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Justifying Violence:

A Critical Comparison of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Michael Bray and Osama bin Laden

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## Abstract

This essay is an inquiry into the ethics of justifiable violence in its extreme form, namely, killing another human being. The question raised by the author is whether Dietrich Bonhoeffer's justification for planning the assassination of Adolf Hitler is comparable to the logic used by Michael Bray or Osama bin Laden. Differences in method of justification of killing between the three are analyzed and inconsistencies in logic are critiqued.

## Introduction

This paper is about the ethical justification of killing from religious convictions. Initially, my interest in the question of the ethical questions about violence was embedded in the writings and actions of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian during World War II, who attempted to assassinate Hitler and was ultimately killed for it. It was interesting to read his initial, pacifistic beliefs about what the Christian should look like today and then see him seemingly contradict himself later with this deliberate proposal and plan of premeditated violence. How is it that a man who claims a Christian should live for others (as opposed to living for oneself) is able to justify an elaborate conspiracy to kill someone? Of course, I realize that this person we are discussing is Hitler, who is frequently used as the epitome of evil in human form; however, the basis of the question I was raising in these initial phases of my study was not concerning the concentration of evil found in Hitler's undoubtedly disturbed psyche. The question was concerning Bonhoeffer's adherence to his own code of ethics, which he adjusted as he experienced and witnessed the evil of Nazism and became involved in active resistance. Why the adjustment? How does he drastically alter his ethic to fit in the action of tyrannicide? These questions (and more) were answered, I found, in a rather remarkable and innovative work by Larry Rasmussen.

Hence, the shape of this present study has become comparative. I wanted to understand which justifications, if any, for an act of violence could *actually* justify the violent act. As a result, I decided to compare two examples of Christian violence and one of Muslim "terrorism" with the underlying question, "Does any difference exist between the two?" The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to analyze and contrast the logic whereby each of the proponents of killing

other human beings justify their decisions. The first instance is the well-documented and well-known assassination attempt by Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Adolf Hitler. The second is from within the Christian pro-life movement; specifically the militant movement advocated by the group the “Army of God.” One of the key players in this movement will be targeted. Reverend Michael Bray, who was imprisoned for violent actions against abortion clinics and has clearly delineated his justification for his beliefs and actions in his book entitled *A Time to Kill: A Study Concerning the Use of Force and Abortion*. The last example is the contemporary actions of Islamic fundamentalism, namely, Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden has funded and directed horrible acts of violence against the United States and has been blatant with his beliefs about why he feels his cause is justified. I will draw parallels between these justifications, seeking their similarities and differences from one another.

### **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Bonhoeffer decided early in his life to be a theologian and began his body of work during his years at Berlin University (1924-1927).<sup>1</sup> He was a prolific writer who allowed his life experience to affect his writing and vice versa. This created a body of work that is reflective of the personal struggles he had with his changing environment and his central question about who Jesus would have been in the midst of warfare, hatred, and dictatorship.<sup>2</sup> The answer to this question, however, changes as Bonhoeffer becomes more deeply involved in the clandestine resistance against Hitler. A study of the shifts in Bonhoeffer’s theology, ethics, and action demonstrates how he developed from a convinced pacifist to a conspirator in one of the most

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<sup>1</sup> J. Deotis Roberts. *Bonhoeffer and King: Speaking Truth to Power*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky (2005): 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> Larry Rasmussen. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky (2005): 75. Much of this analysis is greatly influenced by Rasmussen’s fine work.

renowned instances of religious resistance in history. Larry Rasmussen focuses on this question in his analysis of Bonhoeffer's theology, ethics, and resistance: "If Christology is indeed at the center of Bonhoeffer's thinking, where is the key here to his move from passive to active resistance?"<sup>3</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer began as a pacifist, arguing that Christ was at the center of all reality and was "the man for others."<sup>4</sup> His lectures on Christology in 1933 examine the meaning of faith and relationship with God in light of this understanding of Christ. He claims that faith is the human participation in Christ's "being for others."<sup>5</sup> What he meant by this was that Christ's existence could only be seen in relationship with another person. Bonhoeffer says Christ "is his being *pro me*."<sup>6</sup> In other words, Christ's life on earth was intentional; his purpose was not, in any sense, selfish, given that others might find freedom and salvation. Christologically, since Bonhoeffer understood that Jesus was God emptied into a man, infinity emptied into a finite human being, everything—"[humanity], nature, and history" revolves around Christ.<sup>7</sup> He is the center for all reality, for Bonhoeffer. Moral action, judged from Bonhoeffer's perspective, is in accordance with reality (Christ), and immoral action "deviates from Christ's form in the world."<sup>8</sup> Christ's being was oriented outwards, toward others and not toward himself. As Rasmussen concludes, "Bonhoeffer is declaring that because Christ is in, with, and under human sociality, a [human] only finds self-fulfillment, indeed self-formation, in being *with* and *for* others; and being with and for others is the way in which a [human] is formed in Christ."<sup>9</sup> The "centrality of

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<sup>3</sup> Rasmussen, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Rasmussen, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Rasmussen, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Rasmussen, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Rasmussen, 15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Rasmussen, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Rasmussen, 20, italics mine.

Christ” gave humans the “freedom to love God and neighbor, and stranger, and enemy.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, Bonhoeffer’s ethic claims that one who adheres to Christ is committing to be held responsible for others in the sense that we have a responsibility to love one another as Christ loved us.

Responsibility, for Bonhoeffer, is a human response to “the reality which is given us in Jesus Christ.”<sup>11</sup> As Lori Brandt Hale describes, Bonhoeffer understood Christ’s demonstration on the cross as dissolving the distinctions and spiritual hierarchy between humans. She says, “We are human beings with our suffering, joys, sorrows, desires, disappointments, and fulfillments—and most important, human beings with our sin and guilt, faith, and hope.”<sup>12</sup>

For Bonhoeffer’s ethics, therefore, this means that in everyday decision-making, one must look to consult the form of Christ in the world or conform to reality, which are essentially the same thing for him.<sup>13</sup> However, Christ’s form in the world *today* is historically conditioned and this is where Bonhoeffer leaves room in his ethic for circumstance and history. Bonhoeffer maintains that while “Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,” the Christ we conform to today “may not be who Christ was for us yesterday.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, when the church gives a command on what sort of action to take, Bonhoeffer says it must take this variable into account. The church must have the “well-informed knowledge of the ever-changing context of decision,” so as to interpret Christ in terms of what he would be like in *today’s situation*.<sup>15</sup> This authority must come from a church that has full knowledge of the state of the world before it gives guidance on moral action. Bonhoeffer concludes, that, for the world at the time (1932), “today

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<sup>10</sup> Hale, Lori Brandt. “From Loving Enemies to Acting Responsibly: Forgiveness in the Life and Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer” *Word & World* Vol. 27, number 1 (2007): 80.

<sup>11</sup> Rasmussen, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Hale, 81.

<sup>13</sup> Rasmussen, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Rasmussen, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Rasmussen, 24-25.

