Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion

The Cold War and American Religion

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Subject: Religion and Politics, Religion in America Online Publication Date: May 2017
DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.398

Summary and Keywords

American propaganda cast the Cold War as one of history's great religious wars, between the godless and the God-fearing, between good and evil. It was a simplistic depiction that was supported and promoted in the highest echelons of government and by the leaders of America's key institutions. During the course of the presidencies of Harry S. Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, U.S.-Soviet rivalry was transformed from a traditional great power struggle into a morality play that drew on firmly entrenched notions rooted in the American past, above all American exceptionalism and its sense of mission. Truman made religion America's ideological justification for abandoning America's wartime cooperation with the Soviet Union. Eisenhower used religion to persuade the world that America was a force for good in the international arena. The resulting anti-communist crusade was to have profound consequences for Christian America, contributing to both religious revival and religious repression in the early Cold War period. Over time it caused irrevocable alterations to America's religious landscape. The anti-communist dynamic unleashed embraced anti-liberalism and was a factor in the rise of the Christian Right and the decline in America's mainstream churches. In addition, the image of a godless and evil enemy dictated an irreconcilable conflict that precluded the very modes of diplomacy and discourse that might have helped avoid the worst excesses, costs, and consequences of the Cold War.

Keywords: Cold War, anti-communism, Christian, crusade, Supreme Being, revival, repression, politico-religious, peace, civil rights

A Religio-political Enterprise

> I believe I repeat, I believe honestly—that Almighty God intends us to assume the leadership which he intended us to assume in 1920, and which we refused. And I believe if we do that, our problems would almost solve themselves.

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> (Harry S. Truman, 1945[1])
>
> If religion is unimportant, it can be tolerated. If it is important, governments will insist on controlling it, regulating it, suppressing or prohibiting it, or manipulating it to their own advantage.
>
> (Samuel P. Huntington, 2001[2])

Religion is perhaps one of the most complex and difficult subjects about which to write, even more so when addressed in the context of the still strongly disputed Cold War era. Religion assumed different degrees of salience at different points in the Cold War, in terms of both domestic and foreign policy. The early Cold War period was particularly significant for establishing a framework that endured throughout the Cold War. It had a profound impact on the nature and conduct of the Cold War as well as effecting remarkable changes on America's religious landscape and the prism through which the nation viewed itself and its place in the world.

The natural starting point for an examination of American religion during the Cold War era ought to be a definition of what is meant by the term "religion," not to mention a theoretical framework and some discussion of whether or not religion can be used as a category of analysis. However, America's secular leaders, whatever their personal religious convictions, dealt not with doctrines and definitions, nor only with religious organizations and leaders, but promoted religion in the broadest terms possible, working with a diverse array of institutions and individuals. Moreover, the state, despite the supposed separation between it and the church, steadily appropriated religiosity and the moral power associated with it, openly encouraging civic religion for Cold War-related purposes. Indeed, the cavalier disregard for particularities meant that even communism could be presented as a religion, albeit a false one challenging the true faith as represented by America.[3]

Crusade rhetoric was a key feature of America's Cold War discourse, enabling what was in essence a traditional struggle for power and influence to be portrayed as a Manichaean conflict in which good battled evil. The strategic use of religion to legitimate American policies while demonizing those of the Soviets undermined the normal modes of diplomacy and discourse that might have helped avoid the worst excesses, costs, and consequences of the Cold War. One outcome of turning the Cold War into a religio-political enterprise was a reconfiguration of inter-denominational relationships that transformed America's religious landscape.

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Origins

It was not Stalin’s attitude toward or treatment of religion that led to the deterioration of U.S.-Soviet relations in the aftermath of the Second World War. Indeed, Stalin had responded positively during the war to Franklin’s Roosevelt’s overtures in the religious realm, necessitated to secure acceptance of the U.S.-S.U. wartime alliance at home and to persuade world opinion that the alliance could be maintained to help build a peaceful and prosperous postwar order. For Stalin, during and after the war, religion provided a ready and relatively easy means of reducing the gulf that remained between him and his allies, and the evidence suggests he hoped it might prove a bridge.[4] At the end of the war, Harry Truman inherited a policy based on U.S.-Soviet co-operation, a public anxious for the peace dividends it promised, and a Soviet Union desperately in need of American aid to help repair its massive war damage.

The Truman administration thought that its superior economic and military power would provide the necessary leverage over Soviet policies to realize a postwar economic order in which American interests would flourish. The application of “dollar” and “atomic” diplomacy served mainly to heighten Stalin’s already suspicious and paranoid mindset.[5] With relations deteriorating, the United States dropped the Soviet bloc from its economic calculations. However, it did not wish to be blamed for rupturing the wartime alliance, in which so much hope had been invested, simply for the sake of promoting global capitalism, a system considered by many only to have delivered slump, fascism, and war.

A sense of righteous power had been gestating within America over a long period. The Civil War had endowed the concept of “manifest destiny” with a global dimension by proclaiming the nation “the last best hope” of peoples everywhere. Religious faith was an “essential ingredient in the formation of American internationalism.”[6] Christian missionaries were at the forefront of American internationalism, particularly after the First World War. They were forerunners for America’s informal model of imperialism that sought to remake the world in its own image. The defeat of Nazi tyranny strengthened existing convictions of an anointed nation with a unique mission: “On the whole . . . they considered it their right, their duty, and their opportunity to lead the world.”[7] Confronting postwar economic realities that required America to move from its traditional isolationism toward globalism and world leadership, Soviet intentions were oversimplified and its threat potential exaggerated. This was particularly the case in the religious realm, an area that the interwar years had demonstrated most able to arouse animosity and loathing toward the Soviet regime.

In August 1947 Truman affected a remarkable and highly publicized letter exchange with Pius XII. By dramatically associating himself with the pope, at that time one of the world’s most respected spiritual leaders, Truman transformed containment into a religio-moral obligation. Moreover, as Pius XII was the locus of ideological opposition to and avowed

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enemy of Soviet Communism at a time when the Roman Catholic Church was deeply implicated in a range of anti-Soviet activities, as American policymakers well knew, Truman signaled to the Soviets the end of the wartime alliance.[8]

American attempts to prevent a Communist electoral victory in Italy's 1948 election mobilized a shifting network of non-governmental organizations that included political parties, trade unions, and the Catholic Church. The complex coterie of lower-level actors contributed to the intellectual framework of "political warfare" inaugurated by George Kennan in Italy with the imperative of waging "war short of actual war."[9] It implemented a series of techniques, ranging from material and propaganda support to covert operations, all intended to avoid direct military confrontation with the Soviet Union. Notably, it was symbolically topped by the partnering of President Truman with Pope Pius XII, bonded by their opposition to and demonization of the Soviet Union.

