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The Fifth Horseman[1]

Religion and the Bomb in the Early Atomic Age

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Abstract. Over the past twenty years, it has become fashionable for scholars of U.S. foreign policy to interpret the United States' role in the Cold War world through the prism of religion. In contrast, this article argues that ideology not religion is the key force influencing American national self-perception. Based on extensive primary source research, it examines the impact of the atomic age on U.S. foreign policy after 1945. The central argument is that after Hiroshima, religion waned in strength as it became obvious that man and science had wrestled from God the power to determine the timing of the Day of Judgment.

Keywords: Religion, Atomic Bomb, Hiroshima, Cold War, Ideology.

1. Early Thoughts on the Bomb's Impact

The scientific or industrial revolutions that began in the early modern era were not really "revolutions." The processes that brought navigational skills, the telegraph, electricity, assembly-line production, trains, motor vehicles, aircrafts, penicillin, and more were tortuous and slow. Revolutions do not last centuries.

1 I am grateful to my Boston University colleague Jay Corrin for pointing me in the direction of this topic and for his support. Above all, I am deeply thankful to Julianna Joy Hellerman who provided research assistance during the research and writing stages of this article. Throughout numerous conversations, Julianna challenged and helped crystalize many of my thoughts and conclusions. This article would not have seen the light of day without her constructive feedback and engaging suggestions.

They are rapid and overwhelming shocks to the system. Revolutions irreversibly remove the world of yesteryear and replace it with something new. August 6, 1945 was such a revolution. As the "second sun" rose above the Japanese city of Hiroshima, everything changed technologically, morally, and spiritually. "It is an atomic bomb," President Harry Truman's official statement announced. "It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East" (The White House 1945). Humanity had entered a new era.

In the Book of Revelation, the Lamb of God unseals parts of the Book of God and summons four beings. Each rides out on a white, red, black, and ashen pale horse, respectively. In most accounts, these horses and their riders symbolize Conquest, War, Famine, and Death. They are the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, the harbingers of the Day of Judgment. The first four and a half decades of the twentieth century brought devastation to mankind on a befitting scale. In the Second World War alone, around sixty-five million died. Roughly one death every three seconds, for six straight years. Conquest, War, Famine, and Death dominated to such an extent that Verdun, the Somme, Okinawa, and the entire Eastern Front became monikers for unparalleled human-made calamity. Coventry, Hamburg, Dresden, Nanjing, and Tokyo became shorthand for the indiscriminate killing of civilians in the name of righteousness. At first pass, the death tolls caused by the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki numbered fewer than in many of the locations listed above; yet, in terms of cataclysm, the names of those two Japanese cities outshone anything that had occurred previously. Before long, the estimated 25,000 dead Dresdners, the 42,000 who perished in Hamburg, even the death of over 100,000 firebombed in Tokyo appeared almost quaint compared to the new atomic world. Only the Holocaust compared.

Contemporaries felt this deeply and quickly. Even before pictures or first-hand accounts from Hiroshima were available, secular and religious thinkers bemoaned the consequences. Echoing the sentiments of Florentine chroniclers after the arrival of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century, the minister John Holmes reflected upon the news of the bomb as follows: "Everything else seemed suddenly to become insignificant. I seemed to grow cold, as though I had been transported to the waste spaces of the moon. The summer beauty seemed to vanish, and the waves of the sea to be pounding upon the shores of an empty world.... For I knew that the final crisis in human history had come" (Boyer 1985: 3). Many journalists concurred. Anne O'Hare McCormick considered the bomb an "explosion in men's minds as shattering as the obliteration of Hiroshima and the U.S. another Prometheus" (McCormick 1945). Hanson Baldwin foreshadowed the philosophical consequences. The atomic bomb unleashed "forces ... outside human experience." It won the war, but it also opened a new chapter in human history "in which the weird, the strange, the horrible becomes the trite and the obvious. Yesterday we clinched victory in the Pacific, but we sowed the whirlwind," he concluded (Baldwin 1945).

