

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Spirit and the Letter: Anti-Communism and Religious Print Propaganda in the 1950s

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Abstract

During the early years of the Cold War, the United States Information Agency (USIA) used religious propaganda as an ideological weapon. As part of a multifaceted information program, the Agency selected, produced, and translated religious literature for display at its overseas cultural libraries. To counter Soviet propaganda accusing Americans of materialism and greed, a group of liberal Protestants closely associated with the Eisenhower Administration worked to promote an affirming and universalized form of religion that expanded beyond the traditional focus on Judeo-Christian spirituality to include all world religions – Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim. Though these efforts frequently conflicted with those of conservative Protestants, Eisenhower’s propagandists consistently framed American spirituality as recognizing the core values present in all world beliefs in contradistinction to the atheistic Soviet Union. Relying on previously unexamined, declassified USIA documents, this study contributes to scholarship on religion and the Cold War as well as American religious history within the context of state propaganda. It concludes that the exigencies of the Global Cold War contributed to the United States Government’s promotion of religious pluralism during the 1950s by making spiritual inclusion a matter of national security.

Keywords: Cold War; Eisenhower; Pluralism; Communism; liberal Protestantism; Trueblood

I. Introduction

On April 21, 1954, members of the United States Information Agency (USIA), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and State Department met at 1778 Pennsylvania Avenue in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood of Washington, DC. Their confidential agenda concerned intelligence requirements needed to counter Soviet anti-American propaganda in Japan, Britain, Germany, and other countries.¹ D. Elton Trueblood (1900–1994), former chaplain and professor of philosophy at Stanford University and recently appointed as the

¹“USIA Survey,” April 21, 1954, (FOIA)/ESDN (CREST): CIA-RDP61S00750A000100130013–1, General CIA Records.

USIA's Chief of Religious Information, told the group that future efforts should identify the "spiritual interests of the US public with the spiritual interests of foreign groups (Moslems, Budhists [*sic*], etc.), to expose and discredit the Soviet effort." "Religion," he said, was the "important opposite of dialectical materialism," and knowledge of foreign religious and spiritual practices was necessary to present the United States as "primarily a spiritual country and not merely a country which produces H-Bombs."²

This essay addresses two questions. First, what was the historical significance of the Cold War for the liberal Protestants working within the Eisenhower Administration? Historians of American religious pluralism have noted that the increased acceptance of Jews and Roman Catholics in the United States was largely a response to World War II. They also argue that Protestant missionaries' experiences abroad contributed to greater acceptance of non-Judeo-Christian religions and to immigration reform.³ This paper argues that the exigencies of the Cold War contributed to religious pluralism by serving as a catalyst for government-sponsored recognition of world religions. As global tensions increased during the decade following the conclusion of the war, the United States and the Soviet Union increasingly vied for the loyalties of European and non-aligned nations. Kremlin propagandists accused Americans of materialism, greed, and a lack of culture.⁴ In response, the USIA's information warriors were tasked with countering that enemy propaganda with cultural-diplomatic efforts in the form of jazz music, modernist art, literature, and religion to demonstrate that the United States had something of cultural substance to offer the world.⁵ For the religious intellectuals within the Agency, their particular mission was to combat the "threat of Communist totalitarianism" by informing the world "of the historic and continuing influence of [the] moral and spiritual forces in American life."⁶ Yet, as Trueblood told the joint agency meeting in Foggy Bottom, appealing to the adherents of other world religions required an open and affirming stance

²"USIA Survey," General CIA Records, 4–5.

³For literature on American religious pluralism, see Mark Silk, *Spiritual Politics: Religion and America Since World War II* (Simon and Schuster, 1988); William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America* (Yale University Press, 2003); Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (Oxford University Press, 2011); David A Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton University Press, 2013); David Mislin, *Saving Faith: Making Religious Pluralism an American Value At the Dawn of the Secular Age* (Cornell University Press, 2015); Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2015); David A Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World But Changed America* (Princeton University Press, 2017); K. Healan Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 2019); Nicholas T. Pruitt, *Open Hearts, Closed Doors: Immigration Reform and the Waning of Mainline Protestantism* (New York University Press, 2021); and David A Hollinger, *Christianity's American Fate: How Religion Became More Conservative and Society More Secular* (Princeton University Press, 2022).

⁴Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (Columbia University Press, 2015), 19–20.

⁵The following monographs examine US cultural diplomacy: Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2004); Kenneth Alan Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (University Press of Kansas, 2006); Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists*; Amanda Laugesen, *Taking Books to the World: American Publishers and the Cultural Cold War* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2017); and Greg Barnhisel, ed., *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Cold War Literary Cultures* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

⁶"Information Program Guidance Special Series: Moral and Religious Factors in the USIE Program," June 22, 1951, RG 306, Subject Files, 1952–1962, Box 6, Replies to Department's Circular Airgram of 5–2-51: Religious Literature in U.S. Information Centers, National Archives at College Park, MD. (Hereafter NA).

on the part of the US Government. In framing the matter of religious acceptance as a matter of national security, the Cold War shaped not only global *perceptions* of American spirituality but also the *content* of American religion.

This essay also answers a second question by examining the USIA's print propaganda: what assertions can be made about the content of anti-communist religion during the 1950s? The monographs dealing with American religious anti-communism from the past two decades generally fall into one of two categories.⁷ One group dismisses the religious rhetoric and propaganda of the Eisenhower Administration as little more than a manipulative invention of civil religion by calculating politicians; the other characterizes anti-communist religion as ambiguous and shallow, but ultimately sincere.⁸ I attempt to move beyond the question of sincerity to one of doctrinal content. By accounting for previously restricted USIA documents which detail the Agency's efforts to use religious print propaganda to influence world opinion, this paper argues that the government-sponsored religion was neither a newly invented religion nor was it an amorphous spirituality. Instead, the Agency's book program was a direct continuation of what Matthew Hedstrom calls liberal religion's literary focus on "mysticism, mind cure, and psychology" which had been increasing over the previous decades.⁹ Again, it was the Cold War imperative which caused this emphasis to take root and flourish at the highest levels of the US Government.

I demonstrate this thesis by first examining the USIA's efforts to leverage religious print material around the world during the beginning of the 1950s. The book program at this time was characterized by internal confusion and external scrutiny, and the easy accessibility of the Agency's overseas libraries posed an inherent security vulnerability which opponents would later exploit. Second, I show how the decision to hire Trueblood to oversee religious propaganda operations advanced the organization's goal of recognizing and affirming all world religions. Third, as the decade progressed, conservative Protestants became incensed at what they perceived as efforts by liberal religious intellectuals within the USIA to keep Fundamentalist and Evangelical books and articles off their shelves. I recount the successful efforts of these conservatives to force the Agency to make concessions regarding religious material which would expose global readers to exclusivist forms of American religion. Finally, despite this setback, the government's

⁷The following article and books detail the role of American religion during the early Cold War: 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*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945–1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); T. Jeremy Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion* (Praeger, 2008); Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Raymond Haberski, *God and War: American Civil Religion Since 1945* (Rutgers University Press, 2012); Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (Anchor, 2012); Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (Perseus Books Group, 2015); John D. Wilsey, *God's Cold Warrior: The Life and Faith of John Foster Dulles* (William B. Eerdmans, 2021); Jack M. Holl, *The Religious Journey of Dwight D. Eisenhower: Duty, God, and Country* (William B. Eerdmans, 2021); Andrew R. Polk, *Faith in Freedom: Propaganda, Presidential Politics, and the Making of an American Religion* (Cornell University Press, 2021); James D. Strasburg, *God's Marshall Plan: American Protestants and the Struggle for the Soul of Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2021); and Michael Graziano, *Errand into the Wilderness of Mirrors: Religion and the History of the CIA* (University of Chicago Press, 2021).