Widely interpreted as an "anti-Red crusade," a spiritual sequel to the political and economic policies embedded in the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan, the seeming partnering of the president with the pope signaled an irreconcilable conflict with the Soviets. The president denounced an "evil, disruptive force intent on thwarting the hopes and ideals of mankind." The pope declared there could be no compromise with an avowed enemy of God.[10] From a diplomatic perspective, bringing Pius XII into the Western alliance was a strategic success that morally justified containment while attributing blame for it to the Soviets. However, it mightily displeased U.S. Protestant leaders, who not only considered the alliance a breach of the Constitution but also were opposed to "any kind of diplomatic relationship that seems to unite Protestantism with Catholicism in a common war against Russia."[11]

Such sentiments did not prevent Truman from proclaiming his intention to bring together under his auspices the world's key religious and moral leaders from all the major faiths in a united front against Soviet Communism.[12] Although it was an endeavor that failed to come to fruition, it achieved another propaganda coup against the Soviets in 1949 with the election of the Archbishop of North and South America to be the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. An American citizen had been elected as the primary patriarch, the primus inter pares (first among equals), in Orthodox Christianity. It was an achievement guaranteed to confirm Soviet suspicions that Truman's interventions in the religious field were intended to encourage dissent within the Soviet bloc. Truman not only had Archbishop Athenagoras flown in his personal presidential plane to Istanbul to assume his new position but, for obvious symbolic reasons, had the plane fly over the Vatican.[13] Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy were each closely connected to the national identity, history, and sentiment of key countries in the Soviet bloc.[14] Truman was letting Moscow know of his overt support for the heads of the two major religions in the Soviet sphere of influence.

Through the services of his personal representative to the Holy See, Myron C. Taylor, Truman also approached the leadership of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to join him, Pius XII, and other world moral and religious leaders he advised were to be

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approached in what was clearly intended as a united international religio-moral front against Moscow. The leadership of the World Council of Churches, the institutional expression of the ecumenical movement that sought to bring the Christian churches together as one, was wary of becoming involved with what was clearly a political maneuver.[15] Although Truman was unable to garner the level of cooperation he sought, his dealings with the WCC aroused the Soviet's "deeply rooted suspicion that the World Council was controlled by Western political influences."[16] Hence the Orthodox churches in the Soviet sphere of influence withdrew from participation. The outcome, a Western dominated Council from which potential Soviet influence had been removed, perfectly suited Truman.

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Ideological Call to Arms

Truman used religion effectively to reverse the wartime policy of cooperation with the Soviets and to resume the interwar practice of using religion as a stick with which to beat communist ideology and the Soviet regime, demonstrating an irreconcilable conflict that could be blamed on the Soviets. Religion helped Truman exaggerate the Soviet threat and persuade the American people to reject isolationism and accept global engagement as part of America's God-given mission to the world. Moreover, it allowed the United States to preserve and build on traditional ties with European powers owing to their common heritage, bonds, and defense of "Western Civilization and Christianity." The United States supported Europe's Christian Democrat parties. The Christian Democrat victory over the Italian Communist Party in the crucial 1948 elections was attributed to the special combination of spiritual and economic power represented by the U.S.-Vatican Cold War partnership. It was also seen as valuable in the developing world, where religion was generally perceived as a bulwark against communism, a means of inoculating against communism the poorer peoples, those most likely to find its promise of economic equality appealing.

Religion was regarded as a key means of distinguishing and giving moral superiority to the American model of modernity over that offered by the Soviets. Equally important, at a time when the Truman administration remained committed to low defense spending and a balanced budget were cost analysis considerations. Even as key officials became increasingly alarmed by the Soviet threat, approaches to defense questions revealed that everyone was looking for a cheap alternative.[17] Ideological conflict was perhaps the cheapest of all options. In its original form as expressed by Kennan, the doctrine of containment was an ideological call to arms that called forth efforts to construct a Western doctrine with which to counter communism.[18] When these proved futile and unwelcome, anti-communism came to serve in its stead.

The religious roots of popular anti-communism endowed it with a pseudo-doctrinal status. These were strengthened and reinforced by the potency of religious themes, symbols, and metaphors in public discourse, coming to rest on two fundamental contentions: that communism was a supreme and unqualified evil, and that its purpose was world domination.[19] This form of "absolutist" anti-communism resided at the heart of conservative Christian anti-communism, which, followed by a generalized "religious" anti-communism, was to prove an exceptionally potent weapon in the political warfare waged against the entire left, including moderate, reform inclined forces, which included Christian and other faith organizations and individuals. In his famous "X" article, Kennan had argued the need for the United States to express "a spiritual vitality capable of holding its own among the major ideological currents of the time."[20] Religious ideas were enshrined in the crucial 1950 Cold War document NSC 68, which referred to defeating the fanatic faith of communism by mobilizing a "spiritual counter-force."[21] The Soviet

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Union was designated the vehicle of a godless and aggressive ideology that sought the destruction of Western civilization and Christianity and indeed all religion.[22]

Designating the Soviet Union the “evil other” allowed the Truman administration to shift America into permanent military, political, and economic intervention on a world scale. When Dwight Eisenhower took over the reins of power, the “Soviet threat” was proving sufficiently crucial to effective management of Congress and public opinion, not to mention the Western alliance, that Soviet overtures following the death of Stalin were rejected, as was Winston Churchill’s summitry. The insistence that the basic situation and danger remained unchanged[23] reflected the extent to which the image of an aggressive, evil Soviet regime dedicated to world conquest—the godless Soviet bogey—had become a crucial Cold War asset that was proving essential to confirming American exceptionalism. Where Truman had sought to identify his administration with organized religion internationally, as well as promoting civil religion, Eisenhower increasingly emphasized the latter, appropriating the spiritual authority usually identified with the churches for his office and the nation.

Eisenhower appointed as his secretary of state John Foster Dulles, well-known as a “Christian statesman.”[24] Notably, more than Soviet aggression, Dulles feared the lack of an international ethos in the West could cause disunity, undermining the sort of politically structured societies he envisioned: “Even if the Soviet threat were totally to disappear, would we be blind to the danger that the West may destroy itself?”[25] Dulles was convinced that a universal values-based creed was essential for world order. Soon after Eisenhower’s first inauguration, Dulles spoke with the president about the need for a comprehensive education program that would assure popular understanding “of the ‘American mission’ and its problems.”[26] Shortly afterwards, *Reader’s Digest*, in language resonant with Dulles’s own sentiments, reported that Eisenhower wanted to use his influence and his presidency to encourage “a spiritual turning point in America, and thereby to recover the strengths, the values, and the conduct which a vital faith produces in a people.”[27]

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Revival

American exceptionalism, the confident conviction that in the providence of God the United States is qualitatively different from all others, portrays the American nation as non-ideological. However, the noted American historian Richard Hofstadter famously observed: “It has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies but to be one.”[28] Eisenhower, elected president by an America in the throes of a religious revival encouraged by society’s core institutions as essential to winning the Cold War,[29] fully understood the power of ideological language to advance pragmatic ends and to have pragmatic interests serve ideological commitments. As the Cold War exacerbated the popular patriotism and civic religion that marked the postwar revival, Eisenhower, who only joined a church once elected president, oversaw the transformation of Truman’s initiative. Rather than a state alliance with organized religion, the nation moved toward a more direct identification with, if not embodiment of, religion itself. Religion and Americanism were brought together in a consensus that personal religious faith reflected proper patriotic commitment.

