Against the World: International Protestantism and the Ecumenical Movement
between Secularization and Politics, 1900-1952

Justin Reynolds

Abstract

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The ecumenical movement was the major international expression of organized Protestantism in

the first half of the twentieth-century. This dissertation reconstructs the intellectual origins of the

movement and its principal institutions, showing how ecumenical ideas and practices were

transformed in response to geopolitical cataclysms, such as World War I, the collapse of

European order in the 1930s, the Cold War, and decolonization, that divided international

Protestant and Orthodox elites in the North Atlantic and Asia. Focusing on church leaders and

lay intellectuals like John Mott, Joseph Oldham, Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, Willem A. Visser't

Hooft, John Foster Dulles, and M. M. Thomas, the project shows how a new relation between

Christian faith and politics emerged from Protestant-led efforts to internationalize religious

authority.

Seeking to manifest world unity through common faith, ecumenists successively redefined the

meaning of Christianity in their efforts to secure international consensus on the public role of the

church among a politically polyglot constituency that included liberals, conservatives,

communists, and fascists. This dissertation argues that the ecumenical movement went through

three stages between 1900 and 1952: the first oriented around building the Kingdom of God on

earth (1900-1925), the second seeking the realize the worldwide church as the basis of universal

community (1930-1950), and the third mobilizing Christians for political revolution (1946-

1952). The focus of the dissertation – chapters 2 through 5 – concerns the rise and decline of the ecumenical project to realize the church, which I argue was the first systematic and internationally successfully effort to articulate "ecumenicity" as a form of Christian pluralism. I show how this project was grounded in a missionary theology of anti-secularism that attributed a breakdown of social and international order to modern civilization's repudiation of God. First defined at a conference of the International Missionary Conference in 1928 as a new "system of life and thought" that had displaced other religions as Christianity's chief global rival, "secularism" identified an enemy that Allied and German Protestants, estranged since World War I, could unite in opposing. Mobilizing dialectical theology against the "totalitarian" claims of the state and the cogito alike, ecumenical anti-secularists jettisoned the historicist theological liberalism on which earlier forms of Protestant internationalism was based. In the 1930s, organizations like the Universal Christian Council of Life and Work and the World Council of Churches institutionalized theological dialogue as a mode of submission to God's sovereignty; for the architects of these bodies, Christian faith was the only possible basis of community life in an age of global fracture. A strategy of international consolidation that ascribed political polarization to spiritual alienation, the ascendant anti-secularism of the 1930s did not anathematize the Nazi-sympathizing Reich church but sought to incorporate it into a world Christian community prioritizing the subordination of "political" to religious loyalties.

After 1948, however, the ecumenical program to realize the church collapsed as its leaders struggled to surmount the ideological divisions of the Cold War. While Eastern European church leaders attacked the World Council as a mask for Western imperialism, critics in the West attacked the Council as an agent or stooge of world Communism. To escape the ideological

impasse of East and West, the movement turned to the Third World in search of a new basis of global Christian unity. Reinventing the ecumenical project in the postwar world, a younger generation of theologians from the global South argued that the universal fellowship of the church would be actualized not by overcoming politics, but by specifying political commitments in solidarity with the liberation struggles of the poor, the non-white, and the colonized. In this paradoxical denouement, those struggling to surmount internal political divisions embraced political action as the essential expression of religious faith, and Christianity, long declared to be the basis of social order, came to be seen as its revolutionary solvent. By locating the ecumenical movement within a history of the ideas that made its institutional functioning possible, this project breaks from common narratives that lodge the movement within trajectories of secularization that rely on problematic attempts to adjudicate the boundaries between theological and non-theological thought and practice.

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Acknowledgements

It is more than conventionally appropriate that the writing of this dissertation should conclude with an occasion for gratitude. I have found the effort to write an original piece of scholarship an experience of dependence on others in the best senses, and friends, family, and colleagues have sustained me in countless ways over the course of research and writing. It is hard to know where to begin or where to end these acknowledgments.

My first thanks go to Samuel Moyn. The thrill of reading his scholarship has powered my attempts at intellectual production since before I entered graduate school at Columbia. From that time onward he has been unfailingly generous with his support, assistance, and criticisms; whatever I sent him he read with stunning speed, his feedback always fastening on the essential points, as a rule before I saw them. He has shown me how the profession of the mind and the life of the mind might include one another; he models both. Susan Pedersen joined my committee at a late stage; I hope she did not come to regret the decision. Her criticisms of an earlier collection of chapters pushed me to chart a new and better course for the project. In the final months, her trenchant feedback was a brace and an inspiration at once, and from her I am still learning how to think about international history. Casey Blake has supported my work since the beginning of graduate school and modeled a style of careful, penetrating thought that always made ideas more than the grip I had on them. I have benefited greatly from Wayne Proudfoot's wide and deep knowledge of the history of Protestant thought, and his responses to the project opened up ways of thinking about its claims I had not suspected. Andrew Preston has been the project's most incisively critical reader; liberal with his encouragement and support, he has been still more so in his queries and pushback.

Introduction

When delegates from 147 Protestant and Orthodox churches gathered for the first Assembly of
the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, *Time* magazine called it the "greatest
church meeting since the Reformation."[1] According to its General Secretary, the Dutch
theologian W. A. Visser't Hooft, the Council would furnish churches not only in the West but
also in Asia, Africa, and South America with an organ for proclaiming "the mind of Christ with
regard to the great spiritual, social, and political problems of our time."[2] Today, the World
Council is largely forgotten, and its architects' vision of an "ecumenical" fellowship, uniting
Christians throughout "inhabitable earth" (*oikoumene*), has been marginalized in a global
landscape of disaggregated and competing Christianities. Drawing on archival research in the
United States, Europe, and India, this dissertation reconstructs three phases of the Protestant-led
ecumenical movement between 1900 and 1952. This history illuminates a transformation in the
relation between religion and politics that occurred within one of the 20th century's least
understood utopian projects: the transformation of Christianity from a western religion to a
global faith that would unite humanity across loyalties of nation, race, empire, and sect.

The chapters that follow will reintroduce an international cast of characters – including
American Protestants such as Reinhold Niebuhr and John Foster Dulles and Europeans such as
the Anglican Archbishop William Temple, the missionary statesman Joseph Oldham, and the

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[1] "No Pentecost." *Time*, no. 11 (September 13, 1948), 52.

[2] Willem A. Visser't Hooft, "The Significance of the World Council of Churches," in *Man's Disorder and God's Design: The Amsterdam Assembly Series,* v. 1 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 178-9.

Swiss dialectical theologian Emil Brunner – that have generally been treated from the perspectives of national or transatlantic historiographies. They also introduce a group of ecumenists from Eastern Europe – such as the Czech theologian Josef Hromadka and the Reformed Hungarian Bishop Alfred Bereczky – and Asia – including the Indian Mar Thomite theologian M. M. Thomas, and the Chinese pastor and church leader T.C. Chao – who will be less familiar to scholars of North Atlantic Protestantism. Viewed as participants in the ecumenical movement, this ensemble helps us to develop a new understanding of the relation between Christianity and modernity, accessible only once we assume the global perspective the ecumenical movement demands.

In this dissertation we will recover the *oikoumene* – a global discursive space defined by concepts of Christian mission, organized by international institutions, and peopled by the greater portion of the intellectual and clerical leadership of non-Roman Christendom – as the site of one of Christianity's most significant 20th-century trajectories. A Greek term originally used to denote the extent of the "habitable earth," *oikoumene* acquired a significance within the ambit of Christianity's universalizing imagination during the 1st century CE.[3] According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus left his disciples with the command that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world [*oikoumene*] for a witness to the nations." The "Ecumenical Councils" of Nicaea (325 CE), Constantinople (381 CE), Ephesus (431 CE), and Chalcedon (451) assumed the name because they convened bishops throughout the *oikoumene* (at the time connoting the Mediterranean world) to define heresies and establish orthodox doctrine concerning the nature of

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[3] See W. A. Visser't Hooft, *The Meaning of Ecumenical* (London: SCM Press, 1953); "Ecumene" and "Ecumenical Movement" in *Religion Past and Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religions,* vol. 6, eds Hans Dieter Betz et al. (Boston: Brill, 2008), 286-304.

Christ, the relations of the Trinity, and the other matters dividing the early church. These two meanings – one secular, denoting a geographical space, the other ecclesiastical, pertaining to the church as a whole – established a semantic field that Protestants, from the Reformation to the late 19th century, had very little use for. It was only with the late 19th century emergence of what historians Michael Geyer and Charles Bright have called the "global condition" – characterized by an acceleration of social, economic, cultural, and political processes shaping the world into a materially integrated totality – that Protestants first began to seek "ecumenical unity" as an expression of religious belief and a manifestation of religious practice.[4] The history of their efforts is the subject of this dissertation.

If global integration made the modern ecumenical project conceivable, global disintegration – evinced in the rise of nationalism, world war, the Russian Revolution, and struggles between colonizers and colonized – made it imperative. We will see that, notwithstanding a few furtive appearances of the term ecumenical in the late 19th century, it was only following World War I, in an interwar a period of "deglobalization" characterized by convulsive wars to secure national or ethnic autonomy in the face of global integration, that programs to realize the "ecumenical" unity of the church first mobilized wide constituencies.[5] Official historiographies of the movement, examined in more detail below, narrate its course in this period as a story of Christian

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[4] Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, "World History in a Global Age" *The American Historical Review*, vol 100, 4 (1995), 1034-1060. Here I am drawing on a broader literature that identifies the mid- to late 19th century as a period that witnessed the emergence of a new kind of global consciousness and material integration. See also Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the 19th Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Christopher Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Press, 2004); Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[5] For the phenomenon of deglobalization in this period, see Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* trns Dona Geyer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

fellowship overcoming the centrifugal pulls of nationalism, racial chauvinism, and class division. In fact, the ecumenical movement did not triumph over these fracturing dynamics but was transformed by them. In particular, the two crises of World War I (1914-1918) and the early Cold War (1946-1950) so bitterly divided the advocates of world Christian unity that they were compelled to dramatically re-define the meaning and practices of Christianity in their efforts to reconstitute coherence shattered by internecine conflict. For ecumenism's architects, the universal truth of the Christian faith could only be apprehended through a consensus of churches representing "all nations, races, and classes." Ecumenical Christianity was an effort to comprehend and embody that consensus as it was worked out by a constituency including Christians from colonized and colonizer nations whose political allegiances ran the gamut from liberalism to conservatism and from fascism to communism. While most research programs have drawn the fault lines of twentieth-century history around such political groups, our concern is with the religious project that sought to define a common faith shared by these groups and the enemies against which such a solidarity – capacious and unstable as it was – could cohere.

This dissertation argues that efforts to realize the "ecumenical" unity of the church went through three stages between 1900 and 1952. Before 1914, Protestants mobilized internationally around a campaign to realize the "Kingdom of God" on earth. This vision, rooted in a tradition of liberal theology that emphasized the imminence of God, sought to "Christianize" the social order at home and extend Christianity abroad through missionary activities. But this program collapsed as a result of World War I, when Allied and German Protestants clashed over the practical initiatives necessary to bring it about: while Allied church leaders saw Wilsonian internationalism and the League of Nations as the first fruits of the Kingdom, German

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Protestants perceived these institutions as fronts of Anglo-Saxon imperialism. Reconstituting

Christian unity in a period of international reconciliation between 1928 and 1933, church leaders

identified "secularism," a world-wide "system of life and thought" constituted by man's efforts

to secure his autonomy from God's rule, as a new common enemy against which Christians

could mobilize. In the 1930s and 1940s, anti-secularism furnished the foundation of the first self-

consciously ecumenical movement, which sought to realize not the Kingdom but the "church," a

global public constituted by God's address and man's obedient response. Inspired by dialectical

theology, this ecumenical project was institutionalized in bodies such as the World Council of

Churches and organized around theological dialogue, a practice seeking to disrupt the doctrinal

formulations that had imprisoned the Gospel in national and confessional traditions in order to

make it speak with persuasive power to a wider world – one globally interconnected but, due to

its lack of a common spiritual basis, in a state of permanent crisis. After 1948, the ecumenical

program to realize the church collapsed as its leaders struggled to surmount the ideological

divisions of the Cold War. While Eastern European church leaders attacked the World Council

as a mask for Western imperialism, critics in the West attacked the Council as an agent or stooge

of world Communism. To escape the ideological impasse of East and West, the movement

turned to the Third World in search of a new basis of global Christian unity. A third ecumenical

project was born when a younger generation of movement activists – led by theologians from the

global South – argued that the universal fellowship of the church could be actualized, not by

overcoming politics, but by specifying political commitments in solidarity with the liberation

struggles of the poor, the non-white, and the colonized. In this paradoxical denouement, a long

struggle to surmount internal political divisions embraced political action as its essential

expression, and Christianity, long declared to be the basis of social order, came to be seen as its revolutionary solvent.

I suggest in the remainder of this introduction that this narrative offers an account of Christianity's relation with twentieth-century politics that challenges dominant historiographies in both the secular academy and church scholarship. Ecumenical history does not fit into the paradigm, common in recent studies of the movement, that sees ecumenism as a last gasp of Protestant establishment in the West, awaiting on the onset of a process of secularization that would overtake it even while appropriating concepts and ideals from originally theological contexts. Nor does it fit into existing research programs that challenge secularization, stressing the resilience of religion in the modern world and, in the case of Christianity, its remarkable proliferation in non-Western societies. Rather, ecumenical history recounts transformations in the ideas and practices of a community imbricated in the politics its vision of collective life sought to overcome. My narrative highlights how ecumenical leaders and organizations responded to the problem of internal conflict generated by their very success in mobilizing a global constituency that included clerics, lay leaders, and theologians on opposites sides of the early 20th century's major political struggles. Neither a movement of the political right nor the left, ecumenism was constituted on a global level by its efforts to evade political identification in the name of transcendent truth. The understanding of politics that emerged from this effort by the 1950s suggests a new way of conceiving Christianity's relation to the discursive space of the secular public sphere.

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For many years, insiders, church historians and theologians with some affiliation to ecumenical institutions, wrote the history of the ecumenical movement. This body of literature has tended to offer a "milestone" approach to the past, chronicling a long story of unfolding unity reaching back to the early 19th century – or in some cases, such as the World Council's three-volume official history of the movement – to the Reformation.[6] Such accounts focus on the accomplishments of magnetic visionaries and hard-working organizers and tend to see conferences – large "representative" gatherings of international Protestant and Orthodox leaders – as the markers of epochs in church history. Serving the imperative of institutional consolidation, this historiography fails to engage with the key narratives that scholars in the wider academy have used to interpret the history of western modernity, including industrialization, the rise of nation states, the ideological confrontation of left and right, the rise and crisis of European colonialism – or the dominant narrative applied to religion's fate in the modern age, secularization.[7] The production of teleological institutional histories has thus ensured the compartmentalization and irrelevance of the ecumenical project to the larger visions of European, American, and imperial history.

In recent years, this isolation has been eroded. Driven by a resurgent interest in religion as a field of historical inquiry, ecumenical ideas, institutions, and personalities have been the subject of an

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[6] *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1571-1948* vol. 1 eds. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1948). The literature produced by ecumenical advocates is vast. Some examples further examples include William Richey. *Ecumenical Foundations; a History of the International Missionary Council and Its Nineteenth Century Background* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1952) and Thomas Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement: An Introductory History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

[7] For an overview of these dominant narratives of 20th-century history, see Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *The American Historical Review*, vol 105, 3 (200) 807-831, 808.

expanding literature, especially among scholars of Atlantic and international history. Rather than constituting a scholarly eco-system unto itself, the ecumenical movement is at the center of contemporary debates over a range of questions concerning the meaning of the secular, revisions and criticisms of the secularization thesis, and the place of religion in the modern world; such debates cut across disciplinary boundaries with ramifications in the wider public. The significance of the movement – the greatest global projection of Christianity in the first half of the 20th century – could not have higher stakes. And yet, most current accounts fold the movement into one of two competing narratives, both of which fail to reckon with the meanings that ecumenists *themselves* invested in the concept of the ecumenical. Here I will describe these two narratives before outlining my own historiographical orientation, which locates the movement's emergence within a story of Christian encounters with "politics" shaped by Protestant-led efforts to cultivate international and interdenominational global unity. While this approach is necessary to understand the aims and aspirations that forged the *oikoumene*, it also suggests a larger analytical program for how scholars might approach "religion" as a historical phenomenon that unsettles the categories of historical analysis itself.

Most contemporary scholars in the secular academy use the term "ecumenical" interchangeably with "liberal" as a grab bag for various impulses that pushed Protestants down the road to secularization: an enlightened (if patronizing) respect for other religions, an "accommodation" with modern science, including Darwinian evolution, and a dominating concern with the practical, worldly application of Christian teaching as opposed to the individual's personal relationship with God. Characteristic of this approach is the most ambitious attempt to date to reckon with the legacy of ecumenical Protestantism, David Hollinger's *After Cloven Tongues of*

Fire. Though it focuses on American Protestants, Hollinger's account expresses common assumptions about the basic intellectual orientation of the international ecumenical movement as a whole.[8] His Protestants "put more and more energy into transdenominational projects and shifted the emphasis of their foreign missions from conversion to social service, welcoming syncretistic religions into the Body of Christ." If evangelical Protestants were "focused vertically, one might say, on the individual believer's relation to the Divine," ecumenists oriented their faith "horizontally," and "[h]ence… became great organizers, institution builders, and social reformers, searching for ways to enact what they understood to be Christian ideals within worldly affiliations and through their instrumentality."[9] In this view, ecumenists walked the road to Weberian disenchantment; their movement was "a commodious half-way house to what for lack of a better term we may call post-Protestant secularism."[10] Sometimes, the narrative is presented as a case of Christianity succumbing to its internal contradictions. Andrew Preston, for instance, has argued that there was a "fatal flaw embedded within the [ecumenical] Protestant worldview: the contradiction between ecumenical tolerance and Christian evangelism."[11] But it's as easy to see the secularization of Protestant values as the fulfillment of

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[8] For approaches to the ecumenical movement in general that see it as an expression of "liberal Protestantism," see David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment*. (New York: Cambridge University Press 2008); and John Stuart, "Empire, Mission, Ecumenism, and Human Rights," *Church History* 83.1 (March 2014) 110-134. Mark T. Edwards' *The Right of the Protestant Left: God's Totalitarianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012) emphasizes the "conservative" elements of the "participator democratic" strains in ecumenical social thought, but generally characterizes ecumenist's as political and theological "liberals."

[9] David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues*, xi.

[10] Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues*, 46.

[11] Andrew Preston, "Peripheral Visions: American mainline Protestants and the global Cold War" *Cold War History* 13:1 (2013), Cold War History 13:1 (2013): 109-130. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2012.707648. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2012.707648, 10.

Christ's world-redeeming promise, a view more amicable to scholars like John Nurser, author of

a celebratory work on the role of the World Council of Churches, in securing the passage of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[12] Both variations on the story have the air of

inevitability. Ecumenists in their openness to Enlightenment and progress were bound to become

"post-Protestants," concealing or naturalizing theological ethics in philosophical liberalism or in

campaigns for world peace, international justice, and universal human rights.[13]

In contrast to the secularization narrative embraced by many professional historians, scholars

focused on the phenomenon of "global Christianity" offer a different perspective. This literature,

which highlights the proliferation of Christian communities and identities especially in the non-

western world, has been dominated by church historians, but many of its core concerns resonate

with the work of critical theorists and anthropologists focused on exposing the imperial

implications of secularization theory.[14] A common point is to recover the irreducible particularity

of religious practice and its resistance to Western models of modernization predicting its decline.

While the secular critics of secularization have not yet examined ecumenism in much detail, their

Christian counterparts in this area have presented the ecumenical movement as a stage in

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[12] John Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations: The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005).

[13] Mackenzie Bok's recent work ("To the Mountaintop Again: The Early Rawls and Post-Protestant Ethics in Postwar America" *Modern Intellectual History* (August 2015), 1-33) has placed the political philosopher John Rawls in this Post-Protestant tradition. I address Bok's work in detail in the Conclusion.

[14] Leading critical theorists of the secular, such as Talal Asad (*Formations of the Secular : Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003)), and Tomoko Masuzawa (*The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)), and Gil Anidjar ("Secularism" *Critical Inquiry* 33, 1 (2006), 52-77) have mostly stressed the Christian theological origins of secularism as a technology of state power and secularization theory as scientific auxiliary of western colonialism. To this extent they belong too to the tradition of secularization theorists discussed in the section above. Their attention to religions' resistance to secular reason focuses on non-Christian cases, particularly Islam. But a parallel logic informs the work of church scholars studying global Christianity as a non-Western phenomenon.

Christianity's extrication from European imperialism – a liberation they celebrate. In these works, the ecumenical movement's early promotion of "indigenous" Christianities in Africa, Asia, and South America was a harbinger of things to come. The declining influence of the establishment or mainline Protestant elites who pioneered ecumenical project is secondary; what is important is the miraculous adaptability Christianity has shown as a cultural program in non-western contexts.[15] In the 1990s, for instance, Anton Wessels introduced the term "inculturation" to describe the process by which Christianity has both reshaped itself and other societies as it has moved across cultural and political boundaries.[16] Working in vein similar to Wessels, the Scottish historian Andrew Walls has argued that the very concept of territorial Christianity (found in constructs of "Christendom" or the "Christian nation") owes nothing to Christianity as such but should be viewed as the result of the way in which tribal peoples of northern Europe in the first centuries CE jiggered the faith to fit with their own homogenous, highly militarized societies.[17] Much of this work has been closely linked with the movement of contextual theology[18] and, more generally, theological orientations that have celebrated cultural pluralism among Christians and dialogue between Christianity and other faiths. From such points of view, the demise of "Christendom" and Euro-centrism has opened up onto a bright era of global

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[15] The major statement of this point of view is Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity.* 2nd Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also the work of Andrew Walls, particularly the essays in *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith.* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002) and David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

[16] Anton Wessels, *Europe: Was It Ever Really Christian? The Interaction between Gospel and Culture.* Trns. John Bowdon (London: SCM Press, 1994).

[17] Walls, "Christianity in the Non-Christian World" in *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 27-48.

[18] S. B. Bevans, *Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002) offers a good description of the approach. He defines contextual theology as "A way of doing theology in which one takes into account: the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture in which one is theologising; and social change in that culture." (Bevans, 1).

Christianity. As these scholars contend, a world where Christianity is no longer a predominately Western religion marks the progress of a form of Christian universalism, premised not on the proselytization of non-Christian others or the spread of "Christian civilization," but on the creative processes of appropriation and transformation of the faith that ecumenists were the first to attempt to realize.

Whether it focuses on the failure or success of Christianity as a cultural program, scholarship on the ecumenical movement overlooks what the term "ecumenical" meant to those Protestants and Orthodox missionaries, clerics, lay activists, and theologians who invested it which such significance in the mid-20th century. To them, as we will see, ecumenism was not a path to "secularism" but a strategy for opposing it. But nor does the ecumenical movement accord with the story of Christianity's robust global proliferation. The "centers of the church's universality," as the Kenyan scholar John Mbiti has put it, may now be in "Kinshasa, Buenos Aires, Addis Ababa, and Manila," but the faith practiced there is not the one that ecumenists envisioned or wanted.[19] Today, indeed, the World Council of Churches, once non-Roman Christendom's center of spiritual and institutional gravity, fails to attract attention from the leaders of growing churches in Africa, the energetically evangelistic Presbyterian Church of Korea, or Pentecostals in North and South America. The dominance of "global Christianity" – characterized as a field of de-centered religious identities for which the vision of a unified world expression of the faith conspicuously fails to mobilize – marks how dramatically the ecumenical movement in the postwar period has lost control over the cultural capital of Christianity.

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[19] Quoted in Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

To recover ecumenical history requires turning our attention to the problem that simultaneously inspired and threatened 20th-century efforts to realize world Christian unity: the problem of negotiating, within a polyglot global constituency that included figures on opposite sides of most of the century's cataclysmic conflicts, the distinction between "authentic" Christian faith and ideology.

For Protestants between 1900 and 1952, "politics" became legible to the international leadership of organizations promoting world Christian unity not as a sphere of state power or governance, but as a source of division within the community they hoped to unite. To see how this new consciousness of politics came about, we need to place ecumenism within a longer history of Protestantism's propulsions into the distinctively modern space of civil society. Abigail Greene and Vincent Viaene have recently drawn attention to the phenomenon of "religious internationalism" as a transformation of religious identities that took place in the "communicative space between the private sphere and the state."[20] The "Protestant International" was one of many religious internationals that Greene and Viaene define as "a cluster of transnational organizations and representations crystallizing around international issues, in which both 'ordinary' believers and religious specialists could serve as protagonists."[21] Entering the public sphere, religious internationals mobilized bodies of opinion, rather than belief, and cultivated a culture of voluntarism that fostered institutions outside of traditional loci of religious authorities such as churches, synagogues, and mosques. In the case of Protestantism, the

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[20] Abigail Greene and Vincent Viaene, Introduction, *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750* eds. Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012), 2.

[21] Ibid, 2.

evangelical revivals of the late18[th] and early 19th centuries provided the original matrix of these public expressions of faith.[22] The reforming impulses of these revivals brought into existence abolition campaigns, foreign missionary societies, initiatives for the moral regeneration of the working classes, as well as associations devoted to promoting international peace. Mobilizing across hardening national boundaries in the 19th century, these efforts centered interdenominational unity and cooperation around issues "not affected by doctrinal disagreement."[23]

The formation of the Protestant International gave a specifically modern form to the long-standing tension between religious and political authority in the Christian West. From its origins, Christianity has been constituted, in a sense, by debates over the jurisdiction of Christ and Caesar, the City of God and the City of Man. But with the emergence of the Protestant International, these debates took shape as attempts to generate public consensus around the meaning of authentically Christian – as opposed to worldly – practice. Insofar as politics refers to specific, partisan commitments to social programs, to governing bodies (such as states or international institutions), or to parties, Protestants denied that their common aims were political at all. Indeed, for the Protestants who led efforts to organize Christians across national and denominational divisions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the universal truth of their faith generated two, conflicting mandates: on the one hand, faith needed to assert itself in the world –

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[22] Christopher Clark and Michael Ledger-Lomas, "The Protestant International" *Religious Internationals in the Modern World*, esp 24-37.

[23] The phrase is taken from a founding document of the International Missionary Council (whose history is discussed in more detail in chapters 1-2), but is reflective of general approach voluntary Protestant-led associations promoting international and interdenominational cooperation on social issues and in missionary work. *Resolution on Missionary Cooperation in View of Doctrinal Differences*, adopted by the International Missionary Council in 1923, reprinted in John R. Mott, *Cooperation and the World Mission* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1935), 48.

through mission work abroad and through social reform at home – and on the other, all such activism had to be "above parties," expressing faith as the adhesive of "Christian" societies. Protestant mobilization in civil society thus sought to embody a form of anti-political public engagement.

In the years leading up to World War I, the project of building the Kingdom of God furnished this anti-political ethos. A necessarily indistinct vision of a redeemed humanity, the goal of the Kingdom justified Protestants' entry into the public sphere through the promise of an end to partisan conflict via the progressive realization of social order based on universal love and brotherhood. In the aftermath of World War I, however, the Kingdom became politicized. While Allied nations saw the approach of God's reign in a vision of internationalism that championed the League of Nations, imperial reform, and the growth of "indigenous" churches in the non-western world, Germans assailed all of these aims as "politics" in disguise. Those on both sides of the divide who, after the War, sought to reconstitute Christian unity confronted a question: how was it possible to mobilize in the public realm – asserting the relevance of their faith to broader social problems – and yet sustain a consensus that the aims pursued there were authentically Christian and not political?

The answer lay in the construction of a new common enemy. In the spring of 1928, as relations between German and Allied blocs began to improve, the International Missionary Council – a body of missionary societies from North America and Europe, as well as representatives from "younger churches" in Asia and Africa – convened in Jerusalem for its first meeting. Fundamentally reframing their world mission, delegates declared that "secularism," the dominant

"worldview" of modern industrial civilization, had displaced other religions as the faith's chief

rival in the East as well as the West. The genius of the concept of secularism lay in its translation

of the international conflicts that threatened Christian unity into a religious problem: man's

search for self-sufficiency and denial of his responsibility to God. Secularism described a scene

of modern social and spiritual chaos, a disorder of life rooted in original sin, but radicalized to

the point of catastrophe by modern man's denial of his true nature and destiny. Secularism was,

in the words of Joseph Oldham, one of its major architects of anti-secularism, "the demonic

attempt to put the world or the self in the place of God."[24]

In contrast to non-Christian religions, "secularism" was endogenous to Christian civilization in

the West. Its growth and worldwide proliferation was the result, ecumenists declared, of the

failure of Christians realize in practice the universal fellowship declared in scriptural revelation.

The movement thus mobilized in the 1930s to achieve a vision of ecumenical community as the

"Una Sancta, the fellowship of Christians who acknowledge the one Lord" across all nations.[25]

Dialectical theologians like Emil Brunner, Karl Heim, Visser't Hooft, Oldham and others

furnished the intellectual foundations of this program in the early 1930s, and their early

diagnoses of secularism and its challenge to Christianity shaped the discourse of the *oikoumene*

throughout the decade. A new rallying call – the unofficial motto of the movement's major event

of the decade, the Conference on "Church, Community, and State" held by the Universal

Christian Council of Life and Work held in Oxford in 1937 – was "Let the Church be the

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[24] Joseph Oldham, "The Christianizing and Unchristianizing of the World," [unpublished address to the Dutch Missionary Conference, 1930] (Joseph Oldham Papers, 15/2/8)

[25] "Report on the Universal Church and the World of Nations," *The Churches Survey Their Task: The Report of the Conference at Oxford, Jul 1937, on Church, Community, and State* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937), 169.

Church!" As these ecumenists conceived it, the "church" was not an introverted body, aloof from the public sphere, but a new global public, constituted through a communal ethics of responsiveness to God's "Word" that – through conferences, theological dialogue, and prayer – would enact the subordination of human wills to God's sovereignty. This public was constituted not by rational deliberation over common goods but by God's address to humanity, and the common life built from collective reflection on its significance to economic, political, social, and international question. Secularism's corrosive effects could thus be contained only within the church – a community in search of obedience to God.

It was from the foundation of anti-secularism that ecumenists made their most significant interventions in mid-century North Atlantic social thought. In a remarkable elision of seemingly opposed programs, ecumenists declared that liberalism, Nazism, and Communism were all manifestations of the "secular and pagan tendencies of our time."[26] While liberal humanism repudiated the Christian God in its search for rational autonomy of the will, "totalitarian" movements of Nazism and Communism arrived at the same end by "ascribing absolute value" to the "pagan idols" of race or class. This blanket condemnation of the major ideologies vying for power in 1930s Europe was the converse of an unsettling strategy of inclusion: if ecumenists assailed Nazism at the moment it became a "counter-church," a source of "total" allegiance, membership in – even enthusiasm for – the Nazi Party was acceptable throughout the 1930s, so long as it remained "on the level of politics." The same was true *mutates mutandis* for other

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[26] As Joseph Oldham described the purpose of the extensive study preparations for the 1937 Oxford Conference of the Universal Christian Council of Life and Work, it was "to understand the true nature of the vital conflict between the Christian Faith and the secular and pagan tendencies of our time." These tendencies, as we will see in chapters 3 and 4, were embodied in Enlightenment individualism as well as the collectivisms of Nazism, Fascism and Communism.

possibilities. As Joseph Oldham explained in 1937, "[a] man may be a National Socialist because he believes government by the party to be in the best interests of the nation or a member of the Communist Party because he regards its aims as leading most directly the emancipation of the laboring classes, or a supporter of capitalism out of a sincere conviction that under conditions the sum of human misery would be increased and not diminished if any other system were substituted for it – and in all these cases he can still hold fast to his ultimate Christian belief."[27] Anti-secularism was a campaign to put politics in its place by abstracting political difference into a symptom of modernity's spiritual crisis.

As we will see, anti-secularism proved surprisingly capable of crossing over shifting ideological boundaries in the 1930s and the 1940s. The *oikoumene* of the 1930s was shaped both by vigorous anti-Nazis, such as the Anglican Bishop George Bell, W. A. Visser't Hooft, and American church leaders, as well as enthusiastic supporters of Hitler, including Karl Heim – a critical early theorist of secularism – and the pastor and economist Hans Schoenfeld, Director of the Study Department of the Universal Council of Life and Work, and later of the World Council in formation between 1938 and 1946. A delegation of German churches, including both the establishment Reich Church and the dissenting Confessing Church, was invited to the Oxford Conference of 1937 – and did not attend only because its request for passports was denied shortly before the event. In the years following 1945, a similar ideological ambiguity was critical to the World Council's efforts to recruit both vigorous anti-Communists, such as John Foster Dulles, and committed supporters of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, such as the Hungarian Reformed Bishop Albert Bereczky, a member of the World Council's Executive

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[27] Joseph Oldham, "The Function of the Church in Society," in Oldham and W. A. Visser't Hooft, *The Church and Its Function in Society* (New York: Willett, Clark and Company, 1937), 212.

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Committee from 1946 to 1952. It was precisely in this capacious inclusion that ecumenists witnessed the world-reconciling work of Christ. None of this is to say that the efforts to constitute a supra-political community were not themselves political: the *oikoumene* was governed, as we will see in chapter 4, by its own institutional structures and authorities, which vested in an international elite of churchmen and laypersons extensive power to determine who would be included in public of God's address. This dissertation, however, takes the ambiguity of ecumenical politics vis-à-vis conventional determinations of right and left as a point of departure for considering a larger methodological question concerning the problem of writing historically about "religion."

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The question of the "politics" of the ecumenical movement takes us to the heart of a wider problem confronting scholars attempting to treat religion historically. At stake in these debates is the coherence of a "secular" approach to history. Are religious utterances to be translated into a language of power, demystified of their transcendent, supra-historical points of reference? Doing so threatens to efface the contextual specificity of the actors' categories the historian purportedly sets out to recover. At the same time, taking the religious utterances of these actors "on their own terms" courts, as the historian James Chappel has recently argued, "adopt[ing] the transcendental claims they make for themselves."[28] Historians thus confront a dilemma: take religion "too seriously" and veer from the discipline's properly critical function into the remit of religious apologetics, or take it not seriously enough and risk erasing the alterity of the past. The latter

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[28] James Chappel, "Beyond Tocqueville: A Plea to Stop 'Taking Religion Seriously'," *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 10, 3 (2013), 697-708, 700.

course has the potential to turn towards an apologetics of its own that asserts, with the very

epistemic certainty it assails in religion, the transhistorical category of "power."[29]

The most important recent scholarship on ecumenical Protestantism grapples with this dilemma

by attending closely the political salience of Christian actions and utterances in specific regional

and temporal contexts. One such work is Samuel Moyn's *Christian Human Rights*, which

identifies Christian intellectuals as the primary vehicles of the transwar propulsion of human

rights into public discourse. Moyn highlights the role of Catholics as well as ecumenical

Protestants in an account of how the theological concept of the person – originally opposed to the

Enlightenment tradition of rights – appropriated rights as its vehicle in the late 1930s and 1940s.

One virtue of the analysis is a clear statement of how intellectual historians committed to

genealogical method can make sense of religious discourse:

> Religion is never merely politics, and one of the deepest aspirations of many of those reinterpreting Christianity across the 1930s and 1940s was to put the 'established disorder' of the world… in its place for the sake of suprapolitical truth. Often, the goal was not move rightwards (or, for that matter, leftwards) as upwards – and thus orthogonally to politics as a whole. And yet such aspirations had inevitably this-worldly implications, especially when they found their ways into such documents as national constitutions and international declarations, or came to be mobilized by parties and publicists pursuing agendas with definite implications for the terms of collective life. There are thus two equal and opposite errors to be avoided: if the first is to treat the spiritual as just the ideological mystifications of the political, the second is to forget that the most otherworldly claims are ultimately significant – certainly for the secular historian – for how they affect this world.[30]

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[29] For a discussion of this historiographical problematic, see Sarah Shorthall, "Lost in Translation: Religion and the Writing of History" *Modern Intellectual History* 13.1 (2016), 273-286.

[30] Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 20.

Such an approach is clear in recognizing that its own terms of analysis do a certain violence to those of the actors it examines. But here is no crude reduction of religion to ideology: Moyn's point about the theology of personalism is that from the beginning it was intended to upend the dichotomy between collectivist options of Communism and fascism in their various forms and the individualism of liberal democracy. And yet Moyn's own "ultimate" priorities are clear: the goal of the historian is to recover the political valence of a discourse that, as a rule, understood itself outside the categories of left and right. Christian human rights were "an epochmaking reinvention of conservatism," necessitated by the implosion of fascist and Nazi regimes that, until the late 1930s, seemed amenable to most Christians. In their dominant transwar iterations, human rights were "part and parcel of a reformulation of conservatism in the name of a vision of moral constraint, not human emancipation or individual liberation."[31] Indeed, Moyn's account seems to argue for the impossibility that Christianity could be anything but conservative, given the nature of its understanding of freedom. "Jesus's truth had been intended to set men free, but not for the sake of their creative autonomy or the satisfaction of their preferences. This liberation was for the sake of subjugation: so that men (and perhaps most especially) women could conform to God's will and moral order."[32]

Moyn is not alone in situating ecumenical Protestants on the political right. Indeed, *Christian Human Rights* belongs to a larger literature that emphasizes the conservative purposes that galvanized Christian actors in the mid-20th century. One of the most fertile veins of 20th-century research on religion and international politics has examined the role of religion and, in particular,

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[31] Ibid, 11.

[32] Ibid, 11.

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Christian publicists, in the consolidation of ideological anti-Communism in the United States and

Western Europe. Scholars such as Diane Kirby, Jonathan Herzog, Philip Coupland, and Jason

Stevens have stressed how figures as diverse as Reinhold Niebuhr, the German Bishop Otto

Dibelius, and the Lebanese philosopher and ecumenical enthusiast Charles Malik, along with

Catholic and evangelical Protestant counterparts in Europe and the US, all helped to frame the

stakes of the Cold War as a struggle between Christian civilization and godless atheism.[33] Most

important for these scholars is to recover how Christian concepts such as "totalitarianism" were

deployed by statesmen, policy-makers, and propagandists to justify imperial exertions of US and

Western power across the globe in the name of protecting freedom from its Soviet nemesis.

In contrast, other scholars have argued that ecumenists were internationally minded,

cosmopolitan avatars of the liberal left. Without denying ecumenists' opposition to Communism,

these scholars draw attention to various points that complicate the picture of ecumenists as Cold

Warriors. Andrew Preston, for instance, has underscored how American figures like John

Bennett, John MacKay, and Samuel McCrea Cavert – all active in the World Council and

officers of what became in the 1930s its US satellite, the Federal Council of Churches – resisted

"blind" anti-Communism and "called for decolonization, nuclear and conventional disarmament,

and unconditional dialogue with the Soviets and recognition of China."[34] More recently, Gene

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[33] See the contributions to *Religion and the Cold War* ed. Diane Kirby (New York: Palgrave, 2003), Jeremy Gunn, T., *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009); Philip M. Coupland, *Britannia, Europa and Christendom : British Christians and European Integration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Jason Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[34] Preston, "Peripheral Visions," 1. Indeed, prominent ecumenists like the Methodist Bishop Bromley Oxnam were among the targets of Senator Joseph McCarthy's investigations in the early 1950s.

Zubovich has authored the most complete attempt to claim American ecumenical Protestants for the tradition of American liberalism. Mining the confluence of theological and political liberalism mapped by David Hollinger, Zubovich demonstrates that ecumenical Protestants from 1940 to 1960 were vigorous critics of racial segregation, social inequality, and western imperialism.[35] Likewise, Michael Thompson has placed the ecumenical movement within a Protestant internationalist tradition congenitally resistant to the identification of religious and national interests.[36] While most accounts of ecumenists as liberals have focused on the American context, recent work by Lucian Leustean on the ecumenical movement and the formation of the European Union suggests how such an approach might be applied to European ecumenists as well.[37] And a study of ecumenical opinion outside of the West – barely yet undertaken, with a few exceptions, outside of church historiographies – reveals a bloc of opinion still further to the left than anything found in the West, including Chinese communists who embraced the Communist regime in 1949, an assortment of Marxists and Third Worldists who championed anti-colonialism and national liberation across Asia and Africa.[38]

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[35] Gene Zubovich, *The Global Gospel: Protestant Internationalism and American Liberalism, 1940-1960* (PhD Dissertation, UC Berkeley, 2014)

[36] Michael Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015)

[37] Lucian Leustean, *The Ecumenical Movement & the Making of the European Community* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014).

[38] See for instance Albert Wu, "German Missionaries, Chinese Christians, and the Globalization of Christianity, 1860-1950" (PhD dissertation, UC Berkeley) and Annegreth Schilling, *Revolution, Exil und Befreiung. Der Boom des lateinamerikanischen Protestantismus in der internationalen Ökumene in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

Historians are bound, as Moyn claims, to uncover the political, this-worldly significance of Christian utterance. But where do ecumenists belong – on the left or on the right? If the divergent appraisals of Hollinger, Zubovich, Preston, on the one hand, and Moyn and the chroniclers of Christian anti-Communism, on the other, suggest anything, it is that the answer to this question depends on the specific regional and temporal context one chooses to focus on. Here, however, the concern is to analyze what made Christians of various political orientations, in diverse regional contexts and over the longue durée of the first half of the 20th century, participants in a single configuration, characterized by continuity of institutions and personnel, as well as abiding theological commitments to and conceptions of Christian universalism. Recovering this history draws into relief how studies of ecumenical Christians within both American and European historiographies project political valences particular to regional contexts onto the movement as a whole. A more global viewpoint is needed to understand a movement whose participants themselves understood their scope of action as specifically worldwide.

This dissertation, therefore, does not locate the ecumenical movement on a political spectrum of the right and left, but rather recovers the interplay between ecumenists' experience of the 20th-century's political upheavals – in particular, the First and Second World Wars, the Cold War, and decolonization – and the theologies of church and mission that emerged within the movement. As we will see, this perspective allows us to get purchase on a transformative moment between 1948 and 1952, when movement leaders first advanced self-consciously "political" action as a form of ecumenical praxis, viewing resistance to colonial structures as the very "language" in which the Gospel was to be understood and communicated in the modern world. To illuminate this shift, I focus on the Indian Marxist theologian M. M. Thomas and the

institutionalization of his ideas in the movement's youth wing, the World Student Christian

Federation. For Thomas and his colleagues, the church could only become a universal

community through its activation in partisan struggle. Combating the recalcitrant human will to

domination could never be exclusively moral or theological; it entailed a struggle for power on

the part of the powerless. This idea succeeded in its time in uniting a global Christian solidarity –

propelling Thomas and later other Third World theologians to positions of power in the World

Council of Churches and helped orient postwar ecumenism around radical "revolutionary"

programs to combat racism and address global inequality. Its triumph, however, increasingly cost

ecumenists their cultural clout in the West, where ordinary churchgoers fell out of the fold or

turned to evangelical Protestantism, especially in the United States. But the success of

"revolutionary" ecumenism in the postwar movement marked in no way a capitulation to the

secularism that ecumenists had so vigorously assailed in the 1930s. Rather, it represented a way

of relating Christianity to political thought and action with relevance today to the question of

religion's role in the public sphere.

For generations of commentators, the Protestant church leaders who formed the backbone of the

ecumenical movement were reinterpreting their faith merely to prepare the way for its demise.

Since Weber, these clerical and lay elites have been cast as the protagonists (or victims, or both)

of secularization in its various meanings, including the decline of belief, the privatization of

religion, the separation of social, economic, and political spheres from religious institutions and

norms, or the translation of theological into political concepts.[39] The apparently inevitable

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[39] For overviews of major variants of the secularization thesis, see José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and the introduction of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

endgame of "accommodation" looms large over recent treatments of the ecumenism as well: as if the movement's champions were simply awaiting their chance to trouble the conscience of liberal cosmopolitans in the West with stories about the "theological origins" of their commitments. A new picture comes into view, however, when we consider the movement from the standpoint of the problems and institutions that constituted its coherence and mobilizing appeal. The postwar revolutionary ecumenism that galvanized the movement after 1945 did not make peace with a private expression of religion; it did not renounce its claims that Christ ruled over all social, economic, and political spheres of life. Its identification with the marginalized was not a translation of Christian ethics into secular terms: it was an effort to ground Christian practice on acts of reciprocal translation, from politics to theology and back again. Only the Gospel, Thomas and his colleagues and successors insisted, could illuminate the meaning of political struggles for justice and liberation; conversely, only as a political ethic could the Gospel be understood. His call for a faith that realized itself exactly in becoming conscious of its political effect offers an alternative to common viewpoints: it dissents from Christian commentators demanding a more robust public role for their religion on the grounds of its allegedly salubrious social effects, and it departs from secular commentators who tolerate public religion on sufferance and request its expositors perform a one-way translation from their comprehensive doctrines into the language of communicative rationality. Attending to ecumenism's 20th-century reinventions, in other words, opens an unconsidered option in contemporary debates over the place of religion in a "post-secular" world.

Chapters summary

This dissertation has two parts, focused on tracing the rise and crisis of the principal iteration of the ecumenical movement in the period between 1900 and 1952. Part I (chapters 1-3) traces the origins of the program to realize the ecumenical church from the late 19th century until 1939 and argues that this goal became the recognized objective of international Christian cooperation only in response to the threat of secularism conceived in 1928. Part II (chapters 4-6), examines how this ecumenical project was institutionalized from 1930 through 1952. It demonstrates that this institutionalization produced divisions within the movement during the Cold War that led to a new understanding of the relation between Christianity and politics.

Chapter 1 offers a history of Protestant internationalism from the 19th century to 1925. In this period, all Protestant-led attempts to cultivate international and interdenominational cooperation in missionary work, social and humanitarian reform, and theological dialogue sought their end in the realization of the "Kingdom of God" on earth, a utopian vision entailing the "Christianization" of social, economic, and political relations, as well as the conversion of souls at home and abroad. Periodic attempts to designate conferences, or councils, of churches as "ecumenical" evinced Protestants' ambivalence toward the term, which was associated with efforts to define doctrinal orthodoxy opposed to the public and interdenominational orientation of Protestant internationalism. A minimum condition for ecumenism's later rise was the collapse of the campaign to realize the Kingdom, whose political implications sharply divided belligerents during World War I and after. I trace this fractious fallout by examining relations between Allied and German missionaries and the efforts of the Swedish Lutheran Archbishop Nathan Soederblom to found the Universal Christian Council of Life and Work as a body to mediate between estranged international blocs. Chapters 2 and 3 examine how the modern

ecumenical project was born in the decade following 1928, and in response to a new enemy: worldwide secularism. Chapter 2 reconstructs the origins of the concept as it was first formulated by missionaries at the Jerusalem Conference in 1928. Not merely another word for atheism or religious indifference, secularism denoted the dominant "worldview" of modern industrial civilization based on scientific experiment and technological application. The chapter concludes with an account of how missionaries mobilized an international campaign to recruit church intellectuals to re-formulate the Gospel in a language that would "speak" to modern – secularized – man. Chapter 3 shows how the interwar ecumenical project emerged from the diagnosis of secularism furnished by dialectical theologians working within the existential categories forged by Continental theologians, such Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Karl Heim, and others. Abandoning the historicist orientation of liberal theology – previously dominant in international Protestantism – these thinkers conceived secularism as modern man's rebellion against God – articulated in both Enlightenment pursuit of rational autonomy and the "pagan religions" of Nazism, Communism, and nationalism. To combat secularism in its various forms, they argued that the church must recover its true ground not in Christian activism striving after the Kingdom of God, but in a responsive obedience to God's Word. Chapter 3 shows how it was this project that galvanized intellectual and clerical elites in Protestant and Orthodox churches in the 1930s.

Part II of the dissertation examines how the ecumenical project conceived in response to secularism was institutionalized from the 1930s to the 1950s. Chapter 4 shows how the practice of ecumenical anti-secularism, which took the form of theological conversation organized in small, informal groups or large gatherings like the Oxford Conference of the Universal Council on Life and Work in 1937, sought a common understanding of God's "message" to humankind.

In these conversations, the church was envisioned as a "public," constituted by God's address to man and the "personal" responses of Christians from various confessional traditions and nations. The theology of "personalism" – which grounded social existence on ethical responsibility to others as a form of obedience to God – furnished the ideological basis of the World Council of Churches as well as various wartime campaigns to formulate a postwar order based on human rights. But even as ecumenists succeeded in enshrining personalism in the United Nations' Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the disruption of international communication during the war attenuated the ecumenical public of the 1930s. After 1945, efforts to reconstitute this public ran aground as Cold War divisions among Protestants and Orthodox Christians in the West and Communist societies eclipsed a theological consensus around anti-secularism. Chapter 5 examines how the World Council of Churches alienated both external critics and erstwhile supporters by attempting to define Christianity as a "third way" between competing ideologies of communism and capitalism. As the program to realize the Kingdom of God became "politicized" after 1914, so, too, was the project to realize the church assailed by Eastern European leaders and the Russian Orthodox Church as a front of Western imperialism and by conservative anti-Communists at home as a vehicle of world socialism. While the World Council remained intractably divided between 1948 and 1952, a younger generation of ecumenists in the World Student Christian Federation articulated in anti-colonial activism a new basis for global Christian unity. Chapter 6, focusing on M. M. Thomas and his colleagues in the Federation, shows how the emergence of "revolutionary" ecumenism in the late 1940s and early 1950s achieved a reversal in the ecumenical conception of politics: no longer a domain to be conquered by Christian unity, "politics" was instead the site of God's providential action in the world.

Part I

Chapter 1

The Ecumenical Projects that Failed: World War I and the Politicization of the
Kingdom of God

Published on the occasion of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1954, *A
History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, consolidated a revolution in church
historiography. Since the first centuries CE, claimed the German theologian and ecumenical
leader Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff in his Forward to the volume, histories of Christianity had
focused overwhelmingly on the divisions among Christian churches. This new volume promised
an approach "from the opposite point of view:" its goal would be to recover an account "of the
earnest unitive efforts" among Christians "by which almost every century has been marked."[1] In
focusing on the years between 1517 and 1948 – the year of the World Council's official
foundation – the volume advanced a bold claim. Protestantism, apparently the embodiment of
Christianity's fissiparous tendencies, a movement that had shattered the unity of Roman
Christendom and proceeded to divide itself into innumerable national and sectarian bodies over
the succeeding centuries, had a secret history, populated by irenic and "ecumenically" minded
advocates who struggled against the forces of sectarianism, nationalist politics, European racism,
and world war for the cause of uniting, not only their own churches but Catholic and Orthodox
bodies as well. Numerous theologians and scholars associated with the World Council produced
essays describing these efforts to promote Christian unity, cataloguing a "growing
consciousness" of the unity of all Christians evinced in missions work, interchurch dialogue over
doctrinal differences, and cooperation in social activism and reform over the 19th and early 20th

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[1] Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff, Forward, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement Vol 1*. Ed. Ruth Rouse and
Stephen Neill (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1954), xxi.

centuries. With the official establishment of the World Council, these Protestant efforts to promote world Christian unity had reached a culminating moment. The formation of the Council was "something so new in the history of the Churches, and summed up so much that had gone before, that it seemed to mark a reasonable conclusion for this study," von Thadden-Trieglaff wrote.[2] The volume was an effort to furnish a usable past for contemporary ecumenical efforts, as well as an exercise in apologetic history: the ecumenical movement was on the march, and history was behind it.

Novel at the time, the approach advanced in *A History of Ecumenical Movement* has now become standard among scholars of the movement. The dominance of its historiographical framework is most obviously visible within the scholarly eco-system of institutional histories of ecumenism, which, fed by the contributions of church historians and theologians, continues to thrive largely in isolation from more recent work on the topic in the secular academy. But there too, in the flurry of recent monographs and articles produced by non-church academics on ecumenical personalities, ideas, and institutions, the idea of the ecumenical movement as a "long" phenomenon, building steam over the 19th century, is common. Many scholars, in offering thumbnail sketches of the movement's origins, draw attention to irenic impulses forged in foreign and home missionary conferences of the 19th century and formation of the institutions such as the Evangelical Alliance (1854) the Young Men's Christian Association, the World Student Christian Federation (1895), and the Federal Council of Churches (1908) in the US. It has become customary, too, to emphasize the primary importance of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in the summer of 1910, which gathered 1,200 missionaries, mostly

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[2] Ibid, xxii

from Europe and North America, to organize a campaign for the "evangelize the world in this generation," in the confident slogan of its organizer, the American Methodist John Mott. The historian David Thompson, for instance, in his 2010 article on Ecumenism for the *Cambridge History of Christianity*, locates "the starting point of the modern ecumenical movement" in Edinburgh in 1910,[3] while John Kent, in another recent work, sees 1910 as the year "when the search for institutional unity [among churches] was first systematically organized."[4] Recent works by Gene Zubovich and Michael Thompson have reiterated the same view; in Zubovich's words, Edinburgh was the "turning point… the first time a major international Protestant organization called for unity among the world's Christian populations to be expressed in concrete institutions."[5]

There is of course, an obvious truth in the observation that the ecumenical movement of the 1930s did not spring from nowhere. It built on earlier efforts, institutions, and networks, and its leaders – such as Mott, the Dutch Reformed theologian W. A. Visser't Hooft, and the British missionary statesman Joseph Oldham – were reared in the international Protestant milieux of the 1900s and 1910s. And yet the idea of a "long" ecumenical movement is misleading in critical respects. First of all, very few Protestants before the 1930s found "ecumenical" a compelling or useful term to describe the form of Christian unity they sought. Its principle referent in their

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[3] David Thompson, "Ecumenism," *Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Hugh McLeod, vol. 9 (Camrbidge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 50.

[4] John Kent, *The Unacceptable Face: The Modern Church in the Eyes of the Historian* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 203.

[5] Gene Zubovich, *The Global Gospel: Protestant Internationalism and American Liberalism, 1940-1960* (PhD Dissertation: University of California, Berkeley, 2014), 5; Michael Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), chpt 4.

minds – the "Ecumenical Councils" of the 4th to the 8th centuries, so-called because they convened bishops from throughout the *oikoumene*, or habitable earth (then taken to mean at the time as the Mediterranean world and the extent of Roman imperium) to define heresies and establish orthodox doctrine concerning the nature of Christ, the relations of the Trinity, and the other matters that divided the early church – suggested a model of Christian unity that these international Protestants were keen to disavow. Ecumenical Councils carried an association with the ecclesiastical authoritarianism of the Roman Catholic Church that was the opposite of Protestant visions of a supra-denominational Christian community that would preserve, rather than squelch, differences of doctrine and nationality, and would be oriented not inwardly toward the church but, outwardly, toward engagement with the world. As we will see, periodic attempts to appropriate the term ecumenical, to invest it with a meaning that would reflect Protestant values, all ran aground over Protestants' own disagreements concerning whether and how to cooperate with the Roman Catholic Church. In this sense, we can say that, to the extent that "ecumenical" Protestantism existed in the later 19th and 20th century, it failed to mobilize its intended constituency.

But there is another reason to stress the failure of the "earnest unitive efforts" of Protestants in the 19th and early 20th centuries to promote Christian unity, rather than their success in furnishing the foundations on which the later, mid-20th century ecumenical movement would be built. 19th and early 20th century Protestant Christian unity movements were organized around a fundamentally different objective than the ecumenical movement of the 1930s. While the ecumenical movement of the 1930s sought to realize God's sovereignty over the "church" – the community of Christians and churches – earlier movements for Christian unity sought to realize

God's sovereignty over economic, political, and social life outside of the church, both within the territorial boundaries of "Christendom" and the expansive mission fields of Asia and Africa. 19th-century movements for Christian unity needed to fail before the ecumenical project that produced *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* and marked the major event in world Protestantism of the 20th century, could be born.

The focus of this chapter is on both describing the organizing ideas and assumptions of 19th and early 20th century ecumenism and charting their collapse. To do this, the history of international Protestantism will be re-periodized around a caesura: World War I, which brought to an end 19th century models of Christian cooperation and enabled a rethinking of the nature and aims of Christian unity in the world. By focusing on this event, I want to emphasize the critical importance of international politics in upsetting the antebellum Protestant paradigm of Christian unity. Until 1914, Protestants had seen doctrinal divisions as the principal impediment to Christian unity, while perceiving a wide space for practical cooperation in mission work and a range of social causes, including evangelization, social reform, and international peace. The War revealed that the greatest threat to international cooperation in Christianizing the world was not theological divisions but political ones. With a mere handful of pacifist exceptions, Protestant church leaders overwhelmingly endorsed their nation's respective national causes in the war, a move that led them to perceive that erstwhile colleagues across the battle lines had forsaken the cause of Christ and turned instead to the mammon of nationalism, greed, or the will to power. Accounts of the long ecumenical movement fail to come to grips with the fallout of this fracture of the Protestant international, even occasionally seeing World War I as a long-term boon for the cause of Christian unity, since it spawned a number of new institutions – such as the Universal

Council of Life and Work, the International Missionary Council – intended to overcome the breaches that the conflict had caused.[6] But the wounds caused by the war were not so easily overcome. Into the mid-1920s, these institutions served primarily as arena in which Allied and German church leaders clashed over the concrete political form that a "Christian" social and political order ought to take. In particular, the destruction of German missions operations during the war, the terms of the Versailles Treaty (especially the infamous article 231, ascribing responsibility for the conflict to Germany), and the League of Nations itself were sources of bitter conflict among Protestants. Rather than seeing these clashes as temporary obstacles, overcome in the end by the superior power of Christian brotherhood, I understand them here as events that so decimated traditional models of international Christian cooperation that they led Protestants to discard them altogether. After 1914, the possibility of international Protestant cooperation in the cause of social reform was hamstrung by a polarization that made both sides distrust the other for advancing "political" rather than authentically Christian agendas. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, when a robust new agenda for international Christian cooperation took shape, it was not only because the scars of war had healed but because its leaders had abandoned the paradigm of Christian unity that had developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first surveys the formation of 19th and early 20th century Protestant internationalism by examining the matrix of Evangelical Revival out of which it evolved and the objectives of Protestant missionary and social activities that emerged in over this period. We will stress that the first Protestant movements toward Christian unity demarcated

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[6] The view is a feature of accounts that see Christian unity movements as pre-history to the creation of the WCC. Two especially prominent examples of this approach are Nils Karlstroem, "Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work, 1910-1925" *A History of the Ecumenical Movement,* vol 1. 512-3; and Thomas Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement: An Introductory History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

spaces outside the authority of the church – spaces conceived territorially in the rubric of "missionary fields" at home and abroad, and conceptually in terms of the social, political, and economic relations that constituted "modern society." The goal of Christian unity movements in the 19th and early 20th century was to establish the rule of Christ in these extra-ecclesiastical spaces.

The second part of this chapter examines how the model of Christian unity collapsed during World War I. Its crisis occurred as a result of German perceptions that former colleagues and brethren in Allied countries were, under cover of Christian purpose, in fact committed to advancing the political rather than authentically spiritual or Christian aims. We will attend in particular to how this perception shaped German reactions to the International Missionary Council and the Universal Council of Life and Work. Throughout both sections, we will draw attention along the way to the periodic attempts to appropriate the term "ecumenical" to define these efforts at Christian unity, showing how they failed to gain traction as a result of disagreements among Protestants over how to approach the Roman Catholic Church.

The Evangelical Revivals that swept back and forth across the Atlantic in the late 18th century and early 19th centuries fostered the associational Protestant culture that concerns us here. Stressing personal conversion and moral regeneration, striving for a new purity in this world, these revivals generated patterns of evangelical activism that brought Protestants into the "public sphere," a space of voluntary association between the private realm and the state. Across the North Atlantic, Protestant activism in the 19th and early 20th centuries coalesced around a number of issues, including the evangelization work, the abolition of the slave trade, care for the sick and

the poor, initiatives for the moral regeneration of the working classes, and international peace

efforts. These mobilizations gave rise to what Christopher Clark and Michael Ledger-Lomas

have termed the "Protestant International," an "informal spiritual empire, a network of formal

bodies that federated believers across increasingly distinct national boundaries."[7] Protestant

internationalism was buoyed on the industrialization of print media, migrations and movements

of peoples, including and indeed above all missionaries into the "non-Christian" world, and the

emergence of the public sphere in Europe. As historians Abigail Greene and Vincent Viaene

have argued, the Protestant International was a precursor to other religious internationals that

emerged in the later 19th and early 20th century and fashioned Catholics, Jews, Muslims,

Buddhists and Hindus into the pioneers of a issue-based mobilization that formed the

foundations of the globalization of civil society.[8]

In the Protestant case, the impetus behind these public mobilizations was a sense that official

church bodies, in their present form, were ill-equipped to carry out the responsibilities of the

Christian faith in the new worlds opened up by "modern civilization." European exploration and

empire had opened up and brought to the awareness of "Christian" peoples vast new continents

and populations of non-Christians which the church lacked the knowledge, organization, and

resources to address. The intensification of imperial competition abroad and the consolidation of

nation-states at home simultaneously fed the growth of Protestant efforts to promote international

peace and arbitration, a move that reflected a growing understanding of inter-state politics as

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[7] Christopher Clark and Michael Ledger-Lomas, "The Protestant International" *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750* eds. Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012), 23-4.

[8] Abigail Greene and Vincent Viaene, Introduction, *Religious Internationals in the Modern World*, esp. 1-4.

constituting a unique "field" in which Christian principles of brotherhood and fellowship could be applied to chasten power politics. Meanwhile, industrialization and urbanization had created social conditions that had disrupted traditional community life, exacerbating class divisions and producing a population of the "unchurched," primarily laborers who had left the church and bourgeoisie that retained only a nominal attachment to it. Peace movements, from the Quaker-led but interdenominational American Peace Society (1828) to the later World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, aimed to make Christian faith and morals an ethos of inter-state relations.

An eschatological vision of the Kingdom of God imbued these cooperative efforts with scriptural justification as well as a sense of urgency and productively vague understanding of overall objectives. Among the justifications for the missions movement as well as social reform efforts was found in Jesus's imperative in Matthew, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."[9] Most, though not all, early advocates of Christian unity efforts were post-millennialist in orientation, embracing an understanding of the Kingdom as a present reality, coming into existence within history. "We gather here," announced Judson Smith, an organizer of the New York Missionary Conference in 1900, "…to study the work of God in many lands, to draw out in some detail the story of Christ's advancing kingdom."[10] Archbishop Randall Davidson predicted at the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, "it may well be that there be some standing here tonight who

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[9] Matt 24:14, KJV

[10] Address of Rev. Judson Smith, *Ecumenical Missionary Conference, New York, 1900: Report of the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions, Held in Carnegie Hall and Neighboring Churches, April 21-May 1*, vol. 1 (New York: American Tract Society, 1900), 30.

shall not taste of death till they see… the Kingdom of God come with power."[11] Nor were

Americans and Britons the only ones to orient their work within the providential economy of the

growing Kingdom. German missionaries, too, spoke of the goal of foreign missions as one of

helping to "build the Kingdom of God and work for the consummation of the world."[12]

Protestant activists at home, such as the pioneer of "Inner Missions," Johann H. Wichern and

Friedrich Naumann in Germany, as well as Social Gospellers in the like Walter Rauschenbusch

in the United States and proponents of the Settlement Movement in Britain like Samuel Barnett

like regularly referred to "building the Kingdom of God" as the goal of their efforts.[13] John Mott

called the emergence and remarkable successes of his and other efforts to evangelize students in

the US and Europe – as well as Asia -- in the World Student Christian Federation "a remarkable

manifestation of… interest in the extension of the Kingdom of Christ."[14]

The Kingdom was a rubric that allowed Protestants in both spheres to assert the Christian nature

of social action, to root it in a religious responsibility. The building of the Kingdom on earth was

God's work, but it required the active cooperation of the human will. Leaving the international

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[11] Quoted in Brian Stanley, *World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 22.

[12] The line, from the German missionary and orientalist Johannes Lepsius in a tract of 1889, reflects a general orientation of German missionaries and Protestant activists working for reform at home as well as in missions operations abroad. Quoted Hanns Lessing, "Evangelische 'Disaporafürsorge' im 'größeren Deutschland'" in *Deutsche evangelische Kirche im kolonialien südlichen Afrika,* Lessing, et al, hrsg. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 145.

[13] For a discussion of the theme of Kingdom in Social Gospel Protestantism in the United States, see Gary Scott Smith, *The Search for Social Salvation: Social Christianity and America, 1880-1925* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000) and Paul Carter, *The Decline and Rise of the Social Gospel: Social and Political Liberalism in American Protestant Churches, 1920-1940* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1956), esp Introduction; for a discussion of its prominence in German home missions work and German theology generally see Marion Dittmer, *Reich Gottes: Ein Programbegriff der protestantischen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

[14] Mott, *Evangelization of the World in this Generation*, (New York: SVM, 1900), 1.

Protestant community critical room in which to accommodate differences over missionary strategy, and political outlooks and allegiances, the Kingdom idea stood for a beatific universal community beyond political programs, governments, and parties. Its vision of universal justice and humanity gave warrant and direction to a whole host of organizational efforts, which, especially by the late 19th century, drew on and contributed to a body of social scientific research and research on the science of religion. For social reformers, science offered the means through which the promise of the Kingdom would be translated into tangible, concrete forms – even as the nature of these forms remained ambiguous and up for dispute.

Scholarship that has looked at modern Protestantism in international and comparative contexts has long emphasized a division between, on the one hand, "liberal" or "progressive" understandings of the Kingdom, rooted in Reform theology and dominant in Anglo-American churches, and a conservative or "quietist" understanding of the kingdom, shaped by Lutheran pietism and dominant in Germany. These accounts have emphasized the divergent political orientations shaped by opposed theological understandings of the Kingdom. Convinced of the possibility of building the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, Protestant liberalism embraced various progressive causes, including social and economic reform and international peace. By contrast, Lutheran emphasis on the transcendence of the Kingdom asserted the limitations of human capacity to shape society in accordance with God's will, and became an impediment to social activism.[15] As we will see in this chapter, these characterizations are useful in portraying, in

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[15] In German and Anglo-American scholarship alike, the emphasis on theological and political divergence of German and Anglo-American traditions has tended to translate into an assumption that, while the liberal traditions of social Protestantism in the US and Britain understood the Kingdom as a possibility attainable within history, the Pietistic German tradition rejected this idea in theory, seeing the Kingdom as an eschatological reality private and interior within history. For two examples, see the Donald Meyer, *The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960) and Johannes Christian Hoekendijk, *Kirche und Volk in der deutschen Missionswissenschaft,* abridged and trns. to the German by Günter Finkenrath, et al. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser

broad and schematic terms, divergent political profiles of Anglo-American Protestantism, which during the late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the emergence of a liberal and progressive establishment, and German Protestantism, which remained supportive of monarchy, and socially and economically conservative.

But exclusive emphasis on the political difference in Anglo-American Protestantism on the one hand and German Protestantism on the other obscures critical shared assumptions that made, in the decades leading up to 1914, Germans and Anglo-Americans willing and enthusiastic partners in a number of social and missionary ventures. In particular, neither "bloc" conceived Protestant religiosity as entirely private, involving only the salvation of the soul. Both traditions embraced efforts to extend the influence of Christian faith and ideals beyond the confines of narrow church communities and beyond the self, and both asserted that Protestant faith entailed both a responsibility to "Christianize" broader society and a series of broad principles that would provide guidance on how to do so. Moreover, they recognized the need for cooperation among lay activists, clerics, and intellectuals alike, and across denominational and national boundaries, in order to realize the Christianization of society.

Thus, while attending to the political differences that defined these two blocs, our concern in this chapter will first be to locate these divergences within a common orientation around action within civil society that enabled international Protestantism to emerge in the first place. More important than theological differences is the formation of patterns of intellectual exchange,

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Verlag, 1967). The distinction remains dominant in recent literature on ecumenism (see eg. Mark Thomas Edwards, *The Right of the Protestant Left: God's Totalitarianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)). As we will see, this idea of a theoretical difference between the two traditions reifies a polarization that only occurred as a result of World War I.

practical cooperation, as well as new international institutions, all of which fed the propulsion of

Germans and Anglo-Americans alike into the public sphere, a propulsion that was understood

and justified by both sides in terms of a responsibility to enact Christian faith beyond the

institutional confines of the church in the broader "secular" world. It was, critically, not toward

"ecumenical" society – understood as ecclesiastical, inward looking, churchly, and requiring the

resolution of doctrinal disputes with a long legacy – but toward the Kingdom that Protestant

missionaries directed their efforts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

I. "Occupying" the Field: The Protestant Foreign Missions Movement until 1914

The modern Protestant missionary movement was constituted from its origins around

cooperation among German- and English-speaking activists. Three Germans from the

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Württemburg made up the first contingent of missionaries sent

from Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1799. For twenty-five years after its

founding, in fact, the CMS, like many other British societies at the time, including the High

Church Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, drew primarily on Germans

and Danes to staff their overseas operations.[16] The fact underscores the transnational origins of

the modern missions movement, which was powered on an evangelical awakening that crossed

political and continental boundaries with remarkable speed and was led by preachers and

intellectuals – John Wesley and George Whitefield in England, August Franke and Nikolaus

Ludwig von Zinzendorf in Germany, Jonathan Edward in the American colonies – who kept

abreast of writings and developments in evangelical movements and social experiments and

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[16] Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004)*,* chpt 2.

ideas across the North Atlantic.[17] By the early decades of the 19th century, this community of

missionary enthusiasts was becoming less transnational – that is, indifferent to national

boundaries – and more distinctively international in nature in consciousness and patterns of

cooperation.[18] By 1830 German-speaking Europe had many societies of its own: the Basel

Missions Society, drawing a largely German staff from the Swabian heartland, was founded in

1815; the Berlin Missionary Society was founded in 1823, the Rheinische Missions Society in

1828, and the North German Society in 1836. British missions organizations had emerged

slightly before that time, first with William Carey's Baptist Missionary Society (1782), the

London Missionary Society (1795) – interdenominational but mostly Congregational – the

Edinburgh and Glasgow Missionary Societies (1796), and the Church Missionary Society

(1799). The Swedish Missionary Society (1835) and the Dutch Missionary Society (1833), the

American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions organized in 1810.[19]

Within these organizations, understandings of the aims and methods of missionary work evolved

considerably over the 19th and early 20th century. The period witnessed significant

transformations in the ways in which Protestant missionaries understood the populations to

whom they sought to carry the Gospel: lurid, sensational depictions of "heathen" abominations

that dominated early missionary literature gave way during the 19th century to more apparently

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[17] Reginald Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Introduction and chpt 1.

[18] Clark and Ledger-Lomas, passim.

[19] For an overview of the founding of Protestant missionary societies in Europe (and North America), see William Richey Hogg *Ecumenical Foundations; a History of the International Missionary Council and Its Nineteenth Century Background.*, [1st ed.] (New York,: Harper, 1952), chpt 2.

reverent descriptions of non-Christian "religions."[20] Growing over the 19th century, and fertilizing a field of comparative theology and religious studies in European and North American universities, a tradition of missionary scholarship – running from the Scottish missionary Alexander Duff's studies of Sanskrit in the mid-century through the Lutheran Bruno Gutmann's studies of the Chagga people and cultures of East Africa to early 20th century studies of Buddhism by the American Methodist E. Stanley Jones and Hinduism by the Scot J. N. Farquhar – evinced a genuine respect for Asian and African cultures while simultaneously reimagining Christianity's ultimate superiority (and providing a discourse on the non-European "other" that abetted imperial control of Asian and African peoples). While early missionaries stressed the importance of saving souls and individual conversion, a growing emphasis over the 19th century on social reform and uplift, powered by the emergence of liberal theology and, especially in British and American cases, enthusiasm for the West's "civilizing mission," imparted to the missionary project a humanitarian cast and focus on secular institutions – such as schools and hospitals – that distressed some conservatives, who wished to keep focused on the primary work of conversion.

In what follows we will give some attention to divergent approaches and ideologies of missionary work, stressing in particular a division between German and Anglo-American models, which developed their own distinctive emphases even as they cross-fertilized one

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[20] For the shift from an early modern framework that conceived "heathen" or "pagan" religions in contrast to "religions of the book" (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) to the schema of "world religions," see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); for the now considerable literature on the construction of "religion" as a category for ordering the non-Christian world that was a constitutive dimension of European colonialism, see Masuzawa, Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), and Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: 1780-1914* (London: Blackwell, 2004), chpt 9.

another. Our primary focus, however, will be on the methods evolved by missionaries across the North Atlantic world to define their common ends and to organize and systemize their efforts to achieve these. We will thus concentrate on one particular practice – the missionary conference – and emphasize the dominance of the objective of "occupying" heathen/non-Christian territory, or "fields," a rubric that illustrated how Protestants in this period understood the territorial dimensions of God's Kingdom. We will finally consider the ways in which missionary efforts to promote international and interdenominational cooperation gave rise to attempts at resolving doctrinal differences among churches in order to overcome divisions between churches deemed compromising to the cause of Christianity's conquest of non-Christian peoples.

The proliferation of missionary associations in Europe and North America and the peopling of Asia and Africa by missionaries spawned new ideas and practices of interdenominational Christian unity. While mission work was by no means incompatible with confessional exclusivism, many missionaries recognized that competition between sects and confessions compromised what they recognized as a common goal of evangelizing non-Christian populations. As Kenneth Scott Latourette has observed, "once transported from the setting in which the inherited confessional loyalties seemed an accepted and immutable part of the religious landscape, more and more missionaries came to believe that divisions among Christians were a scandal, a denial of the Faith."[21] First on the mission fields of Asia and Africa, then increasingly at the home base in Europe and America, missionaries responded to the "scandal" of their own divisions by claiming a common Christian identity and attempting to organize and coordinate their efforts to evangelize non-Christian peoples. The paradigmatic expression of this

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[21] Kenneth Scott Latourette, "Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council" *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1954), 354.

cooperation was the missionary conference, a distinctive social practice and site of intellectual exchange.

Beginning in the mid-19th century, and increasing in size, frequency, and number throughout the century, missionary conferences were opportunities for members of individuals societies to meet, share inspiration and advice, and to discuss matters of common concern in their relations with "native" peoples and imperial governments. One of the first such meetings took place in Ootacamund, South India, in 1858. It included representatives from eight societies working in South India, including the major non-conformist British missionary societies, the Basel Missionary society (staffed by Swiss and Germans), and a representative from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPK). Delegates delivered papers on questions confronting their workers in the area, including effective methods of vernacular preaching, teaching and administration of missions schools, translation of the Bible, and the relation of Christian teaching to caste. They also worked out "comity" arrangements, through which the societies agreed to divvy up their respective "fields" of operation so as not to compete with converts and compromise the credibility of Christianity by highlighting sectarian disagreements. Among the conferences preliminary arrangements was "collect[ing] and publish[ing] the Statistics of the Missions in Southern India and Ceylon, and also of the yet unoccupied field of Heathenism," a booklet which broke down territories in terms of population size, ethnicities represented, religious beliefs, social conditions, numbers of converts already won.[22]

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[22] *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference*, Held at Ootacamund, Apr 19th-May15, 1858 (Vepery: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1858), 328

The Ootacamund conference illustrates the sense of spiritual solidarity between High-church Anglicans and evangelicals, Germans and Britons that was galvanized by shared trial, a common occupation with the problems of missionary praxis, and a perception of the immensity of the task before them. In a speech applauded by the meeting's participants, G. U. Pope, the delegate of the SPK, spoke of a common mission that required members of different denominations to put aside their theological and doctrinal differences. The impossibility of any one society "successfully occupying the field" of South India as a whole made cooperation in spite of doctrinal differences imperative. "Protestant Evangelical Missionaries agree in a sufficient number of points to enable them to regard one another as fellow-labourers, to rejoice in each other's success, and to be willing to regard the fields occupied by others as really brought under Christian teaching and influences."[23] Activities of the missionaries in this field were "different but not discordant," Pope explained.[24] Geography mattered to the missionaries: the site of their endeavors was one where evangelicals could assert, act on, and organize around a new sense of supra-sectarian solidarity: "while in Europe and America, controversies" over matters of doctrine "tend to elicit truth… in the Mission field they can result in nothing but evil."[25] The report of the conference celebrated the spirit of cooperation and unity that characterized the discussions. "We cannot but record," announced the delegates, "our heartfelt joy and gratitude at the general unanimity of our views, and the perfect harmony of Christian love which, through the rich grace of our one Lord and Master, has prevailed among us." The spirit of common approach to shared challenges generated a new sense of solidarity among "many beloved brethren who before were only known to us by

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[23] Ibid, 334.

[24] Ibid, 337.

[25] Ibid, 334. In this spirit they sent a letter of protest to the Leipzig Mission, a confessional Lutheran mission, which had refused prior comity agreements and was seeking to draw catechists and converts into away from other missionary congregations. The Leipzig society would later shift its policy to embrace comity.

name… while the knowledge we have gained of each other's labours, trials and successes will, we trust, greatly enlarge our minds, encourage out hearts and guide our efforts, so long as we may be permitted to labour in this heathen land."[26]

The meeting at Ootcamund was followed by similar meetings in India; 1862 marked the first Decennial Missionary Conference of Indian Protestant missions, which would bring delegates from German, American, Swiss, Swedish, and Dutch societies together with the (slowly) increasing numbers of "native" converts. Japan's first missionary conference, in late September, 1872, in Yokohama, included representatives from American and British societies as well as a Russian Orthodox Priest; its report announced that denominational divisions "obscure the oneness of the Church," and resolved to work for the advent of a catholic "Church of Christ" in Japan.[27] Similar conferences were held roughly every ten years in Japan. In China, where American mission societies had invested heavily, the first major international missions gathering took place in Shanghai in 1877, with 126 representatives from twenty-six missions. Like its predecessors, this gathering was largely European, with a handful of "native" pastors shown off more as trophies than participants (the one Chinese pastor attending as an "honorary member"). In 1907, a successor conference was held again in Shanghai where plans were launched for a national council of missionary societies with a permanent organization.[28]

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[26] Ibid, Appendix, i.

[27] Hogg, 25.

[28] Hogg provides a useful overview of missionary conferences "in the field" in *Ecumenical Foundations*, chpt 2.

As conferences convened with increasing frequency in the missions field, Europeans and Americans began to hold similar events in Europe and the United States. While meetings in Asia and Africa focused on the local "field," these gatherings surveyed the entirety of the missionary field, often distinguishing between fields "occupied" – places where missionary societies had set up stations and were operating schools and churches – and "unoccupied" – those where there was as yet no missionary presence. Large gatherings held in New York and London (1854), in London (1860), and in Liverpool (1880) were organized primarily by missionary societies and activists in Britain and the US, but included small contingents from missions societies on the European Continent. All of these conferences, like that at Ooctamund, emphasized the value, utility, and urgency of Protestant cooperation across denominational and international divides in the interest of a common purpose.

To commemorate roughly one hundred years of Protestant missions, a "Centennial Missionary Conference" was organized in London in 1888. The meeting is especially important for our purposes because it witnessed the first serious attempt of the Protestant missionary community to position their efforts at interdenominational coordination as the true legacy of the "ecumenical unity" of the church, going back to the church councils of Nicaea, Ephesus, and Constantinople. On at least two occasions, participants in that conference referred to the gathering as an "ecumenical council." Speaking toward the end of the conference, the British layman Sir S. Arthur Blackwood, claimed that the gathering was "an Oecumenical Council in the truest sense of the Word, because its participants were "those engaged either in directing or carrying Missionary enterprise throughout the world."[29] Another delegate, impressed with both the

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[29] *Report of the Centenary Conference on the Protestant Missions of the World*, ed. James Johnston, 2 vols (London: James Nisbet, 1888), vol I, 467.

international and denominational variety included and the geographical scope of the missions fields surveyed, bullishly called it "the most important and thoroughly ecumenical council that has ever yet assembled."[30]

The appearance of these claims is *prima facie* surprising, since the term ecumenical had not previously been applied to Protestant efforts to promote international and interdenominational unity. It was the result, as Brian Stanley has persuasively suggested, of anti-Catholic sentiment, or more specifically a rough coincidence of Catholic and Protestant gatherings that enabled Protestants to first conceive their vision of cooperation as an alternative to Catholic assertions of universality.[31] Behind Blackwood's claim that the conference was Oecumenical "in the true sense of the word," was an invidious comparison with the twentieth "ecumenical council" of the Roman Catholic Church – better known today as the First Vatican Council – convened in Rome eighteen years earlier. That Council's decrees – including a canon defending papal infallibility – were roundly and predictably assailed by evangelical Protestants.[32] It was the Catholic model of conciliar ecumenism – in which bishops and prelates sought to resolve doctrinal differences in a series of decrees that would be binding on all members, under penalty, in some cases, of excommunication – that Blackwood and others repudiated in their appropriation of the term "ecumenical." A Protestant ecumenical council, by contrast, would have the purpose "not to frame new creeds, not to fight over old battles, but to organize more completely, and to start more powerfully, the most extensive and practical system of Gospel propagation that the world

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[30] A. T. Pierson, "Literature of Missions: The Centenary Conference of Missions," *Missionary Review of the World*, vol xi, no 9, (Sept, 1888), 641.

