

ABSTRACT

William Sloane Coffin, one of the most influential and representative figures of the Protestant Liberalism movement has been the subject of the present research. The main aims of this project are to analyze the social and religious work of an important liberal Christian during the period 1960 -1990 in the history of the United States of America, as well as publicize his position and actions to achieve social justice by using his most important and famous works.

This research registers his influence as pacifist and his actions at the front line defending the civil rights and some important social issues. As well as his life and his memorable written works in the first two chapters respectively, and a deep analysis of the social and religious work from his position as Christian this is detailed in chapter 4. The relationship he made between religion and politics; his work on controversial issues such as sexism, segregation, abortion, nuclear weapons, and the Vietnam War were also examined in chapters three and four.

For being an ardent human rights defender, a passionate activist, and an eloquent critic against the Vietnam war, William Sloane Coffin, has been taken into consideration to be part of different analysis and used as an example to confront social and political problems that most part of the time are not examined.

KEY WORDS

Antiwar, Chaplain, Civil Rights, Social Issues, Ministry, Vietnam, William Sloane Coffin, Jr.Yale University, Riverside Church, Justice

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“ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE OF THE CLERGYMAN AND ACTIVIST, RV. WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN, DURING THE PERIOD 1960- 1990 IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.”

Tesis previa a la obtención del Título de Licenciada en Ciencias de la Educación en la Especialización de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my beloved family members.

They had made many sacrifices to give me the

opportunity to accomplish my goal.

To all my best friends for their moral support

and encouragement.

Thanks to you all.

Tania

DEDICATION

This written work is dedicated to my family,
who has known to give me their support to reach my goals
along my academic life.

Ximena

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INTRODUCTION

William Sloane Coffin, Jr. was born on June 1st, 1924, into a wealthy family of New York City. He grew up in a world of liberal Protestantism, Republicanism, and the optimism of the postwar boom economy. Music also had a special power in Coffin's life. Inspired by the idea of saving the European civilization during World War II, he enrolled in the army. Racism in the army gave him crucial lessons in black and white equality. He worked for the Central Intelligence Agency on Russian affairs. He showed exceptional qualities of leadership, idealism, and charisma.

As Coffin was a man who loved crusades; he undertook a new mission, the challenge of Christian ministry. He was influenced by the world's greatest theologians. He became the best known mainline Protestant. His life was rich in experiences that made an auspicious career possible for him. He became Chaplain of very important institutions: Phillips Academy, Williams College, Yale University, and Riverside Church.

William Sloane Coffin, Jr. became a peace and social justice activist who worked his whole life to make religious conviction a part of public discourse. For more than a quarter-century he had to deal with the most controversial social issues facing the United States churches: abortion, sexism, homophobia, racism, poverty, and the environment. Coffin put himself and his faith on the line from the first Freedom Rides to protests against the Vietnam War, nuclear disarmament, sanctuary for Central American political dissenters, and an egalitarian church policy for gays and lesbians. His strong convictions regarding the U.S. policies in Vietnam made him encourage

young men to resist the draft. He was willing to be arrested, tried, convicted, and jailed so that his message would be heard.

Coffin's deep faith in God's love was the foundation for his preaching. He believed that the Church and Christian beliefs must turn their teachings towards politics and everyday social problems. His powerful and moving sermons as well as his books were based on the Christian Gospel. His wisdom made of him a great influence over the American public, especially among young people. His teachings changed minds.

CHAPTER I

1. BIOGRAPHY

1.1 BACKGROUND

Edmund Coffin, William Sloane Coffin. Sr.'s father was the first family member to attend Yale College, graduating in 1866. When Edmund Coffin got married to Euphemia Sloane, they created a powerful furniture business called W. & J. Sloane.

Edmund and Euphemia Coffin had two children, Henry Sloane and William Sloane for whom they put special and close attention. Edmund served as an elder at the Brick Presbyterian Church. He brought his family into the world of that church and the world of Yale University. The Sloane-Coffin family remained close to these. At that time, and during Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr., Yale was and still is an institution of great importance for politics and culture, serving the American elite by educating and preparing its sons for leadership.

After William Sloane Coffin Sr.'s graduation, he began to work at W. & J. Sloane, Furniture Company. During his adult life he shouldered philanthropic responsibilities. He and other Brick Church members used to organize clubs for children and mothers. Also, William taught Sunday School at Christ Church in New York.

William Sloane Coffin Sr. was thirty eight years old when World War I broke out. He joined the New York City Mission Society and went to Germany. It provided him the opportunity to help soldiers by setting up rest centers near the German lines. Here Coffin displayed his qualities: generosity, courage, self involvement, fairness across class lines, etc. On his return from Europe in 1919 he became its president (until his death).

Catherine Butterfield was born in Kansas City in 1892. Catherine's childhood was parentless when her mother died and her father put her in an Episcopal convent school in Kenosha, Wisconsin. After Catherine graduated, she attended Simmons College. Then World War I broke out, and she went to France when she was accepted for service with the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association.) There she showed her boldness and found some delights and sadness while working behind the front lines. Among Catherine's experiences she met her future husband, William Sloane Coffin. After a brief courtship they were married. Their relationship was as happy as it was full. They complemented each other with their charitable activities. She was young and pretty and had Coffin's spirit and intelligence while he had energy to carry on their purposes.

1.2 CHILDHOOD

Catherine and William had three children: Edmund, William, and Margot. William Sloane Coffin, Jr. was born on June 1st, 1924, into the wealthy elite of New York City. His paternal grandfather was co-owner of the very successful W. & J. Sloane Company. His uncle was Henry Sloane Coffin, president of Union Theological Seminary and one of the most famous ministers in the U.S. His father, William Sloane Coffin, Sr., was president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and an executive in the family business.

The Coffin family moved to a two penthouse apartment in a building on East Sixty Eighth Street in Manhattan. Young William used to enjoy the spectacular views of the East River and the rising of the Empire State Building. In New York William, or Bill as his parents called him, lived like any other boy at that time. He played at home and attended the Buckley School for Boys, and during the summers he went to his house in Long Island. He said that Ned, Margot and he spent some of the best hours of their childhood there without books and playing with their pets.

The most intimate relations that Coffin remembered were those held with two servants in particular. The first one was a Swiss governess, Mademoiselle Lovey, from whom Bill learned French and most of his religious piety. Coffin's words were "... my greatest childhood intimacy was with Mlle. Lovey and God."¹ The second figure in Coffin's memories was the chauffeur, Louis Bach, who taught Bill to box. For this reason Bill called Bach his fight manager. When he was in third grade, every afternoon Bill used to challenge some friend and/or enemy for a wrestling match. The chauffeur observed Bill's performance, and while they were returning home Bach gave him pointers for the next fight. In fourth grade, and with the chauffeur in attendance, one Father's Day Bill won the featherweight boxing championship of Buckley School.

One of the many ways Buckley School encouraged its students was boxing. Weakness was frowned upon because the School principle was based on brain and muscle. They even had a combative school song. Bill flourished at school where he frequently led his classes or was at the top of the other pupils. His parents often praised him and signed weekly report cards that described him as "independent, aggressive, disliking authority, athletically competitive and ambitious, enjoying public approval."²

For Bill, Ned, and his sister Margot, summertime was a golden time. They spent most of the summers in Oyster Bay, Long Island. They spent some summers in France. During the winter Bill and his brother daily skipped along the block on Lexington Avenue. At nights they played a game of backgammon. Sometimes on Saturdays the children and their father would go to the W. & J. Sloane Store or to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of which William Sloane Coffin, Sr. was the board president. This period was apparently stable and prosperous. Catherine called it Bill's golden past.

After the crash in 1929, the Coffin family, like other wealthy New Yorkers, faced economic pressure. William Sr.'s father, Edmund Coffin, was a prominent lawyer, real estate developer, and reformer who owned Hearth and Home Corporation, a property investment and management firm that renovated and rented low-income housing development in New York. Upon Edmund's death in 1928, it went to his sons William and Henry, with William managing the firm. When the Great Depression hit in 1929, William allowed tenants to stay whether or not they could pay the rent, quickly draining his own funds, and at a time when the family's substantial W. & J. Sloane stock was not paying dividends.

During that tough time, the family had to sell the Long Island property and had to say good bye to a substantial domestic staff, especially Bach. To replace Mlle. Lovey, who had to return to Switzerland, the family employed a young French woman named Gigi; but according to Bill's memories, she could not take the special place that Mlle. Lovey had.

The situation got worse. On the afternoon of Saturday, December 16th, 1933, Ned was celebrating his twelfth birthday. Bill was nine and Margot eight. That afternoon the children were playing marbles in the playroom, when Bill's father returned from the Museum of Art. Bill remembered that he went into his room without saying a word. It was something strange. After a while Catherine entered the room and found her husband lying in his bed. He was dead. William Sloane Coffin, Sr. died in 1933 at age fifty-four from a heart attack he suffered returning from work to home.

Carmel

The family entered a new world because they had lost the head of the family, the main economic source, and the key to their position in the New York society. They had enough money to survive, but they had to manage it

frugally. After this, Bill's mother Catherine decided to move the family to Carmel, California, to make life more affordable. It was possible with the financial support from her brother-in-law, Henry Coffin. After years spent in the most exclusive private schools in Manhattan, the three Coffin children were educated in Carmel's public schools. Catherine became a very strong presence in the children's lives as well as their primary caretaker.

Ned was to enter the eighth grade, Bill the sixth and Margot the fifth. Catherine accompanied them to their first school day. The children were wearing the private Buckley School short pants. It provoked Bill's first fights because one of the children made fun of his pants. During the morning recess, that boy was easy to beat because he had no idea about boxing. After lunch, Bill observed in the classroom how a boy named Danny Villepondo bothered his classmates with spitballs. He was astonished because the victims didn't react. So he thought his friends needed a protector, and during the afternoon recess Bill was having his second contest. But he didn't have the same good luck. Danny Villepondo was seventeen, and he did know how to box. Bill realized that with Danny as a friend he wouldn't have anything to worry about. According to Bill the rest of his days in Carmel were equally satisfactory because he had learned his first lesson about injustice.

Bill displayed a number of talents early in his life. He played basketball and baseball on local championship teams. Music also played an important role. It became a passion for him. He was a talented musician. In California Bill played the guitar and sang Evangelical hymns. He also played the clarinet and the piano in the school orchestra. Soon he became devoted to the piano and planned a career as a concert pianist. His idol was Toscanini, and Walter Damrosch, former conductor of the New York Orchestra, was his teacher.

Bill became Catherine's favorite son when she saw "his aggressiveness, his physical talent, his musical ability, his spirit, his extraverted charm, his interest in being the center of things and his ambition."³

In this period of Bill's life he had his first experience of love. When he was in sixth grade, Bill experienced a rush of feelings for a girl named Elaine. Both of them were shy and couldn't even look each other in the eye. Then in seventh grade, Bill felt the same emotions for another girl whose name was Alice. They were elected president and secretary of the student body, and it was a great excuse to be together. They were good friends talking about many things, but they never confessed their feelings for one another. He wrote later that his Carmel years were the "the least complicated" and "the three most joyful years of his life."⁴

Deerfield Academy

Bill was approaching his thirteenth birthday in 1837, when his uncle Henry proposed that his mother send the two boys to Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts. Henry believed that there the children could receive a proper boarding school education. Ned accepted immediately, but Bill didn't want to leave his music. He really wanted to become a good concert pianist and didn't believe that Deerfield was a good place for that purpose. His mother was in a dilemma because she was proud of Bill's musical talent, but on the other hand, education was important, too. So they made a deal: If he did well at the new school for a year, she would take him to study music in Paris. At the urging of his uncle Henry, who was still contributing to the family's finances, his mother enrolled him in Deerfield Academy in 1938.

At Deerfield Academy, Bill had to work very hard both at schoolwork and at football. He set a scoring record in his division. But for him every day

at school was too orderly, and nothing exciting happened. There he got a real idea of work, and for a while he wanted to give up music temporarily. Bill's self-confidence and leadership skills shone. If he thought that something had to be done in another way, he would just say it. He did everything well.

Paris

In the summer of 1938, Catherine took her three children to France. William moved to Paris at the age of fourteen to receive personal instruction in the piano and was taught by some of the best music teachers of the 20th century, including Nadia Boulanger, Bill's harmony teacher. Both Ned and Bill went into American Summer Conservatory. At summer's end Ned returned to Deerfield, and Margot went to a Swiss school. Bill and his mother stayed in Paris to continue pursuing Bill's dream.

Will's musical abilities were impressive, as was his aptitude for learning languages. Catherine arranged for them to spend the better part of two years alone in Paris and elsewhere in Europe so that he could devote himself exclusively to developing his skills on the piano with Jakes Fèvrier as his teacher. The boy practiced for hours every day in an apartment with his mother. They went on excursions, and Bill absorbed a great deal in terms of worldly knowledge and self-confidence; but their personal world was a small one, inhabited by two people. He and his mother devoted their lives to music. He channeled all of his energy into the piano. The young Bill did not have friends, and girls had to compete with the overpowering presence of his mother.

Bill used to offer his services as a guide at places such as Notre-Dame to collect tips and buy concert tickets. The concerts were the main source of his inspiration. He had two favorite artists: Germaine Lubin and Jakes Fèvrier. Catherine's favorite artist was Alfred Cortot, so Fèvrier arranged a meeting for Bill to play for him. Bill played very well, and Cortot asked him to play for him again in Paris, but it was impossible because the World War II broke out.

Geneva

After a year, the Coffin family held its reunion near the Swiss border. They were too close to the war zone because Germany had invaded Poland. The United States Congress passed the Neutrality Act declaring neutrality and instructing American citizens to leave Europe. Ned returned immediately to Yale, and Margot was taken again to her Swiss boarding school. However, Bill and his mother were in a dilemma: they both wanted to help the French war efforts in any way, but they couldn't lose their passports and citizenship. Reluctantly they went to Geneva where Bill enrolled at the Ecole International de Genève and began to study piano, harmony, and counterpoint. At school he directed the orchestra, played goalie on the soccer team, and related with boys and girls of his own age. In Geneva, Bill met the grand old man of pianists, Ignace Paderewski, who he had revered when he started studying piano at Carmel. "Paderewski was an exiled Polish pianist whose country Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin had just divided. Bill found the defense of culture inextricably linked with the fight against tyranny."⁵

Coffin began to feel the German militarist threat to people and things he cared about. He viewed the war with the great excitement of a sixteen-year-old-boy, and even wanted to join the French Foreign Legion, but he was too young. In 1940, the war attacks were getting closer and more dangerous so Catherine planned to go back to the United States and enroll Bill in music school during the summer and before his return to Deerfield boarding school.

Andover

Bill enrolled in Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. That school offered more music than Deerfield, and the well-known teacher named Felix Fox lived in nearby Boston. He had agreed to be Bill's teacher.

At the beginning Bill felt lonely, bored, and separate from the rest of the students at school because he practiced for long hours. He just took three of the four courses required. Soon he showed his talents as a pianist and as a singer in the school orchestra. To avoid hurting a finger he stopped practicing all sports except track. One year had passed and Bill became a popular boy. He had many admirers, both boys and girls, who wanted his company. He became the president of the Glee Club, so he used to organize dances and concerts with girls' schools. He was also a piano soloist. He believed that the best part of Andover was two of its teachers: Dr. Patteicher, scholar of Bach, and Arthur Darling, an American History teacher.

At this age Bill started to show the characteristics of the adult Coffin. He continued with his aggressive charm and verbal facility. Music had a great influence on his personality, giving him the power over every one who was close to him. He learned everything through music, even politics. He was greatly influenced by Paderewski, the former exiled Polish minister and pianist.

1.3 EARLY ADULTHOOD

Bill stayed at Andover from 1940 to 1942 while his mother was trying to resume her college education. They kept in regular contact with letters. His mother was always watching over his development. The bombing of Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entry into the war changed Bill's idea of opposing the war; he worried his mother because she knew that Bill soon wanted to enlist.

When he graduated from high school in 1942, he enrolled in Yale University in the school of music. There his teacher was Bruce Simonds. While continuing his pursuit of the piano, he was also excited by the prospect of fighting to stop fascism and became very focused on joining the war effort.

His mother had also moved to New Haven and established their first home after they had left Carmel. The idea was to be as close as possible to her sons because Ned was going into the Navy within three months. After his brother's departure, Bill's desire to get into the war intensified. First, he applied to the French Foreign Legion, but his petition was denied. Then he applied to work as a spy with the Office of Strategic Services in 1943, but was turned down for not having sufficiently "Gallic features" to be effective. So he decided to wait for his draft notice which arrived in April 1943.

Bill went into Fort Dix, New Jersey, and when he put on his uniform he recalled, "I felt a serenity of spirit that I had rarely before known."⁶ According to Warren Goldstein, author of the book A Holy Impatience: "Coffin was ready for a different life."⁷ At Fort Dix he was classified infantry because in spite of the fact that he had done well on the IQ tests, he had set the Fort Dix record for the lowest score on mechanical aptitude.

Bill loved the life he had during four years in uniform, from 1943 to 1947. He excelled with the bayonet drill and had immersed in the physical intensity of the U.S army. He also enjoyed the company of his trainers during those seventeen weeks of basic training. Once again, his mother's presence was as strong as before. Their emotional relationship and correspondence turned into Bill's love life conversations.

At Fort Dix, Coffin understood and acquired respect for the American Legionnaires. He closely related to the poor and non-educated Southern Baptists. In a letter Coffin had written, "I must say their friendliness, the

sincerity and particularly the Bible learning of these Southern Baptists is really impressive.”⁸ He sang in the regimental church whose chaplain had put him in charge of bringing the Gospel message in song because he knew a little about religion.

The first time that Coffin noticed segregation was at Camp Wheeler. In the town there were signs everywhere: over buses, drinking fountains, restrooms, restaurants, etc, for “Colored” and “Whites.” There were no blacks in the camp who were called “niggers”.

As Coffin had fluency in French, he was transferred from Infantry to Military Intelligence at the Training Center at Camp Ritchie, Maryland. Not much was demanded from Coffin there, so he was often bored. He also met with some friends from Andover: David Chavchavadze, Chingis Guirey, and his Andover teacher, Dr. Hasencleaver. Camp Ritchie was like a Tower of Babel: there were Turkish speaking personnel, the camp laundry was handled by Arabs, German and Australian personnel trained to interrogate prisoners, and Coffin belonged to the French Speaking personnel. There Coffin and his school friends were trained for future liaison work with the Free French Forces. However, he and his friend Guirey still wanted to be at the front lines. Guirey taught Bill some Russian folk songs, and his ability to sing these songs made Bill say “these two songs were to alter the course of my life.”⁹ Their training ended in January 1944, and they won admission to Officer Candidate School. Coffin moved to Fort Benning, Georgia.

In Officer Candidate School (OCS) Coffin met and had the opportunity to train with African Americans for the first time. Even though they were also college educated, they were segregated. Blacks could only command black troops, and all belonged to a single platoon. They also had to memorize the Army manual because if they said the answers in their own words, TAC officers would find something wrong and throw them out of the army. The

technical skills and leadership qualities of the black officers impressed everybody at the Fort, and it was the “final proof of black-white equality.”

During the seventeen weeks of training the candidates were taught to be teachers with both leadership and evaluation skills. After a serious conversation with Lieutenant Rogers, Coffin wanted to become a Lieutenant because in that way he could increase opportunities to be sent to the front lines. So in June 1944 he returned to Camp Ritchie as a Second Lieutenant just after he graduated. Finally, in September Coffin’s orders arrived. He was sent with a large contingent of German and French speaking specialists to the New York embarkation center, and then they sailed to Europe.

At that time, Coffin was still chaste in spite of having plenty of opportunities to lose his virginity. The first night they arrived in England, he jogged five miles until he reached a bar in Litchfield. There he met and lost his virginity with a pretty British woman. At that moment, the twenty-year-old boy was in a great dilemma: he said that people are to be loved and things are to be used. For that reason he had lived an unsophisticated sexual life. At the same time, he had experienced some doubts about his manhood that made him wonder “if I wasn’t really being more cowardly than moral.”¹⁰ In the end he decided that when he returned to the U.S. he would continue behaving the same as before, but while he was overseas he would let nature take its course.

Coffin was shocked by the wartime life in England. There he observed many behaviors of a country at war, and he was new to women’s sexual desires for which he wasn’t emotionally prepared. The evenings

usually ended with the British at the dart boards, and the Americans getting drunk.

Coffin stayed with the Sixteenth Replacement Depot for a month and a half waiting for orders. In November his orders arrived, and he and his unit went to Le Vèsinet, outside of Paris. He was full of joy because he knew that there he could find his childhood friends. He visited his music teachers Fèvrier and Mlle. Boulanger. He had to be an interpreter at army headquarters in his beloved city, Paris, but his happiness couldn't be complete because he still wanted to fight at the front. So he applied again for a transfer which was accepted.

On December 16th, the same date as the eleventh anniversary of his father's death, Coffin announced to his mother that the next day he would head into combat. He went to the edge of the Compiègne forest. He was worried because he had never commanded infantry troops. He also realized that those people in the barracks felt miserable because they would go soon to the front. On Christmas Eve, the list of the people who were going to the front was read, but Coffin's name wasn't on the list. Instead, he received an offer which was to train troops rather than going immediately to the front. He chose to train troops and was promptly put in charge of the training program with his captain. He was indispensable.

After some time, Coffin's job in Compiègne evaporated, and he had nothing to do there. He was bored so he asked for a transfer to the South Pacific. But his Yale friend, Chinghiz Guirey had other plans for him. Guirey had worked as an interpreter for the American Army to make contact with the

Russians. One day, Guirey invited Coffin to meet him at Le Vèsinet and explained to him his plans for Coffin's future. He suggested that Coffin enroll in an intensive Russian language course by the Russian Liaison School. Guirey arranged an interview between Coffin and Commandant Shouvaloff. Coffin's friend had planned to persuade the commandant to accept Coffin into the school. Guirey asked Coffin to sing those two Russian folksongs he had taught him some years ago. Although Coffin didn't know what he was singing, he convinced the commandant and he was accepted in the school in May 1945 with a deal: he had to learn Russian within three months.

As Guirey was working in the painful repatriation programs he wanted more well-prepared American diplomats involved in that program so they could realize why displaced Soviet citizens didn't want to return home. And Coffin was one.

Coffin was confused about going to the South Pacific and taking that chance. But after a great dilemma and a two hour conversation with Guirey, he decided to let the issue solve itself with the orders that arrived first. One day later, the commandant sent a messenger to bring him to Le Vèsinet again. Once again, he couldn't achieve his desire to go to the front because then he was involved in another task. Maybe his desire wasn't as strong as he thought, and someone else as always made the important decisions for him.

At that time Coffin was twenty-one years old, and then he made his first important decision without consulting his mother: he decided to join the Russian speaking personnel without knowing it would be a hard and painful

job. He attended three classes daily with great excitement. He said he felt as happy as a child putting together words and then building whole sentences. He practiced with his tutor and talked to himself in Russian.

A week later in Le Vèsinet, Coffin went to the Russian Theater Presentation of Paris in order to practice his Russian. There he was impressed by the voice and movements of a beautiful actress. At the beginning he attempted to meet her on backstage and ask her to teach him some Russian dances. But he decided to continue learning Russian and then he would be able to have a conversation with her in Paris. As he didn't know her name, he asked a person in the audience for it so that he could find her in a directory book.

The next week Coffin went to Paris, but when he searched for her name he couldn't find it. Then he called another actress who gave him three addresses. He looked for her house by house until he found her house. A janitor opened the door and he asked for Mlle. Piskounoff, the one who dances. The janitor said that there were two actresses there, so Coffin couldn't know who the right person was. Finally, the janitor phoned Manya and said that an American Lieutenant was asking for her. When they met she was impressed by Coffin's accent so she invited him to a party where he, Manya, and her friend had a good time. Also Coffin was introduced into the world of the Russian exiles. They continued dating, and soon he was in love of her.

Coffin continued studying at the Liaison School, and he went to visit Manya every weekend. There he met many Russians. He was in direct

contact with the Soviet refugees and their sorrow. Manya was suspected of being a collaborator with the Germans, and that is why the French Resistance had shaved her head.

