

God's Armies

"The Rise and Decline of Christian Militarism in Prussia-Germany from Hegel to Bonhoeffer: The End Effect of the Fallacy of Sacred Violence" by John A. Moses, in *War and Society* (May 2005), School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Univ. of New South Wales, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia.

Today's Islamist terrorism is hardly the first instance of "sacred violence" in recent history. Consider Nazi Germany: Adolf Hitler's brutal rampages at home and abroad had the unshakable sanction of German Protestantism. When Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45) courageously spoke out against the Nazis, he was defying not only the state but a religious tradition that went back to the 16th century and Martin Luther himself, says Moses, who teaches in the School of Classics, History, and Religion at Australia's University of New England.

The German Reformation had brought church and state closer together. In Luther's view, the Prussian and other Protestant Germanic states had to be able to use military force to resist any restoration of papal control. The ironic result was that the church, previously independent of the state, now became subordinate to it, unable to criticize any government policy, foreign or domestic.

Against that background, G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) formulated what became virtually Prussia's official philosophy. Systematizing Luther's theology of state power, he portrayed the state as the instrument of God's will on earth. And in the Hegelian view, observes Moses, a state had to be able "not only to defend itself but to expand at the expense of less powerful neighbors. By the very fact of being weaker, they had no justification to continue to exist and there-

fore, rightly, ought to be absorbed into the greater power."

Beginning with Otto von Bismarck's chancellorship of the Reich he founded under Prussian leadership in 1871, many Germans "came to believe that Germany was the 'World Historical Nation,' chosen by Almighty God to exert preeminence in the world." Not even defeat in World War I disabused them of this notion.

Hegel's philosophy, giving divine sanction to the state's power politics and warfare, "underlay not only the discipline of history but also Protestant theology in German universities," writes Moses. German Protestant theology "endorsed emphatically the notion of a warrior God."

Bonhoeffer—who warned in mid-1932 that there would be war if the Nazis came to power (as they did the following year), and who later joined a plot to assassinate Hitler—rejected that prevailing theology and its underlying Hegelian notion that the state operated in a realm removed from the rest of humanity. Such thinking, Bonhoeffer wrote, "contradicts fundamentally Biblical thinking. . . . Indeed, there are not two realities but only one reality and that is the reality of God revealed in Christ within the reality of the world." Arrested by the Nazis in 1943, Bonhoeffer was hanged two years later, and became, posthumously, one of the most influential Christian theologians of modern times.

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"The Death of Environmentalism," and they have ignited a continuing debate in a community that had always considered itself united.

Bogged down in promoting shortsighted,