[31] Stanley, 18.

[32] For an account of Protestant reactions in the US, see Grant R. Brodrecht, *'Our Country:' Northern Evangelicals and the Union During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2008), 378.

has ever seen."[33] This new vision of ecumenicity would take emphasis off of divisive questions

of doctrinal validity and lay it instead on the "ecumenical" scope of the Christian mission –

emphasizing the purely secular meaning of the word designating the inhabited earth.

For a period, this polemical, anti-Catholic assertion of ecumenicity found a limited traction. The

following Protestant missions conference, held in New York in 1900, was called an "Ecumenical

Missionary Conference," since, in the words of its organizers, "the plan of campaign which it

proposes covers the whole area of the inhabitable globe." However, the larger vision of a

Protestant ecumenism failed to materialize at the time. Apart from references to the 1900

conference, there are no appeals for an "ecumenical council" – much less any references to an

"ecumenical movement," a coinage that did not appear in print until 1925 – in Protestant

literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Even at the 1900 conference, the organizers felt

compelled to couch their title in qualifications, noting that the gathering was ecumenical in the

planetary scope of missions work, but "not because all portions of the Christian Church are

represented by delegates;"[34] some attendees, like the New York politician and missions activist

Seth Low, looked forward to the day when a future gathering would include Catholic and

Orthodox participants.[35] As missionaries planned a third missions conference in Edinburgh in

1910, they significantly dropped the original proposed title – "The Third Ecumenical Missionary

Conference" – in favor of what they called the less "confusing" "World Missionary Conference."

Two years before that gathering, which has commonly been identified as the origin of the

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[33] *Report of the Centenary Conference*, 469-70.

[34] *Ecumenical Missionary Conference, New York, 1900: Report of the Ecumenical Conference of Foreign Missions, Held in Carnegie Hall and Neighboring Churches, April 21-May 1* (New York: American Tract Society, 1900), 10.

[35] Ibid, 14.

Ecumenical Movement, its organizing committee decided "to change the name of the Conference from "Ecumenical Missionary Conference" to "World Missionary Conference."

> The reasons for this change were that the term ecumenical has a distinctly historical and technical significance. It is associated with conciliar action, and as the meeting at Edinburgh is to be a conference and not a council, a deliberative and not a legislative body, the word ecumenical is inappropriate and misleading.[36]

By 1910, in other words, Protestants had abandoned their campaign to redefine "ecumenical" as denoting deliberative conference, finding it now more expedient to distinguish the Protestant model of cooperation from "ecumenical" practices. Stanley has argued that it was the growth of authentic ecumenical spirit – an awareness of the relative quality of ones own denomination and the legitimacy of others – that ironically gave rise to this decision.[37] There is something to this – the Edinburgh conference included far more denominations from Continental Europe than any previous gathering – but it is important to stress that it was one group in particular that likely occasioned the decision to jettison the title ecumenical with its razor edge of anti-Catholicism. One of the achievements the organizing committee of the Edinburgh committee was to secure the participation of a sizable Anglo-Catholic contingent, including official representatives of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, which had refused to take part in the Centenary Missions Conference of 1888 and the "Ecumenical Missionary Conference" of 1900. As a condition of their involvement, prominent Anglo-Catholics like Bishop Charles Gore and H. H. Montgomery pushed for a less antagonistic stance against Rome, ensuring, for instance, that

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[36] Minutes of Executive Meeting Committee of the World Missionary Conference, 1910, Sept 1908, 18. See also Minutes of the General Committee, Sept 23, 1908, 21 (Union Theological Seminary Archives (hereafter UTS), World Missionary Conference Archives, Series 3, Box 1).

[37] Stanley, chpt 3.

South America would not be included in the designation of the "non-Christian world." The dropping of the term ecumenical probably emerged from similar considerations.

The Edinburgh Conference has widely been described as the culmination of the 19th century missions movement.[38] Its chief organizer and chairman, John Mott, had by 1910 become the major figure in the international missions world largely through his work in creating the Student Volunteer Movement and the World Student Christian Federation, which grew out of attempts to recruit university students in Europe and the US, as well as in Asia, to missionary work. Far more representative of Continental viewpoints than either the London or New York gatherings, it included substantial representation from German and Continental societies. It marked an effort to integrate two traditions of missionary thinking that had emerged over the 19th century, one predominant in German missiological thinking and the other predominant in Britain and the US. But before examining the Edinburgh conference in detail, it is worth considering these two traditions and how they approached the task of "evangelizing" the non-Christian world. We will emphasize that, despite certain divergences in theological background and methods, they shared a common orientation around a specific problem: how organized Christianity could exploit the opportunities of non-western societies being transformed by the incursion of western modernity and the emergence of an interconnected world. The sense of possibility was balanced by an understanding of new challenges. As anti-Catholicism increasingly failed to provide a coherent enemy at home, missionaries became concerned that their evangelizing work into the non-western world was threatened in the rear by a host of modern ills – materialism, atheism, alcoholism, and prostitution – spread to Asia and Africa as the result of modern communications

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[38] Thompson, "Ecumenism," 50-1; Hogg, 98.

and transportation, European empire, and economic globalization – the very factors that also brought missionaries to these regions. They feared the destructive effects of modernity on non-Christian societies, and yet saw them simultaneously as further arguments why these societies needed to accept Christianity in order to retain moral coherence and social order.

By the turn of the 20th century, it had become customary to distinguish two broad traditions within the foreign missions movement: a "liberal" majority, dominated by British and American missionaries and a strong and influential Lutheran-German minority, deeply tied to Pietism and particularly influential in German societies. The differences between these traditions primarily concerned their approach to the problem of the incursion of "western civilization" into the mission fields. Many Britons and North Americans embraced western "civilization" and "progress" as vehicles of God's will. By contrast, a non-liberal minority, closely tied to Lutheranism and especially Pietistic traditions, focused more narrowly on individual conversions and viewed the western encroachments on native life with indifference or even hostility.

For many in the liberal camp, spreading the Gospel was inseparable from bringing the rule of law, responsible government, hospitals and schools teaching secular subjects such as science and math and literature, and freedom of religion to non-Christian lands. To the extent that western governments aided this process, they served a providential role. There were also just useful: colonial authorities provided safety in territories where the natives might resist missionary incursions. But empire was problematic, too. Missionaries were never comfortable where economic motives seemed to trump humanitarian concerns and the evangelical imperative. When imperial administrations brutally oppressed native populations, Christian missionaries were

known to voice opposition – sometimes loudly. Colonial governments were not always so

enamored of missionaries, either. Beginning in the late 19th Century, Dutch officials began trying

to limit missionary activities in the East Indies as a result of conflicts with Muslims; the British

government, an even more frustrating case, promoted the reformation and modernization of

Hinduism in India, barred missionaries from the emirates of northern Nigeria, and promoted

Islam in the Sudan.[39] Civilization might serve God's purpose, but its worldly agents were not

always dependable allies.

Continental European missionaries embraced a different set of theological emphases. Though

Protestant missionary societies existed in most countries with Protestant populations, my focus

here will be on the single largest and most significant contingent, comprising the German

societies and the Basil Mission Society, which was legally Swiss, but drew most of its staff and

financial support from the Pietistic hotbed of Southwestern Germany. With some notable

exceptions, the German milieu put less emphasis on the salvific effects and providential role of

civilization.[40] A Pietistic emphasis on individual conversion and a broadly Romantic celebration

of *Kultur* made many German missionaries advocates of the *preservation* of local cultures. Tribal

orders and customs were seen as God's handiwork and the potential foundation of *Volkskirchen*

that would reflect the particular genius of individual peoples and point to the marvelous diversity

of God's creation (not to mention His heirarchies: there was generally little doubt that certain

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[39] Andrew Walls, 43-4.

[40] The major source of the German missiological tradition remains Johannes Christian Hoekendijk, *Kirche und Volk in der deutschen Missionswissenschaft,* abridged and translated to the German by Günter Finkenrath, et al. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1967). For a particularly useful analysis of the German debates over the virtues of western civilization in the years before World War I, see Hanns Lessing, "Evangelische 'Disaporafürsorge' im 'größeren Deutschland'" in *Deutsche evangelische Kirche im kolonialien südlichen Afrika,* Lessing, et al, hrsg. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011). Also Ustorff!

Völker had achieved higher levels of culture *and* Christianity than others had – and perhaps ever would). This concern with promoting local forms of Christianity turned some, like Gustav Warneck, the towering figure of systematic *Missionswissenschaft* in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, and the Africa missionary Bruno Gutmann, into sharp critics of all attempts at westernizing native peoples, a vice they attributed mostly to Anglo-Saxons who had confused their own *Zivilisation* with the Kingdom of God. None of this is to say that Germans were, on balance, any less enthusiastic about the overseas *Kaiserreich* than the British were about their empire. German colonies, once acquired, were a gift from God that eased access to heathen peoples and helped to secure Germany's precarious position among the world powers, and German missionaries were among the most enthusiastic proponents of Germany's overseas empire.[41] The critique of Europeanization contained within German missiology was more generally a strategy enabling missionaries to challenge British imperialism while defending their own imperial ventures; conversely British and American missionaries occasionally condemned the brutal and uncivilized character of German imperialism, especially in South West Africa.

Above all, the theoretical differences between these points of view concerned a difference in how missionaries ought to present Christianity in relation to the social, material, and cultural export of "civilization." For British and American missionaries, the central point was that civilization and the Gospel needed to travel together. These missionaries feared a situation in which European empire would deliver the edifices of civilization – science, modern industry and bureaucracy, material and technological progress – to the rest of the world without its moral and

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[41] See most recently Jürgen Kampmann, "'Festhalten an der Nationalität und am Glauben der Väter' Kolonie und 'Deutschtum in der deutschen theologischen Diskussion bis 1922," also in Lessing, et al, 2011, is a useful, critical account of the German theologians' failure to deal consistently with the claims of nationality. This has been a long-standing theme since Hoekendijk's work.

religious foundation. From Lahore in 1902, Joseph Oldham, a young Scottish missionary serving with the YMCA, wrote: "educated India is determined to have our western culture and civilization whether we like it or no… The question is whether [that civilization] is to be permeated by Christian principles, or whether it is to be agnostic and materialistic in its tendency. We are giving these young men our knowledge and our civilization; dare we give them this without also giving them our religion?"[42] Germans, by contrast, took a deeper interest in the preservation of cultural difference. They were the champions of indigenous particularity and took as their objective the Christianization of non-western social orders and cultures: rather than seeking to hold together the unity of civilization and Christianity, German missions sought to develop the organic connection between the Gospel and the particular culture life and expressions of indigenous peoples. As Warneck put it, the purpose of missions work was to "plant" *Volkskirche*, communities that fortified folk ties, indigenous practices, and traditions of hierarchical rule precisely by Christianizing them. The only way to ensure a continuous, robust and rooted Christian adherence, rather than a superficial lip-service to Christianity that was more rooted in facile or material interest in the goods of Western civilization.

The distinction between these two approaches, however, ought not to be overdrawn. By the early 20th century, both Germans and Anglo-Americans increasingly were united around a shared anxiety toward the expansion of materialistic, atheistic, agnostic strains of civilization into the fields of the non-Christian world. They found themselves alike invested in the defense of "religion" abroad against the onslaught of modern civilization, emanating from the west. A common dilemma – how to transform non-Christian societies without leaving them to the

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[42] Transcript of YMCA "Quarterly Paper" for April 20, 1902 (JO Papers, 1/1)

disintegrating and anti-religious impulses in modern life – dominated missionary thinking at the

turn of the century. This dilemma lay at the heart of the Edinburgh Conference of 1910.

As the conference report on "Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World" stated, the

Edinburgh conference convened at a moment when the opportunities for missionary expansion

seemed propitious.[43] The world had become more interconnected than ever before, easing the

travel of missionaries across oceans and into continental interiors. The exploration of the

inhabited earth was basically complete. Improved means of communication and transportation

have "spread out like a great network over nearly all of the great spaces of the unevangelised

world," making the "occupation" of previously inaccessible places in Africa and the Asian

heartland possible for the first time.[44] The spread of western learning – in large part through

missionary schools – had removed inherited prejudices and superstitions. The "ancient religions"

were on the retreat and non-Christians were more open than ever to the message of Christ. One

particular advantage to the prospects of world evangelization "is that the vast majority of people

of the non-Christian nations and races are under the sway, either of the Christian governments or

of those not antagonistic to Christian missions."[45]

But what the Report termed the "open door" to the East would not remain open for long. If

missionaries did not act "aggressively," a series of mounting obstacles would overwhelm them.

The uniquely "plastic" state of non-Christians would harden. The collapse of the ancient

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[43] Mott quoted in Charles Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott 1865-1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979) 342.

[44] *Report of Commission I: Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World.* Published for the World Missionary Conference 1910 (London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 6.

[45] Ibid, 7.

religions would create a "spiritual vacuum" which, if not filled with the spirit of Christ, would

push non-Christian peoples to the "worst forms and practices of western life." These included the

"growth of habits of luxury and self-indulgence"[46] and, more seriously, "the spread of infidel and

rationalistic ideas and materialistic views." "From many parts of the non-Christian world," the

report warned, "have come reports from our correspondents telling of the wide dissemination of

agnostic, atheistic, materialistic, and socialistic (of a destructive character) literature, traceable to

western sources… The writings of Haeckel, Huxley, and Spencer, and the anti-theistic and anti-

Christian articles… are widely circulated not only in India and Japan, but also in… Turkey and

China."[47]

As they drove deeper into the non-Christian world, then, missionaries raced against an expanding

"spiritual vacuum." Far more than any other religion, this was the real threat to their enterprise,

and it explains the urgency gripping Edinburgh in 1910. The rejection of religion in its various

forms – "anti-theism," "materialism," "atheism," all terms denoting a lack of or opposition to

religion – spreading from the west threatened to undercut the basic approach to Christian

apologetic on which the appeal to non-Christians was based. This approach can be seen in the

Report of Commission IV of the conference, "The Christian Message in Relation to Non-

Christian Religions," compiled under the leadership of the Scottish theologian D. S. Cairns.[48]

Influenced by the approach of comparative theology and the writings of F. D. Maurice and

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[46] Ibid, 22.

[47] Ibid, 24.

[48] The best short introduction to Commission IV is Brian Stanley's *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910.* For particular discussion of the roles of fulfillment theology, see Kenneth Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, 1846-1914* (London: Epworth Press, 1995), and Paul Hedges, *Preparation and Fulfillment: a History and Study of Fulfillment Theology in Modern British Thought in the Indian Context* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), chpts. 6 and 8.

Wilhelm Herrmann, Cairns worked from the assumption that non-Christian faiths contained spiritual truths that intimated in partial or corrupted terms the universal truth of Christian revelation. The missionary's task was to seek out these "points of contact," using them as bridges for leading societies and souls to the Gospel. Cairns's report was based partly on a questionnaire, distributed to hundreds of missionaries, asking them to reflect on where these "points of contact" could be found within the forms of non-Christian religiosity that they encountered in their fields (the report was divided into chapters on "Animistic Religions," "Chinese religions," "the religions of Japan," "Islam," and "Hinduism"). Possible points of contact included the recognition of a Supreme Being, belief in the immortality of the soul, or any practices or customs that seemed to encourage holiness or religious insight. Not all agreed on how such points of contact ought to be treated. Adherents of "fulfillment theology" like the India missionary J. N. Farquhar could take a relatively high view of other religions, viewing Christianity, for instance, as the "crown of Hinduism." On the other hand, Wilhelm Dilger and other Germans of Pietistic outlook drew on points of contact – *Anknüpfungspunkte* – in order to illustrate contrasts between Christianity and other faiths.[49] A. G. Hogg – a figure we will encounter again toward the end of this dissertation – argued that missionaries' task was to establish the "challenging relevancy" of the Gospel to Hindu beliefs – evincing a kind of middle ground between repudiation and incorporation.[50] But in all of these cases, overlapping spirituality was the conversation starter for missionaries, the condition of evangelical possibility.

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[49] Stanley, 211-14.

[50] A. G. Hogg, *Karma and Redemption: An Essay Twoard the Interpretation of Hinduism and the Re-statement of Christianity* (London: Christian Literature Society, 1909).

By contrast, no possibility of communication existed in the spiritual vacuum. This was what made it so abhorrent: without religion, the apologetic maneuvers necessary to missionary work could not get off the ground. The atheist or materialist Asian or African was a nightmare scenario because he (and most missionaries did think of the archetypal Asian or African as male, even as they recognized the importance of female evangelists and converts) fell between the cracks of home and foreign missionary approaches: he lacked a spiritual point of contact with Christianity through the religion of her forebears, and he lacked the bare familiarity, however weak, with Christianity per se that home missionaries sought to kindle. In such civilized despisers of religion, missionaries caught a glimpse of their endgame: "The great question with reference to all of these countries [of the non-Christian world] is, Shall they be dominated by Jesus Christ and His religion or not? Unless the principles and spirit of Christ do shape the new civilisation it is sure to become materialistic and rationalistic." "[N]o policy could be more disastrous than for the Christian Church to allow any people to become civilised without bringing the superhuman Gospel upon them in their transition state."[51] German and Anglo-American theologians might embrace different estimations of the relation between Christianity and other religions, but so long as they agreed that their task in the field was to present the Gospel to the adherents of other religions, these differences existed within a consensus around a common interlocutor, who could be addressed through his intimation of the divine – his religion. The task of building the Kingdom in the non-Christian world, then, was primarily a matter displacing or "fulfilling" other religious civilization – before the fundament of "religion" was destroyed altogether. "Science" in this enterprise was recognized as a potential seedbed for anti-religious thinking and ideas. However, properly understood, allied with Christian faith and put to

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[51] Ibid, 28.

missionary ends, science was not at all opposed to religion but the means by which it could be improved and Christianized.

At Edinburgh this elixir of anxiety and opportunity was shared by Germans and Anglo-Americans. The two blocs did not announce their common aims in perfect unanimity. Gustav Warneck, prevented from attending in person due to old age, sent Mott a letter questioning the emphasis on speed and technical organization in the missionary enterprise. The greatest advance to the missionary cause would not come through erecting a "complicated machinery" of missionary operations from the West but through bringing about "a visible presentation of the Christian life on the part of persons who were once heathen." In line with the German tradition, Warneck stressed the primary importance of local churches and "native" evangelists; he took exception too with Mott's obsession with reaching *all* "unoccupied" regions of the world and arued that it would be more prudent to devote energies to regions where Christianity had the greatest opportunities for growth or was most threatened by expansive Islam. But even Warneck's critique reflected the fundamental understanding of missions work in the antebellum era: its purpose was to establish Christ's rule over territory. The conference, he wrote, was "of such critical importance for the future of missions," and he prayed that it would be "fruitful for the expansion and development of His Kingdom in the non-Christian world."[52] His disagreements concerned the methods for doing this, not the essential purpose itself.

It is worth noting that although the report deploys many terms to describe forms of negation or criticism of religion – "agnostic," "atheistic," "rationalistic," "infidel" – "secular" is not among

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[52] "Carrying the Gospel," 434-5.

them. "Secular" enters the Edinburgh literature only in the context of a discussion of "secular education" in the mission field, that is, secondary or post-secondary education in which religious instruction was optional or non-existent.[53] The rise of "national systems of education" in Japan, China, and Turkey, as well colonies like India, was worrying to the authors because it was often "secular" and threatened the overwhelmingly dominance that missionary schools enjoyed in much of the non-western world in the nineteenth century. There is an implication that these new, state-run schools contribute to "materialistic" outlooks among the educated classes by providing a conduit for natural science and other secular subjects while sidelining religion. But the outlooks themselves were not "secular."

Nor were they "secularist." That there is no reference to "secular*ism*" at all in the reports is consistent with the original intention of the term, first introduced in 1851 by the Victorian Freethinker George Holyoake. Holyoake envisioned secularism as a positive philosophy that would go beyond the skeptical challenge to Christianity and furnish what Freethought had often been accused of failing to provide: an alternative foundation for morality. (Secularism, he wrote, concerned itself with the "the province of the real, the known, the useful, the affirmative… The Secularist… asks what will but conduce to the welfare of a man in this world, and endeavours to promote that."[54]) After a fairly brief efflorescence in radical Freethought circles in the 1850s and early 1860s, the term secularism seems to have fallen into general disuse, and even Holyoake preferred to call himself an "agnostic" after Thomas Huxley coined the term in 1869. As far as missionaries were concerned (and insofar as they were even aware of the term "secularism"), this

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[53] *Commission I*, 29.

[54] Quoted in Lee Grugel, *George Jacob Holyoake: A Study in the Evolution of a Victorian Radical* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1976), 74.

marginal, politically extreme, and particular mid-nineteenth-century attempt to substitute for Christianity an alternative, quasi-religious system of life and belief was not a concern in the mission fields they knew. It would take a war, its tumultuous global aftermath, and a crisis in the missionary movement to make the language of secularism a part of the missionary arsenal – but this is a topic we will take up in the following chapter.

II. "Christianizing" the Social Order: Social Protestantism in Germany, Britain, and the United States until 1914.

The "foreign" missions movement had a domestic counterpart – the "home" missions movement, as it was called in Britain and the United States, or *Innere Mission* in Germany.[55] Home missions, like foreign missions, trace their roots to evangelical awakenings of the early 19th century. The American Home Missions Society, formed in 1810 as the counterpart to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, was established to promote evangelical work among Native Americans and white settlers on the frontier, where they were cut off from church life in eastern towns and cities. By the 1840s and 1850s, however, most home missions work in North American and Europe had come to focus around a constellation of issues – unemployment and poverty, social "vices" such as prostitution and alcoholism, the decline of the family, care for the sick and indigent – broadly grouped under the rubric of the "social problem." As the deplorable conditions of urban, industrialized modernity moved to the center of their work, home missions evolved into an enterprise that was distinct from foreign missions not only in the territorial jurisdiction it claimed – "home" as opposed to "foreign" – but in its conceptual

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[55] "Interior Mission," the terms multivalence registered both an emphasis on interior (moral and spiritual) regeneration of the individual and society as a goal of missionary work as well as the focus of the work on domestic as opposed to foreign fields.

underpinnings. The first task of foreign missionary work was to expose the shortcomings of indigenous belief systems, laying bare their errors and insufficiencies, in order to champion the Christian alternative. By contrast, missionaries working the home front confronted something like the opposite challenge: their task was to rebuild or resuscitate Christendom threatened by the sins, corporate and individual, of modern life.[56] Both home and foreign missionaries saw missions work involving the conversion of "society" and "individuals" alike – even when they disagreed over the precise relation between social regeneration and individual salvation. Home missions, however, focused on making theoretically Christian societies "truly" Christian in practice, whereas foreign missions focused on bringing exogenous peoples and beliefs into the ambit of Christendom.

This categorical distinction was reflected in many ways. First, foreign missions societies in all European and North American countries were institutionally distinct from home missions societies and other Christian reform bodies. One partial exception to this rule – the international Student Christian Movement – distinguished in its conferences and literature between evangelization work in "home" and "foreign" fields, sometimes subdividing the former into evangelizing work in "Protestant" and "other Christian" (i.e. Catholic and Eastern Orthodox) areas.[57] Missions work in "Christian" as opposed to "non-Christian" societies so clearly required

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[56] Edward L. Queen, "Home Missions," *Encyclopedia of American Religious History, Vol. I* (3rd edition), 643-7; Latourette (1941), chpts 6-8; For useful insights into home missionary thought and practice in the US in the 19th and 20th centuries, see John A. Hutchison, *We Are Not Divided: A Critical History and Study of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America* (New York: Round Table, 1941), chpt 1. For a useful overview of the conceptual framework of *Innere Mission* and how it was distinguished from foreign missions in the work of 19th century German missiology, see Klaus Schäfer "'Weltmission und Volksmission' Geschichte – Bestandaufnahme – Perspektiven" (unpublished address before the *Delegiertenversammlung der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Missionarische Dienste,* 24 May, 2005) http://www.a-m-d.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Texte/weitere_Autoren/Schaefer20040525.pdf.

[57] See, e.g. *Report of the Conference of the World Student Christian Federation at Lake Mohonk*, *June 2-8 1913* (WSCF: New York, 1913), 243-267.

different techniques of social action and strategies of persuasion that the distinction rarely

required spelling out. But some explicit distinctions between the two can be found. As the

Scottish Congregationalist John Brown Paton – familiar with the German tradition of *Innere*

Mission – explained in 1873: "In contrast to the foreign 'outer' mission of the Church," the

"inner" mission of the church "sets forth its mission *within* land in which it is planted. bringing

into vivid relief and definite vision the immediate and practical work of the Church among all the

people of that land. The object of this immediate and practical mission is, that the country it thus

occupies, shall become, not nominally but in reality, a part of Christendom in which the

institutions and usages of society, and the condition of the people, harmonise with the righteous

will of God."[58]

While it is customary to narrate the history of foreign missions as a convergence of tributaries

toward the conflux of the Edinburgh conference of 1910, the history of social Protestantism

before 1914 lacks a culminating event. Rather, it presents a picture of the various movements in

"Christian" societies, most of them municipal, regional, and national in focus, mimicking one

another in institutional organization and drawing intellectual inspiration from visions of

Christian social reform that crossed national boundaries. Toward the end of the 19th century and

in the first decades of the 20th, however, one specifically international issue moved toward the

center of efforts at Protestant reform. Before the outbreak of World War I, an Anglo-German

peace movement succeeded for a brief moment in mobilizing the support of church leaders and

lay Protestant reformers in Britain and Germany. In what follows we will first outline in broad

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[58] John Brown Paton, Introduction, *Inner Mission Pamphlets*, (London: J. Clark, 1908), vi.

terms the features of the home missions work as it relates to Protestantism, before focusing in

detail on this effort at promoting German-British "friendship" through the churches.

Many scholars have observed a political divergence between Anglo-American home missionary

efforts and German ones. Antecedents of the home missions movement in Britain may be found

in the social and moral campaigns of evangelical Protestants in the late 18th and early 19th

centuries, especially abolitionism in Britain and the international Quaker peace movement. These

efforts provided inspiration for later liberal and progressive politics in Britain and the US.

Indeed, much home missions work in these countries took on an explicitly liberal cast.

"Settlement houses," such as Toynbee Hall in London and Hull House in Chicago, offered

shelter, moral uplift, and Christian literature to the poor. They furnished a matrix of social reform

movements in both countries. "Christian socialists" in Britain, centered around the Guild of St.

Matthew (1877-1909) and the Christian Social Union (1889-1919), pillars of Victorian reform,

were strong proponents of economic reforms which mobilized support within the Anglican

Church and Non-Conformist churches. Meanwhile, the Social Gospel Movement in the United

States, championed by figures like Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, similarly

championed progressive reforms, workers movements, and urban sanitation.

By contrast, the origins of home missions in Germany were strongly conservative. The Hamburg

pastor Johann Wichern founded houses for the care of orphans and promoted prison reform in

Prussia in the late 1830s and 1840s out of a conviction that if churches did not evolve a social

program and humanitarian networks of their own, socialism would sweep religion from German

society. Wichern conceived of German "interior mission" as a Christian response to the threat of

socialist revolution and anarchy. His efforts found favor with conservative church leaders and with departments of the Prussian state.[59] By the mid-century, a network of charitable organizations had sprung up around the country, serving as a nexus for Christian social action and reform advocacy. The Central Committee for Interior Mission of the German Evangelical Church [*Zentral-Ausschuß für Innere Mission der deutschen evangelischen Kirche*], founded in 1849 in the aftermath of a wave of European revolutions, emphasized philanthropic work and generally did not challenge structural inequities in German society. However, social Protestantism in Germany was not uniformly conservative. Alfred Stoecker's Christian Socialist Workers Party [*Christlich–soziale Partei*], for example, advocated national labor associations, higher wages, the eight-hour day, and pensions for widows and orphans. The Protestant Social Congress [*Evangelisch-Sozialer Kongress*] brought liberal theologians in German universities, such as Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf von Harnack, in the ambit of social reform while also providing a platform for liberals like Friedrich Naumann.[60]

While social Protestantism had its liberal protrusion in Germany, German liberal reformers, unlike their British counterparts, never developed strong support among the clerics of its state churches [*Ländeskirchen*]. Wichern's Inner Missions remained suspicious of the more structural transformations advocated by the Evangelical Social Congress. The terrain of social Protestantism in Germany was politically polarized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while in the US and Britain, Social Gospel ideas drew support within the mainstream of clerical

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[59] Albert Wu, "Unashamed of the Gospel": Johann Hinrich Wichern and the Battle for the Soul of Prussian Prisons, *Church History*, 78 (2009), 283–308

[60] For the most useful overview of the nexus of Protestant activism and state policy in the Wilhelmine and Weimar periods, see *"Weder Kommunismus noch Kapitalismus": Bürgerliche Sozialreform in Deutschland vom Vormärz bis zur Ära Adenauer* hrsg Rüdiger vom Bruch (München: C. H. Beck, 1985).

leadership.[61] In 1888, the Lambeth Conference of the Church of England advocated for factory-

act legislation; in 1897, the Conference recommended state aid for the sick, unemployed, and

aged. In the United States, Social Gospel principles underwrote the formation of organizations

such as the Federal Council of Churches – comprised of official representatives from 32

denominational bodies – whose "Social Creed" (1908) laid out a robust condemnation of social

inequality and unregulated capitalism.

Despite an overall difference in the dominant political orientations of German and Anglo-Saxon

Protestantism, it is worth underscoring their essential similarities. First, the most liberal Social

Gospellers and the most conservative social reformers in Germany shared a conviction that

Christianity was not, per se, a political doctrine but that its truth and social message transcended

political categories and parties. Second, social Protestantism in Germany and the Anglo-

American milieu alike was grounded in liberal *theology* shaped by Schleiermacher and Ritschl –

a theology stressing the immanence of God's work and the presence of the Kingdom of God in

this life. Even the "otherworldly" orientation of Pietistic Lutheranism embraced the Kingdom as

the telos of social reform: Wichern's *Innere Mission* commissions, for instance, had the purpose

of "helping to build the Kingdom of God within Protestant Germany and among Germans living

abroad."[62] The possibility of building the Kingdom – of instantiating Christian social relations

and community within this world – brought Protestants into the associational space of the public

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[61] Kenneth Barnes, *Nazism, Liberalism, and Christianity: Protestant Social Thought in Germany and Britain, 1925-1927* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), chpt 2.

[62] "Der Central-Ausschuß für Innere Mission der deutschen evangelischen Kirche hat den Zweck und die Aufgabe, innerhalb des evangelischen Deutschlands, sowie unter den im Auslande lebenden Deutschen, durch den Dienst der Innere Mission das Reich Gottes bauen zu helfen." Quoted in "Central-Ausschuß für Innere Mission der deutschen evangelischen Kirche: Programm und Statut*"* [Conference Program for a meeting of the Berlin Chapter of the Inner Mission (Evangelische Laendeskirchearchiv in Berlin, 29/270)]. See also "Innere Mission" in *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol 10 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1882), 23.

sphere. Both parties believed in the possibility and urgent necessity of building a Christian

society outside of the church, one that would be actualized not merely in worship, preaching, and

church attendance but in Christian social relations and in a unity of physical and spiritual well-

being for all classes of society. The conservative tenor of German home missions work might be

understood at best as a function of the stronger mobilization of the organized Socialist Party

(SPD) and the presence of an anti-religious political left that was never as strong in Britain,

much less the US. But if a divergence in political orientation and sensibility surely existed,

German and Anglo-American approaches to home missions were more alike than different: both

emphasized that Christianity had a specifically public role to play, both emphasized corporate as

well as individual salvation, and both believed that the Christian transformation of society

required state action, not just private philanthropic initiative.[63] No less a Social Gospeller than

Walter Rauschenbusch could praise the German tradition of social Protestantism, with its fruits

of the Protestant Social Congress and the Friends of Protestant Freedom, noting even in 1918 the

"wonderful work of the 'Innere Mission' since Wichern."[64]

This shared theological matrix of liberal and conservative visions of social reform underscores

how both were concerned with the "Christianization" of a modern civilization that seemed only

precariously Christian. It was possible to embrace much different political choices – to support

Prussian absolutism or "Christian socialism," democracy or monarchy – while still subscribing to

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[63] For Wichern's relations with the Prussian State around the question of Prison Reform, see Albert Wu, 283-5. For an account *Innere Mission* in the local context of Thürigen that stresses its social reformist (as opposed to merely private philanthropic) orientation, and its institutional influence on regional and municipal governments, see Edward J. Mattheiu "Public Protestantism and Mission in Germany's Thuringian States, 1871-1914 *Church History* 69 1 (March 2010) 115-143.

[64] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: MacMillan ,1918), 28.

the fundamental principle that wider, secular society was a site of Christian missions work, where souls and communities alike needed to be brought to reflect the ideals of the Kingdom. All movements of social Protestantism, notwithstanding their political variegation, sought to realize a truly "Christian society" that was *not* the ecclesiastical body of the church but the wider space of "society," constituting class relations within national boundaries as well as international relations.

In Germany, the US, and Britain, conceptions of Christian society became both highly nationalized and internationalized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the US, social Protestantism often embraced a belief in America's providential destiny as a nation called out among others to serve as a model to other nations of universal ideals of equality and freedom. In Britain, the same sorts of associations were identified with a world historical vision of the British Empire as both a civilizer of nations and a specific form of Christian commonwealth. In Germany, the nationalist thrust of the inner mission as well as liberal reformers such as Naumann and Stoecker expressed itself in advocacy for *Volksmission* at home (in contrast to *Voelkermission* abroad). According to this idea, the patterns and cultural forms of Christian life in Germany would reflect and amplify the peculiar virtues and difference of the German *Volksgemeinschaft.* Thus home missions reflected the same divergent assumptions about cultural difference that shaped foreign missions, discussed above. German-Lutheran and Anglo-American-Reformed embraced the "generalizing universalism" which assert the validity of a Christian civilization in every situation, whereas German missions embraced a "relativizing

universalism," where a category of nationhood/Volk is taken as universally valid but only to describe phenomena essentially different in every iteration.[65]

The national orientation of social Protestantism as a rule lent Protestant support to imperial expansion and implicated the churches in national rivalry and competition. But Protestant nationalism did not merely incubate antagonism among Western nations, it also sought to overcome such antagonism. Groups such as the Federal Council of Church's Commission on International Peace and Goodwill, established in 1908, supported arbitration movements, and the Lambeth Conferences of 1897 and 1908 urged arbitration and other peaceful methods of settling disputes. After the Hague Conference of 1907, the first Christian peace organizations with specifically international membership emerged. Following the Hague conference, two of its attendees, the British Quaker MP J. Allen Baker and the German Baron Eduard de Neufville succeeded in securing the support of church leaders in both countries for a series of exchanges between German and British church leaders.[66] In 1908, Baker assembled an interconfessional committee and invited 130 German churchmen to England; the following summer, German churchmen returned the favor, convening with over 100 British theologians and clerics and lay activists in Germany. The idea behind these conventions, in the words of then Archbishop Randall Davidson, was to create "the right atmosphere" for dealing with relations between the two powers, and Westminster and Berlin patronized the efforts. In 1910, the German pastor Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, a veteran of the Student Christian Movement and founder of a

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[65] For this distinction see Christopher Hill, "Conceptual Universalization in the Transnational Nineteenth Century" *Global Intellectual History*, eds. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

[66] See Daniel Gorman, "Ecumenical Internationalism: Willoughby Dickinson, the League of Nations and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches" *Journal of Contemporary History* vol 45, no 1 (Jan, 2010), 55-6, and Nils Karlstroem, "Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work" *A History of the Ecumenical Movement,* 512-3.

British-style settlement movement in East Berlin, and the British liberal Willoughby Dickinson established in 1910 the Associated Councils of Churches of the British and German Empires for Promoting Friendly Relations between the Two Peoples. Periodicals, such as the *Peacemaker* in Britain (1911) and *Die Eiche* (1913) in Germany – were started to tout the venture and drum up support for German-British peace through Christian solidarity.

Energized by progressive optimism and a conviction that shared religious and moral allegiance could tame imperial competition, these groups represented the first real attempt to unite Protestants internationally around a cause that was, specifically, a concern of "Christendom" as a whole, rather than merely individual Christian nations. The task of subordinating diplomatic relations between sovereign states to the Gospel of brotherly love was thus a unique issue in the repertoire of home missions in its international focus. It was distinguished from missionary work in the foreign fields, which contained no sovereign state powers, with the exception of Japan.[67] But these efforts met a monumental setback even before the ink was dry on their quixotic mission statements. At its first meeting in Constance, Germany, from August 3-4, 1914, "war by time table" requisitioned the German rail system; more than half the delegates could not even make it to the gathering. Those who did attend hastily declared the formation of a new institution – the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches (WA) – as Europe descended into war. The WA succeeded in winning the support of Andrew Carnegie, who funded its operation through the "Church Peace Union," a philanthropic institution he founded later that

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[67] The Protestant-led peace movement as it emerged in the late 19th and early 20th century was a matter falling within the purvey of home missions since it concerned "Christian" nations. The aims of arbitration and international organization that these groups supported were intended to address relations between sovereign states, and thus for the most part excluded relations on the missions fields, where, with the eventual exception of Japan, Westerners recognized no sovereign states.

year. As we'll see, however, during the War, "continuation committees" of the World Alliance in Britain, France, and the UK and United States never managed to bring church leaders in their countries into conference. The War eclipsed the vision of international Christian cooperation that brought late flowerings of the home missions movement like the WA into short bloom.

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Before addressing the impact of World War I on international Protestantism, one final feature of the landscape of Protestant-led cooperation of the antebellum era requires mention. In addition to the practical efforts we have examined here, aimed at extending the rule of Christ over the domains of western society and the non-Christian world, there were a number of efforts in the 19th and 20th centuries to resolve longstanding doctrinal divisions between churches. In the United States and Britain, these efforts were often referred to as a search for "organic unity" among churches.[68] Dialogues between individual Anglican and Orthodox clerics found surprising common ground in issues that had divided churches for centuries, including the Sacraments and the *filioque*, added by the Western church to the Nicene creed.[69]

Though the organizers of the Edinburgh conference agreed to set matters of church "legislation" to the side, some did recognize that doctrinal differences between churches compromised the cause of missions work abroad. One outgrowth of the Edinburgh conference was the formation

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[68] See for instance the contributions to *Church Unity: Five Lectures Delivered in the Union Theological Seminary, New York, During the Winter of 1896*. (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1896).

[69] See the discussion of these efforts in Thomas Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement: An Introductory History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), chpt 4.

of The World Conference of Faith and Order, founded by the American Episcopal Bishop of the Philippines, Charles Brent. The organization sought to provide a platform for the representatives of various Protestant and Orthodox churches to become better acquainted with each others' theological and ecclesiastical positions in the hopes of working slowly toward "organic union." But no efforts were made in these discussions to *formulate*, from a perspective outside or above the traditions represented in these conversations, the terms of such a union. Brent saw the body rather as an explicitly paramissionary organization, whose purpose would be to enhance the credibility of Christian churches in their efforts at evangelization abroad. He approached the question of resolving doctrinal questions separating the churches on the grounds that "it is little short of absurd to try to bring into the Church of Christ the great nations of the Far East unless we can present an undivided front. For purely practical reasons we feel the necessity of the Church's realization of Unity."[70] The first assembly of the World Conference on Faith and Order would be delayed by the outbreak of World War I and not held until 1927.

III. World War I and the Collapse of the Kingdom

The War dealt a devastating blow to all Protestant international movements. It constituted a caesura. This was *not* because the experience of the war chastened optimistic assessments of the progress of the Kingdom – as we will see, some Protestants on the victor's side found in the conclusion of the Peace, and in particular in the establishment of the League of Nations, new reasons for optimism that the era of a coming Christianization of the social and international order was nearer at hand than ever before. But it was precisely the postwar institutions that

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[70] Quoted in Alexander C. Zabriskie, *Bishop Brent: Crusader for Christian Unity*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948), 92.

Anglo-American and many neutral Protestants championed that German Protestant leaders rejected, seeing them as instruments not of the Kingdom's reach but of Anglo-Saxon (or Anglo-French) imperium. In other words, between 1914 and 1927, the prospects of a Protestant internationalism anchored in the Anglo-German cooperation on which it was based collapsed as a result of political conflicts between these two blocs. During the War and its aftermath, "politics" seemed to intractably divide the Protestant international and became a source of division far more destructive to the cause of cooperation and unity than theological and doctrinal differences had been previously.

The story of the emergence of "politics" as a source of division among Protestants in this era has generally been glossed over in most church histories of the movement, as well as more recent accounts by secular historians. Though there has been no shortage of accounts of the animosities between German and Allied church leaders during and after the war, the emphasis of church histories has been on the ultimate reconciliation between the former belligerents. Moreover, many of these histories have drawn attention to the cluster of new international organizations – including the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches (1914), the Universal Conference on Life and Work (1919), and the International Missionary Council (1921) – that emerged during the war and in its immediate aftermath to recover the "unity" among Christians that the war tore apart. However, these institutions, all inspired and created by Allied or neutral church leaders, far from *promoting* cooperation and unity generally served well into the mid-1920s as arena for the expression of Allied-German recrimination. Their creation and the gatherings they organized furnished occasions for German and Allied church leaders to clash over whether the postwar settlement was a step on the way to universal harmony or a victor's

peace that enchained the defeated. While church histories elide this period of conflict into a larger narrative of the advance of church unity, secular historians have tended to overlook the Allied-German rift altogether, focusing mostly on American and British support for the League of Nations and variations of Protestant liberal internationalism.

The following section will treat the war and its immediate aftermath in two parts, first focusing on its impact on foreign missions and then examining its impact on European church leaders and lay activists whose work focused on the application of Christian faith and principles to social and international problems.

The war dealt a devastating blow to cooperation among foreign missionaries, particularly between German and British missionaries. In August of 1914, Allied forces attacked German colonial possessions, and by 1915 the Kaiser's overseas empire was essentially decimated, though fighting continued until 1918 between Allied troops and the resourceful German general Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck in East Africa. Almost without exception, able-bodied missionaries working in former German territories, as well as Allied colonies, such as India and Southeast Africa, were imprisoned or repatriated. To the Germans, the Allied treatment of German missionaries was an outrageous violation of a principle that had gained traction in missions discourse in the preceding half decade, that of the "supranationality of missions," a bid to accommodate and welcome the efforts of missions groups from other nationalities within imperial territories.[71] Karl Axenfeld, director of the Berlin Missionary Society, decried the

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[71] See Ernst Damman, "Ausblick: Die deutsche Mission in den ehemalgen deutschen Kolonien zwischen den Weltkriegen" *Imperialismus und Kolonialmission. Kaiserliches Deutschland und koloniales Imperium,* ed. Klaus J. Bade (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982) For a concise description of the disruption of the German mission societies during

British *Missionspolitik* as an unprecedented incursion of the state into "religious" matters. Worse

still, not one British missionary had condemned this crime. While it had always been true that the

British missionaries tended to elide the interests of their Empire and the Church of England with

the cause of Christ, the war had pushed this confusion to new extremes.

The *Deutscher Missions-Ausschuß,* an organization representing all missions in German-

speaking territory, responded by issuing the "Appeal to Evangelical Christians Abroad," drafted

by Axenfeld and signed by most of the leaders of German missionary societies, including

Richter, Paul Hennig of the Herrnhut Missions Society, as well as prominent supporters of

German missions such as Adolf Harnak and Adolf Diessmann and the court pastor, Ernst

Dryander in early September 1914. It claimed that Germany had gone to war in self-defense

again "Asiatic barbarism," attacked Britain for allying herself not only with Russia but with

"heathen" Japan. The letter referred to "unnamable" crimes perpetrated on German missionaries,

lamented the break of a union with those "who by blood and history and faith are our brothers,

with whom we felt ourselves in the common world task more closely bound than with almost any

other nation."[72] It went on to note the terrible setbacks the British missionary policy had dealt to

the cause of world Christianization that both British and Germans had heralded in Edinburgh

four years before.

> The mission fields which the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh indicated as the
> most important in the present day – in mid-Africa with its rivalry between Christendom
> and Islam for the black races, and eastern Asia remolding its life – are now becoming the

the War, see Richard V. Pierard, "Shaking the Foundations: World War I, the Western Allies, and German
Protestant Missions," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (1998), 13-19.

[72] Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J. H. Oldham* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 126

scenes of embittered struggles between peoples who bore in a special degree the responsibility for the fulfillment of the Great Commission in these lands.[73]

A British response, written by Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury, defended British conduct, citing evidence of the government's desire to stay out of war in August 1914, while echoing the Germans' remorse at the breach of fellowship between the two nations. None of this had a meliorating effect. Acrimony between the German and British churchmen increased steadily as the conflict wore on: not long after the "Appeal to Evangelical Christians Abroad," twenty-nine Protestant pastors joined a dozens of German academics in signing the "Appeal to the Civilized World," an encomium to the glories of German culture which emphatically dismissed charges of German "barbarism" in Belgium. Protestant voices on each sides of the conflict declared that the other had sacrificed the cause of Christ to perfidious national interests, besmirching the religious work of missions with the struggle for power.

No direct correspondence or personal contact was possible after the autumn of 1914 among missionaries who had forged intimate bonds of friendship and cooperation in the years before the war. The Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh conference, chaired by Mott with Oldham as Secretary, kept in touch with German allies through the intermediary of Friedrich Würz, inspector of the Basel Missionary Society in Switzerland. Through Würz, who was sympathetic to the German cause, the Germans implored Oldham to lobby the British government for a release of missionaries and restoration to their stations. Oldham refused: while regretting the destruction of the German missions effort, he saw little likelihood that an approach to the British Government would do much good, and instead set to work organizing a "relief fund" for German missionary operations to ensure that their operations would be taken over by Lutheran societies

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[73] Quoted in Ibid, 126.

in Scandinavia and the US, or, barring the possibility of an intra-confessional hand-off, British missionaries.[74] Privately, Oldham expressed his shock at Germany's conduct in the War – especially after her introduction of poison gas, the use of which "fills me with horror," as he wrote to a friend.[75] Germany had "renounced her claims to a place in the family of nations." In public, Oldham struggled to remain neutral. But the events of 1916 only deepened the conflict over the war time fate of missionary work, as British interned German missionaries in India, pressured China and South Africa to do the same, and appropriated properties of the North German Mission in West Africa.

Abandoning their British channel in Oldham, the Germans turned increasingly to Mott by late 1915, lobbying him to circulate a document enumerating German grievances among the Edinburgh Continuation Committee. When Mott declined to do so, they began to sense an erosion of Mott's neutrality. Richter and Axenfeld dispatched lengthy letters to Mott criticizing his unwillingness to criticize "the Satanic campaign of lies and calumny" from English missionaries. Axenfeld even lectured Mott that America was effectively "an ally of our enemies," since it continued to sell arms to the British, preferring to "earn billions" rather than retain strict neutrality. A momentary reprieve in the bad relations caused by Mott's visit to Berlin in June 1916 was entirely undone by the Americans' declaration of war against the Germans in April 6, 1917. Exacerbating the situation further, Mott took part in a special diplomatic mission to Russia under Elihu Root in June 1917. Though Mott maintained that his part in the mission had purely concerned "religious, educational, and humanitarian purposes," the Germans

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[74] Clements, *Faith on the Frontier*, 147-55.

[75] Pierard, 611.

disagreed. The *Evangelisches Missions-Magazin* expressed the consensus view of the German missionary community in announcing that they could "only view Mott's trip with great sorrow. We fear that he is now lost to the cause of German missions. The idea of a Protestant world mission was stabbed in the heart when Mott joined the belligerents."[76] When the Scottish missionary J. N. Ogilvie attacked the "fatal spirit of meglomania" which had consumed the Germans, making their missionary efforts "which a few years ago were a glory" now "a hissing and a shame" at a General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the die was cast. Würz wrote Oldham that the conduct of Mott and the British will "destroy the last vestige of community that remains among us."[77] The German *Missionsausschuß* declared in 1917 that it no longer recognized Mott as Chairman and Ogilvie as a member of the Continuation Committee, which after this point effectively ceased to function.

The end of the War found some of the victors in a reconciliatory mood, but this did not restore cooperation between the two blocs. In April 1918, before the conflict had reached its conclusion, umbrella missionary organizations in the US and Britain quickly set up an "Emergency Committee" to provide funding for war-impaired missions, including German missions. The following year, Oldham, through his contacts in the Foreign Office, succeeded in convincing the delegates at Paris to add a provision protecting German missionary assets from the general confiscation of German imperial possessions written into the Peace Settlement. Article 438 of the Versailles Treaty stipulated that the property of German missionary societies would be placed under "a board of trustees… composed of persons holding the faith [denomination] of the

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[76] Quoted in Pierard, 615.

[77] Pierard, 616

Mission whose property is involved." This provision, along with petitions by American and British to peace leaders to ensure rights of missionary freedom in the territorial Mandates enabled Germans to later recover their missionary holdings overseas; at the time it did little to ease the tensions between the Germans and the Allies. On his first postwar visit to Germany in 1920, Mott was subjected to intense questioning at a meeting of missionary and student movement leaders over his conduct as a member of the Root Commission in Russia. Axenfeld afterward wrote Mott, "you have lost the important religious position you have enjoyed in Germany before the war and it will be very hard to regain it." At a meeting in Crans, Switzerland, German and Allied representatives of the Edinburgh Continuation meeting reassembled to plan the formation of the International Missionary Council – the first plans for which had been floated in the months following the Edinburgh conference. But the meeting devolved into arguments over war guilt. In March 1921, the German *Missionsausschuß* voted to boycott all international meetings so long as German missions were barred from Allied held areas. Thus when the IMC was formally established at the Lake Mohonk conference later that summer, no German's were in attendance – a fact that left Mott and Oldham deeply pained and embarrassed. "Is it not a fundamental Christian principle that differences between Christians, however deep and great, are to be resolved within the Christian fellowship and not as a precedent condition to it?" Oldham remarked pointedly to his colleague, the Council's American Secretary, A. L. Warnshuis. To the Germans, however, the entire undertaking of international missionary cooperation seemed to have been absorbed into the British will to power, forfeiting its authentically Christian concern.

Politics, which missionaries had previously been able to sideline in favor of voluntary cooperation around a "religious" aim of evangelization, had split the missionary community at its heart. The Germans saw in the Peace Settlement and the League of Nations not an inclusive international system but Anglo-Saxon imperialism by subtler means. In a multi-part survey of the global missionary situation in the *Neue Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift,* Richter predicted catastrophic consequences for Protestant missions under the hegemony of the Anglo-Saxon "Nation-State-Concept" [*Staatsidee*].[78] Richter argued that the German "people-concept" [*Volksidee*] had always recognized the right of heathen peoples to develop themselves along lines specific to their historical and racial particularities. But the "false" or "lying sign" [*Heuchelschild*] of political self-determination was quite another matter.[79] It sprung from the peculiarly Anglo-Saxon notion that the state existed, not by the will of God as a guarantor of social order in a sinful world, but through the wills of individuals contracting to promote their interests and well being. If the British were not careful to explain where and how the principle was to be applied, Richter ominously warned, it threatened to break the dams of legitimate authority and throw nations into chaos, permanently setting back the cause of Christian missions. In Wilson's idea of a world "safe for democracy," German missionaries saw a world perilously unsafe for missions work. Axenfeld, for his part, similarly saw in the Peace Settlement the end of the principle of the supra-nationality of missions and its subordination of religious concerns to political ones. For him, the League institutionalized the system of international relations that justified the British destruction of German mission works. It set a precedent that could only be more dangerous in the hands of non-Christian states. What would happen if, at some future date,

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[78] Julius Richter, "Zur Missionslage," *Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift* 1, 46 (1919), 24.

[79] Ibid, 45.

war were to break out between the United States and Japan for control of the Southern Pacific? "Is it truly so difficult to recognize that, if it were to come to such a conflict, God forbid, Japan would have, in matters concerning the treatment of missionaries, a poor model [in Allied conduct] to follow?"[80] Conversely, what if either missionaries in India or – more likely, Indian converts – were to throw their support behind resistance movements against the Raj in the putative name of God? Even as British missionaries labored to ensure missionary rights in mandated regions, for Axenfeld the restoration of the German empire remained a necessary condition for keeping politics in the non-Christian world in its place.

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World War I broke apart German-Allied cooperation in foreign missions work – the area where voluntary association of Christians in the 19th and 20th centuries had been most effectively and robustly international in scope. What effect did it have on the various international movements for social reform and international peace? For one thing, the conflict brought the problem of interstate relations to the center of the Christian social agenda in Britain and the US. A movement that had focused primarily on class relations within nations shifted its attention to the international domain. Walter Rauschenbusch, overstating the contrast somewhat, nonetheless captured the shift in emphasis in 1917: "Before the War the social gospel dealt with social classes; to-day it is being translated into international terms. The ultimate cause of the war was

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[80] "Ist es wirklich so schwer, zu erkennen, daß, wenn es zu solchem Konflikt, den Gott verhüten wolle, kommen sollte, Japan, was die Behandlung der Missionen anlangt, ein schlimmes Vorbild erhalten hat?" Karl Axenfeld, "Der Weg der Boten Christi und die Mächte dieser Welt" *Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift* 3, Jahrg 45 (1918), 110.

the same lust for easy and unearned gain which has created the internal social evils under which

every nation has suffered."[81]

But in proportion as international relations moved to the center of Protestant social thought and

activism during and in the years after the War, the prospects for cooperation among German and

Allied churches diminished. During the war, clerics in neutral countries led numerous attempts at

conciliation, seeking to convene summits of church leaders from belligerent countries and to

rally a united declaration concerning the War. But all of these came to naught. After the war, the

terms of the peace, in particular the War Guilt clause in the Versailles Treaty and the proposal

for a League of Nations, only exacerbated antagonisms between Allied and German church

leaders. Seeking to overcome these tensions, Protestants in allied and neutral countries attempted

once again to launch an "ecumenical" body, this time in 1919. Conceived by the Swedish

Archbishop of Uppsala Nathan Soederblom, the "Ecumenical Council of Churches" would

include not individuals or voluntary associations but representatives from official church bodies.

The effort, however, failed in two respects. When Catholic Churches refused to join, the bodies'

organizing committee dropped the title "ecumenical," marking yet another retreat for the

Protestant-led vision of interchurch unity. Moreover, when the body – renamed the Universal

Council of Life and Work – finally convened in 1925, seemingly intractable divisions between

Allied and German church leaders ensured that it would fail in one of its primary objectives: to

promote Protestant and Orthodox support for the League of Nations.

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[81] Rauschenbusch, 4. Also see C. Roland Marchand, *The American Peace Movement and Social Reform 1889*-1918 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), chpt 9.

After the ignominious conclusion of the Constance Conference, the leaders of the World

Alliance in Germany and Allied countries issued statements lamenting the outbreak of war, yet

insisted on the justice and honor of their nations' respective causes. William Temple compared

the broken body of European Christendom to Christ on the Cross, "but this time… it is as though

Peter were driving home the nails, and John were piercing the side." Great Britain, however, "is

engaged in a war from which… there was offered to our nation no honourable way of escape,"

he insisted, distancing himself from pacifist opposition to the struggle.[82] Peace, declared

Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze in January 1915, was his dearest new year's hope. And yet the

German armies were engaged in a war of self-defense (*Notwehrkrieg*), and their success was a

precondition of a peace that would be worthy of the sacrifice [*der der Opfer wert ist*].[83]

From 1914 through 1918, the campaign to organize Protestants behind the cause of peace

became the exclusive preserve of churchmen in Neutral countries. The most important of these

figures – a towering presence in ecumenical historiography – was Soederblom. On various

occasions in the Fall of 1914, 1916, and 1917, Soederblom appealed to church leaders on both

sides to support a negotiated peace. If any Protestant churchman stood a chance in this quixotic

campaign, it was him. It was not only that he had a degree of credibility as a citizen of a neutral

country. A veteran of the Student Volunteer movement, Soederblom was close friends with

church leaders in Europe, including in Britain Temple and the Scottish Congregationalist A. E.

Garvie; in France, Paris Professor of Theology Wilfred Monod, who belonged to one of France's

most prominent Reformed families and was head of the French Protestant Federation; and in

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[82] William Temple, "Christianity and War," *Papers for War-Time*, 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1914), 2-3.

[83] Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, "1915," *Die Eiche*, (Jan, 1915), 1.

Germany, Adolf Diessmann and Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze. He was also a Lutheran with deep

ties to the academic and clerical world of German Protestantism: between 1912 and 1914, for

example, he had been a Professor of Religion at the University of Leipzig. Soederblom's son

served as a German officer in the war and was killed in combat.

Soederblom's wartime efforts met with repeated frustration, however. Seeking to rally

churchmen from belligerent countries to support a peace appeal in 1914, Soederblom was turned

down by the Germans (who portrayed the German campaign as one of just self-defense), the

British (who insisted on the need to vindicate the violation of Belgian neutrality), and the French

(who insisted on the total evacuation of foreign forces from French soil as a precondition for a

peace summit). Moved by Pope Benedict XV's peace appeal in 1917, Soederblom even reached

out to individual Catholics, such as the Archbishop of Cologne, to participate in a conference for

Protestant and Catholic churches to bear witness to Christian solidarity in the face of the conflict

in January of 1916. The Archbishop expressed his interest in the proposal but declined to attend,

observing that it would be necessary first for the Pope to announce his position on the matter. As

for Protestant churches from belligerent countries, they refused to participate. Until 1917,

Americans in the Church Peace Union and the World Alliance had supported Soederblom's

efforts, backed by large contingents of American Protestantism that wished to stay out of the

conflict. But the declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare by Germany and the sinking of

the *Lusitania* eroded the appeal of American pacifism, while the mainline of American liberal

Protestantism threw its support behind Woodrow Wilson's decision to bring the United States'

into the War in April 1917.[84] Before long, Social Gospellers such as Shailer Matthews and

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[84] For the best account of this American Protestant rallying to the War cause, see Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith : Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), chpts 13-15.

Arthur J. Brown, a leading voice in the Federal Council of Churches, came to suspect

Soederblom of harboring "pro-German" sympathies.[85] When in the spring of 1917 Soederblom

organized an international conference in Uppsala, only representatives from churches in Neutral

countries – Holland, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden – sent delegates. It was not

until October 3, 1919 – after the close of the Paris Peace Conference – that Soederblom, at last,

managed to convene German, British, Italian, Belgian, and French delegations in one place, at a

chateau in Oud Wassenaar in Holland. Even this was only a partial victory. While British and

French and American churches sent official representatives, the only Germans attending –

including the liberals Siegmund-Schultze and Diessmann – came as individuals, and represented

a position far more conciliatory than most of the German church hierarchy (the delegation was,

for one, willing to sign a statement acknowledging German's moral culpability for the violation

of Belgian neutrality – a position that the newly constituted *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*, a

body representing all regional churches in Germany, would not endorse). Dubbed a "spiritual

peace conference," the gathering at Oud Wassenaar was conceived as an opportunity for postwar

Christians reconciliation, and statements were passed defending the principle of the

supranationality of missions (but not demanding the reinstatement of German missions),

supporting the protection of religious minorities (a movement urged by sections of the Hungarian

Evangelical Churches), and identifying in rather vague terms the necessity for Christian churches

to support efforts to strengthen international law. Even with the liberal Germans, however,

agreement was persistently beyond reach: when the French delegation attempted to pass a

motion supporting the War Guilt clause in the League charter, the Germans nearly left the

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[85] Karlstroem, "Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work," 520.

conference, insisting that no political conditions must be laid down on the renewal of international friendship among the churches.

While a meeting of churches proved impossible between 1914 and 1918, in Allied countries, the War ushered in new visions of international Christian unity, inspired by an experience of sundered fellowship that both sides found irreparable. Already in 1914 William Temple called for the church to become "an international society, actually and perceptibly one, bound together by devotion to Christ. If there were such a society in the world, the individual Christian would feel his membership of it in the same way as he feels his membership of his nation."[86] Particularly in Great Britain, a body of thought emerged arguing that the church was essentially international, its universalism an ethos reining in the aggressive impulses of sovereign states. A Commission of the Church of England on Industrial Questions convened in 1918 recommended that work on "moral and social questions" across international boundaries could help to suture the "divisions of Christendom" and the "violated fellowship" between belligerent nations. "We say deliberately," its report declared, "that in the region of moral and social questions we desire all Christians to begin to act together as if they were one body, in one visible fellowship… to bring all Christians together to act in this one department of life as the one visible body would involve no loss and manifold gain. We should get to known and trust one another: we should learn to act together and we should prepare the way for fuller unity."[87]

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[86] Temple, "Christianity and War," 14.

[87] Bengt Sundkler, *Nathan Soederblom: His Life and Work* (Lund: Gleerup, 1968), 222.

These appeals were significant. They revealed that even while churches in belligerent countries found it impossible to meet with one another during the War, they evolved a conception of broken fellowship that clarified a postwar task of reconciliation. Experienced as a rupture in international Christian solidarity, the war ushered in nostalgia for an age when the church universal subtended and superseded national and local identities, allegedly providing a moral consensus restraining the worst excesses of international power politics. It was not uncommon, especially in Britain, to look wistfully back to the Middle Ages – even while dealing a jab to Catholic authoritarianism for provoking its fracture. "The old Papacy," wrote Temple, "was the noblest ideal by which men generally have ever tried to act. But… it tried to reach its goal by a short cut. It used the world's methods for God's purpose." Temple looked forward to a reconstitution of the church as an international society that would ensure the freedom of Christians to embrace their confessional independence. If the "wild Europe" of the Middle Ages "could even for a time acknowledge the ideal of a divine society transcending national divisions, we have hope that such a society might be built again, with all the deeper understanding that the centuries have brought."[88] Increasingly, efforts to promote Christian unity after the War would seek a Protestant varient of Catholic Christendom that would realize the moral and spiritual conquest of "worldly" motives, which Rome, in her confusion of politics and religion, had failed to achieve.

After the war, Allied and Neutral church leaders found occasion to act on their vision of an organized body of churches representing the unity of Christendom. Marrying Medieval nostalgia with the optimism of progressive internationalism, architects of these efforts found in Woodrow

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[88] Temple, "Christianity and War," 15.

Wilson's proposal of a League of Nations an institutional model of postwar Christian

organization. The League was widely welcomed among Protestants in the US and among liberal

Anglicans and non-conformists – and received the enthusiastic support of Neutral churchmen in

Scandinavia and Switzerland.[89] Soederblom himself was a strong supporter. But it was not just

that the League per se, or the values of open diplomacy and the moralizing of international

relations, appealed to these churchmen. Many church leaders saw the League's proposal as the

template for a parallel organization of churches. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople

was the first to call for such a body in the summer of 1919. The Holy Synod of the Church of

Constantinople (the Ecumenical Patriarchate) issued a formal invitation to the Anglican Church,

the Old Catholic churches in the European Continent (which retained Catholic rites but had

broken away from Rome), and the Armenian Orthodox Churches to form a "league of churches."

The proposal was put forward by the *locum tenens* of the Ecumenical See, the Metropolitan

Dorotheos of Brussa:

> As the most significant announcement and recommendation for union of the different
> nations in a League of Nations have come from the great Republic of the United States of
> America in the Western world, so also the most significant announcement and
> recommendation for the study on the approach and the union of the different Christian
> denominations in a League of Churches ought to come from the Great Church of
> Constantinople in the East.[90]

In advancing this proposal, the Ecumenical Patriarchate was responding to its own

circumstances, quite different from those of Soederblom, the Americans, French, and Neutrals.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate seems to have conceived the proposal as an instrument for limiting

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[89] Andrew Preston describes how deep and influential support for the League among liberal Churches was in the
United States in *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Knopf,
2012), esp 275-90. For Soederblom's support of the League, see Sundkler, 330-1.

[90] Quoted in W. A. Visser't Hooft, *Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: World
Council of Churches, 1982), 1

the incursions of Protestant missionaries into Orthodox "fields" in the Middle East – a practice

which often left Protestants seeking converts from Orthodox churches. It further sought to unite

Protestants and Orthodox behind a campaign to prevent the Italian government, "abetted by the

covetousness of the Roman Catholic Church," from claiming territories on the Aegean Sea and

northern Epirus, predominately Greek Orthodox.[91]

The Metropolitan's proposal was reported in the church press in England, and to a lesser extent

the United States.[92] Soederblom too took note – perhaps through a friend serving as a Swedish

diplomat in Constantinople[93] – and, in 1919, advanced his own proposal for a "league of

churches." Like the Metropolitan's plan, Soederblom's would comprise formal church bodies.

But in contrast to the Orthodox emphasis on church comity in the Near East and Catholic

incursions into Greek populations in the Balkans, Soederblom envisioned a league focused on

the range of social, economic, and moral issues that had been at the center of home missions

work, as well as, above all, international peace and reconciliation. He hoped that this body would

expand beyond the ambit of Protestant churches, incorporating not only Orthodox Churches but

the Catholic Church as well.

Signifying the scope of his plans, Soederblom invoked again the idea of an "ecumenical"

assemblage. "What I propose," Soederblom wrote in the British periodical *The Contemporary

Review* in July 1919 (which was followed up by a similar appeal that fall in *Die Eiche*) "is an

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[91] "Needed – A League of Churches: By His Eminence Dorotheos, Patriarch of the Greek Church An Authorized Interview with Gregory Mason of the Outlook Staff." *The Outlook*, (July 9, 1919), 407

[92] Visser't Hooft, *Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches*, 1.

[93] Johannes Kolmodin. For Soederblom's relation with Kolmodin and his role in relations between Orthodox and European Protestants, see Sundkler, passim.

oecumenical council representing the whole of Christendom, and so constructed that it can speak on behalf of Christendom, guiding, warning, strengthening, praying in the common religious, moral, and social matters of mankind."[94] The proposal illustrated that the cause of international peace had become the churches' central "spiritual" and "moral" issue. It was there where the reforming energies of Christians were most needed. "The world has now learned, from dreadful realities, that the sovereignty of States is not the last word in politics; that, on the contrary, each must relinquish something of its sovereignty for the sake of the whole, and recognize itself as belonging to a higher unity… if our civilization is to be saved from mutual destruction of its component parts." For Soederblom, the war made western civilization "willing to recognize the greatness of the despised Middle Ages." Sovereignty – the unqualified right of states to decide in their own case – had been effectively discredited. "Even in politics it is necessary to work upon sound moral principles, and the universal church was needed as a new source of common moral authority."[95] This "common moral authority" was needed now more than ever. The League of Nations had borne witness to a desire to base international relations on transparency and open diplomacy in the hopes of bringing to bear moral influences on politics. But no such change could be effected, Soederblom insisted, unless the churches united to exert their influence on the actions of states. "*The unity of nations must become religion or part of our religion*," [italics original] he wrote. "If… the League of nations, is ever to be more than a dreadful caricature or an empty form, effective only by means of might and oppression, it must become Christian in

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[94] Nathan Soederblom, "The Church and International Goodwill," *Contemporary Review* 116 (Jul 1, 1919), 314.

[95] Ibid, 309.

earnest, even as the very thought of it is regarded with faith and enthusiasm by hundreds of thousands who rarely if ever enter any church."[96]

Wilson's League of Nations was premised on the belief that participating states would not have to give up their sovereign claims; in fact, the League system carved a unique space for national self-determination. For Soederblom, by contrast, the cause of peace required states to relinquish sovereignty. However, his proposal was premised on a conception of ecclesiastical authority that paralleled Wilson's ideas of sovereignty. As members of the League of Nations were not required to renounce authority to a centralized body, so members of Soederblom's ecumenical body would not derogate from their authority in matters of doctrine or church order. Here was the same principle at work that had underwritten all voluntary organizations of Protestants around missionary and reform efforts in the years before the War. Indeed, while Soederblom praised medieval Christendom, his vision counterposed the Roman approach to unity – centralized and authoritarian – with an "evangelical catholicity" that would be based upon the principle of religious "freedom" represented in the Protestant Reformation. While Rome had sought to squelch difference in "the greatest hierarchical organization ever known in the history of religion," Soederblom's council would recognize a unity within a diversity of beliefs,

> one that should allow the various religious communities to retain their creeds and organizations undisturbed, and continue their accustomed manner of divine service, but at the same time serve and strengthen the cause of spiritual unity, realizing that each one of the different sections of Christianity has its own gift of grace in the common heritage of faith, its contribution to worship, to the ideal of life and the future.[97]

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[96] Ibid, 311.

[97] Ibid, 313.

Soederblom's proposal was essentially a demand that church bodies themselves could no longer hold aloof from the sphere of social and international activism that had previously been the preserve of voluntary organizations. They would need to learn to bracket disagreements over matters of "faith and order" in order to concentrate on a kind of practical unity in service. Not to do so was to admit Christianity's corporate impotence in the modern world. "An evangelical catholicity is imperative, or division will end in helpless weakness." Soederblom acknowledged that the Faith and Order movement, since 1910, had taken on the challenge of resolving doctrinal disagreements, but he argued that churches could not wait for these debates to be resolved before giving some corporate expression to Christian unity. "It is a magnificent and lofty task to work for greater uniformity in creed and Church government, as the Conference of Faith and Order seeks to do, but the unity must find expression now among the various parts at present composing the whole."[98]

Soederblom's proposal would include in theory every Christian church, including all Protestant denominations, the Anglican Churches, the Roman Catholic, and the Orthodox Churches. In light of his failed efforts to bring Rome to conferences during the War, Soederblom found that "it is too much to hope that Rome, with its exclusive sectarian isolation, should as yet be willing to be represented in any such common council."[99] But he did suggest that the two remaining "ancient offices" of the Christian church" – the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Patriarchate of Constantinople – should hold seats *ex officio* on the council, alongside three or four elected representatives from Protestant denominations in America and Europe, "according to their

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[98] Ibid, 314.

[99] Ibid, 314.

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importance and characteristic influence." He stressed that the churches in the United States and Germany, where there were numerically "the largest continents of evangelical Catholicism," deserved the greatest levels of representation.

Soederblom made his proposal for an ecumenical assembly of churches at the meeting of the World Alliance in Oud Waassenaar in 1919; further plans were discussed at meetings in Paris later that year and in Geneva in 1920. Though some individuals, like the Swiss Reformed pastor Otto Herold, resisted the idea that the conference ought to involve Orthodox representatives – and vehemently opposed Soederblom's openness to the eventual inclusion of the Catholic church – most figures in the World Alliance supported the idea that – in the words of the American Federal Council on the matter – the "the ultimate conference should be inclusive of all Christian bodies of all countries."[100] Archbishop Davidson agreed to throw the support of the Church of England behind the venture so long as both the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and of the Roman Catholic Church would participate. When the Orthodox Churches agreed to send a delegation to the planning meeting in Geneva in 1920, Davidson was satisfied. As for Rome, it proved sufficient to meet Davidson's qualms that Soederblom invited the Vatican to take part.[101] Unsurprisingly, and consistent with its position on Protestant-led ventures up to the time, the Vatican refused to take part; the Curia's response to Soederblom only acknowledged receipt of his invitation and did not make any statement concerning the conference itself.

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[100] Sundkler, 237.

[101] Ibid, 235.

While Rome's refusal to take part in Soederblom's venture was unsurprising, it proved decisive in ensuring that the effort would not be called an "ecumenical council," as Soederblom had hoped. Examining the anemic minutes of the Geneva conference, it is difficult to determine whether the term was abandoned out of a desire to keep peace with Rome by avoiding a phrase that would suggest Roman Catholics had no place in the true church, or out of the opposite sentiment: to give up altogether in courting Rome. Though Soederblom clearly envisioned a Council that could claim to be ecumenical even without the Roman Catholic Church, others disagreed. J. A. McClymont of the Church of Scotland moved on the last day of the meeting to omit the word "ecumenical" from the conference's title, though the neither the official minutes or the notes of the meeting preserved in the World Council's archives record why.[102] The following day, the American Arthur J. Brown pushed for renaming the conference in order to "avoid embarrassments which would come out of employing the term 'Ecumenical.'" Once again, the minutes do not explain Brown's reasoning or Soedblom's reaction – though they do offer hints that the non-participation of Rome was the critical issue. "It is hoped that this Conference will be ecumenical," the minutes state, implying that so long as all churches were not represented, it could not call itself ecumenical.[103] At that meeting, the decision was made to call the new body the "Universal Conference of the Church of Christ on Life and Work," with Soederblom's apparently grudging support.[104]

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[102] "Records of the Preliminary Meeting to Consider a Universal Conference of the Church of Christ, on Life and Work, Geneva, Switzerland, Aug 9-12, 1920) (Geneva: Jounal de Genève, 1920), 8.

[103] Ibid, 28.

[104] Sundkler surmises Soederblom's frustration from his frequent use of the term around 1919-1920, though after this point he seems to have come to employ primarily the alternative "evangelical Catholic" when describing the nature of the Christian unity Life and Work would pursue. Sundkler, 248-9.

As for the German Churches, the Representative Body of the German Evangelical Church, or

Kirchenausschuß, was invited to the conference in 1921. Under the presidency of Herman

Kapler of the Prussian United Church, the Germans agreed to participate, only to pull out in

January 1923 in protest against the French occupation of the of the Ruhr. Careful coaxing by

Soederblom convinced Kapler and other leaders of the German Evangelical Church to change

their minds, and in the end, Germany sent a delegation to the Stockholm conference of 1925.

However, the events of that gathering showed that critical political disagreements still frustrated

the cause spiritual unity on practical issues.

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By proposing his "league of churches," Soederblom's hope had been for participating churches

to find a measure of practical agreement and a platform for advocacy on social and international

issues, while leaving to the side divisive matters of church doctrine and order. As Hermann

Kapler, head of the German delegation at Stockholm, phrased the conference's logic, "Doctrine

Divides—Service Unites." That phrase would become the informal motto of the Life and Work

movement as a whole, quoted regularly by Soederblom and others throughout the mid-1920s. In

fact, however, "service" did not unite. German and Allied Churches clashed when they

assembled in Stockholm in August 1925 over the specific political form that such social and

international Christian "service" entailed.

The centrality of political as opposed to theological differences in the German-Allied conflict

that defined the Stockholm conference has not adequately been understood. Many scholars of

ecumenical history and historical works that have drawn on this body of research have reiterated

that it was two "theological" orientations – German Lutheranism, with its otherworldly

orientation, Pietistic conservatism, and the Social Gospel of Allied church leaders on the other –

that clashed at Stockholm. In these accounts, different understandings of the Kingdom of God,

with Lutherans emphasizing its wholly transcendent nature and human impuissance, and the

Anglo-Saxon liberals convinced of bringing the Kingdom to realization within history through

human exertion, explain the bitter conflicts that nearly broke up the conference.[105] Yet it was not

theological but political differences that complicated practical cooperation, above all over the

question of the nature of the League of Nations. On issues such as moral reform (e.g. support of

the family, hygiene, and sexual ethics), care for the poor and the provision of medical and social

services, German and Allied delegates spoke in a similar language stressing the need for the

social application of Christian principles. Where they differed was *not* over the theoretical

question of whether the Kingdom could be realized within history, or the eschatological reality

beyond it. The decisive disagreement was rather over the question of whether the specific

organization of the League could be recognized as a sign of the Kingdom (as Allied Churchmen

were inclined to believe), or rather as a power-political organization used to secure and

legitimize allied war gains and imperial interests abroad.

At a conference in Hälsingborg, Denmark, delegations from Protestant and Orthodox churches

set the agenda for the conference. The themes – "The Church and economic and industrial

problems," "The Church and social and moral problems" – including prostitution, alcohol, and

crime – "the Church and international relations," and "the Church and education" – represented a

précis of the concerns of home missions organizations as they had evolved over decades. In

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[105] See for instance Nils Ehrenstroem, "Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work, 1925-1948," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, vol. 1. ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1948), 545-551. and Michael Thompson, *For God and Globe,* 114-6.

Allied nations, the most liberal sections of church opinion dominated the study preparations for the conference: in the US, study of the themes was organized by the Federal Council of Churches, while for the British delegation, the Conference on Politics, Economics, and Citizenship (COPEC), held in 1924, doubled as preparation for the Stockholm gathering. COPEC, organized by William Temple, R. H. Tawney, and Bishop Wood, aligned Anglican and non-conformist leadership of British churches along a platform advocating redistribution of ownership of industry (leavened by calls for reconciliation and not conflict between capital and labor) and comparing the Covenant of the League of Nations to "the laws of Christ applied to nations."[106] It was, in the words of historian Kenneth Barnes, "the monumental event in the social gospel movement in England in the 1920s."[107] The German preparations, by contrast, were controlled by the *Kirchenausschuß*, which excluded more liberal individuals such as Diessmann and Siegmund-Schultze from taking part. (Siegmund-Schultze, who had become from his post as editor of *Die Eiche* perhaps the greatest advocate of international church cooperation in Germany at the time, was denied a place in the German delegation altogether, and managed to attend only after receiving a personal invitation from Soederblom.). The *Kirchenausschuß* had been vocal in the earlier 1920s in its opposition to the Weimar Republic (while heeding the Kaiser's request that they cooperate with the new rulers), the Versailles Treaty ("a monstrous injustice done to the German people"),[108] and the League of Nations ("a syndicate of the victors," and a "system of

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[106] *International Relations: Being the Report Presented to the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship at Birmingham, April 5-12, 1924*, vol 7 (London: Longmans Green, 1924), 88.

[107] Barnes, 20.

[108] *Verhandlung des 2. Deutschen evangelischen Kirchentages 1921* (Berlin-Steiglitz: Deutsches evangelisches Kirchenausschuß and Evagenlischer Pressverband für Dutschland, 1921), 266.

enslavement").[109] By 1924, ensured by Soederblom that no discussion of war guilt would take place at Stockholm, the *Kirchenausschuss* released a "Social Message," that in vague terms praised the courage of the middle classes under the difficulties of inflation, and condemned conflict between workers and capital.[110] While expressing sympathy for the economic depredations of the working class it called above all for national unity. Significantly it issued no findings on international affairs. While American and British preparations focused on the production of extensive reports, Kapler and the bishops of the *Kirchenaussschuß* focused on ensuring that the Germans would arrive in Stockholm presenting a united front, especially in their opposition to the League. He even convened a meeting in Berlin to prepare the delegation's theological position on international relations. One British delegate recalled later that the Germans resembled a "solemn phalanx," and their positions "seemed almost drilled."[111]

At Stockholm the conference organizers had scheduled discussion of international relations for later in the meeting, hoping to build consensus on issues such as "labor and unemployment" and "moral and social questions" before tackling the more divisive issues. For the first few days, the discussions dealt with matters of industrial reform, social and moral problems, and the relation of the church to public life. Disagreements remained muted. Both sides agreed that the churches were not merely concerned with the salvation of souls but with the well-being of society as a whole. To be sure, it is possible to read off from the speeches the different political orientations of Social Gospel and Lutheran figures. The Dean of Worcester Cathedral, the Rev. W. Moore

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[109] Quoted in Borg, "German Protestants and the Ecumenical Movements: The War-Guilt Imbroglio, 1919-1926" *Journal of Church and State* 10, 1 (Winter 1968), 62.

[110] Borg, 60

[111] Quoted in Barnes, 42.

Ede, lamented that the church had been "driven out" of society by a regnant laissez faire ideology that "proclaimed that the way to promote the well-being of society was for everyone to look after his own interest." But the church was complicit in its own exclusion, at fault for focusing on "personal salvation" while ceding the responsibility for the salvation of society to the state.[112] For the Dean the conference was an event of great promise for those who "believe in the Social Gospel." "What we need to attempt to-day is to extend the range of Christian idealism within the economic order which we have inherited. We must seek to transform it from within."[113] According to the economic historian and British delegate Sir William Ashley, the "civilized world was entering a period of nationalization or socialization" of industry, after long heralding the virtues of individual enterprise. The churches' task was to create "the initial driving force" – an ethos of "unselfish desire for social betterment" – for these efforts to consolidate the public regulation, and where necessary public ownership, of industry.[114] From the French delegation, Elie Gounelle channeled Walter Rauschenbusch's call for the "Christianization of the social order." Christians needed to prove by their actions that they were not a mere "appendage of capital," as the advocates of "revolutionary materialism" argued they were.[115] "We express the wish that the churches may strive without wearying for the transformation of the present capitalist régime," a transformation that demanded workers' entrance "through honest and productive labour, into the ownership of the means of production."[116]

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[112] George Bell, *Stockholm 1925* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 124.

[113] Ibid, 128.

[114] Ibid, 159-61.

[115] Ibid, 165.

[116] Ibid, 171.

