

Paul Fine*

Cold War Crusaders:

Paul Tillich's Influence on Religious Anti-Communism

<https://doi.org/10.1515/znth-2025-0014>

Abstract: During the 1950s, the Eisenhower Administration used American religion in the global ideological war against Communism as a propaganda tool. Where genuine spirituality flourished, they contended, communist ideology would naturally be rejected. Thus, a host of efforts—both overt and covert—were undertaken to strengthen religious faith both in the United States and abroad. Recent studies of this government-sponsored religion have tended to focus on the most visible elected politicians and cabinet members who lauded American faith and encouraged inclusive religiosity. This article takes a different approach, focusing primarily on several lesser-known promoters of religious anti-communism who worked closely with the Eisenhower Administration to translate public rhetoric into practice. It demonstrates that all were theologically astute intellectuals whose concepts of religion and American exceptionalism were shaped, in part, by Paul Tillich in different but significant ways. Their critical use of Tillich's theological formulations presents a more nuanced picture of America's religious cold warriors than is normally portrayed. I contend that, by examining these under-evaluated individuals, we gain a clearer understanding of the essence of American civil religion as it developed during the early Cold War.

Keywords: Cold War, American Religious History, Paul Tillich, Religious Propaganda, United States Foreign Policy, Eisenhower, Will Herberg, D. Elton Trueblood, Democracy

1 Introduction

“The potentialities of religion as an instrumentality for combating Communism,” wrote the United States Psychological Strategy Board in a classified 1952 memo to the Central Intelligence Agency, “are universally tremendous.” Thus, it concluded, future government efforts ought to facilitate the “furtherance of world spiritual

*Corresponding Author: Paul Fine, Wolfson College, Theology and Religion, University of Oxford, Linton Rd., Oxford, OX2 6UD, paul.c.fine@gmail.com

health; for the Communist threat could not exist in a spiritually healthy world.”¹ This report, quoted in William Inboden’s *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, indicates a widespread effort by the U.S. Government to use American religion to combat Soviet Communism during the early stages of the Cold War. In addition to its overseas focus, this government-sponsored religious activity was also instrumental in promoting a wide-spread increase of religious interest in the U.S. during the late 1940s and 1950s, with church attendance peaking at 69 % in 1960, religious books topping the non-fiction best-seller lists, and Judeo-Christian values being promoted by Hollywood and Nashville.² Commenting on the new shape of postwar American religion in 1963, one observer wrote that “nowhere else is religion prospering as in America.”³ These signs of spiritual renewal were welcomed by American leaders as evidence of the nation’s growing immunity to communist influence.

Beginning with Seth Jacobs and Dianne Kirby nearly twenty-five years ago, a number of historians of American foreign policy and the Cold War have examined various facets of the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations’ use of religious propaganda as both a defensive measure and an offensive weapon in the ongoing ideological battle against Communism.⁴ Their studies have examined the public

1 Quoted in William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945–1960: The Soul of Containment* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 118.

2 Cf. Bill J. Leonard, “American Religion in the Postwar Years.” In *Religions in America: Volume III, 1945 to the Present*. Stephen J. Stein (ed.). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 11, 14; and Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America’s Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 171.

3 Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion: Volume 3, Under God, Indivisible, 1941–1960*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1996, 293.

4 On the relationship between religion and the Cold War in the United States see Seth Jacobs, “‘Our System Demands the Supreme Being’: The U.S. Religious Revival and the ‘diem Experiment,’ 1954–55.” *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 4 (2001): 589–624; Dianne Kirby (ed.), *Religion and the Cold War*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*; T. Jeremy Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion*. Westport: Praeger, 2008; Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America’s Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011; Raymond Haberski, *God and War: American Civil Religion Since 1945*. New York: Rutgers University Press, 2012; Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy*. New York: Anchor, 2012; Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*. New York, NY: Perseus Books Group, 2015; Eugene Ford, *Cold War Monks: Buddhism and America’s Secret Strategy in Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017; John D. Wilsey, *God’s Cold Warrior: The Life and Faith of John Foster Dulles*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2021; Jack M. Holl, *The Religious Journey of Dwight D. Eisenhower: Duty, God, and Country*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2021; Andrew R. Polk, *Faith in Freedom: Propaganda, Presidential Politics, and the Making of an American Religion*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021.

rhetoric and private internal memos by prominent elected officials and senior cabinet members such as Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969) and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (1888–1959). They have also focused on the implementation of the now-familiar symbols of American civil religion during the 1950s, such as the inclusion of “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance, the establishment of the National Prayer Breakfast, and making “In God We Trust” the national motto.⁵ All are agreed that one lasting effect of the Eisenhower Administration was its “conflation of God and country,” which shaped many modern-day Americans’ understanding of themselves and their country.⁶ The symbols of civil religion created during these years of strain later became convenient banners around which the Religious Right would coalesce in the 1970s and 80s.⁷ Kevin Kruse concludes that Eisenhower constantly told Americans that the United States had always been a Christian nation, “and they’ve believed it ever since.”⁸

Yet the historians of America’s religious Cold War disagree over the *sincerity* of the politicians who promoted the movement as well as the *content* of that religion. One group of historians, represented by Andrew Preston, a historian of American foreign policy, asserts there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Eisenhower or his cabinet, that they were fervent believers in a very vague religion.⁹ The content may have been ambiguous, but the political elite were pious adherents to the faith of anti-communism. Another group dismisses the religious revival out of hand as nothing more than a calculated tool that was invented and wielded by cunning politicians.¹⁰ Andrew R. Polk, the most recent exemplar of this view, sees both Eisenhower and the religious intellectuals he employed as caring only to create “a particular type of American religion that advanced their agendas,” which he defines as “Faith in Freedom.” Thus, he sees no need to interact with or examine their theological “accuracy or authenticity.”¹¹ On the one hand, all of these studies have expanded our understanding of the Cold War conflict by accounting for the widespread references to religion by American politicians. On the other hand, the focus on the most visible promoters of America’s government-sponsored religion

5 Kruse, *One Nation Under God*, xiii.

6 Haberski, *God and War*, 52.

7 Cf. Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 216.

8 Kruse, *One Nation Under God*, xiii. For an explanation of the way symbols of American civil religion become “sacraments,” see Richard M. Gamble, *A Fiery Gospel*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019, 4–7.