Previous revivals had derived from the grass roots and were bottom-up enterprises. The early Cold War revival, not unlike the McCarthyite era of political repression that accompanied it, was orchestrated from above. Notably, on March 6, 1946, the day after Winston Churchill’s famous Fulton speech, Truman declared that the survival of the civilized world required Americans to fortify their spiritual strength through a renewal of religious faith. The president called for a moral and spiritual awakening, a revival for which he sought support from America’s key faith communities, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish, to provide the necessary impetus.[30] At this point in time, faith communities, deeply worried by the spread of secularization that accompanied modernization, naturally welcomed the prospect of a religious revival. Leading Christian churchmen had been active during the war to secure access to the corridors of power to promote Christian influence in the postwar world, which they perceived as essential for its betterment. Hence mainstream Christian leaders were willing accomplices in what Jonathan Herzog has aptly called the spiritual-industrial-complex, a beneficiary of state sanction and commercial talent that “worked to foment a religious revival that was conceived in boardrooms, rather than camp meetings, steered by Madison Avenue and Hollywood suits rather than traveling preachers, and measured with statistical precision.”[31] Henry Luce, the influential publisher who coined the term “American Century,” promoted religious revival as essential to winning the Cold War.[32] Two of the era’s most notorious figures, Senator Joseph McCarthy[33] and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover,[34] paraded as defenders of Christianity against communist atheism.

The barrage of anti-communist, anti-Soviet propaganda in the early Cold War years subsumed most Christian leaders and certainly their congregations. Later mainstream clerical criticism of the way in which Christianity was instrumentalized in the service of secular forces created an opportunity for fundamentalist and evangelical Christians to

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forge a place for their own uncompromising brand of Christian anti-communism. The strength of the revival was confirmed by opinion polls and the consumption of religious books, films, TV, and radio programs. Whether the quantitative increase represented qualitative change in the nation's religious life was questioned.[35] The deterioration in U.S.-Soviet relations, accompanied by apocalyptic rhetoric in a nuclear age, contributed to the emergence of the "Age of Anxiety," which in turn gave rise to neo-religious movements centered on individual expression and personal development. Norman Vincent Peale, with his two best sellers *A Guide to Confident Living* (1948) and *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), perhaps best represented the resulting "harmonial" religion. While his critics indicted the image of Christianity Pealeism conveyed, it was in the long American church tradition of preoccupation with wealth and well-being in this life as much as in the next. Nonetheless, it provided additional ammunition for critics to lambast the revival's superficiality and lack of theological depth, charging that it minimized doctrine and dogma in order to make Christianity more comfortable, practical, and usable.

The revival's preoccupation with capitalism and "Americanism" were further causes for concern.[36] Certainly the communist threat offered a culturally acceptable scapegoat against which clergy attempted to reforge the waning connection between religious duty, social participation, and national identity.[37] However, the cultivation of popular perceptions about U.S. moral leadership and benign use of power meant that Christian values were increasingly represented in secular forms. It reflected a process of assimilation and translation of a religious system of values into secular ethics. Such a process accords with Van Kersbergen's view of secularization as representing "the condensation or transference of religious morality into secular ethics."[38] Secularization comprises a transformation of religious contents into worldly substance, and the various and diverse groups promoting patriotism and civic religion highlighted the mix of religiosity and secularization that characterized America's postwar revival.

"Religion in American Life" stressed "the importance of all religious institutions as the foundations of American life." "Spiritual Mobilization" identified American religion with anti-communism and the defense of free enterprise capitalism.[39] The Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order, established in 1953, had as a promoter Elton Trueblood, the U.S. Information Agency's chief of religious policy. It had two major aims: "to stress the importance of religious truth in the preservation and development of genuine democracy; and to unite all believers in God in the struggle between the free world and atheistic Communism, which aims to destroy both religion and liberty."[40]

In 1954, the phrase "under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance, and Congress required all U.S. coins and paper currency to bear the slogan "In God We Trust." Two years later that became the official U.S. motto without a dissenting voice in House or Senate. The way in which religion and Americanism were brought together in a consensus that personal religious faith reflected proper patriotic commitment was epitomized by President Eisenhower's 1955 declaration: "Without God, there could be no

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American form of Government, nor an American way of life. Recognition of the Supreme Being is the first—the most basic—expression of Americanism. Thus the Founding Fathers saw it, and thus, with God's help, it will continue to be."[41]

Notably, in this same period a "Christian amendment" to the Constitution was easily defeated. In line with Truman's vision, "Adhesional religious symbolism was what Congress wanted, not invidious distinctions among the God-fearing."[42] The same sentiment permeated the Supreme Court, which in 1931 used the word "Christian" to describe the nation. By 1952 it was using the term "religious": "We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being."[43] Mainstream church leaders, Catholic as well as Protestant, were already worried about the instrumentalization of religion and the way in which the American way of life was assigned the status of religion.[44] Concerns about the generalized religiosity and patriotic moralism that characterized America's revival were further exacerbated by Eisenhower's blunt 1954 declaration: "Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith—and I don't care what it is."[45]

With global aspirations accompanied by a determination not to be categorized in the same mold as the old European powers, the term "religion" was stressed rather than "Christianity" in order to deflect any such allegations. Christianity was a tainted concept in the developing world owing to its historical association with colonialism and imperialism, and indeed racism. Truman's religious front theoretically embraced Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, indeed, anyone who believed in God. Ambitious and impractical, and highlighting presidential ignorance of the deep doctrinal divides and ancient animosities that divided Christian from Christian, never mind from the rest of the world's religions, the core idea revealed an understanding that if America was to have global appeal, it could not rest solely on "the defense of Western civilisation and Christianity." In addition, as Eisenhower learned from Truman's failure to unite the world's Christian leaders in opposition to the Soviet Union, they were not necessarily reliable allies.

Many Protestant and Orthodox Christians were reluctant to be involved in anything in which they discerned the hand of the Vatican, while many more objected to Christianity being treated as simply another religion. Moreover, most American Christians remained wedded to "Christian exceptionalism," reflected in the slogan of the National Council of Churches (NSC), established in 1950 to confront communism, materialism, and secularism, "the building of a Christian America in a Christian world."[46] Eisenhower's strategy was to identify with a range of individual American Cold Warrior Christians such as Billy Graham, Fulton Sheen, and Cardinal Spellman at home, while his rhetoric for wider consumption identified the nation with a "Supreme Being."

