

American Protestants and U.S. Foreign Policy Toward the Soviet Union During the Eisenhower  
Administration: Billy Graham, Reinhold Niebuhr, and G. Bromley Oxnam

by

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B.A., Northern Illinois University, 2008

M.A., Western Illinois University, 2010

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation considers American Protestant perceptions of U.S. foreign policy directed toward Soviet Union during the Dwight D. Eisenhower presidency (1953-1961). The question of what a culture dominated by Protestant denominations thought of its global adversary has not yet been sufficiently explored by scholars of either American religious history or diplomatic history. Most scholars who deal with the intersection of religion and foreign policy during the Eisenhower Administration tend to accentuate the close relationship that existed between government policy and general religious attitudes. That is to say, a general, widespread Protestant support of foreign policy objectives stands as the prevailing interpretation. Most historians conclude that America's Protestant church leaders—preachers, pastors, and bishops—either actively supported government foreign policy objectives or sought to insert their own stances into existing policy. More recently, historians have published monographs that further explore Protestant Christianity with regard to foreign policy in the 1950s. By acknowledging the different strands of Protestant Christianity, scholars have raised significant questions that have heretofore gone unanswered. The primary question is the one that this dissertation seeks to answer—how widespread was American Protestant denunciation of communism and, simultaneously, how broad was American Protestant support for foreign policy objectives?

Billy Graham, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Garfield Bromley Oxnam represent the three most prominent representatives of Protestant Christianity's three major strands. These three acknowledged opinion makers that serve as the focus of this dissertation were not uniform in their perspectives of U.S. foreign policy, yet they all denounced communism and—to a degree—supported America's efforts to combat the Soviet Union's sphere of influence throughout the course of the Eisenhower Administration (1953-1961). This conclusion helps explain the

tremendous perseverance of containment as a strategy by attributing its success, in part, to the large, Protestant body of supporters that continued to sustain and encourage Washington's policies directed toward the Soviet Union.

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Robert Linder  
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: AMERICA, EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY, AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN THE 1950s

On October 10, 1955, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (1888-1959) took his place at the front of an American Legion audience at the Dinner Key Auditorium in Miami, Florida. He spoke on a topic that he would continue to address in public settings for the last remaining years of his life: communism versus democracy. He assured his audience that democracy would come out on top of the then decade-old Cold War. In a speech that resembled many others that Dulles delivered during his tenure as Secretary of State, he depicted both the Soviet Union and American political systems in a way that resonated with his audience:

We have principles. Our productivity and our power do not rattle haphazardly about the world. They are harnessed to basic moral principles. There is a school of thought which claims that morality and foreign policy do not mix. This has never been, is not, and I pray never will be, the American ideal. Diplomacy which is divorced from morality also divorces the government from the people. Our people can understand, and will support, policies which can be explained and understood in moral terms. But policies based on carefully calculated expediency could never be explained, and would never be understood.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Foster Dulles address before the American Legion in Miami, Florida. October 10, 1955. Box 43, Folder 3, Eleanor Lansing Dulles Papers, 1880-1984, Dwight D. Eisenhower Archives, Abeline, KS. Historians differ in the exact dates that the Cold War encompassed. While some claim that the American-Soviet posturing and planning that signified Cold War relations between the two powers began before WWII ended, most agree that the Cold War began in 1945. One, or a combination, of three significant events is referred to as the beginning of the Cold War: the Yalta Conference in February, the ending of the war in Europe in May, the bombing of Japan and the Potsdam Conference in July and August. Others look to 1947 as the official beginning of the Cold War as the Truman Doctrine was announced, communists seized power in Poland, and the National Security Act restructured America's military and intelligence agencies. Many historians point to the fall of the Berlin Wall in late 1989 as the end of the Cold

Dulles' speech characterized the climate and context of the Cold War (1945-1991) among policymakers at the highest level. Since the Harry S. Truman Administration (1945-1953), America's foreign policy had pivoted from one concerned with the halt of the major Axis powers that formed after the signing of the Tripartite Act (1940) to one focused on the containment of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence.

The close of the Second World War (1939-1945) brought with it a restructuring of the world stage. The United States stood alone as the sole world superpower. The nation acted as the world's policeman and safeguard of democracy. The Truman doctrine and Marshall Plan conveyed America's power and aspirations for a more peaceful, economically secure world. Immediately after World War II formally ended, the difference between Soviet and Western perspectives of the future emerged. Communism, and with it, the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, appeared to many Americans to spread rapidly. President Harry S. Truman (1884-1972) sought to combat Soviet aims and dampen the spread of communist and left-leaning states with a strategy known now as containment. Economic and military security was not enough to combat the great scourge of communism. To many, this divide between democracy's capitalism and communism was not centered on military strength, economic might, or even the persuasive utilization of propaganda. It was faith. The distinguishing trait between democracy and communism was the inherent difference in political and religious systems.

American foreign policy and religion became intertwined to a degree that was unprecedented in the post-war years. The increase in prosperity, victory over the Axis powers, and the explosion in population were certainly factors in this relationship. America's guiding

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War, while others look to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 that brought Boris Yeltsin to the Russian presidency as the official close of the Cold War. I use the most widely cited set of dates: 1945 to 1991.

foreign policy principles took on a religious tone that invoked heavy moralistic and spiritual qualities while simultaneously reflecting the mood of many Americans at the time. This was largely due to the religious mood of the early Cold War. The nation witnessed a sharp increase in religious activity and the attention that some of America's religious leaders commanded spoke to the notion that many Americans identified their nation as wielding a special place in the world. Indeed, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Americans posted record numbers of church membership and caught the bug of evangelism to a stunning degree in the 1950s.

Many scholars have noted this time period's sharp increase in religious sentiment. More recently, historians have given a greater deal of attention to the study of foreign relations and religion in the early Cold War. However, most studies fail to properly take into account the perspective of Protestant leaders on foreign policy. Instead, most studies declare the failure of Christian leaders to insert their voices into government policy, or point to Christianity as a minor influence on the shaping of official policy. This study assesses the perspectives of the standard-bearers of the three largest and most influential strands of Protestant Christianity—Neo-Orthodoxy, liberal Protestant Christianity, and evangelical Christianity—to determine their stances, respectively, of U.S. foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. I specifically argue that the three acknowledged opinion makers that serve as the focus of this dissertation were not uniform in their perspectives of U.S. foreign policy, yet they all denounced communism and—to a degree—supported America's efforts to combat the Soviet Union's sphere of influence throughout the course of the Eisenhower Administration (1953-1961). This conclusion helps explain the tremendous perseverance of containment as a strategy by attributing its success, in part, to the large, Protestant body of supporters that continued to sustain and encourage Washington's policies directed toward the Soviet Union. My argument demonstrates that many

Protestants supported a hawkish American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. This study does not acknowledge that the three standard bearers of Protestant Christianity solely influenced policymakers' decisions in pursuing policies that held true to a containment approach. Rather, this dissertation is a social, religious, and intellectual history of Protestant Christianity's reactions and responses to foreign affairs policies. These early Cold War years present a combination of unique events—events that posed an entirely favorable climate for a sharp increase of civil religion and a large base of Protestant Christian support for certain Cold War policies. This thesis holds tremendous significance for our understanding of the Cold War, American religion in the 1950s, and the relationship between church and state. It speaks to the sudden popularity of civil religion in the 1950s and adds to the awareness of Protestant Christianity's role in American culture and politics.

Billy Graham (1918-), Reinhold Niebuhr (1893-1971), and Garfield Bromley Oxnam (1891-1963) represent the three most prominent representatives of Protestant Christianity's three major strands. Graham was undoubtedly the face of evangelical Christianity from 1949 on. Reinhold Niebuhr led the charge of Neo-Orthodox theology in America and Oxnam served as one of the most recognizable and publicly active members of theologically liberal Protestant denominations. These three figures were questioned on their understanding of American foreign policy throughout the Eisenhower era. While Graham, Niebuhr, and Oxnam all expounded on the attributes of America's role in the world at times, Graham and Oxnam, namely, reserved their pronouncements occasionally. Overall, the three collectively demonstrated highly loyal descriptions of America vis a vis the Soviet Union and more often than not, supported the policies of Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles (1888-1959). The impact that their perspectives wielded was due to the context of the times that they operated within.

Evangelical Christianity underwent a boom in America during the 1950s. It had represented a prominent feature of American life throughout the nation's history. Yet, the 1950s were a time of unique evangelical growth. The United States population achieved its biggest growth in history—from 150 million in 1950 to 180 million in 1960—as newly married couples began what is now referred to as the baby boomer generation. On any given Sunday morning between 1955 and 1958, almost half of all Americans were attending church—the highest percentage in US history. During the 1950s, nationwide church membership grew at a faster rate than the population, from 57 percent of the population in 1950 to 63.3 percent in 1960.<sup>2</sup>

This impressive increase in religious activity was not simply a boost in church membership. The 1950s witnessed extraordinary expansion among most of the major Protestant denominations and evangelical parachurch organizations. Evangelicals were growing in number across college campus ministries. Bill Bright's Campus Crusade for Christ and other organizations, such as Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and Navigators, spread from campus to campus throughout the 1950s. Simultaneously, evangelical missionary efforts expanded. The Christian Missionary Fellowship, founded in 1950, and World Vision, founded two years later, sought to revive the great missionary endeavors of the nineteenth century with the then-rising wave of evangelical growth. By 1960, Protestant missionaries totaled 29,000 and the number sponsored by evangelical organizations rose from 44 percent to 65 percent.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Carol Tucker, "The 1950s-Powerful Years for Religion." *USC News* (June 16, 1997) <http://news.usc.edu/25835/The-1950s-Powerful-Years-for-Religion/> (accessed October 11, 2014). For church membership distribution in the 1950s, see William Peterson, "Religious Statistics in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1 (Spring, 1962): 165-178.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 181-182.

At the same time, America went through a transition in its approach to foreign affairs. The early years of the Cold War wrought significant change on all levels of American society. Many scholars agree that these years encompassed a period of increased civil religion in America. Others point to the changing nature of foreign policy and race relations. Indeed, when America emerged victorious from World War II, the nation stood as the lone world superpower. In the wake of WWII, a collective, national fear of and opposition to Nazi Germany and the Axis Powers was replaced by the fear of communism. Anticommunist fervor gripped many arenas of public and private life. It was in this context that America's foreign policy took on a different scope. The U.S. government revised its foreign policy toward the Soviet Union to reflect the postwar world. In America, policy centered upon confining the spread of communist influence, and emerged as the dominant approach to Soviet Russia. The policy of containment, described below, lay at the heart of American policy toward the Soviet Union from the late 1940s until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

### **Cold War Foreign Affairs**

As America emerged from WWII, many government leaders recognized the U.S.S.R. as a foe to be dealt with. The alliance that was forged for the sake of defeating the Axis Powers immediately faltered at war's end as disagreements over territory and influence arose. It was not until American diplomat George F. Kennan's (1904-2005) "long telegram" that he cabled from his offices in Russia back to American government officials that U.S. statesmen began to formally see the world in terms of spheres of influence.

Serving at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Kennan dispatched his eight-thousand-word cable in February of 1946 and therein laid out the foundations for the future containment policy

that would serve as the United States' approach to the Soviet Union for decades. Within this Embassy report, Kennan provided a detailed analysis of Soviet aspirations and view of the world. He concluded that Soviet and American values were fundamentally different and irreconcilable. Kennan held that the United States needed to exert pressure in strategic locations for as long as it took the Soviet Union to fail from its own flaws. Kennan's assessment of the Soviet Union's strengths, weaknesses, goals, and values along with his prescription for appropriate policy caught the attention of many policymakers in America. Not only did his work from the Embassy in Moscow elevate Kennan from a consular official abroad to the head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, but Kennan's articulation of the sources of Soviet conduct and suggested policy approaches also set in motion the strategy of containment as a primary, national foreign policy.<sup>4</sup>

The origins of American foreign policy in the 1950s actually began in the 1940s. Most historians recognize that the Soviet Union and the United States of America envisioned the post-WWII era differently before the Second World War came to a close. Indeed, Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945) and Harry S. Truman (1884-1972) realized that America and the Soviet Union would not continue their war-induced alliance indefinitely. Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal (1892-1949) considered Soviet ideology's compatibility with democracy the same as Nazism's or Fascism's compatibility with democracy. A change in American foreign policy that reflected this vision did not occur, however, until 1950.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 2012), 422-423; William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 17 and 37.

<sup>5</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 195.



Two years after the close of WWII, the term “containment” came to describe America’s national foreign policy toward the Soviet Union and was outlined in a *Foreign Affairs* article, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.”<sup>6</sup> Kennan authored this essay, which appeared under the pen name “Mr. X.” Kennan saw foreign policy as primarily concerned with the security of the nation and of the ability of the U.S. to advance the welfare of its people by ensuring a peaceful world order. The policy of containment sought to restrict, or contain, the sphere of Soviet influence to the borders of the U.S.S.R. Kennan is credited with forming the basis of U.S. foreign policy that largely guided national security for over forty years, however, he never bothered to compose an official policy that detailed the strategies and tactics in which containment would be executed. This responsibility fell to the State Department and Defense Department, whose policy position papers came to be known as National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68). This policy effectively systemized containment and created a national policy that was based more on perception of power than on anything else. Guided by NSC-68, American foreign policy throughout the 1950s aimed to restrict Soviet influence from other parts of the world while simultaneously furthering America’s democratic goals abroad.<sup>7</sup>

Historians have assessed the foreign policy of the immediate post-WWII and early Cold War years with some regularity from that time period until today. The two prevailing schools of thought on America’s Cold War foreign policy come from historian William Appleman Williams (1921-1990) and Kennan. Most historians find Williams’ and Kennan’s interpretations the most

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<sup>6</sup> George F. Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25 (July 1947): 566-582.

<sup>7</sup> Many historians have attested to the significance of this report for America’s next forty years of foreign policy. For example, historian Andrew Preston cites this document as “one of the most important documents in American diplomatic history,” characterized by “the libertarian impulse of the Reformed Protestant tradition.” Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 439.

dominant views of American foreign policy. Williams essentially finds a shared ideology among policymakers as a beneficial facet. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will follow historian Michael Hunt's definition of ideology: "An interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and suggests appropriate ways of dealing with that reality."<sup>8</sup>

George Kennan considered ideology a bad thing in policy. He despised legalism and moralism, opting for "realism" or a pragmatic approach to foreign policy. Kennan dealt with the reality of any given situation and worked with the facts at large rather than theory or idealism. Cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) posed a third leading perspective of ideology. This consensus-school anthropologist argued that ideology stemmed from and was maintained by society's culture. Though he did not offer a prescription for policymaking, he illuminated the power that one nation's larger public wields in shaping and influencing official government policies. Together, these scholars maintained competing views of foreign policy. All three, along with the historians who studied their interpretations, though, largely agreed with the American policy of containment as feasible. Indeed, the historiography of America's early Cold War years contains several differing perspectives of US foreign policy.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), xi.

<sup>9</sup> Historian Michael Hunt finds the economic and ideological approach of William Appleman Williams along with the moralistic and realistic approach of George Kennan narrow and anemic in explaining how ideology and foreign policy interact. Hunt finds U.S. foreign policy best understood as a three-part system centered upon the self-congratulatory promotion of liberty abroad, the tendency to view others on the basis of a racial hierarchy, and a profound antipathy to social revolution, see Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987). Walter LaFeber despises the legalistic and moralistic approach of Kennan and points out Kennan's irony in having an anti-ideology view of foreign policy. Kennan argues, in fact, for a realist ideology that is to be led by policy makers competent and skilled enough to craft national policies. LaFeber finds the same link between domestic and

One of the most fascinating points that reappears in several historical studies is the characterization of the Cold War. Many historians have concluded the Cold War was a religious war. The Cold War was waged on many fronts that were completely irreligious. However, the crafting of actual policy typically included references to the different religious components of America and the Soviet Union. To describe communism as “atheistic” or “godless” was an exercise that was common at all levels of American society. Collective opposition to communism acted as a cohesive gel to policymakers and the American public alike. Many Americans saw the Cold War struggle between communism and capitalism as nothing less than a religious struggle between good and evil.<sup>10</sup>

### **Defining Evangelical Christianity**

The meaning behind terms such as “evangelical,” “evangelicalism,” and “Evangelical Christianity” is often convoluted. In several cases, “evangelicalism” and “Evangelical Christianity” are used interchangeably. I have chosen to use “Evangelical Christianity” because of its greater historical meaning and also because it clarifies the subject better than the too-often employed “evangelicalism.” Evangelical Christianity is identifiable by the two urges that it fosters in evangelicals: (1) the desire to spread the “good news” of the gospel, and (2) the desire to improve society. Evangelicals historically have held a number of theological beliefs in common: (1) the Bible is the ultimate authority in religious life; (2) Jesus Christ is God incarnate; and (3) salvation is gained through a personal faith in Jesus Christ alone through his

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foreign policies that Williams does, see Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1996* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Many scholars have described the Cold War as a religious war. For example, William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960*, 2; Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 412-417; Mike Grimshaw, “Encountering Religion: *Encounter*, Religion, and the Cultural Cold War, 1957-1967.” *History of Religions* 51 (August 2011): 31-58.

atoning and sacrificial death on the cross. This salvation leads to a life that is spiritually and morally transformed. These three beliefs describe Evangelical Christianity in the most basic, historical sense.<sup>11</sup>

Evangelical Christianity has taken on different forms in different time periods and contexts. In America, it stretches back to European settlement. Evangelical Christianity flourished until a period of decay between 1700 and 1725. The First Great Awakening (1730-1760), led by the fiery preaching of George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards sparked a national revival that burned until 1775. With the American Revolution came religious decline. Until the turn of the century, the religious mood in America lingered in the aftermath of substantial vitality. With the beginning of the nineteenth century, came the Second Great Awakening (1800-1860). This period encompassed all of the 1800s until, again, the outbreak of war led to religious decline. Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists expanded in an evangelical golden age that saw membership rolls swell as a result of methods such as itinerant preaching and revival meetings which invoked the piety, salvation, and “rebirth” of millions across the country. Indeed, the greatest reform movements of the nineteenth century—abolition, temperance, women’s rights, and the focus on eradicating sexual sin—were a direct outgrowth of the Second Great Awakening.<sup>12</sup>

From the American Civil War (1861-1865) to the present, America’s religious history has taken on a trajectory of twists and turns comparable to its earlier phases. The Second Great Awakening ended as the nation became embroiled in civil war. This religious decline lasted

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Pierard and Robert Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988), 16 and 320n.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Azbug, *Cosmos Crumbling: Antebellum Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

through the years recognized today as Reconstruction (1865-1877). From 1877 through 1890, America underwent a period of new, urban revivalism. This period gave way to an era of the Protestant establishment during an age of new immigrants. This Protestant establishment took its place in American society at the same time as immigrants from mostly European countries, though Asian and Latin American immigrants factored in, came to the United States in staggering numbers.

Between the close of WWI and the most intense years of the Civil Rights Movement, or 1918-1965, America's religious history underwent a period of Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy and the subsequent dominance of the American religious landscape by the theologically liberal establishment. Considering that the range of years that this study focuses on falls within this period of theologically liberal Protestant ascendancy, this context will be explained in more thorough detail later. Beyond 1965, a period of religious ferment and evangelical resurgence occurred. The shape of America's evangelical construction changed in the face of political and military actions in the 1960s and 1970s. It changed again in the 1980s and 1990s with challenges to education policy, family planning, women's roles in society, conservative politics, and Middle Eastern affairs. Overall, America's religious history is one that lacks anything close to a linear path through centuries of American history.

### **Eisenhower's Civil Religion**

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969) was in touch with the religious mood of Americans throughout his two terms in office. His faith was ecumenical and general, which struck a collective cord with Americans in a large variety of churches. Eisenhower's faith was undoubtedly sincere, and he capitalized on his religious role once in the White House.

Once in office, Eisenhower took on his national, religious role with relative ease. Despite a childhood grounded in religious study and prayer, there is little to suggest that Eisenhower was preoccupied with religious matters before World War II. Born in Texas, the Eisenhower family moved to Abilene, Kansas, when Dwight was only a few months old. As a child, young Dwight's paternal grandfather was a successful farmer and preacher among the River Brethren, a small, Mennonite offshoot that originated after 1775 around the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. Known today as the Brethren in Christ, this small sect incorporated Wesleyan perfectionism with pietistic religion and an Anabaptist view of the church and discipleship. Later in life, his mother joined the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, Eisenhower never attended any church regularly after his teen years, despite twice daily, family Bible readings as a boy.<sup>13</sup>

Eisenhower fit the role of America's pastoral figure well. He joined the National Presbyterian Church after its pastor, Dr. Edward L.R. Elson, a former Army chaplain of his acquaintance from WWII in Europe, heavily courted Eisenhower's membership. From the point of his initial inauguration on, Eisenhower frequently linked spiritual renewal with national renewal, appealed to God's providence, and employed a civic faith that endeared many Americans to the Eisenhower Administration's goals and aspirations.

The civil religion that Eisenhower employed was not new. Elected officials had appealed to a higher deity, or God, since the presidency of George Washington. Eisenhower used civil religion, though, in a way that was highly cognizant of the times. The greatest difference between civil religion and nationalism is the fact that civil religion does not demand one's highest allegiance. One can participate in civil religion if he or she believes in God. Eisenhower

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<sup>13</sup> Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency*, 184-185 and 328n4; Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment*, 264-265; Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*, 442-443.

combined general, religious belief with American perspectives of communism and historically long-existing perspectives of the nation's special place or purpose in the world that produced a powerful civil religion.

The definition of “civil religion” has been debated since sociologist Robert Bellah’s landmark article published in 1967 provoked an increase in discussion on the topic.<sup>14</sup> Many scholars—sociologists, historians, political scientists, and anthropologists—have debated the term ever since. This dissertation uses historians Richard Pierard and Robert Linder’s definition:

The widespread acceptance by a people of perceived religio-political traits regarding their nation’s history and destiny. It relates their society to the realm of ultimate meaning and provides the vision which ties the nation together as an integrated whole. It is the “operative religion” of a society—the collection of beliefs, values, rites, ceremonies, and symbols which together give sacred meaning to the ongoing political life of the community and provide it with an overarching sense of unity above and beyond all internal conflicts and differences.<sup>15</sup>

In American society throughout the 1950s, several forms of civil religion were acted out in many different ways. The display of the American flag inside of churches, elected officials’ public calls for divine favor and intervention, prayers for military success, inserting “In God We Trust” on coinage, and adding “Under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance, all represented manifestations of civil religion in the Eisenhower years.

### **The Three Faces of Protestant Christianity**

Civil religion was present in many facets of American society. The makeup of America’s religious population was not as cohesive as the description of civil religion’s presence might

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96 (Winter 1967): 1-21.

<sup>15</sup> Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency*, 22-23.

suggest. Several issues divided Protestant Christianity along church, denominational, theological, or regional lines. To be sure, the history of American Protestant Christianity contains attributes that are constant, enduring themes. However, this history is also fluid and marked by change. The leading theological and denominational structures shuffled continually over four centuries due to the context of each generation's era. Great awakenings, revivals, circuit riding, towering evangelical figures, competing theological perspectives, denominational splits and mergers, Biblical criticism, and Darwinism account for a small fraction of the challenges and victories that Protestant Christianity in America has experienced. Considering the long and complex history of Protestant Christianity in America, the point must be made for the purposes of this dissertation that certain terms and concepts related to religion in America during the mid-twentieth century did not hold the same meaning as they did during the mid-nineteenth century or mid-eighteenth century.

The terms that I use are specific to the time period. Evangelical, liberal Christianity, and Neo-Orthodoxy are terms that carried certain connotations in the 1940s and 1950s. A definition of terms is appropriate to establish clarity. Neo-Orthodoxy is a theological perspective that emerged in the twentieth-century as a direct result of theologians' disillusionment with liberal theology and the destruction of World War I (1914-1919). This theology was developed in the aftermath of WWI by Swiss theologians Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Emil Brunner (1899-1966), though Barth's 1919 publication, *Commentary on Romans* represented the primary work to push back against liberal Protestant theology. Neo-Orthodoxy sought to recover the insights and themes of the Protestant Reformation while at the same time adjusting to Biblical criticism and modern science. Neo-Orthodoxy represented a rejection of theological liberalism and a return to Biblical authority.



Neo-Orthodoxy differed from theological conservatism. While theological conservatives believed that the Bible was the Word of God, Neo-Orthodoxy held that the Bible *contained* the Word of God. Neo-Orthodoxy's main thrusts were its emphasis on sin and guilt, the transcendence of God, and the uniqueness of Christ. Barth and Brunner are credited with Neo-Orthodoxy's conception, however, it was Niebuhr who led the rising numbers of disillusioned, theological liberals to subscribe to the major tenets of Neo-Orthodox theology.<sup>16</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr, Garfield Bromley Oxnam, and Billy Graham have been carefully selected to represent Neo-Orthodoxy, liberal Protestant Christianity, and evangelical Christianity, respectively. These three men represent the standard-bearers of their respective Christian category. This dissertation ultimately questions American Protestants' views of United States' foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. These three individuals represent the three most dominant sections of Protestant Christianity in America during the Eisenhower Administration.

Reinhold Niebuhr was the face of Neo-Orthodoxy in America throughout the 1950s. He was a well-known figure among intellectuals decades before he reached his peak in the 1940s and 1950s. Long before moving to his post at Union Theological Seminary in New York, Niebuhr operated as a pacifist and theologically liberal pastor at the Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit Michigan until 1928. During this time, Niebuhr wrote *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, which began his break from the social gospel and from liberal theology. From roughly the point of this book's publication (1932) onward, Niebuhr rejected liberal theology and embraced the crisis theology of Neo-Orthodoxy.

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<sup>16</sup> For further detail on Neo-Orthodoxy, see Andrew Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 197n2.

Niebuhr's prolific output garnered a name for himself in academic circles. Three of his twenty-one books, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1941), and *The Irony of American History* (1952) propelled Niebuhr to the ranks of a respected, tenured academic whose perspectives carried much weight with a generation in the throes of change in the early Cold War. Indeed, scholars of political philosophy, theology, and history frequently looked to Niebuhr for his assessments of society. In total, Niebuhr authored more than 2,600 articles in publications such as *The Nation*, *New Republic*, *The New Leader*, *Christian Century*, *The Progressive*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The Journal of Religion*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *Atlantic Monthly*. He contributed opinion articles to leading newspapers and founded two periodicals, *Christianity and Crisis* and *Christianity and Society*. Additionally, Niebuhr contributed to 126 books. Yet it is not Niebuhr's overwhelming rate of publication that makes him the standard bearer of Neo-Orthodoxy in the 1950s. His rigorous writing-life merely accounts for a portion of this status.

Niebuhr had a hand—and an influence—in a number of organizations. He participated in many societies, leagues, and fellowships: the YMCA, the Federal Council of Churches, the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, the Fellowship of Socialist Christians, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the League for Independent Political Action, the Socialist Party of New York, the editorial advisory board of the quarterly *Armenian Affairs*, and the Foreign Policy Commission of the Americans for Democratic Action to name some of the groups Niebuhr worked with. In most cases, Niebuhr rose to a position of leadership in those organizations to which he devoted his time.

Niebuhr also maintained ongoing correspondence with numerous leading figures. He traded letters, telephone calls, and conversations in person with Harvard President James B.

Conant (1893-1978), Dwight D. Eisenhower, J. Edgar Hoover (1895-1972), the Washington D.C. National Presbyterian Church pastor Edward Elson (1906-1993), Hans J. Morgenthau (1904-1980), Adlai Stevenson (1900-1965), George Kennan, Norman Thomas (1884-1968), Senator Hubert Humphrey (1911-1978), evangelist Sherwood Eddy (1871-1963), John Foster Dulles, and W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963), just to name some of the more prominent figures of the 1950s. Niebuhr was seemingly everywhere, all of the time. One must remember that he wrote, participated in a number of organizations, and continued correspondence with dozens of people simultaneously while working as professor of Christian ethics at Union from 1928 to 1960. Niebuhr's dedication to his academic post frequently had him lecturing in large classrooms and theaters, instructing students in his New York apartment, preaching in Union's chapel, participating in student and youth gatherings along the East Coast and Midwest, and serving certain commitments to his department and Union Seminary President Henry Sloan Coffin (1877-1954).<sup>17</sup> Altogether, Niebuhr wrote, spoke, and taught at a furious pace. He articulated ideas that offered a unique perspective on American affairs. It is for all of the examples above combined that Niebuhr stands out as the leading Neo-Orthodox figure in America during Eisenhower's presidency.

Billy Graham represented the face of Evangelical Christianity in the 1950s. His emphasis on conversion to Christ during his many international revivals launched his name and his Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) organization to dizzying heights of popularity. Over the course of his life, Graham has preached, in person, to over 200 million people in more than

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on Niebuhr's life and professional accomplishments, see Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row Publishers, 1987), and Michael G. Thompson, "An Exception to Exceptionalism: A Reflection on Reinhold Niebuhr's Vision of "Prophetic" Christianity and the Problem of Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy." *American Quarterly* 59 (September, 2007): 833-855.

185 countries. This does not include hundreds of millions more on radio, film, and television. Graham was comfortable with national leaders from the Eisenhower Administration (1953-1961) through the Gerald Ford Administration (1974-1977), and provided religious leadership and support to presidents from Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush. Moreover, Graham's revivals brought him international fame.

Graham's message took on a sense of urgency to many of his listeners as he infused the immediate threat of communism into his sermons in the 1940s and 1950s. During his 1949 revival in Los Angeles, Graham repeatedly referenced Harry S. Truman's announcement that Russians had successfully developed and tested an atomic bomb. In Los Angeles in 1949, Graham featured the divide between communism and the West as a means of illustrating the real and imminent threat that evil posed as well as in other revivals across New England, South Carolina, Washington, D.C., and London in the early 1950s. Graham stressed conversion to packed audiences using methods that illustrated his awareness of global events. Graham attracted attention because of his abilities to offer hope and cohesion through religious revivals to a vulnerable and anxious nation. His radio program, *The Hour of Decision*, reached a peak of 1,200 stations across America before being converted into a television show. In 1955, Graham's BGEA created *Christianity Today*, which quickly rose to the top of evangelical journals. It continues to this day as the leading publication for evangelical Christians. Graham's career is one of the most impressive of any American evangelical leader in any age of American history.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For a concise overview of Graham's message and the channels that the preacher used to communicate, see Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 2-31 and 231-234.

Graham's legacy is defined by the multitudes of people across the world who came to Christ as a direct result of Graham's preaching. He has also been recognized by a number groups and organizations for his evangelistic efforts. His awards include: the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation Freedom Award, the Congressional Gold Medal, the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion, and the Speaker of the Year Award. He was also bestowed with the Honorary Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire and recognized by the National Conference of Christians and Jews for promoting understanding between faiths. Additionally, Graham has been honored with a structure, the Billy Graham Center, at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois.

Identifying one individual as the stand-alone representative of liberal Christianity in the 1950s is a difficult task. It has proven a conundrum to other historians.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the 1950s presented a rare picture of American Protestant Christianity. Due to many factors that spanned the nation, including a general search for meaning and spiritual assurance, a desire for stability following a tragic world war, and the popularity of Billy Graham's rallies and revivals, evangelical growth intensified. At the same time, the national mood of civil religion was greatly heightened. Additionally, the theological pull to the left was expressed across the country.

Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam best represents this large swath of theologically liberal Protestants. Other theologically liberal Christians come to mind as possible candidates for this title: Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) was arguably the best-known pastor in the 1920s

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Neo-Orthodoxy, liberal Christianity, and Evangelical Christianity were identified by Elisha Coffman as the leading sectors of Protestant Christianity. Coffman depicts Niebuhr as Neo-Orthodoxy's standard-bearer and Graham as the face of "evangelicalism," yet does not cite one individual as representative of liberal Christianity, see Elisha Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7-12.

and 1930s. Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) made the social gospel a part of American Christianity more so than any other individual. Even John Foster Dulles expressed serious conviction with regard to his Presbyterian faith. Yet these individuals fall outside of the scope of this dissertation. Fosdick and Rauschenbusch, respectively, were at the peaks of their respective public and religious lives before the scope of this study. Dulles had too much of a hand in foreign affairs to examine, as he often directly oversaw official American foreign policy.

During the Eisenhower Administration, Oxnam served as one of the main leaders of the Methodist Church. His selection as the standard-bearer of liberal Protestant Christianity does not admit that the Methodist Church was the most liberal. Rather, Oxnam himself stands out as the most recognizable, active liberal Protestant leader with regard to America's foreign policy. The Methodist Church was, in the 1950s, the largest Protestant denomination in the country and it retained a large network of churches, colleges, hospitals, and seminaries. In the 1950s, this extensive reach was unparalleled in scope and size. The Methodist Church continued to be the largest single Protestant group until the Southern Baptist Convention, although not a denomination, surpassed it in 1967 after nearly three decades of phenomenal growth.<sup>20</sup> Oxnam had moved up from within the church rapidly while maintaining a strong ecumenical presence within a series of multi-church organizations. He worked closely with the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) and continued his service after it became the National Council of Churches (NCC). He also led the World Council of Churches (WCC), serving as president of the FCC and WCC. He was outspoken in his denunciation of communism and also of America's extremism in combating it at home. His testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee

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<sup>20</sup> Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 186.

(HUAC) garnered him more attention from his fellow theologically liberal Protestants and the country at large.

Oxnam had an eclectic, well-traveled résumé. After finishing school at the University of Southern California and seminary at Boston University, Oxnam served as a pastor in Los Angeles. He went on to teach at Boston University's School of Theology before taking his post as the president of DePauw University. He then embarked on a series of travels overseas as itinerant preacher Sherwood Eddy's (1871-1963) secretary. He returned to the United States to assume the role of Methodist Bishop of Omaha between 1936 and 1939. After spending a majority of his time serving the nation during World War II in several religious roles, Oxnam led the FCC for a number of years. He was the Methodist Bishop of the Boston area from 1939 through 1944, of New York from 1944 through 1952, and then finally of the Washington, D.C. area from 1952 through 1960.

Oxnam was involved in many international and ecumenical efforts over the course of his life. By the time Eisenhower was in office, Oxnam had fulfilled an appointment by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to visit the Mediterranean Theater and the European Theater of operations during World War II. He had also served an appointment by Secretary James Forrestal as a member of the Secretary of the Navy's Civilian Advisory Committee and received a certificate of appreciation from the Navy for his services during World War II. Oxnam was awarded the Order of the Phoenix by the King of Greece and represented a large group of American churches at the enthronement of the Archbishop of Canterbury (1945). Additionally, Oxnam was appointed as a member of the President's Commission on Higher Education (1946-1948) and chaired a commission to study postwar religious conditions in Germany (1945). His most recognizable role was as Secretary of the Council of Bishops for the Methodist Church. During the course of

the 1950s, Oxnam represented the prototypical theologically liberal Methodist. In the forthcoming chapters, Oxnam's role as the major voice behind theologically liberal Protestants is made clear.<sup>21</sup>

### **Methodology**

The methodological approach this dissertation will use for analyzing Niebuhr's, Graham's, and Oxnam's perspectives on American foreign policy involves a combination of social history, intellectual history, and literary analysis of the available historical evidence. Using these approaches provides insight into a subject that can be approached from many angles. The majority of scholarly attention that is devoted to this subject matter has, until recently, dealt solely with foreign affairs or religion. With the publication of recent studies that take aim at the intersection of foreign affairs and religion during Eisenhower's Administration, the perspectives of nationally recognized leaders of Protestant strands have either been ignored or not given thorough treatment. While the recent trend to accentuate the more pacifist and peace-oriented approaches of a minority of America's Protestants highlights the notion that Protestant cold warriors did not represent the entirety of America's Protestant body, the failure to gauge the great majority of American Protestants' attitudes toward policy leaves several lingering questions. Social and intellectual approaches to this large segment of the American public bring forth greater understanding of America's support for the foreign policies of the 1950s. These approaches also untangle a knotty legacy of moral, ethical, and state-focused ideals. The erudition and world perspective of each of these three figures speak directly to American attitudes in the 1950s. Literary analyses provide a closer look at the pronouncements of Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnam.

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<sup>21</sup> G. Bromley Oxnam, *I Protest* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 38.



The following chapter serves as an assessment of the growth of civil religion and the context of America's Protestant structure between the 1940s and the end of the Eisenhower Administration. Chapter 3 traces the upbringing of Graham, Niebuhr, and Oxnam in order to better understand their formative years and to identify the basis of their thought in adulthood. The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters cover Graham, Niebuhr, and Oxnam, respectively. Their lives and actions are considered, yet the greatest amount of attention is given to their official and unofficial views of American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union between 1953 and 1961. Chapters 7 and 8 take account of the extensive influence that Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnam wielded. These two chapters describe the number of organizations that each man either led or in which they participated. These two chapters also examine the level of church support for U.S. foreign policy objectives. The final chapter concludes the dissertation and analyzes the legacies of Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnam along with the impact that their efforts had within the larger progression of national foreign policy in the 1950s.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **CIVIL RELIGION AND AMERICA'S PROTESTANT LANDSCAPE**

The state of American Protestant Christianity in the 1950s was one of transition, alteration, and ascendancy. The liberal theology that came to dominate most Protestant Christian denominations had reached its peak and swollen membership rolls had not yet entered into the decline that set in between the 1960s and 1980s. Indeed, the dominant narrative in American religious history in recent years has been one centered on the political mobilization of religious conservatives and the insurgent, growing political and religious conservative mood in America. This crucial time period between the Truman and Kennedy Administrations (1945-1963) offers an era of transition between the crisis that theological (and political) liberals faced following WWI and the resurgence of conservative Protestant Christianity following the most intense years of the Vietnam War (1955-1975). In the 1950s, Neo-Orthodoxy cut to the heart of the crisis of liberal theology while evangelical Christianity restored the promise of salvation to multitudes of Americans living in an age of anxiety.

Historians who take account of the heyday of liberal Christianity often refer to churches and seminaries in their charting the decline of liberal theology. Scholarly work tends to focus on theologically liberal Protestant's Enlightenment roots, engagement with Darwinism, postmillennialism, and faith in humanity's ability to persevere, overcome, and realize progress. This same standard narrative tends to focus on the successes of the Social Gospel and emphasize theologically liberal Protestants' faith in human nature and progress. As many disheartened

theological liberals realized that they could not induce a one-thousand year period of peace to usher in Christ's return or perfect humanity in the face of two world wars, Neo-Orthodox theological arguments and evangelical calls for repentance and renewal took hold of American churchgoers' ears.

In addition to the changing nature of America's theological belief structures, the context of the 1950s greatly influenced the trajectory of America's religious life. The Cold War was waged with increasingly religious characterizations. The identification of good and evil was made abundantly clear by America's elected officials and preachers used the perilous state of foreign affairs with Soviet Russia frequently in their sermons and characterizations of the times.

### **Protestant Christianity in the 1950s**

In the decade following WWII, Protestant leadership wielded extensive public influence. Many Protestant leaders also held similar views on communism, Soviet Russia, and U.S. foreign policy. However, internal fissures revealed that not all Protestant denominations were harmonious in their perspectives of religion or politics. While many primarily theologically liberal denominations supported international cooperation through economic aid and the encouragement of multinational institutions, as they had for decades, other conservative, neo-orthodox, and evangelical church leaders forwarded opposing suggestions for future American action.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have cited these political and theological disputes among several denominations as evidence of the inability of Protestant leaders to forge a united front against communism. This

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Cambridge historian Andrew Preston argues that religion and American ideology in the Cold War was not nationalistic, militant, and obsessed with anti-communism. Preston contends that mainline Protestants challenged containment through calls for nuclear and conventional disarmament, decolonization, higher levels of foreign aid, and unconditional dialogue with the Soviet Union, see Andrew Preston, "Peripheral Visions: American Mainline Protestants and the Global Cold War." *Cold War History* 13 (February, 2013): 109-130.

monolithic support from America's religious community is something that both government and religious leaders desperately desired.<sup>2</sup>

By the 1950s, many Protestant denominations shared similar theologically liberal qualities as a result of several factors. The largest of these denominations had attained such hefty sizes in membership, that they were too respectable to combat the pressures of an increasingly secular society. That is, rather than lose the clout and standing that they had accumulated over the course of several generations, many denominations embraced the socially and theologically liberal stances that were evident across pockets of greater American society. These theologically liberal churches, sometimes referred to as the "mainline" churches, continued to move left on the theological spectrum as they further solidified liberal theology in their seminaries and churches, expanded their numbers of schools and hospitals, and sought to continue their rate of growth and acceptance across the country.