9 Cf. Preston, *Sword of the Spirit Shield of Faith*, 443. Kirby, Inboden, Holl, and Wilsey also hold this general view.

10 This view is held to varying degrees by Gunn, Herzog, Kruse, and Polk.

11 Polk, *Faith in Freedom*, 9.

(Truman, Eisenhower, Dulles, etc.), has resulted in somewhat of a stalemate in which there seems no resolution to the disagreement as to the sincerity or content of anti-communist spirituality.

There are, however, exceptions to the rule. K. Healan Gaston's study of American Judeo-Christian beliefs during the twentieth century, for example, approaches Eisenhower's religious rhetoric through the lens of his speech writer, the liberal Catholic Emmet J. Hughes.¹² This allows her to give a much more nuanced picture of Eisenhower, his privately held beliefs, and the way those beliefs manifested themselves during his tenure in office.

This article takes a similar approach by reassessing the religion of anti-communism through the lens of three lesser-known religious operatives who were closely associated with the Eisenhower Administration. In particular, I focus on the influence that Paul Tillich (1886–1965), one of America's most respected philosopher-theologians, had upon their ideas.¹³ Highlighting their common appeals to his theology, I contend, helps to move beyond the question of sincerity to one of content. It provides further nuance to our understanding of the underlying theological motifs of American civil religion by shedding light on its inclusive, ecumenical features in an increasingly pluralistic society. After briefly situating Tillich in the broader context of America's psychological warfare campaigns, I proceed to demonstrate the influence of his ideas in three cases: Voice of America employee, Roger Lyons, and an accusation of atheism before Joseph McCarthy and the House Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in 1953; D. Elton Trueblood, the United States Information Agency's Chief of Religious Policy and his inclusive religious propaganda; and Will Herberg, a sociologist promoting the Biblical foundations of American democracy. Tillich's theory of the historical development of world religions provided Lyons the confidence to maintain open dialogue with adherents of non-Christian beliefs, while for Trueblood, it was the best way to express the superiority of American Judeo-Christianity while still affirming the validity of other world religions. Herberg applied Tillich's categories of autonomy, heteronomy, and theonomy to the contemporary global conflict, asserting that American democracy was theonomic. This paper demonstrates that each of these three figures applied aspects of Tillich's theology on behalf of the United States' religious Cold War against the Soviet Union.

¹² Cf. Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America*, 179–80, 191–2.

¹³ Cf. Andrew Finstuen, "Tillich, Paul Johannes." In *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States*. George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport (eds.). New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, 2307.

2 Paul Tillich and Religious Propaganda

Nearly all the theologians who came to prominence during the middle decades of the twentieth century were profoundly shaped by conflict. Paul Tillich was no exception.¹⁴ He had grown up in Germany before the Great War at a time of peace which he later remembered fondly.¹⁵ While serving as a chaplain in the German Army, however, his idealism and naive optimism in humanity's inherent goodness quickly gave way to an understanding of world history as a "series of unreconciled conflicts."¹⁶ In the early 1930s, while serving as the dean of the philosophy faculty at the University of Frankfurt, he was revolted by an attack on Jewish students in his classroom by their Nazi peers. His subsequent calls for opposition to National Socialism led to his being declared an enemy of the Third Reich.¹⁷ In 1933, at the age of forty-seven, he fled to the United States with his family, where the theologian of Christian Realism, Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), had arranged for him to join the faculty of Union Theological Seminary.¹⁸

With the outbreak of World War Two, Tillich remained outspoken in his opposition to the Nazi regime. In 1942, he was approached by the United States Office of War Information to record a series of German-language radio addresses for the newly-founded Voice of America (VOA) radio propaganda station.¹⁹ In February of that year, William "Wild Bill" Donovan (1883–1959), who later founded the Central Intelligence Agency, had overseen the first VOA propaganda transmissions as part of an effort to shape foreign opinions of the U.S.²⁰ The VOA would soon grow into

14 I relied on the following references for Paul Tillich's background: Finstuen, "Tillich, Paul Johannes," 2307; Daniel J. Peterson, *A Brief Overview of the Life and Writings of Paul Tillich*. Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2013; Russell Re Manning (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Gary Dorrien, "Revolt of the Neoliberals: Reinhold Niebuhr, John C. Bennett, Paul Tillich, and the Dialectics of Transcendence." In *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, & Modernity, 1900–1950*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003; William Steward Skiles, "Broadcasting Law and Gospel: Paul Tillich's Wartime Ministry to Nazi Germany." *Church History* (2024): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640724000726>; Samuel Andrew Shearn, *Pastor Tillich: The Justification of the Doubter*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022.

15 Cf. Peterson, *A Brief Overview of the Life and Writings of Paul Tillich*, 17.

16 Peterson, *Paul Tillich*, 20–1. For a comprehensive study of Tillich's theological development prior to and during his wartime service, see Shearn, *Pastor Tillich*, 16, 182–6.

17 Cf. Dorrien, "Revolt of the Neoliberals," 487–88.

18 Cf. Finstuen, "Tillich, Paul Johannes," 2307.

19 Cf. Skiles, "Broadcasting Law and Gospel," 494. For additional information on Tillich's work with the VOA see Christian Danz et al. (eds.), *Paul Tillich im Exil*. Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2017.

20 Cf. Wilson P. Dizard, *Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S. Information Agency*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004, 11, 17.