Within the Eisenhower administration, religion was an operational component of both overt and covert enterprises from the beginning. Unsurprisingly the NSC had a program to support the Orthodox Church and encourage resistance and even subversion throughout the Soviet bloc. The NSC and the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), also

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looked to win support from Buddhist and Islamic leaders, whom they feared were susceptible to the influence of Chinese Communists. In the Middle East it was claimed that the Christian West and the Muslin East confronted a common global foe. To convey the sense of a "common moral front," the American embassy distributed a brochure entitled *The Voices of God*, intended to suggest a nexus between various faiths and American values. With a mosque on its cover, the brochure contained quotations from the Qur'an, Muslim poetry, Jesus Christ, Isaiah, Chinese philosophy, the Buddha, the Sanskrit Bhagavad Gita, Abraham Lincoln, and Mahatma Gandhi.[47] In addition and with far more threatening implications, the Department of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, JCS, and the CIA, looked to fund and generally support anti-Soviet Arab leaders. Notably, America's combined initiatives of encouraging conservative anti-communist religion and destroying the Left contributed to the rise of militant Islam throughout the region.[48]

Part of the legacy of the religious cold with its message that the godly were benign and the godless evil was, as French scholar Olivier Roy cogently observed, "Americans have never seen Islamism as an ideological enemy."[49] Indeed, Islam was deemed both a bulwark and a weapon against communism,[50] an attitude that was to have profound consequences with global repercussions because many U.S. diplomats viewed groups such as the Taliban as "messianic do-gooders—like born-again Christians in the American Bible Belt."[51] Recently released documents show that the religious cold war was a factor in the Ayatollah Khomeini's calculations. In November 1963 he sent a message to the U.S. government explaining he was not opposed to an American presence in Iran, necessary as a counterbalance to Soviet influence, notably stressing "his belief in close cooperation between Islam and other world religions, particularly Christendom."[52] When the Shah of Iran's regime was confronting collapse in 1979, Carter feared a communist takeover and potential Soviet influence far more than that of a "holy man."

Certainly Khomeini wasted no time in eliminating all the Marxist groups that had supported the struggle against the Shah, but his regime was deeply anti-Western and the United States found itself branded the "Great Satan." American failure to learn from the Iranian revolution was demonstrated following the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. National security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski saw an opportunity to export a composite ideology of nationalism and Islam to the Muslim majority Central Asian republics with a view to destroying the Soviet system.[53] Reagan's administration gave insufficient attention to how the religious can and will transgress the boundaries between the sacred and profane to assert their own political, social, and economic agendas. Worse still, because they were the most virulently anti-communist, American support gravitated toward right-wing, more radical forms of Islam, the consequences of which have far outlived the Cold War.[54]

Notably, at the end of the Eisenhower administration Reinhold Niebuhr declared that the West had been successfully inoculated against communism "by the historical dynamism of the Judeo-Christian tradition."[55] American Judeo-Christianity was a construct intended to reinforce the notion of a religious nation that was a model of tolerance and a force for good. In the late 1930s the anti-fascist left had combined with Protestant neo-orthodoxy

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to emphasize the shared heritage of Christianity and Judaism to counter anti-Semitism and fascism.[56] Mark Silk, who charted the rise of the term “Judeo-Christian,” noted how it operated as “a catchword” versus “fascist fellow travelers and anti-Semites.”[57] It was an innovation that emphasized similarities and continuities between the two monotheistic faiths to unite them in opposition to totalitarianism while also serving to distance Jews from their associations with communism and Christians from theirs with anti-Semitism. With the advent of the Cold War, Judeo-Christianity moved from being an anti-fascist to an anti-communist construct. It helped strengthen anti-communism in America when it was waning elsewhere and was further confirmation of how far the nation had moved from its prewar Protestant-centrism. The new emphasis on Judeo-Christianity meant one particular historical event, the creation of Israel, had portentous significance, becoming another contributory factor helping evangelicals to renegotiate and redefine their place in American political culture.

Repression

The Christian struggle against secularization, the bête noir of the church in the 19th century, became merged in the 20th with that against communism. The assumption that the churches would be natural allies against communism did not take into account the general tendency within Christianity since the 19th century to respond to the socioeconomic, cultural, political, and ideological challenges of modernity. It was a tendency given added urgency by the Second World War coming after the mass industrial slaughter of the Great War, followed by chronic economic depression and political instability. Mainstream church leaders paid serious attention to achieving a more just, equitable, and stable world, one in which secular power was disciplined by moral authority. Initially, they welcomed the access to the corridors of power facilitated by a shared religion-state anti-communism. However, Christian anti-communism proved very different from the secular variety.[58] Moreover, the varied, complex, and diverse range of American Christians held an array of often divergent views, including criticism of the capitalist system and the American way of life. Hence clerical status proved no defense against charges of communism. Indeed, the religious had to be policed to ensure they did not deviate from the Cold War consensus, built as it was on a religious foundation.

The Cold War consensus that Soviet Communism constituted a clear and present danger of subversion at home and military aggression from abroad helped justify the massive enlargement of the control and surveillance functions of the state. The broad interpretation accorded communism meant the targeting of liberal churchmen belonging largely to America’s mainstream Protestant churches, with tendencies toward supporting peace, opposing colonialism, and commitment to the ecumenical movement. As early as 1949, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) claimed that the churches were infiltrated, issuing a pamphlet, *100 Things You Should Know About Communism and*

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Religion.[59] Subsequently the Judiciary Committee named Christian ministers in its "list of most typical sponsors of front organizations," in a handbook it produced about the CPUSA, "What It Is: How It Works."[60]

An insufficiently appreciated aspect of McCarthyism, a top down process intended to enforce conformity to the Cold War consensus, was the impact on America's mainstream churches. In the immediate postwar period leaders from American industries, businesses, media, churches, and government identified "religious faith" as "one of the most potent arrows in the quiver of domestic security."[61] One outcome was "the deliberate and managed use of societal resources to stimulate a religious revival in the late 1940s and 1950s."[62] According to Jonathan Herzog, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was at the heart of, to use Herzog's metaphor, the spiritual-industrial-complex: "Fewer Americans brooded more about the dangers of domestic communism, and fewer benefitted more from the fears they helped create."[63]

Hoover decried Christian dissent as far worse than the secular variety, proclaiming that a communist success in the field of religion made "the comrades diabolically happy."[64] The FBI linked dissent with disloyalty, meaning, as one former FBI agent remarked, that "investigations of hundreds of perfectly harmless people continued on through the years."[65] There was a cacophony of charges against churchmen from CPUSA informers. The best known was Herbert Philbrick,[66] who warned the American public that "The Communists are After Your Church."[67] Overt surveillance of "suspect" clergy meant their parishioners questioned their loyalty. FBI files reveal how many churchgoers believed there was a communist campaign to subvert America's churches.