Biblical metaphors consistently surfaced to describe the bomb, but they often had an eerily human component for a companion. Brigadier General Thomas Farrell, Deputy to Major General Leslie Groves' Manhattan Project, who witnessed the July 1945 Trinity Test in New Mexico, relayed it as follows:

> No man-made phenomenon of such tremendous power had ever occurred before.... Thirty seconds after the explosion came first, the air blast pressing hard against the people and things, to be followed almost immediately by the strong, sustained, awesome roar which warned of doomsday and made us feel that we puny things were blasphemous to dare tamper with the forces heretofore reserved to The Almighty. (War Department 1945)

Power "heretofore reserved to The Almighty" was on cue. Reporting to the Senate Special Committee on Atomic Energy, following a fact-finding mission to Japan, Farrell dismissed any comparison between the bomb and traditional warfare. Explaining that it would take 2,000 B-29s to carry a TNT load comparable to the Nagasaki bomb, he noted that such an operation "would require 112,000 men." On August 9, a single aircraft had destroyed a city of 350,000, killing approximately 58,000 outright – and nuclear technology was still in its infancy. "This isn't a bomb at all," Farrell thundered. "The use of the word bomb carries with it a completely inaccurate picture of what this thing does" (de Vore 1946; Chairman's Office 1946). The "atomic bomb was the turn of the screw," Robert Oppenheimer concluded (Federation of American Scientists 1946: 59–69). It made the prospect of future wars "unendurable. It has led us up those last few steps to the mountain pass; and beyond there is a different country" (Broad 1987).

The editors of the journal *The Christian Century* believed that after the bomb, man moved "in an unmapped wilderness, poignantly aware that we are spiritually and intellectually unprepared for the decisions we now must make … [the] new weapon has destroyed at one blow the familiar conception of national security, changed the scale of destructive conflict among peoples and opened before us all the prospect of swift ruin for civilization and even the possibility of a speedy end to man's life on earth" (*Christian Century* 1946: 455–456). Truman never regretted the use of the bombs against Japan, but he understood that their force was "too revolutionary to consider in the framework of old ideas" (Truman 1945a). The United States may, to paraphrase the nineteenth-century intellectual and preacher Orestes Brownson, still have been a nation with the soul of a church, but in Oppenheimer's new atomic age country, except perhaps to the most cynical, charity, forgiveness, and kindness appeared as nothing more than fig leaves of the new reality. Before Hiroshima, man merely desired to play God. In August, the inescapable conclusion was that he had acquired the capability. The war's apocalyptic scale of death permanently replaced God with science, ideology, and the nation state. Hiroshima was the most powerful embodiment of the fact that Americans no longer stood in reverence of God but in fact possessed the power to design and modernize the world.

2. Religion and Politics: Thoughts on Scholarship

This article's argument that Christianity lost a considerable amount of its potency and power as a unifying force after Hiroshima goes against the grain of much recent scholarship. If anything, since the late 1990s, many historians focusing on religion and the Cold War have come to see Christianity as a master key and religion as a sort of "conscience of American foreign relations" (Preston 2006, 2012; Inboden 2008; Herzog 2011). This argument commonly rests on cultural-political initiatives, polls confirming Americans' Christianity, the rise of Billy Graham's evangelism, and policymakers' statements about godless communists and god-fearing Americans. In that sense, religion becomes the companion to the traditional story of the American postwar consensus.

The theory is understandably compelling but is easily overstated. Boastful speeches by statesmen with frequent one-line references to God make for seemingly uncomplicated assertions about the importance of the personal faith of presidents and their advisers and, by extension, the nation. This is especially so when those ideas are lifted from speeches while leaving other content behind. Add to this the academic's yearning for sweeping reinterpretations, and what emerges are exclusionary suppositions insisting that "only by summoning the American people to a religious crusade could US leaders maintain domestic support for the extraordinary measures needed to fight the Cold War" (Inboden 2008: 4).