Speeches from the German delegation contained nothing like these calls for structural transformation or a redistribution in ownership of the means of production. Indeed, the Germans seemed to caution against such radical proposals by asserting the limitations on human efficacy in social reform. "Nothing could be more mistaken or more disastrous than to suppose that we mortal men have to build up God's Kingdom in the world," intoned the Bishop of Saxony, Ludwig Ihmels.[117] Hermann Kapler similarly declared that sin laced all efforts to transform society, reminding the assembly of "the perverseness of the world and the hardness of man."[118] The social reforms these figures emphasized were aimed not at curbing the power of capital, or socializing the means of production, but rather at providing welfare services for the poor. Pastor Jacob Schoell stressed that the greatest domain for the church's work lay in the sphere of strengthening bonds of family and morality. "Of greatest importance is the Christian shaping of sexual life, marriage and family," – pointedly relegating social and economic matters to a secondary place. But some German delegates called for a more expansive program of social reform. Licentiate Johannes Steinweg, director of the Central Board of Home Missions in Berlin, suggested that the differences between the churches on economic and social problems were not so large as they might appear. "Christian love does not merely carry on the struggle with individual need; it has to do with collective distress on a large scale." The churches' role must extend beyond mere private philanthropy; they had a responsibility to prod the state and to guide its policies in the promotion of social welfare. "Side by side with social 'caritas' must stand social reform, the reshaping or the transformation of the conditions of life in their wider range

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[117] Nils Ehrenstroem, "Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work, 1925-1948," *A History of the Ecumenical Movement,* vol 1., 547.

[118] Quoted in Barnes, 60.

and bearing."[119] To be sure, the divergent politics of Lutheran and Social Gospel thinking on social problems was in evidence here, and expressed itself in the German's emphasis on the limitations on structural transformation: "the poor ye shall always have with you," counseled even the reform-oriented Steinweg. But the larger point is that none of these divergences suggested to delegates themselves a critical breach of "unity." No specific questions of labor or class relations divided the two groups, and the conversation remained at a high level of generality. On economic and social questions, local variations (critical as they were in their political implications within national contexts) were lodged within an orotund consensus that churches had a social responsibility, not merely to individual souls, and that the state could be enlisted to support reforms for the expansion of a Christian society.

Yet as the conference moved to discuss international affairs, conflict erupted. Predictably, delegates from Allied countries spoke out in favor of the League. According to the Bishop of Lichfield, churches had a specific responsibility to "seek to strengthen the League of Nations, and will never be satisfied till all the peoples of the world are in covenant together."[120] "Dare we do less," asked Charles Brent of the US, "than hold… that it is the duty of the churches to through their united weight in support of the organized fellowship of nations?" Without the support of the churches and their moral guidance in international politics, the League would become an arena of inter-state competition. Divorced from organized Christendom, the League, as well as other international institutions such as the Permanent Court of Arbitration and the Geneva Protocol, would become nothing but "machines which have no saving or regenerating

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[119] Ibid., 135-6.

[120] Ibid, 420.

power for human beings." "The League of Nations needs the sympathetic support of the churches to help it to become, in personnel and character, representative of all mankind."[121] Pastor Jules Jézéquel, General Secretary of the French National Union of Reformed Churches, was more frank than others in laying out the political responsibilities of the churches in the international sphere, declaring that "the Church ought to become the careful attendant of the League of Nations."[122]

When a subcommittee on international affairs, chaired by Brent, drafted a statement expressing the Conference's support for the League of Nations and its efforts to promote world peace,[123] German delegates rose to object. The report "did not take fully into account," declared Kapler, "the extraordinary difficulties involved." It was based on "fatal misconceptions."[124] Julius Richter was more blunt: "We Germans suffer severely from the regrettable fact that most of the decisions of the League of Nations, as far as Germany is concerned, are obviously unjust and have even gone beyond the fearful conditions of the Treaty of Versailles" – likely a reference to the Leagues refusal to intervene when France and Belgium reoccupied the Ruhr in 1923.[125] To German eyes it appeared that underneath the Allied churchmen's bromides about world peace lay a will to power. To support the League was not to advance the cause of Christ but to advance the cause of Anglo-Saxon (or Anglo-French) world domination and the suppression of Germany. With the expressions of the Allied church delegations in mind, Karl Victor Klingemann,

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[121] Ibid, 180.

[122] Ibid, 474-5.

[123] Borg, 61.

[124] Bell, *Stockholm,* 450.

[125] Ibid, 510.

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Superintendent of the Rhine Province, asked the pardon of the assembly "if I state a view of the great questions involved which may not be yours." In Germany, "we suffer under heavy burdens and cannot judge with that equanimity which may come natural to nations satisfied with the present state of things." The idea of a League of Nations – acceptable and noble in the abstract – was in its present form not an instrument of international peace, but a device of victorious nations to enforce the German subjugation. "In the present state of the League we cannot find religious power or any communion with the Kingdom of God." [126] Pastor Walther Wolff of the Provincial Synod of the Rhineland echoed the same charge, arguing explicitly that the purpose of the Life and Work Conference – and the church as a whole – did not lay with advancing, ministering to, or guiding the operations of the League. "We, who wish to speak about the *divinely willed* basis of international relations, ought to avoid even the slightest semblance of conscious or unconscious hypocrisy, and we must not be led astray by human, nay, far too human, formulas, but endeavour to penetrate into the truth. Consequently we are here concerned neither with pacifism, nor with the League of Nations, nor with the idea of arbitration, all of which are nothing but human attempts to regulate international relations under the viewpoint of higher expediency."[127]

The delegates at Stockholm remembered the day of the conflict over Brent's proposed statement as "Black Tuesday."[128] Soederblom had to urge some Germans not to walk out of the conference. In view of the churches' deep divisions over the League, the Stockholm Conference

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[126] Ibid, 451-2.

[127] Ibid, 537.

[128] Sundlker, 373.

unsurprisingly issued no Report on International Questions. Thus, it is unconvincing to see the conflict between Allied and German church leaders over the League as rooted in theological disagreements over the relation between the Kingdom of God and history. As we have seen, both blocs believed that the Kingdom was partially, if not entirely, realizable this side of eternity, and both concurred in seeing the Kingdom as the telos of Christian social action and reformist impulses. The critical point is that they began to clash over the specific form of Christian service in international relations. The War and the peace settlement compelled German and Allied leaders to take sides; as a result the coherence of a Christian social program that could be embraced by all Protestant churches was shattered. The denouement of the Stockholm conference revealed that the campaign to "occupy" the field of international relations, like the campaign to "occupy" non-Christian lands overseas, had become political in nature. Rather than defining a domain of international Christian cooperation, Stockholm defined a domain of conflict. In the aftermath of the war, former belligerents could no longer recognize one another as allies in a common cause. In their support of the League, Germans suspected Allied church leaders of being fundamentally driven by political, as opposed to Christian, motivations.

Conclusion

The later 1920s witnessed an improvement in relations between German and Allied Church leaders that reflected a more general spirit of internationalism sweeping the European Continent. After threatening to withdraw from the Universal Conference on Life and Work immediately after the Stockholm conference, in 1926 the German churches found themselves in a more conciliatory mood. That August, French and German representatives worked out a common statement condemning war and insisting "that no final moral judgment is necessarily established

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in political instruments."[129] They further agreed that the Conference would entertain no discussions of German war guilt. The following month, Germany entered the League of Nations and the German churches' criticism of it largely ceased. President Kapler and the Archbishop Davidson agreed to host a conference on the topic of the "Kingdom of God" for German and British theologians in Canterbury in 1927, evincing an effort to conceive of differences between the two blocs as primarily theological in nature and to create a common understanding on those grounds. In 1929, a German economist and pastor, Hans Schoenfeld, was appointed to lead the Study Department of Life and Work. In 1926, the International Missionary Council began planning what it imagined as the successor to the 1910 Edinburgh Conference, an event which Mott, Oldham, and the IMC leadership hoped would involve a substantial representation from German mission societies.

The churches, too, had their "Locarno" moment in the later 1920s. But the rapprochement between Allied and German churches did not bring with it consensus around a new social program. Nor was it the older, antebellum vision of the territorial expansion of missions that would provide the organizing conceptual frame for international Protestant cooperation into the 1930s. Drawing on a new intellectual movement of dialectical theology, which originated in Switzerland and Germany after the war but largely in isolation from international Protestant institutions and networks until the late 1920s, missionaries, lay activists, and clerics in the late 1920s and early 1930s conceived a new common endeavor that came to be called the ecumenical movement. In a remarkable reorientation of the aims of international Protestantism, clerics and lay leaders in the years following 1928 shifted their goal away from extending the Kingdom over

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[129] Quoted in Borg, 69.

the domains of society, economics, and politics – and away from the aims of "occupying" territories at home and abroad. Instead, they turned to organizing the rule of Christ within the "church" itself, a community that was recast in the 1930s as an alternative public sphere, a world fellowship that would not isolate Christians from the world but would provide the unique locus of reconciliation between nations, races, and classes on a global scale. This transformation will be the subject of the following chapter, which traces how Protestants came to conceive "secular civilization" as a new enemy of the faith – an enemy that was not external, but internal to the church.

Chapter 2

A Common Enemy: The Healing of the Anglo-German Divide And the
Construction of Secular Civilization

In early January 1915, Joseph Oldham received large envelope from Friedrich Würz, director of

the Basel Mission Society. Würz had become since the outbreak of the World War I a

spokesman for the aggrieved leadership of the German missions community. Through him,

Julius Richter, Karl Axenfeld, and other heads of German missions societies communicated with

their erstwhile colleagues in Great Britain and the United States, generally to lodge irate protests

against Allied treatments of missionaries in the field. On this occasion, Würz had enclosed –

along with an agitated letter from his own pen accusing the British of exaggerating the

significance of Belgian neutrality – a number of recent articles from German authors attacking

the British *Missionspolitik*. He called on Oldham to join the anti-British chorus in the name of

Christian solidarity.

In his reply, Oldham did not say much about the treatment of German missionaries. Rather,

looking to defuse tensions, he offered what could be described as an "ecumenical" account of the

causes of the War. It was the result, he wrote, not of English perfidy or German aggression but of

a complete breakdown of western civilization, which had spurned Christianity and become

dominated by materialism, egoism, and power worship:

> I cannot help thinking that the war is teaching us to draw a clearer distinction than we
> have done in the past between the Church of Christ and what we have been accustomed
> to speak of as Christian civilization… We have assumed that we had 'a Christian

civilization' which has something which we could proudly offer to the non-Christian world. God is showing us how rotten that civilization is.[1]

This reading of the War was offered in a gesture of conciliation, but it was also Oldham's deeply held personal view. In the years following 1914, the idea that the War had revealed the fundamentally unchristian nature of contemporary western civilization became a commonplace among church leaders in Allied countries.[2] Even as they defended for the Allied cause, many Protestants in Britain and the US did so with a sense of reservation, convinced that a deeper sickness of modern society was to blame for the conflict. "In a world gone pagan, what is a Christian to do? For the world has gone pagan," William Temple, Rector at St. Paul's Piccadilly and future Archbishop of Canterbury, assured the readers of a pamphlet series, *Papers for War-Time*. While Germany's actions showcased a particularly vicious repudiation of Christian ideals, they were but symptoms of an underlying corruption – expressed in an overemphasis on nationalism and an acquisitive modern society – that had infected Britain as well. The American missionary statesman John Mott sounded a similar note, writing in 1915 of the "colossal exhibition the War affords of the unchristian character of much of our so-called Christian civilization."[3]

By the early 1920s, German Protestants had come to a similar conviction. In German parlance, to assail *Zivilation* was to attack its Anglo-French champions; it thus was a mode not of self-chastisement but of intra-Protestant combat, generally tied to a defense of German *Kultur*. But

[1] Oldham to Würz, Jan 15, 1915 (Joseph Oldham Papers (hereafter JO), 1/10/1)

[2] A. J. Hoover, *God, Germany, and Britain in the Great War: A Study in Clerical Nationalism* (New York: Praeger, 1989), chpt 1; Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), chpt 3.

[3] John Mott, *The Present World Situation: With Special Reference to the Demands Made Upon the Christian Church in Relation to Non-Christian Lands* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement, 1915), vi.

after the defeat of 1918 and the formation of the Weimar Republic, many German Protestants

came to believe that Germany too was becoming an "unchristian" society. Clerics, missionaries,

and lay Protestant activists lamented the fall of the Kaiser – *summus episcopus* of the Protestant

Church in Prussia – and the secular foundations of the Weimar Republic, which shattered an

alliance of "throne and alter" that most Protestant leaders in the 1920s remembered nostalgically.

Further, many were horrified by a gauntlet of *kirchenfeindlich* movements threatening the

Church's position from the Left and Right. These included not only the Communist Party and

elements antagonistic to the church in the Social Democratic Party, but also neo-pagan

movements that valorized Germany's mythic past while derogating Christianity as a religion of

the weak. Among the figures churches found arrayed against them in the 1920s was General

Erich von Ludendorff, who dramatically left the Protestant church in 1927, embracing the Nordic

god Wotan.[4]

In Germany and former Allied nations, then, a Protestant discourse of cultural pessimism

emerged in the 1920s, constituting a distinctive strain within a larger body of literary and

philosophical reflection on the decline of western civilization. While scholars of German history

have linked the phenomenon of cultural pessimism to nationalist politics,[5] this line cannot be so

clearly drawn when we examine the history of Protestantism from an international vantage point.

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[4] For a discussion of church attitudes toward the Weimar Republic, see J. R. C. Wright, *'Above Parties:' The Political Attitudes of the German Protestant Church Leadership 1918-1933* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); Kurt Nowak, *Evangelische Kirche und Weimarer Republik: zum politischen Weg des deutschen Protestantismus zwischen 1918 und 1932* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1981); and Daniel R. Borg, *The Old-Prussian Church and the Weimar Republic: A Study in Political Adjustment 1917-1927* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1984). For one example the church's characterization of Ludendorff as one of many anti-Christian forces in "der Kampf wider Gott," see "Volksmission in der Kirche Margabowa," *Oletzkower Zeitung* (March 5, 1928).

[5] For example, Fritz Stern, *Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).

In the 1920s, fears of de-Christianization provided a matrix for reconciliation between estranged blocs German and Allied Protestants. These fears afforded Protestants an opportunity to re-think the bases of Christian unity, and to formulate a new understanding of their common mission in an era of improved international cooperation following the German entry into the League of Nations and the Treaty of Locarno. The aim of this chapter is to explore how German-Allied reconciliation took place. In the late 1920s, opposition to "secularism" furnished an agenda of international cooperation distinct in its aims and methods from the program to realize the Kingdom of God on earth that had united the Protestant international in the decades before 1914.

The decisive event in the emergence of this new program was a conference held by the International Missionary Council in Jerusalem in 1928. There, a gathering of 231 representatives from missions societies in Europe, Britain, and the North America, as well as numerous representatives of the so-called "younger churches" from Asia, Africa and Latin America, declared that a new enemy, a world-wide "secular civilization," had displaced other religions as Christianity's chief global rival. "Secularism," as it was first defined at Jerusalem and elaborated by missionaries in the months that followed, was a fundamentally new concept in the Protestant imagination. It was not "atheism," "unbelief" or "indifference," terms that Protestants had previously used to designate localized threats to the faith, mostly among workers and intellectual elites. Nor was it equivalent to philosophical negations of God or metaphysical reality. Secularism was rather a positive "system of life and thought," which had succeeded in establishing itself as the hegemonic worldview of modern industrial society, in the "East" and "West" alike.

Grounded in a scientific, experimental attitude toward truth, this dominant belief system rejected the idea of a cosmos ordered by a transcendent deity. "Secular civilization" described a world in which social and international conflict resulted not from political factors but from a modern repudiation of religion, among all classes and nations, as the basis of social, moral, and epistemic cohesion. The missionary construction of secularism, achieved through missionary strategies of categorization that had previously been applied to characterize non-Christian religions, enabled Protestants to re-conceive their relations with one another as collaborators in a new missionary task: to reformulate the Christian message in a form that would be persuasive, and speak in the terms of the "modern mind." In the months following the Jerusalem conference, missionaries in Germany as well as former Allied and Neutral nations cooperated to mobilize theologians and philosophers around the task of constructing Christianity as a critique of the secular worldview. They did so in an atmosphere of crisis which acknowledged that the church as a whole was at present unequipped intellectually and spiritually to confront this enemy which it faced at home and abroad.

This chapter traces German and Allied perceptions of the de-Christianization of modern society in the 1920s, showing how these perceptions culminated in the idea of secular civilization around which former belligerents declared their united opposition, re-consolidating the international Christian unity that proved so elusive since the outbreak of World War I. Narrowing our focus from the broader world of international Protestantism to the community of missionaries, we will focus on the figure of Joseph Oldham, who was a major architect of the idea of secularism crafted in the months leading up to the Jerusalem conference. In the 1920s, Oldham worked at the nerve center of Protestant missionary operations, serving as Secretary of the Edinburgh

Conference Continuation Committee from 1910-1921, editor of the *International Review of Missions* from 1912 to 1927, and Secretary of the International Missionary Council. The anti-secular campaign that emerged after Jerusalem marked the long-sought success of his efforts since the War to re-establish comity and cooperation among estranged German and Anglo-American blocs.

The chapter has two parts. The first shows how developments in missionary thought in both spheres in the early 1920s laid the ground for the Jerusalem moment, even as German-Allied relations remained a scene of residual conflict over the issues of war guilt, the League of Nations, and Allied postwar internationalism. Behind the foreground of these conflicts, however, both blocs conceptualized the de-Christianization of modern society as an unsettling of the antebellum division, discussed in the last chapter, between "Christendom" and the "non-Christian world." German and Allied missionaries conceptualized this unsettling in different ways, and proposed different solutions, in the years leading up to Jerusalem. Outside Germany, missionaries developed a new concept of the "non-Christian world" as a global society or "world civilization," constituted by international trade, imperial politics, and communication and transportation technologies. This deterritorialized mission field united all nations, races, and classes but lacked any common religious ethos, and hence required Christianity to achieve the moral and social cohesion material and economic integration could not provide. By contrast, Germans rejected the internationalist politics that this vision implied. Focusing their attention on German society, they identified de-Christianization rather in terms of the formation of anti-Christian "worldviews" at home, including pagan nature worship and Bolshevism, and, for champions of a new movement of dialectical theology, strains of "cultural Protestantism"

[*Kulturprotestantismus*] that deified human values, institutions, and civilization itself instead of the transcendent God of scriptural revelation.

In the second part of the chapter, we will examine the construction of secular civilization at the Jerusalem conference and early, groping attempts by German and Allied thinkers to define this new global rival. To identify the conflict between secularism and Christianity was to acknowledge that organized Christianity had failed in its efforts to subordinate modern souls and societies both in the foreign "fields" of missionary endeavor and at home. It marked a recognition that Christianity was not on the way to securing its dominance but had been defeated by a new system of life and thought that had been nurtured within the Christian West, but had spread throughout the globe. Chastened together, Protestants developed a new international program: to rethink and reformulate the Christian "worldview." This was a task that theologians and Christian intellectuals must lead. The call for a Christian worldview marked a new development for Protestant internationals who had sought before 1928 to separate "theological" and "doctrinal" discussions from practical and service-oriented tasks of the church. In this new program, we can see the early origins of what would become the ecumenical movement of the 1930s. But in 1928-9, the appeal to the theologians was gesture made in desperation, motivated by the sense that Christianity had been decisively dislodged from its position of cultural and social authority.

I. Unsettling the Boundaries of "Christendom" and the "Non-Christian World:" 1914-1927
As we saw in the last chapter, the missionary movement of the 19th century had organized along two fronts. "Foreign" missions were charged with spreading the Gospel in the "non-Christian

world," encompassing Asia, Africa, and the South Pacific. "Home" missions aimed to revitalize the faith within the European and North American societies of "Christendom," targeting groups like the rural and urban poor, immigrants, and laborers whom the churches had failed to reach. Notwithstanding the different theological and political orientations that shaped how missionaries in different countries and confessions approached their tasks, Protestants in all parts of the North Atlantic agreed that spreading the Gospel required at home required fundamentally different techniques and strategies than spreading it abroad. In the foreign fields, missionaries' task was to vindicate Christianity's superiority to other "religions." At home, the task was to vindicate Christianity to those who were indifferent to or had repudiated it. As we saw, both projects were understood to be parts of a common program of Christianizing the world whose objective was the building of the "Kingdom of God" on earth.

The catastrophe of World War I unsettled this division between "home" and "foreign" missions. This unsettling occurred in both Germany and Allied countries, but it was conceptualized in different ways, which reflected in part the different experiences of political defeat and triumph as well as divergent theological traditions between the Anglo-American and German milieux. The concern in this section is to examine how thinkers in both spheres registered a collapse of the Christendom/non-Christendom dichotomy, and in doing so sought to re-imagine the missionary task for a postwar age.

Oldham offers an useful point of entry into the impact of the war on missionary thinking in victorious nations. Around the time that Oldham wrote his letter to Würz, he composed two pieces for *Papers for War-Time*. Both examined at close range the "rotten civilization" to which

Oldham had evoked in the letter quoted at the outset of this chapter. That civilization's

distinguishing characteristic was the domination of materialistic, acquisitive, and self-seeking

impulses that only Christianity, Oldham claimed, could keep in check. The "antagonisms of the

nations were only one expression" of this secularized civilization. "The same wrong attitude is

seen in the racial prejudice and hatred which is one of the most sinister features of our time."

Another manifestation was "the industrial warfare and class alienation that disturb the life of all

western nations and was increasingly evident in industrial centers in Asia as well." Nationality,

class, and race: these were the three axes, as Oldham saw it, on which the "disintegrating

influences" of civilization acted, and together they pointed to the global extent of the crisis that

the war revealed. "For the first time," he wrote, "we have a world civilization so interdependent

in all its parts that its dissolution would spread universal ruin."[6] Oldham's first book, *The World

and the Gospel* (1916) expanded on these insights, fleshing out his conception of a "world

civilization" threatened by the absence of a common religious adhesive:

> The peoples of Asia and Africa constitute two-thirds of the population of the globe…
> [T]heir lives and destinies have become inextricably interwoven with our own. The world
> is now one; the interdependence of its parts is increasing from year to year. Few
> important questions are without their international aspects. The social order which we
> have to try to Christianize is a world order… The fight for a spiritual view of the world,
> for justice and fair-dealing, for the protection of the weak and the redemption of
> childhood, for the establishment of goodwill and brotherhood, takes many forms and
> must be waged on many fronts, but it is the same fight.[7]

The global scope of Oldham's anxieties here drew on an imperial frame of reference. Indeed, he,

along with other liberal-minded British imperialists like Edwyn Bevan and William Temple were

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[6] Joseph Oldham, "The Church and the Hope for the Future," *Papers for War-Time*, no. 36 (London: Oxford University Press, 1915), 6.

[7] Joseph Oldham, *The World and the Gospel* (London: United Council for Missionary Education, 1916), 70.

the first to include "races," along with "nations" and "classes," in their conception of the

worldwide social order that was threatened by the War.[8] But after the War a vision of a supra-

European "international society" as the specific site where Christianizing influences must be felt

registered beyond British circles as well.

The 1920s witnessed an explosion of literature in the missionary community contending that the

goals of missionary movement had decisively changed. The object was no longer primarily to

"occupy" foreign fields, but rather to achieve world-wide social and spiritual integration.

Missionaries in North America, Britain, and Neutral countries embraced this view, as did many

"native" church leaders in Asia. "Today the battle-line [of missions] is no longer thousands of

miles away from the home base," wrote the Chinese pastor Y. Y. Tsu in 1926. "It follows the

Main Streets of the cities of the world, it goes through the homes and farms of all climes, and

finds Christian and heathen nations on both sides of the line." No longer a campaign to

"conquer" non-Christian lands, the missionary movement had become "a struggle between love,

neighborliness, human brotherhood and the forces of peace on one side, and enmity, greed,

injustice, and the forces of discord on the other."[9] One measure of the new dimensions of

missionary work was that even Protestants who had previously not been deeply involved in the

foreign mission community found its work of pressing broader significance. To Samuel McCrea

Cavert, a Presbyterian minister and head of the American Federal Council of Churches, missions

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[8] See Edwyn Bevan, "Brothers All: The War and the Race Question" *Papers For War-Time* no. 4. Cf. accounts of ecumenism from American historians who concentrate on the matrix of race relations in the US to explain progressive ecumenical politics. It was, rather, the global frame of the British empire that first generated the idea of a "world civilization" that not merely upset older dichotomies of civilization and barbarism but asserted a common social order or polity of which races were contributing members.

[9] Quoted in Samuel McCrea Cavert, *The Adventure of the Church: A Study of the Missionary Genius of Christianity* (New York: Missionary Education Movement, 1927), 45.

were not "something apart" from Christianity but "the warp and woof of the Gospel itself." His

work *The New Adventure of the Church* (1927) explained why: "Geographical definitions will no

longer suffice" to demarcate the missionary field," he wrote.[10] Technological advances and

economic interconnections had reduced the "modern world… to the dimensions of a single

dooryard. A voice in San Francisco is heard in London. One goes from New York to Tokyo in

the time it took his grandfather to go from New York to Buffalo. What affects one person now

affects all."[11] Like Oldham, Cavert described this spatially and temporally contracted yet "sadly

sundered" civilization constituted by the fault lines of group conflict. "Capital and labor line up

in hostile camps. Nations are arrayed in bristling distrust, building submarines and bombing

planes with which to protect themselves from one another. Races are separated by yawning

chasms of prejudice, the white man assuming himself to be inherently superior to the black and

the yellow, and imposing himself upon them in ways which they bitterly resent."[12] In this world,

the Christian mission was "a far greater undertaking than occupation of the geographical areas of

the globe with preachers of the Gospel;"[13] it entailed nothing less than "bringing every province

of our thinking, every area of our social thinking and conduct, every region of the relation of

individuals, classes, races and nations to each other…under the influence of Christ."[14] Francis P.

Miller, Administrative Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, echoed the same

point, noting that, in the postwar world, the "essence of missions" had become "not *geographical*

expansion, but *expansion*. [Missions] does mean carrying the Gospel to Africa, but it also means

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[10] Cavert, *The Adventure of the Church*, 25.

[11] Ibid, 21.

[12] Ibid, 15.

[13] Ibid, 24.

[14] Ibid, 27.

just as truly carrying the Gospel into some as yet unoccupied area of human relations."[15] [italics original.]

The question was how this new world order could be "Christianized." Numerous programs and proposals emerged in the 1920s seeking to explain how this could be achieved. Champions of the League of Nations saw the organization as a step in the direction of a formation of an international community of nations organized according to Christian principles. Wide-spread especially among North American Protestants, this view was echoed in statements such as that by the Canadian Liberal politician Newton Rowell. For him, the League reflected a conception of international relations in which one nation would view another, "not as a real or potential enemy, but as a real or potential friend." This would substitute "competition in the preparation of war" with "co-operation for the preservation of peace." While "the old conception was essentially pagan, the new is essentially Christian."[16] We saw in the last chapter that enthusiasm for the League was widespread among Protestants throughout former Allied and Neutral nations. But there were other approaches as well. Oldham, for instance, supported the League but invested his energies elsewhere, above all in promoting missionary education in Africa and Asia. Oldham prioritized education as a means of building up a corps of non-western Christian leadership, imbued with a consciousness in a universal community of the church. "If…," he declared to a Swedish missionary society in 1924, "Christianity is the real remedy for the ills from which the world is at present suffering, the educational work of the Church abroad is of supreme importance. If Christian principles are to exert an influence on the relations between different

[15] Francis P. Miller, "Forward," *The Church and the World* ed Francis Miller (New York: Association Press, 1926), v.

[16] Newton Rowell, "The League of Nations" *International Review of Missions*, vol. 10 (1921), 402.

nations, they must be understood and in some form accepted by all peoples."[17] According to this vision, political institutions like the League would not themselves do the work of Christianizing international relations, which required the prior formation of elites with the right set of moral ideals. During the 1920s, Oldham put this belief into practice through his work with the Phelps-Stokes Fund, whose Tuskegee-style approach to technical education he believed might be effectively combined with religious instruction in order to help young Africans find their place in the modern society of nations.[18] Drawing on these ideas, he also became active in efforts to reform colonial administration in East Africa.[19]

For many Protestants, a critical part of the program to "Christianize" international relations entailed promoting the growth and independence of churches outside of the West. In a sense, the movement to "indigenize" Christianity was an old one: mid-nineteenth-century missionary leaders like Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn had argued that the goal of missionaries overseas was to make themselves redundant – to "euthanize themselves," in Venn's memorable phrase – by building up "native churches" that could be independent and self-sustaining.[20] But the years following World War I saw the first serious efforts at devolution of authority to indigenous churches. In the early 1920s, the national missionary councils in China, Japan, India, and Africa

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[17] Joseph Oldham, "The Western Contribution to Education in Asia and Africa," undated [likely Feb or March 1924] (JO Papers, 15/6/77). Published in *Christian Education in Africa and the East,* ed. Michael Sandler (London: Student Christian Movement, 1924), 1-11.

[18] Elisabeth Engel, *Encountering Empire: African American Missionaries in Colonial Africa, 1900-1939* (Stuttgart: Fritz Steiner Verlag, 2015); Keith Clements: *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J. H. Oldham* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999).

[19] See Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), chpt 7, 225-6; Penelope Hetherington, *British Paternalism in Africa* (London, F. Cass, 1978); Clements, chpts. 9-10.

[20] For Venn, see Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004) 167-172.

were transformed into national *church* councils in which Chinese, Japanese, Indian and African Christian leaders were given larger authority.[21] The International Missionary Council, founded in 1921 with Oldham as its international secretary and Mott as Chairman, was intended to be a partnership between Western missionaries and non-Western church leaders. The idea behind these campaigns was to strengthen the church as a global community, united in encouraging the reconciliation of peoples and as a body of like-minded elites that could oversee the nurturing of friendship and understanding. The program reflected the idea that only as a multi-national and multi-racial society could the church effectively contribute to the formation of an international ethos within various nations.

After the War, then, Protestants in Allied countries imagined the missionary "field" as a spiritual and social domain that cut across the traditional geographical demarcations of East and West, Christendom and non-Christendom. While the older vision of missions work was based on the notion of territorial expansion from a Western core outward, the new vision identified missions work as the key to international reconciliation against the disaggregating powers of race-hatred, nationalism, capitalism, and communism.[22] While the older vision imagined non-western peoples as the recipients of Christianity, the postwar viewpoint emphasized the church as the bulwark of international order.

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[21] Hogg, 210-15.

[22] Missionaries wrote surprisingly little focused on the specific threat of Soviet Communism. They saw it as an expression of class antagonism, and in this respect mirrored its rival, capitalism. Both fit easily into the broad diagnosis of a world imperiled by centrifugal forces.

The campaign to re-establish ties with German Protestants, attempted fitfully since the outbreak

of the War itself, was a further dimension of the international turn in missionary thinking among

Protestants in Allied and Neutral countries. Oldham, as a Secretary of the IMC with strong ties to

Germany (having spent the academic year 1904-5 studying under Gustav Warneck in Halle) was

central in these efforts. As he re-conceived the missionary task and its institutions in the 1920s,

Oldham kept up a regular effort and correspondence with the heads of German missionary

societies and lobbied the British government to enable Germans to return to their operations

overseas. Looking to draw the *Missionsausschuß* back into international partnerships, Oldham

and Mott promptly made one of the major activities of the IMC the administration of financial

aid to German missionaries still working overseas. Oldham and the heads of British missions

societies also lobbied the British government for easement of the restrictions on German

nationals in British colonies and the restitution of German missions properties in India and

British Africa. By 1923 the British government had adopted a policy of no restrictions upon

missionaries "recognized" by the Conference of British Missionary Societies in British colonies

and mandated territories.[23] The following year, the Conference recognized eight German

missionary societies, which began to rebuild their operations in India, Cameroon, Tanganyika,

and Togoland, though individual missionaries were still required to secure permits from British

authorities.

If these developments brought some progress in the restoration of international missionary

cooperation, suspicion of Anglo-American tactics and motives remained the dominant theme of

German missionary literature between the Armistice and the Jerusalem Conference. Irate over

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[23] William Richey Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations; a History of the International Missionary Council and Its Nineteenth Century Background* (New York,: Harper, 1952), 230.

what they viewed as Allied missionaries' "complicity" in the expropriation of German missions properties overseas, the German *Missionsausschuß* boycotted the founding of the International Missionary Council in 1921. Meanwhile, German missionaries in the early and mid-1920s only intensified their criticisms of the Social Gospel and the Anglo-Saxon reduction of Christianity to *Aktivismus*. For the Germans, the new internationalism of their Anglo-Saxon counterparts was, far from an attempt to regroup and redirect missions work, a profound threat to the Christian cause in the world, since it was based on a systematic confusion of religious and political motives. In his 1922 *Die evangelische Mission: Ursprung, Geschichte, Ziel* [The Protestant Mission: Origin, History, Aim], the Marburg theologian and missionary Heinrich Frick assailed the watchword of Student Volunteer Movement – "the evangelization of the world in this generation" – as a trite and unrealistic program that had always been more about spreading civilization than advancing the Gospel.[24] Frick acknowledged that Anglo-Saxons since the War had given up on their campaign of world "occupation" by an missionary army committed to quixotic ideas such as planting two churches a day and preaching the Gospel to every living human within twenty years. But if anything, the overly political and worldly orientation inherent to the Anglo-Saxon missions project was flaring up worse than ever in the postwar period, as American and British missionaries posed as champions of international society and world peace. For Frick, there were two things wrong with the internationalist missionary project: first, it evinced a syncretistic streak which inclined Americans to an overly favorable estimation of other religions, to the point where Christianity became little more than one expression among many of a universal spirituality. Second, Anglo-American preoccupation with social and humanitarian

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[24] Heinrich Frick, *Die evangelische Mission: Ursprung, Geschichte, Ziel* (Bonn, Kurt Schroeder, 1922), esp 352-61. On this critical document and its appraisal of American Protestant "activism," see William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), esp 136.

work over preaching the Gospel eclipsed religious aims with worldly concerns. To be sure, German missionaries even before the War had lodged warnings against their American and British counterparts' tendencies to confuse the spread of civilization with the spread of the Gospel. But as Frick's case illustrates, after 1914, these critiques became qualitatively different, in that they questioned the very motives of Anglo-Saxon missionaries.[25]

As we saw in the last chapter, Julius Richter had lodged similar complaints against Anglo-Saxon aims and methods in the years following the War. Indeed, for him, the ambition to "Christianize" international relations belied a confusion of imperial and missionary objectives that brought the motives of his Anglo-Saxon counterparts into question. While Oldham and others sought to orient the task of missionary education around preparing non-European peoples to make their distinctive "contribution" to the Christianization of racial, national, and class relations – a project which channeled its own assumptions about white superiority – Richter argued that missionary schools ought to forgo all forms of "modern" education. He feared in particular that contact with any form of western civilization would nurture in non-Christian peoples a commitment to the principles of national "self-determination" and demands for political independence. The few schools that German missions still administered – in Dutch Suriname and Java – concentrated on the cultivation of ties with *Volk* tradition in an effort to stave off the disorienting effects of westernization. The aim was still here the development of indigenous Christian cultures that would retain "points of contact" with native traditions – rather than preparing them for membership in a new, international church.[26]

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[25] Frick, *Die evangelische Mission*, 360-72.

[26] Julius Richter, "Missionsschulfrage," *Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift* 13, 47 (1920),

Hostile to missionary internationalism, and preoccupied with regaining access to their former fields, Germans continued throughout the early and mid 1920s to view missions work through the paradigm of geographical expansion and the occupation of non-Christian space. No significant voice in the German community echoed the idea of a global missionary field of modern civilization, so prevalent among British and American missionaries. Nostalgic for the old *Kaiserreich*, the Germans evinced little concern with the unfolding of conflicts between nations, races, and classes – or they attributed such conflicts precisely to Anglo-Saxon world hegemony. Nor did they recognize a particular Christian mission to make the world church a space of international Christian cooperation and unity across national, racial, and class lines.

Nonetheless, German missionary writings of the period reveal that there, too, the distinction between "home" and "foreign" missions work was becoming unsettled. This unsettling was most pronounced in writings of the 1920s that interrogated the traditional distinction between the "heathen" [*Heiden*] of Africa and Asia and the *Entkirchlichen* [unchurched] or *abgefallenen Christen* of Europe, populations that could be considered nominally Christian but who had "fallen away" from the church in practice and had become indifferent to organized Christianity. In a widely-discussed essay of 1919, the German theologian, lexicographer, and missionary enthusiast Gerhard Kittel declared that Germany had become a "heathen nation" [*heidnische Volk*] or was at least well on the road to becoming one. Pagan attitudes such as nature worship and materialism had spread far and deep among the younger generation[27] Bringing the Gospel to the youth would be, in his estimation, a task essentially similar to evangelizing Africa or Asia.

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[27] Gerhard Kittel, "Die volksmissionarische Aufgabe" *Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung* Nr. 20 (1919), 411.

That German Christians faced such a prospect was in large part due to the War, which had severed the relation of the younger generation from the faiths of their fathers.[28] It is possible that some of the German missionaries repatriated from their fields in Allied or Allied-conquered territories overseas may have also contributed to this elision of distinctions between foreign and home missions work. As Hartmut Lehmann has shown, a great number of these returnees took up work in home mission societies, where their encounters with a socialist movement and the revival of neo-pagan spiritualisms may have underscored similarities between new thought movements at home and religions abroad.[29] As Georg Beyer, head of the Berlin Mission Society, argued in 1919, foreign missionaries were the best equipped Christian apologists to convert irreligious Germans to Christianity – after the War, whose loss Beyer attributed to the weakening of Christian faith in the population.[30]

Similar views were expressed by theologians influenced by a new theological movement – so-called "neo-orthodox" or "dialectical" theology – that swept Germany and Switzerland in the years following the War. A detailed account of the movement's origins and early development, the subject of a vast literature, is beyond the scope of this chapter. But it is important for our purposes to note how dialectical theologians like Karl Barth and Emil Brunner in Switzerland and Friedrich Gogarten and Rudolf Bultmann in Germany contributed to a broader postwar unsettling of the categories of Christian and pagan in German-speaking Protestant world. Barth's epochal *Letter to the Romans*, first published in 1916 and substantially revised in its second

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[28] Ibid, 411.

[29] Hartmut Lehmann, "Missionaries Without Empire: German Protestant Missionary Efforts in the Interwar Period (1919-1939), *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2003).

[30] Georg Beyer, "Die Heidenmission im Dienst der Volksmission," *Handbuch der Volksmission,* ed. Gerhard Füllkrug (Schwerin: Bahn, 1919), 121-48.

edition of 1922, assailed liberal theology since Schleiermacher for domesticating God's

revelation in human values and institutions. Appalled by his German professors and mentors'

conscription of God's support for the German war effort in documents such as the "Letter to the

Civilized World" – and by the general scene of pious war mongering among Christian leaders on

both sides – Barth's *Letter to the Romans* asserted a humanly unbridgeable divide between

divine will and human understandings of the same. Drawing on Kierkegaard and Overbeck,

Barth sought to liberate theology from the framework of scientific knowledge and focus it on its

"true" object: a God who could not be known except in the event of an existential crisis of

revelation that upset all categories of rational or affective apprehension. Every attempt to ground

theology in the human subject short-circuited exactly the knowledge it sought. God was "wholly

other," Barth wrote; hence he was not an object of cognition or source of feeling but a subject

that addressed humankind from beyond, with a message of judgment and salvation. Any

apprehension of God on the part of fallen humanity was due exclusively to God's self-revelation,

not to the exertions of the human mind. To speak of Jesus as an ethical exemplar or Christianity

as an uplifting, civilizing cultural force was a form of "pagan" idolatry which effaced God's

action with a human construction: religion.[31] In the 1920s, the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten,*

served as a platform for Barth and his fellows in arms, from which they attacked a German

theological establishment beholden in their view to an attempt to domesticate the divine within

human consciousness. In their view, western civilization had departed from faith in God by

elevating *Kultur* to the level of an absolute, becoming in effect a new, "pagan" civilization.

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[31] Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans* trns. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

Throughout the 1920s, Barth, along with his colleagues, evinced relatively little interest in engaging the missionary community. The ideas of the movement Barth led did, however, furnish a concept of Christian idolatry which some thinkers applied explicitly to unsettle the idea of European culture as "Christian" in any meaningful way. Missionaries like Karl Hartenstein of the Basel Mission brought Barth's repudiation of "Christian culture" into missionary discourse. Drawing on Barth, he asserted a relentless distinction between Christian faith and the dominant ideas of a civilization that reduced God's revelation to culture, ethical action, or the unfolding of historical of historical consciousness.[32] For Hartenstein, even most of the parishioners of the *Ländeskirchen* in Germany had become captive of a "naturalized" culture that claimed the mantel of Christian religion but was essentially heathen, deifying "culture" in the place of Christ.[33]

Though critical of the Anglo-American missionary tactics, then, Germans Protestants too were questioning the boundaries between "home" and "foreign" missions in the 1920s. For figures like Kittel and Hartenstein, the question was not how to activate Christianity in social programs that would counter the antagonisms of nations, races, and classes on a global scale. They raised the question instead of whether Christians at home might increasingly have to re-import the strategies of foreign missionary apologetics to deal with rising heathenism in Germany. Here was a vision of Christendom in which the task of the church was not merely to extend its influence

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[32] Karl Hartenstein, "Was hat die Theologie Karl Barths der Mission zu Sagen?" *Zwischen den Zeiten* 6 (1928), 59.

[33] Not all missionaries agreed with these views: Siegfried Knak, head of the Berliner mission, wrote a lengthy but courteous critique of Kittel (Knak, "Voelkermission und Volksmission" *Flugschriften der deutschen Evangelischen Missions-Hilfe* 11 (1921)) arguing that, while the home missions task in Germany had certainly grown as a result of Communist and neo-pagan movements, the work of restoring formerly Christian people to the Gospel was essential different than bringing populations with a traditional tie to non-Christian cultures to knowledge of the Gospel.

over society through the instrumentalities of philanthropy and social legislation. Rather, Christianity had to confront and defend itself against new, modern religions or quasi-religions that had taken hold on the home front. Christianity in this view had become, not merely a religion that must reassert its hold over society, but one religious option among many in the tumultuous and divisive spiritual market of the Weimar Republic.

I have suggested that the 1920s ought to be seen as a transitional period for Protestant missionaries, when movement leaders in Allied countries and Germany alike struggled to come to grips with a missionary situation profoundly different than the one they had known before the War. On the one hand, these two blocs re-imagined the missionary task of the church in much different ways: while Allied Church leaders envisioned a de-territorialized, global space of "world civilization," Germans focused on recovering their missions stations abroad, and remained suspicious of the Anglo-Saxon internationalism that in their view colored attempts to rethink missions work in the postwar world. Despite this difference, however, both German and former Allied missionaries rethought the missions project in ways that unsettled the distinction between "home" and "foreign" missionary work. The epochal accomplishment of the International Missionary Conference of 1928 was the construction of a new missionary task that would galvanize both contingents by positing a spiritual enemy that they faced in common: a secularistic worldview or "system of life and thought" that was not limited to the West but characteristic of a modern, world-wide civilization linked together East and West. To the construction of this enemy we now turn.

II. The Jerusalem Conference and the Construction of Secular Civilization

The Jerusalem Conference of 1928 was envisioned by its architects as the successor of the Edinburgh conference of 1910. It would be the first major conference of the International Missionary Council since the end of the War. By the time an organizing committee – referred to simply as the "Committee of the Council" – was formed in 1926 to oversee the planning for the conference and commissioning of preliminary reports, relations between Allied and German Protestants had improved enough for Germans to take an active interest in the conference. As we'll see, even as Germans persisted in pointing out the characteristic errors and threats posed by Anglo-Saxon Social Gospel during and after the Jerusalem conference, these critiques became secondary in comparison with a new recognition of common purpose uniting them with the rest of the international missionary community.

The significance of the Jerusalem Conference was due to the way in which its organizers, drawing on traditional missiological strategies of categorization, channeled anxieties over the waning influence of Christianity to argue that Christianity faced a new enemy in the world, a world-wide "secular civilization," which they defined not as the absence of religion but as a positive "system of life and thought." In some ways, the idea of secularism married elements from the German missions discourse of the 1920s examined above – namely that western civilization had not merely fallen away from Christianity but produced new, positive worldviews that opposed Christianity as total accounts of reality – with the de-territorialized conception of the missionary field espoused by non-German Protestants. But secularism as conceived at Jerusalem was not a synthesis of existing ideas but rather a conceptual innovation. The term expressed a conviction, shared by Allied and German missionaries, that the "religious" conception of the world, grounded in the idea of an all-powerful spiritual world or deity who

ordered the universe according its design, had been decisively dethroned. Modern industrial

society looked instead to science to explain the sovereign forces of nature and society, giving rise

to a worldview in which belief in God among those inclined to believe might be tolerated, but in

no sense could furnish a common ground for common social, political and economic life.

The critical innovations that we will look at here all took place within a field of preparatory work

focused on the production of a volume of essays studying "Non-Christian Systems of Life and

Thought." This volume followed the model of the report of Commission IV at the Edinburgh

conference, which, as discussed in the last chapter, included reflections from missionaries and

scholars of religion on the "points of contact" between Christianity and its various competitors

among both "world religions" such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, as well as the

"primitive" or "heathen" religions of Africa and the South Pacific islands. But there was a

critical difference between these preparations in 1910 and 1928. According to Mott's biographer,

Oldham, Mott, and the American secretary of the IMC, A. L. Warnshuis, met in 1927 in New

York to consider whether alongside articles on the message in relation non-Christian religions,

some kind of reflection on materialism and rationalism might be commissioned as well.[34] This

discussion continued at a conference planning meeting in London in March. Though the minutes

of this meeting do not describe in any detail the conversations that took place, they do record the

outcome: "It was proposed that another paper should be added to those already proposed on the

different religions. The title finally approved for this was *Secular Civilization*, dealing with the

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[34] Charles H. Hopkins *John Mott: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 660.

attempts to find alternative spiritual foundation for the world to Christianity." [original emphasis][35]

In contriving the category of secular civilization, missionaries undertook the inverse of the secular construction of religion that scholars like Talal Asad have recently analyzed.[36] Here, by contrast, was a religious construction of "secularism" that conceived it, not as atheism or materialism by another name (much less as a demarcation of the powers of church and state, a meaning the term would not become widely associated with the term until after World War II), but as a new spiritual competitor to Christianity, a worldview that had come to occupy the role of religion in providing an underlying worldview or orientation to modern life. If "secular civilization" denoted, or "dealt with," a search for spiritual foundations, it was not simply the negation or critique of spirituality represented by those earlier ideas. The phenomenon of secular civilization filled the "spiritual vacuum" of non-theistic beliefs that, as we saw in the last chapter, missionaries feared in 1910 would make evangelizing work in the non-Christian world impossible.

From the moment of its first appearance in 1927, secular civilization provoked a conversation about how to formulate the Gospel in a way that would make "contact" with the assumptions and categories of this new way of life and thought. In the months leading up to the conference, this conversation was limited to British and American voices, and it was dominated by the

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[35] "Note of a Meeting of the British Members…March 18, 1927," 2 (WCC, 260.001, folder 01).

[36] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). See the previous chapter for a review of recent literature on the construction of religion.

application of an evangelical strategy that had been prevalent among liberal theologians in their efforts to translate the Gospel into terms comprehensible and persuasive to the adherents of non-Christian religions. That strategy sought to establish a commensurability between Christianity and secularism on the basis of "values" that the two held in common – and to proceed to demonstrate that Christianity embodied or expressed those values in a more perfect form. But at the Jerusalem conference and in the months following, the missionary community as a whole came to believe that this was not a promising approach. However superior Christian values might be, to assert or demonstrate this fact, through argument or action, failed to meet the secularists' objections to Christianity, which was not an disagreement over values but a question of ultimate authority. Was the universe ordered by impersonal forces that could be discovered and mastered by science, or by a God who ruled the cosmos according to his personal will? As Oldham put it in 1929, "in the past we have been addressing audiences… whose conscience was on our side." Speaking to other religions that accepted the idea of an ultimate transcendent authority or objective order in the world, missionaries could present the Gospel as the final or most perfect account of this divine order. But secularism was a worldview premised on the repudiation of this idea of a supernatural authority. The secular mind's very "sense of truth is against us."[37] Modern man had turned away from religion to science as the ultimate arbiter of truth, embracing with it a view of the universe as ordered by blind, impersonal forces that had no meaning or purpose of their own.

To formulate the claims of the Gospel as a response to such a worldview would require a fundamental rethinking of the message, task that missionaries believed that they could not

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[37] Joseph Oldham, "The New Christian Adventure: A Statement Made to the International Missionary Council at Williamstown, Mass. July, 1929" (London: International Missionary Council, 1929), 6.

undertake alone. It required a mobilization of the intellectual elites of the church as a whole, in order to combat a challenger that faced off against the church in all parts of the globe. As Oldham wrote to Robert E. Speer, Secretary of the American Presbyterian Mission, reading the Jerusalem reports had brought home "with an altogether new clearness that some of the major issues affecting the Christian cause in the world to-day lie outside the recognised province of the mission boards and are plainly the concern of the Church as a whole."[38] The upshot of the encounter with secularism was a program, led by missionaries, to organize theologians and philosophers to "reformulate" the Christian message in relation to an understanding of the world that the church at present was intellectually unequipped to address.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will trace how the effort to conceive a apologetic strategy vis-à-vis secular civilization went through two stages between 1928 and 1929. The first strategy – the search for common values – was abandoned as missionaries became convinced that it failed to meet the secularist challenge, which was rejection of God's authority on the basis of a scientific cosmology positing impersonal, natural forces as the dominant order of the world. But the missionaries did not wish to revert to the "fundamentalist" position of rejecting science in the sense of rejecting findings concerning the age of the earth, the evolution of the species, and the authorship of scripture. They thus could do little more than assert the difference between the "Christian" and the "secular" worldview, while professing their own incapacity to bridge this divide. It would not be until 1930, as a result of theological inspiration drawn into the discussion on secularism from a movement of dialectical theology, that missionaries would discover a way of inscribing the secularist challenge within a cosmology that defended God's authority.

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[38] Oldham/Speer, May 24, 1929. (WCC, 261.001).

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Shortly after the London meeting in 1927 that recommended commissioning a paper on "secular civilization" for the Jerusalem volume on the "Christian message," Oldham, along with his colleagues William Paton, a Presbyterian missionary who had worked in India, and William Temple, now Bishop of Manchester, composed a short memo reconnoitering this new phenomenon.[39] The document began by outlining the general approach envisioned for the "Message" report. "Our plan, as you will remember, is to approach this subject from a point of view in the main experimental… that is to say, while no treatment ought to exclude the formal differences between Christianity and the ethnic religions… we wish to gather information and to promote thought on another aspect of the subject, namely, the spiritual values which are found in the ethnic religions and in Christianity." But in Europe and America, and increasingly in the East as well, the major "alternative faith or inspiration for living, as against mere irreligiousness" was the "spirit of secular civilization." Oldham, Paton, and Temple went on to enumerate three "spiritual" values associated with secular life: the honest and rigorous pursuit of truth characteristic of modern science, the aesthetic appreciation found in modern art, and a spirit of philanthropy and service to humanity independent of Christian inspiration. These were all aspects of secular civilization that Christians ought to celebrate and treat as spurs to discover expressions of the Christian message awesome enough to incorporate and supersede them. "Can

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[39] The memo was written as a letter from Oldham's office address (Edinburgh House, 2 Eaton Gate, London, S. W. 1) to Mott May 9, 1927 (WCC, 260.001/02). I am inferring the likelihood of Paton and Temple's contributions to this letter from the minutes of a conference preparatory meeting held three days before the letter was sent: "It was agreed that Mr Paton, Mr Oldham and the Bishop of Manchester should write a letter to Dr Mott explaining just what they mean by 'secular civilization', and what they want the writer [of the study of the subject for the Jerusalem preparatory volumes] to deal with." ("International Missionary Council, Note of the Meeting of the Committee to deal with Emergencies on May 6th, 1927," 1-2 (WCC, 213.08.33)).

we find," they asked, "someone who can sketch this type of thought for us with sympathy and insight, doing justice to its positive best and show also where it fails and what true Christianity has to give that it can never give?"[40]

The man chosen for the job was Rufus Jones, an American Quaker and Professor of Philosophy at Swarthmore College. His paper, "Secular Civilization and the Christian Task" extended the line of thinking laid out in Oldham, Temple, and Paton's memo. Like that document, Jones speech stressed the global reach of this new "non-Christian system of thought and life:" not only was secular civilization gaining ground among the educated classes in the East, it was also the nexus for the Marxist movement and the source of communism in Russia, which "has placed itself by official action definitely outside all Christian churches." Jones's definition of "secularism" – a term he used interchangeably with secular civilization – seemed to question whether it could be understood as a properly "spiritual" phenomenon. "I am using 'secular' here," he clarified at the outset, "to mean a way of life and an interpretation of life that include only the natural order of things and that do not find God, or a realm of spiritual reality, essential for life or thought."[41] But his discussion of secularism repeatedly stressed its "spiritual," even "religious" elements, and he identified these as promising "points of contact" that could be used by missionaries to plead their case to the modern mind. Like Oldham, Paton, and Temple's memo, Jones's paper also concentrated on secularism's "values of life," and Jones's account of these values followed the 1927 memo closely Those who were indifferent to traditional religions (Christian or non-Christian) embraced "high and noble ends," Jones wrote, such as the

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[40] Memo from Oldham's address/Mott, 2-3. May 9, 1927. (WCC, 260.001/02).

[41] Rufus M. Jones, "Secular Civilization and the Christian Task," *The Christian Life and Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems* (New York: International Missionary Conference, 1928), 284.

appreciation of beauty found among lovers of art, nature, and poetry. For such people, "the esthetic order is… a divine order" giving rise to "attitudes not unlike that of worship."[42] Jones also praised the commitment to the pursuit of truth exemplified in modern science, finding there too evidence of a "devout and truly religious spirit."[43] Further, he acknowledged that the humanitarian spirit of non-Christian believers – their concern for the poor and for social improvement – often put Christians to shame.

Jones's paper went on to outline a strategy through which Christianity could vindicate itself against this new opponent. He elaborated a program, steeped in Social Gospel ideas and an appeal to cooperation with other religions, bound to excite German animus. First, he robustly embraced ideals of the Social Gospel, arguing that Christianity would need to prove its claims to truth through "a convincing laboratory experiment" that would exhibit the power of the faith to drive progressive reform. Cooperative action of all Christians to "transform the unlovely sections in our modern cities and make them sweet, wholesome, and beautiful… [and] carry the reconciling spirit of a constructive wisdom into the complex problems of labor, business, and industry…" would demonstrate to the world Christianity's power and bring at last the Kingdom of God to earth.[44] Second, embracing the sympathetic attitude toward non-Christian religions typical of theological liberalism, Jones called for Christianity to join forces with other world religions to oppose a "common enemy" of secularism. He emphasized the need for Christianity to draw inspiration and insight from other religions, which he conceived as collaborators in a

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[42] Ibid, 243.

[43] Ibid, 244.

[44] Ibid, tk.

search for religious verities. "Other religions are not so much 'false' as they are inadequate and hampered by their limits," he wrote, and he argued that Christ "comes to 'fulfill,' to complete, to realize the divine creative work" in other religions – not to eliminate the foundations they had built. In the conclusion of his speech he called with a flourish for an alliance of all religions to defend the spiritual way of life against secular civilization.[45] We go to Jerusalem, he wrote, "as those who find in the other religions which secularism attacks, as it attacks Christianity, witnesses of man's need of God and allies in our question of perfection. Gladly recognizing the good they contain, we bring to them the best that our religion has brought to us."

In assessing the broader impact of Jones's presentation on the missions community, it is critical to distinguish between the category of secular civilization it brought into a wider international discourse and the liberal vision of missions work that his paper endorsed. Predictably, Germans attacked Jones's speech as a particularly extreme version of the theological liberalism they anathemized, seeing it as part of a larger imbalance and Anglo-Saxon bias in the gathering. Richter, in a review of Jones's speech published after the gathering, attacked it as a typical defense of Social Gospel activism that "dissolved" the Gospel into humanitarian social concern, and effaced the unique truth of Christianity vis-à-vis other religions.[46] Far more significant, however, than these replays of older conflicts was the remarkable unanimity that emerged at the conference around the idea of secularism as Christianity's new global rival. In smaller group discussions on the message that followed Jones's presentation of his paper, most all delegates

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[45] Ibid, 273.

[46] "Der mit dem Social gospel [sic] Hand in Hand gehende frische Aktivismus löste das Christentum auf in die Vaterschaft Gottes und die Bruderschaft der Menschen, wobei beides im Nebel unklaren Denkens unterzugehen schein." Julius Richter, "Die Tagung des Internationalen Missionsrates" *Neue Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*, 7 (1928), 196.

clamored to join the conversation about "secularism." "So great," the authors of the Conference Report later wrote, "was the interest in the subject of the Christian Life and Message in Relation to Modern Secularism that it was necessary to hold two meetings, and these were attended by nearly half the members of the Council."[47] In these discussions, and the conversations that followed the event, the missionary community came to recognize that an evangelical approach based on the search for common values between Christianity and secularism was a non-starter. Indeed the problem of secularism seemed to invalidate all previous approaches to missionary work as they had been focused around other religions.

What I want to emphasize about these conversations is that they all analyzed secularism, not as a system of values, but as a crisis of authority. "Science," missionaries agreed, was an authority of sorts for the modern mind. But it represented a reign of chaos, since the cosmos it revealed lacked any ultimate meaning or purpose. The apologetic task in response to this challenger would thus have to establish Christianity as a unifying framework into which all values, forms of knowledge, and moral claims could find their end and orientation. What was needed, as the Dutch missionary Hendrik Kraemer put it at Jerusalem, was a new Christian "worldview," an account of ultimate truth that would restore a Christian order to all realms of knowledge, society, and ethics. "What hampered missionaries was that they did not have a comprehensive view of life, but a set of detached dogmas," he declared at Jerusalem. So long as they lacked a clear and

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[47] Ibid, 401.

comprehensive world view, "neither the Church nor the missionaries could be quite clear about their message."[48]

This project – to produce a Christian "worldview" – was of fundamental significance for the history of international Protestantism. It effected a number of transformations in earlier ideas and practices. First, the project transformed the aims and organization of the missionary movement. A constellation of societies originally organized to carry the Gospel to the unoccupied fields of Asia and Africa mobilized itself to organize a theological assault against an enemy that was present in all parts of the world, and would ultimately destroy religious systems of belief, where it wasn't doing so already. Second, this project furnished a new spirit of international collaboration in place of the conflict and suspicion that had previously dominated relations between Germans and Allies: *all* sectors of the missionary community, as we will see, rallied to the cause of producing a new Christian worldview. Further, the aim of this project fundamentally differed from the earlier program of seeking to establish the Kingdom of God; its goal was the production of a new knowledge of the Gospel, not of practical methods and programs for Christianizing social relations. In this sense, the effort to produce a Christian worldview laid the groundwork for the later emergence of the ecumenical project of the 1930s. But in the transitional moment of late 1928 and 1929, missionaries did not see themselves as leaders of a new movement, confidently advancing against the enemy. Rather, they sounded an alarm of confusion and crisis: the church as a whole *lacked* the weapons it needed, and it remained at this critical juncture unclear how where these weapons could be found. Was there a way to formulate

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[48] Hendrik Kraemer, "The Need for a Comprehensive View" *The Christian Life and Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems*: *Report* of the *Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, 1928* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 283.

Christian convictions so as to make them persuasive in a world that ceased to find religion of any form credible?

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In a summary of the Jerusalem Conference published in the *International Review of Missions* in the Autumn of 1928, William Paton explained what the gathering had achieved – and what remained to be done. The delegates had departed Jerusalem united in the "permanent conviction… that this world of secularist thought has come to stay… if we are thinking of the future, there lies the enemy." Secularism had decisively displaced the array of old challengers – Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Confucianism – as Christianity's major rival in the world. "It is abundantly clear that the ethnic religions cannot withstand it; [secularism] destroys them inevitably as they come into contact with it." However, Paton went on, "to recognize this is only to state a task, not to explain a problem." The Jerusalem conference attendees had in fact reached no understanding of what secularism was, or how the church could effectively counter this new menace. "It is clear," he continued, laying out the task ahead, "that the Church… is called in this generation to use all its powers to commend with persuasive force, backed up by sincere and [sic] consistency of practical application, the Christian Gospel to the mind of our time."[49]

In Paton's account, the challenge of secularism did not mandate the "alliance" with other religions, as Jones had called for. As we'll see, this was a silver lining of secularism: since it seemed poised to "destroy" other religions, its dominance allowed missionaries to leave behind

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[49] William Paton, "The Jerusalem Meeting – And After" *International Review of Missions* vol. 17 (July, 1928), 441.

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divisive debates among themselves over the relation between these religions and Christianity. Moreover, while acknowledging the need for "practical application" of the Gospel, Paton put emphasis on the intellectual challenge of presenting Christianity to the modern mind. Missionaries could put aside as well the question of whether the League of Nations or other particular political bodies were advances or retreats in the Christian cause. The new work was one of theological "construction," as a similar report put it in early 1929. And the first step to reimagining the Christian message was establishing a clearer understanding of the world in which it needed to be preached.

Joseph Oldham made his first attempt to describe this world in a speech at a gathering of the Committee of the IMC held in Williamstown, Massachusetts, in July 1929. The speech illustrates how missionaries first began to conceive of secularism as a problem of authority, rather than the commensurability of religious values. Oldham began by underscoring the profound difference between the missionary situation in 1910 as compared to 1929. Significantly, there had been at Jerusalem "no commission on unoccupied fields," as there had been at Edinburgh in 1910, in the "Carrying the Gospel" volume, examined in the last chapter. "But the meeting at Jerusalem did none the less arrestingly call attention to a vast, important field, which, while it cannot be described as unoccupied, has certainly not yet been entered with a fraction of the energy, courage, and resources that are required." This "field," Oldham stated, was "the world of modern industrial civilization, based on the results of scientific enquiry to the increase of wealth and welfare, and dominated by the scientific outlook." The scientific outlook posed a new challenge to Christianity. "We must bear in mind that we have to do here not merely with old controversies, in which the Church has always been engaged, in regard to a theistic… view of

world."[50] A "scientific outlook" was not equivalent to atheism or materialism. Rather, it was a comprehensive, self-sufficient, and complete understanding of life, embraced by modern peoples "as the explanation and interpretation of the creative forces of their actual world."[51] This worldview had gained prestige as a result of the stunning successes of the application of science in the natural and social worlds. "Secular civilization is successfully subduing to its purposes the forces of nature. It is enabling men to cross the oceans, to conquer the air, to open up deserts to make things grow where nothing grew before, to improve the breeds of plants and animals, to stamp out diseases and to engage in a multitude of other efforts of which the results are indubitably real."[52] These achievements "obscure for many the thought of God as a living force in the world." Their effect on the spiritual life of humankind was to propagate an understanding of truth discoverable by scientific experiment and analysis alone. "The scientific method relies on experiment, and it is therefore natural for those who live in a world in which the application of the scientific method has brought about such dazzling transformations to look to experiment in individual and social conduct as the supreme means of discovering truth."[53] The success of the experimental method left no room for the "religious" conception of a divine agent, ordering the universe. It explained the world with reference to immanent, natural and social forces, discoverable and harnessable by human ingenuity. What Christians were confronting in the secular view of life, then, was an alternative account of "reality," "not simply one of several rival philosophies," but rather a broad underlying set of ideas and assumptions that furnished modern man with a view of the world in which religion simply lacked any compelling meaning. For

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[50] Oldham, "The New Christian Adventure," 3.

[51] Ibid, 4.

[52] Ibid, 7.

[53] Ibid, 5.

Oldham this view of the world was present across a number of distinct intellectual and social contexts. "Whereas in previous generations it was the relatively few highly educated and serious minds that had their faith undermined by the new knowledge, today the assumption underlying the secular attitude to life are through the universities in all countries being communicated to successive generations of students and through books, magazines, and the press permeating the general mind."[54] "The masses, and not merely the thoughtful few," in the West as well as in the East, had embraced science as the arbiter of truth, and in doing so, adopted secular view of the world.

Oldham pointed to two recently published works as classic expressions of the secular viewpoint, H. G. Wells's *Open Conspiracy* (1928) and Walter Lippmann's *A Preface for Morals* (1929).[55] Both works reinforced the inadequacy of an approach to secularism based on common values between it and Christianity. Lippmann and Wells expounded high ideals of selfless service to humanity, and both authors indeed held out hope that such ideals could form the basis of a new, quasi-religious ethic. Lippmann's work in particular was not an attack on religion, but a diagnosis of a modern condition in which belief in God seemed impossible, even for those who wanted to believe. The triumphs of science, the retreat of Christianity into milquetoast modernism, the long-term consequences of the "logic of toleration" developed in the wake of early modern sectarian conflicts, and the rise of patriotism constituted together what Lippmann termed, in a phrase that Oldham quoted, the "acids of modernity." The agent dissolved in these acids was God. What was lay beyond the realm of credibility for this modern mind, in

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[54] Ibid, 4.

[55] Ibid, 5.

Lippmann's account, was a universe ordered by God's benevolent hand – "the theocratic idea."

For Oldham, the missionary challenge was one of upholding the authority of God in the face of

the vision of reality that Lippmann described. "It is necessary for us to explain and vindicate the

grounds on which as Christians we accept Jesus as lord and Master, as arbiter in matters of

conduct and our guide in life. We have to show in what sense He is an authority."[56] And yet

Oldham conceded that Christians – himself included – had no idea of how this demonstration of

the reality of God's authority in the world could be effectively achieved. "We have to do here

with a state of mind on which the mere re-assertion our religious convictions will have little

effect."

Other attempts by missionaries to define of secularism in this early context of the immediate

aftermath of the Jerusalem conference stressed, like Oldham, the theme of modernity's

repudiation of the kingship of God. Often these accounts were more explicit than Oldham's in

evoking the confusion and anarchy of world that lacked any conception of overarching authority.

But even here, the emphasis was not on organized Christianity's *failure* to represent its God as a

persuasive common standard and point of integration. If modern man had lost confidence in God,

these accounts asserted that Christians had not yet found an adequate means of re-securing this

confidence. For the Anglican theologian Oliver Quick, secularism could be identified precisely

as the failure of Christianity to furnish an integrative common standard for various social groups

as well the spheres of modern life – art, economics, society, politics, and religion – lacked an

integrative common orientation.

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[56] Ibid, 5-6.

The Christianity of the reformed churches has not succeeded in interpreting the great central doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement in such a way as to make men find in Christ Himself a unifying authority over all life which may provide a common goal and a common lay for all the manifold activities of the human mind and spirit. Each activity pursues its own peculiar line of study, knowledge and creation. Each claims its own autonomy, and refuses to accept standards of good and bad, right and wrong, from any authority outside itself. 'Business is business,' say some, meaning thereby that industrial activities cannot submit to standards of conduct intended to apply equally to all dealings of men with one another. 'Art for art's sake' is by now an older-fashioned slogan, which has declared the right and duty of the artist alone to fix the canons by which his creations are to be judged. Each separate science pursues its own road to truth, and has its own methods of verification…[57]

William Paton echoed this theme in an article published in the *International Review of Missions* later that year. Secularism for him was not a discrete set of ideas but rather an "enemy" which was nothing but "the result of the failure of religion to integrate the life of man." Secularism was the "separation of the departments of life from the centre to which they belong, so that they become kingdoms in their own right, self-dependent, acknowledging no common suzerainty."[58] In Germany, Martin Schlunk, director the *Missionsausschuß* gave a similar account in a speech to conference of missionary societies of Brandenburg in the Spring of 1929. The phenomenon of *Säkularismus* identified at the Jerusalem meeting was no "single branch of knowledge, no graspable institution," but rather,

a prevailing mood, a principle, a lifestyle that one encounters in all places, which, like poison gas, conquers all life in its presence. It is the feeling that Christianity is in terminal decline.[59]

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[57] Oliver Quick, "Lausanne, Jerusalem, and the Modern World," *The Church Overseas* (Apr, 1929) 99-110.

[58] William Paton, "What is Secularism?" *International Review of Missions* vol 18 (1929), 354.

[59] "Wo finden wir den Säkularismus? Wie fassen wir ihn? Es ist kein Wissenzweig, keine irgendwie greifbare Institution, sondern, ich möchte sagen, eine Grundstimmung, ein Prinzip, eine Lebenshaltung, denen man überall begegnet, die wie Giftgas alles, was Leben hat, in ihre Gewalt bekommen. Es ist die Stimmung: Das Christentum hat abgewirtschaftet." Martin Schlunk, "Der Kampf Gegen den Saekularismus daheim," *Neue Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift* 7 (1929), 194.

If secularism had become the chief enemy of the church, then the fault lay with Christians themselves. The very idea of secularism registered an acknowledgement that the church had failed to fulfill its historic mission in the world. God had been displaced from the modern imagination, leaving not an absence but a ruling authority that was no ruler at all, but a reigning principle of relativity: the truth that denied absolute truth. As Lippmann had put it, "Whirl is King." It was a formulation that exactly captured the concept of secularism as Christian missionaries themselves understood it, and in it was implied a new idea of the task of the church.

Having described the condition of secularism, each of these missionary authors issued an appeal for a new formulation of the Christian worldview that would unify various categories of knowledge. The imperative was to offer Christianity as a new unifying framework of truth. This was, all agreed, a task for theologians. Paton argued that the great work of the church today fell on those called to the vocation of thought. "It involves in the realm of thought an explanation of the Christian view of God and the world, so that that view is shown not only to be compatible with (for instance) biological fact, but to be the inner truth on which ultimately the other depends."[60] Schlunk made the same point: The task of a Christian world view would be to demonstrate that that "which science lacks, we have," namely "unity, finality [*Geschlossenheit*], and ultimate orientation [*Bezogenheit*] to the ultimate cause" that the modern world in its fragmentation secretly sought. The task was not to attack the "relative truths of individual sciences, "but to make them recognizable as relative truths[, and] to place them in the light of the eternal truth of God." A new theology was needed, not to "discredit the ethical forces of

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[60] Paton, "What is Secularism?," 356.

secularism" but to assimilate them under the aegis of faith. Schlunk called for a "great synthesis" of thought.[61]

In response to the challenge of secularism as the reign of a scientific mode of knowledge, the years following the Jerusalem conference witnessed an unprecedented reorganization of the missionary project. A community that had constituted itself around a set of challenges and body of expert knowledge pertaining to the study of non-European peoples and religions reached beyond its boundaries, to recruit and organize a range of figures that had not previously been involved in the missionary work, narrowly conceived. In the months following the conference, Oldham, Paton, and Schlunk formed small study groups of missionaries and theologians. Their correspondence swelled in this period with letters to missionaries, theologians, clerics, and lay Christians in the urgent task of mobilizing thinkers to contribute to the pressing task of the "theological re-statement" of the Christian message.[62] Paton, working closely with Temple in the weeks after the conference on Theology and the World Missions, planned a follow-up conference on "Christian Sociology" that was held in York in October. During his travels in the Near East and India in the spring, he encouraged the Christian Councils of missionaries and representatives of mission churches in these countries to form "groups of people who would give themselves to the most thorough study" of the problem of secularism in the context of non-western societies, "taking the Jerusalem volume on the Christian message as a basis, and seeking to carry further the work done there."[63] Paton also remained in close contact with the director of

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[61] Schlunk, 196.

[62] The records of these correspondence are held primarily in Oldham's personal papers at New College in Edinburgh and the International Missionary Council Collection at the World Council of Churches Archives in Geneva, see esp WCC, 26.11.34.

[63] Paton/ (WCC, 26.0021).

the YMCA in Switzerland, Joachim Müller, and Adolf Keller, a Secretary of the Universal

Council on Life and Work, as they organized a "Study Conference of World Christian

Organizations" in Geneva in May 1929. For his part, Oldham worked his American contacts,

encouraging Warnshuis that Spring to convene a group of theologians in Chicago and asking

John Mott to draw together "first-rate minds" to study on the issues raised at Jerusalem.[64]

Oldham also contacted theologians, churchmen, and intellectuals – including the Scottish

philosopher John Macmurray, T. S. Eliot, R. H. Tawney – in Britain to organize discussion

groups in England.[65] Hugh Mackintosh, theology professor at New College, Edinburgh, was

assigned to organize a "Scottish Group."[66] Meanwhile, on the European Continent, the educator

and theologian Philip Kohnstamm and Hendrik Kraemer organized a discussion on the Christian

worldview in Holland.[67] In Germany, Schlunk and his colleague Walter Freytag, Secretary of the

Missionsausschuß, encouraged all of the mission boards to sponsor independent "round tables"

on the *Säkularismusfrage*.[68]

The German participation in this project is particularly worth emphasizing. Richter, who was in

attendance at the Williamstown conference, was so impressed with Oldham's discussion of

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[64] See Oldham's correspondence with Mott from the Winter and Spring of 1929 in held at the Yale Divinity School Archives (hereafter YDS), Mott Papers, Box 66, and Oldham/Warnshuis, February 8, 1929 (WCC, 26.11.05/10).

[65] See Oldham's correspondence and papers in WCC, 261.010 and 301.2.010, which also includes a list of organizers responsible for similar groups in Japan, China, "Near East," and India; also Paton's parallel efforts in WCC 261.010.

[66] Oldham/Mackintosh Feb, 24 1930 (WCC, 301.2.010).

[67] See Oldham/Kohnstamm correspondence (WCC, 26.11.34) and Notes on a "Conference in Holland," Dec 1929 (WCC 261.010).

[68] For a record of these German efforts, see "Technische Vorbereitungen un Protokolle von Konferenzen und Tafelrunden der kontinentalen IMC-Studiengruppe für die Säkularismusfragen. 1929-33" Archiv des Evangelischen Missions-Werkes, EMW, 0155. See also Schlunk, Freytag, and Richter's correspondence with Oldham in the archives of the World Council of Churches, (WCC, 24.11.34).

secularism that he had it translated and reprinted in the *Neue Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift,*

and proudly forwarded to Oldham himself the response to the article from the aging Adolf

Harnack, who averred that there could be little question that the article put its finger on "the most

important Christian missionary task of to-day…"[69] After Jerusalem, Germany was not an

exception to the international missionary community; its leaders and mission boards joined the

general organizing rush to pool thought around the challenge of opposing secularism. Recent

works by Todd Weir and Hent de Vries, in tracing the first emergence of the terms *Säkularismus*

and *Säkularisierung* into German philosophical, theological, and sociological vernacular to the

Jerusalem conference, underscore the extent to which German Protestants embraced a program

in accordance with the broader post-Jerusalem consensus.[70] Siegfried Knak, an erstwhile staunch

critic of Anglo-Saxon *Aktivismus* who had replaced Georg Beyer as head of the Berlin

Missionary Society, published *Saeklularismus und Mission* in 1929, a work that largely echoed

the estimation of the Jerusalem conference, defining Christianity's new enemy in the world as "a

worldview and attitude" behind the "commerce, politics, industry and technology of the day."[71]

In a letter to Oldham, the director of the Leipzig Missionary Society Carl Ihmels – son of

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[69] Oldham's translated speech was published under the title "Der Säkularismus als Menschheitsgefahr" *Neue Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift,* 10 (1929). Harnack's response to the article is found in Richter/Oldham, November 12, 1929: "Ich danke Ihnen herzlich für die Zusendung des Aufsatzes von Oldham (Unchristliche Weltkultur). Hier liegt in der Tat die *wichtigste* christliche Missionsaufgabe der Gegenwart oer vielmehr die wichtigste christliche Aufgabe überhaupt." (WCC, 26.11.34/17).

[70] Hent de Vries, *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 435; Todd Weir, "Secularism and Secularization. Postcolonial Genealogy and Historical Critique" (Münster: Preprints and Working Papers of the Center for Religion and Modernity, 2015), 10.

[71] Siegfried Knak, *Säkularismus und Mission* (Glütesloh: Bertelsmann, 1929), 2. See also the collection of Siegfried Knak's reflections on the *Säkularismusfrage* in Evangelisches Ländeskirchliches Archiv in Berlin, Archiv des Berliner Missionswerks, Nachlaß Siegfried Knak, (1/10997). This folder also includes correspondence with the members of missionary societies in Berlin/Brandenburg concerning the possibility of organizing discussion groups on the secularism problem, as well as copies of contemporary publications by a small minority of still revanchist German theologians suspicious of the term's international (and more distantly British) origins. (for instance Wilhelm Scholz, "Säkularisation, Säkularismus und Entchristlichung. Ein Wort zur Auseinanderhaltung der drei Begriffe" *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 11, 4 (1930).

Ludwig Ihmels, Bishop of Saxony, who had powerfully assailed Anglo-Saxon activism at the Stockholm conference – wrote to Oldham, "I have the impression that the question concerning secularism has begun to stir the feelings [of theologians and missionaries] in Germany."[72] In November 1929 Oldham circulated a memorandum reiterating many of the themes from his Williamstown speech, and sent it around to the heads of missionary societies in Germany and Switzerland, soliciting their response. Karl Hartenstein responded to Oldham's speech with an enthusiastic affirmation of its claims: "The lines you have drawn out in your Memorandum are really ours and we are very thankful that we came in personal touch you, so that we could see what the real task would be in facing the secularistic problem. I realize more and more that the whole problem of theology and church will be touched by this question of secularism so that we are compelled to go into the last crucial points of faith and community which must be taken in view to enter the spiritual house of this secularistic world."[73] Oldham for his part believed, as he wrote to Mott in January 1930, that "I am more impressed than ever with the importance of the contribution which the continent [sic] can make to our thinking in regard to the 'message.'"[74] Around the same time, he praised Schlunk's efforts to organize study of the *Säkularismusfrage*: "I have felt ever since the meeting at Jerusalem that this is a field in which the contribution of the Continent and of Germany in particular must be proportionally of greater importance in relation to the Anglo-Saxon world in the actual extent of missionary opportunities."[75]

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[72] Ihmels/Oldham March 7, 1930, 1 (WCC, 24.11.34). "Ich habe den Eindurck, daß die mit dem Säkularismus zusammenhängenden Frage anfangen auch die Gemüter [feelings, stirrings] in Deutschland stark zu bewegen."

[73] Hartenstein/Oldham Feb 1, 1930 (WCC, 26.11.34)

[74] Oldham/Mott, Jan 16, 1930 (WCC, 26.11.34/17).

[75] Oldham/Schlunk, Dec 19, 1929 (WCC, 26.11.34/16).

Conclusion

The months following the Jerusalem conference found the international missionary community united in defeat – and scrambling to launch a guerilla campaign. I have stressed in this chapter how a common perception of Christianity's failure to assert its dominance over modern civilization at home and abroad furnished the foundation for new solidarity among previously estranged Allied and German Protestants. By the time of the Jerusalem Conference, relations between these two blocs were already on the mend. But anti-secularism concretized common objectives and furnished a program of practical cooperation. It was a program that dissolved the categories and distinctions of the 19th century missionary movement, based on a territorialized spiritual geography demarcating "Christian" and "non-Christian" worlds. The ascendency of secularism revealed that the church in all parts of the world faced off against a common enemy. The novelty of the new situation was illustrated by the fact that missionaries felt themselves unequipped to respond to a challenger that was not a religion but an ascendant secular worldview rejecting the religious understanding of divine omnipotence in all of its traditional forms. To make Christianity credible in the modern world, they believed, would require incorporating the truths of science into a new synthesis. But how this could be done without rejecting those truths *tout court* – and following a path that American fundamentalists had recently shown to lead to public embarrassment and irrelevance – was unclear. As we'll see in the next chapter, the solution to the problem framed in the months after the Jerusalem meeting came from a surprising source. The movement of dialectical theology, which attracted many young theologians in Germany and Switzerland in the 1920s, had not exerted a significant influence on the missionary community throughout the 1920s. But it was in that movement's conception of revelation –

which its leaders conceived as an "existential" event irreducible to rational categories – that not only missionaries but also the wide field of Protestants and Orthodox thinkers who rallied to the post-Jerusalem agenda in the years following 1929 would discover the reality they sought. Dialectical theologians contended that Christianity's historical decline could be mastered by comprehending it in the terms of revelation – as a consequence of man's rebellion against God. Secularism in this view was not the triumph of science but the rebellion of man in his inveterate resistance to the only lord that could offer salvation. The effort to restore the authority of that lord over a modern subject whose rebellion assumed catastrophic proportions in the 1930s gave rise to the ecumenical movement that succeeded.