The most smeared and watched clergyman in America was the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., who typified the dilemma confronting social gospel adherents who condemned communism but also critiqued American capitalism and militarism, the brutality of the latter in the form of the Vietnam War drawing global condemnation. King lamented: "If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read Vietnam." In his final sermon, delivered from the pulpit of the National Cathedral in Washington shortly before his assassination, King indicted Vietnam as "one of the most unjust wars that has ever been fought in the history of the world."[68] The initial premise for investigating King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was communism, a charge widely used to damage and discredit civil rights activists. Cold War rhetoric contrasted America's free society with the Soviet slave society, an irony for African-Americans, descended from slaves and largely still denied the fruits of freedom, the struggle for which caused the FBI to identify them as national security threats. Notably, evangelical fundamentalism was a critical factor defining the social context of civil rights activism and discourse; it was also a source of tension. While the SCLC, with its mission of "redeeming the soul of America," manifested the social gospel imperative, the vast majority of African-American churches embraced conservative fundamentalist doctrines. The Cold War heightened divisions within African-American faith communities, with conservative evangelicals loyal to U.S. nationalism, while "a groundswell of activists emerged to oppose both internal colonialism and the external formations of U.S.

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imperialism."[69] Black Power further divided black church leaders, with many indicting it as unchristian and divisive while others defended it as compatible with Christianity. Exchanges in the 1970s between liberation theologians from Latin America and their black counterparts from the United States highlighted the impact of the religious cold war on the African-American community. As Sylvester Johnson incisively observed: "Black liberation theology embodied the critical inflection of Black radical politics."[70]

The CPUSA had long been a strident critic of American racism, meaning churchmen openly empathetic to the civil rights movement risked FBI surveillance. Concern about the way in which America treated its black population joined opposition to nuclear weapons and support for the "Soviet-inspired" peace movement as markers of subversion in the eyes of the FBI.[71] The FBI labeled suspect clergy "communist stooges" for knowingly or unknowingly helping the communist cause.[72] Such attitudes and activities were naturally damaging to social gospel adherents and the liberal theological tradition that promoted social activism and societal change and was critical of the inequalities resulting from capitalism. They also raised questions within the mainstream churches about their relationship with the state and about confronting oppression, poverty, and injustice when it derived from the policies of their own government. As Heather Warren has cogently observed: "By the late 1960s ecumenical Protestantism's consistent opposition to racism and war ironically made it a contributor to the dissolution of the national consensus that it had helped hold together for many years."[73]

The think tank revolution of the 1970s led to America's churches becoming embroiled in an ideological struggle. Several think tanks had explicitly conservative religious platforms that repudiated détente and revived an earlier Cold War worldview, along with its rhetoric. Institutes such as the Ethics and Public Policy Center, the Institute on Religion and Democracy, the Center on Religion and Society, and the James Madison Foundation indicted the World (WCC) and National (NCC) Councils of Churches, denominational peace programs, and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. All were regarded as influenced by liberation theology, supportive of Third World revolutionary movements, insufficiently critical of Soviet policies, and "soft" on communism. Progressive church leaders were targeted over foreign policy issues, especially U.S.-Soviet relations, the arms race, and Central America, by "front groups" within several denominations established by the Institute on Religion and Democracy. With an agenda of discrediting and defunding their targets, the conservative religious think tanks were themselves funded primarily from non-church sources, including major military contractors and well-known conservative foundations.[74]

In 1997, Alan Geyer, a widely published Christian ethicist and ecumenical leader, canon ethicist at the Washington National Cathedral, professor of political ethics and ecumenics at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, former director of international relations for the United Church of Christ, and former editor of the *Christian Century* (1968–1972), based at the Church Center for the United Nations, published *Ideology in America: Challenges to Faith*. In it he detailed an aggressive corporate business assault on the mainline churches, "largely indirect, covert and refracted through a variety of value-

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shaping institutions."[75] In the early Cold War the anti-communist crusade assumed a natural affinity with mainstream Christianity. The attacks on liberal mainstream churches in the last two decades of the Cold War highlighted the extent to which Cold War Christian conservatives made little distinction between liberalism and communism, with all that implied.

Roman Catholic Dissent

The identification of anti-communism with Americanism, a process that pre-dated the Cold War, helped reduce America's long-standing anti-Catholicism. The identification of Roman Catholics with anti-communism once the Cold War began ensured their group loyalty and patriotism was largely unquestioned. Roman Catholic prelates were among the most vociferous critics of Soviet Communism, especially highlighting "religious persecution." Papal indictments of communism reach back to before the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, but of particular relevance for the Cold War period was Pius XI's 1937 encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*, which instructed the faithful: "Communism is intrinsically wrong, and no one who would save Christian civilization may collaborate with it in any undertaking whatsoever."[76] The encyclical required some fudging for American consumption when the United States and Soviets were allied against the Nazis. However, its message and warnings about how communists "try perfidiously to worm their way" into even religious organizations resonated well with early Cold War policies and propaganda.

In the course of the 1960s, however, inequality, racism, war, and poverty, indeed a complex range of social and global ills, meant new priorities and a more nuanced approach to communism from the American Catholic hierarchy that reflected significant changes taking place in the Vatican. John XXIII sought to engage Moscow. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis, the pope not only repudiated the concept of a just war in a world armed with nuclear weapons, he drew a notable distinction between unchristian Marxist philosophy and the positive practices to which it could give rise.[77] Paul VI built on the *Vatican Ostpolitik* diplomacy initiated by John XXIII and addressed the plight of the developing world and unjust international structures.[78]

Conservative Catholics, such as William Buckley, and publications like the *National Review*, plus neoconservative Catholics, adhered to hard-line opposition to communism and the Soviet Union, retaining Cold War outlooks.[79] From their perspective, the Catholic hierarchy had succumbed to secular leftish views. Bishops who expressed socio-economic concerns about Latin American affairs found themselves under attack, with the National Conference of Catholic Bishops taken to task by the *National Review* and accused of sounding like Fidel Castro.[80]

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More than criticism was meted out to lower-ranking clergy, some former missionaries who had witnessed what they considered American-supported oppression of the poor in Central America, Africa, and elsewhere in the Global South. Those who adopted the tactics of civil disobedience faced the full brunt of the law, including imprisonment. Examples included the Berrigan brothers, priests Phil and Dan, who along with other Catholics became fugitives to maximize the political symbolism of their cause, resulting in a massive FBI operation and the eventual imprisonment of both priests.[81]

