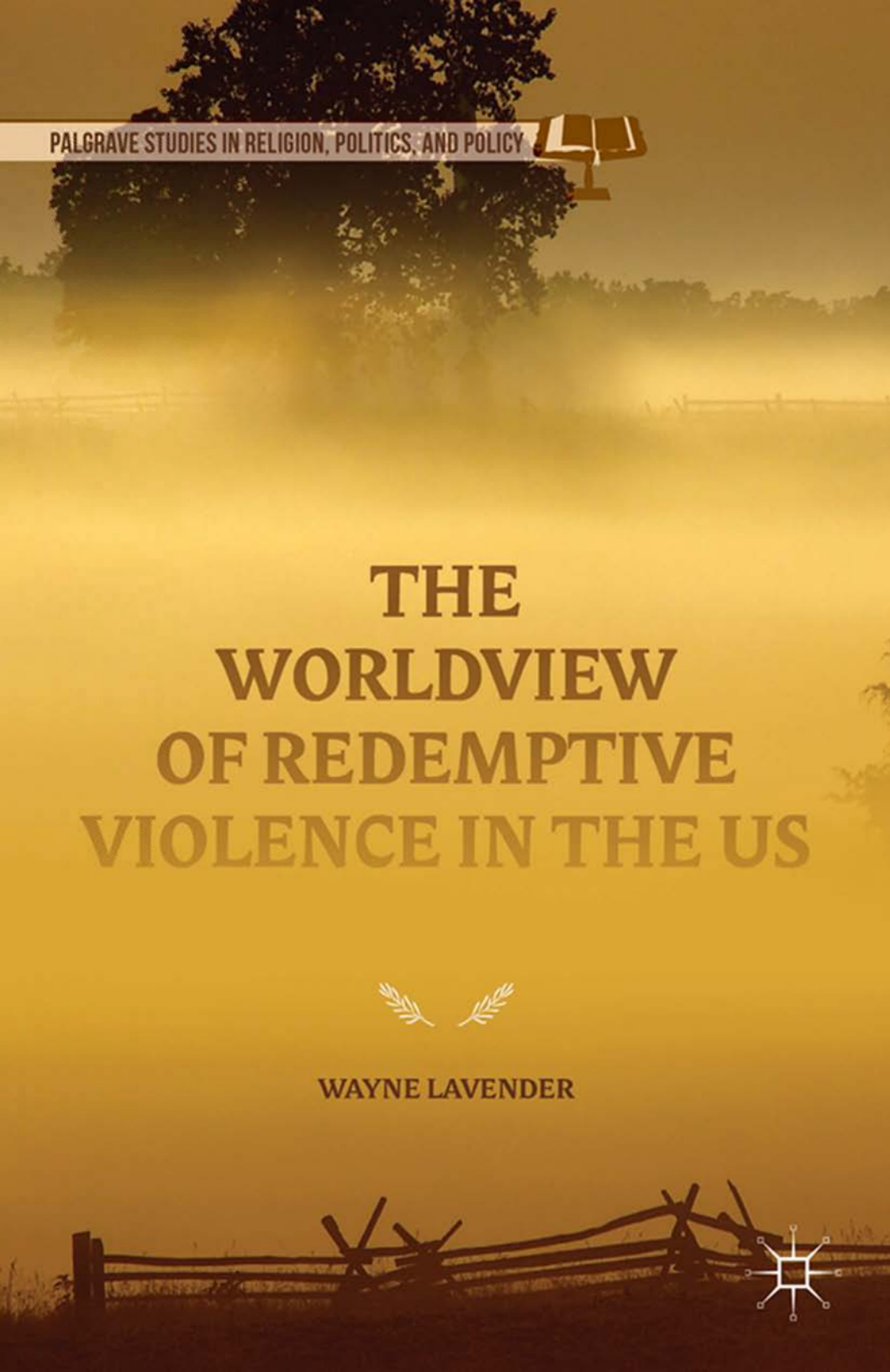
PALGRAVE STUDIES IN RELIGION, POLITICS, AND POLICY
THE WORLDVIEW OF REDEMPTIVE VIOLENCE IN THE US
WAYNE LAVENDER

Palgrave Studies in Religion, Politics, and Policy

Series Editors: Ted G. Jelen and Mark J. Rozell

A generation ago, many social scientists regarded religion as an anachronism, whose social, economic, and political importance would inevitably wane and disappear in the face of the inexorable forces of modernity. Of course, nothing of the sort has occurred; indeed, the public role of religion is resurgent in US domestic politics, in other nations, and in the international arena. Today, religion is widely acknowledged to be a key variable in candidate nominations, platforms, and elections; it is recognized as a major influence on domestic and foreign policies. National religious movements as diverse as the Christian Right in the United States and the Taliban in Afghanistan are important factors in the internal politics of particular nations. Moreover, such transnational religious actors as al-Qaida, Falun Gong, and the Vatican have had important effects on the politics and policies of nations around the world.