While the religious emphasis has resulted in some excellent scholarship and raised valuable questions about American identity, its exclusionary nature also creates an intellectual bunker mentality dismissive of alternatives. Aiming to abandon such singular prisms, this article returns religion to a more moderate place in the American postwar narrative. Based on accounts since Hiroshima, including media coverage and personal reflections, it explores the atomic bomb's impact on faith, ideology, politics, and national identity. In recent decades, scholarship on ideology has been among the most important contributions to the study of America's role in the world. Rather than recoil from the unpopular connotations associated with American exceptionalism, many historians now see that ideology as central to any past or present understanding of the United States (Stephanson 2000; Westad 2005, 2017; Hunt 2009; Holm 2016). As the colonial historian Gordon Wood argues, since the nation's founding, the "idea of America" has been draped in ideology. In the absence of a shared ethnicity, a national language, naturally defined boundaries, or a unifying religion, cohesion emerges from ideas of democracy and freedom. The belief in America as a perfect society may be more imagined than real, but it has remained a cornerstone of national identity. Like other ideologies, the idea of an exceptional America embodies a certain religiosity because at its core is a vision to remake the world in its own image. If "we Americans were not leading the world towards liberty and free government, then what was our history all about?" (Wood 2011: 319–320). Although far more critical of the answer than is Wood, the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr would have understood the point. As Niebuhr acerbically noted in 1944, the American belief in democracy is merely "a less vicious version of the Nazi creed." He cautioned, "no society, not even a democratic one ... is great enough or good enough to consider itself the end of human existence" (Niebuhr 1944: 133). Emphasis on ideology neither neglects nor rejects the role of religion or Judeo-Christian values in the American experience after 1945. It reminds us that religion infused ideology, not the other way around. Christianity may be an important accompanying feature for the study of U.S. foreign policy, but it is not the engine of national ideology, nor is it equal to its identity.

3. Reacting to the Bomb

August 1945 witnessed the end of the Second World War, but as the astute *New York Times* reporter James Reston noted, the atomic bombs left Americans "wondering about old ideas and old prejudices and even about what they had assumed to be old truths." Accompanying his article was a cartoon with the arm of science holding the future of civilization in the palm of its hand (Reston 1945).

Like Oppenheimer, Reston principally spoke from a secular background, but the emphasis on the bomb's revolutionary qualities rang true to many churchmen as well. The bomb struck such a chord with Christians because in an instance, it overturned virtues of humanity, justice, charity, and even Augustinian just war theory. Institutionalized Christianity replicated this struggle for purpose and meaning, though these debates were neither unanimous nor simple. If anything, they reflected a faith deeply torn. Christians might readily accept that God tests humans on an individual level, but Hiroshima and Nagasaki were entirely new crosses to bear.

"If Dachau was a crime," insisted the clergyman Abraham Johannes Muste, "Hiroshima is a crime" (Danielson 2006: 645). *Catholic World* simply declared the bomb a break from Christian ethics (Boyer 1985: 203). The Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (FCC) lamentingly called for a halt to air attacks. Alongside the influential Presbyterian and later Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, FCC President G. Bromley Oxnam insisted that if "a professedly Christian nation" felt morally free to use atomic weapons, "men elsewhere will accept

that verdict ... [and] the stage will be set for the sudden and final destruction of mankind" (Rosendorf 1999: 65). In that dilemma lay the rub, and because of its exclusionary nature, it was not surprising that some facets of institutionalized Christianity would find ways to reconcile faith in country and faith in God with the war's end. Consequently, in an almost desperate search for purpose, Dulles and Oxnam eventually concluded, "the way of Christian statesmanship was to use our newly discovered and awesome power as a potential for peace rather than an actuality of war. To the extent that our nation followed that way, it showed a capacity of self-restraint which greatly increases our moral authority in the world" (Giangreco and Moore 2019: 296).

But for many others, humanity had crossed a moral Rubicon. Hiroshima was "a catastrophic conclusion ... to the war's apocalyptic surprises," declared the Vatican's *L'Osservatore Romano*. "Da Vinci wanted to defeat death by thought," the paper concluded, but unfortunately, "the road of men who have not his Christian charity must defeat death with death." The "discovery of this weapon" cast a sinister shadow "on the future of humanity." Old certainties were now irrelevant. The British Christianity Calling Council considered the bomb "unparalleled terrorism" (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1945a, 1945b). The Dean of Salisbury captured a sentiment echoed "in churches and chapels across" England. "If mankind will turn to God the Creator and seek his help to find his will, which is peace, there is hope.... If not, despair. The choice is inescapable." At Westminster Abbey, R. L. Donaldson told his congregation: "we can no longer call ourselves a Christian people. We are a nation pagan at last" (Willis 1997: 424, 429).