God's command for us is the order of *international peace*.”<sup>16</sup> Bonhoeffer continued preaching this message well into Hitler's reign. Hale summarizes:

“...there is no escape from the commandment of Christ to love one another; this command includes loving (and forgiving) those who are beyond one's national, political, social, and racial bounds; it includes loving those who might...be your enemies.”<sup>17</sup>

However, a significant shift occurs between the Bonhoeffer of the 1930s and the Bonhoeffer of the 1940s. Hale claims it is after 1939 that his ethic begins to reflect his involvement in the resistance. She indicates two specific events that sparked the change in Bonhoeffer: *Kristallnacht* in November of 1938 and his return to the United States in 1939. *Kristallnacht* was a truly crucial event that caused Bonhoeffer's anger to expand to include not only the perpetrators, but also those who did nothing—specifically the church. As a result of this, he begins to understand this Christian responsibility to live “with and for others” as including “the readiness to take on guilt.”<sup>18</sup> This can also be seen, Hale says, in Bonhoeffer's second visit to the U.S. He accepted an invitation to lecture at Union Theological Seminary during the summer of 1939, but decided after less than a month that he must return to Germany and accept “his role, as a German, to take on both responsibility and guilt.”<sup>19</sup> In *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937), Bonhoeffer discusses responsibility in the form of what he calls “deputyship.” Deputyship reflects the chasm between “God's action and [human] behavior,” it is “the willingness to act vicariously for others.”<sup>20</sup> However, in *Ethics* (1941), Bonhoeffer adds a new dimension to this idea: deputyship is the action of any responsible person, Christian or not; it is

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<sup>16</sup> Rasmussen, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Hale, 83.

<sup>18</sup> Hale, 84.

<sup>19</sup> Hale, 85.

<sup>20</sup> Rasmussen, 38-39.

“a characteristic of normal human conduct.”<sup>21</sup> At the core of deputyship is his idea of the acceptance of guilt: “Jesus did not seek first of all to be good or to preserve his innocence. Rather, he freely took upon himself the guilt of others. Responsible [people] should do the same.”<sup>22</sup> He allows necessity to force a responsible person to accept guilt by not just empathizing with those who suffer, but by taking action, perhaps even through conspiracy.

Bonhoeffer also discusses the role of the normal and the extreme in the life of the “responsible” person by correlating reality and three aspects of Christ’s life: “incarnation (affirmation of this world)...crucifixion (judgment of this world) and resurrection (creativity for a new world).”<sup>23</sup> These things cannot be separated, but must contribute to and complement one another. In other words, Bonhoeffer asserts that extreme action is not the norm, but is, in fact, permitted “in matters of necessity.” Bonhoeffer allows that there may come a time (such as the time in which he found himself) when “extremist deeds may be Christ’s command in the given situation and thus must be undertaken with full resolution.”<sup>24</sup> The emphasis in *The Cost of Discipleship* is obedience, but there is a different emphasis in *Ethics*—freedom. Bonhoeffer was deeply involved in the clandestine conspiracy at this time and this can be seen in that he no longer claims divine law as absolute, but as normative, leaving room for an exception: tyrannicide.<sup>25</sup>

Bonhoeffer struggled with his ideas of affirmation (incarnation) and judgment (crucifixion) of his world and questioned how he could participate to bring about a new world (resurrection). He reluctantly decided that he could not possibly affirm the injustices of Hitler

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<sup>21</sup> Rasmussen, 41.

<sup>22</sup> Rasmussen, 51.

<sup>23</sup> Rasmussen, 44.

<sup>24</sup> Rasmussen, 45.

<sup>25</sup> Rasmussen, 50.

and, therefore, that he must condemn them. The only recourse he could find was to take extreme measures to bring about the resurrection of a new world. This is how Bonhoeffer accepted his responsibility and freedom to be Christ in his current circumstance, being fully aware that he risked being wrong in his assessment of who Christ would be today.

### **Michael Bray and the Army of God**

Reverend Michael Bray is a Lutheran pastor in the suburban town of Bowie, Maryland. When author Mark Juergensmeyer met with him for an interview, he noted that Bray was “a cheerful, charming, handsome man” and that there was “nothing...intensely fanatical about him.”<sup>26</sup> However, this seemingly normal man has a story and message to share that is anything but ordinary. In July 1985, Bray and two other defendants were charged with the 1984 destruction of seven abortion clinics in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia with damages coming to \$1 million.<sup>27</sup> Bray was found guilty and imprisoned from July 1985 to May 15, 1989.<sup>28</sup> Bray owns a copy of the *Army of God* manual, which is produced by a group who calls themselves the Army of God; the text is filled with “detailed instructions for various forms of destruction and sabotage aimed at abortion facilities.”<sup>29</sup> Juergensmeyer notes that Bray neither claims nor denies authoring the manual. He was also the spokesperson for Rev. Paul Hill, who shot and killed Dr. John Britton and his security escort James Barrett in Pensacola, Florida in 1994, and Shelly Shannon, who shot and wounded Dr. George Tiller in

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<sup>26</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA (2000): 22.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Bray. *A Time to Kill: A Study Concerning the Use of Force and Abortion*. Advocates for Life Publications: Portland. OR (1994): 9, 10; Juergensmeyer, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Bray, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Juergensmeyer, 21.

Wichita, Kansas.<sup>30</sup> In his book, *A Time to Kill*, Bray systematically lays out what he feels are the theological misinterpretations of the church and his justification for the use of godly force against what he calls a modern holocaust: the legal practice of abortion.<sup>31</sup> Bray views himself and believers like him as fighting against an enemy that is tantamount to the Nazis.<sup>32</sup> An examination of Bray's writing will determine where his justification for killing aligns with those of Bonhoeffer and where they differ.

Bray begins with the idea that "behavior is a product of doctrine."<sup>33</sup> He goes on to describe and deflate several examples of "bad doctrine" from within the Christian pro-life movement including: faithfulness and obedience to God, the victimizing of women as opposed to the unborn, contraception, capital punishment, and pacifism. Bray argues that there is a hierarchy of obedience. While pro-lifers may feel they are adhering to the will of God by blockading the doors to an abortion clinic, Bray claims that this "is not necessarily the noblest or highest method of obedience."<sup>34</sup> This may be a false security in what one *thinks* to be the will of God. He compares these actions with shoveling versus bulldozing to move a mountain: "If God has said, 'Move this mountain' and we use a shovel instead of bulldozers, have we been faithful?"<sup>35</sup> Faithfulness and obedience, then, come to full fruition when one truly seeks God's will, which Bray seems to imply is necessary violent force, including killing other human beings.