America's primary non-clandestine radio network for psychological information overseas.²¹ From March 1942 through May 1944, Tillich wrote and recorded 112 addresses which were subsequently broadcast in occupied Europe.²² His work for the U.S. Government, which Ronald H. Stone calls the most "passionate of his political writings," was kept a secret from his closest friends.²³ In these classified addresses, he urged his German listeners to resist Hitler, who was waging war on God in an attempt to "destroy justice. [...] But this god," he declared, "is an idol, and he will be smashed by the God of righteousness and of justice."²⁴ He denounced the German clergy who were calling upon God for victory while Jews were being rounded up and deported and Polish "women and children, old men and the sick are being driven together and being shot down with machine guns."²⁵ Yet, for all of his denunciations of National Socialism, Tillich remained pro-German.²⁶ He had hoped his addresses might cause his countrymen to abandon Hitler and the Nazi Party, but he never abandoned the love of his country. In an unfortunate reversal, by the end of the war, he was blacklisted by the U.S. Army over his public promotion of lenient economic and political policies toward his defeated homeland.²⁷

Though this negative experience caused Tillich to shun political issues for the remainder of his career, his profile as a theologian only grew. He found widespread acclaim with his 1952 best-selling book, *The Courage to Be*, which emphasized the ethical act of courage in the face of widespread anxiety and social strain in the atomic age.²⁸ According to Garry Dorrien, the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*, published in 1951, "towered above" all the other liberal-theological publications at the time. For the next two decades, his contemporaries consistently appealed to Tillich's formulations and arguments to sharpen their own thought.²⁹ His preeminence in America was cemented in 1959 when he graced the cover of *Time* magazine, and he is widely recognized as one of the "greatest theologians of the twentieth century."³⁰

21 Cf. Alan L. Heil, *Voice of America: A History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, 49.

22 Cf. Ronald H. Stone and Matthew Lon Weaver (eds.), *Against the Third Reich: Paul Tillich's War-time Addresses to Nazi Germany*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know, 1989, 1.

23 Stone and Weaver, *Against the Third Reich*, 1.

24 Stone and Weaver, *Against the Third Reich*, 3, 28

25 Stone and Weaver, *Against the Third Reich*, 89.

26 Cf. Stone and Weaver, *Against the Third Reich*, 9.

27 Dorrien, "Revolt of the Neoliberals," 495.

28 Cf. Dorrien, "Revolt of the Neoliberals," 497. For an overview of the social anxiety of the 1950s cf. George M. Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief*. New York: Basic Books, 2014.

29 Cf. Dorrien, "Revolt of the Neoliberals," 499.

30 Finstuen, "Tillich, Paul Johannes," 2307, and Peterson, *Paul Tillich*, 12.

The growth of Tillich's theological influence coincided with an increase of tension in the Cold War. With the Soviet detonation of its own nuclear weapon in 1949, the U.S. increasingly turned to psychological warfare and diplomacy to avoid the use of atomic, or eventually, hydrogen bombs.³¹ The VOA, whose funding had been drastically reduced following the war's conclusion, was expanded to occupy a central role in the ideological battle against communism.³² It was placed under the newly-founded United States Information Agency (USIA) in 1953 and tasked with convincing listeners behind the Iron Curtain and other parts of the globe that American art, music, technology, and religion were superior to anything offered by the Soviet Union.³³ The Foreign Office soon reported that the USIA—whose main propaganda outlet was the VOA—“was primarily ‘a weapon of political warfare in the struggle against Soviet communism.’”³⁴ The three examples which follow demonstrate the prevalence of Tillich's theological influence on promoters of American religion during the early Cold War, and the extent to which the VOA continued to traffic in his ideas for spiritual-psychological warfare material.

3 Roger Lyons: Atheism and Joseph McCarthy

Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (1908–57), a Republican from Wisconsin, came to prominence in 1950 when he announced he had in his possession a list of Communists who had infiltrated the State Department.³⁵ Eisenhower's election in 1952 resulted in McCarthy's promotion to chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, and he used his new position to aggressively seek out purported Communist subversives within the U.S. Government.³⁶ He declared that “Communists and queers” had “sold 400 million Asiatic people into atheistic slavery,” implying that homosexuality and atheism were the tell-tale indicators of a communist sym-

31 Cf. Michael D. Gordin, *Red Cloud at Dawn: Truman, Stalin, and the End of the Atomic Monopoly*. New York: Picador, 2010, 248; Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, 19.

32 Cf. Heil, *Voice of America*, 45–9.

33 Cf. Kenneth Alan Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006, 102–3.

34 Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 102.

35 Cf. *Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations*, Volume 1, Eighty-Third Congress. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953, xiii. See also Philip Nash, *Clare Boothe Luce: American Renaissance Woman*. New York: Routledge, 2022, 114–16.

36 *Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, xiii–xiv.

pathizer.³⁷ As the VOA was subordinate to the State Department at the time, its employees soon found themselves in McCarthy's crosshairs. On Saturday, February 14, 1953, in a private executive session before the investigative committee, a former VOA employee, Nancy Lenkeith, let it slip that she knew of "only three people who admitted to any religious belief" in her former department, and that "atheism was taken for granted."³⁸ One month later, as pressure mounted, Dr. John Cocutz, Chief of the "Rumanian [sic] Service, Voice of America," told the committee he was skeptical of the VOA's current efforts to use "religion as a weapon [...] against communism."³⁹ He was not surprised their efforts were being hindered, though, given the rumors that the chief of the VOA's religious desk "does not believe in God."⁴⁰ Thus, on March 2, 1953, Roger Lyons, the Director of Religious Programming for the VOA, found himself seated before Joseph McCarthy in a public hearing to answer for his rumored atheism.

The first line of questioning taken by McCarthy was to determine if Lyons attended a "church or any synagogue" regularly.⁴¹ Lyons explained that he did not, though he had contributed ten dollars to his local church recently. He then went on to clarify that he did not belong to any religious group, but reassured the committee he was neither an "atheist, or an agnostic. I believe in God."⁴² McCarthy then moved to Lyons's qualifications for his position—a line of inquiry made all the more serious considering George Herrick, a broadcast engineer, had recently been fired by the VOA after the investigations committee discovered his lack of engineering credentials.⁴³ Lyons read a statement acknowledging "the importance of emphasizing religious and moral factors in the Voice of America broadcasts," and that he could produce "letters from clergymen of all faiths" that he was proficient at his job.⁴⁴ Senator Jackson proceeded to probe into Lyons's religious education.

Lyons explained that he had studied religion at Columbia University and majored in philosophy. He had primarily studied religion at Union Theological Seminary, which is associated with Columbia, where he had worked under "Prof.

37 *Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, xxv.

38 *Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 574.

39 *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations: United States Senate, Eighty-Third Congress*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1953, 228, 234.

40 *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 233.

41 *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 298.

42 *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 299.

43 On March 5, 1953, three days after Lyon's questioning, Raymond Kaplan, another VOA engineer, committed suicide over fears that he would also be called before the Senate Investigations Committee. See *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 464, 648.