Writing in the *Christian Century*, Wesner Fallow hoped for a Christian solution to humanity's new predicament, but his words would have calmed few. "August 6, 1945," he insisted, "brought back normality, however much believers may lose themselves in the engulfing fear of unbelievers. The normality ... consists of the rightness, the correctness, of not only contemplating but also expecting [the] world's end." The problem was that the world's end was in the hands of man who before "possessed no means for holding a knife to every person's throat. Today he not only holds that knife but he also has the diabolical power to derange the human mind, so ghastly is the scope of threat and fear." (Fallow 1946: 1147–1148). Christians had always considered man fallible, but as one writer asserted in response to Fallow, in the past, "when the expectation of the end of the world has arisen, it has been believed that God himself would destroy it; hence there was nothing for men to do but to get themselves ready for the day. But today it is not believed that God is threatening the world; it is man in his sin" (Gallagher 1946: 1309). *Life* photo journalist Bernard Hoffman recounted that sin in a note to his editor after visiting Japan a year earlier:

> We saw Hiroshima today – or what little is left of it. We were so shocked with what we saw that most of us felt like weeping; not out of sympathy for the Japs but because we were shocked and revolted by this new and terrible form of destruction. Compared to Hiroshima, Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, are practically untouched.... The sickly-sweet smell of death is everywhere. (*Washington Post* 2015)

The caption accompanying Hoffman's "Photo of the Week" reads: "A stone head of Christ, dislodged by the atomic blast at Nagasaki, lies before the ruins of a Roman Catholic Cathedral." The brief article attached saw in the image "the stony symbol of the moral problem facing a people who profess to follow His teachings" (Hoffman 1945).

A year later, a public FCC report captured with raw emotion the mood now common. The authors – Niebuhr among them – insisted: "We would begin with an act of contrition. As American Christians, we are deeply penitent for the irresponsible use already made of the atomic bomb.... We have sinned grievously against the laws of God and against the people of Japan" (FCC 1946). Yet, this

was more than a matter of man's sinfulness. "Our latest epochal triumph of science and technology may prove to be our last," commented *Christian Century*. The "new weapon has destroyed at one blow the familiar conception of national security, changed the scale of destructive conflict among peoples and opened before us all the prospect of swift ruin for civilization and even the possibility of a speedy end to man's life on earth" (*Christian Century* 1946: 455–456).

This internal moral conflict reflected deeper historical questions because it challenged whether Christian values and human progress could continue to jointly direct and inspire U.S. foreign policy in an atomic world. The separation of church and state notwithstanding, America had always been religious at heart. Phillip Freneau captured this in his eighteenth-century poem "The Rising Glory of America," in which America ideologically replaced Greece and Rome but did so ordained with the mandate of "a New Jerusalem sent down from heaven" (Freneau and Pattee 1902). This morphed with a national identity that Alexis de Tocqueville observed during his nineteenth-century travels in America (Preston 2012: 9, 14). Before and after the Civil War, this found a voice in millennialism and westward expansion. The link intensified, and the logic only grew louder as President William McKinley, backed by fervent supporters like Senator Albert Beveridge and Henry Cabot Lodge, called for an overseas American Empire. In this era, there was no contradiction between God's plan, the expansion of an American role in the world, and the idea of progress (Thomas 2010). As Walter McDougall points out, it was not surprising that the quest to make the "world safe for democracy" was right around the corner (1997: 101–121). Nor was it surprising that Woodrow Wilson merged his quest to save the world with ideas anchored in the Social Gospel (Hankins 2016; Burnidge 2016).

Even if the Great War in the end scarred Americans, the vision of a foreign policy tied to Christianity easily resurfaced after 1940. Vice President Henry Wallace insisted that while the Bible preached social justice, the idea only gained "complete and powerful political expression until our nation was formed as a Federal Union" (Wallace 1942). Sounding very similar, Wallace's replacement on the 1944 ticket, Harry Truman, asked, do we "not owe it to our children, to all mankind ... to be sure these catastrophes do not engulf the world a third time? This is America's destiny." Convinced that the responsibility to save the world from itself rested with America, he argued that if "some good can come out of this war, it is that we are willing to assume the obligations God intended for us to take" (Truman 1944; *Washington Post* 1944). It was a common theme among intellectuals as well. Helen Hill and Francis Miller called for American global leadership. Hill argued that "the American method of industry and commerce and the universal acceptance of the English language is creating a situation in which it will be possible once again to build a concept of Christendom" (Hill 2000 cited in Edwards 2009: 75–77).