Next, Bray argues that churches have been backed into a corner by the rhetoric of the pro-choice camp that focuses on the woman as the victim. In order not to offend, churches have begun to reach out to women in crisis without mentioning the brutal effect of abortion on the

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<sup>30</sup> Juergensmeyer, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Bray, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Juergensmeyer, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Bray, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Bray, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Bray, 18.

unborn. This, he says, completely overlooks the fact that the woman is taking an active part in the killing of her own child.<sup>36</sup> He cites the Council of Orange (sixth century), *Didache*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, the Council of Elvira, and the *Apostolic Constitutions*, none of which are part of the biblical canon, in order to establish that the woman has historically been responsible for the killing of her child. The Council of Orange, for him, establishes that a woman is responsible regardless of if she is “saved” (a Christian) or not. The *Didache* and *Epistle of Barnabas* “both condemn the sin of abortion;” Bray quotes directly from the *Didache*: “You shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill them when they are born.”<sup>37</sup> Bray uses the Council of Elvira, Basil of Caesarea, Jerome, and the *Apostolic Constitutions* to demonstrate that abortion has historically been viewed as murder and merits the “penalty of murder.”<sup>38</sup> Bray reduces the Christian’s idea of contraception to a seduction by “overpopulation propaganda.”<sup>39</sup> The role of human beings, he asserts, is to procreate, to “be fruitful and multiply,” as is the command of God. God should be trusted to sustain the earth and its inhabitants; our only concern should be to obey the commands of God.<sup>40</sup>

Lastly, Bray turns to two issues of significant interest for the purpose of this study: capital punishment and nonviolence. He clarifies that the term “pro-life” is not a universal term; it does not apply to *all* of human life. This term is meant exclusively for those who oppose abortion. To extend it beyond this, he says, is to misconstrue the doctrine of the sanctity of human life. Divine authority is given to “civil authorities” to implement capital punishment for

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<sup>36</sup> Bray, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Bray, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Bray, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Bray, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Bray, 23.

capital crimes.<sup>41</sup> Thus, he argues for the protection of innocent life and the sanctioned destruction of guilty life, or capital punishment.

One of Bray's primary biblical reference points for supporting capital punishment is in the Gospel of John. His goal with this story is to demonstrate how Christians typically misinterpret it to suggest a nonviolent Christian life. He discusses the story of the woman who is protected and forgiven by Jesus after being accused of adultery (John 8:1-11). Since modern critical editions of Scripture note that this passage is not present in the most ancient manuscripts, Bray claims that it cannot be used as a basis for any doctrine. In contrast to the documents and events he uses above, it *is* in the canon and he admits that it is believed by scholars to have been a historical event. Since he views himself as a literalist, he must address the questions about why Jesus, if non-pacifistic, does not condemn and kill the woman. Jesus recognized that the woman's accusers were attempting to trap him, but he also knew that the law required that there be two witnesses present for judgment. Thus, when Jesus asks for the one who has sinned to cast the first stone, Bray claims Jesus was actually looking for a witness to testify to the woman's guilt. He was not "introducing a new system of justice."<sup>42</sup>

Capital punishment, he says, "signals the role of the Author of life in human affairs and government." God has placed authorities in power in order to fulfill God's bidding, which includes capital punishment: "He...ordained godly government with the authority to take life, liberty, and property."<sup>43</sup> Bray continues his explanation by demonstrating that the idea of humans being created in the image of God does not suggest that a human's life is inviolable, meaning

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<sup>41</sup> Bray, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Bray, 25.

<sup>43</sup> Bray, 27.

that there are certain offenses that can deny a person their right to life.<sup>44</sup> Bray goes on to argue that “force” is not synonymous with violence and is, in fact, amoral and can be used for either good or evil.

He assumes the same for nonviolence: it can be used for good, but can be evil when a person does nothing to help an innocent victim. Bray discusses several biblical references in order to demonstrate his understanding of the Christian misunderstandings of violence and nonviolence. The account of Peter cutting off the servant’s ear in Gethsemane during Jesus’ arrest (Mark 14:47; Matt. 26:51; Luke 22:50; John 18:10) has nothing to do with nonviolence, Bray argues, since Jesus had suggested earlier that the disciples take swords with them on their journey to spread the gospel (Luke 22:35-38).<sup>45</sup> Mark, Luke, and John do not record a clear rebuke for Peter’s use of the sword and Luke is the only one that records the healing of the officer’s ear.<sup>46</sup> Jesus’ rebuke of Peter is actually in response to Peter’s “zealous impulsiveness,” the influence on Peter by the political Zealot party, and the “general failure of the disciples to understand Christ’s mission of atonement whenever He spoke of it.”<sup>47</sup> Peter is lacking in faith and overflowing with zeal, which creates a problem several times in the Gospels: his lack of faith while walking on water (Matt. 14:28); his zealousness to suffer for Jesus (Luke 22:33); his demand that Jesus wash his whole body after washing his feet (John 13:8); and his refusal to accept Jesus’ future “suffering, death, and resurrection” (Matt. 16:22).<sup>48</sup> Therefore, Matthew’s record of the rebuke should be considered in relation to the rest of the records of Peter’s relationship with Jesus. So, Jesus’ scolding that “He who lives by the sword dies by the sword”

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<sup>44</sup> Bray, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Bray, 54.

<sup>46</sup> Bray, 54-57.

<sup>47</sup> Bray, 56.

<sup>48</sup> Bray, 56.

is not a judgment on the use of violence, but a judgment on the disciples for continuing to misunderstand his purpose for being on earth.<sup>49</sup>

Paul's assertion that a Christ-follower does not wage wars of flesh and blood, but uses spiritual weapons in order to fight a spiritual battle (II Cor. 10:3; Eph. 6:12) is another illustration that is typically misconstrued by Christian pacifists, according to Bray. The idea here is that Paul recognizes that there is a spiritual battle to be fought. Bray says that spiritual evils invade the minds and bodies of humans and these are the battles we are fighting with the intangible spiritual weapons. But, he interjects, we still must "employ physical means to fight physical battles."<sup>50</sup> In these physical battles, however, the Holy Spirit is accessed for the guidance of the warrior.

Bray's interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount also allows for the use of godly force. He understands Christ's words to be meant figuratively, not literally. It should be noted that Bray separated from his church when it merged with the national Lutheran churches due to perceived differences in biblical interpretation. Bray and ten families started their own, home-based church where they interpreted the Scriptures as they thought they should be interpreted: literally.<sup>51</sup> Bray claims, though, in the case of the Sermon on the Mount, a literal, "wooden" interpretation would cause contradiction with the rest of Scripture.<sup>52</sup> Jesus is not speaking literally when he discusses divorce, judgment, oaths, litigation, prayer, capital punishment, and violence in the Sermon on the Mount, but using the literary technique of hyperbole in order to "break through all the bad doctrine which had attached itself to the words of Scripture."<sup>53</sup> Bray specifically discusses three

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<sup>49</sup> Bray, 57.

<sup>50</sup> Bray, 54.

<sup>51</sup> Juergensmeyer, 22.

<sup>52</sup> Bray, 48.