After the war, Soviet repatriation officers acted with impunity in France. In Coffin's memoir, he remembered his visit to Drancy when two Soviet officials arrived to take one of the refugees home by force. Soviet officials were ashamed when they saw an American officer there.

Coffin had finished his Russian course, and he was going to be a liaison officer with the Red Army. He was still twenty-one years old, and he wasn't prepared for marriage. He went to work in the headquarters of the American XXII Corps in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, where he was in charge of a liaison team. His relationship with Manya changed, and he visited her family rarely.

In Pilsen, Coffin, as a translator and an operative, helped to solve problems between Russian and American armies. Also, he learned that Soviet soldiers drink because of the anxiety they felt. They were depressed and even willing to desert. His liaison work developed into a drinking environment, filled with tales and chicanery. The way he used to negotiate was called "Vodka diplomacy". Coffin liked Soviets, maybe because they were political opponents and at the same time military allies. There he made Soviet friends.

In November 1945, Coffin tried to get to Vienna when the American and Russian troops left Czechoslovakia. He was not transferred to Vienna and was assigned to another headquarters at Bad Tolz, Munich. His job was to be General Lucian Truscott's personal interpreter. It was not hard work since General Truscott used his time learning to ski. As his new headquarters was near the impressive Bavarian Alps, Coffin began to take skiing lessons with Sepp Kessler, a former paratrooper. Sepp taught Coffin skiing in exchange for food and drink. Coffin and his new friend spent most of their time practicing and talking about war and politics. This experience showed once more that he experienced his emotional life with men rather than with women. "Coffin's charm attracted women easily but he was more engaged by the world of men."¹¹

A family reunion was planned in New Haven, Connecticut, because Coffin was scheduled for demobilization and Ned was coming back from Japan. At that moment, Bill was engaged and fascinated by everything Russian. He thought he couldn't stand being away from his current life, so he signed up for twelve more months.

Coffin was transferred to Hof, Germany, into a liaison team commanded by his friend George Bailey. There his job consisted of repatriation, and it was limited to accompanying Soviet officials to the Nuremberg trials. When it was possible they helped the West Germans contact their relatives in East Germany. At Hof, he used to visit displaced people, and also he spent five evenings a week with an educated engineer learning and taking notes about Russian history.

In 1943, Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt agreed in the Geneva Convention to repatriate each other's citizens. But at the end of the war there were many refugees who preferred to live life anywhere other than to return to their old life under Stalin's dictatorship. In the Yalta conference in 1945, Churchill and Roosevelt changed the previous agreement to make repatriation a voluntary affair. Repatriation was forced just in cases of desertion or treason. But the agreement was not publicized, and thousands of innocent Russians were brutally repatriated by British and American troops.

Coffin's life changed when he was plunged into a top secret project in a German camp at Platting in 1946. The Soviet government was pressing Washington to fulfill the Yalta agreement and complete repatriation of the Russians accused of treason. The real purpose of Coffin's mission was to screen and identify the Soviet people to be repatriated. For the rest in the camp, Coffin and other officers were there to get information about the reasons those people had to leave the Soviet Union. At the beginning, Coffin censured the supposed traitors because they had been fighting for the villain Hitler. After Coffin spent several nights hearing stories about Stalin's dictatorship, abuses and cruelties, he understood those men's reasons for not wanting to go back to the Soviet Union.

Most of the people at Platting were members of the first division of the famous General Vlassov's Russian Army of Liberation. Vlassov was against Stalin's government. Coffin found the operation more and more distasteful, but he had to obey his orders. The American First Division had planned to carry out the repatriation by a dawn attack, so the night before it they organized a show with poetry, singing, and dancing. At dawn the plan was put into action, and soldiers tear-gassed Soviet prisoners to force them

from their barracks as part of the plan. Bleeding from self-inflicted wounds, the Soviets pleaded with the Americans to shoot them rather than to be returned to the Soviet Union.

Coffin witnessed tragic events during the repatriation as he wrote in Once to Every Man: A Memoir: “I saw several men commit suicide, two rammed their heads through windows sawing their necks on the broken glass until they cut their jugular veins. Another took his leather boot-straps, tied a loop to the top of his triple-decker bunk, put his head through the noose and did a back flip over the edge which broke his neck. . . The memory is so painful that it's almost impossible for me to write about it. My part in the Plattling operation left me a burden of guilt I am sure to carry the rest of my life.”¹²

In August 1946, Vlassov and thousands of repatriated men were hanged. This experience made Coffin furious with himself and frustrated because he thought he should do something to avoid this massacre. He later had pangs of conscience; the experience made him a hard-line anti-Communist. It had a great impact in Coffin’s later decisions, such as joining the CIA and opposing Stalin’s government and practicing civil disobedience in opposing the Vietnam War.

In 1942 Coffin had completed his extra months in the Army, and it was time to return home and to college. He did not say good bye to his beloved girlfriend, Manya. He just wrote to her. They both knew that they were from different worlds in spite of sharing the same interests.

Now Coffin had other interests about his career which were oriented to diplomacy. He had given up his dreams of being a concert pianist. He was admitted to Yale as a senior because of his past experiences during the war, his ability to speak Russian and French, and his knowledge about Russian history and literature. He wanted to major in political science, so he enrolled

in different courses such as economics, political theory, comparative government, etc. He belonged to two organizations, one of which was the American Veterans Committee that opposed Soviet policies and politics of the American Legion. He also sang with the Yale Glee Club and toured some countries in Europe where he still could observe the scars of war. For instance, the destroyed towns received American goods which had to be distributed among families as part of the Operation Democracy carried out by Isabella Greenway King in which Coffin participated.

At this time, Coffin found himself immersed in matters of good and evil. He was confronting two different theories: on one side he admired Existentialists and on the other his beliefs were settled in religion. There was a time in which Coffin wanted to deny God's existence. He questioned God's love because world was full of sorrow. When he attended the funeral of his friend who had died in an automobile accident, he understood God's will and that the world is not ours as well as our lives. He became a believer and learned that faith is closely related to action. His religious thinking was beginning to take shape as a result of his experiences of life and death. Reinhold Niebuhr, a Protestant theologian, also influenced Coffin's religious perspectives.

At the age of twenty-five, Coffin had grown personally and intellectually, and his intellectual capacities had provoked the attention of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Coffin was attending his senior year when the CIA invited him for an interview. The Agency was looking for experienced Americans who spoke good Russian and for well-educated people opposed to Soviet communism.

Two weeks later, Coffin received an invitation for a conference organized by the Theological Union. As Coffin did not have plans for that weekend he decided to attend because the lecturer was going to be Reinhold

Niebuhr. Niebuhr passionately talked about “American racism, poverty and the need for church people to protest injustice in the name of God and human decency.”¹³ This speech and his previous mentioned experiences made Coffin decide for the ministry career and withdraw from the CIA although he had not stated it yet.

Coffin sent a letter of apology to the CIA and entered Union Theological Seminary. The Seminary was a powerhouse in liberal Protestantism which promoted ethical involvement in the world and encouraged its students to attack social problems. There Coffin debuted as a speaker, and the teaching of renowned theologian Reinhold Niebuhr of Union Theological Seminary was a particularly influential force in Coffin's spiritual development. Niebuhr advocated political activism as a necessary expression of faith, a creed that became the guiding principle of Coffin's public life. Moreover, he had acquired a new principle that guided most of his speeches for many years. He believed that the only way to fight against social injustices was love.

After three years in the Seminary, the Korean War broke out in 1950. Coffin decided to leave his studies and plans for a couple of years and joined the CIA in Germany to train anti-Soviet Russian refugees for operation within the USSR to collect information. In Munich, he helped send anti-Soviet Russians back into Russia; they would parachute in by night and work against the Soviet regime in paramilitary teams. He carried on an extensive training program from lectures in economics to espionage techniques. During his three years working for the CIA, Coffin had trained three teams using the name Captain Holliday. This effort was a complete failure because the Soviet authorities captured them. The third team that was captured revealed the real names of their trainers and the location of the CIA safe house. After the failures and Stalin's death in 1953, Coffin wanted to distance himself from the CIA.

1.4 THE MINISTRY AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Rev. William Sloane Coffin's life was full of important events during his ministry and political life, but before he became a minister and activist he had to face many difficulties. For instance, after his father died with no money in his pockets, he was taken to Paris where he studied harmony in hopes of becoming a classical pianist. The interest in music continued at Phillips Academy at Andover, from which he graduated in 1942 and for a year at Yale's music school. Then he entered the Army and was sent to Europe as an infantry officer.

Because of his facility with languages, he was made a liaison to the French and, later, the Russian Army. In 1946, he took part in operations to forcibly repatriate Soviet citizens who had been taken prisoner and who, once repatriated, were never heard from again. The deceptions in which he took part to gain the prisoners' trust before handing them over, left him a burden of guilt he was sure to carry the rest of his life. "Certainly," he said, "it influenced my decision in 1950 to spend three years in the C.I.A. opposing ~~the~~ regime."¹⁴

His reference was to the years of the Korean War which he spent in the C.I.A. after being recruited by his brother-in-law who was a top agency official. In Germany, he helped send anti-Soviet Russians back into Russia; they would parachute in by night and work against the Soviet regime in paramilitary teams.

"I had seen that Stalin could occasionally make Hitler look like a Boy Scout," Rev. Coffin explained in an interview with Tim Weiner, a reporter from the *New York Times* who was preparing a history of the C.I.A. "I was very anti-Soviet but very pro-Russian." But Soviet intelligence detected nearly

all of the efforts, and Rev. Coffin said the missions nearly always ended in disaster. "It didn't work," he said. "It was a fundamentally bad idea. We were quite naïve about the use of American power."¹⁵

The years in the spy agency were only an interlude because before joining in 1950, Coffin had to leave the Army. In 1947, he returned to Yale and earned a degree in government. In 1949, he was captivated by the possibilities of a religious vocation when, at the urging of his Uncle Henry, he attended a conference at Union Theological Seminary and heard Reinhold Niebuhr and prominent ministers from Harlem speak. So he returned to the United States in 1953 to study for the ministry at Yale Divinity School, graduating with the Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1956. That same year he was ordained a Presbyterian minister. He also married Eva Anna Rubenstein, an actress and dancer who was the daughter of the pianist Arthur Rubenstein. The couple had three children before the marriage ended in divorce in 1968.

After spending a year at Williams College as chaplain, Rev. Coffin was named to the chaplain's post at Yale in 1958. The civil rights struggle was heating up, and he was arrested three times when he went south to join it. The arrests came in 1961, while he was taking part in a Freedom Ride in Montgomery, Alabama; in 1963, while he was protesting segregation at an amusement park near Baltimore, Maryland; and in 1964, at a St. Augustine, Florida, lunch counter that he and others were trying to integrate.

Coffin was terribly dismayed, with his CIA background, when he learned in 1964 how different the history of French and U.S. involvement in South Vietnam was from what the U.S government public position was. The US government made a public promise to hold a referendum in South Vietnam about unification with North Vietnam.

Coffin was in early opposition to the Vietnam War and became famous for his anti-war activities and his civil rights activism. He had a prominent role in the Freedom Rides, challenging segregation and the oppression of black people. As chaplain at Yale in the early 1960s, Coffin organized busloads of Freedom Riders to challenge segregation laws in the South. He asked for help from Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy who tried to dissuade the Freedom Riders. His first arrest caused some surprise at Yale, but he said he was only setting a moral example. Later in that day he said that every minister has two roles, the priestly and the prophetic. The prophetic role is to be the disturber of the peace, to bring the minister himself, the congregation and entire moral order some judgment.

The athletic and voluble Rev. Coffin became a familiar figure on Yale's campus, riding his motor scooter, joking with students and challenging them to stand up for what they thought. By 1967, the campus that had largely welcomed him back from Montgomery as a man of courage was convulsed with the passion surrounding the Vietnam War. He was increasingly concentrating on preaching civil disobedience and supporting the young men who turned in their draft cards. He was one of several well-known intellectuals who signed an open letter entitled "A Call to Resist Illegitimate authority" which was printed in several newspapers in October 1967.

Much of the turmoil was over the draft, from which young men in college were exempt but which was waiting for them as soon as they left academia. Rev. Coffin, a critic of the country's war policy since 1965, had been a founder of a group called Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam. However, he had concluded that letter-writing and seeking out policy makers and members of Congress were having no effect.

In 1967, Coffin chose a course of civil disobedience. First, he offered the chapel at Yale as a sanctuary for those who were refusing to serve in

Vietnam. Then, on October 16th of that year, he presided over a service at the Arlington Street Church in Boston. At this service he called for a major demonstration at the Pentagon, at which young men who were resisting the draft turned over their draft cards to him for delivery to the Justice Department. He and three others left about 185 draft cards and 175 classification notices at the Justice Department in Washington on October 20th, a Friday, even as the capital braced for a weekend of demonstrations.

Coffin told James Reston, a Times columnist, that his effort was intended to mount a "fair and dignified" legal challenge to the draft, and his statement to the Justice Department made it clear that the protesters were courting arrest as a symbolic act - a position in accord with his statements that civil disobedience required confronting the draft and accepting the legal consequences. There was no immediate arrest, however, as the capital focused on the confrontations in the streets between radical protesters and helmeted troops outside the Pentagon. But on January 5th, 1968, Coffin, Dr. Benjamin Spock, Marcus Raskin, Michael Ferber, and Mitchell Goodman were indicted by a Federal Grand jury for "conspiracy to counsel, aid and abet draft resistance." All but Raskin were convicted that June.

Coffin said he had not pushed the thought of draft evasion on anyone who did not already have it, but the government argued that this defied common sense, given the persuasive power that someone of his standing would have when he took a position or set an example. Coffin, Dr. Spock and two of the other three were convicted of conspiracy, but the verdicts were overturned in 1970 on appeal, largely because of errors made by the judge. They could have been retried, but the government chose not to do so. The case made him a national figure of protest -lionized by the left, vilified by the right, and puzzled over by his superiors at Yale.

Kingman Brewster Jr., an expert on Constitutional law who would himself run afoul of the Nixon administration, was Yale's President, and his reactions said a great deal about the difficulties Coffin's brand of conscience could present. Eight days after Coffin turned in the draft cards in Washington, President Brewster gave a speech to parents of Yale students and said, "I disagree with the chaplain's position on draft resistance, and in this instance deplore his style."¹⁶

Two years later, after Coffin's conviction was overturned but before the government dropped the case, President Brewster stood before entering freshmen and held up Coffin and Mayor John V. Lindsay of New York as two men who were "wholly unashamed of their high purpose. "He drew applause when he criticized the draft as a system of conscription which makes the campus a draft haven and distorts career choices in an effort to avoid service in a war nobody wants to fight."¹⁷ If the draft issue proved a political minefield for those seeking to hold Yale together, the pattern became only more complex as the war dragged on into the Nixon administration and another incendiary issue came to the forefront: the prosecution of Black Panthers in New Haven, Connecticut on kidnapping and murder charges.

In the spring of 1970, a constellation of spokesmen for the radical left - among them Tom Hayden of Students for a Democratic Society, David Dellinger of the antiwar movement, Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin of the Yippies, the poet Allen Ginsberg and Black Panther leaders - convened a giant rally just outside the Yale campus to protest both the prosecution of the Panthers and the conduct of the war. Officials throughout the Northeast feared an explosion of violence at Yale's doorstep. National Guard troops were sent into New Haven; among Yale's students and faculty, political sympathy for the left ran high, but so did a concern to prevent violence. Students organized a group of marshals to keep tempers cool.

Coffin met with rally organizers, who chose to put the fiery speakers with the most potential for disruption in the morning and the more boring ones at night. He served on a committee of monitors, and on the one night when events threatened to get out of hand, he helped persuade a National Guard commander to keep his troops inconspicuous. In the end, the gathering proceeded largely peacefully, and when it was over many at Yale basked briefly in self-congratulation that the threat of serious violence had been averted. Then came news that four young protesters had been killed when troops opened fire at Kent State University in Ohio, where a remarkably similar stage had been set that week - tense national guardsmen facing angry students - but with less success at controlling tempers and fears.

In September 1972, Coffin was a member of a group of clergy and peace activists who went to Hanoi to accompany three released prisoners of war on their return to the United States. He remained chaplain of Yale until 1976, when he stepped down to work with world hunger programs and write his memoir. A few months later, he separated from his second wife, Harriet Gibney, whom he had married in 1969. That marriage, like his first, ended in divorce, and he remarried once more, to Virginia Randolph Wilson, who survived him. In 1977, he became senior minister at the Riverside Church- an interdenominational congregation affiliated with both the United Church of Christ and American Baptist Churches and one of the most prominent congregations in New York City. There, he promoted international arms control and mobilized congregants to work on local issues like unemployment and juvenile delinquency. He was controversial, yet an inspirational leader at Riverside. He openly and vocally supported gay rights when many liberals still were uncomfortable with homosexuality. Some of the congregation's socially conservative members openly disagreed with his position on sexuality.

In 1979, Coffin was one of three American clergymen who, along with a fourth from Algeria, went to Tehran at their own expense to help the

American hostages held there celebrate Christmas. In the 1980's, after leaving Riverside, he was a leader of Sane/Freeze, an organization that campaigned for disarmament and a freeze on nuclear testing.

Coffin's activities slowed considerably in the 1990's, and in 1999 he suffered a stroke, but he continued to write and speak out from his home in Strafford, Vermont. In the spring and fall of 2003, he spoke out repeatedly in criticism of the war President Bush was leading in Iraq. In October, he founded an organization of religious leaders calling for the elimination of nuclear arms. That fall, he preached at Riverside Church again, on World Communion Sunday, after being introduced by Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations. His voice resonant, even though his speech was slow and somewhat slurred, Coffin told the congregants that there was "a huge difference between patriotism and nationalism." He also said:

"Patriotism at the expense of another nation is as wicked as racism at the expense of another race . . . Let us resolve to be patriots always, nationalists never. Let us love our country, but pledge allegiance to the earth and to the flora and fauna and human life that it supports — one planet indivisible, with clean air, soil and water; with liberty, justice and peace for all."¹⁸

1.5 PERSONAL LIFE

William Coffin was a man with a family, who inevitably had to live through the controversy of his activist life. In December 1956, the beautiful artist Eva Rubinstein left the world of Broadway to marry William. He was a little worried about moving to a small town in New England because he thought it was going to bore Eva.

Coffin and Eva tested the difficulty of the first year of marriage. She began to feel inferior to everyone else and full of doubts because it was really

hard to live with a very overbearing and supercritical man. It was recognizable as “the problem with no name” by Betty Friedan in 1963. Eva said that cooking, cleaning, raising children, caring for a husband didn’t give her the sense of fulfillment it should have. By mid-January 1958, Amy Coffin was born. Eva’s stitches had not completely healed when she found herself pregnant again, and during Christmas Break in New Haven Alexander Sloane was born. David Andrew followed fifteen months later and by 1960 Coffin had three children separated by just twenty-six months.

Being married to Coffin had certain rewards, especially once he became chaplain at Yale, because Eva was exposed to famous and interesting people; but the arrival of children didn’t draw her closer to her husband. He knew nothing about caring for babies and was expected to be fully engaged by his chaplaincies, not his domestic life.

By the summer of 1960, Coffin’s mother needed an eye operation, and Eva saw that as a good chance to try to repair the deteriorated relationship with him. She said, “It has been a joy to me to spend time with Catherine these last few (10) days,” “I feel as though I were given a second chance to straighten out a relationship and I intend to do my utmost to right it.”¹⁹ Unfortunately, Catherine did not collaborate too much, and it was easier for Eva to take care of the children without her husband than to take care of her mother-in-law.

Eva was not having much fun because she was abandoned by her husband and with lots of people to take care of. She wrote letters which illustrated the struggles of a young wife dealing at once with a critical mother-in-law, an unsatisfying marriage, a complex relationship with Coffin’s colleagues and friends, her own demanding parents, and a generally low opinion of herself. She was living a celibate summer.

Eva began going to see her husband's assistant, David Byers, first as someone to talk to and then because she was attracted to him. Coffin realized that, and she admitted seeing Byres. The only thing he wanted to know was if she was sleeping with him. Coffin's response "blew me away." She remembered him "marching up and down the room, pounding his fists on the walls as he reached them, saying, 'he doesn't have the scope! He doesn't have the scope!'"²⁰ He said that she had wounded his pride, but then he surprised her with the revelation that he had had an affair with his secretary in Puerto Rico two summers earlier. She promptly gave up on the marriage and sexual fidelity, so they divorced.

Eva Coffin moved into a tiny New York apartment to try a new life as a photographer, and the children stayed with William. He had counseled many couples with marital problems, but he didn't find the exact words for himself to do it. He went to see President Brewster to tell them about the divorce and to offer his resignation as chaplain. Brewster offered him a room in his house, and he was really surprised.

Like poets and novelists, Coffin used his own and others' experiences as the raw stuff of his sermons. What he taught about virtually any matter – emotional, theological, or political- came out in his sermons, the receptacles of his most intense and focused intellectual energy. He was afraid of public failure, although many good friends stayed with him and gave him support in everything. Erick Erickson, a psychoanalyst, helped him to relieve his fears, saying "a little failure in your personal life can only improve your ministry."²¹ He knew that all men and women were sinners; accepting this truth about himself proved as difficult as accepting his much earlier insight about accepting the full meaning on "the Lord giveth."²²

Coffin was intimidated because he was a domestic "ignoramus". His three children-aged ten, nine, and eight- needed attention more than ever. He

didn't know how to cook or clean, pay the bills or shop for groceries, dress children or attend parent-teacher conferences. So he hired a housekeeper, Bertha Lynch, who "...may have taken half my paycheck, but she saved my life."²³

The children, who were described as "hellions" by their dad, had to deal with a guilty mother who had left them, a guilty father who lived in the public eye when he was at home, a series of adults who cared about them but changed all of the time; many friends and strangers passing through the house, and their grandma who expected them to come to dinners dressed and ready to behave as if they were attending night tea. David had a learning disability and a bit of anger toward his mother, which was shown in difficult ways. On the other hand, Amy and Alex terrorized baby sitters and frequently escaped the house at nights, becoming well-known to the campus police for their pranks. Coffin was stuck in a serious dilemma: he could give up on one of his roles entirely, but he didn't consider it a good idea. He instead continued spending more time in public and feeling guilty about his children.

Most observers agreed that Coffin began to change: he played soccer and football with the boys, sang and played the piano; he paid attention to Amy's piano lessons. The kids occasionally dropped by his office, and he then took a walk with them on the campus. David fell in love with church music and the choir. Sometimes he felt "the most fathered when I went to church. I didn't listen to a word he said during the sermons ... it was the sound of his voice I was concentrating on."²⁴

Coffin sought a replacement for his first wife, so Harriet Gibney seemed a good choice. Harriet had the exact experience that Coffin needed – children. He agreed: "I was impressed by her psychological perception;" and "the kids really needed attention. Needed a mother."²⁵ She had strong intuitions about him; but she nevertheless found herself charmed and

attracted to the outsized figure that Coffin cut at the time. Harriet had two children from a previous marriage. His kids were really comfortable with her and Amy one day asked her father “when are you going to marry Harriet?”²⁶ It surprised him so he asked her to marry him and she accepted. He hoped that if he married Harriet the chaos of the year after Eva’s departure could be stilled and he could bring more warmth and stability to his home life.

They married in September 1969, on Marsh Island in Maine, in a ceremony with more than one hundred friends and family members. At first it seemed to work, but the problems began to surface soon. He did not cut down his schedule and did not fully realize that having been a professional woman before marrying him, Harriet would approach married life very differently from Eva.

Harriet wanted to work at Yale, but she was not welcomed with open arms. In 1969 Yale had broken with 168 years of tradition and admitted five hundred women to its freshman, sophomore and junior classes. Harriet protested against the masculine culture at the college, and its representative in her own family in ways that endeared her to few of her husband’s friends and colleagues. Bill was accustomed to being the center of attention, and some friends used to say she was jealous of him.