Chapter 3

"Let the Church be the Church!": Dialectical Theology, the New Anti-Secular
Polemic, and the Origins of the Interwar Ecumenical Movement

William Paton began an article in the July 1929 number of the *International Review of Missions* with an anecdote. "A friend of mine told me recently that a member of his congregation had come to him and plaintively enquired, 'What is this 'Secularism' that everybody talks about now?"[1] The question in the mouth of the parishioner was undoubtedly the central concern of Protestant missionaries in the months following the Jerusalem Conference. More than that: it would become in the 1930s the dominating question of international Protestantism as a whole, providing a point of reference that would join the intellectual and clerical leadership of non-Roman Christendom together in a single conversation centered on diagnosing the nature of secularism and advancing a Christian "response" to it. "We are apparently witnessing a convergence of ideas toward a new, creative thought," the Dutch missionary and theologian Hendrik Kraemer wrote in 1930, essaying the responses to the Jerusalem conference among various strains of Continental theology. That gathering had "concentrated universal attention on a problem of decisive importance for the future, namely the relations of Christianity and secularism." The effort to organize a united front against secularism, Kraemer predicted, would inspire Christians to a regenerative re-discovery of their faith that would, in the coming years, take on new forms of characteristic expression. The fact that secularism was identified as a "missionary" problem was significant, Kraemer explained: just missionaries had reinterpreted Christianity in the past through their encounters with other religions, so too, now, the Christian

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[1] William Paton, "What is Secularism?" *International Review of Missions* vol 18 (1929), 346.

community and its message – eternal and transcendent in its apparently infinite capacity to speak to the needs of all humanity – would be transformed in relation to its new opponent, secularism.[2]

Kraemer's prediction was prescient. The discourse on secularism in the years following 1930 indeed fundamentally reorganized the thought and practice of international Protestantism. From a constellation of networks and institutions devoted to realizing the Kingdom of God in the wider world, international Protestantism became, in the decade following the Jerusalem Conference, and in direct response to the rival of secularism its participants identified, an effort to realize the "church" as a distinctive society, set apart from a hostile world in its essential convictions about the nature of man, history, and the foundations of human community. As this new program coalesced, Protestants and Orthodox elites rallied around the idea of "ecumenical" Christian unity – an idea that, as we saw in chapter 1, that had previously failed to mobilize. This epochal shift was the result of a new understanding of the church as the only possible locus of community life in a world whose divisions and conflicts – which seemed to amplify to catastrophic proportions in the 1930s and 1940s – were the consequence of modernity's rejection of God. From this point onward, the question of whether Protestant and Orthodox cooperation could be called "ecumenical" without the official cooperation of the Roman Catholic Church was moot. The ecumenical church was not a council of ecclesiastical bodies but a universal community encompassing all nations, races, and classes united in obedience to God. Only such a society, ecumenists argued, could withstand the centrifugal pulls of rationalistic individualism on the one hand and "neo-pagan" collectivisms of nationalism, fascisms, and communism on the other.

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[2] Hendrik Kraemer, "Christianity and Secularism," *International Review of Missions* vol 19 (1930), 195-6.

This chapter examines how the critique of secularism generated the intellectual foundations of the ecumenical movement as a program oriented around the realization of the church. We will stress that the critical development here was a conception of secularism originally advanced by dialectical theologians from the European Continent as they made their first ventures into to the post-Jerusalem conversation about secularism after 1930. Focusing on a number of figures within the remit of this movement, including Karl Barth, Theophil Spoerri, W. A. Visser't Hooft, and Nicholas Berdyaev, we will give particular attention in the early parts of the chapter to two men: the Swiss Reformed theologian Emil Brunner and the German Lutheran Karl Heim. While by no means the sole architects of the ecumenical anti-secularism, their early reflections on secularism in 1930 are particularly important for our discussion since they highlight two intellectual innovations – the conceptualization of secularism in terms of Christian anthropology, and the program of ecclesiastical "realization" – that would be foundational to the movement in the decade that followed. Their work shows that the essential features of anti-secularist ideology were in place before most Protestants were concerned with the phenomenon of Nazism. It was not racist anti-liberalism per se that ecumenists saw as the chief threat to their faith, but a secularized civilization of which Nazism was a symptom.

Building off the perspective of dialectical theology, ecumenists in the 1930s understood secularism, not as the success of science in shaping the modern world, but as the rebellion of man against God, achieved through man's attempt to make science a comprehensive account of life and the universe. Rejecting the historicist orientation of liberal theology that had shaped characterizations of secularism in 1928-9, these thinkers placed the drama of the modern world

within the anti-historicist frame of man's eternal relation to his creator. First in the Renaissance

and with growing impudence in the centuries that followed, modern man had wielded reason to

assert his autonomy from God and his dominion over the world. This rebellion had brought about

spiritual confusion and uncertainty and with these, a collapse of social order. In response,

modern man had sought to recover a transcendent purpose through "neo-pagan" or "political

religions" of nationalism, Fascism, and Communism. But in seeking order on a false basis, these

"religions" only prepared the way for an amplification and globalization of unrest. Dialectical

theology, in other words, centered the debate about secularism not around the acceptability of

specific scientific findings, but around the problem of authority and social order, and the

common conceptions of ethical responsibility and collective purpose necessary to ground social

existence in the modern age.

By recovering this conception of secularism and its degeneration into neo-paganism, we will

discover a critical point about the origins of the "ecumenical movement" itself, which have been

generally misunderstood by existing scholarship. Most recent scholars have characterized

ecumenists as theological liberals, committed to promoting an accommodation with science and

other religions and espousing to a host of liberal, pluralistic cultural and political projects. They

have thus linked the ecumenical project to a longer progress of secularization through which

Protestants made their peace with the "Enlightenment," a limited, private role for religion, and

the institutional separation of church and state.[3] By showing how ecumenism emerged originally

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[3] This is interpretation has been advanced primarily by scholars focusing on American Protestants and follows a division central to historiography of modern American Protestantism, emphasizing the division between "liberal" and "evangelical" or "fundamentalist" Protestantism. Its most important expositor is David Hollinger (see *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); see also Gene Zubovich, *The Global Gospel: Protestant Internationalism and American Liberalism, 1940-1960* (Ph.D dissertation, U.C. Berkeley, 2014), Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), and William Inboden, *Religion and American*

out of anti-secularism, we will locate its history not within the dominant narrative of

Protestantism's self-secularization but within a longer story of attempts by internationally

minded Christians to re-imagine – in response to divisions within their own community – the

historical form that God's universal dominion must take. For ecumenists of the 1930s, that form

was theological community united in opposing a Christian worldview based on revelation to

various manifestations of "secularism" and pagan movements that, despite their apparent

differences, were essentially similar in asserting human self-sufficiency in defiance of God's

sovereignty. This program of ecumenical internationalism would prove remarkably resilient, in

spite of the political polarization of Europe in the 1930s, and in particular in spite of tensions

between anti-Nazi and Nazi-sympathizing Protestants. One key to its success was that it was able

to conceive precisely this polarization as a symptom of the secular disintegration that ecumenical

Christianity must overcome – a task whose conceptual foundation we will examine in this

chapter and whose practical execution we will examine in the following chapter.

The present chapter has three parts. The first will examine Brunner and Heim's writings on the

secularism in 1930, showing how they were occasioned by the international mobilization of

theologians that followed the Jerusalem Conference and how they developed a polemic attacking

secularism that sought to relativize, without rejecting, the truths of modern science. The second

part will show how various theologians in the period between 1930 and 1937 expanded these two

thinkers' critique of individual autonomy to include a constellation of movements that seemed to

oppose it, such as nationalism, Fascism, and Communism. They achieved this feat of conceptual

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Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment. (New York: Cambridge University Press 2008). In attempting
to locate not only American Protestants but the ecumenical movement as a whole within this schema, these works
not only misrepresent the intentions non-American ecumenists but American ecumenists as well, who embraced, as
we will see, the framing of secularism first advanced by European dialectical theologians.

synthesis by positing that contemporary humanity was in the grips of a "secularism syndrome," according to which the bid for autonomy generated an opposite but equally anti-Christian trend toward new heteronomies. We will then trace the percolation of the secularism syndrome idea in wider circles of Protestant and Orthodox thinking in the 1930s, showing how it furnished the premise on which ecumenists elaborated the project of world Christian unity in the face of political polarization, the collapse of liberal democracy, and the growing strength of political movements of Nazism, Fascism, and Communism. Finally, we will show how a self-consciously "ecumenical movement" emerged as a program to "realize the church" in opposition to competing secular and pagan programs of social order. Since the Protestant and Orthodox actors we have been following in this dissertation began to refer to themselves as ecumenists in this period, we will follow their usage.

I. Dialectical Theology and the New Anti-Secular Polemic

We saw in the last chapter how the confrontation with secularism prompted missionaries to reach out to theologians in order to formulate a new understanding of the Christian "message" that would make effective "contact" with the assumptions of the modern world. The theologians that missionaries recruited proved willing and enthusiastic partners in this enterprise. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine all of these discussions in detail. Here I want to focus only on the origins of a line of argument that would go onto provide the intellectual foundations of the ecumenical movement that emerged in the 1930s.

In 1929, the missionaries who had assembled in Jerusalem confronted a problem. They had identified secularism as a new global rival, but they found themselves – and the church as a

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whole – unequipped to defend Christianity against it. The root of this impasse lay in the tradition

of theological liberalism within which all missionaries – and indeed most of North Atlantic

Protestant world – operated throughout the 1920s. Though German missionaries and church

leaders at times assailed the politics their Anglo-American counterparts yoked to it, liberal

theology furnished Germans too with a set of broad assumptions and categories. Liberal theology

stressed a historicist reading of scripture that welcomed the findings of Higher and Lower

criticism. It repudiated doctrinal dogmatism and insisted on the compatibility of Enlightenment

reason and Christian revelation. Liberals embraced an immanent conception of God who was

present within human experience and working out his providential plan toward the Kingdom.[4]

Secularism posed a crisis for this current of thinking because it described a historical condition in

which the progress of God's plan had been halted. Intellectual elites, the working classes, and the

bourgeoisie alike were turning away from God; science had become the new authority and

shaping force of modern civilization. Missionaries could cast aspersion on secularism for causing

moral and epistemic disorder and fragmentation. But doing so only underscored the historical

failure of Christianity as a unifying cultural and religious framework and did nothing to suggest a

positive program for regenerating the faith. Missionary writings on secularism in 1929, then,

evinced a cognitive dissonance: on the one hand, secularism was an enemy, on the other, the

imperative of liberal theology was to accommodate, not deny, the advances of natural and social

science. As theological liberals, missionaries were unsure how to vindicate God's authority while

at the same time accepting the age of the earth, Darwinian evolution, and the human authorship

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[4] See William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976) and Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology* 3 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001-6).

of scripture. Especially for American and British missionaries, the recent catastrophic implosion of Fundamentalism seemed to underscore that any publically robust form of Christianity must not take the route of wholesale rejection of science. But on what grounds could secularism be rejected, while salvaging science?

In the years following 1930, dialectical theologians would furnish the answer to this question. In the following section, we will focus on two dialectical theologians in particular – Emil Brunner and Karl Heim – illustrating how their diagnosis of secularism represented the first attempts to conceive this phenomenon outside the liberal theological framework. Brunner and Heim made the question of secularism not one of the credibility of science – acceptable within its appropriate domain of "natural" phenomena – but of man's obedience to God. This shift was achieved through repudiating the historicist orientation of liberal theology and insisting on the anti-historicist horizon of *Existenz*, with its focus on the eternal relation of man with his creator. At stake in this shift, Brunner and Heim argued, was recognizing that scientific rationality and divine revelation were two distinct grounds of knowledge and morality, whose only reconciliation could come through a subordination of the former to the latter. Insisting on revelation as ultimate truth, they interpreted the success of science and the historical decline of organized Christianity within the biblical account of original sin. From this perspective, science was an instrument of modern man's rebellion against God. Indeed, they went on to claim, the entire modern project of the West sought to enshrine and normalize that rebellion, making human autonomy the basis of a new form of social order and civilization. Brunner and Heim's early reframing of secularism would become normative for the ecumenical movement in the 1930s, even among its advocates who did not identify themselves as "dialectical theologians."

In order for this conception to emerge, the concepts and categories of dialectical theology needed to be first brought to bear upon the problem of secularism that had been diagnosed at Jerusalem. We discussed in the last chapter the role of dialectical theologians in problematizing in the German-speaking world a division between foreign and home missions, through the advance of a critique of Christian culture as a form of heathenism, or the idolatrous worship of culture, and a re-assertion of divine transcendence. For the most part, however, throughout the 1920s, dialectical theologians declined to elaborate the relevance of their ideas to questions of social reform and missionary work, convinced that the task of theology was above all one of explicating God's self-revelation: it was essential to their point that the task of theology had been obscured by the confusion of the categories of society, history, culture and politics with the object of faith, a God who remained "wholly other." There were, however, by the late 1920s, a handful of German-speaking churchmen who had become interested in applying the insights of dialectical theology to a broader field of ethics and social theory. Three of these figures – Heim, Hendrik Kraemer, and Karl Hartenstein, Würz's successor as director of the Basel Missionary Society – had attended the Jerusalem conference. Another figure, Emil Brunner, was brought into the post-Jerusalem conversation by Joseph Oldham's effort in late 1929 to convene a group of theologians on the European Continent to discuss the secularism problem. That group epitomized the idea of anti-secularism as a program that could unite formerly estranged blocs, since it included Germans as well as Swiss and French and Dutch thinkers.

Oldham's group, the so-called "the Continental Group," convened for the first time on October 7, 1930, in Basel. Its members – including German missionaries Walter Freytag, Heinrich Frick,

and Siegfried Knak, the Dutch theologians Philippe Kohnstamm and W. A. Visser't Hooft, the

French theologian Henri Monnier, and the Czech philosopher of science Emmanuel Radl – were

assigned to read in advance a short document prepared by Oldham himself on secularism, as well

as longer essays from Brunner and Heim.[5] We will examine these latter two essays in some

detail, emphasizing in particular the importance of Brunner's contribution to the longer

development of ecumenical thinking in the 1930s. In order to understand the arguments

advanced in this essay, it is necessary to consider Brunner's intellectual trajectory in the years

before 1930, when he developed a conception of the polemical "task" of theology that, though

developed independently from the missionary community, would prove crucial for its re-

organization in confrontation with secularism.

In the early 1920s, Brunner was among the first theologians in Switzerland to join Barth in his

quest to reorient theology around the existential crisis of revelation. However, even in that

decade his trajectory took him down a path different from Barth and many of his other partners

in arms. Brunner's works of the mid-1920s, including his inaugural lectures as Professor of

Systematic Theology at Zürich and his 1927 work *The Mediator* [*Der Mittler*], evinced an

interest in developing a Christian social ethics. Brunner's ethics sought to elucidate a divergence

of "theological" and "philosophical" understanding of the origins and basis of society by

recovering a dimension of existential reality as the plane on which the human being encountered

God and discovered the foundation of his social and moral obligations in the world. By the late

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[5] The history of the "Continental Group" and its connection with the proliferation of study groups on the secularism problem that emerged between 1929 and 1933 deserves more serious attention than it has received. For accounts that mention the "Continental Group," Brunner's papers prepared for it, and the conversations that occurred there, see Werner Ustorf, *Sailing on the Next Tide: Missions, Missiology, and the Third Reich* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2000), chpt 7, and Frank Jehle, *Emil Brunner, Theologe im 20 Jahrhundert* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2006).

1920s, Brunner's focus on the problem of Christian ethics led him to develop a conception of theology's "polemical" or combative task: its concern with critiquing the basis of modern "worldviews" or ideologies, dominant forms of social thought that were opposed to the Christian conception.[6] First in a series of lectures given in the United States in 1928, then in a 1929 article "The Other Task of Theology," Brunner laid the groundwork for a conception of theology's task that would prove immensely influential to the larger world of Protestant thought in the 1930s, though it was developed at the time apparently without knowledge of the Jerusalem conference's proceedings.[7]

While the primary task of theology, Brunner argued, was reflection on the Word of God, the "other" task was to find the languages and questions by which to present the Word of God as a "question" concealed by the regnant attitudes and beliefs of contemporary culture. "Eristics," from the Greek *erizein*, for struggle or combat, was the name that Brunner gave to this "other task," which departed from traditional approaches to Christian apologetics in its decisive rejection of rational argumentation as the path along which the unbeliever would be led to faith in God.[8] The Enlightenment tradition of natural theology, Brunner wrote, had made the mistake of attempting to defend Christianity on rational grounds, which were foreign to biblical revelation. In this way it ceded the territory to its opponent without a fight, placing the Christian

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[6] Alaister McGrath, *Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2014), chpt 2. For an account of the break that Brunner's turn to "polemics" caused with Barth (and an interpretation of the role of "The Other Task of Theology" in this story, which culminating in their major debate over natural theology in 1934, see Bruce McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Deveopment 1909-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 402-7.

[7] For an account the relation between Brunner's theological approach and German missiology, see John Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity,* Missio Dei*, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), chpt 3.

[8] Emil Brunner, "Die Andere Aufgabe der Theologie" *Zwischen den Zeiten* 7 (1929) 255-76.

in the "doubtful position" [*verzweifelte Lage*] of having to "prove the Gospel as theoretical truth."[9] The task, however, was to throw reason itself into doubt, to expose it in light of the biblical conception of man as a creature both in search of God and, as a consequence of original sin, unable to find God by his own powers. Brunner's eristics sought to re-conceive the project of apologetics as an effort to provoke in individuals consciousness of an existential crisis that rational thinking only obscured. That crisis was the Word of God itself, which encountered man from beyond the pale of history, announcing to him his true nature – as a sinner whose salvation could only be achieved through Christ. This revelation demanded a decision of faith. Brunner's eristics characterized human rationality as at once a concealment of this decision and a pursuit of a truth it could not rightly comprehend so long as it sought to secure it by its own powers of apprehension. It would be the task of eristic theology, Brunner wrote, "to show how through God's word reason expressed both humans' need for salvation and their incapacity to achieve it."[10] Brunner was not arguing here that rational inquiry was *insufficient* as a mode of divine apprehension. Had he simply argued that reason was insufficient for salvation, he would have been uttering a platitutude of Christian thinking differentiating him in no way from the liberal theology of Jones, Paton, Quick, or Oldham. Brunner's point rather was that rational inquiry must be seen "dialectically," from two perspectives. On the one hand, it was a means by which the human creature sought to apprehend the truth of himself and his universe; it bespoke the dignity of man as a creature formed in the image of God. At the same time, however, in seeking to ground such knowledge on itself, rational inquiry was also a "fatal error," an assertion of

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[9] Ibid, 260.

[10] Ibid, 260. "Es wäre also die Aufgabe der eristischen Theologie, zu zeigen, wie durch menschliche Vernunft teils Quelle lebensfeindlichen Irrtums und teils in ihrem eigenen unvollendbaren Suchen erfüllt wird."

human will that alienated man from God by occluding the event of revelation and the decision it demanded.[11]

"The Other Task of Theology" was published in the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* in the autumn of 1929. It seems doubtful that Oldham was familiar with the article; though he read German and followed developments in German theology, there is little indication that he read *Zwischen den Zeiten*, or indeed had evinced much interest in the movement of dialectical theology before 1929. It is possible, however, that Oldham was familiar with an incipient version of Brunner's argument in "The Other Task," laid out in the latter's 1928 *Theology of Crisis*, in which Brunner had argued that the task of theology was to "deliver" the Western world from the "colossal ideology" of the Enlightenment, which "rests on a quite definite understanding of human life in which man does not see himself as he is" – as a sinner before God – but rather as a autonomous rational agent.[12] The *Theology of Crisis* was published in Britain in October 1929. The following month, Oldham wrote to Martin Schlunk to inquire whether, "in view of the general objects which we have at heart" in developing a Christian response to secularism, it would be desirable to have Brunner attend a meeting of a small group of missionaries and theologians from the European Continent that Oldham was planning to hold in Basel the following year. "I feel… that the movement which Brunner represents is important," he added.[13] A few weeks later, Oldham wrote to Brunner himself, sending him a copy of the speech he had given at Williamstown that summer. Brunner's reply expressed his interest in and gratitude for Oldham's speech – claiming

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[11] Ibid, 176.

[12] Emil Brunner, *Theology of Crisis* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1929), xxii. For publication history see Alistair McGrath, *Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2014), chpt 2.

[13] Oldham/Schlunk November 11, 1929 (WCC, 26.11.34/17).

even to have read it "out loud" with his wife – and the two met in person in Zürich in January.[14]

Brunner agreed to join the group. He also agreed to produce a preliminary article for the first meeting, which was published under the title "Secularism as a Problem for the Church" in the *International Review of Missions* in October. That piece, along with a speech that Karl Heim gave at the Bremen Missionary Society conference in the summer of 1930, furnished the basis of discussion at the first meeting.

It is worth looking at both of these interventions in some detail, in order to analyze the crucial re-orientation of perspective on secularism they advanced. While missionaries between 1928 and 1929 had seen secularism as a product of the historical advance of science and its stunning successes in remaking modern society, these thinkers offered a different aeteliogy. The worldview of secularism that grounded the social, political, and economic order of modern civilization as a whole, they argued, was a decision against God, an attempt by man to ground his existence on his own powers of reason. In this view, secularism was a phenomenon distinctive of the Christian West, not because of the West's technical and scientific achievements, but because of the particular relationship between man and God revealed by Christianity, a relation that was prior to, indeed the condition of possibility for, the emergence of modern scientific and industrial civilization. According to Christian revelation, because of original sin, man existed at a distance from God. Man met God's revelation as a personal "Word" from beyond: morally responsible to God, he was also free to affirm or deny God's will. By decoupling man from the cosmos and asserting his peculiar status as a person formed "in the image of God," Christianity had made possible its own contemporary impotence – and consequently contemporary humanity's distress.

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[14] Brunner/Oldham January 2, 1930 (WCC, 26.11.34/17).

Brunner's article began by positing "secularism" as an unprecedented phenomenon in world history.[15] In all times and places, not only the "ancient Mediterranean culture," but "also the old China and Japan, Mexico and Peru, even the world of so-called primitive peoples," civilization had always been tied to religion. The decline of any particular religion had always been synonymous with the collapse of the civilization that had been built upon it, while new civilizations that arose to replace "decadent" ones always advanced their own understanding of man's binding ties with the divine. Outside of the Christian West, the separation between culture and religion "never takes place; what really happens in every case is simply the replacing of one religious supremacy by another."[16] It was a "fact" of world history that "man always feels himself to be bound, in two respects, bound to higher powers and bound to society." Even in civilizations that were oriented toward the "mundane" – that is, the things of this world in contradistinction to a realm of eternity or transcendence – the religious sense expressed itself in a recognition of the objective order in which one belonged. The "mundaneness" of ancient Greek, Roman, and Chinese culture, for instance, was a "a mundaneness which somehow receives its delimitation, its norm, its law… from beyond itself, from a divine world."[17]

The essence of secularism, Brunner contended, was not an orientation toward the things of this world but rather the emancipation of the individual from his double bind, to God and to his fellows. It was an emancipation that only could have occurred "on Christian soil," since it

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[15] Emil Brunner, "Secularism as a Problem for the Church," *International Review of Missions* vol 19 (Oct 1930), 495-511.

[16] Ibid, 495.

[17] Ibid, 496.

required Christianity's understanding of the *relative* independence of man as an individual endowed with free will, beholden to God for salvation but also free to accept or reject God through a decision of faith. In Brunner's account, secularism first emerged during the Renaissance, whose creative lights carried out the first attempt to base a civilization on the systematic denial of man's responsibility to God and the elevation of his own powers over self and cosmos. While orthodox Christianity understood man as a "pilgrim" in the world, responsible ultimately to a Lord in heaven, "the men of the Renaissance" asserted their lordship over self, society, and the natural world, uprooting themselves from the objective order of God's creation: "Man is no more assigned a place in the world; he confronts it as its lord and regards it as material for his will." This epochal declaration of independence was for Brunner not the consequence but the precondition for the emergence of modern science. "Modern science," he wrote, "is only possible as the product of the autonomous and emancipated personality."[18]

In Brunner's account, "reason" was the "means and principle" of man's emancipation: and it was through the application of reason to reshape both the natural and the social world that he asserted both his independence from other men (since "rational knowledge is what each man can tell himself") and from God ("for it is in virtue of reason that he is lord of the world, and through reason he makes it his scientific and technical object."). Brunner did not derogate reason absolutely: rightly used, reason could illuminate the divine order present in both the natural world and in social "orders" of creation such as the family and the state. He further clarified – against any comers who might accuse him of espousing Christian "fundamentalism"[19] – that

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[18] Ibid, 496.

[19] Not mentioned in "Secularism as a Problem for the Church," "Fundamentalism" as advanced by American Protestants such as George Machen and William Jennings Bryan was familiar to Brunner from this time in the

Christians ought to accept the findings of the scientific method as it had been applied to

questions of the origins of the earth, the heliocentric universe, and the human authorship of the

scripture. But as he argued the previous year in "The Other Task of Theology," reason had to be

understood dialectically; it was at once an instrument for apprehending God's order and the

instrument that enabled man to violate that order, by drawing the natural world and the social

order alike under human control. What Brunner attacked were applications of reason that denied

the limits of its applicability, and in doing so became an instrument of human will to power.

"Through reason the modern man is God to himself, for every law of truth and good he possess

in himself, that is, in his reason."[20] Secularism in Brunner's telling was nothing but the abuse of

reason for the purpose of making its bearer self-sufficient, a law unto himself, unwilling to

recognize dependence upon God. In a line: "Autonomy is self-deification."[21]

Brunner's account went on to describe a series of apparently inexorable consequences that

followed from Renaissance man's declaration of independence. All sense of an inherent,

objective moral order rooted in God's will, was eaten away in the following centuries through a

succession of philosophical movements from the Enlightenment to Romanticism from scientific

positivism. Philosophical idealism, a remnant belief in the divinity of man, was challenged by a

mechanistic conception of the universe as an order that could be controlled by human ingenuity.

Man came to believe that the social order itself was nothing but a human contrivance, established

by the free consent of human wills. "The State no longer represents an original social order but a

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United States, as a visitng student at Union Theological Seminary 1923-4; his lectures on the *Theology of Crisis* advanced dialectical theology as an alternative to theological "modernism" on the one hand and "fundamentalism" on the other. See McGrath, 58-9.

[20] Brunner, "Secularism as a Problem for the Church," 498.

[21] Ibid, 498.

mere *contra social*; economic relations and the life of the peoples can only be understood as the play of tyrannous and egotistic wills. Marriage and the family are purely natural forms dominated by the principle of utility or of sex, and therefore also conceived as exemplifying the *contrat social*."[22] The result of the new "temper" of emancipation then was an alienation of man from God as well as the natural world, which he now stood over and against in a position of exploitation and technical utility, as well as his fellow man. The final stop on this downward spiral was a relativism which denied the possibility of truth and even tired of self-assertion itself – a denouement which earned Brunner's admiration, at least, for its frank recognition of the endpoint of man's bid for autonomy.

The upshot of Brunner's account was a conception of secularism fundamentally different from that advanced at Jerusalem and in the months following – and pregnant with a future. Oldham, Paton, Schlunk, Quick, and the other missionaries who wrestled with the question of secularism in the months following the Jerusalem conference had all understood it from a historical perspective; they had described a triumph of scientific assumptions about the nature of the world and reality. Brunner was arguing by contrast that this triumph needed to be seen in the true light of revelation as a particularly extreme and complete form of rebellion against God. Vindicating God's sovereignty required recognizing that modern "man" was his rival claimant to the throne, and debunking the "scientific worldview" as the ideology serving as its defense. "This historical study," he concluded, "has been meant to lift the idea of secularism out of the fashionable superficiality into which it has fallen, and to cast a clearer light on the grounds for this, the most important movement of the last three hundred years." It was only by shifting the frame of

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[22] Ibid, 503.

reference from the historical progress of science to man's eternal relationship with God that the truth of secularism could come into view:

> Secularism is not the product of modern science; modern science is the product of secular thought. It is not the product of social relations, such as modern democracy, the reverse is the case; it is not the product of modern civilization and economic life, the reverse is the case. The modern world is the product of the new temper and this new temper is the individual's basing himself on his own reason, the autonomy and autarchy of the rational individual… Emancipation from God is the principle and ground of the modern development of civilization, not its consequence. Behind modern culture stands the modern man, as its bearer, its shaper, its *causa efficiens*. The perversion of all relations is a product of a perversion in the self-interpretation of man. The ordinary view is exactly the reverse; it moves inward from without, it sees the modern man as the product of the new relations and thus transposes cause and effect.[23]

The "ordinary view" here was a general conception of modern civilization advanced by self-identifying secular thinkers themselves. But it was equally a description of Christians' *own* understandings of the phenomenon of modern civilization. The critique was leveled, implicitly, at Oldham, Schlunk, Paton, and other missionaries understandings of secularism as the failure of Christianity to assert its authority over modern society. To view the matter in that way was to parrot the modern self-understanding itself, to play into the hands of the secularist heresy, and "cede the ground," as Brunner had put it "The Other Task," without a fight. We will examine below how Brunner re-articulated his program of "polemic" theology as a response to the phenomenon of secularism, and how this entailed a new conception of the role of the church as a theological community, constituted through a collective search for the recovery and fighting proclamation of God's Word.

Heim's essay "The Struggle Against Secularism" [*Der Kampf Gegen den Säkularismus*] differed from Brunner's article in some respects: it did not, for instance, lay as much emphasis on rational

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[23] Ibid, 500.

autonomy as the "means and vehicle" of modern rebellion. For Heim secularism could just as easily take the form of deification of the "world" – the nature of cosmos – as of man. But like Brunner, Heim rooted the secularist heresy in the existential possibility uniquely furnished by Christian revelation, which placed man in the agonizing condition of a decision to accept or reject God's Word of salvation. Again the problem of the secular worldview was inscribed within the perspective of an anthropology centered on the concept of sin, offering an account that would not repudiate scientific findings but rather attempt to recover the moment of divine repudiation that lay behind them.

Heim's address began by challenging two common accounts of secularism. He did not identify secularism with the conception of reality generated by Newtonian physics – the "worldview of a system of closed causality," [*Weltbild des geschlossenen Kausalzusammenhanges*] which denied divine agency in natural or social processes. Nor had secularism emerged from the triumph of a "technical" *Weltanschauung* that had taken shape in the wake of the industrial revolution and the proliferation and increasingly wider application of technology in various realms of life. Instead, the prevalence of technology merely explained the ease with which the secular worldview had spread throughout the world – furnishing a configuration of moral and spiritual assumptions that fed secularism's epidemic profusion like the crowded living conditions of the Hamburg waterfront enabled the spread of cholera.[24] Heim supported this claim by observing, first, that the worldly orientation of secularism had existed in many forms well before the birth of modernity, for instance in the philosophies of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius, as well as analogue

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[24] Karl Heim, "Der Kampf gegen den Saekularismus," 2. Speech delivered at the the Bremen Missionary Conference, Summer 1930, (WCC, 26.11.34/20). Technics enables the spread of secularism "etwa wie gewisse Wohnungsverhaeltnisse im Hafenviertel von Hamburg schuld daran waren, dass die Cholera, nachdem sie einmal eingeschleppt war, sich rasend schnell verbreitete."

areligious philosophies in the non-western world. Second, the leading expositors of the modern

scientific worldview, including Galileo, Copernicus, Descartes, and Newton, had been believing

Christians. Their innovations had not shaken, but rather strengthened, their belief in the God of

creation.

The "final ground" [*letztes Grund*] of secularism could not, in fact, be discovered by taking

scientific worldviews on their own terms. Like Brunner, Heim argued that secularism could only

be understood by recovering the spiritual condition of man illuminated by Christian revelation.

Non-biblical religions, he argued, asserted an identity of the eternal and the natural orders.

Natural forces were identified with the actions of Gods. While purely "this-worldly"

philosophies had taken shape in non-Christian cultures, these had either been contained to a

small intellectual elite or, if they succeeded on a larger scale, had brought on large-scale cultural

collapse.[25] Biblical religions, by contrast, had advanced a strong distinction between time and

eternity – between the ruling forces of existence in this world and God's eternal kingdom. The

relative autonomy of the "world" imagined in Judaism and Christianity allowed for a distinction

between two dimensions of being: one constituted by the relation between the subject and objects

and another constituted by the encounter of the subject with the divine person of God. Invoking

Martin Buber's distinction, Heim referred to these modes of relation as the "I-it" and the "I-you."

Biblical revelation distinguished the two through its absolute prohibition on the objectification of

the divine as an idol or image: God was not an object but an entirely different kind of being,

present in the world but fundamentally different from it. Such a God revealed humankind's

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[25] Ibid, 6. "Wie die Glieder eines Körpers absterben, wenn das Herz stillsteht, so können diese Kulturgebilde keine Eigenleben führen, wenn sie nicht vom Herzblut der Religion durchströmt werden."

"embarrassing position" of dependence: its salvation relied upon the action of a God who "comes to us from beyond," and "with whom we can never become identical."[26]

In consequence of the ontological division between time and eternity in Biblical religions, humanity was, for the first time, confronted with a choice concerning its ultimate "orientation." Scripture revealed a decision, between allegiance to the world and allegiance to God. "Already through the either/or relation that exists between these two realities… it becomes possible from a biblical standpoint – indeed it appears as a serious possibility, confronting every human being – to decide for the cosmos and against God."[27] It was biblical revelation that framed the choice in which secularism made sense. "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" was the biblical expression for secularism.[28] Like Brunner, Heim asserted that secularism could not be understood as a product of scientific progress; it must rather be understood as a rejection of God and the personalist conception of the universe posited in Christian revelation.

Brunner and Heim's ideas offer the first examples of a significant re-description of the phenomenon that missionaries had identified at Jerusalem. For both figures, the anti-historicist frame of existential decision, central to the broad current of dialectical theology, brought to light the source of modern secularism that historical thinking and liberal theology concealed. The

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[26] Ibid, 12.

[27] Ibid, 14. "Schon durch dieses exclusive Entweder – Oder Verhaeltnis, das zwischen beiden Realitaeten besteht, durch das Ausgeschlossensein jedes Identitaetspunktes wird es also vom biblischen Standppunkte aus moeglich, ja es erscheint geradezu als die eine sehr ernsthafte Möglichkeit, die vor jedem Menschen steht, sich fuer den Kosmos und gegen Gott zu entscheiden."

[28] Ibid, 14.

triumph of secularism could only be explained as concealment, through a dimension of *Existenz*, of the reality of man confronted with God's revelation – a concealment which itself only underscored the deep truth of Christian anthropology rooted in the conception of man as a sinner, inveterately disposed to assert his own agency in the place of God's. Already within weeks of Brunner and Heim's writings, Oldham had publically adopted their understanding of secularism. No longer was it merely the "scientific outlook" of modern industrial civilization, as he had characterized the phenomenon in 1929; it was now, as he declared in a speech before a Dutch Missionary Conference in the summer of 1930, "the demonic attempt to the world or the self in the place of God."[29] In the years that followed, Protestants and Orthodox Christians across the North Atlantic would likewise embrace the idea of modernity constituted by man's rebellion against his creator.

II. The Secularism Syndrome: The Emergence of Neo-Pagan Religion from the Crisis of Individual Autonomy

Brunner and Heim's assessments of secularism both took their aim at scientific rationality as it first emerged in the Renaissance evolved through the forms of Enlightenment, mechanistic philosophy, scientific positivism, and modern idealisms. But the broader polemical program that they advocated – one in which the crucial task was distinguishing between worldviews that made "man" the center of existence and a Christian view which placed God as sovereign – could be applied as well to interpret a range of movements that dethroned reason and questioned science. This became clear in the years between 1930 and the Oxford Conference of 1937– the culminating event of Protestant and Orthodox thinking on the problem first framed at Jerusalem

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[29] Joseph Oldham, "The Christianizing and Unchristianizing of the World," 1930 (Joseph Oldham Papers, 15/2/8), 3. The speech mentions both Heim and Brunner's articles, noting their "remarkably similar" conclusions (1).

nine years before. By the time preparations for that event began in 1935, Joseph Oldham, the

principal organizer of the conference's monumental study program (which we will examine in

more detail in the following chapter), could declare that the Christian Church's "vital conflict"

was not only with secularism but with "the secular and pagan tendencies of our time."[30] The

"pagan" tendencies here referred to various cultural and political movements – such as

nationalism, communism, and fascism – which did not valorize rational autonomy but denigrated

it in the name of collective solidarities. In this section we will explore how apparently opposed

social and political ideologies – from fascism to communism to liberal individualism – were

integrated under the rubric of the modern repudiation of God's authority. The critical step in this

history was the emergence of an idea I will term the "secularism syndrome," according to which

new forms of collectivism were born in reaction against modernity's spiritual and social chaos

but only served to perpetuate it, since they too failed to find salvation in the only authority that

could offer it.[31] Adapting anti-secularism to the fracturing of European political order was a

strategy for solidifying unity among Christians and churches across national and ideological

divisions. Its aim was not to anathematize Protestant or Orthodox Christians who declared

political allegiance to international Communism or the Nazi state (or liberal democracy, for that

matter), but to define Christianity as a universal faith that might accommodate all political

allegiances. In this utopian vision, Christians could unite in policing what seemed to be an

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[30] Indeed it was precisely the aim of the Oxford Conference study preparations "to understand the true nature of the vital conflict between the Christian faith and the secular and pagan tendencies of our time." See Joseph Oldham's "General Introduction" to the Oxford study volumes. Eg. "General Introduction," *Christian Faith and the Common Life* (Chicago: Willett, Clark, and Company, 1936), vii.

[31] My account here draws on an interpretation first advanced by Graeme Smith in his work *Oxford 1937: The Universal Christian Council of Life and Work Conference* (Frankfurt aM: Peter Lang, 2004), 74-95. Smith, characterizing the diagnosis of Oldham, Brunner, and other Oxford intellectuals in the mid-1930s, argues that they saw "totalitarian" movements as a "postmodern" reaction to modern individualism and its socially disintegrative effects. In contrast to Smith, I stress that ecumenists interpreted "individualism" and "totalitarianism" not as ontologically distinct ("modern" and "postmodern") but as different expressions of the anti-theistic animus that characterized the modern age.

increasingly unstable boundary between the political and the religious, and keeping the former in its place by declaring Christianity the fundamental basis of social and spiritual order.

Shortly after Brunner and Heim issued their critiques of secularism in 1930, other voices challenged their focus on hypertrophic rationalism. Theophil Spoerri, for instance, a professor literature and colleague of Brunner's at the University of Zürich, published in 1931 *Die Götter des Abendlandes*, which argued that what was distinctive of contemporary European culture was not the Renaissance "deification of man" but rather the search for new idols.[32] Perhaps on Brunner's suggestion, Spoerri was put in contact with Oldham, and drawn into preparations for the meeting of the Continental Group in 1930 and a subsequent meeting of the group in 1932. In Spoerri's account, humankind could not bear the isolation of true independence, and had run to embrace new impersonal principles – nationalism, fascism, and communism – as replacements for God. W. A. Visser't Hooft seconded the point in a letter to Oldham critiquing Brunner's presentation of secularism. "Modern man is getting over his over his worship of freedom," Visser't Hooft averred in 1931. More decisive than individualism was "the new collectivism." In movements such as "fascism, national-socialism, communism, etc," he wrote, man discovers new transcendence. And we are therefore not only face to face with the job of filling a vacuum, but also of fighting the new idols."[33] No less a figure than Karl Barth had argued the same thing when, in a speech delivered at a meeting of the World Student Christian Federation in 1932, he joined the post-Jerusalem debate. The idea of "secularism" misrepresented the basic spiritual

[32] Theophil Spoerri, *Die Götter des Abendlandes: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Heidentum inder Kultur unserer Zeit* (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1931).

[33] Quoted in "Christentum and Wirklichkeit: Memorandum by J. H. Oldham" (1931?), a document quoting responses received from Continental Group participants to a "Christentum und Wirklichkeit," a paper prepared for the Group in preparation for its second meeting in 1932. (WCC, 26.11.34/24).

condition of modern civilization, he argued. "Does 'Christianity' see and understand that, in contrast to the past, it is faced today by a whole series of other 'religions?'"[34] Barth argued that what were often seen as worldviews or "philosophies of life" were in fact new religious movements, which were not grounded individual autonomy but rather its submergence. "Man can chose his philosophy of life, or even invent one of his own." A religion, however, differed from a worldview in that it "takes hold of man with a power which overcomes all personal choices and desires and which forces him to obey without knowing, or wishing to know why he does so." Barth identified three modern "religions." Communism asserted the "sovereignty… of the 'working class' as the absolute standard and goal of all things, claiming supreme sacrifice and excluding all other claims." Fascism" ascribed absolute value to the principles of "race" "people," or "nation," finding in a strong leader such as Hitler or Mussolini the embodiment of these principles. "Americanism," Barth's third religion, embraced the "gods [of] health and comfort," and was perhaps the "strongest of the three," because "neither of the others is so self-dependent, so plausible, so easy and cheerful to live up to." Seemingly opposed to one another, the conflict between these religions was in fact insignificant, since "they are able to practice mutual tolerance," agreeing to recognize one another's gods as legitimate for those to whom it speaks and even "learn from one another." But the opposition between these new religions and Christianity was "merciless" and absolute, since Christianity claimed the existence not of one god among many but of *the* God: it thus forced the followers of these religions to "justify their most sacred rights, namely their very existence as religions."[35]

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[34] Karl Barth, "Questions Christianity Must Face," *Student World* (3rd Quarter, 1932), 93.

[35] Ibid, 95.

Was the enemy facing the Christian church primarily of one secularism or of a resurgent paganism? Distinct as these assessments of the dominant tendencies of modern civilization were, the remarkable and decisive feature of ecumenical discourse in the 1930s was that it did not fracture over this question. Indeed, the ecumenists' improbable achievement of the 1930s was the construction of a synthetic account of modern civilization that explained the disintegration of liberal democracies in Europe and the wider world as part of a "secularism syndrome." According to this argument, humankind's initial rebellion against God had taken the form of scientific rationalism and hypertrophic individualism. But the destruction of traditional moral and religious by Renaissance and Enlightenment heresies had taken their toll: contemporary humanity in the 1930s was desperate to restore a sense of order, moral assurance, and purpose that modernity had destroyed. This interpretation effectively linked "secularism" and "paganism" as two consecutive stages of the secularization process, the former a moment of defiant self-confidence, the latter an illustration of man's desperation in alienation from God.

After Hitler's ascent to power in Germany, Christian intellectuals increasingly understood the course of modern politics through the lens furnished by these debates over the nature of secularism, debates whose foundational assumptions had been in place already before 1933. Not only Nazism, but an array of political movements – including nationalism and Communism – came to be grouped together under the rubric of collectivist reactions against secular individualism, and held up as proof positive of that the modern project of scientific mastery and rational autonomy had was dying by self-inflicted wounds. Critically, these new movements, while apparently different of secular individualism, were in a fundamental sense identical with it, since they only further perpetuated and reinforced humanity's rebellion against God.

The Russian Orthodox émigré philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev – among the theologians drawn into the post-Jerusalem study groups and a participant in a gathering of theologians convened by Paton, Adolf Keller, and the Swiss head of the YMCA in 1929 to discuss the problem of secularism identified at Jerusalem – was one early theorizer of the secular syndrome. Berdyaev's 1933 *The End of Our Time* devoted primary attention to an theological analysis of Soviet Communism, which he saw as a pseudo-religion, resembling a faith in its aspiration to provide a total account of reality and ultimate purpose, despite an ostensible commitment to atheism. Communism's growing international strength, including its triumph in Russia, had to be understood as a consequence of the "end of the Renaissance."[36] Much like Brunner, Berdyaev identified the Renaissance as the beginning of western humanity's turn from Christianity to a new "faith in man and the autonomous powers which were his strength," a faith Berdyaev termed "humanism." But the "paradoxical denouement of modern history" was that "humanism has not strengthened man but weakened him."[37] "Autonomy" turned out to be a foyer to despair and loneliness, which left man with no sense of obligation or orientation. "Man is tired to death and is ready to rest upon any kind of collectivism which may come," Berdyaev wrote.[38] Communism provided deracinated man with a sense of responsibility and purpose that secularized "humanism" was powerless to afford.

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[36] Nicholas Berdyaev, *The End of Our Time: Together with an Essay on The General Line of Soviet Philosophy* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1933), see esp chpt 1.

[37] Ibid, 15.

[38] Ibid, 16.

This pattern of interpretation could be applied to draw any number of new political movements into the matrix of secularism and its endgames. A report on "Church and Community" of the Oxford Conference of 1937 applied it to nationalism and to Communism alike: both were modern "attempts to reconstruct social and moral life" in the ruins of secular atomization. The report suggested that nationalism was the more important of the two reactions against modern individualism, noting that outside of Russia it seemed to be carrying the field of modern politics in "Japan, China, India, Turkey, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Ireland, and… many others countries." At its root, nationalism was a response to the collapse of "old loyalties and pieties," which had destroyed the "spiritual unity of the community," deprived societies of "common standards" and all sense of trust between members of the community. Having emancipated themselves from "unquestioned authorities," modern man was now seeking to construct new ones.

> If the evolution of society during the last few centuries has been from corporate solidarity to individual self-determinism, modern nationalism aims at a reversion to a position in which men's rights and duties spring naturally out of their station in the community. Instead of the individual being solicited by a multitude of competing claims between which he has himself to arbitrate, the national community itself is to be the sole source of standards and values. The freedom of the individual to manage his own life as he will is deliberately sacrificed to social cohesion.[39]

The freedom to choose the sources of one's own ultimate allegiance was like the "'freedom' of an unemployed man to spend his time as he will, which means in practice that no significant way of spending it is open to him, and that his life is emptied of meaning and savour."[40] In this condition of rudderless autonomy, man gave himself "willingly and gladly" to a new sense of

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[39] "Longer Report on Church and Community," *The Churches Survey Their Task*, ed. Oldham, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937), 193.

[40] Ibid, 193.

purpose supplied by nationalism (or communism), which were projects that were not narrowly political but offered instead a response to unmet "spiritual needs."

In connection with the ecumenical diagnosis of the secularism syndrome, it is worth noting that it was here, as a part of the endgame of modernity's self-dissolution, that ecumenists located the phenomenon of "totalitarianism." The term, of course, was widely deployed in the mid-century North Atlantic, beginning in the 1930s, and Catholics may have been the first to bring it into wide circulation.[41] The idea of a "total" state, assuming control over all dimensions of social and personal life, was for ecumenists one form that the reaction against secular disintegration in its nationalist, communist, or fascist variants could take. Ecumenists were careful in their discussions of totalitarianism to distinguish the phenomenon from questions over the formal rights and powers of the state – a merely political question on which Christians might legitimately disagree. Oldham made the distinction clear. In an essay of 1935 he noted that Christianity per se had not object to "authoritarian" forms of government per se: "The social benefits which have resulted from the increased activity of the state" in various fields – including relief for the unemployed, "town and country planning," the organization of agriculture and business – "are sufficient evidence that a large extension of the functions of the state is not in itself something to be resisted or feared."[42] (Indeed, he continued, "the aims of an authoritarian state might be inspired by, or in large measure consistent with, the Christian view of life."[43] "Totalitarianism," however, was essentially anti-Christian, since it was not a political form but a

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[41] James Chappel, "The Catholic Origins of Totalitarianism Theory in Interwar Europe," *Modern Intellectual History* 8, 3 (2011), 561-590.

[42] Joseph Oldham, *Church, Community, and State – A World Issue* (London: Harper & Bros, 1935), 8.

[43] Ibid, 14.

conscription of the state to serve a purpose only religion could properly fulfill, of providing a universal and ultimate sense of purpose and meaning to life. "The totalitarian state is a state which lays claim to man in the totality of his being; which declares its own authority to be the source of all authority… which seeks to impose on all its citizens a particular philosophy of life; and which sets out to create by means of all the agencies of public information and education a particular type of man in accordance with its own understanding of the meaning and end of man's existence. A state which advances such claims declares itself to be not only a state but also a Church."[44] Rightly understood, totalitarianism was an expression for a longing for order and moral purpose that modern individualism had destroyed. But it was critical to see that the Christian church could not isolate "totalitarianism" as its exclusive or even privileged enemy in the world. "The deeper meaning of totalitarian claims will be missed if they fail to open our eyes to a state of things which is found in every country." In democratic states as well, instrumentalities of education, the press, broadcasting and cinema were all propagating a concept of life opposed to the Christian conception of the nature and destiny of man. "The life and death struggle of the Christian Church is "none the less real where the general mind of the community becomes paganized, even though the state may remain politically neutral."[45]

Understood from the standpoint of ecumenical theology, new forms of collectivism, whether they were described as "totalitarian" or "utopian" or "neo-paganism," or designated as "political religions, only extended the rebellion against God begun in the Renaissance. Like the individualism and reliance of rationality that they repudiated, these movements expressed an

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[44] Ibid, 9-10.

[45] Ibid, 15.

attempt of modern man to redeem himself. Surveying the broad lines of discussion at the Oxford

Conference and the body of reports it generated, the American chapter of the Universal Council

of Life and Work stressed that the conference delegates had broadly united around this

interpretation of contemporary politics and culture:

> Not only did the Conference characterize the present era as one of disintegration but it
> diagnosed contemporary evils as due to the secularization of the spirit and outlook of
> humanity. Again and again it was proclaimed that humanism, the elevation of man's
> power and authority to the level of the divine, was responsible for the present condition
> of society. Thus the ascription to the state of supreme power and construction of utopias
> as means whereby man engineers his own salvation… were deplored as responsible for
> the collapse of human values.[46]

By 1937, when these words were written, the contemporary scene of "modern civilization" in its

global dimensions was very different from that of 1928-1930. The success of anti-democratic

and anti-liberal forces was assured not only in Germany and in Europe, but in Japan and Asia as

well. Extremism on the Left and Right was on the rise. For ecumenical thinkers these

developments were all to be understood within the framework of the secularist repudiation of the

Christian God, an interpretation first achieved through dialectical theology's reframing of the

phenomenon identified in 1928 at Jerusalem. The effort to escape the anarchy brought in the

train of the Renaissance only led to new configuration's of modern man's rebellion against God.

In fact, as ecumenists were keen to point out, viewed from a global perspective, the new

collectivisms of resurgent nationalism, communism, and fascism only exacerbated the moral and

social anarchy they claimed to overcome. What seemed like a regimentation of life and the

restoration of "community" ties through collectivist movements was, in fact, a more profound

form of social and spiritual disorder. As the Oxford Report on "Church and Community" stated:

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[46] "Salient Features of the Oxford Conference," Forward to the *Oxford Conference Study Series based on The Message and Reports of the Oxford Conference on Church, Community, and State* (New York: Universal Christian Council, 1937), 3.

Human life is falling to pieces because it has tried to organize itself into unity on a secularistic and humanistic basis without any reference to the divine will and power beyond itself. It has sought to be self-sufficient, a law unto itself. Nor is there any hope in the ascription of sacred quality to nation, or state, or class. A false sacred, a false God, merely adds demonic power to the unredeemed passions of men. Though bringing about temporary and local unity it prepares for mankind an even worse and wider conflict.[47]

Over the 1930s, then, the discourse on secularism evolved to incorporate the rise of anti-liberal political movements in Europe and elsewhere. The new "collectivisms" such as nationalism, fascism, and communism evinced the shattered confidence of the Enlightenment project and the desperate bid to restore order and morality that followed from the abandonment of God. Yet they failed to secure the end they sought. "Local unity" or momentary consolidation of a new communal order was only a foundation of conflict on a larger, more global scale, as war erupted in Spain and Manchuria and the European Continent seemed possibly poised for a second conflagration From a theological perspective, the source of these conflicts was plain to see. Like the individualism they apparently rejected, these new collectivisms were based on the attempt to assert human independence from the divine. New collectivisms were the symptoms of modern project, not alternatives to it. These interpretations of contemporary political conflict retained the theological orientation of Brunner and Heim's early interventions of 1930s. That is, they characterized modernity in terms of an epochal rebellion against God, begun with the liberation of the individual from responsibility to God in the west and only exacerbated by attempts to restore responsibility and community life. Only by restoring the relationship with God, they implied, could man find the spiritual and social peace he vainly sought to secure for himself.

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[47] "Report on Church and Community," *The Churches Survey Their Task,* 68.

We saw in the last chapter how anti-secularism was born as an expression of international Protestant solidarity in 1928. The successive reinterpretations of secularism and paganism over the 1930s were attempts to shore up the unitive function of this discourse. As it had had united the blocs of German and Allied Protestantism estranged after World War I, so anti-secularism would retain the allegiance of German Protestants even as many of them – including Heim, Knak, Frick, and Freytag – declared enthusiasm for Hitler's government. (We will examine in detail how the Reich Church was practically incorporated into the ecumenical movement in the next chapter). The critical innovation that the concept of secularism furnished was a distinction between allegiance to nation or race that might be legitimate so far as it was "political" but not religious – and the phenomenon of a "pagan" elevation of such loyalties that constituted a challenge to God's sovereignty. Anti-secularism objected to the hypertrophy of the state, or to nationalist (or class) loyalties at the moment that they transgressed their appropriate bounds and become "total" sources of meaning and purpose. The question of when exactly this transgression occurred – that is, the question of what particular policies and programs evinced the existence of spiritual totalitarianism rather than a merely legitimate and Christian use of state power or nationalist loyalty – was a question that the theology of anti-secularism in its 1930s iteration did not only not answer, but was designed to evade. Its goal, indeed, was specifically to avert such discussions of particular policies or political programs, in order to assert the primacy of a common Christian and spiritual front against modernity's repudiation of God. The description of modernity's spiraling social and spiritual disorder furnished the foil against which ecumenists would articulate their own conception of a Christian alternative to secularism. To the discussion of ecumenists positive proposals for social order, and the ways in which these proposals transformed the aims of Protestant internationalism, we will now turn.

III. "Let the Church be the Church:" The Anti-Secular Origins of the Ecumenical Movement

Emil Brunner's 1930 "Secularism as a Problem for the Church" provides a starting point to understand how the ecumenical movement emerged out of the dialectical theological critique of secularism. Having characterized the phenomenon of secularism as a demonic assertion of independence on the part of modern man against his two fold-responsibilities to his fellows and God, Brunner concluded with some thoughts on the task of the church in its conflict with this new challenger. Elaborating on the idea of an "eristic" theology from his article on the "Other Task of Theology" from the year before, he argued that Christian thinkers must take the offensive, polemically asserting revelation against reason as the only source of true understanding of human nature and the world. Armed with dialectical insight, theology must become a "struggle of faith with the powers of the *Zeitgeist*," confronting modern man with his true nature and by so doing "[deprive] him of his alleged positions, and [show] him the destructive and dissolving nature of his thinking, in order to place him before the message of the living God."[48] However, Brunner's account in 1930 did not merely reiterate his position; it broke new ground. Cognizant of an audience more international than *Zwischen den Zeiten*, and embracing the collaborative ethos of Oldham's efforts to promote post-Jerusalem study, Brunner explained how eristic struggle formed the basis of a new understanding of the church as a community united through its theological endeavor. In this understanding, we can find the intellectual origins of a re-orientation of international Protestantism, away from its prior ambition to build the Kingdom of God and toward its 1930s focus on realizing the church.

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[48] Brunner, "Secularism as a Problem for the Church," 509.

For Brunner, combating secularism required in the first instance that Christians correct their own secularistic understanding of the universe. Any attempt to combat secularism by an appeal to "religion" in general was bound to fail, since "religion" as such was a merely a psychological or sociological phenomenon, a constellation of rational or affective efforts to relate to the divine. In this sense, Brunner explained, Christianity "is not 'religion'; it does not have its basis in religious thought, feeling or action, but in the divine action and the divine word." The crisis of the church in the modern age was that the church itself had lost its true basis: Christians were themselves secularistic in the sense of denying God's self-revelation as the source of truth and knowledge. Only by recovering its origin – the Word of God – could the international community of Christians discover its calling in the world.

> That the Church should recover this [the Word of God], its real ground, which it has lost nearly everywhere—this is the first and incomparably the most important task of the Church in view of the problem of secularism. The Church must reconsider and cast back to the possession it has lost. But this reconsideration is just theology, theology as a struggle for the truth of the Word of God, for the true self-interpretation of man which is given in revelation.[49]

Christians must learn to collectively orient themselves around a theological ethics of responsiveness to God's revelation. This entailed the chastening of intellectual ambition, and the cultivation of obedience to God's self-disclosure, which humankind encountered always as a message from beyond. Theology was thus a means of expressing the bonds between God and man and among men that formed the Christian community. The church, the community created through this collective ethics of responsiveness, was not one religious body among others but as the only authentic basis of social existence. As much as Brunner's theology insisted on the

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[49] Ibid, 507.

"either/or" of Christian faith – entailing a decision either for or against God – he was here

advancing a "both/and." For it turned out that the critique of secularism most likely to be

efficacious in the world would come only through the church recovering what it truly was. "As

men of to-day we can only apprehend the divine Word through conflict with the thought of our

time. And we can only sustain the conflict if we understand the Word of God in its proper

content."[50] Thus Brunner announced the deceptively simple task of the church in relation to

secularism:

> The first task of the Church is once more to become a Church, i.e. to recover again the
> thing that makes it a Church, namely, the Word of God, without which it is only an
> ecclesiastical body without a soul.[51]

Brunner's utterance here expressed, for the first time, the objective of what would come to be

known in years following as the "ecumenical movement:" a movement that would seek, not to

Christianize the world, but to Christianize the church, a community set apart from the world,

and, in its opposition to the spiritual foundations of modern society, the guardian of the only

truly universal social order. Brunner's early articulation of this task shows how it was originally

grounded in the re-orientation of the problem of secularism first brought about dialectical

theology. But in the years that followed, the program brought into focus within the horizon of

Existenz would gain adherents well beyond the circle of theologians and church elites and

laypersons who identified themselves as "dialectical theologians" – including among those who

would indeed take issue with many of Brunner's ideas (such as American Protestants who found

Brunner's preoccupation with sin corrosive to the springs of Christian action.) This percolation

enacted, in other words, the intra-Christian theological "struggle" that Brunner described, one in

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[50] Ibid, 507.

[51] Ibid, 506-7.

which theological debate within the Christian community would serve as a new means of constituting international Christian unity.

For some sense of the longer-term success of Brunner's proposal, consider the similarity of the quotation above to what can justly be viewed as the classic statement of international ecumenism in the 1930s, the "Message" issued by the Oxford Conference of Life and Work in 1937:

> The first duty of the Church, and its greatest service to the world, is that it be in very deed the Church—confessing the true faith, committed to the fulfillment of the will of Christ, its only Lord, and united in Him in a fellowship of love and service.[52]

These words, widely cited from 1937 onward, became the basis of the "crusading motto" of the 1930s ecumenism: "Let the Church be the Church!"[53] Both official statement and unofficial watchword encapsulated an argument already present in Brunner's essay of 1930. They insisted that the mission of the church was not external to the Christian community but a matter of its internal reorganization. "We do not call the world to be like ourselves, for we are already too like the world," explained the Oxford "Message." "Only as we ourselves repent, both as individuals and corporate bodies, can the Church call men to repentance. The call to ourselves and to the world is to Christ."[54] This reorganization was an attempt to configure a form of community life that would subordinate human agency to the sovereignty of Christ – the "only Lord" of the church. The unity of the fellowship of the church "is not built up from its constituent parts, like a

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[52] "A Message from the Oxford Conference to the Christian Churches," *The Churches Survey Their Task*, 57.

[53] According to the ecumenical historian Nils Ehrenstroem, the motto, which did not appear in any of the published Reports, was included in an early draft of the Report on "The Universal Church and the World of Nations" (examined below), drafted by the Scottish-born Presbyterian and President of Princeton Theological Seminary John A. MacKay. (Ehrenstroem, "Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work, 1925-1948," *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* vol. 1 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1954), 591.

[54] "A Message from the Oxford Conference to the Christian Churches," *The Churches Survey Their Task*, 57.

federation of different states, it consists in the Sovereignty and redeeming acts of its one Lord."

Earlier programs of international Christian unity had perceived a world in which the struggle to extend God's sovereignty had primarily involved its outward projection and expansion. The ecumenical program, however, posited a struggle was internal to the church: a struggle for obedience against the prideful self-assertion of man that modernity sought to normalize and in doing so amplified. But this internal struggle was not an introversion or a turn away from the world: indeed, its basis was a polemical re-description of modernity that sought to present intra-Christian debate within the framework of a master narrative of sin and reconciliation. The overcoming of the modern world's rebellion would take place once it was re-conceptualized and re-located within the church.

How ecumenists in the 1930s sought to practically use theological discourse as a means of organizing the church towards this end is the subject of the next chapter. Our concern in the remainder of this chapter is to examine the intellectual foundations of this organizational effort. We will do so by investigating a broad reorientation that occurred in that decade, away from the task of spreading the Kingdom, toward that of realizing the church. This shift, in one sense, entailed a celebration of churchly identity and otherworldly orientation. But the shift was made, as Brunner's article suggested, not with the intention of abrogating Christianity's public role, but rather redefining it as a new form of public engagement, centered around combat. The shift evinced, in other words, acceptance of the both the idea that Christianity faced off against a many-headed hydra of secularism/paganisms *and* that in order to combat these, a new formulation of the Word of God was needed. In its aspiration to universal dominion, Christianity

could not merely "apply" its teachings to the social realm; it had to do battle first with opponents asserting their own authority to organize social and spiritual life in the modern world.

This "church-centric" vision of international Protestantism was extremely successful in the 1930s; to best illustrate this, we first turn to its relationship to a milieu removed by theological and cultural temperament from that of Continental dialectical theology. As we have seen in the previous chapter, American Protestants in the 1920s had already been touting the "church" as a critical expression of Christian solidarity. But in the 1920s these appeals had remained fundamentally committed to the earlier 19th century view that the church's role was to "Christianize" the social order through the development of concrete programs for reform bringing social relations into conformity with an ideal Kingdom of God. The innovation of this program, as opposed to pre-1914 versions, was simply that it globalized a picture of the society that needed to be Christianized: rather than distinguishing between a "Christian" West and a "non-Christian" rest, Anglo-American Protestants argued that the church must direct its reforming efforts towards the international scope of relations between "nations, races, and classes".

In the 1930s, the focus shifted away from the development of concrete proposals, toward asserting the church as a solidarity in opposition to multiple spiritual, national, and ideological challengers. The American Congregationalist John Bennett, a young theologian at Auburn Theological Seminary, registered the shift in a 1935 article in the journal *Christendom*, later expanded the following year into a book with the title *Christianity – And our World*. Bennett began his work by contrasting the attitudes of the generation of Protestants that had come of age

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before the War and his own postwar generation. "For the past generation it was possible to be sincerely Christian and yet fit easily into civilization," he wrote. "The world seemed to be a hospitable place for the development of Christian faith and the realization of Christian ideals."[55] Walter Rauschenbusch's 1912 classic, *Christianizing the Social Order*, gave epitomic expression to those expectations. Rauschenbusch had surveyed a world in which, in Bennett's words, "the greater part of the work of Christianizing the social order was already done." Christian principles and faith dominated "the home, the church, the school, and the political state." It remained only to apply Christian principles to the "economic order" in order to bring at last the Kingdom of God to the world. Yet today, Rauschenbusch's outlook was "completely foreign to the world in which we live." "No longer can Christians fit easily into their world," for "the forces which have most momentum in our society are pagan forces."[56] Communism was "avowedly anti-Christian," but bourgeois capitalism and Nazism were likewise hostile, though they often assumed a "Christian veneer." Resurgent paganism forced Christians everywhere to recover a sense of where they stood. "It is as Christians come to see the degree to which they are living in a world which is alien or hostile that they are thrown together as a Church against the world."[57] Bennett argued that the church was a social order that was the antidote to "individual egoism" and "collective egoism."[58] Insofar as Christians realized their fellowship with one another through common faith, Christianity would check the centrifugal forces of individualism as well as the

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[55] John C. Bennett, *Christianity—And Our World* (New York: Hazen Foundation, 1936), vii.

[56] Ibid, viii.

[57] Ibid, 59.

[58] Bennett's discussion (18-22) follows Reinhold Niebuhr's contrast between "individual egoism" and "collective egoism," in which a capacity for self-transcendence present in "personal" relationships is undermined by the structural patterns of behavior constituting class, national, and racial groups. See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), esp chpt 1.

conflicts generated by race prejudice, nationalism, and Communist and Nazi totalitarianism. Bennett concluded with reference to the anonymous second century "Epistle to Diognetus" – a reference common among American ecumenists in the 1930s and 1940s[59] – asserting that it was the church that "holds the world together." In the "period of disintegration" that defined his own day, Bennett argued that the Christian fellowship – spread throughout the world as the result of the missionary movement – was the "only international organism which has real roots in the various nations."

Bennett's contemporaries embraced much the same concept of the church and its task in a hostile world. Like him, they argued that the times demanded a new understanding of an institution that had been synonymous with Christianity's irrelevance and narcissism. According to Samuel McCrea Cavert, writing in 1936 in the *Bulletin* of the Federal Council of Churches (widely circulated and aimed toward a popular audience), most people understood the "church" as a local parish – "the church of Jonesville," or at best a national denomination. Truly understood, however the church was "the universal Church of Christ, binding together men and women of every nation, race, and class, throughout successive generations, in a world fellowship."[60] Recovering a true understanding of the meaning of the church was the deepest need of humanity in its present state of crisis.

> The other forces that are today the chief rivals of the Church for the allegiance of mankind are sounding rallying cries that are hopelessly divisive. Hitler is crying, 'Whoever is not of German blood cannot follow me.' Mussolini is crying 'Whoever is

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[59] See for instance Francis P. Miller, "New Religion of Nationalism," in *The Christian Message for the World Today* eds E. Stanley Jones et al. (New York: Round Table, 1934), 68 and Samuel McCrea Cavert, "Ecumenical Church in Time of War," *Anglican Theological Review* (Apr 1940), 17..

[60] Samuel McCrea Cavert, "The Editorial Outlook," *Federal Council Bulletin* (Nov 1936), 1-2.

not an Italian nationalist cannot follow me.' Stalin is crying, 'Whoever is not of the proletariat cannot follow me.' Is there any *uniting* voice? There is One: '*Whosoever* [of whatever race or nation or class] would come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me.' Upon the Church rests the responsibility of giving adequate embodiment of that unifying Voice in the world today.[61] [Brackets in the original]

The question for Cavert and Bennett then, was not how Christians could transform the social order but how they could "realize" the church. Their colleague Henry Van Dusen, President of Union Theological Seminary in New York, echoed the point. "No one who tests the pulse of contemporary feeling can have failed to note the signs of a reviving interest in the church," he wrote in 1936. While the theological modernism had cultivated distrust of religious institutions among seminarians in the 1920s, Van Dusen's current students were discovering the church as a global solidarity at the moment that totalitarian states in Spain, Mexico, Germany and Russia threatened Christian interests. For these students, what Van Dusen characterized as a "feeling after the church" was not a derogation of Christianity's public role but the fulfillment of it.[62] Such a transformation could only be imagined in a world where the church had become an alternative to competing programs of social and spiritual mastery over a single, worldwide civilization.

Along with the valorization of the church came the repudiation of the Kingdom of God as an goal attainable by human effort. Indeed, very idea of "building the Kingdom of God on earth" seemed to ecumenists to represent a secularization of Christianity. Reinhold Niebuhr reminded his growing transatlantic audience repeatedly in the 1930s and 1940s that this was a utopian vision at odds with the essential point of Christian anthropology, which was that even the most

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[61] Ibid, 4.

[62] Henry Van Dusen, "The Meaning of Oxford, 1937," *Federal Council Bulletin* (March 1937), 6.

idealistic human efforts were shot through with sin. The realization of the Kingdom could only be at God's initiative.[63] In advancing the position Niebuhr was simply reiterating the predominant post-Jerusalem opposition of the secular and the Christian worldviews, the latter ostensibly based on the deification of man, and the latter rooted in an understanding of man's fallen nature. William Temple stressed the same point. For him, as for Niebuhr, to deny the attainability of the Kingdom in history was not a counsel of withdrawal from the world but a demand that Christian social and political action be animated by a sense of the limits of human agency. In his essay for the Oxford study volume on *Christian Faith and the Common Life*, Temple asserted, "[w]e must rid ourselves completely of the Pelagian notion that we can 'build' or 'extend' the Kingdom of God." Christians at best had the responsibility to "prepare the way for the Lord; but he will come in his own time."[64] Christians' social responsibility was to embody the ethics of the Kingdom – that is, to bear "witness" in social and political life to an authority that could not be identified with any existing temporal institution, idea, or value. The goal of the Christian hope was not "any social or political achievement," and God's final victory over history does "not… crown our efforts by the establishment of the perfect cooperative commonwealth." "Our task is not to construct the Kingdom, but to live in the conditions of this world as those who, by the grace of God through the redemption effected in Christ, are citizens of the Kingdom."[65] The church, Temple explained, was nothing other than the community of those seeking to live as "citizens" of the Kingdom in this world.

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[63] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, passim; *An Interpretation of Ethics* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1935), passim.

[64] William Temple, "Christian Faith and the Common Life," in *Christian Faith and the Common Life* ed. Nils Ehrenstroem (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), 61-2.

[65] Ibid, 62.

To articulate the shift from Kingdom to church, a new language was needed. It was in the effort to describe the new object of international Christian unity that the terms "ecumenical" and "ecumenicity" came at last into broad usage in the 1930s. The words became invested with the hopes of Protestant and Orthodox Christians who were committed to the anti-secular campaign. Berdyaev predicted confidently that atomistic individualism, "already beaten in a false fashion by Communism," would be vanquished "truly by the Church and the oecumenical spirit."[66] Beginning in 1933, when the Universal Council of Life and Work began to organize study groups similar to those that Oldham and others had organized in the immediate aftermath of the Jerusalem Conference, they were called "ecumenical study conferences," since their aim was to reach a consensus around Christian teaching in opposition to secular understandings of questions ranging from the responsibility of the state, to the concept of the nation, to the bases of a just economic order.[67]

Reflecting the rupture that the anti-secular program marked, the term ecumenical carried for all of its champions an aura of novelty and excitement. Though its usage grew in the early 1930s, especially on the European Continent, the term's international breakout year was 1937. For the delegates of the Oxford Conference that July and a gathering organized the following month in Edinburgh by the World Conference on Faith and Order, the word crystallized common aspiration. "One of the ways in which ideas are spread is through new terms," explained the American division of the Universal Council of Life and Work in its short summary of Oxford Conference literature. "If we in America are to appreciate the central drive of the Oxford

[66] Berdyaev, 109.

[67] See "The Church and the Social Order" (Study Report), Rengsdorf, 8-15 March 1933. (WCC, 24.002).

conference, we must learn the meaning of a word hitherto little used among us – namely, the word 'ecumenical.' It means world-wide, and as applied in the deliberations at Oxford and also at Edinburgh it signifies 'concerning the whole household of the faithful,' meaning the entire Christian Church in conscious fellowship."[68]

The growth of this conscious fellowship was the "good news" of the era for the advocates of international Christian cooperation. "The glorious word 'ecumenical,' is beginning to have a new place in the life of the Church," declared Samuel McCrea Cavert, Secretary of the Federal Council of Churches of the USA in an article reviewing preparations for the assemblies at Oxford and Edinburgh.[69] Filing stories for the *Christian Century* on location from Great Britain that summer, Charles Clayton Morrison, editor of the *Christian Century*, explained to his American readers that the assembled clerics, theologians, lay Christian philosophers and activists were "learning to use this word 'ecumenical." It, "and its substantive, 'ecumenicity,' are on all our lips. We are an 'ecumenical movement,' both Oxford and Edinburgh are its expression."[70] John Mackay seconded the verdict: "A new term has been added, or, perhaps, one should say, an ancient term has been restored, to the current speech of educated Christians," he wrote in 1937, in his review of the two gatherings. "Whatever may prove to be the other achievements of the world gatherings of churches held at Oxford and Edinburgh, this at least is one: the word 'ecumenical' was definitely reborn at these conferences with a richer connotation than had ever

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[68] "Salient Features of the Oxford Conference," 5.

[69] Samuel McCrea Cavert, "The Church as a World Community" *Federal Council Bulletin*, vol 19, 9 (Nov 1936), 13.

[70] C. C. Morrison, "Our Christianity is True!" *Christian Century* (August 4, 1937), .

belonged to it before."[71] In his opening address to the Oxford Conference, Cosmo Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury, declared that the existence of an "ecumenical movement" uniting not only Christians in Europe and North America but in Asia and Africa as well, was "a wholly new fact in Christian History."[72]

As ecumenists came to embrace the ecumenical church, they simultaneously reimagined prior efforts to promote world Christian unity as a pre-history to their current efforts. These accounts attributed to ecumenists' forebears a purpose that had been unthinkable to them at the time. For the authors of the Oxford Report on "the Universal Church and the World of Nations," the true significance of the missionary movement was not that it had extended the "Kingdom" in the world – as antebellum missionaries had in fact understood their objective – but that it had enabled the church to become truly "oecumenical," by drawing into it members from all nations across the inhabitable earth. "A special ground of faith and courage amid the perplexities of our age is that the Christian Church is becoming truly oecumenical… [since] the missionary movement of the past century" had succeeded in making "the bounds of the Christian community co-extensive with the inhabitable globe."[73] Moreover, attempts to cultivate a sense of common Christian identity across denominations had served, not to bolster the power of churches to transform broader society, but rather to enable Christians to "[realize] anew that the Church is one." This sense was now being sharpened still further by "the emergence in different parts of the world of political systems usurping the role of Churches, and demanding absolute allegiance

[71] John MacKay, "The Ecumenical Road," *Christendom* 4 (Autumn 1937), 535-8.

[72] Quoted in Oldham, Introduction, *The Churches Survey Their Task*, 31.

[73] "Report on the Universal Church and the World of Nations," *The Churches Survey Their Task: The Report of the Conference at Oxford, Jul 1937, on Church, Community, and State* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937), 168-9.

of men and women." In response to these challengers, "Christian churches in every land" were being awakened to their "deepened loyalty to Christ and the Church and a fresh sense of their need of solidarity in Christ."

The report on the "The Universal Church and the World of Nations" further clarified how the campaign to realize ecumenical unity differed from previous efforts to work for international peace and cooperation. The latter failed to comprehend from a "Christian point of view" the problem of social and international disintegration. "The term 'international' necessarily accepts the division of mankind into separate nations as a natural if not a final state of affairs. The term 'oecumenical' refers to the expression within history of the given unity of the Church. The one starts from the fact of division and the other from the fact of unity in Christ." To view churches' "thought and action" as international in nature was true insofar as, on the plane of history, national and ecclesiastical divisions still defined the landscape of Christendom. But the aim of "the church" per se must be the cultivation of a unity not achieved by human effort, but given by God and registered as an imperative of Christian obedience. Relations among churches were "oecumenical in so far as they attempt to realize the Una Sancta, the fellowship of Christians who acknowledge the one Lord." Such relations expressed in preliminary form a reconciliation of all peoples achieved in Christ's sacrifice and yet incomplete within history. Christian revelation furnished "an insight not derived from ordinary political sources. To those who are struggling to realize human brotherhood in a world where disruptive nationalism and aggressive imperialism make such brotherhood seem unreal, the Church offers not an ideal but a fact, man united not by his aspiration but by the love of God."[74]

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[74] Ibid, 169.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the intellectual origins of the ecumenical movement that first emerged in the 1930s. It has argued that the movement took form as a critique of secularism first advanced by dialectical theologians. In this critique, secularism was a rebellion against God that could take the form of imperious rationalism or neo-pagan religion. As described by dialectical theology, secularism was not an autochthonous rival. The condition of possibility for its historical emergence was the relation between man and God established in Christian revelation. Christians confronted secularism as an enemy present in the wider world, but also present within the church, in the form of divisions among churches and a "rationalization" of Christianity that had contributed to the contemporary crisis. Social division and conflict in all forms was a consequence of original sin, but the Christian church was distinguished from broader society as the unique site where the "sin" of division was acknowledged and repented – and overcome by God's grace. Foregrounding the scriptural revelation of man's separation from God, ecumenists inscribed the crisis of modern civilization within their own community, as a struggle among Christians and Churches to recover the eternal Word of God in terms germane to the present age. Establishing the dialectical tension between revelation and reason underscored that the quest to build the Kingdom of God in history was a product of the secularistic hubris that it was now the task of the Christian community to combat. Ecumenists thus declared that their goal was to realize the church, not the Kingdom, in history, and they reinterpreted the history of previous attempts to promote international Christian cooperation in the light of this new task.

By encompassing liberal individualism and its apparent opposites of Nazism and Communism under the rubric of a coherent enemy, ecumenists sought to consolidate Christian unity in a decade of political polarization that threatened once again to alienate the Germans from their co-religionists in other countries. Novel as the ecumenical objective was, those who organized around it struggled to walk the same narrow road as their predecessors, fashioning a Christian program at once public but not "political," relevant to broader society but above parties. As we'll see in more detail in the next chapter, ecumenists were remarkably – disturbingly – successful in retaining the loyalties of German church leaders and theologians who cheered Hitler's ascent to power in 1933 and were willing to make peace with the regime throughout the 1930s.

In the following chapter, we will examine how ecumenists sought to realize the church in practice. Insisting sharply on the sovereignty of God and obedience of man, ecumenists nonetheless still embraced the instrumentalities of bureaucratic organization in order to usher the community of the church into existence. To make God's authority effective in the world required organization and exercise of power. The question of what institutions ought to exert that power, and toward what practical and immediate goals, would begin in the 1940s to undermine the international unity that ecumenism sought.

Part II

Chapter 4

A "Personal Community" against Secular Civilization: Institutionalizing the
Ecumenical Church, 1929-1945

By the mid-1930s, the Protestant and Orthodox advocates of international Christian unity had

become "ecumenists." They saw the realization of an "ecumenical" church as the solution to the

crisis of secularism, a reigning spiritual and social disorder brought on by modern man's

rebellion against God. This chapter shows how, between 1929 and 1945, ecumenists reconceived

and reformed a constellation of existing international organizations in accordance with this

objective. Their efforts sought to transform the "church" from an institution aloof from the

public sphere to a new kind of public body, inclusive of all nations, races, and classes. To

achieve this transformation, ecumenists conceived and constituted in practice the ecumenical

church as a community of persons. As a "personal community," ecumenists believed, the church

would break through ecclesiastical isolation and become a social order in which the dialogue

between diverse cultural, political, and religious perspectives would instantiate universal God's

rule.

Recent scholarship has underscored the significance of idea of the person in interwar social and

political thought. A range of thinkers from diverse philosophical and religious traditions –

including ecumenical Protestants, Catholics such as Jacques Maritain, the German

phenomenologist Max Scheler, and the French essayist and thinker Emmanuel Mounier – turned

to the concept of the person to re-imagine the bases of social order in the interwar period.[1]

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[1] See for instance Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015),
esp chpt 2; Marco Duranti, "Conservatives and the European Convention on Human Rights," *Toward a New Moral*

Intentionally vague in their concrete political implications, philosophies of the human person were deployed to summon the possibility of a spiritual and often specifically religious third way between binary alternatives: capitalism and communism and individualism and collectivism. In these accounts, "personal community" was envisioned as a social order in which individual self-realization would come through, not at the expense of, a communal life of responsibility and service to others. For the Non-conformist Emmanuel Mounier, for instance, the person was used, as Samuel Moyn has recently written, "to insist on respect for self-realization that 'collectivism' ruled out, while pressing it to imply a community that brought atomized individuals back together."[2] For Christian thinkers, the idea of the person was a strategy that rooted authentic social order in responsibility to God. While Catholic thinkers stressed communal rights and duties of the person to God and others, ecumenical variations on personalism, deeply shaped by dialectical theology in the 1930s, traced out a vision of universal community encompassing all nations, races, and classes.[3] The idea of personal community articulated ecumenical opposition to both moments of what was discussed in the last chapter as the "secularism syndrome": it offered resistance to rationalistic individualism on the one hand and neo-pagan religions – such as Communism, fascism, and Nazism – on the other. The origin of the affective and ethical bonds that created such a community lay an act of faith: an obedient "yes" to God's word that simultaneously bound one to others in relations of charity and mutual responsibility. In this

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World Order? Menschenrechtspolitik und Völkerrecht seit 1945, eds. Norbert Frei and Annette Weinke (Göttingen, 2013), 82-93; and most recently Terrance Renaud, "Human Rights as Radical Anthropology: Protestant Theology and Ecumenism in the Transwar Era," *The Historical Journal* (forthcoming). For Scheler's personalism, see Stephen Schneck, *Person and Polis: Max Scheler's Personalism as Political Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) and Michael Gubser, *The Far Reaches: Phenomenology, Ethics, and Social Renewal in Central Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

[2] Moyn, 85

[3] Renaud, 11.

account, Christian faith would balance the claims of individual freedom and communal responsibility, achieving a synthesis that fatally eluded secular attempts at social integration.