<sup>53</sup> Bray, 48.

examples that are held as bases for the doctrine of nonviolence and opposition to his advocacy of the use of violence: (1) the “eye for eye, and tooth for tooth” example (Matt. 5:38);<sup>54</sup> and the commands of Christ (2) to “love our enemies” (Matt. 6:27) and (3) to not judge others (Matt. 6:37).<sup>55</sup>

The first example leads the reader into the famous “turn the other cheek” passage which pacifists use as a cornerstone for the Biblical basis of nonviolence. Jesus, according to Bray, is asserting that vengeance is God’s and that the Christian victim should respond to personal injustice with humility and forgiveness. This is not to say, however, that this is the same reaction that is expected when injustice is pressed upon *another*.<sup>56</sup> Bray argues that this principle of turning the other cheek does *not* give Christians the right to ignore or tolerate injustice committed to another. Jesus’ imperative to “do to others as you would have them do to you” refers to every person, or rather every *innocent* person. Bray says that those in opposition to him who quote Jesus’ commands to “love your enemies” and to not judge or condemn another are torturing Scripture. Bray argues that one who looks past injustices in order to love the sinner has a “misguided” notion of love and that his own defense of “true justice” is out of love for both victim and perpetrator.<sup>57</sup> He claims that Jesus’ admonition not to judge or condemn others is in response to believers who consider themselves righteous and others as below them.<sup>58</sup> There is a time to peacefully protest and a time to use force. This nonviolent sentiment in the anti-abortion movement, he feels, has provided “peace for abortion practitioners” and has infiltrated the anti-abortion movement with immoral nonviolence.

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<sup>54</sup> Bray, 50.

<sup>55</sup> Bray, 52.

<sup>56</sup> Bray, 51.

<sup>57</sup> Bray, 26, 52.

<sup>58</sup> Bray, 52.

In order to make theological room for his justification of “godly force,” Bray must first answer “the Jesus question:” How can a person read the account of Jesus in the gospels and intend to kill another person? Where is the justification for this in the person of Jesus? Bray contends that Jesus came for a specific purpose: to die passively as the sacrifice to atone for the sins of humanity.<sup>59</sup> According to Bray, Jesus was God incarnate; he was Lord of the earth at the beginning of time and has returned to reign with the Father. Jesus had a purpose for being on earth and it was not to be warrior or to start a revolution; it was for the purpose of sacrificing himself. Now, however, Jesus has another role, and it is not as “the passive sacrifice anymore.”<sup>60</sup> Bray is proposing then, that Jesus cannot be at the center of Christian purpose and action since his calling was very specific. The significance of Jesus is viewed completely differently by Bray than it is by Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer felt that, for a person to be ethical, they must adhere to Christ’s form in the world. Christ’s “form” in the world was as a victim; on this, Bray and Bonhoeffer agree. However, Bonhoeffer’s conclusion was to imitate this form at all costs; hence, the *Cost of Discipleship*. For Bonhoeffer, the Christian’s form as a victim can be a costly aspiration. The responsible human being is one who understands his/her deputyship in the acceptance of guilt. A responsible person feels guilty for the suffering of others and has the freedom (in Christ) to act in their defense first with nonviolence or, in an extreme/necessary case, violence. The difference between Bonhoeffer and Bray at this point, however, is that Bonhoeffer finds Jesus at the center of this reasoning:

Without a single exception the touchstone of content and direction is Jesus Christ, the Deputy, Reality Personified, the Origin and Goal of Conscience, the Bearer of Guilt and the Bestower of Freedom, even freedom to violate the divine law. This Jesus is the Responsible Person par excellence. It is he to whom we are to conform.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Bray, 38.

<sup>60</sup> Bray, 39.

<sup>61</sup> Rasmussen, 63.

Bray feels that, as an example, Jesus' *character*, not role, should be considered—a distinction that Bonhoeffer never makes. Bonhoeffer's Jesus is a victim, just as Bray's is, but Bonhoeffer's is a victim *for others*. While Bray seems to dismiss this "role" of Jesus and asks the reader (the Christian) to focus on his "character," Bonhoeffer sees the role of Jesus as indicative of the type of role a Christian should have in the world. Bonhoeffer and Bray are reading the same gospels, the same records of the life of Jesus; however, their interpretation and contextualization of Jesus is completely contradictory. When approaching the gospels from a context of war, Bonhoeffer asks a question, "What is the form of Christ in the world for us today?" It would seem that Bray comes to the gospels with an answer already in mind. He speaks of the "Man of War, the God of Israel, and the whipping of impious Jews and property destruction wrought by Jesus" and systematically dismisses the pacifist image of Jesus.<sup>62</sup>

### **Critique of Bray**

Bray's ideology suffers from two blatant problems: his use of authoritative texts and his self-righteous approach to faith and action. Bray works from conclusion to proposition. He approaches the Scriptures as a self-proclaimed literalist who already has the answers to his questions. When he encounters something contradictory, he merely dismisses it just as he did Jesus' encounter with the adulteress or his rebuke of Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane. He discusses references that support his interpretation of the biblical mandate of the use of godly force and accepts their truth without analysis or discussion. However, he thoroughly discusses biblical references that contradict this interpretation as if they cannot be taken literally. He emphasizes Jesus' assertion to the disciples that they should take swords with them on their journey to spread the gospel—justification for which he finds in Matthew 10: 1-14 and Luke

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<sup>62</sup> Bray, 28.

22:36 (although there is no mention of the sword in the Matthew passage).<sup>63</sup> However, he dismisses Jesus' rebuke of Peter as a message of nonviolence, although the story as a whole *is* mentioned in all four gospels: Mark 14:47; Matt. 26:51; Luke 22:50; John 18:10. Instead, Bray explains that the rebuke—"Those who take the sword will perish by the sword."—is not recorded in every gospel and concludes that it must be a cumulative response from Jesus concerning Peter's character. Bray does detailed research in order to shake the traditional understanding of the famous passage. One would think a biblical literalist would read the four accounts of the same incident and consider them with more weight than an incident that is recorded once. But, as is demonstrated above, Bray is not *that* kind of literalist. He believes, word-for-word that "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed," (Gen. 9:6), but declares that the *entire* Sermon on the Mount is figurative, not literal, crying, "Oh the folly of taking literally what Christ intended figuratively!"<sup>64</sup>

He refers to an incident where Jesus demonstrates anger and force: the incident at the temple where Jesus turns tables and scorns vendors for bargaining and selling in a place of worship. He cites John 2:13-22 and Mark 11: 15-21 and implies that they are two separate events. He does not discuss the differences between the stories, he does not exegete them theologically, nor does he step outside biblical lines to affirm or deny their occurrence or legitimacy, as he does specifically in his discussion of the woman as victim.<sup>65</sup> He only approaches passages and traditions that are contradictory to his ideology in this way. He attacks the Sermon on the Mount and demonstrates how it contradicts the rest of Scripture and,

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<sup>63</sup> Bray, 43, 54.

<sup>64</sup> Bray, 24, 47.

<sup>65</sup> Bray, 19-22.

therefore, must be meant figuratively. He never entertains the idea that his conclusion might be mistaken.