Protestant churches in the 1950s also inherited the circumstances of their forbearers. By the 1950s, a significant shift had occurred in many of the social responsibilities of American churches. Due to the executive and legislative impulses of many progressive and New Deal politicians, the United States government had subsumed many roles that had previously been tended to by churches. Indeed, care for the poorest, most helpless of society during the Great Depression—the oldest and youngest, laborers and the disabled—was gradually moved from the church to the state. The self-constructed notion of respectability, the shift in social care from church to government, and the spread of theological liberalism, then, had vastly changed the

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<sup>2</sup> William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22; Elisha Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7; Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 2012), 415, 467-469.

nature and structure of many American Protestant churches. The effects of these three forces had also changed the nature of American society.<sup>3</sup>

The term “mainline” stems from its reference to the railroad industry. The word is representative of an old railway line that ran along the east coast of the country to the elite, northwestern suburbs of Philadelphia. In time, this term also came to describe the “mainliners” of society, or the well-to-do, old-moneyed elite of society. Scholarship that invokes the term frequently utilizes it to depict a set of Protestant, Christian denominations. There are several variations of this list, but it typically includes the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Disciples of Christ, United Methodist Church, Congregational Church (now included with the United Church of Christ), Episcopal Church, northern Baptist churches, and the Presbyterian Church (USA). Just as there is ambiguity surrounding exactly which denominations comprise this “mainline” set of churches, confusion exists over exactly what makes certain denominations candidates for the title. Scholars most often cite practices and theological beliefs such as ecumenism, activism, liberalism, and modernism as defining characteristics of “mainline” churches, yet these denominations all differ in some respect with the beliefs and practices that they each exhibit.<sup>4</sup>

Theologically liberal churches had come to dominate the face of the American Protestant landscape. These denominations underwent a period of transformation from the period of Charles Darwin’s publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859 through the 1920s. During this span of time, Christians were forced to deal with the questions that scientific advancement, higher criticism of the Bible, and the importation of European methods of university instruction

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<sup>3</sup> Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*, 466.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the term “mainline,” and the denominations that comprised it, see Elisha Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline*, 1-6; and George M. Marsden, *Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 98-99.

brought to bear. Many churches moved away from literal readings of the Bible and opted for broader, more liberal readings of scripture following the modernist-fundamentalist controversy that many claim reached its climax in the 1925 Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee.<sup>5</sup>

During this trial that centered upon the teaching of evolution in high-school science classes, the great majority of Americans were given the opportunity to follow court proceedings through updates, descriptions, and interviews on the radio. This form of communication was both new and widespread and it allowed the trial to reach an elevated level of importance. Despite winning the nationally reported trial, three-time presidential candidate and “Cross of Gold” speaker William Jennings Bryan succumbed to the humiliation and bullying of attorney Clarence Darrow in what many described as the death knell for fundamentalist Christians. From the 1920s onward, fundamentalist Christians largely pulled away from society as church-founded universities severed ties with their denominational affiliations, removed mandatory attendance for chapel services, and brought theologically liberal faculty aboard.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Edward Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 3-8, 222-224, and 267-278; David Mislin, *Saving Faith: Making Religious Pluralism an American Value at the Dawn of the Secular Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 3-9; and George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 184-188.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of universities moving away from the churches that founded them, see James Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998); George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19-23.

## The Methodist Church

The Methodist Church represented one of the largest Protestant denominations in the 1950s. Statistics from the years during and after World War II reveal the extent of Methodism's reach. At that time, the Methodist Church controlled nine universities, sixty-nine colleges, nine schools of theology, twenty-five junior colleges, fourteen secondary schools, and five other miscellaneous institutions. Together, these 131 institutions of education contained 117,000 students that were taught by a faculty of 6,000. The annual budget for these collective Methodist institutions was \$42,000,000. To make this expansive network of Methodist instruction possible, the Methodist Church had invested more than \$400,000,000 in equipment, campus material, and buildings.<sup>7</sup>

The history of Methodist growth in the United States is a profound story of success and rapid expansion. Though the Methodist presence in America stretches far earlier, the nineteenth century witnessed an explosion in church membership at the heels of itinerant preaching, the use of common, everyday language in sermons, and the employment of circuit-riding tactics across the then-continually expanding South. Between 1800 and 1860, Methodists grew in number from the tens of thousands to nearly two million. The Second Great Awakening, which occurred during this period of growth, brought with it a number of reform movements that restructured the face of American religious and secular life while simultaneously bolstering the fabric of the American religious community.

Methodism continued to expand through the Gilded Age and Progressive Era (1877-1917), taking a turn toward theological liberalism in the early twentieth-century at the same time

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Moats Miller, *Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam: Paladin of Liberal Protestantism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 291-292.

as most other large Protestant denominations. Embracing the liberal tendencies of American society fueled Methodism's growth as membership rolls swelled from over four million in 1900 to over ten million by the close of the 1950s. In many ways, Methodists reflected the larger American society. Their church hierarchy was structured in a democratic manner. This structure neatly paralleled America's political structure. By the time of the 1950s, the Methodist Church was an overwhelmingly "white" denomination. In its first years, American Methodism had counted a very large African-American contingent in its membership. As early as the nineteenth century, however, discriminatory practices in America's northern cities led many black Methodists to leave the church and organize their own denominations. By 1940, African-Americans made up just 4.2 percent of the denomination's numbers. This number continued to decline. By 1976, the Methodist Church reported that only 3.57 percent of its members were black and its total "ethnic minority membership" equaled 4.25 percent. Like many of Protestant Christianity's larger denominations, Methodism fit the majority of white Americans' racial, political, and social perspectives of culture and society.<sup>8</sup>

### **The National Religious Mood**

Evangelical Christianity in the 1950s was on the rise due, in no small part, to the efforts of Billy Graham. The crux of Graham's message was salvation. Yet, his alter call was much more than an appeal for conversion to Christ in his listeners. Graham illustrated his "good news" of the gospel with the peril and anxiety of the nuclear stalemate with the U.S.S.R. that Americans

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<sup>8</sup> Howard Spann, *Evangelicalism in Modern American Methodism: Theological Conservatives in the "Great Deep" of the Church, 1900-1980*. PhD Dissertation, John Hopkins University, 1995; 19-20. For a concise overview of early American Methodism's rise and growth, see John Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 3-20.



## UNITED METHODIST LAY MEMBERSHIP

UNITED STATES POPULATION<sup>9</sup>

| METHODIST  | % CHANGE | YEAR | NUMBER      | % CHANGE | % UMC |
|------------|----------|------|-------------|----------|-------|
| 57,858     | -        | 1790 | 3,929,214   | -        | 1.5   |
| 65,181     | 12.7     | 1800 | 5,308,483   | 35.1     | 1.2   |
| 175,088    | 168.6    | 1810 | 7,239,881   | 36.4     | 2.4   |
| 268,728    | 53.5     | 1820 | 9,638,453   | 33.1     | 2.8   |
| 501,298    | 86.5     | 1830 | 12,860,702  | 33.4     | 3.9   |
| 894,753    | 78.5     | 1840 | 17,063,353  | 32.6     | 5.2   |
| 1,247,077  | 39.4     | 1850 | 23,191,876  | 35.9     | 5.4   |
| 1,802,927  | 44.6     | 1860 | 31,443,321  | 35.6     | 5.7   |
| 2,011,942  | 11.6     | 1870 | 38,558,371  | 22.6     | 5.2   |
| 2,963,723  | 47.3     | 1880 | 50,155,783  | 30.1     | 5.9   |
| 3,788,426  | 27.8     | 1890 | 62,947,714  | 25.5     | 6.0   |
| 4,650,026  | 22.7     | 1900 | 75,994,575  | 20.7     | 6.1   |
| 5,571,751  | 19.8     | 1910 | 91,972,266  | 21.0     | 6.0   |
| 6,748,837  | 21.1     | 1920 | 105,710,620 | 14.9     | 6.4   |
| 7,986,419  | 18.3     | 1930 | 122,775,046 | 16.1     | 6.5   |
| 8,346,004  | 4.5      | 1940 | 131,669,275 | 7.2      | 6.3   |
| 9,736,752  | 16.7     | 1950 | 150,697,361 | 14.4     | 6.5   |
| 10,647,864 | 9.4      | 1960 | 179,323,175 | 18.5     | 5.9   |
| 10,671,774 | 0.2      | 1970 | 203,211,926 | 13.3     | 5.3   |
| 9,519,407  | -10.8    | 1980 | 226,545,805 | 11.4     | 4.2   |

Figure 1. Methodist growth in America

<sup>9</sup> United Methodist Membership Statistics. "United Methodist Membership as Compared to the United States Population Census." General Commission on Archives and History. Duke University Libraries. (accessed December 28, 2014). <http://guides.library.duke.edu/religionDATA>

faced. He brought an immediacy and sense of urgency to his revivals that helped propel him—and evangelical Christianity—back into national prominence. Graham began his pastorate as a fundamentalist, but by the 1950s, he represented something much different than a typical fundamentalist preacher. He did not dwell on theology, only on the core message of the Bible: accept Jesus Christ as your savior—you will realize salvation through belief in Christ. Graham has been identified as a “neo-evangelical,” or an evangelical Christian who stood somewhere between the fundamentalism that insisted on narrow, strict views of the Bible and modernists, who believed that the best way to preserve and expand Christianity was to incorporate it with the thoughts, practices, and ideals of the modern world. Graham was highly cognizant of the times, mainly preached a fundamentalist message, and had made peace with the larger, theologically liberal segments of Protestant Christianity. It was these qualities that enhanced his image and gave rise to the spread of evangelical Christianity after WWII.

In the 1950s, religious revival was widespread throughout American culture. Typified by Graham’s large-scale crusades in several major cities, many Americans maintained a positive perspective of their nation’s status in the world. Yet, this evangelical mood was strikingly secular. The largest Protestant denominations and the country’s most recognizable leaders espoused a religion-in-general that neatly fit the mold of the greatest number of Americans. This religion, or civil religion, took on a new form and reached new heights during the Eisenhower Administration (1953-1961).

Civil religion in the 1950s was prevalent in many forms across the nation. The form that it took can be identified by three major attributes. The first of these elements is a strong emphasis on the individual as a spiritual being. By its nature, Christianity is a religion that holds a personal

relationship between the individual and his or her creator at its core. This point was extolled upon frequently in American denunciations of the communist system. The second element assumed that America's system of democracy, specifically, was founded on and maintained a spiritual foundation. The understanding that America was founded as a nation upon a hill, created to promote and foster freedom and liberty in the service and at the direction of God, demonstrated itself in many political, religious, and mainstream methods of publication throughout the 1950s. This idea had shaped foreign and domestic policies and national agendas for generations, yet this element of civil religion provided a compelling point of support in the ideological war against communism. The third feature that civil religion demonstrated during the Eisenhower Administration was its crusading character. Indeed, the Cold War was a struggle that many Americans framed as a chosen nation combating the evils of a tyrannical, oppressive, godless enemy.<sup>10</sup>

These three features of civil religion can be identified across the nation during President Truman's last term, as well as in subsequent decades. Yet, the intensity of these three components of civil religion was dramatically increased under Eisenhower's leadership. Eisenhower himself cultivated this civil religious sentiment among Americans in an attempt to gain further public support for Cold War policies. In him, one can identify these three components repeatedly in public addresses, speeches, and press releases.<sup>11</sup>

Eisenhower fulfilled his role in the nation's civil religion through methods other than spoken and written declarations. Before offering his own private prayer at his first presidential

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<sup>10</sup> Richard V. Pierard and Robert D. Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988), 195-198.

<sup>11</sup> For example, see William Lee Miller, *Piety Along the Potomac: Notes on Politics and Morals in the Fifties* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), 19-34; and Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency*, 198-200.

inauguration, Eisenhower took the presidential oath with his left hand resting on two Bibles: one presented to him by his mother following his graduation from West Point and the other used by George Washington in 1789. Eisenhower strengthened the relationship between religious leaders and the White House through the formation of an annual Presidential (now National) Prayer Breakfast, his own baptism at the National Presbyterian Church, and the appointment of John Foster Dulles as his Secretary of State.

President Eisenhower connected America's existence and history to God at many times throughout his two terms in office. Most of Eisenhower's talks before the Presidential Prayer Breakfast, later named the National Prayer Breakfast, demonstrate as much. Eisenhower's conception of such a gathering came on the heels of Congress' decision to formally observe a national day of prayer annually, which was enacted in 1952. Eisenhower tapped further into the religious impulse that was highly evident in the country at the time by placing himself at the head of the national religious table. The Presidential Prayer breakfasts allowed Eisenhower to affirm his place in the larger context of America's civil religion, frame a specific, spiritual history of America's foundation, and set a recurring event in the nation's annual calendar that sustained support for government leadership into the coming decades.<sup>12</sup>

Eisenhower's symbolic and controversial decision to present himself for baptism spoke volumes to Christians across America and expanded his credentials as a national, pastoral shepherd. On February 1, 1953, just twelve days after his inauguration, Eisenhower was baptized at the National Presbyterian Church on Washington's Connecticut Avenue at the urging of Billy Graham. Though Eisenhower did not wish the event to become public, news of Ike's baptism

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<sup>12</sup> Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 77-81; Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency*, 197.

almost immediately hit the press and was widely disbursed across the country. This was the first time in American history that a president had been baptized while in office.<sup>13</sup>

Eisenhower's selection of John Foster Dulles to take the Secretary of State post represented another facet of Eisenhower's finger on the pulse of America's religious mood in the early Cold War. Not only was Dulles arguably the most well prepared and highly qualified candidate for the post, but Dulles also connected with many Protestant Americans due to his piety and his well-known moral worldview. Dulles came from a deeply devout Christian family. His grandfather lived his life abroad as a Christian missionary and his father was a Presbyterian minister. John Foster Dulles grew up listening to his father's sermons each Sunday, studying the Bible before and after school, and experiencing a Presbyterian atmosphere at Princeton. Dulles also had family ties to high-profile political seats as well. His uncle, Robert Lansing (1864-1920), served as the 42<sup>nd</sup> Secretary of State and John W. Foster (1836-1917), who John Foster Dulles was named after, served as the 32<sup>nd</sup> Secretary of State. John Foster Dulles' background as a diplomat and international lawyer prepared him for the Secretary of State position. His life's work as a Presbyterian layman, ecumenist, and theologically liberal Protestant neatly complimented Eisenhower's Administration and further linked high profile figures in America's government to America's churches.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Eisenhower's wife, Mamie, was already a Presbyterian at the time of his baptism and the couple's subsequent membership in the National Presbyterian Church. See Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: The Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 207; and Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency*, 203.

<sup>14</sup> Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 385-386. Studies on John Foster Dulles' faith and on his actions as Secretary of State are broad and numerous. Townsend Hoopes offers both a concise overview of Dulles' ability to connect his faith to his diplomatic tactics and also an explanation of Dulles' impact on what the average American citizen thought of communism in, Townsend Hoopes, "God and John Foster Dulles." *Foreign Policy* 13 (Winter, 1973-1974):

Through these actions and more, Eisenhower generated favor from the public and governmental leaders, regardless of their political persuasion. His strategic appeals to Christian Americans were compelling and attractive to many during the earliest years of post-WWII Soviet-American tensions. It was under the canopy of civil religion that the Eisenhower Administration rallied support for America's Cold War foreign policies.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Changing of American Religion in the Early Cold War**

To compound the religious upheavals evident in the differences between neo-orthodox, evangelical, and theologically liberal Christians, fault lines widened throughout Protestant Christianity in other areas. This difference of opinion on theological matters is apparent in the ecumenical movement as it existed in the 1950s. Major international church organizations had maintained a presence in American society for decades, yet theological issues made differences more apparent between the largest of America's national and international church organizations during the early Cold War years. A brief overview of the Federal Council of Churches, National Council of Churches, World Council of Churches, American Council of Christian Churches, and International Council of Christian Churches better clarifies the state of American Protestant churches as they advanced into the second half of the twentieth-century.

The Federal Council of Churches (FCC) was founded in 1908 and included thirty-three denominations. This coalition of eighteen million Protestant Americans operated within larger

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154-177. For a description of Dulles as a reflection of his times and of dominant attitudes among American leaders, see Gaddis Smith, "The Shadow of John Foster Dulles." *Foreign Affairs* 52 (January, 1974): 403-408. For summaries of Dulles' approaches to power and policy as a Protestant Secretary of State, see Richard Immerman, *John Foster Dulles: Piety, Pragmatism, and Power in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Wilmington, DE: S&R Books, 1998); and Albert Keim, "John Foster Dulles and the Protestant World Order Movement on the Eve of World War II." *Journal of Church and State* 21 (1979): 73-89.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 200-205.

society mainly through efforts that sought to solve the problems of the industrial era. Founded at the height of the Progressive Era, this organization sought to combat the toll that Gilded Age and Progressive Era industrialization exacted on poor and working class American life. The FCC voiced its position on a range of issues. It largely supported the Allied position throughout WWI, yet it held to the goal of world peace throughout WWII. Furthermore, the FCC aided in the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948. In 1950, the FCC merged with thirteen additional interdenominational agencies to become the National Council of Churches (NCC).

The NCC (later the National Council of Churches in Christ in the U.S.A.) carried on the work that the FCC began. The NCC grew to a membership of twenty-nine denominations and a combined membership of thirty-three million church members from 143,000 congregations. Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert (1888-1976), a Presbyterian who previously served as the FCC General Secretary from 1921 to 1950, Dr. Eugene Carson Blake (1906-1985) of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A, and Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam advanced the interdenominational work of the NCC. Many religious leaders like these cultivated an organization that promoted multi-church cooperation for many of the goals that the FCC had aspired to carry out, while at the same time furthering social action that harkened back to the days of the Social Gospel. Very quickly, the NCC became the standard symbol of the Protestant cooperation and unity that existed in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century.<sup>16</sup>

The NCC operated a massive bureaucracy that consolidated an expansive set of resources into a single network. This network was highly efficient in channeling the collective voice of a number of churches into impactful accomplishments. The NCC established a mutually beneficial

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<sup>16</sup> E.V. Toy, Jr., "The National Lay Committee and the National Council of Churches: A Case Study of Protestants and Conflict." *American Quarterly* 21 (Summer, 1969): 192.

relationship with the U.S. government and played a role in the overall support of foreign policy. The NCC considered the white, theologically liberal, middle class as its core constituency and represented, in many ways, the majority of Americans. With regard to their relationship to American foreign policy, the NCC's Church World Service worked closely with the State Department for years in worldwide relief and humanitarian endeavors. The NCC's support of the Cold War was blatant and intentional until the late 1960s and 1970s when it changed its stance in the context of the Vietnam War. Throughout the Eisenhower Administration, however, the NCC represented one of the largest coalitions of Christian churches in the world and largely supported most U.S. Cold War foreign policy.<sup>17</sup>

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was an ecumenical organization of different Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican groups from every continent in the world. Officially formed at its first assembly in 1948 due to a lengthy delay caused by the fighting of WWII, the WCC sought to support churches in missionary and evangelical tasks, foster renewal, express concerns for peace, and bind its member churches to visible unity in faith and worship.

The FCC, NCC, and WCC had similar mission statements. The self-proclaimed goal of all three groups appeared general enough to include the great majority of Christians. The FCC and NCC sought to manifest the essential oneness of the Christian churches of America in Jesus Christ as their divine Lord and Savior, while the WCC claimed itself a “fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour” (*sic*). Despite an agreement among each organization's member churches concerning an agreeable, basic and fundamental understanding

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<sup>17</sup> Jill Gill, “The Politics of Ecumenical Disunity: The Troubled Marriage of Church World Service and the National Coalition of Churches.” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 14 (Summer, 2004): 175-176.



of scripture and their own group's foundational belief, these organizations came under fire from rival, theologically conservative Christians.<sup>18</sup>

The American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) represented a separatist, fundamentalist coalition of churches. Founded in 1941, the main impetus of the group's organization was to combat the FCC (and later the NCC) with Protestant orthodoxy in the face of rival groups' modernism and liberal theology. Carl McIntire (1906-2002) served as the first president. McIntire, a minister in the Bible Presbyterian Church, was well known as a popular religious radio broadcaster and founder of the weekly newspaper *Christian Beacon*. His own ministry expanded greatly between the 1940s and 1960s with an audience that desired a strong, fundamentalist gospel. McIntire believed that the ecumenical movement had compromised the truth of the gospel in its attempt to create a one-world church. In combating the FCC and, later, NCC, McIntire confronted the growing theologically liberal trend that many large Protestant churches represented in the growing ecumenical, international church movement. The ACCC had its greatest clashes with the NCC and WCC throughout the 1950s. Moreover, the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) was founded in 1948 to offset the influence of ecumenism in the face of the founding of the WCC that same year. Unlike the FCC, NCC, and WCC organizational goals, the fundamentalist, McIntire-led groups sought to protest against "the tenets of modernism and to proclaim the doctrines of the faith of the Reformation," thus redeeming the fundamental message and interpretation of the Bible.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Harold C. Fey, ed., *The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, vol. 2: 1948-1968 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009); Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, vol. 1: 1517-1948 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 579.

McIntire's opposition to ecumenical activities was not in isolation. Other individuals voiced their concern with the motives and scope of organizations like the NCC and WCC. Dr. Fred Schwarz (1913-2009), an Australian physician and founder of the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, and the Rev. Billy James Hargis (1925-2004), radio minister and founder of the Christian Crusade ministry, also used fundamentalist theological perspectives along with militant anti-communism to rouse support for opposition to more theologically liberal churches and organizations.<sup>20</sup>

In the main, these multi-church organizations included a large segment of American Protestants. Though theological differences often acted as a wedge among organizations, all of the aforementioned groups agreed—at times—on social and political issues that fell outside of church doctrine or theology. Indeed, the Cold War often blurred the lines that demarcated outstanding differences among each of these organizations. On the whole, the FCC, NCC, and WCC represented the largest ecumenical Christian organizations in the world. Their size speaks to the overall state of American Protestant Christianity—one that was outward looking, concerned with the world, and involved in social matters. The more fundamentalist organizations, such as McIntire's ACCC and ICCS, were focused on retaining the fundamentalist view of the Bible. These organizations opposed the theologically liberal perspective on scripture that their rival FCC, NCC, and WCC maintained. The ACCC and ICCS also demonstrated more aggressive stances on communism and alternate faiths. Many other denominations, churches, and sects fell outside of these large organizations, yet taken together,

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2014), 304, 313-315; Angela Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 40-41.

they present a general picture of the state of Protestant Christianity during the Eisenhower Administration.

This picture is much more complex than any broad generalization of the time can adequately describe. It is true that America underwent a general uptick in religious behavior in the decades leading up to the mid-twentieth century. This increased religious expression was intensified further after the close of WWII. The new state of affluence and abundance contributed to millions of working-class and middle-class Americans turning to organized religion. Simultaneously, the peril of the communist threat brought these same Americans to turn to Christianity as a means of protection, assurance, and salvation. To say that the United States underwent a religious phenomenon, or another period of “great awakening,” as some have, does not tell the entire story. Friction existed within the American religious community. This dissertation largely follows the neo-orthodox, theologically liberal, and evangelical forms of Protestant Christianity, however, the 1950s was a time of much change, tension, and awkward growth within the grand makeup of American churches.<sup>21</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Several major changes within America’s social and religious history occurred within the context of the early Cold War years. It is the mid-twentieth century that marks a noticeable end to great American theological thinkers. Granted, new waves of scholarship and academic approaches to dealing with psychology, history, and sociology emerged in the second half of the

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<sup>21</sup> Toy, “The National Lay Committee and the National Council of Churches: A Case Study of Protestants in Conflict,” 190. For a description of a great awakening in twentieth century American history, see William McGloughlin, Jr., *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004); and Robert Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 2000).

twentieth-century. Yet, Reinhold Niebuhr stands as the last great American theologian in a line that stretches far back to Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). Beyond the life of Niebuhr, one can identify few intellectuals within Protestant American groups. This fact represents one of the most important contributing factors to the place of American Christianity throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The 1950s also gave rise to a new mode of political expression. Americans began to hitch their religion to their political ideas at a much different level than before. This is not to say that the intermingling of personal religious and political ideals did not occur before the post war era of United States history. Indeed, there is a vast and rich history of political action, rhetoric, and voting behavior that has been based upon moral motives. But the widespread revival of civil religion and the easily identifiable, common enemy that the Soviet Union represented in the minds of many Protestant Americans contributed to a mixing of the religious and the secular in a manner that set the stage for many partisan planks for the next several decades. This “God and Country” mindset blossomed in the following decades to become the basis for the shape that the conservative Republican Party of the 1980s took.

The national emphasis upon freedom and security had its beginnings in the Monroe Doctrine (1823) and subsequent Theodore Roosevelt Corollary (1904). What is now recognized as the military industrial complex truly took off during WWII, however, it was in the 1950s that these ideas of world policing and maintaining American interests overseas were solidified. Following WWII, the Soviet Union represented America’s sole legitimate superpower rival. It was within the highly religious American society of the 1950s that many of these longstanding notions coalesced to form the backbone of future American political and religious ideas.

One of the thrusts of this intellectual, social, and religious restructuring was the “churchmen,” as they were called. Many of America’s ecumenical and multi-church organization leaders made great strides in contributing a religious component to America’s collective identity. During the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations (1945-1961), a real presence was established by leading religious figures for the first time in global politics. Worldwide efforts brought resolutions, acts of support, or petitions of disagreement to national governments concerning foreign affairs. In many international matters, large, transnational religious bodies voiced their perspectives on grand strategy and specific policies to a degree that was unprecedented in American politics. In short, American preoccupation with the Cold War pulled many Christians’ intellectual currency away from further understanding and exemplifying the religious life while simultaneously coating political agendas with heavy moralistic tones.

One way of determining Protestant attitudes toward foreign policy is to examine the religious leaders who were in place during this time period. By focusing on the major figureheads of Protestant Christianity’s three largest strands—evangelical, theologically liberal, and Neo-Orthodox—a clearer picture of religious attitudes concerning foreign policy emerges. To provide a more complete background of the three acknowledged opinion-makers in Billy Graham, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Garfield Bromley Oxnam, the following chapter details the earliest years of each man’s life, respectively. Such an examination reveals both striking similarities and glaring differences in each religious leader’s childhood and adolescence, education and life choices, and future path to the top of their particular segment of Protestant Christianity. It also provides a better understanding of American religious life from the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE FORMATIVE UPBRINGING OF GIANTS**

To fully comprehend the state of American religion in the early Cold War, one must take the three major forms of Protestant Christianity into consideration. Neo-Orthodoxy, theological liberalism, and evangelical Christianity stand out as the leading strands of Protestant Christianity during this time frame. Obviously, this was not always the case. In following the rise of these three facets of Protestant Christianity, one must turn to the decades-long path that each form took in their respective climbs toward widespread and popular acceptance throughout the American religious landscape. One cannot understand the full picture of American religious history in the twentieth century without considering the three major figureheads, or opinion makers, of each Protestant group. This chapter outlines the roots of Billy Graham, Garfield Bromley Oxnam, and Reinhold Niebuhr's views of the world by examining their early years. Through a discussion of each man's childhood, parents, household, and education, one may better understand the interchange of competing theological and political ideas within the scope of American religious history as they developed in the aftermath of WWII.

#### **Billy Graham**

Billy Graham's family descended from a line of Scotch-Irish ancestors who immigrated to the Carolinas before the American Revolution. Both of Billy Graham's grandfathers had fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War. Billy's mother and father, Morrow Coffey and Frank Graham, were wed in 1916 in North Carolina, where both of their families had enjoyed extensive roots. They had their first child, Billy Frank, two years later. Billy was followed by

three siblings, Catherine, Melvin, and Jean. Billy's parents built one of the largest dairy farms in the area with seventy-five cows and four hundred regular customers. This afforded the Graham's the ability to erect a handsome new colonial-design brick home with indoor plumbing. The Grahams were able to accomplish this success by working with and benefitting from a growing contingent of tenant farmers. Graham's biographer, William Martin, noted that the Grahams took young Billy to the doctor at one point, complaining that "he never wears down." They were told, "It's just the way he's built." Billy was rarely quiet. He could be found running through the house, overturning egg baskets, knocking plates from the kitchen table, or hurling a passing auto with rocks at given points of his childhood.<sup>1</sup>

Billy Graham's childhood, adolescent years, and young adulthood have been recounted many times in several books that cover the evangelist's life. Perhaps one of the most recent works by Duke historian Grant Wacker sums up the widespread interest with Graham's life best in his observation that Graham's story is so often repeated, "It has acquired the patina of a Damascus Road experience."<sup>2</sup> Wacker also makes note of an interesting facet of Graham's childhood—that the most remarkable thing about Graham's childhood is just how unremarkable it was. Young Billy's parents instilled a rigid level of self-restraint in their children. This level of discipline was not outrageous for parents of multiple children in the early-twentieth century to exhibit. Both Graham parents employed corporal punishment at several instances and Billy Frank found himself on the receiving end hundreds of times during his childhood. In retrospect,

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<sup>1</sup> William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 55-57.

<sup>2</sup> Historian Grant Wacker uses this quote to describe Billy Graham's conversion story, however, the same quote can be applied to the entirety of Graham's childhood years; see Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 6.

Billy's mother once suggested that she and her husband could have gotten by with a lighter touch. Remembering examples of her husband administering punishment, she reminisced aloud: "I knew what he was doing was biblically correct," she conceded, "and children didn't die," but "I think I would use a lot more psychology today." Indeed, Billy's parents used psychological methods as well. In an effort to stifle any of his children's potential curiosities with the bottle, as he knew his own father to abuse, Frank once forced Billy and Catherine to drink beer until they vomited.<sup>3</sup>

Billy's mother and father attended the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, a small Calvinist sect that accepted the literal truth of the Bible. Their church also fully adhered to the seventeenth-century Westminster Confession of Faith. Billy's mother Morrow (who also made the memorization of Bible verses a high priority in the standard routine of any given day in the Graham household) drummed Bible verses into Billy Frank's head as she scrubbed his back in the washtub; fittingly, the first one she taught him was that great golden text of evangelicalism, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." She also kept a scripture calendar on the breakfast-room wall, and each morning she tore off a verse the children were expected to memorize before they left for school or, during the summer, before they went out to play.

The Graham family prayed at every meal and gathered in the family room each evening for further devotions. In this setting, Billy's mother would read Scripture and other inspirational material, and Frank would pray. Billy's brother Melvin remembered his father's prayers during these after-supper, family gatherings, "His hands would tremble and his voice would shake a little, but people used to love to hear him pray." The children became more involved as they

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<sup>3</sup> Martin, 58.



grew older, often reading verses or offering simple prayers. By age ten, each child memorized the Shorter Catechism. This exercise was no easy feat as the Shorter Catechism compresses the heart of Calvinist theology into 107 concise questions. Life was not entirely uneventful in the Graham household. The children did adhere to a family ban on games and newspaper comics each Sunday, however, the Graham children were occasionally surprised from time to time. In one instance, Frank broke precedent by taking the family out for ice cream after church one Sunday evening.

Billy remembered his childhood favorably. Considering his rural upbringing on the family farm, Billy offered, “For a child of the Roaring Twenties who reached adolescence in the Depression of the early thirties, rural life probably offered the best of all worlds.” He added, “And being farmers, we could manage to live off the land when the economy nose-dived in the 1929 stock market crash.”<sup>4</sup> Billy’s adolescence was not out of the ordinary. His interests were as common as any other white, rural teenage boy. For the most part, Billy suggested later in life, this included girls, fast cars, and baseball. Graham recalls his teenage years as the time when he came to Christ. Graham’s conversion story places him in a tent not far from his home, listening to an itinerant evangelist named Mordecai Ham. Ham was a traditional Southern evangelist known in 1934, the year of Billy’s conversion, as an evangelist who was successful in winning converts for Christ, attacking negligent and soft clergy, and chastising immorality. Ham would later be associated with far right-wing political causes and anti-Semitism, but revealed no major sentiments regarding these matters in the fall of 1934. Ham’s tent revival lasted for six weeks. Though raised in a strong Christian home, Billy cites Ham’s revival as the moment of his conversion. After visiting several times, Billy made his way down Ham’s tent aisle to confess his

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<sup>4</sup> Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: Waller and Company, 1997), 5.

sins and accept Christ. He would go on to lead multitudes of people down the aisles of his own revival venues in the same manner for the next

Following his high-school graduation, Billy sold Fuller Brushes door-to-door in South Carolina (which he was superbly good at). In the fall of 1936, Billy began his studies in Cleveland, Tennessee at Bob Jones College. Due to his dislike of Bob Jones College's strict social rules, the president's stringent control, and the area's damp climate, Billy transferred the next semester to the Florida Bible Institute (FBI), near Tampa, Florida. Like Bob Jones College, FBI was an unaccredited institution. Having received his Bachelor of Theology degree in May of 1940, Graham accepted a scholarship from Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. Though Graham matriculated into both Bob Jones and FBI unaware of either school's accreditation status, he did acquire several skill sets that were invaluable to his character and later professional life. Graham found the authoritarian control that existed on the campus of Bob Jones College antithetical to the fundamentalist theology that dominated the school. Moreover, Graham sharpened his preaching skills and tried his hand at radio ministry while a student at FBI. It was Wheaton, however, that provided Graham with the most worthwhile education of all the schools he studied at.

At Wheaton, Graham's style of sermon delivery transformed into that of the preacher that would lead the nation into an evangelistic resurgence in the 1950s. He also encountered an expansive network of friendships and acquaintances that he cultivated over the course of his life. Perhaps most importantly, Graham met his future wife, Ruth Bell (1920-2007), while at Wheaton. He eventually graduated from in 1943. Graham's marriage to Ruth, his relationship

with her father, general surgeon L. Nelson Bell (1894-1973), and his career beyond graduation are the subject of Chapter Four.<sup>5</sup>

### **Reinhold Niebuhr**

Reinhold Niebuhr was born on June 21, 1892 in Wright City, Missouri. His father, Rev. Gustav Niebuhr (1863-1913) emigrated from Germany to America in 1881 at the age of eighteen. Reinhold's father was a minister for the German Evangelical Synod, (which went on to be absorbed by the United Church of Christ), a denomination created by the 1817 union of the Reformed and Lutheran churches in Prussia. Gustav's faith combined a pietistic, evangelical Christianity with an openness to the theological liberalism of the late nineteenth century.

Reinhold's father, Gustav was characteristic of his generation in his acceptance of the patriarchal views that dominated American life. He also displayed the tendencies of a stereotypical authoritarian German father. He did not believe in dancing, shirking household chores, or reading newspapers on Sunday. He expected his family to follow these rules.<sup>6</sup> He discouraged his daughter, Hulda, from pursuing higher education. He may be remembered most though, aside from his lifelong career as a pastor, for having a profound, positive impact on his family. Three of his four children went into the ministry. His life and religious views undoubtedly influenced the course of his children's lives. He took his final position as pastor at St. John's Evangelical Church (now the United Church of Christ) in Lincoln, Illinois in 1902 and remained there until he died unexpectedly of diabetes at the age of 50 in 1913.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Martin, 59.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Calvin Brown, *Niebuhr and His Age: Reinhold Niebuhr's Prophetic Role and Legacy* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 16; Jon Diefenthaler, *H. Richard*

Reinhold's mother, Lydia (Hosto) Niebuhr (1869-1961) served her husband in the role of an unpaid co-pastor and managed the domestic sphere of the home. This was typical for many pastors' wives during the time period. Very little is known of her private life. Lydia's sister, Adele Hosto, went on to become a consecrated Deaconess in the German Evangelical Synod and her father, Edward Hosto, was a missionary with the German Evangelical Synod. It is safe to say that Reinhold came from a family that was very committed to living out spiritual lives.

Reinhold had three siblings. The oldest, and only sister, was Hulda Niebuhr (1889-1959). Like all of her siblings, Hulda was exceedingly bright. She respected her father's wishes and did not pursue a college education following her high school graduation in 1906. She did unpaid church work in her home and at her father's church in Lincoln, Illinois and, later, in Reinhold's Detroit parish. After her father's death in 1913, however, Hulda decided to apply to college. She eventually earned an A.B. and M.A. at Boston University, becoming one of the first three female assistant professors at Boston University in 1927. She moved to New York City the following year to work on her Ph.D. at Columbia Teacher's College and, despite not finishing her doctorate, became one of the earliest Ministers of Education (officially Director of Religious Education) in America in 1930. She served in that role between 1930-1945 at the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York.

The second child and firstborn boy, Walter Niebuhr (1890-1946) was the more rebellious of Gustav and Lydia's children. Descriptions of Walter typically portray him as tall and handsome with good athletic abilities. His immediate ambition was to be a college fraternity man followed by a successful career in business. His father did not attempt to block his eldest son's

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*Niebuhr: A Lifetime of Reflections on the Church and the World* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 4.

choices in life, yet he did not grant his approval either. Walter was the only Niebuhr child not to become involved in church work. He remained a faithful Christian and became a businessman and journalist. After his father's death, he proved to be the financial savior of the family. His success in life was volatile. He often relied on his brothers' financial stability to supplement his lack of income at various trying times in his life. Lydia gave birth to a second son and third child, Herbert, who died in infancy. This was still a fairly common and extremely unfortunate occurrence that many families experienced at the time.

Reinhold and Helmut Richard Niebuhr were the two youngest siblings. H. Richard (1894-1962), the youngest brother, is often considered to be the most brilliant of the Niebuhrs. One of the interesting ironies of scholarship that focuses on Reinhold or H. Richard is the tendency to name H. Richard the better-educated and more intelligent theologian while simultaneously referring to Reinhold as America's theologian.<sup>8</sup> H. Richard did not have as close a relationship with his father as his brother Reinhold did. Shy and quiet as a youth, H. Richard followed his brother's footsteps graduating from Elmhurst College in 1912 and Eden Seminary in 1915. He earned his M.A. in philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis in 1918 and became the only member of his family to finish a doctorate, receiving his B.D. and Ph.D. from Yale in 1923 and 1924, respectively. H. Richard was ordained by the Evangelical Synod in 1916 and was the pastor of an Evangelical Synod congregation in St. Louis between 1916 and 1918. He also served as pastor of a Congregationalist church while pursuing his Ph.D. in New Haven, Connecticut. H. Richard went on to serve as President of his denomination's Eden Theological Seminary from 1919 to 1931 and then as professor at Yale Divinity School from 1931 until his

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<sup>8</sup> Any appropriate examination of this irony falls beyond the scope of this section. Yet, this question requires further exploration, as it has not been sufficiently addressed in any of the scholarship that covers either Reinhold or H. Richard Niebuhr.

death in 1962. He wrote much less than Reinhold, yet he remains extremely influential to theologians today. His most popular work, *Christ and Culture*, remains a standard textbook in many seminaries and divinity schools throughout North America.<sup>9</sup>

Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), known as Reinie to his friends, was clearly one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century. Indeed, he stands as one of the last great Christian intellectuals. Born in Wright City, Missouri, Reinhold had a close and intensely strong relationship with his father. Commenting on the influence of Gustav upon his middle-son, Reinhold's biographer, Richard Fox noted, "he...found his father the most interesting man in a prairie town of ten thousand residents. [To Reinhold] his father's vocation was more interesting than that of anyone else in Lincoln."<sup>10</sup> Reinhold graduated from Elmhurst College in 1910 before moving on to Eden Seminary, which functioned more as a pastoral and missionary finishing school than an accredited post-baccalaureate seminary. Two events made 1913 a bittersweet year for Niebuhr: his graduation from Eden and his father's death. He took up his father's pastorate before moving to Yale.

In 1915 he was ordained by his father's church, St. John's Evangelical Church in Lincoln, Illinois and subsequently called as the pastor of a small mission, Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit, Michigan. Bethel had sixty-five members when Niebuhr arrived and over seven hundred when he left in 1928. Largely thanks to his mother, Lydia, living with him, assuming both domestic duties as well as serving in much of the routine work of the church, Reinhold was able to become very active outside of his pastoral duties; even involving himself in the politics of the city. During this time, he wrote his *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, which

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<sup>9</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951).

<sup>10</sup> Fox, 11.

began his break from the social gospel and marked the beginning of his own school of “Christian Realism.”<sup>11</sup>

In a very brief overview of the Niebuhr household, several main points stand out. The head of household, Gustav, was a first-generation immigrant American. He chose to plant his roots in the Midwest and live out the life of a pastor. This household was strongly patriarchal. Reinhold and his siblings all demonstrated rigid obedience to their father’s wishes—save Walter on a few occasions. The women of the home, Lydia and Hulda, operated within the stringent sphere of women at the turn of the twentieth century. Lydia operated within the domestic sphere of the home, raising her children and supporting her husband, and Hulda observed her father’s wishes—at least until his death. By considering the lives of Hulda and Lydia, one can identify a shift in the perspectives of two generations. Though Hulda went without demonstrating anything in the way of an extreme, feminism-activist streak, she did mark a break with the past practice of most women by choosing her own independent path following the death of her father. Hulda’s career, in its own right, signaled a changing of the times and the erosion of separate spheres and Coventry with her choice for education and her later career in New York City.

There are several similarities that exist among the three men that serve as the main figures of analysis for this dissertation. Yet, there are also profound differences. By looking at the earliest years of Reinhold Niebuhr’s life, one may identify many of these differences. The actions of Reinhold’s family speak to larger changes that occurred in this time period. Women’s rights began to make gains, the large influx of immigrants that moved into the United States was not as new as it was in the late nineteenth century, yet the Niebuhr’s contribute to the story of

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<sup>11</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932).

how and where many of these immigrants settled and made a life. As will be discussed later, the Niebuhr's were German, and this characteristic posed an entirely different set of complexities in the 1930s. In examining Reinhold Niebuhr's early years, one can better understand the man during his formative years and beyond. One can also gain a fuller understanding of America itself.