Rise of the Christian Right

The question of the emergence of the "religious right" is a matter of historiographical contention and likely to remain so for many years to come. Matthew Sutton persuasively argues that the anti-statist ideology at the core of the modern religious Right originated with the beginnings of fundamentalist political mobilization, which "developed among fundamentalists during the 1930s, parallel to and corresponding with the birth of modern liberalism."[82] The Cold War certainly helped open the door to the Christian right, which had far fewer qualms about U.S. foreign and domestic policies than their liberal mainstream counterparts. It also strengthened the fundamentalist tradition, more rigidly anti-communist than the evangelical and critical of the strategy of civil disobedience and the admixture of religion. Angela Lahr's research has shown how the early Cold War worldview induced by Christian anti-communist rhetoric reduced the distinctions separating secular and evangelical America. Conservative evangelicals were able to move from a tangential to a central subculture owing to the emergence of a new patriotic evangelicalism fostered by America's brand of absolutist anti-communism and the way in which it intensified strands of premillennialism. There were and are considerable disparities between different groupings of evangelicals.[83] However, the ubiquity of early Cold War anti-communism, underpinned by the threat of nuclear annihilation, allowed evangelicals of all stripes to construct a closer relational identity with the rest of America than had previously been the case, helping them assimilate into mainstream culture, which led to more political participation and subsequently a political power base.[84]

At the same time as it became increasingly evident that America's bipolar world model was to be maintained by military force, including nuclear weapons, a more critical attitude emerged among liberal Christians who had initially accepted, and indeed contributed to, the notion that communism was an ideological nemesis with the persuasive power of religious faith. Prior to the Vietnam War, most adhered to the Christian realist viewpoint articulated by Reinhold Niebuhr for the Second World War, that the use of force to restrain evil was defensible on the ground of Christian ethics as well as Christian caution. However, deep concern existed about the means in an era of weapons of mass destruction, plus concern about the impact on American society.[85]

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As Jason Stevens has argued, the prevailing perception that the Soviet Union was an absolute dictatorship dedicated to the suppression of freedom and faith, and to their substitution with slavery and a demonic political religion, justified a Christian defense of America's form of imperialism as a "lesser evil." However, while the rationale of committing an evil to prevent a greater evil might have eased some consciences, it was entirely rejected by neo-fundamentalist evangelicals, such as those affiliated with the National Association of Evangelicals, who in an effort to transcend past attitudes rejected by most American Christians looked to identify themselves with national values and interests. According to Stevens, the alignment of neo-fundamentalism with the nation's foundational myths and global aspirations brought acceptance and respectability from people and policymakers, especially those who found the concept of lesser evil, with its attendant implications of sin and guilt, less than acceptable. Salvation and regeneration were more appealing, particularly to civil religion adherents.[86]

American civil religion, of course, has from its very beginning in the 17th century been millennial. Millennialism, in all its varieties, stands at the centre of America's distinctive civil religion. The millennialism that subscribes to biblical visions of the final battle when good will triumph over evil gave rise to the mainstreaming of forms of rapture theology, along with the conviction that evil must be destroyed. The conviction that evil cannot be redeemed led in turn to a popular belief in "redemptive violence," an alarming concept to liberal Christians that further divided them from their conservative counterparts.

At leadership level by the 1960s, the bible-thumping, paranoid anti-communism, along with elements of bigotry and racism of the Old Christian Right gave way to a "secular sounding rights based discourse" carefully shaped to meet the needs of the New Christian Right.[87] The "boilerplate cold war paranoia" and virulent anti-communism crucial to consolidating the early Cold War consensus was seen as counterproductive at home and certainly abroad. Although members of today's Christian Right draw a distinct line between themselves and their predecessors, historian Heather Hendershot argues: "The old extremists' language was softened, but many of their underlying ideas were intact in what had become mainstream conservatism."[88]

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Conservative Christians

As the apocalypticism and anti-communism of the early Cold War eroded under the impact of first the civil rights movement and then the Vietnam War, the depiction of the East-West confrontation as between good and evil became less and less tenable among mainstream liberal Christians. Conservative Christians, however, remained staunchly anti-communist, fiercely patriotic, and wedded to a worldview in which the United States was benign and the evil Soviets still sought to subvert America and dominate the globe. Hence ant-statist and traditionally isolationist evangelicals became staunch internationalists committed to America's global manifest destiny and the redemptive power of Christianity.[89] By the 1960s they were the dominant force in the missionary movement, promoting the gospel of Jesus and most certainly not the social gospel favored by their liberal counterparts. Nonetheless, and despite traditional convictions that charity belonged in the domain of the church rather than the state, they encouraged humanitarian interventions on the part of the U.S. government, albeit a move reflecting interests as well as ideals.[90]

As with previous generations of Christian missionaries, however, good intentions did not necessarily lead to good outcomes. Religious freedom had been a key weapon in the propaganda arsenal of the early Cold War. Even as the Cold War waned, convinced that the freedom to evangelize was the core human right, because salvation was the basis of freedom and the surest way to alleviate suffering, U.S. evangelicals, along with the Reagan administration, supported the Rios Montt regime in Guatemala. Accepting his arguments about the need to remove the communist threat, U.S. evangelicals aided and abetted genocidal state violence.[91]

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Morality Play Politics

Realpolitik characterized the period following the Cuban Missile Crisis in both the White House and the mainstream churches. The promotion of religious liberty, a particularly potent religious cold war weapon given its virtual sacrosanct status in American tradition, declined precipitously as the Cuban Missile Crisis ushered in détente. Indeed, America itself was subject to charges of suppressing religious freedom in Vietnam. The Vietnam War caused major dislocation between the American government and liberal clergy. The Cold War policies of the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations were all criticized by liberal Christians, Catholic as well as Protestant, especially of course the nuclear arms race. This was a period of turmoil within mainstream Christianity, with Protestantism rocked by "secular theology" and Catholicism by Vatican II. The same period saw conservative Christians increasingly united by their anti-communism and ardent patriotism, especially the broad section emerging as the "Religious Right," evangelicals, fundamentalists, and conservative Catholics. While liberal Christians looked to promote understanding between East and West, concerned about the dangerous consequences represented by confrontation, not least, of course, nuclear annihilation, conservative Christians remained convinced that they were engaged in an irrepressible conflict against an irreconcilable foe.