⁸The first view is held to varying degrees by Jacobs, Gunn, Herzog, Kruse, and Polk, and the second view is held by Kirby, Inboden, Haberski, Preston, Wilsey, and Holl. See, n 7 for references.

⁹Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion*, 15.

propagandists found other non-attributable means to advance their own liberal theological views. By staging events which fostered interreligious dialogue and by paying for positive press coverage – none of which could be directly traced to the Agency – the government contributed to the efforts of liberal Protestants to posit a unifying spiritual core which facilitated religious cooperation.

II. Early Stages of the Spiritual Conflict

The government-sponsored book programs of the 1950s came on the heels of what Hedstrom calls a “religious middlebrow culture that freshly asserted the centrality of books and reading,” preparing “readers for a spiritual engagement with religious ‘others.’”¹⁰ The editors and publishing executives who organized the successful book campaigns of the previous decades had overwhelmingly come from the mainline denominations of American Protestantism and were guided in their book-promotion efforts by the traditional goals of liberal religion. Their efforts had increasingly advocated for tri-faith cooperation, promoted religious material which emphasized the psychological and mystical aspects of spirituality, and contributed significantly to the growing pluralization of American society.¹¹ The USIA Library program followed this trajectory.

The first Agency center, the “Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin,” opened in Mexico City on April 13, 1942.¹² By 1945, the United States Information Service (USIS), which was renamed the USIA in 1953, operated libraries in thirty-two cities which ranged from Paris, Madrid, and Moscow to Bangkok, Bombay, and Baghdad.¹³ At the conclusion of the war, with the closure of the Office of War Information which had original oversight of the libraries, the USIS and its book centers passed to State Department control. USIS libraries were directed to provide a “window on the West” for their readers.¹⁴ Consequently, they were stocked with literature which ostensibly presented a balanced and fair view of the various cultural trends in the United States. As the decade progressed, however, budgetary cuts continually chipped away at the USIS, and by the beginning of the 1950s, it was feared that the entire program might be folded.¹⁵ It comes as no surprise, then, that directives concerning religious literature were rather ad-hoc during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Though increased standardization would eventually occur, internal confusion and outside scrutiny foreshadowed future security vulnerabilities for the books program.

In early 1948, Bernard Aldridge of the Gideons International sent a letter to the USIS director offering to donate copies of the Bible to each overseas library.¹⁶ Three months later, the USIS responded to Aldridge that, though they appreciated the Gideon’s offer,

¹⁰Ibid., 20–21.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²“Historical Background of USIS Library Program,” RG 306, Subject Files, 1954–1972, Box 32, 1966 Religious Advisory Panel Notes, NA.

¹³“Historical Background of USIS Library Program,” NA. Though renamed as the “USIA” by Eisenhower, the Agency was still referred to as the “USIS” when operating abroad.

¹⁴“Historical Background of USIS Library Program,” NA.

¹⁵Wilson P. Dizard, *Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S. Information Agency* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 38. See also Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁶Bernard E. Aldridge to Director, USIS, March 12, 1948, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 6, Religious Materials 1951–1952, NA.

they only needed eleven Bibles for centers in China.¹⁷ Yet Aldridge was concerned that every USIS library have “at least one copy of God’s Holy Word available” and asked that each library provide a response to his offer.¹⁸ This minor incident raised confusion over how to handle offers of books or literature from private organizations for display at US Government information centers. The Agency eventually decided to accept the Bibles as a “donation,” but sent them only to centers that requested them.¹⁹ In the end, nearly eight months after Aldridge’s free offer of the Gospel, the Gideons shipped sixty-three copies of the Bible to the USIS for distribution.²⁰ As an indication of his pleasure, Aldridge informed the Agency that he had just returned from Finland where he had visited a USIS library in Helsinki. There, he had been able to peruse the stacks freely and was happy to find that everything was “made available to various interested parties.” So impressed was he that he had “no hesitation in saying that the money spent for this type of ‘propaganda’ should be worthwhile” and that Gideons International stood ready to fulfill any future requests for the Bible.²¹ This openness and accessibility of overseas library material, however, would eventually prove to be the libraries’ Achilles heel.

Uncertainty also stemmed from the public’s misunderstanding of the USIA libraries’ role. It came to the attention of USIS leadership in 1951 that several libraries had received “numerous unsolicited gifts of publications on religious subjects.”²² In some cases, the individuals and organizations offering material had requested signed statements from the local library directors promising to “catalog and retain the items for public use.”²³ The library center in Johannesburg, South Africa, indicated that it had indeed received several recent donations of religious literature from the local Mormons and Christian Scientists who, after browsing the shelves, “complained politely” that their materials be made publicly available.²⁴ The American Embassy in Brussels responded that it too had recently received a package of books from the local Christian Scientists, one of which was *The Life of Mary Baker Eddy*.²⁵ In both instances, the respective libraries politely accepted the books but did not put them in circulation.

At the same time, the USIS was cognizant of a growing desire for religious material abroad and, as a short-term solution, told its library directors to indicate which books their centers might need.²⁶ Kuala Lumpur’s director indicated that he wanted to distribute

¹⁷C.E. Walton to Bernard E. Aldridge, June 23, 1948, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 6, Religious Materials 1951–1952, NA.

¹⁸Bernard E. Aldridge to C. E. Walton, June 30, 1948, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 6, Religious Materials 1951–1952, NA.

¹⁹Lawrence Morris to CAS, July 23, 1948, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 6, Religious Materials 1951–1952, NA.

²⁰Bernard E. Aldridge to C. E. Walton, November 16, 1948, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 6, Religious Materials 1951–1952, NA.

²¹Aldridge to Walton, NA.

²²“Circular Airgram: Religious Literature in the United States Information Centers,” May 2, 1951, RG 306, Central Files 1949–1965, Box 3, 1952: Religious Materials – Overseas Operations General, NA.

²³“Circular Airgram,” NA.

²⁴Johannesburg, South Africa 332 to Department of State, May 23, 1951, RG 306, Subject Files 1952–1962, Box 6, Replies to Department’s Circular Airgram of 5–2-51: Religious Literature in U.S. Information Centers, NA.

²⁵American Embassy, Brussels to Department of State, June 6, 1951, RG 306, Subject Files 1952–1962, Box 6, Replies to Department’s Circular Airgram of 5–2-51: Religious Literature in U.S. Information Centers, NA.