Harriet was always competing with him because she did not agree with the sexism of the culture at Yale. Coffin’s social competitiveness was simply taken for granted by those who knew him. She wanted to be on the platform with him. He disliked Harriet’s competitiveness and did not enjoy collaborating with her, but he could not confront her. As the marriage deteriorated, her temper showed more and more. She did many things to bother him: made him late for events, changing her clothes at the last minute, forgetting her keys, undecided about whether to come. When Harriet drank she wanted even more to talk with him in a way she knew intimated him. These matters

intensified when he took a sabbatical year starting in the fall of 1973 to write his memoir.

At the end of the school year the Coffin's spent the summer on Marsh Island, where under Harriet's direction they hauled driftwood and lumber and built cabins. She was always trying to get him to talk, and he could not confront her to stop these conversations. Back at Yale Harriet gave him very astute criticism on his manuscript. She pushed him to make certain emotional themes more explicit. In November 1974, they argued again. She said she was scared that night and that she wanted to talk to him but he refused. She was very persistent in provoking him. At three in the morning she was drunk, and "she broke the door down to a room where I was trying to sleep... So I said 'what the hell I've got to do this again.' Only this time it was dark, and I guess I didn't take quite enough aim"²⁷

Coffin's judo abilities gave Harriet a huge black eye, so he had to take her to the hospital. In the morning her whole face was swollen. He talked to his friends who said they couldn't stand her either. They said they also wanted to hit her. Wolf said, "Coffin you can't hit anybody but you certainly can't hit your wife. You've got to get out of the marriage if that's the way you feel.' Divorce yes. Abuse no."²⁸ Coffin didn't realize the gravity of the situation. His friends said if he hit her maybe he had a good reason: "...in some situations where... if somebody has had a lot to drink and they're being impossible and difficult you just say tchew, you know, out of here! So that's my fantasy." Bill and Harriet were in deep trouble.

After Coffin's second marriage failed, he was depressed and alone. His children had gone to their respective schools. Coffin had more time to work on his memoir "Once to Every Man". He wrote about his life with great energy. In the meantime, his brother Ned had mentioned Coffin to a female friend, Virginia Randolph Wilson. When Coffin arrived at Ned's house one weekend,

she was invited to dinner. They both were recovering from divorce. She had no money to support her two children. Although she had a boyfriend she enjoyed the evenings of intense conversations. The next time Coffin came to Strafford, they went out to dinner. After that, they started dating and not so long and maybe because of Coffin's need of caretaking, they fell in love. She broke up with his boyfriend and continued visiting Coffin. When she decided to get involved with Coffin, she committed herself totally to the relationship. She knew that it would be complicated because she was twenty-two years younger than Coffin. Also, she was uneducated in the ways of cosmopolitan political, artistic, and intellectual life. Her children did not like him. Besides, Coffin was absorbed by his book and uninterested in domestic matters. Randy loved her children as well as Coffin's children. She was able to live in country domesticity and she became passionately committed to Coffin's work.

Coffin finished his memoir, and they began to think about the future. They bought a house and took a step toward domestic stability. They married in 1984, and she became passionately committed to him and his work. Into his old age, Coffin finally found a relationship that nurtured him happily. Since 1998 Coffin's physical health had been deteriorating. He was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and suffered two strokes. He had to recover from a paralysis on his right side and had to use a cane. Some time later he was in a wheel chair. Although his athletic ability had deteriorated, he kept preaching and playing the piano. Randy always accompanied and took care of him until Coffin's death in April 13th, 2006.

CHAPTER II

2. A BRIEF MENTION OF HIS WRITTEN WORKS

2.1 CREDO

In this chapter, we're going to make a brief mention of some of the most remarkable books of Rev. William Sloane Coffin. These works have been so successful that they are still well read and used in different fields, so that they are used to highlight the labor of this man. The first book we are going to mention is Credo, which was written 1994. James Carroll was the one who wrote the foreword for this book and the publisher of it was Westminster John Knox Press located in Louisville, Kentucky.

"I love the recklessness of faith. First you leap and then you grow wings,"²⁹ says William Sloane Coffin in this soul-stirring collection of quotations from his sermons and unpublished speeches. This volume overflows with passion, incisive thinking, imaginative political insights, and prophetic calls for action directed at Christian communities. The thematic sections of the book reveal the range of this social activist's interests: *faith, hope and love; social justice and civil liberties; social justice and economic rights; patriotism; war and peace; nature; life in general; the church; and the end of life.*

Many memorable sayings appear in Credo. They are a verbal and spiritual feast from Coffin's fertile mind and rich life. His combination of faith, learning, and activism is very Presbyterian. This spirit of venture and self-dedication has found expression, of course, not only in Coffin's preaching but in his life, and he urges others to do the same.

The book collects some words that emphasize Coffin's role as the prophet of a new way of being religious. All these things help explain Coffin's impact on his generation, his nation and the church. The quotes collected here come from the treasures that Coffin has said in a thousand circumstances and serve as a chronicle of the things that matter most in the early twenty-first century: for instance, how lovers are together; how a nation faces the temptation to create empires; how peace can be organized after all; how grief defines happiness.

The word "credo" comes from the same root as "cardio." As his title suggests, faith for Coffin is less a matter of the head than the heart. Unconditional trust and love are at the center of all great religions and of the God-experience itself. And our differing ways of talking about the divine -- historic creeds and confessions -- are less "hitching posts" than "sign posts" for Coffin. They are not intended to be intellectual stopping places but rather spiritual starting points that direct attention to what is most central to human existence.

As a Protestant, Coffin emphasizes faith. For him faith is the power of love because it helps to recognize God's infinitive love as unending and not about control and power. Besides, faith is to trust without the necessity of proof. Coffin's sermons give ample testimony to Jesus and the power of God's love revealed through him. "Miracles do not a messiah make," he observes. "But a messiah can do miracles. . . . I can also report that in home after home I have seen Jesus change beer into furniture, sinners into saints, hate-filled relations into loving ones, cowardice into courage, the fatigue of despair into the buoyancy of hope. In instance after instance, life after life, I have seen Christ be 'God's power unto salvation,' and that's faith enough for me."³⁰

About faith he says: "There is nothing anti-intellectual in the leap of faith, for faith is not believing without proof but trusting without reservation. Faith is no substitute for thinking. On the contrary, it is what makes good thinking possible. It has what we might call a limbering effect on the mind; by taking us beyond familiar ground, faith ends up giving us much more to think about."³¹ This clergyman has no interest in doctrines and creeds as hitching posts; instead, we should use the love of God as the hitching post. It is a force that brings diverse people together whereas, far too often, doctrines serve as walls that keep people apart. Coffin, in one of our favorite passages, states: "Love measures our stature; the more we love, the bigger we are. There is no smaller package in the entire world than that of a man wrapped up in Him."³²

The noted preacher and social-justice advocate William Sloane Coffin is also a master of the written word. He crafts phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that provoke, inspire, amuse or convict. "The Bible is less concerned with alleviating the effects of injustice than in eliminating its causes." But equal attention is paid to the "Church." Just as his voice never lets the Church get too far from its political obligations, he never lets his politics turn into one man's ideological rant. He believes in humanity enough to challenge us, yet he knows our frailties: "It is often said that the Church is a crutch."³³ It is a crutch because continually returns to his source in the Gospels, and this source always sends him out again.

In Coffin's book, the political implications of the Gospels wrestle with the moral imperatives of political life. Coffin doesn't want simply to know "the truth;" he wants to know "the function truth plays" in our collective life. His aim is to inspire people and he succeeded, yet he probably would be more pleased if his words stirred people to action and reflection. Coffin's preaching seeks to transform our hearts, and thus our world. He urges churches to take

up the cause of the poor, the homeless and the helpless. But he knows that congregations that practice justice, even as they walk in the steps of Jesus, risk social censure as progressive do-gooders. "Jesus knew that 'Love your enemies' didn't mean 'Don't make any!'"³⁴

The selfishness of individuals mirrors the selfishness of nations. Coffin, who is a true patriot, speaks out against certain warps he identifies in the policies of those in power. He laments the growing gap between the rich and the poor. This has created "an underclass [that] has all the markings of a subordinate caste."³⁵ In a meditation on the line "Give us this day our daily bread" in the Lord's Prayer, Coffin says of Jesus: "How angry he must be with the way our government is now filling the rich with good things, and sending the poor away empty. How he would scorn an economic theory that says we must heap more on the platters of the rich, for only so will more crumbs fall to the poor. Never has a government climbed off the backs of the upper-class so fast to tap-dance on the backs of the poor. Never in recent history have we had so blatant a plutocracy: a government of the wealthy, by the wealthy, and for the wealthy."³⁶

Internal Christian debates enter the picture, too. "The problem is not how to reconcile homosexuality with scriptural passages that condemn it, but rather how to reconcile the rejection and punishment of homosexuality with the love of Christ."³⁷ Coffin goes beyond Biblical literalism and considers love as something normal no matter if couples are heterosexual or homosexual, what is important is love.

On economic rights: "Had I but one wish for the churches of America I think it would be that they come to see the difference between charity and justice. ...Charity seeks to alleviate the effects of injustice; justice seeks to eliminate the causes of it."³⁸

Coffin lets his love for America come across clearly, which makes his denunciations all the more credible and stinging. Surely Republicans will seldom find themselves nodding in agreement, yet there is plenty to make Democrats squirm as well. Ultimately the greedy, the apathetic, and the individualistic receive the worst of his wrath. Coffin blames no one except all of us: So when in anguish over any human violence done to innocent victims, we ask of God, "How could you let that happen,"³⁹ it is well to remember that God at that very moment is asking us the exact same question.

Coffin reminds us that loyalty to the Biblical tradition means adherence to higher standards than "national security" in matters of war and peace. He challenges the flag-waving that often passes for patriotism in America. The slogan "my country right or wrong" is like saying "my grandmother drunk or sober,"⁴⁰ Coffin says. Real patriotism demands an effort to restore sobriety to a nation drunk on wealth and military might.

When we think about new heaven and a new earth, we think about a world without war, without famine, without inequality. We think about a world at peace. "Historian Will Durant estimated that in all of human history only twenty-nine years can be described as free of war. And of all centuries, the one just past set records for bloodletting."⁴¹

What does peace even look like to a world like that? We are a people shaped by our wars; we learn our history, our geography, our nationality by our wars. Our children grow up thinking war is the norm, and peace is an anomaly. War has become the condition rather than the exception.

With the daily news filled with stories of mounting casualties, fruitless peace-talks, rebel attacks, prisoners of war, demolished communities, it is

difficult to refute the historian's claims that our world is at war. But the presence of war in the world and in our blood-stained history books does not negate the potential and the necessity of peace. But as William Sloane Coffin says, "Peace does not come rolling in on the wheels of inevitability. We can't just wish for peace. We have to will it, fight for it, suffer for it, demand it from our governments as if peace were God's most cherished hope for humanity, as indeed it is."⁴² Our fervent prayers for peace, for a new heaven and a new earth, should compel us to get off our knees and work to enable its existence. More is required of faithful people than sitting on their hands in prayer and hoping God will do the rest. We must admit that at times we are the missing piece; we do more to hinder God's creation than nourish it. We hold grudges, we chuckle at offensive jokes, we permit intolerance, we let stereotypes become truths, we take more than we need, we dismiss each other's feelings, we antagonize, we gossip, we undermine.

Coffin has another plan in mind -- some would say a vision. Where but from a pulpit like his would you encounter an alternative analysis of both the problems facing our world and such radical solutions as, for example, a call for the total elimination of nuclear weapons? Presidential aspirants and party hacks alike might get a transfusion of conviction from clerics like Coffin. He reminds us that while politics may be the art of the possible, hope consist in making things possible tomorrow that seem impossible today. Coffin says we need to get beyond that to live and help live. In America, "We the People" is meaningless unless it really means all of us. In the world at large, people have made the world great for some and now it is time to make the world great for all.

To Coffin, our relationships are what give texture and meaning to life, and much of the dis-ease of modern existence stems from a culture that cares more for things such as luxury and lucre than for human beings. "There

are people and things in this world," Coffin declares, "and people are to be loved and things are to be used."⁴³ But increasingly, we have it backward, loving things and using people like expendable commodities.

Coffin also believes that economic justice is a great big, fat issue that churches need to address. Charity is not the same as justice. Charity mitigates some of the horrors of injustice, but the Bible is far more interested in ending injustice.

Another issue Coffin discusses for churches is peace. It is stunning to realize that individuals and small groups will shortly have the means of using weapons of mass destruction. As far as terrorism goes, economic justice would certainly slow down the recruiting of terrorists. Several billion dollars should be taken off the military budget to wage real war on poverty. American policies energize terrorists, help recruit more of them, and are totally self-destructive.

The two great Biblical mandates are peace and justice. They need to be at the top of the agenda for churches. Coffin says the churches have grown too conservative, like the whole country, forgetting that the devil tempted Jesus with wealth and power. The country is now in spiritual recession. Some churches are "irrelevant righteous," he says, and others are "more concerned with free love than free hate." He says the answer to bad religion is not no religion but it is good religion. He laments that much about church life is "management and therapy. There is so little prophetic fire."⁴⁴

Coffin criticizes some practices of churches because he thinks that Christians hide in religion to appear to be moral. Morality is the greatest problem of America, it is ambiguous. That is why Coffin is hard on Fundamentalist preachers. "Anger has a very important spiritual benefit," Coffin says. "If you don't have anger, you end up tolerating the intolerable and

that's intolerable. I still have plenty of anger that is ready to be used at a moment's notice."⁴⁵

Through the final chapter, *End of Life*, God is the central character in this volume — and Coffin's strength and comfort. Coffin's Credo focuses on "The End of Life," and it is clear that at age 79 he is thinking about the journey's end. "It's not that I feel I'm withdrawing from the world, only that I'm present in a different way," he muses. "Although still outraged by callous behavior, particularly in high places, I feel more often serene, grateful for God's gift of life."⁴⁶ He believes that life is measured by its content rather by its duration. Jesus is the example because he died at the age of thirty-three and he lived a complete life making his purposes come true. That is the way we have to live if we do God's will.

Moreover, if we lead a life full of charity and pursuing social justice, death will not be something to be afraid of. At its close, Coffin contradicts the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, saying: "The only way to have a good death is to lead a good life. Lead a good one, full of curiosity, generosity, and compassion, and there's no need at the close of the day to rage against the dying of the light. We *can* go gently into that good night."⁴⁷

"As I think I have said in other places, it's a very good thing we don't live forever. ... If life were endless, we'd be bored to death. ... The fact that we're going to die gives meaning to life, gives meaning to our days. And that is a good thing."⁴⁸ With this Coffin made us think of death as a good and necessary thing. Death for Coffin is also an equalizer because when people die differences of race, class, nationality, and sexual orientation all become nothing.

Early on, Coffin got his mind around the core of a faith that has irony at its heart: Where love is the mightiest power, where unmerited good is as

much a marvel as evil, and where a life put in God's good hands can instill hope and life even in the face of death.

Too weak to take on a major writing project himself, Coffin relied on Editor James Carroll to collect and compile snippets from a lifetime of sermons and lectures, arranged around broad themes such as "The Church" and "Nature," to create Credo.

In his prime, Coffin must have been a commanding physical presence. In his introduction to the volume, Carroll recalls the first night the two spent in jail together, locked up for trespassing at the U.S. Capitol in 1972. In the darkness of the night, as each of the priests and ministers who had been arrested lay alone in their cells, Coffin's deep baritone began to sing. The words were from Handel's Messiah -- "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people" - and the voice was rich, resonant and full of strength.

Unfortunately, that voice is much diminished in these pages. Although intended as the record of a high-voltage career, Credo lacks the personal dimension that might give extra amperage to pronouncements that are often more edifying than electrifying. The reader wants more of the man spilled out on these pages, less of the pundit or preacher.

In conclusion, Credo could well be subtitled "The Best of William Sloane Coffin." Because of the collection of sentences and paragraphs from a lifetime of sermons organized into topical categories – "conclusions," Coffin writes, "from a lifetime of continuous education."

2.2 A HOLY IMPATIENCE

A Holy Impatience is a complete biography of a famous and important clergyman, William Sloane Coffin, living during and dealing with the most controversial times the United States was facing. It was the epoch of the 60's.

The title of the book was taken from one of the first prayers offered by Coffin on October 26th, 1958. It was about love and unity in which Coffin showed a moral impatience toward those social issues. Coffin disagreed with some Christian practices based on rules and divisions rather than on love.

The author, Warren Goldstein, describes the life and times of William Sloane Coffin chronologically. His biography is linked with intrigue and paradoxes. It is based on unparalleled access to family papers and open interviews with Coffin, his colleagues, family, friends, lovers, and wives. The book tells the remarkable story of Coffin's life, and the author captures the nature of the great preacher and activist who came to be called the "Voice of American Protestant Liberalism."

Warren Goldstein provides abundant evidence for his claim that Coffin "became the outstanding voice of liberal Protestantism in America, one of the last unabashedly liberal voices in American public life during the ascendancy of Reagan Republicanism, the rise of right-wing fundamentalism, and the dramatic rightward shift of public policy and discourse."⁴⁹

There are three very important aspects to this book. First, it is well researched and documented. Goodstein skillfully combines personal

interviews with source writings. Secondly, the book helps us understand Coffin's nature and times as well as the events that shaped his social and political activism. Finally, the book also tells us about Coffin's personal life, especially the troubling aspects of his marriages and family life.

Goldstein wrote this biography because Coffin was first and foremost a churchman and a preacher, and one of the most important facets of his immense legacy is the impact he had on two generations of churches and church people. The author captured the zestful image of Coffin as a popular cultural hero.

The most compelling part of the biography is in the early chapters, where Coffin's early life is registered. Goldstein's book is candid, indeed at times unsparing, in probing into Coffin's personal life. His father died in 1933 when he was nine, and he maintained an unusually close relationship with his mother, Catherine. Such a bond seems quite understandable for a person who loses one parent so early, but it piques Goldstein's sometimes overactive Freudian curiosity and at times pushes his investigation close to the quagmire of psycho-history.

As for theology itself, Goldstein does not emphasize it but he shows a good ear for Coffin's role as a religious leader. Amid the theological and worship innovations of the 1960s, "Coffin remained theologically and liturgically orthodox."⁵⁰ He was not one for guitar services. He stuck with traditional Bible explications and classical music. Goldstein writes that "Coffin, unlike the Berrigan brothers or Episcopal Bishop James Pike, drew little inspiration from the cultural phenomena of "the sixties."⁵¹ He "had little feel for 1960s counterculture. He never advocated 'free love'; he never adopted the reflexive anti-Americanism of many of the young people; and he never learned anything about rock music. What did engage Coffin from the 1960s

was the culture of publicity and celebrity."⁵² This last discerning comment comes from Goldstein's well-turned concluding chapter, in itself a fine essay on Coffin's life and work. Goldstein notes correctly that Coffin played a role in the 1960s revival of the social gospel, embracing a gospel of love well suited to an activist and egalitarian era. Niebuhr inspired Coffin, but the neo-orthodoxy associated with Niebuhr was always a more effective vehicle of critique than of change, and in religious terms Coffin had to turn in another direction to do the work he wished to do. Even Martin Luther King, who Coffin followed as a religious thinker, persisted more than did Coffin in upholding the importance of Niebuhrian sentiments. However, as Goldstein recognizes, these alternatives had nothing to do with religious experimentation or relaxation of disciplined biblical fidelity. He quotes Rabbi Arnold Wolf's remark that "the usual image of Bill Coffin is a political radical of international importance and something of a phony Christian pastor, [but] both of those assessments are wrong. Politically I think he was ... courageous in a personal way, but not particularly vanguard or unusual... But as a Christian pastor I always found him wonderful. He was a real preacher."⁵³

Goldstein stresses that Coffin's traditionalist worship tendencies helped him in cultivating senior figures at Yale and in mending his fences with the university president in particular. These tasks he performed like a virtuoso. His relations with Kingman Brewster, Yale president during most of Coffin's time as chaplain there, provide many fascinating moments in this biography. Brewster comes off particularly well in this account. The president of one of the nation's most eminent universities, with powerful and often conservative alumni to placate, he defended Coffin down the line as a person doing his job responsibly and very well. At one point Brewster publicly rebuked Coffin for his behavior in the draft-protest matter, but Goldstein suggests persuasively that this was part of a complex dance that Brewster performed; he was never really alienated from Coffin. This is not to say that Brewster did not truly

disagree with what Coffin did. A skilled lawyer, he always parsed his position carefully; but Brewster saw it as Coffin's duty to challenge Yale students from a sound religious and moral perspective and he saw it as his own duty to protect his chaplain politically so that the chaplain could fulfill that role. Showing that he was willing on occasion to criticize Coffin made it easier for Brewster to protect him, as he always did at difficult moments. Perhaps the private correspondence of today's university presidents will one day show them to have been as impressive as Brewster appears here.

Goldstein's best chapters deal with Coffin's increasing activism while serving as Yale's chaplain and later as head of Riverside Church. Coffin first caught the public eye when he helped organize and then led the effort to desegregate the interstate bus system with what came to be called "Freedom Rides." This section of the book represents history as it should be written - with a sagacious use of sources, a strong narrative drive, and an authentic whiff of the charged atmosphere of the times.

About the movement to end the war in Vietnam, Coffin at first hesitated. As Goldstein shows, he was not sure that this issue posed the same kind of clear moral choice that racism and segregation did. Also, he was on a first-name basis with many Washington leaders who supported the war. That made things difficult - though it helped later when he became an antiwar leader and these people felt compelled to return his calls. Coffin's participation in the peace movement was characteristic of his style. First he agonized, but when he made his decision to oppose the war, he unstintingly poured all the power of his personal example, boundless energy, and silver tongue into the fight. He did this with the support, if not the agreement, of Kingman Brewster with whom he kept in close communication.

In 1977 Coffin left the Yale chaplaincy to become the pastor of Riverside Church in New York City. Under his leadership it became not just a

powerful preaching station but a buzzing center for the peace and nuclear disarmament movements. Meanwhile, Coffin was one of the most sought-after graduation and special-events speakers in the country, and he had a hard time saying no to such invitations. He seemed to be everywhere, often flying across the country; but just as he had always gotten back to Battell Chapel for Sunday services, so he was almost always back in his pulpit at Riverside Church by the time the bells rang. As Goldstein correctly states, he was becoming - next to Martin Luther King Jr. - the most influential liberal Protestant in America.

Goldstein had Coffin's cooperation in preparing this biography, and it is to the credit of both historian and subject that this book renders Coffin's private failings in such detail and with so few excuses. His first two marriages come in for microscopic, almost clinical, analysis and post hoc speculation. As Goldstein writes bluntly, "Coffin was a marital disaster."⁵⁴ It took him two broken marriages to get to a third, successful one. Even his third marriage seems to have worked primarily because Coffin's wife, Randy, was so willing to accommodate herself to his habits and needs, not because Coffin changed much as a person. The first two times he married in apparent haste and badly. He had no interest in caring for his children or maintaining himself and his household in any way, always assuming someone else would do these things for him. Some may think this behavior refers only to stereotypical male neglect of household chores, but it was much worse than that. Large areas of his interior life were a shambles. He had almost no capacity for emotional intimacy with his wives. He was at least once unfaithful to his first wife, Eva. According to this account, he drove her to far more affairs than he had. "Coffin's intimate life has possessed a striking consistency over many decades," Goldstein explains. "The simplest way to put it is to say that he did not have much of one.... Coffin never developed the knack of reflection and self-exploration."⁵⁵

Coffin's focus on productive engagement with the exterior world absorbed nearly all of his emotional and physical energy. He loved pursuing women and the social whirl of life lived intensely but never knew what to do when the music stopped.⁵⁶ His second wife, Harriet, he married because he was lonely and needed someone to look after his children; none of it worked out well. Harriet developed a bad drinking problem and interests in psychology and feminism, and Bill did not take to any of that. Harriet became desperately unhappy and tried to force Bill into discussing matters he preferred to avoid. On two especially ugly occasions, with Harriet drunk and Bill unable to escape her (literally) or cope with her, he hit her, once injuring her badly.