For ecumenists, the idea of the person played a critical role in the institutionalization of their movement. It enabled them to assert the larger, public significance of the church. In this view, the church was a universal society actualized in the polyvocal responses to God's address. Rather than an institution cut off from the modern world, the church was the only form that a truly global social order could take. This order was conceived as a public, communicative space, actualized through theological conversation and debate among those "personally" addressed by revelation. Rather than evincing a Christian accommodation within the secular "public sphere" as conceived by Jürgen Habermas and others, the ecumenical public denied the very possibility of mutuality and recognition among secular points of view: God's Word was the origin of society and the basis of authentic "common life."[4] Ecumenists sought to institutionalize a public of persons through organizations – such as the World Council of Churches – created to facilitate and regulate this conversation, and by establishing the protection of "persons" as a bulwark of international order – an objective pursued, first in the 1940s, by the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace in its efforts to promote the legal norm of human rights. As we will see, these two programs to institutionalize personhood generated tensions in the movement. Wartime efforts to

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[4] In defining the public as a "communicative space," I am drawing on Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* trns. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989) (see also the Introduction to *The Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press 1992)). The Christian personalist critique of the secular public constituted not a "counterpublic" in Michael Warner's sense of the term, but a challenge to the condition of possibility of public life outside of Christian revelation. (See Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2002). In developing the idea of the ecumenical movement as an *alternative* public space, premised on a critique of the organizing assumptions of "secular" modern civil society, I draw on James Kennedy's incisive characterization of the imagined community of the ecumenical church in "Protestant Ecclesiastical Internationals," *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 292-318, see esp 296-7.

enlist the support of states and international political institutions to defend the rights of personhood undercut the anti-secular program that had brought the idea of the person to the center of ecumenical discourse in the 1930s.

This chapter traces how ecumenists from 1929 to 1945 brought a constellation of existing international Christian organizations in line with the critique of secularism and the "personalist" social theory that emerged from it. As we saw in chapter 1, international Christian institutions were originally designed to organize Christians and churches internationally to realize the Kingdom of God at home and abroad. Realizing this task required a division of labor to promote Christian unity in different areas: missionary societies and conferences promoted cooperation in the spreading of the Gospel in non-Christian lands, the World Conference on Faith and Order organized churches to resolve doctrinal disagreements, and bodies like the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches and the Universal Council on Life and Work sought to coordinate Christians' and churches' social and humanitarian activities. But in the 1930s, as movement intellectuals cast secular civilization – the reigning disorder of modernity brought on as the result of modern man's rebellion against God – as the dominant rival of Christianity on the world stage, the theory and practice of these institutions shifted. Institutions first created as instruments for organizing the various operations of the world church were re-imagined as mechanisms for resolving the crisis of modern social disorder by generating a personal community cutting across social and political boundaries. Between 1939 and 1945, ecumenists developed proposals for a postwar political order, based on the protection of universal human rights that were meant to preserve the theological ethics of personalism and

empower it to shape the conduct of states. But these proposals undermined the practices of theological anti-secularism that had inspired them in the first place.

This chapter has four parts. The first part will briefly explore ecumenical conceptions of "personal community," showing how ecumenists in the 1930s located the defense of "personhood" as the major front in their struggle against secularism. The battle against secularism, in the forms of both atomistic individualism and the neo-pagan collectivism, would be prosecuted, ecumenists believed, by a "personal community," in which theology – the effort to reach a collective understanding of God's message to the world – would constitute the basis of social order.

The second part of the chapter will examine what this theological community of persons looked like in practice. The first personal communities ecumenists built emerged within the network of study groups convened in the wake of the Jerusalem Conference of 1928. In the last chapter, we saw how the concepts of secularism were developed and propagated within these groups. Here we attend to these groups not from the perspective of ideas they produced but rather from that of the practices on which they were based. These practices involved the production, circulation, critique, and revision of theological essays seeking to describe the nature of the conflict between Christianity and secularism. The aim of these practices was not to conclusively resolve discrepancies between viewpoints among Christians united in a more fundamental agreement on the necessity of Christian opposition to secularism. The aim was rather to clarify points of disagreement as diverse expressions of a *common* faith, to distill questions on which Christian thinkers might legitimately differ, and to invite participants to further dialogue. These strategies

of inclusion, however, enacted exclusions of their own: of non-elites and non-European thinkers, of those who denied that Christianity and secularism were conflicting systems of thought, and those who saw in dialogue and ecumenical sympathy a tolerance for heretical belief. We will examine these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion by looking at how ecumenical study was administered in groups such as Joseph Oldham's "Christian Message" group, similar American and European ventures, as well as the World Student Christian Federation's "Message Commission" and the preparations for the 1937 Oxford Conference of Universal Council of Life and Work.

In the third part of this chapter, we will consider how ecumenists' accounts of theological dialogue became conceptualized under the rubric of ecumenical *movement*, a vision of the progress of personal community that furnished the conceptual foundations of the World Council of Churches. Contemporaneous with the emergence of anti-secular practice, and as a reflection on it, thinkers such as Adolf Keller, Oliver Tomkins, Suzanne de Dietrich, and W. A. Visser't Hooft theorized theological debate as an act of obedience to God that instantiated the universal community of the church. To these thinkers, the church took historical form through polyvocal responses to a God who overpowered the domestications of human consciousness. Here, I show how their theories of ecumenical unity within difference drew on themes from dialectical theology to conceive exchanges and encounters with *other* national and confessional traditions as sites of a supra-historical encounter with the divine *other*. Their vision thus harnessed the anti-historicist eschatology of dialectical theology with a commitment to the progressive realization of the church as a worldwide Christian community within history. International Christian organizations were thus providentially instruments for reconciling history and eternity. Even

while they repudiated older liberal theologies that portrayed social reform or revolution leading

to the Kingdom of God, ecumenists nonetheless insisted that God's redemptive acts were indeed

visible within history, specifically in the formation of a world Christian community expressing

itself in conferencing, the formation of global networks of personal relations, and ongoing

theological conversation. The 1938 constitution of the World Council of Churches, which

consolidated existing international Christian organizations into a new body, reflected this social

theory and philosophy of history in its aims and structure.

The fourth part of the chapter focuses on World War II, showing how the conflict prompted

ecumenists to imagine an alternative political order that would enshrine their personalist

theology in concrete political institutions. The idea of human rights, which ecumenists developed

after 1939 and which furnished the central principle of postwar order thinking in groups like

John Foster Dulles's Commission on a Just and Durable Peace, was an attempt to a translate

theology of personal responsibility into proposals for the reform of international political

organizations. The ecumenical turn to "rights" represented a rapprochement with worldview

secularism even as the concept sought to limit the menace of national sovereignty. At the same

time, with the wartime collapse of international communication, the life of the ecumenical

exchange and debate was hamstrung. Though the work of the Commission on a Just and Durable

Peace has been interpreted by many historians as a culmination of interwar ecumenical activism,

it marked at the same time a departure from ecumenical practice: Dulles and his commission,

along with similar groups in the UK, privileged not inter-Christian dialogue but the mobilization

of mass publics and state apparatuses. Their success in enshrining the personalist concept into

the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights represented simultaneously a

realization of ecumenical hopes and threat to the practices of dialogue and exchange on which the ecumenical movement had been based.

I. "Personal Community" in Ecumenical Social Thought

In his 1929 speech at Williamstown outlining secular civilization, Joseph Oldham described secularism as a crisis of authority. Its distinguishing characteristic was the repudiation of God's providential order in the name of an understanding of existence based on experiment and induction. For Oldham this crisis was identical with an increasing de-personalization of life. "The civilization which has grown up as a result of applied science is largely and increasingly impersonal. The relations between human beings have become so complex, impersonal forces have come to dominate human society." The dominance of "forces" over "persons" expressed the diminishing influence of Christianity. "In simpler conditions of an earlier society, man's goodness could be exhibited over practically the whole range of his activities and relations." But in the more complex conditions of modern society, "it is not possible for him to manifest his goodness in the same way, inasmuch as the conditions do not permit him to be good alone."[5] Modern society compelled man to act in groups, thus effacing or minimizing the opportunity for a specific kind of inter-personal relationship.

The good society for Oldham was the personal society, one that enabled the fulfillment Christian morality that was threatened where persons were folded into larger social groupings. The personal relationship was the site at which God exerted his authority. In the 1930s, a similar

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[5] Joseph Oldham, "The New Christian Adventure: A Statement made to the International Missionary Council at Williamstown, Mass. July 1929" (London: International Missionary Council, 1929), 6-7.

vision of personal relations as the site of God's sovereignty became a central motif of anti-

secular polemic. But it also underwent a change, as a consequence of dialectical theologians'

framing of the secularism problem. In particular, dialectical theology's emphasis on alienation –

on man's distance from God, and his incapacity by his own innate powers to make contact with

the divine – made the idea of the person a powerful vehicle for Christian reflection on the

problem of difference and community. Indeed, over the 1930s, ecumenists drew on the concept

of the person to insist that the characteristic feature of Christian society was its capacity to

contain and mediate difference without succumbing on the one hand to anarchy and social

dissolution or on the other to "totalitarian" domination. Ecumenists thus often concentrated their

attack on secularism at the point of anthropology, elaborating a conception of man as a

theological being, united to others through a common relation with God.[6]

Brunner had argued as early as 1930 that the critical point of a Christian anti-secular polemic

must address the question of man.[7] While the Enlightenment had asserted man's self-sufficiency,

Christianity insisted on his dependence on God. Throughout the 1930s, theologians centered

their attacks on secular modernity around this point: by locating, they claimed, the ground and

purpose of existence within itself, modern society had made authentically social existence with

others impossible. The Yale theologian Robert Calhoun, for instance, in his paper prepared for

the Oxford Conference, asserted the difference between Christianity and "modernism" – a

phenomenon he argued found epitomic expression in American pragmatism – was a matter of

different attitudes toward experience. Whereas "modernism" asserted that the human creature

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[6] For accounts that place debates over the nature of man at the center of transatlantic intellectual life in the 1930s and 1940s, see Mark Greif, *Age of the Crisis of Man* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), and Renaud.

[7] Emil Brunner, "Secularism as a Problem for the Church" *International Review of Missions* vol 19 (Oct 1930), 508.

was constituted through experience, the Christian understood that "'the center of gravity'" for human life and thought lay "outside the range of human experience."[8] Emil Brunner, in his contribution to the volume (a summary of his recent work *Mensch im Widerspruch* (1937, translated as *Man in Revolt* (1939)) similarly posited that "[m]an is a 'theological' being; that is, his ground, his goal, his norm, and the possibility of understanding his own nature are in God."[9] For both of these thinkers, responsibility to God implied responsibility to others. For Brunner, "the source of man's responsibility is the same as its content, namely, unselfish, spontaneous love: it is this love which makes him responsible, and it is this love again which he owes his neighbor."[10] Pierre Maury similarly underscored how responsibility to God created the basis for relations to others. The anthropology of the Christian faith, he argued, committed the church to see "in every man (and not only in its members) a creature in the image of God." This committed Christians to a view of the other that was mediated by a prior relation to God's Word. Maury argued that the church was committed to "defend in each and for each… not [primarily] the sacred rights of human personality, not any moral value, but the 'brother for whom Christ died.'"[11]

Oldham himself, six years after his Williamstown speech, would identify "personal community" as the central theme of the Oxford study preparations, "an issue which is to the various lines of

[8] Robert Calhoun, "The Dilemma of Humanitarian Modernism," in *The Christian Understanding of Man*, eds. T. E. Jessop and Robert Calhoun (London: Willett, Clark, and Company, 1938) 69.

[9] Emil Brunner, "The Christian Understanding of Man," in *The Christian Understanding of Man*, eds. T. E. Jessop and Robert Calhoun (London: Willett, Clark, and Company, 1938) 142.

[10] Ibid, 152.

[11] Quoted in Renaud. See Pierre Maury, "The Christian Understanding of Man," in *The Christian Understanding of Man*, eds. T. E. Jessop and Robert Calhoun (London: Willett, Clark, and Company, 1938), 267

inquiry what the hub is to a wheel."[12] What is important in this conception – critical to the

history of ecumenical institutionalization examined here – is the way in which the idea of

personhood dictated the relation with God as template for relations with others. For in the rubric

of "responsibility" – literally, response-ability, or an ability to respond – ecumenists advanced a

vision of society in which the relations between human persons mirrored relations between the

individual and the person of God. "The Christian Church is committed by its central affirmations

to the belief that the life of man finds its meaning and fulfillment in a community of persons,"

Oldham wrote in 1935, surveying the preliminary work of the conference. Oldham clarified that

this conception rested on the prior act of God's revelation and an ethics of responsiveness to

God's Word that constituted responsibilities to both the divine and to others.

> God has spoken to us in His Son. He has revealed Himself through His Word. The word – used in the widest sense to include every form of self-expression – is the means by which persons communicate with persons. In addressing us God invites from us a response. He asks for trust, loyalty, and obedience. Through our response to the word addressed to us we become responsible persons and only through such response to the Father of our spirits can we become truly persons.[13]

The person in this conception was a being conceived not from a sociological, biological, or

philosophical perspective, but from a theological one. Persons were creatures whose social

existence was constituted through their obedient response to God's address. For Oldham the

person lit the way for a Christian alternative running between solipsistic individualism – the

original source of social atomization – and the collectivism that sought and failed to overcome

this atomization. It was in its capacity to clarify the point of opposition to both alternatives that

the appeal of the idea of the person lay. "The reason for emphasizing this central element [of

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[12] Joseph Oldham, *Church, Community, and State – A World Issue,* (London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1935), 35.

[13] Ibid, 36.

personal community]… is that it is precisely this understanding of the life of man that is denied by all the doctrines that are in the ascendant to-day. It is denied by those who maintain that the final and decisive thing in life is blood or race," those who "contend that man's ultimate loyalty is owed to nation or a state," and those "who hold that man's primary need is bread and that his life his wholly determined by material realities."[14] Shifting his aim from the triumvirate of Nazism, nationalism, and Communism to the self-authorizing individual, Oldham fired again. The claim that persons realized their nature only through community with God and others "was equally opposed to the view which regards man as an individual existing in his own right… free to pursue his self-centered aims, unfettered by bonds which unite him inseparably with his fellow men."[15] Though the "modern collectivist systems" were a "justifiable" response to "self-seeking individualism," they "have their origin in the same secular mind from which individualism sprang and the same mistaken confidence in the self-sufficiency of man." Only the relation of alterity could preserve a community from the imperious human will. "To subordinate the other to our own view or will is to destroy fellowship or community. For community implies the continued presence of the other in his otherness."[16] For Oldham, this vision of an order at once radically pluralistic and morally coherent could only be realized as the church; conversely, the public role of the church in the present age was to become, in practice, the solution to the crisis of social order besetting modern man.

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[14] Ibid, 37.

[15] Ibid, 37.

[16] Ibid, 38.

It surely seems ironic today that a vision so explicitly founded on the recognition of otherness would be unmoved to even so much as mention the role of non-Christians. But for Oldham, that exclusion was just the point: only Christianity could secure the radical pluralism demanded in an age of global interconnection. A universal society based on the recognition of difference would challenge the parochial solidarities of race and class, as well as the anarchy of individual liberation. Oldham stressed that "personal community" was not just a theory; it needed to be realized as well in conduct: "the personal life as a response to the claims of persons is something that has to be lived," embodied in the concrete actions of individuals and communities.[17] More important than theoretical riposte was the living embodiment of an ethics of personhood, based on the give and take between others in search of a common obedience to God. In fact, as we'll see, the practice of "personal community" that ecumenists called for took shape as a collective effort to develop a polemic against secularism. The theology of personhood, as ecumenists understood it, was a reflection of the practices through which ecumenists sought to stimulate one another in the collaborative production of the Christian message to the modern world.

II. Personal Community in Practice

To understand the ecumenical personalism as a practice, we need to look back to the years immediately following the Jerusalem Conference of 1928, specifically to the study groups that emerged in these years to address the question of the conflict of Christianity and secularism. In the last chapter, we focused on the substance of the concepts of secularism produced by participants in these groups. Here it is our task to interrogate more closely the nature of the

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[17] Ibid, 41.

practices that constituted these groups. As we will see, these groups were more than ad hoc

instruments for theorists to find mutual stimulation and share and disseminate ideas. They were

efforts to build a theological community governed by rules and procedures for managing conflict

and clarifying consensus. It was in these rules that ecumenists first developed, in embryonic

form, the governing structures of what they would later present to the world as the "ecumenical

community" of the church.

Joseph Oldham, so instrumental in publicizing the idea of "secularism," was also the chief

architect of this new form of theological community. From his first efforts to form study groups,

he was quite clear that the cultivation of affective ties and a sense of personal "fellowship" were

central to the intellectual program he envisaged. As he explained his broader vision in the spring

of 1930, the task of combating secularism required

> that in all countries small groups of persons who are alive to [the] gravity [of the challenge of secularism to the church] should set themselves to discover with completely open minds and an uncompromising sincerity what are the crucial issues which Christianity has to face in the modern world. The first task is not to find an answer to questions but to discover what the critical and decisive questions in the present situation really are… We should find out what are the real questions, and the search must be undertaken in co-operation so that we may have a sense of fellowship and solidarity (as far as possible international) in a common task.[18]

For Oldham, concentrating reflection on a set of questions entailed specific organizational

procedures. First, groups needed to be convened in order to decide what these questions were.

Oldham was involved in the organization of many such groups, as we saw in the last chapter, but

here we will focus on the illustrative case of the so-called "Christian Message Group," which

first convened in Basel in the fall of 1930 and included eight members: Oldham himself, Emil

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[18] Oldham and Frick, "Christianity and the Modern World," 2 (WCC, 261.010)

Brunner, Karl Heim, Walter Freytag, Philippe Kohnstamm, Henri Monnier, Heinrich Frick, and Visser't Hooft. At its first meeting, the group began by formulating the questions around which its collective study would revolve. They decided upon two: "In what respects and how far are our Christian teaching and preaching at the present day unreal?" and "What is the meaning of the un-Christian character of the actual modern world?"[19] Following the formulation of these questions, the group selected two of its members, Karl Heim and Emil Brunner, to write papers in response to these questions. Once completed, the essays were submitted to Oldham, who circulated them to the group, soliciting their criticisms and comments. These responses themselves were, in turn, mailed to Oldham, who produced a lengthy summary that reproduced long sections of text from individuals' responses, organizing these around a number of themes.[20] The idea in this procedure was to identify points of agreement and disagreement among the participants, using this clarification as the basis of further discussion. In response to the criticisms that Oldham circulated, Brunner and Heim produced second drafts of their papers, which were re-circulated to participants to serve as the basis of the group's second in-person conversation, held in 1932. The purpose of this procedure was not only to achieve a kind of collective intellectual clarity around major problems, but also to generate a spirit of collective undertaking in which even the clarification of disagreements would serve the function of strengthening a common sense of identity and purpose.

Pioneered by Oldham, the form of anti-secular discourse was reproduced by others, often under the auspices and support of international Christian organizations. When Visser't Hooft organized

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[19] Oldham, "Note on Continental Group," WCC, 26.11.34/21

[20] "Christentum und Wirklichkeit, Memorandum by Joseph Oldham" (WCC, 26.11.34/24).

the first meeting of the World Student Christian Federations "Commission on the Message," he selected, out of the total thirty participants, fifteen – including himself, Oldham, Reinhold Niebuhr, Josef Hromadka, John MacKay, and the Indian theologian S. K. Datta, to produce papers on a range of themes relating 'the "Federation's Message in relation to the Principal Alternatives to Christianity offered by the Modern World."[21] These essays would "be multigraphed and translated and sent out to the delegates so that everyone will have read them before the meeting," providing common points of departure for the conversation.[22] Likewise the Theological Study Group, first convened by Union Theological Seminary Professor Henry Van Dusen in 1934 in an effort to extend Oldham's European efforts into the United States, commissioned papers from each of the roughly half dozen participants in its yearly meetings, all of which addressed a single theme, including "What is Essential and Distinctive in the Gospel Message Today," "the Church," "Grace," and others.[23] These papers were circulated in advance and provided a means of orienting conversation and debate around both a common theme and individual interpretations or points of view on it. A social theory was embedded in these exercises, one centered on the principle of building an intellectual community by assuring that participants were speaking about and in response to a single point of view.

Those who organized these groups denied that their purpose was the establishment of theological unanimity. Rather, they valorized debate, individual expression, and disagreement as constitutive

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[21] "Programme of Retreat of Student Leaders, Holland, July 31st to August 5th, 1930" (WCC, 213.10.11).

[22] Visser't Hooft/Zuylenveld Participants Feb 30 1930 (WCC, 213.10.11).

[23] For accounts of the Theological Discussion Group, see Heather Warren *Theologians of a New World Order: Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian Realists: 1920-1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), chpt 4 and Mark T. Edwards, *The Right of the Protestant Left: God's Totalitarianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), chpt 3.

of the pluralistic fellowship that distinguished the church from the disorder and strife of secular civilization. Oldham's group agreed that no attempt should be made "to formulate conclusions to which its members would be expected to subscribe."[24] He explained his thinking on the matter in detail to a colleague in 1930:

> My whole interest in the subject [of secularism] is in order that we may see more clearly where the Christian forces can most successfully direct their efforts. This will come about through a deepening understanding of our problems rather than through any attempt at formulation which, just because of the immensity and richness of the problem, must necessarily be different for different minds. To put the matter briefly, I am quite satisfied that different minds should be brought into contact with one another for the sake of mutual stimulus, leaving each entirely free to embody the results of that common thinking in whatever formula of point of view seems to him most adequate."[25]

Van Dusen took the same position in his statement inviting American theologians to the first meeting of the Theological Discussion Group in 1933. "The aim of the discussion will be to discover what is essential and distinctive in the Christian gospel for today. There will be no thought of formulating a statement or articulating a position, or creating a school of thought." What was sought was explicitly not "another forum for theological debate," but "something of the nature of an informal fellowship for sharing convictions."[26] *Church Against the World* – a volume of essays drawn from contributions to the Theological Study Group by three of its regular participants, Yale professor H. Richard Niebuhr, the German-émigré theologian Wilhelm Pauck, and the former World Student Christian Federation General Secretary Francis P. Miller – articulated the same understanding of a community of inquiry united by a concern to "represent a

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[24] Oldham, "Note on Continental Group," (WCC, 26.11.34/21).

[25] Oldham/Joachim Müller 12 Sept 1930 (WCC, 26.11.34/17).

[26] "Proposed Conference Retreats of Younger Christian Thinkers," (YDS, Theological Discussion Group Papers, Box 5, fld 48), 1.

[26] Ibid, 1.

point of view" opposed to that of the dominant worldly orientation of modern civilization. "The title of our book," wrote Niebuhr, "is not so much the enunciation of a theme as it is the declaration of a position. We are seeking not to expound a thesis but to represent a point of view and to raise a question… 'What must we do to be saved?'"[27] As participants in a similar study group put it in 1929: "Discussion with the modern world means, primarily, a searchingly critical discussion with ourselves, with Christianity as it is."[28]

Between 1930 and 1934, efforts to institutionalize an anti-secular Christian community took place on a small scale. Convinced that intimacy was the secret to insight, these groups usually numbered around 5 to 10 and never more than 30 participants. Their organizers saw blockbuster assemblies like the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, which drew hundreds of delegates and issued platitudinous resolutions, as structurally unsuited to the challenge of nurturing serious reflection. Between 1935 and 1937, however the enthusiasm for the study group model among participants and the widely acknowledged urgency of the topic of conversation overcame the anxieties of scale. Various informally coordinated efforts to cultivate group thinking were integrated, brought under the umbrella of an ambitious effort of centralization that preceded the Oxford Conference of the Universal Council of Life and Work in 1937. Oldham himself, appointed by Life and Work as the chief organizer of the conference, presided over this centralization. Not only was the task of the conference study preparations – to "understand the true nature of the vital conflict between the Christian faith and the secular and

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[27] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Introduction," in H. Richard Niebuhr, Wilhelm Pauck, Francis P. Miller, *The Church Against the World* (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Company, 1935), 1-2.

[28] "Final Minutes of the Conference on Oecumenical Research" prepared for the Study Conference of World Christian Organizations, Geneva, July 30-Aug 2, 1929, 2.

pagan tendencies of our time"[29] – a continuation and expansion of the post Jerusalem agenda, it was also a culmination of the practice of anti-secular community first developed in the years following 1928.

Oldham's appointment as study director of the Universal Council of Life and Work placed at his disposal a support staff and resources considerably greater than those he could marshal through his own efforts. Henry Van Dusen coordinated contributions from North American participants, while Life and Work's Geneva Research Department, comprised of Hans Schönfeld of Germany and Nils Ehrenström of Sweden, oversaw the work of translating and mimeographing contributions between English, French, and German. In the two years preceding the Oxford Conference, this group coordinated the commissioning, circulation, reviewing and critique of over 250 papers written by theologians, clerics, and lay Christian thinkers written on nine themes: The Christian Understanding of Man, The Kingdom of God and History, Christian Faith and the Common Life, The Church and Its Function in Society, Church and Community, Church and State, Church Community and State in Relation to the Economic Order, and Church Community and State in Relation to Education. Each essay was circulated among at least four and sometimes as many as thirty or forty persons, representing a cross section of churches nationalities represented in Council of Life and Work, who were each asked to write a critique.[30] The critiques were then submitted to the author, who redrafted the essay. The cycle was repeated

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[29] Oldham, "General Introduction," *Universal Church and the World of Nations* (Willett, Clark, and Company: New York, 1938), vii. The Introduction was printed at the head of all of all nine volumes of Oxford preparatory material.

[30] For a description of Oxford study preparations, see Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J.H. Oldham* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999)*,* 314, Nils Ehrenstroem, "Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work, 1925-1948," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, vol. 1. ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1948); and now Michael Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), ch. 5.

in most instances more than once. With an eye to ensuring roughly proportional representation, Oldham and his associates selected the best papers to publish in six volumes shortly after the conference.

One purpose of these papers and the process of critique and revision that went into their production was to ready delegates for the work of the Oxford Conference itself, which convened from July 12-26, 1937. The five reports drafted and released while the conference was in session – addressing the themes of "Church and Community," "Church and State," "Economic Order," "Education," and "the Una Sancta and the World of Nations" – were written quickly yet reflected a level of intellectual engagement and consensus that could only have been generated through years of preparatory work.[31] But as Oldham repeatedly stated, the larger goal of preliminary study was not the conference itself, or any specific collective utterance that might come out of it, but rather "the education of a wider constituency."[32] He envisioned a trickle-down effect, in which "groups for study" of the major themes of the Oxford Conference "would be formed among members of theological faculties, among theological students, in the local parish or congregation and in connection with young people's organizations. There is no reason why there

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[31] The final Section reports – some of which, including the report on the Una Sancta and the World of Nations – contained sections that paraphrased the essays of individual authors – were drafted within one week and "accepted" by the plenary session (the reports on "Church and Community" and "Church and State" were referred back to session and completed after the close of the conference. Conspicuous to reviewers and participants (and ecumenical commentators since) was the high quality of the reports; American theologian J. H. Nichols averred that "the authority of the Oxford Reports was unprecedented, at least in Protestant social ethics, and their competence enabled them to rank with the best of secular thought, a phenomenon scarcely seen since the seventeenth century." (quoted in Edward Duff, SJ., *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches*(London, New York: Longmans, Green, 1956), 16).

[32] Minutes of the of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Universal Council on Life and Work at Chamby (Switzerland), 1935, 32.

should not be hundreds or even thousands of such groups."[33] The production of an anti-secular polemic was synonymous with the creation of a community of opinion.

Eschewing any claim to a final, exhaustive formulation of the Christian message, the Oxford Conference preparations mirrored its predecessors in aiming at the indefinite perpetuation of a conversation, the formation of a community of ongoing inquiry. These conversations were to be the beachhead of a Christian invasion of modern thought, a strategy that was underscored by Oldham, Van Dusen, and others' assiduous courting of intellectuals and opinion shapers across the Atlantic world. From the beginning of the anti-secular exercise, Oldham sought out "first rate minds" who were also institutionally and culturally elite. R. H. Tawney and T. S. Eliot in England were early participants in these discussion groups. Among the authors commissioned to write studies for the Oxford conference were well known Protestant theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr, Emil Brunner, and Paul Tillich, and Russian Orthodox émigré theologians like Nicholas Berdyaev and Georges Florovsky. Politically well connected lay Christians such as Philip Kerr (Marquis of Lothian), John Foster Dulles, and Alfred Zimmern also took part. The open-endedness of the conversation was central to the movement's vision of a "universal" community, in which faith would provide the means of including persons of all nations in a collective search after an understanding of the Gospel. In this vision, like-mindedness was synonymous with an acceptance of diversity of perspectives on certain fundamental questions.

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[33] Ibid, 33.

Though they were intended to clarify disagreements and produce debate, the administrative practices that brought Christian intellectuals into these communities of discourse also kept others at the margins, and excluded some altogether. Not all dissent was welcome. Here we will focus on three excluded groups to illuminate the contours of the "mainstream" of theological anti-secularism as well as its often-permeable boundaries. There were, first, those whose theological outlook was deemed insufficiently attuned to the challenge of secularism as a rival, anti-Christian system of thought and way of life. The decision to exclude these individuals was often openly and explicitly discussed; it helped the organizers of the study groups clarify the nature of their project and its aims. Other exclusions were less explicitly justified; they reflected, rather, the structural inequalities instantiated in an elite organization dominated by North Atlantic theologians and church leaders that carried over and reflected assumptions about European superiority and imagined geographies of periphery and metropole. Study organizers were on the whole rather indifferent to the problem of how to involve non-elite opinion in these discursive communities (though they did think hard about the technical challenge of how to reach a mass audience with their ideas). Further, they often assumed that the place of Christians from the non-western "younger-churches" in these conversations was primarily that of passive recipients, whose role would be to absorb the insights of North Atlantic theological elites. Finally, anti-secular practice effectively excluded many German Protestants of the Confessing Church on account of their refusal to acknowledge the competing German Reich Church – which embraced the Nazi regime's church legislation – as a legitimate church. There was an irony in this exclusion, since most ecumenists sympathized with the Confessing Church and celebrated its resistance against the Nazi regime. But the Confessing Church's anathemazation of the Reich Church – which members of the Confessing Christian group saw not as one church among others

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but as a heretical body that had forfeited the Gospel for idolatrous nationalism – could not be reconciled in practice with the movement's commitments to dialogue and mutual recognition.[34] Surprisingly, up until 1937, ecumenical practice more effectively integrated the corporate participation of the Reich Church than it did the Confessing Church.

The record of deliberations among the chief organizers of these gatherings reveals how selections were made based thinkers' willingness to embrace the idea that the Christian mission in the world entailed intellectual combat against secularism as an opposed worldview. Those who rejected this framing or found their primary theological commitments elsewhere were either quietly ejected from the conversations or not invited in the first place. An illustrative example is Karl Barth, a theologian who, despite the enormous impact of his writings on Christian thought in general and ecumenical theology in particular, was never invited to take part in ecumenical study groups. The literature on Barth and ecumenism has stressed that Barth himself was skeptical of the ecumenical movement in this period, but it has failed to see that ecumenical leaders were convinced that he would not be a productive presence in the community of opinion they were seeking to build. To Oldham and Visser't Hooft, Barth was objectionable not because he was a polarizing figure but specifically because they believed that his approach to theology denied the premise of anti-secular combat. They came to this view of Barth by 1930, in large part as a result of his disputes with Emil Brunner over the "point of contact," where Barth maintained that argument and persuasion were powerless to produce Christian faith, which could only come from God's initiative. Oldham and Visser't Hooft came to believe that the Swiss theologian had

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[34] The Catholic Church was not invited to take part in the Oxford Conference. Nonetheless, individual Catholics like Christopher Dawson, a friend of Oldham's, did participate in preparatory study (Dawson contributed an essay, " to volume *The Kingdom of God and History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938, 197-217)). Moreover groups of German Catholics published volumes of essays addressed the Oxford theme. (TK)

embraced an understanding of theology that all but vitiated human agency and thus the possibility of reaching an audience of the secular-minded. As Visser't Hooft put it, Barth had taken the position "that God's word to us is spoken into emptiness." This was problematic because "the possibility of answering is practically excluded. The danger… is that it is no longer in a real sense dialectic. It becomes again onesided and onesidedness in theology always means rationalization."[35] Barth's complete rejection of natural theology, as Visser't Hooft read it, denied any agency to humans in turning back the tide of modern secularism. This reading "confirmed my view that it is perhaps better not to have Barth in any of the meetings like the one at Basle," Visser't Hooft wrote in 1930 to Oldham, who concurred.[36] Barth was not only not invited to take place in those consultations; he was excluded from all ecumenical discussions until after the War.

At the opposite end of the theological spectrum, the organizers of ecumenical study also had no time for "modernists" preoccupied with establishing the compatibility of Christianity and scientific rationality. If Barth's radically otherworldly orientation seemed indifferent to the anti-secular struggle, theological modernists erred in the other direction. Their thinking erased the tension between Christian and secular worldviews through a preoccupation with accommodating science and faith.[37] After a period of experimentation with the membership of various study groups in the US and Europe, older liberal theologians whose work had been shaped by the

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[35] Visser't Hooft/Oldham October 21, 1930 (WCC, 26.11.34/6).

[36] Visser't Hooft/Oldham December 2, 1930 (WCC, 26.11.34/6).

[37] The issue here was not whether science and religion were compatible – no ecumenical theologians took the fundamentalist position of the incompatibility of science and revelation. The issue was rather a willingness to acknowledge conflict between Christianity and secularism as comprehensive accounts of reality – a tension based on the idea that the scientific worldview, while offering procedures useful in explaining natural processes, innately transgressed its appropriate boundaries.

prewar project of Kantian theology found themselves on the outside. When the modernist

University of Chicago theologian Henry Nelson Wieman argued at one of Oldham's theological

study groups in 1929 that "rationality and scientific method" could be used to determine the most

psychologically efficacious formulation of the Gospel, he ensured that he would not be invited

back.[38] Oldham objected that Wieman "is trying to make a case for Christianity on a basis which

many of us regard as hopeless. He is trying to find a place for it *within* the abstract scientific

view, whereas the first step towards progress seems to many of us to be the clear recognition that

religion is essentially different in character from the scientific attitude toward life." The

exclusion of "modernists" was not complete or total, just as it is hard to fit individuals into an

ideal type. But Wieman was not the only older horse put out to pasture: important thinkers like

William Hocking, for instance, who expressed reservations over whether anti-secular polemic

was in the best interest of Christianity, was not invited to the Van Dusen's Theological

Discussion Group and relegated to a minor role in Oxford preparations, though he had had

played an important part in the missionary and church unity movements of the 1920s. In Europe,

a similar fate befell the Czech liberal theologian and philosopher Emanuel Radl, an early

participant in the Basel Group discussions who was not invited back. The American theologian

Ernest Johnson had his contribution to the Oxford volume on "The Church and Community"

outright rejected by Oldham – seemingly because it argued that the rise of Nazism and

Communism could be explained with reference to political and economic, rather than spiritual

factors.[39]

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[38] See Henry Nelson Wieman, "The Scientific Method and the Christian Gospel" in *Theological Education and the World Mission of Christianity: Conference of Theological Seminaries meeting at Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, NJ, Nov 29-Dec 1, 1929*.

[39] Oldham on Johnson's paper: "though it contains some interesting matter it is quite definitely not what we had in view. (Oldham Papers, 11-9-35, 2). I'm drawing here on Graeme Smith's reading in *Oxford 1937*, 145.

Beyond those excluded from the program on ideological grounds, there were a number of what might best be termed structural inequalities in ecumenical discourse. These ensured that there were margins to the conversation in which ecumenical elites hoped that messages would resonate but which they believed had little to say in response. The insights generated by carefully selected international elites would percolate down through publications and educational institutions to a broader audience. Thus the York conference in 1929 had imagined that one product of the deliberations of theological elites over the struggle against secularism would be the development of new curricula for seminary courses. Oldham vision of a 1,000 "Oxfords" reflected a similar view of distribution and publicity: once they had been exposed to the essays of leading theologians and lay intellectuals, pastors and ordinary lay people could learn to ask the right questions and discuss them amongst themselves. Following the Oxford Conference, thanks to the efforts of the Federal Council of Churches, "little Oxfords" actually did take place: in one instance, church goers in the city of Evanston, Illinois, gathered on a regular basis on Sunday afternoons in 1938 to discuss the Oxford literature, hear speeches from American churchmen who attended, and produce their own reports in the conference theme.[40] Tellingly, even the church leaders who organized these debates had no institutional mechanism in place for circulating the findings of these popular conferences back up to the elite level: there is little evidence that what was said at these local gatherings was reckoned with seriously by the ecumenical elites who encouraged their organization.

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[40] For a description of the Evanston "Oxford," see Thompson, 150.

In addition to being mostly confined to intellectual, clerical, and in some cases political elites, these groups were also overwhelmingly European and North American. Though organizers of the discussion groups disputed how representatives from "younger churches" of Asia ought to be incorporated, they were, in general, kept at the margins. It is true that the organizers of anti-secularism encouraged the formation of discussion groups outside of the West: Oldham's colleague William Paton, for instance, convened secularism discussion groups in Bombay, Cairo, Beirut, and Baghdad while on a tour of missions outposts in 1929, and encouraged local missionaries to oversee them and organize them on an ongoing basis.[41] Oldham's papers indicate that he kept a record of "theological groups" convened in China, Japan, and India – but no records, minutes, of papers produced in the meetings seem to have made their way into Oldham's hands; or if they did, he didn't preserve them.[42] But there were few serious efforts to incorporate the findings or insights of non-Europeans into discussions among western theologians. When John Mott, Chairman of the International Missionary Council, floated the idea of convening a "world group" that would involve theologians from Europe, North America, as well as Asia, Oldham was skeptical. Such a group would likely be too large and lose the collaborative *esprit*. Its primary advantage, Oldham wrote, would be "get[ing] the idea well lodged in the mind of some leading Orientals." Some months later, when he learned that C. T. Chao, an American-educated theologian at Yenching University, was passing through London on his way to take up a fellowship in Oxford, Oldham requested him to attend an upcoming meeting of a British study group: "You will meet some of the best Christian minds in England and if it is in any way possible for you to be present you would, I think, find it worth your while to change

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[41] William Paton, "What is Secularism?" *International Missionary Review* vol 18 (Jan, 1929), 347-9.

[42] Oldham, "Theological Groups," (WCC 301.2.010).

any engagement that you can get out of to come to this meeting." There was no mention or expectation of the possibility that Chao would substantively contribute to the work of theological construction; the priority for him was the preliminary one of learning to think the problem of secularism in the right way.

Mott's suggestion that Asian thinkers be included in these conversations indicates that there were some disagreements among the western elites who organized the groups. Moreover, while the groups that Oldham organized were in practice exclusively American and European, other anti-secularism discussion groups incorporated non-Europeans and Europeans more successfully: the World Student Christian Federation, for example, involved a range of Asian thinkers in its first meeting on the Christian message, including WSCF Secretaries S. K. Datta, T. Z. Koo, as well the P. C. Hsu, a philosophy professor and Chao's colleague at Yenching University. Subsequent Federation retreats – which were held roughly twice a year between 1930 and 1935 – similarly reflected a level of non-western inclusion that never made its way into the Life and Work preparations. When Oldham took control of Oxford preparations, his American deputy Van Dusen periodically chafed at his colleague's indifference to including a sufficiently "adequate" number of Asians in the group: "active Oriental participation is indispensible as a third point of reference and solvent between the two poles to which European and American thought tend incurably to gravitate," he wrote Oldham at one point, adding that it was uncertain whether "we can speak of a general ecumenical Christian conference without adequate and able representation from the Orient."[43] In the end, however, no contributions to any of the Oxford study volumes

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[43] "Extract from Letter to Dr. Oldham from Professor Van Dusen" undated, likely 1936 (WCC, 42.0081). Oldham's concerns are expressed periodically in his extensive correspondence with Oldham and H. L. Henroid, General Secretary of the Universal Council of Life and Work during this period. See for instance Van Dusen/Henroid Apr 27, 1937 (WCC, 42.0081).

were commissioned from non-Western thinkers. Only 40 representatives from "other regions" – ie., regions outside of Europe and the North America – were invited to attend the conference itself, and many of these were representatives from white settler churches (as in New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa). Two non-Europeans – T. Z. Koo of China and the Rev. Chukichi Yasuda of Japan – delivered addresses in at the Oxford plenary sessions.

Though some ecumenical elites protested the marginalization of non-western church leaders and intellectuals, their case simply did not seem all that important to the movement leaders in the 1930s. By contrast, there were intense debates over whether and how to involve German Protestants in the ecumenical program of theological study at a time when the churches in that country were bitterly divided in their attitudes toward the Nazi regime. Given that Nazism figured in ecumenical polemic as arguably the most menacing manifestation of "political religion," one might expect that clerics who welcomed and sought accommodation between the Protestant church and the regime would be excluded from the community of discourse discussed here. In fact, however, the establishment Reich Church was far more integrated into the preparations for the Oxford Conference than the anti-establishment Confessing Church, which included German Protestantism's most vocal critics of the Nazi regime, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Niemöller, and Hans Böhme.

The integration of German Protestants with open and avowed loyalty to the Nazi regime, who were willing to go along not only with Hitler's domestic reforms but with his church policies, such as the purging of non-Aryan pastors and the re-organization of ecclesiastical government around the *Führerprinzip*, is a topic that has been largely passed over in most literature of the

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ecumenical movement. Most of this work has tended to focus on either ecumenists who heroically stood up to the regime and supported the Confessing Church – like George Bell, Bishop of Chichester – or the broadly anti-totalitarian cast of ecumenical discourse in the period.[44] It has ignored or soft-pedaled the role of ecumenical organizers who took a much more critical view of the Confessing Church – among them, no less a figure than the Secretary of Life and Work's Research Department, Hans Schönfeld, who received a portion of his income from the Reich Church Ministry after 1938[45] and, in the interest of inclusion and dialogue, ensured that German Christians were involved in Oxford study preparations and conference planning sessions. Reich Church representatives attended a meeting on Church and Community in Fanö, Denmark, in 1934 as well as organizational meetings for Oxford study preparations in Paris in 1934 and in Chamby, France, in 1935 and 1936. What has also been overlooked is that the Oxford Conference preparations generated significant contributions from Reich Church intellectuals. With the support of the Universal Council, the Reich Church leadership commissioned essays on the theme *Kirche, Volk und Staat* (an "advertising brochure for the

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[44] Most movement historiography – most of it produced after 1945 has highlighted the opposition to Nazism among the movement leaders such Joseph Oldham and above all George Bell. See for instance Nils Ehrenstrom, "Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work," Biographies of George Bell's campaign to draw attention to the Church Struggle in Germany and valorize the cause of the Confessing Church has contributed to the perception that the Ecumenical Movement was collectively anti-Nazi. While opposing Nazism "as a religion," however, ecumenical strategies of inclusion incorporated individuals who embraced Nazism as a political allegiance. Armin Boyens's account of the relations of the Reich Church with the ecumenical movement (*Kirchenkampf und Ökumene 1933-1939: Darstellung und Dokumentation* (Munich: Kaiser, 1969)) suggests that the German Church leadership only used the movement to shore up their own legitimacy – and that of the Nazi government – abroad and at home, an account that flattens a more complicated engagement and tends to downplay the significance of the very deep engagement between Geneva and the Reich Churches, as well as a shared commitment to what I have called here ecumenical practice. The most exhaustive accounts of the Kirchenkampf, including Klaus Scholder, *Die Kirchen und das dritten Reich* 3 vols. (Frankfurt aM: Ullstein, 1977-2001) and Gerhard Besier and Scholder *Spaltungen und Abwehrkämpfe 1934-1937* (Munich: 2001). Vols 1 and 2 of Scholder's history of the German Church struggle, offer a more nuanced account of the church struggle and its bearing on the ecumenical movement, as does Eberhard Bethge *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

[45] Bethge, 669. See also Bethge, 551, where Bethge characterizes Schönfeld as "effectively a member" of the Reich Church around Bishop Heckel, and Bethge, 350, where he recounts Schönfeld advising Bishop Heckel in his dealings with George Bell.

Third Reich" according to Karl Barth[46]) as a companion to the Oxford volumes edited by

Oldham. That the German Evangelical Church was not represented at the Oxford Conference

was not at all the result of Geneva's efforts – indeed, Life and Work had put substantial energy

into attempting to broker an agreement between the Reich Church and the Confessing Church so

that there could be a united German delegation. The reason for their absence was only the

intervention of the German state, which, refused to grant passports to the German delegation on

the eve of the conference.[47]

There were numerous reasons for a pattern of ecumenical relations that effectively included (up

until the state's decisive intervention) the Reich Church while excluding most members of the

Confessing Church.[48] All of them reflect unsettling features of the discursive regime that

valorized theological dialogue as a means of international inclusion, and which had emerged

within a movement animated since the 1920s by efforts to achieve rapprochement and

cooperation between German and Allied churches. First, German Christians such as Reich

Bishop Lüdwig Müller, tapped by Hitler to oversee sweeping reforms of church, embraced an

anti-secular ideology that resonated in many ways with the post-Jerusalem agenda advanced by

the ecumenical leadership. Müller and his deputy Theodor Heckel agreed that "secularism" –

particularly Bolshevism and a modern *Lebenstil* prevalent in the cities and among disaffected

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[46] Quoted in Boyens, *Kirchenkampf und Oekoumene*, 138.

[47] Boyens, *Kirchenkampf und Oekoumene*, 152-5 for a description of church state relations and the lead up of the decision to deny the German delegation passports. Boyens suggests that Heckel was relieved at the decision and to scuttle German participation. He suggests the decision to deny passports came from the SS, who took initiative in the absence of clarity over whether the issue fell under the jurisdiction of the Foreign Office or the Church Ministry.

[48] Some individual members of the Confessing Church, such as Hanns Lilje, Werner Wiesner, and Wilhelm Menn contributed essays to the Oxford volumes. Lilje, "Church and Nation," *Church and Community* ed. Kenneth S. Latourette et al. (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1938), 85-114; Werner Wiesner, "The Law of Nature and the Orders," *The Christian Faith and the Common Life* ed. Kenneth S. Latourette et al. (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1938).

workers and intellectuals – was the chief enemy of the church in the modern age.[49] Many of the

earliest participants in Oldham's study groups, particularly the missionaries Julius Richter,

Siegfried Knack, and Walter Freytag. would go on to become not just Reich Church loyalists but

Nazi Party members. Others, such as Karl Heim, embraced in the mid-1930s the centrist Young

Reformation Movement which sought a middle way between the Confessing Church and the

German Christians, objecting to the intrusions of the German state in ecclesiastical affairs while

proclaiming a "joyful yes to the new German State."[50] Allegiance to the post Jerusalem agenda,

in other words, could be accommodated easily with pro-Nazi politics.

To be sure, the anti-secularist agenda as envisioned by the Reich Church and its supporters in the

1930s differed in critical ways from that envisioned by Allied ecumenists. For one thing, Reich

Church intellectuals and clerics were understandably cool on Anglo-American and Continental

polemics against totalitarianism that dominated in the ecumenical mainstream, since these

polemics so often identified the Nazi regime they supported as an efflux of pagan religion. They

also embraced theological orientation that legitimated the *Volk* as an "order of creation"

continuous with God's revelation, a position that was in the minority outside of German

Lutheranism (though not unrepresented: Scandinavian Lutherans also espoused order of creation

theology). But disagreements over the role of the state and the nation were considered within the

bounds of ecumenical discourse. Indeed, ecumenists saw it as central to their project of

promoting world Christian dialogue to resolve these intra-church debates, and to exclude a group

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[49] For an account of how anti-secularism – especially fear of Bolshevism – turned German missionaries to embrace Nazism after 1933, see Werner Ustorf, *Sailing on the Next Tide: Missions, Missiology, and the Third Reich* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

[50] Quoted in Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 103.

of Christians eager to take part in ecumenical consultations on the basis of their "political" allegiances seemed to offend against the vision of a church truly inclusive of all nations, races, and classes. Oldham recognized that these were open questions in his introductory pamphlet to the Oxford Study program: In fact he highlighted the need to study questions such as: "What is the Christian understanding of the common bonds which constitute the life of a people or nation? What is the relation between the community and the state?"[51] His pamphlet even invited consideration of "how far ought the Christian Church to be a *Volkskirche*?"[52] These were the pressingly urgent questions of theology which divided Christians and the appropriately ecumenical attitude toward them was to invite as many points of view to the table – so long as they identified as Christian and were willing to play by rules of debate and conversation.

The main reason that Reich Church intellectuals were more involved in the study program of the Oxford conference is that they were willing to play – and exploit to their advantage – the rules of theological dialogue that constituted ecumenical polity. Far from univocally belligerent against co-religionists from other countries, the Reich Church actively sought out the support of churchmen outside of Germany and cultivated their ecumenical contacts. They viewed the ecumenical movement as a means of legitimating the Reich Church and delegitimizing the domestic opposition of the Confessing Church – which is not to say that their involvement was wholly cynical: the Reich Church included a number of theologians and thinkers, such as Eugen Gersteinmaier, Heinz-Dietrich Wendland, and Paul Althaus, who took part in international Christian conferences and consultations before the outbreak of World War II. Meanwhile, the

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[51] Oldham, *Church, Community, and State – A World Issue*, 24-5.

[52] Ibid, 29.

supporters of the Confessing Church attempted to pressure ecumenical bodies into deciding

unilaterally to support their view of the Reich Church as a heretical church. From 1934 onward,

Bonhoeffer pressed this point repeatedly with Geneva: the ecumenical movement needed to

decisively repudiate the Reich Church as a heretical church if the Council was committed to the

true church and not merely an association of peoples interested in theological discussion. Despite

sympathy for the Confessing Church among ecumenist circles, this demand that other German

churches be *excluded* was a bridge too far for a movement founded on the belief that it was

precisely through dialogue and mutual recognition of churches that the church actualized itself in

history. The French General Secretary of the Council of Life and Work, H. L. Henriod, explained

to Bonhoeffer that the Council lacked the authority to make such determinations: if a church

claimed to be a Christian church, the council could do nothing but welcome it to the table.[53] As

Schönfeld put it in a memo attacking the Confessing Churches ultimatum, the Oxford

Conference preparations sprang from the very "soil of the church." But he denied that there

could be a place in this project for a theology that refused to acknowledge in good faith the

legitimacy of other understandings of Christianity. "if what is demanded here [by the Confessing

Church] is a theology that declares itself to be absolute, then it will hardly be possible to deal

with this within the framework of our ecumenical research." Bonhoeffer's response to this was

as clear as it was incompatible with the study program: Geneva seemed capable only, he wrote,

of advancing "theological problems." "What is demanded is an ecclesiastical decision, not a

theological dialogue with the German Christians."[54]

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[53] Bethge, 368-9.

[54] Quoted in Bethge, 473. The World Conference of Faith and Order – which was involved in a similar program of preparatory study leading up to its conference in Edinburgh in 1937 – took a line on this matter identical to that of the Universal Council of Life and Work. Invoking Faith and Order's doctrinal "basis," the organization's General Secretary and Oxford Regius Professor of Theology Leonard Hodgson explained to Bonhoeffer in 1935: "We

III. Anti-Secular Discourse as Ecumenical Movement: Theologies of "Ecumenism" and the Origins of the World Council of Churches

We have examined so far how anti-secularism was institutionalized as a practice of theological

dialogue administered by international church elites and organizations. These practices created

an intellectual community, centered on the North Atlantic and largely Protestant but including

Orthodox thinkers as well. For this community, the achievement of "personal fellowship" –

linking individuals with one another through collaborative search for God's Word – constituted

the church's resistance to secular society. As anti-secularism was institutionalized, some

movement intellectuals reflected on this process itself, developing an ecclesiology that emplotted

the progressive realization of the ecumenical church within history. This theory viewed

theological dialogue, not merely as an ad hoc response to the urgent need for a more robust and

persuasive formation of the Christian message to the modern world, but as the constitutive

activity of the church itself, entailing a communal ethics that connected human communities with

the divine. Adopting a term which had remained, until that time, marginal within international

Christian discourse, these theorists described that community as "ecumenical," denoting both its

world-wide extent as well as the ethics of spiritual and intellectual pluralism on which it was

based. In applying the term "ecumenical" to a new practical reality, they helped to publicize a

new meaning of the word and extricate it from associations with formal ecclesiastical bodies.

"Ecumenical Unity," they argued, in no way resembled the authoritarian approach to church

governance epitomized by the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, these theorists argued,

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cannot, as a Movement, exclude the representatives of any Church which 'accepts our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour'… we cannot arrogate to ourselves the right to discriminate between them." (quoted in Bethge, 480).

"ecumenicity" was a mode of Christian humility, which accepted the inassimilability of diverse expressions of Christianity as the historical manifestation of a universal faith. This body of theory drew on dialectical theology to interpret the practices of anti-secular discourse as the solution to humankind's sinful lust for domination.

In its systematic postponement of resolution, these theorists argued, ecumenical dialogue embodied submission to the divine logos. It offered, then, a solution to the problem of sovereignty that was at the center of the crisis of modern life, evinced in the "totalitarian" claims of the state and the cogito alike. If modernity was defined as humankind's usurpation of God's sovereignty, the bureaucracies of international bodies were instruments for restoring sovereignty back to God, and putting man in his rightful place. Critically, ecumenical institutions made no claim to speak *for* the church, rather, their function was to regulate an ethics of responsibility – and "response-ability" – to the utterances of others. In this way, ecumenical theory concealed the exercise of power by bureaucratic elites, presenting them merely as instruments that would liberate persons from the servitude of inherited national, racial, and sectarian biases into the positive freedom of responsibility to God. This connection of bureaucratic organization and godly community formed the basis of the constitution of World Council of Churches, which emerged from consultations among various Christian unity movements in the mid-1930s looking to conceptually and institutionally consolidate various bodies into a single "ecumenical movement."

As Visser't Hooft noted in his 1954 history of the meaning of ecumenical, it was only in the mid 1930s that the terms ecumenical, and ecumenical movement, entered into wide use.[55] We have seen in previous chapters how Nathan Söderblom attempted to rally church leaders to the idea of forming an "ecumenical council" of churches in the 1920s. The proposal, however, failed to mobilize, and though a handful of German and Scandinavian theologians occasionally employed the word "ecumenical" to refer to nature of the worldwide church in the 1920s, the term had no broad circulation. But in the 1930s the term was able to experience its "break-through" because it was invested with a new meaning, describing the phenomenology of Christian anti-secular dialogue.

Among the earliest and most important theorists of this new interpretation of ecumenicity was the Swiss dialectical theologian, director of the International Christian Social Institute in Geneva, and veteran of numerous Christian unity institutions, Adolf Keller.[56] Keller's case is especially important to us he was the first to employ the term "ecumenical" research to the collaborative study on secularism, thus linking what had been a parochial vocabulary to an ideological and institutional project pregnant with a future. In the Spring of 1929 Keller became involved with Joachim Müller, head of the Swiss YMCA, and William Paton in an effort to organize a study conference in Geneva to address the Christian response to "a new conception of life [that is sweeping through the world in a strong and united current," a development that "was realized with special clearness by the meeting of the International Missionary Council at Jerusalem at Easter, 1928." Keller and Müller's agenda for the meeting differed in few respects from the

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[55] W.A. Visser't Hooft, *The Meaning of Ecumenical* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 25-6.

[56] For a useful general biography of Keller, see Marianne Jehle-Wildberger, *Adolf Keller: Ecumenists, World Citizen, Philanthropist*, trans. by Mark Kyburz and John Peck (Eugen, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

similar documents produced around the time by Oldham, Paton, Visser't Hooft, and Van Dusen – except in the special emphasis it placed on reflexive theological consideration of the communities of discourse that were produced in these consultations. The challenge of secularism raised, Müller and Keller wrote, in particularly acute form "the essential meaning of oecumenical fellowship." [57] That meaning Keller sought to analyze in the years that followed through a creative appropriation of the theology of Karl Barth.

Two years after the Geneva study conference, Keller completed what would become his best-known work, *Der Weg der dialektischen Theologie durch die kirchliche Welt*.[58] The work shows how dialectical theology furnished a way for advocates of world Christian unity to conceive the practices of theological debate and dialogue *already underway* in the post-Jerusalem study groups as the sites of the historical emergence of the community of the church. The idea of an ecumenical movement, as Keller understood it, denoted a widening debate over the meaning of Christ's revelation that would gradually incorporate the national and confessional divisions of churches and denominations.

Der Weg der dialektischen Theologie durch die kirchliche Welt was an extended treatment of the theology of Karl Barth and its reception and the North Atlantic world. The work surveyed the impact of neo-orthodox thinking on churches in Europe and the United States, on Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic churches, and on missionary work. But Keller aspired to much more than

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[57] "Study Conference of World Christian Organizations," (WCC, 261.010)

[58] Quotations and page numbers that follow from the 1933 English translation, Adolf Keller, *Karl Barth and Christian Unity*, trns. in collabobation with Werner Petersmann by Manfed Manrodt (New York: Macmillian) – CK AGAINST ORIGINAL.

a reception history; he wanted to show how Barth's concept of existential "crisis" provided a new ethic of citizenship for Christians to participate in what he called the "ecumenical" unity of the church. Previous approaches to Christian unity, Keller argued, had sought to resolve differences by focusing on "a mere 'minimum theology,' that is, the smallest circle of that common knowledge which had been gained by the mutual subtraction of all that is differentiating."[59] But the effort to distill a minimum theology exemplified the Pelegian ambition to achieve salvation through works. It was an expression of human pride in the form of an imperious rationalism. Rather than seeking to "resolve" disagreements over doctrine or the nature of church's social responsibility, Christians could find in Barth's theology a new approach to the problem of sectarian and confessional difference. The "ecumenical movement," in Keller's view began with the experience of an existential crisis, namely recognition of the *irresolvability* of doctrinal disagreements through human ingenuity and compromise. To be ecumenical was to experience as a judgment of God the "inner contradiction between that which the church preaches and that which the church now is; a contradiction between its designation to be the Body of Christ, *Corpus Christi* and that which the church really is, namely, a distressing picture of division and discord, a lacerated and dismembered Body of Christ." And yet collective recognition of international and interconfessional *division* as a form of sin provided, ironically, the basis of a new Christian solidarity.

In Keller's account, Barth showed how a theology that began, not with *human* understanding of the divine but with the disruption of *God's* original act of self-revelation could form the basis for a new mode of engagement with those of other confessional traditions.

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[59] Keller, 273

> In a theology of revelation we never begin with the 'reaction' of man, but with the 'action' of God. God speaks to me—that is what first strikes me. God, however, according to the testimony of other people, also speaks to him, also to the other church, in a different way. That occurs to me first as an offense, as a contradiction. We can either revolt against it or we can take it as a dialectical mystery, as the illumination of a universal truth modified by variations of time and place. God's time is a different time from that of the human spirit.[60]

Barth's "wholly other" God was, for Keller, the God of the *other* Christian, the other church: accessible not through one's own powers of apprehension but precisely in the offense and resistance provoked by difference. If the idea of an ecumenical council suggested the image of an ecclesiastical imperialism, in which a church elite would impose its views on others, the ecumenical ethics Keller espoused was premised on the humble acceptance of theological disagreement as an experience of God's judgment on all attempts to formulate Christian faith. "The Ecumenical Movement," Keller wrote, "has been accused of 'hybris.' If understood correctly it is rather a new humility of those individual churches which do not consider their preliminary and accidental nature as something final."[61]

One consequence of Keller's idea of ecumenism was that various descrete organizations: Universal Council of Life and Work, the World Conference on Faith and Order, the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches, and the International Missionary Council, were now understood to be taking part in essentially the same activity: that of cultivating a community of theological dialogue. This claim of an underlying identity of function was most dramatic and surprising the cases of Life and Work and Faith and Order – the two most well known international Christian organizations at the time. Throughout the 1920s the

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[60] Ibid, 269.

[61] Ibid, 261.

leadership of these institutions had emphasized that their roles were functionally distinct and complementary: Life and Work focused on promoting practical cooperation in social activism and bracketed all discussion of doctrinal disagreements, while Faith and Order focused on the resolution of doctrinal disagreements. Now Keller claimed that both bodies were involved in the same work of "translation." Faith and Order was involved translating distinct confessional traditions into "responses" to questions of doctrinal and ecclesiastical order faced by all churches. Life and Work was concerned with translating social problems and injustices into theological questions concerning the nature of a Christian organization of society and the manner of God's providential action in history. This idea of a single ecumenical practice would become in the next five years critical to the movement, as its leaders entertained proposals for consolidating Faith and Order and Life and Work into a single organization.[62]

With the help of his strong contacts in the American and British Protestantism, Keller's book quickly found an English translator and publisher and appeared as *Karl Barth and Christian Unity* in 1933. To an American and British audience that tended at this time to view Barth as an intransigent apostle of orthodoxy and intolerance, the book presented a sharply different view. But Keller was offering more than a palatable Barth: he was formulating the ethics of a new kind of Christian community. In the 1930s, in this community, individual and collective obedience to God was actualized through the give and take of conflicting theological perspectives; theology was the idiom of inter-personal relations that enabled the balance of collective purpose and individual difference. This vision furnished ecumenists with an argument that they alone held the

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[62] See esp Keller, 265-75 for a discussion of Faith and Order and Life and Work.

solution to a crisis of social order based on the exclusive claims of nationalism, racial prejudice,

and proletarian revolution.

Those who self-identified as "ecumenical" in the mid-1930s saw themselves as participants in

the sort of theological community that Keller described.[63] The young Anglican priest Oliver

Tomkins was one such individual. "It was at my first Federation Conference in 1930 that I

became an 'oecumaniac,' and I have been trying ever since to understand what it was that began

for me there," he wrote in 1937. In "A Beginners Guide to Oecumenism," published in the

World Student Christian Federation's periodical *Student World* in 1937, Tomkins offered a story

of his conversion. Becoming ecumenical (or ecumeniacal), Tomkins wrote, began with the

experience of "groping for an emphasis" – a common point of contact among their various

different commitments and perspectives. This was the central event of international Christian

conferences. He wrote of his own experience in one of the retreats organized by Visser't Hooft's

"Commission on the Message:"

> The 'oecumenical group' at that Conference was supposed to look at all the different
> expressions of Christianity represented there, and see if it could find in them anything
> that could be called the 'Message of the Federation.'" That was in the glorious days when
> Americans, on the crest of the 1929 boom, felt they were 'bringing the Kingdom of God'
> at unprecedented speed; when the voice of Karl Barth first came booming across Europe,
> not very distinct as yet, but already uncomfortably insistent on such things as sin; when
> the British on the whole had American ideals but were increasingly prepared to dress
> them in the decent clothes of evangelical language; when the Russian Orthodox were for
> most still interesting refugees, who had a bewildering habit of lapsing into obscurantist
> affirmations about the Faith of the Church. 'Groping for an emphasis' was certainly about

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[63] Other illustrations of the terms proliferation include the following. In 1933, Life and Work started hosting
"oecumenical study conferences" where theologians sought to define Christian concepts of social order in contrast to
"secular" ideologies of liberalism, fascism, and communism. ("The Church and the Social Order" (Study Report),
Rengsdorf, 8-15 March 1933. (WCC, 24.002).) In 1934, the Church of England Council on Foreign Relations
christened its new French-language review *Oecumenica.*

all that could be expected from a group like that, and 'oecumaniac' was a fitting pun to express the lunacy of trying to do it at all.[64]

To Tomkins the technical exercise in crafting a common affirmation of faith only *seemed* technical: beneath it, a profound collective spiritual transformation was taking place. Tomkins called the experience a "pilgrimage," which proceeded through stages that were essentially the same whether they appeared in the microcosm of the individual experience of the international life of the church and in the macrocosm to the history of what he called the "oecumenical movement." The first stage was one of surprise at the "reasonableness of other traditions and consequent optimism of a quick solution." But this "puppyhood of oecumenism" was fleeting. "Close fellowship is followed by each tradition having to define itself more clearly… Then comes the painful discovery that there are differences which cannot be explained away." It was critical for conversation to reach this sense of impasse, in which reason was revealed to be incapable of resolving fundamental disagreements "on the nature of man himself, on the manner of God's self-revelation, on the character of means of grace and of the hope of glory" that stand "at the heart of our common faith." The apprehension of a central emphasis that lay in the space between irresolvable positions was the paradoxically *common* experience that bound participants together. "When the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood in the midst of them… Just when all progress seems to be barred and door irrevocably locked, those who thought they were divided *know* that they are at one in a way which defies expression. They know, they know not how, that the same Lord who called them called also those from whom they differ." Here was the "hardest lesson" of oecumenism: "we must love those of another confession not in spite of their

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[64] Ibid, 123.

convictions, but *because* of them; not because we like them for their human qualities, but because we find them in the love of Christ."[65]

The destination of Tomkins' pilgrimage was an understanding of theological and national traditions as different interpretations of a common faith. Anglicanism and Calvinism, for instance, "in many ways conflict; but the conflict takes on religious importance only when an Anglican and a Calvinist discover that it is their *common* faith in God about which the disagree." The consensus sought in ecumenical conferences was a consensus over the value of difference as an experience of the divine.

> When we prayed together, heard the Bible together, listened to the Faith expounded, we *knew* that beneath all differences it was the same Lord who had called us. In that paradox lies the command and the task of oecumenism. Oecumenism is our answer to the Divine Imperative to realize the unity we cannot express. [italics original][66]

As Tomkins explained oecumenism, it was a collective solidarity that could be expressed *only* in prayer and listening. This denouement of ecumenical "pilgrimage" was not a conference report – but the chastening activity of attempting to formulate a Gospel that was, in the last instance, an utterance from God, not man – and thus necessarily remained beyond the capacity of human expression.

Suzanne de Dietrich expressed a similar view. "In a time like ours, when so many masters claim men's allegiance and on the other hand so many souls claim to be their own master, the Christian community is slowly coming to a new awareness of what it means to be 'Christ's slaves'," she

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[65] Ibid, 127.

[66] Ibid, 124.

wrote in the same *Student World* issue that published Oliver Tomkin's contribution.[67] Dietrich, born in Alsace and a Secretary of the WSCF since 1936, had secured an international reputation in student circles since the late 1920s as one of the most inspiring biblical exegetes of her generation.[68] In this article she sought to ground the conventional wisdom of the ecumenical movement on scriptural bases. "The Bible knows of a man-made and a of a God-given unity," she wrote, counterposing in the manner of Reformation preaching an Old Testament law and New Testament gospel. The Genesis story of man's attempt to build a tower "'whose top may reach to heaven'" ended with its collapse.[69] By contrast, the New Testament offered the story of the Pentecost, in which, expectant and faithful, a "few men" waited until "the first of the Holy Spirit descend[ed] upon them." The same alternatives faced humankind today. "Now we are living in a 'Tower-of-Babel age'," she wrote. "We are faced with world-wide ideological movements aflame with the conviction that they are building up a new world-order, and bringing Heaven to earth."[70]

In contrast to these efforts, the ecumenical movement was called to bear witness to a "God-given inclusiveness." She went on to elucidate the nature of this elastic unity – "a unity based not on uniformity." It was grounded, rather, on a valuation of difference as a mode of Christian contrition. "We are ready to acknowledge our trespasses as individuals; but we are generally much less ready to acknowledge them as a group, be it a racial, a national, or a religious

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[67] Suzanne de Dietrich, "The Biblie and Oecumenism," *Student World* (3rd Quarter, 1937), 118.

[68] Hans-Ruedi Weber, *The Courage to Live: A Biography of Suzanne de Diétrich* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1995), and Johanna M. Selles, *The World Student Christian Federation 1895-1925: Motives, Methods, and Influential Women* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), chp 7.

[69] Dietrich, 114

[70] Ibid, 115.

community."[71] But it was through acceptance of the Christian "other" that submission to God's will became possible. We should, she wrote, "learn to see the other, not in our own perspective, but in the perspective of God's calling to *him*."[72] The common ground of the early Christian community – like that of the contemporary church – was always hidden behind and within disagreement over its meaning and mission. Reading Paul's letter to the Galatians, "still hot with the fire of the battle, one senses a tremendous inward struggle."[73] Paul and his correspondents "have come to an agreement *not* by way of mutual concession, but because each of them acknowledged that the other had received his calling *from God*."[74] In its apparently infinite powers to include difference the church differed from the brittle unities of human vintage. The deduction from this view was that Christian unity was always both "fact and promise." Signs of it appeared in history – and these signs seemed, Dietrich implied, to be multiplying in the in 1930s within the Federation and other ecumenical bodies – but its complete realization lay beyond time.

John Mackay too witnessed signs of the appearance of the *oikoumene*. Like Keller he noted that the unfolding of ecumenical unity took place through the activities of all international church organizations. In the article reflecting on the Oxford and Edinburgh conferences examined at the beginning of this chapter, he tied together the missionary expansion of Christianity with the growing sense of global Christian solidarity in a metaphor of ecumenical progress.

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[71] Ibid, 121.

[72] Ibid, 121.

[73] Ibid, 118.

[74] Ibid, 118.

The amazing success of the Christian missionary movement during the last century planted branches of the church in every representative area of the world. A truly ecumenical church became possible for the first time in history. A truly ecumenical church became possible for the first time in history. This possibility began to pass into actuality after the Edinburgh Conference of 1910. The scattered children of the 'Great Mother,' members of the diaspora, sought to express their unity in life and faith and missionary action. Stockholm [the first conference of Life and work in 1925], Lausanne [the first conference of Faith and Order in 1927] and Jerusalem were highway inns, 'Interpreter's Houses', for pilgrims on the ecumenical road.'"[75]

Here was the ecumenical faith as a triumphal philosophy of history, one that would shape approaches to the movement down to our own day. Though earlier champions of Christian unity had rejected thinking of their aims as "ecumenical," and not thought of themselves as part of an ecumenical movement, Mackay could see things otherwise with the advantage of hindsight. All previous efforts to promote world Christian unity had secretly served to advance the church along the ecumenical road.

What is interesting about Keller, Tomkins, Dietrich, and Mackay's accounts is that they located ecumenism as an identity, community, and theological worldview that emerged exactly and only in the sorts of exchanges, dialogues, conferences, personal relationships and common study enabled by international bureaucracies. Such a social existence actualized "persons" under the sovereignty of God, furnishing an ecclesiology that addressed not questions of order and worship within existing denominational structures but rather the broader social crisis of modernity. The purpose of ecumenical bureaucracy was to plan and stage the personal encounters that would actualize the church as community constituted precisely in the failure of human ingenuity and goodwill. The administrative work of organizing gatherings, drafting reports, and crafting statements was a work of the creative destruction of human pretensions to complete knowledge:

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[75] John Mackay, "The Ecumenical Road," *Christendom* (Autumn 1937) 536-7.

only God could bring together what human organization alone could not achieve. The idea enabled the conceptual unification of Christian's world history as the formation of a world community in the face of modern civilizations unraveling.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

For ecumenists, existential crisis – the recognition of alienation from God described by dialectical theology – was always a collective experience: it galvanized a pluralistic Christian community. In the 1930s era of ecumenism's emergence and popularization, the movement also addressed a more material and mundane set of crises. The histories of these crises were intertwined. After 1929, all of the organizations committed to international Christian cooperation faced budget shortfalls. The idea of ecumenism provided an intellectual framework that guided the institutional consolidation of these bodies, a development that culminated in the decision, taken months before the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences and ratified by the delegates at these meetings, to merge the Faith and Order and Life and Work movements into a single "World Council of Churches."

As we have seen in chapter 1, up through the 1920s, relationships among the various Christian unity movements had been understood overwhelmingly in terms of a division of labor. Söderblom, for example, distinguished Faith and Order and Life and Work as two complementary – but theoretically distinct – "ways to unity:" the first pursued a method of "faith" that aimed to reconcile differences in church doctrine and confession, and the second a method of "love" that brought them together "practically" through "Christian cooperation in

social action."[76] But in the 1930s, Keller's view that all Christian organizations were involved in essentially the same activity – theologically resolving the problem of social existence itself – became widespread. Church leaders as a result began to see redundancy in "ecumenical" organizations. "The crisis of the ecumenical movement, which is the subject of so many discussions" declared the Biblical scholar Arvid Runestam at an executive committee meeting of Life and Work in 1932, "is the crisis of the ecumenical movement as a whole."[77] A memo drawn up by Schönfeld on "The Future of the Oecumenical Movement" in 1933 noted that though "at present the Oecumenical Movement is being carried on from four different centres [Life and Work, Faith and Order, the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches, and the International Missionary Council] increasingly… the expansion of the work of each is bringing it closer to the field occupied by the others." In particular, "it is becoming apparent that the difficulties encountered in each field have their roots in theological and philosophical conceptions which affect all phases of Christian thought and activity alike."[78]

The eye for redundancy was sharpened by economic necessity. At the same time as the encounter with secularism had enabled a conceptual unification of the ecumenical movement and the emergence of forms of ecumenical practice broadly the same across various institutions, all of these bodies were experiencing financial set-backs brought about by the Great Depression. In 1931 after years of narrow surpluses, expenditures of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work exceeded receipts by 18,000 Swiss Francs, and the institution ran a cash deficit of

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[76] Nathan Soederblom, *Christian Fellowship, Or the United Life and Work of Christendom* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1923), 115, 155.

[77] Quoted in W. A. Visser't Hooft, *Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 27.

[78] "The Future of the Oecumenical Movement: Some Suggestions," 1 (WCC, 301.001).

5,726 Swiss Francs.[79] Though the Council's Finance Committee, under new leadership from

1933, succeeded in stabilizing the deficit in the years that followed, Life and Work's financial

difficulties were only finally resolved when it was dissolved as an independent organization in

1938 and reconstituted as a division of the World Council of Churches-in-Formation. Faith and

Order's financial difficulties began even before Black Friday: following an inaugural conference

in Lausanne in 1927, in the fiscal year July 1928-July 1929, the organization ran a deficit of

$12,476 – over half its operating budget of $22,720. By 1931, a campaign to increase church

contributions and "some very liberal individual gifts"[80] balanced the yearly budget but Faith and

Order remained in debt until 1934.[81]

These material concerns provided the backdrop for a "consultation" among the top leadership of

the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches, the International

Missionary Council, the World Student Christian Federation, Life and Work, and Faith and

Order held in York in 1933. Convened by Archbishop William Temple at the suggestion of

William Adams Brown, the meeting was the first of a series of roughly yearly gatherings to

consider steps for integrating what was now regularly referred to in the singular as "the

ecumenical movement." There were two broad options on the table – greater informal

coordination that would allow organizations to share the costs of conferences, staff, and project

budgets, or a formal merger of one or more movements. Though earlier talks of closer inter-

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[79] Minutes of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, Geneva August 11-13 1932, 8-10 (WCC, 301.001).

[80] "Records of the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order at High Leigh, Hoddesdon, England August 18-21, 1931, 10-13 (WCC, 301.001).

[81] Minutes of the Meeting of the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order at Hertenstein 3-6 September, 1934, 12 (WCC, 301.001).

organizational collaboration had focused on the possibility of joining Life and Work with the

World Alliance (the two major "service"-oriented movements) discussions in the "Committee of

Fourteen," later expanded into a "Committee of Thirty-Five," centered on the relation between

Life and Work and Faith and Order. Some older voices, such as Wilfred Monod, as well as the

German Evangelical Church representative Erich Stange, opposed combining the two bodies.[82]

But the strong proposal of consolidation had won out by 1935, propelled in part by Temple's

decision in that year to make his own support for "an interdenominational, international church

council representing all the churches with committees to carry on various projects now forming

the objectives of distinct world movements."[83] In separate meetings in the summer of 1936, Life

and Work and Faith and Order appointed a Committee of Thirty (later thirty-five) representatives

"to review the work of ecumenical cooperation since the Stockholm [Life and Work] and

Lausanne [Faith and Order] conferences and to make recommendations to the Oxford and

Edinburgh conferences regarding the future policy, organization, and work of the ecumenical

movement."[84] These recommendations of the Committee of Thirty-Five held that the two

movements "should be more closely related in a body representatives of the Churches and caring

for the interests of each Movement."[85] The proposal was accepted in a plenary session at Oxford

with two dissenting voices.[86] At Edinburgh, it passed *nem. con.* after the Bishop of Gloucester,

sympathetic to the objections of German bishops to the plan, had succeeded in altering the

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[82] "Second Meeting of the Unofficial Consultative Group of the Oecumenical Movements Paris, August 3-4, 1934," 2 (WCC, 301.001).

[83] Quoted in Visser't Hooft, *Genesis and Formation,* 36.

[84] Quoted in Ibid, 39.

[85] Quoted in Ibid, 39.

[86] Ibid, 43.

language of the resolution to clarify that "some members of this Conference desire to place on record their opposition to this proposal."[87]

The World Council of Churches was not an inevitable product of material factors that made sustaining numerous expensive international outfits untenable after 1928-9. Rather, the particular strategy of consolidation ecumenical leaders pursued reflected ecumenical ideology's specific understanding of theological conversation – the traditional remit of Faith and Order – and social action – the remit of Life and Work. For ecumenists theological discourse was authentically social existence. The management of disagreements and the ethic of openness to the other modeled harmonious pluralism to a secular world hopelessly divided by racial, national, and class conflict. The confrontation with secularism thus suggested to the movement the intellectual plausibility, even desirability, of a more institutionally streamlined international movement at the moment that such consolidation became more of a live possibility than ever.

After the proposals for the Council were accepted by committees of Faith and Order at Edinburgh and Life and Work at Oxford later that summer, a meeting was took place Utrecht in 1938, where delegates from both organizations finalized a constitution, drafted in 1937, for the new body. This group, dubbed the Council's "Provisional Committee," brought into existence an institution that reflected the core ideas of the ecumenical movement as it had taken form over the 1930s. Membership in the WCC would be offered to those "Churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior" – implying, of course, that there were many such churches and

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[87] Quoted in Nils Ehrenstroem, "Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work, 1925-1948," *A History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1517-1948* vol 1 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1954), 433-4.

that no historically extant church was identical with the true church.[88] The Council's functions

would be to facilitate common action by member churches, cultivate cooperative study among

Christians, host world conferences, and "promote the growth of ecumenical consciousness in the

members of all Churches." The new body would carry forward the discussions on ecclesiastical

and doctrinal matters historically advanced by the World Conference on Faith and Order and the

discussions on social ethics advanced in the Universal Council of Life and Work under one

roof.[89]

Representation in the new body would be on a regional basis, reflecting the – sometimes very

rough – estimations of church members in different parts of the world. Continental Europe was

granted the largest number of representatives – 110 – followed by the US (with 90), Great

Britain and Ireland (with 60), 50 from Asia, 25 from Africa, Australia, and South America, and

otherwise not represented. An exception to the regional principle was granted in the case of the

Orthodox Churches, which were given 85 seats. Representatives from church bodies would be

appointed for five years – the amount of time between Assemblies – and regional bodies would

determine what percentage among the allotted spaces in the Assembly would go to which

denominations and churches.[90] A "Central Committee" of 90 representatives, reflecting the same

regional percentages, would meet on a yearly basis to handle the Council's business and issue

pronouncements on a more regular basis, while a smaller "Executive Committee" of the Central

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[88] A position which effectively excluded Rome, which maintained at the time that Christian unity would take place as a return to the true (ie. Roman Catholic) church. The "basis" of the Council was adopted from the basis of the World Conference on Faith and Order. "Constitution for the Proposed World Council of Churches: Unanimously adopted by the Provisional Conference in Utrecht, Holland, May 9-13, 1938," (New York: World Conference on Faith and Order; Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, 1938), 1.

[89] "Constitution for the Proposed World Council of Churches," 3-4.

[90] Ibid, 5-6.

Committee would meet roughly twice a year and would be charged with the practical work of coordinating theological study, executing relief plans, and hiring staff.[91]

That the Council was an expression of the vision of ecumenical community developed in the 1930s was most clearly visible in the section of its constitution outlining the authority of the new body. The section enumerated two powers. The first was the authority to "take action on behalf of constituent Churches on such matters as one or more of them may commit to it." The second was "to call regional and world conferences on specific subjects as occasion may require."[92] As we have seen, the authority to convene discussions among church representatives and to set the agenda of these conversations ("on specific subjects as occasion may require") was essential to ecumenical governance. The third article articulated the limits of this governmental authority: "The World Council shall not legislate for the churches; nor shall it act for them in any manner except as indicated above or as may hereafter be specified by the constituent Churches."[93] An explanatory letter to the constitution written by William Temple elaborated on this point: Council was "not a federation as commonly understood, and its Assembly and Central Committee will have no constitutional authority whatever over its constituent churches."[94] Rather, he wrote it was to be a forum in which churches could freely consent to statements or positions taken in common. "Any authority that [the Council] may have will consist in the

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[91] Ibid, 6-8. The Executive Committee's roles and responsibilities were not laid out in the original constitution.

[92] Ibid, 4.

[93] Ibid, 4.

[94] William Temple, "Explanatory Memorandum on the Constitution of the World Council of Churches" Appendix IV, W. A. Visser't Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982), 109.

weight which it carries with the churches by its own wisdom."[95] According to its architects, then, the World Council was not a "mouthpiece" of non-Roman Christendom, but a vehicle for the emergence of a universal Christian community. Its role was to remove obstacles inhibiting the spontaneous emergence of this "community," through generating personal contacts between representatives from churches across the world. Underwriting its creation was an ideology, not of social progress, against which orthodox theology asserted limits based on original sin, but of ecclesiological progress. And the Council was the instrument: it was assumed that churches would evolve toward greater reliance upon this body and, through it, on one another in their witness on pressing political, religious, and ethical questions of the day.