Palgrave Studies in Religion, Politics, and Policy serves a growing niche in the discipline of political science. This subfield has proliferated rapidly during the past two decades and has generated an enormous amount of scholarly studies and journalistic coverage. Five years ago, the journal *Politics and Religion* was created; in addition, works related to religion and politics have been the subject of many articles in more general academic journals. The number of books and monographs on religion and politics has increased tremendously. In the past, many social scientists have regarded religion as a key variable in politics and government.

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The Worldview of Redemptive Violence in the US
By Wayne Lavender

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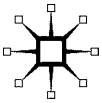

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This book is dedicated to politicians, policy makers, academics, religious leaders, and citizens of the United States who see and understand that the huge military spending and quick decisions to use military forces to solve international conflict are unsustainable, immoral, and counterproductive. It is dedicated to the men and women who have the wisdom to see this reality, and the courage to work for change. It is dedicated to what the United States can and should be—the world leader in promoting justice, democracy, liberty, freedom, and peace—a nation capable of unveiling a golden era of peace and prosperity for all of the world's people where cooperation and collaboration replace competition and conflict to solve humanity's pressing needs.

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Foreword

Wayne Lavender has written an extraordinary book that challenges US citizens to reconsider the underlying assumptions that comprise a common worldview that directs how we think about public policies. Without such reconsideration, he believes that the nation is stuck in a destructive pattern that has enormous consequences globally. Dr. Lavender is asking us to question our own deeply ingrained cultural and social values—a large challenge indeed.

He is just the person to write such a book. We met in 2007 when Wayne first enrolled in the PhD program in public policy at George Mason University. He was in all respects an unconventional student in our program: an ordained United Methodist pastor who had served churches in Connecticut for over two decades. Wayne had already written a well-received book—*Counting Ants While the Elephants March By: Thoughts on Church and State, Poverty and Terrorism, War and Peace*—and frequently lectured at church, civic, and academic forums. In a mid-career stage of life, where most choose to settle comfortably in what had brought success,

Wayne decided instead that he needed to find a different path to do more to promote the cause of peace that drives him daily.

The first time I met Wayne we discussed what motivated him to leave the ministry to study public policy. He explained that he saw a deep connection between the roots of our cultural values and what drives the nation continuously toward policies of aggression. He said that, in his own way, he wanted to make a larger contribution to building a more peaceful world. I was struck by the idealism of seeing a PhD program as a vehicle for promoting more widely a message of peace, but I knew immediately that Wayne was serious about this quest.

And he didn't waste any time. Wayne completed the entire PhD program the fastest of any student in the School's history—in just 27 months. He worked as a research assistant and as a teaching assistant for me. I chaired his doctoral dissertation. In fact, although this book is an outgrowth of his doctoral thesis, it is a significantly reworked text that builds on experiences he has had since completing the PhD. After taking his degree, Wayne established a nonprofit organization, The Foundation for Orphans, and he taught for 18 months at the University of Human Development in the Kurdish city of Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq. Recently, he became the executive director of a Habitat for Humanity regional office in Virginia. Wayne now is quite likely the only United Methodist pastor with a PhD in public policy.

In the aptly titled *The Worldview of Redemptive Violence in the United States*, Dr. Lavender contends that the prevailing lens through which the United States government and citizens view the world is the "myth of redemptive violence." Building upon the concept originated by theologian and biblical scholar Walter Wink, Dr. Lavender critiques the United States' current priorities and practices as being dominated

by the view that violence is an essential means for improving the human condition and securing justice and peace. As fish are unaware of the water in which they swim, we are unconsciously formed by and participate in the myth of redemptive violence. Our collective memory, how we teach history, the symbols we value, the role of religion, and our popular myths and legends create and perpetuate the belief that violence is redemptive and necessary.

Thus, the myth of redemptive violence has become the dominant worldview or framework by which we understand the world. History, collective memory, symbols, religious heritage, and legends and myths form the building blocks of any worldview. Those components of US culture are replete with violence, militarism, war, and "might makes right." Dr. Lavender presents compelling evidence that exposes the power and influence of the myth of violence and persuasively argues that the practices resulting from the myth are unsustainable, morally wrong, and ineffective in securing justice, human well-being, and peace.