### **Garfield Bromley Oxnam**

Garfield Bromley Oxnam was born on August 14, 1891 in Sonora, California. His father, Thomas Oxnam, was a miner who moved often from one mine to another, constructing a church—frequently with his own hands—and serving as its pastor at each stop along the way. Thomas, who was born in the village of Pool in the district of Carn Brea, Cornwall in 1854, had been mining since he followed his own father into the mines at the age of seven. After the death of his father and bleak prospects, Thomas moved from mines in Cornwall, to South Africa, to Montreal, to the American West. Thomas met his bride, Mamie, in Illinois during one of these moves. Bromley's mother, Mamie was a devout Methodist, active in local church, a charter member of Woman's Christian Temperance Union and daughter of a miner. Thomas and Mamie moved further West together after becoming husband and wife.

Garfield Bromley Oxnam was the second of four children, and by the time he was four, his Methodist, mining father had moved the family to Los Angeles—a city that Oxnam would be associated with until 1928. The oldest sibling, Tom, was eight years older than Brom (as he was referred to by those closest to him) and maintained a distant relationship. Bromley looked upon his sister, Lois, who was three years younger, with the affection of a protective older brother. The youngest Oxnam child, Willie, enjoyed attending ballgames and the circus with Bromley.



He also enjoyed the schoolyard protection that his older brother provided. In short, the Oxnam children were a hodgepodge of characters. Tom went on to be an engineer who was politically conservative in his politics. Lois, a caring girl and dutiful daughter who remained unwed, carried on through life taking care of her widowed mother, and Willie, the musically talented social butterfly, dreamt of an acting career that never took off.

Thomas Oxnam's aspirations for his children were surely realized in Bromley's life. G. Bromley Oxnam was named Garfield after the Republican president and Bromley after Dr. Robert I. Bromley—the surgeon who saved his mother's life three years before Bromley's birth. Foreshadowing his politics later in life, Oxnam went by Bromley rather than Garfield from his childhood.<sup>12</sup>

The son of a miner, Bromley ascended through life from humble beginnings to enjoy a comfortable level of success. After spending his childhood and adolescent years in Los Angeles, he attended the University of Southern California from 1909 until 1912. It was there that Oxnam met, courted, and proposed to Ruth Fisher. Oxnam's family and Ruth's family were prominent members of the First Methodist Church in Los Angeles and shared much in common. Most of all, Ruth and Oxnam were deeply devoted to their Methodist beliefs. When Oxnam decided to sit for examination by the Quarterly Conference, First Methodist Church and subsequently granted a local preacher's license in August of 1912, Ruth was ecstatic. She was especially pleased as she had more than encouraged him in his decision-making on the matter. Oxnam was heavily involved with the task of pastoral responsibilities between the end of 1912 and the beginning of

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Moats Miller, *Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam: Paladin of Liberal Protestantism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 25-30.

1913 before he travelled by train to Boston, Massachusetts to begin formal training for the ministry at the Boston University School of Theology.

That Oxnam was the prototypical liberal Methodist of this era can be identified as early as his choice to attend the BU School of Theology. Oxnam's sole biographer, historian Robert Moats Miller observed, "Bromley chose to study at the BU School of Theology because he considered it Methodism's premier seminary." Miller contends that Oxnam found several aspects particularly appealing: "He admired the school's contributions to the Church, its emphasis on the social aspects of Christianity, and the tradition of liberalism associated with [professor] Borden Parker Bowne's philosophical idealism."<sup>13</sup> The Methodist Church had found the liberal trend in theology appealing long before Oxnam had decided to enter into college. Yet a combination of both a Methodist upbringing coupled with an embrace of theologically liberal interpretations of the Bible had convinced Oxnam of his need to pursue a life within the Methodist Church.

Oxnam had a passionate affection for Jesus Christ (he gave his life to Christ before enrolling at USC) yet he despised dogma. He confessed to his diary, "I have not said the Apostles' Creed for four years, because I did not believe in it...I am going to take that Creed, sentence by sentence and try to write what I believe under each sentence. I hate ritual, formalism."<sup>14</sup> Oxnam could be found reading work by Adam Smith and Karl Marx outside of his mandatory readings.<sup>15</sup> When important figures visited Boston to speak, Oxnam attended—and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Miller, 57.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Oxnam used these authors to uphold the Christian faith in a sermon approximately forty years later: "The Christian Gospel is not to be found in Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations' nor in Karl Marx's 'Das Kapital.' It is to be found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, in the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of the New Testament, and in the vision of

took notes. Oxnam decided that Walter Rauschenbusch's Harvard sermon which he attended in 1914 was the grandest that he had ever heard. Oxnam married Ruth in 1914, graduated in 1915, and was ordained in January of 1916. Oxnam chose to be ordained in Massachusetts because he planned to pursue postgraduate study there, yet he neglected to follow through on his application to Harvard's Ph.D. program in history. Having been received on trial by the Southern California Annual Conference in absentia before leaving for Boston, he returned to Los Angeles to begin his ministerial appointment.

### **Conclusion**

By juxtaposing these three men, several similarities come to the fore. Each one of these Christian leaders came from humble beginnings. From the descriptions above, one can identify a travelling miner, a first-generation German pastor's family, and a North Carolina farmer's homestead as the background for each of Oxnam, Niebuhr, and Graham's beginnings. Each man came from modest families. Each attended college. Each man also rose quickly in their spiritual and professional lives to preside over the explosive growth that their respective form of Protestant Christianity underwent in the latter half of their lives.

In each man's youth, one can identify a major impact that each one of their fathers left upon them. Oxnam, Graham, and Niebuhr all respected their fathers and held the toil of each of their lives in high regard. All men incorporated the values and work ethic of their respective fathers into their own lives. Additionally, all three men moved from adolescence to adulthood between the 1910s and the 1930s. This timeframe was ripe with major theological and political

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John in The Revelation." G. Bromley Oxnam, "We Intend to Stay Together!" A Sermon Delivered to the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches at the First Methodist Church, Evanston, Illinois. Chicago: Methodist Church Commission on Promotion and Cultivation Central Promotional Office, 1954.

questions of ethics and morality. WWI, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, the Great Depression, the New Deal, and the beginning of WWII all occurred at a period of time in each man's young life when each would have still been deciding their own views of the world for themselves. Indeed, it was either one, or a combination of these very incidents that were the deciding factor for Niebuhr's rejection of theological liberalism and turn to Neo-Orthodoxy; Oxnam's embrace of the Social Gospel and theological liberalism—strongly hitched to ecumenical, global, interchurch organizations; and Graham's call to evangelize as many men and women as he could possibly reach.

Oxnam, born in 1891, and Niebuhr, born in 1892 were both older than Graham, born in 1918. Both Niebuhr and Oxnam were also born into a first-generation American household. This may also explain Oxnam and Niebuhr's differences in political perspectives in comparison to Graham. Although Oxnam and Niebuhr wield additional sociological and demographic differences compared to Graham, both were also old enough to live through and remember the height of America's Progressive Era. Both would have been old enough to remember the effects that industrialization and immigration exacted upon the country years earlier.

Obviously, each man demonstrated differences as well. Geographically, each man was raised in very different regions of the country. Niebuhr spent his youth, for the most part, in the Midwest. Graham grew up in North Carolina. Oxnam, though never in one place for too long during his childhood, largely grew up in California. Each man experienced a different religious upbringing than the other. Despite these similarities and differences, each man made his own name in the Protestant Christian community. All three gained enough notoriety and name recognition to enjoy something in the way of power and respect. All three also enjoyed the limelight and the association with power. In several instances, one can identify all three men

reaching out for and responding to the acknowledgement of government bodies, media attention, and U.S. Presidents.

Each man also spent most of their lives advocating for very different forms of Protestant Christianity. Reinhold Niebuhr sought to apply his understanding of ethics, morality, and Christianity practically to the political tensions of the day. G. Bromley Oxnam sought to undermine aggression, injustice, and friction on a global scale through large, international efforts. Billy Graham had hoped to change the world from the inside out by bringing as many people across the globe as he could to recognize their sin in the presence of a real God. These very different understandings of the Bible, the world, and humanity, all coalesced at a very peculiar time in America's religious history.

## **CHAPTER 4**

# **BILLY GRAHAM'S EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY IN THE 1950S**

The life and career of Billy Graham has left a tremendous footprint upon American history. The work that Graham performed over sixty years touched the lives of millions. Through the printed word, in-person rallies and revivals, and television sets, Graham's appealing personality, relevant and meaningful sermons, and ability to demonstrate the applicability of his message to the lives of his audiences propelled him and his ministry to dizzying heights. In the 1950s, Graham solidified his hold on his place within the great pantheon of America's religious history through record-breaking attendance at rallies, his radio and television ventures, and his decision to operate from the place of a moderate, evangelical Christian, rather than the waning fundamentalist camp or the then-dominant theologically liberal wing of the spectrum. While Graham's impact on American foreign policy that dealt with the Soviet Union was not nearly as influential as that of other leading Protestant Christians, his interaction with anti-communist sentiment aided in the federal government's cultivation of public support for hawkish policy and Christians' willingness to more closely align their religious beliefs with political behavior.

Having grown up on a dairy farm in North Carolina, Graham shifted his stance from the fundamentalist understanding of the Bible that he affirmed early in life to something that can only be described as "evangelical." Graham made obvious and intentional overtures in making himself and his message as acceptable and open as possible. Graham moved away from the fundamentalist stance that he previously subscribed to and embraced a perspective, sometimes

referred to as “new evangelicalism.” This theological, religious, and personal stance was evident throughout the 1950s, but crystallized during the 1957 New York crusade held in Madison Square Garden from May to September. During that timespan, Graham cooperated with theologically liberal Protestants and Roman Catholics in advertising and carrying out the sixteen week-long revival that saw an astonishing 2.4 million cumulative attendees turn out to hear Graham’s message.

His turn away from fundamentalism was, in reality, not all that drastic. He still maintained an acceptance of most of the doctrinal pillars that fundamentalists held as true, yet Graham avoided entangling himself in debates centered upon dogmatism and Armageddon. Graham did so by placing an emphasis, in the 1950s, on evangelism and cooperation with all Christians. In one example, Graham responded curtly to a direct line of questioning that attempted to pin him down at a particular point along a theological spectrum: “I am neither a fundamentalist nor a modernist.”<sup>1</sup> His own shift both reflected and impacted the religious sentiments of many Americans. Indeed, coupled with the rise of Neo-Orthodoxy, it was Graham’s popularization of this version of evangelical Christianity that upset the theologically liberal churches’ dominance over American Protestantism.<sup>2</sup>

It was this quality of Graham’s that aided in his rise to stardom in America. Indeed, Graham had his finger on the pulse of many Americans’ greatest fears and aspirations—

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Rice, “Questions Answered About Billy Graham,” *Sword of the Lord* June 17, 1955, p. 10. Further frustrating self-identifying fundamentalists, Graham answered another reporter; “The ecumenical movement has broadened my viewpoint and I recognize now that God has his people in all churches.” See, Martin, *A Prophet With Honor*, 220 and 657n220.

<sup>2</sup> The most recent assessment of Graham attributes the overall meaning of Graham’s career to a combination of Graham’s personal, creative agency and the changing forces that shaped modern America, see Grant Wacker, *America’s Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 1-18.

especially in the first decades of his ministry. His ability to frame nearly every sermon that he delivered in the 1950s within the context of dire global affairs confirmed the personal worries of many individuals, thus presenting the closing, “altar call” portion of his message with greater urgency and importance. Graham used this same model of delivery in many varieties of ministry. Academics and the mainstream press have examined Graham’s career, meaning, and legacy since he marched into the national spotlight after his 1949 Los Angeles revival. One of the overarching themes of Graham’s legacy continues to be that of Graham’s having been “geared to the times.”<sup>3</sup>

### **The Ministry of Billy Graham**

Graham’s life story has been recounted many times. With few exceptions for perspective or author’s emphasis, the details and conclusions vary little. Graham’s handling of his finances, his marriage, and his image—all categories that have demolished careers of weaker-willed church leaders for generations—has become the benchmark for pastors, preachers, and religious personalities across the nation. Yet, this chapter on Graham merits, at the least, a brief sketch of the high points of his career.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Youth For Christ leaders described their own evangelistic efforts as “Geared to the Times, but Anchored to the Rock.” Billy Graham served as the organization’s first full-time evangelist. Graham was with YFC when he benefitted immensely from publisher William Randolph Hearst’s desire to cover Graham’s YFC rallies frequently. For further reading on Hearst’s directive to “Puff Graham,” see, William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor*, 93 and 631n93; John Dart, “Billy Graham Recalls Help From Hearst.” *Los Angeles Times* June 7, 1997. [http://articles.latimes.com/1997-06-07/local/me-1034\\_1\\_billy-graham-recalls](http://articles.latimes.com/1997-06-07/local/me-1034_1_billy-graham-recalls) (accessed September 20, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> The prevailing biographical or autobiographical works that cover Graham are Martin, *A Prophet With Honor*, Graham, *Just As I Am*, McLoughlin, *Billy Graham, Revivalist in a Secular Age*, (New York: Ronald Press, 1960), David Aikman, *Billy Graham: His Life and Influence* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), John Pollock, *The Billy Graham Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), and Roger Bruns, *Billy Graham: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood



After the success of the previously mentioned 1949 Los Angeles meeting, Graham's crusades grew in size and in frequency. Following a crusade in Boston, Graham spent the remainder of 1950 refining and sharpening his revival campaign presentation in Columbia, South Carolina; Portland, Oregon; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Atlanta, Georgia; and several New England states. Aside from crusades, Graham also launched his *Hour of Decision* radio program on the ABC network. This venture led to a half-hour television program, also titled *Hour of Decision*, which lasted from 1951 to 1954. Though brief in its lifespan, it gave way to network television broadcasts that were made from his actual crusade rallies. Besides radio and television, Graham further capitalized on popular media forms of the day through film. Graham's film ministry began in 1951 with *Mr. Texas* and went on to claim over 100 million viewers. In radio, television, and movie formats, Graham demonstrated his ability to connect with and speak for multitudes of Protestant Christian Americans. The rapid-fire exposure in the most relevant media forms of the day played no small part in Graham's quickly becoming a national household name.

Radio, television, film, and large-scale crusades did not represent the only outlets for Graham's ministry in the 1950s. In 1952, Graham utilized the printed word as an extension of his multi-faceted ministry. He began with a daily newspaper question and answer column titled

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Press, 2004). Other works centered on Graham exist, such as Wacker, *America's Pastor*, Andrew Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), Angela Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Ken Garfield, *Billy Graham: A Life in Pictures* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2013), and Steven Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), among others, yet these either fail to go into the depth that the former list covers, or these works are focused on particular aspects of Graham's life or career. Many articles, newspaper editorials, M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations that are not listed also consider Graham. It is from these secondary works, primary sources from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Billy Graham Center Archives (hereafter BGCA) in Wheaton, Illinois, and online holdings of BGCA at <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives> that most of the biographical information in this chapter is drawn.

“My Answer.” This column, which was sponsored by the *New York News-Chicago Tribune* syndicate, provided Graham the opportunity to address the hundreds of thousands of letters that he received each year. “My Answer” appeared five days each week in many newspapers across the nation. Due to its popularity, several hundreds of Graham’s answers served as the basis of his eighth book, which Doubleday published in 1960, simply titled, *My Answer*. By the end of the 1950s, Graham’s “My Answer” column reached an estimated 16 million readers.<sup>5</sup>

Graham’s most impactful print apparatus, however, was *Christianity Today*. One of the major guiding hands in this endeavor was his father-in-law, Lemuel Nelson Bell (1894-1973). Graham got along well with his wife’s father and mother, L. Nelson and Virginia McCue Bell (1892-1974), who had spent a life’s work as Presbyterian missionaries to China. L. Nelson and Virginia served as Presbyterian medical missionaries in China from 1916 to 1941 within Jiangsu Province, three hundred miles north of Shanghai. As a chief surgeon and administrator of the Love and Mercy Hospital, L. Nelson kept a busy schedule with medical, administrative, and pastoral duties. Upon returning to the United States, L. Nelson continued to practice medicine in Asheville, North Carolina. In 1942, Bell founded the *Southern Presbyterian Journal*. In 1956, he became the executive editor of the newly launched *Christianity Today*, after discussing the idea and scope of the periodical with his son-in-law, Graham. Very few people had as large an influence upon Billy Graham as Bell.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*, 143; Graham, *Just As I Am*, 1115.

<sup>6</sup> Graham envisioned *Christianity Today* as a platform for evangelicals—which he also referred to as “conservatives”—to both challenge the theologically liberal perspective of *The Christian Century* and also to restore “intellectual respectability” and “spiritual impact” to evangelical Christianity. He especially aimed to reach a broader audience of ministers than he was at the time. See Graham, *Just As I Am*, 425-430; Papers of Lemuel Nelson Bell, Collection 318, “Biography,” Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, IL,

During a crusade in Louisville, Kentucky, Graham received a letter from his father-in-law concerning the first-ever run of the magazine: “My dear Bill, 285,000 copies of the first issue of *Christianity Today* finished rolling off the presses in Dayton at 2:00 A.M. today.”<sup>7</sup> It quickly became the premiere Christian periodical in the world. It also dealt significant blows to the circulation numbers of Reinhold Niebuhr’s *Christianity and Crisis* and theologically liberal Protestants’ main source of theological and church-related information, *Christian Century*. Indeed, the latter result was one of Graham’s chief aims when he conceptualized *Christianity Today*. Graham took this success further in 1960 with a more popular-minded monthly publication, *Decision* magazine. Complete with large, glossy photographs, devotionals, and positive stories, Graham hoped to further his reach and ministry. He accomplished as much with the wide dissemination of both *Christianity Today* and *Decision* magazine.<sup>8</sup>

The main aspect of Graham’s ministry in the 1950s remained his crusades. In 1954, Graham led his colossal crusade in London. In 1957, he held his aforementioned New York City crusade. All in all, Graham carried out eighty-five crusades throughout the Caribbean, Europe, Australia, Canada, the “Far East,” and the United States. Beginning in 1960 and carrying through each year for four decades, Graham would further spread the reach of his crusades to include more of East Asia, Africa, Mexico, and the Middle East. His core constituency remained, however, in America. Despite Graham’s repetitive references to the gloomy state of world

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<http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/GUIDES/318.htm#3>. (accessed online, October 10, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Letter from L. Nelson Bell to Billy Graham, October 10, 1956; quoted in Graham, *Just As I Am*, 430.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to the founding of *Christianity Today* and *Decision* magazine, Graham also released six books in the first decade of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s (BGEA) existence. He would go on to write thirty-two books over the course of his ministry. BGEA proudly boasts that *Decision* magazine currently maintains an annual circulation of 400,000. <http://billygraham.org/news/media-resources/electronic-press-kit/bgea-history/> (accessed November 1, 2015).

affairs, the inherent sin of each crusade-goer, and the prevalence of sin in society, people flocked to each of Graham's crusades in droves. Between 1949 and 1954, for example, a staggering 10 million Americans attended a Billy Graham crusade.<sup>9</sup> It was Graham's ability to harness widespread concerns with the worldly and the divine, coupled with the persuasiveness of his message that thrust him to celebrity status in the 1950s.

### **Evangelical Christianity and Billy Graham**

Billy Graham came to personify evangelical Christianity in the 1950s. He channeled his successes through a number of outlets that dominated America's large, Protestant population. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) was established in 1950 as the official nonprofit, religious corporation that would manage the finances for Graham's successful projects. The majority of these BGEA-led efforts were introduced in the 1950s through a variety of formats. Notably, Graham branched out to every popular form of media that he could in the decade or so after his "Christ for Greater Los Angeles" Crusade in September of 1949.

Graham's meteoric rise in popularity could not have been possible without the herculean efforts of many. His ministry's core team worked alongside one another for decades. Graham's team was finalized in the late 1940s. The two most prominent and trusted members were Graham's musical soloist, George Beverly Shea (1909-2013) and front man Cliff Barrows (1923-). Other men factored in to Graham's team, such as his brother-in-law Leighton Ford (1930-) and Graham's lifelong friend Grady Wilson (1919-1987), who served in capacities as preachers, yet Barrows and Shea remained Graham's closest and most trusted confidants. Barrows, a fellow Youth For Christ member, fit in well with Graham's endeavors by working as Graham's crusade announcer and organizing and leading enormous choirs. Shea was Graham's

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<sup>9</sup> Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*, 129.

musical soloist. Reminiscent of teams of evangelists and musicians of the past, Graham and Shea represented an accessible, popular, and successful duo.

Indeed, Billy Sunday (1862-1935) had Homer Rodeheaver (1880-1955), Dwight Moody (1837-1899) had Ira Sankey (1840-1908), and Graham had Shea. The latter two complimented each other's individual talents by attracting would-be revival goers who may not have been strong or secure enough in their own faith to attend with Shea's songs and hymns. Then Graham would follow. As Graham put it: "We used every modern means to catch the ear of the unconverted and then we punched them straight between the eyes with the gospel."<sup>10</sup> Shea's contributions to Graham's work became iconic; especially in his renditions of "How Great Thou Art" and "Just as I Am." Graham's modeling his ministry on effective strategies of past preachers was not limited to bringing Shea on board. He looked far back through American history for other methods as well.

Closely related to successful preacher and musician combinations of the past, Graham shared additional similarities with popular and important religious leaders in American history. Graham was no stranger to using the printed word to promote the Gospel. Much like the eighteenth-century evangelist George Whitefield who preached against a selfish preoccupation with the pursuit of wealth, Graham utilized the commercial tools of his time to promote his ministry. Similar to Whitefield, Graham put several advance publicity methods into action during his many revivals. Graham sold his books and other materials at rallies and revivals, advertised his impending crusades in local newspapers, and engaged in self-promotion when addressing

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<sup>10</sup> Billy Graham, *Revival in Our Time* (Wheaton, IL: Special Edition for Youth for Christ International, 1950), 3, quoted in Grant Wacker, "Billy Graham's America," *Church History* 78 (September, 2009): 502; and William McLoughlin, Jr., *Billy Graham: Revivalist in a Secular Age*, 38.

correspondence to friends and acquaintances in positions of power. All of these were methods that garnered major currency for evangelists throughout American history. Throughout the 1950s, Graham introduced these successful concepts of the past incrementally into his own ministry.<sup>11</sup>

Graham made seemingly subtle changes to his work—mostly throughout the 1950s. His forays into different communication forms and channels certainly factor into this evolution, yet the much more personal, in person crusade experience benefitted most from Graham’s utilization of past methods. At the 1950 Columbia, South Carolina campaign, the sponsoring Layman’s Evangelistic Club hired Willis Haymaker (1895-1980) for the purposes of advance work and encouraging cooperation across denominational lines in the area. Haymaker, the son of Presbyterian missionaries, had gained some form of notoriety through his work in campaign and rally organization with Bob Jones, Sr., John R. Rice, and others in the prior two decades. It was at Graham’s 1950 rally in South Carolina that Haymaker put in place Billy Sunday’s delegation system: churches that agreed to cooperate in the coming Graham revival would agree to reserve sizable blocks of tickets on certain nights. This ensured optimal attendance at each service offered by Graham. Haymaker’s borrowed technique went over so well that Graham convinced him to join his ministry as the official head crusade organizer; a position that Haymaker held until he retired in 1979.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*, 142; Lambert, “Peddler in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Great Awakening,” in Stanley N. Katz, et. al., *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 511-529.

<sup>12</sup> “Biography of Willis Graham Haymaker,” BGEA: Papers of Willis Graham Haymaker, Collection 1, BGCA. [www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/GUIDES/001.html](http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/GUIDES/001.html) (accessed October 25, 2015). See also, Martin, 129.

In addition to advertising his impending crusades ahead of time, assessing local churches' interest in cooperating with the Graham team, and providing meeting days, times, and advance tickets to cities where crusades were to be held, Graham also mimicked evangelists of the past in his decision to build meeting place structures or tabernacles specifically for his crusades. In Portland, Oregon, in 1950, for example, Graham was able to have a football field sized tabernacle that seated 12,000 constructed for his services. Much like the methods of Billy Sunday four decades earlier, Graham erected large structures to house the great multitudes of revival-seekers in advance of his arrival.<sup>13</sup>

Graham came to personify evangelical Christianity in many ways. His position in the upper echelons of the American religious community came about as a result of his efforts toward diversifying the scope and reach of his ministry through the BGEA in the 1950s. This rise in popularity and importance were also aided by the successes of his team, the guidance of his father-in-law, L. Nelson Bell, and also Graham's ability to harness the successful strategies of the most successful evangelists of the past. In accomplishing these goals, Graham demonstrated his heightened perception of the national mood.

His audience—mostly theologically and politically conservative white Protestants—embraced Graham as a mouthpiece for their greatest fears and aspirations. By praying on the White House lawn in 1950, to the chagrin of President Truman, Graham sent a message to the American public that faith was welcomed in Washington at a level that was, until then, not as casually displayed. Graham's major successes across the world throughout the 1950s etched his

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<sup>13</sup> For comparisons of the likeness between Graham and Sunday in evangelical revival logistics, see, *ibid.*, 133; Roger Bruns, *Billy Sunday and Big-Time American Evangelism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 99; and Kathryn Lofton, "The Preacher Paradigm: Promotional Biographies and the Modern-Made Evangelist." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 16 (Winter, 2006): 95-123.

name in the collective American mind as the standalone figurehead of evangelical Protestant Christianity.

### **Billy Graham and Communism**

A basic assessment of Graham in the 1950s leads one to find him a cold warrior in almost any definition of the term. He was certainly anti-communist. Yet, it remains difficult to assign a generalized title to Graham concerning the intensity of his sentiments regarding communism versus capitalism; or the Russian-American tensions of the Cold War. Graham was vehemently opposed to the idea of communism. He found the form of communism that existed throughout the Soviet Union threatening at best. More often than not, he judged it as evil. He also used the potential of communism's spread as a point of illustration in several of his sermons. In 1951, Graham produced a pamphlet, titled "Christianism vs. Communism" for wide distribution that illuminates this point:

In Korea the blood of American soldiers is being shed every day to hold back this philosophy of Karl Marx. The communist philosophy has infiltrated into every country of the world, including America. Communism is on the march. Everywhere we hear the tread of its armed feet and everyone wonders what lies ahead... This Bible is not only a Bible recording historical events, but it also pronounces with accuracy the events that are yet to come. There are strong indications that the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth chapters of Ezekiel are devoted almost entirely to the tremendous rise of Russia in the latter days. There are strong indications in the Bible that in the last days a great sinister anti-Christian movement will arise. At this moment it appears that communism has all the earmarks of this great anti-Christian movement. Communism *could* be only a shadow of a greater movement that is yet to come. However, it carries with it all the indications of anti-Christ. Almost all ministers of the gospel and students of



the Bible agree that it is master-minded by Satan himself who is counterfeiting Christianity.<sup>14</sup>

Graham repeated variations of this perspective in most of his crusades, commentary, and publications in the 1950s. The feature of Graham's that complicates our understanding of his strict adherence to a complete commitment to American anti-communist sentiment is his occasional critique of sinfulness in America. Graham declared several points through the 1950s that flew in the face of American exceptionalism's greatest hallmarks. He boasted of God's lack of any special favor toward either Americans or their nation. He suggested that communism's spread very well might be a sign of God's judgment upon America's sinful behavior. He cautioned his crusade audiences against maintaining a holier-than-thou mentality and warned of Americans' delusions of being collectively immune from God's judgments.<sup>15</sup>

In cases where Graham participated in such discourse, it typically preceded a description of the importance of salvation through Jesus Christ. However, his perspectives suggest that Graham was not a cold warrior in the sense that he used the religious framework of Cold War descriptions to sidestep or overlook sin in America. In every other facet of opposition to communism, Graham was undeniably on board. He held that communism needed to be defeated. Graham even demonstrated instances of using Scripture to justify armed conflict with communists. On the eve of the Korean War, Graham wrote to President Harry Truman: "The Bible many times urges us to be prepared for war, and Jesus Himself predicted that there would

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<sup>14</sup> Graham, "Christianism vs. Communism," Pamphlet, 1951. "Duplicates by and about Billy Graham" Box. BGCA. Graham made comparisons of America, democracy, or capitalism with good and communism with evil often. For a further discussion of these juxtapositions, see Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares*, 84-86.

<sup>15</sup> "The New Evangelist," *Time*, 25 (October, 1954): 60; cited in Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*, 129.

be wars and rumors of wars till the end of time.” Furthermore, Graham urged Truman to, “total mobilization to meet the communist threat, at the same time urging the British Commonwealth of Nations to do the same.” Graham then added: “The American people are not concerned with how much it costs the taxpayer if they can be assured of military security.”<sup>16</sup> Over the course of the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations, Graham supported the option of using military force against communism. As with most Americans, his calls for the exchange of fire diminished as the nuclear stalemate intensified. In this regard, Graham called for spreading the message of Christ as the primary weapon in the fight against communism rather than emphasize military action.<sup>17</sup>

Graham’s prescriptions for how to deal with communism elicited both competing views and lack of unanimity within the larger American Protestant community concerning America’s Cold War rival. Toward the end of Eisenhower’s first term, Graham’s public assessments of communism drew criticism from preachers and pastors across the nation. *Christian Century* and *Time* magnified Billy Graham’s place in this dialogue and opened the discussion to a larger, national audience. In July of 1956, *Time* published a piece on the matter that opened with the question, “Is ubiquitous Billy Graham good for Christianity?” For the negative, Union Theological Seminary professor Reinhold Niebuhr, who *Time* claimed, “[had] done more than any man in the U.S. to hose away the froth of religious liberalism with the cold high-pressure stream of neo-orthodox polemic,” found Graham too simplistic in his theology. Niebuhr concluded that Graham, “thinks the problem of the atom bomb could be solved by converting the

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<sup>16</sup> Letter from Graham to Harry S. Truman, July 30, 1950, Presidential Correspondence, Harry S. Truman, 1949-1952, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, Independence, MO.

<sup>17</sup> The history of anti-communism in America is complex. For an overview of American interactions with anti-communist sentiment in the 1950s, see Wacker, *America’s Pastor*, 231-234 and 380n160.

people to Christ, which means that he does not recognize the serious perplexities of guilt and responsibility, and of guilt associated with responsibility, which Christians must face.” In this, Niebuhr found Graham at fault for adhering to a “pietistic moralism” framework. Niebuhr publicly voiced his discontent with Graham at several instances throughout the 1950s. More often than not, Niebuhr’s critique centered upon Graham’s lack of dealing with larger issues of justice. However, Niebuhr was also a revered public intellectual who recognized his own public perception eclipsed by a younger, attractive, and immensely popular evangelist.<sup>18</sup>

As the Cold War progressed, Graham continued to describe communism in dark characterizations. He also advocated for spreading the Gospel as the best means of dealing with the communist threat to America. The shift from advocating military confrontation, as in his call for intervention in Korea, to endorsing evangelism as the greatest weapon in the fight against communism was not merely for show. Graham expressed this position in places outside of the public eye. In late 1957, Graham wrote to President Eisenhower, “If our hope lies only in our terrifying weapons then we have little hope.” Graham also added, “The American people need to be encouraged to look to God who is the source of all our spiritual and moral strength.” As the Cold War quickly became a nuclear stalemate, Graham frequently called for spiritual weapons in prayer and conversion over military confrontation.<sup>19</sup>

### **Billy Graham and American Foreign Policy**

Billy Graham’s stance on American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union in the early Cold War years is not clear-cut. Like many Americans, Graham’s views of the perceived

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<sup>18</sup> “Billy and the Theologians,” *Time*, 46 (July, 1956): 51.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Billy Graham to President Dwight Eisenhower, December 2, 1957. Presidential Correspondence: Dwight David Eisenhower, 1952-1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

communist menace remained constant between the end of World War II and the most intense years of the Civil Rights Movement, yet his thoughts on how to proceed in light of the standoff varied through the years. As the Korean War intensified, Graham felt that President Truman needed to either commit fully to waging war in Korea and see the intervention through to victory—or get out entirely. Graham had no qualms with war if they fit his standards for justification. This point revealed itself several times in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Indeed, his unabashed support for American policy in the early years of the Vietnam War support this observation. Yet, in the 1950s, as in the late 1960s, Graham's support for the use of military force tapered off. The best categories of interpretation for identifying Graham's perspective of foreign policy during the Eisenhower Administration are twofold: the situation in Formosa and Graham's association with the White House.

The situation in Formosa in the early 1950s was turbulent for America, Mainland China, Chinese nationalists within Formosa, and the U.N. Like other regions that represented political, cultural, and military battlefields of the Cold War by proxy, Formosa came to symbolize the struggle between the democracy of the West and the communism of the Soviet Union. The reason that the island of Formosa came to wield such a prominent place in America's foreign policy had much to do with the complicated nature of its international status.

The history of America's postwar policy toward Formosa, like many of America's postwar relationships, began before the end of World War II. Legal precedent was set with the Cairo Declaration of December 1, 1943 when President Franklin Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek determined that all of the territories that Japan had absorbed would be returned to the Republic of China. In the 1945 Potsdam Proclamation, Prime Minister Churchill, President Chiang, and President Harry Truman declared

that the stipulations of the Cairo Declaration would be upheld and that Japanese sovereignty would be limited to specific islands that the authors saw fit. In 1951, when the Treaty of Peace was signed with Japan—which neither the Soviet Union nor China signed—a provision was included which renounced Japan’s right to Formosa and Pescadores. Since Formosa had been held by Japan since China ceded the territory in 1895, the Treaty of Peace that was signed with Japan effectively left Formosa without a controlling nation-state. When fighting broke out in Korea in 1950, President Truman authorized the U.S. Seventh Fleet to patrol the strait between Formosa and China with the intention of preventing armed conflict between the Chinese at Formosa and the mainland, communist Chinese nation. Though Americans in the 1950s would have welcomed an end of communism in “Red” China, the U.S. government was not prepared to aid a Chinese Nationalist invasion of mainland China. Though brief, this situation was nearly always at the forefront of discussions centered upon admitting China to the United Nations. Along with the islands of Quemoy and Matsu, Formosa’s fate was closely followed in the foreign policy circles of many Western nations. As such, the developments surrounding China, Formosa, Quemoy, and Matsu, also became topics of discussion for many American religious leaders.<sup>20</sup>

Many Americans viewed the small islands of Quemoy, Matsu, Pescadores, and the larger island of Formosa as strategic and friendly areas in a region in the throes of communistic struggle. While some favored Formosa’s invasion of the communist, “Red” China mainland, most were hesitant. The majority, however, found the set of islands off of the coast of China to be too valuable to lose to communism. Graham remained neutral, publicly. He offered his

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<sup>20</sup> Most of the background information on the history of American foreign policy toward Formosa derived from Arthur Dean, “United States Foreign Policy and Formosa,” *Foreign Affairs* 33 (April, 1955): 360-375.

unqualified support for foreign policy, privately, in several instances. For example, Graham wrote to Eisenhower in 1954 to let the President know that he had been praying for him as the President wrestled with the “Indo-China problem.” Graham assured the President that, “whatever your ultimate decision, I shall do my best through radio and television to make my contribution in selling the American public.” In closing, Graham offered, “My private opinion is that Indo-China must be held at any cost.”<sup>21</sup>

There are other sources that point to Graham’s stance on Formosa and China. During the height of American anxiety over communism in the 1950s, L. Nelson Bell loomed large in Graham’s decision making. Bell, like many other Americans in general and evangelical Christians in particular, was diametrically opposed to America’s formal recognition of China and China’s admission to the U.N. Coupled with Graham’s speaking tours of East Asia, which bypassed China, and also Graham’s inclusion of China in his sermons as one of the regions where communism loomed large, it remains safe to identify Graham as one who opposed China, supported U.S. efforts in Formosa, and spoke against communism in all regions of the world where it existed.<sup>22</sup>

Aside from Graham’s thought concerning American policy itself, the evangelist’s relationship with the White House offers another facet of Graham’s role in Cold War affairs. Graham’s interaction with sitting presidents began during the administration of Harry S. Truman.

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<sup>21</sup> Letter from Billy Graham to President Dwight Eisenhower, May 10, 1954. Presidential Correspondence: Dwight David Eisenhower, 1952-1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>22</sup> For Bell’s attitude toward China, see letter from L. Nelson Bell to W.P. Strube, December 1, 1958. “Christian Anti-Communist Movement, 1958-1961.” General Correspondence Box. BGCA. For Graham’s tour of East Asian nations and territories, see letter from Billy Graham to President Dwight Eisenhower, January 7, 1956. Presidential Correspondence: Dwight David Eisenhower, 1952-1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

Having been granted a meeting with President Truman, Graham left a sour taste in Truman's mouth when he reenacted the prayer that he had held in the Oval Office for reporters to see on the White House lawn immediately after leaving Truman's presence. Although Graham received sharp criticism for his actions, the symbolism of his message stuck: America needs God. In this, Graham paved the way for the uptick in public displays of civil religion for the remainder of the decade.<sup>23</sup>

Graham's relationship to the Office of the President was mutually beneficial during the Eisenhower Administration. It was during Eisenhower's two terms in office that Graham established himself as a nationally recognized evangelistic force, a leader that spoke for many Americans, and a shaper of national dialogue. As Graham's ministry and popularity grew between 1953 and 1961, his actions and public pronouncements did much to shape anti-communist discourse and intensify the mainstream acceptance and embracing of civil religion. Though Graham's evangelistic message had the specific goal of converting non-believers to followers of Jesus Christ, his characterizations of the Cold War bolstered what political scientist, historian, and journalist William Lee Miller described as "religion-in-general." As sociologist Will Herberg described, between 1949 and 1953, Bible distribution increased by 140 percent in America. Approximately four-fifths of adult Americans believed that the Bible was the revealed word of God. Yet, only 53 percent of those polled could name the first four books of the New

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<sup>23</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011), 173; and Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 24 and 27.

Testament. Herberg concluded that America seemed to him to be both the most religious and most secular of all the nations on earth.<sup>24</sup>

It was this great wave of faith in faith that Graham rode upon in the early years of his career. As President, Eisenhower took advantage of this swell of religious sentiment for his approval, agenda, and support of domestic and foreign objectives. All in all, Eisenhower used this national, revivalistic theme well. The years of his Administration were relatively comfortable ones for many Americans. Conflict was avoided in China and Vietnam. The Korean War ended. Tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States were eased. Yet this pervasive religiosity reared its head in nearly every facet of executive action. In many of these displays of civil religion, Graham could be found. Eisenhower echoed many of the good versus evil descriptions of the Cold War that Graham outlined. Eisenhower obliged when Congress adopted a resolution in 1952 that the president proclaim a National Day of Prayer once a year. He began the first Presidential Prayer Breakfast in 1953. In many of Eisenhower's public displays of religiosity, be it speeches, breakfasts, or luncheons, Billy Graham was frequently present.<sup>25</sup>

Graham's presence at many of Eisenhower's public displays of religion mattered immensely to millions of Protestant Americans. It was the culmination of Eisenhower's civil religion, Graham's evangelism, Americans' fears of communism, and America's "religion-in-

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<sup>24</sup> William Lee Miller, *Piety Along the Potomac: Notes on Politics and Morals in the Fifties* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), 128; Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 1-3; Richard Hughes, *Myths America Lives By* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 170.

<sup>25</sup> Pierard and Linder, 190-197; Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Bev Shea, and Billy Graham's presence at prayer gatherings were covered extensively. Some of the most extensive coverage was carried in the "Bulletin of International Christian Leadership." For such publications, see issues from 1953-1957, in box "Fellowship Foundation Newsletters, 1942-1970," BGCA.



general” that created so sharp a divide in many Americans’ eyes on the perception of the world having been divided into good and evil. Though Graham did not specifically and intentionally outline his stance on most foreign policy matters, his relationship to the White House and his support of Eisenhower did much to influence American support for the Eisenhower-Dulles foreign policies of the 1950s.

### **Conclusion**

From the short descriptions of Graham’s association with American leadership and his view of the Formosa situation, several points stand out. First, Graham acted as a vehicle for evangelical concerns with or support for existing foreign policy. While the topics that Graham spoke about largely concerned policies other than those directed toward the Soviet Union, his commentary on communism and his outlook on Formosa find Graham to be, like many Americans in the 1950s, one who was opposed to the spread of Soviet influence and supportive of the containment of communism to the areas it existed in Asia. At the same time, Graham reflected the changing thought of many evangelical Christians concerning America’s strategies for supporting American interests overseas and for dealing with communism. At the outset of both the Cold War and the Vietnam War, American attitudes were exceedingly more hawkish than years into either conflict. In this, Graham was of the same mind. The concern that many Americans felt over China, the United Nations, Japan, nuclear holocaust, and communistic takeover were also realized in Graham. His changing mind on the handling of the Cold War through official US policy was not unique. In many ways, it was very much in line with the perspectives of the majority of Americans.