44 *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 299.

Paul Tillich.”⁴⁵ Lyons, under the inspiration of Tillich, had “become very, very interested” in the study of religion, to the extent that he had organized weekly seminars with Tillich as lecturer over the course of three years.⁴⁶ Lyons’s training at the feet of Tillich, he believed, had well prepared him for his present position with the VOA. He also assured the committee that his lack of membership or regular attendance at any church or synagogue was actually an asset, as it better prepared him to interact with “areas of the world that are largely non-Christian, such as areas which are Buddhist, Moslem [sic], Hindu, and so forth.”⁴⁷ On the one hand, he said, spirituality is more than attending church. On the other, his lack of denominational affiliation made him open-minded and unprejudiced toward an array of world beliefs.⁴⁸ Ultimately, however, the investigative committee remained skeptical. Their primary interest, McCarthy told Lyons, was that he produces some evidence of a public profession of his belief in “a Divine Being.”⁴⁹ The rest was apparently irrelevant.⁵⁰

Lyons’s eager inclusivism is indicative of the increasing pluralism of American society in the 1950s.⁵¹ Eisenhower, keen to build a religious coalition to combat communism, welcomed all to join with few exceptions. He excluded certain Protestant Liberals and Fundamentalists from his grand spiritual project. The former were shunned because of their openness to the transformative goals of Socialism, the latter over their refusal to work with non-Fundamentalist versions of Christianity.⁵² Cooperation was essential to present a united front against communism. As early as the Truman Administration, political leaders were recognizing the need to expand religious cooperation to include faiths which fell outside traditional Judeo-Christianity.⁵³ In a recent monograph, K. Healan Gaston demonstrates the way in which Eisenhower increasingly sought friendly relations with Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims during the latter stages of his presidency, gradually leaving behind the exclusionary language of “Judeo-Christian” in his quest for even greater inclusivity.⁵⁴ The VOA, tasked with convincing people around the world

45 *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 299–300.

46 Cf. *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 300.

47 *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 301.

48 Cf. *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 300.

49 *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 303.

50 I have yet to determine Lyon’s fate at the VOA following his questioning by McCarthy.

51 For a contemporary assessment of the growing religious pluralism, see Martin E. Marty, *The New Shape of American Religion*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958.

52 Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 102–03.

53 Cf. Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 145.

54 K. Healan Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019, 176–78.

that America's Way of Life was superior to that offered by the Soviet Union, presented a picture of American religion which was open and embracing of a variety of faiths.

As a student, Lyons had prolonged exposure to Tillich's understanding of God as "man's ultimate concern."⁵⁵ This, Tillich argued, was the key to "understanding the dynamics of the history of religion," from the most "primitive prayer to the most elaborate theological system."⁵⁶ The world was full of diverse religious beliefs about God, and for Tillich, the history of religions recounted the long story of the "progress" of their development.⁵⁷ He gave the example of Buddhism, which at first glance appeared to "have no god." Yet this misunderstanding came from an overly "moral or logical" conception of God. For, if God were defined "as that which concerns man ultimately," wrote Tillich, then "early Buddhism" and "Vedanta Hinduism" both had a valid conception of God and fell neatly within the chronological story of the development of theistic religions.⁵⁸

As the conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States spread, the two powers increasingly attempted to gain the loyalty of the undecided nations. Lyons's position with the VOA required that he communicate that Americans were sympathetic and supportive of those other nation's non-Christian, traditional religions. Having studied under Tillich, Lyons felt especially qualified to execute his pluralistic mission on behalf of the United States Government. Tillich refused to involve himself with political matters after his blacklisting by the U.S. Army.⁵⁹ His understanding of God, however, which was essential for affirming non-Judeo-Christian religions around the world, influenced students like Roger Lyons who had no qualms about promoting non-discriminatory religious interaction on behalf of the VOA. The subject of the next section went even further in implementing Tillich's ideas to facilitate religious cooperation in the battle against atheistic communism.

4 D. Elton Trueblood's Affirmation of Islam

On Monday, March 15, 1954, *Time* magazine reported that D. Elton Trueblood (1900–94), a Quaker professor of philosophy, had been hired by the USIA to "sell" Ameri-

⁵⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951, 211.

⁵⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:211.

⁵⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:219

⁵⁸ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 220.

⁵⁹ Cf. Dorrien, "Revolt of the Neoliberals," 495–6.

can religion to the world.⁶⁰ As Chief of Religious Information, he was responsible for all religious material which the Agency promoted abroad through various print, broadcast, and film mediums.⁶¹ The USIA's "most important religious outlet," was the VOA, which allotted between seven and eight percent of its weekly broadcasts to "religious programming" for transmission "behind the Iron Curtain."⁶² Among the tasks of his official job description, he was to initiate "new programs [...] having to do with the affirmative answer to communism."⁶³ This section focuses on one specific transcript Trueblood wrote entitled "The Birthday of Mohammad" in 1955.⁶⁴ The original script was subsequently translated into Farsi and broadcast in Persia (modern-day Iran), and provides further insight into the contours of anti-communist religion and the influence of Tillich.

It was only fitting, wrote Trueblood, that the "significance" of the birthday of the "Prophet Mohammed" should be recognized by an American "from the point of view of the faith which is the predominant faith of the American people—the faith of Christ."⁶⁵ The "service of Christ," however, did not keep them "from appreciating the wonder of the life and teaching of Mohammed."⁶⁶ This was made possible in America's "pluralistic society," by realizing "that all men are finite and that each, at the best, sees only a portion of the total truth, [and] we can be glad for the fact that light is shed from more than one angle."⁶⁷ After citing his appreciation for Mohammed's emphasis on strict "monotheism" and a rejection of "all that is idolatrous," he concluded that Americans could "learn from Mohammed [...] and consequently rejoice" for the "lives [...] ennobled by his teachings."⁶⁸ Here, in a nutshell, was the outworking of the pluralistic emphasis of America's public religion on full display.

As this section demonstrates, Trueblood thought that Tillich's formulation of the history of religion was the best available explanation for America's increas-

60 "Religion: Truth Salesman," *Time*, Volume LXIII, no. 11 (1954): <https://time.com/archive/6794869/religion-truth-salesman>. For information on Trueblood see James R. Newby, *Elton Trueblood: Believer, Teacher, and Friend*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990.