John F. Kennedy moved away from the Cold War Manichaeanism of Truman and Eisenhower. Although Kennedy's election was a critical factor in diminishing American anti-Catholicism in public life, he played down the role of faith in policymaking, concerned not to seem to favor Roman Catholics. In order not to inflame anti-Catholic opposition that charged him with being a papal puppet, when Kennedy visited Paul VI he was received without an official state welcome, and rather than kneeling and kissing the pope's ring, the president shook his hand.[92] Distinctly different from the public piety paraded by his two predecessors, Kennedy presented faith as private and personal. Rather than the public promotion of civil religion, Kennedy adhered to the strict separation of religion and state, making it clear he did not regard religion as a Cold War weapon.[93] Not that Kennedy or, subsequently, presidents Johnson and Nixon abandoned moralistic rhetoric informed by religious references. And most certainly their Christian citizens from both left and right remained determined to influence U.S. foreign policy.

Lyndon B. Johnson was president at a time when new immigrants brought Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism to an America witnessing the rise of Eastern and New Age spiritualities, with a Supreme Court reinforcing the constitutional separation between church and state. Johnson followed Kennedy's ecumenical, non-denominational stance, although he was seemingly close to Billy Graham, by now almost a presidential prerequisite. Johnson confronted criticism from Christian liberals and Christian realists increasingly alarmed by American imperialism and militarism; however, he was able to rely on vocal clerical support from Cardinal Spellman as well as Billy Graham.

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Perhaps unsurprisingly, having been Eisenhower's vice president, Richard Nixon, raised a Quaker, fully understood the importance of civil religion and made far more frequent reference to religion than had Kennedy or Johnson. Indeed, he was the first president to use the term "God Bless America."[94] He also took regular counsel with Billy Graham, although the latter seemingly had reservations about the president's faith.[95] Nixon's commitment to détente, supported by the supreme realism of his secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, precluded, despite the increasing religiosity of America during his tenure, a return to the sort of religious cold war promoted by Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles. However, the religious cold war had attained a momentum, supported and buoyed by its conservative Christian adherents, which by now was beyond the control of its secular elite creators, as Gerald Ford discovered when he replaced Nixon following the latter's Watergate-prompted departure. Popular sympathy for Soviet Jews prevented from emigrating confronted Ford with the importance of Israel to premillennial prophecy as Conservative Christians relinquished anti-Semitism amid the re-emergence of Christian Zionism and opposed détente.

The growing political strength of American evangelicals was reflected in the election of Jimmy Carter, the nation's first born-again president. However, Carter continued détente, was committed to the separation of religion from politics, and not only rejected the civil religion notion of Americans being God's chosen people but, on the few occasions he invoked Scripture, used it to chastise rather than commend the American people.[96] Following the Iranian revolution, an event whose impact on conservative Christians remains to be fully determined, Carter used religious rhetoric to demonize Iran's new Islamic government, and he resumed the practice of his early-Cold War predecessors of using religion to distinguish the United States from the Soviet Union: "The Soviets are an atheistic nation; we have deep and fundamental religious beliefs."[97] It was Ronald Reagan, however, who proved most adept at galvanizing the legacy of the religious cold war, targeting conservative Christians for electoral support and securing office on a platform of tough talk with the Russians accompanied by a massive arms buildup. Reagan's rhetoric caused consternation for many mainstream Christian leaders. Addressing the Catholic bishops' conference shortly after Reagan's election, Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit lamented:

> We've just elected a President who has stated his conviction that we can have superiority in nuclear weapons, an utter impossibility. We have a Vice-President who has clearly stated that one side could win a nuclear war and that we must be prepared to fight one and to win it. When we have that kind of thinking going on, it seems to me we are getting ever more close to the day when we will wage that nuclear war and it will be the war that will end the world as we know it.[98]

Reagan resurrected the Truman-Eisenhower morality play presentation of the Cold War as a Manichaean conflict. He emulated Eisenhower in recognizing the electoral importance of Christian voters. Billy Graham had advised Eisenhower to run for the presidency, telling him: "The Christian people of America will not sit idly by in 1952. They are going to vote as a bloc for the man with the strongest moral and spiritual platform,

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regardless of his views on other matters. I believe we can hold the balance of power."[99] Reagan emulated Truman in promoting U.S.-Vatican relations and managed, as Truman had not, to establish full diplomatic relations between the two in 1984. Prior to this, in 1982, John Paul II had, however inadvertently, legitimized deterrence, and hence U.S. nuclear strategy, when he stated it to be a "morally acceptable" step toward disarmament. The pope's critical stance toward liberation theology, seen as representing a force opposed to the policies of key U.S. allies in Latin America, was also interpreted as showing favor to the United States.

In popular mythology, the born-again president partnered with the Polish pope to bring down the Soviet bloc. The scholarly consensus is that the collapse of the Soviet bloc had more to do with internal rather than external pressures.[100] Nonetheless, that Reagan, like Truman and Eisenhower, recognized religion as the major area of vulnerability for the Soviets was illustrated by his response to the pope's visit to Poland: "I have had a feeling . . . that religion might very well turn out to be the Soviets' Achilles' heel."[101] That pope and president collaborated against the Soviets was strongly suggested by investigative journalist Carl Bernstein along with the dean of Vatican journalists Marco Politi, particularly with regard to supporting Solidarity.[102] Certainly John Paul II shared the American interest in supporting human rights in Poland, yet he and the Polish bishops opposed America's call for economic sanctions. Moreover, his 1987 encyclical, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, accused both East and West of betraying "humanity's legitimate expectations."[103] Notably, the pope echoed sentiments expressed by Reinhold Niebuhr at the time of the Vietnam War, when Niebuhr had questioned whether the two superpowers were radically different and wondered if they had not each revealed "similar imperialist impulses."[104] Two decades later John Paul II wrote "Each of the two blocs harbors in its own way a tendency toward imperialism, as it is usually called, or towards forms of neo-colonialism." The United States had long been concerned to distinguish what it claimed was benign intervention in the developing world from old Europe's exploitative imperial practices. To be put in the same framework as the S.U. was unthinkable and unleashed the wrath of secular and Christian conservatives alike for daring to imply "moral equivalence."

An absolute verity of the Christian right is that American influence is a force for good in the world, reinforced by traditional conceits, all of which were forefronted during the Cold War, such as the American Commonwealth as the new Israel, a Chosen People, a new promised land, a redeemer nation. All helped sanction territorial expansion, moralistic foreign policies, cultural imperialism, and unwarranted presumptions of innocence in world conflicts. All were verified in the eyes of the Christian Right when the Soviet bloc disintegrated, which they heralded as the "triumph" of God's country over the godless Soviets and used to consolidate the link between Christian superiority and American exceptionalism, for them an essential feature of national identity. The process served to reinforce the narrative of destiny and mission, a crucial rhetorical device for American leaders, and to affirm the victory of the American model of modernity, critical to

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the global dominance of capitalism over socialism. It also sanctioned the extension of America's religious marketplace, freed from the taint of imperialism and endowed with a reinvigorated belief in a universal mission.[105] Above all, it established conservative Christianity as the ascendant force in America's religious landscape.