In more subtle ways, Graham's relationship to the White House can be used to examine his stance on foreign policy. Of the eleven presidents that Graham had a relationship with, Truman was the most unique. Indeed, Truman was the one president that did not care for Graham, felt no need to court Graham for approval, and generally dismissed Graham for several reasons. From the presidency of Eisenhower on, however, Graham was a welcomed individual in the White House. Many presidents used Graham's popularity and position of public prominence for personal gain, political currency, and national goals. In this, Graham typically supported each sitting president in customary and polite ways. In concert with Eisenhower, however, Graham furthered American foreign policy by offering to support the desires of Eisenhower's campaigns. He also exacerbated the groundswell of civil religion by promoting Eisenhower's religiosity.

## **CHAPTER 5**

# **REINHOLD NIEBUHR, NEO-ORTHODOXY, AND THE EARLY COLD WAR**

Many of Reinhold Niebuhr's close friends, and some distant, intelligent outsiders, regularly described Niebuhr as a prophet. Niebuhr was, admittedly, embarrassed by this title. An incredibly publicly engaged individual, Niebuhr was too humble and self-critical to accept such esteemed terms of endearment. The fact that so many thought of Niebuhr as such a prolific individual speaks to his mastery of a wide range of subjects. In matters concerning the contemporary Christian life, international relations, ethics, diplomacy, and morality, many of Niebuhr's prescriptions were timely and on point. While many of Niebuhr's perspectives on a range of issues remain important and insightful to this day, this chapter demonstrates what Niebuhr thought of the Soviet Union during the Eisenhower Administration. More specifically, this chapter assesses Niebuhr's thought concerning U.S. foreign policy toward the Soviet Union during the years of the Eisenhower presidency (1953-1961).

Reinhold Niebuhr was instrumental in shaping the opinions of many American intellectuals and government leaders regarding U.S. foreign policies toward the Soviet Union in the early decades of the Cold War. George F. Kennan (1904-2005), who is credited with conceiving America's Cold War foreign policy of containment, wrote to Niebuhr, "I don't think I've ever learned from anyone things more important to the understanding of our predicament, as

individuals, and as a society, than those I have learned, so to speak, at your feet.”<sup>1</sup> Outspoken in his denunciation of communism, Niebuhr fit neatly into the prevailing mode of American ideology. During the Eisenhower Administration, Niebuhr applied his understanding of Christianity, morality, ethics, and sin to foreign policy in a way that drew the attention of many important figures and diplomats in the 1950s. Niebuhr’s unique understanding of ethics, Christianity, and diplomacy was a major factor of consideration for many American intellectuals and policymakers over the course of the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> Niebuhr’s comprehensive approach to foreign policy and international affairs was the sum of a life’s work examining major philosophical questions; yet, his thought can be boiled down to the core issues of love and justice.

This chapter demonstrates that Niebuhr’s emphasis on love and justice served as the basis of his perspective of the Soviet Union as well as his approaches to Christianity and foreign policy. Through a discussion of Niebuhr’s Christian Realism, his position as a public intellectual, his break from theological liberalism and subsequent embrace of Neo-Orthodoxy, and his commentary on foreign policy and international affairs, Niebuhr’s understanding of love and justice reveals itself to be the fundamental mode of his thought and overarching worldview. The best place to begin in examining Niebuhr’s interaction with American foreign policy is with a brief overview of his philosophical understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Kennan to Niebuhr, April 12, 1966. “Papers of Reinhold Niebuhr” Box 49, “George Kennan 1966” Folder, Reinhold Niebuhr Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter, “Niebuhr Papers, LOC”).

<sup>2</sup> For example, see letter of praise from Dwight Bradley, Director of *The Religious Associates of the National Citizens Political Action Committee* to Niebuhr, March 22, 1948. “General Correspondence” Box 2, “Bra-Bri” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

## Christian Realism

Niebuhr's academic interest in theology, sin, and society between his college years and World War II, or roughly 1910 to 1945, account for his creation and embrace of Christian Realism.<sup>3</sup> The fact that many scholars disagree among themselves on particular questions related to Niebuhr's Christian Realism attests to the complexity of its scope. Put succinctly, Christian Realism is a branch of philosophic thought that was developed by Niebuhr in the 1940s and 1950s and found that the kingdom of heaven cannot be realized on earth because of the innately corrupt tendencies of society. It did not adhere to any specific position on political issues.<sup>4</sup> In Christian Realism, individuals' sinful nature is a perpetual barrier to either attaining any kind of society that resembles a utopia or realizing heaven on earth.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, due to the injustices that arise on earth, an individual is therefore forced to compromise the ideal of the kingdom of heaven on earth. Under the guise of Christian Realism, Niebuhr argued that human perfectibility could never happen. The major emphasis of Christian Realism is on the sinfulness of humanity.<sup>6</sup>

Niebuhr saw sin as something that was inherent to every living person. Because of this, Niebuhr rejected post-millennial theology, or the belief that Christ will return to establish heaven on earth after a period of one thousand years of peace. The focus then became one of dealing

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<sup>3</sup> For a thorough assessment of Niebuhr's Christian Realism, see Robin Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 277.

<sup>5</sup> Niebuhr does use Christian Realism as a launching pad for anti-communist diatribes. An example of Christian Realism's emphasis on pride or self-love as the basis of sin coupled with seething anti-communist rhetoric can be found in: Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).

<sup>6</sup> The Christian Realism of Niebuhr should not be confused with the Christian Realism associated with President Jimmy Carter in the 1970s. For a brief discussion of Jimmy Carter, Christian Realism, foreign policy, and diplomacy, see Gary Smith, "Jimmy Carter: A Progressive Evangelical Foreign Policy," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 9 (December 2011): 61-70.

with the injustices of the world rather than improving society for the ultimate goal of ushering in the return of Christ. The only real demands of Christian Realism's subscribers were that they follow a middle path, according to historian Richard Fox, "of utopianism and resignation."<sup>7</sup> Christian Realism fit with Niebuhr's Neo-Orthodoxy and served as the basis of his theological belief, as well as his intellectual popularity, from the time of Niebuhr's introduction of it until his death. Evidence of this Christian Realism logic appears in Niebuhr's characterization of communism, his approaches to foreign policy, and his views on the Christian life.

### **The Soviet Threat and U.S. Foreign Policy**

Niebuhr's spoken and written pronouncements over the course of the 1950s reflected the intellectual ground that he had come to develop over the course of the preceding decades. His Neo-Orthodoxy and Christian Realism were on full display in most, if not all, of his public commentary. Yet, Niebuhr also changed his tone with the course of contemporary events. As the perceived threat of nuclear war waned over time, so did Niebuhr's rhetoric. His emphasis on the suddenness of impending atomic catastrophe dissipated through the years of the 1950s and he gradually called for co-existence with the Soviet Union. It is easy for many to point to this slight shift in Niebuhr's views and identify contradictions in his thought. Yet, Niebuhr considered many of his foundational beliefs concerning Christian and secular life to remain central despite changes in the strategy or approaches to diplomacy that he emphasized. Niebuhr was not contradictory in his views of foreign policy or the Soviet Union. Like many Americans—especially those directly involved in policy planning—Niebuhr underwent a period of shifting perspectives on the Cold War.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

One of the most apparent changes in Niebuhr's thought can be seen in his perception of the threat of nuclear war decreasing over time with the Soviet Union. In the years immediately following World War II, Niebuhr pictured the global stage of affairs in grim descriptions. In 1951, Niebuhr declared, "Our margins of safety are obviously much slimmer than a decade ago when the Nazi fury was at its worst." He continued, "Perhaps the most unnerving aspect of the present situation lies in the fact that the 'play' is now primarily in the hands of the opposition. The Soviets can overrun Europe at any time." Niebuhr claimed, "The two powerful deterrents to such a venture are the fear of our atomic weapons and their economic weakness. Atomic weapons could presumably damage Russia more than she could damage us. We must arrive, therefore, at the conclusion that a relaxation of the world tension by possible bargains is extremely difficult"<sup>8</sup>

By the time that Eisenhower took office, however, Niebuhr had shifted to a noticeably different stance. As early as 1954 Niebuhr replaced his emphasis on caution and tension with the notion of coexisting with the Soviet Union. He retained the necessity of a need for firmness against communism and continued to describe communists in general as atheistic and godless. However, the willingness to ease tensions took a paramount place in Niebuhr's prescriptions.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, Niebuhr sought to raise awareness in America concerning the willingness to accept China into the United Nations.<sup>10</sup>

The matter of United Nations' acceptance of China into its formal ranks was a matter of great importance during the Eisenhower Administration. The factors surrounding China's

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<sup>8</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "Ten Fateful Years," *Christianity and Crisis* XI, no. 1 (February 5, 1951): 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> Niebuhr, "The Limits of Military Power," *The New Leader* 38 (May 1955): 16-17.

<sup>10</sup> Niebuhr, "Editorial Notes," *Christianity and Crisis* XIII, no. 24 (January 25, 1954): 186.

admission were hotly debated in America. From policymakers in Washington D.C. to the general American public following along in the nation's newspapers, several perspectives existed on whether or not to allow China into the United Nations. This wide array of opinions for and against China's entry existed within the American religious community as well. Those Protestant leaders who tended to uphold more theologically and politically conservative views tended to support keeping China out of the United Nations whereas theologically and politically liberal Protestant leaders tended to support China's admission to the United Nations. Across the political and theological spectrum, however, most Protestant preachers, pastors, professors, and theologians supported some kind of American intervention in Formosa and the Formosa Strait. Niebuhr fell into the overall mindset of those politically and theologically liberal Protestant leaders in his support for China's admission to the United Nations.<sup>11</sup>

By the mid-1950s, Niebuhr conveyed more optimism than he had since the ending of World War II. He felt comfortable expressing his opinion that the Soviet Union did not desire a general war and the prospect of mutual annihilation seemed a thing of the past. Moreover, the "big thaw" brought about by the Geneva Conference and the Atoms for Peace Conference held toward the end of 1955 prompted Niebuhr to remark: "There is more than a ray of additional hope in [these] development[s]. Altogether the future seems less menacing than it did only one short year ago."<sup>12</sup> His perspective on the Soviet Union was altered further between 1956 and 1958. The events of Stalin's death in 1953 and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's (1894-1974) rise to power between 1954 and 1955 prompted Niebuhr to adopt a cautiously optimistic stance

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<sup>11</sup> Letter from Will-Matthus Dun to Niebuhr, March 12, 1955, Box 2, "Christian Action" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>12</sup> Niebuhr, "American Leadership in the Cold War," *Christianity and Crisis* XIV, no. 17 (October 18, 1954): 129-130; Niebuhr, "Editorial Notes," *Christianity and Crisis* XV, no. 15 (September 19, 1955): 114.



concerning the Soviet Union. This perspective was a blend of the more aggressive position he held in the late 1940s and early 1950s coupled with the optimistic position of the early and mid-1950s.

In late 1956, Niebuhr examined the pros and cons of a Khrushchev-led Russia and ultimately declared the only good news to be that “the communist empire is in the process of decay.”<sup>13</sup> Niebuhr considered the encouraging aspects of the Khrushchev triumph in the Soviet Union: the dethroning of Georgy Malenkov (1902-1988), Vyacheslav Molotov (1890-1986), and Lazar Kaganovich (1893-1991) along with the delivering of Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” in February of 1956. Niebuhr found all of these things to be questionable for the future trajectory of the Soviet Union and beneficial to the United States. Niebuhr also considered the troublesome aspects of a Soviet Union under Khrushchev; namely the crackdown on Hungarian rebels in 1956.<sup>14</sup> The years between Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s ascendancy (1953-1956) were years of uncertainty and turmoil in the larger Soviet Union. All in all, Niebuhr found this period of transition in Soviet leadership as helpful to America’s position in the Cold War.

With regard to Khrushchev’s attitude toward China, Niebuhr determined: “We do not know how successful he will be with the Chinese. But the difference in his temper and in theirs indicates both a difference between a revolution leavened by pragmatism and a revolution in which ‘old believers’ are still dominant.” Niebuhr went on to conclude: “It also suggests potential differences of interest between Russia and China, which we ought to exploit, rather than ignore.” This final perspective of an uneasy willingness to coexist peacefully is the final

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<sup>13</sup> Niebuhr, “There is No Peace,” *Christianity and Crisis* XVI, no. 20 (November 26, 1956): 158.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; Niebuhr, “Changes in the Kremlin,” *Christianity and Crisis* XVI, no. 14 (August 5, 1957): 107.

view Niebuhr held throughout the Eisenhower Administration. Although elements of the three perspectives he adopted can be found at varying instances throughout the 1950s, Niebuhr largely moved from a perspective of immanent war in the early 1950s to one of optimism in the mid-1950s to one of guarded coexistence during the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>15</sup>

Niebuhr was comfortable in the role of public commentator. In the late 1950s he maintained his demand for coexistence with the Soviet Union and turned his attention to the barriers to peace demonstrated by Americans. He urged Americans to shed any clichés of Soviet world domination in the hopes of fully grasping the predicament that both America and the Soviet Union were entangled: neither power was going away and neither power wanted war.<sup>16</sup> Niebuhr argued in *Christianity and Crisis* under article titles such as “The Long Haul of Coexistence” and “Coexistence Under a Nuclear Stalemate” that war preparation and hysteria over Soviet world domination were incorrect responses to effectively dealing with the reality of the Cold War.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Niebuhr suggested that America needed to coexist with the Soviet Union in order to outlast it: “This is not a matter of great exertions for a decade but a matter of living under stress for a century or two. We must acquire the humility to be sufferable to our friends and the patience to outlast an unscrupulous foe.”<sup>18</sup> Though the Cold War ended sooner

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<sup>15</sup> Niebuhr, “Khrushchev and the Cold War,” no date, unpublished essay, Box 16, “Speech, Article, and Book File,” “Khrushchev and the Cold War” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>16</sup> Niebuhr, “Uneasy Peace or Catastrophe,” *Christianity and Crisis* XVIII, no. 7 (April 28, 1958): 54-55.

<sup>17</sup> He also argued that the creation of a world government as a peaceful solution to the Cold War was just as dangerous as nuclear war in: Niebuhr, “A Protest Against a Dilemma’s Two Horns,” *World Politics* 2, no. 3 (April, 1950): 338-344; “The Illusion of World Government,” *Foreign Affairs* 27, no. 3 (April, 1949): 379-388.

<sup>18</sup> Niebuhr, “American Leadership in the Cold War,” *Christianity and Crisis* XIV, no. 17 (October 18, 1954): 129-130; Niebuhr maintains this position in his book *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (New York: Charles Scribner’s and Sons, 1959), 282: “The task of

than a century or two beyond its origins, Niebuhr was closer in his calculations than many who felt that the war would drastically heat up and climax in an exchange of missiles.

Niebuhr's shifting stance on the Soviet Union translated seamlessly to his views of appropriate U.S. foreign policy. As Niebuhr came to the conclusion that neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R. appeared willing to initiate a nuclear war, he did not rule war on a lesser scale completely out of the equation. Indeed, Niebuhr's belief that the U.S. must retain its arsenal of atomic weapons was a mainstay of his commentary throughout the 1950s.<sup>19</sup> Before Niebuhr began to call for coexistence, however, he reiterated the importance of America's need to be prepared for conflict other than the exchange of nuclear strikes. In 1956, Niebuhr wrote:

“We face the temptation of drawing purely pacifist and dangerous conclusions from the obvious fact that a nuclear war is unthinkable. But if we come to the conclusion that this fact means that force is under all circumstances ruled out, the Russians will only have to threaten force to persuade us to yield. We must risk war in order to protect people from tyranny, or the Russians will take advantage of us at every turn.”<sup>20</sup>

Even as Niebuhr emphasized national security above all else in the latter half of the 1950s, he increasingly advocated for the relaxing of tensions. This significant move away from language

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managing to share the world without bringing disaster on a common civilization must include, on our part, a less rigid and self-righteous attitude toward the power realities of the world and a more hopeful attitude toward the possibilities of internal developments in the Russian despotism."

<sup>19</sup> See letter from Niebuhr to Reverend Karl Baehr, which contains Niebuhr's contention that "peace rests upon an atomic stalemate." October 22, 1956. "General Correspondence" Box 2, "Bae-Bark" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>20</sup> Niebuhr, "There is No Peace," *Christianity and Crisis* XVI, no. 20 (November 26, 1956): 158.

that bordered on calling for war preparation demonstrated a shift in Niebuhr's thinking toward diplomatic paths to mutual coexistence as paramount to peace.<sup>21</sup>

### **Niebuhr on Anti-Communism**

Niebuhr was firmly against communism. His level of anti-communism was not nearly as acerbic or passionately aggressive as most Americans. His penchant for demonstrating his appreciation for America, which stemmed from being a man of German descent living in the United States through both world wars, manifested itself in anti-communist rhetoric through the 1950s. Niebuhr's anti-communism, though, had qualifications. Niebuhr opposed communism as a model of social and political organization. He did not think it fair for the vast number of people who lived in a communist state. At the same time, Niebuhr also opposed the level of anti-communist hysteria that he perceived in America.

Niebuhr demonstrated his concern over the level of anti-communism in America several times. In the fall of 1952, he agreed to sign an American Democratic Action statement, "A Statement on McCarthyism," which featured prominent Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish leaders in an expression of chastisement directed at the "invidious threat" that McCarthy-led anti-communist rhetoric and action posed to the "freedoms of all Americans."<sup>22</sup> Niebuhr rebuked Senator McCarthy's anti-communist tactics and spoke against the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) practices at several instances. In one such example, Niebuhr observed

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<sup>21</sup> Niebuhr, "The Dismal Prospects for Disarmament," *Christianity and Crisis* XVII, no. 15 (September 16, 1957): 113.

<sup>22</sup> Letters exchanged between Otto Spaeth and Niebuhr, October 20, 1952 and October 23, 1952. "General Correspondence" Box 2, "Americans for Democratic Action" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

HUAC's methods were "a little lower than McCarthy."<sup>23</sup> Niebuhr did, however, like the work that the Senate Internal Security Committee was doing to root out communism in American institutions. Niebuhr was, at once, against communism, but at the same time, also against extreme measures that resulted in the unjustified labeling of innocent Americans as subversive or threatening.

In the 1950s, Niebuhr fashioned himself a champion of levelheadedness amid the flurry of rabid and tremendous anti-communist sentiment. Concerning Bishop Oxnam's testimony before HUAC, Niebuhr observed:

I think that the charges that Bishop Oxnam spent his week serving communism and only Sundays serving God was fantastic. As was the hearing that they gave him and the rather lame conclusion at which they arrived, that Oxnam was not a communist. In this kind of a world these indiscriminate charges against "liberals," even those who had a certain softness toward the communist movement at one time, hinders rather than helps ferreting out the real communists.<sup>24</sup>

Niebuhr made it a point to speak out against unwarranted discrimination that was grounded in anti-communist fears. Moreover, he took action to remedy what he considered to be heinous misjudgments by the government that were committed under the guise of anti-communist measures. In 1956, Niebuhr wrote to President Eisenhower to urge the release of frozen Social Security payments to Jacob Mindel, a communist convicted under the Smith Act. In the letter, Niebuhr asked, "Can our nation really gain anything in majesty, in moral stature, by

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<sup>23</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to H.H. Lippincott, January 29, 1954, "General Correspondence" Box 8, "Li" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

these small acts of vindictiveness against dissenters, even if the dissenters were involved in a conspiracy?”<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, Niebuhr requested that the President pardon two men, Henry Winston and Gilbert Green, who were also imprisoned after having been convicted under the Smith Act.<sup>26</sup> Niebuhr advocated for individuals arrested for violating the Smith Act without having engaged in any act of consequence against the federal government. Niebuhr explained in a letter to President Eisenhower that Winston and Green were, “a reminder of that short time ago when Communists were jailed for the doctrines they preached rather than for acts of espionage, sabotage or violence.” Niebuhr expanded on his plea: “Within the past year, the United States Supreme Court and the courts have taken an increasingly dim view of the Smith Act.” Niebuhr recalled that numerous convictions had been reversed and a number had been “set aside completely.” Niebuhr concluded, “Strong and compelling doubts are now cast upon convictions which were originally dubious as a firmer confidence is established in our Bill of Rights and Constitutional guarantee.”<sup>27</sup>

Niebuhr recognized the weight that the label of “communist” carried with it. Comparable to his support of Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam during Oxnam’s time spent in front of the HUAC, Niebuhr’s advocacy for individuals who were named communist remained at the forefront of his time. In 1957, Niebuhr wrote to Central Intelligence Agency director J. Edgar

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<sup>25</sup> Niebuhr to Eisenhower, February 3, 1956, and two letters from Niebuhr to Eisenhower, undated, “Correspondence” Box 5, “Dwight D. Eisenhower” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>26</sup> Officially titled the Alien Registration Act of 1940, the Smith Act, named after U.S. Representative Howard W. Smith of Virginia, set penalties and fines for two or more persons who conspired to advocate for or commit the violent or forcible overthrow of the government. This Act was revised several times and can now be found in its current form at 18 *U.S. Code* 2385, as of 2000.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Hoover (1895-1972) to urge the withdrawal of the label of communist from Niebuhr's acquaintance, Mr. A. J. Muste.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Niebuhr was thoroughly consumed with the ripple effects of American anti-communist sentiment. He remained involved in his own research of international affairs, geopolitical strategies, and the relationship of international states with one another vis a vis the communist-democratic tension. He continued to read as much as he could on Russia, communism, and the larger sphere of the Soviet Union—sometimes ordering books through the Columbia University bookstore when time was scarce.<sup>29</sup>

Keeping Niebuhr's support for those individuals whom he perceived to be incorrectly identified as communists in mind, Niebuhr was not completely against American efforts to identify and eliminate communism within the United States. If anything, Niebuhr was more sensitive to and aware of levels of pro-communist sentiment that demonstrated a dangerous or treasonous edge than the typical American. He genuinely feared the potential worst-case scenario of the Cold War. The changing structure of international relations due to Cold War tensions also gave him pause. As an American professor and theologian living in the U.S. during the early Cold War, he took steps to ensure his own name was not tainted with the doubt and concern cast upon socialists and communist sympathizers. In 1954, he asked to be removed from the editorial advisory board of the quarterly *Armenian Affairs*, "immediately," because of the journal's pro-Soviet leanings.<sup>30</sup> He also took steps to disassociate himself from acquaintances that seemed to Niebuhr too overtly radical in their pro-communist sentiment. More than the average American,

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<sup>28</sup> Niebuhr to Hoover, April 8, 1957, "Correspondence" Box 5, "J. Edgar Hoover" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>29</sup> Niebuhr ordered four titles dealing with communism, in general, at the end of the academic year in 1957, see letter from Niebuhr to Columbia Bookstore staff, May 13, 1957, "Correspondence" Box 4, "COB-COL" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>30</sup> Niebuhr to Edwin Wright, June 9, 1954, and Niebuhr to Charles Verantes, June 6, 1954, Reinhold Niebuhr Papers Box 2, "AN-AS" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

however, Niebuhr confidently and articulately called out the negative attributes of extreme anti-communism.

While Niebuhr remained proud of the country he lived in and cognizant of the pleasures his life afforded him, he had no issue critiquing the unfavorable aspects of American life. Perhaps more than anything, Niebuhr criticized both the hysteria and the complacency that the Cold War cultivated in the American mind. He was also consistent in his views of America's tremendous power and position in global affairs. To Niebuhr, any approach to Cold War foreign affairs or policy that dealt in extremes—be it overly hawkish and assertive or overly passive and noncommittal—was harmful and irresponsible. More often than not, Niebuhr perceived America's handling of foreign relations, in general, as forceful. In an undated sermon titled "Protestantism and the Crisis in Modern Civilization," Niebuhr described America as a menace to world peace due to the nation's tremendous power, political naivety, moral hypocrisy, and its sufficiency of economic forces.<sup>31</sup> In short, Niebuhr thought America was a bully in world affairs. Since the ending of World War II, Niebuhr found the U.S. to be manipulative and imposing when furthering the nation's interests abroad. It seemed to Niebuhr, in most instances, this proliferation of American strength abroad came at the expense of less prominent and less developed sovereign states.

Niebuhr had a negative view of America's handling of the Suez Crisis (1956). In line with Niebuhr's perceived negative aspects of American hegemony in world affairs described above, he found America's reaction to the Suez Crisis unreasonable. Niebuhr felt that America's disassociation from Britain during the Suez Crisis hurt Britain and did not benefit America.

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<sup>31</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "Protestantism and the Crisis in Modern Civilization," undated sermon, "Speech, Article, and Book File" Box 14, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.



Niebuhr also determined that distancing the nation from Britain during the Suez Crisis was an effort to “exploit our colonial past,” despite the American belief that the country represented the “palladium of democracy.” Because of the outcome of the Suez Crisis for Israel, the United Kingdom, France, and Egypt, Niebuhr concluded:

We must try to profit by the lessons of history to the extent of knowing that the unity of a nation or a community of nations is not guaranteed merely by free elections, but by a responsible use of power by the hegemonous forces in the community, including the community of nations. This problem is so difficult that it would baffle even the most prudent statesman. That is why it is not being solved by Eisenhower’s and Dulles’ slogans.

Moreover, Niebuhr denounced British responses to certain world events for the same reasons. Niebuhr found British resentment over American “obtuseness” to territorial disputes across the globe as a reason for the British “abortive venture in the Suez Crisis.” Niebuhr determined:

Unfortunately, their desperate answer was so wrong, that it did nothing to convict us of our obtuseness. Indeed, it only served to accentuate the blindness of our self-righteousness and left us as ever a blind giant tottering among the Lilliputians and rejecting the guidance of other giants, less blind than we. Our failure to relate our power creatively to the order and security of an alliance of free nations would be catastrophic but for the fact that the Russians make all the opposite mistakes in even greater proportions.

With American policies ranging from the Soviet Union to the Middle East, Niebuhr found America’s superciliousness a stumbling block to the responsible use of power. He also found the

general attitude of Americans—to include policymakers—too arrogant to cultivate favorable sentiment toward the United States around the world.<sup>32</sup>

### **Niebuhr on Christian Activity in Government**

With an obvious increase in religious expression at the government level during the course of the 1950s, many Americans came to embrace more frequent expressions of civil religion from their elected officials. Niebuhr's stance on Christianity's relationship to government was more complex. He advocated for the keeping of one's political stances separate from religious beliefs. In reality, Niebuhr's staunch opposition to many Republican planks was grounded in his theological study. While Niebuhr criticized those who applauded manifestations of civil religion from representatives of government agencies, he participated in civil religion—to an extent. Niebuhr railed against American government leaders' use of religion as a tool in the fight against communism and also against those who used the Bible to uphold certain political convictions. He found these expressions too simplistic in grappling with the realities of international relations. He did not, however, find that Christians should withdraw from political participation.<sup>33</sup>

Niebuhr felt that American Christians had a responsibility to participate in the democratic process as citizens of the United States. He felt it unwise, however, to hitch one's religious beliefs to partisan planks or political party aspirations. Niebuhr claimed:

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<sup>32</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "America: A Nation with Imperial Powers," undated article, "Speech, Article, and Book File" Box 15, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>33</sup> For Niebuhr's belief that Christians should be politically active and refrain from "remov[ing] their religious life from political debate," see letter from Niebuhr to Mrs. E.C. Congdon, December 3, 1953, "General Correspondence" Box 3, "Americans for Democratic Action" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

It is impossible to draw political decisions from one's religious commitments, for political decisions are very hazardous. I happen, in a general way, to accept what is known as the New Deal program. That is, I believe that the sovereign power of the state can be used for human welfare. I also recognize that there is a grave danger of too much state power. Every political decision involves a dozen contingent elements. We have to make them according to our best judgment and if we are Christian we will have a certain amount of tolerance toward each other, because we will recognize how frail the reason which arrives at these decisions, and how much it is influenced by interest.<sup>34</sup>

Niebuhr was consistent in his contention that drawing a "straight line between a religious conviction and a political party" was "hazardous," yet the majority of his own comments on communism and foreign policy toward the Soviet Union were grounded in the core concepts of his own religious convictions; namely love and justice.<sup>35</sup> Prior to assessing Niebuhr's approach to foreign policy, one must first grasp what forms American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union took during Eisenhower's two terms in office.

### **Eisenhower-Dulles Foreign Policies**

By the end of World War II, the notion of containing the spread of communism had reached an unprecedented height. As early as 1941, U.S. policymakers anticipated the problem that Russia would pose in the postwar world. Yet, enlisting their help in defeating Germany took priority over communism. By the war's end, the creator of containment as a strategy, American diplomat, political scientist, and adviser George F. Kennan, saw his approach to American foreign policy embraced. Kennan coined the term "containment" in 1947 calling for a long-term,

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<sup>34</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to Charles Evans, October 27, 1952, "General Correspondence" Box 5, "Ev" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to William Gleditsch, Jr., November 8, 1956, "General Correspondence" Box 5, "GI" Folder; and letter from Niebuhr to Robert Latham, March 28, 1961, "General Correspondence" Box 8, "LA" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

“patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansion tendencies.”<sup>36</sup> Containment took many forms from 1947-1989, but it reigned supreme as the policy of choice for each administration between Harry S. Truman and Ronald Reagan.

The policy of containment underwent many changes throughout the entirety of the Cold War but can be explained as being executed in two different forms: asymmetrical and symmetrical. The asymmetrical approach was favored by President Dwight Eisenhower, his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and Reinhold Niebuhr—among others. This form of containment sought to confront the enemy at the time and place of one’s choosing rather than wait for a confrontation or situation deemed vital to national security to arise. The essential thrust of this policy was maintaining the initiative in military conflict. This approach can be seen in various military operations in Korea, Vietnam, Central America, and South America. The symmetrical approach was one that sought to include the “periphery” of communism’s borders rather than focus on points of greater military strength or buildup. It also attempted to broaden the narrowness of choice that was evident in the asymmetrical approach: the choice between escalation and doing nothing. The Kennedy Administration adopted this style of containment.<sup>37</sup>

Eisenhower and Dulles’ foreign policy was characterized as the “New Look” approach. This policy took many forms, but is largely recognized by some of its major components: brinkmanship and massive retaliation. Dulles and Eisenhower conceived of their New Look strategy from the concept of containment. This strategy included such policy objectives as “Rollback,” or the atrophy of the Soviet Union’s expansive borders and “Liberation,” or the

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<sup>36</sup> George F. Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* XXV (July, 1947): 575, quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>37</sup> Gaddis, 3-5.

removal of communist influence from Soviet Union satellite nations and the establishment of democracies within them. This New Look policy was articulated in NSC-162/2 and incorporated alliances, psychological warfare, covert operations, and the concept of "brinkmanship."

Brinkmanship was a part of the New Look strategy aimed at escalating threats of warfare until a particular policy objective was obtained. Dulles' notion of massive retaliation dismissed a perimeter defense as politically and realistically impossible. To match Soviet armies or enforce a 20,000-mile line of defense along the Soviet Union's borders was untenable. Massive retaliation, though, offered a solution in that it reserved the means to retaliate instantly against points within the Soviet Union that would do the most damage and, in a way, serve as a counter-action from America's military. This strategy freed the United States from responding to particular incidents within specific geographic locations by leaving open the option to strike whenever and wherever the most damage could be inflicted to deter further Soviet action. These particular strategies fit into the New Look objective of achieving maximum deterrence of communism at a minimum cost.

Niebuhr was generally supportive of Eisenhower politically and personally, yet was critical at times of the Eisenhower-Dulles New Look foreign policy. This policy largely fit the three aforementioned stages of Niebuhr's perspectives on foreign relations with the Soviet Union throughout the 1950s. He defended Dulles' policy of brinkmanship.<sup>38</sup> Niebuhr also applauded Eisenhower's efforts toward deescalating the tension as the 1950s progressed. However, Niebuhr took issue with many finer points of Eisenhower and Dulles' New Look strategy. For example, Niebuhr disagreed with the perimeter defense that Eisenhower used as the basis of his foreign

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<sup>38</sup> Niebuhr, "There is No Peace," 158.

policy in his immediate years as president as unfathomable.<sup>39</sup> Niebuhr took issue with Eisenhower's perimeter defense strategy in places that were considered by Niebuhr to be "bloc frontiers," such as Korea, Germany, and the Taiwan Strait.

Niebuhr was also critical of issues larger than the particularities of certain foreign policies. Specifically, Niebuhr found the greater, overarching American ideology concerning foreign relations questionable. During a discussion of a paper that Niebuhr delivered to the Theory of International Relations Meeting (where Niebuhr's friend and international relations expert Hans Morgenthau was present) Niebuhr described America's ideological approach to the Cold War as defective in that it "equates power with force and goodness with the absence of force." He had identified a trend in American foreign policy that recognized the lack of force as positive and the use of force as negative. In several examples, Niebuhr expressed his dissatisfaction with American approaches to the larger Cold War, policymakers' strategies, and official policy.<sup>40</sup>

Like other leading religious figures, Niebuhr objected to any political moves that were seen as too soft on communism throughout Eisenhower's two terms.<sup>41</sup> Publicly, many nationally recognized pastors, preachers, and theologians called, generally, for a tougher approach to dealing with communism. Collectively, these "churchmen" represented a substantial and important portion of Americans to government policymakers. Within this section, Niebuhr was meaningful. There are very few studies of Niebuhr's perspective on Eisenhower and Dulles' foreign policy. In the scholarship that does exist, Niebuhr is commonly credited as having

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<sup>39</sup> Walter LeFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1996* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 119.

<sup>40</sup> "Theory of International Relations Meeting Proceedings," January 14, 1957, "General Correspondence" Box 4, "Cob-Col" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>41</sup> William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 68, 76-79.

influenced foreign policy-makers with his Christian Realism-driven approaches to policymaking. As the chair of the Americans for Democratic Action's Foreign Policy Commission and extensive background within government foreign policy circles, for instance, Niebuhr's perspectives carried weight. In 1946, the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, William Benton issued some of Niebuhr's report concerning education during a press conference.<sup>42</sup> In 1949, the State Department's Policy Planning Staff Director, George F. Kennan, brought Niebuhr in for official staff meetings twice as a consultant in drawing up policy planning papers. Those in positions of power regularly turned to Niebuhr for input on matters of American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union.<sup>43</sup>

As Niebuhr's currency as a legitimate consultant on matters of foreign policy grew in the 1940s and 1950s, so did his level of frankness. Niebuhr maintained a polite and professional air when speaking of major figures in America's hierarchy of leadership. Yet, his straightforward responses to diplomatic and foreign affairs revealed dissatisfaction with Eisenhower and Dulles policies as the 1950s wore on. In private correspondence, Niebuhr revealed his support for Illinois Governor, and later Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson's presidential bids in 1952 and 1956. While Niebuhr's voting record reveals that of a Democratic Party supporter, he was not averse to voting outside of the Democratic ticket, based on the individual whom Niebuhr found the most suitable. In 1956, Niebuhr confided to a trusted friend, "The Eisenhower myth has achieved a new proportion of quite fantastic dimensions. I don't know

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<sup>42</sup> Letter from William Benton to Niebuhr, October 14, 1946, "General Correspondence" Box 2, "William A. Benton" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of his views on Eisenhower-Dulles foreign policy, see Inboden, 47, 64, 68, 76-79, and 297. For discussions that emphasize Niebuhr's influence, see Jason W. Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America's Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 48, 61; and Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 359-360.

what it will do to the world.”<sup>44</sup> Niebuhr found Eisenhower’s popularity disconcerting due to Niebuhr’s previously highlighted uncertainty over the handling of the Suez ordeal, the New Look policies, and America’s general direction forward in the Cold War.

Niebuhr found Eisenhower’s widespread appeal and popularity perplexing after Eisenhower’s first term in office. As Eisenhower was campaigning for his second term, Niebuhr summarized his thoughts on the faults in Eisenhower-Dulles foreign policies:

In foreign policy, the Administration has relied too much on military alliances, and Mr. Dulles has confused the picture by his simple moral preachments and distinctions, and thus the whole non-committed world of Asia and Africa have been alienated. The new flexibility of Russian policy has contributed to this alienation, so that American prestige has fallen catastrophically while the Administration pretends that new developments have been prompted by our strength. We need at least as much flexibility in our foreign policy as the Soviets have revealed, and I think there is no way of getting it except by a Democratic victory.<sup>45</sup>

Following Eisenhower’s repeat victory over Stevenson in 1956, Niebuhr wrote to Stevenson, “I find it rather sad that the Eisenhower myth ran to such proportions that it was not possible to penetrate it.” Niebuhr continued, “In the last days of the campaign the failure of the Administration in foreign policy actually brought it votes as long as we were assured peace.” Niebuhr worried, “I feel that we are confronting a new kind of isolationism which was well illustrated by the inimicable [*sic*] conference between [Jawaharlal] Nehru and Eisenhower.”<sup>46</sup>

Isolationism, unwarranted mass popularity, and the application of incorrect policy to foreign affairs were not the sole points that Niebuhr raised with Eisenhower’s actions during

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<sup>44</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to Reverend Paul R. Abrecht, November 8, 1956. “General Correspondence” Box 2, “AL” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to Ernest Lefever, June 19, 1956, “Correspondence” Box 8, “Lef-Lew” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to Stevenson, December 27, 1956. “Correspondence” Box 11, “Stevenson, Adlai E.” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.



Ike's first four years in the Oval Office. Niebuhr also observed that Eisenhower represented the Republican Party's acknowledgement of Franklin D. Roosevelt's foreign and domestic programs. Niebuhr observed that the "political phenomenon" of Eisenhower's popularity was especially significant. Niebuhr noticed that Eisenhower's popularity was the summation of the perceived successes of both domestic and foreign policy. Niebuhr suggested that Eisenhower was the agent of the "acceptance by Republicanism of the major policies of the Roosevelt revolution of the past two decades." Niebuhr elaborated:

In foreign affairs that meant acceptance of the concept of our nation's responsibility for the health of the community of free nations. In domestic politics the revolution meant a break with the doctrinaire laissez faire traditions of Republicanism, and the intervention of political power in economic affairs for the purpose of preventing violent fluctuations in the economic life, and of establishing minimal standards of social security. Thus Eisenhower may be said to stand for ninety-five percent of the foreign policy of the previous administration.<sup>47</sup>

Niebuhr's perception of Eisenhower, then, was one that recognized the President as skillful and politically savvy, for sure. Yet, Niebuhr also saw Eisenhower as the embodiment of the Republican Party's coopting Democratic policies of the 1930s and 1940s in the application of successful foreign and domestic programs to the realities of America's life in the 1950s. He found Eisenhower-Dulles New Look policies lacking. He found America drifting toward isolationism in the midst of heightened consumerism. In all of this, Niebuhr longed for a reassessment of American approaches to foreign relations that would result in greater flexibility within America's Cold War foreign policy.

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<sup>47</sup> Niebuhr, "The Phenomenon of President Eisenhower," (April, 1955) *The New Leader*, "Speech, Article, & Book File" Box 16, "The Phenomenon of President Eisenhower" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

Though Niebuhr demonstrated his positions with the self-assurance and confidence of a successful elder statesman, obviously not everyone agreed with him all of the time. In response to a statement issued by Niebuhr and Yale University's Dean Liston Pope, which appeared in *Time* in the spring of 1955, Dr. Will-Matthis Dun, the pastor of Abilene, Texas' Aldersgate Methodist Church, penned a scathing letter to Niebuhr over the article's support for a line of military protection in East Asia to be moved back from Quemoy and Matsu to Formosa and the Pescadores. "The same logic which lies beneath your argument that we should draw it at the Pescadores and Formosa can be used, were we to allow [the communists] to gobble Quemoy and Matsu, when the turn comes for them to turn their hand to the Pescadores and Formosa," Dun growled. "It is the policy of appeasement—it is the policy which can only be defended in the light of fear." Dun admitted further, "I love and esteem you—but, by golly, I certainly do not agree with you on this matter. Thank God for Dulles—and I sincerely hope and pray that he and the military keep the line drawn right [at Quemoy and Matsu]."48

Interestingly, most disagreement over foreign policy among the religious community occurred over policy that was directed at East Asia. Religious leaders across the country typically agreed with American foreign policies that considered Europe or the larger Soviet Union. Any lack of support for foreign policy aimed at the Soviet Union or European countries usually took the form of religious leaders who called for a broad and terribly non-specific "tougher stance," generally, against communism. In fact, studies published in the 1950s noted that Protestant institutions that submitted statements to

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<sup>48</sup> *Time* article clipping, "Matsu-Quemoy Defense Not Morally Justified," and letter from Will-Matthus Dun to Niebuhr, March 12, 1955, Box 2, "Christian Action" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

government agencies concerning foreign policy tended to speak overwhelmingly to East Asian rather than European policy. This was due, in large part, to the presence and interests of American missionaries in Asia. The three individuals who serve as the focus of this dissertation are no different. They, along with most noteworthy religious leaders in the 1950s, spoke specifically and with greater frequency on American policy toward East Asia. With America's foreign policy toward the Soviet Union, most religious leaders—and most Americans—accepted containment as the best policy framework for the Cold War. With this realization in mind, one may better comprehend the acceptance and continuation of the Cold War's depiction as a battle of good versus evil in the minds of many Americans.<sup>49</sup>

### **Niebuhr on Israel**

The state of Israel represented a hot topic of debate within American policymaking circles and, more broadly, American society in this period. The irresolute hesitancy over confidence in Israel's conception and continuation was apparent in Niebuhr's own thought. Niebuhr was supportive of the state of Israel, however, reluctantly so. In 1957, Niebuhr answered a self-proclaimed anti-Zionist on matters pertaining to Israelis and the creation of a Jewish homeland: "I think I too am an anti-Zionist but I am pro-Israel," Niebuhr contended, "For the Israel state once established has to be protected. Our great mistake was in establishing it."<sup>50</sup> This statement represented a blatant departure from his claim a year earlier, when Niebuhr expressed

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<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of Protestant American engagement with the United States' East Asia policy compared to European or Soviet policy, see Ernest Lefever, "Protestants and United States Foreign Policy, 1925-1954: A Study of the Response of National Protestant Leaders to the Issues and Direction of U.S. Foreign Policy and the Theoretical Assumptions Which Underlay That Response." PhD. Dissertation, Yale University, 1956.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to Dr. John Newland, January 21, 1957, "Correspondence" Box 9, "New Christian Advocate-New Mexico, University of" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

his support for the Zionist movement during WWII because he thought it important that “the Jews should have a place to flee to from the Nazi terror.”<sup>51</sup> In most cases, Niebuhr did outline his support for the state of Israel. He continued to convey his sympathy for “the desire of the Jews to establish a homeland after their experience with Nazism.”<sup>52</sup> However, his ambiguity in justifying Israel’s creation points to the uncertainty that Niebuhr wielded with regard to how and where the post-WWII Jewish homeland was established.