61 "Religion: Truth Salesman."

62 "Religion: Truth Salesman."

63 "United States Civil Service Commission Position Description," January 28, 1955, Box 31, Folder 98, D. Elton Trueblood Papers, Friends Collection and Earlham College Archives, Richmond, IN. Hereafter referred to as DET Papers.

64 D. Elton Trueblood VOA Bulletin, "The Birthday of Mohammed," Central Program Services Division, Talks and Features, October 27, 1955, Box 31, Folder 96, DET Papers.

65 Trueblood, "The Birthday of Mohammed," 1.

66 Trueblood, "The Birthday of Mohammed," 1.

67 Trueblood, "The Birthday of Mohammed," 1–2.

68 Trueblood, "The Birthday of Mohammed," 2–3.

ingly pluralistic faith.⁶⁹ Yet Trueblood did not accept Tillich's complete theological system without criticism. In *Declaration of Freedom*, a book Trueblood authored for use as government religious propaganda in 1955, he wrote that communism was a new religion which had replaced "faith in God" with "faith in dialectical materialism."⁷⁰ The way to defeat this "perverted faith," he wrote, was the "clarification and exemplification of a better faith, which we find inherently convincing and to which we are consequently committed."⁷¹ He found the "ground of hope" in "a developing historical faith" which recognized "Divine Personality" as the explanation for "the existence of finite persons" who displayed personality of their own."⁷² This "fact" of individual personality was "embarrassing to the materialistic atheist," and proved the existence of a "Living God" who existed "beyond our world of change."⁷³ In his *Philosophy of Religion* (1957), Trueblood wrote that Tillich's definition of God was "a radical reinterpretation of divine personality."⁷⁴

Tillich had written in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology* that if God were reduced to an entity, if the theologian brought God "into the subject-object structure of being," then God was no longer "the ground of being."⁷⁵ Rather, this reduced God to another mere "being among others [...] a being beside the subject who looks at him as an object."⁷⁶ This led Tillich to the "startling revelation: God does not exist," since God is beyond existence.⁷⁷ For Trueblood, this reasoning led to a God who was "an impersonal absolute, a mere being with no consciousness or purpose."⁷⁸ *"If God is not personal, in a literal sense, then God is not the ultimate explanation of that which most requires explanation. [...] Only one who is supremely personal can be the Ground for the emergence of even the finite personality which we see in our fellows and know intimately in ourselves."*⁷⁹ The development of human beings in the world through the long process of evolution was "not away from the personal, but toward it and possibly through it."⁸⁰ Thus, for Trueblood, the religion of anti-communism was founded on a recognition of individual personality which was itself grounded in the personality of the existent God. Acknowledgement

69 Cf. D. Elton Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957, 227–30.

70 D. Elton Trueblood, *Declaration of Freedom*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1955, 20–1.

71 Trueblood, *Declaration of Freedom*, 21.

72 Trueblood, *Declaration of Freedom*, 114.

73 Trueblood, *Declaration of Freedom*, 114.

74 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 269.

75 Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:172.

76 Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:172.

77 Peterson, *Paul Tillich*, 71.

78 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 269.

79 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 270. His italics.

80 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 270.

of the divinely deposited personality within every human being led to the recognition of individual worth and freedom and implied the goodness of democracy.⁸¹ We see, then, that the government-sponsored religion was not an uncritical acceptance of Tillich's theology as a whole.

Yet there was a significant aspect of Trueblood's religious propaganda that was reliant upon Tillich's systematic theology. In the epigraph to his chapter, "The Existence of World Religions," Trueblood quoted loosely from Tillich's 1948 book, *The Protestant Era*: "There are anticipations of Christianity in all history. This insight is deadly for ecclesiastical and theological arrogance."⁸² The United States was a pluralistic society, and its citizens were being brought into increasing contact with adherents of other faiths around the world. For the casual American observer, wrote Trueblood, this often led to the misconception that "'true religion' merely means *my* religion and 'false religion' merely means *yours*."⁸³ At first glance it appeared that a "cruel dilemma" between two options was presented to the seeker, "both of which are intolerable."⁸⁴ The first option was to assert the "exclusive claims" of one's chosen faith. For Christians this would mean that "Christ is *the way*, all other proposed ways are delusions. There is no other way by which men may be saved."⁸⁵ If taken to its logical conclusions, however, it resulted in "really terrible consequence[s]. It means, for one thing, that Socrates is in hell!"⁸⁶ Any "truly thoughtful" person would have to exclude this as a live option. Any God who would damn people to destruction because they never had the opportunity to hear "the saving truth [...] would be more devil than God. [...] He would not even remotely resemble Jesus Christ."⁸⁷ The second option was "*religious indifferentism*."⁸⁸ This view held that, just as there may be many paths around a mountain, all eventually converge at the peak. Yet this relativization of all religions as the solution to the existence of many diverse world faiths "is one which leads to absurdity."⁸⁹ It also denied what Trueblood believed was the objective superiority of Christianity as a

81 Cf. Trueblood, *Declaration of Freedom*, 118.

82 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 219, his italics. The actual quotation is as follows: "there are anticipations of Christianity in all history. This insight, which is deadly for ecclesiastical and theological arrogance, is strengthening for Christianity in the light of the Protestant principle." Cf. Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1948, xxvii.

83 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 219. His italics.

84 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 220

85 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 221. His italics.

86 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 221.

87 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 220–22.

88 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 222. His italics.