Coffin's red-eye schedule took a toll on family life. In later years he regretted not having spent more time with his family, although Goldstein claims that the children never seemed to complain. In the early 1980s Coffin lived through horrendous losses. His mother died. Then, a short month later, in January 1983, his son Alex, with whom Coffin had an unusually close bond, was killed after his car skidded into Boston Harbor during a storm. The best way to deal with his grief was to write and deliver a sermon about it. Titled simply "Alex's Death", it is the most requested of all his hundreds of sermons. Engulfed by grief, the family gathered in Vermont where Coffin's brother Ned lived and where Coffin had been courting Randy Wilson, who he later married.

Goldstein's last chapter, "Flunking Retirement," nicely sums up Coffin's last situation. Two small strokes and a heart attack had slowed him down, but just a bit. He lived in Stafford, Vermont, in a rambling frame house next door to the village church. He was extremely happily married to Randy Wilson, a warm and charming but no-nonsense Vermont Yankee. He walked with a cane. Due to his persevering efforts with a speech therapist, only a slight slur colored his inimitable New York accent. He spoke in public less frequently but

followed the news carefully and counseled a range of young church leaders who at that time still looked to him for wisdom. He could always produce just the right aphorism or one-liner for any occasion.

Goldstein's biography gives the life in full of a person of significant, if not enormous, influence. Now that Coffin has died we can try to view his deeds and character in a fuller perspective. His career charts the path of the liberal northern Protestant Clerical Intelligentsia during the Cold War. He was able to exert some influence on the establishment, particularly on their youth, in the 1950s and 1960s, a time when that establishment retained much of its traditional sway in society and culture yet was opening itself to new perspectives and challenges. That time would not last very long. Eventually, Coffin provided national leadership to the fragment of American Christians who pursued peace and social justice. However, this fragment of Christianity found itself increasingly disempowered and out of step with the overall direction of the Christian churches, whose vital, rapidly growing segments lay on the right in the 1970s and afterward. Coffin was a person of his time.

2.3 A PASSION FOR THE POSSIBLE

William Sloane Coffin's A Passion for the Possible presents a vision for the future that challenges assumptions and deepens our understanding of the importance of social justice and change. Coffin deals with social issues that continue to face U.S. churches, such as abortion, sexism, homophobia, racism, poverty, the environment, and nuclear disarmament.

The book is divided into nine short chapters: *A Vision of the Future, Beyond War, The Environment, Beyond Charity, Race and Class, Sexism, Homophobia, Abortion, and Career Versus Calling.*

This book contains more than good sermon material, however. Coffin writes with the love, passion, and hope of one who is engaged with some of the complex issues of our day. People of religious faith who are struggling to make sense of the messy matters addressed in each chapter will find their views helpful and challenging. He outlines his task in the introduction: "Certainly a better world is both imaginable and feasible. But, as always, if there's a way to the better, it lies in first taking a look at the worst."⁵⁷ Coffin thinks that American churches must stop "retreating from the giant social issues of the day into the pygmy world of private piety. The chief religious question is not, 'What must I do to be saved?' but rather 'What must we all do to save God's creation?'"⁵⁸

Coffin's vision of the future is about a world in ashes and silenced by death if we don't stop the production of weapons of mass destruction and the environmental pollution. He thinks we can teach children to pledge allegiance and respect the earth as well as human life.

Coffin also believes that Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Racism are threats for/to human unity and the solution could be to understand that all of us have more in common than we have in conflict.

In *A Vision of the Future* he encourages us to imagine a world with a peace keeping force in defense of each other, with mindful citizens, with an international income tax to support international agencies, a world free of violent conflict and divisions between rich and poor. But he emphasizes the fact that if we see these as utopias, we are not going to achieve a universal unity.

In *Beyond War* Coffin mentions that only God has the right and the authority to destroy life on the planet; the only thing we have is the power because we should not make weapons. Therefore, to make or to threaten to use nuclear weapons must be an abomination in the sight of God.⁵⁹ He also thinks that a good way to abolish the use of nuclear weapons is to ban weapon's trade.

Coffin comes up with his own "axis of evil" — environmental degradation, pandemic poverty, and a world awash with weapons. He challenges Christians to speak out against nuclear weapons and the insane American policy of what he calls "nuclear apartheid." He wants us all to work for peace.

In *The Environment*, Coffin asserts that during the last four decades the planet shows nefarious human handiwork; smog, acid rain, immense holes in the ozone layer, the increase of carbon dioxide, etc. We continue doing the earth huge damage. Some reasons for that are the rapid increasing of populations accompanied by a sinful greed that makes people careless and unbridled exploiters of the earth's resources. We consider nature as a

toolbox. Also, there is a lack of a charter with ethical considerations for nature, similar to human rights.

People are the planet managers, so to save the environment we need to stabilize the world population, prevent famine, and develop reverence, moral qualms, and ethical considerations. The most important advice is to implement a Strategic Environment Initiative recommended by the former American vice-president, Albert Gore. It deals with waste reduction, recycling, conservation of soil, forestry, and energy. Also, churches are morally obligated to develop awareness and save the environment.

In *Beyond Charity*, Coffin makes a differentiation between charity and justice. They are different matters: the first one is a personal attribute, while the second is a public policy.

Poverty is another problem in society due to the unequal distribution of wealth in a country in which Capitalism has failed. Coffin believes that there cannot be such if there is equal dignity for all people. We need to understand that not only poverty but also superabundance can keep people in a subhuman state. The private possessions make the difference between rich and poor. In the search of power rich people have abandoned public services in favor of the poor. So rich can get richer only if poor get poorer. The purpose must be to eradicate poverty, which will save more money, rather than trying to help the poor. Coffin believes that we cannot be neutral in front of injustices or tyranny because we would be supporting it instead of protesting against it. In other words, when we see tyranny we must confront it.

A Passion for the Possible should be pondered and shared with the intention, hope, expectation, and charge that Coffin gives: "I believe that God is calling each and every one of us to show up, to 'double the heart's might,' to help one another build a more just and generous society at home and a genuine, viable global community that hates war and holds nature in reverence."⁶⁰ All of us are challenged by the pluralistic character of our society's religious beliefs and ethnic makeup, by its limited natural resources, by its racial tensions, and by its failures in social justice. For the common good we must strive to find our common bonds. Our failure to do so will lead to further decay and destruction, and Coffin reminds us that it need not be that way.

Despite the fact that racism has been abolished there is still traces of the monstrosity of inequality, especially for the majority of black Americans "...racism remains bone-deep in American society."⁶¹ Coffin also calls racism "a congenital deformity in our body politic."⁶² He also makes a correct explanation when he says that in the eyes of the world all linked to oppression and racism contradicts everything that represents our country – in terms of freedom.

In *Race and Class* Coffin also mentions poverty and all the social problems around it. To avoid it we need some policies, especially for children, based on three important things: a healthy start, a head start, and a fair start. In this way we can help people who beg in streets.

Coffin redefines the term violence, saying: "Violence needs redefinition. It should mean anything that violates human dignity, human

rights. Exploitation is the essence of violence, and its perpetrators can engage in it without ever drawing a knife or squeezing a trigger.”⁶³

When Coffin talks about homophobia (*Homophobia*), he is reflecting on what Christians say about it and contrasting our thoughts with what God and the scripture said about it. It is not scripture that creates hostility toward homosexuality, but Christians are the ones who take some passages to condemn it. He also realizes “the problem is not how to reconcile homosexuality with scriptural passages that condemn it, but rather how to reconcile the rejection and punishment of homosexuals with the love of Christ.”⁶⁴

Coffin makes us think about this controversial topic, asking some questions that we need to think about before criticizing and stigmatizing somebody just because of his or her sexual orientation “If people can show the tenderness and constancy in caring that honors Christ’s love, what matters their sexual orientation?”⁶⁵

Coffin remarks that churches do not do anything for homosexuals; churches should work at giving orientation to all people who think that they live in sin, thanks to the “cooperation” of some ministers. He shows us that other churches, in Canada for instance, have found a solution based on orientation of membership “...if homosexuality doesn’t exclude you from membership in a church, it can’t exclude you from ordination.”⁶⁶ Gays and lesbians feel pain when their families, schools, and churches turn their back on them. We have to learn to accept people with all their limitation and

preferences because if God did not say anything about them how could we?????

Another interesting chapter in this book is *Abortion*. According to Coffin's beliefs, an unborn child is a child from the very start. This belief is really far from what the Supreme Court said in 1973 where in some cases the term "person" did not include the unborn – it was giving a legal, not a moral, definition of unborn life. The Court explicitly said unsatisfactory legal definition were proved by its decision because they divide pregnancy into progressive trimesters –from no value – to some value – to considerable value.⁶⁷ Coffin says that if we cannot agree on a moral definition of unborn life, abortion will remain a moral dilemma: "...the worst thing we can do with a dilemma is to resolve it prematurely because we haven't the courage to live with uncertainty..."⁶⁸

On the other hand, an improvement in contraception and sexual education will raise our moral responsibility. Coffin finishes this chapter with "...whether it is taking or preventing life – whichever our belief – abortion remains at best a mournful undertaking."⁶⁹

Coffin's chapter on *Career Versus Calling* is particularly relevant to his ministry. After he retired, he was asked what he would emphasize if he were currently serving as a university chaplain. He replied that a great deal needs to be done to help students understand the importance of having a sense of vocation. The university should encourage students to consider that there is more to life than having a career and achieving material success. It needs to engage them in examining their social responsibilities and the moral and

ethical issues and social implications embedded in what they are learning. This chapter is characteristic in that it is filled with potent one-liners and thought-provoking phrases. Coffin writes: "A career seeks to be successful, a calling to be valuable. A career tries to make money, a calling tries to make a difference... A career . . . demands technical intelligence to learn a skill, to find out how to get from here to there. A calling demands critical intelligence to question whether 'there' is worth in going forward."⁷⁰

In his Epilogue: *A Word to the Preachers*, Coffin challenges pastors to confront controversial issues and preach with confidence and courage: "It is my deep feeling that most people in the pews are far more prepared for painful truths than we give them credit for. What they want their preachers to do is to rise to a conscious level the knowledge inherent in their experience. And the majority of them realize that the painful truths known and spoken sour and subvert life less than those known and unspoken."⁷¹

Coffin invites everyone to be heard what he has to say, even those who do not want to hear from him or do not agree with him. He also questions us about why we avoid talking about controversial topics. He says it is because we are not confident about what to say and because we do not want to ask our professors, mentors, colleagues, etc.

2.4 ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN'S MOST IMPORTANT QUOTES

"Hope arouses, as nothing else can arouse, a passion for the possible."
⁷²

Hope is actually a spiritual practice. It is what we need to move forward on our boldest projects and our wildest dreams. No wonder the preacher and

social activist William Sloane Coffin said, "Hope arouses as nothing else can arouse, a passion for the possible." It's a feeling that can be expressed in words with the power to pull us through hard times. It lends a forward thrust to audacious projects and dreams begun with great commitment, ardor, and idealism.

Hope is a state of mind, independent of the state of the world. So if your heart's full of hope, you can be persistent when you cannot be optimistic. You can keep the faith despite the evidence, knowing that only in doing so has any chance of changing. When a person is not optimistic, he is always very hopeful.

***"If your heart is full of fear, you won't seek truth; you'll seek security. If a heart is full of love, it will have a limbering effect on the mind."*⁷³**

Coffin believes that the most important thing nowadays is to try to think straight. Faith makes better thinking possible, but we cannot think straight with a heart full of fear. If our heart is like a stone, we cannot have good thoughts either about personal or about international relations. On the other hand, a heart full of love has a limbering effect on the mind. This means that Christians should never think that they honor the greater truth they find in Christ by ignoring truths found elsewhere. Coffin said this quote to introduce the crucial issues for the United States' well-being and even to the planet's survival.

***"The world is too dangerous for anything but truth, and too small for anything but love."*⁷⁴**

The world has always been dangerous. It has not always been small, but it has been large, and that has brought its own problems. The great world

for countless generations has had its fearsome mystery, and for a long time most people would not venture beyond the margins of what was close and familiar.

William Sloane Coffin, Jr. offers us a way to survive. The keys, he says, are "truth" and "love." Parents must be honest with their children about the world. Of course, they must also love them. But they must not smother them and overprotect them from the realities of the world and of life. Parents must let children try out their wings. They must be honest about life's dangers.

We must never give up on the effort to do our best in life, no matter how futile or overwhelming it may seem. If we live honestly and with love, if we each day do our best to build our lives in the best way we know, we will have reason at the end to be thankful. If we learn to live our lives well in love and service, we will have no reason to regret them.

If we build our lives carefully and wisely, they will shelter us through all our days. We must do the best we can, in honesty and love, each and every day of our lives. If we do this, we will have all the tools we need to survive in this world. "The world is too dangerous for anything but truth, and too small for anything but love." We always have to remember this and go forth to live our lives more honestly and more lovingly, for this may be the only chance we get. And let us have the courage to live each day, not in fear of what might be, but in hope for what already is.

***"Not to Bring Peace, But a Sword"* ⁷⁵**

Let us start by recognizing that there is unacceptability about disagreeable truth. We all shield ourselves against its wounding accuracy. Not only do we do this as individuals, but we do this as a people and as a

nation. Twenty-seven hundred years ago, as some of you may remember, not because you were there, but because you read the Bible, the priest Amaziah said of the prophet Amos, "...the land is not able to bear all his words." (Amos 7:10)

Every prophet has realized that nobody loves somebody for being the enemy of their illusions. Also, every prophet has realized that most of us want peace at any price as long as the peace is ours and somebody else pays the price. That is why the prophet Jeremiah said, "'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace," and why Jesus said, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34 NIV)

Coffin wonders if Americans do not have something that they should contribute to the burial grounds of the world, something that would make the world a safer place. He thinks there is something in people an attitude more than an idea. It lives less in the American mind than under the American skin. That is the notion that America is not only the most powerful nation in the world, which it certainly is, but that it is also the most virtuous.

According to Coffin it is their pride-swollen faces that have closed up their eyes to an almost unimaginable neglect of the poor, the bloat of the military, the size of the deficit, the sorrow of the aged and infirm among them. There are lots of implications to this. Coffin finds this tough text, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword," is a wonderfully honest statement about the need for the sword of truth, Christ's sword of truth that heals the wounds it inflicts.

"Love your enemies" does not mean "Don't make any"⁷⁶

Coffin says this quote to encourage churches and Christians to raise the cause of the people in need and misfortunate. Those are the poor, the homeless and the helpless. But he knows that congregations that practice justice, even as they walk in the steps of Jesus, risk social censure as progressive do-gooders. God does not tell us to hate those who look different than us, so we have to see everyone as equal and the same, just with different packaging.

"God has the authority to end life; humans have the power to do it."⁷⁷

During the 1980s, Coffin was minister of Riverside Church, in New York, one of the nation's foremost churches, and he brought that church into the nuclear arms race issues. He was moved to say that the church should be involved with issues like the nuclear arms race because only "God has the authority to end life on this planet. All we human beings have is the power." And as our power to do so is so clearly not authorized by any tenet of the faith, be it Christian, Muslim, or Jewish, the mere possession of nuclear weapons struck him as an abomination in the sight of the Almighty, comparable to the mere possession of slaves 150 years ago. And the analogy could be pressed because 150 years ago, the conversation went between those who said we must humanize the institution of slavery and the others said, no, we have to abolish it.

In the 1980s, the discussion was between those who said we must limit the horrible, horrible fallout of these weapons of mega-destruction -- the neutron bomb, for instance, destroyed people but not property, the perfect

capitalist bomb, Coffin supposed we could say -- and those who said, no, we should abolish every last weapon from the face of the earth. He saw this clearly as a religious issue, just as he saw the environment as clearly a religious issue, and just as he saw the matter of rich and poor clearly as a religious issue.

“Human beings who blind themselves to human need make themselves less human.”⁷⁸

In some of his books, Coffin talks about people who do not care what happen to other people. Human beings are so selfish because we only see and do things just for us we do not think in others people necessities. We do not think we can help others but we can do it; and that is exactly what Coffin says. There are people in need, and we do not realize that we can do a lot for those people. The mere fact of not wanting to help makes us less human because we must think that we can help ourselves and of course help others. Coffin makes us reflect on many social issues that cause us to realize that if there was a person who died for us, why we cannot we do “something” for those who need a hand to improve their lives.

“So don't let money tell you who you are. Don't let power tell you who you are. Don't let enemies and for God's sake don't let your sins tell you who you are. Don't prove yourself. That's taken care of. All we have to do is express ourselves. It's difficult, but we're a lot more alive in pain than in complacency”⁷⁹

Coffin was a man who liked to express his thoughts freely because he did not care about the consequences of his words. His words made people reflect about who they really were. Money and power do not say anything

about us because as Abraham Lincoln said, “all men are created equal.” With or without money we are who we are. We are not perfect, we make mistakes, and we learn from them; so there is no reason to let people say things about us just because our mistakes. People have the chance to rectify mistakes. Many people died to defend our liberty; so we have to express ourselves freely and defend our thoughts, and we have to act according to the way we are and to please others. A human being does not live by what people are saying but what makes him feel better.

***“Without love violence will change the world, it will change it into a more violent one”*⁸⁰**

The World is becoming more dangerous because every problem in different contexts is solved violently. It seems people have forgotten that the most useful way to solve something is by talking. Money and power are the main reason why people are violent. Disagreements between powers have caused wars where thousands and thousands of innocent people have died because they fight to get more power and control over things they are really interested in.

The church promotes love and respect for our fellows but “powerful people” do not consider any other way to solve problems. They only consider “violence.” Nowadays with all the controversy in the world people are going to make the mistake of getting what they need in life by fighting. The panorama is going to be human beings killing each other.

God created a world for people to live in peace, harmony and love. He wanted us to live as brothers, but unfortunately violence is more powerful than love because people get what they want easily by confronting violently other people.

“Diversity may be the hardest thing for a society to live with, and perhaps the most dangerous thing for a society to be without”⁸¹

We need to seek first to understand one another before seeking to be understood. One idea might be to do two hands reaching to support each other with the motion of going to clasp or shake. Each hand could be multi-colored for diversity (different colors or even patterns, dependent upon what you want to do and your stylization methods). Whether that be done in abstract sharp triangles or a smoother gradient into each other. Without support of our differences, we are lost. Reaching out, supporting one another, holding hands is a symbolic representation of that.

Coffin says that LOVE will change the world to a less violent one. That may be true but it would be good to ask ourselves how and when it is going to happen. The best way is to know the main objective, the main reason why God created us. We should respect human rights, respect the geographic sovereignty of each country, keep away the egoism, the imperialism, fight the violence, war, conflict, and any other system of abuse. We should demolish the weapons factories and support the sustainable development sciences, invention, which reduces the world today as a small antique village. We should increase love and dialogue and do our best with the time the Good God have given to us.

“I’m more hopeful than optimistic.”⁸²

The opposite of hope is not pessimism, but despair. And if we can keep despair at bay and just keep the faith, despite the evidence, knowing that in only in so doing has the evidence any chance of changing. But, in a way, over the long run, there is room for a certain amount of optimism.

“There must be something wrong with what we think is right”⁸³

Some Christians create hostility to homosexuality when they interpret and share some sentences from St. Paul or other Old Testament laws. Coffin recommended us to stop doing literal understanding to scriptures in different aspects as we almost do with slavery, it is time to do the same with gays and lesbians. According to Christians, the norm is Christ's love but unfortunately we do not practice what we preach, we just condemn homosexual based on what we understand from scriptures. We have to start talking about what is “normal” not about what is “natural”, which is according to the norm. Coffin used to say how can we do when we talk about sexual orientation or argue for its illegality if people do not understand homosexuality as something normal. This will be the first step to accept this sexual orientation. He said we need to stretch our minds to a new idea and learn to accept people no matter their religion, culture, color, or in this case sexual orientation, it is not easy but neither impossible.

“Faith is not believing without proof, it is trusting without reservation”⁸⁴

A misconception about faith makes us believe in what we can prove. Coffin helps us to get the real meaning of the word ‘faith’: “Faith is being grasped by the power of love, it is recognizing that what makes God is infinite mercy, not infinite control; not power, but love unending.” This definition helps us and says that faith does not mean that if we need something it was going to be given to us just because we name God. Things are going to be given because God's mercy not because God has control over the things, when we can do with faith is “...become channels for divine mercy to flow out to save the lost and the suffering.”

CHAPTER III

3. RELIGION AND POLITICS

Rev. William Sloane Coffin, liberal preacher, summed up his faith and by extension, himself: "I believe Christianity is a worldview that undergirds all progressive thought and action."⁸⁵ He believed the Christian church is called to respond to biblical mandates like truth-telling, confronting injustice, and pursuing peace.

3.1 CHRISTIANITY

Liberal Christianity is sometimes called liberal theology, which covers diverse, philosophically informed religious movements and ideas within late 18th, 19th, and 20th century. The word *liberal* in liberal Christianity does not refer to a leftist political agenda or set of beliefs, but rather to the manner of thought and belief associated with the philosophical and religious paradigms developed during the Age of Enlightenment. The Enlightenment is a term used to describe a time in Western philosophy and cultural life centered upon the eighteenth century, in which reason was advocated as the primary source and legitimacy for authority.

The theology of liberal Christianity prominent in the biblical criticism within liberal theology is often characterized as non-propositional. This means that the Bible is not considered a collection of factual statements but instead documents the human authors' beliefs and feelings about God at the time of its writing -within a historical/cultural context. Thus, liberal Christian theologians do not claim to discover true propositions but rather to create religious models and concepts that reflect the class, gender, social, and political contexts from which they emerge. Liberal Christianity looks upon the Bible as a collection of narratives that explain, exemplify, or symbolize the essence and significance of Christian understanding.

Liberal Christianity, broadly speaking, is a method of biblical hermeneutics, an individualistic method of understanding God through the use of scripture by applying the same modern hermeneutics used to understand any ancient writings. Liberal Christianity does not claim to be a belief structure and is not dependent upon any Church dogma or creedal statements. Unlike conservative varieties of Christianity, it has no unified set of propositional beliefs. The word *liberal* in liberal Christianity denotes a characteristic willingness to interpret scripture without any preconceived notion of accuracy of scripture or the correctness of Church dogma. A liberal Christian, however, may hold certain beliefs in common with traditional, orthodox, or even conservative Christianity

At Yale Divinity School, Coffin had great teachers from whom he learned and shaped the bases of his Liberal Christianity beliefs. He learned the difference between conventional Christianity and orthodox Christianity. He began to see evil as the corruption of freedom and the perversion of the most God-like in each person.

From a course on Christian ethics given by Coffin's professor, Richard Niebuhr, (Reinhold's brother), he understood that Christian theology did not separate body from soul, as well as Christian ethics did not separate personal morality from social morality. He acquired the sense of the meaning of Christ's divinity. He realized that the belief that Christ is God-like is less important than the belief that God is Christ-like. He conceived Christ as a mirror of humanity rather than a window to divinity. He also learned that it was important in sermons to make himself vulnerable, showing his own doubts and fears to reach the hearts of others. The person who helped him most was Dostoevsky. Through Dostoevsky's writings Coffin understood best the depths of human depravity and the Christian understanding of redemption. Like Dostoevsky, Coffin also disliked any notion of salvation through some

kind of repression or psychological mutilation. Moreover, they agreed that creeds and laws are important as sign posts, not as hitching posts.

For Coffin, the Bible was less a collection of details and more a sweeping narrative of a fiercely loving God determined to bring a wounded creation to shalom and justice, and for Coffin preaching was the voice of a human gathered up into this redemptive intention. At the end of his studies at Yale Divinity School, he saw that conventional Christianity seemed all too often a religion of creeds and laws, which were frequently repressive, while orthodox Christianity was liberating.

3.2 POLITICAL-RELIGIOUS RELATIONSHIP

The complex relationship between religion and politics is an important topic as a matter of significant social concern. American mainline Protestantism has been at the center of efforts to achieve political reform, and its teachings have been an integral part of Americans' most sacred understandings of their nation as well as of their responsibilities as citizens. As recently as the 1960s, mainline Protestantism played a major role in the Civil Rights Movement, the protest movement against the Vietnam War, and the extension of rights and entitlements to women.