Those who publicized the Council emphasized that it would provide a powerful institutional opportunity for churches to deliberate and give united voice to certain basic positions of the Christian faith. "The Council will provide a central forum from which expression may be given uncompromisingly to certain universal standards of thought and conduct which Christians everywhere are called upon to follow," announced one pamphlet distributed in the United States to promote fund-raising for the new body.[96]

The most important expositor of the theology behind the Council was its first General Secretary, Visser't Hooft, who guided the body through its natal stage from 1938 to its founding 1948, and would serve as General Secretary until his retirement in 1968. Visser't Hooft spent much of the war reflecting on the significance of the council and its purpose within the larger ecumenical

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[95] Ibid, 109.

[96] "Christian Unity Fund Report," (WCC, 301.002)

movement. Among his many writings on the meaning of the Council and the fellowship it sought to represent and extend, one is particularly useful to us here. In 1945, Visser't Hooft began "The World Council of Churches: Its Nature – Its Limits," an essay he finished early in 1946 and would later publish as part of the Amsterdam conference preparatory documents.[97] The essay interpreted the Council as a body caught between its status as a man-made institution and as an instrument of divine revelation. Visser't Hooft began by clarifying what the organization was *not*. The Council must not be understood, on the one hand, as a representative body with legal authority over the churches, for the simple reason that the Council itself was not a church. It lacked the *notae ecclesiae*, the marks of the church, present in the original Christian *koinonia* depicted in the Acts and the Epistles. Though it was clearly a Christian fellowship of *some* sort, its members lacked "full common witness" – they embraced different and incompatible teachings on Christian worship – and "full sharing in the sacramental life."[98] On the other hand, it was equally misguided to view the Council as "just an organization" which Christians to might use on an ad hoc basis to consider together the problems of unity, to become more familiar with each others traditions, and to collaborate on specific tasks. Though some "practical supporters" of the Council viewed the Council in these purely "human" terms, the Council was in fact more than this because its very existence gave expression to the unity of the *Una Sancta*. The fellowship that both created and was nurtured by the Council was God's fellowship, and its visible

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[97] The pamphlet version of the document printed in 1947 as well as the final version contain comments (mostly laudatory) from Oldham, Cavert, Bell, Van Dusen, and the German pastor Wilhelm Menn. Following the pattern of ecumenical study perfected in the led up to the Oxford Conference, the document was circulated, critiqued, edited, and redrafted before appearing in a volume of preparatory material for the Amsterdam Conference in 1948. The text, and the process that produced it, represented an attempt to formulate an ecumenical understanding of the Council itself, and the substantive claims that Hooft put forward in it highlight better than any other single document how the interwar ecumenical agenda was carried over into the postwar period.

[98] Visser't Hooft, "The Significance of the World Council of Churches," *Man's Disorder and God's Design: The Amsterdam Assembly Series.* vol 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 182.

manifestation was a sign of his working to bring Christians across the world together. "The World Council cannot be a mere organization simply because it is a Council *of Churches*. For the Church in the churches insists on asserting itself. Wherever two or three churches are gathered together, the Una Sancta is in the midst of them and demands to be manifested."[99] By providing a platform for churches from around the world to meet, the Council taught Christians to "[discover] the sickness" of their disunity and to find "something of that clarity and certainty of preaching and witness which characterized the New Testament Church, until they are truly 'becoming the Church' and meet each other on the level of that *metanoia*." What unity the churches might discover through the Council was not man-made but "received" from God, though "that does not mean that man's role is purely passive. We are to look out for [unity] and be constantly ready to receive it."[100] God's revelation of the unity of the church lay wholly with his initiative, but to be receptive to this initiative required action on the part of humans, in this case action of a specifically bureaucratic nature: preparing conferences and reports, executing projects, balancing budgets, and raising the funds that would allow the operation to continue its work of nurturing international contacts among churches. Visser't Hooft thus rehashed a paradoxical theology of grace in the form of a mission statement: "The World Council," Hooft summarized, "is not the Una Sancta, but a means and a method which have no other *raison d'etre* than to be used for the building of the Una Sancta."[101]

IV. From Ecumenical Dialogue to Political Rights

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[99] Ibid, 185.

[100] Ibid, 187.

[101] Ibid, 187.

Late in life, Visser't Hooft averred that the outbreak of World War II occurred "at the worst possible moment" for the ecumenical movement.[102] It is a judgment that unsettles the claims of much recent scholarship, which has generally portrayed the early 1940s as the period of the movement's greatest triumphs and international prestige.[103] In the 1940s, ecumenical groups such the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace in the United States succeeded in making their way into mainstream political culture of the United States and enshrining the "personalist" theology that ecumenists had incubated in the 1930s as a founding principle of the postwar international order, above all in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. When the Universal Declaration stated that "full development of the human personality" was a guiding principle for the conduct of all countries,[104] it did indeed embrace a theological morality that ecumenists, as well as Catholics, had authored and actively sought to popularize. But the political success of the movement's ideas was only one part of the wartime story of the movement, and this success itself was an ambiguous development for those international church elites whose primary interest was the cultivation of world Christian unity. As groups like the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace in the US and its British counterpart, the Peace Aims Group, secured popular support and gained access to Washington and Westminster elites and postwar planning boards, ecumenical dialogue in the specific sense that we have been discussing here – focused on spiritual conversation among Christians from diverse nations and confessions – languished as a result of the disruption of international communication and travel. Further, the

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[102] Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs*, 129.

[103] This presumption appears in part in the fact that most attention to the ecumenical movement focuses on the 1940s, including for instance John Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations : The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) and Gene Zubovich, *The Global Gospel: Protestant Internationalism and American Liberalism, 1940-1960* (PhD Dissertation, UC Berkeley, 2014).

[104] "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," *Basic Documents on Human Rights* ed. Ian Brownlie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 21-7.

shift in attention of theologians and churchmen in Allied countries from ecumenical dialogue to the advocacy of concrete political objectives – such as the creation of a new United Nations Organization and the legal provision for human rights – was a threat to the integrity of the movement, and it was recognized as such by Visser't Hooft, Henry Van Dusen, and others. The war years witnessed, in other words, the emergence of a political movement based on ecumenical ideas but at odds with its defining practices as well as the ideology of anti-secularism itself. For American ecumenists like John Foster Dulles and O. Fredrick Nolde, the powers that mattered for extending Christian influence in the world were not bodies like the World Council in formation but Allied governments and the United Nations. Further, their and other ecumenists' efforts to sell Christian-inspired – but "secular" – principles like human rights to a general public displaced the anti-secular ideology that had been so galvanizing in the preceding decade.[105]

In this section we will counterpoint two stories: the *formation* of a robust ecumenical vision of postwar order and *attenuation* of ecumenical dialogue between 1939 and 1945. We will focus first on the formation of the ecumenical idea of human rights as a political principle, a development which furnished the main objective of ecumenists' advocacy work for postwar order but which was absent – or at best, only implicitly present – in 1930s ecumenical discourse.

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[105] This account of Dulles's role in the ecumenical movement challenges many accounts of the development of his thought. Mark Toulouse (*Transformation of John Foster Dulles: from Prophet of Realism to Priest of Nationalism* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985), Introduction) has argued that Dulles went from a "prophet of realism" to a "priest of nationalism" in the late 1940s, as a result of coming to terms with the gravity of the threat of the Soviet Union after 1948 (and shifting away from the church circles of the ecumenical movement to the political milieux of the Republican Party, and later the State Department). William Inboden has emphasized by contrast the continuity of Dulles "utopian" ideals, suggesting that shift of the late 1940s was "an evolution not a conversion," as Dulles "withdrew his dreams from transnational bodies In both cases, the emphasis is on Dulles's alienation from the Ecumenical Movement and its "internationalist ideals." (William Inboden *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: the Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 227) My account suggests that the framework within which Dulles's later 1940s trajectory took place – one that emphasized human rights as the fundamental Christian political commitment – emerged in 1939. It was the set of ideas about the states role in protecting personhood that he developed in cooperation with ecumenical thinkers that established the conditions in which the later strains in his relation with the movement took place.

We will then examine how the breakdown of international communication dealt a blow to the

World Council-in-formation, and served to isolate groups like Dulles's Commission on a Just

and Durable Peace from the larger ecosystem of ecumenical critique. The purpose of this

narrative is not to suggest that ecumenists opposed the coming of a postwar order that reflected

their ideas – in the early 1940s, the accomplishments of Dulles and others in bringing the

influence of the churches to bear on international affairs was celebrated by Visser't Hooft and

European theologians, even as they lamented how lopsidedly American the study and advocacy

work on postwar order was. The point is rather to suggest that this period brought about a new

relation of the movement to international politics, laying the foundation for the developments we

will explore in the next chapter. The administration of ecumenical discourse was, of course, itself

political, in the sense that institutional elites wielded powers to shape the agenda of the

ecumenical discussion and select who was included in and excluded from these discussions. But

in the 1940s in a new way state power and the power of secular institutions – like the UN –

posed a challenge to ecumenical authorities, *precisely* when the former adopted theological

concepts endorsed by the latter.[106]

The outbreak of hostilities in Europe in 1939 only confirmed what ecumenists had been arguing

about the nature of modern civilization since 1914: that it was characterized by an essentially

moral and spiritual, if not physical, struggle between nations, races, and classes. World War II

did not challenge in any way ecumenists' basic diagnosis of the crisis of modern civilization. But

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[106] This argument attempts to historically locate the emergence of a distinction, first observed by James Kennedy, between the ecumenical program as envisioned by its principal architects and the efforts of John Foster Dulles and other Americans to maximize the political "impact" of ecumenical networks and ideas. See Kennedy, "Protestant Ecclesiastical Internationals," 295-6, see also Michael Thompson's relevant discussion of Dulles in Thompson, chpt 7.

it did affect the ideas and institutions of the movement. In particular, in the collapse of the existing international order, ecumenists saw – and seized – an opportunity to conceive and propagandize new political frameworks that would serve as the bases for a postwar order consonant with the ideas of community life and personal responsibility to God that they had developed in the 1930s. In fact, they began to envision a new international political order even before the existing one had actually collapsed, specifically, in July of 1939, six weeks before the Wehrmacht's invasion of Poland.

On July 14, 35 ecumenical theologians and laypersons gathered at the Beau Séjour Hotel in Geneva. The conference, organized by the World Council-in-formation, included a high caliber cast of theologians such as Emil Brunner and the German Rhineland Lutheran Wilhelm Menn as well as laypersons with experience in international affairs like the British classicist and political scientist Alfred Zimmern, the international lawyer and future Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and Max Huber, the Swiss lawyer attached to the International Court at the Hague, and the Dutch jurist Frederick van Asbeck. Ostensibly, the meeting was convened to consider the role of the churches in halting Europe's drift toward war. During the conversations, the American Congregationalist Alfred W. Palmer suggested that the churches hold a peace conference and arbitrate between Germany and other powers. But the proposal only lead to an acrimonious exchange between Palmer and van Asbeck, who felt that any approach to the "present German government" would be "a gross betrayal of Christianity and of the cultured races."[107] For van Asbeck – and, it turned out, for the majority of attendees – the more promising path seemed to lie in the long game. Needed were new kinds of international organizations that

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[107] "The Churches and the International Crisis," [Minutes of a Meeting Convened by the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches, July 14-19, 1939], 29. (WCC, 24.012)

would make ecumenical norms and principles operative in inter-state relations. Surveying the

prospect of immanent war, the conversation turned to the specifics of international political

organization in a way that earlier ecumenical discussions had not.

The meeting began with a discussion of the role of Christian morality in interstate relations.

Shaped by different theological and sociological backgrounds, Anglo-American and Continental

churches had clashed over this question in the 1930s, and their disagreements flared up quickly

at the meeting. Wilhelm Menn opened the conversation with a sustained defense of the position

that the church could claim "no compelling power, even in the spiritual sense." It represented

rather a community of the redeemed, a body set apart from the world of nations which looked

forward to and prefigured the harmonious society to come. Menn's Lutheran pessimism drew

fire from Alfred Zimmern, who contended that it left no room for a Christian understanding of

"law" – the principle of a difference between the just or unjust use of force. William Paton

similarly assailed Menn's position for denying that what happens within the "small group and the

individual soul" of Christians would not in some way "bubble up" to have a tangible effect even

on international relations. And yet this was the difficulty: by what standards could the actions of

states be judged to be in line with the Christian faith? Palmer put his finger on the problem when

he observed that there was a categorical difference between the standards to which individuals

and states ought to be held. "Our problem is that while we have to deal not only with

individuals," but with organized groups:

> these artificial persons, corporations, groups, etc., do not accept responsibilities which
> individuals composing them would often accept as their ethical responsibility... Though
> we do accept the Christian ethics as individuals, how far can we carry that Christian
> ethical standard over to the behaviour of our governments[?][108]

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[108] Ibid, 4.

The answer given to this question at Beau Séjour differed in critical respects from any answer that movement advocates had given in the 1930s. In line with their emphasis on theological over political solutions to international disorder, ecumenical intellectuals had stressed that there could be no specifically political solution to the problem of sovereignty, since that problem was at root spiritual and not political. The 1937 Oxford Conference Report on "The Universal Church and the World of Nations" – which participants were asked to re-read before coming to Geneva in July – had identified the church's "contribution" to international politics along these lines. Christians' collective role was to not to advocate for this or that political form but to cultivate, through their preaching and witness, an ecumenical "ethos:" a pre-legal and pre-political sense of responsibility, a respect for lawfulness as such without which all legal regimes were destined to be empty formulae. But in 1939, with the destruction of existing political and legal institutions seemingly imminent, ecumenists showed a new willingness to take on the question of what a legal reflection of theological ethos would look like.

Was there a way to enshrine "personal" moral responsibility in the conduct of impersonal states? Toward the end of the first session, Emil Brunner suggested that there might be. His proposal took the form of a via media between Menn's eschatology and Paton's qualified historicism. "What you want," he said, addressing Paton, "is that something of the Christian Church should be manifested in the political world." But "truly Christian standards" of selflessness and unconditional love were unrealizable where states deal with one another; by insisting on their application the churches merely guaranteed their own impotence. Like the philosopher returning to the cave, Brunner suggested that the church "go down to a level which is applicable to the political world." What was needed was a set of standards that could apply specifically to

relations between states, thus ensuring that some residue of Christian ethics might seep up from the realm of personal to international relations. Brunner called these standards a "moral minimum," contrasting them to the "ethical maximum" that applied to individual persons. "We have to fix as a principle this: We as Christians have a vital interest in the problem of a moral minimum. At present there is no ethics whatever recognized and the recognition of some standards is much more than speaking in general about the highest Christian ideals."[109]

The next day the idea was taken up by John Foster Dulles. A moral minimum, he argued, carried its nearest approximation in the idea of states' responsibility to uphold certain individual "rights." It was a term that had played little role in ecumenical thinking on international order up until that time. Churches had long seen as one of their common interests the protection of "religious liberty" and "rights of conscience," but Dulles now was referring to a more capacious idea of rights and yoking it not just to missionary interests but to the very possibility of taming power politics. Dulles construed a regime of individual rights as the legal expression of Brunner's concept of a minimum morality and hence the only possible way to bring international relations into line with Christian principles. If states could be made to protect the "dignity and worth of individual persons,"[110] they could be harnessed to the Christian cause. Nor was it fantasy to believe that they could be so conscripted: to prove his point, Dulles pointed to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of the United States' Constitution. Drawing a comparison between slavery in the antebellum American South and the contemporary Nazi persecution of Jews and other non-Aryans, Dulles argued that the crimes of both regimes lay in the fact that

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[109] Ibid, 5-6.

[110] Ibid, 7.

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while assuming a power over all the people within its jurisdiction, [the government] did not treat them all with equal worth and dignity… certain persons, because of racial characteristics, such as the Jews, or the Czechs, when incorporated [into the political order] were incorporated as subjects. That was a denial of the equal worth of the individual.[111]

A state's protection of its own citizens' "worth and dignity" required establishing political and legal rights for all citizens. It was not only in the realm of racial justice that individual rights mattered. Since power was projected not only within states but also across international borders, responsibility also had a global dimension. In their pursuit of markets and natural resources in particular, states "exercise in fact an economic power that very far transcends their responsibility." In Dulles vision states needed to be made responsible not only to those "who are subject to its laws," but to the dignity and worth of all peoples, which by implication included the protection of certain economic rights (though he left these undeveloped).

The Beau Séjour meeting would go on for another two days, but the basic framework of the report was set by the conjuncture Brunner's demarcation of a distinct subcategory of Christian ethics and Dulles's appeal to a concept of limited government. The report broadly followed Dulles's formulation. Concretely that meant preserving a space for the claims of personal morality in what the report termed "the hard impersonal world of states." The report argued that all human beings – even non-Christians – could subscribe to this vision of international relations based on certain "fundamental principles."

> Among [these fundamental principles] must be included the equal dignity of all men, respect for human life, acknowledgement of the solidarity of good and evil of all nations

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[111] Ibid, 7.

and races of the earth, respect for the plighted word, and the recognition that power of any kind, political or economic, must be co-extensive with responsibility.[112]

The "moral minimum" of inter-state relations was to be realized, according to the first "Christian principle" enumerated in the report, in the idea that "power should always be exercised with a full sense of responsibility" for the equal worth and dignity of all human beings. From this it followed that all citizens deserve certain equal rights before the law, though the report, acknowledging that more "clarification on this point was needed," contented itself with indicating the purpose of such rights rather than enumerating specific ones. "The ruling power should not deny essential rights to human beings on the ground of their race or class or religion or culture or any such distinguishing characteristic." The purpose of these protections was not to liberate individuals from moral and ethical standards but – to the contrary – to safeguard a space in which persons could submit themselves to the ethical responsibilities of Christian love. "The function of the Christian ruler is to use his responsibility as to render those, under whom his power extends, themselves more fully responsible thereby adding to their human dignity and enabling them better to fulfill their social duties as men and Christians."[113] The responsible use of power also required cooperation among states. "If Christian principles of national conduct are to be made effective there must be some form of international organization which will provide the machinery of conference and cooperation." This international organization was needed on the one hand to "prevent isolated outbreaks of violence and on the other to bring to bear the public opinion of all nations in order to make effective the principle of justice between individual

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[112] "Churches and the International Crisis: A Memorandum Prepared by an international conference of lay experts and ecumenical leaders convened in July, 1939, by the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches" (New York: Federal Council of Churches, 1939), 8.

[113] Ibid, 11.

nations."[114] International cooperation would also redress economic inequalities: a short appendix

to the report indicated that a particular area of concern was that power over colonies and

mandated territories be used more responsibly – ie. in the economic interests of the

inhabitants.[115]

The fundamental principles of the Beau Séjour report reflected ecumenical theologies of

personhood. Significantly, however, the report asserted that accepting these principles required

only common moral sense, not personal faith. "While it is our Christian faith which urges us to

adhere to these principles they are of such a character that many who do not profess the Christian

faith, but are equally bewildered by the openly proclaimed moral anarchy, will respond with

cordial assent."[116] The political inscription of theological personhood blunted the anti-secular

polemic that produced the concept of personhood in the first place. The conference report

evinced some discomfort with this realization, acknowledging, in a passage that Brunner drafted,

that "the Church can never be satisfied with urging such directions upon all its members. It has a

greater message for the world, the word of redemption and eternal life." But the exigency of

imminent war suggested now that the churches had a responsibility to lay down the foundations

of a political order that, if it would not redeem the world, would at least rein in the chaos of

international competition. The Christian message "will not be taken seriously if the Church does

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[114] Ibid, 11-12.

[115] Ibid, 19.

[116] Ibid, 8.

not earnestly impress upon its members the standards of political conduct which are derived from Christianity."[117]

At least one participant was less sure. Max Huber, the international lawyer whose essay for Oxford had developed the concept of a pre-legal "ethos," explicitly dissented from the report's findings. Arriving two days after the conference began, there was little he could do about this but criticize drafts that were already written when he got there. The church, he said, "has to say to the world a specifically Christian word." By advancing principles that could "win assent" from non-Christians, it had betrayed its vocation. "<u>This specific Christian element is not represented in our message,</u>" he declared, so emphatically that the minute-taker found fit to underline the statement. "Two-thirds of it could have could have been said as well by any well-intentioned non-Christian people. To a large extent [the report is] a secular message."[118] For Huber, the statement erased any pretense to be a message *of the church*, since it renounced the specificity and exclusivity of Christian truth in pursuit of principles that could become the basis of an overlapping consensus of Christian and non-Christian worldviews alike. Similar objections, as we'll see, emerged from other quarters of the movement during the War.

The Beau Séjour consensus furnished a concept of rights that churchmen made central to their proposals on postwar international order between 1940 and 1945, especially in the US and Great Britain. As the historian John Nurser has written, Dulles, as well as his colleague and friend Roswell Barnes, General Secretary of the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) and also a Beau

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[117] Ibid, 8. For the ascription of these lines to Brunner, see William Paton, *The Church and the New Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 63.

[118] "The Churches and the International Crisis," Minutes, 36.

Séjour attendee, returned to New York with "clear indications of the directions in which the body of participants wished to move."[119] William Paton similarly took the Beau Séjour reports as a foundation for the ecumenical study on postwar order in Britain, where he formed the Peace Aims Group, which became the major conduit connecting churches and state officials involved in postwar planning. During the early 1940s, these groups became leading advocates of the idea that a postwar order must ensure that states were held accountable to and protected certain "rights" regardless of their internal political form. This is not the place to trace their activism – culminating in the success of John Foster Dulles, Charles Malik, and O. Fredrick Nolde in inserting a personalist language in the UN Charter in 1945 and, in 1948, drafting critical sections of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, including Article 18 on religious liberty – in detail, a task which in any case has already been taken up by other scholars.[120] It must suffice here to note that the condition of possibility for their proposals was the innovation of a "moral minimum" of rights. The idea enabled a positive political program to take shape out of a discourse of anti-secular critique.

When the Federal Council of Churches convened for its biennial meeting in December 1940, it condemned the outbreak of war in Europe while issuing a note of hope: after the hostilities "there will assuredly emerge the opportunity for a world order which, even though it be far from perfect, will at least be an improvement on that which preceded it."[121] That world order must be one "wherein the unit of value is not some body corporate or some personification of the nation,

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[119] Nurser, 51.

[120] For example, Linde Lindkvist, *Shrines and Souls: The Reinvention of Religious Liberty and the Genesis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Malmö: Bokbox, 2014); Nurser, *For All Peoples and Nations*; Kenneth Cmiel, "Review Essay: The Recent History of Human Rights" *American Historical Review* 109, 1 (2004) 117-135.

[121] Quoted in Paton, 64.

race, or class, but the individual human being." There followed an enumeration of "certain rights and duties" that had to be guaranteed to individual persons in keeping with their dignity, "including freedom of thought, of conscience, of worship and of expression, and an opportunity for livelihood, without which intellectual and spiritual freedoms have little practical content." The 1940 meeting also formally established the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace, which would go on to become the principal mouthpiece of American Protestantism on postwar order. The Commission's "Six Pillars of Peace," written by Dulles in 1943, declared, as its final and arguably most fundamental "political principle" that "the peace must establish in principle, and seek to achieve in practice, the right of individuals everywhere to religious and intellectual liberty."

In Britain, too, the Beau Séjour framework had a powerful impact on the churches thinking on postwar order. In his work *The Church and the New Order* (1941), Paton, organizer of the Peace Aims Group, outlined the church's "consensus… with respect to postwar arrangements." Reviewing key sections of the Beau Séjour report – a document which he observed "likely would not have gained won acceptance at the Oxford Conference"[122] – and American and British utterances on postwar order, Paton wrote that they witnessed "remarkable agreement" on the proposition that "There are basic human rights and these lie deeper than political systems. It is therefore more important to fasten attention upon them than upon systems of government, important as the ethical grounds of democratic government may be held to be."[123] From 1940-1943, the Peace Aims Group and Dulles's Commission exchanged reports and sought consensus

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[122] Paton, 66.

[123] Ibid, 66.

in their recommendations for a postwar order. Despite disagreements over the shape of an

international organization – the British churches favored early on a body under Great Power

leadership while the Americans called for a general association of nations that would include

smaller powers[124] – the Atlantic Allies agreed on the importance of human rights with an

emphasis on religious liberty. When Dulles released his Six Pillars of Peace, it was welcomed

"unreservedly" by the Peace Aims Commission which largely concurred with its vision of world

order.[125] Most strikingly in Britain and the US, human rights had become the political language

of ecumenical personalism.

For our purposes, however, the significance of the idea of human rights as a consensus objective

of the ecumenical movement lies how it enabled the institutionalization of forms of activism that

diverged from the ecumenical practices that we have examined thus far in this chapter. The Beau

Séjour conference and its successors did not present their findings as invitations to debate but as

precisely the kind of theological (or moral) "minimum" that Keller had attacked in his work of

the 1930s. As a principle of political organization, rights per se were not up for contestation. Nor

were groups like the Dulles Commission or the Peace Aims group intended for or suited to

promoting specifically theological discussion. They were founded as intermediary institutions,

whose role would be to link ecumenical thinking to the world of political action and institution-

building. As Paton put it, the Peace Aims Group's method was "to establish friendly confidential

relations between those who know something of the Christian consensus and the experts who are

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[124] Zubovich, 44-5.

[125] "A Christian Basis for Reconstruction," 1 (WCC, 26.11.41/4)

advising the government with respect to post-war arrangements."[126] In late 1939 and early 1940,

Paton began to assemble a group of thinkers who would meet regularly throughout the war.

Arnold Toynbee, director of studies at Chatham house, was a participant. John Hope Simpson

and Alfred Zimmern, prominent figures of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, also took

part in the group, as did William Temple (Archbishop of Canterbury after 1942), and George

Bell, Bishop of Chichester. Following discussions at its first meeting in the winter of 1939, Paton

wrote optimistically to Temple that the group offered a promising channel for the extension of

church influence on British policy, highlighting the importance of Arnold Toynbee, and through

him, Chatham House's involvement in particular.

> The group were extremely keen that this should be done and again and again expressed
> their sense of its importance…. You know of course, that all these men are working
> under the aegis of the Chatham House, but in quite close contact with the Foreign Office.
> …I am quite clear that there is open to us a method of work whereby the results of
> informed Christian thinking would be taken into serious account at least by our own
> Government.[127]

The Peace Aims group met regularly throughout the War, but its influence met with two

obstacles. First, Winston Churchill resisted any formal declaration of peace aims until the war

was won. Second, Paton, its major organizer, and Temple, its most prominent participating

cleric, both died during the War, (the former in 1943, the latter in 1944), and without them the

group struggled to sustain its work without a standing institutional structure.[128] It was, in any

case, by way of the United States that political principles derived from Beau Séjour would find

their widest international impact.

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[126] Philip M. Coupland, *Britannia, Europa and Christendom : British Christians and European Integration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 31

[127] Coupland, 31-2.

[128] Nurser, 52.

The Commission on a Just and Durable Peace embraced a method similar to that of the Peace Aims Group. In comparison to its British counterpart, it was more focused on the work of mobilizing not just elite policy-makers but popular opinion as well. The FCC Executive Committee described its goals in January 1941 as follows: to establish the "foundations of an enduring peace," ready 'the people of our churches and of our nation' to assume responsibility for this peace," keep contact with the WCC's Study Department, and consider proposals for a gathering of international church leaders following the conflict.[129] In practice, the Commission proved effective in shaping national debate over the war, advocating for American support of Britain before Pearl Harbor, and mobilizing publics through events like "World Order Day" to accept American leadership in the world. This group's study papers and statements were widely distributed to congregations and parishes and the media. It also occupied an important part in the semi-official think-tank world that clustered around James T. Shotwell's Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, itself already active in the late 1930s. Dulles's contacts in the Republican Party, with the White House, and with the State Department ensured that his Commission's proposals received a hearing at the highest levels. As Michael Thompson has recently put it, Dulles's priority in these activities was to make the churches "brokers" of public opinion. Toward this end, ecumenical study occupied a necessary, but secondary role. The major concern was not to for churchmen to arrive at the "mind of the church" through international dialogue but to impress one determination of this mind, in the form of specific recommendations or guidelines for a postwar order, in broader American and international publics, as well as governing elites.[130]

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[129] Quoted in Ibid, 58.

[130] Thompson, 175.

As the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace extended its publicity efforts and its contacts with the State Department postwar planning bodies, the economy of ecumenical intellectual exchange in which its vision of postwar order had been nurtured was grinding to halt by 1941-2. The War, which created opportunities for ecumenists to win a hearing with state actors, made international discussion among ecumenists in the North Atlantic difficult. Throughout the 1940s contact between US and UK study groups on international order remained intact. But Visser't Hooft and Henry Van Dusen fretted over the isolation of Anglo-American church groups from Asia and the occupied European Continent. Beginning in 1939, Visser't Hooft, Schönfeld, and Ehrenström of the WCC-in-formation Study Department initiated two new ecumenical study programs: one devoted to the "The Church's Responsibility for International Order" – which was envisioned as an extension of the discussions held at Beau Séjour – and another devoted to the "Ethical Reality and Task of the Church," a broader meditation on the function of the church in modern society. Memoranda outlining the two study programs, drafted by Ehrenström and Visser't Hooft, were sent out to church leaders in the US, Europe, and Asia in 1939. But while theologians in the US, Britain, India and – thanks to copies smuggled into Germany, Hungary, France, Holland and Yugoslavia – the European Continent as well produced responses to these memoranda,[131] these were written months, sometimes years apart, and Geneva found it impossible to circulate them broadly. An operation of Oxford-like efficiency was out of the question after 1940.

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[131] For a collection of these responses received by Geneva, see WCC, 301.1.03.

Van Dusen feared that the breakdown of communication was compromising American groups' ability to represent a truly ecumenical perspective and threatening the ability of the movement to unite Churches to resist national mobilization and propaganda. It was "crucial," he wrote in a letter sent out to veterans of earlier ecumenical study programs in July of 1940, that the churches keep apprised of one another's thinking on the conflict and on questions relating to the postwar situation: "[I]f non-Roman Christendom is to exert any important influence upon world events in the years immediately ahead, it must be prepared for by continuous ecumenical discussion now."[132] These efforts of coordination were persistently frustrated by disruptions of the post, especially between 1940 and 1942, when letters took any where from three weeks to four months to travel between New York and Geneva. Seven months later after Van Dusen's circular announcing the need for coordinated thought during war time, he sent Visser't Hooft a folio of American responses to the memo on "The Ethical Reality of the Church" for comment from European theologians. After a year of only intermittent communication with Geneva, during which he had received no written reflections on the American papers, Van Dusen wrote a distressed letter to Visser't Hooft, fearing that the success of the study program – and with it the integrity of the movement as a whole – was on the line. "With regard to the American collaborators, we cannot too strongly stress the keen, indeed, almost bitter disappointment of our workers here over the failure to receive from Geneva any reaction to the Chicago Group's memorandum on the Ethical Reality of the Church," Visser't Hooft, for his part, echoed Van Dusen's concerns. While supportive of the Dulles Commissions' efforts, Visser't Hooft lamented in 1944 that the "the study of these questions continues to suffer from the fact that while the

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[132] Van Dusen/Unlisted Recipients, July 10, 1940 (WCC 24.016/1)

Anglo-Saxon Churches are able to express themselves freely on these matters, and make

excellent use of these opportunities, the churches in other countries cannot speak out."[133]

During the War there were a handful of responses to the American and British churches'

proposals for postwar order from the European Continent. Groups did convene in Switzerland,

Holland, and Hungary to discuss documents produced by the Dulles Commissions, including

"Six Pillars of Peace."[134] None of these documents expressed direct disagreements with the

Commissions findings or proposals; indeed many of the groups supported the idea, hardly

objectionable in itself, of a postwar order that would ensure rights of the person and limit

"totalitarian" state power. But ecumenists did regularly note the concern that had animated

Huber's objection at Beau Séjour. Proposing political institutions, wrote Ehrenström in a critique

of a precursor to the Dulles Commissions' "Six Pillars of Peace," ought to be secondary to the

church's distinctive task of proclaiming the Gospel.[135] Moreover, he noted that apparent

agreement on political proposals imperiled the ecumenical cause, since it obscured deeper

disagreements between Christians. Christians may agree on principles, but they approach them

from a different angle, so they have different implications "in the field of concrete policy," he

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[133] Visser't Hooft, "Report on Activities During the Period July 1943-1944," [unpublished memorandum], 8. (WCC, 994.2.10)

[134] For the response of Swiss study group [members no identified] to Dulles' Commission, see "Comments on the 'Six Pillars of Peace' of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America," Nov, 1943 (WCC, 24.013); For a Dutch memorandum on postwar order, see "The Church and the International World," December 1942 (WCC, 301.1.03). For the Hungarian Oecumenical Council's response to a WCC document analyzing of churches' "agreements and disagreements" concerning postwar order, see "The Church and International Reconstruction," Feb 1944 [signed by A. Radvénsky, Laudislaus Ravas, and E. de Boér] (WCC, 24.014)

[135] The document was a report of the "Delaware Conference" of the Federal Council of Churches on "A Just and Durable Peace," held March 3-5 1942 at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio. See "Guiding Principles" of that report (pp. 4-9). For the an account of the significance of the meeting in the brokering of a compromise between American Protestant realists and pacifists, see David Hollinger, "The Realist-Pacifist Summit Meeting of March 1942 and the Political Reorientation of Ecumenical Protestantism in the United States" *Church History* 79.3 (Sept 2010), 654-677.

wrote.[136] Ecumenical study ought to seek to excavate the disagreements that were masked by

agreements on the level of principle. Visser't Hooft himself regularly objected during the War

that Dulles's thinking on postwar order had too much a political slant too it; the American failed

to grasp that as a result of the war Europeans had wholly lost a "common ethos" that was

necessary to build a postwar order; in particular in Nazi Germany, the Christian morality that had

formed the basis of the old order had been entirely whipped out. Far more important than

proposing new political mechanisms was – as Huber had argued and as Dulles acknowledged but

tended to soft-peddle – the churches' work of the cultivation of a common ethos.[137]

On one of the rare occasions when Continental churchmen had the opportunity to meet with

members of the Dulles Commission – at a meeting in New York in 1941 – Adolf Keller echoed

these concerns about his appraisal of the Americans efforts. At issue was the irony that principles

claiming validity for all peoples, creeds, and nations always obscured hegemonic intentions. As

he had written ten years before, Christian theology uniquely provided the idiom for a truly

ecumenical understanding of others, one that penetrated further than tendentious claims

concerning the universal validity of "rights." "We must make an effort to understand the deeper

nature and subconscious psychology of other nations. It is not enough to project our 'imago' of

what they are, upon their inner deeper life and values. A constant attempt of a deeper translation

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[136] N[ils]. E[hrenstroem], "Some Introductory Notes on the Delaware Report," 2-3 (WCC, 24.013/2)

[137] See for instance Visser't Hooft's analysis of the Dulles Commission's "Long Range Peace Objectives" in "Notes on 'Long Range Peace Objectives' from a Continental Standpoint," [unpublished memorandum], 1941 (WCC, 994.2.08). For Visser't Hooft's emphasis on the need for Christians to focus on the cultivation of an ethos over establishing political organizations (especially in Germany), see Visser't Hooft, "Third Memorandum on the Reconstruction of Christian Institutions in Europe," [unpublished memorandum], 1944 (WCC, 994.2.10), and Visser't Hooft, "Germany and the West," March 1940 [first draft] (WCC, 24.017)

of another life must therefore accompany our moral judgment and political activity."[138] That "deeper translation" was what the American project was lacking.

Conclusion

"It is true," wrote Visser't Hooft in a memorandum of May 1943, that "in spite of its provisional character, the Council has been able to function in different realms. But the uncertainty of its present position is nevertheless a real handicap." The lack of ability to communicate among churches meant that, "as things are at present, the Council lacks the necessary authority to speak and to act. And if in spite of this lack of this lack of official authority it speaks or acts anyway, it remains unclear in whose name it does so." It was understandable that the War had delayed the first assembly and official founding of the World Council. Visser't Hooft noted too that the War had actually drawn the churches "spiritually" closer together; though separated and incommunicado, they felt themselves fortified by the idea of a Christian fellowship deeper than the lines of conflict. Nonetheless, without regular and direct exchange, the "mind" of the church was at risk of becoming divided within itself, even as the moral capital of the world church appreciated among broader publics in the US and Europe. This created a situation with hidden dangers. "A Council which is 'forbidden to act in the name of the Churches except in so far as all or any of them have commissioned it to do so' is in danger of making the wrong start if it does not associate its member churches as early as possible and as fully as possible with its planning and shaping of policy."[139]

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[138] Quoted in Thompson, 175.

[139] "Post-war Task of the World Council of Churches," May 1943 [unpublished memorandum held in Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary, dated], 6

Visser't Hooft was surveying the future of the movement from the perspective of the principles upon which it had been founded it in the 1930s. In that period, ecumenism emerged as a discursive practice that asserted Christianity's superiority over secularism as a capacity to forge community from difference, unity within disagreement, a pluralistic order where secular assumptions only produced social disorder on the micro level of individual alienation or the macro level of conflicts between nations, races, and classes. Theology was the unique idiom that could "hold the world together," as John MacKay had put it, and even as the efforts to organize a theological discourse inscribed exclusions and operated on a politics of its own, ecumenists carefully guarded the border between theological discourse and political discourse. During the War, however, seeing the collapse of existing order as an opportunity to formulate their own alternative, ecumenists began to imagine a legal and political framework that would not challenge but enshrine their vision of personal community. Their idea of a postwar order in which states would be held accountable to universal rights at once instantiated personalist theology and created obstacles for the ecumenical practices on which this theology was based. In the next chapter, we will see how the space for theological pluralism shrunk still further as the movement found it increasingly difficult to ignore the political implications of an ecumenical community.

Chapter 5

From Unity to Discord: The World Council of Churches in the Cold War

Between 1940 and 1945, the ecumenical movement reached the apogee of its international

prestige. During World War II, groups such as the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace in

the United States and the Peace Aims Group in Great Britain had established "the churches" as

serious players in Allied debates over postwar international order. Ecumenists' vision of a world

order based on the protection of human rights and religious liberty won backing from statesmen

and publics and was written into the United Nations Charter and Universal Declaration on

Human Rights. After 1945, the attention of the movement's leadership shifted to preparations for

the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches, begun in the late 1930s but delayed during

the War. Even before hostilities had ceased, despite the disruption of international

communication, requests for membership in the inchoate body flowed steadily into its Geneva

headquarters. By 1939 – one year after the first invitations had been sent out – 55 churches had

joined the "World Council in formation," 90 had joined by 1946, and 147 had joined by the time

of the Council's inaugural Assembly in 1948.[1] Consistent with its interwar position toward the

Movement, the Roman Catholic Church declined membership, holding that Christian unity

meant return to the true church. But for ecumenists the stalemate with Rome was a sideshow to

dazzling new successes. In addition to all mainline Protestant Churches in the United States, all

major state and free churches in Europe, Orthodox communions from Constantinople to Iraq and

India, as well as numerous "younger churches" from Asia, Africa, and South America had

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[1] Regular reports were prepared on churches that had accepted and rejected the invitation. See the document entitled
"Churches that Have Accepted the Invitation," July 1939 (UTS, William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library
Collection, Series 1B, box 13, for 1946 numbers, see "Minutes of the Meeting of the Provisional Committee,
Geneva, Feb 20-3, 1946" (WCC, 301.006).

agreed to send delegates to the Assembly. For the clerical and intellectual leadership of

Protestant and much of the Eastern Orthodox Christendom, the ecumenical movement's efforts

to organize the activities and utterances of a "world church," incorporating all denominations,

nations, classes, and races, reflected a galvanizing vision of Christianity's future.

Among the greatest and most symbolic of the movement's postwar triumphs came in Germany.

As we've seen in previous chapters, the split between German and Allied Protestants brought

about by the First World War was a trauma that inspired many of the impassioned efforts to

organize international Christian unity in the 1920s and 1930s. But in 1945 it seemed like a long

struggle for Allied-German unity had finally come to an end. In October of that year, German

bishops gathered in war-flattened Stuttgart to reconstitute the Evangelical Church in Germany,

and promptly voted this body into the World Council. Led by veterans of the Confessing Church,

the German churches also issued a statement acknowledging its complicity in the "endless

suffering" Germany had inflicted upon the world.[2] The Council's General Secretary, Willem A.

Visser't Hooft, was ecstatic: "If the German church would speak this language," he later wrote,

"all obstacles to fellowship would be overcome."[3] The holding of the WCC's inaugural assembly

in Amsterdam in August 1948, a gathering widely hailed in the secular and religious press of the

North Atlantic world as "the greatest gathering of churches since the Reformation," only

confirmed these hopes.[4]

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[2] "Declaration of the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany" (WCC, 37.0004). For the original text and translation, see (http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/projects/niem/StuttgartDeclaration.htm)

[3] Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 191

[4] "No Pentecost." *Time*, no. 11 (September 13, 1948), 52. The personal reactions of those who attended echoed this line more ecstatically: Amsterdam was "the greatest event since the Reformation," declared Dr. A. R. Wentz, President of the Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary ("Dr. Wentz Says Amsterdam's Events Will Shape History,"

But if the late 1940s marked a high point for the project of world Christian unity, the period also

witnessed the emergence of new fault lines between and within the churches that ecumenists

sought to mobilize. The Cold War, as the historian Dianne Kirby has argued, was a "religious

war," in which appeals to Christian values and responsibility in particular were central in

defining the stakes of the struggle and in marshalling public opinion on both sides.[5] To be sure,

in this struggle, the West relied most heavily on the "spiritual weapons" furnished by the

concepts, rhetoric, and rituals of the Christian faith. In the United States and Western Europe,

religious and political leaders routinely cast their governments as the defenders of religious

liberty and values as well as "Christian civilization" itself against the "godless" Soviet Union.[6]

But in the Communist sphere as well, Eastern European and Chinese regimes sought out and

found church leaders willing to lend their support to the new regime and to justify political

allegiance to Communism on theological grounds. In the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox

Church – systematically suppressed for two decades following the Revolution – was rehabilitated

during the Patriotic War and became in the later 1940s an important ally of Soviet imperium in

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Gettysburg Times, Oct 4, 1948. See also a summary of secular and religious press coverage in H. Paul Douglass, "Some American Reactions to Amsterdam," *Ecumenical Review*, vol. 1 no. 3 (Spring 1949).

[5] Dianne Kirby, Introduction, *Religion and the Cold War* ed Diane Kirby (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

[6] Kirby's own work has prominent in emphasizing religion as a basis of ideological anti-communism. See Dianne Kirby "Harry S. Truman's International Religious Anti-Communist Front, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the 1948 Inaugural Assembly of the World Council of Churches" *Contemporary British History* (2001) 15 (4). 35-70. See also Jeremy Gunn, T., *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009); Philip M. Coupland, *Britannia, Europa and Christendom : British Christians and European Integration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

the East.[7] Not merely a war between "godless" communism and the "god-fearing and free," the Cold War was a struggle pitting rival Christianities against one another.

In this field of intra-Christian conflict, the World Council presented itself as a mediating body. Against attempts to align Christian interests with one side or the other, ecumenists argued that the world church's unique concern lay in the reconciliation of peoples and nations in the East and the West through the discovery of their common faith. As Visser't Hooft explained in 1949, "the first concern of the World Council," in the area of international politics "must be that neither the ecumenical movement as a whole nor the churches individually shall identify themselves to such an extent with any social or political ideology that religion becomes exploited for purely secular, political ends."[8] Its task "must be," he continued, to maintain unity among Christian churches "even though, and precisely when, they arrive at divergent solutions to their relation to the State and the social order."[9] In the years between 1945 and 1950, Visser't Hooft and his colleagues in the Geneva office of the Council devoted their energies to promoting dialogue, cooperation, and common worship between church leaders in the East and the West. They assailed the anti-Communist direction in US foreign policy and Eastern violations against "religious liberty" alike, while celebrating institutions such as the United Nations as a mechanism for the peaceful resolution of tensions between the West and the Soviet Union. International church organizations, according to their architects and leaders, were frameworks in which Christianity

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[7] Daniela Kalkandjieva, *The Russian Orthodox Church, 1917-1948: From Decline to Resurrection*, (London ; New York: Routledge, 2014). For a study of the epistemological dilemmas posed by religion's persistence in the atheist Soviet Union, see Sonja Luehrmann, *Religion in Secular Archives: Soviet Atheism and Historical Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[8] Visser't Hooft, "An Ecumenical Approach to the Soviet-Western Tensions," *Christian Responsibility in World Affairs*, 1949, 16.

[9] Visser't Hooft "Ecumenical Approach," 16.

could be interpreted and practiced as a "non-political" third way in an era of geopolitical polarization.

For some scholars, the position of the World Council in the Cold War seems to mark the recrudescence within the movement of a liberal idealism that rested faith in the power of morality to tame power politics.[10] In fact, the position of movement in the Cold War reflected the continuing centrality of the anti-secular discourse whose origins and development we have traced in previous chapters. In this discourse, secularism was conceived as a worldview and way of life, premised on the rejection of God and modern man's quest for "self-sufficiency," that was responsible for a global breakdown of social and international order. Finding expression not only in the "totalitarian" regimes of Communism and Fascism, but also in the ideologies of nationalism, liberalism, and humanism in the West, secularism as ecumenists understood it was not concentrated in any area of the globe, political allegiance, social movement, nation, or class. In the postwar period, ecumenists read the conflict between Western powers and the Soviet Union as the latest instantiation of this global menace. As Martin Wight, the British international theorist, Anglican layman, and an editor of the WCC's periodical the *Ecumenical Review*, put it, it was in the contemporary international sphere, above all in the competition between the West and the Soviet Union, "that the demonic concentrations of power of the modern neo-pagan world have their clearest expression."[11] While anti-communists in the West isolated the threat of secularism politically and geographically in the Soviet Union, ecumenists like Wight and

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[10] This line of interpretation is especially marked in William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Andrew Preston, "Peripheral visions: American mainline Protestants and the global Cold War," *Cold War History* 13, no. 1 (2013): 109–30.

[11] Martin Wight, "The Church, Russia, and the West," *Ecumenical Review,* vol. 1, no. 1 (1949), 30.

Visser't Hooft rejected the idea that Soviet Communism was the only, or even the primary, enemy of the faith. They wove polemic against "totalitarian" Communism within a broader critique that also attacked the materialistic tendencies of western capitalism and of geopolitical power struggle per se. At the Amsterdam Assembly, ecumenists gave this vision succinct expression when they stated, in one of the gathering's most publicized reports, that "the Christian churches should reject the ideologies of both communism and capitalism, and should seek to draw men away from the false assumption that these extremes are the only alternatives."[12]

But if there is a conspicuous continuity between the ecumenical movement's ideological program before and after World War II, there were stark differences in the impact of this program on the landscape of international Christian ideas and institutions. In the interwar period, ecumenical anti-secularism succeeded in fostering the global integration of Protestant and Eastern Orthodox intellectual life and a new sense of international solidarity among non-Roman churches. It enabled the formation of new organizations such as the World Council. In the period between 1945 and 1950, by contrast, the anti-secular ideology ecumenical advocates shared *failed* to produce greater harmony within the movement. Rather, it provided a minimum framework of shared assumptions that only served to underscore the obduracy of political disagreements between church leaders from Western and Communist states. Agreement on first principles proved insufficient for resolving movement loyalists' divergent judgments on international events and crises – including the imprisonment of religious dissidents in Eastern Europe, the Communist Revolution in China, and above all, the Korean War. In the postwar period, these clashes moved to the foreground of ecumenical conversation. As a consequence,

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[12] "The Church and the Disorder of Society," Report of Section III of the Amsterdam Assembly, *Man's Disorder and God's Design: The Amsterdam Assembly Series* 4 vols. (Harper and Bros; New York, 1948), 195.

the discursive space of the movement shifted from a site of intellectual and practical integration to a site of conflict and antagonism.

The concern of this chapter is to trace this transformation, showing how anti-secular ideology failed to secure a basis of ecumenical unity and how "politics" came to be conceived as a unique threat to the movement. The problem was not only that ecumenists saw their international activity as spiritual and not political in nature. The authority vested in ecumenical institutions was an authority to convene and promote debate, not to conclusively resolve disagreements. As discussed in the last chapter, the pronouncements of the World Council carried only the authority of their inherent "wisdom," and the body lacked any power to impose its determinations on member churches. During the Cold War, "politics" emerged as precisely that space of disagreement that conversation, dialogue, and conferences could not resolve. These failures ended up threatening, even in the minds of erstwhile supporters, the very legitimacy of the World Council as an instrument of world Christian unity.

The irony of this transformation was that it stemmed from the success of the movement in achieving many of its long-sought goals: in the face of Cold War polarization the movement won support from a constituency reaching across the divide, including clerics and theologians who both vehemently opposed and embraced Communist regimes. Ecumenical thinkers had also worked out a broadly shared understanding of the theological significance of Communism's emergence as well as the relation between Communism and Christianity. With the formal establishment of the World Council of Churches, the movement possessed an institution that allowed church representatives to deliberate together and to project their views on pressing

international issues into the public sphere. Further, geopolitical conditions after 1945 made travel, conversation, and assembly of churches in general, including between church groups in the West and the Communist East, more possible and frequent than it had been in the 1930s, and especially the 1940s, when World War II had severely limited possibilities for contact.

This chapter has four parts. The first will examine how and why Communist churchmen were integrated into the institutional authorities of the movement, as well as the surprising ways in which ecumenical ideology accommodated political allegiances to Communist as well as Western regimes during the Cold War. Part two will focus on the fallout from the movement leadership's first major postwar initiative to "bridge" the Cold War divide: an effort, between 1945 and 1948, to bring the Russian Orthodox Church into the World Council. We will see how this effort failed to allay suspicions of the World Council as a political organization among Russian churchmen while simultaneously antagonizing anti-Communists such as US President Harry Truman. The third part focuses on the Amsterdam Assembly itself, in particular the manner in which theological consensus – heralded by ecumenists since the 1930s as the major sign of growing unity among Christians – failed to prevent the flaring of political discord among ecumenists, evinced in the public clash between American statesman and Presbyterian John Foster Dulles and the Czech theologian Josef Hromadka. The fourth part shows how the formal establishment of the World Council and the creation of organs empowering the body to deliberate and pronounce upon specific international issues only exacerbated the political divisions within the movement, a dynamic that played out spectacularly in the aftermath of the outbreak of the Korean War. By 1951, political discord had eclipsed theological agreement as the

dominant and visible feature of international ecumenical culture, creating a crisis that a

"common faith" seemed powerless to resolve.

I. Foundations of the Cold War *oikoumene*: The Political Indeterminacy of Ecumenical Anti-Communism

A decisive factor in the story we are tracing here was a political malleability of ecumenical

ideology that made it compatible with political allegiance to both Western and Communist

powers. Thus while Americans and Western Europeans dominated in the movement, church

leaders from Communist countries were not only welcomed into it but assiduously courted to

join ecumenical conferences and consultations as well as the institutional hierarchy of the World

Council of Churches. The intellectual as well as the institutional trajectory of the movement in

the postwar years was shaped by substantive agreement between Western and Eastern church

leaders on a range of theoretical and theological problems, including an interpretation of the

causes for the emergence of Communism as a political movement and cosmological system that

challenged organized Christianity. It was also shaped by the opportunities for communication

and direct personal contact that Communist regimes enabled by permitting church leaders to

participate in the Council's activities.

Especially because most interpretations of the movement have emphasized the prominence of

anti-totalitarianism in ecumenical discourse, the reasons for the inclusion of Communist-

sympathizers is worth examining in some detail. In their capacity to find a hearing within the

movement, Communist-sympathizing churchmen differed from Nazi-sympathizing church

leaders in the interwar period. Drawing out here the difference between will allow us later to see

more clearly the nature of the conflicts that did divide ecumenists during the Cold War, and why they proved so difficult to resolve.

In the 1930s, ecumenists, along with Catholics, were the major architects of a conceptual synthesis that grouped Nazism, Fascism, and Communism together under the rubric of "political religions" or "totalitarianism." As discussed in chapter 3, these movements, ecumenists believed, had emerged to meet a deep longing for spirituality and transcendence that secular modernity – based on technical and scientific mastery, and indifferent or hostile to God – was powerless to meet. Nazism, Communism, and Fascism imbued the state with God-like powers of omnipotence; in doing so they theologized politics, subordinating all areas of life within the state to central control while transfiguring international relations into a site of clashing fanaticisms. While opposing totalitarian states as "counter-churches," however, ecumenists' attitude toward totalitarianism was never as simple as univocal antagonism. Their polemic against totalitarianism was lodged within a narrative that explained the emergence of totalitarian regimes as a function of the corporate sins of organized Christianity. According to this narrative, it was, in part, the wrongs of the church itself that explained the international and spiritual disorder of the world – and consequently the rise of totalitarianism. Organized Christianity had erred in voluntarily withdrawing from the "vital streams" of modern life. Faith had become an appendage of bourgeoisie respectability; churches had failed to combat the disintegrating forces of nationalism, failed to address racial antagonisms, and failed to confront the inequities that led to the proletariat's politicization in movements like Communism. The regimes that had grown in the spiritual vacuum of a post-Christian civilization were a judgment of God on the churches which, in their national and denominational divisions, all too clearly reflected the larger break-up of

modern civilization along national, racial, and class lines. By tracing the origins of totalitarianism to the failure of the church, ecumenists clarified their task: to "realize the church" as a universal community constituted by the give and take between Christian points of view from all "nations, races, classes, and denominations."

One consequence of this narrative was the political promiscuity it afforded to – even demanded of – the ecumenical project. While these churchmen condemned "totalitarianism" per se, they actively courted the participation of churches under Nazi and Communist regimes. Indeed the cultivation of these relationships was central to the anti-secular program of the movement. We have seen in the last chapter how, in the 1930s, the ecumenical movement courted members of the German Evangelical Church – which was prepared to accommodate the New Order of Hitler's Germany – in the Oxford Conference of 1937. In the postwar world, the World Council embraced a similar policy toward church leaders who actively and vocally backed the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and Communist China.

Driven by the same interest in consolidating the church as a supra-political and global community, the campaigns to recruit churches in the "totalitarian" regimes of Nazi Germany and Eastern Europe played out much differently. For one, Communist regimes proved much more open to their church leaders attending international church conferences than Nazi Germany did. Where the expansion of Nazi authority within Germany and outside of it cut off churches from one another, the establishment of Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe coincided with a reversal of the regime's anti-religious policy of the 1930s and the re-emergence of the Moscow Patriarchate to international prominence, a development which, as we will see, set the stage for a

protracted courtship between the WCC and the Russian Orthodox Church. While Hitler's government refused passports to the German church delegation, preventing them from attending the Oxford Conference of 1937, Eastern European governments permitted church delegates considerable opportunities for participation in ecumenical events and bodies. Protestant Churches from Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia sent delegates to the Amsterdam conference of 1948. Numerous Eastern church leaders served in leadership positions of the Council. Franticek Bednar, professor at the John Hus Theology Faculty in Prague was on the Executive Committee of the Commission of the Churches and International Affairs; Alfred Bereczky, Bishop of the Reformed Church of Hungary, was a member of the World Council of Churches' Executive Committee, and Josef Hromadka was a member of its Central Committee. All were vocal supporters of their nation's Communist governments established after 1948. Similarly, the Council leadership featured Chinese ecumenists who backed the Mao government – among them T. C. Chao, one of the body's five Presidents. By contrast, after 1937, virtually no Nazi-sympathizing German Protestants held leadership positions in ecumenical institutions.

Outside of the Communist sphere, Communism as a political movement also enjoyed a level of sympathetic interest and engagement that Nazism never did. Support for Nazi ideology and loyalty to the German state, were largely confined to Germany. But Communism – with its vision of universal human equality and specifically internationalist orientation – accrued a body of sympathetic reflection in the ecumenical Anglo-Continental mainstream. We have encountered in previous chapters a number of these figures who, in the 1930s, combined condemnation of Communism as a pseudo-religion with admiration for Communism as a

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political program that echoed of Christian principles. For the Reinhold Niebuhr of *Moral Man and Immoral Society,* Communism contained a vision of social equality in line with the brotherhood of man and advanced an understanding of the necessity of power politics that was closer to the Christian understanding than liberal pacifism. The Scottish theologian John Macmurray praised the materialist orientation of Marxian social thought as a corrective to a liberal Christian idealism that was at odds with the Incarnation and the church's imperative to concern itself with the material and practical needs of human beings in society. Nicholas Berdyaev – who fled Soviet Russia in 1922 – praised the social concern of Communism, interpreting its success as evidence of the church's servitude to its alliances with the old regime and with bourgeois Europe. The "Message" of the Oxford Conference of 1937 had argued that, while Communism's "utopian expectations" and "godlessness" must be "unequivocally rejected," the church must "recognize that Christians in their blindness to the challenging evils of economic order have been partly responsible for the anti-religious character of these movements."[13] In all of these accounts, the idea of communism as a judgment on the church was the basis of both ecumenical polemic and a qualified approbation.

It is true, of course, that after 1945 figures like Niebuhr, Macmurray, and others became more reticent about the virtues of Communism and more vocal about its evils. But this was a shift in emphasis from one point to another within the logic of ecumenical anti-secularism, not a rejection of the entire system of thought. Thus John Macmurray in 1948 could attack Communist regimes but exhorted British university students in 1948, "let us realize that the triumph of Marx

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[13] "A Message from the Oxford Conference to the Christian Churches," *The Churches Survey their Task: Report of the Conference at Oxford, July 1937, on Church, Community and State* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938), 61.

is the measure of the failure of the Christian Church. The truth of Communism must be assimilated before its error can be overcome."[14] Niebuhr around the same time could argue that even as Communist and Fascist regimes resembled one another in practice, "Marxism… may well contain proximate solutions for the immediate problems of social justice in our day."[15] His Union Theological Seminary colleague John Bennett echoed the same point in his important book *Christianity and Communism* (1948). On the one hand, Communism in its contemporary form was "a threat to essential forms of personal and political freedom." On the other hand, Bennett wrote, "the errors of Communism are in large part the result of the failure of Christians, and of Christian churches, to be true to the revolutionary implications of their own faith."[16] Any strategy for resisting the errors of communism must involve a critique of the social evils of capitalism.

Among church leaders in postwar Eastern Europe, the margin for sympathy with Communist ideas and politics that ecumenical theology furnished the basis for a positive allegiance to Communist regimes. Without great strain or intellectual acrobatics, figures such as Hromadka, Bereczky, Chao, and his colleague and fellow philo-Communist T. Y. Wu could draw on a constellation of ecumenical themes – organized Christianity's culpable disregard of the working classes, the need for a geographically and socially universal Christian ethic, and the possibility of distinguishing Communism as a political program from its cosmological claims – to offer robust

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[14] John Macmurray, "Communism 1848-1948," *Student Movement,* (Feb, 1948), 9-11.

[15] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Present Disorder," Section III of the Amsterdam Assembly, *Man's Disorder and God's Design: The Amsterdam Assembly Series* 4 vols. (Harper and Bros; New York, 1948), 21.

[16] John Bennett, *Christianity and Communism* (New York: Association Press, 1948), 9.

defenses of the view that, rather than representing a threat, the expansion of Communism in the postwar period was blessing that the church ought to greet with open arms.

Though he had been an advocate of Masaryk's liberal reforms in the 1930s, Hromadka, for instance, immediately declared his support for Klement Gottwald's regime after the 1948 coup. Hromadka saw Communism as a revolt against an unjust social order but not necessarily a revolt against God. Properly understood, Communism "does not adhere to any metaphysic that would elevate an earthly reality (be it the class of the proletariat or the ultimate classless society) to the plane of an Absolute."[17] It offered, rather, a political program that channeled fundamentally Christian principles of social equality to combat an entrenched social order. Communism answered the demand of "the 'Eastern' masses," he wrote, "for more human dignity, social equality, cultural progress, and a for a fair share in the political responsibility for the new world order." Moreover, acknowledging the legitimacy of the Communist critique of organized Christianity – that it had been a tool of bourgeois power – would strengthen the credibility of the church's resistance to the ideological atheism of orthodox Communism. With the collapse of the old order, the Church would be freed from an entanglement that had compromised the power of the Gospel among workers. He announced that the fruits of the Church's new, more socially marginal position in Czechoslovakia were already becoming clear. Since February of 1948, "the Church of Christ" in Czechoslovakia had "become much more relevant. She has ceased to be a decoration of life, a relic from the past, a clerical institution or a club for religious refinement."[18]

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[17] Josef Hromadka, "Our Responsibility in the Postwar World," *Man's Disorder and God's Design* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1949), 128-9.

[18] Josef "Hromadka, "The Condition and the Task of the Church in Europe," comments delivered at a "visitors meeting" on August 25, 1948 during the Amsterdam conference, 3 (WCC 42.0039).

In this view, the providential event of Communism was the midwife of a rebirth of Christianity that would purge it of its parochial spiritualism and liberate it from its traditional form as a bourgeois religion.

Bereczky took a similar position. Like Hromadka a bitter opponent of the National Socialist regime, Bereczky became leading Bishop of the Reformed Church in Hungary in April 1948. He succeeded later that year in negotiating an agreement with the Communist government of Matyas Rakosi that allowed Reformed Churches to continue religious worship and control over religious education within state schools. It was an arrangement that Bereczky felt was not a compromise but a form of penance for the sins of the church in the past.[19] Like Hromadka, Bereczky understood the Communist revolution as a judgment of God on the church. "In the face of the advance of this great Marxist revolution and the coming to power of the Communist Party in our country, it is our opinion that the Church is driven to self-examination." Bereczky was entirely in line with the ecumenical view that held the church responsible for the emergence of Communism. Communists filled a spiritual vacuum left by Christianity's lack of concern for the proletariat. "In a time of judgment," he wrote in 1948, "our Church must proclaim to the people, to Church people as well as the entire Hungarian people, the message of repentance.[20] Where Hromadka had distinguished between support for Communist politics and Communism as a religion, Bereczky emphasized the new evangelistic opportunities opened up by Eastern Europe's political transformation. A pietistic strain in his thought led him to see the new regime

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[19] Joseph Pungur, "Protestantism in Hungary," *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia: The Communist and Post-Communist Eras* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 118-20.

[20] Albert Bereczky, *Hungarian Christianity in the New Hungarian State* trns (Birmingham: Husband and Ourrell, 1948), 9.

as a fresh opportunity for missionary action. "I do not think I misunderstand Paul… if I go to the Marxists as though I were a Marxist." There was no "serious hindrance" facing the church in this field; on the contrary, by accommodating the regime and its social policies, the church had the opportunity to walk through doors that had previously been closed to it. "She can preach the Gospel freely to the working people in the factories, mines, and works of all kinds, whom she has tended more to forget and neglect than the peasants and the intelligentsia."[21] Consistently with this position, Bereczky assailed those who attacked the Communist government for pursuing "political ends." Catholics were the worst purveyors of politics under the guise of Christian piety. When the Cardinal Joszef Mindszenty was imprisoned in 1949 for defying the Communist government, Bereczky took the side of the Hungarian State: "the Archbishop of Erztergom," declared a statement Bereczky wrote along with other pro-Communist Reformed and Lutheran clerics, "has not been fighting for religious liberty, for the simple reason, because such a fight has not been necessary at all." Mindszenty was fighting rather for a restoration of "the rule of the Habsburgs, a dynasty of most evil memories, and a feudalistic régime, a logical outcome of the former."[22] By permitting freedom of worship and control of religious education, the Communist regime not only posed no threat to the negative liberties of the churches. It also imbued the church with a new positive liberty: the opportunity to reinterpret the Christian Gospel in a way that would resonate with a group – the workers – who had for so long existed outside the church's effective reach.

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[21] Ibid, 13.

[22] "Hungarian Protestant leaders on the case of Mindszenty," included in a letter Bereczky/WCC Feb 2, 1949. (WCC, 42.009).

In China, most foreign missionaries and many Chinese Christians – particular those who were

Catholic or fundamentalist Protestants – were hostile to the Communists. Some, however,

welcomed Mao Zedong's regime, and this number included many who held prominent roles in

the ecumenical movement.[23] They drew on similar arguments to those put forward by Hromadka

and Bereczky and like them appropriated the tropes of repentance and providential opportunity

in the new political scene. Further, these Chinese Christian apologetics for Communism argued

that the new regime was an opportunity to realize in practice the goal that western missionaries

themselves had long heralded in theory: the formation of an autonomous Chinese church that

would be understood, no longer as an extension of western missionary work but as an organic

and integrated presence in Chinese society and culture. When the Communist government called

for the immediate departure of all foreign missionaries after the fall of Beijing on October 1,

1949, 19 Chinese Christians welcomed the move in a pamphlet entitled "Message from Chinese

Christians to Mission Boards Abroad." The Church would have its "due place" in a future

Chinese society, the document asserted, but only through a "a purge," in which "many of the

withered branches will be amputated." T. Y. Wu, head of the Chinese YMCA, and a speaker at

Oxford Conference of 1937, was adept at recasting long-time ecumenical missionary objectives

in a Marxist language of anti-imperialism. In May of 1950, Wu was one of the principal

signatories of the "Christian Manifesto," which called on Christians to "recognize clearly the

evils that have been wrought in China by imperialism, recognize the fact that in the past

imperialism has made use of Christianity, purge imperialistic influences from within Christianity

itself, and be vigilant against imperialism, especially American imperialism, in its plot to use

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[23] See for instance Albert Wu, "German Missionaries, Chinese Christians, and the Globalization of Christianity, 1860-1950" (PhD dissertation, UC Berkeley) and John Keating, *A Protestant Church in Communist China: Moore Memorial Church in Shanghai 1949-1989* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2012), Introduction, chpts 2-3.

religion in fostering the growth of reactionary forces."[24] Wu's efforts to institutionalize the

complementarity between the new regime and Christianity culminated in the "Three Self

Movement," which became the chief liaison body between the Communist state's Religious

Affairs Bureau and the Protestant churches in the early 1950s. The Three Self Movement rested

on a concept originally espoused by western missionaries like Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson

to name the goal of a Chinese church that would be "self-supporting, self-governing, and self-

propagating."[25] It was the PRC's elimination of foreign missionaries that would allow the church

in China finally to realize these goals – goals that Wu hoped would, in the long run, create a

stronger international Christian solidarity.

Wu's vision was shared by T. C. Chao, a veteran of the World Student Christian Federation, a

professor of theology at the Yenching University, and President of the WCC. Beginning in late

1949 Chao became one of the Chinese Communism's most important and vocal defenders for

English-language audiences. In two articles in the *Christian Century* published in 1949-1950,

Chao hailed "the destruction of feudalism in China," and argued that Christians everywhere

ought to rejoice in the new opportunities for social reform. "There is no reason why China

cannot become a classless society and create a sort of 'new democracy' to suit her genius and

temperament. The very thought of the possibility of such a creation gives hope and cheer."[26]

Like Wu Chao assailed the legacy of imperialism as the chief obstacle to Christianity's future in

China. For too long Christians had been hobbled in China by the perception that their religion

[24] Quoted in Daniel Bays, "Christianity in the New China," *A New History of Christianity in China* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 158.

[25] For a discussion of the Three-Self Movement, see Bey, 159-60.

[26] T. C. Chao, "Days of Rejoicing in China," *Christian Century,* Mar 2, 1949, 266.

"stands on the side of the status quo, that it is connected with imperialistic and bourgeois aspirations; that it is the opiate of the people."[27] Christianity "as taught by Christ" was "none of these things," and it would now – under conditions of Communism – have the opportunity to prove itself through an internal "reconversion and revitalization."[28] The real struggle for Christians in China, for Chao, was not against the external enemy of Communism but against a spiritual lethargy and egoism that compromised its message to the Chinese masses. Eschewing anti-Communism, the "Christian Church in China must understand that its real enemy is not on the outside and that its future is not to be determined by hostile forces external to itself. The Church "must… confess its sins and shortcomings in seeking to save its own life by occasionally siding with reactionary forces." Chao pointed by name to Chiang Kai-shek, H. H. Kung, and James Sung – ministers of the Kuomintang – as "Judases of the Christian faith."[29]

As these cases show, theological defenses of Communism could take many forms. In China, ecumenical philo-Communists presented the political revolution as an opportunity to realize the long-sought goal of an authentically indigenous, self-sufficient Chinese church; for Bereczky and Hromadka the emphasis fell more on Christian support for Communist plans for rebuilding a society destroyed by war. But whatever these differences in emphasis, ecumenical Communists all converged around a single point: that Communism was a purifying chastisement of organized Christianity, which would, in the long run, enable the church to become more truly the universal society that it was by its nature. Western ecumenists did not disagree with this claim in principle,

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[27] Ibid, 266.

[28] T. C. Chao, "Red Peiping After Six Months," *Christian Century*, Sept 14, 1949, 1067.

[29] Ibid, 1067.

even when they diverged dramatically from the political allegiances their co-religionists in the East derived from it. A real, if – as we will see – elusive consensus, in the East and the West, over the productiveness of a Christian engagement with Communist ideas and the source of Communist appeal, as well as possibilities of direct contact with and participation of Communist church leaders in ecumenical conferences and organizations set the terms for the movement's trajectory in the Cold War. As tensions between the West and the Soviet Union deteriorated, observers and critics on both sides demanded that the Council clearly declare its political allegiance for one side or the other. The Council's refusal to do this generated suspicion of the movement as a whole from critics on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

II. Prelude to Fracture: The World Council Alienates anti-Communism and the Moscow Patriarchate

The World Council's courtship of the Russian Orthodox Church, which began in 1945 and ended in 1948,[30] prefigured the dilemmas that would increasingly confront the movement during and after the Amsterdam Assembly. On the one hand, the ecumenical leadership's determination to involve the Russian Orthodox Church antagonized anti-Communists in the West, who viewed the Moscow Patriarchate as an arm of the Soviet government. On the other hand, the Council's advances met with skepticism by many Russian Orthodox leaders as well as the Soviet state, who suspected the ecumenists of covertly seeking to draw the Russian Orthodox Church into an anti-Communist alliance. The Council leadership's efforts to transcend Cold War politics only reinforced the perception that the WCC was a "political" organization – though the precise nature of these politics remained distressing unclear. Caught between the two camps, Visser't

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[30] In 1960, negotiations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the WCC resumed, and the ROC joined the Council in 1961.

Hooft could only protest that both sides had "misunderstood" the true nature of the Council. By 1948, the price of a clear explanation seemed to be a political determination that the movement refused to make.[31]

Throughout the 1930s, the possibility of involving the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in ecumenical activities was so far out of the realm of possibility that the issue was not even discussed. Prime target of the Bolsheviks' anti-religious policy in the two decades following 1917, the Moscow Patriarchate, once the center of a mighty ecclesiastical imperium stretching from Harbin to the Middle East and into Poland, was by 1939 on the verge of extinction. A mere 500 churches remained in the USSR, less than 1% of pre-Revolution number.[32] Severed from Moscow, many Russian Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe and the Middle East had become "autocephalous" – self-governing – others had come under the jurisdiction of the other great center of Eastern Orthodoxy, the Patriarch of Constantinople. Those Russian Orthodox figures who participated in the ecumenical movement in the interwar period, such as Nicholas Berdyaev, George Florovsky, and A.A. Alexieff, were members of diasporic Russian Orthodox churches in London, Paris, and United States.

Between 1943 and 1945, however, a conjuncture of factors propelled the Moscow Patriarchate to international prominence, and, so it seemed to Visser't Hooft and the WCC for a period of tenuous hope between 1945 and mid 1948, potentially into the ecumenical movement's orbit. Though Hitler had banked on the support of the Russian churches as a fifth column, many

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[31] "Report of the General Secretary to the Executive Committee," 1949, 1

[32] J. A. Hebly, *Russians and the World Council of Churches* (Belfast: Christian Journals Ltd., 1978), 12.

Orthodox leaders in Russia rallied to the defense of "Holy Rus." Stalin did not attempt to curtail

the church's activities, which reinforced his own appeals to the Patriotic War. Following a

meeting in 1943 between Archbishop Sergei and Josef Stalin, the church won new rights

domestically and the support of the Soviet State in reconsolidating its hold over Orthodox

churches elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In the years that followed, an

alliance with the Soviet state resurrected the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to international

prominence and enabled its reassertion of control over religious life in the Eastern Soviet

Union.[33] During the War, it seemed that Christianity might even serve as a bridge between

officially atheist Russia, and an Atlantic partnership whose political culture was becoming more

steeped in religious rhetoric.[34] Delegations of Anglicans and Russian Orthodox met in 1943 and

1945, when the Metropolitan Nikolai announced "a common struggle against Fascism which

"assumes a sacred significance as the defense of Christian principles from the barbaric foes of

our Christian civilization."[35] Even once the war ended, meetings between Anglicans and

Orthodox were frequent; the Archbishop of Canterbury attended the investment of Patriarch

Alexi as Patriarch in 1945.

It did not take long, however, for the enthusiasm of western politicians and religious leaders

concerning the resurgence of the Moscow Patriarchate to cool. In particular, the Roman Catholic

Church – which in 1948 declared the complete incompatibility of Christianity and Communism –

saw the ROC and close ties with the Soviet State as grist to the mill of a centuries old

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[33] Anna Dickinson, "Domestic and Foreign Policy Considerations and the Origins of Post-war Soviet Church–State Relations, 1941–6" in *Religion and the Cold War* ed. Dianne Kirby (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 23-36.

[34] Dianne Kirby, "From Bridge to Divide," *The International History Review,* 36.4 (2014), 721-44.

[35] Ibid.

antagonism. Shared anti-Communism was, by 1946, drawing the Vatican into a closer alliance with the United States government that was cemented in part around containing the ecclesiastical empire of the Russian Orthodox Church. As Dianne Kirby and William Inboden has described in detail, between 1946 and 1948, a centerpiece of President Truman's foreign policy of containment rested on building an alliance of religious leaders against Communism. One enthusiastic ally that Truman secured was Pope Pius XII – largely through the efforts of his Ambassador to the Vatican, the Episcopalian layman and industrialist Myron Taylor. Both Taylor and the Vatican agreed that there could be no place for the Russian Orthodox Church in an international front against Soviet Communism. Summarizing Rome's assessment of the Russian Orthodox Church, Vatican Secretary of State Monsignor Domenico Tardini wrote in April of 1948 that it was nothing but "the vehicle of Soviet political activity and an arm of Soviet imperialism." "In every country outside the area of Russian control the Orthodox Church is an instrument for propagandizing elements in sympathy with Orthodoxy and preparing their reconciliation with the Soviet regime."[36] The Moscow Patriarchate was seeking to use local churches in Eastern Europe "to bolster support of the Communist controlled government and the parties supporting these regimes." Myron Taylor agreed, characterizing the church in Russia under Patriarch Alexi as "an arm of the state that could not be looked upon as an independent religious body."[37]

Ecumenists took a sharply different view. After a series of conversations with Anglicans and Russian Orthodox, Stefan Zankov, veteran ecumenist and Metropolitan of the Bulgarian

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[36] Inboden, 130.

[37] Inboden, 142.

Orthodox Church, wrote Visser't Hooft suggesting that the Moscow Patriarchate would be open to intensifying contacts with the ecumenical movement. "I have the impression that we must give the Russian Church time to get to know the Ecumenical Council, and that we must also allow the churches of the West time to gain understanding of the situation of the Russian Church."[38] At a meeting of the Provisional Committee of the World Council in February 1946, the decision was taken to write to the Patriarchate, proposing a meeting in Prague or Paris in the autumn of that year. Metropolitan Nikolai responded in July welcoming the idea in principle. Assured by the supportive words of Russian Orthodox clerics and monks now making more frequent visits West, the WCC assembled a delegation in the late summer for what Visser't Hooft considered would be "one of the most historic events in ecumenical history."[39] In October, however, Nikolai wrote to Visser't Hooft to postpone the meeting: the delegation could not secure the appropriate visas in time. But Nikolai remained optimistic that a future meeting would be possible.[40]

Visser't Hooft and the World Council leadership were well aware that the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church were performing a delicate balance of ecclesial and political calculations. Professor L. Zander of the Institute for Orthodox Theology in Paris, wrote to Hooft assessing Metropolitan Nikolai after having met him in Paris: "One sees in him, on the one hand, the Orthodox hierarch with all the qualities and gifts which characterize our higher clergy; on the other hand, one recognizes quite clearly a dignitary of the Soviet State, who is bound by

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[38] Hebly 18.

[39] Visser't Hooft/Hromadka Sept 24, 1946 (WCC, 42.0039)

[40] "The Very Saintly Patriarch of Moscow and of all Russia has instructed me to inform you that he has received your invitation to take part in a meeting of representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Conceil Oecumenique des Eglises" and that he has accepted. We will let you know soon the names of our representatives. We intend to complete our preparations, including a minimum study of the history and former activities of the ecumenical movement, so that the meeting can take place at the end of the autumn of 1946."

obligations of which he pretends to be unaware."[41] Visser't Hooft also perceived that any action

the Moscow Patriarchate would be permitted to take toward the council would only be with the

blessing of General Georgii Karpov, Head of the powerful State Committee for Orthodox Church

Affairs.

But in the two years leading up to Amsterdam, it seemed that the play of geopolitical and

ecclesiastical politics would work out in the ecumenical movement's favor. [42] By 1946, the ROC

had decisively abandoned the idea of launching its own "international Christian Conference" – a

possible competitor to the World Council. For the Moscow Patriarchate and the Soviet State

alike, Rome – the seat of anti-communism and the Orthodox world's oldest nemesis – was a

common enemy in relation to whom the Protestant-dominated WCC might serve as an ally. The

Patriarchate also perceived that the Council would erect no obstacle in pursuit of its attempt to

re-consolidate control over Russian Orthodox churches in Eastern Europe and the Middle East,

as well as confessions that had come under the dominance of the rival Patriarch of

Constantinople after the Russian Churches dismemberment after 1917. Geneva's approach to the

Greek-Russian struggle sought to engage both sides in a strategy whose objective was to

maximize the representation of Orthodox communions at the event. The Council promised the

Orthodox churches together a generous 85 seats at the conference – enough to ensure that both

Greek and Russian churches would hold enjoy proportionally greater representation than

Protestant denominations. And it seemed, as late as July 1948 – a mere month before the

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[41] Hebly, 19.

[42] The best accounts of this episode are in Gerhard Besier, Armin Boyens, and Gerhard Lindemann, *Nationaler Protestantismus und Ökumenische Bewegung: Kirchliches Handeln im Kalten Krieg 1945-1990, Zeitgeschichtliche Forschungen, 3* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1999), 1074. and J. A. Hebly, *The Russians and the World Council of Churches* (Christian Journals Limited: Belfast, 1978), esp chpt 1.

Amsterdam Assembly – that Council's courtship of the Russians approach would bear fruit. Even

as the Stalinst coup in Czechoslovakia in February of 1948 and the blockade of Berlin in April

and May worsened relations between the Soviet Union and Western powers, Metropolitan

Nikolai wrote hopeful letters to Geneva, acknowledging receipt of a packet with WCC

constitution, conference reports from Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences, and documents

relating to the history of the movement. He promised that the ROC would give its final answer to

the invitation after consultations that would be held at a conference of Orthodox Churches in

July. At this event, Hooft was confident that a strong bloc of pro-ecumenical voices – led by

veterans of the Movement like the Bulgarian Metropolitan Zankov and the Romanian theologian

Ioan Coman – would carry the day.

When Taylor travelled to Geneva in 1948 to discuss the possibility of recruiting the WCC to join

Truman's anti-Communist spiritual front, he was surprised to find that Visser't Hooft viewed the

Moscow Patriarchate as an authentic Christian body – and that he was eagerly anticipating its

attendance at the Amsterdam Assembly. The presence of a Russian delegation at Amsterdam,

Taylor warned the WCC General Secretary, "would open Pandora's box of sabotage and

obstructionism similar to the Russian tactics at the United Nations."[43] To this, Visser't Hooft

explained that Taylor simply did not understand the purpose of the World Council, whose

campaign to bring all churches together would not stop at the Iron Curtain. Taylor and Truman's

attitudes toward the World Council and ecumenism would become increasingly critical. Truman

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[43] Inboden, 131.

saw ecumenists in the US as well as abroad as the chief obstacles to his campaign to unite the

spiritual and moral forces of the world against the threat of godless Communism.[44]

While exacerbating a rift with anti-Communists in the West, the campaign to draw the Russian

Orthodox church into the Council ultimately failed. Just a few weeks before the opening of the

WCC's Assembly, Visser't Hooft received a letter from Metropolitan Nikolai President of

Moscow Patriarchate's Foreign Church relations, summarizing the decision of the conference of

Russian Orthodox Churches held in July: "While expressing to you its appreciation for the

invitation which it received," Nikolai wrote, the Moscow Patriarchate "declines to take part in

the Ecumenical Movement with its present tendencies."[45] The letter was accompanied by

conference resolution that portrayed Rome and Geneva competing for the cooperation of the

Orthodox churches in a campaign to dominate one another. Both the Vatican and the Ecumenical

Movement sought to extend their "worldly" influence and had "lost faith" with the cause of true

Christian unity, which the Russian Orthodox Church alone represented. The document alleged

that the intention of the ecumenical movement was to create "an Ecumenical Church as an

international influence," and that to join this church would be to "enter a political arena which

was foreign to [the Orthodox church's] purpose." To accept the invitation would be "comparable

to falling into the temptation which Christ refused in the desert."[46] The resolution had been based

largely on testimonies prepared by the Russian Archpriest Razoumovsky, who presented a nearly

100-page report tracing what he characterized as the growing influence of a worldly orientation

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[44] See Inboden, chpt 1.