For all Wallace's hyperbole, his narrative effortlessly connected Christian ideals with American exceptionalism and repudiated the kind of Christian pacifism that had won favor during the interwar period. It also linked seamlessly with modernist Protestantism that now became "part of the liberal-moderate cultural mainstream" and which saw "God's continuing to be revealed through the best developments of modern times." On matters of both domestic and foreign policy matters, its "leading spokespersons were respected participants in the national conversation" (Marsden 2014: 100–104). Many of them called on Americans to build a new world order. The FCC shared this view. In a series of collected essays entitled *A Religious Faith for a Just and Durable Peace*, contributors heralded a collaborative and moral universe anchored in Christian values. The Presbyterian minister Everett Clinchy insisted that in the final analysis, "it is only upon

recognition of a more than natural religion that the natural virtues demanded by pacific world relations are possible. This is a conviction of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews." Another contributor, pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick, concurred. "The lag of our political setup behind our vital needs is too obvious and too disastrous to be left unchanged." Christian Realists understood well enough that the Book of Revelation condemned the coward along with murderers and idolaters. Victory against the Axis would instill in Americans, and indeed the world, new Christian norms and values. In March 1943, Dulles and the FCC's Committee on a Just and Durable Peace published *Six Pillars of Peace*, a small book that similarly pointed toward a harmonious postwar American-led international society (FCC 1942, 1943; Preston 2012: 394–395).

The greatest national advocate of these ideals did not come from the cloth. At least, not directly. The son of Presbyterian missionaries, Henry Luce became the most influential public voice in faith-based foreign policy during the 1940s and 1950s. The owner of *Life*, *Time*, and *Fortune* magazine, Luce reached more homes than any media prior to the Digital Age. He is most famous for his 1941 call for an American Century, but beneath his ambitious and cultural arrogance lay a powerful Christian spirituality. "Morally speaking," Luce insisted, "the devil does not usually attack when you are in the pink of moral perfection. So also historically speaking, nations may choose their own time for highway robbery; they can never choose the time of their own testing." The test of humanity was now, he believed, and it was up to America to "be the elder brother of the nations in the brotherhood of man" (Luce 1942: 91). The world needed American values; values that Luce intimately connected to the Christian faith. As the heirs to Western civilization, "above all Justice, the love of Truth, [and] the ideal of Charity," he considered it a uniquely American responsibility to lift "the life of mankind from the level of the beasts to what the Psalmist called a little lower than the angels" (Luce 1941: 65).

This vision of a harmonious American-inspired world order appeared to come to fruition in the early summer of 1945. At the closing of the San Francisco Conference that created the United Nations Organization, President Truman delivered a stirring speech inaugurating the kind of organization American Christians called for. Dulles' "sixth pillar" emphasized "that the right of spiritual and intellectual liberty must be both recognized and made a matter of international concern. Only if the peoples of the world move toward common standards of knowledge and morality can international organization achieve the broad popular support needed for its effective development" (FCC 1943). In its core principles, the U.N. merged human rights, compassion, peace, and American leadership. Invoking the Almighty, Truman summed up the mission in a most Christian-Realist fashion: "Let us not fail to grasp this supreme chance to establish a worldwide rule of reason—to create an enduring peace under the guidance of God" (Truman 1945b). Endorsing the U.N., Senator Arthur Vandenberg echoed an ideal that eighty years before had forcefully married religious and democratic morals. Extolling the virtues of Christianity, Vandenberg considered the new U.N. Charter nothing less than "an emancipation proclamation for the world" (*Washington Post* 1945). Overwhelmingly popular among religious leaders, politicians, intellectuals, and scientists, Americans embraced the idea of leading the world into the light. American church leaders in particular played a part in rallying this support (Preston 2012: 408–409).