God's Politics offers a clarion call to make both religious communities and governments more accountable to key values of the prophetic religious tradition. This means to make them pro-justice, pro-peace, pro-environment, pro-equality, and pro-consistent with the ethics of life.

William Sloane Coffin said: "To know God is to do justice. To recognize this implacable moral imperative of the faith represents the kind of good religion that mixes well with politics."⁸⁶ All may know and experience more of

this kind of good religion during our lives. In Coffin's book, Credo, the political implications of the Gospels wrestle with the moral imperatives of political life. His voice never let the Church get too far from its political obligations; he never let his politics devolve into one man's ideological rant. He believed in humanity enough to challenge us, yet he knew our frailties: "It is often said that the Church is a crutch."⁸⁷ Coffin embraced a philosophy that put social activism at the heart of his clerical duties. American social practices and political policies, he said, was like of a partner engaged in a "lovers' quarrel." An example of the relationship he describes is based on a theoretically simple Christian Act- to love one's enemy. Coffin came to this conclusion when he compared policy and the arena of religious principles.

For Coffin, politics and religion were inseparable, and the constant theme of his written works was the need for social justice. Politics and religion have never been far apart in the preaching and doings of Coffin. He believed in the power of civil disobedience to bring social and political change. He thought that political aims have always been limited by religious considerations. He had the special ability to make biblical argument related to U.S. politics on war compelling to a general audience.

The public perception is that religious people in the U.S. are generally rare, and those who have a fanatical vision of the world and life are marginalized. However, in the world of politics and power circles, Coffin sees it is in a different way: to him it is a compact ultra organized force for political purposes determined to seize power at any cost. Such is the case of the Christian Coalition, the non-denominational Christian conservatives' largest and most powerful U.S. religious organization.

For political conservatives, such organizations as the Christian Coalition are a "godsend", easy to mobilize in political campaigns, loyal

groups at the time to vote, and in general fundamental parts of its propaganda machine. For liberals and progressives, a group ideologically as hostile as the Christian Coalition is a worthless partner as "religious", and it is given the label "disabled" in political discussions. The general population, which is outside the positions of extremist religious groups, is watching with amazement, and sees the world as distorted by the publicity given to these powerful minority groups.

In a country where 90% of the population claims to believe in God, Coffin finds it difficult to accept that "most" Christians support policies that contradict religious principles so outrageously, such as charity, justice, love of neighbor, ethics, and alternative worldviews. However, the religious right insists on imposing on the rest of the citizens their extremist positions, claiming to represent all Christians in their views: outright prohibition of abortion, prayer in public schools, federal budget cuts for poor families, denial of economic aid for single mothers, and racist anti-immigrant policies.

Coffin argues that since early in the twentieth century, when the Christian Coalition had emerged as a significant political force, those Christians who reject its extremist positions have sought in vain, with despair and confusion, a voice that represents their values with more justice. This absence is due to a notable lack of organization and strategy of the progressive and moderate Christian sectors and the fact that they are routinely ignored by the mass media.

Christians currently marginalized by the media are characterized by participation in the Civil Rights Movement against racism and systematic discrimination started in the 60s, and many protested against the Vietnam War and against U.S. intervention in Central America in support of dictatorial

governments in the region. Among the outstanding figures of these movements driven by respect for life and human dignity are Martin Luther King Jr., Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, William Sloane Coffin, and Dorothy Day.

Despite this tradition of progressive and militant religious organizations in favor of justice and ethics in the individual and institutional framework, with clear speech against greed, indifference and coldness of heart, the religious right has monopolized the political space to talk of "individual responsibility"-to punish single mothers for their sin and to support the cuts that the political right wants to do in government programs that help families and single mothers from low income. Meanwhile, the Christian Coalition exits through the forum when it comes to denouncing the sin of greed of billion-dollar corporations which get even richer, firing thousands of employees from one day to another.

In the U.S. there are many who believe that religion should be an essential part of the great debate now facing those who are rich and in power for the poor who lack it. The moral power of religion does not only apply to the dilemmas of the past nor to the problems of individuals present, but also has a transcendent dimension that can help all human beings to imagine different creative ways, moral, social, and economically sound, to organize economic and political relations of society. To discard the imaginative potential of religion is to ignore a powerful speech that can stand up to those in power with greed, selfishness, and coldness of heart.

3.3 RELIGIOUS INTERVENTION

3.3.1 Vietnam War

The Vietnam War was a military struggle fought in Vietnam from 1959 to 1975, involving the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front

(NLF) in conflict with United States forces and the South Vietnamese army. From 1946 until 1954, the Vietnamese had struggled for their independence from France during the First Indochina War. At the end of this war, the country was temporarily divided into North and South Vietnam. North Vietnam came under the control of Vietnamese Communists who had opposed France and who aimed for a unified Vietnam under Communist rule. The South was controlled by non-Communist Vietnamese.

3.3.1.1 The United States Involvement

The overarching geopolitical aim behind the United States' involvement in Vietnam was to contain the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. The country became involved in Vietnam because American policymakers believed that if the entire country fell under a Communist government, Communism would spread throughout Southeast Asia. This belief was known as the "domino theory." The U.S. government, therefore, helped to create the anti-Communist South Vietnamese government. This government's repressive policies led to rebellion in the South, and in 1960 the NLF was formed with the aim of overthrowing the government of South Vietnam and reunifying the country.

Whether the United States should have heavily committed itself militarily to contain Communism in South Vietnam remains a hotly debated topic. The debate is closely related to the controversy over whether the problems in Southeast Asia were primarily political and economic rather than military. The strategy of The United States generally proceeded from the premise that the essence of the problem in Vietnam was military, with efforts to "win the hearts and minds" of the South Vietnamese populace taking second place.

The involvement of The United States in Vietnam began during the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961), who sent the U.S. military to South Vietnam. Their numbers increased as the military position of the Saigon government became weaker. In 1957 Communist rebels -Viet Cong - began a campaign of terrorism in South Vietnam. They were supported by the government of North Vietnam and later by North Vietnamese troops. Their goal was to overthrow the anti-Communist government in the South.

John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) decided to commit American support troops to South Vietnam. Four thousand troops were sent in 1962. There has been an endless debate about what he would have done in Vietnam. He, of course, did escalate American involvement by expanding the number of advisors there from 15,000 to 16,000. However, there is evidence that he would not have Americanized the war to the extent that Lyndon Johnson did. He was skeptical of the military. He feared that the U.S. could get bogged down in Vietnam. He had Secretary of Defense McNamara in 1962 lay out plans for American withdrawal by 1965. On the day he left for Dallas, Texas, in 1963, he asked his policy advisor Mike Forrestall to lay plans for a full discussion of Vietnam, including a full discussion on getting the United States out of there. In the fall of 1963, American efforts to build a democratic bulwark against Communism in South Vietnam were failing. President Kennedy struggled to get the Diem government and a communist insurgency under control. On November 3, 1963, Ngo Dinh Diem died at the hands of his generals. Less than two weeks after President Diem's death, President Kennedy was assassinated.

After John Kennedy was murdered, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson served the last fourteen months of Kennedy's term. He then was elected to his own full term. It began in January 1965. Much of his time and energy would be taken up by the war in Vietnam. By early nineteen-sixty-four,

America had about seventeen-thousand troops in Vietnam. The troops were there to advise and train the South Vietnamese military.

Under President Johnson (1963-1968), U.S. intervention mushroomed both militarily and politically. Johnson asked for a resolution expressing U.S. determination to support freedom and protect peace in Southeast Asia. Congress responded with the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, expressing support for "all necessary measures" the President might take to repel armed attacks against U.S. forces and prevent further aggression.

During the conflict, approximately 3.2 million Vietnamese were killed, in addition to another 1.5 million to 2 million Laotians and Cambodians who were drawn into the war. Nearly 58,000 Americans lost their lives. What the war did to the United States and to the American people was drastic. Every American family was impacted, losing husbands, sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, and friends. Over 50,000 Americans were killed, and many of those who returned suffered and still suffer deep physical and emotional scars. Many more veterans took their own lives, and others were treated as social outcasts or ended up on America's streets among the homeless.

The United States did not lose the war in Vietnam, but the South Vietnamese did after the U.S. Congress cut off funding. The fall of Saigon happened April 30th, 1975, two years after the American military left Vietnam. The last American troops departed in their entirety March 29th, 1973. The U.S. entered the war to prevent Vietnam from uniting under the Communist banner and in so doing supposedly saved the surrounding countries from going Communist. President Richard Nixon said that the U.S. won the Vietnam War. He meant that they stopped the Communist takeover of Southeast Asia. In contrast, many people believed that the U.S. lost the war because of the strategies used during the war. In Vietnam the U.S. Army experienced tactical

success and strategic failure. America's withdrawal from Vietnam was seen as a waste of American lives with small likelihood of a successful outcome.

Opposition to the Vietnam War

Within the peace movement some advocated a unilateral withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam. One reason given for this position was that it would contribute to a lessening of tensions in the region and thus less human bloodshed. An additional reason was that the Vietnamese should work out their problems independent of foreign influence. These critics advocated that U.S. forces remain until all threats from the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army had been eliminated.

Early opposition to America's involvement in Vietnam was centered on the Geneva Conference of 1954 and its mandate that elections be held to unite the country. America's refusal to sign the Accords, and their support of Diem, was considered to be thwarting the very democracy that America claimed to be supporting. John Kennedy, while Senator, opposed involvement in Viet Nam.

Opposition to the Vietnam War tended to unite groups opposed to U.S. anti-Communism, imperialism and colonialism and those involved with the New Left, Capitalism itself, such as the Catholic Worker Movement. High-profile opposition to the Vietnam War turned to street protests in an effort to turn U.S. political opinion against the war. The protests gained momentum from the Civil Rights Movement that had organized to oppose segregation laws, which had laid a foundation of theory and infrastructure on which the antiwar movement grew. Protests were fueled by a growing network of independently published newspapers (known as "underground papers") and the timely advent of large venue rock'n'roll festivals such as Woodstock and

Grateful Dead shows, attracting younger people in search of generational togetherness.

The late 1960s in the U.S. became a time of youth rebellion, mass gatherings and riots, many of which began in response to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. but which ignited in an atmosphere of open opposition to a wartime government.

Provocative actions by police and by protesters turned antiwar demonstrations in Chicago at the 1968 Democratic National Convention into a riot. Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley brought 23,000 police and National Guardsman against 10,000 protestors. Explosive news reports of American military abuses, such as the 1968 My Lai Massacre, brought new attention and support to the antiwar movement.

When veterans of the Vietnam War returned home, they joined the movement, including John Kerry, who spearheaded Vietnam Veterans against the War and testified before Congress in televised hearings. Antiwar protests ended with the final withdrawal of troops after the Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1973. South Vietnam was left to defend itself alone when the fighting resumed.

Antiwar Movements

The antiwar movement in opposition to the Vietnam War attracted members from college campuses, middle-class suburbs, labor unions, and government institutions. The movements gained national prominence in 1965, peaked in 1968, and remained powerful throughout the duration of the conflict. Encompassing political, racial, and cultural spheres, the antiwar movement exposed a deep schism within 1960s American society.

Protest to conscription has been a feature of all American wars. During the Vietnam War, draft evasion and draft resistance reached a historic peak, nearly crippling the Selective Service System. Combined with the revolt inside the military and the larger civilian antiwar movement, draft resistance acted as another fetter on the government's ability to wage a war in Vietnam and brought the war home in a very personal way for a generation of young men. Draft resisters filed for conscientious objector status, didn't report for induction when called, or attempted to claim disability. Soldiers went AWOL (Absent without Leave) and fled to Canada through Underground Railroad networks of antiwar supporters.

As the 1960s went on, the campuses became crucibles of antiwar protest, as students came to protest an unjust war, campus bureaucracy, and a graduation that would bring them draft eligibility. Since the draft loomed over students' futures and provided an avenue for direct resistance to war on an individual level, much student activism was concerned with the draft.

Beginning in 1964, students began burning their draft cards as acts of defiance. By 1969, student body presidents of 253 universities wrote to the White House to say that they personally planned to refuse induction, joining the half million others who would do so during the course of the war.

By the later years of the war in the early 1970s, draft resistance reached its peak. In 1972, there were more conscientious objectors than actual draftees, all major cities faced backlogs of induction-refusal legal cases, and the Selective Service later reported that 206,000 persons were reported delinquent during the entire war period. Yet draft resisters, combined with the larger antiwar movement on campuses and inside the military, was successful: there were too many people to punish or send to prison. So great were the numbers of draft resisters that in 1977, President Carter passed a general amnesty to all those who had fled abroad in defiance of the draft,

allowing them to return to the United States. Out of 209,517 accused draft offenders, less than 9,000 were convicted.

Americans for Reappraisal of Far Eastern Policy (ARFEP)

Although Coffin followed public affairs closely, he kept his distance before throwing himself into public debate in 1965. He paid little attention to the Vietnam War before 1965. He kept his distance because he needed to be the center of attention and the action. The reason is that Coffin had always admired the men of action, or those directing action.

Vietnam became a significant issue in the academic, religious, and foreign circles in which Coffin lived. In August of 1965, he joined a Connecticut “speak-out” against the war after he had preached his first sermon saying that the U.S. people should consider that issue as Christians.

Later, Coffin was convinced that he had to do something, which was when he wrote a proposal in which he suggested re-opening the China debate by forming a committee to support U.S. recognition of the People’s Republic of China, to normalize trade and travel with China, and to admit China to the United Nations. With this Coffin believed that it was better to rally on a flank attack rather than a frontal assault.

Coffin sent his proposal to the “hot shots” such as Bennett, Lynd, and Lowenstein. These people later became known as Americans for Reappraisal of Far Eastern Policy (ARFEP). The ARFEP organized formally on the Yale campus. They organized the “crash program” to launch discussions on fifty campuses. October 24th, UN Day, was set as a target date for an opening with symposia, teach-ins, lectures, movies, panels, seminars, etc. Coffin unleashed a torrent of correspondence announcing the “crash program” to persuade people to attend. He and Lowenstein formed a great couple: he

was a well known and passionate preacher while Lowenstein was the best organizer in the country. That helped the growth of the organization.

The ARFEP's goals were to form pickets and organize draft card burning to get away from the exclusive attention on Vietnam and get to the broad problem of Asia. "The ARFEP's program stirred up interest in Asia that translated into study groups, public forums, newsletters, speaker series, and the like."⁸⁸ The result was that interest and activity soon transferred to the Vietnam issue.

The significance of the ARFEP was two-fold: "First, it showed that campus organizing on foreign policy issues could spark interest, raise money, and unite faculty and students...Second, the experience was personally important for Coffin who realized once again how much he enjoyed a crusade."⁸⁹ Coffin showed his insights in these matters which were tactical rather than substantive. The ARFEP group started to decline, and Coffin felt that he was ready for a different kind of crusade.

Clergy Concerned About Vietnam. (CCAV)

The Clergy Concerned About Vietnam (CCAV) was a broadly based group of clergy in New York City who held an ecumenical forum on U.S. foreign policy in Asia. The CCAV invited five thousand area clergy to a study conference on Vietnam on November 28, 1965 where Coffin was an invited speaker.

The organization purposes were as follows: first, to call on President Johnson to extend the Christmas-bombing pause he had begun on December 24th, to stop further escalation, and to "negotiate an end to the war;" and second, to give priority to economic development for human purposes at home. Coffin was in charge of making calls to clergymen around the country to organize CCAV chapters in a week. At the end of the week he

had fulfilled his goal because one hundred clergymen had accepted. That was the precise experience he had been searching for.

CCAV worked almost exclusively among religious professionals, using biblical language. Coffin's persuasive skills made him invaluable to the group. He was the person who announced the formation of the group and the creation of 150 chapters in forty-three states to the New York press. The members of the CCAV tended to be more politically liberal than the members of local churches. They emphasized traditional legal educational and pressure techniques rather than non-violent tactics used by the ARFEP. Coffin and the organization searched for an appropriate framework through which they could express their position on the war. They considered: "that military victory was both elusive and unlikely to produce the stated goals of American policy, that real negotiations made more sense than intensified military pressure, and that both of these positions had solid religious backing."⁹⁰ Coffin compared the United States ship of state to the Titanic just before it hit the iceberg because "if we decide on all-out escalation of the war in Vietnam, then to all intents and purposes of the human soul we may be sunk."⁹¹

CCAV's position was based on three tenents. First, the history of the conflict, according to the U.S administration, was defending the independence of democratic South Vietnam, but the CCAV's version stressed the legacy of colonialism with Vietnamese resistance to the French and the American sabotage of the Geneva accords. The conflict in Vietnam was a civil war rather than an example of Communist aggression. Second, war opponents used brutality and corruption while the supporters emphasized the National Liberation Front's (NLF) use of terrorism. Third, opponents to the war focused on the enormous destruction to people and soil caused by weapons, while supporters stressed the need to use powerful weapons against guerrillas.

As executive secretary of CCAV, Coffin met the theologian Abraham Heschel, who sounded like Reinhold Niebuhr. Coffin borrowed Niebuhr's and Heschel's language for his repertoire, and he criticized the exclusiveness of church people who did not understand that Christ "died not for the church but for the world."⁹²

Coffin participated as a discussant of "China and the Conflicts in Asia" during the National Inter-Religious Conference on Peace. He also recruited more staff for the growing organization. The group formally decided to stay in existence until the end of the war. Finally, they changed their name to Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV). The organization continued with the same position taken by the clergy concerned about Vietnam.

The Clergy and Layman Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV)

Coffin renounced his position as executive secretary of the newly formed CALCAV and started to act as a public figure. He could now consult, speak, write, and raise money. The organization grew rapidly from 18 chapters to 68 chapters within a year, and pressure for genuine negotiation increased. The Clergy and Layman Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV) created opportunities for liberal clergy to oppose the war since they had high-level connections in American political establishment and could lay claim to elite status.

Coffin and the war opponents had few choices in opposing the war. First, they said that Vietnam and China had a long history of antagonism that would trump their shared commitment to Communism. Second, it was a civil war and the country itself had to decide its own future. Third, the commitment to keep a country from going to Communism by any means, especially through military action and without any scope, could lead to eventual failure.

The unenviable task of war opponents was to convince most Americans that a Communist Vietnam would not be all that bad.

At the same time, Coffin was in charge of the Chaplaincy of Yale, where he was lucky to have the two Yale presidents he did as both were profoundly committed to the version of liberal culture that Yale represented as its best. During that time Coffin was asked to run for Congress, but he declined. Instead, he assumed a leadership role in the moderate wing of the antiwar movement, and his name became important to that movement.

Vietnam War at Yale

Coffin's traditionalist worship tendencies helped him in cultivating senior figures at Yale and in mending his fences with the University president in particular. Many Yale graduates more conservative than Coffin found his willingness to plunge the University into politics appalling. More than a few called for his ouster. Fortunately for Coffin, the two presidents he served during his tenure as chaplain - Griswold and Kingman Brewster Jr. - protected him despite their differences with him.

Coffin's relations with Kingman Brewster, Yale president during most of Coffin's time as chaplain there, provide many fascinating moments in his chaplaincy. Brewster was the president of one of the nation's most eminent universities, with powerful and often conservative alumni to placate; he defended Coffin down the line as a person doing his job responsibly and very well. At one point Brewster publicly rebuked Coffin for his behavior in the draft-protest matter, but this is not to say that Brewster did not truly disagree with what Coffin did. A skilled lawyer, he always parsed his position carefully. But Brewster saw it as Coffin's duty to challenge Yale students from a sound religious and moral perspective and he saw it as his own duty to protect his chaplain politically so that the chaplain could fulfill that role. Showing that he

was willing on occasion to criticize Coffin made it easier for Brewster to protect Coffin, as he always did at difficult moments.

At Yale, Coffin had some students and Brewster's support to fulfill a good cause, along with the United Church of Christ, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Jewish Peace Fellowship's support. "Love one's enemy" was a slogan used by Coffin's new effort. It consisted of a plan to send medical supplies to all war victims in both sides of the fighting lines. This plan became known as "Vietnam Relief" which would be carried out through the Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC).

The CFSC sent medical aid to Vietnam to be used by victims on all sides of the conflict in accordance with Friends' tradition of relief work which cuts across the boundaries of war and conflict. Many American Friends knowingly contravened U.S. law by contributing to this work through Canadian Friends. For some the program was controversial, but for many it was a labor of love in war-time. It provided considerable aid to the sufferers and served as a witness against war.

On the other hand, this aid was misunderstood by the press. For instance, the *Times* put it "U.S. letting Yale Group Send Medical Help to Foe in Vietnam." Some publishers disliked Coffin and editorialized against the effort, even trying to collect petition signatures asking for the repeal of the group's license.

Coffin's achievement in this affair was "to move the discussion from foreign policy, where government authorities spoke with more power, to the arena of morality and religious principle... The entire effort represented a theoretically simple Christian act mentioned above "to love one's enemy."⁹³

Coffin converted the Yale chaplaincy into one of the great pulpits in the country. It had become an institution without peer in the educational world for raising and articulating fundamental religious principles and a genuinely uncomfortable gospel.

During Coffin's chaplaincy, he continued raising money for the CALCAV, but his interests had changed. As the organization was close to insolvency, he was interested in dramatic gestures. That was when 1966 the Yale Drama School and he organized an Education-Action mobilization in Washington with a "highly dramatized version of outrage and anguish."⁹⁴

Later, the CALCAV had gained such importance that when Martin Luther King decided to confront the Vietnam issue, he came to CALCAV to participate in the April 15th spring mobilization. King then joined the organization.

Draft and Civil Disobedience

The Johnson administration expanded the draft dramatically as the war expanded. There were some who refused induction and went to jail, some who left the country, and others who sent back their draft cards.

For Coffin and his religious colleagues, civil disobedience in opposition to the war came slowly at first. Draft law was federal law, and draft resistance could land violators in federal prison. Moreover, civil disobedience during wartime would expose protesters to the charge of treason and to the Communist label. Nevertheless, his personal path and the choices of a growing sector of the antiwar movement were beginning to converge on the issue of the draft. An increasing number of adults and young men were concluding that resistance to the draft should be the axis strategy to battle the Vietnam War. He became the unofficial pastor and the country's key religious

figure on the draft issue. He also was the one most trusted by young men opposed to the war. He and his CALCAV colleagues looked for tactics that would put them directly into legal danger and to dramatize their opposition to the war through the draft. Coffin and Richard Neuhaus resolved to develop a concrete proposal on civil disobedience and the draft for CALCAV.

Coffin allied with hundreds of young draft-eligible men who had been organizing into groups of draft resisters. He made an argument which brought some misunderstandings with press critics and put him in a degree of conflict with them. He desired "to see thousands of students opposed to the war gather on some specified date in some urban centers throughout the country, there with a moving simple statement to surrender their draft cards at previous designated federal buildings"⁹⁵

Newspapers reported Coffin as having issued a call for clergy to mobilize students to turn in their draft cards instead of publicizing his real efforts to make a distinction between what he urged clergy to do and what he hoped students would do on their own. Then Coffin had to explain to Brewster, the press, and Yale alumni his original idea, and he had to apologize for his lack of clarity. Coffin stressed that he was not advocating violence and he was against draft card burning, which he considered a hostile act. He did not advocate withdrawal but rather negotiation.

Coffin chaired the press conference at the New York Hilton that formally released the one draft resistance manifesto that had emerged preeminent from all the rest: "A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority," drafted at the Institute for Policy Studies. As the war intensified he became ever more troublesome to Brewster, although the two never reached the point where they could not discuss their differences. Increasingly during 1967, he concentrated on preaching civil disobedience and supported the young men who turned in their draft cards. When in October he raised the possibility of

declaring Battell Chapel a sanctuary for resisters or the site of a large demonstration of civil disobedience, Brewster said no and called the chaplain before the Yale Corporation. The result was a slap so hard that a less confident man than Coffin would have resigned. Brewster told him that the chapel was University property and thus under control of the Yale Corporation; as chaplain Coffin was a University employee directly responsible to the President and Corporation; and in his role pastor of the Church of Christ at Yale he was responsible to the senior deacons.