[45] Quoted in Visser't Hooft, "The Moscow Patriarchate and the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches," *Ecumenical Review*, 1, 2 (Winter 1949), 188.

[46] Ibid, 190.

within the Movement in the years since 1937. Razoumovsky referred to a number of ecumenical

documents that exposed, in his view, the political ambitions of the movement. One major piece

of titular evidence for the Council's true intentions came in Razoumovsky's mind from a line

from the Edinburgh report of 1937, which Razoumovsky possessed in the French translation:

"Nous ne pensons pas que l'Eglise unie d'après les principes de l'œcuménicité puisse être une

force internationale influente, sans aucun organe permanent sous forme de conférence ou de

congrès."[47] Razoumovsky highlighted the words "une force internationale influente" in order to

show that the primary aim of the planners of the World Council is to gain worldly influence.

The ROC's rejection placed Visser't Hooft – and the ecumenical movement – in a complicated

position. It was clear to him at the time that the Patriarchate's rejection was the result of a

perception that the Council was an instrument of the West, an estimation that recent research has

supported by showing how seriously Russian Orthodox representatives and Soviet officials took

the anti-Communist rhetoric of documents released by the World Council and antecedent

institutions, as well as a 1946 resolution of the Council Provisional Committee, calling for a

revision of the Potsdam Accords.[48] But if Visser't Hooft wished to retain the possibility of a

future involvement of the ROC, he could hardly accuse the Russians themselves of acting on

political motives. In a public response to the ROC's rejection published after the Amsterdam

conference, Visser't Hooft's instead took a defensive posture, arguing that the Russians had

"profoundly misunderstood" the nature of the Ecumenical Movement. The article laid out the

promising signs of Russian involvement as they had taken shape in 1946 and 1947 and quoted

liberally from WCC statements abdicating any ambition for "political power." Instead of

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[47] The French text is reproduced in Ibid, 194. See also the summary of Razoumovsky's report in Ibid, 191-4.

[48] Kalkandjieva, 314-5. For Visser't Hooft's reaction at the time, see Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs*, 91.

accusing Razoumovsky of ill will, Visser't Hooft questioned the fairness of his reading of certain

key ecumenical documents, attempting to keep their disagreements within the ambit of good

faith. In particular he observed that the French translation of the Edinburgh Report had

misconstrued the original, which had made no reference to "a force of international influence"

but had spoken instead of the church as "an effective international community," "communauté

internationale effective." Countering Cold War politics was a matter, in other words, of

achieving precision and clear understanding of the ecumenical movement's true aims. The reply

inscribed both a strategy of church diplomacy and an ecumenical optimism: that political

disagreements could be tamed and overcome through a theological conversation converging

around "mutual understanding" and a common faith.

The ROC's rejection represented a challenge to the movement that it would face with increasing

regularity in the years following 1948. Seeking to become a peace-maker between East and

West, ecumenists were accused of objectively serving the interests of one side or the other.

Against this rebuke, the Council could do little but assert that their true intentions had been

"misunderstood." In 1948, the ecumenical movement's claim to be a space of transcendence –

where political differences that divided peoples could be overcome through their common

allegiance to the church – met its first serious rebuke. It would not be the last.

III. A Third Way in Theory: The Responsible Society Between Communism and Capitalism

Spurned by the Moscow Patriarchate and increasingly at odds with the dominant anti-

Communism of western political and religious leaders, the Council leadership stayed its middle

course. To the representatives of 147 churches assembled at Amsterdam, Visser't Hooft

explained the vocation of the church in a world "obsessed by politics:"

> We live in a world obsessed by politics and large masses of men cannot believe that any
> great undertaking of an international character should be free of political bias. Our task is
> to prove in word and deed that we serve a Lord Whose realm certainly includes politics
> but Whose saving purpose cuts across all political alignments and embraces men of <u>all</u>
> parties, <u>all</u> lands.[49]

In its official statements, optics, symbolism, and rituals, the Assembly was a demonstration of

the church as a supra-political body. Despite the absence of the Russian Orthodox Church, the

Amsterdam Assembly did include Protestant Churches from Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, Latvia,

Estonia, Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Many of these representatives did not take active

part in the Council proceedings, or else sought out roles in sections and subcommittees of the

conference that dealt with ecclesiastical and doctrinal issues. But their presence was felt. Even

where these church leaders from the East were not directly involved in the drafting of resolutions

and debates, representatives from Western churches sought to articulate a conception of

Christian social order explicitly critical of Western Capitalism, as well as the totalitarian

impulses of Communism. This attempt to clarify a theoretical third way, however, failed to

resolve the question of the position of the church in relation to Cold War politics, both for critics

outside the movement and for ecumenists themselves.

In session for three weeks at the end of August and early September in 1948, the conference was

organized around a daily regimen of worship services, meals, plenary speeches, and working

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[49] Visser't Hooft, "Report of the Provisional Committee," UTS William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library
Collection, Series 1B, box 16, folder 8.

sessions of four "sectional committees," each of which was charged with producing a report

addressed to different aspects of the council's theme, "Man's Disorder and God's Design." The

exposition of the theme reiterated the tropes of ecumenical anti-secularism as a trans-political

and –ideological phenomenon. "Man's disorder is inescapably manifest in every aspect of the

world's life today," wrote Henry Van Dusen in the General Introduction to the study volumes

prepared in advance of the conference. "The disappearance of common standards, the denial of a

law of God above the wills of men and states, the disintegration of family life, the dissolution of

community, loss of faith save the false faith in human wisdom and goodness, emptiness and

meaninglessness in the souls of men" were all features of modern life in areas across the globe.[50]

To a crisis of disorder that was equally present in Communist and Western societies, ecumenists

presented the world church as a source of social and spiritual order that could harmonize social

relations beneath and above the level of politics.

The primary statement of the Council's middle path emerged from the report of the Third

Section, devoted to the theme of "The Church and the Disorder of Society." This committee,

which included a powerful line-up of theologians a laypersons including Reinhold Niebuhr, John

Bennett, Emil Brunner, Joseph Oldham, the American lay businessman Charles Taft, and the

Dutch politician Constantin Patijn, produced a statement articulating a vision of Christian social

order that would stand as an alternative on the one hand to Soviet "Communism" and on the

other to Western "Capitalism."

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[50] Henry Van Dusen, "General Introduction," *Man's Disorder and God's Design* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1949).

The origins of this vision had emerged in preparatory study for the Amsterdam conference.

Beginning in 1947, Joseph Oldham and Visser't Hooft began referring to the object of Christian

commitment as "the responsible society." The term appealed because it had not been

appropriated as a slogan by either side in the conflict: Oldham, and Visser't Hooft rejected "the

free society" as too one sidedly in line with Western anti-Communism, and "democracy" was

discarded because its meaning was too sharply contested between the Communist and Western

powers.[51] The idea of the "responsible society" positioned the church's view of right social order

as a critique of the organizing principles of western and communist societies and their practice.

As developed in the Amsterdam report, this critique rested on the idea that the possibility of

Christian life in modern society – in both East and West – was threatened by two entwined

factors. First, under conditions of modern life there had emerged "vast concentrations of

power—which are under capitalism mainly economic and under communism both economic and

political." These concentrations of power – in the state or in large private enterprise – reduced

the sphere of personal responsibility to a vanishing point. "To find ways of realizing personal

responsibility for collective action in the large aggregations of power in modern society is a task

which has not yet been undertaken seriously." It was not freedom per se that ecumenists looked

to extend to individuals, only the freedom necessary to "act as moral and accountable beings"

under modern conditions that subordinated all of life to the commands of the state or the logic of

the market.[52]

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[51] See for instance Visser't Hooft's account of the origins of the phrase in his *Memoirs*, 205.

[52] "Report of Section III 'The Church and the Disorder of Society,'" *Man's Disorder and God's Design*, vol 3. 189-90.

The second threat to personal responsibility that ecumenists described was the hegemony of "technics." In both Western and Eastern societies, the concentrations of power were achieved and perpetuated through a mastery of technologies of communication, propaganda, and social control that sought to harness the power of nature for the use of humanity. Technics were, on the one hand, merely technical: technologies served those who exercised the concentrations of economic and political power. But the irony of technics was that the more they promised mastery the more they enhanced the destructive effects of the human will to dominance. While technology "enables man the better to use nature" it was "controlled by a momentum of its own." The drive to control nature and society de-humanized man, subjugating individuals and societies to forms of exploitation that were destructive of "the natural foundations of society in family, neighborhood, and craft." The report called on Christians to seek to preserve areas of family life, local association, and meaningful vocation which would safeguard "a satisfying life for 'little men in big societies.'" This was the "responsible society," one in which humankind could take part in the relations of moral responsibility to himself and to God through which he became the kind of creature he was. Defining the features of social order that could applied modularly and ought to be the object of striving for Christians throughout the globe, the report offered the following summary: "A responsible society is one where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order, and where those who hold political authority and economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and to the people whose welfare is affected by it."[53] This view repudiated the dominant ideological alternatives of the age. Committing themselves to the cultivation of the "responsible society," "The Christian churches

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[53] Ibid, 192.

should reject the ideologies of both laissez-faire communism and capitalism, and should seek to draw men away from the false assumption that these extremes are the only alternatives."[54]

Of all the statements released by the Amsterdam Assembly, none attracted as much attention as that of the Third Section. And particularly in the US, virtually all of this attention – outside of the ecumenical church press and journals – was hostile. To some critics, it was unclear whether the report was intended to refer to the theories of Communism and Capitalism or the actual operation of both systems. The *Wall Street Journal*, for instance, averred that "laissez-faire" capitalism did not exist in any form in the modern world. By attacking it ecumenists had assailed a social system in which none of them had actually lived; they might as well have issued "a ringing resolution condemning the regime of Napoleon III."[55] The *Los Angeles Times* agreed: "Genuine laissez-faire capitalism never has existed anywhere; there have been always some restrictions." If the authors of the report were referring to capitalism as it actually existed, they had woefully mischaracterized it. "The regime of free enterprise" had defects, but is "has demonstrably raised the material status of mankind to the highest level in the world's history." "Where there is free enterprise, the world is improving."[56]

More brutal criticisms attacked the report for playing into the hands of Communist propaganda. It was beyond comprehension that the moral leadership of Christian churches could suggest, as one critic put it, that capitalism and communism were "equally bad."[57] "It seems like a total

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[54] Ibid, 195.

[55] "Bad Names," *Wall Street Journal*, Sept 21, 1948

[56] "Bewilderment at Amsterdam," *Los Angeles Times*, Sept 5, 1948.

[57] Allan Crow/John Foster Dulles May 15, 1950 (John Foster Dulles Papers, Box 51).

disregard of all ethical values to lump communism and capitalism in the same phrase and to indict them both equally. It is very much like saying that a man who is guilty of violating a parking ordinance is just as guilty as a man who cuts his neighbor's throat," wrote one commentator.[58] Where the report had sought to define Christianity as an alternative to Cold War politics, critics saw only political confusion. "Where did these spokesmen stand?" asked Elmer T. Petersen of the *Daily Oklahoman*. "They are neither white nor red, but presumably pink or vaguely spotted, holding to some form of collectivism." Even as he acknowledged the indeterminism of the statement, Petersen saw the report as a blow to the values of Western democracy and Christian faith. The "collectivism" that the churches advocated "essentially, means increasing dependence upon the political state, with corresponding loss of faith in personal regeneration as a cure for social ills. These leaders call their program a 'social gospel….' in practice they lean toward socialistic doctrines and depend heavily upon government to take charge in areas of good works hitherto concentrated in individual goodwill, thus proportionately relieving the individual of moral obligations to love and care for his fellow man."[59] George Peck, a syndicated journalist, wrote that the report had delivered the ecumenical movement into the hands of the Soviet Union. "Most certainly the Communists will take great comfort from this report," he wrote. "Whether these church dignitaries are aware of it or not, they have allied themselves with the radical revolutionists who, first of all, would abolish private property and then, this having been accomplished would abolish the Christian and all other religions."[60] Just as Truman and Taylor could not understand the decision to court the Russian

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[58] Lawrence Fertig, "Defends Capitalism [sic]," *NY World Telegram*, Sept 13, 1948.

[59] Elmer T. Peterson, "What Means This 'Social Gospel?'" *Oklahoman*, Sept 9, 1948.

[60] George Peck, "The American Way," *Perrysburg Ohio Journal*, Oct 18 1948.

Orthodox Church, so the Amsterdam report's equilateral condemnation of laissez-faire

capitalism and Soviet Communism seemed to many commentators as either incoherent or plainly

inconsistent with fundamental precepts of the Christian faith. In the eyes of its critics, the

document's attempt to steer a middle way did not reflect the transcendence of politics but simply

political confusion.

While the statement generated significant criticism outside the conference, however, none of

those delegates who attended the conference spoke out against it. In fact, the document was

praised as an impressive synthesis of the widely divergent perspectives encompassed in the

Council's membership. Reinhold Niebuhr, for instance, called on American readers to recognize

frankly that international Christian thinking encompassed a much wider range of opinion than

was present in conventional American thinking.[61]

Nonetheless, it was clear that whatever consensus the idea of the responsible society generated, it

was not, in fact, a recipe for resolving all disagreements between delegates from Communist and

Western nations. Consensus on the level of theory was one thing, but the political judgments of

ecumenists in relation to the West and the Soviet Union's societies and systems of rule were

quite another, as became clear in discussions that occurred in the Section IV of the conference,

addressing the theme of "The Church and the International Disorder." In the plenary session

devoted to this theme, John Foster Dulles, the Republican Party's likely Secretary of State should

Thomas Dewey win the election of 1948, and Josef Hromadka took turns affirming and

denouncing the spread of communism. By the time they met in person in Amsterdam, their

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[61] Reported in Paul Douglass, "Some American Reactions to Amsterdam," *Ecumenical Review*, vol. 1 no. 4 (1949), 288.

opposed and irreconcilable positions had already become clear in the essays they had written

before the conference for inclusion in the Amsterdam study volumes. In his contribution, Dulles

called on Christians to support the political arrangement of what he called "the free society,"

founded on limited government and the rights of intellectual and religious freedom. World peace

was contingent upon the creation "more areas of freedom" and the gradual adoption of universal

moral law as the basis of international and social order. As Dulles frankly wrote, he was

recommending a "political path," which "leads from the West."[62] Hromadka sharply disagreed.

Communism had rebuilt social order in the East and had taken over much of the social impetus

of Christianity. Acknowledging the Soviet Union's brutal tactics and the philosophy of historical

materialism posed a potential threat to the "sacredness of human personality,"[63] he nonetheless in

denied that "free societies" as Dulles defined them were particularly in line with Christian

principles. "Millions of European citizens are doubtful whether the 'free democracies' of the

West are qualified to meet the needs of the present, and to organize effectively a new order on

the basis of real social justice and equal opportunity… Is not a material, economic interest on the

part of 'big' industries and financial concerns looming behind all the high-sounding slogans of a

'free democracy,' behind all the efforts to protect 'individual' freedom,' 'free enterprise' against

any control by government, society and state?"[64]

Dulles and Hromadka's irreconcilable positions exposed a cleft that no amount of theological

synthesizing could resolve. Yet as long as the World Council insisted on placing questions of

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[62] Dulles, "The Christian Citizen in a Changing World," *Man's Disorder and God's Design*, vol. 4 75

[63] Hromadka, Untitled. Speech before the Plenary Session of the Amsterdam Conference. August 24, 1948, (UTS William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library Collection, Series 1B Box 16), 6

[64] Hromadka "Our Responsibility in the Post-War World," *Man's Disorder and God's Design*, vol 4 122.

international politics on its agenda, such disagreements were unavoidable. As we will see, the formal establishment of the World Council at Amsterdam created conditions that ensured that these disagreements would come increasingly to the forefront of international ecumenical conversation.

The Amsterdam Assembly ushered in a new phase of the ecumenical movement. Among the most significant outcomes of the event was the formal establishment of the World Council. When, on August 23, delegates unanimously ratified the WCC constitution, they brought into existence a constellation of international organs, including the WCC Assembly and two "governing bodies" – the Central Committee, comprised of 90 members whose denominational and geographical make-up reflected the Assembly as a whole and whose purpose was to carry out resolutions of the Assembly and to handle budgetary matters, and a smaller, 40-person Executive Committee.[65] Whereas the Assembly as a whole would convene once every five years, the Central Committee and the Executive were constitutionally obligated to convene at least once a year. Through them the World Council possessed organs that could deliberate on a regular and ongoing basis, issuing statements on particular international events with greater frequency. This development was, on the one hand, widely viewed as a positive development: it enabled the Council and the movement to "declare the mind of Christ with regard to the great spiritual, social and political problems of our time" more regularly and with a higher public profile.[66] On the other hand, this capacity created expectations that significantly complicated the task of maintaining harmony among the movement's constituencies. Leading up to and during the

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[65] For a discussion of the WCC constitution, see the preceding chapter.

[66] Visser't Hooft, "The World Council of Churches – Its Nature and Task," *Man's Disorder and God's Design*, vol 1, 179.

Amsterdam Assembly, the elucidation of an ecumenical "third way" in the Cold War had been a largely theoretical exercise, a matter of defining Christian social ethics in opposition to real existing conditions in East and West and competing ideologies. Now the Council would have a new test: could its leaders generate unanimity around statements issued in response to specific political events?

On this question, the fate of the movement as a whole seemed to hang between 1948-1950. Its overshadowing significance transformed the central themes and problems of ecumenical discourse. The polemic against secularism, so critical to the formation of the movement and predominant up through 1948, became increasingly irrelevant. Where ecumenists once concerned themselves with assailing modernity's rebellion against God and the social disintegration that resulted from it, the Council leadership in Geneva now became preoccupied with what Visser't Hooft referred to as the "art of equilibristic:" a practice of delicate balance in commentary on international affairs seeking to demonstrate the political relevance of the churches' "witness" while at the same time safeguarding its moral authority from charges of partisanship.[67] This was not a task that held anything like the galvanizing appeal of anti-secular prophecy. In the years leading up to the summer of 1948, ecumenists had become increasingly isolated from blocs of anti-Communist opinion in the West and the Russian Orthodox Church. In the years following Amsterdam, the movement's supporters *themselves* began to turn on the Council, in many cases coming to the same conclusion that the movement's external critics had:

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[67] The term, referring to circus skills requiring balance such as tightrope and unicycling, was first introduced by Albert Bereczky in a his open letter to Visser't Hooft of Aug 9, 1950 (see below). Bereczky meant the phrase to disparage the Council's neutralism in the Cold War, but Visser't Hooft happily accepted it as a description of precisely the responsibility of the church to avoid the pitfalls of either partisan position. (Visser't Hooft/Bereczky, Sept 19, 1950 (WCC, 42.009)).

namely, that the Council had become a "political instrument," for all its efforts to avoid precisely that fate.

At the moment that formalization of the Council enabled it to issue statements on particular international events, the prospects for a Christian third way seemed dimmer than ever. The two years after Amsterdam witnessed a sharp deterioration of US-Soviet relations. In the last days of the Assembly, the Hungarian Lutheran Bishop Ordass was imprisoned by authorities in Budapest, prompting protests from the US government. Early in 1949, the Catholic Cardinal Jozef Mindszenty was imprisoned for treason and espionage. In March of 1949, three Protestant Pastors pleaded guilty to espionage in show trials in Sofia. Also in 1949, the Soviets detonated their first atomic bomb, and China fell to Mao Zedong's communists. In 1950, Truman announced the United State's determination to develop a hydrogen bomb, and war broke out on the Korean Peninsula. As Visser't Hooft wrote at the time, "the international situation has developed in such a way that it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the position formulated at Amsterdam." The possibility of standing between the rival blocs had evaporated. "There is even less 'vital space' for a third position."[68]

How would the Council respond to these events? Ecumenists developed two strategies. First, the Executive and Central Committees of the WCC generally followed a course that sought balance between public pronouncements criticizing Western powers on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other. Thus in the summer of 1949, after the high profile trials of church leaders in Eastern Europe, the Central Committee, meeting in Chichester, England, issued a statement

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[68] Visser't Hooft, "Notes on the World Council of Churches as Between East and West" Confidential Memorandum, March 1949, 1. (WCC, 301.014).

asserting that the churches were "deeply disturbed by the increasing hindrances which many of its member churches encounter in giving their witness to Jesus Christ."[69] In February of 1950 it issued a statement condemning the hydrogen bomb as "the latest and most terrible step in the crescendo of warfare that has changed war from a fight between men and nations to a mass murder of human life."[70] Both of these statements eschewed specifically denouncing either Communist governments or the United States; they were rather attempts to abstract from the context of particular of political bodies and interests a set ethical and religious issues. The Chichester statement spoke in general terms about the threat of totalitarianism, characterizing it as a "false doctrine" which taught the "self-sufficiency of man" and the subordination of all human ends to political or economic objectives – while making no particular reference to Eastern European powers. Likewise the statement against the hydrogen bomb made no explicit reference to the United States, which had tested the weapon in January. Calling on every man – "be he statesman or scientist or ordinary citizen" – to "ponder in his conscience… how far his own action or attitude contributes to the danger of world suicide," the document went on to demand "a gigantic new effort of peace" between the two "hostile camps." "We urge the governments to enter into negotiations once again, and to do everything in their power to bring the present tragic deadlock to an end."[71] These statements were characterized not only by a generality intended to secure them from any danger of taint with power politics. They also evinced a broader policy of

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[69] "Statement of the Central Committee on Religious Liberty, Chichester, England, July 1949" *The First Six Years: A Report of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches on the activities of the Departments and Secretariats of the Council* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1954), 111-2.

[70] "Statement of the Executive Committee on the Hydrogen Bomb, Bossey, Switzerland, February 1950" *The First Six Years*, 112.

[71] Ibid, 112.

establishing parity in the WCC's public statements, balancing its warnings against the US and Communist powers.

Parity and generality were not the only features of the ecumenical third way. The WCC also looked to the activities of the UN as means for churches to enter the political realm without becoming "political." The UN served the movement as a kind of beacon, a framework of opportunities for action that would promote international reconciliation and peace. Ecumenists had worked to cultivate their influence in the UN since 1945, when Dulles and Fredrick Nolde travelled to San Francisco to write theological personalism into the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, as we saw in the last chapter. As Cold War tensions deepened, relations with the UN evolved. Ecumenists increasingly *relied* on the UN as a source of its agenda, latching onto the organization's various humanitarian initiatives as means of asserting the church's relevance in international politics along lines that could not easily be assailed as politically or ideologically partisan.

As part of this strategy, the work of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), established in 1946 to serve as a liaison with the UN, became increasingly important between 1949 and 1950. Ecumenists had from the war years onward placed special emphasis on the international protection of "human rights" as an area of special Christian concern. Where ecumenists became involved in specific initiatives to promote human rights, they worked through the CCIA, which itself followed the lead of the United Nations.[72] For instance in early

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[72] For a useful account of the origins and early history of CCIA, see Matti Peiponen, *Ecumenical Action in World Politics: The Creation of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), 1945-1949* (PhD Dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2012).

1950, weeks after the General Assembly adopted the Genocide Convention, Frederick Nolde and his colleague Kenneth Grubb, CCIA Executive Director, wrote to church leaders encouraging them to lobby their governments to sign or ratify the Convention.[73] In response to the trials of churchmen in Hungary and Bulgaria, the CCIA advised UN bodies in consultations with denominational representatives able to provide documentary evidence to the General Assembly, which charged these governments with violating obligations under the Paris Peace Treaties of 1947 to "take all measures necessary to secure to all persons under (its) jurisdiction, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, the enjoyment of human rights and of the fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, of press and publication, of religious worship, of political opinion and of public meeting." In its other forms of activism as well, the CCIA generally focused on mobilizing church opinion around issues that had already become concerns of UNO bodies. When the UN adopted a resolution in November of 1948 calling for the repatriation of Greek children in Eastern Europe, Grubb prepared a statement for the Central Committee expressing "concern over the inhuman abduction of many thousands of Greek children from their homes and fatherland."[74] In 1949 the CCIA supported referral of the legal status of South West Africa to the International Court of Justice.[75]

The movement's support of the UN and the channeling of its activism through issues taken up by UN bodies was a strategy of entering politics without becoming co-opted by political interests. But it relied implicitly on a broad acceptance in both East and the West of the UN itself as a

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[73] Quoted in *The Commission of the Churches On International Affairs: 1949-1950* (New York: World Council of Churches, 1950), 19.

[74] Quoted in Ibid, 21.

[75] Quoted in Ibid, 25.

body that stood above politics, constituting, a "town hall for the world," as Dulles put it in 1948. Here was an Achilles heel of the strategy of "equilibristic," which stood exposed from late 1949 onward and was struck hard by the outbreak of the Korean War.

In October of 1949, Mao Zedong, having driven most of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces off of the Chinese mainland, declared the People's Republic of China. China's seat in the General Assembly and the Security Council remained occupied, however, by the Republic of China. In protest against the exclusion of the PRC, Stalin boycotted the Social Security Council beginning in early 1950. The consequence of this move was a Security Council dominated by the US and its allies for a critical seven months, during which war broke out on the Korean peninsula. As North Korean forces advanced toward Seoul in July, the United States convened a meeting of the Security Council, which voted, on the basis of evidence provided by UN observers on the peninsula, unanimously to condemn North Korea's attack and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities. This was followed by a resolution enabling member nations to assist the South Korean Army in pushing the North back to the 38th parallel – and enabling the United States to intervene under the cover of UN approval.

There was a parallel between the UN's response to the Korea crisis and the World Council's response to the UN's resolution. In both cases, through the absence of Communist representatives, Western representatives dominated the deliberations. In the WCC's case, this imbalance was due to a coincidence: in the summer of 1950, just as hostilities broke out on the Korean peninsula, the Central Committee of the WCC was preparing to meet in Toronto for its first gathering in North America. The location of the meeting made it difficult for Eastern

Europeans and Asians on the Committee to attend. Of the 96 theologians, laypersons and clerics who attended, most were from North America and Western Europe.[76] The sole Chinese churchman – and one of only three Asians – among the Committee members present was the American seminary-educated Episcopalian minister Y. Y. Tsu, a staunch nationalist who had fled Shanghai soon after the Communists had taken over the city.[77]

IV. The Korean Crisis and the Challenge to the World Council's Authority

A few days before the meeting in Canada, CCIA directors Kenneth Grubb and O. Fredrick Nolde drafted a statement commending the UN Security Council for "its prompt and forthright resolution calling for the immediate cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of North Korean armed forces to the thirty-eight parallel." Pointing out that the UN resolution was based on "the most objective source available" – an observer commission of representatives from seven nations – Grubb and Nolde's statement went on to support the police action of the UN to repel the armed attack and restore international peace and security in the area. At Toronto, the Central Committee worked from this resolution to draw up its own "Statement on the Korean Situation and World Order." The crucial part reiterated the gist of the CCIA resolution:

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[76] Visser't Hooft was aware of the dangers courted by holding a Central Committee meeting in the Western Hemisphere. Noting that it was "unlikely that any of our colleagues will be with us from Eastern Europe at Toronto," he circulated in early April (two months before the outbreak of war in Korea) to Central Committee members in the United States an excerpt from a letter from Josef Hromadka predicting that international tensions could were endangering the World Council. In particular it was necessary for western churchmen to avoid comparing "our situation and that of the Germans in 1933." "It becomes all the more important that we should hear [Hromadka's] 'cri de Coeur and remember [our Eastern European colleagues] in our prayers." (Visser't Hooft/"Friends" Apr 6, 1950 (FCC, Series II, Box 23)).

[77] "Y. Y. Tsu." *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, ed Howard Boorman, assoc ed. Richard Howard (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), vol. 3

An act of aggression has been committed. The United Nations' Commission in Korea, the most objective witness available, asserts that 'all evidence points to a calculated, coordinated attack prepared and launched with secrecy' by the North Korean troops.

Armed attack as an instrument or national policy is wrong. We therefore commend the United Nations, an instrument of world order, for its prompt decision to meet this aggression and for authorizing a policy measure which every member nation should support. At the same time, governments must press individually and through the United Nations for a just settlement by negotiation and conciliation.[78]

When the resolution was discussed on July 23, there were few dissenting voices. According to the meeting minutes, Martin Niemöller questioned whether a more general defense of the values of "freedom, independence, and unity" was preferable to the specific endorsement of military action in what might justifiably be considered a civil war. The only other dissenting comments on record came from American Quakers, who objected to the use of force in general. Among ecumenical Christianity's major figures present – including Bishop George Bell, Reinhold Niebuhr, Pierre Maury, and John MacKay – all supported the statement.[79] Aside from the pacifist abstentions, the resolution passed unanimously, along with a more pastoral note extending "profound sympathy" with the people of Korea – in the North and the South – with their "ordeal."[80] When it was released on July 25, the resolution received a warm reception in Western countries. John Foster Dulles found in it evidence that, despite its penchant for moral equalizing, the Council could make the right decisions in exigencies of international crisis. He asked Edward Barret, US Assistant Secretary of State, to step up publicity of the Council's resolution over the

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[78] "Statement of the Central Committee on the Korean Situation and World Order, Toronto, Canada, July 1950," *The First Six Years 1948-1954*, 119-20.

[79] See the records of the conversation in *Minutes and reports of the Third Meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches Toronto (Canada) July 9-15, 1950* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, undated), 26-7.

[80] "Letter of the Central Committee to Christians in Korea, Toronto, Canada, 1950," *The First Six Years,* 121.

United Nations radio and Voice of America.[81] In London, Ernest Bevin wrote to George Bell congratulating him and the Central Committee's "admirable statement."[82]

The approbation from Western leaders was soon countered, however, by attacks on the statement from Eastern church leaders. In an open letter to Visser't Hooft, the Hungarian Bishop Bereczky protested the statement as the culmination of the Council's misconceived approach to international politics. Bereczky did not object to the intrusion of the church into the politics sphere; he took issue rather with what he viewed as a transparently partisan statement which aligned the Council with the Western powers. The Council was preoccupied, he wrote, with speaking against the "heathen" world while ignoring the dangers of "Pharisee-ism" – a hypocritical appropriation of Christian rhetoric and piety in the cause of worldly politics which he saw at the root of the Truman Administrations foreign policy. For Bereczky what was needed for the church to be "convincing" in the political sphere was a message of "repentance" from Western leaders for the implication of Christianity in a legacy of western imperialism whose continuity with contemporary American foreign policy was self-evident. "It took my breath away," he wrote, that the statement contained no reference to imperialism or sufferings of colonized peoples in Asia. The legacy of western aggression was the deep cause of the "wildfire" spread of Communism in Asia and, Bereczky seemed to imply, the Korean conflict itself.[83] He further took issue with the Council's reliance on the United Nations for guidance, charging that a decision based on the supposed "objectivity" of the UN Observers Commission was no

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[81] Dulles/Barret Jul 26, 1950. Dulles Papers, Box 51.

[82] Bevin/Bell, Jul 29, 1950. WCC, 428.16.2.9.1.

[83] Albert Bereczky, "Offener Brief an den Generalsekretär des Weltkirchenrates Dr. W. A. Visser't Hooft," Aug 9, 1950 (WCC, 42.009/3).

replacement for Christian conscience. Further, to consider the United Nations "non-partisan" when the Soviet Union and China were not represented in it was clearly itself a partisan move. "You have warned the World Council against entering the political sphere," Bereczky reminded Hooft, "and here you nonetheless accept the 'non-partisan objectivity' of a political element." Indeed, in accepting the UN's version of the facts, Hooft had clearly condemned the other side in the conflict.[84] Characteristically for the committed ecumenist he was, Bereczky closed his seven page attack on the Council's Korea statement with a plea for dialogue: it was precisely because he wished to remain in the Council that he had lodged his complaints in a public forum. But between his attack and the overwhelming support of Western ecumenists for the action, it was difficult to see where the World Council could find a common ground.

In September Visser't Hooft received a second attack from the East. Josef Hromadka and the Czech Brethen Bishop Victor Hajek, in another letter of public protest, echoed many of Bereczky's complaints. Hajek and Hromadka asserted even more forthrightly than the Hungarian Bishop that the Korean statement had jeopardized the World Council's authority as an instrument of Christian unity. "We are really disturbed by the fact that, in one of the most decisive and tragic moments of world history, the World Council… has identified itself, self-assuredly, with one side" in the conflict. Why had the Council had not condemned other international aggression, including the exclusion of "Democratic China" from the UN and the bloody suppression of the peoples of Vietnam and Malaya fighting for their political freedom

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[84] Ibid, 5. The complete quotation reads as follows: "Sie haben den Weltrat vor einem Eintritt in die politische Sphaere gewarnt – und zwar selbstverständlich auch in der Kenntnis der politischen Verantwortung der Kirche – und heir nehmen sie dennoch die 'unparteiische Sachlichkeit' eines politischen Faktors an, ja Sie nehmen sogar dessen Feststellung die Tatsachen an, offensichlicht verurteilen Sie zugleich den Tatsachenbefund der anderen Seite und auch das, wenn man ihm Glauben schenkt."

and social self-determination? At stake in the Council's interventions in political affairs was the question of whether the Council was capable of serving the function its architects had envisioned. "We are increasingly disturbed…" they wrote, "lest the Ecumenical movement hitherto represented, with such a dignity, by the World Council of Churches become an instrument of one power-group." Like Bereczky, Hromdka and Hajek called on Western nations in the Council to be especially on guard against the motives that led their interventions in world affairs, suggesting even that it was the "traditionally Christian" character of these societies that made unchristian policies in Eastern Asia especially culpable. "A vast majority of the Christians organized in the World Council of Churches comes from the traditionally Christian countries... It is precisely for this fact that they should carefully watch the motives of their own nations in international politics."[85]

Appended to the end of the open letter was a handwritten note from Hromadka to Visser't Hooft, in which Hromadka threatened to boycott preparations for the second Assembly pending the General Secretary's response. Noting that his involvement in the preparations would itself be a "rare privilege," he stated that his decision in the matter would depend "on the result of our discussion which may follow the letter you have before you." "We mean it in all earnest," he continued, "and pray that some way might be found to understand one another more adequately and fruitfully."[86]

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[85] "Letter from Prof. Josef L. Hromadka and Dr. Viktor Hajek to Dr. W. A. Visser't Hooft" Nov 30, 1950, (WCC, 37.0003).

[86] Handwritten note appended to a personal copy of the Hromadka/Hajek letter of protest, (WCC, 42.0039).

Opposition to the statement did not only come from Eastern European churches. The French YMCA attacked the Korea Statement as well, along the same lines of Bereczky and Hromadka's critique, assailing it as proof that the Council had taken sides in the conflict. In a statement following taking much the same line as Bereczky and the Hromadka-Hajek letter, the journal *Réforme* published a statement of the French Student Christian Federation attacking the Korean statement as an indication that the World Council had tilted dangerously to the right, and risked becoming an agent of the power politics it claimed to transcend.[87]

At the Geneva headquarters, the WCC staff in late 1950 and early 1951 devoted themselves to damage control. Bishop George Bell convened an emergency meeting of the Executive Committee for January 1951. As he acknowledged, there was no possibility of retracting the statement without re-convening of the Central Committee: in any case, such a move would undoubtedly fail to win the support of western church leaders, who remained firmly in favor of the UN resolution and America's role in the peacekeeping action in Korea. Bell himself had voted for the resolution, and remained convinced of the justice of the peacekeeping mission and the duty of the churches to support it, even as he saw the existential threat the movement confronted. It was imperative to involve Eastern Europeans in the meeting, which was sure to be divisive. "We shall certainly have big problems on our hands at the Executive," Bell wrote to Hooft, while stating that the meeting must provide an opportunity for the airing of grievances. "We must let the various, and no doubt competing, views have full expression."[88]

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[87] "Les Eglises et la Guerre de Corée," *Réform* (Nov 1950)*,* 2.

[88] Bell/Visser't Hooft Jan 18, 1951, (WCC, 37.0003).

Meanwhile, Visser't Hooft sought to placate the statement's critics. His defense of the Korea statement, however, did little more reiterate the position that he had taken since the breakdown of the Council's courtship of the Moscow Patriarchate: attacks on the World Council as a "political instrument" were simply based on a "misunderstanding" of the ontological status of Council and its utterances. As Visser't Hooft put it to Bereczky when the latter visited him in person in Geneva in late 1950, "No resolution of a World Council Body," Visser't Hooft explained, "ever commits all the member churches."[89] The pronouncements of the Council were not attempts to impose an "official line" on the churches; rather, they were statements made *to* member churches, and invitations to response. He reiterated that line in a memorandum composed for the emergency meeting of the Executive Committee. The Council "is not authorized to speak <u>for</u> the Churches," but only "<u>to</u> the churches."[90] Pronouncements from the Council's organs left each member church "the right to define its own position with regard to such pronouncements, that is to reject of confirm them." Correctly understanding the economy of ecumenical dialogue was, for Visser't Hooft, the Movement's response to the challenge of political polarization. Those who saw the alignment of the WCC with the West had – like the Russian Orthodox Church – fallen victim to a misunderstanding.[91] This line of defense was a strategy for domesticating dissent: in fact, Visser't Hooft was suggesting, the conflict that the Korea statement had set off simply showed that the Council's design was working as it was supposed to.

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[89] "Notes on a Conversation with Bishop Bereczky of the Hungarian Reformed Church on September 2nd, 1950," (WCC, 42.009/3).

[90] Visser't Hooft, "The World Council of Churches and International Conflict," Memo Prepared for the Executive Committee of the WCC in preparation for its meeting in Bièvres, Jan 30-Feb 1, 1951, 1. (WCC 37.0003).

[91] Ibid, 6.

Bereczky, for one, was unconvinced. To him, the Korea statement brought to light the disconnect between the World Council's self-understanding and the reality of its functioning in a politically polarized environment. There could be no space outside of politics in which ecumenical conversation could take place: in theory ecumenical discourse might claim to exist in a sphere "above" politics, but in reality all such discourse carried a political valence. What was important was not just the intentions behind the statement but the impression it left. For his part, Bereczky believed that it was only through *embracing* Communism that the churches could effectively secure a vital, prophetic space, apart from a capitalist order that had compromised the authenticity of its Gospel in the modern age. This was an extreme position: even Hromadka had never argued that the Council needed to make a corporate statement in favor of Communism. But the premise of Bereczky's objection – that there could be no purification of ecumenical conversation in a politically polarized age – was echoed by churchmen who in no way shared the Hungarian Bishop's politics. As Henrik Kraemer, now director of the Ecumenical Institute and certainly no friend of the Soviet Union and Eastern European regimes, wrote to Visser't Hooft: "The pronouncement of Toronto was essentially wrong because, although it was not intended to be so, it was a political statement and not a word of the Church to the Churches." Kraemer made clear that he "did not agree with the arguments" of the statement's critics: Bereczky and Hromadka were no less "political" in their protests against the statement than the authors of the statement had been.[92] The only solution, in Kraemer's mind, was that the Council become much more reticent in its pronouncements on pressing international affairs: retreat, in his mind, seemed to be the only way for the church to retain its supra-political position.

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[92] Kraemer/VtH 13 Jan 1951, (WCC, 37.0003).

That proposal was surely more practical than Bereczky's call for an ecumenical turn to Moscow, but it too was an option that few movement leaders were willing to take seriously. Visser't Hooft rejected it as at odds with the Council's duty to assert the message of the Christian faith in international affairs. As he put it at the time, one of the central tasks of the World Council "is to render concrete witness to the Lordship of Christ and to the implications of this Lordship for national and international life."[93] The Council seemed caught in a dilemma: securing the unity of churches in the Council required a turn away from internationally contentious issues that representatives on both sides of the conflict were unwilling to take.

When it gathered in Bièvres outside of Paris on January 21, 1951, the Executive took an intermediary path. The frank conversation between church leaders from the West and Eastern Europe failed to materialize: Bereczky and Hromadka were unable to attend (possibly because Hungarian and Czech authorities were freshly suspicious of the Council after its Korea statement). The gathering drafted a ruminative document, released in February, that neither endorsed the American-led police action nor repudiated the Toronto statement. Noting the absence of "churchmen from Eastern Europe," the document began by asserting that the Executive Committee had given "much thought to the grave situation caused by the international crisis" in Korea – a euphemistic characterization of the debates that saw two critical WCC officers threaten to resign. The statement settled into a posture of ethical abstraction, condemning political conflict and declaring that its "victim is man. Often he is treated no better

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[93] "The World Council of Churches and International Affairs," Memo Prepared for the Executive Committee of the WCC, 1950, 1 (WCC, 37.0003).

than an object, or at best a tool, rather than a responsible person."[94] Extending prayers to the

Korean people on both sides, the statement seemed unobjectionable.

Three months after the Bièvres statement, however, the fallout from the episode worsened still

further. In China – though ecumenists seemed not to be aware of the fact until much later – the

Toronto statement had played a role in a new crackdown on Protestant churches by the

Communist government. In mid-April, Lu Ting-I, Director of the CPC's Central Propaganda

Department, presided over a show trial of numerous Chinese pastors. In his opening remarks –

according to a transcript of the trials delivered to George Bell by British missionaries who had

left China but remained in touch with sources there – Lu Ting-I assailed the movement as an

organization "created with the direct support of American imperialism," funded by John

Rockefeller Jr. and headed by the "famous war-monger John Foster Dulles."[95] Y. Y. Tsu, who

had endorsed the Toronto statement, was attacked as a "counter-revolutionary degenerate"[96] by

Chinese Anglicans who were sympathetic to the Communist regime. The Presbyterian minister

and WCC President T. C. Chao – who was himself, as we saw earlier, a supporter of the

Communists – found himself saddled with what had become an unacceptable foreign

entanglement. On April 28, 1951 – ten months after the outbreak of war – Chao took the step that

Hromadka and Bereczky had threatened and tendered his resignation from the WCC Presidium.

The Korea statement, he explained in a letter to the WCC, had placed him in "an impossible

situation." "As a patriotic Chinese I must protest against the Toronto message, which sounds so

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[94] "Letter of the Executive Committee to the member Churches of the World Council," Bièvres, France, February 1951" *The First Six Years,* 121.

[95] "Extracts from report on Peking Conference April 16-21, 1951," (WCC 301, 014).

[96] Ibid, 4.

much like the voice of Wall Street, and as a president I should endorse the statement. I can no longer be one of the presidents of the World Council," Chao added, indicating that "in doing so I want to say that I have complete freedom to affirm my faith in and my loyalty to Jesus Christ."[97] That Chao's letter was coerced went without saying to Visser't Hooft and Bell, but, as ever, their concern was primarily to avoid reinforcing the impression of the Council that reigned in China and other Communist nations. Visser't Hooft recommended holding off publishing a statement on Chao's resignation, lest simply announcing "the fact that we have lost our Asian President… might seem to indicate that we have become a purely western body."[98]

Conclusion

The presence of pro-Communist church leaders in ecumenical institutions and the World Council bureaucracy reflected and reinforced the determination of the body to chart a "non-political" third way in the conflict. The challenge of defining Christianity as an alternative to the West and Communism increasingly marginalized the anti-secular discourse that had originally galvanized ecumenists in the 1930s. Between 1945 and 1950, ecumenists continued to embrace anti-secularism, attempting to frame the Cold War, not as a struggle of Christian civilization against godless atheism but a conflict of the rival materialisms of capitalism and communism. But the attempt for forge unity through a Christian vision and practice of social order – the "responsible society" – revealed the limit of a shared theological and intellectual orientation in the face of mounting political polarization. Shared spiritual commitment to the transcendent neutrality of the church proved politically ineffective, not just in meliorating the conflict between the US and the

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[97] Chao/Presidents of the WCC, April 28, 1951 (WCC, 428.16.2.9.1).

[98] Visser't Hooft/Presidents of the WCC, May 18, 1951. (WCC, 428.16.2.9.1).

USSR but in generating cohesion within the polyglot constituency of the World Council. Up until 1948, the movement's efforts to court Communist churchmen alienated it from critics in the West; after 1948, these same efforts to trace a third way began to create a split within the movement itself. Increasingly, the common commitments of ecumenical thinking only provided the occasion for bitter clashes between churches that took sharply opposed positions on the major events of the day.

Was their any hope for world Christian unity in a world where theology had come to seem like politics in disguise? By early 1951, repeatedly frustrated in their efforts to "transcend" the Cold War, ecumenists were ready to give up on the conflict altogether. In the deliberations that led to the Executive Committee's follow-up statement on Korea, released from Bièvres, some participants argued the way out of the vortex of political antagonism led not from the West – as Dulles had argued at Amsterdam – or from the East – as Bereczky was now insisting – but from the South. For Stephen C. Neill, a Scottish-born former missionary and Anglican Bishop in Tirunelveli in South India in the early 1940s, now a member of the Executive Committee, the whole approach of Toronto and Bièvres "does not take nearly enough account of the passionate desire of S[outh] E[ast] Asia and Africa to keep out of the present conflict, which it regards merely as a conflict between two western materialistic ideologies." For Neill, the struggles of the "new nations" for a place in the postwar international order resonated with the frustrated aims of the ecumenical movement. "Whether India and other countries can keep out of the battle, and whether they will really be able to discover a third way remains to be seen." But Neill was hopeful. In particular, he had been impressed with the leadership Jawaharlal Nehru had shown in the fall of 1950, when he sought to broker negotiations between Beijing, Moscow, and

Washington and proposed a peace resolution that would bring Communist China into the UN while removing North Korean forces from the South. "The recent intense activity of the Indian delegation at U.N.O.," Neill wrote, was "good evidence… of the conviction of some of these countries that the world scene is not to be interpreted in the light of the one at present most prominent conflict."[99] To Neill, the incipient "non-aligned" movement represented a worldly instrumentality whose political aims – meliorating the East-West conflict and building a new social order that would serve as an alternative to Soviet Communism and Western Capitalism – resonated with ecumenists' sense of their spiritual vocation in the world. As we will see in the next chapter, he was not alone in perceiving an alignment of concerns between the churches and what was coming to be called the Third World. By 1951, in fact, a younger generation of ecumenists – led by an Asian theologian – had already worked out a new ecumenical theology that took the political struggles of the decolonizing world as a basis for revolutionizing the movement's understanding of its global mission.

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[99] Stephen C. Neill, "W.C.C. and the International Conflict," [a memorandum in response to Visser't Hooft's essay of that title], (WCC, 37.0003).

Chapter 6

Ecumenical Revolutionaries:
M. M. Thomas and the Transcendence of Politics in the Third World

In the 1930s, ecumenical thinkers had struggled to disentangle theology from politics. The crisis of secularism, they believed, had reached an apotheosis in the emergence of the "political religions" of Nazism and Communism. Forsaking religion in its traditional forms, modern humanity had turned to false idols, investing nations, races, and classes with aspects of divinity. Not only in Europe, but in all parts of the world touched by the spread of "secular civilization," parties, movements, leaders had become instruments of salvation, transforming politics into a site of clashing fanaticisms whose secular frames of reference concealed their religious character. So, at least, went the logic of ecumenical polemic.

In response to the spiritual and social "disorder" of secular modernity, ecumenists sought to establish a world community on the basis of true faith. Their effort to realize the universal church as a global unity of believers from all corners of the "inhabitable earth" (*oikoumene*) was a campaign to put politics in its place, in theory and practice. The theology ecumenists expounded in international study groups, journals, and conferences rested on a categorical distinction between "political" and "personal" relationships: in the former, conflicts for power and domination enacted the fall and humanity's alienation from the divine; in the later, God's grace brought humanity together in relations of love and mutual responsibility. Ecumenists sought to parochialize politics in practice by creating and participating in international institutions and networks that would enable Christians, by gathering, debating, and enacting their common faith, to transcend the political divisions that separated nation-states and empires. For the movement's

supporters, the inaugural conference of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948 in Amsterdam was a triumph of the personal over the political. In common worship, in theological consensus, in schemes for cooperation in service and relief projects, participants caught a glimpse of the universal church as a historical reality.

But at the moment that clerics, theologians, and church leaders assembled at Amsterdam, a competing vision of the relation between ecumenism and politics was emerging within the youth wing of the movement. In 1951, the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) published *The Christian in the World Struggle*, a study guide intended to stimulate reflection on the political aims and responsibilities of Christians in all parts of the globe.[1] Largely the work of a young Indian theologian and Marxist, M. M. Thomas, the book seemed to utterly reverse the anti-political theology that had interwar ecumenists had advanced. Thomas and his co-author, the British theologian Davis McCaughey, argued that the church would become a historical reality not outside of, but rather through its participation in politics. The work evoked a world in the throes of a "social revolution on an unprecedented scale," defined by the struggle of "submerged classes, nations, [and] races seeking power and responsibility which was previously denied them."[2] To understand the struggle from a Christian perspective, Thomas and McCaughey wrote, was to perceive the need of siding with the revolutionaries. "Behind and within the social revolution of our day, and in spite of everything that protagonists and antagonists say about it, the Christian sees by faith the righteous hand of God."[3] For Thomas and McCaughey, the

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[1] Printed on cheap paper, the 200 page work, complete with study questions, bibliography, and appendices, was distributed to SCM chapters in Europe, North America, South America, and Asia.

[2] M. M. Thomas and J. D. McCaughey, *The Christian in the World Struggle* (Geneva: World Student Christian Federation, 1951), 16-7.

[3] Ibid, 40.

"personal" and the "political" were not distinct but rather coterminous spheres of existence. The authors called on student Christians to find God in the "technicalities of politics."[4] In their theology, there was no space beyond politics where the church could safely plant its community: to remain aloof was to decide for the counterrevolution. Christians became the world community that Christ made them only when they entered together the world struggle in solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized.

For the ecumenical movement, *The Christian in the World Struggle* was an indication of things to come. From 1928 to 1968, ecumenists went from the front lines of the "church struggle" – whose flashpoint was Nazi Germany – to a "world struggle" – played out in the global Third World. It was a shift in the ways in which the movement understood and articulated its purpose: in the 1930s, movement leaders were concerned primarily with protecting the church from contamination by secularized ideologies and modes of thought; in the postwar period, they were primarily concerned with defining and carrying out the church's responsibility within the secular realm. Thomas's book advanced, for the first time, the theological innovations on which this shift in orientation would be based as it played out first within the WSCF and then WCC in the postwar period.[5] From the late 1950s onward, what seemed to virtually all observers and participants to be the conspicuous feature of the movement was its valorization and theological justification of "radical" political engagement. In these years, movement theologians like

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[4] Thomas and McCaughey, *The Christian in the World Struggle*, 8.

[5] Thomas's career within ecumenical institutions reflects the prominence of his ideas. After serving as a Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation in the period discussed in this chapter, he became secretary of the East Asian Christian conference for church and society and a chairman of the World Council's Program on Christian Responsibility Toward Areas of Rapid Social Change, established to develop a theology and practice of ecumenism in the Third World. He chaired the Central Committee of the World Council from 1968 to 1971 and was elected a WCC president from 1983-91.

Richard Shaull, H. D. Wendland, Kyaw Than, and Emilio Castro proclaimed "theologies of revolution" at international conferences; church leaders marched against the Vietnam War and the World Council of Churches embarked on controversial programs of aid and activism in the global South, including the "Program to Combat Racism," which funneled church funds to support Marxist guerrillas in southern Africa.

What caused this seemingly dramatic shift in the ecumenical appraisal of politics? The question has hardly been addressed in scholarship on the movement, which has perceived no real transformation in ecumenical attitudes toward politics in the 1940s. Scholars have tended to either approach ecumenical actors *as* political actors – addressing their theology to the extent it informs their political actions and allegiances – or looked to the 1960s as the moment at which the movement became, for the first time, "politicized." The former approach has generally emphasized political progressivism and liberal internationalism as constitutive, if contested, agendas of the movement from its inception. In these accounts, the radicalization of international ecumenism in the 1960s was continuous with Anglo-American Social Gospel Protestantism of the late nineteenth century. Transnational ecumenical elites, including not only North Americans but Europeans, Asians, and Africans, thought and acted within a tradition whose principle feature was the priority of social reform in search of the Kingdom of God over individual conversion and whose intellectual foundations were already in place by the time of Walter Rauschenbusch. One major shortcoming of this approach is that it fails to reckon with the repudiation of liberal theology that defined ecumenical consensus in the 1930s, when neo-orthodoxy became an international idiom. More seriously, it fails to account in any way for the international practice of ecumenical Christianity and the impact of contacts and exchanges among theologians, clerics,

and laypersons from the various theological and confessional traditions within the North Atlantic and between Europeans and North Americans on the one hand and non-western church leaders on the other. As a result, in these historical accounts, the ecumenical movement becomes the echo chamber of an Anglo-American political-theological imagination.[6]

A second historiographical approach attempts to take seriously the international contacts, exchanges, and debates that ecumenical institutions and networks enabled. In doing so, these scholars see a major break occurring within the movement's history in the postwar era, as church leaders and theologians from the Third World asserted greater control over the movement beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[7] But this approach fails to explain why these leaders from the non-European world, after years of being marginalized within the movement, should have finally achieved the positions of bureaucratic and intellectual leadership previously denied them. Both accounts make little of what was the peculiar feature of ecumenical discourse of the

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[6] This approach has been dominant in most recent work on ecumenical Christianity, especially in the United States. See David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), and William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008). The same approach of collapsing ecumenical actors into political contexts has been applied to studies of ecumenists in Britain and Europe, eg. Philip M. Coupland, *Britannia, Europa and Christendom : British Christians and European Integration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Lucian Leustean, *The Ecumenical Movement & the Making of the European Community* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014). The politics of ecumenists look different depending on whether they are situated within a European, British, or American context, suggesting how political readings of ecumenism shut down or sharply limit the possibility for understanding what enabled the Movement to mobilize across nations and regions.

[7] Examples of this approach include many official ecumenical histories or histories written by figures associated with the movement. Important works are Annegreth Schilling, Klaus Fitschen u.a. (Hg.), *Die Politisierung des Protestantismus. Entwicklungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland während der 1960er und 70er Jahre* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 150-167; Margaret Nash, *Ecumenical Movement in the 1960s* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1975), esp Part I, and David L. Edwards, "Signs of Radicalism in the Ecumenical Movement," *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1948-1968* ed. Harold Fey (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1968), 373-410 for early accounts of the ecumenical embrace of political radicalism in the 1960s. More recently, Jill K. Gill (*Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left* (Dekalb, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2011)) has chronicled ecumenical involvement in the anti-Vietnam War movement in the United States. Many of the essays in *Die Politisierung des Protestantismus:* ed. Fitschen et al. develop the thesis of a radicalization of ecumenical politics in the 1960s in an international and European context.

1940s: the first emergence of "politics" as a field invested with a peculiar theological significance for the cause of world Christian unity.

In this chapter, I will address the ecumenical "discovery" of politics in a new way. My approach offers a history of the World Student Christian Federation's "Political Commission," the intellectual and institutional milieu in which Thomas developed the ideas he advanced of *The Christian in the World Struggle.* The name of the body itself announced its novelty: in keeping with interwar ecumenists' suspicion of politics, there had never been a "political" commission in the WCC or indeed in any other ecumenical organization. Founded in 1946, the Commission was first a product and then the locus of a series of discussions around the specifically "political" responsibilities of Christian students. As we'll see in the first part of this chapter, these conversations began at a moment during World War II when it became apparent to the Federation leadership that, for young Christians across the world mobilized in the armed forces, in the European Resistance, or displaced by violent conflict, there could be no escape from politics, which permeated all aspects of life in a "total war." At first, the political activation of youth looked like it might pay ecumenical dividends, as Allied victory presented an opportunity for ecumenical Christians to help write the terms of a postwar order. But hopes that student Christians could reach a consensus around their political objectives were shortly upset by disagreements over the appropriate attitude toward Communism.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Cold War brought the cause of church unity to an impasse in the North Atlantic world. But for ecumenists from the colonized regions of Asia, long marginalized in the movement, the East-West conflict presented an opportunity. The second part

of this chapter examines how Thomas, while an organizer of youth student Christian groups collaborating with Communist Party actions against British rule in the early 1940s, developed concept of ecumenical dialogue which would enact, rather than attempt to transcend, political conflicts. The third part shows how Thomas's theology, developed at the intersection of international ecumenism and anti-colonial struggle, was adopted by Federation leaders as the antidote to Cold War divisions on an international global scale. These sections emphasize the central role of the Marxian idea of ideological critique in Thomas's ecumenical theology. Years before Communism threatened ecumenical unity, Thomas appropriated Marx to diagnose theological debate among Christians as political combat in disguise. But, he claimed, the presence of politics in the *oikoumene* did not discredit the integrity of the movement; rather, it pointed toward a deeper apprehension of "unity in Christ," established through the recognition of political disagreement as an expression of original sin.

The story of the ecumenical discovery of politics then, is also the story of a renegotiation of authority within the movement, as Christians from the Third World began, for the first time, to play a significant part in shaping the intellectual and practical agendas of international ecumenical institutions. Thomas's case shows in detail how this renegotiation took place, and why what he and his North Atlantic colleagues called "the Asian point of view" held so much promise: by defining the struggle of "submerged nations, races, and classes" in theological and not political terms, Thomas offered a strategy for consolidating the ecumenical community outside the impasse the East-West conflict. For all its insistence on *participation* in political struggle, his theology of "revolution," succeeded because it promised the transcendence of politics that ecumenists had sought since 1914 but in the postwar period seemed increasingly

unable to achieve. In an age when ecumenists were attacked as both instruments of western imperialism by churches in the Eastern bloc and agents of world Communism by Western religious conservatives, the expansive possibilities of the Third World promised movement elites a new source unifying purpose.

The theologies developed in the Federation's Political Commission saved the ecumenical movement from fracture. But political ecumenism could not entice American evangelicals, the Russian Orthodox clerisy, or any of the other counter-ecumenical Christianities whose emergence we examined in the last chapter back into the movement. Indeed, to ecumenism's most vocal critics – religious anti-Communists in the US – the theology of revolution seemed to exemplify precisely the "politicization" of Christianity it sought to circumvent. Thomas's ascent, then, brings into focus the ironic denouement of the movement whose history we have traced throughout this dissertation. In the interwar period, ecumenists' campaign to overcome politics had posited the world church as the foundation of social order. Christianity's universal truth transfigured national, racial, and class conflict into godly diversity, redeeming humanity from the chaos of contemporary secular civilization. The postwar history of the WSCF we will examine here shows how, in order to salvage a global remnant in an age when the Cold War and decolonization rent Protestant and Orthodox churches, ecumenists found it necessary to abandon the idea of Christianity as the foundation of social order. Preserving the unity of a cross-section of international church elites required mobilizing around a new vocation, that of a revolutionary avant guarde, whose mission in the contemporary world was not to secure social order but to overturn it, through political struggle and transformation. After the early 1950s, Christians could

embrace either the cause of ecumenical solidarity or that of religious social stability and harmony. They could not embrace both.

I. Conceiving a Theological Dialogue on "Politics:" Origins of the WSCF Political Commission, 1942-46

It was within the constellation of student Christian groups – representing a constituency that was, for the most part, under the age of the thirty five – that the political turn in ecumenical thought first took place. It began with a conflict that was, in a phrase repeated in numerous Federation conferences and articles in the Federation's journal *Student World*, a "total war." The phrase did not only denote the intrusion of violence into the civilian sphere; it encapsulated a new understanding about the relation between "theological" and "political" praxis. After 1939, even followers of Karl Barth – who had throughout the 1930s argued relentlessly against all efforts to derive a political program from the absolute demands of the Gospel – conceded that it was impossible for Christians to remain incognizant of religious responsibilities that could be fulfilled only through political action. In Barth's Confessing Church, Christian obedience required partisan opposition to a Nazi regime that had become a "secular religion."[8] In and outside of occupied Europe, the war drew student Christian groups into the arena of "politics" in various ways. Conscripted into the military, imprisoned, resisting occupying powers (or collaborating with them), displaced, and forced to immigrate, young Christians in the 1930s were swept dramatically into the force fields of power politics. As Robert Mackie in 1942 had put it,

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[8] Philippe Maury, a Secretary of the Federation who will be discussed shortly, was a Barthian in the French Resistance and argued that at the moment of resistance to totalitarianism the churches action was at once theological and political. Consider also the reflection of the New Zealand student Christian leader Alexander Miller (who spent the war years in Scotland) on the churches' relation to Nazism: ""Not to resist Nazism was to acquiesce in it. There was no living alternative at all." ("Is Everything Permitted," *Student World* (4th Quarter, 1945), 288.

"political issues have invaded the sanctum of the university… Consequently any action has become political action, and faith is directly expressed by daily affirmation and resistance."[9]

Why was it that there was no recognition of "politics" as an issue of ecumenical concern among the older milieu of the World Council of Churches-in-formation? The occlusion was due in part to differences in the membership and aims of the WCC and the WSCF. The WCC was a Council of *churches*. The various schemes of postwar international order advanced in WCC-connected groups such as the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace and the British Peace Aims Group aspired to speak with the authority of the universal church, a divine community whose interests ecumenists jealously distinguished from all specifically political programs. But if they denied the political authority of the church per se, ecumenists were equally agreed that individual Christians had a responsibility to enter the realm of political action, acting according to conscience in light of Christian principles and teaching. The WSCF was structurally more open to conversations about individual students political decisions because it was an organization comprised not of member churches but of voluntary institutions – the so-called Student Christian Movements, organized nationally and regionally across the world – which were themselves constituted not by member churches but by individuals. This constitutional difference created the room in which Federation leaders could frame conversations around political issues as matters confronting the individual Christian conscience, even as they hewed to the consensus position that the church as such remained above politics.

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[9] Robert Mackie, Editorial, *Student World,* (4th Quarter, 1942), 248.

In 1942, as fighting raged in Europe and Asia and international communication became more difficult, the Federation initiated a new series in the *Student World,* entitled "Thinking Ahead as Christians." Its aim was to stimulate collective reflections among its constituencies on questions of "political" responsibility. The series featured essays, personal correspondence, and documents pertaining to debates over war aims and postwar order that would help, in the words of a Federation resolution of 1942, student Christians to reflect on their "responsibility in the political realm." The idea was to circulate reflections stimulating readers to reach a deeper understanding of their faith by connecting it with the concrete ethical and political decisions that the war had forced upon them. "We agreed that that our particular responsibility for clear thinking as members of the Federation lay not in the realms of political 'blue-prints' or theological restatement, but in the area where these crossed and overlapped, in the area where had to seek to live our lives as Christians," read the resolution of a 1942 conference held by the Federation in Poughkeepsie, New York, where a small gathering of Federation staff and representatives from the student ecumenical diaspora had gathered.[10] "Thinking Ahead as Christians" was a conversation framed for *participants* in what the Poughkeepsie meeting called an "international civil war."[11] From 1942 to 1946, the series published pieces ranging from correspondence of SCM members in the armed forces, reflections by political prisoners in Germany and China, participants in the resistance, and documents produced by the Peace Aims Group, the Commission on Just and Durable Peace, and other organizations devoted to world order.[12]

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[10] Mackie, "Thinking Ahead as Christians" *Student World*, (3rd Quarter, 1942), 147.

[11] Ibid, 193.

[12] See for instance the articles in *Student World* (3rd Quarter, 1942) for a study guide featuring "Questions for Thinking Ahead," focusing on issues of the Christian attitude toward communism, postwar international organization, imperialism, and "Anglo-American leadership" of world order. Staged dialogues between Christian perspectives representing apparently quintessential views of churches from different nations and confessions on

The mass mobilization in wartime of youth was a necessary, but not sufficient condition for a conversation on Christian political responsibility. There was a second factor as well, the full implications of which the Federation leadership shied away from discussing explicitly. The war had not only brought Christian students *into* the political arena; it had generated a Christian student community homogenous enough in its political loyalties to make the prospect of a conversation about politics appear promising as an exercise of *inclusion*, a practice through which Christians could discover common ground rather than conflict. Up until the late 1930s, the Federation had sought to maintain a broad representation of student Christian groups – including those who were sympathetic or at least not outwardly opposed to Nazism – in the name of bearing witness to a church unity transcending political boundaries. The ecumenical project valorized *theology* as the idiom of ecumenical consensus – a language in which the unity of Christians could be discovered in spite of political loyalties and convictions dividing it. But during the war, largely as a consequence of the difficulties of communication across belligerent lines, the reach of the Federation's network all but completely excluded Christian groups opposed to the Allied cause. The students whose writings appeared in the pages of the Federations *Student World*, who attended its occasional conferences, and whom the Federation imagined itself to speak for and to included, occasionally, German or Japanese Christians. But these were either resistors – whose works were published anonymously – or refugees who had made their way to Allied countries. Already by the late 1930s, Nazi-sympathizing Protestants had begun to slip out of the ecumenical orbit, distressed by the majority's mobilization of the

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political questions were a feature of the 4th Quarter 1943 issue. The issue in the 3rd Quarter of 1945 highlighted accounts of Christians who had served in the resistance and/or been imprisoned in concentration or POW camps.

rhetoric of "totalitarianism" to attack the Hitler regime. The war made the break complete, loping

off the limbs of the body that had reached substantially different political judgments.

"The Rediscovery of Politics," a memo outlining a proposal for the Political Commission written

in early 1946, observed that the "Thinking Ahead as Christians" series "had shown conclusively

that Christian students who started from a common faith frequently reached similar conclusions

about political facts and events, even though the impossibility of correspondence between them

prevented the interchange of ideas."[13] The consensus included "students in occupied Europe as

well as in Anglo Saxon countries, in the neutral countries no less than in Japanese-occupied

Asia."[14] The document celebrated this risorgimento of the *oikoumene* without mentioning that it

had been achieved through the destruction of fascist political programs ecumenists had once

sought to accommodate.

Tantalized by the possibility of advancing a new stage along the path of Christian unity, the

Federation leadership was caught up short when, after the war, political solidarity among

Christians began to unwind along with the wartime alliance between the Western powers and the

Soviet Union. The first signs of this unwinding registered in 1946. Seeking to further stimulate

discussions initiated in the "Thinking Ahead as Christians" series, Philippe Maury, a Secretary of

the Federation, a veteran of the French Resistance, circulated a "political questionnaire" to SCMs

in Europe, North and South America, and Asia that spring. Part one addressed the attitudes of

university students in general. "What political doctrines are fashionable today among students?"

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[13] "Rediscovery of Politics," Anonymous Memorandum, 1. (WCC 213.13.1).

[14] Ibid.

it asked. "To what extent are they really accepted as a rule of thought and action? What proportion of the student body is touched by them?" It then inquired as to whether communism was "active in your universities? If so, is it in its ideological aspect, as a doctrine of history, of society, of the world and of men, or as a purely political force ('the party' or Russia)?" "What is the attitude of students to capitalism?" "To the different socialist solutions? To class-war? to plans for social security?" Following these questions, a second part of the questionnaire inquired into the political attitudes of Christian students: "Are members of your SCM concerned about politics?" it asked. "Does this concern lead them to concrete action?" "Are Christian students aware of any specifically Christian attitude to politics? If so, what foundation can they find?" [15]

The capacious range of questions posed here served multiple purposes. Gathering information about the political thinking of both Christians and non-Christians allowed the Federation to frame a dialogue germane to the wider landscape of student opinion and ideas. It recalled the earlier organizing strategies of pre-World War I missionary surveys, whose function of categorizing religious beliefs and practices we examined in chapter one. Likewise, the dialogue on politics initiated in 1946 replicated the conversational form that emerged under Oldham's supervision beginning in the years following the Jerusalem Conference of 1928, examined in chapter three. That conversation, however, had eschewed discussion of *political* attitudes, since it construed politics as a field in which Christians might legitimately disagree, even as they could unite around a theological affirmation of faith. But in the wake of its wartime experience, the Federation sought to expand the scope of discussion where Oldham and other earlier church leaders had feared to tread.

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[15] "Political Questionnaire," (WCC 213.13.24).

In the uncharted territory of politics, it remained unclear where the appropriate boundaries of ecumenical concern lay. Drawing on the findings from the questionnaire, "Rediscovery of Politics" sought a middle ground between theoretical formulation and the prescription of specific political decisions and allegiances. On the one hand, the discussion of politics could draw on a body of what ecumenists in the interwar period had called "social thought," particularly as it had been gathered in the study volumes compiled in preparation for the Oxford Conference. But talk of a *political* message expressed an impulse for greater specificity and the need for practical guidance in the application of social thought in concrete situations. Such recommendations, however, would have to be made without "politicizing" the gospel – that is, without aligning the "cause of Christ" with any specifically political party, state, interest or ideology. An ecumenical politics would have to be explicitly political and supra-partisan at once. The anonymous authors of the "Rediscovery of Politics" memo summarized the difficulty without offering the solution: "On the whole the tendency among [Christian students] is to relate the Christian point of view to a sort of socialistic democracy which will combine social justice and individual liberty. But they never go the length of confusing Christianity with any particular political ideology, past or present." At the time the political questionnaire was distributed, this question of the relation between theory and practice was not only unresolved, it was also not yet pressing. "It seems as if Christians students all were aware of serious lacuna which marks the thought of their churches in political matters. Everywhere they make an effort to study this type of question in the light of the Bible."[16]

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[16] "Rediscovery of Politics," 5-6.

In the spring of 1946, as Maury collected responses to his questionnaire, he and the Federation staff assembled a vision of a postwar world that was not only politically divided but divided over the value of politics itself. In most countries, according to the responses of the SCMs, students were indifferent, exhausted from the war and disillusioned by the peace. But two groups still had "faith in political ideas." The larger of these "aspires toward a unifying society, whether it be to a conservatism that clings to order and tradition or rather to a liberalism which admits of the harmonious development of personality, a humanistic socialism which guarantees in peace and freedom the establishment of a satisfying social justice." A smaller group "attracted by the communist dynamic,… makes its appeal to violence and although dependent upon its own strength and unsupported by general sympathy, proves itself as the only group which regards political activity as vital." In Asia – mentioned as a footnote, though Maury had received responses from India, China, and Burma – nationalism clouded the opposition, uniting students in "quasi-unanimity" around the cause of independence from European rule.[17]

These conclusions effectively centered the debate over politics in the WSCF around the question of the relation between Christianity and Communism, "the essential force by which students measure their reactions today."[18] As Robert Mackie put it in a *Student World* editorial in 1946, Communism was "the most dynamic theory of world political organization, which young people are meeting today. You may distrust it or dislike it, react from it or condemn it, but it remains the most serious claimant upon the political enthusiasms of youth."[19] The principal alternative to

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[17] Over a dozen local chapters responded to the questionnaire. The responses can be found in WCC archives (WCC, 213.13.24).

[18] Ibid, 4.

[19] Robert Mackie, "Youth's Dilemma and Christian Hope (Editorial)" (3rd Quarter, 1946), 195.

Communism was withdrawal from the political realm altogether. Between these two extremes – one denying politics' value, the other placing ultimate hope in political action – the Federation hoped to distill the Christian's concern with politics, rather than define a political program. "In so far as fascism is discredited, or suppressed vast numbers of young people today must apparently choose between communist faith or a belief in hopelessness," Mackie continued. "That is why it is so important for Christians to discover whether they have anything to say, in the political realm, which will attract and hold the most virile and idealistic minds…. What is the hope that we can hold out, as Christians, to a student world which has lost political confidence, or is placing it in false solutions?"[20]

In the summer of 1946, the difficulties of expressing Christian "hope" in political terms became acutely clear around the question of how Student Christian Movements ought to respond to two student organizations formed in the immediate aftermath of the war. In 1945, over 500 youth groups from countries around the world, gathered in London for the inaugural meeting of the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), which passed resolutions committing itself to the pursuit of "peace" and "democracy" and elimination of "fascism" in the postwar world. The following year in Prague, the International Union of Students (IUS) convened 600 delegates from student organizations of various political and religious affiliations who similarly proclaimed lofty visions of postwar peace and democratic order. It was no secret to anyone in the SCM network that the organizations had emerged from Kremlin drawing boards.[21] That didn't stop SCMs from Britain to Indonesia from sending delegations, however – many of which

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[20] Ibid, 195.

[21] For an account of the origins of the WFDY and IUS and their ties to the Communist Party, see Joël Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, trns. Ralph Blumenau (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

participated actively in the proceedings.[22] Penry Jones, for instance, a Secretary for the British SCM, became a Vice President of the WFDY. For others student Christian groups, however, the organizations were simply "fronts." One anti-communist from the United Student Christian Council of the United States averred that Jones "was the most dangerous person in the whole WFDY," because his participation "gave the stamp of approval of western Christians on a show that was actually controlled by communists."[23]

Facing these sharp disagreements within its constituency, the Federation put ecumenical unity to the political test. At its first conference since the outbreak of the war, held in Bossey, Switzerland in 1946, a subcommittee was assigned to formulate a policy of action for SCMs with regard to the IUS and WFDY. Chaired by Jones and Maury, the committee agreed that the Federation should not forthrightly condemn the organizations. Participation should be encouraged. The report failed to clarify, however, the objective of this participation. The minutes record contradictory recommendations. On the one hand, the WFDY and the IUS were interpreted as spaces for evangelization, where Christians bring the gospel to "politically-conscious youth" and transform the organizations from within, from "political" bodies to "truly universal ones."[24] In this mode, Christians and Communists would be ideological competitors, competing for the allegiance of young "people of good will yet lacking in criteria for judgment…" The following recommendation, by contrast, emphasized that, whatever their opposition to Communism as a rival, *ersatz*-religious system of thought, Christians ought seek

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[22] For Kotek's discussion of Jones's participation, see *Students and the Cold War*, 80 and 111. A. J. Coleman, "Two World Movements," *Student World* (1st Quarter, 1947), 38 refers to participation by Christian groups from Indonesia as well as Holland and France.

[23] Quoted in Coleman, "Two World Movements," 38.

[24] "Report of Section III: SCM Members and Political Aims," 3 (WCC, 213.13.1).

out opportunities to cooperate with Communists around specific political and international objectives. Precisely by engaging with Communists and other groups, Christians could become adept at "political technique," learning to advance their cause through parliamentary procedures, the drafting of resolutions, and campaigning for spaces on representative councils. The committee also stressed that, since Communism embraced certain broad visions of social equality and "democratic world order" in line with Christian teaching, the opportunities for cooperation should be possible to find.

As some Federation staff members themselves acknowledged, the Commission's recommendations were "unsatisfactory."[25] Agreeing that "engagement" with Communists in the IUS and WFDY was necessary, the findings seemed to counsel two conflicting courses of action. Would the "engagement" with Communism in the IUS and the WFDY prioritize confrontation or cooperation? Were these international student organizations to serve as theaters of Christian-Communist combat, where SCMs could counter Communist influence on students? Or did they present opportunities for Christians to cooperate with Communists in pursuit of circumscribed objectives and learn the arts of political maneuver? The Political Commission had essentially stated that the IUS and the WFDY ought to be both. Intending to provide a framework to guide the conduct of SCMs in the IUS and the WFDY, Jones and Maury advised that contrary lines of action were admissible, indeed advisable.

The contradictory messages of the proposals were not simply products of the confused thinking. They reflected the difficulty of translating a theological appraisal of Communism that ecumenists

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[25] Coleman, "Two World Movements," 35.

had broadly shared throughout the 1930s and 1940s into a program of political action. As we've seen in previous chapters, the common ecumenical appraisal of Communism insisted on the value and insight of Communist "ideals" of universal human equality *and* assailed the atheistic framework within which these ideals were embedded as a "demonic" secularization of Christian teaching. Had the Committee been content to issue a statement of theological principles, its dialectical "yes" and "no" to the ideology of Communism might have posed no problem. But the Political Commission courted political definition at the same time that it resisted it. As they sought to translate a common faith into collective action, the nuance of their theological appraisal of Communism collapsed into incoherence. Put in another way: the divisions that rent the ecumenical community were not theoretical but lay in the field of practical action; they concerned whether Communism as a political movement ought to be opposed or approached. Here, the Federation was helpless to facilitate the "Christian hope" it sought to carry into the political realm. It found help from an unlikely source.

II. Peripheries Toward Centers: Thomas Moves to Geneva, the Church Moves into Politics
Up to the late 1940s, Christians from the "younger churches" of Asia and Africa were marginal to the major ecumenical institutions, welcomed as specimens of the church's world-wide extension but rarely afforded the opportunity to shape the agenda of ecumenical conferences or study programs. It was the problems confronted within the Federation's Political Commission – in particular, the inability of its North Atlantic leadership to present a coherent political response to Soviet Communism – which ushered theologians from the emerging "Third World" into positions of leadership within the movement. The case of M. M. Thomas, who became the chief

author of the theological framework for an ecumenical conversation about politics in the late 1940s, shows how this shift took place.

Thomas first elaborated a theology of politics during the early 1940s, contemporaneously with the Federation's efforts to stimulate the broader international conversation on political questions in the "Thinking Ahead as Christians" series. But Thomas's wartime experience, and his theological conclusions drawn from it, were at odds with the dominant story about emerging political consensus that the Federation celebrated through and up to the end of the war. In contrast to North Atlantic leaders of the Federation, Thomas believed that a Christian consensus regarding politics inscribed an imperialist vision that divided the church and betrayed its vocation as a supra-political community. In his view, the SCM network was not a site of converging political judgments but an arena of political struggle that centered around the independence of subject peoples.

Thomas's position cannot be explained as a consequence of his Indian identity alone, or even of his status as a colonial subject. In fact, the majority of Indian student Christian groups shared western ecumenists' assumption that the war had created new opportunities for concerted international political action – in particular on questions of Indian self-rule. The issue was not that "Indians" saw conflict while "Europeans" imagined unity. Rather, as the case of Thomas shows, the emergence of Marxian social analysis furnished the categories through which it became possible to conceive of a politically rent church. He was not the first to attempt to combine Marx and ecumenical theology; many Western ecumenical theologians had turned to Marx to re-imagine the social witness of the church in the 1930s. But in the context of colonized

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India, his engagement led to a new vision of the ecumenical project's relation to politics – and consequently of the overall aims of the movement. This vision made him an outlier both on the international level and within the Indian SCM network during the early 1940s. But after the war, as Thomas's preoccupations with the relation between Communism and Christianity and the problem of intra-Christian political conflict moved to the center of the *international* agenda of the Federation, that body took a profound interest in Thomas's ideas.

Thomas was born in 1916 in Travancore, in southern India, into the Mar Thomite church, a Syrian Orthodox communion that traced its roots to the purported arrival of the apostle St. Thomas to the subcontinent in the first century AD. Like many young Indian Christians – Mar Thomites as well as members of recently established Protestant Churches by European missionaries – he became involved in the local chapter of the Student Christian Movement. In the late 1920s and 1930s, the Indian SCM network was embroiled in debates over reconciling Christian faith with the Indian national movement.[26] For many of these young men and women, the teachings of Gandhi held great appeal. In the concepts of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* – not unlike many western missionaries – they found a social and religious teaching reconcilable with Christian ethics of the beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. "Gandhism" lit the path for the emergence of an "indigenous" form of Christianity, through which it could assume Indian culture

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[26] For relations between Christian communities and the national movement in India see Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), especially chpt 9 and D. Arthur Jeyakumar, *Christians and the National Movement: The Memoranda of 1919 and the National Movement*, (Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2009), especially chpts 3-4, which emphasizes the broad support of Indian church leaders for the national movement though does not elaborate in much detail the arguments mobilized for this end or the specific vision of a post-colonial social order embraced in Christian circles. For missionary and local Asian Christian communities support for national movements and anti-imperial sentiment, Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004).

and spirituality. He offered an Indian politics, too, showing Indian Christians how they could play a role in the movement for self-rule.

Thomas embraced a different prophet. He was one of a minority of Indian student Christians who turned to Marx as a source of political and theological inspiration. This group was concentrated in the Keralan regions of Madras, Travancore, and Cochin, where the Communist Party of India mobilized significant support, especially following its legalization in 1942.[27] While the Party's presence in the local political environment surely helped Thomas to think of Marx as an interlocutor, his encounters with European theologians and their works furnished him with a model of how a Christian dialogue with Marx might proceed. A crucial encounter occurred in the summer of 1940, when, at a study retreat at the Christavashram in Manganam, Thomas heard the Anglo-Catholic and SPG missionary Fr. Leonard Schiff deliver a history of Christian social thought.[28] Schiff articulated the elective affinities between Marxian concepts and practice and Christianity, from the primitive communism of the apostles to the twentieth-century traditions of Marxian theologies. Thomas later wrote that Schiff's exposition of Marx was "so appeal and challenging, so that for the next few years I was struggling to relate my understanding of the ultimacy of Jesus Christ in the light of Marxian insights."[29]

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[27] For a short history of the Communist Party in these regions, see Sreedhara Menon *A Survey of Kerala History*, (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravathaka Co-operative Society, 1967); for an exhaustive (if dated) survey of Communist Party organization in India see Gene D. Overstreet, *Communism in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959). The Communist Party was legalized in India after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union altered the party line from condemnation of a "capitalists' war" to support for the Allies in a "war against fascism."