Niebuhr professed his views on Israel and many other subjects through a variety of channels. More often than not, Niebuhr saved some of his most thoughtful and provocative writing for his own publications. His most widely recognized and most successful was *Christianity and Crisis*. Niebuhr also oversaw the operation of a much lesser-known journal, titled *Christianity and Society*. Very close to *Christianity and Crisis* in both scope and intended audience, *Christianity and Society* never reached an audience broad enough to sustain itself, financially. The journal was significant in its representation of Niebuhr’s shifting thought, however. Niebuhr utilized the journal, renamed from *Radical Religion* to *Christianity and Society* in 1940, as an intellectual defense of democracy. With *Christianity and Society*, Niebuhr had hoped to shape the future of society after Hitler’s demise by advocating for a democratic society that incorporated socialist approaches to the ownership of major productive enterprises. The publication also represented his newest editorial venture after a lengthy and highly

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<sup>51</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to Lutfy Diah, April 12, 1956, “Correspondence” Box 4, “Di” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from RN to Archie Gillespie, September 25, 1956, “Correspondence” Box 5, “Gi” Folder; Letter from Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal editor Dr. Abraham J. Klausner to Niebuhr, April 20, 1955, “Correspondence” Box 3, “Ce” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

publicized split with *The Christian Century*'s editor Charles Clayton Morrison. Though shortlived, *Christianity and Society* had a circulation of 850 in 1950.<sup>53</sup>

Within these journals, Niebuhr further established his place among some of the nation's leading intellectuals. His contributions also provoked disagreement within the American Protestant community. Niebuhr's criticism came as a result of comments made on Israel, Neo-Orthodoxy, and government leadership. Niebuhr's stance on war, however, tended to invite most of the criticism that he received. In response to Niebuhr's views of the inescapability of war and the morality of a war justly waged, Charles Lyttle from the Meadville Theological School in Chicago blamed Niebuhr for maintaining a "shocking disregard" for the "fundamental decencies of your Christian ministry and professorship." Lyttle denounced Niebuhr's comments as "feeble yet sinister sophistries about never being perfect or ever being able to achieve our ideals in their perfection, therefore let us surrender to the lesser evil of war." He further scolded Niebuhr:

From your books, sermons, and speeches, I know that this has been for years your clever rationalization of a brazen apostasy from the plain teachings of Jesus Christ: "Be ye perfect" – "Blessed are the peace-makers," etc. You, though a professor of Christian Ethics (!) have changed all that to "Be ye imperfect" – "Blessed are the war-makers." War can never be tolerated by any genuinely Christian ethical system, any more than cannibalism or adultery can be rationalized into a "lesser evil." There are no greater evils! War is the sum of all evil, in motive, in effect.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> "Correspondence" Box 2, "Christianity and Society, 1950" and "Christianity and Society, 1952-1953" Folders, Niebuhr Papers, LOC. For further discussion of Niebuhr's editorial positions with these journals, see Fox, 196-197.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Charles Lyttle to Niebuhr, May 10, 1941,

Niebuhr's perspectives of war, foreign nation states, and America's role in the world were grounded in his theological study and past foreign relations experience. At the core of Niebuhr's insight, lay the foundation of his thought—love and justice.

### **Love and Justice**

The link that connected Niebuhr's perspective of the Soviet threat with his foreign policy prescriptions was Christian Realism. Niebuhr's brand of Christianity informed his stance on global affairs and emphasized justice, responsibility, and anti-complacency. This overarching theme can be detected as the central component in most of Niebuhr's speeches, interviews, and writings over the course of the 1950s. Considering the tension that existed between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in 1951, Niebuhr stated:

A Christian faith which declares that all of these horrible ambiguities would not exist if only we loved each other, is on exactly the same level as a secular idealism which insists that we could easily escape our predicament if only we organized a world government. A Christian faith which solemnly assures men that peace can be had by "men of good will" but is unavailable if we lack good will can drive us to as complete a despair as the despair which secular idealism is widely creating.<sup>55</sup>

Niebuhr essentially rejected pacifist approaches as any realistic or pragmatic ways of dealing with foreign policy concerning the Soviet Union. Moreover, Niebuhr's criticism of pacifism went much deeper than a dispute with pacifist views of foreign policy. Niebuhr saw pacifists,

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<sup>55</sup> Niebuhr, "Ten Fateful Years," *Christianity and Crisis* XI, no. 1 (February 5, 1951): 1.

especially pacifist-Christians, as subscribing to a distorted concept of Christian love in applying an individual ethic to a collective situation.<sup>56</sup>

In what was arguably Niebuhr's most concise and succinct explanation of the Christian command of love, one can identify elements of Niebuhr's Christian Realism, Neo-Orthodoxy, and general approach to foreign policy:

Love has what might be called two dimensions: the vertical dimension of perfection, of sacrificial love; and the horizontal dimension of concern for all people, of concern for social justice and the balances by which it is maintained. The pacifist comprehension of love seizes upon one of these two aspects. It makes an absolute of sacrificial love at the expense of social responsibility. The pacifist tends to regard the love command less as an over-arching principle which confronts the Christian in all his relations than as a neat formula to use in situations of violence. This is an inadequate, distorted view of the Christian concept of love. This partial view leads the pacifist to exalt peace over the claims of justice, when a choice between the two must be made. Non-violence is regarded as a pure expression of love, while the struggle for justice is seen as a rough and inferior approximation of love.<sup>57</sup>

Additionally, Niebuhr considered struggles for justice and peace as having the same sanction in the commandment of love. Both presented a moral imperative, but for Niebuhr, justice reserved the right to the prior claim. "While order may be conducive to justice, there can be no lasting peace without justice," Niebuhr wrote. "The Biblical concept is expressed by Isaiah: 'And the effect of righteousness will be peace' (Is. 32:17). The just war position gains strength from the consideration that the triumph of an unjust cause would defeat both the ends of justice and the

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<sup>56</sup> Niebuhr, "Is There Another Way?" *The Progressive* (October, 1955): 24, quoted in D.B. Robertson, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1957), 299-301.

<sup>57</sup> Niebuhr, "God Wills Both Justice and Peace," *Christianity and Crisis* XV, no. 10 (June 13, 1955): 77-78.

future hope of peace.” In Niebuhr’s Christian Realism, the pacifist is socially irresponsible in making an absolute of non-violence. More importantly, the pacifist is not true to the Christian command of love when he or she regards violence as sinful, no matter how just the cause.<sup>58</sup>

This excerpt from a 1955 edition of *Christianity and Crisis* is crucial to understanding Niebuhr’s acceptance of the morality of a just war. It is also essential in explaining the importance of love and justice to Niebuhr; both in his approaches to foreign policy as well as to his concepts of Christian duty and America’s national responsibility. To Niebuhr, passivity and complacency were anathema. Justice as an outgrowth of sacrificial love and responsibility was not only good, but also the only practical means of dealing with the tension that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union. The premium placed on sacrificial love by pacifists in an absolute sense was, to Niebuhr, inadequate and distorted. By equating justice with love, Niebuhr effectively opened the door to accepting the notion of a just war. While Niebuhr admitted, “there is no adequate definition [of a just war],” he did not refrain from writing off the morality of a just war as relative. In the same article, Niebuhr concluded:

Each must decide whether, on balance, there is enough preponderance of moral value on one side of a conflict to justify conscientious participation. While the judgments of the Christian community can help, in the final analysis the individual conscience is the arbiter of the concept of a just war.<sup>59</sup>

In Niebuhr’s Christian Realism, then, sacrificial love without justice was a misunderstanding of the commandment of love. A just war, however, was not completely out of the question.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



Niebuhr's Christian Realism called for, above all else, a middle ground between hysteria and complacency. Niebuhr strongly urged approaching the Cold War upon a middle path that avoided either an eagerness to launch a nuclear missile or a passive approach toward relations with the Soviet Union. In a televised interview, journalist and television news anchor Mike Wallace (1918-2012) asked Niebuhr if, given the choice, it would be better to live under communism rather than have a nuclear war. Niebuhr responded, "We have to risk a nuclear war in order to escape capitulation to communism."<sup>60</sup> Niebuhr had stated his preference to war as opposed to living under communist rule four years previously in a *Christianity and Crisis* editorial: "It is not possible for an individual to choose a certain and present evil in preference to what is imagined to be a worse future one." Niebuhr continued, "We cannot escape the dilemma which we confront by the fact that the threat of atomic power may be a deterrent of war; but this threat also involves the risk of an atomic war and the consequent destruction."<sup>61</sup> For Niebuhr, national defense under the rubric of justice certainly took precedent over passivity and complacency shrouded under the guise of peace.

### **Niebuhr and American Views of Russia**

One of the most stunning omissions from all of Niebuhr's critique and commentary from the 1950s is any discussion of the Russian people outside of the political leadership. This characterization of Russians as one solid monolithic group of godless and atheistic communists was standard rhetoric for the era. However, Niebuhr's own journal, *Christianity and Crisis*, included occasional references to Russian churches despite Niebuhr's silence on the matter. For

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<sup>60</sup> Michael Wallace, "The Mike Wallace Interview: Reinhold Niebuhr," April 27, 1958. University of Texas at Austin Harry Ransom Center. [http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/multimedia/video/2008/wallace/niebuhr\\_reinhold.html](http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/multimedia/video/2008/wallace/niebuhr_reinhold.html) (accessed September 1, 2014).

<sup>61</sup> Niebuhr, "Editorial Notes," *Christianity and Crisis* XIV, no. 6 (April 19, 1954): 42-43.

example, a 1954 edition of *Christianity and Crisis* contained an article that basically outlined 101 Orthodox Russian Churches and religious communities within the Soviet Union, ultimately concluding that the number of leadership vocations within the church was increasing.<sup>62</sup> Niebuhr does not invoke language that goes as far as describing all Russians as evil, yet he made no attempt to differentiate between a communist enemy and the common Russian citizenry.

The closest that Niebuhr came to discussing the Russian people in general was in a discussion of the significance of a National Council delegation visit to the Russian Church. Niebuhr ultimately determined that the value of the visit was, “to give the Christians of Russia some contact with Christians in democratic lands and impress upon them both the freedom with which they deal with in international issues and to contribute a little to the emancipation of the Russian mind from the preconceptions in which all citizens of totalitarian states are imprisoned.”<sup>63</sup> Beyond finding a glimmer of hope in building diplomatic bridges between America and Russia through Christian fellowship, Niebuhr was, by and large, mute on any differentiation between the Soviet political leadership and the Russian people. His silence on discussing the place of the Russian commoners or the Russian churches was typical of anti-communist sentiment in America at the time. Yet, while Niebuhr’s anti-communism was standard fare for the time, his criticism of America’s attitude toward the Soviet Union was a complete departure from mainstream American thought.

Niebuhr varied and occasionally conflicted with popular American opinion when it came to the intricacies and particularities of communism and what to do about it. He revealed flashes

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<sup>62</sup> “Tells of Existing Religious Communities in Russia,” *Christianity and Crisis* XIV, no. 8 (May 17, 1954): 64.

<sup>63</sup> Niebuhr, “The National Council Delegation to the Russian Church,” *Christianity and Crisis* XVI, no 7 (April 30, 1956): 49-50.

of patriotism throughout his life and mostly supported the Eisenhower Administration at any given time during the 1950s.<sup>64</sup> Simultaneously, he chastised Americans for worsening the conflict by having no grasp of the meaning of their faith, engaging in complacency with regard to Russia, or by resorting to unnecessary hysteria. In 1954, Niebuhr observed, “It would be nice if Christian humility could reinforce common sense and we could express a faith which can set limits to the pride of a great nation.” Niebuhr stated, “Undoubtedly our lack of wisdom in the complexities of international politics is due not so much to ignorance as to the vainglorious imaginations of a nation which bestrides this narrow world like a huge colossus!”<sup>65</sup> A few months later, Niebuhr opined:

The “Unknown God” in America seems to be faith itself. Our politicians are always admonishing the people to have “faith.” Sometimes they seem to imply that faith is itself redemptive. Sometimes this faith implies faith in something. That something is usually an idol, rather than the “God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” who both judges and has mercy upon sinful men and nations. Sometimes we are asked to have faith in ourselves, sometimes to have faith in humanity, sometimes to have faith in America. Sometimes it is hope, rather than faith, which is really intended. We are to have hope that we will win the cold war or that the cold war will not break out into an atomic conflict. Much of it is a perversion of the Christian Gospel.<sup>66</sup>

He was as well known for his Christian Realism approaches to foreign affairs as he was for his harsh critiques of those segments of American society who erred on the side of either being too

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<sup>64</sup> Despite disagreements over specific policies, Niebuhr was overwhelmingly pro-Eisenhower and pro-Dulles. For example, see: Niebuhr, “Editorial Notes,” *Christianity and Crisis* XIII, no. 24 (January 25, 1954): 186; “Editorial Notes,” *Christianity and Crisis* XIV, no. 13 (July 26, 1954): 99; “American Leadership in the Cold War,” *Christianity and Crisis* XIV, no. 17 (October 18, 1954): 129-130; “The President’s Triumphal Journey,” *Christianity and Crisis* XIX, no. 23 (January 11, 1960): 202-203.

<sup>65</sup> Niebuhr, “American Leadership in the Cold War,” 129.

<sup>66</sup> Niebuhr, “Religiosity and the Christian Faith,” *Christianity and Crisis* XIV, no. 24 (January 24, 1955): 184-185.

passive or too aggressive. Historian William Inboden considered Niebuhr to be “so institutionally ambivalent that he served sometimes as a chief architect of the churchmen’s statements and other times as an outside critic.”<sup>67</sup> Any apparent ambivalence or ambiguity can be explained in Niebuhr’s understanding of Christian Realism and Neo-Orthodoxy.

His impatience for complacency or any soft approaches to dealing with real or perceived Soviet threats was notable. He was equally intolerant of hysteria and denounced the use of nuclear weapons. Anything that resembled more of a middle ground approach to foreign policy—suggestions that fell between overreaction and complacency—was aligned more with Niebuhr’s Christian Realism and was generally applauded by Niebuhr. He urged Americans to shed their clichés of Soviet aspirations for world domination and recommended approaching the Soviet Union with an attitude of relaxing tensions.

Niebuhr, in most instances, moved from a perspective of the Soviet Union that bordered on calling for preemptive strikes to one of a guarded coexistence over the span of Eisenhower’s presidency. His Christian Realism was central to this shift and accounted for his application of, what he considered to be, appropriate ethical, moral, and political foreign policy strategies. It was Niebuhr’s emphasis on love and justice that served as the basis of his perspective of the Soviet Union. The priority of love and justice to his own theological and political beliefs also propelled him to the position of stature that he enjoyed over the course of his life and to the prominent place in America’s religious history that he wields today.

### **Niebuhr within the American Religious Panorama in the 1950s**

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<sup>67</sup> Inboden, 61.

When examining Niebuhr's life during the course of the Eisenhower Administration, it is important to keep several points in mind. To appreciate the work ethic, sense of obligation, and output of Niebuhr, one must remember key facts related to Niebuhr's character, health, and sense of community. First, Niebuhr's character was that of an honest, intelligent, and extremely self-aware theologian. A pastor and academic in his own right, Niebuhr took pride in the accumulation of knowledge and work that he had attained by the 1950s. He was involved in politics. Since his days as a pastor in Detroit in the 1910s, Niebuhr had closely followed politics. He frequently put extraordinary effort toward shaping the outcome of political races, political climates, and the political direction of his country, region, and locality. Niebuhr knew his politics down to the local level. As an influential religious leader, he was often listened to when he made public statements pertaining to current political affairs. He involved himself in local politics in Detroit, wrote political pieces to the editor of the *New York Times*, and even stood as the Socialist candidate for a New York State Senator office in 1930.<sup>68</sup>

During Eisenhower's two terms in office, Niebuhr was in his sixties. Niebuhr's health is an important consideration to keep in mind when assessing his actions in this period. As a man who battled frequent bouts of depression and ill health over the course of his life, Niebuhr's first stroke in 1952 severely limited his furious pace of publication, speaking, and traveling. It also worsened his depression. Perhaps one of the greatest factors in Niebuhr's flippant remarks concerning a host of events and people was the physical pain that Niebuhr grappled with every day. Niebuhr's insecurities and diminished sense of worth were magnified as the 1950s progressed. One area of Niebuhr's life that this was most apparent was in his relationship with

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<sup>68</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to the editor of the *New York Times*, October 30, 1953 "Correspondence" Box 9, "New York Times-New Zealand Student Christian Movement" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC. Niebuhr's Senate bid garnered him 1,480 votes to Democrat Duncan O'Brien's 20,271 and Republican Wilbur Murphy's 10,947. See Fox, 124.

Billy Graham. One illuminating example of Niebuhr's view of Graham can be found in an article that Niebuhr proposed to the *Christian Century* in 1956:

There is more hope that Graham himself will see the weaknesses of a traditional evangelical perfectionism in an atomic era than that his clerical and lay sponsors, with their enthusiasm for any kind of revival will see it. For Graham is a world traveller and a very perceptive observer of the world scene with its many collective problems. His instincts are genuine and his sense of justice well developed. He could embody the cause of justice, particularly where it is so closely and obviously related to the love commandment as on the race issue, into his revival message. The only thing that could prevent such a development is that it is contrary to the well established "technique" of revivalism.<sup>69</sup>

Niebuhr commented on Graham and his ministry often throughout the 1950s. Niebuhr found Graham wrong in believing that America could, "solve the problem of the atomic bomb by converting individuals."<sup>70</sup> Niebuhr found Graham's prescriptions for prayer as a primary means of combating communism insufficient. While Niebuhr believed that Billy Graham was an "earnest Christian" who held the "largest audience of any evangelist in all history," Niebuhr repeatedly claimed that Graham had not yet "grasped and preached a whole gospel."<sup>71</sup> Niebuhr's perspective of Graham's theology, though, did not mean an abnegation of Graham's worth. Niebuhr felt that Graham was doing much for evangelism around the world. He simply found Graham's use of his ministry less impactful than it might have been had Graham or his associates

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<sup>69</sup> Niebuhr, "A Proposal for Billy Graham," article proposal to the *Christian Century*, June 20, 1956, "Speech, Article, & Book File" Box, "A Proposal for Billy Graham" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to Reverend Johannes Ringstad of the Immanuel Lutheran Church in Escanaba, Michigan, April 26, 1956, "Correspondence" Box 10, "Rh-Ri" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>71</sup> Correspondence between Niebuhr and Sherwood Eddy, written on Niebuhr's draft of an article, "Let us pray for Billy Graham and Norman Vincent Peale," nd, "Correspondence" Box 5, "Eddy, Sherwood" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

commanded a deeper and more thorough—or Niebuhresque—understanding of the Bible. This view may be attributed to Niebuhr’s sincere assessment of Graham’s theology, Niebuhr’s jealousy of a younger, handsome, widely-known religious figure that had surpassed Niebuhr in popularity and attention in the 1950s, or a combination of the two.

Lastly, Niebuhr’s sense of community in the 1950s is important to understanding his place in society. He actively maintained an impressive amount of correspondence with numerous individuals, organizations, and societies. As a seasoned scholar, Niebuhr’s time and attention was sought after from students, colleagues, consultants, corporations, and government bodies. Niebuhr attempted to continue the several relationships that he had established over the course of a lifetime. Many of Niebuhr’s closest friends were notable figures in positions of prominence. Hans J. Morgenthau considered Niebuhr a close friend. He regularly sought Niebuhr’s insight on a number of projects and attended several academic functions with him.<sup>72</sup> Emil Brunner, a noted Swiss theologian and the co-founder of the Neo-Orthodox school of theological thought, was also a good friend of Niebuhr’s. Niebuhr admitted that he always felt close to Brunner, they were good friends, and Brunner’s *Man in Revolt* influenced him greatly early on in Niebuhr’s life.<sup>73</sup> The Washington, D.C., National Presbyterian Church pastor Edward Elson considered Niebuhr a “great theologian.”<sup>74</sup> Indeed, an exhaustive list of Niebuhr’s close friends—not to mention his acquaintances and the groups he either led or participated in—is too long to mention here.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Letter and enclosure, Hans J. Morgenthau to Niebuhr, January 21, 1955, “Correspondence” Box 8, “Morgenthau, Hans J.” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to Dietz Lange, March 26, 1961, “Correspondence” Box 8, “La” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from Elson to Niebuhr, September 30, 1955, “Correspondence” Box 5, “Elson, Edward L.R.” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>75</sup> Two excellent starting places for identifying Niebuhr’s closest friends, coworkers, organizations, and groups are the Library of Congress’ Niebuhr holdings or Richard Fox’s biography of Niebuhr.

Suffice it to say that Niebuhr was thoroughly embedded in America's religious makeup. His sense of community provided the backdrop to his social, professional, and personal life.

Keeping the Niebuhr of the 1950s in mind, one finds an advanced scholar, respected man, and wise analyst of current affairs. Niebuhr was also deteriorating in health and scaling back his normal involvement with professional affairs. Despite his march into his golden years taking a toll on his body and mind, Niebuhr was still immensely influential and important to American religion, academics, and foreign affairs.

### **Conclusion**

Niebuhr's presence loomed large in American life throughout the 1950s. He had attained the position of a revered and well-respected public intellectual. Niebuhr's perspectives on foreign policy, theology, Protestant Christianity, and America's role in the world reached large audiences. Through television interviews, newspaper articles, radio, popular magazines, and scholarly publications, Niebuhr's opinions on several contemporary issues could be found. Indeed, Niebuhr represents one of America's last great theologians.<sup>76</sup> He was immersed in the most important national dialogues of his time and acutely aware of the political, religious, and international currents of his day.

Niebuhr was also very different during the years of Eisenhower's terms than he was several decades earlier. He had scaled back his vocal support of more socialist approaches to politics. He presided over the then-expanding Neo-Orthodoxy vein of theology. Due in part to Niebuhr's efforts, Neo-Orthodoxy challenged theologically liberal Protestant Christianity as a

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<sup>76</sup> This assessment of Niebuhr having represented one of the United States' last great theologians is my own. I base this conclusion upon comparable American, self-proclaimed theologians.



force to be reckoned with. Because of much of Niebuhr's academic work in the 1930s, fundamentalist and conservative approaches to theology lost ground to liberal theology, and later, Neo-Orthodox theology. Niebuhr's split with theological liberalism created ripples in American theological circles that would eventually reshape the landscape of American religious life. The three major forms of Protestant Christianity in the 1950s: Evangelical, Neo-Orthodoxy, and theologically liberal, would not have been so were it not for the influence and impact of Niebuhr's life.

Niebuhr's views of the world were, at once, similar to his fellow Americans, and on the other hand, very much at odds with most of his countrymen and women. Niebuhr was very happy and humbled to be an American. He was also very ashamed of many of his nation's actions on the world stage. He concluded that America was a bully in much of its foreign policies. He found America to have overexerted its influence in a number of instances overseas. At the same time, he joined many in calling for a more robust, firm, and stronger stance against the global spread of communism. Niebuhr was particular in his anti-communism, though. He chastised the tactics of Senator McCarthy and the HUAC. Yet, he commended other Congressional efforts toward monitoring and managing communism in America. He surveyed the political developments in Soviet Russia, several nations in Europe, portions of East Asia, and regions of Africa with an astuteness to which many in the upper echelons of American policymaking circles gave great attention.

With foreign policy, Niebuhr praised some of Eisenhower's and Dulles' strategies and spoke against others. He did not favor portions of certain New Look tactics, yet, he also appreciated much of the Eisenhower Administration's more level-headed and cautious approaches in the early years of Eisenhower's first term. In general, Niebuhr found American

foreign policy troublesome when it was veiled in religious rhetoric and given divine sanction by American leadership. In this, Niebuhr identified the growth of civil religion as a disturbing phenomenon for the effects that it had on both religion and foreign affairs. In closing, Niebuhr's greatest contribution to American life in the 1950s was his ability to truthfully acknowledge the course that America was on with regard to larger domestic issues and looming international issues. He took Billy Graham to task in the 1950s for Graham's reluctance to address the race issue. He wrote about America's faith in faith itself, or the half-heartedness of nominal Christians. He identified America's hypocrisy in the difference between foundational ideals and actual practice. During the anxiety of the 1950s, Niebuhr was especially relevant because of his ability to identify and articulate the sources of national anxiety for the larger American public.

Niebuhr, the champion of Neo-Orthodox Christians in America, was not the sole voice in the larger public's discussion of religion and politics. Other religious leaders clamored to insert their own stances on the communist threat in the 1950s. Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam offered a theologically liberal take on the best way to engage anti-democratic threats across the globe. It is to Oxnam that the next chapter turns.

## CHAPTER 6

### G. BROMLEY OXNAM, LIBERAL PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY, AND THE NATIONAL RELIGION

On Saturday, March 4, 1950, Methodist Bishop of the New York Area, G. Bromley Oxnam delivered a speech to the Young Men's Hebrew Association (Y.M.H.A.) in Aurora, Illinois. Oxnam's speech, "Whither America—The Nature of Our Present Crisis" resembled a series of speeches he gave across the country in 1950. The heart of Oxnam's message was something that he referred to as America's great "if moment" of history. Oxnam perceived his country as standing at one of its great "turning points," faced with the decision of what to do in the face of its communist rival's ever-expanding reach. Oxnam declared, "The only way you can deal with an ideology with which you disagree is to present a better one." Oxnam expounded on this point a month earlier at the Ohio Pastors' Convention, slamming the arms race between the U.S. and Soviet Russia the day that the U.S. government decided to develop the hydrogen bomb, and suggested that the church must take the lead in the battle of ideologies.<sup>1</sup>

Oxnam's thought on early Cold War tensions provides an interesting perspective on religion and American foreign policy in the 1950s. Oxnam was, in many ways, the prototypical theological liberal of his time. His biographer, historian Robert Moats Miller described him as, "certainly the most powerful (and imaginative) bishop in The Methodist Church, then the largest

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Baker, "Use Double Auto Shift in Pastor Talks: 2 Religious Leaders Use 'Platoon System'." *Columbus Dispatch* Thursday, February 2, 1950; G. Bromley Oxnam Diary Entry, Wednesday, February 1, 1950, Box 19, "World Crisis Discussed by Oxnam." *Aurora, ILL Beacon News* Monday, March 6, 1950, Box 19, Garfield Bromley Oxnam Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Oxnam Collection, LOC).

and most muscular Protestant church in the United States.”<sup>2</sup> One can see in his public statements and in his own personal diary (one that he kept daily for decades) several calls for coexistence and peace when referring to the nuclear stalemate. Yet, like many who get close to the highest circles of power, Oxnam supported more aggressive American foreign policy at times. This chapter traces the personal and professional life of Oxnam and examines his stance on American foreign policy. Granted, no major religious leader in the 1950s marched in step on all social, political, and religious issues, yet utilizing Oxnam as a representative figure contributes to a better understanding of theologically liberal Protestants and their thought on the cold war during the 1950s. These theologically liberal churches collectively voiced concern or support in a variety of ways throughout the 1950s. In many interdenominational and ecumenical statements that spoke to many of the political issues of the day, Oxnam’s name was either present, or very much involved in their very crafting.

This chapter provides an overview of Oxnam, his role in the nation’s perspectives of foreign policy, and his place within the greater national religious body. While names such as William Randolph Hearst and Billy Graham are synonymous with American religion in the 1950s, the theologically liberal strand that Oxnam operated within has received little attention and largely escaped public memory. Indeed, the 1950s were a time of anxiety for many. For a majority of America’s largest Protestant churches, this was much more the case. On paper, membership rolls swelled, Americans who were establishing families, homes, and lives around the country exhibited a greater religious sincerity than ever before, and church monies funded expanding denominational missions, personnel, and buildings. At the heart of many theologically

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Miller, *Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam: Paladin of Liberal Protestantism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 9.

liberal churches, however, a decline had begun to set in that would reveal itself a major crisis in the 1960s and 1970s.

At mid-century, many theologically liberal churches had outgrown those qualities that gave rise to the power they wielded. In a sense, they had expanded and grown to the point where they were too respectable to preach an honest Gospel. The focus of many of these churches—social issues, race, and urban plight—left many of their congregations uneasy. The enormity of the ecumenical efforts that many churches supported also disheartened some churchgoers who desired a more local church focus. One of the arenas that theologically liberal church bodies moved further into was national politics. By rallying behind the goals that Presidential Administrations cloaked in religious tones, many churches acted as a means of public support for government goals. A description of Oxnam's actions throughout the 1950s illuminates some of these aforementioned points. This study of Oxnam details a change in Oxnam's thinking—from a more liberal, peaceful, anti-war approach to foreign policy that dealt with the Soviet Union in the 1940s, to an ambiguous position that changed off and on through the 1950s. This ambiguity ranged from calls for open discussion with the Soviets to full support for the existing, more aggressive policies of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Administration. This observation is helpful in better understanding Oxnam's, among other theologically liberal Christians', perspectives of America's foreign policy regarding the Soviet Union. To better grasp where Oxnam operated from politically and theologically, one must understand, at the least, a brief, personal background.

Oxnam's many adventures between his formative years and his election to the presidency of DePauw University will not be meticulously detailed here as most of this overview is contained in Chapter Three. After turning down his acceptance to Harvard's History PhD

program, Oxnam returned to California. Having been received on trial by the Southern California Annual Conference in absentia before he left for seminary studies at Boston University, Oxnam decided to return to Los Angeles and take up his ministerial appointment. After a brief, successful appointment in Poplar, California, Oxnam accepted a position at the nearly moribund Church of All Nations in a downtrodden area of East L.A. From his position there, Oxnam established his base of operations. While pastor at the Church of All Nations, Oxnam left three times to travel with evangelist, socialist, YMCA leader, author, and itinerant missionary Sherwood Eddie (1871-1963). He essentially served as Eddie's secretary doing evangelical missionary work and meeting with heads of state and foreign dignitaries in Nanking, Canton, Hong Kong, Singapore, England, Germany, and Russia.

After ten years of service at the Church of All Nations, Oxnam had drastically improved the church's future prospects. He inherited the pastorate with 111 souls in the congregation in 1917. By 1927, Oxnam had overseen the substantial growth of the congregation, solid financial support insured, and a skilled staff and fresh leadership brought in. Several new buildings were built and dedicated. He accepted a faculty position as a professor of practical theology and city church at the Boston University School of Theology where he taught for the 1927-1928 academic year. In 1928, Oxnam moved from his professorship at Boston to the presidency of DePauw University.

Oxnam advanced through a variety of positions following his move from Boston University to DePauw. He served as the DePauw University president for eight years, from 1928 to 1936, before being named the Bishop of the Omaha area. Oxnam held this post from 1936 until 1939 before happily returning to Boston as Bishop of the Boston area between 1939 and 1944. Oxnam then moved to take up the post of Bishop of the New York area from 1944 to 1952

before making his final move to Washington to become the Bishop of the Washington area between 1952 and 1960. It is during his decades as a bishop in the church and as a leader of the Federal, National, and World Councils of Churches that Oxnam publicly interacted with American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union and with the vitriolic hatred that most American's wielded against communism.

### **Oxnam's Political and Theological Character**

Several of Oxnam's characteristics stand out during the Eisenhower Administration. First, Oxnam was a tireless Methodist bishop. He kept a demanding schedule that included his primary duties as bishop of the Washington area of Methodist Churches and Secretary of the Council of Bishops, his presidential duties as the head of the World Council of Churches, his speaking engagements around the world, and his output of publications. Throughout any given year in the 1950s, one could find Oxnam delivering a sermon by invitation, breaking ground on a new Methodist facility, or conferring with religious and government leaders outside of the time that he dedicated to official business. He and his wife, Ruth, travelled much. Second, Oxnam was outspoken on his perspectives of foreign policy. Both privately and publicly, Oxnam was consumed with the course of future action regarding the Cold War. Third, his well-developed responses to questions concerning matters of foreign policy typically offered little direction, aside from transferring the Soviet-American standoff to the United Nations. Like many of the then-called churchmen—religious figures in nationally recognized positions of prominence—Oxnam also enjoyed the affiliation with power. Keeping these major attributes in mind, it is apparent that Oxnam utilized his position within The Methodist Church and World Council of Churches to maintain relationships with government figures, further the goals of theologically liberal Protestant churches, and urge America's foreign policy to move closer to the authority

and control of the United Nations. Ultimately, Oxnam's work contributed to the rise of civil religion in the United States, the widespread support of Eisenhower and Dulles' foreign policy directed toward the Soviet Union, and the later atrophy of many theologically liberal Protestant churches.

Oxnam was outspoken in his core religious beliefs, yet continuously emphasized his faith in humankind, technology, and science. He held strong convictions regarding God, Jesus, and the Bible. He did not doubt the divinity of Jesus, the personal relationship with God that each individual had access to, or the complete forgiveness of sins that Jesus attained for all people from his work on the cross. In his revealing and genuine account of his beliefs, *A Testament of Faith*, Oxnam declared, "God [is] revealed in Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> He continued, "For me, religion is commitment to Christ Himself, since the Christian faith has always held that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, that, as Jesus said, 'I and my Father are one.' It is really becoming a new man in Christ Jesus."<sup>4</sup> With chapter headings such as "I Believe in God, I Believe in Jesus Christ, I Believe in Life Everlasting, I Believe in the Church, I Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins," and "I Believe in Man," Oxnam reveals himself to be an evangelical, liberal Methodist who found the body of believers to be valuable in changing society.

Oxnam found great value in the work of men. His emphasis on social uplift and the improvement of the neediest segments of society reflected the traits of Social Gospel-era Christianity. He rejected, however, being associated with the Social Gospel, as he believed that there was only one Gospel and its thrust was not merely social. His involvement in ecumenical

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<sup>3</sup> G. Bromley Oxnam, *A Testament of Faith* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1958), 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.



organizations and his community outreach suggest his inclination toward improving those around him who were less fortunate than most. While Oxnam expressed his dissatisfaction with prayer that became mechanical and his unease with creeds, he certainly focused on the point of “God is love.”<sup>5</sup> Oxnam was never a theologian and frequently avoided outlining any theology of his own. However, his breakdown of the Apostles’ Creed in *A Testament of Faith* shows that he had a stronger grasp of theology than he let on.

Oxnam preferred to live out his faith. Though the majority of his life was spent in administrative roles, he sought to effect greater change in his immediate proximity by focusing on bringing the message of salvation to, and uplifting the lives of, the most unfortunate around him. His ten years at the Church of All Nations serves as an example. He was offered five different (and more comfortable) assignments before finally leaving the church for his teaching position with the BU School of Theology in 1928. Oxnam claimed that he did not feel as if his work was finished in the largely immigrant section of Los Angeles that his church served. When Oxnam took his post as the Bishop of the Washington area, he set out immediately to connect with those Methodist churches that he oversaw. In the first three months of his tenure at Washington—in September, October, and November of 1952—Oxnam and his wife Ruth visited all 1691 churches in the area. With district superintendents frequently serving as navigators, Oxnam and Ruth averaged between twenty and twenty-five churches per day.<sup>6</sup>

As previously mentioned, Oxnam’s beliefs reflected those of most theologically liberal churches of the time. Oxnam lived through the height of theological liberalism in America (1900-1960) and worked the majority of his academic and religious career during the point at

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Moats Miller, *Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam: Paladin of Liberal Protestantism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 312.

which theological liberalism dominated American culture (1930-1960). Theological liberalism applied the features of late nineteenth-century German rationalism—ideas of the Enlightenment, or reason coupled with theories of evolution—to the study of science and religion in attempt to reconcile theology with biblical criticism and science. Oxnam’s liberal worldview was on full display in a 1948 publication. In this article, which largely seeks to reconcile Christianity and the Bible with science, Oxnam declared, “Science and religion are essential to man’s salvation.”<sup>7</sup> Theological liberalism was an intellectual movement and Oxnam was firmly in its camp.

### **Association With Power**

Oxnam’s major access to the highest levels of American power came from his close, personal relationship with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (1888-1959). Though Oxnam had some association with New York Governor and presidential candidate Thomas Dewey, and Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy, and held correspondence with Standard Oil Company head, John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937) and YMCA leader John Mott (1865-1955) into the 1950s, Dulles was Oxnam’s closest friend in the highest circles of power. Indeed, it is because of Dulles that many of Oxnam’s perspectives concerning American foreign policy garnered as much of a hearing as they did. Because of this relationship and the doors it opened, Oxnam was looked to by large numbers of Methodists and Protestant churchgoers as one who could legitimately speak to the crisis of the early Cold War with some authority along with advice grounded in Christian principles.

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<sup>7</sup> G. Bromley Oxnam, “Religion and Science in Accord.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 256 (March, 1948): 147.

Dulles and Oxnam had met before their time spent together in the 1940s on the Federal Council of Churches' National Study Conference on the Churches and World Order and also on the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace. Dulles, a Presbyterian, and Oxnam, a Methodist, both hailed from theologically liberal backgrounds, participated in (and helped to form) national and international ecumenical organizations, and attempted to further America's democratic reach through bodies of Christian networks and interdenominational organizations. Both men called for a foreign policy to be guided by moral objectives. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, these moral objectives became ambiguous in the name of national security. On August 9, 1945, Oxnam (then president of the FCC) and Dulles jointly issued a statement that conveyed both men's pride at the "scientific miracle" of atomic energy, yet also their concern over its potential misuse. They called for self-restraint until the Japanese government had more time to respond to the American ultimatum, but, as historian William Inboden has pointed out, "Notably, the statement raised no qualms about the bombings as a direct assault on Japanese civilians—even though forbidden by the cardinal tenets of the Christian just war position."<sup>8</sup> This instance is not the only event that raises questions over Oxnam's place at the intersection of religion and politics in mid-twentieth-century American foreign affairs.

Oxnam spelled out his general support for the potential use of atomic weapons again in 1950. The FCC was re-born in 1950 as the National Council of Churches (NCC). The new organization declared its willingness to shape its own policies in light of the goals of the United Nations. The statements of the NCC leadership during its opening years reflected a growing consensus with respect to foreign policy among church leaders—to include leading theologically liberal figures. In response to Secretary of State Dean Acheson's address to the NCC conference

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<sup>8</sup> William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 32.

on the Korean conflict, a panel of NCC leaders—including Oxnam, Dr. Edward Pruden, president of the American Baptist Convention and sometime pastor to President Truman, and the new NCC president, Episcopal Bishop Henry Knox Sherrill, all stated their willingness to support the use of atomic weapons if future circumstances demanded so.<sup>9</sup> In an act that accentuates the ambiguity of Oxnam’s position on foreign policy, the same year, Oxnam agreed with United Lutheran Church in America president, Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, that talks eventually should be held with Russians regarding “hydrogen and atom bomb control.”<sup>10</sup>

Oxnam’s relationship with Dulles only grew closer through the 1950s, throughout Dulles’ tenure as Secretary of State, and into the days preceding his death. Oxnam was invited to both of the presidential inaugurations as a guest of Dulles. Dulles also summoned Oxnam to Dulles’ official Secretary of State offices, the White House, or more informal settings at several points throughout the 1950s. In some cases, Oxnam’s perspective was sought. In others, it was readily offered without prompting. In 1950, for example, Oxnam and his wife Ruth were invited to the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York as guests of Dulles to hear a presentation that Dulles had drafted in response to a recent Herbert Hoover speech. Once at the Waldorf, Dulles admitted to Oxnam that he was “sticking his neck out on this, and it might cost him his political future.” Oxnam assured Dulles that he did not think that was the case and “if we allowed this drift to isolationism to engulf us,” that Dulles’ speech attacked, Oxnam warned, “we would be

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 55. In 1953, Oxnam stated that there was “no alternative to the Korean War” and asserted that “we must be as strong as it is necessary to convince Russia that she can’t win.” See, Oxnam diary clipping, “Bishop Oxnam Urges Aid to Meet Threat of Reds.” Box 22, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

<sup>10</sup> “Asks U.S. Vow Not to Use H-Bomb.” *Wichita Negro Star* March 3, 1950, 1.

postponing the evil day and—many of us think—insuring our defeat.”<sup>11</sup> Dulles and his wife, Janet, invited Oxnam to several functions.