²⁶“Circular Airgram: Religious Literature in the United States Information Centers,” May 2, 1951, RG 306, Central Files 1949–1965, Box 3, 1952: Religious Materials – Overseas Operations General, NA.

religious books to local Christian missionaries for “their work among the people of Malaya.” These books needed to be on “comparative religion” which would “not offend those of any religious faith,” and they had to be “of an inspirational nature and of no particular faith.”²⁷ Headquarters determined that books on Buddhism, “Mohammedanism [*sic*] and possibly Confucianism, Taoism, and one or two other faiths” might be sent to the Information Center for use in the field.²⁸ Yet, it specified that any materials dealing with specific local religions and beliefs should not “be placed on the shelves of the Information Center.”²⁹ Another library in Melbourne responded that there would be “little or no interest ... in Biblical history, doctrinal discussion, theology, [or] lives of the early church fathers.”³⁰ Instead, the Melbourne director thought that books “on self-help through ... religion and psychology” would be well-received. His suggested titles included best-selling books which promoted the spiritual benefits of right-thinking, *Peace of Mind* by Joshua Loth Liebman and *Guide to Confident Living* by Norman Vincent Peale, which highlights the affinity of Agency staff for the progressive religious trends of the day.³¹

As these suggestions from the field arrived, the USIS was formulating a long-term solution which it hoped would address the lack of religious literature in its libraries. In April 1951, a new religious advisory panel was appointed to assist with book selection as well as general religious content for the *Voice of America* (VOA), the USIS’s primary propaganda broadcasting station.³² The panel was made up of three representatives of America’s dominant faiths, Edward Hughes Pruden (Protestant), Thomas J. McCarthy (Catholic), and Isaac Franck (Jewish).³³ An Agency press release announced that its “Campaign of Truth” would be “made tremendously more effective” by the new tri-faith panel, all while maintaining “absolute impartiality” toward all religions.³⁴ Behind the scenes, though, it was not all smooth sailing. At the panel’s meeting in September 1951, they discussed the viability of the USIS assisting with the establishment of a multi-faith United Nations religious organization to combat communism.³⁵ The meeting ground to a halt, however, when the three members disagreed over the proposed plan. McCarthy opposed the UN organization on the grounds that it was impractical. Pruden was favorable since he believed that “certain fundamental, spiritual and ethical beliefs ... are held in common by all faiths” – a position of which he had been convinced when Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (1900–1990), Ambassador from India, had addressed the Baptist church he pastored. Franck largely agreed with Pruden, but thought any decision on the matter should be postponed until a later date.³⁶ McCarthy and Pruden did agree that the

²⁷T. W. Smith to Stuart Hummel, “Kuala Lumpur’s Request for Religious Books,” November 20, 1952, RG 306, Central Files 1949–1965, Box 3, 1952: Religious Materials – Overseas Operations General, NA.

²⁸Smith to Hummel, NA.

²⁹Smith to Hummel, NA.

³⁰American Consulate, Melbourne, Australia to Department of State, June 6, 1951, RG 306, Subject Files 1952–1962, Box 6, Replies to Department’s Circular Airgram of 5–2–51: Religious Literature in U.S. Information Centers, NA.

³¹American Consulate, Melbourne to Department of State, NA; Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion*, 16.

³²“Department of State for the Press,” April 20, 1951, RG 306, Records Related to Committees, 1948–1958, Box 12, I Religious Panel, NA.

³³“Department of State for the Press,” NA. See Mislin, *Saving Faith*, 7, 12.

³⁴“Department of State for the Press,” NA.

³⁵“Minutes of the Meeting of the Religious Panel,” September, 19, 1951, RG 306, Records Related to Committees, 1948–1958, Box 12, I Religious Panel, NA.

³⁶“Minutes of the Meeting of the Religious Panel,” NA.

looming threat of communism called for “some common expression of their deistic faith,” but in the end, the topic was shelved for future debate.³⁷

This slightly unwieldy religious advisory panel was tasked with selecting a list of books which would then be distributed to all USIS libraries in 1952.³⁸ The new policy attempted to take into account the various needs of each station and each library director was asked to provide his input to the panel. The books chosen were to “present the principles of freedom of religion and separation of church and state” in America, while avoiding any “extreme religious bias or purely sectarian interests.”³⁹ Thus, in November 1952, a package of fifty-seven pre-selected books was sent to each of the USIS overseas libraries.⁴⁰ The titles in the bibliography provide a snapshot of the religious aspects of American life which the Agency wanted to present to the world. Titles which highlighted the tri-faith aspects of the United States included *What the Jews Believe*, *Judaism and Modern Man*, *Catholic Social Principles*, and *Protestant Manifesto*. A significant number of the books detailed world religion and the philosophy of religion: *Procession of the Gods*, *These Also Believe*, *Types of Religious Philosophy*, *Forgotten Religions*, and *The Great Religions of the Modern World*. There were also a number of books written by popular modern mystics: *Seeds of Contemplation* by Thomas Merton, *Deep Is the Hunger* by Howard Thurman, and religious-psychological titles such as *Peace of Mind* by Joshua Liebman.⁴¹

Conspicuously absent from the bibliography were any books from the theological standpoints of the Fundamentalist or Evangelical wings of Protestantism. This was an understandable decision by the panel for two reasons: The first was the general disdain felt by the liberal Protestants within the USIS for conservative Protestants, which David Hollinger refers to as resembling a patronizing dismissal of “poor country cousins.”⁴² The second had to do with the Agency’s policy regarding overseas literature selection. Books by Fundamentalists and Evangelicals were known to reject any religion other than traditional Christianity, as they understood it. How then could they be shelved in international libraries? Given the operational constraints posed by the Agency’s global area of operations, combined with the overwhelmingly liberal religious makeup of the panel and other future religious advisors to the USIA, the decision to bypass conservative Protestant books during the first decade of the religious book program is unsurprising. Eventually, however, the Agency would be forced to deal with this tension.

In the meantime, the recent Soviet acquisition of an atomic bomb had quickly escalated Cold War tensions.⁴³ Fears in the United States were heightened by Billy Graham’s warnings of impending doom and the “red scare” which played out with Senator Joseph McCarthy’s warnings of “Communists and queers” who had infiltrated the highest levels of the United States Government.⁴⁴ Thus, when Eisenhower came to

³⁷“Minutes of the Meeting of the Religious Panel,” NA.

³⁸“Circular Airgram: Religious Literature in the United States Information Centers,” May 2, 1951, RG 306, Central Files 1949–1965, Box 3, 1952: Religious Materials – Overseas Operations General, NA.

³⁹“Circular Airgram,” NA.

⁴⁰“Religious Books,” November 25, 1952, 1952: RG 306, Central Files 1949–1965, Box 3, 1952: Religious Materials – Overseas Operations General, NA.

⁴¹“Religious Books,” NA.

⁴²Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 11.

⁴³Michael D. Gordin, *Red Cloud at Dawn: Truman, Stalin, and the End of the Atomic Monopoly* (Picador, 2010), 11, 248.

⁴⁴Grant Wacker, “Billy Graham’s 1949 Los Angeles Revival,” in *Turning Points in the History of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Heath W. Carter and Laura Rominger Porter, (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2017), 229–230;

office in 1953, the USIS was rechristened as the USIA, and the religious war against communism was placed into high gear.