Thus, Bray creates a theology in which all of Scripture's reference to war and force is literal, Jesus' words are figurative when contradictory, and his works are evidence of his purpose as a sacrificial lamb and nothing more. Christ's being is reduced to his death for the salvation of humanity. The goal of the Bray-ist Christian is not to live like Jesus, but to follow the commands of God, which exclude Jesus' command to love our enemies and not judge others.<sup>66</sup>

It is highly contradictory that Bray not only reinterprets such classic passages as these, but also uses noncanonical examples in his research, especially since he split from his church in 1984 because of their "abandonment of the doctrine of scriptural literalism."<sup>67</sup> He cites the *lex talionis*, an ancient code that calls for retributive justice. He claims that Jesus does not and would not contradict this "just and good" precedent of retributive justice with his call to turn the other cheek.<sup>68</sup> It should also be noted that Bray dedicates an entire chapter to the re-interpretation of Scripture, but *never* mentions the Ten Commandments. Again, what kind of literalist is this? What about God's command that one "shall not murder [or kill]" (Exodus 20:13)? In all of this quoting and analyzing, he somehow leaves out any mention of the very straightforward commandments from God to his people. This demonstrates again Bray's selective literalism.

In the first chapter of his book, Bray states that Christians are warned against "false assurance" of their faithfulness in action.<sup>69</sup> First, he gives no biblical basis for this doctrine, which causes one to wonder if Bray is simply rewriting Christian doctrine to suit his perceptions of reality. Secondly, he discusses what he assumes to be the correct interpretation of biblical

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<sup>66</sup> Bray, 52.

<sup>67</sup> Juergensmeyer, 22.

<sup>68</sup> Bray, 51.

<sup>69</sup> Bray, 18.

passages with complete confidence and approaches Christian pro-life doctrines of nonviolence and love as if they are juvenile delusions. He claims that pro-life advocates who try to help pregnant women by giving them alternatives to abortion or who hold signs in protest are possibly not performing the ultimate acts of obedience in defending the unborn. Thus, if Christians are, in fact, warned against a false assurance of obedience and faithfulness, how does he remain confident in the legitimacy of his own actions and beliefs?

Bray undergoes no struggle, no anguish, much unlike Bonhoeffer. The compelling element in the journey of Bonhoeffer is that he begins as a pacifist and reluctantly concludes that, in extreme cases, violence is necessary and part of a Christian's role in the world. Bonhoeffer qualifies, however, that while participation in systematic violence (war) may be necessary, "it will always be agonizing for the Christian."<sup>70</sup> Bonhoeffer cannot simply dismiss the wholly loving and nonviolent life of Jesus. Bray and his disciples, however, express no agony, but joy. In an interview in the HBO documentary, *Soldiers in the Army of God*, Paul Hill, a colleague of Bray, states that he was joyful for the prospect of dying for being obedient to Jesus Christ in the defense of innocent children.<sup>71</sup> Michael Bray and the people that he encourages to commit such acts are proud of their actions and think that they are divinely sanctioned to do them. In contrast, Bonhoeffer wrote that if a Christian did have to fight, or "take up the sword," they would have to pray "daily for forgiveness of the sin and for peace."<sup>72</sup> Where is this struggle for Bray? It is nowhere to be found; most likely because Bray is approaching the life of Jesus, the Bible, and any other authoritative texts he decides to use with his justification already in mind.

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<sup>70</sup> Rasmussen, 99.

<sup>71</sup> *Soldiers in the Army of God*, prod. Marc Levin, Daphne Pinkerson, and Daniel Voll, dir. Marc Levin and Daphne Pinkerson, 71 min. (Home Box Office, 2005), DVD.

<sup>72</sup> Rasmussen, 107.

Bray also tends to contradict himself on two specific ideas: (1) godly justice and (2) obedience to earthly authority. Bray argues that “God does not have separate standards of justice for different people groups...All are to be protected equally; including the unborn.”<sup>73</sup> At this point, Bray does not qualify that any group is left out of this protected collective; however, this standard of justice for all that he claims here is contradicted by his earlier statement that guilty people forfeit their right to life and protection.<sup>74</sup> Abortion doctors and clinics, obviously, fit directly into this category. He quotes the verse from which he gathers this doctrine of the sanctity of human life: “Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his image God made humankind.” (Gen. 9:6) He asserts that “God does not view human life as absolutely inviolable.”<sup>75</sup> He means by inviolable that a human life is not absolutely protected from violence. Again, this blatantly contradicts his assertion above that all people should be protected equally.

Secondly, Bray contradicts his doctrine on the establishment of godly government by his very actions. He claims that governments have been established with the divine authority to take vengeance by taking life, liberty, or property.<sup>76</sup> It is this very government he is working against in his plight. This government legalized abortion; these doctors who perform abortions are not performing illegal acts. Bray is fighting what he views as a system of violence—however, that system is not one that is propelled by the people against which he is initiating force. He advocates the demolition of abortion clinics (abortuaries, in his terms) and the killing of doctors (abortionists or baby killers), and yet seems to overlook the fact that it is the government that allows them to be there and do what they do.

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<sup>73</sup> Bray, 51.

<sup>74</sup> Bray, 26.

<sup>75</sup> Bray, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Bray, 27.

In a 1994 symposium on the justification for murder of abortion doctors, several pro-life advocates argued that acts like those of Paul Hill discredit the entire pro-life movement. Defending oneself or another is a basic human right, many argued, but intending to kill or harm another person is directly contradictory to the calling of the Christian to be an example of the alternative to violence. Bray is missing the point; it is not only the abortion clinic and doctor that fuel this system, but also the government that allows it and the woman who makes the appointment. Bray's assumption that he has the right to take matters into his own hands creates anarchy, which is also contradictory to their cause:

“No Christian, however well-intentioned, has the moral right to declare himself the sole detective, district attorney, judge, jury, and supreme court in our democratic society and on his own authority set aside the natural law and the Ten Commandments.”<sup>77</sup>

While Bray makes a compelling argument for the opposition of government-sanctioned abortion; his attempt at justifying his advocacy of violence in the pro-life movement fails.

### **Islamic Fundamentalism and Osama bin Laden**

Osama bin Laden has brought some of the most fundamentalist Muslim organizations together to form the World Islamic Front in order to wage holy war, or *jihad*, on the United States of America.<sup>78</sup> He is the mind behind al-Qaeda, an organization that employs terrorism in order to achieve this end. He has been attributed and claimed responsibility for both of the attacks on New York City's World Trade Center in 1993 and 2001, the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the bombing of an American military residence hall in Saudi Arabia in 1998, and the Bojinka Plot—which was supposed to end with “the destruction

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<sup>77</sup> Nuechterlein, James A. “Killing Abortionists: A Symposium.” *First Things* no 48 (Dec. 1994): 29.