89 Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 222.

force for good. The “horn[s] of this dilemma” demanded a more profound examination of the question raised by world religions.⁹⁰

The solution to the problem was provided “most eminently” by Paul Tillich, wrote Trueblood.⁹¹ He cited Tillich as having found a “middle ground” between the previous two dilemmas.⁹² As Trueblood recounted his understanding of Tillich’s third way from volume one of his *Systematic Theology*, religion had developed dialectically in three stages. The first stage was polytheism. This position was “natural” for “natural man, who is bound to observe the richness of the concrete spirituality of the world.”⁹³ The worship of multiple gods by “ancient men” was proof that they recognized the “many aspects of the spiritual life.”⁹⁴ This polytheistic thesis “ultimately gave way to a rigorous monotheism,” the antithesis. This was seen most fully in Judaism, though it was also displayed in the “fanatical devotion [of] Islam,” and was “partially understood by Plato.”⁹⁵ Though the monotheistic antithesis represented an improvement over polytheism, he wrote, the answer it provided was ultimately inadequate, and “we are driven to a synthesis, which restates the central insight of the thesis, but with the benefit of the purging which the antithesis provides.”⁹⁶ This final step revealed the idea of the Trinity. It brought “balance between the concrete and the absolute elements in religious experience.” Once these steps were taken into account, there was “no doubt which is the highest rung on the ladder.”⁹⁷

Trueblood agreed with Tillich that the Trinitarian synthesis could not be fully comprehended “if we are mere literalists. ‘Trinitarian monotheism,’ says Tillich, ‘is not a matter of the number three. It is a qualitative and not a quantitative characterization of God. It is an attempt to speak of the living God, the God in whom the ultimate and the concrete are united.’”⁹⁸ Thus, for Trueblood, the different Gods in whom the various adherents of world religions believed—polytheistic, monotheistic, or Trinitarian—were all different qualities or aspects of the same divine personal being. Tillich provided Trueblood an understanding of world religions which made room for unity within an increasingly diverse America. The American spirituality which Trueblood promoted around the world made

⁹⁰ Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 222–23.

⁹¹ Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 224.

⁹² Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 227.

⁹³ Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 228.

⁹⁴ Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 228.

⁹⁵ Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 228.

⁹⁶ Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 228.

⁹⁷ Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 228–29.

⁹⁸ Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, 229.

room for “Moselms [*sic*] and Christians and Jews and many more [...] [who] have the greatest things in common. The question of the particular banner is secondary.”⁹⁹

The Cold War was a global conflict which witnessed two competing ideologies vying for the allegiance of the undecided nations. The task for Trueblood was to “sell” an American spirituality which proved attractive to as many people around the world as possible. Tillich’s inclusive understanding of the history of world religions provided a framework for creating a coalition of diverse religious leaders and adherents. Some, Trueblood believed, were more primitive in their understanding of the existence of spirit in the world, some were more advanced. All, however, could be unified by the fact that they recognized one of the various forms in which that spirit had manifested itself in world history.

5 Will Herberg: Theonomy and Democracy

In November 1954, the Foundation for Religious Action in the Social Civil Order (FRASCO) held its first National Conference at the Hotel Sheraton-Carlton in Washington DC.¹⁰⁰ The organization’s goal was to provide “an ideological and spiritual counteroffensive” to the constant attacks of communism “in the battle for men’s minds.” The three founders were D. Elton Trueblood, Charles W. Lowry, and Edward L. R. Elson, who pastored Eisenhower’s church in Washington, DC.¹⁰¹ Trueblood’s involvement ensured that the entire conference was recorded and broadcast abroad by the VOA.¹⁰² This section examines the use of Paul Tillich’s theology by Will Herberg (1901–77), a Jewish American sociologist, in a speech to the attendees of the conference.¹⁰³

On the second day of the FRASCO conference, two hours before Eisenhower gave a brief address to the same crowd, Herberg took the podium to deliver

⁹⁹ Trueblood, *Declaration of Freedom*, 117–18.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Invitation to attend the “National Conference on The Spiritual Foundations of American Democracy,” (FOIA)/ESDN (CREST): CIA-RDP80R01731R001200070075-4.

¹⁰¹ Invitation to attend the “National Conference on The Spiritual Foundations of American Democracy,” CIA. Lowrey and Elson were the two official founders of FRASCO. Trueblood, however, was recognized as being central to its conception and promotion. See Will Herberg, “The Study of Man: Communism, Democracy, and the Churches,” *Commentary*, April 1955.

¹⁰² “It’s Wrong to ‘Use’ Church, Pfeffer Says.” *Church and State*, February 1955, Volume 8, No. 2, Box 31, Folder 5, DET Papers.

¹⁰³ For context on Herberg, see Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion: Volume 3, Under God, Indivisible, 1941–1960*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1996, 286–91.

a speech entitled “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy.” The Cold War, he told his listeners, was a religious battle. “Communism and the faith that underlies American democracy confront each other in a conflict that admits of no compromise because it is a conflict of ultimates. Quite literally, it is a struggle for the soul of modern man.”¹⁰⁴ America had drawn its democratic ideals from the Biblical traditions of Judaism and Christianity, but those roots were often obscured and little understood. In the past, Americans had often been “prone to an oversimple idealism” when it came to their religion, but the direct attacks of communism required an explicit understanding of the spirituality which made the American Way of Life possible. It also demanded a proper understanding of the self, with its “perversities and limitations.”¹⁰⁵ The natural disposition of humans was to “idolize ourselves and our works, to attribute quite uncritically final significance to our institutions, to make of our achievements an instrument of pride, power, and self-glorification.”¹⁰⁶ Yet a proper understanding of the doctrine of “original sin” exposed these sinful tendencies. The story of Adam and Eve’s fall in the book of Genesis, for Herberg, demonstrated humanity’s loss of communion with God which resulted in “self-alienation and social conflict.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, individuals and society were both under the judgement of God.

A naive idealism which viewed religion as simply facilitating and blessing any nation’s hegemonic claims *tout court* was anathema to Herberg. Yet he agreed with Trueblood that human personality was central to a democratic faith. “Man [...] is precious in God’s sight. [...] He is potentially the child of God and the object of His redemptive concern. [...] Every man is indeed an end in himself, a person whose worth cannot be measured or compared. [...] Personality is the first of the ethico-religious ‘values’ that the biblical tradition affirms, and it can have no secure grounding apart from that tradition.”¹⁰⁸ For a democratic society to survive it needed to guard against the sinfulness of individuals and societies while also promoting the dignity of human beings. Yet, without the foundational truths of America’s Biblical heritage this clear-eyed view of both human corruption and human dignity was impossible. The *No* of alienation and God’s judgement needed to be held in tension with the *Yes* of God’s overflowing love for His creation. It is with this context that, near the conclusion of Herberg’s lecture, he used Tillich’s theological categories to further explain the Biblical grounds of democracy.

104 Will Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy.” November 9, 1955, Box 31, Folder 5, DET Papers, 1.

105 Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 1.