III. Trueblood Sells the American Way of Life

On Monday, March 15, 1954, a *Time* article entitled “Religion: Truth Salesman” announced the appointment of D. Elton Trueblood as the USIA’s new Chief of Religious Information.⁴⁵ Trueblood, a Quaker philosopher of religion, had risen to prominence during the 1940s with a string of best-selling books published by Harper and Brothers, one of which, *Alternative to Futility* (1948), had been included in the earliest bibliographies provided to USIA libraries.⁴⁶ With a theological education from Harvard Divinity School and a PhD in philosophy from Johns Hopkins University under the mentorship of Arthur O. Lovejoy (1873–1962), Trueblood was considered an up-and-coming intellectual in the liberal religious establishment.⁴⁷ Additionally, he had spent time under the mentorship of Rufus M. Jones (1863–1948) at Haverford College, the most-recognized proponent of mysticism during the first half of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ By the time he came to the USIA, Trueblood had already spent two decades promoting a religion of mystical inwardness which emphasized the “inner light,” which he viewed as open and available to all humanity.⁴⁹ This inward reality could be tapped into by any spiritual seeker regardless of their formal religious affiliation and, as we will see, provided a foundation for the American way of life. As he told *Time*, his new position with the Agency was “really an enlargement under government auspices of what I’ve already been doing.”⁵⁰

Trueblood came to the USIA at a time of uncertainty and crisis for the Agency. The previous year had brought unwanted scrutiny and pressure on the national stage when several members of the Agency – including the VOA’s religious advisor, Roger Lyons – had been questioned by Joseph McCarthy and his investigative committee over accusations of atheism within the State Department.⁵¹ The line of questioning had also focused on the book program when it came to light that a certain USIA employee had referred to Whittaker Chambers (1901–1961), author of the best-selling anti-communist book, *Witness* (1952), as a “psychopath,” and that he would not “touch him with a ten-foot pole.”⁵² The fallout from the proceedings led Eisenhower to transfer the USIA from the

“Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, Volume 1, Eighty-Third Congress,” (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953), XXV.

⁴⁵“Religion: Truth Salesman,” *Time* Vol LXIII, no. 11 (1954). <https://time.com/archive/6794869/religion-truth-salesman>.

⁴⁶Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion*, 78, 112; Declassified Bibliography, June 1953, RG 306, Central Files 1949–1965, Box 3, 1952: Religious Materials – Overseas Operations General, NA.

⁴⁷See Jerry Hopkins, “Trueblood, David Elton,” in *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States*, ed. George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) and James R. Newby, *Elton Trueblood: Believer, Teacher, and Friend* (Harper & Row, 1990).

⁴⁸Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 18, 252.

⁴⁹D. Elton Trueblood, *The Essence of Spiritual Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1936), 72.

⁵⁰“Religion: Truth Salesman,” *Time*.

⁵¹“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), 298–300.

⁵²“Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, Volume 1, Eighty-Third Congress,” 568–570.

State Department to the newly formed National Security Agency in 1953. Security concerns over the Agency's overseas propaganda operations, then, were understandably high.⁵³ Consequently, as Chief of Religious Information, Trueblood attempted to build trust in the USIA through his public speeches and writing. In an article for a Quaker audience entitled "My Work in Washington," he wrote that the government was attempting to "unify our efforts in the struggle for men's minds."⁵⁴ Citing the overseas libraries as "perhaps the most successful single enterprise of the Agency," he proclaimed that "a truly free society must rest on Judeo-Christian foundations."⁵⁵ His public communications, however, never mentioned his involvement in planning a "Case Study on Thailand" which laid out the details for a clandestine "psychological offensive" which would strengthen and promote Buddhism as a defense against communist ideology.⁵⁶ Part of this omission was certainly because the Thai plans were classified. The other obvious reason is the outcry these plans would almost certainly have elicited from conservative American Protestants. Not only was the USIA promoting Judeo-Christian faith at home, it was helping to bolster other world religions abroad, and doing so with American tax dollars.

As Kenneth Osgood's study of Cold War propaganda details, the USIA's book program sought "doctrinal warfare materials" which would "highlight the 'discrepancies between totalitarian theory and practice.'"⁵⁷ Yet, for all the efforts of the Agency's religious advisors, there were inevitable "gaps" in the literature.⁵⁸ To that end, the USIA had a department dedicated to commissioning books which met those critical, spiritual needs. As Osgood notes, the files which detail this aspect of the program do not indicate which books were published, though the records from 1965 alone show that forty-three manuscripts were commissioned.⁵⁹ Here, again, Trueblood is helpful. As part of his duties according to his position description with the USIA, he was to use "part of his time to write both books and magazine articles which will be useful in the work of the Agency. Books so written may be widely used abroad ... and magazine articles ... used by the magazines which the Agency sponsors."⁶⁰ One such article highlighting the vitality of American spirituality was published in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1955 and then sent to overseas libraries.⁶¹ This aspect of his job description is also the context for a statement which he wrote in *The Friend* indicating that much of his time with the USIA was taken up with writing a new book.⁶² An Agency press release in June 1955 announced that Trueblood would take a two-month leave of absence "to complete a literary work."⁶³ The resulting book, *Declaration of Freedom* (1955), was later described in a USIA bibliography as "a reaffirmation of the values vital to a free society – freedom, responsibility,

⁵³"Historical Background of USIS Library Program," April 9, 1965, RG 306, Subject Files 1954–1972, Box 32, 1966 Religious Advisory Panel Notes, NA.

⁵⁴"My Work in Washington," January 20, 1955, *The Friend*, Box 31, D. Elton Trueblood Papers, Friends Collection and Earlham College Archives, Richmond, IN. (Hereafter DET Papers).

⁵⁵"My Work in Washington," DET Papers.

⁵⁶"Case Study on Thailand," 1954, CREST: CIA-RDP61S00750A000600030035-3, General CIA Records.

⁵⁷Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 296.

⁵⁸Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 297.

⁵⁹Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 297.

⁶⁰DET Position Description, January 28, 1955, Box 31, Folder 98, DET Papers.

⁶¹"America's New Religious Vitality," April 1955, *Cosmopolitan*, Box 31, Folder 98, DET Papers.

⁶²"My Work in Washington," January 20, 1955, *The Friend*, Box 31, Folder 97, DET Papers.

⁶³USIA Press Release No. 137, June 29, 1955, Box 31, Folder 98, DET Papers.

equality, dignity of the individual, moral order, and religious faith – in the battle between the free world and communism.”⁶⁴

Declaration of Freedom claimed there were three possible outcomes in the Cold War conflict: a communist victory, open war, or “the penetration of all the world by the dream of a society that is both just and free.”⁶⁵ The third option could be achieved only by supplanting the religion of communism with a “better faith, which we find inherently convincing and to which we are consequently committed.”⁶⁶ It went on to state the six “positive freedoms” cherished by the West: freedom to learn, to debate, to worship, to work, to live, and to serve.⁶⁷ These six freedoms were facilitated by “the idea of equality” and the “dignity of the individual.”⁶⁸ Yet this entire world view, “on which so many of the world religions unite,” was made possible because “there is Another,” a living and personal God. This “Divine Personality” explained the existence of individual personality, a fact which was “embarrassing to the materialistic atheist.”⁶⁹ Personality was the inward reality which united “Moslems and Christians and Jews” who had “the greatest things in common. The question of the particular banner is secondary.”⁷⁰ The key was to understand the link between the “respect for personality” and religion, “a connection so often mentioned by President Eisenhower.” It was of the utmost importance that the dignity and “unique worth of each individual” be recognized even though there was so much apparent difference and inequality in the world. “Why, then is he [the individual] valuable ...”? because “*Man becomes an object of value only if his value is derivative.* As a physical or even a moral specimen he may not be much good, but if he is a creature made in God’s image, that is a different matter entirely. Then he has, in spite of sin and failure and ineptitude, a link with eternity.”⁷¹

Trueblood’s book, which set the West in diametric opposition to the “godless” communists, was fully in line with the historic language of liberal Protestantism, with its long-held fascination with individual personality and divinely-ordained dignity.⁷² This conceptualization of the individual, which emphasized the primacy of personality as evidence that all were children of God, was central to the Eisenhower Administration’s anti-communist rhetoric. Each and every human being was considered worthy of dignity, equality, and freedom because of what they contained by nature. *Declaration of Freedom* was tailor-made for use in the ideological war against communism. Its content ensured that it would be purchased and used by the book program for years to come.