3. Toward the End

Six weeks after the San Francisco Conference, Hiroshima charred the U.N. dream. How, Reston distressingly asked, can people "full of prejudice and fear and selfish national desires" be expected "to live together in a world that has atomic bombs but that has no generally accepted

rule of law?" (Reston 1945). Answers to questions of that sort particularly preoccupied scientists, intellectuals, and religious community leaders. In meetings, conferences, and publications, scientists united to push for world government and global unity. By 1946, several of them, including Oppenheimer, University of Chicago professor Harold C. Urey, and journalist Walter Lippmann, contributed essays to the small but immensely powerful book *One World or None*. The collective message was that the very existence of the bomb demanded cooperation. "Another war," insisted Urey, would guarantee "that little of the physical and human bases of our civilization would be left" (Federation of American Scientists 1946: 149–163).

Niebuhr briefly clung to the World Federalist Movement and even attended the inaugural meeting of the Committee to Frame a World Constitution. In the end, hope rather than belief in world government inspired his support. Niebuhr's faith in God did not translate into a faith in man, whom he did not believe possessed the required "universal moral sense." He was no more confident, however, that the problem of the day could be solved by some simple "return to religion, as the traditional religionists would have it" (Niebuhr 1945). As early as 1940, he declared to a friend that war effectively represented the "end of a Christianity which tries to find a vantage point of guiltlessness from which to judge a guilty world" (Edwards 2009: 77). In his dejected philosophy of man, Niebuhr understood that history makes a mockery of man's illusions. He did not abandon God, but he rejected the idea of America as humanity's savior (Bacevich 2008: 23–25). Inevitably, many of faith refused this Niehburian logic and clung to increasingly hollow-sounding just war theories. Among the most aggressive were Arthur H. Compton, a deacon turned nuclear physicist, and the Presbyterian minister Wilbur Moorehead Smith. Exhibiting all the characteristics of guiltlessness and the will to judge sinners, Compton saw no contradictions between faith and science. "Atomic power is ours, and who can deny that it was God's will that we should have it," he insisted (Compton 1946). In a similarly defiant tone, Smith sought to reclaim for Christianity a relevance many had felt had vanished in the ashes of Hiroshima: "If the Scriptures actually foresee such an hour as that in which we live, and that toward which we are moving, then they prove themselves once again the inexhaustible, ever-contemporaneous, divinely-inspired word of God, that abideth forever." What remained unshaken, he insisted, was "the fact that sins can be washed away in the blood of the Lamb of God." For those who possessed faith, the course of humanity remained steady. "If one does not, then the dawn of such an age as the atomic age means the very dissolution of the foundations of life" (Smith 1945). Mostly recovered from his initial shock to Hiroshima, Reverend Holmes, on the "unhappy birthday" of August 6, 1946, now viewed science as the "servant of government ... war ... [that] made inevitable the supreme calamity and atrocity of the atomic bomb." Now, humankind must rediscover "those basic values of the spirit which science has so consistently ignored and restores them to their old position of authority. The atomic age must be a religious age or it will destroy us all" (Holmes 1946).

Even in these hopes for a Christian world, gloom is evident. Their attempt to marry God's plan with a victory culture held up poorly against reality. The bomb made the very idea of victory immaterial. Science, not religion, had made sure of that. In 1946, the Los Alamos scientist Phillip Morrison detailed a hypothetical atomic attack on New York City:

> From the river west to Seventh Avenue, and from south of Union Square to the middle thirties, the streets were filled with the dead and dying. The old men sitting on the park benches in the square never knew what had happened. They were chiefly charred black on the side toward the bomb. Everywhere in this whole district were men with burning clothing, women with terrible red and blackened burns, and dead children caught while hurry-

> ing home to lunch.... The statistics were never very accurate. About three hundred thousand were killed, all agree. At least two hundred thousand had been buried and cremated by the crews of volunteer police and of the Army division sent in. The others were still in the ruins, or burned to vapor and ash. As many again were seriously injured.

Morrison finished, "New York had thus suffered under one bomb.... The bombs will never again, as in Japan, come in ones or twos. They will come in hundreds even thousands.... The cities of men on earth will perish" (Federation of Scientists 1946: 1–15). *Life* captured this new man-made reality with even more fervor. In an imagined story of a 36-hour conflict, the U.S. wins the war, but over 40 million people are dead. All cities of more than 50,000 inhabitants resemble Nagasaki. In New York City, only the grand lions outside the Public Library still stand. From their perch, they look over a destroyed city (*Life* 1945). What all these images captured was that God would not matter in the next war because there would be nothing left to worship.