<sup>78</sup> Kelsay, John. “Bin Laden's reasons: Interpreting Islamic tradition.” *Christian Century* 119 no 5 (Feb 27-March 6, 2002): 26.

of eleven large U.S passenger airplanes over the Pacific Ocean in one momentous day in 1995.”<sup>79</sup> He has written two declarations of *jihad* (1996 and 1998) instructing all Muslims to consider it their “individual duty” to attack the United States and its allies in any way possible, whether the attack be on military personnel or civilians.<sup>80</sup> The Qu’ran has traditionally been interpreted by *ulama*, or “learned authorities,” in order to provide agreements on the *Shari’a* or “the path that leads to happiness.”<sup>81</sup> The *Shari’a* is crucial to Islamic tradition and doctrine because it refers to the ideal way to live in order to achieve true earthly and heavenly fulfillment.<sup>82</sup> However, in the last 150 years, this very exclusive argument has become an increasingly public debate, one that bin Laden and other fundamentalist leaders have joined.<sup>83</sup> The two sides that have formed are these: fundamentalists and pluralists. Fundamentalists (Osama bin Laden and his followers) believe that true justice is formed under an Islamic state that is devoted, “(a) to the establishment of Islam as the state religion, and (b) to the implementation of divine law, in the sense that policies are clearly derived from textual precedents.” On the contrary, pluralists believe that a just political system is one whose policies are simply “consistent with Islamic values,” and who is willing to look beyond the traditional understandings of the Qur’an.<sup>84</sup>

It is important that we compare and contrast bin Laden’s justification for violence with Bonhoeffer’s because of Bonhoeffer’s insistence that his ethic of deputyship was “a possibility

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<sup>79</sup> Juergensmeyer, 61, 70.

<sup>80</sup> Kelsay, 29: Kelsay inserts an excerpt of bin Laden’s “Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders” in his article in *Christian Century*.

<sup>81</sup> Kelsay, John. “Democratic Virtue, Comparative Ethics, and Contemporary Islam.” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33 no 4 (Dec. 2005): 699; Kelsay, “Bin Laden’s Reasons,” 27.

<sup>82</sup> Kelsay, John. “Islam and the Problem of Violence,” in *War or Words?: Interreligious Dialogue as an Instrument of Peace*, ed. Donald W. Musser and D. Dixon Sutherland (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 39.

<sup>83</sup> Kelsay: “Democratic Virtue, Comparative Ethics, and Contemporary Islam,” 699.

<sup>84</sup> Kelsay: “Democratic Virtue, Comparative Ethics, and Contemporary Islam,” 699.

and a standard for all [humans].”<sup>85</sup> Likewise, Bray and bin Laden feel that their ethic is absolutely universalizable and should be adhered to by everyone. While there are many similarities, there are several differences between the three. The first difference is obvious. The different religions give us not only a whole new vocabulary, but also a new set of doctrines and understandings about reality. Therefore, an understanding of Islamic fundamentalism requires an understanding of Islamic tradition and doctrine of war.

Suicide attacks, or “martyrdom operations,” are not part of the Islamic tradition; there is actually no history of suicide at all in Islam.<sup>86</sup> Suicide attacks as a weapon were not an accepted tactic until the early 1980s as a “means to expel American and other foreign troops” from Islamic territory.<sup>87</sup> In the early ‘90s, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad utilized martyrdom operations against Israel in the West Bank and Gaza. At first, the trend started with Shi’ite groups attacking military targets, but the most recent attacks have been focused on civilians and carried out by Sunni groups.<sup>88</sup> There is no hope of military gain, however, in the eyes of the “martyr.” The purpose of the attack is to instill fear and weakness in the enemy or to cause the enemy to “suffer what the avenging side is suffering.”<sup>89</sup>

Attachment to life is seen in Muslim literature as a characteristic of evildoers; therefore, the Muslim embraces death and the Muslim fighter should view it as an honorable goal to be reached.<sup>90</sup> The Islamic understanding of the martyr is significantly different than the Western, Christian, or Syriac understanding (*sahedo*). The Christian martyr is one who passively accepts

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<sup>85</sup> Rasmussen, 41.

<sup>86</sup> Cook, David. “Suicide Attacks or “Martyrdom Operations” in Contemporary *Jihad* Literature.” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*. Vol. 6, Issue 1 (2002): 7, 8.

<sup>87</sup> Cook, 8.

<sup>88</sup> Cook, 8.

<sup>89</sup> Cook, 9.

<sup>90</sup> Cook, 11.

suffering and death in the face of militant opposition. However, it is rare that a Christian martyr seeks out his/her martyrdom in battle. The Arabic term, *shahid*, refers to a Muslim martyr who is “allowed and even encouraged to seek out circumstances” where death is an almost certain outcome.<sup>91</sup> The fundamentalists who adhere to this understanding of a *shahid* do not rely heavily on classic *jihad* literature, but on a context of Muslim inferiority.<sup>92</sup> David Cook notes that today’s radical Islamic leaders strongly repudiate any rule and/or control by a non-Muslim government and tend to exaggerate their losses. It is highly unlikely that Muslims suffer from greater oppression than any other ethnic, religious, or social group in the world, but this sentiment is probably reflective of “their collective historical consciousness of a necessity to be superior.”<sup>93</sup> This sentiment, combined with America’s occupation of oil in the Middle East, it’s protection of and assistance to Israel, and military presence in Somalia, Chechnya, Kashmir, and Lebanon provides Osama bin Laden with what he views as just cause to wage war on the oppressors of the Islamic community: America.<sup>94</sup>

Michael Bray uses the Biblical text, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed” to justify his acts of arson and others’ acts of violence (Gen. 9:6).<sup>95</sup> Likewise, Islamic fundamentalists site similar texts from the Qur’an. Sulayman abu Ghayth, a spokesman for al-Qaeda, cites Qur’anic verses in order to demonstrate Islam’s divine right to attack those who have attacked them:

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<sup>91</sup> Cook, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Cook, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Cook, 14.

<sup>94</sup> Bin Laden, Osama. “Letter to America.” *The Observer* Nov. 24, 2002 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver/>): 1, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Bray, 24.

God said, “One who attacks you, attack as he attacked you,” and also, “The reward of evil is a similar evil,” and also, “When you are punished, punish as you have been punished” [see Qur’an 2: 190a, 194]”<sup>96</sup>

As Kelsay points out, verses such as these are used in order to “establish a right of reciprocal justice.”<sup>97</sup> Accordingly, they have specific numbers of Muslim victims whose deaths they are avenging; the numbers are given in Abu Ghayth’s article: “We have the right to kill four million Americans, two million of them children, and to exile twice as many and wound and cripple hundreds of thousands.”<sup>98</sup>

There are two terms for fighting in Islam: *jihad* and *qital*.<sup>99</sup> *Jihad* refers to the divine sanction to wage war for the purpose of “either expanding or defending the community.”<sup>100</sup> This type of struggle is communal; some Muslims will fight and others will support the cause in other ways, but the emphasis is on protection of the community by the government-sanctioned military. It requires the authority of an established Islamic government, or *khilafah*. Justice is to be exemplified through a legitimate political system. However, this has not been the case for several decades and it is the duty of the Muslim to work toward establishing this *khilafah*. In other words, the duty of the Muslim is to establish *khilafah*, then engage in *jihad* once it is authorized by the political order.<sup>101</sup> *Qital*, on the other hand, refers to the right and duty every Muslim has to “defend the lives, liberties, and properties of others who are victims of aggression.”<sup>102</sup> The difference between this and *jihad* is that this duty is individual. The threat is heightened and the enemy has invaded Muslim territory. The duty of every individual is to

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<sup>96</sup> Kelsay, 699-700.