During the mid-1950s, at the apogee of mainline Protestantism’s cultural influence, a diverse group of ministers, authors, and philosophers were working inside the US Government to promote their cherished, progressive theological beliefs around the world. As the next sections demonstrate, when pressured by their conservative counterparts, they tended to fall back on the policy directives which forbade them from proselytizing or

⁶⁴“Subject Bibliography No. 13, January 10, 1956,” RG 306, Subject Files 1954–1972, Box 32, 1966 Religious Advisory Panel Notes, NA.

⁶⁵D. Elton Trueblood, *Declaration of Freedom* (Harper & Brothers, 1955), 14–15.

⁶⁶Trueblood, *Declaration of Freedom*, 21.

⁶⁷Trueblood, *Declaration*, 53–70.

⁶⁸Trueblood, *Declaration*, 71, 90–91.

⁶⁹Trueblood, *Declaration*, 114.

⁷⁰Trueblood, *Declaration*, 118.

⁷¹Trueblood, *Declaration*, 118.

⁷²Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity 1900–1950* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 286–287.

criticizing any non-Judeo-Christian belief system. Internally, however, the policy directives to promote and find common ground with all world religions went hand in glove with the essence of their faith.

IV. Conflict with Conservatives

The public accessibility of the overseas libraries combined with a preference for shelving material with progressive religious themes eventually resulted in open conflict between the liberal Protestants of the Agency and their conservative American counterparts. Fundamentalists' criticisms of the USIA's promotion of religion had been growing for years. In 1954, upon Trueblood's hiring, a flurry of protest letters from Fundamentalists such as Carl McIntyre (1906–2002) had poured into the White House accusing him of pacifism and his "past sympathy with Marxist principles."⁷³ Yet the government's internal reaction was dismissive. As Paul H. Davis informed Eisenhower, "Elton Trueblood, as you doubtless know, is a Quaker and is also well accepted by all other denominations (except the extreme fundamentalists, who, likewise, don't even accept the fact of evolution)."⁷⁴ Trueblood's successor at the Agency, Ronald Bridges (d. 1959), similarly referred to the USIA's Fundamentalist opponents as "crackpot critics" to whom "we cannot yield on any matter of principle."⁷⁵ Yet, he could also read the writing on the wall. "We are careless indeed," reported Bridges, "if we ignore responsible criticism and this opens the way for the crackpots to take over."⁷⁶

For some American conservative Protestants, the overseas libraries presented an opportunity for proselytization. In 1952, Roy Garrison of the Seamen's Church Institute had acquired a list of all Agency Information Centers and then inaccurately informed various American Christian organizations that, if they simply mailed their religious literature to USIA headquarters in Washington, D.C., the government would forward that material on to all of their international libraries.⁷⁷ Between 1952 and 1953, the USIA received unsolicited religious literature from several conservative religious organizations, including the William Jennings Bryan Bible Class, the American Prophetic League Inc., Zondervan Publishing House, the Bible Truth Depot, the Bible Sabbath Association, the Gospel Witness and Protestant Advocate, and more – all at the instigation of Garrison.⁷⁸ The bundles which arrived in Washington included fifty-five copies of *Prophecy Monthly*, fifty-four copies of *Is Christ Coming Soon?*, forty copies of *Yon Motley Crowd*, and "The Campaign of Truth."⁷⁹ George Finney of the Information Center Service politely informed

⁷³Markku Ruotsila, *Fighting Fundamentalism: Carl McIntire and the Politicization of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 124.

⁷⁴Paul H. Davis to Dwight D. Eisenhower, February 16, 1955, DDE's Records as President, Official File, Box 748, OF-247 USIA 1955, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

⁷⁵"In re Guidance to Field on Proper Balance on Religious Material in USIS Libraries," January 22, 1958, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 16, Religious Materials 1955–1958, NA.

⁷⁶"In re Guidance to Field," NA.

⁷⁷George J. Finney to George C. Williams, January 6, 1953, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 6, Religious Materials 1951–1952, NA.

⁷⁸Finney to Williams, January 6, 1953; Finney to Herbert Hebsacker, January 8, 1953; Finney to Zondervan Publishing House, January 8, 1953; Finney to Elie T. Loizeaux Jr., January 8, 1953; Finney to George A. Main, January 2, 1953, Finney to Georgina Lindsay, December 15, 1952 RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 6, Religious Materials 1951–1952, NA.

⁷⁹Finney to Williams; Finney to Herbert Hebsacker; Finney to Zondervan; Finney to Loizeaux Jr.; Finney to Main; Finney to Lindsay, NA.

Garrison that there were no funds for mailing these materials overseas, and that, though the material was “quite generally useful,” it was “not immediately suited” to current requirements in the field.⁸⁰ If the USIA thought they had heard the last of Garrison, however, they were wrong.

From the early days of the books program, conservative Protestants would travel abroad to assess and catalog religious material on display. In 1953, Garrison reported to the American Bible Society (ABS) that, after traveling to several Information Service libraries, he was concerned at the lack of Bibles. He told them he was willing to pay for each international library to receive two Bibles, “one for reference and one for circulation.”⁸¹ The ABS eventually shipped 900 Bibles to overseas libraries, though they informed Garrison that his “complex orders and ... correspondence” had cost them an additional \$600 on top of the original estimate.⁸² Over the course of working with him, the ABS experienced what the USIA was about to discover – Roy Garrison was difficult to work with. In its final letter to him, the ABS concluded that it had “expanded [*sic*] very considerable effort to carry the program according to your wishes. We find, however, that you are manifestly unsatisfied and have made to us and to other persons quite ridiculous charges about our staff in spite of our efforts to be of service. Cooperation in Christian work cannot continue under such circumstances.”⁸³ Many are the afflictions of the righteous, indeed.