Oxnam and his wife Ruth took telephone calls and letters from the Dulles’ at several points throughout the 1950s, including a warm Christmas card each year, from the Dulles’ to the Oxnam’s.<sup>12</sup> In a conversation with Mrs. Dulles in 1954, Oxnam learned that “Foster,” as those closest to the Secretary called him, thought very highly of Oxnam. Mrs. Dulles also let Oxnam know that she and her husband wished for their son Avery to meet with Oxnam. In the same conversation, Oxnam shared his opinion of John Foster’s brother, Allen, who Oxnam felt was a “very interesting person,” who, “despite how he comes off, is not rude at all.”<sup>13</sup> This relationship only grew over time. Aside from official meetings, Oxnam acted as sometimes-pastoral guide and friend to Dulles as Eisenhower’s second term continued on. Oxnam and Dulles’ interactions presented a mixture of friendly bantering and informal discussions of policy and Washington. In 1957, Dulles telephoned Oxnam at home following Oxnam’s gall-bladder surgery. Dulles called to extend his warm-wishes as someone who had already experienced the surgery.

Like many of Dulles’ conversations, however, small talk often changed to discussions of his work. Shortly into the same phone call, Dulles turned to administrative economic woes: “These men are perfectly willing to authorize all the money necessary for military facing of a problem but hesitate when it comes to the economic aid, which after all is more fundamental when you come to deal with the real situation we face.” Dulles continued, “A few million dollars wisely spent in economic aid may be worth many, many millions that involve the use of power.” Dulles then explained that he thought “the churches” ought to be more helpful than they have

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<sup>11</sup> Oxnam diary entry. Box 19, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

<sup>12</sup> Oxnam diary clipping, Box 22, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

<sup>13</sup> Oxnam diary entry. June 15, 1954, Box 23, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

been before Oxnam outlined his frustration over the difficulty the State Department presented when the Methodist Church leadership brought “very significant movements” that fall outside of the scope of State Department “concrete situations.” After empathizing with Oxnam, Dulles explained that he thought that there could be a closer relationship between the churches and the government. He then let Oxnam know that he missed him and wished for him to “stop by some time.”<sup>14</sup>

Oxnam took Dulles up on his invitation and met with him in May. The exchange that took place describes the cordial relationship the two maintained. It also reveals both men’s perspectives on policy as well as their honesty with one another on foreign policy strategies. When Oxnam met Dulles at his State Department office, Dulles welcomed him, “I wanted you to come just so that we might have a long talk. I covet the pastoral relationship of minister and layman.” Dulles continued:

I should not say it but [Covenant First Presbyterian Church senior pastor Edward L.R.] Elson, while a very fine fellow and no doubt all right to fill a church and to keep the administration going, is quite hopeless when it comes to pastoral association. He has nothing to do with me. I simply attend the services and listen to him preach.<sup>15</sup>

Dulles then began to recount the problems that he faced, particularly, as Oxnam noted, the problem of applying “the Christian principle in the concrete situation.” Dulles revealed that the days he had spent in the Federal Council of Churches were perhaps the happiest of his life. There, Dulles was able to concentrate thinking upon “the principles” and he felt that in that

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<sup>14</sup> Oxnam diary entry. Box 28, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

<sup>15</sup> Oxnam diary entry. May 13, 1957, Box 28, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

atmosphere, principles could be considered in “the light of religion.” Like other conversations between Oxnam and Dulles, the topic soon turned to church-state relations. Dulles said:

How difficult it is and I really do not know the answer, but I have a feeling that there ought to be a closer relationship between the Church and the leaders of government who are charged with these responsibilities. Both the President and I are Christian men. We are humble men, and we find ourselves quite alone. It has been a long time since any churchman has come to see me. I treasure the letters that come. In fact, I used to take them home over the weekends to read them. They sustain one when the going is tough.<sup>16</sup>

After assuring Dulles that many men avoided visiting him out of a mixture of respect and affection, Oxnam admitted, “I myself have deliberately refrained from coming because I did not want to add so much as a single caller to the burden of responsibility you carry.” Oxnam added, “I know that each person takes from your strength and we did not wish to do that.” Dulles responded, “It is the other way around. The presence of such friends add to strength,” before Oxnam opened the door to a sensitive foreign policy matter. Oxnam replied, “I agree thoroughly. There can be honest difference of opinion. For instance, some of us have differed with what is thought to be your attitude in India.” After being prompted for explanation, Oxnam offered, “The arming of Pakistan and the general attitude toward [India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal] Nehru (1889-1964) that seems to indicate a certain clash of personality.”<sup>17</sup>

Oxnam briefed Dulles on other Methodist bishops’ disturbance over news of President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles’ views on arming Pakistan and reluctance over supporting Nehru in certain facets of international diplomacy. Oxnam also conveyed a conversation that he

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

had with Nehru about Nehru's attempt to drive a wedge between Soviet communism and Chinese Nationalism. Oxnam claimed that Nehru felt that American policies were driving Soviet communism and Chinese nationalism together. Of course, both the United States and the Soviet Union were both competing to make India an ally throughout the 1950s. Secretary Dulles would have been well aware of Nehru's criticism of the 1956 Suez Canal invasion by British, Israeli, and French forces. He also would have been aware of Nehru's sensitivity to American distrust of Nehruvian socialism, despite the generally favorable relationship that Eisenhower and Nehru maintained.

To this conversation, Dulles responded, "[Nehru's plan to drive a wedge] is a very interesting and arguable position to take, but the difficulty lies in the fact that Mr. Nehru does not consider the time factor." Dulles wondered out loud, "What do we do while he is driving the wedge, and how long is it going to take for the wedge to be driven?" Dulles explained the reality of the situation to Oxnam, "There are strategic considerations that have to be faced. We have fought three wars now to see that we do not have an unfriendly Western shore of Europe." Dulles shared that he did not dare to allow the Soviets to take Formosa or the Philippines. "We have to hold," Dulles warned, "How do you hold and at the same time drive the wedge that he is talking about?" With the informal and unfiltered consideration of official policy that Dulles demonstrated during his time with the FCC's Just and Durable Peace Commission, Dulles speculated, "If we do not hold and he drives a wedge, or fails to drive it, and the Soviets take all these territories, then we face a conflict in the Pacific, if it should come, with a much weakened position."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



It is conversations like these that show the closeness that Dulles and Oxnam shared. They were comfortable with and trusting of one another. Because of years of friendship and discussions, Oxnam enjoyed the association with power that his relationship with Dulles provided. It also allowed him the opportunity to share news of his overseas and interchurch interactions with Dulles, while at the same time gain the perspective and insight of America's top foreign policy strategist on international relations.<sup>19</sup>

### **Oxnam on American Foreign Policy**

Publicly, Oxnam frequently claimed something akin to the quote that opened this chapter when outlining the Cold War rivalry. Whether speaking as a representative of the World Council of Churches, The Methodist Church, American Protestants, or merely himself, Oxnam made it a point to frame the Cold War as a battle of ideologies. He also urged peaceful navigation through the stalemate. However, Oxnam detracted from some Protestant leaders in his support of maintaining a strong military presence and his push for a path that led to United Nations' control over many of the matters that stood at the heart of the Soviet-American conflict. Aside from suggesting the handover of Cold War foreign policy from the United States to the United Nations, maintaining America's arsenal of atomic weapons, and maintaining military might, Oxnam had very little in the way of proposed alterations to the progression of the Cold War. For example, as early as March of 1950, Oxnam felt the need to clarify comments that he made to a reporter earlier and wrote a reply to an editorial that published his stances on several issues.

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<sup>19</sup> Oxnam's relationship to Dulles was widely known. For example, he was described as a "long time friend of John Foster Dulles" in John Will, "Bishop Oxnam Urges Aid To Meet Threat of Reds," *Mobile Press Register*, 2, January, 1953, Box 22, Oxnam Collection, LOC. Also, Oxnam frequently played up this public relationship: "I know that Secretary Dulles believes in Christian principles. He has no idea of leading us into war," *ibid*.

Oxnam penned, “Realists quite apart from the morality involved know that in war all weapons will be used. The restraining factor is not moral principle, but the fear of retaliation.”<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, his thinking on foreign policy was shaped by a number of factors. Yet, in the 1950s, Oxnam conferred with many individuals that were steeped in the world of American foreign policy. He relied on contacts, acquaintances, and previous service from his time in the 1940s with the FCC. Throughout 1950, Oxnam met to discuss “the present situation” with John Foster Dulles, Reinhold Niebuhr, International YMCA head Eugene E. Barnett (1888-1967), Rockefeller Foundation president Chester I. Barnard, Stanley High of Readers’ Digest, Roswell P. Barnes of the Federal Council of Churches, and Dr. O. Frederick Nolde, of the Commission of Churches on International Affairs. Many of Oxnam’s perspectives came from a combination of his own assessment and the opinions of other leading secular and religious figures.

Oxnam summarized his position on the Cold War during one of these meetings in December of 1950. His diary entry that recounted a meeting with several concerned leaders struck at the core of Oxnam’s stance on the conflict. Oxnam felt that in the five years after the close of WWII, “the West” had become “reinvigorated.” He described Russia as having realized this and having come to the point where they questioned whether or not they could expand the domination of the world any further in the same manner that they had spread initially—through the conquering of satellite nations through communism. Oxnam felt that Russia might turn to war to continue to take over and control countries outside of its reach. Oxnam also saw interdependence, “from the international point of view,” bring about the presence of the United Nations. He saw these points, and more, as reason enough to ask, will Russia continue to attempt

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<sup>20</sup> Oxnam diary entry. Box 19, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

domination through peace, or through war?<sup>21</sup> Nowhere did Oxnam consider the idea that Russia would halt the spread of its communistic reach. It is important to note that Oxnam viewed Russia's continued expansion as a question of how—not if. Like many Americans in the 1950s, propaganda and a general sense of fear persuaded Oxnam to believe that Russia desired nothing short of global domination.

It is apparent that Oxnam confided his innermost thoughts in his diary. From his view of the Cold War, Oxnam believed that America needed to build up “full military strength” and match it with “political strategy of the highest order.” Considering the fact that for years “Containment” had reigned supreme as America's guiding foreign policy ideology as found in National Security Council document 68, the Marshall Plan had been rolled out, and the United Nations had been formed, Oxnam felt convinced that policy and the authoritative structures in place measured up to sound and complimentary political tools and strategy.<sup>22</sup>

Oxnam often carried the most important points of these meetings with highly regarded figures such as Dulles, Niebuhr, and Nolde with him. He maintained discretion when he regularly tapped in to these meetings publicly. During a speech at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York on February 22, 1951, Oxnam told his audience, “America must counter Russian influence with better applied ideas as well as with an imposing force of arms.” He added that communism had been stalled in Europe because of “the Atlantic Pact, Marshall Plan aid, and President Truman's Four Point Program.” Yet, Oxnam warned, Russia, seeing her “force in being” greater than American arms, “may thus strike Europe and Asia by force to capture the

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<sup>21</sup> Oxnam diary entry, December 18, 1951, Box 20, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

potential needed to balance the United States.”<sup>23</sup> Often in Oxnam’s calls for peace and public pronouncements on the Cold War, he painted the Soviet-American standoff in dire and imminent language. As the 1950s progressed, he tapered off his punctuated inflections of anxiety and fear—yet his calls for coexistence and peaceful resolution matched his support for existing, aggressive American foreign policy.

### **Oxnam on Domestic Issues: HUAC, Race, and America’s Place in the World**

While Oxnam’s perspectives on American foreign policy directed toward the Soviet Union stand as the major thrust of this chapter, his observations of the United States, in general, bear discussion. Oxnam was progressive in his thought on many domestic issues. Through a short discussion of Oxnam’s views on domestic issues, one may better understand a more complete picture of his thinking on the 1950s in general and America’s place in the world, specifically.

The 1950s contained much in the way of change on the American landscape. A major uptick in consumerism had severe ramifications—positive and negative. The Cold War took on a new arena of battle by proxy in the space race. Mainstream forms of entertainment drastically changed with the introduction of new styles of clothing, music, television, food, and travel. In some of the most hotly debated changes that occurred during the Eisenhower Administration, Oxnam stuck to deeply held views. In fact, Oxnam is associated with his impact within the domestic sphere of American life more so than in the realm of foreign affairs. This section pays attention to three major issues: race, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), and domestic legislation dealing with military affairs. By exploring Oxnam’s interactions with each

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<sup>23</sup> Oxnam diary clipping, “Bishop Oxnam Urges More Unity in West: Methodist Leader Says Ideas and Guns Needed to Beat Russian Threat.” Box 21, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

of these three topics, one may gain a more thorough sense of who Oxnam was, and how his confrontations with these issues and bodies shaped his larger world-view.

Oxnam's views on race were on par with many political and theologically liberal white Americans. However, like many of the issues that he tended to, Oxnam occasionally acted more hesitantly about certain matters in public than he did within the walls of his home. Oxnam despised racism. He felt that it was truly one of the nation's greatest shortcomings. Recounting a memory of his days as a seminary student at Boston University, Oxnam recalled seeing "Pickens, a great Negro" who was in his graduating class:

The day we graduated and I was walking down the hill, I saw him standing there. I said, 'Pickens, what's the matter?' Then he told me, that now it was over, he had never been treated anywhere the way he had been treated at the School of Theology. He was a man, not just a black man. Now he must return to all of the discriminations his race suffers. I can see him now as he shook his head, dried his eyes and walked away like a man.<sup>24</sup>

Undoubtedly, Oxnam gained a more racially accepting world view early, from his diverse upbringing as a miner's son in California, subsequent service as the pastor of a church in a densely immigrant populated area of Los Angeles, and globe-trotting with Sherwood Eddie. Oxnam makes it clear in his most intimate writings, though, that he despised Jim Crow segregation. Following a trip to Jackson and Vicksburg, Mississippi, Oxnam opined:

My first impression of the station was repugnant—colored waiting room, white waiting room. I went into the ticket office. What a contradiction it all is. Here is a white man who waits upon people at two windows, one on one side for Negroes, one on the other side for whites.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Oxnam diary entry, March 11, 1950. Box 19, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

<sup>25</sup> Oxnam diary entry, April 1, 1951. Box 20, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

While Oxnam confided his disgust with racism to his diary and called for an end to racial discrimination publicly, he did not go as far as he could have in speeding up the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> He made no major overtures in the way of activism. Additionally, at the 1954 World Church Council meeting in Evanston, Illinois, Oxnam (along with other WCC presidents and President Eisenhower) spoke to a segregated crowd of 18,000.<sup>27</sup> While his stances on racism, Jim Crow segregation, and the hypocrisy of American foreign policy demands on communist dictators in light of racism at home prove Oxnam to be ahead of the times, he nonetheless balked in specific instances of paramount importance during the first twinklings of the Civil Rights Movement. Oxnam's legacy is less defined by his stance on race-relations than it is with his vociferous, outspoken denunciation of congressional communist witch-hunting.

The moment of Oxnam's life that he is, perhaps, best remembered for is that of his testimony in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee in July, 1953. HUAC Chairman Harold H. Velde, himself a Methodist, chaired the hearing that allowed Oxnam to raise any issues that he found with HUAC's personal file on Oxnam; and Oxnam had several issues. The Oxnam hearing, which Oxnam published a personal account of in *I Protest*, came about due to a series of actions at a time when national paranoia over communist infiltration was at an all time high.

The importance of Oxnam's HUAC hearing that occurred at a peak moment in America's anxiety over the spread and threat of communism cannot be understated. As previously mentioned above, Oxnam's own personal account of the hearing was published as *I Protest*, among other places. Some of the nation's leading newspapers, such as *Washington Post* and *New*

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<sup>26</sup> For Oxnam's call for an end to racism at home, see Oxnam, "Proposals for Peace—IV" *The Nation* 1953.

<sup>27</sup> Photograph in Oxnam diary, n.d., Box 25, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

*York Times*, carried extracts of the investigation. *U.S. News and World Report* published the entire transcript. NBC televised the entire hearing in order to present a half-hour long segment. Though the clip is no longer available, an audio-taped recording of the hearing is available today.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, Oxnam's challenge to the legitimacy of HUAC's investigations, or, the committee's basis for investigation and the labeling of certain individuals and groups as communist, communist aid, or communist sympathizer, began the erosion of questionable HUAC power.

In short, Oxnam had caught wind of HUAC's sudden curiosity with, as HUAC Chairman (and Methodist) Harold H. Velde, phrased it, "the church field." Velde's assertion that HUAC would look into a growing number of Protestant leaders and laymen over questionable actions occurred at the same time as Carl McIntire's publication, *Bishop Oxnam, Prophet of Marx*, and *American Mercury* magazine contributor Joseph Brown Matthews' article, "Reds and Our Churches." In both of these publications, several Methodist preachers and bishops were identified as communist party members. In McIntire's publication, Oxnam was identified as the most popular and radical representative of the pro-communist element within American religious circles. It is publications like these, alongside former committees and organizations that Oxnam participated in, as well as a sizeable Federal Bureau of Investigation dossier on Oxnam, that made up the HUAC file on Oxnam. Oxnam responded to his critics, publicly, at several instances. It was a tirade on the floor of the House of Representatives on March 17, 1953, however, given by California Republican Representative Donald L. Jackson that prompted Oxnam to challenge HUAC's slanderous assertions. Jackson growled: "[Oxnam] has been to the

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<sup>28</sup> Miller, 576 and 578n1.

Communist front what Man O' War was to thoroughbred horse racing...having served God on Sunday and the Communist front for the balance of the week.”<sup>29</sup>

Oxnam sought a negotiated redress of his grievances with HUAC, to no avail, from February through June of 1953. HUAC members were persistent in their attempts to deflect Oxnam's rebuttals to their larger investigatory processes concerning Protestant churches, leaders, organizations, and individuals. Finally, Oxnam and HUAC settled on a date of July 21, 1953 to hold a hearing in which Oxnam could speak to the evidence against his affiliation with the Communist Party.

During the hearing, Oxnam aggressively pulled apart HUAC evidence—largely made up of questionable hearsay, far-right-leaning publications, and baseless claims against organizations—point by point. At an early point in the hearing, Oxnam stated:

Why did the individual who clipped derogatory statements concerning me fail to clip such announcements as the following: My appointment by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to visit the Mediterranean Theater and the European Theater of Operations during the War; or my appointment by Secretary [of the Navy, James] Forrestal as a member of the Secretary of the Navy's Civilian Advisory Committee; or the announcement that the Navy had awarded me the highly prized Certificate of Appreciation for services during the War; or that I had been invited to be the guest of Archbishop Damaskinos, then Regent of Greece, and that the King of Greece had awarded me the Order of the Phoenix; or that I had represented the American churches at the enthronement of the Archbishop of Canterbury; or that I had been appointed by the President as a member of the President's Commission on Higher Education; or that I was chairman of the Commission approved by the President to study postwar religious conditions in Germany? This might be called pertinent information. I have held the highest offices in the power of fellow-churchmen to confer upon me, such as the presidency of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. I am one of the Presidents of the World

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<sup>29</sup> Congress, House, Representative Donald L. Jackson, 83<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., *Congressional Record* (March 17, 1953): 2024; Angela Lahr, “The Censure of a Bishop: Church and State in the McCarthy Era,” *Methodist History* 44 (October, 2005): 29; Miller, 569.



Council of Churches, perhaps the highest honor that can come to a clergyman. I hold positions of responsibility in the church I love and seek to serve, among them, Secretary of the Council of Bishops.<sup>30</sup>

The hearing lasted from 2:30PM until 12:20AM in front of over five hundred spectators in the Caucus Room of the Old House Office Building. HUAC members, including Chairman Velde, Representative Jackson, and Michigan Republican Kit Clardy, became increasingly venomous as Oxnam finished each point by questioning the procedures of the committee. In one instance, the committee sprang questions reaching as far back as the 1930s and 1920s, which prompted one reporter to comment, “The next question will be pre-natal.” As Oxnam continued on, maintaining what appeared to be the coolest attitude in the room, another news reporter could be overheard saying, “What a sight! A drunk congressman interrogating a Methodist bishop!” And Oxnam proceeded on in this fashion, denying and exposing as false much of the information that comprised his HUAC file.

Finally, after midnight, California Democrat Clyde Doyle moved “that the record show in these hearings that this committee has no record of any Communist Party affiliation or membership by Bishop Oxnam.” Surprisingly, this motion was seconded by Jackson, who had compared Oxnam to Man O’War months earlier. Oxnam was not on the HUAC radar again following his hearing. With its conclusion, Oxnam’s HUAC hearing punched a series of holes in HUAC authority in the eyes of many Americans—members of Congress included.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> G. Bromley Oxnam, *I Protest* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 38.

<sup>31</sup> Oxnam diary entries, photograph, newspaper cartoon, and newspaper clippings, March 15, 1953 to June 3, 1953. Box 22, Oxnam Collection, LOC; Oxnam, “Rule by Slander,” *The Watchman Examiner*, March 19, 1953; Miller, 575-579.

Oxnam's thought on American foreign policy aimed at the Soviet Union is often stated bluntly throughout the 1950s. Yet, an overview of his perspective of America and America's role in the world colors the broader scope of Oxnam's worldview. As mentioned previously, Oxnam was firmly in the camp of theological and political liberal thought. His own thoughts on God, Jesus, salvation, the Bible, science, and churches have been explored above. His take on political matters, however, further crystalizes who Oxnam was and what issues he felt passionately about. His full-fledged support of the United Nations and positive image of the United States further describe Oxnam's association with mainstream, liberal thought in the 1950s.

Oxnam's view of the world was a blend of suspicion and hopefulness. Oxnam found the actions of HUAC Senators deplorable. He found the plight of blacks reprehensible in an age of prosperity. He also found America to be wanting in several facets of its then-current state of existence. Oxnam desired peace—with Russia as much as with any nation. He had several ideas that he thought might bring the world closer to the one that he envisioned. For example, Oxnam found a great benefit in the idea of a single, authoritative, "world law." He imagined a path to this end through the perfection of the United Nations: "Loyalty to the United Nations must be developed, and those who would destroy it must be restrained." Furthermore, Oxnam quipped, "Concepts of absolute national sovereignty must give way to the idea of world law, democratically determined."<sup>32</sup> He also felt that a starting point to improvement rested upon a correction to the widespread economic disadvantage of the American citizenry: "Peace cannot be built upon foundations of economic injustice." Oxnam continued, "Positive programs of land reform designed to give the disinherited peasant ownership of the land are essential to peace."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Oxnam, "Proposals for Peace—IV" *The Nation* 1953.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

On a contradictory note, Oxnam suggested that Americans must come into world affairs “with clean hands” by supporting “basic human rights and basic freedoms in world affairs,” despite his rosy view of America’s history. On December 13, 1953, Oxnam told an audience of 1,500 at the First Church of Boston, in the history of America’s foreign affairs, “The American has never been a bully and refuses to be led in that direction.”<sup>34</sup> This whitewashing of oppressive action at home against blacks, Native Americans, and Japanese, along with the oversight of American actions a generation earlier in The Philippines, Mexico, and Hawaii, still did not restrain Oxnam from pointing out perceived deficiencies in American government processes. Oxnam frequently called out what he saw as hastily, or incorrectly made decisions or bills in Congress.

In one instance, he called into question the plausibility of Congressional authority. After returning from London and Paris in February of 1951, Oxnam publicly questioned what right Congress had to determine how many troops were needed in Europe: “Nothing appears sillier to me than a man getting up on the floor of the Senate to say he’s against communism and then refusing to cooperate in providing the men and arms to fight communism.” Oxnam finished, “Since when have Senators been qualified to tell military men how many men they need for necessary operations?”<sup>35</sup>

Related to his views on bad decisions in the halls of power, Oxnam also perceived the negative attributes of government overreach. Sensitive to the trend of churches losing dominion over matters of community support and assistance to the needy, Oxnam believed that the country

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<sup>34</sup> Oxnam diary clipping, January, 1954, Box 24, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

<sup>35</sup> Jerry Neil, “Bishop Oxnam Finished Wrestling With Devil Early, Now He Jousts With Papists.” Page 1. *Arkansas Gazette* April 6, 1951. Oxnam clipping in 1951 Diary, Box 20, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

would be improved if many of the matters that government programs tended to were handed over to churches: “It is imperative that the number of private agencies, such as the...World Council of Churches and the Church World Service...be increased to release the thought and the charity of groups other than government.”<sup>36</sup> To Oxnam, a general shifting of power from state to church, and from sovereign nations to the United Nations spelled out the path to an improved society and community of nations.

From this short series of examples, one can see that Oxnam held a wide array of views on many matters. Like many inclined to fall to the left of the political spectrum, Oxnam found racial reconciliation, economic fairness, if not redistribution, and international cooperation on international matters worthwhile endeavors. At the same time, Oxnam chastised what he saw as foul, negligible, or wrongheaded actions within Congress. His views that encouraged international and ecumenical cooperation give a more robust description of what many of Oxnam’s innermost thoughts were linked to.

### **Criticisms of Oxnam**

As to be expected, none of Oxnam’s actions, public declarations, or perspectives on domestic or foreign policy had the unanimous support of all Americans. Not all Protestant, or even Methodist leaders demonstrated unfailing support for Oxnam. It is in the criticisms of Oxnam that one may find the fault lines in America’s Protestant establishment. The three major strains of Protestant Christianity in the 1950s were Neo-Orthodoxy, theologically-liberal, and evangelical. These three strands surfaced between the end of World War II and the 1960s. But even within each of these facets, cracks existed. It is apparent from Oxnam’s HUAC experience

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<sup>36</sup> Oxnam, “Proposals for Peace—IV” *The Nation* 1953.

that he withstood pressure from the political far-right during the McCarthy-era domestic communism probe that occurred. Whether through direct involvement or by affiliation, this same political segment, to include some nationally recognized fundamentalist, Christian pastors and preachers, represented the main source of Oxnam's criticism.

Print was the medium that Oxnam was most often attacked through. Oxnam was typically targeted for his anti-Catholic comments and his perceived association with communism between the late 1940s and his HUAC hearing, in 1953. Though Herbert Hoover, the FBI, and the Congressional HUAC members had Oxnam on their radar, it is the scalding derogatory remarks of those within Oxnam's own Protestant Christian community that reveal the lack of unanimity within America's Protestant Christian population.<sup>37</sup>

By and large, a number of Catholic, fundamentalist, and theologically conservative churches took public swipes at Oxnam. Most of this was the result of Oxnam's negative public statements in the 1940s concerning the Catholic Church and his founding of the organization, Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Oxnam's leading role in and continued association with the latter prompted backlash from Catholics and Protestants alike. The Dubuque, Iowa *Catholic Witness* cited the *Washington Times Herald's* description of Oxnam as an "outspoken foe of Catholicism" in their story that portrayed Oxnam as standing firm on his dislike of Catholics and outright embrace of communism.<sup>38</sup> The same

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<sup>37</sup> Aside from providing Oxnam's HUAC members with helpful information prior to Oxnam's hearing, Hoover also made his thoughts on Oxnam clear, publicly. In a response to one reporter's questions concerning organizations that Oxnam belonged to, Hoover replied, "I confess to a real apprehension, so long as Communists are able to secure ministers of the gospel to promote their evil work," "Bishop Oxnam, Scarritt Speaker 'Member Communistic Fronts'," *The Nashville Record*. March 4, 1952.

<sup>38</sup> "Washington's Protestant Bishop...Hard on Catholics; Soft With Commies," *Catholic Witness*, June 19, 1952.

story, carried by the *Tuscon Arizona Register*, described Oxnam as a “two-fisted preacher,” who has “flailed with equal enthusiasm at what he has considered excesses of capitalism and Catholicism.”<sup>39</sup>

When discussing Catholicism in the 1950s, one must remember that the Catholic Church looked and functioned much differently then than it did after 1965. The years of the Eisenhower Administration encompassed the final years of the Catholic Church’s pre-Vatican II era. This distinction is important due to the place that the Catholic Church held in American society before and after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Formally the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, or *Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum Secundum*, this twenty-first ecumenical council gathering of the Catholic Church—the second at St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican—resulted in several major changes throughout the Catholic Church.<sup>40</sup> In the main, Catholic leaders addressed relations between the Catholic Church and the modern world through a series of constitutions, declarations, documents, and statements. Among these, the use of vernacular languages in the Mass, revisions of the liturgy, bishops’ garments, the ability to celebrate Mass with the officiant facing the congregation, and new approaches to historical criticism of the Bible all featured prominently as changes to Catholic life. The results of Vatican II changed the Catholic Church and reframed American perspectives of Catholicism’s interaction with the world.<sup>41</sup>

Members of the Catholic Church rejected communism during the 1950s on par with members of Protestant Christian churches. Perhaps best personified in Catholic Archbishop

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<sup>39</sup> “Press Jabs Dr. Oxnam Upon Anti-Catholic Bias,” *Tuscon Arizona Register*, June 20, 1952.

<sup>40</sup> The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council is the translation of the Latin *Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum Secundum*. Italicized emphasis on the Latin is my own.

<sup>41</sup> For a thorough discussion of Vatican II, see John O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

Fulton Sheen (1895-1979), whose radio and television programs reached millions of listeners, Catholics found common ground with Protestants in their anti-communism. In one example, Sheen denounced the leadership of the Soviet Union during a presentation in February of 1953, concluding with the warning that Joseph Stalin would one day meet his judgment. Sheen issued this stern statement days before Stalin suffered a stroke and died.<sup>42</sup>

Oxnam encountered greater opposition from outside of the Catholic community. The growing minority of far-right conservative Christians represented the swath of Protestant Christians that publicly attacked Oxnam with the greatest frequency. This group of American Christians was represented in some of the most ascendant groups of the late 1950s and 1960s: The ACCC, ICCC, Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, and John Birch Society. While some of these organizations were founded out of a religious impulse and some out of a political impulse, all of the above—in one fashion or another—touted beliefs, goals, and perspectives of both religious and political conservatism. At the heart of all of them was a deep sense of vitriol toward communism and “liberalism”—though this term was applied as a blanket to encompass many facets of theological liberalism, support for more socially liberal domestic policies at home, and approaches to foreign affairs that were considered to be less than assertive.

These groups and the individuals that comprised them came out against Oxnam and the Methodist Church regularly. The founding of the ACCC and ICCC represented a less-than-subtle backlash against the mechanisms and work of the FCC, and later, NCC. As discussed in Chapter Two, the members of the ACCC and ICCC, along with individuals adhering to the work of the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, among others, found the direction that theologically liberal

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<sup>42</sup> See, Thomas Reeves, *America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen* (New York: Encounter Books, 2001) and Kathleen Riley, *Fulton J. Sheen: An American Catholic Response to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Alba House, 2003).

church leaders and organizations took in the early Cold War reprehensible. Anything that could be perceived as sympathetic to communism was a target for these groups.

In 1952, the Evangelical Methodist Church's publication, *The Evangelical Methodist*, carried a story by Dr. W.O.H. Garman, the Vice President of the American Council of Christian Churches, titled "Oxnam Worked With Communists and Communist Fronts." Either Oxnam, "pink Methodist" preachers, or other theologically liberal church leaders were the direct object of scorn in several instances of Carl McIntire's radio program and Billy James Hargis' *Christian Crusade*. Indeed, even after a Congressional committee had formally cleared Oxnam of "any Communist Party affiliation" in 1953, Oxnam continued to receive public lashes from the same segment of conservative Christians.

Carl McIntire led the ACCC to attack Oxnam in a speech called "How Communism is Using the Church—a Challenge to Bishop Oxnam," in December of 1953 during the ACCC's meeting at Hollywood American Legion Stadium. Using familiar and redundant generalizations, McIntire and his council charged that "[Oxnam] and other church leaders are using the church to promote Marxist Socialism." McIntire railed against the perceived communist infiltration of theologically liberal churches often throughout the 1950s and Oxnam was a favorite target. It was the rapid insurgence of such attack pieces in print media—publications of both conservative churches and organizations, along with mainstream media—that brought about the rise of conservative forces on the fringe of the theological and political spectrum. It was also public



declarations such as these referenced that demonstrated the growing cracks across the face of Protestant Christianity.<sup>43</sup>

### **Oxnam's Recounting of a Life's Work**

Toward the end of the 1950s, Oxnam's hindsight revealed regrets in some instances and clarity in others. In most cases, Oxnam remained inconsistent in his assessments of foreign policy that was directed toward the Soviet Union as well as his approximation of Eisenhower-Dulles approaches to international affairs. During the Autumn of 1957, Oxnam began to privately admit his doubts of Dulles' Cold War strategy. Considering Dulles' *Foreign Affairs* article, "Challenge and Response in United States Policy," Oxnam found the basis of the Secretary of State's message "disappointing." In an example of Oxnam's more hawkish stance on Cold War diplomacy, he found Dulles' foreign policy not aggressive enough: "It is brilliantly done, argued with the rare skill that he possesses, but is based upon the assumption that our policy is one of response." Oxnam thought that if America could be the "challenging party, forcing response," in the stalemate with Russia, America could be "in a much stronger position."<sup>44</sup> Oxnam had no suggestion for tactics to use in forcing Soviet response, but would have found massive retaliation and brinkmanship lacking.

Oxnam openly expressed his feelings concerning foreign policy, Eisenhower, and his close friend, Dulles. These personal and private conclusions were, in the main, restricted to his

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<sup>43</sup> Oxnam diary clipping, Dr. W.O.H. Garman, "Oxnam Worked With Communists and Communist Fronts," *The Evangelical Methodist*, 1952, Diaries and Journals Miscellaneous, 1903-1960, Box 31, Oxnam Collection, LOC; Oxnam diary clippings, "Church Leader to Attack Methodist Bishop Oxnam," December 1, 1953; "Reds Permeate Many Churches, Says Leader," *Los Angeles Times*, Thursday, December 17, 1953, 2; "Pastor Flays Church Marxism;" "McIntire Hits Oxnam Aid to Red Program;" and "Christian Churches Chief Tells Red Infiltration," Box 22, Oxnam Collection, LOC. See also, Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*, 543.

<sup>44</sup> Oxnam diary entry, October 20, 1957, Box 31, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

diary. Oxnam, like many other leading Protestant pastors, preachers, and bishops, found the final years of Eisenhower's second term as years marked by a general loss of prestige on Eisenhower's part. Granted, many American presidential administrations lose popularity in the closing months and years of a second term. However, Oxnam was very specific in his approximation of the sources of Eisenhower's loss of prestige.

On New Year's Day in 1958, Oxnam penned in his diary, "President Eisenhower's loss of prestige is, I fear, but an expression of the inability of contemporary business leadership to understand what is going on in the world." In sum, Oxnam found Eisenhower's source of authority as the nation's pastor diminished. He found Eisenhower to have lost the respect of America's business class—or those in positions of power in the national business community—to their own greed. Oxnam perceived Eisenhower as having lost the command and religious authority that typically comes with the office of the President in the face of consumerism and opportunistic profit. Surprisingly, Oxnam found Dulles as worthy of this blame for the same reasons, "With the fullest respect for Mr. Dulles, and I admire him deeply, we lack the challenging voice of the Woodrow Wilson period, of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt era." Oxnam wondered if his dear friend in the State Department who had expressed his desire for a closer relationship between church and state in years past could provide words to the American populous that dealt with "repentance, reconciliation, regeneration, not to speak of realism, reassessment, readjustment, and many more."<sup>45</sup>

Oxnam's critique of the leaders and policies that he unabashedly supported throughout much of the 1950s became more pronounced as the Eisenhower Administration drew to a close. In the few short months that Dulles spent between stepping down from the Secretary of State

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<sup>45</sup> Oxnam diary entry, January 1, 1958, Box 32, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

post on April 22, 1959 and his death on May 24, 1959, Oxnam made an abrupt shift on his perception of Eisenhower-Dulles foreign policies. In late March of the same year, Oxnam considered new Secretary of State Christian Herter in light of Dulles' absence in his diary. Oxnam found Herter "much quieter" than Dulles. He also considered Herter to be "just as effective if not more so, and without the limitation of policy based upon deterrents, massive resistance, ability to retaliate, and so on." In retrospect, Oxnam came to the realization that the foreign policy direction that Eisenhower and Dulles took in the grand scheme of the Cold War led America—and all of the nations that were affected by the struggle—down the wrong path. Oxnam revealed:

There are real questions that come to mind as to Mr. Dulles' contribution. I held Mr. Dulles in very high esteem and continue to do so, but sooner or later you are up against a stone wall when your policy is apparently based upon certain inflexibilities. He was of the opinion that people could not tolerate the [Chinese] dictator [Mao Zedong] indefinitely, that sooner or later freedom would win out. However, what do you do when you refuse to have anything to do really with 600,000,000 people in China. Sooner or later we had to come to it with regard to the Russians and we deal with them now.<sup>46</sup>

Toward the end of his tenure with the Methodist Church, Oxnam not only doubted some of his earlier support for Eisenhower and Dulles' foreign policies toward the Soviet Union, but also his own thoughts on how the United States should proceed in the Cold War. His public support for American foreign policy wavered, as reported by the *New York Times*, in 1958. The November 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Times* printed Oxnam's desire to bring Russians to America in the hopes of strengthening ties between the two powers. In the same article, Oxnam also came out

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<sup>46</sup> Oxnam diary entry, March 27, 1959, Box 33, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

against his American government's decision not to recognize China.<sup>47</sup> To be sure, he denounced the communist system until the end. However, when reflecting upon his decisions over the course of the years of the Eisenhower Administration, Oxnam found himself to be unsure of whether his full-fledged support of his friend and Secretary of State was well-founded, or offered in too quickly.

### Conclusion

Oxnam was a force to be reckoned with in American religious history. His rapid flurry of publications, interviews, speeches, and lectures are hard to fathom. Oxnam's biographer claims that no other Protestant minister of Oxnam's generation could match Oxnam's record of fulfilling—in person—speaking engagements numbering “hundreds annually over the period of four decades.”<sup>48</sup> Oxnam edited five books and wrote seventeen in addition to thousands of articles and news columns. While a mere handful of his publications still hold interest today, Oxnam's outpouring of written and spoken commentary was more than worthwhile to his readership throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

Oxnam regularly and publicly called for peaceful discussion between the Soviet Union and America between the end of WWII and the end of his life, in 1963. He frequently advised against the dangers of the arms race and claimed that dialogue between the two powers was the best foreign policy option. His actions were nonetheless contradictory. Whether in private correspondence between himself and Dulles, personal conversations with Eisenhower, or notices

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<sup>47</sup> “Bishop Urges Russians to Visit US,” *New York Times*, November 19, 1958, Oxnam diary clipping, Box 33, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

<sup>48</sup> Miller, 348-349. Miller acknowledges Billy Graham's crowds at crusades, Reinhold Niebuhr's speaking regiment, and Harry Emerson Fosdick's radio audience that reached millions. He strongly emphasizes large, *in person* addresses that, for Oxnam, averaged ten talks a week. The period between 1940 and 1955 was the height of Oxnam's lecture circuit.

sent to tens of thousands of Methodists, Oxnam encouraged and promoted the whole of existing American foreign policy. This foreign policy departed, in many ways, from the calls for peace, discussion, and understanding that Oxnam argued so vehemently for. As Oxnam welcomed the U.S. government's foreign policy throughout the 1950s in greater measure, he continued to call for peace. As the 1950s progressed, however, his peaceful rhetoric became less frequent.

Oxnam's legacy does not hinge upon his forays into America's foreign policy conversation. He is remembered more today for his challenge to the legitimacy of HUAC accusations and for his anti-Catholic suspicion of Kennedy's ability to serve as President. He is also revered, among those who remember him favorably, for his work with the Methodist Church. From USC to his several appointments as Bishop, Oxnam grew up, lived, and worked within the Methodist Church. Although Oxnam is associated more with America's domestic history rather than America's foreign relations history, his life is instructive in several ways. Oxnam was arguably the most prominent and well-known theologically liberal Christian during his adult life. He interacted with and conveyed his ideas to many thousands of Americans throughout his professional career. He is representative and reflective of politically and theologically liberal Christians with regard to his opinions of the Cold War.

The willingness among Americans to characterize communists as atheist, godless, and evil transcended any individual identification with theological or political strands. Degrees of variation existed throughout the American public, but many Americans accepted the policy of containment as the best tool in the fight against communism. In this, most theologically liberal Christians agreed with the whole of America's religious population. The desire for peace and an end to the tensions produced by the Cold War was a shared American sentiment. Yet, the best defense available against the exchange of nuclear bombs was also a coveted means of assurance

among most Americans throughout the anxiety-filled years of the Eisenhower Administration. In this short overview of Oxnam's relationship to American foreign policy directed toward the Soviet Union, one finds a representative slice of the contradictory emotions many Americans felt: contentment with economic prosperity, fear of nuclear war, pride in America's global supremacy, worry over communism's advancement, happiness with America's religious mood, and caution in global affairs.