[28] Later published, Schiff, *The Christian in Society*, The Christian Student's Library, No. 21, (Madras: CLS for the Senate of Serampore College, 1960). Thomas mentions the encounter with Schiff in his unpublished memoirs, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, (manuscript held in United Theological College, Bangalore (Thomas Papers, Box 38)), 11. See also George M. John, *Youth Council of Christian Action 1938-1954* (Madras: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1972), 17.

[29] "Schiff's own mixture of Anglo-Catholicism, Barthianism, and Marxism," Thomas continued, "was interesting, but it was not clear how he related them to each other, and integrated them in his own person. I remember his telling

Schiff pointed Thomas in the direction of ecumenical thinkers who sought to combine Marx and with neo-orthodox theology. In 1940-1, Thomas made a close study of socially progressive Reports of the Oxford Conference, the Tambaram Conference, and the Malvern conference, presided over by the (now) Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple. In a notebook preserved in Thomas archives, he also took careful notes on the writings of John Macmurray, Reinhold Niebuhr, and, at great length, Nicholas Berdyaev – the most important Orthodox theologian in the ecumenical ferment of the late 1930s.[30] It is significant that no extensive notes on Marx's own writings survive in Thomas's records. Alongside accounts of his readings of ecumenical theologians in his archives, there is no mention of reading Marx's works, though he later made reference in his memoirs to having devoted a portion of 1942 to the study of *Capital*.[31] His concern, to judge both from archival records, his published writings, and his later testimony, was not with understanding or practicing Marxism "on its own terms." Rather, from his first serious encounters with Marxism, his concern was to subtend Marx within a Christian theological framework.[32] His primary interlocutors were those theologians who had sought to appraise Marx from a "Christian point of view."

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me once that integration has to be worked out by every person in his own way." (*Faith Seeking*, 54) This effort to Thomas's own mind became the red thread of his early intellectual biography, which he later called, in the title of a collection of his early writings, an "ideological quest within Christian commitment."

[30] The notebook, entitled "Christianity and the Science of History" is held in United Theological College, Bangalore (Thomas Papers, Box 2).

[31] Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 16.

[32] The record gives little evidence that Marx without Christ was not an option Thomas openly weighed. This is not to say of course that he did not consider abandoning his faith. Thomas's friend and fellow SCMer A. V. Thampy was one close associate in the NCYA who did eventually leave the fold, becoming an active organizer of Communist student federations in Tranvancore, Alleppey, and Cochin.

Up to a point, Thomas's early intellectual biography folds into an account of the global "circulation" of theological ideas first propounded in the North Atlantic world. Debates between Gandhians and Marxists in the Indian SCM, for instance, may be viewed as one site of a global quarrel between liberal and neo-orthodox theological blocs that played out around the same time in the US, Europe, Britain, China, and Japan. Where Gandhian student Christians embraced theological liberalism to establish the continuity of Christ's presence in Indian culture and Hindu spirituality, Marxists embraced neo-orthodoxy, asserting the radical discontinuity of existing social and cultural forms with the Kingdom of God. Where Gandhians were pacifist, Marxists were Christian realists, believing violent struggle to be a constitutive part of historical existence in a fallen world.[33] Moreover, most of Thomas's own early writings adopted a style of reading Marx "against the grain" learned directly from Macmurray, Niebuhr, Berdyaev and other ecumenical thinkers. Like his western counterparts, Thomas was preoccupied with the problem of "secularism" as the source code of modernity's ills, and he read Marx as a symptom of the virus. Marx's vision of class conflict, his concept of human equality, and his account of a coming communist society were for Thomas, as they were for Western theologians, secularized versions of Christian theological concepts of original sin, *imago Dei*, and the Kingdom of Heaven, respectively. His first two mature essays, published in the Madras *Guardian* in 1941 and 1942, respectively, held up Nicholas Berdyaev as the disabuser of first Gandhi then Marx: Gandhian non-violence, premised on an assumption of the "inherent goodness of man," Thomas found wanting before Berdyaev's grasp of "the tragic depths of man and society,"[34] while Thomas

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[33] For a summary of these orientations, see George, chpts 2-4.

[34] Thomas, "Varna and Christianity," *Guardian,* March 5 1942 and "Democracy Must Conquer itself," *Guardian*, May 7, 1942. Excerpts from both essays are printed under the title "Gandhi, Marx, and Nicolas [sic] Berdyaev's Neo-Orthodox Critique of Modern Civilization," in an anthology of Thomas's younger writings, *Ideological Quest Within Christian Commitment* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1983)*,* 39-60.

followed Berdyaev in endorsing the "social truth" of Marx while exposing his "spiritual error."[35]

"The Human Person," which Thomas published in the Indian SCM publication *Student Outlook*

in 1944, reiterated a narrative of western civilization's de-Christianization – embodied in its

myth of an eschatological "end of history" through progress, proletarian revolution, or racial

utopia, that was commonplace in North Atlantic theological literature.[36] "A Social Manifesto for

the Church," authored mostly by Thomas in 1941 and adopted by the Mar Thomite Student's

Conference in 1943, was largely pastiche, weaving quotations from the Oxford, Malvern, and

Tambaram conferences.[37] To the extent that student Christian groups in India organized

themselves around a response to the worldwide crisis of secularism, they participated in a global

ecumenical discourse whose concepts, as we have seen in chapters three and four, first emerged

in the North Atlantic.

But Thomas's use of Marx differed from Europeans'. Niebuhr and Macmurray, though they at

various points espoused class politics, never actively took part in the Communist Party. For his

part Berdyaev was a target of the Party, having been imprisoned and then expelled from the

USSR in 1922. Thomas, on the other hand, embraced political collaboration with Indian

Communists as a live and appealing option. In the 1940s, Thomas's brother Cheriyan moved into

a Communist collective and Thomas himself applied for Party membership in 1943. His

application was rejected when he refused to desist in his efforts to evangelize his comrades.[38] He

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[35] Ibid*,* 40-1.

[36] "The Human Person" *Student Outlook,* (Nov-Dec 1944), 31-47.
[37] "Social Manifesto of the Church, *Guardian,* May 21 1942, 8; also in Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, 62.

[38] For Thomas's account of these events, see *My Ecumenical Journey,* 18-19.

emerged from that experience determined to contribute to the Communist cause on his own terms. In 1943, he formed a para-Communist Christian youth organization – the National Christian Youth Council; its goal, in the words of its charter, was to "to combine evangelism with social action," on the basis of commitment to both "the Catholic Christian Faith and Marxian Scientific Socialism."[39] The NCYC collaborated with Communist student federations to demand constitutional reforms to the State Congress and protest the suppression of labor strikes by the State Dewan Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer.[40] This kind of direct anti-colonial action was largely unknown in Europe. European theologians denounced "imperialism" in theological terms; they interpreted it as an expression of original sin in the form of a prideful will to dominate. For Thomas, theological anti-colonialism was a guide to explicitly anti-colonial political praxis. Europeans denounced "imperialism" in the abstract as an expression of the original sin of pride; Thomas took to the streets.

This difference in practice was also reflected in theoretical emphasis. Ecumenists in the West imagined themselves as spokespersons of church institutions which, however embattled in a secular age, were heir to a dominant position within their societies. The assumption of Christianity's cultural capital was woven into ecumenical discourse in the West, even – indeed especially – among those neo-orthodox thinkers who found the fusion of Christ and culture anathema. By contrast, Christians in India were a minority, at times stained with suspicion by

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[39] Thomas, "Catholic Christian Faith and Marxian Scientific Socialism" *Ideological Quest*, 75. For an account of the origins of the NCYA and the Youth Christian Council of Action, another Christian youth organization with which Thomas was involved and which organized political actions in Kerala, see George, *Youth Christian Council of Action.*

[40] "M. M. Thomas is organizing cells of Christian young men here to work side by side with the Communist groups." (V. V. Alexander/K. K. Chandy June 22, 1943, quoted in George, *Youth Christian Council of Action 1938-1954*, 67).

their association with the occupying power. This peculiar status of the church within Indian society oriented Thomas's theology from the very beginning around the need for cooperation of Christians with non-Christians in a struggle whose objectives were defined in secular terms.[41] He thought of the church not as an institution that needed to vindicate its dominant position in society but as one institution among others – some religious, some not – in a political coalition seeking Indian independence. As the Social Manifesto that Thomas wrote for the Mar Thomite student conference put it: "The Church forms only a part of the community therefore, *it should be the policy of the churches, wherever possible, to give their willing co-operation to and seek the co-operation of all men of goodwill,* Christian or Non-Christian, in ethical and social action. The co-operation, here referred to, should be real, through shared responsibility in planning and execution."[42] [italics original] This idea of the church relation to other religious and secular groupings simply did not figure prominently in Western ecumenical discourse. Those neo-orthodox voices in Europe and the US who championed a prophetic, socially marginal role for the church stressed the singularity of its witness and the exclusivity and finality of its truth; they had little to say about other religions at all, and generally scorn for "secular" organizations, parties, and movements. Those who welcomed a more socially dominant role for the church imagined it not as one player among many in civil society but the overarching, inclusive loyalty of all parties, nations, races, and classes. It was in the colonial world that the idea of a delimited social role for the church in a religiously pluralistic society was first articulated. And it emerged in the idea and practice of theological Marxism as Thomas advanced it.

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[41] Indian Liberals stressed the need for this cooperation with non-Christians – other religious groups like Hindus and Muslims as well as secularists – too. Significantly, however, as we'll see, it was Thomas and not any of India's liberal theologians who ascended within the international movement. Thomas's neo-orthodoxy and Communist commitments made him attractive to Geneva in a way that Gandhian liberals like K. K. Chandy and K. P. Philip never were.

[42] Ibid, 71.

Thomas's political mobilization of Marxian neo-orthodoxy in the context wartime India exemplifies what Shruti Kapila has called the "rupture" that defines the transmission of concepts across colonial divides.[43] This rupture also emerged in Thomas's interventions into international ecumenical discourse. In fact, what makes Thomas's early intellectual development especially significant for our story is the way in which his appropriations of European theologians doubled back on the community from which they came, fundamentally challenging it. Marx furnished Thomas not only with a "political technique" for his participation in Indian politics; it also provided him with a new interpretation of ecumenical conversation itself and its entanglements with the political interests it sought to transcend.

This critique, which formed the basis of Thomas's subsequent efforts to revise the ecumenical project in the postwar period, emerged first in a short article, "The British SCM and the Indian Political Situation," which marked Thomas's first sustained effort to directly address a European audience. In the summer of 1942, shortly after the collapse of a series of negotiations to set the terms for the colony's independence after the war, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution demanding immediate independence in return for Indian support of the British war effort. British authorities reacted swiftly to the so-called "Quit India" resolution, repressing a wave of popular protests and jailing the Congress leadership, including Gandhi. Early the following year, Augustine Ralla Ram, General Secretary of the India SCM, cabled his counterpart in Britain, Rev. William Greer, requesting the British SCM to lobby for Gandhi's release. One result of this exchange was a "questionnaire" issued in April 1943 to its counterpart

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[43] Shruti Kapila, "Global Intellectual History and the Indian Political," *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History.* eds. McMahon, Darrin M. and Moyn, Samuel. (Oxford University Press, New York, 2014), 254-74.

on the subcontinent, "so that you may understand our hesitations and by your answers [to help us] see more clearly."[44] The questionnaire probed Indian opinion on three points: whether Hinduism provided an adequate basis of "progressive government" in an independent India; whether the withdrawal of the British would lead to civil war, and whether "the one party nature of the Congress machine" would make the development of "democratic government" unlikely. Virtually all responses worked to correct what the Indians characterized generously as British "misunderstandings" of politics. The tenor was cooperative, but by the time the conversation drew to a close in 1945, the opportunity for action on the part of the British SCM had long passed. But both sides agreed that it had been, in the words of Ralla Ram, an "epoch-making" exchange that extended the ecumenical unity into the realm of "political judgments."[45] Highlights were published in the Federation's "Thinking Ahead as Christians" series in the *Student World* and a separate booklet put out by the SCM press.[46]

Thomas had a less charitable approach to the exchange. His reply, "The British SCM and the Indian Political Situation," published in the Madras *Guardian* in May 1943 focused on the questionnaire's first prompt, which inquired into Indian Christians' views of Gandhian non-violence and claimed that the pacifist ideology "remains influential in the country and the Congress Party."[47] Although the British SCM acknowledged pacifism among its members, "as a political policy," "many of us regard [pacifism] as an illusion dangerous to the order and peace

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[44] *Deadlock in India* eds. William Greer and Augustine Ralla Ram (London: SCM Press, 1946), 6.

[45] Ibid, 8.

[46] "Thinking Ahead as Christians," *Student World* (3rd Quarter, 1944), 233-5. *Deadlock in India* (London: SCM Press, 1946).

[47] Thomas, Guardian Dec 16 1943, 6.

of a fallen world."[48] Thomas's reply began with an emphatic endorsement of the majority British

opinion that non-violence, as "a political policy," was essentially non-Christian. It had its origins

in a "Hindu conception of the divinity of man," which countered the doctrine of original sin and

denied "the contradiction between Law and Grace," seeing "no essential conflict between the

two corresponding orders of the World and the Church."[49] "Pacifism as a political doctrine" was

Pelagianism, pure and simple. But that was not the real issue.

The real issue was the British SCMs "blindness to political facts." Gandhian non-violence was

not the pervasive ideology of the Congress that the questionnaire insinuated it was. Echoing

other Indian responses, Thomas explained that the Congress had repeatedly asserted its readiness

to use force in the political arena – beginning with its promise to aid the Allies in the fight

against fascism. But Thomas's reply then took a novel turn. In the assumption that the Indian

political leadership was all pacifist, the British SCM had become a conduit of imperial

"propaganda" to discredit the Indian demand for Independence. "It does not require so acute a

capacity of analysis to show that the Britisher's blindness to the real facts of the Indian situation,

whether conscious as in Amery and Co. or unconscious as in the British SCM hides a real

imperialistic *unwillingness to part with power*."

In Thomas's view the questionnaire took part in an ideological project to shape Indian

consciousness in conformity with the political and economic interests of British capitalism. The

questionnaire, Thomas wrote, left "a tragic feeling of unhappiness at the thought that the British

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[48] M. M. Thomas "British SCM and the Indian Political Situation" *Ideological Quest*, 78

[49] Ibid, 79.

SCM has not thought it sacrilege to invoke the name of a Christian Movement to give a halo of supranational disinterestedness to the oft-repeated die-hard imperialist's question *whether we Indians have the capacity to govern ourselves*."[50] Thomas here linked his theological critique of Gandhism with an ideological critique of the British SCM. Both, he wrote, were blind to the movements of original sin, expressed in Gandhism in the form of a belief in the perfectibility of man and in the questionnaire in the presumption of an impartial conversation about political questions. This was a fundamentally new way of combining Marx and neo-orthodoxy; rather than incorporating Marxian insights into a neo-orthodox framework, Thomas proposed a more dialectical relation between the two in which both systems undid one another's presumptions to finality. It was one thing to accept the theological proposition that man was a sinner and power-politics a necessary tragedy; these views were the common stuff of European and North American ecumenical pronouncement. It was quite another to expose, concretely, the political interests served precisely in the ecumenical effort to establish a supra-political community based on common faith and theological outlook.

Yet for Thomas the point of this exercise was not to discredit the British SCM. Exposing the political program enshrined in the British questionnaire, Thomas wrote, was an exercise no less Christian for being Marxist: "the Christian conception of man states that all human values are not only imperfect but also perverted by human pride, that there is no absolute disinterestedness in the world; that all doctrines and questionnaires, ideas and ideals, programmes and moralities of man are *ideology*. Christianity is quite in agreement with the Marxist conception of ideology;

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[50] Ibid, 84.

only the concept should be enlarged to include *all* who are in the world, including Marxists and Christians."[51]

Insofar as intra-Christian conversation was "ideological" it could not be "ecumenical." It expressed human passions – the passion for power – instead of the divine love that constituted the fellowship of the church. As Thomas saw it, ideological critique served an explicitly ecumenical function in that it pointed to the obstacles remaining in the way of the movement's project of building an international Christian community transcending politics. For him, the path upward toward the perspective of eternity must be taken with one's eyes fixed downward, on the material, ideological, and political interests that kept the Christian as much as anyone tethered to earth. The unveiling of ideology in theological conversation served a dialectical purpose, revealing the source of Christian unity in a power beyond human control. "The word of reconciliation is not in us," Thomas concluded, "but must come from the Order of Grace, where in greater response to the divine reconciliation given in Christ, we may more fully overcome the perversity of our partial values, that we may find ourselves growing in the realization of the oneness of the Catholic Church, the *elect nation* wherein alone is realized the destiny of the world."[52]

Thomas's reconciliation of Marx and neo-orthodox theology drew much from European thinkers, but it broke new ground. The political conflict between colonized and colonizer Christians was not to be bracketed as an obstacle to Christian unity but understood within an economy of grace

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[51] Ibid, 84.

[52] Ibid, 84.

working to uncover the source of a deeper Christian fellowship. This paradoxical position –
which acknowledged the depth of intra-Christian conflict only to show the way beyond it – helps
to explain what made Thomas's thinking so important to the North Atlantic leadership of the
Federation in the postwar period. As the Cold War threatened ecumenical unity, Thomas's
strategy for domesticating political oppositions within the *oikoumene* found an international
audience at the highest levels.

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Thomas's "The British Questionnaire" elicited relatively little attention in 1943. It was not
included among the selections of the British-Indian exchange published in the "Thinking Ahead
as Christians" series in the *Student World*. Nor, in fact, were *any* of Thomas's writings published
outside of India during the War. Considering Thomas's obscurity on the international level, it
may seem strange that, in 1946, he should have been chosen to join the WSCF staff in Geneva at
all. But the Federation's postwar "discovery" of Thomas makes sense when viewed in relation to
the new geopolitical configuration of the postwar period. Thomas became an Asian of interest to
the Federation as the very question that had preoccupied him in the war years – in particular,
relation between Communism and ecumenical unity – moved to the center of the Federation's
international agenda, in particular, its efforts to promote a common approach to Cold War
politics.

In 1945, T. Z. Koo, the long-serving Asian Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation,
announced his retirement. When it met in the summer of 1946, the Federation's Executive
Committee decided to offer Thomas a staff position as Koo's effective replacement. In his letter
to Thomas inviting him aboard, Robert Mackie explained that the Committee was eager "to have,

working from our headquarters here in Europe, some leader from an Asian country."[53] In general,

the decision to appoint Thomas is unclear and negotiations between British authorities and the

INC in 1946 may well have convinced the committee that Koo's Asian replacement ought to be

an Indian.[54] But one clue to Thomas's appeal comes from the first article published with his

name in the byline in the *Student World*, in the summer of 1946. Co-written with his friend,

Malcolm Adesisiah – a fellow Indian Marxist and Secretary of the Madras SCM – the article,

"The Social Revolution India," placed the Indian situation in the context of the debate over

Christianity and Communism. Communism, the article claimed, was a "sane" guide to Indian

politics: it provided a theoretical apparatus which placed the Indian struggle in international

terms and framed the essential issues in terms of universal social justice, while the Communist

party exemplified an approach to Indian independence that balanced the national cause with

international consciousness. Communism, the authors concluded, was Christian "realism" in

action in Asia – though they stressed that cooperation with the Communists in politics in no way

meant tolerance for their atheism.[55]

Regardless of how many student Christian leaders agreed with their contention that Communist

politics was Christian politics in colonial India, the article succeeded in inserting the Indian case

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[53] Robert Mackie/M. M. Thomas, August 28, 1946. (WCC, 213.13.145)

[54] We might see the Federation's move – as Thomas himself did in his memoirs – as an effort to stay ahead of the curve of decolonization, ensuring that nationalities poised to gain greater autonomy from European nations would be represented in international Christian organizations. The point is valid, as far as it goes. The YMCA and YWCA, as well as the International Student Service – an outgrowth of the WSCF – had recently hired additional Asian staff. Ecumenists shied away from political challenges to European empires, but they responded to their retreat by making the accommodations necessary to ensure Christianity would have a future in newly independent nations. The negotiations between British authorities and the INC in 1946 may well have convinced the committee that Koo's Asian replacement ought to be an Indian. But that consideration alone does not explain why Thomas in particular, of all possible all Indian candidates, was chosen.

[55] Malcolm Adesisiah and M. M. Thomas, "Social Revolution in India," *Student World* (3rd Quarter, 1946), 223-35.

study into the Federation's dominant network of questions – about Christian political responsibility, about Communism and "revolution," and about the Federation's role in a geopolitical context defined by ideological rivalry. After receiving Thomas's acceptance of a WSCF position, Mackie wrote to C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer that Thomas would be of great service "in the task of creating a sense of fellowship and solidarity between the students of East and West. Out of a number of names which have been suggested to us that of Mr. Thomas has been chosen because of his peculiar fitness for the task."[56] What made him "peculiarly fit" for ecumenical work was his ability to bridge two "East-West" oppositions, showing how the political situation in India related to parallel divide of the Cold War. Before the East-West tension even became the "Cold War," Thomas demonstrated that it was a global phenomenon.

III. Thomas in the Federation: Making the Personal Political

When Thomas arrived in Geneva in February of 1947, he was asked by Robert Mackie to outline how he might best serve the Federation. Noting his experience in India as an organizer of movements "in Christian political action" and in the "evangelization of the more ethically conscious participants of consciously atheistic and secular movements," Thomas wrote, "I shall be thankful if I am allowed to pull my weight in the Political Commission of the Federation." He then noted the Federation's ginger relations with the IUS and the WFDY, which raised, he believed, questions at the core of the Commission's work:

> The question of the relation between the Federation and the two new world Movements, the I.U.S. and the W.F.D.Y. was discussed by the General Committee at its last meeting… [This question] raises the whole problem of Christianity and politics in the university community… [since] the theological implications of such co-operation and participation remain rather vague still. The Political Commission has to set itself the task

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[56] Mackie/Iyer, Oct [undated, likely 1st], 1941 (WCC, 213.13.145)

of answering some questions like the following: …What are the aims of Christians participating in these Movements – to achieve a natural end or to proclaim the Gospel?... Are we right in pursuing a common natural end without being able effectively to proclaim the word of God's judgment and redemption of all nature? Or to attempt to evangelise to the detriment of the unity necessary for the realization of the natural end? How may we keep up this tension?[57]

Thomas defined the Commission's task. It was, first, to examine the bases of efforts by organizations like the IUS and WFDY to unite students and youth on the "natural plane" in relation to "natural ends," that is, the achievement of concrete political objectives. What did it mean for students to unite around "democracy" and "anti-fascism," and how could they do so while fulfilling their responsibility to evangelize? The evangelical imperative threatened to limit the possibilities of non-Christian contact; the imperative for political cooperation risked forfeiting the responsibility to "proclaim the Gospel." But the Christian had to live between these two possibilities, maintaining a constructive tension between them.

Framing the issue in this way, Thomas highlighted his own skill for the task: his work in India had combined cooperation with "atheistic and secular" movements and evangelization of their members. And he proceeded to indicate explicitly the procedure by which the creative tension of these two imperatives could be maintained. Immediately following the lines quoted above, Thomas continued:

> It is necessary to see whether we of the Federation are harping on the theological difference out of a political fear, and in this connection, though we know the Federation owes its life to an act of God beyond politics, it would only be a recognition of the fact of sin, to be suspicious of oneself and examine whether the Federation itself is allied with any group of material and political interests.[58]

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[57] Thomas/Mackie, February 27, 1947 (WCC, 213.13.125)

[58] Thomas/Mackie, February 27, 1947 (WCC, 213.13.125)

The constructive "tension" between evangelistic and natural objectives was to be achieved, Thomas contended here, through an ecumenics of suspicion. Working toward an inclusive, "ecumenical" politics entailed first interrogating the political and economic interests that conditioned the ecumenical community's thought and action. For Thomas, to be "suspicious of one's self" as a member of the Christian community meant to expose the political entanglements of institutional ecumenism: the "alliance of the Federation with a group of material and political interests." Such expressions of suspicion would affirm the student Christian community's unity in faith around a doctrine of original sin that prevented a perfectly transcendent political praxis. In effect, Thomas's proposal was to turn the extant approach of the Political Commission inside out: rather than try to produce a political consensus, his strategy was to excavate and include the variety of political alternatives at play within the movement, and, by doing so, make them the recognized objects of debate. Rather than conceiving the Federation as a body that might *first* settle on a principle for guiding Christians' political activities, Thomas envisioned a body whose objective entanglement with geopolitical interests undermined its stated ambition to be a universal community.

Thomas's call for an ecumenics of suspicion was, at first, neither welcome nor well understood among the Federation staff. Philippe Maury, who was overseeing the work of the Political Commission when Thomas arrived and who imagined himself as a leading architect of the Federation's thinking on politics, replied to his new colleague's vision with some confusion: "I don't see clearly what you mean when you say 'to be suspicious of oneself and examine whether the Federation itself is allied with any group of material and political interests.' If we have to be very careful we have also not to be afraid of the devil, and in a way to take our stand on the

ground of our faith and without bothering about what it would look like; if the Communists are

happy, all right; if the reactionaries are happy, all right also. I take care to be faithful to Jesus

Christ and not to support the point of view of anybody."[59] Behind Maury's rebuke was an

understanding of Christian political responsibility that he developed in articles in the *Student

World* and in internal memos to the Federation staff. Maury claimed that his approach was an

application of lessons he had learned while serving in the French Resistance to the postwar

situation. In this view, the aim of the Christian in politics was to protect a space within the social

order in which the freedom of the church could be preserved from state interference. Challenges

to the existing social order were permissible only under circumstances in which that order

threatened the freedom of Christians to live a life of spontaneous obedience to Christ; otherwise,

the state's divine commission was to preserve a minimum of order, holding back a pull toward

chaos that was the ineluctable consequence of original sin. The purpose of politics was to create

the institutional and legal frameworks that would direct attention beyond them, to man's destiny

in eternity.

In an article in the spring 1945 issue of *Student World*, for instance, Maury sketched out a

political ethics that assailed all political systems – including parliamentary democracy, socialism,

and liberalism – in the name of what he called a higher Christian "realism."[60] Commitment to

one political form or another, Maury argued, must be casuistic, guided by a calculation of

whether it was likely preserve a space for Christians to obey a divine authority which not only

transcended worldly authorities but which stood in permanent, eschatological tension all worldly

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[59] Ph. Maury/Thomas March 19, 1947 213.13.162.

[60] Ph. Maury, "The Political Realism of a Christian," *Student World* (4th Quarter 1945), 295-301.

authorities. The experience of the War completed a disillusionment with political ideologies that had begun in the 1930s. This stance toward political form (and reform) was not, of course, shared by all western theologians. It stood at the extreme Barthian end of the spectrum of positions embraced within the movement, and many SCM leaders – including Ronald Preston, discussed below – embraced a more optimistic, Niebuhrian appraisal of the capability of the state, whose role was not only to ward off social chaos but promote a more positive "democratic" program that would struggle to bring social conditions toward the ideals of human equality inscribed in the Kingdom of God, even if a final realization of these was impossible under conditions of the fallen world.

Significantly, Maury first identified Thomas as a theological ally against Niebuhrians, appraising from Thomas's letter to Mackie and his article in the *Student World* a hard-core neo-orthodox thinker who asserted radical discontinuity between the order of grace and social order. We are starting, he wrote to Thomas, "on similar theological bases – similar, it seems to me, if not identical."[61] This made it perplexing to Maury that "we reach totally different practical positions." In a series exchanges between March and May of 1947, Thomas argued that, viewed from the standpoint of a colonized people, Maury's approach denied precisely the freedom of the church it sought to protect. For Thomas, the problem with Maury's approach to religious freedom was that it did not really ensure the "freedom" of the church at all. "When I speak of religious freedom I mean something more than a legal freedom of religion," he explained. "Religious freedom should be defined as the right of the Church not only legally but <u>really</u> to be beyond the political and economic orders; and at the same time to be in the political and

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[61] Ph Maury/Thomas March 14, 1947 (WCC, 213.13.162).

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economic orders." Transcendence was a matter of practice. It was the church's prophetic

capacity, not its legal protection, that vouchsafed Christian freedom. "If I accept your proposition

that in our political choice I must choose that State which helps the missionary and evangelistic

movements most in India, I have to keep supporting British power in India, though I know that

Indian nationalism alone can bring that order which will mean tolerable living conditions to the

peoples of India."[62] In the colonial context, legal protections of religious liberty served too much

the interests of state power to be credibly in the interest of the church as well. Paradoxically,

legal religious liberty in these contexts marked the servitude of the church, its imprisonment

within political ideology.

> The question is whether the Church is allowed to maintain by the State and the economic order a reality beyond itself; and whether the tension is reality. This determines to my mind whether a society is totalitarian or not in the religious sense. There are states which give religious freedom legally but where we find that the churches are either satisfied with taking a place as the Department of State without any tension with the state, or by being under the state as conscious of unconscious agents of the State. When the Church becomes a political instrument for the American ideology or of the Russian ideology I cannot think that the Church maintains religious freedom.[63]

For Thomas it was essential to distinguish one's "theological" and "political" loyalties. "You

seem to think that a theological fight means also a political fight," Thomas wrote to Maury. An

opposition to Communism on theological grounds was not only justifiable but necessary, insofar

as "Communism" constituted a set of claims about the ultimate nature and destiny of humankind

that were at odds with Christianity, which foreclosed the horizon to transcendence and the

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[62] Thomas/Ph. Maury June 26, 1947 (WCC, 213.13.162). Considering the great attention recent scholars have given to ecumenists as champions of human rights, and particularly the right of religious liberty, (see for instance Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012), John Stuart, "Empire, Mission, Ecumenism, and Human Rights," *Church History* 83.1 (March 2014) 110-134, and Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations: The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005)), Thomas's qualified critique of religious liberty here is a reminder of the range of perspectives encompassed within ecumenical discourses.

[63] Thomas/Ph. Maury, Apr 2, 1947, 2-3 (WCC, 213.13.1620)

"personal responsibility" of humankind before its creator. To endorse a "political" struggle against Communism, however, one had to define the specifically "political" alternative one was struggling for. "If you want to fight communism politically you have to do it in the name of another political end: you can do so only in the name of individualism today and you have to justify it politically." In trying to justify this fight theologically, Maury was making a category mistake. It was not the teachings of Christ but Maury's "Anglo-Saxon ideology… of individualism" which was the real and unacknowledged basis of his political opposition to Communism. To mobilize the ecumenical community around such an ideology was to forfeit its obedience to Christ in the name of serving a "power bloc." Without a clear distinction between the political fight and the theological fight against Communism, "true ecumenism," Thomas feared, would vanish. Were Maury's political ethic to prevail in the ecumenical movement, "I have my fear that [the World Council and the Federation] may become a power-show against communism; based not on the gratitude for the redemption of God but the fear of losing political power."[64]

As Maury and Thomas debated the relation between evangelism and politics, they also exchanged letters pertaining to the practical activities of the Political Commission. Maury's presence in New Haven, as well as his frequent visits to SCM groups across North and South America, made coordinating the Commission's work a complicated feat of trans-Atlantic communication. Thomas, in closer personal contact with Mackie and the rest of the Federation staff, began to assume a greater role both in directing the day-to-day work of the Commission and in defining its intellectual foundations. Thomas acquired new authority as a consequence of

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[64] Ibid, 2-3.

Maury's absence, but the fact that the Federation staff allowed this to happen spoke to their willingness to give Thomas latitude in shaping the Commission work.

One way Thomas exerted his influence was in the development of a strategy for "sharing of information" on topics of political concern among SCMs.[65] The General Assembly had mandated that the Federation serve as a conduit for the circulation of news items and political analysis but left open the mechanisms it would employ to do so. At a meeting in March 1946, shortly after the Truman Administration had announced its decision to aid the governments of Greece and Turkey to contain Communist advances in Eastern Europe, the Federation met in Geneva to discuss this aspect of the Commission's work. Mackie and the rest of the staff had initially had the idea of asking a member of the Greek SCM to write an analysis of the situation. But this raised difficulties: with Greece in the middle of a civil war between pro- and anti-Communist groups, the Greek SCM itself, noted Francis House, a Federation staffer who had recently visited the region, comprised starkly divided positions: "It would be very difficult to get true facts about Greece from Greece itself in the present situation—because… passion rules both sides. It would be unwise to ask anybody to write on this." In view of the likelihood that any contribution from Greece would be hopelessly partisan, Thomas suggested an alternative approach: getting various student leaders from outside of Greece who stood on different sides of the issue to contribute their own reactions to the Truman Administration's actions. Rather than seeking a single "authoritative" interpretation of the situation in Greece, in other words, the

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[65] At its conference in Bossey in 1946, the General Committee had identified the facilitation of "exchange of information, opinion and conviction among the movements concerning political issues" as a task of the Political Commission. "Meetings of the Meeting of the General Committee of the World's Student Christian Federation, 'Chateau de Bossey, Clégny, Switzerland, August 9th to 20th, 1946," 19 (WCC, 213.01.2).

Commission would initiate a "Federation-wide discussion," that would represent different points of view on an issue which, Thomas observed, "sharply divided the Federation."[66]

The episode illustrates how Cold War polarization created room for Thomas to shape the terms of ecumenical conversation toward a model of intra-Christian debate that had emerged first in the Indian context. In a world where "true facts" on political situations were elusive, accommodating ecumenical conversation to intra-Christian political conflicts – the achievement of Thomas's early work in the British-Indian SCM discussions in colonized India – seemed like the best way forward for the movement as a whole.

In April of 1947, Thomas, with Mackie's support, worked to organize this political conversation. In mid April he wrote to Ronald Preston, who had taken over from Greer the chairmanship of the British SCM in 1945, asking Preston to produce "a long letter giving your reactions to the present American foreign [policy] revealed in the decision to aid Greece, and to the implications of that policy in the European and Asiatic world."[67] Thomas, however, took the prerogative of the first salvo. No sooner had he requested Preston's statement than he launched into his own take on the decision to aid Greece and Turkey and the disastrous effects he believed it was already having on the cause of ecumenical unity. "I am very much frightened at people making Anti-Communism the norm of their politics," he wrote. As American Protestants like Reinhold Niebuhr and John Foster Dulles lined up in support of the campaign to block Russian influence in Eastern Europe, they threatened to collapse the ecumenical church into a political power bloc.

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[66] Political Commission Staff Meeting Minutes, Apr 2, 1947. (WCC, 213.13.162).

[67] Thomas/Preston, April 12, 1947 (WCC, 213.13.162).

Thomas, who had recently met Niebuhr and delivered a sharp critique of his draft essay for the

WCC Amsterdam study volume series, opened the vents of his frustration with Niebuhr and

other American churchmen in his letter to Preston.

> John Foster Dulles['s] statement makes it very clear... what the New American Century is
> going to mean for the Asiatic freedom movements. He has gone all out against them
> saying they are 'communist inspired!'… The tragedy to my mind lies in the fact that the
> Church in America seems to be so fully behind the State Department… [T]he theologians
> are all out for anti-communism with a little criticism of America at the tail end. They
> have all ceased to be prophets in my mind... The other day at Bossey I met Reinhold
> Niebuhr to whom I owe a lot of my theology of politics. Hence I felt that he had betrayed
> me personally. He is going about sent by the State Dept justifying the ways of the New
> America to man. I had to challenge him to think out… his politics in relation to the
> Asiatic freedom movements, which he had not done. I do not think he had ever done that.
> It is true of most of these Christian thinkers…. When Dulles says that the best way to
> fight Russia is to fill the Churches and be armed to the teeth, I wonder what that concern
> for church means.[68]

Thomas's point here was similar to the one he had made to Maury: in the US, Christian

enthusiasm for the campaign against the Soviet Union had erased any tension between the

perceived ends of the church and the political aims of the state. Totalitarianism was equally

present in the East and the West. But the tone of the letter – "passionate," as Thomas put it at the

end – was distinct from the more stayed exchange with Maury. Attacking Niebuhr and Dulles,

Thomas spoke not of the deficiencies of their theology but of their political decisions. These

were acts of personal betrayal: for Thomas politics was personal.

"You talk very wildly about R. Niebuhr," Preston wrote in his reply to Thomas. To say he was

sent by the State Department was, in Preston's words, "hysterical nonsense." Preston also

announced his full support for the decision to aid Greece and Turkey, surmising that the majority

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[68] Thomas/Preston, April 12, 1947 (WCC, 213.13.162).

of British Christian student opinion was behind him.[69] The line Thomas took failed to understand the realities of "power politics." "If India is weak and divided on its own Russia moves in unless Britain keeps control of the Indian Ocean (or the USA). In China sooner or later the USA will be forced to take more drastic steps or let Russia in. This is not to say that Asiatic freedom movements are Communist inspired, but that the word 'freedom' can be very sentimentally used." Playing power politics on the international level was necessary in order to preserve the prospects for "social democracy," "the fine flower of the western tradition…. To be striven for mightily." In contrast to Maury's political agnosticism, Preston forthrightly declared his political allegiances in his defense of democracy as a form of government in line with the moral precepts of Christianity. But he acknowledged that his position applied more to Europe than to Asia. "The moral values associated with Russian power may well be more suited to the historical situation of some countries – China? E. Europe?" "The point is," that Communism was "a false God for the west." Preserving what remained of Christian civilization in the form of social democracy required keeping Russian encroachment at bay.

Thomas's long response to Preston amounted to an attack on the latter's attempt to bracket the Asian case – to apply to power political calculation narrowly within the parameters of superpower conflict. The problem was not that *he* – Thomas – was being insufficiently realist ("I do not think, Ronald, that there is any necessity to tell a citizen of a subject nation like India that there is no other politics than power politics"); it was that Preston was being insufficiently

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[69] Lettering his responses to Thomas's requests, Preston wrote: "(a) the reactions of Britain to the American loan to Greece and Turkey are in general favourable, except for about one third of the Labour Party and those to the left of it. (b) [The loan's] implications for the European world are thought to make for stability; on the Asiatic world I'm afraid British opinion has not thought much… My own opinion agrees with the majority of (a) and (b)." (Preston/Thomas May 7, 1947 (WCC, 213.13162)).

"ecumenical" in his outlook. "It is all right for you to uphold one side of power-politics, but if you want also to exploit the ecumenical movement for your power-politics than certainly to my mind it is the death of true ecumenism. True ecumenism to my mind depends upon whether the Church knows enough of the power of the pardon of God to deny power-politics, at least to such an extent, that it is able to unite within it people playing and supporting different power politics."[70] Preston could not be "ecumenical" in his Christian faith and think only of European societies in his political calculations. What was at stake in ecumenicity was the right to introduce into the political conversation a different framing of the significance of the Truman doctrine – and the East-West struggle generally. Thomas went on to advance a framing of the issue that accounted for Asian independence movements. From that perspective, the conduct of the Soviet Union took on a much different cast: rather than the boogey of social democracy, Moscow's vocal support for independence of subject peoples and its challenge to the Western powers and their empires in all parts of the globe made them a force for the very values that Preston was celebrating. "Russian power-politics is a force for Liberalism in world politics," Thomas explained. "If we have to choose between power politics – as you and I believe we have to do – we in India choose the Soviet to the Anglo-American power. We believe that what you might call Soviet Imperialism means much more freedom for us in Asia than the Anglo-American so-called democracy."[71]

Preston's reply began by conceding, implicitly, Thomas's central point: that an discussion about politics could not be, as he had put it, "truly ecumenical" without incorporating Thomas and his

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[70] Thomas/Preston, May 19, 1947 (WCC, 213.13.163).

[71] Ibid, 2.

shooting critique of "Anglo-Saxon so-called democracy." "First of all," Preston wrote, "may I

say the most important thing: we are very anxious you should come to our annual staff Reading

Party," referring to an upcoming gathering for local chapters of the British SCM. The topic of

conversation would the Marxist perspective a variety of theological themes, including the

concept of the person and the Church's role in international politics[72] – "and your view would of

course be very valuable for that," Preston indicated. That same issue that had brought Thomas

from India to Geneva – the international saliency of Marxism as a challenge to Western

ecumenism – would bring him now to London, as a guest speaker to one of the largest and most

internationally influential SCMs. Of course, the inclusion of Thomas was for the sake of

continuing debate: Preston was not backing down on his critique of Thomas's position; he went

on in the letter to argue that Thomas's support for Russian geopolitics actually collapsed the

tension between power politics and normative ordering of society. "While I was talking about

power and morals both being necessary, I notice you take up the first and ignore the second, and

write about preferring Russian power politics; this is revealing, because Marxism repudiates the

whole tension between power and morals which I think is vital." It was one thing to expose

European parochialism, but Thomas had yet to explain the positive connection between his

support of Russia's geopolitics and his Christian faith. His approach was at risk of "produc[ing] a

Marxist political analysis plus a transcendent Christian faith which are in different dimensions

and never meet."[73] Thomas made no direct reply to the charge at this point, but, as we'll see,

Preston had hit upon a critique that Thomas would take increasingly seriously after 1948, when

the Prague coup and the resistance of the Communist Party in India to the post-Independence

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[72] Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey,* 49.

[73] Ibid, 2.

government led him to reconsider whether the Soviet Union was indeed the best "political ally" against Western imperialism.

In June 1947, after three rounds of exchanges, with the prospect of Thomas's immanent visit to the UK, the correspondence drew to a close. Thomas and Preston began editing the letters in preparation for their publication and circulation to SCM groups as what would become the first of a series of "Federation dialogues." "I ought to end this correspondence," Thomas wrote in his last letter to Preston, "by asking you for your forgiveness for the lack of charity I revealed in our political discussion. I am sorry about it." This was anything but a casual courtesy. For Thomas it was a theological statement central to his understanding of what an ecumenical conversation about politics was and how it served its function within the larger framework of Christian unity. Political argument required forgiveness because it was an enactment of sin, the conflict between rival points of view reflecting the fallen condition of humanity. A political conversation such as Thomas imagined always ended, if it went rightly, with contrition: before one's neighbor and before God.

By June 1947, Thomas had been in Geneva for five months and had succeeded in introducing political dialogue as a new institutional practice that would become the central feature of the Political Commissions work in the coming three years. In all, between 1947 and 1951, the Federation would produce ten such dialogues, based on exchanges and reflections from theologians, missionaries, and student youth Christian leaders from around the world, on topics ranging from Communism in China to Bulgarian politics to South African Apartheid. Some of these documents – like the Preston-Thomas exchange – were redacted versions of conversations

among Federation and SCM staff. On Maury's suggestion, his exchange with Thomas was added

to the series, as was a correspondence Thomas conducted in the Spring of 1947 with Kenrick

Baker, an American missionary in Cairo, concerning Christian and Communist cooperation.

Other circulated documents were single-author overviews of a political event or question:

Malcolm Adesisiah, for instance, produced a report on the political situation in Bulgaria after a

visit there on International Student Service business. Written as personal reflections rather than

impartial briefings, these texts sought to accentuate and not efface the partial, engaged

perspective of the author. As Maury later reflected on the positive feedback from SCMs who had

received these statements: "it is obvious that most of the documents we publish in our Sharing

information scheme tend automatically to become Dialogues which is I think the best sign of

their usefulness and of the vitality and relevance of the P[olitical] C[ommission] as a whole."[74]

The emergence of this new institutional practice illustrated an intellectual shift. The Federation

dialogues articulated a new way of thinking about ecumenical community and the modalities

through which it would be realized. The shift emerged clearly in the brief statement appended to

the cover page of Federation dialogues. It read in part:

> The Federation is primarily a personal community, and therefore personal dialogues are
> truer to its essential character than any other method for exchange of convictions on
> topics of vital concern, on which there are bound to be deep differences. The Political
> Commission has therefore decided to initiate Federation dialogues as a means of
> discussion of political convictions within the life of the Federation.[75]

Previously interwar ecumenists had categorically distinguished personal from political relations:

the one was constituted by competition between rival wills to power, the other enlivened and

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[74] "Political Commission" Memo, Philippe Maury, Dec 4, 1947, 6 (WCC, 213.13.2).

[75] See for instance the cover letter to Federation Dialogue No. 2 "On a Christian's Approach to Communism" (WCC, 213.13.24).

touched by God's presence. This distinction, however, collapses in the Federation dialogues. For the first time a major ecumenical organization in its official statements indicated it was precisely *through* debate and conflict between individuals with "deep differences" on political questions that personal relations between Christians – and contact with the divine – would be established. A theology of political debate would expose for all parties a deeper dimension of common faith. In the Federation Dialogues, the personal would become political. Thomas had not only outlined the parameters of how a conversation about politics should take place in the ecumenical community; he had also plotted a new understanding of the ecumenical project itself.

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I have emphasized thus far the reasons for the North Atlantic ecumenical elite's promotion of Thomas to a position of intellectual leadership within the Federation. At the moment when conflicting political positions toward Communism threatened to divide the world Christian community, Thomas presented political conflict as the medium of the "personal relations" that constituted Christian understanding. If ecumenists could not reach a consensus on political questions, their debates could at least become the site of a new consciousness of the church, activated at the moment that Christians enacted their political disagreements.

As Thomas provided the Federation with a new approach to politics, the course of world events in the late 1940s were transforming his own political orientation. Up until the end of 1947, Thomas remained committed to the Communist Party as an ally of Asian independence movements and the most promising anti-imperial force in geopolitics. As late as November of that year, he travelled to visit French and Czechoslovakian SCM chapters, in order, he wrote, to see how student Christians were "trying to face the realistic political issues of the relation

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between communism and Christianity in a positive way."[76] He heralded the efforts of student Christians to reach the sort of constructive reconciliation of Communism and Christianity that he himself had worked out, believing that the "evangelistic aim" of the Federation depended on the emergence of a strong bloc of ecumenists committed to Communist politics.

Beginning in 1948, however, he moved away from his commitment to Communist revolution. A number of factors contributed to this. The Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, a mere four months after Thomas had visited the country, and the decision of the Communist Party of India to oppose Nehru's government after Independence were disillusioning experiences. Thomas did not publish any responses to these events, but they led him to question whether Communism was in fact the anti-imperial force that he had imagined it to be. He began to absorb Preston's warning about the danger of a Communist politics that occluded all moral considerations in a realist calculus of power. Especially after the assassination of Gandhi on January 30, 1948, he revised his earlier, dismissive views of Gandhism: it now seemed to Thomas that non-violence offered Christians in India the best strategy for maintaining the tension between political participation and witness to the perfect love of Christ. But this was a least bad option. In a letter to Mackie written in early 1948 – one of his few explicit discussions of his political evolution at the time – he wrote that his year in Europe had left him "not really hopeful" about the political situation, in India or the world.

> …[e]specially since my coming to Europe has given me new perspectives to look at Indian nationalism. That coupled with the assassination of Gandhiji by Hindu fanaticism and the rejection by the Communist Party of India of their united front policy and their leadership of the people's movement and their acceptance of war against the national government and complete alliance with Russia have led to a radical rethinking in me. So you may rest assured that I have been very open to the challenges that have to me in

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[76] Quoted in Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey,* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990), 50.

Europe and this impact has been real, though of course I may not see entirely eye to eye with all of you… [due] to the international situation and its tensions… the Christian may have no option but to say No to all politics or to concern himself with such ineffective politics as Gandhism in which alone both the concerns for justice and charity can be combined in some small measure.[77]

Thomas's chastening took him down a path much different than the one travelled by so many Western intellectuals who turned from left radicalism to liberalism and conservatism in the years following 1945. To say he moved to the right is to flatten and misunderstand a far more interesting and significant development – one that makes sense only once we appreciate Thomas's commitment to the ecumenical project of organizing, stimulating, and deepening the community of personal dialogue and encounter. His disillusionment with Communism did not express itself in any clearly defined new political program or allegiance to a new party. The CPI's anti-Nehru stance and the Soviet action in Prague made him, he later wrote "appreciative of the insights of Liberal Democracy." But we get little purchase on what is significant about Thomas's evolution to the extent that we consider him after 1948 a "liberal democrat" – or a "Gandhian," for that matter. What was significant was that no new, coherent ideological commitment replaced his early faith in Communism. His intellectual exertions, rather, focused increasingly around the problem of constructing a *theological* framework to accommodate and guide political debate within the Federation.

In tracing this shift in the coming section, it is important again to follow the conjuncture of institutional practices and intellectual production. At the moment that Thomas's political allegiances were unsettled, the Federation was preparing for the second meeting of its Central Committee since World War II, held in Whitby, Canada, in 1949. The bureaucratic imperatives

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[77] Quoted in Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey,* 60.

surrounding this event – the concrete tasks of organizing an agenda and producing reports – clarified dominant ecumenical ideas and in doing so concretized the locus of authority in the Federation. In this way the event itself clarified the triumph of Thomas's framing of the Political Commission's task. Three years before, at the Bossey conference in 1946, the challenge of formulating a Christian position on international communism had prompted the Federation's decision to bring Thomas onto its staff. There he had remained, throughout 1947, a self-styled critic, a voice from the margin of a Western-dominated ecumenical movement. At Whitby, he was thrust into a different role. On the first day, the Central Committee voted to appoint Thomas alongside Davis McCaughey, a young British theologian, as co-secretaries of Section III, devoted to a discussion of the SCMs and political concerns. Over the next week, Thomas took the lead in drafting the Section's report on this theme, and later turning this report into a Federation "Grey Book," a study guide circulated to SCM chapters around the world as a framework and basis for conversation and debate. No longer at the margins, Thomas would at Whitby assume the role of leading architect of a terminology on which political conversation would be carried out on the international level within the Federation.

IV. "A Common Approach to the World Struggle" – and its Price

Before examining this episode in Thomas's career it is worth summarizing where we have come thus far. Marx informed Thomas's view of the ecumenical community from the vantage point of colonial India. Marxian ideological critique gave Thomas a set of critical resources for exposing the unfinished business of the ecumenical movement's efforts to transcend politics in their witness to a Lord whose kingdom was not of this world. Guided by Marx the Indian/Asian perspective, he found power politics – the struggle for power between nations, states, and

peoples and economic groups and classes – present, though unacknowledged, and largely invisible from a western point of view, in the activities and utterances of the church. Thomas's critical contributions along these lines were welcomed – or at very least, not easily dismissible – by western ecumenists because they offered a solution to a crisis of ecumenical identity: Thomas showed political conflicts within the North Atlantic community over Communism, could be reinterpreted, not as threats to ecumenical unity but as steps toward its fulfillment. Marxian categories such as "ideology" deployed within the framework of a neo-orthodox theology provided a strategy of domesticating political conflict within the *oikoumene*.

The Federation Dialogues series provided the clearest expression of how Thomas's theology would work as a method of organizing and conceptualizing political debate within the student Christian community. But the Dialogues also raised a question. Could the ecumenical movement move beyond critical self-awareness of the political conflicts it contained toward a consensus among Christians around political aims? Thomas himself had raised this issue in his letter to Mackie shortly after arriving in the Federation, when he asked whether it would be possible for the SCMs to discover a source of unity on the "natural plane." Having called for and practiced an ecumenics of suspicion as a preliminary step toward the achievement of this goal until 1948, Thomas's efforts after that year focused on positive construction over deconstruction of ecumenical consensus. Between 1949 and 1952, he devoted himself to articulating the basis of a Christian political praxis, grounded in an understanding of what was at stake for Christians, as Christians, in the political realm.

The Christian in the World Struggle was the first fruit of this effort. Based largely on ideas

Thomas first developed in an early draft of the Whitby report, it was revised and amended in the

years that followed both by McCaughey and Thomas, drawing on input from Federation staff as

well as numerous theologians and SCM members. "It can be said," according to Philip Potter and

Thomas Wieser in their history of the WSCF, that in the years between 1949 and 1951, the

writing and production of the Thomas-McCaughey report "dominated the work… of the

Federation."[78] In 1950, a study conference devoted exclusively to a consideration of the draft

was held in Bièvres, outside Paris.

The focus of this section is an analysis of the final form the document took. Though a delineation

of Thomas and McCaughey's individual contributions is possible on some points, the final

product was a collaborative effort and individual authorship is difficult to distinguish. Both men

expressed satisfaction with the final product.[79] The congruence of their thinking marked the

emergence of a new postcolonial ecumenical regime which sought to provincialize the West and

turn to the political, economic, religious and social transformations of the Third World as the

inspiration for a new ecumenical theology. It also marked the denouement of Thomas's

disillusionment with Communism, even as his writing remained reliant on Marxist categories

and insisted on the need for ecumenists to enter the political struggle as "revolutionaries." More

important than its significance within Thomas's trajectory, however, is the significance of this

document in the history of the ecumenical project. In order to establish the political unity of

Christians, the document repudiated the assumption on which interwar ecumenism was based,

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[78] Philip Potter and Thomas Wieser, *Seeking and Serving the Truth* (London, SCM Press, 1997), 171.

[79] McCaughey/Bridston June 12, 1950 (WCC, 213.13.25).

namely, the idea of the church as a foundation and allegiance that would provide a foundation of social order. Instead the document advanced for the first time a vision of the church as a disruptive, revolutionary force, whose political effect was not to harmonize social relations but to transform them.

That this work reflected Thomas's *disillusionment* with politics was not obvious on first encounter with the text. Sounding revolutionary themes, it placed itself immediately in a socialist tradition of thought. "We are in the presence of a social revolution on an unprecedented, one might say, on a world scale," the document announced in its opening gambit.[80] Thinkers "from Saint-Simon to Stalin" had foretold the coming of this revolution, which the authors defined as the "rise submerged classes, nations, and races demanding not simply the amelioration of their lot, but participation in the total life of society." Touching all areas of life – family structures, cultural production, and economic relations, as well as forms of government – the revolution also extended to all regions of the globe. Its effects were most evident in Eastern Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa, where revolution took the form of "a revolt against the enslaving penetration of a West European and North American world." The West, too, was a theater of conflict, led by the "industrial working classes." What defined these upheavals was the struggle on the part of oppressed groups for "power and responsibility which was previously denied them."[81] The Christian's attitude toward this revolution was unambiguous. "Since power is essential to responsibility, the Christian welcomes this revolution."[82]

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[80] Thomas and McCaughey, *The Christian in the World Struggle*, 15.

[81] Ibid, 16.

[82] Ibid, 26.

Evoking a revolutionary *oikoumene*, the text departed in fundamental ways from the interwar ecumenical thinking. Just to conceive of social change under the rubric of *revolution* was revolutionary: traditionally, ecumenists understood contemporary society as a site of "disorder" in which the rise of secularism had brought nations, races, and classes into conflict. Now Thomas and McCaughey were arguing that these conflicts did not express modern humanity's abandonment of God but rather constituted sites of his providential action in the world. Further, while the older generation of western ecumenists had associated "personality" with "responsibility" – to God and to one's fellow humans – Thomas and McCaughey took the novel step of insisting that there could be no "responsibility" without "power." If the dignity of persons was achieved in and through revolutionary action, the church stood for a set of principles much different than interwar ecumenists had suspected. Religious liberty and social "order" would no longer do foundations of the good society. Prioritizing either left Christians with "too narrow a perspective," for "it is the human race, and not just religious groups within it, which is the object of God's love and judgment."[83] At the same time, not law and order as such but only specific laws that "minister to the human person" were defensible in their own right. "In a world where law is considered and used as an instrument of arbitrary power to the detriment of human personality, we render ourselves incapable of distinguishing between totalitarianism and democracy."[84] As an alternative either to religious liberty or "order," Thomas offered a new locus of the Christian political concerns: "our concern," they wrote, "is for social justice."[85]

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[83] Ibid, 12

[84] Ibid, 14.

[85] Ibid, 10.

As much as it sought to insert the Federation into a political struggle, however, the document reiterated the ecumenical anathema of "politicizing" the church. Chasing every exhortation to political struggle was a warning against absolutizing political objectives. The Christian's "yes" to the basic urge for justice dialectically entailed a "no" to the demonic elements present in all revolutionary movements, which tended to mistake their utopias for the Kingdom of God. Revolution, Thomas and McCaughey stated repeatedly, was not without risk. Because it "springs from an urge for power," the revolution carried with it the possibility that power might become an end in itself.[86]

In that vein of qualification, the document offered significant leeway for interpreting what "revolutionary action" might mean in particular national and local contexts. In some countries, it might take the form of resistance to the capitalist system or colonial government; in others, it might entail resistance to "totalitarian" government; elsewhere, it might mean working through parliamentary structures to promote progressive social reforms. These were decisions only the conscience of individual Christians could make. In this broad interpretation of revolution, the struggle might be violent here but not there; require cooperation with the Communists in China but necessitate opposing them Western Europe.

Despite these variations, however, there was one class of political arrangements that most reliably ensured the preservation and flourishing of "personal" existence in the contemporary world. "Where social democracy is an alternative… the 'yes' which [student Christians] say to

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[86] Ibid, 32.

the revolution can be expressed through the support of a genuinely revolutionary, but non-totalitarian party."[87] Here Thomas's "appreciation for Liberal Democracy" showed its face. He and McCaughey privileged "the political methods which we call democracy developed in Western Europe in a society which was at least subconsciously Christian."[88] Two features of "democratic procedures" and institutions were most valuable from a Christian point of view. First, the system gave "expression to the conviction that the State is a morally responsible entity." Social democracies subordinated the power of the state, in principle, to the authority of law, itself responsible to the collective will of the people. Popular sovereignty ensured a space of debate and the liberty to criticize government, which reflected the Christian idea that "there is no finality in politics."[89] In endorsing "social democratic" procedures, the writers reiterated that they were not "necessarily advocating support of parties with the title Social Democrat; nor were they endorsing social*ist* democracy. Rather, they were advocating on theological principle "political techniques whereby power is checked by power" in an arrangement that allow for a "permanent revolution in society."[90] To be "permanent" the revolution must be controlled.

Taken together, these qualifications may lead us to wonder whether Thomas, at the moment he attained the authority to frame the ecumenical conversation about politics, actually advanced a vision that differed substantively from the one which was imagined before he even arrived at the Federation, in the period when Maury had circulated his political questionnaire. In one crucial

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[87] Ibid, 63.

[88] Ibid, 70.

[89] Ibid 74. Quoted from a statement of the British Council of Churches, "*The Era of Atomic Power*" (SCM Press, London, 1946), 36.

[90] Ibid, 63.

respect, the premise of the Political Commission's work was the same as it had been before Thomas arrived: Christian faith entailed responsibilities in the political realm that could not be defined in political terms. Had Thomas's disillusionment with political Communism landed him in a position different perhaps in emphasis, but essentially similar, to Maury's political agnosticism?

In its ultimate refusal of politics, *The Christian in the World Struggle* did indeed echo Maury, as well as the interwar tradition of ecumenical thinking more broadly. But it also marked a significant shift, not in the content of its theological claims but in its understanding of the broader role of the church in society. Maury, along with the older generation of ecumenical leaders, understood the church as the site of "true community," where God's will reigned as the logos of conversation, exchange, and cooperation among Christians from different churches and nations. By locating God in the technicalities of political action, Thomas and McCaughey had re-enchanted a historical process playing out outside the church, in the secular realm. Still more, the text denied that God's presence could be *in* the church absent the church's involvement in that historical process of revolution. It was no longer in the actualization of the church per se but in the political activation of Christians that God's will became visible within history. No longer the node of social order, the church comprised a group of social "outsiders" working to transform society from the margins. "The coincidence of youth and the intellectual classes in 'outsider' position is of the greatest interest to student Christian groups: it is what puts them… at the point of articulation, or of greatest self-consciousness, in the revolutionary ferment."[91]

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[91] Ibid, 21.

To be sure, Thomas and McCaughey insisted that a dialogue within the church was still necessary in order to "illuminate for members of different national movements their own political analyses and decisions." But their account of contemporary church and society summoned a world in many ways closer to that of fin de siècle missionaries such as John Mott than interwar ecumenical champions like Joseph Oldham. What they understood under the rubric of "politics" resembled what pre-ecumenical Protestant missionaries had understood under the rubric of "religion." In fact, Thomas and McCaughey made the comparison explicit. "In that our task is to help one another to receive the Gospel of judgment and mercy in our political lives, the technique of approach will not be unlike that of the missionary," they wrote.[92] A reference to one of the most prominent missionaries of the pre-1914 age in an earlier draft of the document revealed clearly the extent to which political ecumenism would drew on earlier missiological strategies. "A. G. Hogg," Thomas wrote, "speaking about the Christian message to the Hindu says, 'in the modes of presentation adopted there must always be challenging relevancy."[93] This search for the "challenging relevancy" of the gospel – the phrase was changed to "disturbing illumination" in the final draft – was the old missionary challenge of placing the stumbling block of Christ in the pathways of the religious thought and practice of non-Christians. In the mission fields of Asia and Africa the gospel had to be formulated in such a way as to both locate its recipient in the contemporary social, religious, cultural scene in which he or she found him or herself, and to *dis*locate him or her by providing a "message of judgment and redemption." "The same thing might be said about our starting point in this political conversation."[94] Here the

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[92] Ibid, 10.

[93] Thomas and McCaughey, "The Christian and the S.C.M. in the World Struggle" (a document produced for discussion at the consultation of the Political Committee at Bièvres, August 17-20, 1950, 5.

[94] Thomas and McCaughey, *The Christian in the World Struggle*, 5.

language the gospel spoke was not that of Hindu religiosity but of political thought and practice. To enter the arena required mastering a political vocabulary of terms such as "'justice,' 'personality,' responsibility'" – "words," Thomas and McCaughey wrote, "which already preoccupy many and form the basic slogans for all parties in the political struggle of our day."[95] The semantic range of these terms, evinced in the contests over their meaning between rival political programs, were the fissures of secular consciousness which Christians would need to exploit. "However much we may regret the confusion introduced into language by giving contrary definitions to the same words, if the Christian wants to enter into the thick of the fight, with his understanding of the meaning and end of the struggle, he must also catch hold of the same concerns and give them a new dimension of meaning. This is the point at which the fundamental concern is felt by many in politics, and therefore the point at which the Christian Gospel can become most relevant and challenging." As missionaries had sought to conceptualize, categorize, and reinterpret the spiritual concepts of other religions in order to fulfill their true meaning in light of the new dispensation, so ecumenical revolutionaries would engage in the same act of apologetic redefinition. The desecularization of political into theological concepts was missionary praxis for a revolutionary world.[96]

As it found contemporary resonance with a pre-ecumenical past, *The Christian in the World Struggle* pointed toward a future dramatically unlike any that interwar ecumenical Christians had anticipated. At the center of the ecumenical project was a supposition with a still longer tradition

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[95] Ibid, 11.

[96] Though none of Thomas nor McCaughey works suggest a familiarity with the political theology of Carl Schmitt, their inversion of Schmitt's aetiology of "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state" (Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 36) underscores their abiding commitment to reversing secularization. In this sense, too, they remained true to the central aim of the interwar ecumenical project, even as they revolutionized its methods.

in Christian thought, namely that Christianity constituted a basis of community and a model of social harmony under God's rule. By envisioning contemporary society as a politicized space in which the Christian was an outsider – as missionaries had been in the "foreign fields" of the pre-1914 Protestant imagination – Thomas and McCaughey repositioned the church to the margins. For the first time, a major ecumenical text had presented the church, not as a locus of social harmony, but as the locus of political struggle. For student Christian leaders, that repositioning salvaged the international unity of Christians at a time when the Cold War threatened to split the movement. But post-colonial global unity – epitomized in the partnership of the Briton McCaughey and the Indian Thomas – required a new role for the church, no longer as the adhesive of social order but as its solvent. In the conclusion that follows, we will consider how this shift in ecumenical consciousness illuminates a larger transformation in Christianity's place in the modern world.

Conclusion

This dissertation has traced the history of Protestant-led efforts to realize the "ecumenical" unity of Christians and churches. Rather than seeing these efforts as parts of a single, continuous campaign culminating stretching from the 19th century to the 1948 formation of the World Council of Churches, I have emphasized shifts in of the meaning of ecumenicity that occurred over the first half of the 20th century, as a result of geopolitical upheavals that divided church leaders committed to the program of world Christian unity. In particular, I have argued that there were three ecumenical projects that arose between 1900 and 1952: the first oriented around building the Kingdom of God on earth (1900-1925), the second seeking the realize the worldwide church as the basis of universal community (1930-1950), and the third mobilizing Christians for political revolution (1946-1952). The caesuras dividing these programs – World War I and the early Cold War – were moments when the possibility of international and inter-church cooperation seemed to collapse altogether, because it became impossible for Protestants and Orthodox church leaders to credit one another's motives as authentically Christian rather than "political." While the programs of the Kingdom and the church abstracted political conflict as a function of incomplete Christianization or secularism, revolutionary ecumenism embraced political conflict as an expression of Christian obedience. For precisely this reason, revolutionary ecumenism offers today an illuminating point of departure to reconsider contemporary debates over the relation of religion and the secular in the public sphere.

Before addressing these debates, it is worth summarizing the argument I have laid out in the preceding chapters. Until the 1930s, all attempts to organize "ecumenical" conferences among

missionaries or an "ecumenical" council of churches were grounded in a theologically liberal program that sought to realize the Kingdom of God on earth. World War I and its aftermath upended this program, not because the horrors of war made the Kingdom an implausible or unconscionable aim, but because Allied and German Protestants could not agree over the practical initiatives necessary to bring about this beatific ideal. While Allies saw the Kingdom coming into existence through the League of Nations and Wilsoninan internationalism, Germans viewed such arguments as attempts to conceal the victors' political interests under a halo of Christian piety. In the 1930s, a self-conscious ecumenical movement displaced the program of the Kingdom and succeeded in fostering wide international participation – including Nazi-sympathizing churches – around opposition to "secularism." Secularism, as ecumenists defined it, cast social and international disorder – as well as conflicts among churches themselves – as the consequence of man's rebellion against God. The only social order capable of worldwide integration was the ecumenical church, constituted as the public of God's address. Ecumenists conceived the World Council of Churches as an instrument for realizing this community "of acquaintance, of conversation, of mutual aid, of witness and of the search for full unity" among Christians of all nations, races, and classes.[1] But the godly community of the interwar imagination became itself a scene of bitter recrimination in the Cold War. As the program of the Kingdom had collapsed under the weight of its political contradictions after 1914, so the program of the church collapsed for the same reasons after 1948. While Eastern European church leaders attacked the World Council as a front for Western imperialism, critics in the West attacked the Council as an agent or stooge of Soviet Communism. The path beyond the

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[1] Visser't Hooft, "Report of the Provisional Committee," (address delivered at the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches," July, 1948), 3 (UTS, William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library Collection, Series 1B box 16 fld 6)

ideological divisions of the Cold War lay in a new politics of Third World revolution. Ecumenists turned to the global South to consolidate the global unity of their movement that eluded church leaders in the East and the West, and M. M. Thomas, along with Davis McCaughey, Robert Mackie, and others in the World Student Christian Federation, led the way.

These shifts in ecumenical thought and practice responded to the dynamics of integration and fracture generated by Protestants' activation in the public sphere between 1900 and 1952. By the turn of the century, much of the clerical and lay leadership of Protestantism had come to view voluntary association – through missionary societies and church organizations promoting social reform – as necessary in order extend the influence of the Christian faith over industrial civilization at home and foreign populations abroad. Their mobilizations generated a new kind of discourse for distinguishing piety from impiety. The basic commitment of the ecumenical projects we have analyzed here was that authentic faith expressed itself through international consensus among individual Christians and churches. Hence the cause of Christian unity – pursued through the founding of councils and conferences, the maintenance of personal networks, and the international coordination of humanitarian and social work – was not merely an efflux of religious idealism; its aim was to secure the viability of Christian faith in an age of global interconnection. When the interwar strategy for abstracting political divisions through the concept of secularism foundered during the Cold War, the movement embraced a paradoxical conclusion: that it was only through political struggle, through the creative destruction of social bonds, that Christianity could realize the universal fellowship it sought. The church had become, not the basis for social order, but a fundament of social revolution.

This surprising denouement suggests a 20th century Christian trajectory at odds with dominant versions of secularization, which tend to stress either the decline of belief, the institutional separation of spheres from religious authority, or the attempt to "substitute" secularly grounded moral or political concepts originally derived from religious sources.[2] In the remainder of this conclusion, I will clarify the distinction between these common stories and the history I have presented here by showing how the ecumenical movement's course in the 1950s and 1960s diverged from the phenomenon of "Post-Protestantism," focusing on the latter's manifestations in the United States.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the program of revolutionary ecumenism first put forth in systematic form in *The Christian in the World Struggle* was institutionalized across the ecumenical movement as a whole. In December 1949, Thomas co-authored the report of an Eastern Asia Christian Conference held under the auspices of the World Council and the International Missionary Council in Bangkok. "The struggle for, and the attainment of, political freedom has awakened the hitherto submerged peoples of East Asia to a new sense of dignity and historical mission," declared that report, borrowing language taken from the World Student Christian Federation's Political Commission examined in chapter 6.[3] The Bangkok conference was followed in 1953 by another Asian summit – in Lucknow, India – where theologians and clerics from the West, Asia, and South America discussed papers in preparation for the Second Assembly of the World Council, held in Evanston, Illinois, the following year. In 1955, the

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[2] For useful overviews of prevailing conceptions of secularization theory in the social sciences, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), Introduction and José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chpt 1.

[3] Quoted in Paul Abrecht, "The Development of Ecumenical Social Thought and Action," *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* vol 2 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1968), 247.

World Council of Churches began a program on "The Church in Areas of Rapid Social Change,"

under the direction of the American Baptist Paul Abrecht and the Dutch Reformed economist

Egbert de Vries. This program convened theologians and lay activists to consider the

responsibilities of the church in countries emerging from colonial rule and seeking rapid social

and economic development. It became a nexus for thinkers interested in developing theologies of

revolution. M. M. Thomas and John Karefa-Smart, a Methodist Elder and university professor

from Sierra Leone (and between 1961-1964, the newly independent country's first Foreign

Minister), served as staff consultants for the Rapid Social Change initiative, along with the

Burmese theologian U Kyaw Than.[4]

By the 1960s, the movement was poised to greet the rise of student protests, New Left politics,

accelerating decolonization in Africa with its blessings. In 1962, Abrecht, and de Vries began

preparations for a conference on "Church and Society," envisioned as a sequel to the Oxford

Conference of 1937. Thomas was appointed Chairman. The purpose of this gathering was to

rethink the interwar tradition ecumenical social thought in light of what Abrecht termed "the

revolutionary realities which shape the modern world."[5] In one of the most influential

preparatory papers, the Princeton Theological Seminary Professor Richard Shaull argued that the

ecumenical church must "provide a context in which people are set free for and encouraged to

accept revolutionary commitment, and are helped to work out a theological perspective on and

an ethic for revolution."[6] Essays by the German theologian H. G. Wendland, the Uruguayan

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[4] For a general overview of the Rapid Social Change Program, see Abrecht, 235-59 and Margaret Nash, *Ecumenical Movement in the 1960s* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1975), chpts 1-4.

[5] Abrecht, 251.

[6] Richard Shaull, "The Revolutionary Challenge to Church and Theology" [paper prepared for the World Council of Churches's Church and Society Conference held in Geneva, July 12-26, 1966] (WCC, 243.02.8).

theologian Emilio Castro (future General Secretary of the World Council from 1985 to 1992), U Kyaw Than, and others all argued that Christian mission must begin with solidarity with the poor and opposition to racism, focusing on flashpoints including Apartheid South Africa, South America, and the American South. The conference agenda, which featured addresses by Margaret Mead, Kwame Nkrumah, and Martin Luther King, Jr., solidified the place of the ecumenical movement in the global left.[7] Participants embraced a vision of social liberation centered on the extrication of the Gospel from its captivity in western cultural forms and its mobilization in resistance to global economic inequality and racism.[8]

As the ecumenical institutions embraced the radical politics of Third World liberation, they hemorrhaged the cultural capital of Christianity in the West. Especially in the United States, this capital was claimed by Christians willing to rally unequivocally to the cause of anti-Communism, and later by evangelical Protestants securing a political position for themselves within postwar conservatism. Meanwhile, many of the concepts advanced within ecumenical theology in the 1930s and 1940s were developed in explicitly secular directions by thinkers who drifted out of the remit of ecumenical conversation – and in many cases away from Christian faith altogether. We saw in Chapter 4 how the idea of human rights abstracted the theological concept of personhood from the practices of ecumenical dialogue originally deemed necessary to its realization. Dulles and Nolde had sought to translate personhood into a legal idiom that could command ascent "by people of goodwill," Christian or non-Christian. In the United States in

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[7] Martin Luther King, Jr. did not attend the event due to his participation in the Chicago Freedom Movement in July. The text of his Geneva speech, "A Knock at Midnight," was delivered in absentia. For the text of the speech see WCC, 243.08.

[8] For a selection of papers prepared for the event, see *The Church Amid Revolution*, ed. Harvey Cox (New York: Association Press, 1967).

particular, cognate programs of translation emerged from a younger generation of philosophers, most notably John Rawls.

As the historian Mackenzie Bok has recently shown, the "ethical motivations" of Rawls's theory of liberalism – developed later in *A Theory of Justice* (1971) – extended a program first developed in his undergraduate thesis, *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith* (1942).[9] While a Princeton undergraduate, deeply influenced by his reading of Emil Brunner and by classes with the philosopher George F. Thomas – a member of the "Theological Discussion Group" convened as a part of the post-Jerusalem study program examined in chapter 4 – Rawls characterized "personal recognition" linking human beings to each other through their recognition of God as the basis of authentic community life.[10] In the 1950s and 1960s, Rawls moved away from theological interlocutors of his thesis, and from the faith of his youth. Seeking to generate a more universalistic basis for the ethics of personal recognition, he sought to ground an ethical vantage point first achieved through religious transformation on rational, "naturalistic" grounds.

Bok and others have focused on tracing out the legacy of ecumenical ideas in the career of "Post-Protestants" like Rawls.[11] Their work remains within a debate over the relation of secular concepts to theological origins, and the "legitimacy" of attempts to establish the autonomy of a

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[9] Mackenzie Bok, "To the Mountaintop Again: The Early Rawls and Post-Protestant Ethics in Postwar America" *Modern Intellectual History* (August 2015), 1-33, 5. For other accounts of Rawls's connection with neo-orthodox/dialectical theology, see Eric Gregory, "Before the Original Position: The Neo-Orthodox Theology of the Young John Rawls," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 35, 2 (2007), 179-206.

[10] Bok, esp 5-8. Tracing this trajectory has been central to David Hollinger's recent work. See the essays in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[11] "Post-Protestant" is a term of David Hollinger's which Bok adopts. See Bok, 3.

secular ethics.[12] Here I have tried to draw attention to a different trajectory, focused not on the

figures that left the ecumenical faith but those who remained in it and attempted to work out, not

secular re-founding of theological ethics, but a new defense of theology's task in the postwar

world. Focus on this group shows that ecumenical Christianity was not just a mid-century gasp

of Protestant establishment awaiting its secularization. Whatever sources of inspiration

ecumenical theology provided for "Post-Protestantism" in its various exertions in ethics,

philosophy, and politics, ecumenical Christianity remained after 1950 an institutionalized effort

to foster world solidarity on the basis of a common faith. And in this undertaking, and the

redefinition of Christian faith in relation to politics that it demanded, we can see an alternative to

dominant accounts of secularization.

Surveying the history of ecumenism in the 1950s and 1960s, what stands out is not a capitulation

to secularism but rather a de-emphasizing of the anti-secularist polemic that was so central to the

interwar ecumenists. No voices in the movement ever argued that Christian faith was merely a

private matter. Thomas and his colleagues and successors never repudiated the critique of

secularism as modern man's rebellion against god in the name of "self-sufficiency." They did,

however, argue that the meaning of this polemic could only be understood by specifying its

political significance. Such a specification was necessary in order to avoid the impression that

the movement was allied to one or the other Cold War bloc.

Theologians of revolution specified their politics by identifying the church with the poor, the

non-white, the "submerged classes." For Thomas and McCaughey, as discussed in chapter 6,

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[12] For the classic statement of this problem, see Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

Christ's universal fellowship was found in solidarity with the "outsider." One might argue that this valorization of Christian marginality was simply an ex post facto justification of the church's slipping cultural control brought on by exogenous forces. But the fact that this argument was advanced already in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Christians in Europe and North America still enjoyed a position of dominance in their respective societies,[13] militates against such an argument. Moreover, there is no evidence that revolutionary ecumenism rose to prominence in the movement as a strategy of adjustment to the "decline of Christendom" in the West. Its ascent was due, rather, to its capacity to furnish a basis for practical cooperation within a constituency threatened with internal fracture. Ecumenists re-located themselves to the society's margins in order to secure the worldwide integration of Christian community that had been their goal from the very beginning.

Focus on ecumenical Christians' cultural defeat in the West, then, comes at the cost of discounting the culture that matter most to them: namely, that of their own movement, the global life of the *oikoumene*. More significantly, such a focus overlooks the movement's subtle account of religion's relation to politics – an account that offers and illuminating alternative to prevailing contemporary versions within both Christian and secular scholarship. Much contemporary work on religion in the public sphere has focused on defending or critiquing the program of

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[13] Most current scholarship on transwar Christianity now stresses its cultural dominance, above all in the ways that it shaped framings of the Cold War, Christian Democracy in Europe, and political culture in the US during a time that saw God inscribed into the pledge of allegiance and "In God We Trust" printed on the dollar bill. Moyn, for instance, calls the transwar period "Christianity's last golden age" on the European content." Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 110. On Christian Democracy's intellectual origins and postwar dominance, see Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and James Chappel, *Slaying the Leviathan: Catholicism and the Rebirth of European Conservatism: 1920-1950* (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2012) and for the abiding social dominance of Protestant in the US context, see Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2014) and Jason Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

"translating" the contents of religious discourse into the terms of rational argument. Rawls

himself advanced such a program of translation in his famous "proviso," insisting that religious

actors furnish "properly political reasons" for their comprehensive doctrines as the price of their

entry into public discourse.[14] More recently, Jürgen Habermas has offered a revision of this

argument (and also of his own prior position), that eschews Rawls's call for religious actors to

police their own arguments, but insists on an "institutional filter" for buffering "informal

communication in the public arena" – where religious appeals need not undergo translation – and

the "collectively binding decisions" of states and other political bodies.[15] Critics of Habermas

such as Peter Gordon have underscored that even his updated program subverts its stated

intention: "translating" theological claims into secular language strips them of precisely the

content that is meant to be translated. Figured as a source of "values" or "normative

imaginaries," religious discourse loses the object that made it meaningful in the first place.[16] The

question at stake in these debates is what a public that accommodates theological discourse while

resisting its exclusions would look like.

Thomas and the revolutionary ecumenical tradition envisioned such a public. For them, this

public did not entail unidirectional translation – from theological into political reason – but an

ongoing practice of reciprocal translation necessary to irrigate two fields of meaning. In *The

Christian and the World Struggle*, Thomas and McCaughey called for a "translation" of political

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[14] John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *University of Chicago Law Review* 64 (Summer 1997), 783.

[15] Jürgen Habermas, "'The Political:' The Rational Meaning of Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology," *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere,* ed Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbai University Press, 2011), 15-33, 26.

[16] Peter Gordon, "Between Christian Democracy and Critical Theory: Habermas, Böckenförde, and the Dialectics of Secularization in Postwar Germany" *Social Research* vol 80, 1 (2013), 173-202.

concepts such as "justice" and "responsibility" into theological terms. This translation was necessary, they believed, in order for Christians to make the Gospel comprehensible in a world where political thought and practice was the dominant vernacular. But the reverse was also true: only by specifying political aims could Christians understand the meaning of their own faith. Political participation furnished the only standpoint from which the eternal truths of the Gospel could be understood. The circular translations of theological and political discourse were for these authors – and, by the 1960s, for the ecumenical movement as a whole – the basis of Christian participation in modern society. Their mission was not to Christianize this society but to apprehend and obey God's will in its revolutionary transformation. Such a program required the autonomy of politics – exactly in order to reveal the object of faith.

Resolving the ecumenical movement's Cold War crisis, then, confronted its theologians with questions of translation that are today at center of contemporary debates over religion in the public sphere. Their solution bears little resemblance to theoretical programs currently advanced by either secular and Christian commentators. It reveals a deep familiarity with a tradition of missiology dating back to the 19th century that was central to Protestant internationalism from its origins, but has fallen since into oblivion – the result as much of ecumenical Christianity's marginalization as evangelical Protestantism's ascent. It goes without saying that Thomas's solution has no standing as a model for non-Christian religious traditions. Nor does the unique vector of revolutionary ecumenism neutralize the missiological tradition it drew from of its (historically dominant) Christian chauvinism. But recovering ecumenism's twentieth-century re-inventions is a critical reminder that its relation to the secular public sphere is not one of linear progression. Rather, it was one of contestation over the terms of Christian engagement in

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politics. For that reason, this history holds insights alike for Christian and secular scholars attentive to the resistance between their respective projects, yet hopeful that this resistance is an occasion for more probing thought on both sides.

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