The Worldview of Redemptive Violence in the US documents the influence of the myth of redemptive violence on how we interpret national history, value symbols of military conquests, wed religion with patriotism, and propagate myths and legends that glorify war and violence. Effectively exposing deeply rooted myths and their destructive consequences requires careful reasoning, supporting data, and convincing alternatives. Dr. Lavender undertakes the challenge with the tools of a political scientist, a pastoral theologian/practitioner, an astute observer of diverse cultures, and a passionate peacemaker. His readable style, accessible data, and understandable images combine to make *The Worldview* a needed and valuable contribution to efforts on behalf of a peaceful world.

The enduring challenge for Dr. Lavender and other critics of the United States worldview is that cultural shifts are very

difficult to achieve and they require generations of intentional actions to alter collective memory, history, symbols, religious practice, myths, and legends. As he has reported to me on numerous occasions and now in the conclusion to this book, in his many public presentations he often receives the greatest resistance, and even, at times, hostile feedback to his message, in houses of worship. The quest to change a nation's worldview is a long and complicated one. This book is an important beginning.

Mark J. Rozell
Dean and Professor of Public Policy
George Mason University

Acknowledgments

This is my first academic book. The book is a rewrite of a rewrite of a rewrite of my dissertation from George Mason University's School of Public Policy. The dissertation, titled "Worldview and Public Policy: From American Exceptionalism to American Empire," would not have been written without the support and help from my professors and colleagues. I would like to give a shout-out to Jack Goldstone, Jim Pfiffner, Janine Wedel, Jack High, Roger Stough, and Catherine Rudder. Thanks also to the professors at George Mason's School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution—particularly Mark Gopin, Richard Rubenstein, and Kevin Avruch—who thought and talked like I did and always offered me an open door when I needed some relief from the world of public policy. Beth Eck was a consistent source of strength and support. Special thanks to my friends who helped me through macro policy, micro and macroeconomics, multivariant regression analysis and quantitative research methodologies: you all are greatly appreciated!

Mark Rozell chaired my dissertation committee. Mark was everything a student could want in a committee chair: he was helpful,

honest, patient, and supportive. He steered me away from futile detours and offered sage advice. I am thankful to Mark for his confidence in me through the dissertation process, for encouraging me to submit this manuscript to Palgrave Macmillan, and for his steadfast friendship.

I could not have undertaken this work without being grounded in an alternative worldview myself. I grew up through the years of the Vietnam War and was blessed to have as a pastor an idealist who was willing to speak out against that conflict while serving in a conservative, veteran-filled congregation. Craig Haight reminded his congregation unceasingly about the nonviolent teachings of Jesus Christ and of the equality of all people regardless of race, color, ethnicity, gender, or name by which they worshipped God. Other clergy travelers I have walked with through the years include Steve Wall-Smith, Daniel Berrigan, Clayton Miller, C. Dale White, and Ken Carder.

I owe thanks to my Iraqi / Kurdish students and colleagues at the University of Human Development in Sulaymaniyah, who taught me far more than I was able to teach them. I am grateful for your generous hospitality and our ongoing relationships that spans thousands of miles, cultures, languages, religions, and war but allows us to stay in touch via modern technology as friends.

My mother was and is today a beacon of strength, a woman of deep faith whose work ethic was grounded in the postdepression / World War II culture: she was a member of the "greatest generation" who was able to instill within me an ability to question authority and ask difficult questions. Her brother, a World War II veteran, shared with us war stories ("Uncle Jim" described some atrocities by US troops that he witnessed) that helped me understand that even so-called good wars are, at best, not so much.

I appreciate the support and encouragement of our children. You had faith in me as I changed course mid-career, leaving a secure position in a leap of faith to return to a

university setting just as some of you were beginning college. Thank you for sitting in on my presentations, for offering critical feedback, for getting me speaking engagements and more.

Finally, a word of thanks to my wife Linda. Words fail to describe the love, patience, and support she offered through the academic journey. I do not have a thought, sentence, or paragraph in this book that has not been vetted by Linda—and, perhaps—originated from her. Traveling this path has often been lonely, but having her by my side has been more than enough.

Introduction

One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in.