Always a skeptic, Niebuhr grew increasingly pessimistic as the 1940s wore on. In 1947, he declared the age in which he lived "secular, either non-Christian or anti-Christian.... It has disavowed the historical religious faiths ... chiefly because modern men find the tragic view of life implicit in religion unacceptable and old theories of redemption irrelevant." History, he argued, "is neither a God nor a redeemer" (Niebuhr 1947).

4. Cold War Faith and Ideology

As the Cold War set in, it became necessary to separate the ideological from the theological. Few in the United States doubted their nation's greatness or even invincibility, but linking that to the kind of Christian certainty of earlier generations proved increasingly impossible. Christianity lingered, but in foreign policy it was largely symbolic, remembered as an afterthought rather than as part of a unifying convention. Tradition instead was sanctified in political values and ideology.

It was not without irony that during the Cold War, technology enabled Christianity's revitalization as it gave birth to the celebrity preacher. None filled that role better or more impressively than Billy Graham. As he explained to a California audience in 1949, "I have been in Europe six times since the war and have seen devastated cities in Germany and the wreckage of war. I believe the only reason that America escaped the ravages and destruction of war was because God's people prayed." Having no time for inconvenient facts like geography – that realists like Niebuhr understood – Graham saw the wars against Nazism and communism as a causeway connecting national faith to humanity's salvation. In his view, God could "still use America to evangelize the world." "I think," he insisted, "that we are living at a time in world history when God is giving us a desperate choice, a choice of either revival or judgment." The news of the Soviet Union's acquisition of the atomic bomb in 1949 only further opened the door for those who, like Graham, sought to use the threat of atomic war as a battle cry. "The world is divided into two sides. On the one side we see Communism; on the other side we see ... Western culture [with] ... its foundation in the Bible, the Word of God, and in the revivals of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." Like evangelicals in the present day, Graham turned the history of Christianity into a product of the American experience. Gone was its European legacy. Christianity was now made in America. "Communism, on the other hand, has decided against God, against Christ, against the Bible, and against all religion." Still, that was not enough. Graham identified communism as "a religion that is inspired, directed, and motivated by the Devil himself who has declared war against the Almighty God" (Graham 1950: 51–59).

Combined with some creative cherry-picking, it is often Graham's public speaking powers, his revival meetings, and his connections to politicians that tempt some scholars to make Social

Christianity and U.S. foreign policy conjoined Cold War twins. They highlight Eisenhower's rhetorical references to faith, his choice of Dulles as Secretary of State, the addition of "one nation under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance, and the adoption of "in God we trust" as the national motto (Preston 2012: 441, 468–480; Herzog 2011: 87, 104–105) as bows to piety. All of these examples highlight that faith still mattered, but they ignore the fact that it was never the same again after 1945. Americans may not have slipped into the debauchery of mid-fourteenth-century bubonic plague-ridden Europe, but, much like the Black Death, the bombs questioned what faith could accomplish. References to God became rhetorical and, rather than reflect a national cause, were instead part of a smorgasbord of tactics used by officials depending on the audience they addressed. This is evident from the fact that none of the major Cold War initiatives or conflicts were driven by religion: the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan and NATO in Europe, Korea, Vietnam, U.S. Aid, and beyond. Religion carried none of them. Instead, all were laced with ideology and references to the Cold War as a battle between ways of life and the *secular* American mission to modernize the world. This was unsurprising because whereas Hitler had easily become the devil reincarnate, the threat the Soviet Union posed was principally as an alternative to the American-designed modernity. At times, officials played up Moscow's atheism, but this was a sideshow. Just as importantly, the United States' allies, politicians, and citizens from London to Paris and from West Berlin to South East Asia and Latin America would have been shocked to discover that they were part of the kind of Christian war against Moscow that several scholars now identify. If the Cold War had been a religious war, the Allies would have faced pressure to live up to religious ideals. That never occurred, nor did the U.S. find it difficult to associate with regimes that were inherently un-Christian in act and deed.