106 Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 2.

107 Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 2.

108 Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 2.

Tillich had first used the categories of heteronomy, autonomy, and theonomy in 1919 to explain the relationship of religion to secularized culture—a topic with which he would concern himself for the rest of his life.¹⁰⁹ As he explained it in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*, “Autonomy means the obedience of the individual to the law of reason, which he finds in himself as a rational being.” This autonomous affirmation of reason, however, was divorced from its “own inexhaustible ground.”¹¹⁰ Heteronomy “imposes a strange [...] law [...] on one or all the functions of reason. It issues commands from ‘outside’ on how reason should grasp and shape reality. [...] The basis of a genuine heteronomy is the claim to speak in the name of the ground of being [God] [...] in an unconditional and ultimate way.”¹¹¹ Theonomy, however, was the ground of both autonomy and heteronomy and “each goes astray when their theonomous unity is broken.” Thus, the proper relationship between culture and religion—though never perfectly realized—was one in which the autonomous use of reason “actualizes itself in obedience to its structural laws and the power of its inexhaustible ground.”¹¹² Tillich saw history as a process of struggle between autonomy and heteronomy with theonomy breaking in upon the world at certain times. Ancient Greece, for example, experienced a period of theonomy before the advent of the pre-Socratic philosophers and then began to transition to the “autonomous structures of reason” with the Milesian school.¹¹³ The Renaissance had experienced theonomy in the revival of Neo-Platonism under the guidance of Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) and Marsilio Ficino (1433–99) but had drifted into autonomy under the influence of Erasmus (1466–1536) and Galileo (1564–1642). The Reformation had been a largely autonomous movement but had soon devolved into heteronomy under the strictures of Protestant Orthodoxy.¹¹⁴ Tillich saw this struggle between autonomy and heteronomy—which often took on political features—as ongoing. The only solution to the tension, he believed, was final revelation, which “overcomes the conflict between [them] by re-establishing their essential unity.”¹¹⁵

Herberg took these three concepts and applied them to the state of the world in the Cold War conflict. Autonomy, he said, is an outlook which views the “self,

109 Cf. Jean Richard, “Tillich’s Analysis of the Spiritual Situation of His Times:” In *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*. Russell Re Manning (ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 123–6.

110 Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:83–5.

111 Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:84.

112 Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:85.

113 Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:85.

114 Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:86.

115 Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:147.

individual or corporate [...] [as] the highest reality in the universe, beyond which there is nothing.”¹¹⁶ He found evidence of this self-reliance most clearly in “secular ‘liberalism.’”¹¹⁷ Heteronomy was exemplified by totalitarianism, whether communist or fascist. It was a way of life in which, under the crushing weight of world conflict and disillusionment, the self willfully submitted itself “totally to some outside law, yielding its freedom and striving to dissolve itself into some larger divinized whole.”¹¹⁸ Human history could be understood, said Herberg, as the “spasmodic efforts to escape from one intolerable extreme by plunging into the other.”¹¹⁹ The faith of the Bible, however, rejected both autonomy and heteronomy. The former as “self-sufficient,” the latter as “demonic and idolatrous.” In their place he advocated for theonomy which he defined as “the grounding of life, individual and collective, in God and in God alone, ‘in whose service is perfect freedom.’”¹²⁰ He was clear that theonomy, which judged both autonomous self-sufficiency and authoritarian absolutism, could never be fully realized in any society without being “corrupted” by the sin inherent within it. Certain “social orders,” however, could recognize God as the ground of their existence, “and strive to limit their claims and pretensions.”¹²¹ American democracy, he believed, represented a system of government which took the “liberating word of theonomy” as its rule of life. As such, it was the “institutionalization of theonomy on the political level.”¹²²

It is doubtful if Tillich would have approved of Herberg’s use of these categories to lend Scriptural authority to American democracy. Indeed, in 1945 Tillich had equated democracy with autonomy in the political sphere which “is conceived as the absence of every authoritarian control. It is the economy of *laissez-faire*.”¹²³ Further, where Tillich viewed history as a constant movement between all three paradigms, Herberg saw history as a conflict between only two—autonomy and heteronomy. Thus, it is difficult to escape the impression that Herberg believed America had finally resolved the tensions of world history by its recognition of God as the fount of freedom. Yet it is clear that Herberg found Tillich’s theology helpful in explaining the Biblical grounds of America’s system of government. By equating American democracy with theonomy, Herberg stamped America’s Way of Life with divine approval over against the heteronomy of Soviet Communism.

116 Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 8.

117 Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 8.

118 Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 8.

119 Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 8.

120 Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 8.

121 Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 8.

122 Herberg, “The Biblical Basis of American Democracy,” 8.

123 Richard, “Tillich’s Analysis of the Spiritual Situation of His Times,” 131.

It also lent credence to the notion that a true American was a religiously devout American, since secularized autonomy was just as idolatrous as totalitarianism. In the end, as one Jewish critic of FRASCO reported wryly, Herberg had been “the star of the session.” He had been “clever, quick, and delighted all the Catholic[s] and Protestants present. [...] He spoke in their terms and presented their philosophy.”¹²⁴

6 Answering the Critics

The critics of the Eisenhower Administration’s religious anti-communism—both past and present—dismissed the movement as shallow, insincere, and concocted for purely political aims. Reporter William Lee Miller, in a 1954 article for *The Reporter* entitled *Piety Along the Potomac*, wrote that the “object of devotion for most political piety [...] is not God but ‘religion.’ There is here no ‘orthodoxy,’ but merely religiosity. The faith is not in God but in faith; we worship not God but our own worshipping.”¹²⁵ In 1958, Martin E Marty doubled down by labeling it a “relativist, pragmatist, common-creed religion-in-general,” which had turned God into a product for feel-good consumption.¹²⁶ Yet, as Roger Lyons explained to Joseph McCarthy in a letter, he believed in his work for the VOA. His promotion of American spirituality abroad came from a sincere conviction that the story of the “birth and growth of the world’s great religions—Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, [and] Judaism,” was fully known and ordained by God.¹²⁷ Where sincere belief in God flourished, atheistic communism was bound to perish.