As Garrison and his conservative Protestant allies continued to make unannounced visits to USIA libraries around the world, they began to compile lists of the religious books they found on the shelves. They were disturbed to discover there were no books which represented the Fundamentalist or Neo-Evangelical view – not even Billy Graham (1918–2018).⁸⁴ For all his complaints about “crackpot critics,” Ronald Bridges conceded their point. A former President of the Pacific School of Religion and long-time advocate of ecumenism and religious pluralism, Bridges was clear-eyed in his assessment of the Agency’s imbalanced content.⁸⁵ In January 1958, he published an internal memo intended to provide guidance on achieving a proper ratio between liberal and conservative Protestant viewpoints.⁸⁶ It acknowledged that these were “sensitive matters to the integrity of the service,” compounded by the fact that the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), America’s most prominent Neo-Evangelical organization, had recently involved itself in the matter. During Trueblood’s tenure, the memo went on, an NAE executive had taken a “considerable tour abroad” and had lodged a complaint over the lack of conservative Protestant literature. Now, four years later, he had taken

⁸⁰Finney to Garrison, December 12, 1952, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 6, Religious Materials 1951–1952, NA.

⁸¹Laton E. Holmgren to USIA, March 31, 1953, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 16, Religious Materials 1953–1954, NA.

⁸²Eric M. North to Roy Garrison, December 2, 1955, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 16, Religious Materials 1955–1958, NA.

⁸³North to Garrison, NA.

⁸⁴Some former Fundamentalists took on the label “Neo-Evangelical” in the 1940s and 1950s to rhetorically distance themselves from Fundamentalists.

⁸⁵For further information on Bridges, see “Of Special Interest: News and Notes,” in *Christian Education*, Vol. 29, no. 1 (September, 1945), 5–9; USIA press release on appointment of Ronald Bridges, December 12, 1955, Box 31, Folder 97, DET Papers.

⁸⁶“In re Guidance to Field on Proper Balance on Religious Material in USIS Libraries,” January 22, 1958, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 16, Religious Materials 1955–1958, NA.

another tour and determined that no improvements had been made.⁸⁷ This prompted the NAE to propose a “resolution of condemnation of the USIA” at its most recent national conference where “charges of prejudice and distortion were aired.” An Agency representative in Washington had placated the Evangelicals, explaining the difficulties posed by selecting religious literature, and had succeeded in convincing them to change their resolution to a “commendation for fair and honest effort.”⁸⁸ But the fact remained, Bridges wrote, Billy Graham “is a newsworthy figure in many parts of the world . . . [He is] the spokesman for many millions of people here and abroad.” Many volumes had been written by Graham and about him by his supporters. But where were his books in USIA libraries? “Nowhere whatsoever, say the zealots. Hardly anywhere say the more cautious observers. And these people [conservatives] do far more visiting and checking than their liberal brethren would ever dream of doing.”⁸⁹ Bridges’ memo concluded that, in order to avoid further scrutiny, a balance needed to be implemented at every library even if it meant taking the decision-making power out of the hands of local librarians to choose their own books.

To come up with a bibliography of potential conservative titles, the Agency turned to an outside contractor, the editor of the Neo-Evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, Carl F. Henry (1913–2003). The list he compiled for the USIA included conservative titles such as *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (EJ Carnell), *A Christian View of Man* (Gordon H. Clark), *Christianity Rightly So-Called* (Samuel Craig), *The Secret of Happiness* (Billy Graham), and *Christianity and Liberalism* (J. Gresham Machen).⁹⁰ Perhaps a bit self-servingly, Henry also included four book titles of his own in the final draft. These were then assessed by contracted reviewers and, if approved, added to a supplemental bibliography from which overseas libraries might make selections. In the meantime, a stop-gap solution was needed. In June 1958, the NAE provided the Agency with a large donation of book packages. Each package contained five books which had been previously cleared by the Agency’s reviewers.⁹¹ Included were Billy Graham’s *Peace with God* and *Contemporary Evangelical Thought* by Carl F. Henry. Though one of the five books, George Burnham’s *Billy Graham and the New York Crusade* was accompanied by a warning that each library should have their Public Affairs Officer carefully assess the “passages on pages 51–69 . . . with an eye to their probable effect on local audiences,” reiterating the difficulty of balancing changing policy directives with overseas operational nuances.⁹²

Yet these changes moved slowly, as all bureaucratic processes do, and by the time the books and new bibliography actually made their way overseas eleven months after Bridges’s initial memo, Roy Garrison was threatening to picket the USIA Headquarters

⁸⁷“In re Guidance to Field,” NA.

⁸⁸“In re Guidance to Field,” NA.

⁸⁹“In re Guidance to Field,” NA.

⁹⁰“Proposed List of Recommended Books on Religion,” May 1, 1958, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 16, Religious Materials 1955–1958, NA.

⁹¹“Four Books on Religion,” June 17, 1958, RG 306, Subject Files 1953–1967, Box 16, Religious Materials 1955–1958, NA. The fifth book was penciled in later.

⁹²“Four Books on Religion,” NA. Though the memo does not mention why it recommended the PAO assess these pages, it is likely because of the explicit references they make to the vice of New York City overcome by Graham’s preaching. Examples include male and female prostitution (52), entertainers being “miserable and lonely as hell” (53), and “controversial movies” with “lustful” themes (65). One can surmise that such portrayals would not have advanced America’s image as a deeply spiritual nation. See George Burnham and Lee Fischer, *Billy Graham and the New York Crusade* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1957).

in Washington, D.C., and take his campaign to Congress. A letter informing the Agency of his intent contained twenty-six “charges” against the books program ranging from legitimate to verging on paranoid.⁹³ One accusation was that USIA libraries did not have the Bible in circulation but, rather, kept them under “lock and key.” This, however, was by design. As one employee wrote in an internal memo, the Bible was the most stolen book at all their centers, and for this reason, it was kept out of general circulation and reserved for reference. Another charge concerned Garrison’s claim that there were 251 Roman Catholic books and only sixty-nine Protestant books in the Agency’s index of titles. Though it took several months of records analysis, the USIA director was eventually able to write Garrison that this was, in fact, not true. Another accusation – and perhaps the most upsetting to Garrison – was over his purported treatment at the hands of the staff at the Library of Congress in Washington.⁹⁴ He recounted the interaction in detail.

In 1955, upon discovering that the index catalog for the USIA libraries was not open for public access, he went to Elton Trueblood and requested an official pass to access the book records. Having obtained permission, he was escorted to the files in the National Library by the librarian and her “four lady assistants.”⁹⁵ But when she found out he was counting the cards pertaining to Roman Catholic books and comparing them to Billy Graham’s file, “her attitude changed and she said that Graham was a new Minister and not entitled to have books in the U.S.I.S. Libraries, but that [Fulton] Sheen [a prominent Roman Catholic] was entitled to have his books in the U.S.I.S. Libraries.”⁹⁶ Then, as Garrison recounted it, he was covertly informed by one of the “lady assistants” that the librarian had removed and hidden a number of the Sheen index cards. He confronted the librarian. She returned the cards so he could count them. He then left.⁹⁷ The incident was still not over, though, as the librarian later accused Garrison of leaving the index cards in disarray, and since he was adamant that he had done no such thing, he paid \$100 for a lie detector test to prove his innocence. The librarian did not give in to his demand that she also undergo a lie detector test.⁹⁸

Ultimately, Garrison’s lengthy – and at times bizarre – private investigation achieved his desired result. He was nothing if not persistent. Soon after his initial threats of pickets and Congressional investigations, the USIA began a nearly year-long inquiry into the religious content of all its books.⁹⁹ The Agency’s Advisory Committee on Cultural Information conceded in 1959 that, while there was a “reasonable ratio” between Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish literature, Protestant books had “tended to emphasize the liberal view, with little or no attention to conservative viewpoints held by a considerable percentage of the American people.”¹⁰⁰ It cited its recent efforts to send conservative books overseas as well as the development of Carl F. Henry’s new bibliography and concluded by affirming its policy to present an accurate and fair representation of

⁹³“Roy Garrison’s Charges, February 4, 1959, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953–1967, Box 16, Religious Materials 1959, NA.