—Marshall McLuhan

While traveling on a domestic flight in 2008 I had an unforgettable experience. I was seated next to a pleasant woman who was on a business trip. We shared some casual conversation before she asked me this simple question: "What do you do for a living?" I could have replied with several answers. I am, and have been since 1986, a United Methodist pastor. The story is, however, a bit more complicated. In 2005, I became the director of a small nonprofit organization called "Passing the Peace." I wrote my first book, *Counting Ants While the Elephants March By.* At the time I was also a PhD student at George Mason University's School of Public Policy. I could therefore have answered that I am a pastor, a director, author, or student. Instead, I tried this: "I am a peacemaker." She acknowledged my answer and was quiet for a moment before replying: "You don't seem to be doing a very good job of being a peacemaker."

She was joking, of course, and we both laughed before settling into the flight and our reading material. After the trip we wished each other well and said goodbye. I imagine she has no memory of this event, but it has stayed with me and is something I think about almost every day. What kind of a peacemaker am I? Am I doing "a very good job of it?" Maybe not.

When we total the human and financial resources the United States marshals for war and warmaking activities and compare them with the resources this nation mobilizes for peace and peacemaking activities we quickly see an enormous disparity, an inequality of epic proportions. The United States spends a great amount of its resources on war and warmaking activities (a total of $1.2 trillion per year when all of the different military-related expenditures are added together) but, in comparison, precious little on peace and peacemaking programs (a total of $50 billion through USAID, State Department, Peace Corps). Is it possible to be a peacemaker within a nation wherein this imbalance between war and peace spending is so extreme? Is it possible to be a peacemaker in a nation that is, in effect, today's global empire?

The existence of a dominant worldview within the United States that supports the myth of redemptive violence indicates that it will be difficult, at best, for the United States to take a leading role in creating and promoting a world of peace in justice. An illustration of this worldview can be seen in the book *Charlie Wilson's War* (and subsequent movie starring Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts, and Philip Seymour Hoffman). The book traces the personal and professional story of Congressman Charlie Wilson (Texas, R), who was responsible for getting his colleagues in the US Congress to deliver billions of US federal dollars to insurgents and guerrilla fighters in Afghanistan to support their war against the

Soviet Union. The funds were sent under the broad-brush realpolitik strategy that the "enemy of my enemy is my friend." The program worked: supported, in part, by funding from the United States, the Afghani guerilla fighters were able to force the Soviets to withdraw from their nation.

But as the war came to an end with the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, Wilson tried to secure US financial support for peace-building activities in the postconflict nation. The humanitarian projects included the construction and staffing of schools, hospitals, and governmental services including roads and other infrastructure. These peacemaking activities cost millions of dollars compared to the billions of dollars Representative Wilson was able to secure for weapons. His attempts at securing funding for peaceful activities failed. Frustrated, Wilson himself summarizes his experience: "These things happened. They were glorious and they changed the world. And the people who deserve the credit are the ones who made the sacrifice. And then we fucked up the endgame" (Crile 2003:520).

The dominant worldview within the United States, then, made it easy for a rather obscure member of Congress to funnel billions of dollars to fund a military operation in Central Asia but did not allow the same person to fund millions of dollars of life-sustaining, humanitarian aid to these people. It was relatively easy for Charlie Wilson to be a warmaker, but not so much for him to be a peacemaker.

Living in a Fishbowl

It is said that a fish does not see the water in which it swims. This means that fish—were they intelligent enough for consciousness—would be unable to perceive or understand that they live in water because this is the only environment

that they have experienced. They know nothing of the air above them or the land that rises out of the sea because these settings are totally foreign to fish. Fish are products of their environment—water—and incapable of perceiving this very water because it's the only reality they have ever experienced. As Marshall McLuhan puts it: "One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in" (McLuhan 1968:175).

In the same manner, human beings are products of their environments. Most people live within one culture, one nation, one environment, and therefore take that setting as normative, ordinary, and routine. They do not see the specific, unique elements from which their culture is comprised and are often oblivious to the subtle and not-so-subtle cultural influences that shape them. S. Martin Lipset frequently said: "Those who only know one country know no country." Lipset suggested that a person who lives his or her whole life within one nation, one culture, can not objectively see the culture (water) in which they reside (swim), because it is only in comparison to other cultures that individuals learn of their own.

Citizens of the United States, like citizens of other nations, consider their culture to be "normal," "conventional," "usual," or "typical." But because the great majority of Americans do not travel overseas, the majority of Americans do not have the opportunity to experience other cultures. According to the US State Department, 109 million Americans own passports, a number that equates to about 35 percent of the population. Of this figure, though, it has been estimated that 14.6 million Americans travel overseas each year—less than five percent of all Americans (Chalmers 2012). Because most US citizens do not travel overseas, most of them do not have an opportunity to experience a foreign culture. What