Carl F. Henry (1913–2003), an early leader in the Neo-Evangelical movement, criticized Trueblood’s VOA bulletin on the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed as barefaced political propaganda. Henry wrote that Trueblood had taken “American propaganda to a hypocritical level,” and had “cheaped religion to an instrument of diplomacy” by his praise of Mohammed and Islam.¹²⁸ Trueblood, however, was quite clear in his published books and public speeches that, though he believed Christianity was superior to other religions in many ways, it was, in its essence, united to all other world religions. God’s spirit was manifested in the world in various forms, and ultimately, the religion with which one chose to align themselves was secondary to the fact that they worshipped God. Trueblood believed that

¹²⁴ Quoted in Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America*, 182.

¹²⁵ William Lee Miller, “Piety Along the Potomac.” *The Reporter* (1954): 25–28, here 26.

¹²⁶ Marty, *The New Shape of American Religion*, 35.

¹²⁷ *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 330–1.

¹²⁸ Carl F. Henry, “The Spirit of Foreign Policy.” *Christianity Today* 1, no. 15 (1957): 20–23, here 23.

Mohammed's teaching helpfully represented divine revelation as the antithesis of the polytheistic thesis.¹²⁹

Andrew R. Polk writes that Eisenhower was instrumental in the creation of a new religion whose core was "faith in freedom" which was subsequently "sold [...] to the American public."¹³⁰ He sees Will Herberg as the most prominent critic of that duplicitous religion, citing Herberg's 1955 book, *Protestant – Catholic – Jew*.¹³¹ In it, he had defined America's broad revival of interest in religion as "faith in faith," which Americans viewed as "a kind of 'miracle drug' that can cure all the ailments of the spirit."¹³² Yet this observation overlooks Herberg's assertion from the same book that Americans and Eisenhower both sincerely believed in and piously adhered to their religion.¹³³ Further, Herberg's speech at FRASCO's first National Conference demonstrates that he viewed religion as necessary for theonomic democracy and that he approved the use of spiritual weapons to combat communism. His criticism of the religion of the American Way of Life in *Protestant – Catholic – Jew* should be viewed as a condemnation of the tendency to use God as a means to an end. He was adamant, however, that Trueblood and the other founders of FRASCO were genuine believers who understood both the dangers of idolatry as well as the necessity of employing religion in the battle against the Soviet Union.¹³⁴ Viewed from this angle, Herberg should be seen as a religious Cold Warrior, not a critic.

7 Conclusion

This article attempts to reassess the features of American anti-communist religion by shifting the focus away from elected officials and prominent cabinet members such as Eisenhower and Dulles, and onto its lesser-known, philosophically and theologically trained proponents. I contend that the current gridlock over the sincerity of the 1950s religious revival comes from an overemphasis on the public pronouncements and policies of politicians. Eisenhower was not an intellectual, a trained theologian, or a clergyman. He spent the better part of forty years as a warrior. We

129 DET spoke to his respect for Mohammed's "teachings" and his "message." He did not, however, specify to which texts he referred.

130 Polk, *Faith in Freedom*, 3.

131 Cf. Polk, *Faith in Freedom*, 161.

132 Will Herberg, *Protestant – Catholic – Jew*. New York: Doubleday, 1955, 103.

133 Cf. Will Herberg, *Protestant – Catholic – Jew*, 15, 68–9, 281.

134 Cf. Will Herberg, "The Study of Man: Communism, Democracy, and the Churches." *Commentary*, April 1955.

must not require too much of him in terms of doctrinal or theological clarity. Any pastor of a local church can relate to the often-shallow doctrinal understanding of many of their most faithful parishioners. This does not negate what Herberg and historian Andrew Preston observed—there is no reason to doubt Eisenhower’s sincerity.¹³⁵ When his administration wanted to clarify and implement his admittedly limited understanding of religion it turned to individuals and organizations such as Trueblood, Lyons, Herberg, FRASCO, and the USIA.

The historians who affirm the sincerity of Eisenhower, Dulles, and other visible promoters of anti-communist religion, face a similar predicament—the most prominent politicians provided little in terms of doctrine which we might analyze. This naturally results in a certain ambiguity when they assess the essence of that religion. Some recognize the influence of theological liberalism,¹³⁶ others see a connection to the Enlightenment,¹³⁷ one questionably defines the religion as Manicheanism.¹³⁸ Understandably, the focus on non-theologically trained, career politicians make defining the religious movement for which they advocated difficult.

I have examined one aspect of three little-known figures who worked closely with the Eisenhower Administration. In their roles as promoters of the government-sponsored religion of anti-communism, Lyons, Trueblood, and Herberg held to something deeper than shallow “faith in faith” or “faith in freedom.” They were all influenced by Tillich’s theology in important ways. For Lyons and Trueblood, Tillich’s history of the development of world religions helped to facilitate their wide-ranging acceptance of non-Judeo-Christian beliefs in an increasingly pluralistic American society. For Herberg, American democracy was the embodiment of theonomy which overcame the idolatry of both heteronomy and autonomy. Of course, any individual’s intellectual formation—religious or otherwise—is made up of more than one source; Lyons traveled to Switzerland to study psychology with Carl Jung;¹³⁹ Trueblood was mentored by the Quaker mystic, Rufus M. Jones;¹⁴⁰ Herberg was influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr.¹⁴¹ Yet examining the contributing stream of Tillich’s theology to these Cold Warriors’ intellectual reservoir helps to move beyond questions of sincerity to matters of theological content. It demonstrates that these under-examined figures were steeped in the technical philosoph-

135 Cf. Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 441–42.

136 Cf. Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 18–9; Wilsey, *God’s Cold Warrior*, 45.

137 Cf. Haberski, *God and War*, 42; Holl, *The Religious Journey of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 188.

138 Cf. Wilsey, *God’s Cold Warrior*, 196.

139 Cf. *Hearings Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations*, 300–1.

140 James R. Newby, *Elton Trueblood*, 41–2.

141 Cf. Marty, *Modern American Religion*, 287. Also see Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man: An Interpretation of Jewish Religion*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997, xiv.

ical theology of their day and shows their firm belief that America was the recipient of unique blessings because of its affirmation of a divine creator. All in all, it provides a picture of a small group of true believers at the heart of what historian Jonathan Herzog calls the “Spiritual-Industrial Complex,” who actively pursued American victory in the ideological Cold War.