Coffin had suggested in a televised debate that young men resisting the draft hold a mass rally to turn in their draft cards. Then he came up with the idea of collecting the draft cards turned in on October 16th and handing them over to the Justice Department around the time of a big march on the Pentagon, scheduled for October 21th.

As October rolled on, Coffin was constantly in the press. He made news on October 13th by meeting with undergraduate leaders and Yale divinity students and asking them to consider turning in their draft cards in Boston. "This was no pressure I put on them," the *Times* quoted him. "It's my job as chaplain to raise issues that are issues. I called them in simply to point out that civil disobedience is a possibility they must face."⁹⁶ That his remarks could be considered disingenuous evidently did not occur to him.

Then, on October 16th, came the Resistance rally - 5,000 strong - on the Boston Common. After the speeches, clergy and Resistance members led the crowd into the Arlington Street Church, where 214 resisters handed their draft cards to Coffin and other clergy, and 67 burned them. (Coffin himself opposed card burning, considering it "an unnecessarily hostile act.") The largest single group of draft cards Coffin brought to the Justice Department came from Yale: approximately 25 from divinity students, 16 from other students, and six from faculty. Because of Coffin, because of Battell Chapel,

and because of Kingman Brewster's principled respect for students' trials of conscience, Yale became the key Northeastern university site for draft resistance.

Three months later Coffin was to experience "the price which society exacts." On January 5th, 1968 he, Dr. Benjamin Spock, Marcus Raskin, Michael Ferber, and Mitchell Goodman were indicted by a Federal grand jury for conspiracy to counsel, aid, and abet draft resistance.

The Boston Five Trial

In May 1968, Boston was the scene of a long-awaited confrontation: Doctor Spock, William Sloane Coffin, Michael Ferber, Mitchell Goodman, and Marcus Raskin faced a trial because of their conspiracy to violate aspects of the draft law. The indictment charged that the defendants conspired to counsel, aid, and abet Selective Service registrants to evade military service and to refuse to carry draft cards, and to interfere with the administration of the Selective Service Act. The factual basis for the government's case is based on the following. On October 2nd, 1967, Raskin, Spock, Coffin, and Goodman, along with a number of others, appeared at a press conference called to announce the "Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority." The Government made no attempt to show what was in fact false, that the defendants had organized the press conference or had agreed on its substance, except to the extent that they agreed that the press conference would make public the "Call to Resist." Each participant in the press conference stated his beliefs with respect to the war and his reasons for associating himself with the "Call to Resist."

The second factual item in the Government's charge was that on October 16, Reverend Coffin and Michael Ferber spoke at the Arlington Street Church in Boston and received draft cards in a ceremony that was

organized by others who were not defendants, as was brought out in testimony that was not contested. Thirdly, on October 20th a group of some 500 people assembled at the Justice Department to transmit to representatives of the Attorney General draft cards collected around the country on October 16th (including some turned over on October 20th). Mitchell Goodman and Reverend Coffin were among those who planned this action. All five of the defendants were present. All except Ferber entered the Justice Department with the various documents that had been collected.

The trial put draft resistance on the front pages of newspapers across the country for three and a half weeks. In this case, the defendants were indicted with conspiring to “counsel, aid and abet diverse Selective Service registrants to neglect, fail, refuse and evade service in the Armed Forces of the United States and all other duties required of registrants under the Universal Military Training and Service Act, to fail and refuse to have in their personal possession at all times their registration certificates (and) valid notices of classification (and conspired to) unlawfully, willfully and knowingly hinder and interfere, by any means, with the administration of the Universal Military Training and Service Act.”⁹⁷

The major criticism of the trial focused on the strategy of the defense. The five defendants looked at the trial as an opportunity to attack the administration’s conduct of the war. Each man made public comments when the indictments came down, and thus the administration was on trial. The defendants wanted a political trial, one in which they would be able to present evidence of the illegal and immoral nature of the Vietnam War, and the defense’s strategies used the trial to score a political victory.

The accused considered three options for their defense: first, they would not address the issues of the war, say that America violated the Geneva Accords or admit that there were war crimes and inequities of the

draft. They would stand mute and take their punishment. This idea resonated more with Coffin and Ferber to whom further civil disobedience appealed on both a religious and a practical basis. "The jury would be instructed to convict the judge would sentence us and we would march out of prison as heroes, with a huge antiwar movement making us into martyrs."⁹⁸

The second option was to declare themselves innocent and then to act as their own lawyers. The third option and the chosen one was to wage a full-scale civil libertarian defense. The reason they chose this option was that they could mount a solid defense to delay further attacks. They admitted that they had given moral and symbolic support to draft resisters, but they said they had never counseled young men to resist the draft.

The third option had exclusive goals: the defendants wanted a political trial where they could present evidence of the immoral and illegal nature of the Vietnam War, but the judge did not allow that. The first two strategies – standing mute and accepting punishment or acting as their own lawyers - were probably the best available options for discrediting the administration. On the other hand, they recognized that there might be some value in winning a civil libertarian victory in which they would undermine the use of conspiracy laws and protect free speech.

The five defendants and the lawyer didn't clarify the objectives, and it was almost impossible to pursue both goals. The decision to abandon the strategy in which the defendants would work as their own lawyers was based on a more civil libertarian assumption that they should not be imprisoned, but it reduced the opportunity of winning political points in the court of public opinion if they were sent to prison as martyrs hurting the administration politically.

Acting individually, The Boston Five decided to have a mix of eclectic lawyers to represent them to avoid being considered part of the conspiracy. Marc Raskin hired the service of Telford Taylor who was the chief American prosecutor in the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal. Dr. Spock hired Leonard Boudin who represented the Cuban government in all litigation with the American government. Rev. Coffin hired James St. Clair who gained notoriety as Richard Nixon's lawyer during the Watergate scandal. Michel Ferber and Mitchell Goodman hired the services of William Homans and Eduard Barshack respectively.

Lawyer Jhon Wall presented the case for the prosecution. During that trial each defendant described their motives and their defense strategies. Rev. Coffin told reporters on NBC that they planned to raise the constitutional legality of the war; but if the government wanted to prosecute them along other lines, they would be prepared to do so.

In the courtroom Judge Ford said that he would not allow the defense to debate the legality of war and the draft. Dr. Spock stated that "Ford was not going to listen to any arguments that the government was wrong about the war." Judge Ford's careful explanation of the indictment in his charge to the jury illustrates very clearly how dangerous a threat to civil liberties the concept of "conspiracy" can be, if the government chooses to make use of it. He charged the jury to determine whether it had been proven "that the defendants had actual knowledge of the alleged conspiracy and its illegal purpose," and joined the conspiracy "with knowledge it was prohibited by law and with a specific intent to violate the law." At the same time he instructed the jury that the beliefs of the defendants with regard to the legality of the war or the constitutionality of the Selective Service Act "must not be considered by you in determining the guilt or non-guilt of the defendants." Hence, without considering their beliefs as to the legality of their actions, the jury was to determine whether the defendants were knowingly violating the law. The

assumption is that the defendants knew they were violating the Selective Service Statute; it is immaterial that the defendants felt they were legally justified in doing so, when legal obligations are considered in a broader context which accommodates the issue of the war's legality.

John Wall presented evidence detailing the acts for which the defendants were indicted. The defendants did not deny the acts; and they used them to get the government's attention, stating that it was not a conspiracy. "The members of a conspiracy don't have to know one another and the conspiracy doesn't have to take place in secret. Each member has to have knowledge of the aims and purposes of the conspiracy and agree with them."⁹⁹ It was enough to convince the jury. On the other hand, the defense presented its arguments. Coffin took the stand first, and his testimony gave the first indication that the court would forbid the defendants to address the larger issues of the antiwar movement. Also, it was clear that the defense's secondary civil libertarian stand would be defeated. Coffin's lawyer asked him why he took part in the October 20th demonstration. He replied that he wanted to show "moral support" for the resisters; secondly, he hoped his actions would "force" the government to prosecute him and others for violation of the Selective Service Act, thus bringing about the trial in which the legality of the war and the draft could be challenged; and thirdly, he hoped that his presence would help the draft resistance movement to "win the hearts and minds of the American people." During the interrogation John Wall emphasized the power of Coffin's words to move young men to commit crimes. Coffin said that he had never considered the power of his speeches to move people to resist the draft. Wall considered that Coffin had presented a bad testimony. Coffin's testimony showed the dangers of changing from a political strategy to a civil libertarian one. The prosecutors charged that through their speeches they were inciting draft resistance, and the defendants

replied that they were only exposing their opinions, exercising their First Amendment rights of free speech.

During the trial Coffin told a reporter of the *New Yorker* “I wanted a trial of stature. I wanted to test the legality of the war and the constitutionality of the Selective Service Act. I wanted a trial that might be a help to selective service conscientious objectors. But this – what is it?”¹⁰⁰

Coffin hoped that his relationship with the draft resistance would reach Americans, including draft-age men who agreed with wrongness of the war. Although the lawyer Wall allowed the defendants to testify about their participation in draft resistance activities, the information filtered through the media did not do much to help them because the media remained largely neutral about the antiwar movements.

Many members of antiwar movements believed that a defense predicated on claiming First Amendment freedoms minimized the importance of civil disobedience to their cause and reduced the friction necessary to sustain their efforts to end the war. The defense created the impression that the defendants were putting aside their principles to avoid conviction.

In closing arguments, the defense lawyers continued pressing the free-speech issue. Goodman’s lawyer Eduard Barshak reminded the jury that the ongoing war in Vietnam had been present in the “atmosphere of this courtroom” throughout the trial, ignoring the judge’s orders regarding the discussion of the legality or morality of the war and the draft. Goodman lawyer, Barshak, asked the jurors to judge the conduct of the defendants against the context of the war and the divisions it created in American society. Michael Ferber finished his closing argument by raising the issue of individual morality and its place in a civil society.

After several hours of deliberation, the jury found William Sloane Coffin, Benjamin Spock, Mitchell Goodman, and Michael Ferber guilty of all charges except counseling draft-age men to turn in their draft cards. No one really expected them to be acquitted, although Ramsey Clark attempted to intervene by urging lawyer Wall to seek only suspended sentences for the four convicted. Judge Ford sentenced them to two years in prison and fined the three older men \$ 5,000 and Ferber \$ 1,000. The convicted men remained defiant, and Ferber, in particular, promised to remain working in the antiwar movement.

The draft resistance movement changed from its original form. The movement turned in new directions, and a new pattern of activism began to develop. The movement did not adopt a strategy of direct action, but it incorporated the war into written and spoken rhetoric. The Boston Five adopted a strategy aimed at civil liberties victories instead of taking a more militant approach. Activists worked for both a draft resistance organization and a worldwide student movement, abandoning more radical confrontational tactics. After the trial's end Coffin received about twenty-five letters a day. His case did not exactly polarize the country, but his correspondents rarely had lukewarm opinions. One writer sent a preprinted circle with crosshairs, under which a paragraph titled "Traitors Beware" suggested the range of people who might be planning to kill the recipient: "Even now two cross hairs are on the back of your necks."¹⁰¹

In July 1969, the appeals court reversed the convictions of Spock and Ferber and ordered a retrial for Coffin and Goodman on the grounds of imprecise instructions to the jury. Coffin's fate remained uncertain. But then the government decided to drop the charges.

Mission to Hanoi

In 1972, the drafts lessened and few American troops remained in Vietnam. At that time, the North Vietnamese decided to release three American prisoners of war (POW). The North Vietnamese delegation in Paris asked Cora Weiss, head of Women Strike for Peace, to gather a small delegation to travel to Hanoi. She asked William Coffin to take part in the delegation. Coffin first thought that the Vietnamese wanted to show their willingness to liberate all prisoners right after the war was over, and then he considered it as a humanitarian act. He was also ready to take part in this mission also because he was tired of the whole affair and fighting Nixon. He wanted to renew his passions for the bomb damage.

During the two-week trip participated in public relations, confrontations and important human contact. They used the attention of the world press to make a strong statement against the war. The delegation saw the enormous destruction of the bombing outside Hanoi. Coffin was personally interested in the interactions between the North Vietnamese and Americans and how they felt about each other. The release of the prisoners had been a complicated process. Hanoi released Lieutenant Markham Gartley, Major Edward Elias and Lieutenant Norris Charles. All three were placed in the custody of Mrs. Weiss and Antiwar Activists David Dellinger, William Sloane Coffin, and Princeton International Law Professor Richard Falk. Even though they were released from prison, the delegation was not immediately allowed to leave Hanoi.

The antiwar escorts said they had agreed with North Vietnam authorities that the return would be made via civilian airlines to avoid possible U.S. military interference. Accordingly, when the delegation finally left Hanoi it headed for Peking and Moscow instead of Laos, where they could be escorted aboard U.S Government planes for the rest of the trip. Mrs. Weiss

and the others believed the military was interfering by escorting the prisoners. In fact, American officials treated the pilots with gentle care all the way home. In Moscow, the American Chargé d'Affaires, Adolph Dubs, met the delegation, issued them new passports, offered overnight accommodations at the ambassador's residence, a medical checkup, and free transportation home. *TIME* Associate Editor Frederic Golden met the prisoners and their escorts. For Coffin the previously planned press conference in Copenhagen was the most important part of the delegation trip. The American Public was anxious to hear the declaration of the three released men. They only said that they supported any policy that could bring prisoners home. None of them made allusion to the damage caused by the American bombing. Then the delegation and the released men flew to New York. About an hour before the plane landed in New York, two U.S. embassy officials from Moscow gave the pilots new uniforms, complete with decorations and name tags. The change caused some dismay among the antiwar escorts, who accused the embassy men of coercion. When the big jet finally touched down at John F. Kennedy airport, and they emerged from the plane all three men were back in military garb. The three POWs testified in the U.S. Senate that their release from Hanoi was conditional on their making antiwar propaganda statements for the delegation, an indication of the regard in which the North Vietnamese held their efforts

Coffin returned with new grief and with a lot of to say about the horror of the war. He realized that apart from those opposing the war, not many really wanted to listen to his testimony. He wrote some articles about the Hanoi mission. He hoped that the prisoner release would afford an opening to change positions on the war. After the Hanoi mission, Coffin preached on the subject of amnesty. He chaired the drafting committee of an interfaith conference for amnesty for opponents and prosecutors of the war. On talk shows he tried to persuade people on the amnesty matter by citing George

Washington's unconditional amnesty to the so-called Whiskey Rebellion. He could not generate much interest in amnesty from important figures such as Billy Graham and William Buckley. At the end, he occasionally talked with Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Coffin remained chaplain of Yale until December 1975, when he retired to become senior minister at the Riverside Church in New York City. In the 1980s he was a leader in the movement against nuclear weapons.

3.3.2 NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Early Political Influence

Peace Action was originally founded as SANE in 1957 by Coretta Scott King, Albert Schweitzer, Dr. Benjamin Spock and others in response to the nuclear arms race and the Eisenhower administration's policies on the production and testing of nuclear weapons. The group's aim was to alert Americans of the threat of nuclear weapons. A full-page advertisement placed in *The New York Times* in November 1957 provoked a nationwide response, and by 1958 the membership of the organization had grown to 25,000. SANE was formally incorporated in July of that year.

For over three decades, prominent men and women such as Dr. Benjamin Spock and Rev. Coffin associated with SANE. They published full-page advertisements, wrote letters, signed petitions, staged impressive rallies, and took to the streets to pressure U.S. leaders and to stop testing, to lessen the risk of nuclear war, and to move toward peace with justice. SANE was at the forefront of liberal nuclear protest movements from the first large American antinuclear rallies of the late 1950's and early 1960's through the organizing of the largest yet demonstration of the Vietnam antiwar movement

in November 1965. It helped to bring about the massive June 1982 disarmament march and rally in New York City. The organization's greatest achievement was the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, halting atmospheric nuclear testing.

The group launched campaigns and rallies to drum up support for its cause and to put pressure on political figures. In 1961, SANE hosted an eight day, 109-mile march from McGuire Air Force Base to the United Nations Plaza that was attended by more than 25,000 people. They organized a rally of over 10,000 people on "Cuba Sunday" to express concern and outrage over the Cuban Missile Crisis. Dr. Spock became a national sponsor and appeared in an ad stating "Dr. Spock is worried." The ad was printed in 700 papers worldwide.

As a way of seeing their goals archived, SANE began working through its political lobbying programs. The organization began by pushing for the election of congressional candidates whose positions reflected those of the organization. In 1966, SANE formed the "Voter's Peace Pledge Campaign" to urge Congressional candidates to work for peace in Vietnam. They became one of the first national organizations to advocate removal of President Lyndon B. Johnson from office. They went on to endorse Eugene McCarthy as the Democratic presidential candidate in 1968.

SANE's Norman Cousins acted as an unofficial liaison between President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev on the Partial Test Ban Treaty negotiations. The organization helped secure the passage of the War Powers Resolution. As the Vietnam War began to escalate, SANE organized a rally at Madison Square Garden that attracted 18,000 people opposing the war, as well as a march on Washington in November 1965 drawing 35,000. Three days after the march, Vice-president Hubert Humphrey met with SANE leaders Dr. Spock, Sanford Gottlieb, and Homer

Jack "to openly, responsibly, and frankly discuss their proposals" to end the war. Many more SANE marches on Washington would occur throughout the war.

SANE would go on to criticize the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and SALT agreements for ignoring offensive strategic weapons. Following Richard Nixon's re-election, SANE advocated Congressional cut-off of funds for the Vietnam War. After the end of the Vietnam War, SANE lobbied to have Congress end the bombing of Cambodia and helped lead a successful effort to pass the War Powers Act. SANE would also take on the military budget and produced the "America Has a Tapeworm" ad. Despite the end of the war, SANE continued actions throughout the 1970s that promoted its purpose.

Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign

William Coffin started a strong nuclear disarmament program at Riverside. Broadening his reach to an international audience, he met with numerous world leaders and traveled abroad. His visits included going to Tehran and to Nicaragua to protest U.S. military intervention there. In 1979, Coffin was one of three American clergymen who, along with a fourth from Algeria, went to Tehran at their own expense to perform Christmas services for hostages being held in the U.S. embassy during the Iran hostage crisis. He also founded an organization of religious leaders calling for the elimination of nuclear arms.

In 1987, Coffin resigned from Riverside Church to pursue disarmament activism full time, saying then that there was no issue more important for a man of faith. In 1989, he became president of SANE/FREEZE. The Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy and the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign (also known as "The Freeze") was the largest peace and justice organization in the United States. The organization's focus was on preventing

the deployment of nuclear weapons in space, thwarting weapons' sales to countries with human rights violations, and promoting a new United States foreign policy based on common security and peaceful resolution to international conflicts. He retired from the organization with the title president emeritus in the early 1990s, and he then taught and lectured across the United States and overseas. He cautioned that we are all living in "the shadow of Doomsday" and urged people to turn away from isolationism and become more globally aware.

During the 1980s, SANE continued to monitor the political and military actions of the U.S. government and beyond. In 1981, The Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign began with the purpose of pressuring the government to stop the nuclear arms build-up. The campaign was initiated by Randall Forsberg's call to "freeze and reverse the nuclear arms race." Many SANE leaders participated in the creation of "The Freeze", as it was sometimes called, which was a grassroots-based confederation of groups spanning the country. Freeze leaders, including Coffin, helped to lead the movement in Congress. The Freeze's grassroots network pushed for nuclear reductions through ballot initiatives in towns and cities across the nation.

Specifically, The Freeze's goal was to get the U.S. and the Soviet Union to simultaneously adopt a mutual freeze on the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons and of missiles, as well as the development of new aircraft designed primarily to deliver nuclear weapons.

During 1982, the SANE political action committee was formed for the political election year. Aside from working to get selected candidates elected it became a driving force behind many proposed nuclear freeze referendums. In a victory for both the Freeze campaign and SANE, Ronald Reagan proposed START I, part of a two phase treaty between the U.S. and the USSR that would reduce overall warhead counts of any missile type.

In roughly the 1983-84 period, when the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign was planning expansively around mass-movement fund raising, lobbying, and Political Action Committees (PACs), SANE was merged into that entity, though local SANE chapters would continue to hold meetings for some time to come. Specific congressional races were targeted, and some of the pro-Freeze candidates credited the movement - and the grass-roots funds it raised - with their success in getting elected, or re-elected, to Congress. From 1984 on, the movement had three actual legal entities, the 'Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign', with both public education and lobbying arms (501.C-3 and 501.C-4 corporations), and the Freeze Voter PAC (501.C-5).

During the 1980s, SANE/FREEZE expanded its work to oppose U.S. military intervention in El Salvador and to end U.S. military aid to the Contras in Nicaragua. The organization promoted its agenda in different ways. An ad was placed in *Variety* magazine signed by over 250 celebrities including Jack Lemmon, Burt Lancaster, James Earl Jones, Sally Field, Shirley MacLaine, and Ed Asner supporting its causes. A weekly radio program by SANE/FREEZE, "Consider the Alternatives", reached 140 radio stations. Their door-to-door canvassing campaign reached 250,000 households.

Nowadays the organization is known as Peace Action. It believes that every person has the right to live without the threat of nuclear weapons, that war is not a suitable response to conflict, and that the United States has the resources to both protect and provide for its citizens. Peace Action's goal is to organize the nation around issues of peace and justice through protests, congressional action, and lobby days. They want our leaders to know that any war, particularly one that involves nuclear weapons, should not be an option.

Coffin's experiences in World War II made him aware of the consequences of using traditional and nuclear weapons. That is why he believed that war as a solution causes all kinds of problems. He believed that

Churches should be involved with issues like the nuclear arms race because only God has the authority to end life on the planet.

Coffin thought that if the US as a world's military superpower did not become serious about disarmament, other nations would also like to have nuclear weapons. He believed that the U.S. needed an international policy about the sale and transfer of weapons, and they needed to put into their budget the formation of an international police force with the troops at the service of a U.N. force. Also, he believed that the U.S. should start the disarmament in their own country and then through this U.N. force monitor and publicize the sale and transfer of weapons in the same way that the slave trade was cut off. This policy would benefit the Americans "if they moderate national sovereignty by accepting disarmament with stringent international inspection, on-site inspection without right of refusal. They would moderate national sovereignty by disarming, with everybody else."¹⁰²

Coffin, along with Martin Luther King, established a connection between war and poverty. He asserted that if all the money went into the military budget, there would be less money available for other things. For instance, industry should be training people for jobs, but there was no money for that.

Coffin also believed that if today religious people started thinking about nuclear disarmament with a quickened sense of conscience, and began to speak out, joining with others in writing, lobbying, and demonstrating, then slowly, surely, the promise of a nuclear-free world would defeat the peril of nuclear war. Peace requires more courage than war, especially when super-patriotism stirs the blood and narrows the mind, constricting the heart.

CHAPTER IV

4. RELIGION AND SOCIETY

Why is an issue social? All issues are social because all human beings are members of communities, and they do not exist in isolation but in relationship. Human beings can be affected by their social worlds in depths of self and community that they do not consciously recognize or articulate easily. The character of a community changes when one person is affected intellectually, emotionally, or behaviorally. Issues are public, and people are aware of them. They also create social consequences on the wellbeing of the society. Issues promote public discussion, and on some social issues the community is deeply and painfully divided. The main agents of division or “culture wars” are sexism, racism, classism, abortion, homosexuality, militarism, and ecological crisis. Coffin preached on all of these issues. When pastors frame sermons to speak to personal needs or issues, the effect of the sermon upon individual listeners affects the social character of the community.

The task of preachers is to help people figure out in every new situation who they are and what they are to do. Coffin’s particular purpose in his Christian preaching was to help the congregation interpret life from the perspective of the gospel. The church used the preacher to help the congregation understand the divine love and call for justice in each and every situation in life. Coffin believed that God seeks a social world in which all relationships are loving and just. The pulpit that is silent on social issues frustrates the purposes of God. Preaching on social issues can enhance the opportunity for all people to know much of God’s love and justice. Such preaching can contribute to the reconstruction of our social worlds.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Protestant pulpits quit being major platforms for just ecclesiastical programs. Preachers like Coffin demanded social and economic justice from influential pulpits in the major cities of the nation. Coffin's pulpit was at Riverside Church. Moreover, preachers were associated with the social gospel movement, and they started using neo-orthodox theological categories to interpret social issues. It was difficult for many preachers to move from giving information about the Bible to interpretation of contemporary life, but not for Coffin. The preachers who made the movement from biblical texts to life tended to do so in individualistic terms under the Enlightenment influence. It was the tendency to direct the sermon to the individual as an individual.

