposition in his *Summa Theologica* where he presented what has become known as *Just War Theory*.[24] If the principles of the Just War theory are accepted, then the author of the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes, thought to the Solomon, was correct when he said:

"…there is a time for everything… a time to kill… a time for war" [25]

To the largely religious 19th Century populations in both the North and the South, the Civil War was such a time!

A Final Word …

In an attempt to bring some closure to the matters raised in this paper, it is proposed now to address directly some of the issues associated with not-so-simple question:

What side was God on?

The perspective of present day society might well follow the position taken by a contemporary historian and member of the Anglican Church of the Sydney Archdiocese when he responded to this question[26]:

"Whose side was God on? If you will forgive me providing a personal answer, God was not on either side! ... There would have been, as you point out, many good Christians on both sides. I rather think God would have been greatly saddened by the conflict – so much suffering caused by man's frailty and inability to find peaceful solutions. For much the same reason, God is not necessarily on the winning side. In the case of the Civil War, the outcomes of no slavery and a united nation, would be seen as highly valuable outcomes by most people and therefore appear to support a victory of good over evil. It is easy to argue for God supporting such an outcome but I think that oversimplifies the issues."

Whether this assessment is correct or not and can be applied to today's conflicts throughout the world is for contemporary society to judge. It is **not** a view however, that would have found much support in 19th Century America and certainly not amongst members of the mainstream Protestant churches during America's Civil War. The notion of their God being a non-interventionist Deity was simply not accepted by the mainstream Christian denominations in both the North and the South. Great store was placed by 19th Century Americans in "Divine Providence" and whilst the peoples admitted they often were not able to discern what God's plan was for them, they firmly believed there **was** a plan! As the hymn-writer of an earlier time proclaimed:

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[23] Rev David Smith, Anglican Priest and active member of the NSW Chapter of ACWRTA, a.k.a. Father Dave, raised this in a presentation to the NSW Chapter of ACWRTA in December 2003.

[24] In this famous work, Aquinas discusses not only the justification of war, but also the kinds of activity that are permissible in war.

[25] Ecclesiastes, Chapter 2, verses 1, 3 and 8.

[26] This quote was contained in personal correspondence with the author from Mr John Lambert, a leading teacher and administrator in both the Government and non-Government sectors of education in New South Wales over the past 30 years.

"God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform" [27]

Both sides perceived God as supporting their respective causes and the established churches of both sides actively supported the respective causes during the War. For the North, victory brought confirmation of the worthiness of the Union cause and the evils of slavery a convenient "high moral ground" to support their overall position. In this regard, however, it should be noted that the abolition of slavery was adopted by the Union "on the run" as the War progressed and was certainly not the primary reason for their going to war! For the defeated Confederacy, the idea of God being on their side was hard to justify on any rational grounds, although the "Lost Cause" mythology provided a most effective rationalisation of their defeat and a basis for their approach to Reconstruction, regarded by many as the next phase of the "war". It was during Reconstruction that the South were much more successful to the extent they could well be declared the ultimate "victors" over the North!

Notwithstanding these perceptions of God supporting their respective causes, there were many instances before, during and after the War where both the North and the South suspended any notion of "Christian values or beliefs" and resorted to a level of warfare not consistent with the "Just War" tradition. In this, neither side could legitimately claim that God was on their side but, more importantly from a theological and ethical viewpoint, neither could assert with any legitimacy that they were on God's side!

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[27] Quoted from the hymn by William Cowper (1731 – 1800). This is a paraphrase of John 13: 7,