## CHAPTER 7

### ALPHABET SOUP: THE EXTENSION OF PERSUASION

Several simultaneously occurring events, to include the phenomenon of the baby-boom population spike, the sharp increase of suburban homes, and the anti-communist fears of many Americans in the 1950s gave rise to an increase of new religious organizations. Throughout the decade, a number of existing religious organizations grew and gained strength due to the exacerbation of anti-communist sentiment, the shifting demographics of the country's population, and the heightened popularity of civil religion within the country. Within many these groups, G. Bromley Oxnam, Billy Graham, and Reinhold Niebuhr often played a significant role in furthering the influence and impact of several religious organizations' goals. This chapter outlines several of the most prominent and most important Protestant religious groups that existed during Eisenhower's presidency. Through a discussion of these groups' efforts toward channeling the national dialogue centered upon anti-communism and foreign policy directed toward the Soviet Union, this chapter reinforces Graham, Oxnam, and Niebuhr's place in the larger American religious community. It also shows the more attentive hearing that the United States government and the greater American public gave to many of America's religious organizations. In demonstrating this, it is apparent that the heightened religious mood in the country furnished America's Protestant leadership with unprecedented power in both acting as a mouthpiece for Americans and providing support for Eisenhower and Dulles foreign policies.

This chapter dedicates most of its attention to select groups, as an exhaustive, detailed examination of each religious organization that operated during Eisenhower's Administration

falls outside of the scope of this dissertation. In particular, this chapter considers the National Council of Churches (NCC), which grew out of the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), which was more international in scope, both the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) and the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC), which were each more theologically conservative and came about at the discretion of pastor, radio host, and *Christian Beacon* founder Carl McIntire, and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which, founded in 1943, represented an organization that offered an alternative group for evangelicals in the post-WWII years. Evangelicals who filled the NAE's ranks desired an outlet different from longstanding theologically liberal organizations and more in line with the theological perspective and worldview of leading figures such as Carl F.H. Henry, Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and Charles Fuller.

Additionally, organizations that were smaller in size, more focused in their missions, and very obviously a product of the political and religious mood of the mid-twentieth century are also considered as their actions (and very existence) spoke heavily to the competing views of American foreign policy during the Eisenhower Administration. Examples of these groups include, but are not limited to: Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, the John Birch Society, and the Christian Freedom Foundation.

A discussion of the major religious organizations in America during the early years of the Cold War reveals several important points. First, the nature of America's religious infrastructure underwent significant change. The most obvious component of this change was the noticeable and sizable increase in church membership and broad expression of religiosity. For example, sociologist Will Herberg garnered great academic and public interest with the publication of his *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* in 1955 by demonstrating that the majority of Americans identified as



Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish. These labels, though, were often overshadowed by Americans' lack of attention to creeds and theologies. Rather, Herberg argued, Americans largely promoted religion as faith in faith itself. This examination of America's "super-religion," outlined many Americans'—who made up most of the country's three major faiths—acknowledgement and acceptance of civil religion.<sup>1</sup>

Second, a larger number of American Protestant individuals in leadership positions enjoyed a greater amount of attention from the American public and from important members of the United States government over the course of the 1950s. This position of enhanced prominence was aided greatly by national anti-communist fears and the very real sense of dread that many Americans held with regard to nuclear war. During these years of anxiety the American public sought solace, comfort, and assurance from their religious leaders.

Third, as the standard bearers of their respective strands of Protestant Christianity, Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and G. Bromley Oxnam exhibited a sense of agency and a level of influence that few other Protestant leaders could claim. In first turning to the connection that Billy Graham maintained with an impressive constellation of organizations, this chapter shows the centrality of Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnam in America's religious community. It also points up the complexity of America's Protestant Christian composition during Eisenhower's years in office while, at the same time, provides clarity in understanding the complicated relationships that existed among Christian churches, denominations, groups, and individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), 263; Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency*, 286; for an overview of the historiography of civil religion and the positions that historians have maintained on the benefit or harm of civil religion, see Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency*, 284-287.

## **Billy Graham's Extensive Network**

Billy Graham's star was on the rise due to a number of factors in the 1950s. Aside from a heightened awareness of the time he lived in, a successful diversification of his own ministry, and his own general appeal, Graham successfully interacted with a number of individuals and organizations that fell in line with his evangelical wing of American Protestants. Along with the benefits that general support from these organizations afforded Graham, the popular evangelist also enjoyed a steady stream of pertinent information from this growing base of evangelical groups. From a myriad of organizations, Graham was able to capitalize on a steady stream of information, insight, and opinion from across the country. One example, the Philadelphia-based Evangelical Foundation, Incorporated, demonstrates as much.

The Evangelical Foundation, Inc. was a small organization founded in 1949 to serve as the heart of fundamentalist Presbyterian minister Donald Grey Barnhouse's (1895-1960) ministry. By the time of Eisenhower's Administration, Barnhouse had already enjoyed a successful career as a pastor of Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church (where he served in this role from 1927-1960), a Bible conference organizer and host, a pioneer radio preacher, and Christian magazine editor. Like several other religious organizations, Barnhouse's Evangelical Foundation, Inc. represented a sliver of the larger body of Protestant ministries, organizations, and groups that existed or were created in the post-WWII years. Also like other such groups, Evangelical Foundation, Inc. served as a breeding ground for future political and religious leaders. The Vice-President of the Board of Directors for Evangelical Foundation, Inc. was C.

Everett Koop, M.D. (1916-2013). Koop, of course, would go on to serve as President Ronald Reagan's (1911-2004) Surgeon General from 1982 to 1989.<sup>2</sup>

Graham benefitted from a collegial relationship with Barnhouse and the Evangelical Foundation, Inc. over the course of many years. Graham counted on Barnhouse in supporting the 1957 New York Crusade in the role of a "research assistant," often providing Graham with religious trends and demographics of the area. He also utilized contacts like Barnhouse to capitalize on pertinent information when it either aided him in advance work leading up to large-scale revivals and crusades or in avoiding potential, figurative landmines. Barnhouse's Evangelical Foundation, Inc. represents one of many organizations similar in size and worldview that directly benefitted Graham's ministry while furthering their own independent organizational goals.<sup>3</sup>

Graham often sought information and recommendations from the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and, as discussed in chapter four, Graham's father-in-law, L. Nelson Bell. These two sources occupied a central place in Graham's day-to-day decisions. Both the NAE and Bell retained an extensive network of contacts throughout various Protestant Christian circles. The NAE was organized in the early 1940s and sought to work as a means of more effectively carrying out Christ's commission for his followers to "evangelize the world." According to the NCC, the NAE was a "voluntary cooperative service organization of evangelical churches,

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<sup>2</sup> Evangelical Foundation letter, June 1, 1962, "Donald Grey Barnhouse Papers, circa 1860s-2000s" Box 5, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA (hereafter PHS). Biographical information for Barnhouse from PHS, "Guide to the Donald Grey Barnhouse Papers, circa 1860s-2000s" Binder, Record Group 480, 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> "19,200 Pack Garden; Visitation Evangelism Program Outlined," August 30, 1957, "The Billy Graham New York Crusade News," "Donald Grey Barnhouse Papers, circa 1860s-2000s" Box 6, "Graham, Billy Correspondence" File, PHS.

denominations, mission organizations, ministerial fellowships, evangelistic organizations, and individuals.”<sup>4</sup>

This group’s very existence spoke to the immense popularity of Graham’s ministry. At the start of Eisenhower’s first term in office, the NAE boasted over 1.6 million members from over 18,000 churches.<sup>5</sup> Many of the NAE’s rank-and-file maintained a view of American foreign policy that dealt with the Soviet Union in a vein similar or equal to Graham’s. While Graham’s public pronouncements concerning the Cold War resonated with multitudes of evangelical Americans, it was not a unanimously embraced perspective.

As previously discussed, Graham often took a hardline stance against communism. Though a popular position for the time, Graham’s anti-communist rhetoric was chastised by the likes of Reinhold Niebuhr for Graham’s lack of pragmatic, feasible foreign policy suggestions. Niebuhr often blasted Graham’s call for a collective expression of Christian love as the answer to Cold War tensions.<sup>6</sup> Niebuhr did not find that saving souls through mass conversions represented the cure-all for Soviet-American hostility. Despite criticism, Graham’s approach to American Cold War strategy directed toward the Soviet Union was extremely popular with evangelicals across the country. This receptiveness was especially apparent within the ranks of the NAE.

At the 12<sup>th</sup> annual convention of the NAE in Cleveland, Ohio, the organization’s then-former president Harold J. Ockenga proclaimed his support for Graham’s stance on the Cold War. Before his audience at Cleveland’s Hollenden Hotel, Ockenga declared, “The Communist

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<sup>4</sup> NCC Press sheet, “What is the National Association of Evangelicals?,” April 25-30, 1954, “NCC Special Topics, 1951-1970” Box 6, “N, O” Folder, PHS.

<sup>5</sup> See appendix 3.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to Reverend Johannes Ringstad of the Immanuel Lutheran Church in Escanaba, Michigan, April 26, 1956, “Correspondence” Box 10, “Rh-Ri” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

propaganda must be counteracted by aggressive proclamation of truth concerning God, moral law, the value of man, the privilege of freedom and humanitarian considerations.” Ockenga assured his listeners, “Only the Christian revelation and gospel is sufficient to establish these truths. The time has come when we must show the world that Christianity is the answer—and the only answer.”<sup>7</sup>

The main message of Graham’s long and successful ministry was the main message of the Bible: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”<sup>8</sup> Graham kept this invitation to conversion at the forefront of all of his pastoral efforts over the course of a lifetime. While this accounts for some of Graham’s popularity, the North Carolina dairy-farm boy turned world-renowned evangelist remained in the public eye due to his ability to keep his message relevant to the times. In the 1950s, this meant communicating the message of the Gospel in light of the Cold War. Graham welcomed connections with organizations that fell outside of the scope of Evangelical Foundation, Inc. or the NAE. During the uncertain years of Eisenhower Administration, when, early on, the threat of nuclear war was a reality, Graham made efforts to kindle relationships with anti-communist religious groups.

Graham and his father-in-law, L. Nelson Bell, established a number of contacts with anti-communist religious organizations in the 1950s. Adding such groups to the Graham ministry’s repertoire in the 1950s further supported Graham’s frequent descriptions of the scourge of communism in his popular crusades and rallies. During the 1950s, Graham, Bell, or a combination of the two exchanged correspondence with the Catholic Freedom Foundation, the

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<sup>7</sup> NAE press release, April 28, 1954, “NCC Special Topics, 1951-1970” Box 6, “N, O” Folder, PHS.

<sup>8</sup> John 3:16.

Christian Freedom Foundation, Inc., and Dr. Fred Schwarz's Christian Anti-Communism Crusade (CACC).<sup>9</sup>

While groups such as the Catholic Freedom Foundation, Christian Freedom Foundation, Inc., and Evangelical Foundation, Inc. supported Graham, L. Nelson Bell, and *Christianity Today* through information, logistical favors, or financial support, Fred Schwarz and his CACC maintained a unique relationship with the Graham ministry.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Fred Schwarz emigrated from Australia in 1952, leaving behind his medical practice for the opportunity to proclaim his anti-communist message across America. Schwarz claimed to have made his decision to completely abandon his comfortable life in Australia because of his faith. He found communism antithetical to his understanding of evangelical Christianity.

Soon after arriving in America, Schwarz began making public speeches and radio addresses across the nation, urging the American public to utilize religion as their chief weapon in the fight against communism. After attending Billy Graham's crusade in Detroit in 1953, the physician-turned-political and religious-barnstormer met with Graham. Graham, who had not only heard of Schwarz, but was also impressed by his anticommunist message, offered to aid Schwarz in establishing contacts within the United States Congress. By the mid-1950s, Schwarz had become a valuable contact within the Graham ministry. Schwarz continued to address

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<sup>9</sup> "RE: Our Nation's Peril," June 29, 1961, "General Correspondence" Box, Catholic Freedom Foundation" Folder, BGCA. Also, see letter from W.F. Strube to L. Nelson Bell, July 17, 1959 and letter from Bell to Strube, December 1, 1958, "General Correspondence" Box, "Christian Anti-Communism Crusade" Folder, BGCA. See also letter from John A. Huffman to L. Nelson Bell, December 30, 1960, "General Correspondence" Box, "Christian Freedom Foundation 1958-1970" Folder, BGCA.

<sup>10</sup> Aside from *Christianity Today's* wide distribution, support from groups and individuals like Catholic Freedom Foundation, Christian Freedom Foundation, Inc., and Christian Anti-Communism Crusade helped propel the journal beyond the subscription rate of rival *Christian Century* in six short years.

members of Congress in breakfast gatherings and unofficial meetings. His CACC grew in popularity as the anti-communist group held School of Anti-Communism classes across the nation. Before the 1950s came to a close, Schwarz's CACC had attracted scores of participants to classes in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Houston, Dallas, Miami, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, his CACC-sponsored pamphlets, such as "Communism... a disease!" and his newsletters, which offered advice on everything from how to prepare for spiritual warfare to which books and films to avoid, intensified the fears of his followers.<sup>12</sup> Schwarz's message was heard in CACC anti-communism classes, for a \$5 per day entrance fee, neighborhood study groups, through radio tapes and films, and lectures in churches, schools, clubs, military and civic groups.<sup>13</sup> This connection from Graham to Schwarz only supplemented the overall reach of Graham's ministry and intensified the evangelist's message. Through networking with the most recognizable anti-communist personalities during the years of the Eisenhower Administration, Graham further solidified the grasp of his sermons in the eyes of his crusade audiences and his ministry's followers.

### **Oxnam's Theologically Liberal Reach**

Oxnam's professional contacts in the Protestant circles of America were as widespread and extensive as any other figurehead of most American industries. A well-seasoned world-

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<sup>11</sup> Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 148-151.

<sup>12</sup> Schwarz, "Communism... a disease!" pamphlet, "Christian Anti-Communist Movement 1958-1961," and Christian Anti-Communism Crusade Newsletter, February, 1961, "Communism, 1934-1961" Folder, Box 18. BGCA.

<sup>13</sup> Schwarz, "Communism... a disease!" pamphlet, "Christian Anti-Communist Movement 1958-1961" Folder, Box 18. BGCA.

traveller, Oxnam had established an impressive amount of acquaintances in various and important places. His connections to the John Foster Dulles family, links with President Harry S. Truman, President and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, John Mott, John D. Rockefeller, and collegial relationship with President Eisenhower and several Congressmen during Eisenhower's two terms provided Oxnam connections to some of the most recognizable, powerful figures in the world.

Oxnam's years of work collaborating with individuals in national and international ecumenical organizations granted him an air of prominence and respectability among America's leading churchmen. Dr. O. Frederick Nolde (1899-1972), a professor at Philadelphia's Lutheran Theological Seminary who worked with Oxnam on the FCC's Commission of Churches on International Affairs, Union Theological Seminary Presidents Henry Pitney Van Dusen (1897-1975) and Rev. John C. Bennett (1902-1995), and Dutch theologian and WCC Secretary General Willem A. Visser't Hooft (1900-1985) represent a fraction of the leading Protestant theologians, pastors, reverends, and bishops that Oxnam counted as professional acquaintances and friends. To an extent, Reinhold Niebuhr supported Oxnam at several instances—especially in Oxnam's brief bout with the HUAC Committee. This large network of personal and professional relationships provided a wide array of contacts for Oxnam that represented a sizable portion of his source of prominence. These individuals that sat upon the pillars of power in religious and secular circles consulted with Oxnam on many matters. In some instances, Oxnam's suggestions or directives were heeded.

During Eisenhower's two terms in office, the structure of American society was much different than it was a generation prior. It was also much different than it would be a generation later. To be sure, many of the institutions that worked as a base of operations for some of the



most influential figures in the country remained in tact in the 1950s. Some of these organizations provided aspiring politicians, rising corporate stars, and community leaders inroads to expanding their own networks and professional relationships. Some of these groups were logical starting places for individuals that were resolved to climb the professional ladder of their choice. The local Lion's Club, Elks Lodge, Kiwanis Club, Moose Lodge, or YMCA remained viable choices for up and coming professionals to join. While many of these community-focused groups and organizations—which maintained longstanding histories and records of growth—certainly appealed, mostly, to middle-aged white male adults, religious organizations began to outpace such organizations in stature and importance.

The above-mentioned organizations were meaningful to many Americans in the 1950s. Along with labor groups, multi-industry corporate groups, and other social-improvement groups, they collectively represented a means of charity and giving. They also represented networks that promised personal growth and professional betterment for a large swath of Americans. Within larger national discussions of power and importance, however, Protestant Christian groups won many more newspaper headlines, television air time minutes, and hours of government leadership discussion than did any other group in the United States. The NCC, WCC, and other religious organizations factored heavily into national dialogue centered on everything from social ills to foreign policy. Church members, print and television media, and government leaders sought out individual churchmen, as they were called, for advice and guidance on the most demanding topics of the day. In some instances, these religious organizations were used as tools by the U.S. government in highlighting the spiritual nature of the Cold War.

Many examples of the White House and State Department showcasing religious leaders and organizations' anti-communism in their framing of the Cold War abound. In several of these

examples, Oxnam's participation is evident. One such example places Oxnam behind the scenes of the 1954 World Council of Churches assembly in Evanston, Illinois. As previously mentioned in chapter six, President Eisenhower appeared at this gathering and spoke to the crowd of 125,000 people gathered in Soldier Field for the festivities. In November of the previous year, Oxnam presented his memorandum and invitation to President Eisenhower at the White House, hoping to secure the Commander-in-Chief's presence and commitment to speaking at the WCC's second annual gathering. Following his trip to the White House, Oxnam penned in his diary, "I was only there a few minutes, and I think everything went well."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Oxnam's invitation was accepted, but his pitch may not have been the sole deciding factor for Eisenhower.

To say the first two years of Eisenhower's first term were busy would be an understatement. Along with several other duties and responsibilities, the President sought to grapple with the complexities of increased hostility between America and the Soviet Union. Taking a cue from Harry S. Truman's approach, Eisenhower latched on to the notion of fleshing out the defining of the Cold War in religious terms. Doing so further cultivated broad support among the general public for foreign policy objectives, bolstered his role as the nation's shepherd, and improved his currency as a trustworthy, just, and moral leader.

Part of Eisenhower's strategy included a restructuring of the nation's intelligence community. One of the main thrusts behind this decision was putting a propaganda machine into place that was strong enough to maintain widespread American support for the Eisenhower Administration's foreign policy goals. This restructuring brought about the United States Information Agency (USIA) in August of 1953 and the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) a month later. USIA assumed responsibility for national propaganda operations, which, until then,

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<sup>14</sup> Oxnam diary entry, November 4, 1953, Box 23, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

were conducted at the State Department, and the OCB worked closely with the National Security Council, which created NSC-68, the blueprint for America's containment strategy, in implementing psychological operations. Eisenhower's new vision for government communications with the American public concerning the Cold War was in place just ahead of Oxnam's invitation to connect with multitudes of Protestant Americans at an event celebrating Christianity in the heart of America.<sup>15</sup>

While Oxnam's impact on the crafting of foreign policy is irrelevant, save the personal conversations he had with Secretary of State Dulles in advance of State Department decisions, the Methodist Bishop's role in bolstering the relationship between religion and nationalism is notable. Oxnam's impressive array of contacts throughout the theologically liberal Protestant infrastructure of America accounts for this ability. Either the acquaintance or close friend of a multitude of American Protestantism's most prominent and important figures, Oxnam leveraged his own power in carrying out the fight against communism. The extent of Oxnam's influence is notable when considering his ability to coordinate huge bodies of inter-church councils and organizations, Methodist churchgoers, and government figures in furthering his idea of how to confront the Soviet Union in the early and most intense years of the Cold War.

### **The World of Reinhold Niebuhr**

Reinhold Niebuhr's reach was markedly different than that of Oxnam's or Graham's. While the extent of Oxnam's reach into the American public was especially apparent with theologically liberal Protestants and Graham's nation-wide evangelical movement shaped the terms of the Cold War in many conservative and fundamentalist evangelical homes, Niebuhr's

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 129-130.

range was all encompassing. One of the most recognizable and renowned churchmen of the 1950s, Niebuhr had one foot in the world of Protestant Christianity and another in international diplomacy. Many Americans, both secular and religious, cherished Niebuhr's observations on religion in America and on the Soviet-American standoff, even as his health diminished over the course of the 1950s.

The extent of Niebuhr's network of contacts was impressive. Though covered in chapter 1, Niebuhr interacted frequently with a multitude of organizations, to include: the YMCA, the Federal Council of Churches, the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, the Fellowship of Socialist Christians, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Foreign Policy Commission of the Americans for Democratic Action. Aside from these more recognizable organizations, Niebuhr also interacted with a number of lesser known organizations, such as the Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Central Conference American Rabbis.<sup>16</sup> Niebuhr also remained close with numerous leading figures. Some of the individuals who interacted with Niebuhr include: Dwight D. Eisenhower, J. Edgar Hoover, the Washington D.C. National Presbyterian Church pastor Edward Elson, Hans J. Morgenthau, George Kennan, evangelist Sherwood Eddy, and John Foster Dulles. Niebuhr counted many more individuals and organizations as close contacts, yet this overview offers a snapshot of the web that Niebuhr operated within.

Many of Niebuhr's religious contacts kindled relationships with the theologian, pastor, and professor earlier in his life. Through his work as a pastor in Detroit and a professor at Union,

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<sup>16</sup> Letter from Herman Reissig to Niebuhr, December 7, 1956, "Correspondence" Box 4, "Com-Cu" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC; Letter from Abraham Klausner to Niebuhr, April 18, 1956, and letter from Niebuhr to Klausner, April 20, 1956, "Reinhold Niebuhr Papers" Box 2, "Ce" Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

Niebuhr met and interacted with many of the country's leading religious figures. Most of Niebuhr's government, political, and international contacts were established later in his life from posts that Niebuhr assumed ranging from Washington D.C. to Paris. Within Niebuhr's wide range of friends and coworkers, Niebuhr often operated in a leadership role. It is this defining feature that separates Niebuhr from Oxnam and Graham. To be sure, Oxnam and Graham were both at the forefront of their respective positions within Protestant Christianity. Niebuhr, however, responded to invitations to assess situations and problems of national and international significance more so than Oxnam and Graham.

Examining two periods of time in Niebuhr's hectic and fast-paced professional life underscores the wide-range of prominent contacts that Niebuhr maintained in his life. The first, from the late 1940s, provides a glimpse into Niebuhr's close working relationship with the U.S. government. The second, further details Niebuhr's ties with the offices of the State Department.

The State Department represented one of the main platforms that offered Niebuhr a large audience. Prior to Eisenhower's election, Niebuhr was the American public's undisputed choice as the most influential American Protestant theologian. He was also the top choice of the State Department. Ever since his government-sponsored tour of Germany in 1946, Niebuhr had met occasionally with the State Department's Advisory Commission on Cultural Policy in Occupied Territories. This same year, Allen Dulles nominated Niebuhr for membership in the Council on Foreign Relations—a coveted and elite honor. Niebuhr joined George Kennan's Policy Planning Staff by invitation in 1949 and served as a member of the American delegation to the Fourth Conference of UNESCO in Paris in September of the same year. Upon his return, he met with Secretary of State Dean Acheson and Acheson's assistant, Marshall Shulman. Weeks after meeting with Acheson, Niebuhr found out that he was being considered for the presidency of

Yale University. Strong letters of recommendation from Chester Bowles and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. were not enough to overcome the eventual decision to select Harvard historian A. Whitney Griswold as Yale's next president.<sup>17</sup>

The State Department sought Niebuhr's insight again in 1953. Niebuhr's collection of political and theological articles, published as *Christian Realism and Political Problems* by Scribners caught the eye of State Department officials shortly after its publication. In particular, State Department Ideological Advisory Staff member Bertram Wolfe found a chapter of *Christian Realism and Political Problems* especially useful. The chapter "Why is Communism So Evil?" was a recycled and retitled version of "The Evil of the Communist Idea," which appeared in the *New Leader* just before the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in June of 1953. On June 30, 1953, just ten days after the Rosenbergs were killed, Niebuhr's recent publication that detailed the evils of communism and also revealed Niebuhr's remarkable level of anti-communism was broadcast over the radio airwaves as "ideological Special No. 256." The State Department's Wolfe found the broadcast especially helpful in alerting the communist threat to Americans. Wolfe noted that the broadcast was "widely used by our language desks and greatly appreciated by them."<sup>18</sup>

One of the greatest instruments of Niebuhr's expansive reach into the lives of the American public and government leadership was his journal, *Christianity and Crisis*. Published from 1941 to 1993, Niebuhr's journal was founded in the midst of WWII. It assessed some of the most important religious and social issues of the time in, more often than not, a typical Niebuhrian, realist and neo-orthodox fashion. It represented a platform for opinions from

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 238-239.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

individuals such as Paul Tillich, George Kennan, and Hans Morgenthau, but also as a vehicle for Niebuhr's own thought and rise to prominence.<sup>19</sup>

Along with Niebuhr's other journal, *Christianity and Society*, which garnered a fraction of the subscriptions that the more influential *Christianity and Crisis* did, *Christianity and Crisis* provided Niebuhr an outlet to postulate his perspectives of the Cold War, Christianity, morality, and international relations. Niebuhr's opinions were highly valued in a number of circles and his forays into founding and editing academic journals greatly enhanced his name recognition. Niebuhr's journal publications also enhanced national acknowledgement of the theologian as one of the leading religious consultants on foreign policy, global affairs, and Christianity's role in the world.

During the years of the early Cold War, Niebuhr was recognized as a respected commentator on American life. He was the embodiment of a public intellectual. He drew accolades and deference from some of the greatest theologians and pastors of his time. He was also sought out in the post WWII years frequently from many of the most important government leaders in America. His exposure to the American public through various media channels maintained his air of legitimacy on topics such as theology, international policy, American attitudes, and religious life. Niebuhr's world was one crafted, intentionally, as a result of his own passions. His invitations to international meetings, arguments in several journals and books, interviews on television and radio, and opinion pieces in newspapers established his place as a respected elder public commentator. His vast network of high-profile professional contacts, the

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<sup>19</sup> For an examination of how *Christianity and Crisis* achieved a level of influence that far exceeded its circulation numbers, see Mark Hulsether, *Building a Protestant Left: Christianity and Crisis Magazine, 1941-1993*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999).

impact of his written arguments, and his sustained media coverage both supported and distributed Niebuhr's world view throughout the 1950s.

### **Tension in Protestant America**

This chapter describes the context of Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnam's respective roles within the American Protestant community. It does not suggest that all denominations, churches, groups, or Protestant individuals were alike in their perspectives on religious or secular matters. In fact, this was not the case at all. The rapid changes occurring across the face of Protestant Christianity demonstrates as much.<sup>20</sup> Rarely were the majority of America's churches in agreement on any matter. Indeed, in many cases, the opposite occurred. The largest and most prominent of America's religious groups were at odds on a host of matters. The NCC, the NAE, and many other religious groups often held differing theological views, opposing political views, or a combination thereof. These differences often played themselves out privately. In some instances, these groups publicly aired their disagreements. But, like Niebuhr's Neo-Orthodox theological perspective and pragmatic, liberal approach to politics, Graham's evangelistic mode

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<sup>20</sup> For a general overview of large-scale changes to Protestant Christianity in America after World War II, see Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), Patrick Allitt, *Religion in America Since 1945: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), Raymond Haberski, *God and War: American Civil Religion Since 1945* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2012), Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), William Inboden III, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Kevin Shultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to its Protestant Promise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Jason Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America's Cold War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).



of Christianity and right-of-center approach to politics, and Oxnam's theologically liberal Methodism and liberal politics, the most important religious organizations in America differed as a result of the widespread and competing views of society. Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnam were the standard bearers of their particular facet of Protestant Christianity in a time when the strands that they represented dominated America's religious life. Many of the organizations discussed here were, in one way or another, connected to the theology and worldview of Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnam. And like Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnam, these groups clamored for a leading position among Protestant Americans. In several examples, this included pointing out why the competition had it wrong.

The struggles of the NCC represent one example of the friction that existed between religious bodies in the 1950s. The NCC felt strong opposition from many corners throughout the 1950s. In most instances, perceived attacks came in the form of outsiders' opposition to the theological underpinnings of the NCC's larger body of members or particular stances that the NCC took on particular issues of national attention. The NCC was quick in its dissemination of communication regarding anti-NCC sentiment. Administrative Secretary Philip Landers circulated a memorandum to members of the NCC executive staff after being alerted to negative remarks from the NAE. Landers reminded NCC leadership not to attack "anti-ecumenical" groups in retaliation, regardless of the level of provocation. In reminding NCC executives of standing policy, Landers provided general information on the NAE, to include its office locations, history of attacks on the NCC, and general overviews of its leadership—among them

the president of the NAE, Evangelical Mission Covenant Church of America pastor Dr. Paul S. Rees, who, Landers noted, “uses the RSV in his pulpit.”<sup>21</sup>

The NCC handled perceived threats well due to a number of factors. Most of all, the NCC maintained a well-established familiarity with opposition. While a large portion of public attacks came from individuals and organizations that aligned themselves with the political and theological right, this was not always the case. The *Christian Century*, which was popular among those more theologically liberal, ran editorials that rebuked the NCC and FCC’s favorable positions on the use of nuclear weapons in Korea.<sup>22</sup>

Along with the groups that serve as the focus of this chapter, many other religio-political groups clamored for a hearing in the 1950s. Many were holdovers from the 1930s and 1940s that still maintained the relevance of their pre-WWII objectives. Others were more political in scope, but still included some of the most recognizable Protestant leaders within their ranks. Examples of such groups include: American Christian Palestine Committee, American Committee for Cultural Freedom, American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom, American League for Peace and Democracy, American League Against War and Fascism, Christian Action, Church League for Industrial Democracy, Methodist Federation for Social Action, National Council of Soviet-American Friendship, National Religion and Labor Federation, and United Christian Council for Democracy.

Within these organizations, and organizations like them, one could find Protestant leaders from Niebuhr and Oxnam to Union Theological Seminary President Henry P. Van Dusen,

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<sup>21</sup> Philip Landers, memo to “Members of Executive Staff,” April 19, 1954, “NCC Special Topics, 1951-1970” Box 6, “N, O” Folder, PHS.

<sup>22</sup> See Inboden, 56.

Presbyterian minister and FCC Secretary Samuel McCrea Cavert (1888-1976), and Harry Emerson Fosdick, the embodiment of the theological liberalism of the 1920s and 1930s, participating or operating in a leadership role.<sup>23</sup>

Over the course of the 1950s, the three leading strands of Protestant Christianity became more pronounced in their dominance over the landscape of American religion. The evangelistic strand, personified by Billy Graham, realized the growth of its impressive organizational infrastructure through the efforts of the NAE and its many outreach projects. Some of these NAE initiatives include: The Chaplains Commission (1944), World Relief (1944), and the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (1945-later renamed Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies). The theologically liberal wing of Protestant Christianity in America was realized in the actions of Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, though the wing lacked a clear and recognizable leader. Theologically liberal Protestants enjoyed their reign over Protestant membership for much of the first half of the twentieth century and expanded in several forms: denominational schools, hospitals, and colleges, multi-denominational organizations, and multi-national groups. The Neo-Orthodox branch of Protestant Christianity, led by Niebuhr, challenged the theological underpinnings of its rival Protestant groups by focusing on the relevance of sin in humanity. But these three strands of Protestant Christianity did not represent the sole groups in existence during the years of the Eisenhower Administration. Indeed, several fringe groups challenged the followers of the major Protestant groups by appealing to the fears and concerns of the early Cold War years in ways that surpassed those of Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnam.

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<sup>23</sup> American Council of Christian Laymen, "How Red is the Federal Council of Churches?" pamphlet, 1949; letter from Niebuhr to Mrs. Elbert Carpenter, November 21, 1955; letter from Niebuhr to National City Bank, February 11, 1952; "Reinhold Niebuhr Papers" Box 2, "AM," "Christian Action," "American Committee for Cultural Freedom, Inc., 1951-1956," and "Christianity and Society, 1952-1953" Folders, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

Carl McIntire's ACCC and ICCC both made a splash when they were conceived and unleashed on the American public. Likewise, other groups, such as Dr. Fred Schwarz's Christian Anti-Communist Crusade represented a pull to the right that became apparent in the 1950s. The seedbed of politically conservative thought that reared its head in the 1964 political campaign of Barry Goldwater (1909-1998) and the pages of William F. Buckley Jr.'s (1925-2008) *National Review* magazine in the late 1950s and 1960s grew out of the anti-communist paranoia of some of these fringe groups of the 1950s. Though these groups fell short of the impact of the three facets of Protestant Christianity that remain central to this dissertation, they, nevertheless, managed to capture the attention of many Protestant Christians.

Aside from McIntire's fundamentalist religious networks and Fred Schwarz's organization, the John Birch Society (JBS) represented one of the fastest growing anti-communist groups in America in the 1950s. Robert Welch (1899-1985) founded JBS after retiring from his career as candy maker. The son of poor, fundamentalist Baptist parents, Welch worked as a businessman for most of his adult life. After retiring from his brother's James O. Welch Company in 1956, Welch focused his retirement years on spreading conservative messages through speeches, tracts, and, eventually, the JBS. Founded in Indianapolis in late 1958, Welch, eleven other men, and their newly created JBS, acted as a modern jeremiad—warning the nation against communism and the spiritual battle of the Cold War. Welch saw the Cold War as a religious war. Indeed, the name of his organization reveals as much. Captain John Birch was a Christian missionary who joined the military during WWII and died at the hands of Chinese Communists in August of 1945. Welch believed that Birch signified “everything that the Communists hate.” Welch and the John Birch Society found Birch's murder representative of a final straw. Welch determined, “With his death and in his death the battle lines were drawn in a

struggle from which either Communist or Christian-style civilization must emerge.”<sup>24</sup> While this perspective does not veer too far from the already-present anti-communist mood in America at the time, the JBS, and organizations like it, presented a pull to the right for many Americans for other reasons.

The JBS grieved the passing of an older and more fundamentalist Christian age in America. Spiritual decline presented ominous problems for JBS members, as the Cold War raged on in a spiritual framework. Aside from its anti-communist stance, the JBS made a name for itself in the 1950s and 1960s by organizing campaigns to remove books, such as *The Last Temptation of Christ*, from the bookshelves of public libraries. Even though some of JBS’s tactics proved too much for many political and religious conservatives, such as the group’s decision to label President Eisenhower a communist, the organization complicated the scene of American Protestant thought with regard to the Cold War. Even after the JBS began to fade from the public view, traditional and moderate political conservatives continued to expand their ranks with Protestant Americans who were increasingly concerned with the Cold War and America’s national moral decay.<sup>25</sup>

Taken together, these outsider organizations were largely all based upon anti-communism and appealed to Protestant Americans. In some instances they fueled the message of Billy Graham’s ministry in stoking the anxieties of Americans in the 1950s. In other examples, they enhanced the positions of Graham, Oxnham, and Niebuhr in taking positions that fell outside of

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Welch, *The Life of John Birch: In the Story of One American Boy, the Ordeal of His Age* (Chicago: Regenery, 1954), 86-110, also quoted in Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 204-205.

<sup>25</sup> Box 406, Eisenhower, Dwight D. “Records as President (White House Central Files),” 1953-1961, Dwight D. Eisenhower Archives, Abeline, KS. See also Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 205.

mainstream perspectives of Christianity, the Cold War, and foreign policy. These groups, such as the Anti-Communist Christian Crusade, ACCC, ICCA, and JBS, all grew over the course of the 1950s and collectively represented the thin slice of American religious life which fundamentalist Christians came to occupy in the 1950s. They illuminated the preponderance of evangelical, Neo-Orthodox, and theologically liberal Protestant Christianity on the expansive stage of American religion. Their existence also revealed the deep and very real sense of anti-communism that continued throughout the 1950s.

### **Conclusion**

The American religious landscape maintained several unique factors over the course of Eisenhower's years as President. The growth of church membership and increase of large-scale religious expression across the country could only be compared with the commonly known Awakenings of prior centuries. The sudden and widespread interest in religion, generally, took a different form than centuries past, however. The mixture of emotions associated with victory in a world war, more acute and frequent habits in consumption, an increase in larger family sizes, a fomenting civil rights atmosphere, and anxiety over the looming threat of nuclear war constructed, shaped, and guided American perspectives on religion.<sup>26</sup> Most Americans' quality of life coupled with the threat of an overseas foe gave greater currency to the notion of American exceptionalism in the 1950s. The manifestation of civil religion during the years of the Eisenhower Administration was an outgrowth of this attitude.

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<sup>26</sup> For a thorough discussion of American fears of the bomb, see Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

While Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnam were not overt propagators of the civil religion of the 1950s, the effects of their actions and the actions of the groups that they identified with greatly influenced the national religious temperament of the Eisenhower era. The subtle influence of these three figureheads' ideas was great. By dispersing their thoughts of the Soviet threat, the Cold War, and America's role in the world through a widespread, recognizable, and influential array of channels, Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnam demonstrated an impressive reach across America. Moreover, these three men confirmed the religious dimension of the Cold War for many through their consistent and regular acknowledgement of the Cold War as a battle between one religious system versus another. These iterations continued as the Cold War was waged by proxy in lands far from the shores of either America or the Soviet Union. Oxnam's support for Dulles' foreign policy goals, Niebuhr's discussions of Formosa, and Graham's sermons featuring communism and the anti-Christ as centerpieces continued throughout the McCarthy witch-hunts, HUAC committee investigations, and aggressive turns in American foreign policy.

These three faces of Protestant Christianity came to their respective public positions of popularity because of the support and acknowledgement of a lifetime's worth of relationships. Acknowledging the major religious organizations and leaders of the 1950s provides a better understanding of this depth of Graham, Niebuhr, and Oxnam's large and eclectic potpourri of influential networks. In examining this American religious landscape of the 1950s, one also better understands the place that large, theologically liberal organizations, such as the NCC, held with respect to those groups on the other end of the political and religious spectrum, such as the ACCC. Identifying these organizations on a spectrum more easily categorizes and compartmentalizes religion in the 1950s. It also illuminates the complexity of Protestant

Christianity as it existed in the 1950s. Understanding this picture of American religion speaks all the more favorably of Niebuhr, Graham, and Oxnham's respective abilities to capitalize upon and drive the perspectives of their religious constituents. It also underscores the influence that foreign policies of the day have on American life and, also, the influence that society has on foreign policy.



## **CHAPTER 8**

### **FOREIGN POLICY AND THE PULPIT**

Throughout American history, every generation has had patriotic individuals within its ranks. More pointedly, Christian Americans have exhibited degrees of patriotism and even nationalism since before the Declaration of Independence. The notion of love or support for one's country is not isolated to the context of the years that serve as the focus of this dissertation. However, the reasoning behind the American public's support for American policy during the Eisenhower Administration is unique. The sources of patriotism were a product of global events. Political parties, the larger American government, and large public institutions have long been able to draw deeply from the well of Protestant support. American Protestant support for foreign policy in the first decades beyond WWII, though, grew out of and was also precipitated by an interesting combination of events. Generally, Protestant support for U.S. foreign policy during Eisenhower's tenure as president came as a result of civil religion, patriotism, and persuasion. That is, Protestants exhibited a degree of their own agency in encouraging the foreign policies of Eisenhower and Dulles during the nuclear stalemate of the early Cold War years. Yet, American Protestants also responded to official government efforts that cultivated a strong anti-communist sentiment.

This chapter examines support for America's foreign policy directed toward the Soviet Union during the Eisenhower Administration (1953-1961) from the nation's Protestant churchgoers. In doing so, this chapter further solidifies Graham, Oxnam, and Niebuhr's respective positions atop the upper echelon of America's Protestant body of Christians. It also

fleshes out the oftentimes-ambiguous political and religious positions of Protestants by exploring the reasoning behind their relationship with American foreign policy. Succinctly, this chapter argues that most Protestant Christians in America did support Eisenhower and Dulles' Cold War foreign policies due to the elevated level of civil religion in the nation, the heightened patriotic sentiment in America, and the overtures from Washington D.C. that specifically sought to favorably impact the American public's support for national policy decisions.

### **Protestant Support for the Cold War**

The general American post-WWII attitude is frequently described with the buzzword, "anxiety." The great majority of Americans were, indeed, living in an age of anxiety between 1945 and 1960 due to several factors. Yet, the very real sense of dread that existed over whether or not World War III would strike unannounced was commonplace throughout the nation. Considering this context, it is not difficult to imagine the willingness of most Americans to support American foreign policy directed toward the Soviet Union—*any foreign policy*—that might decrease the tensions inherent in a nuclear stalemate. By the time Eisenhower took office in 1953, Americans were desperate for a noticeable decline in the Soviet-American standoff.

One of the great ironies of the progression of the Cold War remains how American Protestant leaders of national reputation sought peaceful de-escalation of the Cold War, yet supported more hawkish foreign policies put forth by Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John F. Dulles. Massive retaliation, a term coined by Dulles in 1954 to describe the promise to use America's superior arsenal of nuclear weapons as a response to communist expansion, signified nearly as daunting a proposal as the strategy of brinkmanship, which Dulles imagined as a game

of chicken played by superpowers.<sup>1</sup> Yet, Dulles maintained an air of legitimacy and respectability with American Protestants during his tenure as Secretary of State due to his religious background. Based largely on a Presbyterian upbringing, Dulles was as open to discussing disarmament with state officials, the wider public, and Protestant representatives as he was the more aggressive policies that stand out from the Eisenhower Administration. When his ecumenical and Protestant beliefs coincided with his policy proposals, which occurred frequently throughout his time as Secretary of State, Dulles very much seemed like the Dulles that Protestant Americans adored. Due to a number of factors, Dulles still commanded attention and provoked discussion among Protestants when his policies took a more hardline turn.