⁹⁴“Roy Garrison’s Charges,” NA.

⁹⁵“Roy Garrison’s Charges,” NA.

⁹⁶“Roy Garrison’s Charges,” NA.

⁹⁷“Roy Garrison’s Charges,” NA.

⁹⁸“Roy Garrison’s Charges,” NA.

⁹⁹“Checking Field Orders of Religious Books, February 17, 1959, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953–1967, Box 16, Religious Materials 1959, NA.

¹⁰⁰“Advisory Committee on Cultural Information: Twelfth Meeting – March 16 and 17, 1959,” RG 306, Subject Files, 1953–1967, Box 16, Religious Materials 1959, NA.

“religious life and thought in the United States.” It also noted that “judgements of demand in the field” when making book selection choices, “cannot be the sole factor governing the selection of publications on religion; such judgements must be related to the obligation of the Agency to tell the religious story of the American people truthfully and fairly.”¹⁰¹ Then, in what must have been a particularly difficult pill for its employees to swallow, the report thanked “Mr. Roy Garrison for bringing this matter to the attention of the Agency.”¹⁰²

Conservative Protestants had won a conventional victory in their ongoing conflict with the liberal Protestants within the USIA. Yet, the Agency had ways of conducting its propaganda campaigns which were less susceptible to outside interference. Despite its concessions to Garrison, by the end of the decade, the USIA was still an ardent promoter of a universalizing, inclusive spirituality. It simply turned to non-attributable print methods of carrying out that mission.

V. Non-Attributable Propaganda

In addition to its overt propaganda, the USIA also carried out operations which obfuscated the government’s role.¹⁰³ By staging religious events within the United States and arranging for favorable press coverage, the Agency was able to create tailored print material for its overseas libraries which appeared free from state involvement. On January 19, 1960, a message was sent to all USIA posts informing them of a new magazine article available for their branches. In Dallas, Texas, the year prior, an interreligious meeting had been held by the Dallas Council on World Affairs, with “speakers representing all major religions and ... countries.”¹⁰⁴ From the Agency’s perspective, this meeting was noteworthy because of its emphasis on “a common belief in God and democratic institutions which the United States shares with non-communist nations.” The message went on that the *Saturday Review* had published a special edition which contained the “principle [*sic*] addresses and conclusions of the conference,” and that the Agency had purchased 50,000 copies for use by the books program.¹⁰⁵

The “Dallas World Conference on Religion and Freedom” had been organized by former Assistant Secretary of State, George McGee (1912–2005), at “the behest of the Department of State.”¹⁰⁶ The proceedings had been reported on by the *Saturday Review*. McGee subsequently contacted the USIA with a proposal that it fund a special edition of the proceedings which would contain the major speeches given at the Conference.¹⁰⁷ Notable speakers were Burmese Ambassador to the United Nations, U Nu (1907–1995), Muhammed Zafrulla Kahn (1893–1985), a Pakistani member of the International Court of Justice at The Hague, and Charles Wesley Lowery (1905–1998), a well-known American anti-communist who had established the Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order (FRASCO) along with Eisenhower’s pastor, Edward L. R. Elson.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹“Advisory Committee on Cultural Information,” NA.

¹⁰²“Advisory Committee on Cultural Information,” NA.

¹⁰³Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 97–98.

¹⁰⁴“World Conference on Religion and Freedom,” January 19, 1960, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953–1967, Box 16, Religious Materials 1960, 1961, 1963, NA.

¹⁰⁵“World Conference on Religion and Freedom,” NA.

¹⁰⁶“Special Edition of Saturday Review Covering the Dallas World Conference on Religion,” [1959], RG 306, Book Development Files, 1954–1968, Box 4, Dallas World Conference on Religion, NA.

¹⁰⁷“Special Edition of Saturday Review,” NA.

¹⁰⁸“Dallas World Conference on Religion and Freedom; Mr. George McGee,” August 11, 1959, RG 306, Book Development Files, 1954–1968, Box 4, Dallas World Conference on Religion, NA.

Of the ten speech transcripts under consideration for publication, six represented “Buddhist, Hindu and Mohammedan [*sic*] religious thought.”¹⁰⁹ None of the ideas expressed by the speakers, wrote Ralph Block in an office memorandum, were “startlingly new in any sense, as might be expected. But the total sense of what was said ... has importance and significance in the fact that these men of different teachings met together in an effort to find a common denominator.”¹¹⁰ Block was confident that a publication promoting the Conference would be “seen as a gathering of Asians with men of the West, mostly of different religious faith ... in a profoundly American community,” and “could have a definite significance in Asian and African areas.”¹¹¹

In a speech entitled “The Assault of Materialism on Man,” Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands (1911–2004) expressed thanks that the days of criticizing and highlighting the differences between world religions were over.¹¹² The newfound sense of unity which allowed for cooperation in the common struggle against communism was grounded “on a solid foundation ... our common acknowledgment of the highness and glory of the Supreme Being to whom we owe our existence. It rests in Him who has created us and made us as we are, and in whom we are able to meet, recognize, respect and love each other as children of one Father.”¹¹³ Whatever differences the Conference attendees might have, the “Supreme Being” was the point in which ultimate unity was found; the “source and instrument of our very being.” Unity, moreover, was particularly important in the global struggle against communism, which Bernhard described as “atheistic, excluding God and denying Him.”¹¹⁴ All world religions, he continued, were univocal in their rejection of this dangerous ideology. Hinduism taught that “want of faith is the greatest sin.” Judaism proclaimed that “The fool says in his heart: There is no God ... they are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity.” Islam concurred that “one can go without God in the desert, but not return into the valley of the Nile,” and Confucianism posited that “when the gods depart, the devils enter.”¹¹⁵ Bernhard’s insistence that a universal core lay at the heart of all religions was followed by U Nu’s speech which attempted to find a solution to what he saw as the dilemma of living in the modern world.¹¹⁶ The West, he said, was faced with a paradox. Advances in science and technology had paved the way to agricultural development, improved medicine, and rapid means of travel. At the same time, though, the happiness and well-being of those living in the West seemed to be declining at a rapid pace. The “chief dilemma,” then, was finding a method of holding together the two seeming opposites – “technological progress and spiritual calm.”¹¹⁷ But daily business and hectic schedules made finding a synthesis increasingly difficult. Thus, the solution he offered was to look beyond the day-to-day tasks of modern life to the ultimate end of existence. Only by finding a quiet place to “contemplate on the over-all issues” would

¹⁰⁹“Dallas World Conference on Religion and Freedom,” NA.

¹¹⁰“Addresses at the Dallas ‘World Conference on Religion and Freedom,’” May 1, 1959, RG 306, Book Development Files, 1954–1968, Box 4, Dallas World Conference on Religion, NA.

¹¹¹“Addresses at the Dallas ‘World Conference,’” NA.