<sup>97</sup> Kelsay, “Democratic Virtue...” 701.

<sup>98</sup> Kelsay, 701.

<sup>99</sup> Firestone, Reuven. “Conceptions of Holy War in Biblical and Qur’anic Tradition.” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24 no 1 (Spring 1996): 108.

<sup>100</sup> Cook, 11.

<sup>101</sup> Kelsay, “Democratic Virtue...” 703,

<sup>102</sup> Kelsay, “Democratic Virtue...” 704.

defend themselves and others through any means necessary to prevent destruction or elimination of the community.<sup>103</sup>

Bin Laden's 1996 address called for Muslims to contribute to the opposition of the American occupation as they were able, which would suggest the traditional declaration of *jihad*. The 1998 *Declaration*, however, addresses Muslims in a state of emergency, indicating that the need for defense has gone from community to individual and from imminent to urgent.<sup>104</sup> The violence in this form of fighting, however, is still reserved strictly for military combatants—for the aggressors—*not* for innocent civilians. Both systems of violence are held to a standard of honorable combat and the targeting of noncombatants is never considered a legitimate means of combat.<sup>105</sup>

However, a letter in 2002 supposedly written by bin Laden counters this view with two points. First, America is a democracy, which allows the citizens of the country to choose their government and its policies. Americans have the freedom to challenge and oppose the government. Thus, in the mind of bin Laden, American citizens are as responsible for the actions of their government as the people they put in power. Secondly, they claim the divine right to revenge. They have the right to destroy villages in America because America has destroyed their villages, they have the right to attack civilians because their civilians have been victims of American attacks, and they have the right to attack the American economy because they feel we have attacked theirs.<sup>106</sup>

### **Critique of bin Laden**

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<sup>103</sup> Kelsay, "Islam and the Problem of Violence," 43.

<sup>104</sup> Kelsay, "Islam and the Problem of Violence," 41.

<sup>105</sup> Kelsay, 704.

<sup>106</sup> Kelsay, "Democratic Virtue..." 704, 705.

Much like Bray, bin Laden approaches the Qur'an with his conclusion already in mind. Most Western scholars have acknowledged that the wide range of Qur'anic verses pertaining to war ultimately contradict each other. The conclusion by Muslim scholars, however, has been on the side of war for centuries.<sup>107</sup> John Kelsay provides a salient assessment of bin Laden's justification for *jihad* in his *Declaration* of 1998. The document raises three issues of controversy: religious authority, the use of force, and the call to indiscriminant killing or total war. There are five known authors—one of whom is Osama bin Laden—however, none of whom is recognized or qualified as a scholar of Islam. Kelsay argues that there are two possibilities as to how the authors maintain the notion that they have the authority to make such declarations. One reason could be that the authors of the *Declaration* assume authority because of the emergency state in which they find themselves. Kelsay reminds the reader “that in the emergency situation, the ordinary lines of authority are suspended.”<sup>108</sup> The other possible reason stems from the fact that there is no clergy in Islam. The implication of the authors, Kelsay suggests, is that authority comes from nearness to God, which is not limited to any one group of people. He notes that actually very few restrictions or criteria exist for making such pronouncements: “One can argue that bin Laden and his colleagues ‘ought not’ make pronouncements like this, but one would be hard-pressed to say that they ‘cannot’ do so.”<sup>109</sup> He concludes that, on the issue of authority, there is no *direct* violation of *Shari'a*.

The manner of armed struggle encouraged in the *Declaration*, Kelsay continues, also does not directly contradict Islamic norms, but it is unusual. Typically, the point of emergency is when Islamic territories are under attack and any means of fighting is employed to defend them.

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<sup>107</sup> Firestone, 108, 109.

<sup>108</sup> Kelsay, “Islam and the Problem of Violence,” 45.

<sup>109</sup> Kelsay, 46.

Deceit is even encouraged in order for a “desperate soldier” to protect Islamic lands.<sup>110</sup> The authors of the *Declaration*, however, take the stance that force abroad must be employed to prevent oppression at home. Osama bin Laden, along with members of Hamas, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and the Islamic Group, have reached far beyond their borders to defend Islamic territories. Still, Kelsay maintains that this is not a violation but merely a peculiarity.

The major violation bin Laden and his colleagues commit in the *Declaration* is regarding the targeting of civilians in acts of indiscriminant violence. Mark Juergensmeyer interviewed Mahmud Abouhalima, who was tried and convicted for his role in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. Abouhalima and others filled a rented truck with explosives and parked it in the basement parking area of one of the towers. The explosion did not cause the damage Abouhalima had wished. Had there been more explosives and better positioning of the truck, the tower would have been damaged enough to fall and cause destruction to the second tower, killing up to two hundred thousand people.<sup>111</sup> Abouhalima viewed his act as avenging the deaths and oppression the United States has caused worldwide. He specifically discussed the United States’ bombings in Japan where more than two hundred thousand people were killed. Juergensmeyer reiterates that this same number of people would have been killed had the 1993 bombing transpired as planned. Abouhalima declared to Juergensmeyer that his job as a Muslim is “to go wherever there is oppression and injustice and fight it.”<sup>112</sup> This is a very different calling than what is seen in the Islamic tradition of *qital*. These deliberate attacks on civilians are, in fact, in direct violation of *Shari’a* precedent: “Islam is very clear on the matter. The Prophet said: ‘Do no cheat or commit treachery, do not mutilate or kill women, children, or old men.’” While

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<sup>110</sup> Juergensmeyer, 82.

<sup>111</sup> Juergensmeyer, 62-63.

<sup>112</sup> Juergensmeyer, 67.

exceptions are made for the protection and defense of Islam and its territories during times of emergency, killing of innocents is *never* permitted.<sup>113</sup>

Bin Laden and his colleagues legitimately employ Islamic tradition to justify their calling of Muslims to participate in the defense of Islam and its territories against the oppression of the United States. On the other hand, their assertion that a Muslim should consider it their personal duty to “directly and intentionally kill” American citizens is not justified, even in the eyes of Muslims who agree with their attitude towards America. Kelsay demonstrates that there are fundamentalist Muslim leaders who have expressed their anxiety over al-Qaeda’s violation of Islamic tradition. In response to an article written by an al-Qaeda spokesperson in support of the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, fellow dissidents spoke out against al-Qaeda’s tactics. Shaykh Muhsin al-‘Awaji is a Saudi religious scholar who spoke out along with two other dissidents on the issue of al-Qaeda’s practice of indiscriminant killing. Al-‘Awaji stated that bin Laden creates conflict in the Muslim community and that, although he supported bin Laden’s actions in Afghanistan and even supports the use of martyrdom operations, he does not support the targeting of innocent civilians, no matter their religion or country.<sup>114</sup> Another fundamentalist leader offered his own criticism: Shaykh ‘Umar Bakri Muhammad of al-Muhajiroun, a group based in the United Kingdom, criticized al-Qaeda’s tactics because they are not carried out under the authority of an Islamic political system. Muslims have the right and duty to defend the lives, liberties, and properties of the Muslim community through systematic strikes against aggressors—but the strikes against noncombatants, once again, is forbidden.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Kelsay, “Islam and the Problem of Violence,” 48.