While Coffin preached revealing his moral and ethical position on social issues from the pulpit, a significant number of pastors did not preach on controversial social issues because of fear. They were afraid of losing their jobs, but the major reason for their silence resulted from theological convictions. Pastors believed that discussion of such topics would distress and divide the congregation. Coffin thought that if the Christian community longed to strengthen the sites of God's unconditional love, preachers should help the congregation to understand the issue from the perspective of the gospel.

4 .1 SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CHRISTIANITY

The first demonstrations on civil rights were not protesting against the American way of life as a whole. The demonstrators were only demanding of America what America claimed already to have given. They were claiming rights which presumably had been secured 480 years before. They as well as Coffin believed in America as a "Cradle of Liberty" and as the "Land of Opportunity". So by the 1950s and early 1960s millions of Americans had

concluded that racial segregation violated American religious and humanitarian principles.

For Coffin, law served power because it was a recapitulation of the status quo with which he disagreed. He felt that Christians must understand that the separation of church and state does not separate a Christian from his politics. Therefore, Christians need to be concerned with laws and concerned to elevate people to the level of the law and to not to lower the law to the level of the people. He made a distinction between leftist and right wing politicians. To the leftist social justice and gender equality were morally and constitutionally “center”, but the right wing appealed to the political center by attacking the moral center.

Coffin believed that all men were created equal with inalienable rights, so there was a need for affirmative action to accept African Americans. “Equal Opportunity” only reflected good intentions while affirmative action registered results. He used to say that Americans were harming themselves when they harmed blacks and others. So the decisions to reach a changing society on issues such as peace or war, freedom or totalitarianism, racial equality or discrimination, homophilia or homophobia were political decisions to do justice.

4.1.1 Civil Rights

During the 1960s, many African Americans believed that civil rights should become a national priority. Young civil rights activists brought their cause to the national stage and demanded that the federal government step in and resolve the issue.

Coffin became a prominent figure in the Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s. He was one of the “Freedom Riders,” a group of black and white activists who rode interstate buses in the South to challenge segregation laws.

Many of activists challenged segregation in the South by protesting at stores and schools that practiced segregation. Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired young people to create groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The aims of the Civil Rights Movement were to include racial dignity, economic and political self-sufficiency, and freedom from oppression by whites. The struggle was about far more than just civil rights under law. It was also about fundamental issues of freedom, respect, dignity, and economic and social equality. These groups were non-violent, and they wanted to achieve equality through peaceful demonstrations and sit-ins. They did not use traditional methods of political activity. Instead of voting for a political candidate and then hoping that the elected official would make good policies, these protesters believed in a more direct democracy. They took direct action —public marches, picketing, sit-ins, rallies, petition drives, and teach-ins— to win converts to their causes and change public policies at the local, state, and federal levels.

Background

From the end of the Civil War to the 1960's period, things had not changed at all for black people. They were still prohibited from voting, and a new kind of social injustice appeared called “Racial Segregation.” For instance, by law, public facilities and government services such as education were divided into separate "white" and "colored" domains. Characteristically, those for colored were underfunded and of inferior quality. Also, when white Democrats regained power, they passed laws that made voter registration

more inaccessible to blacks. Black voters were forced off the voting rolls. The number of African American voters dropped dramatically, and they no longer were able to elect representatives. From 1890 to 1908, Southern states of the former Confederacy created constitutions with provisions that disenfranchised most African Americans and tens of thousands of poor white Americans. Exploitation also increased economic oppression of blacks, Latinos, and Asians, including denial of economic opportunities and widespread employment discrimination. Another example was mass racial violence against blacks.

Because of the lack of immediate practical effect, private citizens increasingly rejected gradualist, legalistic approaches as the primary tool to bring about desegregation. African Americans were faced with "massive resistance" in the South by proponents of racial segregation and voter suppression. In defiance, they adopted a combined strategy of direct action with nonviolent resistance known as civil disobedience, giving rise to the African-American Civil Rights Movement of 1955–1968.

4.1.1.2 Civil Rights Acts

In 1946 The Supreme Court declared segregation on buses that crossed state borders illegal, and also President Truman established a Committee on Civil Rights. Four years later discrimination in the Armed Forces was banned.

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court handed down its decision regarding the case called *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, in which the plaintiffs charged that the education of black children in separate public schools from their white counterparts was unconstitutional. The opinion of the Court stated that the "segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact

is greater when it has the sanction of the law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the "Negro group."

After the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, the Supreme Court decided to end segregation. African Americans started to speak out more about their racial opinions. In Montgomery, Alabama, a bus boycott ended with a victory for the African Americans.

The Supreme Court ruled that the Alabama segregation laws were unconstitutional. During the boycott a young African American Baptist minister, Martin Luther King, Jr. became well known. Throughout the long boycott he advised African Americans to avoid violence no matter how badly provoked by whites. Rosa Parks was tired of sitting in the back of the bus and giving up her seat to white men. One weary day she refused to move from the front of the bus, and she became one of history's heroes in the Civil Rights Movement.

The 1957 Civil Rights Act

The 1957 Civil Rights Bill aimed to ensure that all African Americans could exercise their right to vote.

The Bill was introduced in Eisenhower's presidency and was the act that kick-started the civil rights legislative program that was to include the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Eisenhower had not been known for his support of the Civil Rights Movement. Rather than lead the country on the issue, he had to respond to problems such as in Little Rock High School. Nine students had been chosen to attend Central High because of their excellent grades. On the first day of school, only one of the nine students showed up because she did not receive the phone call about the danger of going to school. She was harassed by white protesters outside

the school, and the police had to take her away in a patrol car to protect her. Afterwards, the nine students had to carpool to school and be escorted by military personnel in jeeps.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was born in the presidency of John F. Kennedy after an analysis carried out by the Civil Rights Commission. That Commission showed that 57% of African American housing was judged to be unacceptable. African American life expectancy was 7 years less than whites. African American infant mortality was twice as great as whites. African Americans found it all but impossible to get mortgages from mortgage lenders. Property values would drop a great deal if an African American family moved into a neighborhood that was not a ghetto.

After Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon Johnson did what he politically needed to do to stop the full implementation of the 1957 Civil Rights Act. Despite the fact he was a Texan, he realized that a major civil rights act was needed to advance African Americans within USA society. He also used the shock of Kennedy's murder to push forward the 1964 Civil Rights Act, part of what he was to term his vision for America - the "Great Society."

The 1954 Civil Rights Act gave the federal government the right to end segregation in the South, prohibiting segregation in public places. This act tried to cover every aspect that some lawyer might use to avoid implementing it. An Equal Employment Commission was created to make sure federal funding would not be given to segregated schools. These had been banned in 1954, ten years previous. Many historians now believe that the 1964 Civil Rights Act was of major importance to America's political and social development.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act

President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 on August 6th, 1965. The 1965 act suspended poll taxes, literacy tests and other subjective voter tests. It authorized Federal supervision of voter registration in states and individual voting districts where such tests were being used. African Americans who had been barred from registering to vote finally had an alternative to filing lawsuits against local or state courts. If voting discrimination occurred, the 1965 act authorized the Attorney General of the United States to send Federal examiners to replace local registrars. Johnson reportedly expressed his concern to associates that signing the bill had lost the white South for the Democratic Party for the foreseeable future. The act had an immediate and positive impact for Blacks.

African Americans gaining the power to vote changed the political landscape of the South. When Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, only about 100 African Americans held elective office, all in northern states of the U.S. By 1989, there were more than 7,200 African Americans in office, including more than 4,800 in the South. Nearly every Black Belt county (where populations were majority black) in Alabama had a black sheriff. Southern blacks held top positions within city, county, and state governments. Also, in 1967 State laws forbidding inter-racial marriage were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

4.2 SOCIAL INTERVENTION

During the 1960's and early 1970's, Reverend William Sloane Coffin, Jr. occupied the pulpit. He brought to the chapel a strong sense of social and political understanding, coupled with a remarkable ability to communicate his positions on civil rights and antiwar sentiments. At Yale and Riverside Churches Coffin found a platform for his political ideology.

He served as chaplain at Yale University for eighteen years and rose to prominence during the 60s and 70s as a leader in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements. Coffin became one of the best known and most controversial figures not only against the war, but also in the Civil Rights Movement and the campaign for a freeze on nuclear weapons. Throughout his life, Coffin preached that social justice was central to Christianity.

4.2.1. SEGREGATION AND DISCRIMINATION

Coffin led a group of students from Operation Crossroads Africa to Guinea, and the trip was beneficial for the group. American and civil rights issues pervaded their experience. Also they faced questions about the “Americans racial” situations. The trip stimulated Coffin’s interest in this issue.

Coffin started preaching on civil rights. He took advantage of the invitations he frequently received from educational institutions to bring up the issue. Coffin used his rhetorical gifts to charge ahead, inspiring the Civil Rights Movement with a new phase, nonviolent “direct action.”

There were two reasons why Coffin decided to join the Freedom Ride. The first reason was the testimony of a black student about the sit-in at the Greensboro lunch counter. Five black students sat down on the empty stools at the segregated lunch counter. A crowd started to gather outside. When the student saw the police, he was relieved; but suddenly they disappeared. The angry crowd came in and the students were cursed, thrown on the floor and kicked. Some of them were burned with cigarettes. Then the police arrested the five students for disturbing the peace. At the jail the police hit them some more, and to make it worse the black student’s mother told him that “Good negroes don’t go to jail.” Coffin was witness to many abuses against black people.

Secondly, The Black Panther trial caught Coffin's attention. The State charged Bobby Seale, founder and national chairman of the Black Panther Party, with conspiracy to kidnap and murder Alex Rackley. At that time the Black Panthers' growth and their call for violent action against racist institutions made the Party a subject of investigations by local and federal law enforcement agencies. A victim of the resulting paranoia among some Party members, Alex Rackley was murdered by fellow Panthers who suspected him of being an informant. On May 1st, 1970 (May Day), some 15,000 Black Panther Party members and their supporters came to New Haven to protest the trial. Yale opened its gates to the crowds, and many students joined the protest. At a meeting with Yale faculty and administrative officers, Kingman Brewster said he was skeptical of the ability of black revolutionaries to achieve a fair trial anywhere in the United States. The trial lasted for many months; and after five days of deliberation, the jury deadlocked, and the case was declared a mistrial.

Coffin struggled for the right attitude toward this trial. On it he said that going forward with the trial might be "legally right but morally wrong."¹⁰³ Coffin proposed a non-violent march from Battell Chapel to the courthouse on May Day, where marches could engage in civil disobedience and submit to prearranged arrest. He again made news. During an interview he said that his intent seemed fairly good but much later he realized that his "legally right but morally wrong" formulation was flip. It was because there were a lot of people who felt that Coffin was a bad influence and that the march was against a more militant stand.

After the Black Panthers were released, Coffin partly canceled the march to avoid an inflammatory situation. He played a key role in trying to plan a peaceful weekend. He organized a Monitoring Committee to meet all the people interested in the issue on "May Day." On that date, the rallies developed with normalcy. Some less pacific groups were controlled with tear

gas. Coffin stayed through the weekend, helping to defuse tensions. After the meeting, he rejoiced at the victory of the nonviolent march. Although many radicals did not like Coffin's religious and moral language, they thought that he drew students away from the suggestion of revolution and confrontation. He made of Battell Chapel the spiritual and moral center of the Yale community.

Freedom Ride

Coffin and other chaplains considered the idea of publicly refusing invitations to speak at private schools with no Negro students. When he tried to raise this possibility, the headmaster of The Masters School accused Coffin of using shocking tactics that bordered on the irresponsible because it would cause youngsters a sense of frustration about an issue that was outside their control.

A group of thirteen Freedom Riders set out on May 4, 1961, from Washington, D.C., to travel by bus all the way to New Orleans. On Saturday, May 13th outside Anniston, Alabama, an armed mob destroyed one of their buses and beat the Freedom Riders. The bus riders were also beaten by the local Ku Klux Klan, and the police did nothing. The next day the Freedom Ride became an international cause célèbre. It forced Kennedy administration to guarantee the riders' safety.

Coffin followed closely Martin Luther King's nonviolent tactics through the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). During the constant attacks against the riders, Coffin and his friend John Maguire kept considering the idea of doing something to join to the cause. Since John knew Martin Luther King fairly well, they were very interested in the Freedom Ride strategy. Soon Coffin and Maguire, inspired by the power of King's words and by his ability to translate them into action, decided to organize their "bus riding." They would be the

first respectable northern whites to join the Freedom Rides movement. They recruited southern important people to integrate the group and to fly to Atlanta to board a bus for Montgomery. Just after the formation of the group, Coffin received a call from Burke Marshall, the head of the Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department, trying to persuade him to give up the “bus riding” idea. But Coffin decided to continue with his plans. So after a speech at Yale, Coffin and the Maguire brothers flew to Atlanta. The group was small composed by four whites and three blacks.

At the Atlanta airport the group was met by two representatives of Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The next morning the group started the hard journey toward Ralph Abernathy’s house in Montgomery. At the beginning, while they were escorted by a trooper, there were no problems in Georgia while. At the Alabama border, however, the trooper disappeared, and there was an armed crowd waiting for them. Fortunately, the bus driver escaped from the angry mob, and they could continue their way. The group disembarked in Montgomery, Alabama, where they were surrounded by a large crowd of hostile white residents held back by local police and the National Guard. After twenty minutes, Ralph Abernathy picked them up. They were escorted to the black district of Montgomery. Coffin and his group stayed at Abernathy’s house for four days, where he could meet Martin Luther King and shared their positions and purposes.

President Kennedy was about to meet with Premier Kruschev, and he was afraid to be embarrassed with those demonstrations and internal affairs. So when the first Freedom Riders group arrived in Mississippi, they were jailed. Also, the administration stated that Coffin’s group represented a distressing change in the composition of the protesters and accused them of stirring up unnecessary trouble. “Once the Freedom Rides started attracting

‘respectable’ northern whites, other mainstream liberals and religious leaders might join them.”¹⁰⁴

For all these reasons Burke Marshall asked for a cooling-off period until there was a return to “normalcy.” This angered the riders; and they said that if a normalcy meant a return to injustice, they would go ahead. Coffin’s group was again escorted to the bus depot; but before they could leave the depot, they were arrested. The group spent two days in jail. Coffin’s high bail was raised by his Yale friends. When they were released, Coffin offered a full page interview to the *Life* magazine and returned to Yale. After the arrest, Robert Kennedy, annoyed with the cooling-off period violation, announced the withdrawal of Federal Marshals from Alabama.

Coffin hoped to encourage the raising of more voices in the South. He explained that he opposed the cooling-off period because he did not believe that only blacks should make concisions. Also he believed that a cooling-off period just would return blacks to the promise of a fairer future. Coffin’s philosophical position “seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue.”¹⁰⁵

The moral power of the first riders reached into the halls of power, changing the White House’s political calculus. Some months later, Kennedy declared “all seating in buses would be without reference to race; color, creeds, and all carriers would have to have that sign in the buses...in all the terminals. The ‘colored’ and ‘white’ signs had to come down at the fountains and at the restrooms.”¹⁰⁶

After the Freedom Ride, Coffin received many nasty correspondences from people who disagreed with his unconventional behavior and attitudes. They thought it was not a Chaplain's business. Coffin became the most controversial person at Yale, and the most controversial white minister in the country. Papers accused him of causing more trouble in their country especially, where he did not belong. Moreover, many were offended and angry that a representative of Yale University had inflamed a complex situation. Luckily, Coffin received the support of Whitney Griswold, Yale's President. "Griswold stated that Coffin acted in response to his convictions as a Christian and the promptings of his conscience as an ordained minister of his faith to make personal public testimony to those convictions..."¹⁰⁷

On the other hand, Coffin also received supporting letters from the Yale alumni. Some students and professors believed that Coffin's labor had taken Yale to a new transformation. His restlessness and courage had successfully forced civil rights issues into the forefront of debate at Yale, a leading American university.

4.2.2 SEXISM

Sexism is known as the discrimination of gender. It was a very big problem in history and still exists today. It started a long time ago, but the term "sexism" was created recently. The religions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism all have produced cultures in which males rule. Before the 20th century all types of rights were only available to males. For example, women could not vote, had limited rights to property, and were usually subject to their fathers or husbands.

The first feminists emerged during the early 20th century and were dedicated to obtain for women the legal rights that men took for granted. Women were becoming involved in the Civil Rights Movement. For instance, in 1963 a journalist named Betty Friedman wrote a book called The Feminine Mystique which challenged the notion that women could only be mothers or wives.

From the 1960s the women's liberation movement campaigned for women's rights, including the same pay as men, equal rights in law, and the freedom to plan their families. Their efforts were met with mixed results. Issues commonly associated with notions of women's rights include, though are not limited to: the right to bodily integrity and autonomy, to vote (universal suffrage), to hold public office, to work, to fair wages or equal pay, to own property, to education, to serve in the military, to enter into legal contracts, and to have marital, parental and religious rights.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

In 1964 race discrimination in employment was banned, and The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was set up to enforce the law. It was created on July 2, 1965, and directed by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Its charge was to prohibit employment discrimination. Unexpectedly legislators amended a bill that banned sex discrimination in employment. After the EEOC ignored many charges of sex discrimination in employment,

women created the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. Betty Friedman led the organization, which urged the end of sexism.

National Organization for Women (NOW)

The National Organization for Women (NOW) was created in 1966 with the purpose of bringing about equality for all women. NOW was one important group that fought for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). This amendment stated that “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex.” But there was disagreement on how the proposed amendment would be understood. Supporters believed it would guarantee women equal treatment. But critics feared it might deny women the right be financially supported by their husbands. The amendment died in 1982 because not enough states had ratified it. ERAs have been included in subsequent Congresses but have still failed to be ratified.

The purpose of NOW was to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society at that time, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men. They believed that the time had come to confront, with concrete action, the conditions that prevented women from enjoying the equality of opportunity and freedom of choice which was their right, as individual Americans and as human beings. NOW was dedicated to the proposition that women, first and foremost, are human beings who, like all other people in society, must have the chance to develop their fullest human potential. The organization believed that women could achieve such equality only by accepting the full challenges and responsibilities they shared with all other people in society. Women should be considered part of the decision-making mainstream of American

political, economic, and social life. NOW gave birth to the Women's Liberation Movement.

Women's Liberation Movement

The 1970's marked a period of time when the women of the United States joined together to protest the injustices in the American Society. While The Movement actually began in the late 1960's, membership and unity increased drastically in the early 1970's. Membership in NOW increased its numbers from 1,200 in 1967 to 48,000. These large numbers of women, divided into many subgroups, from the mainstream organization NOW to more radical groups like Witch (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy From Hell), fought to improve many facets of society; job inequalities, public offices, childcare, abortion, the economic system, independence, the media, gender stereotypes, and sexist oppression. In contrast, a great deal of the men in the '70's society had a reaction to the Movement that was not positive. The negative reactions to the Movement can be explained by many men's fear and hatred toward the changes the women of the Movement were trying to make. There were a lot of men out there who hated the idea of women working, especially in jobs outside the traditional service and clerical fields, and who hated the wider changes of which working women were a part.

During the late 1970's and with the arrival of undergraduate women, the Yale campus turned on male-female issues; the male-female ratio, integration of women into a previously all-male institution, sexuality, and the ordination of women. Coffin was considerably less engaged by the women's movement than he had been by the war on civil rights. He grew up in a more masculine time and found it hard to incorporate feminism into his style and his work. Three years later, from the pulpit Coffin began to make changes by including women in his sermons more often. He believed that men needed to develop more of the so-called feminine virtues. For Coffin, vulnerability was a

great virtue that men could learn from women. Without this virtue there could be neither honesty nor intimacy. Women were more likely to show concern for peace and fear of war than men because of their social conditioning to focus on the human and personal. Churches also would profit enormously from women entering the ministry. He asserted that the presence of women had changed Yale for the better.

The ordination of women was a controversial issue in religions where either the rite of ordination or the role that an ordained person fulfills has traditionally been restricted to men because of cultural prohibitions or theological doctrines. A key theological doctrine for most Protestants was the priesthood of all believers. The notion of a priesthood reserved to a select few was seen as an Old Testament concept, inappropriate for Christians. Prayer belongs equally to all believing women and men. What interested Coffin at this point was the concrete quality in women's caring. It was what made women such natural pastors. He thought that as long as women clergy were pastoral, their male parishioners would tend to accept and even deeply appreciate them.

Coffin came to admire Anne Bennet for being a fierce feminist as well as wife and mother. According to Coffin, she became indispensable for women who, through her, learned of their own neglected dignity. She was also indispensable to men who, like Coffin himself, read what she had to say. Anne became indispensable to the Church because she knew that religious tradition did not preclude the Church having something in its future that it never had in its past. She also never separated God's consolation from God's truth. Anne Bennet's virtues inspired Coffin to support women's ordination. He believed that the Church life would become increasingly warm, communal, and egalitarian. After the second wave of feminism, mainstream Protestant

churches increasingly took for granted a moderate commitment to women's equality. Presbyterians dropped barriers to ordination in 1956. Student bodies at seminaries of liberal Protestantism were rapidly transformed. That is why, by 1970, many Protestant women were ordained, although the Vatican continued to argue against the ordination of women. Males and females approached parity in pursuing degrees in religious education.

Coffin made a call to men, saying that they owed apologies to women because they married women and charmed women, but they never took women as seriously as they took themselves. He said that men have to become aware that the true test of sexism occurred less at the workplace than at home. This means that the crudest discrimination against women occurred in families. Women are physically abused, and the domestic drudgery and child caring are not justly shared.

Coffin defined himself as a "recovering chauvinist," explaining that "when I was young, women taught in grammar school and in high school but rarely in universities. They were nurses yet hardly ever doctors. They were secretaries but seldom law partners; even fewer were clergy. In short, the world of my youth was extremely sexist. As I grew older, I loved women, was charmed by them and even managed to charm a few myself, but rarely did I consider women's lives as important as those of men. I must have been middle-aged before I came to see a feminist as a woman who refused to be masochistic. Since then, I've considered myself at best a recovering chauvinist; like a river I still carry some of the silt of my past."¹⁰⁸

For Coffin, women were aware that ever since the human race began, misogyny –male fear and hatred of women- has been present. Misogyny served to

instruct men in those feelings toward an enemy that served as the enabling mechanisms for the legal mayhem, rape, and murder. He realized that the antidote to misogyny was really androgyny which meant the recognition that to some degree all human beings are both feminine and masculine.

The sex role separation produced an “intimate enemy.” Women struggled to maintain their individuality. The battle between sexes took place not only in intimate relationships, but within each human being. The sense of frustration at having been cut off from a whole range of human characteristics is inevitable, limiting socialization into sex differences. As Coffin said frequently “The women most in need of liberation is the woman in every man.”¹⁰⁹

4.2.3 ABORTION

At what point, if at any, can born life be called human? This question is the platform used to debate the law and morality of abortion, and it is used by Coffin to defend his position about this issue.

Abortion is certainly a medical procedure, but is it a medical question? If science is in no position to decide when in a womb natural life becomes human, so science is not in position to decide that unborn life is never human. That is a moral judgment, in Coffin’s view, to make the value of a fetus solely dependent on whether or not the mother wants it. He argued that, to be sure, a fetus is part of a woman’s body, but it is also not part of a woman’s body if a man participated in its origin, and its destiny is to live on its own. How can it

be considered merely a woman's property, like an ear, and its removal no different from the removal of any other tissue of a woman's body?