The foreign policies unveiled during Eisenhower's two terms in office sustained continued support over the course of years for several reasons. First, Protestant Americans, in the main, went along with these policies. There were objections, to be sure, but overall, the American Protestant community continued to stay on board with Eisenhower's Cold War leadership. This is demonstrated in the actions and words of Protestant leaders across the theological spectrum. Second, President Eisenhower actively and intentionally sought out support for official government policies through a variety of channels. Eisenhower put the power of the federal bureaucracy to work in building broad support for his Cold War agenda early and often. Moreover, Eisenhower and Dulles each committed to seeing their policy objectives through over and above the institutional tools that they had set in motion. Each man made personal efforts to bolster support from Americans, especially the Protestant demographic, in growing public support for Cold War foreign policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 2012), 460.

The Protestant community displayed its own willingness to trust in Eisenhower's plan for navigating the Cold War. From the theological left to the more fundamentalist, theological right, Protestants repeatedly expressed a dedication to the policies of the Eisenhower White House. Fundamentalist leaders such as Billy James Hargis and Fred Schwartz were entirely accepting of the federal government's use of religion to frame the Cold War. In fact, these men of prominence on the theological right flourished in their own careers because of it. Perhaps Carl McIntire, more than any other fundamentalist Christian, serves as the best example of theologically conservative Protestants fully supporting foreign policy directed toward the Soviet Union in the early Cold War.

As discussed in previous chapters, McIntire founded his own church during the years of the Great Depression and published a weekly newspaper, the *Christian Beacon*, before beginning a daily radio program in the 1950s. McIntire went on to found the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) in 1941 and the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) in 1948. These bodies represented a theologically conservative alternative to the ecumenical, theologically liberal work of the Federal Council of Churches (later the National Council of Churches) and the World Council of Churches. Although McIntire, his radio program, and his larger bodies of conservative, Protestant organizations heavily scrutinized the theological underpinnings of theologically liberal Protestants, anti-communism remained at the core of his rising public profile's momentum. Anti-communism also represented a shared sentiment across the theological spectrum of Protestants. McIntire's battle against theologically liberal Protestant individuals and institutions was an amalgamation of McIntire's rejection of theological liberalism and his deep-seated sense of anti-communism. Within this mindset, McIntire, and his many followers across the nation, departed with Protestants to his left on the theological

spectrum on nearly every matter, except for a hawkish, anti-communist foreign policy. McIntire opposed Dulles' appointment as Secretary of State initially considering Dulles' theologically liberal Presbyterian background, however, as McIntire's attention shifted toward those he deemed communist sympathizers within America's largest institutions (and his lack of negative commentary on Dulles' foreign policies) McIntire gradually settled down his opposition to Eisenhower's first Secretary of State.<sup>2</sup>

Like McIntire, Bishop Oxnam also warmed up to Dulles and his State Department policies. Before Eisenhower was elected in 1952 and Dulles became Secretary of State in 1953, Oxnam was already pondering what his large, Methodist body of Christians could do to contribute to America's Cold War efforts. "There seems to be a great fatalism sweeping across the nation, and the feeling that this is inevitable. Perhaps it is," Oxnam confided to his diary in 1951. "There must be some way to reach the minds and hearts of men so far we haven't found it. Perhaps this is the greater reason for the religious agencies; we've got to be a lot wiser, a lot more courageous, and a lot more aggressive."<sup>3</sup> In 1953, Oxnam determined that atomic bombs were not the answer to the Cold War.<sup>4</sup> This hesitancy toward more aggressive foreign policies changed over the course of Eisenhower and Dulles' time in their respective offices, however. By 1955, Oxnam argued against a pacifist approach to the Cold War by outlining his own three-point foreign policy. In front of an overflow crowd of 11,000 at the First Methodist Church in San Diego, Oxnam disagreed with his pacifist debater, Dr. Henry Hitt Crane (1890-1977) in offering his blueprint for America's Cold War policy:

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 211.

<sup>3</sup> Oxnam diary entry, January 6, 1951, Box 20, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

<sup>4</sup> Oxnam diary clipping, December 5, 1953, "Force is not the Answer to World Crisis," *Owensboro, KY Messenger*, Box 22, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

1—We must provide insurance against another world war. A strong army will serve to avert an attack.

2—We must demonstrate the good fruits of freedom, thus undermining despots by contrast.

3—We must play a major part in the effort to develop backward areas, thus creating new allies.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, a combination of Oxnam's close personal relationship with Dulles, Oxnam's recognition from the White House on several occasions, and Oxnam's own perspectives on communism and the Cold War shifted the Methodist Bishop's stance on appropriate foreign policy during the Eisenhower Administration. Though Oxnam advocated for discussions of peace more frequently after Dulles' departure from the State Department, his willingness to garner Protestant support for the Eisenhower-Dulles foreign policies of the 1950s are notable.

Having considered figureheads of the right and left ends of the theological spectrum, it appears practical that Protestant Christians that fell somewhere in the middle also agreed with and supported America's Cold War foreign policy toward the Soviet Union under Eisenhower's watch. This was the case. Personified by Billy Graham, Evangelical Protestant Christians also backed Eisenhower and Dulles' foreign policy strategy. By linking America's role in the Cold War to messianic prophecy, Graham, like many evangelical, Protestant Christians, identified the United States as a democratic, positive, and Christian nation engaged in a high-stakes standoff with an evil foe. In defining the Soviet Union with such terms, Evangelical Protestants gave wide leeway to the architects of foreign policy directed toward the Soviet Union.

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<sup>5</sup> Oxnam diary clipping, January 28, 1955, "Opposing Views on 'Way to Peace' Aired by Methodist Opponents," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, Box 24, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

Based in fear of a nuclear holocaust, much of Graham's Cold War rhetoric resonated with an American public that was genuinely afraid of Soviet capabilities and intentions. While Graham largely neglected to offer his specific positions on American foreign policy, he did occasionally meet with top government officials after concluding his overseas tours. He also lent the Eisenhower Administration his aid in bringing Protestant Christians on board with policymakers' plans for navigating the Cold War. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Graham assured President Eisenhower that he would do his best "in selling the American public" Eisenhower's foreign policy decisions.<sup>6</sup> The American public needed little in the way of persuasion, however. Many Graham-rally attendees accepted Graham's characterizations of the Cold War with rousing applause. When Graham described communism as a religion against God, "motivated by the Devil himself," his listeners tended, more often than not, to wholeheartedly agree.<sup>7</sup>

The larger, evangelical support for foreign policy evident in Graham's friendly audiences and Graham's enduring success as an evangelical found in this example can be attributed to the climate of the Cold War. Graham was incredibly aware of the context in which he preached. William Martin, Graham's leading biographer, has best described this as Graham's having been "geared to the times."<sup>8</sup> The popular evangelist preached the Gospel against the backdrop of the Cold War throughout the 1950s. In doing so, he reciprocated the fears of many Americans, while

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from Billy Graham to President Dwight Eisenhower, May 10, 1954. Presidential Correspondence: Dwight David Eisenhower, 1952-1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>7</sup> Graham quoted in Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion: Under God, Indivisible, 1941-1960*. vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 151-152 and Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 469.

<sup>8</sup> William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.), 89; *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 25.

simultaneously reinforcing negative connotations of both communism and the inhabitants of the Soviet Union. These repeated characterizations of communism as the work of the anti-Christ helped evangelical, Protestant Americans more-readily support aggressive and hawkish foreign policies throughout the 1950s. While working as a source of reference for evangelical Christians in fleshing out their Cold War enemy, Graham also reinforced many of the government's own propaganda efforts which sought to paint the Soviet Union in the most unflattering light possible.

As represented by several figures, Protestant Christians had several men in leadership roles encouraging support for Eisenhower-Dulles foreign policies. McIntire, who represented a thorn in the side of Eisenhower, voiced his support for official anti-communist efforts of the 1950s to his theologically conservative faction of American Protestants. Graham encouraged his large flock to recognize the evil of the Soviet Union's anti-Christian way of life. Even Oxnam, a theologically liberal Protestant supported foreign policies of the 1950s privately and publicly. While Niebuhr did much to offer a Christian interpretation of international affairs, he stood apart from his fellow churchmen in offering a realist approach to managing foreign affairs. Having split from theologically liberal Christianity—to include pacifists—in the 1930s, Niebuhr examined Cold War strategy from the vantage point of a Christian willing to engage in war.

Throughout the 1950s, Niebuhr used his position as the face of Neo-Orthodoxy in America to his advantage. Though his support for foreign policy is difficult to pinpoint, Niebuhr's work suggests that he maintained his large following by deploying criticism of current affairs in a language steeped in the idea of original sin. Scholars, in some cases, have found Niebuhr an apologist for American democracy and anticommunism—a typical characterization of many midcentury consensus intellectuals. Niebuhr was more complicated than this, though. He did operate as a conventional cold warrior in some aspects, yet he remained loyal to applying



his own understanding of original sin to international problems of justice and peace in a way that sometimes contradicted his articulation of anti-communism and the Cold War.<sup>9</sup>

His perspectives on major developments of the Cold War, from Khrushchev's rise to power to the Hungarian uprising were followed closely in large, popular publications. His status as a public intellectual afforded him this vast following. Yet, the relationships that he had developed over a lifetime also endeared many Protestant leaders to Niebuhr's takes on current events. In his thirty-two years of work at Union, for example, Niebuhr was responsible for the training of at least two generations of seminary students. Many of these carried Niebuhr's Christian Realism and Neo-Orthodoxy forth into the coming decades. His influence upon these students that went on to become America's pastors, educators, and professionals was great.<sup>10</sup> Coupled with a large, loyal following of intellectual disciples and a dedicated American public, Niebuhr maintained the viability of his perspectives of the Cold War through his output of publications in the 1950s.

Despite struggling with severe physical and mental health issues as the 1950s wore on, Niebuhr continued to turn out publications in a variety of formats. Niebuhr's major topics of interest in such titles as *The Irony of American History* (1952), *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (1953), and *The Self and the Dramas of History* (1955) took a turn away from the theological and strictly toward the political with his publication of *Pious and Secular America*

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of Niebuhr's thought and theology during the Cold War, see Andrew Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 57, 206n35; Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 232-234, 247.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of Niebuhr's impact on American's pastors, see Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*, 100-103.

(1958).<sup>11</sup> The enduring Cold War and all of its social, political, and diplomatic manifestations provided much for Niebuhr to dissect.

When Niebuhr did assess Cold War tensions, he often did so in a practical manner. As previously discussed in earlier chapters' consideration of Niebuhr's stances on Stalin's death and the Formosa crisis, Niebuhr had the ability and the tendency to offer detailed suggestions to specific international incidents. It is no wonder that Niebuhr found George Kennan's "realism" approach to foreign policy so refreshing in a government that Niebuhr felt had been haunted by legalistic moralism since WWI.<sup>12</sup> It was this ability of Niebuhr's to place Cold War hostilities within a broad, historical context, while simultaneously applying ideas of original sin and specific strategic suggestions to specific foreign policy issues that legitimized his place within the Protestant discussions of foreign policy in the 1950s.

Most American Protestants fell into the theological perspectives represented by the men discussed above. Bishop Oxnham, Billy Graham, Reinhold Niebuhr, Carl McIntire, Billy James Hargis, and Dr. Fred Schwarz represented the vast majority of Protestant Americans—from the far left of the theological spectrum to the far right. Instances of their supporting foreign policy are reflective of America's larger Protestant body. The Cold War was a complex standoff that featured many unknown variables and the discussion of strategies remained a prominent topic of national discussion throughout the 1950s.

When these representative figures were not chiming in on how America should approach communism and the Soviet Union, other formal organizations offered an alternative for Christian

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<sup>11</sup> For Niebuhr's literary interests turning toward the political and cultural, see Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, 267.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; 238.

Americans to gather information from. In addition to several groups' ministries, publications, rallies, and gatherings already discussed, the Foundation for Religious Action in Social and Civil Order (FRASCO) represents yet another example of the God and country attitude that prevailed under Eisenhower's watch. Founded by National Presbyterian Church pastor Edward Elson and Episcopalian rector Charles W. Lowry in 1954, FRASCO sought: "To unite all believers in God in the struggle between the free world and atheistic Communism which aims to destroy both religion and liberty." FRASCO featured several well-recognized leaders, including Henry Ford II, Herbert Hoover, Henry Luce, and Elton Trueblood. Within FRASCO one could find representatives of big labor, mass media, big business, and political leadership. This snapshot of an organization with representation that reached into nearly every corner of American life stands as a clear demonstration of America's desire to wage a religious battle against the forces of a perceived evil enemy.<sup>13</sup>

Though it was extensive, support for national goals in the Cold War did not solely come from Protestants themselves. This was not a one-way street. The initiative is recognizable in many corners of the Protestant American community, yet, the support that Protestants displayed for American foreign policy was also heavily courted from the U.S. government. Aware of the possibility that the Cold War tension that was obvious between the Soviet Union and America could continue on for the foreseeable future, elected officials in the United States government launched several campaigns to shore up and solidify public support for its foreign policy objectives. Not coincidentally, Eisenhower found Protestant Americans the most important segment of society to target.

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<sup>13</sup> FRASCO information and mission statement quote from Jonathan Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 162-163.

## The U.S. Government As Tiller of the Protestant Soil

As a five-star general in the United States Army charged with leading the Allied Forces in Europe as Supreme Commander in WWII, and later in 1951, the Supreme Commander of NATO, Dwight D. Eisenhower understood the importance of public support for military endeavors. As president, Eisenhower found larger public support for his approach to the Cold War so important that he sought to influence the country's backing for his forthcoming policies directed toward the Soviet Union early on in his first year in the White House. As discussed in the previous chapter, Eisenhower launched a multi-faceted strategy in 1953 that aimed at further bolstering the already broad support that existed for Cold War foreign policy. Building off of the religious characterization of the war inherent in both foreign policy document NSC-68 and previous President Truman's descriptions of Soviet tensions, Eisenhower introduced new efforts toward framing the Cold War as a religious struggle against an evil enemy and reaching further into America's Protestant population. Through the work of the United States Information Agency, Operations Coordinating Board, and "Atoms for Peace" program, Eisenhower brought American Protestants further into his administration's work toward foreign policy objectives.

Perhaps no other man was better suited for this task. Eisenhower maintained the image of a president in a pastoral role throughout his two terms in office. By comforting his fellow Americans, serving as a spiritual example, and providing ethical and wise leadership, Eisenhower succeeded in drawing the framework of the Cold War and in intensifying the mood of civil religion.<sup>14</sup> Eisenhower went to work in this comingling of religion and politics in many ways. The USIA and OCB represent two official government bodies that carried out Eisenhower's Cold War propaganda efforts.

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<sup>14</sup> Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency*, 184-185.

Created in late 1953, these two entities facilitated American Cold War propaganda efforts at home and abroad. Much of the USIA and OCB's work contained heavy religious tones and sought to cultivate widespread support for American efforts across the world. They played a crucial role in rallying domestic support for foreign policy and also in projecting a favorable image of America to the rest of the world. Along with Eisenhower's approaches to international diplomacy which included expanded trade through credits and loans, academic exchange visits, and information programs, the president utilized programs such as the USIA, for example, in America's presence in Eastern Europe—setting up American bookstores, libraries, and reading rooms. By working through a number of agencies, Eisenhower aimed to portray the Soviet Union as antithetical to America by illuminating Soviet weakness, aggression, and danger.<sup>15</sup>

The USIA, OCB, and other domestic agencies received fresh marching orders from Eisenhower by way of his “Atoms for Peace” campaign. Eisenhower introduced the overall theme of “Atoms for Peace” during his December 8, 1953 address to the United Nations. This speech, and subsequently, this program, was meant to provide a framework for peaceful discussions around nuclear weapon control. Within this proposal, Eisenhower aimed to demonstrate his willingness to work toward a peaceful solution to the nuclear stalemate between America and the Soviet Union. This message was intended to resonate with the larger American public—not least of these, the significant body of theologically liberal Protestants, which contained the most significant number of pacifist Christians. In reality, “Atoms for Peace”

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<sup>15</sup> George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 667.

contained more than a genuine effort to discuss nuclear arms with the Soviets and the reassurance that Americans so desperately longed for.<sup>16</sup>

An OCB document from January 8, 1954 reveals the propaganda efforts that spawned from Eisenhower's speech. While the White House desired both domestic and international audiences to believe that Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" signified an olive branch, the OCB exploited the president's atomic proposal to portray the United States as the sole power responsible and capable enough to peacefully develop atomic energy. The OCB attempted to downplay recent peace-rhetoric posturing that the Soviet Union had demonstrated. The group determined to keep America fixed in the minds of the world as the lone peace-seeking nation in the Cold War. Indeed, in the months following Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" speech, the OCB led a group working toward exactly that end. Aside from coordinating the mass communication of American propaganda efforts, the OCB determined that realizing the full effects of their propaganda efforts included "maximum repetition of the principal points over a period of several months."<sup>17</sup>

The OCB, USIA, "Atoms for Peace" program, international student and teacher exchange, foreign credit and loan efforts, and information programs collectively made up the Eisenhower Administration's propaganda umbrella. To be sure, many of these programs were beneficial to individuals and organizations across the world. However, the underlying motives that most of these Cold War strategies carried represented a substantial piece of American Cold War efforts. By leveraging psychological tactics in the tense Soviet-American standoff, the U.S.

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<sup>16</sup> Shawn Parry-Giles, "The Eisenhower Administration's Conceptualization of the USIA: The Development of Overt and Covert Propaganda Strategies," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24 (Spring, 1994): 271.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*; 271.

government demonstrated remarkable aptitude in maneuvering the Cold War as it progressed. The Eisenhower Administration worked through official agencies to present a very intentional picture of America's place in the Cold War. In doing so, it successfully persuaded multitudes of Americans—to include Protestant Americans—that the United States was on the right side of a high-stakes war against an evil foe.

Of course, these groups do not represent all of the Eisenhower Administration's efforts toward public outreach. The president utilized his own public image to further drive home his incorporation of civil religion in the 1950s. Still the only president to begin an inaugural address with a prayer, Eisenhower repeatedly took advantage of the many invitations to publicly speak before Protestant audiences. In doing so, Eisenhower was able to repeat his characterization of the Cold War, its stakes, and the looming enemy. Shortly after his first election in 1952, Eisenhower spoke before the Freedom Foundation. Before this audience, Eisenhower claimed, "Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is."<sup>18</sup> He conveyed the idea that national faith required a recognition of the reality of God and America's obligation to do God's will.

During the American Legion's "Back to God" program in February of 1953, Eisenhower spoke of the need to fortify the country's resolve in the battle against communism. As the featured speaker of the "Back to God" presentation, Eisenhower followed two Protestant ministers, Reverend Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993) and Chaplain John B. Williams, and the Vice President Richard Nixon, in a patriotic ceremony for which the NCC had secured free airtime on NBC. Eisenhower would go on to use the annual "Back to God" program as a recurring setting for his call to recognize America's need for a religious foundation. Before the

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<sup>18</sup> *New York Times*, December 23, 1952, p. 16.

NCC in 1953, Eisenhower explained that the U.S. government was a “translation in the political field of a deeply-felt religious faith,” again repeating the hallmarks of civil religion.<sup>19</sup>

Arguably more of an impact than the above instances combined, the National Prayer Breakfast convened for the first time in February of 1953 at business magnate Conrad Hilton’s (1887-1979) Mayflower Hotel in Washington D.C. Organized by Kansas Senator Frank Carlson (1893-1987) and expanded in later years by Seattle-based Methodist minister Abraham Vereide (1886-1969), the National Prayer Breakfast, touting an inaugural theme of “Government Under God,” established itself as a steadfast bulwark in the nation’s civil religion panorama. In the coming years, Eisenhower returned to the annual breakfast, Billy Graham served as the keynote speaker, and the event grew in attendance and press coverage.<sup>20</sup>

During the 1957 Prayer Breakfast, Eisenhower was presented the desk and chair that he used to write the prayer that was read at his inauguration in 1953 along with a plaque from hotel owner Conrad Hilton. In front of the Prayer Breakfast audience, which had grown from five-hundred at the inaugural gathering to over one thousand at that year’s meeting, Eisenhower reflected on the prayer that he wrote for his presidential inauguration:

I think that prayer is somewhat related to these Prayer Breakfasts. We can pray in our quarters, but we can also come to gatherings occasionally...announcing to the

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<sup>19</sup> Eisenhower quote and speeches before religious bodies from Raymond Haberski, Jr., *God and War: American Civil Religion Since 1945* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 36-40. For information on Eisenhower and the “Back to God” program, see Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 74-75.

<sup>20</sup> “Bulletin of International Christian Leadership.” For detailed coverage of the National Prayer Breakfast gatherings of the 1950s, see issues of “Christian Leadership,” “Bulletin of International Christian Leadership,” and “International Christian Leadership Bulletin” from 1953-1957, in box “Fellowship Foundation Newsletters, 1942-1970,” BGCA. On Senator Carlson and Abraham Vereide’s roles in the National Prayer Breakfasts, see Kruse, *One Nation Under God*, 77-81.



world that we come as laymen and meet, making the same acknowledgment that was made in that prayer and doing exactly the same thing. We are telling people that this nation is still a nation under God. This is terrifically important today. It still is a nation founded on a religious faith with great concern for the sentiments and compassion and mercy that Mr. Hilton so elegantly spoke about. That is what we want others to think about when they think of the United States...I believe, if I am not misquoting, that even the Bible says when a strong man is armed he keepeth his palace. We intend to remain strong, but let us always do it with the certainty that anyone who comes in integrity, observing the moral values that we know are imbedded in this great religious faith, will be received as a friend and taken with us down the road to future happiness.<sup>21</sup>

The larger national reaction to the National Prayer Breakfast's calls for spiritual renewal and recognition of God's relationship with America represented another success in Eisenhower's appeals to the Protestant segment of the population during his administration's maneuvering of Cold War hostilities.

Collectively, the federal government's Cold War propaganda efforts were intricate, multi-faceted, and, overall, successful. By putting a highly mobilized propaganda engine in place, Eisenhower and his administration effectively cultivated a widespread base of support for Cold War foreign policy directed toward the Soviet Union. At the heart of this support was the large group of Protestant Americans who recognized the Cold War as nothing less than a standoff between good and evil. During the years of the Eisenhower Administration, the U.S. government played a major role in defining the terms of the war for Americans. It also influenced the level of support that Americans exhibited for its policies.

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<sup>21</sup> Eisenhower's address to the National Prayer Group reprinted in "Christian Leadership" bulletin. Vol. 11 No. 1. January, 1957. Box "Fellowship Foundation Newsletters, 1942-1970," BGCA.

## Conclusion

It is clear that public support for the Eisenhower Administration's Cold War foreign policies remained strong throughout the 1950s. This support was sustained from a combination of government efforts, such as propaganda strategies, and Protestant backing, as represented in this chapter by Niebuhr, O'Connell, Graham, and other leading Protestant figures. At the heart of this support was the sense of fear that the Cold War instilled in many Americans. Government policymakers kept a close eye on Soviet activity through a variety of channels during Eisenhower's terms in office. The United States government recognized the Soviet Union and the threat of communism as their greatest challenge in foreign affairs during this timespan. The American public grappled with the uncertainty of the Soviet Union's nuclear intentions on a daily basis in the post-WWII period. This fear drove government efforts toward and public support for the foreign policies that guided America's approach to the larger world throughout the 1950s.

The fear of communism in general and nuclear war in particular drove American attitudes of the Cold War throughout the 1950s. Even after Joseph Stalin's death in March of 1953, Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the United States in 1959, and the general sense of eased tensions that set in during the late 1950s across America, both the public and government preoccupation with the containment of communism's spread carried forth as a mainstay of American foreign policy. James Schlesinger (1929-2014), who served as Secretary of Defense, Secretary of Energy, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, and Director of the CIA, described this Soviet threat as America's "magnetic north" for foreign policy.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> James Schlesinger, "America and the World," *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (1992/1993): 17.

The forms that Eisenhower and Dulles' foreign policies took sustained continued public support throughout Eisenhower's time as Commander-in-Chief. This support was the product of both the U.S. government as well as the American public rallying behind the religious framework of the Cold War. As the final, concluding chapter describes, the ramifications of America's Cold War foreign policy in the 1950s were significant and long lasting within the nation's social, diplomatic, and spiritual ethos in the decades beyond.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION: THE LEGACY OF PROTESTANTS AND THE COLD WAR

While the landscape of America's religious demographics underwent significant change after WWII, most Protestant's views of America's foreign policy directed toward the Soviet Union provided a shared, common adhesive that bound otherwise theologically diverse Americans together. No single statistic serves as an explanation, but the larger picture of Protestant attitudes collectively shows that the level of anti-communism and fear of nuclear warfare drove a civil religion that allowed for robust Protestant support of U.S. foreign policy. For example, Billy James Hargis' Christian Crusade claimed 120,000 donating members and boasted a mixture of anti-communist diatribes and fundamentalist Christian messages across four hundred radio stations near the end of the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> Bill Bright's Campus Crusade for Christ was warmly received over the course of Eisenhower's years in office, enrolling substantial numbers of students in its forty campuses across fifteen states. Campus Crusade for Christ was also popular among its wealthy supporters, who welcomed the ministry's anti-communist, pro-America culture. At the same time, Youth for Christ enjoyed substantial success throughout the decade, providing Bible instruction in high school clubs, summer camps, and youth conferences. At the end of 1959, for example, Youth for Christ's Capital Teen Convention at the National Armory attracted roughly ten-thousand teenagers to Washington D.C. for the program's festivities. During the event, President Eisenhower was so moved by their presence, that he

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 208.

invited them onto the lawn of the White House to speak to them near the National Christmas tree.<sup>2</sup>

Other examples of large-scale Christian support for national goals and anti-communist foreign policy abound. Religious Americans found communism so threatening that seventy-seven percent of church leaders and editors of religious publications that Billy Graham personally surveyed favored the experience that Eisenhower possessed in the lead up to the 1952 presidential election. Surely, Graham's sizeable following warmly received the evangelist's comparison of Eisenhower's first talk on foreign policy to the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>3</sup> Official religious bodies also moved to political action out of anti-communist sentiment. Large, interdenominational religious groups regularly adopted resolutions denouncing communism. For example, the NAE, with over one-million members and roughly twenty-thousand churches, adopted such a resolution in nearly every year of the 1960s.<sup>4</sup>

This support for foreign policy is also evident within Protestant Christianity's standard-bearers that serve as the focus of this dissertation. Bishop Oxnam was close enough to John Foster Dulles to describe his efforts to the Secretary of State when attempting to "mobilize opinion" for U.S. policy within his vast Methodist ranks.<sup>5</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr characterized the post-WWII mood of Americans when he explained in a letter to Harvard President James B. Conant why evil, or destruction, must be done in order to accomplish good, such as defeating an

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<sup>2</sup> William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 45.

<sup>3</sup> Billy Graham claimed the sample size of his personal survey was nearly two hundred. See *ibid.*; 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> Angela Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85. For a detailed list of NAE membership statistics, see Appendix B.

<sup>5</sup> Oxnam diary entry. between January 26, 1957 and February 26, 1957, Box 28, Oxnam Collection, LOC.

evil force.<sup>6</sup> Billy Graham confessed in a mass-publication pamphlet that “[Communism] carries with it all the indications of anti-Christ.” Graham claimed, “Almost all ministers of the gospel and students of the Bible agree that it is master-minded by Satan himself who is counterfeiting Christianity.”<sup>7</sup>

This heightened religious mood was also felt in American Protestants’ missionary endeavors. In 1952, approximately 18,000 North American missionaries were serving outside of America’s borders. By 1960, this figure had risen to more than 29,000. The proportion of these foreign missionaries that were sponsored by evangelical organizations had also risen—from 44 percent to 65 percent.<sup>8</sup> In several different ways, the American Protestant community was prepared and willing to go to war with an evil foe that lurked across the oceans, threatening the very nature of American democracy.

The hawkish foreign-policy views of many Protestants were, in fact, the majority opinion throughout America’s churches in the 1950s. Yet they were not unanimous. Pacifist Christians, including those that participated in the Fellowship of Reconciliation and those civil rights leaders that preceded the large-scale movement of the 1960s, such as A. Philip Randolph (1889-1979), James Farmer (1920-1999), and Bayard Rustin (1912-1987), frequently demonstrated a nonviolent approach to conflict and resistance. However, many theological liberals such as G. Bromley Oxnam regularly moved away from pacifism as anti-communist rhetoric that characterized the 1950s grew more popular. Many theologically liberal Protestants were able to

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from Niebuhr to James Conant, 1955 or 1956. “General Correspondence” Box 2, “Conant, James B.” Folder, Niebuhr Papers, LOC.

<sup>7</sup> Graham, “Christianism vs. Communism,” Pamphlet, 1951. “Duplicates by and about Billy Graham” Box. BGCA.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 182.

make the shift from a message of peace to one incrementally more aggressive in tone, which took the form of international cooperation and containment, because of the tremendous weight of the Holocaust coupled with the rise of civil religion in America. A minority of Christians, though—namely Mennonites, Quakers, and other historic peace church members—retained an anti-war approach to the Cold War. Perhaps best personified by Congregationalist minister (raised within the Dutch-Reformed Church) and peace activist A.J. Muste (1885-1967), this small minority of Christians that fell outside of the anti-communist mainstream vociferously objected to America's role in the context of the Cold War.<sup>9</sup>

Because of the context of the times, the major thrust of Cold War foreign policies of the 1950s prevailed into the following decades. When President John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) announced to the American public on the night of October 22, 1962 that American U-2 spy plane photographs taken over Cuba revealed Soviet missile installations, the relationship between foreign policy and apocalypticism was reaffirmed in the eyes of many Americans.<sup>10</sup> A deep-seated thread of America's chosen place in the world remained in place through the 1960s and 1970s. Intertwined with this strand of thought was the policy of containment. True to the notion of America's place as a beacon of light atop a hill in a dark world, this guiding foreign policy acknowledged America's religious role in the international community. It did so for the duration of the Cold War. From the close of WWII to the fall of the Berlin Wall, or roughly 1947 to 1989, the containment of communism in all of its manifestations guided thinking, discussion, and

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 2012), 494.

<sup>10</sup> Angela Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares*, 112, 114.

action among the American public and policymakers.<sup>11</sup> First officially outlined in National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68), the policy of containing the spiritual, political, and military challenge that communism posed lent a religious element to American foreign policy for the following forty years.<sup>12</sup> This idea is apparent in America's actions in Vietnam throughout the 1960s and 1970s as well as in the rhetoric employed by President Ronald Reagan when posturing against the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

The three men that serve as the focus of this dissertation were highly present at this rapidly blending intersection of foreign policy and religion during the years of the Eisenhower Administration. Niebuhr, Oxnam, and Graham's legacies stretch far beyond their actions during this episode in American history. Oxnam passed away in March of 1963 and Niebuhr died in June of 1971. Neither heavyweight of Protestant Christianity was able to see the aftermath of the early years of the Cold War's effects on American policy and religious life. Niebuhr is largely remembered for his theological contributions, his ability to articulate his understanding of sin to the American public, and his role as a public intellectual. Oxnam, though less well known, is typically remembered as a successful Methodist Bishop who oversaw substantial growth in the Methodist Church's education efforts, missionary endeavors, and church membership roles. More than anything else, though, Oxnam personifies, for many, the defiance that Senator McCarthy and the Congressional HUAC Committee evoked from the politically and theologically liberal segment of American society. His testimony in front of the HUAC Committee remains the most publicly followed incident of his life. Billy Graham, of course, went on to outlive both Oxnam and Niebuhr. His ministry remains his legacy. Graham's work as

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<sup>11</sup> For discussion on communism in the Soviet Union as the chief threat to freedom around the world, see Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 153-159.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 422-430.



an evangelist is the primary point in his life's work. Obviously, many have looked closely at Graham's role in America's history of race relations, politics, business, and evangelism. His relationship with President Richard Nixon (1913-1994) and his stance on Vietnam remain points of criticism. Overall, however, Graham, like Niebuhr and Oxnam, retains a relatively positive view of his life and his life's work from the American public, scholars, and biographers.

In sum, the early Cold War years represent a time of major shifts in American life. Left with many questions after the close of WWII, Americans faced new possibilities and new challenges. An uptick in mass consumption, the growth of suburban residential areas, favorable economic conditions, and the ease that many Americans found in attaining an acceptable standard of living provided a level of satisfaction among many Americans. Average family sizes increased as the baby-boom began and the resurgence of church membership demonstrated a country enjoying the post-war world. At the same time, communism and the threat of nuclear warfare posed fresh anxieties. The Civil Rights Movement gathered steam as the 1950s gave way to the 1960s. New and lingering issues sprang into American life. It was within the early years of the Cold War that America's religious leaders found the American public ripe for guidance.

In assessing the perspectives of the standard-bearers of the three largest and most influential strands of Protestant Christianity—Neo-Orthodoxy, liberal Protestant Christianity, and evangelical Christianity—it becomes clear that the American religious landscape was anything but united. Theological differences, political differences, and competition kept many Protestant Americans at odds with one another over a host of issues. However, the combination of anticommunist sentiment and civil religion worked as forces that brought Protestant Americans together. Protestants were not uniform in their perspectives of U.S. foreign policy, yet, as demonstrated by Niebuhr, Oxnam, and Graham, they denounced communism and—to a

degree—supported America’s efforts to combat the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence throughout the course of the Eisenhower Administration. This support for foreign policy was essential to the United States government and important to Christian Americans. Within the story of Protestant support for American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union during the Eisenhower Administration, one can also identify evidence for religious support for the military, which represents a major American trend that transcends all American history. The level of support that was on display in the mid-twentieth century, however, remained a fixture of American religious life (despite being tested during the years of the Vietnam War) throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

The context of the Cold War allowed Protestant Americans to enhance their political power among American subgroups. This power was not truly streamlined and capitalized upon until the years of what is commonly recognized as the culture wars—centered upon social struggles over abortion, feminism, gay rights, and education—streamlined and gathered evangelical Christians to the voting booths in large numbers beyond the 1970s. The prominence that Protestant Christians achieved, as evident in their respective figureheads, pushed Protestant values and opinions further into Americans’ understanding of what America was. Future generations carried forth the religious values of Protestant Christians of the 1950s, general as they were, and utilized them as foundational modes of understanding their world and their culture.

## APPENDIX A

### Billy Graham Crusades from 1947-1959<sup>1</sup>

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Location(s)</u>   |
|-------------|--|
| 1947        | Grand Rapids, Michigan<br>Charlotte, North Carolina  |
| 1948        | Augusta, Georgia<br>Modesto, California  |
| 1949        | Miami, Florida<br>Altoona, Pennsylvania<br>Los Angeles, California   |
| 1950        | Boston, Massachusetts<br>Columbia, South Carolina<br>New England States Tour<br>Portland, Oregon<br>Minneapolis, Minnesota |

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<sup>1</sup> Crusade information by year most easily accessible in Graham, *Just as I Am*, 1107-1114. Also, see “Timeline of Historic Events,” Billy Graham Evangelistic Association <http://billygraham.org/news/media-resources/electronic-press-kit/bgea-history/timeline-of-historic-events/> (accessed September 14, 2015).

Atlanta, Georgia

1951

Southern States Tour

Fort Worth, Texas

Shreveport, Louisiana

Memphis, Tennessee

Seattle, Washington

Hollywood, California

Greensboro, North Carolina

Raleigh, North Carolina

1952

Washington, D.C.

American Cities Tour

Houston, Texas

Jackson, Mississippi

American Cities Tour

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Albuquerque, New Mexico

1953

Florida Cities Tour

Chattanooga, Tennessee

St. Louis, Missouri

Dallas, Texas

West Texas Tour

Syracuse, New York

Detroit, Michigan

Asheville, North Carolina

1954

London, England

Berlin, Germany

Copenhagen, Denmark

Düsseldorf, West Germany

Frankfurt, West Germany

Helsinki, Finland

Paris, France

Stockholm, Sweden

Nashville, Tennessee

New Orleans, Louisiana

American West Coast Tour

1955

Glasgow, Scotland

Scotland Cities Tour

London, England

Paris, France

Zurich, Switzerland

Geneva, Switzerland

Mannheim, West Germany

Stuttgart, West Germany

Nürnberg, West Germany

Dortmund, West Germany

Frankfurt, West Germany  
Rotterdam, The Netherlands  
Oslo, Norway  
Gothenburg, Sweden  
Aarhus, Denmark  
Toronto, Canada

1956            India and East Asia Tour  
                  Richmond, Virginia  
                  Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
                  Louisville, Kentucky

1957            New York City, New York

1958            Caribbean Tour  
                  San Francisco, California  
                  Sacramento, California  
                  Fresno, California  
                  Santa Barbara, California  
                  Los Angeles, California  
                  San Diego, California  
                  San Antonio, Texas  
                  Charlotte, North Carolina

1959            Melbourne, Australia

Auckland, New Zealand  
Sydney, Australia  
Perth, Australia  
Brisbane, Australia  
Adelaide, Australia  
Wellington, New Zealand  
Christchurch, New Zealand  
Canberra, Australia  
Launceston, Australia  
Hobart, Australia  
Little Rock, Arkansas  
Wheaton, Illinois  
Indianapolis, Indiana

## APPENDIX B

### National Association of Evangelicals Membership in 1953<sup>1</sup>

| <u>Church</u>                                 | <u>Number of Churches</u> | <u>Membership</u> |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Assemblies of God                             | 6,362                     | 370,118           |
| Brethren in Christ                            | 103                       | 5,760             |
| Christian Church of North America, Inc.       | 154                       | 13,000            |
| The Church of God                             | 2,542                     | 126,844           |
| Church of the United Brethren in Christ       | 329                       | 19,723            |
| Churches of Christ in Christian Union         | 220                       | 10,000            |
| Congregational Methodist Church               | 160                       | 11,189            |
| The Evangelical Free Church of America        | 273                       | 21,500            |
| Evangelical Mennonite Brethren                | 15                        | 2,000             |
| Evangelical Methodist Church                  | No information available  |                   |
| Free Methodist Church of North America        | 1,212                     | 48,954            |
| General Six-Principle Baptists                | 3                         | 280               |
| Holiness Methodist Church                     | 27                        | 675               |
| International Church of the Foursquare Gospel | 577                       | 78,471            |

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<sup>1</sup> All information from the 1953 *Yearbook of American Churches*, the *Apostles of Discord*, and the NAE's *United Evangelical Action* listing. Cited from a condensed form in, "Denominations that are Members of the National Association of Evangelicals," April 19, 1954, "NCC Special Topics, 1951-1970" Box 6, "N, O" Folder, "Exhibit 1 and 2," PHS.



| <u>Church</u>  | <u>Number of Churches</u> | <u>Membership</u> |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------|
| International Pentecostal Assemblies   | 96                        | 5,000             |
| Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Conference  | 9                         | 1,593             |
| Mennonite Brethren Church of<br>North America                                    | 59                        | 10,359            |
| Missionary Bands of the World, Inc.  | 10                        | 1,000             |
| Missionary Church Association<br>(National Association of) Free Will<br>Baptists | 75<br>2,700               | 6,175<br>400,000  |
| Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends Church<br>(Independent)                           | 81                        | 6,042             |
| Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church  | 51                        | 4,636             |
| Open Bible Standard Churches, Inc.   | 235                       | 25,000            |
| Pentecostal Holiness Church  | 1,030                     | 43,150            |
| Primitive Methodist Church of the U.S.A.   | 90                        | 12,320            |
| Reformed Presbyterian Church of North<br>America                                 | 75                        | 5,174             |
| United Holy Church of America, Inc.  | 365                       | 26,451            |
| United Missionary Church, Inc.   | 222                       | 13,920            |
| Wesleyan Methodist Church of America   | 940                       | 34,213            |
| Pentecostal Church of God of America, Inc.                                       | 650                       | 55,000            |

| <u>Church</u>  | <u>Number of Churches</u> | <u>Membership</u> |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Association of Fundamental Ministers<br>and Churches | NA                        | 900               |
| The Church by the Side of the Road                   | NA                        | 5,500             |
| Elim Missionary Assemblies                           | NA                        | 4,000             |
| Evangelical Mennonite Church of North America        | NA                        | 1,907             |
| Evangelistic Tabernacle                              | NA                        | 260               |
| Grace Gospel Evangelistic Association                | NA                        | 15,000            |
| Missionary Methodist Conference                      | NA                        | 741               |
| United Fundamentalist Church                         | NA                        | 1,000             |
| Conservative Congregational Conference               | No information available  |                   |
| New England Evangelical Baptist Fellowship           | No information available  |                   |
| Pentecostal Evangelical Church                       | No information available  |                   |
| Total:   | 18,665                    | 1,657,855         |

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