<sup>114</sup> Kelsay, “Islam and the Problem of Violence,” 51.

<sup>115</sup> Kelsay, “Islam and the Problem of Violence,” 52-53.

These criticisms most likely evoked the response in 2002 of Osama bin Laden in his “Letter to America.” In this document, bin Laden lists his reasons for attacking the American economy, military, and citizenry. He goes on to defend his actions by restating that America’s citizens choose their government and benefit from its exploits abroad. He concludes by citing the *lex talionis* (law of justified retaliation), which provides his justification for avenging the death and suffering of the Muslim community with proportional death and suffering of Americans.<sup>116</sup> This is, in fact, the same precedent touted by Bray in his justification.<sup>117</sup> This law of retribution takes the form of “an eye for an eye” in the biblical tradition while functioning to justify bin Laden’s claim to “the permission and the option to take revenge.”<sup>118</sup> While bin Laden’s ideology concerning aggression towards the United States in defense of the Islamic community is supported by many Muslims, his targeting of noncombatants is not only a subject of controversy in the Muslim community but also in complete contradiction to Islamic tradition and values.

### **Conclusion**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Michael Bray, and Osama bin Laden have all taken up arms in seemingly different wars. However, they all strive to topple a system of oppression and injustice. Bonhoeffer, as we have seen, struggles to remain a pacifist during a time and a regime where violence seemed to be the most viable option. My thoughts at the start were that, while Bonhoeffer may have had good reason to kill Hitler, it was still unethical and not in accordance with the life of Jesus. However, studying the justifications of Bray and bin Laden has given me unforeseen insight into the theological and ethical circumstance of Bonhoeffer. All three men

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<sup>116</sup> Kelsay, “Islam and the Problem of Violence,” 54-55.

<sup>117</sup> Bray, 51.

<sup>118</sup> Kelsay, “Islam and the Problem of Violence,” 54.

find themselves up against what they see as an oppressive force that needs to be stopped. Bray sees abortion as murder and seeks reciprocal justice by supporting the killing of abortion doctors. Bin Laden views America as an international bully and seeks reciprocal justice by attacking symbols of American power and influence, such as embassies and economic centers. Bonhoeffer saw that one man piloted the oppressive machine he faced and he sought not reciprocal justice, but to *be* Christ—something that he determined required the use of violence.

Until 1939, Bonhoeffer “underscored...the centrality of Christ and the freedom, engendered by the cross of Christ, to love God and neighbor, and stranger, and enemy.”<sup>119</sup> Until 1939, Bonhoeffer called the church to pacifism. It was only after this pacifism did not produce any result that Bonhoeffer determined that violence was acceptable, but only as a necessity. Bonhoeffer struggled with the painful decision to employ violence in a time of necessity. While I know that this struggle does not make the act ethical, it does demonstrate a much different approach to theology and ethics than what we see in Bray and bin Laden. Bonhoeffer found that the most efficient way to stop the oppression of the Third Reich was to kill one man. Bray and bin Laden, however, are not searching for the most efficient way or to use the *least amount* of violence; they are looking for the most debilitating, shocking, and observable ways. They are using violence to send a message. Bray blows up abortion clinics and supports the killing of doctors to send a message to the government, women who want abortions, and abortion doctors. Bin Laden orchestrates suicide missions to demonstrate to the United States government exactly what he is willing to do and whom he is willing to kill in order to stop American oppression. Juergensmeyer calls Bray and bin Laden’s form of violence “performance violence.”<sup>120</sup> What he means by this term is that these acts are strategically planned in order to have a dramatic impact

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<sup>119</sup> Hale, 80.

<sup>120</sup> Juergensmeyer, 126.

on the spectators. They are meant to “illustrate or refer to something beyond their immediate target.”<sup>121</sup> In other words, the ultimate goal of attacks like these is not literal but symbolic.

Bonhoeffer had no desire for this aspect of violence; he *literally* wanted to put an end to the horrific events he lived and experienced by killing one man.

Bonhoeffer is on a completely different theological and ethical plane than the other men in this study. His method is honest and authentic; he works through Scripture and circumstance equally and attempts to find a solution that conforms to both. His study of the Bible, history, theology, and Christ are all done to inform his developing ethic. In contrast, both bin Laden and Bray are moving backwards. They already know what they believe and they are selective with their literalism and their fundamentalism. It would be as easy for Bray to accept the Prince of Peace as it is for him to accept the God of War; and bin Laden could easily acknowledge that the killing of innocent civilians is not a means of honorable combat. The existential struggle that we find in Bonhoeffer is absent in both Bray and bin Laden.

My initial question was, “How can a man who claims a person should live for others justify an elaborate conspiracy to kill someone?” The responsibility of living for others, as Bonhoeffer saw it, required him to protect victims of unjust oppression. Just as Jesus took on the guilt of the world, Bonhoeffer saw that the Christian must reluctantly *take on the guilt* for the oppression of others. Bonhoeffer would not have approved of the use of violence to send a message or warning or to instill fear or terror in a group of people. In other words, Bonhoeffer’s violence is not terrorism, unlike that of Bray and bin Laden. The difference between terrorism and Bonhoeffer’s tyrannicide is that Bonhoeffer’s goal was to end the current evil circumstances of oppression in which he lived with the last option he had left. Bray and bin Laden have not

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<sup>121</sup> Juergensmeyer, 125.

exhausted every other path before advocating violence. Their goals are symbolic and meant to instill fear, and they attack innocents in order to send a bigger message to a more extensive, powerful audience. If Bonhoeffer is unethical in his attempt to kill another, albeit Hitler, he can still be acclaimed for his method of reaching such a conclusion.

During the course of this study, ethics has evolved from a clear right or wrong to a continuum. While Bonhoeffer's justification may not justify his act, I cannot put him on the same end of the ethical continuum as Bray and/or bin Laden. His method is one of theological and ethical integrity. He did not make the decision for tyrannicide flippantly. He was willing to be ethically and theologically mistaken in order to be Christ in the world *today*. Bray and bin Laden are assured that they are not mistaken. They undergo no agony or struggle in their justifications. While Bonhoeffer sought to have the most impact with the least amount of violence, Bray and bin Laden seek to have the maximum impact with the maximum amount of violence. This is ethically and theologically mistaken in both the Christian and Muslim scriptures and traditions, as we have seen. If one considers Bonhoeffer's actions to be unethical, this study demonstrates that his method places him closer to the "right" side of the continuum. The same cannot be said, however, for Bray and bin Laden.

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