Enemies, Violence, and Salvation

States, large and small, have traditionally mobilized their religious resources to legitimize their own policies while demonizing those of their enemies. However, the atavistic representation of what was in essence a clash of two rival models of modernity as a life and death struggle between the forces of good and evil, a struggle for the soul of the world, had profound consequences for America and the international community. These were exponentially exacerbated by the complex dynamics of America's domestic religious landscape, which was itself irrevocably changed. George Kennan, reputed as the "father of containment," after watching the unfolding Cold War under Truman and Eisenhower, poignantly appealed:

> Let us not repeat the mistake of believing that either good or evil is total. Let us beware, in future, of wholly condemning an entire people and wholly exculpating others. Let us remember that the great moral issues, on which civilization is going to stand or fall, cut across all military and ideological borders, across peoples, classes, and regimes—across, in fact, the make-up of the individual himself. No other people, as a whole, is entirely our enemy. No people at all—not even ourselves—is entirely our friend.[106]

The religious cold war ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition to a still-unfolding legacy, it highlighted worrying traits in American religion that still persist, not least the pursuit of salvation in history and the seeming faith that redemptive violence can save the world.[107]

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Review of the Literature

Today it is generally recognized that Cold War policies cannot be understood simply in terms of “realism,” power politics, and geopolitical considerations, especially in America, where ideology, based on and informed by religious beliefs and values, was crucial in shaping both perceptions of and responses to the Soviet Union. However, Cold War scholars paid scant attention to religion prior to the turn of the century. The focus on Cold War culture in the 1990s, following the unpredicted and relatively peaceful disintegration of the Soviet bloc, led to some consideration of religion in combination with culture.[108] An area in which the religious dimension of not simply the Cold War but American history as a whole was effectively explored was American nationalism. The classic text is, of course, by Ernest Lee Tuveson, who documented the numerous texts positing America as a “redeemer nation.” Published in 1968, Tuveson’s *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role*, details the extent to which America’s perception of itself as a “Chosen Nation” sanctioned territorial expansion, moralistic foreign policies, cultural imperialism, and unwarranted presumptions of innocence in world conflicts.[109] More recently, with more attention now accorded to religion in American history,[110] further excellent works have appeared examining American nationalism’s affinity with Christianity, which made American civil religion a powerful force that could effectively draw on national myths that resonated with a Manichaean presentation of the Cold War.[111]

Unsurprisingly, church people were well aware of the “religious cold war” as it unfolded. For example, one of the 20th century’s most influential Protestant theologians and an important intellectual voice, Karl Barth, warned that churches had no occasion to take sides in the East-West conflict. Arguing that the Cold War was about power and ideology, Barth advised the community of Jesus Christ to seek “another, third way of its own.”[112]

They were also acutely conscious of the complex implications and consequences of religion’s role and the compelling questions it raised. A ground-breaking historical study that also tackled the political implications was Alan Geyer’s *Christianity and the Superpowers: Religion, Politics and History in US-USSR Relations*. It was published in 1990 in cooperation with the Churches’ Center for Theology and Public Policy, a national and ecumenical research center of which Geyer had served as the founding executive director for a decade (1977–1987). Geyer articulated concern about what he perceived as disturbing trends by conservative Christians to manipulate Cold War history.[113] Related concerns to those expressed by Geyer were more recently articulated by politico-activist and author Susan George.[114] Geyer’s book was written at a time when momentous changes were taking place in the Soviet bloc and openly declared an interest in seeking to provide a comprehensive grasp of Russian history and culture as a way for Americans better to understand the Soviet Union, most particularly the parallelism of their religious origins and messianism.[115]

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Geyer's penetrating analysis did not, notably, garner the same attention bestowed on the journalistic efforts of Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi, who added a conspiratorial embellishment to the popular perception that born-again president Ronald Reagan and Polish Pope John Paul II had contributed to the disintegration of the Soviet bloc.[116] At the same time, an article, "Truman's Holy Alliance: The President, the Pope and the Origins of the Cold War," suggested that U.S.-Vatican relations also contributed to the escalation of the Cold War.[117] The latter had very little impact beyond marking direct scholarly interest in the religious dimension of the Cold War. However, by the end of the decade, not only were more articles being published about the religious dimension of the Cold War,[118] but a pioneering conference took place in 2000 that brought together international scholars from a range of countries and disciplines with the sole purpose of tackling the question of "Religion and the Cold War." The result was a pioneering collection of papers published in 2003 that established the field as worthy of serious scholarly attention.[119] The collected scholarship confirmed that there was a religious dimension to the Cold War and that it mattered. The contributions were critical in opening up the field. Ten years later another volume devoted to the subject area appeared.[120] The preface suggested that the religious dimension could now be viewed as a subgenre of Cold War studies.

The new volume, edited by Philip E. Muehlenbeck, built on and extended the scope of the first, bringing in a range of new scholarship addressing non-Christian religions and a wider geographical spread, demonstrating that the field was now well established and attracting new scholars. However, Muehlenbeck expressed reservations about some scholars who, he felt, overemphasized the importance of religion. Important contributions to the field, based on impeccable research, put forward new interpretations of Cold War history that required the personal faith of key policymakers be taken into consideration in assessing crucial Cold War decisions. Elizabeth Edwards Spalding argued that Cold War origins, early decisions, and policies could not be satisfactorily explained without reference to religion.[121] William Inboden accorded religion significant weight as a causal factor, stating that the various arguments previously put forward to explain the origins of the Cold War were insufficient because "they ignore God."[122]

Jonathan P. Herzog focused less on personal faith and more on institutions in *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War*.[123] Herzog detailed the construction and promotion of America's postwar religious revival by societal leaders from business, government, media, Hollywood, and the military, as well as the church. Another important contribution came from a global research project involving ecumenical churchmen and Cold War scholars, *Christian World Community and the Cold War*, edited by Julius Filo.[124] The same research project gave rise to an interesting oral history contribution, "The Cold War Challenge to the Christian Churches," in which church people converse together in front of the camera about their respective Cold War experiences.[125]

Notably, religion was treated very differently in two major new collections of Cold War scholarship. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, a three-volume affair published in 2010, reverted to the practice of addressing religion in conjunction with culture.[126] In

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contrast, the more comprehensive *Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, published in 2013, devoted a full chapter specifically to "The Religious Cold War."[127] Arguments that there was a "religious cold war," albeit from authors differing on precisely what the term means, were now appearing,[128] as were discernible differences between those who saw personal piety as playing a role in Cold War policies and those whose interpretations tended toward suggesting the instrumentalization of religion for political purposes.[129]

As new scholars enter the field and new archival evidence is explored, the subject will yield even more insights into the Cold War era. Given that the Cold War period remains one of bitterly contested interpretations, it is almost inevitable that the same will be true of religion and the Cold War. Given the nature of religion, perhaps even more so.

Further Reading

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