Coffin's answer is that science can provide an answer to the question above. Science can tell us when a heart starts beating, as it can when a brain has stopped functioning. But science cannot tell us when it is morally right to cease all artificial supports for a dying person because science is not in a position to declare, "This is no longer a human being." It is the business of science to provide the facts of natural life, not values of human life. In other words, when human life ends and when human life begins are moral mysteries and as such cannot be proven or disproven. Some every religious people hold that an unborn child is from the very first day is a child. There are other equally serious religious people who disagree. No less a figure than Saint Tomas Aquinas 700 years ago believed that a fetus had to be "ensouled" before it was considered a human being. Thus, from the Middle Ages to modern times, abortion in the early weeks of pregnancy was generally not viewed as taking a life.

Thomas Aquinas totally condemned abortion for any and all reasons. He did question when the soul was created since at that time the scientific knowledge was not as advanced as today. He believed that a male child was not fully enough developed to be judged human and therefore to have a soul until forty days of pregnancy and that the female fetus could not be judged fully human until eighty days of pregnancy. Aquinas' conclusions were the best that could be expected in his days. While not applicable today, they are of historical significance.

On the other hand, according to Tertullian, "a person who is ever going to be a person is one already because the fruit is already in the seed." Personally,

Coffin turned to the Tertullian theory because he believed that an unborn child is a child from the very start. Once fertilization is complete, the living entity is genetically human, deserving protection and defense. It seemed to him the crowning glory of Christian ethics.

According to the public laws, Coffin's position was more compelled by Tomas Aquinas. For instance, a Missouri law called a fertilized egg a human being "with all the rights privileges, and immunities available to persons, citizens and residents of this state."¹¹⁰

Coffin believed that the laws are not enough to stop the problem of allowing women to make a decision that can be considered moral malice murder. He said that it would be better for governments and legislators to promote a project to make people conscious about contraception methods and family planning. People could then avoid the decision of who will live, who will die, and who will decide. He also criticized the position of people who preach the sanctity of even unwanted pregnancies and the attack on nutrition programs for pregnant women, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

Coffin discussed abortion not because it is a complex, controversial, and pressing problem but because for him it is an unyielding dilemma. It is a dilemma that yields but a little, and only to those who accord it the respect due on unyielding dilemma. He considered the phrase "... sanctify of life" which can be evoke in favor of fetal rights, in favor of the right to self-determination on the part of the mother, and in favor of the human species, right to survival, threatened as we seem to be by overpopulation. "God forbid the taking of innocent life." Or "we cannot play God."¹¹¹ He said that God himself does not play God, as the phrase is generally understood.

Gods does not intervene in our affairs as the primary murderer's pistol, sitting behind every steering wheel, and smoking every cigarette. Of course we cannot play God, but we also cannot pretend we ourselves are without choice, without responsibility, mere passive victims of whatever befalls us.

Coffin said that God wants us to affirm and protect life, more and more of it. God must have been pleased with the social consciousness that finally grew sufficiently sensitive to abolish slavery. God must be pleased today with our long-overdue recognition of the rights of women, the rights of the parishioner, soldiers, poor people, children, even whales.

On the criminalization of abortion Coffin asserted that there was a real problem in calling a crime something a great many people do not even consider a sin. To criminalize it would not of itself instill a sense of the sanctity of prenatal life. He considered that only education could do that, and a state-enforced anti-abortion policy could have the pro-life consequences that the pro-life movement claimed. Also, that policy would only reduce the number of abortions and be satisfying to the pro-lifers making thoughtful religious people anti-abortion and pro-choice.

Coffin as a canon lawyer thought that the criterion for a good law is its enforceability. That was precisely why, after they proved unenforceable, the prohibition laws of the 1920 were finally repealed in 1934. On the other hand, a national anti-abortion law would also create a small army of quack practitioners; and it would cruelly penalize legitimate physicians trying, according to their own lights, to be humane as well as law-abiding. It would create extortionists "shaking down" both legitimate and illegitimate practitioners. Most of all, it would bring great suffering to innumerable women, mostly poor women. Many wish more unmarried women would

consider, rather than having an abortion, bearing their children and giving them up for adoption. But that is asking a lot when a moral stigma attaches itself to both the mother and her baby in many an illegitimate birth. The ancient Romans changed the legal definition of an illegitimate child from a child “of the people,” a child belonging to everyone. It would certainly reduce the number of abortions if in all our minds we made the same conceptual change and also expanded maternity leave and child-care opportunities. Because human beings cannot agree on a moral definition of unborn life, abortion will remain a moral dilemma, “...the worst thing we can do with a dilemma is to resolve it prematurely because we haven’t the courage to live with uncertainty.”¹¹² *Passion for the possible* (74) People will remain divided, focusing either on the fetus as an object of value or on the woman as a moral agent who must have freedom of choice.

Coffin, however, argued that contraception poses much less of a problem. If we would improve methods of contraception, and through religious and secular education, raise our standards of moral responsibility, the day might come when abortion would no longer be the heart-wrenching social issue it is today, for the simple reason that it would rarely any longer be necessary. “... Whether it is taking or preventing life –whichever our belief- abortion remains at best a mournful undertaking.”

Further, to outlaw abortion would only reduce the number of legal abortions, not the total number of abortions. And it is the poor who would be forced to seek out more dangerous alternatives. The two countries with the lowest abortion rates in the world are Belgium and the Netherlands, where abortion is totally legal, but where society takes seriously its support for the poor. In short, on this painful issue Coffin remained pro-choice, pro-women’s choice.

The moral position of the Catholics remains that they recognized the less of two evils. They know that to legalize abortion means more legal

abortions. But it also means fewer deaths of women from illegal abortions. Father Grinan has suggested the removal of abortion from the field of legislation, provided there is an understanding that Catholic doctors would not be forced to perform operations to which they are conscientiously opposed. Coffin tried to suggest that the right of life of a fetus from the moment of contraception is to narrow a basis for determining the morality of abortion. Such a view does not differentiate sufficiently between biological and human life, between potential and actual life; but it leaves out altogether the question of life in an unconvincing manner.

Coffin considers one more statement: "whether or not to have an abortion is a medical question to be decided, like all other medical questions, by the patient and her doctor."

It has been said that a woman's right to an abortion is an absolute right. Whether that means a legal or a moral right is not always clear. What is clear is that, whether legal or moral, an absolute right – one right taken out of a framework of all other rights – is what causes the debate. What is the opposite of a profound truth? Another profound truth, what's the opposite of a human right? Another human right. These are genuine dilemmas; and as Coffin said, the worst thing we can do with a dilemma is to resolve it prematurely because we haven't the courage to live with uncertainty. On this issue, as on the homosexual issue, he thought we have to listen and think and read, pray hard, and reason together, all of us.

Coffin also said that he was looking forward to the day when technology would be so advanced and society so enlightened as to make abortion unnecessary. In the meantime "abortion is a nasty thing, but our

society deserves it." If people follow Father Drinan's line of reasoning, Coffin thinks we may reach widely acceptable legal position. It is the women themselves who have to make the decision whether or not to have an abortion. In other words the legal question is relatively clear to him. But the moral question – under what circumstances to have an abortion – appears to Coffin a complicated one. As to the question at what point, if at any stage, can unborn life be called human he did not have the answer. He believed that in God's words there are mysteries known only to God. We may be God's own people, but we shouldn't play God.

4.2.4 HOMOPHOBIA

Homophobia is discrimination against homosexual people. It comes up in many places and in many ways. Many times it is not intended or people display homophobia without realizing it: for example, in some cases, when people say "That's so gay!" Sometimes people are homophobic because of their religion: they believe that their God or laws say that homosexuality is wrong.

Like many other kinds of discrimination homophobia is often caused by false education or ignorance. Many people do not understand that homosexuals are normal people who simply chose to love or are attracted to people of the same gender.

Like Coretta Scott King said, "Homophobia is like racism and anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry in that it seeks to dehumanize a large group of people, to deny their humanity, their dignity and personhood."¹¹³ In George Weinberg's words, "The roots of homophobia are fear. Fear and more fear."¹¹⁴ Stereotypes have been created, such as the common thought that gay men are extremely feminine and lesbian women are more masculine than heterosexual women. Some people claim

they can tell if someone is gay and others say that gay people make them uncomfortable or scared. Though these people do not intend to be harmful or even know that they are being discriminatory, they still are.

Inevitably, in a homophobic society many people feel uncomfortable with displays of same-sex affection. But their comfort is not the issue. At issue is the discomfort of gays and lesbians who for years have been isolated, silenced, abused, and killed. The image of Matthew Shepard hanging on a Wyoming fence still burns in many American minds and hearts.

Coffin had much to say about this issue because in that time many cases of homophobic behavior were experienced in different fields. In one of his lectures, "Homophobia: The Last Respectable Prejudice," he confronts homophobia for two reasons. The first is that many people struggle to live with diversity. He said that the only hope for the world is for people to find community in diversity, and that for America the gay agenda has largely replaced the Communist threat as the battering ram of reactionary politics. Instead of a "Commie" behind every bush, there is a gay person sick and sinful. The second reason is that while the Church has generally given the last support to the oppressed, in the case of homosexuals the Church has lead in the oppression.

Sometimes people say that it is just a matter of how we interpret Bible texts, but it is more than that. The journey to ending slavery saw people quoting the Bible for and against; but it became a much bigger struggle. Coffin believed that somehow a mood swept the world, gradually impacting people's minds and hearts that told them slavery was wrong. The same was true of the ordination of women to the priesthood and the remarriage of divorcees in the Catholic Church. People in the church began to see that their attitude was not in touch with Jesus, the Lord of the Church.

Fear has led to a number of silly arguments that end up with people separating from each other, like those who tell us that women should not be

ordained as priests because Jesus only chose men. Coffin questioned the Church about this issue and invited the bishops to check their work in teaching about it because he said that they are facing the wrong direction, causing much suffering and prompting countless seekers to say, “If this is religion we’re better off without it.”¹¹⁵

Homosexuality was not a big issue for biblical writers, and nowhere in the four Gospels is it even mentioned; although there are verses in the Old Testament that forbid or deplore homosexual behavior. For Christians, the problem is not how to reconcile homosexuality with the scriptural passages that condemn it, but how to reconcile the rejection and abuse of homosexuals with the love of Christ. Coffin asked himself the following: If people can show the tenderness and constancy in caring that honors Christ’s love, what matter their sexual orientation? A relationship should be judged by its inner worth rather than by its outer appearance?

Coffin believed that Christians need to develop an interpretive theory of Scripture. “I’m sure that no word of God is God’s last words.”¹¹⁶ Coffin thinks that the love of Jesus is indeed the plumb line by which everything is to be measured. And while laws may be more rigid, love is more demanding, for love insists on motivation and goes between, around, and way beyond all laws. The Bible, after all, is the foundational document for all churches the world around, but if people take the Bible seriously, they cannot take all of it literally. People do not honor the higher truth they find in the Bible by ignoring truths found elsewhere. He believed Christians should be impressed by the fact that in 1973 the American Psychological Association declared homosexuality as having no signs of illness.

Coffin was a strong believer in traditions, but he felt that Church doctrines were not immune to error and tradition is no oracle. People have always tried both to recover tradition and to recover from it. People know that the Roman Catholic Church repudiates violent forms of homophobia. But to deplore the violence while continuing to proclaim the ideas that undergird it strikes thoughtful people as

hypocritical. The teaching of the Church sanctifies the denigration of gays and lesbians.

Gays are natural enemies because of the personal revulsion many straights feel about gay sexual behavior. Coffin thought that sex was dynamite and that people should recognize the power of involuntary attraction. No one should be blamed for feeling revulsion because it is normal in a homophobic society like this. What is essential is to recognize the cultural source of this revulsion and not to act in ways that hurt others.

Coffin argued against the religious right because of its cruelty and its ignorance. He said that ignorance stems from self-righteousness and complacency; and it is an ethical, not an intellectual default. Homophobia represents a completely rational fear of sexuality, divorced from reproduction and justified by pleasure alone. If true, heterosexuals are caught between longing for more freedom and fear of losing a more orderly and virtuous, if more repressed, world. Were that the case, then straight people opposed to what they perceive as gay promiscuity should be supporting same-sex unions.

Coffin contradicted what straight people say about gays and lesbians being responsible for their failures in straight relationships. They believe that gays threaten to destroy heterosexual marriages; and they do not realize that fidelity depends on each member of the couple, and it could happen because of some other reason that only the couple know. These people hide their responsibility by blaming gay people. On the other hand, he disagreed with the assumption that straight people are not comfortable with same-sex marriages. He said that the problem is that it is not easy to change their thoughts. "Straight people should sit down quietly and compare our own discomfort with the discomfort of gays and lesbians who for years have been excluded, silenced, abused and even killed."¹¹⁷

When Coffin attended a conference at Pomona College where his former colleague at Yale, Bailey, was invited as a consultant for adult choirs; the invitation

was based on his musical credentials as chairman of the college's music department and former music director at Pasadena Presbyterian Church. Coffin threatened to cancel his appearance at the conference because the organizers decided to cancel Bailey's presentation because he was director of the Gay Men's Chorus. Bailey said that these kinds of things happen all the time and he decided to do nothing about it, but then he resolved to ask Coffin for help in appealing the decision.

According to Bailey and others, Coffin told fellowship leaders that he would not take part unless Bailey was retained. In addition, Coffin suggested that since he wanted to do a service focused on AIDS, the Gay Men's Chorus should be invited to sing. Bailey accepted Coffin's suggestion. "Once the issue was resolved, I have felt nothing but warmth and interest in who we are and how we make music." Bailey said.

The 140-member chorus --appearing at half-strength because of vacations-- sang five songs, including "Ave Maria." After its closing song, the tuxedo-dressed chorus received a standing ovation from about 900 delegates and visitors in the Claremont United Church of Christ Congregational. The only discordant note came from the nondenominational Choristers Guild, who withdrew its customary co-sponsorship of the national conference.

The United Methodist Reporter said that correspondence between guild and fellowship officials showed that guild directors were willing to co-sponsor only if the Gay Men's Chorus was not identified as such in printed programs or by word of mouth. The newspaper said some guild directors were concerned that its conference sponsorship would imply approval of homosexuality.

Although Coffin declined to comment specifically on the controversy, he told a conference workshop that "homophobia" is "a thorn in the flesh of the United Methodist Church" and that the church in general "is behaving disgracefully" in reaction to homosexuals. From the pulpit during the worship service, Coffin suggested -to much less applause than the chorus received -that both state and church should extend their official benefits and blessings to stable, loving gay and lesbian couples.

Coffin declared that homosexual communities in major cities have taken the lead in providing resources and support to AIDS sufferers. Outside homosexual circles, "people have been acting out their fears based on misinformation," he said. "God is warning us all again that the cost of ignoring truth is higher than the pain of seeing it," he added.

Another example of homophobic discrimination was the refusal of NBC and CBS to air a TV ad by the United Church of Christ (UCC), which is a mainline, Protestant denomination of 1.3 million members who gather in some 6,000 congregations across the country. There was nothing unseemly or hateful about the ad; quite the contrary. In effect, it said that there are no outsiders to a God who created all humankind, and as Christ himself was the soul of hospitality, a faithful church strives to be inclusive. Pictured among a variety of people who had been hurt by exclusion were two men walking hand in hand.

Coffin said that NBC and CBS were guilty not only of censorship but also of insensitivity to considerable suffering. No doubt, the networks feared a right-wing backlash. He argued that it is true that leaders of the Religious Right repudiate violent forms of homophobia. But to deplore the violence, while continuing to proclaim the ideas that undergird it, strikes thoughtful people as hypocritical. Seeds

of disrespect all too often blossom into hatred and violence. He said that the UCC properly implied that millions of American Christians are at odds with the Christian Right. They know that the Biblical book of Leviticus forbids homosexual relations. They are also aware that the same book condemns barbecued ribs and Monday Night Football for it is “toevah” – an abomination – not only to eat pork but merely to touch the skin of a dead pig. “In reality, there are no biblical literalists, only selective literalists. By abolishing slavery and ordaining women, millions of Protestants have gone far beyond biblical literalism. It is time we did the same for homophobia.”¹¹⁸

CONCLUSION

William Sloane Coffin Jr. was, after Martin Luther King Jr., the most influential civil rights and antiwar campaigner, as well as a liberal Protestant in America. He sought to inspire and encourage an idealistic and rebellious generation of college students, between the early 1960's and the end of the twentieth century. Protestants constituted a majority of American Christians during this period, but only by combining liberal and conservative denominations.

Martin Luther King conquered the liberal religious field for years by leading the greatest movements and winning significant preeminence: but Coffin's effect was more varied, consistent, and less transcendental. His personality, his perception about Christianity, and his often ingenious enthusiasm were felt by millions of Americans, even on Television. He was well-known because of his controversial public stands at Yale and at Riverside Church, as well as his public appearances.

Coffin based his ideas on his clear assumption about political positions, and on his Christian faith, defending his actions which were the subject of controversy. He used some of his actions to explain to his critics the fundamental, unimpeachable principles of the war by sending medical supplies to North Vietnam and celebrating Christmas with the Americans in Iran. He believed that it was a more important Christian act than worrying that the antiwar movements might be using him. He created situations where people would be forced to rethink their beliefs about the war, for example. He

used his position in the heart of the American establishment to raise questions that people could answer without feeling they had to go to jail.

Coffin preached to Jews as well as Christians at Yale and elsewhere. He was influenced by the ecumenical spirit of American religious activism. His language invited listeners into the world of his beliefs by using the moral language of Neibuhrian prophetic Protestant liberalism which he considered the emotional Hebraic-prophetic roots of Christianity. He used Niebuhr as a critique of sentimentality, of self-righteousness, and of pride. He preached the glories of a large God whose power he celebrated and praised. The gap between this relatively distant God and suffering, sinful humanity could be bridged only by love. Jews in particular found Coffin's preaching and religious advocacy not only congenital, but also moving and powerful.

Coffin represented his Christianity in ecumenical terms gradually. He was able to claim the role of many other men, not only of liberal Protestant preacher, but of liberal preacher to the nation. He was the liberal counterpart to Billy Graham and, from the 1970s on, the true successor to Martin Luther King Jr.

Coffin gained his self-confidence because of the wealthy life to which he was accustomed, and the constant involvement of his mother in his life gave him the sense of love from his earliest years. As a boy, he often confused his mother's love with God's. The overwhelming presence of his mother took so much space in his life that finally he left Paris without telling anybody he had gone. When he married Eva, he did not know anything about how to handle a marriage. With no domestic experience and with three

children, Coffin was a marital disaster. Eva and Harriet lived with a man who was emotionally sustained by his public roles but not exactly his role as a husband, partner, or father. Finally, he found stability with Randy Wilson which made him happy into his old age. She offered him acceptance rather than the criticism that Eva offered to him. She did not care about his incompetence at home. She chose to do what she knew how to do, on behalf of Coffin who did what he did best.

Coffin was a man of his time, consumed by his vocation. He was lucky finding women willing to provide a home for his children when he had no idea how to be a caretaking parent. Few men of his generation tried to juggle family responsibilities with a demanding vocational life. The notion that truly great leaders can combine practical devotion to family with a fully engaged public life remains a myth. “As millions of working parents know all too well, the public and working worlds are particularly unforgiving regarding the demands of family life,” Coffin said.

Coffin grew up in an environment in which the Church was consequential to public life. His preaching, as well as the Protestant Church, was essential for public discourse on a range of issues. The Presbyterian Church figured significantly at Yale where Coffin’s influence ran deeply into it. While Chaplain, he was pastor to students, faculty, and staff. His Christianity became infused into every corner of Yale life. He had plenty of gifts with which he could focus on the piano, languages, athletics, and preaching. He also succeeded as a writer by publishing his memoir Once to Everyman.

Coffin worked hard on aphorisms that became “Coffinisms.” From his pulpits in Battell Chapel at Yale, the Riverside Church in New York, and hundreds of pulpits all over the U. S. came powerful sermons for preaching and on uncomfortable gospel. These sermons moved hearts, changed minds, and called Americans to change the world. He preached with passion and an inimitable style. He reached such importance that he even inspired a character in a national cartoon strip, “Doonesbury,” by Garry Trudeau. Garry considered that with Coffin Yale was changed forever.

Coffin was a great patriot who loved his country too much to leave it alone during the social and political upheaval of his time. His early and strong leadership in the struggle against segregation and discrimination on the basis of race, his key role in organizing opposition against the war in Vietnam, and his continuing personal investment and national leadership in the campaign to abolish nuclear weapons from an increasingly dangerous world placed him among the most important Christian leaders in American history.

On Civil Rights, Coffin managed his efforts using his own strategies. He often paused awaiting the right moment to act to maximize his own leverage. He brought many thousands of students and other parishioners into engagement with issues they had been ignoring. He was able to make his point of view respectable at Yale, Riverside and in Liberal Protestantism around the U.S. He strode with giant footsteps across the U.S. in turbulent times, and his voice cried out for justice and peace, a justice and peace that in his mind flowed directly from his deep and personal faith in God. That deep faith was the foundation for his preaching. He was among the most effective and memorable of all American preachers.

Coffin's self-righteousness and confidence that he could lead others engaged him in social issues with political import. He forced Americans to think more seriously and in religious terms about the enormous social issues that the American society was facing. His self-confidence led him to take risks with regard to the Vietnam War. His leadership helped to create the peace and justice organization Clergy and Laity Concerned. He used the little influence he had on the Johnson and Nixon administrations to bring pressure for an ending of the Vietnam War. Coffin also helped to undermine the U.S. government's credibility by attracting federal indictment and creating controversy over Vietnam. Millions of students throughout the country took stands on matters of draft resistance and the morality of the war thanks to Coffin's influence.

The rise and the fall of American political and religious liberalism were intimately linked to Coffin. He came onto the national stage during liberal resurgence of the early Kennedy years and days of the Civil Rights Movement. He brought both an activist and ecumenical Christianity with a new form of faith that the world could be made better. His ability to combine the secular and real world with the Scriptures talking about God's love made him an influential exponent of Christianity. Warren Goldstein called him the "preeminent white voice of the changing times in mainline Protestantism."¹¹⁹

Coffin's career demonstrated a new nature of liberal politics and religion from the 1960's to the 1990's. His religious faith and religious values provided an indispensable support for much of the period of activism. He contributed greatly to the ecumenical spirit and political coalitions of this time.

During Coffin's decade as senior minister at Riverside, it became the most important institution in the country for those who disagreed with nuclear weapons. Thanks to the Riverside Disarmament Program, the largest demonstration in American history took place in June, 1982. Despite many failures, the program succeeded in the field of arms control. Under Coffin's direction, Riverside was an institutional base for religious and political liberals. It was at Riverside that Coffin also became more interested in preaching on issues called "Culture Wars" – sexism, abortion, and homophobia.

Coffin's influence changed young people's lives. Some decided to be ministers, others joined the Peace Corps, some decided to work in Africa with Operation Crossroads, others turned in their draft cards, and some decided to go to the South to work on Civil Rights. His influence still remains in people's minds as an icon of courage, justice, and goodwill for his time.

William Sloane Coffin's teachings through sermons left his audiences the best heredity that a society could need during tough times. He believed that it was the power of God's love to fight against the enemies of a society: war, nuclear weapons, racism, sexism, abortion, and homophobia. He used to preach that social justice was central to Christianity.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1



William Sloane Coffin is sharing his wisdom during one of his speeches.

<http://www.ncccusa.org/gifs/coffin5a.jpg>

Appendix 2



William Sloane Coffin, Jr., in Guinea during his 1960 Operation Crossroads trip.

http://images.library.yale.edu/madid_size1/22593/008015.jpg

Appendix 3



William Sloane Coffin, Jr., speaking at a rally at Yale University in 1961.

http://images.library.yale.edu/madid_size1/22593/008018.jpg

Appendix 4



Coffin and his group disembarked in Montgomery, Alabama during the Freedom Rides.

http://images.library.yale.edu/madid_size1/22593/008019.jpg

Appendix 5



Coffin followed closely Martin Luther King's nonviolent tactics.

http://images.library.yale.edu/madid_size1/22593/008021.jpg

Appendix 6



William Sloane Coffin was found guilty of all charges except counseling draft-age men to turn in their draft cards during the Boston Five Trial.

http://images.library.yale.edu/madid_size1/22593/008023.jpg

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