To single out statements lauding God's role in the Cold War is to underplay the more pervasive emphasis on ideology that dominated politics and policymaking behind closed doors as well as in public pronouncements. Ideology, the secular ideal that America stood for, may have possessed its own religiosity, but it pitted western civilization in all its facets – not Christian values – against the anti-democratic forces in the Kremlin. Simply put, the Cold War message of an exceptional United States did not require God. If anything, in contrast to religion, ideology made the American way of life comprehensive. It unified people regardless of whether they subscribed to any religious faith. It was not coincidental that it would be modernization theory, the most atheistic of vehicles for the reform of the world, that came to characterize U.S. foreign policy in the early Cold War (Ekbladh 2009).

6. Concluding Thoughts

Plenty of religious thinkers lamentingly acknowledged the new reality. Not all linked it explicitly to the bomb, but few would have denied that the consequences of Hiroshima had changed society. The secular and the material increasingly replaced the spiritual in the American mind. As the Jewish sociologist Will Herberg noted, Christians may have been rallying to the Church out of norm, but they were "forgetting all about Christ when it comes to naming the most significant events in history; men and women valuing the Bible as revelation, purchasing and distributing it by the millions, yet apparently seldom reading it themselves." Regardless of denomination, American faith had become "empty and contentless, so conformist, so utilitarian, so sentimental, so individualistic, and so self-righteous" (Herberg 1955: 2, 15). Others were no less forgiving. Daniel Bell, among the era's leading thinkers on American identity, insisted that while utopia remained a virtuous goal for humanity, the path "to the City of Heaven can no longer be a 'faith ladder,' but an empirical one.... [A] utopia has to specify

where one wants to go, how to get there, the costs of the enterprise, and some realization of, and justification for the determination of who is to pay" (Bell 1960: 405). It hardly got more secular than that.

The spike in divorce rates after the war as well as the plethora of material goods all of a sudden available to consumers further revealed the spiritual decline. So, ironically, did Billy Graham. Because for all his bombastic rhetoric and in spite of his sincere beliefs, he also helped make Christianity a commodity. In the 1950s, Niebuhr still spoke with the greatest clarity: "Our gadget-filled paradise suspended in a hell of international insecurity [fails to offer] even the happiness of which the former century dreamed." He continued, "Only when we realize these disappointed hopes can we have a truly religious culture. It will probably disappoint the traditionally pious as much as the present paradise disappoints the children of the Enlightenment" (Niebuhr 1958: 1–13). Niebuhr's frustration targeted every aspect of American exceptionalism but it was rooted in the realism of the age he now lived in. A decade earlier, Reverend Benjamin B. Hersey of the Church of the Divine Paternity in New York, perhaps inadvertently, came close to capturing the meaning of it all. As he told his congregation, the gate had closed on the past. There was no return to the world before August 6. "O no, things have gone too far for that.... That possibility vaporized with the steel tower on the New Mexican desert and in the explosions over Hiroshima" (Preston 2012: 381–382).

As the American atomic monopoly vanished, causing a full-scale nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union after 1949, the two competing Cold War powers embraced their own myths of innocence and beliefs in the permanent corruption of the enemy. Each maintained its faith in science and rationality to solve humanity's problems, but both also embraced mutually exclusive ideologies.

In this context, religion in America slipped into the background. It could still be dusted off for rhetorical use, but its light at best flickered. Except for the symbolism it continued to sustain, faith had performed its final act. In the end, the "cultural upheaval" of the 1960s put the final nail in the coffin of mainstream Protestantism (Marsden 2014: 123). Because America was no longer the country it had once been, by the time social conservatives revived religion as a political force in the late 1970s, Christianity had ceased to be a unifying force and now instead emerged as a divisive one. For all its humanitarian values and principles, Christianity had always been combative, deterministic, and in many ways exclusive as well. Like Graham, Pat Roberson, Jerry Falwell, and others made commercial brands out of this. The bond between democracy, America, and Christianity that Wallace, Luce, and even Dulles advanced during the Second World War had been broken. Unity was gone for good. Hersey anchored his sermon in the unveiling of the four horsemen, but it was the fifth horseman that made the perversity of humanity's accomplishments clear. Its color was immaterial, but he who sat on it had the name of Man, and total annihilation followed with him. God as previously embraced was effectively dead. How could it be otherwise? In the atomic age, the Day of Judgement was no longer in God's hands.

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