¹¹²“The Assault of Materialism on Man,” April 17, 1959, RG 306, Book Development Files, 1954–1968, Box 4, Dallas World Conference on Religion, NA.

¹¹³“The Assault of Materialism on Man,” NA.

¹¹⁴“The Assault of Materialism on Man,” NA.

¹¹⁵“The Assault of Materialism on Man,” NA.

¹¹⁶“The Dilemma of Man in an Age of Technology,” April 17, 1959, RG 306, Book Development Files, 1954–1968, Box 4, Dallas World Conference on Religion, NA.

¹¹⁷“The Dilemma of Man in an Age of Technology,” NA.

reconciliation be found. “The secret therefore to spiritual balance and contentment is: CONTEMPLATION. So,” he told his listeners, “take time off from your other pre-occupations to contemplate.” Another speech, “Sanatan Dharma – ‘The Eternal Law’ – In Modern Times,” given by Braj Kumar Nehru (1909–2001), declared that the “entire human race stands poised at one of the most fateful cross-roads in its history.”¹¹⁸ At such a crucial point, it was necessary for each religion to provide a relevant answer to the present crisis. For all their outward apparent differences and emphases, “it would be a pity” not to recognize the unifying aspect of all world religions, “for the lowest common denominator among the different religions might still contain the highest proportion of wisdom and relevance When one speaks, therefore, of some of the distinctive aspects of Hinduism, the distinction is more a matter of degree than of kind.”¹¹⁹

Charles Lowry, was the most prominent American whose speech made it into the *Saturday Time’s* special edition. In terms of content, it was essentially a reiteration of the themes already advanced by others and is briefly presented here only to demonstrate an American’s alignment with the beliefs and emphases of his global counterparts. A liberal Protestant with a long history of working closely with the Eisenhower Administration in the battle against communism, Lowry also found great commonality between the various religions of the world.¹²⁰ He believed that spiritual unity could be found in the individual and in ethics. As proof, he quoted a questionable translation of the Gospel According to Saint John to assert that the “true Light . . . enlighteneth every man coming into the world,” implying that the spirit of Christ lived within every human being whether they were aware or not.¹²¹ Thus, not only was broad consensus evident, for Lowry, in the “sacred books” of all humanity, it was also found within the individual self. Though he conceded that there were “enormous divergences,” he was adamant that all religions affirmed a basically anti-communist stance:

The world religions agree 1) on a spiritual view of the universe and human life; 2) that man is a sacredness – that is, he is innately of special and infinite worth, a moral and spiritual being who can never be understood and manipulated according to the behavioristic theories of Pavlov and Watson; and 3) the state is made for man and not the opposite, with the result that the total state is seen to contravene the law of God or eternal law of righteousness held by all great religions to be at the heart of the universe.¹²²

Religion provided the impetus for ethical action which was sorely needed in the ideological war against communism.

For the liberal Protestants of the USIA, spirituality unified rather than divided. These progressives eschewed what they saw as outdated statements of traditional Christianity in favor of a socially active and inclusive spirituality. To that end, the Agency actively

¹¹⁸“Sanatan Dharma – ‘The Eternal Law’ – In Modern Times,” April 18, 1959, RG 306, Book Development Files, 1954–1968, Box 4, Dallas World Conference on Religion, NA.

¹¹⁹“Sanatan Dharma,” NA.

¹²⁰For Lowry’s role with FRASCO see Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945–1960*, 278–289; For further biographical information see also Charles Wesley Lowry, “Moral Factors of National Strategy,” *Naval War College Review* 8, no. 7 (1955): 33–57.

¹²¹“Is There an Ethical Consensus of the World Religions?” April 18, 1959, RG 306, Book Development Files, 1954–1968, Box 4, Dallas World Conference on Religion, NA.

¹²²“Is There an Ethical Consensus of the World Religions?” NA.

promoted interreligious dialogue at conferences such as the “Dallas World Conference on Religion and Freedom” and the highly publicized meetings of FRASCO in 1954 and 1955. In both instances, the US Government was instrumental in promoting a form of inclusive religiosity which extended beyond Judeo-Christianity in response to the global nature of the Cold War.

VI. Conclusion

In June 1957, Edward L. R. Elson (1906–1993) met with King Saud of Saudi Arabia and handed him a letter from President Eisenhower.¹²³ Elson, the pastor of National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., where he had baptized Eisenhower five years before, was a co-founder of FRASCO and a long-time associate of Trueblood. His six-week tour of the Middle East, coming on the heels of the 1956 Suez Crisis, was seen by the administration as an opportunity to strengthen its relations with the volatile region.¹²⁴ The short letter to King Saud highlighted “the common bond of faith in God” which was shared by both Saudi Arabia and the United States and emphasized Eisenhower’s hope that Elson would be able to demonstrate the “spiritual life” of the nation. After all, the letter concluded, the United States had “deep respect ... for those who walk parallel paths to God.”¹²⁵ In addition to the brief letter to King Saud and Elson’s tour of the Middle East, Trueblood recorded messages celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed which were broadcast in Persia by the VOA, and Eisenhower and his wife, in an “unprecedented gesture,” attended a dedication ceremony for an Islamic Center in Washington, D.C.¹²⁶ All of these were part of a larger effort by Eisenhower, Elson, and others within the administration to align American spirituality with other world religions.

K. Healan Gaston has demonstrated that, as his presidency progressed, Eisenhower used the term “Judeo-Christian” less and less, eventually discarding it altogether in favor of “religion,” a “more inclusive term that accommodated Muslims and Buddhists.”¹²⁷ Through an examination of the USIA’s books program and the content of its religious literature, this essay has argued that postwar religious pluralism was, in part, a consequence of the Global Cold War which drove the United States Government to affirm other world faiths by way of its global propaganda. Bolstering the image of the United States as a deeply spiritual nation meant making its religious posture toward spiritual “others” one of affirmation, inclusion, and unity. I also contend that anti-communist religion was not the invention of a new form of religion nor was it amorphous or ambiguous.¹²⁸ Instead, the content of the Agency’s books program was directly in line with the previous literary efforts of liberal Protestants to promote mystical and psychological versions of spirituality. It also followed the postwar trend of liberal religious

¹²³Dwight D. Eisenhower, “To Ibn Abd Al-Aziz Saud,” in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, ed. L. Galambos and E.D. Van (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 273–274.

¹²⁴Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 291.

¹²⁵Eisenhower, “The Ibn Abd Al-Aziz Saud,” 274.

¹²⁶Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 291–292. For an account of Trueblood’s 1967 message to Persia see Paul C. Fine, “Cold War Crusaders: Paul Tillich’s Influence on Religious Anti-Communism,” *Journal for the History of Modern Theology/Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte* 32, no. 1 (2025).

¹²⁷Gaston, *Imagining Judeo Christian America*, 5–6.

¹²⁸I examine other theological contours of religious anti-communism in a forthcoming article in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*: “Made in the Image of God: A Reassessment of American Anti-Communist Religion.”

intellectuals who increasingly refused to denigrate other world religions or to view non-Judeo-Christian beliefs as mere “stepping-stones toward Christ.”¹²⁹ In summary, the exigencies of the Global Cold War drove the United States Government to take up the cause of religious pluralism as a matter of national security.

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¹²⁹Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 9–10.