From a Christian World Community to a Christian America: Ecumenical Protestant Internationalism as a Source of Christian Nationalist Renewal

Mark Edwards

Department of History, Political Economy, Geography, and Social Studies, Spring Arbor University, Spring Arbor, MI 49283, USA; mark.edwards@arbor.edu

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Abstract: Christian nationalism in the United States has neither been singular nor stable. The country has seen several Christian nationalist ventures come and go throughout its history. Historians are currently busy documenting the plurality of Christian nationalisms, understanding them more as deliberate projects rather than as components of a suprahistorical secularization process. This essay joins in that work. Its focus is the World War II and early Cold War era, one of the heydays of Christian nationalist enthusiasm in America—and the one that shaped our ongoing culture wars between "evangelical" conservatives and "godless" liberals. One forgotten and admittedly paradoxical pathway to wartime Christian nationalism was the world ecumenical movement ("ecumenical" here meaning intra-Protestant). Protestant ecumenism curated the transformation of 1920s and 1930s Christian internationalism into wartime Christian Americanism. They involved many political and intellectual elites along the way. In pioneering many of the geopolitical concerns of Cold War evangelicals, ecumenical Protestants aided and abetted the Christian conservative ascendancy that wields power even into the present.

Keywords: Christian nationalism; Protestantism; evangelicalism; ecumenical movement; Reinhold Niebuhr; Francis Miller; *Christianity and Crisis*

Was America founded as a Christian nation? Among historians, at least, the best approach to that question has been Robert Handy's *A Christian America* ([1971] 1984). David Sehat and Steven Green, among others, have more recently updated Handy. According to them, the nineteenth century witnessed the construction of a vibrant Protestant Christian "moral establishment" in society, culture, and politics. America then experienced a "second disestablishment" and "spiritual depression" between 1880 and 1940, when the nation's invented as well as actual religious heritage was challenged. Of course, Handy's story parallels traditional secularization narratives which posit a universal declension from an imagined golden age of Christian influence in public life. The problem with taking twentieth-century dechristianization seriously remains what to do with Christian nationalist renewal during World War II and the Cold War as explored by Kevin Kruse and others (including Handy in his second edition). Did the wartime revival suggest America was undergoing some sort of "reenchantment" or entering a "post-secular" age?[1]

A better conclusion might be that Christian nationalism in the United States has neither been singular nor stable. The country has seen several Christian nationalist ventures come and go throughout its history. Historians are currently busy documenting the plurality of Christian nationalisms, understanding

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1   (Handy 1984; Kruse 2015). On the idea of a nineteenth-century "moral establishment", see (Sehat 2010). See also (Green 2010).

them more as deliberate projects rather than as components of a suprahistorical secularization process. This essay joins in that work. Its focus is the World War II and early Cold War era, one of the heydays of Christian nationalist enthusiasm in America—and the one that shaped our ongoing culture wars between "evangelical" conservatives and "godless" liberals. One forgotten and admittedly paradoxical pathway to wartime Christian nationalism was the world ecumenical movement ("ecumenical" here meaning intra-Protestant). Protestant ecumenism curated the transformation of 1920s and 1930s Christian internationalism into wartime Christian Americanism. Ecumenical leaders involved many political and intellectual elites along the way. In pioneering many of the geopolitical concerns of Cold War evangelicals, ecumenical Protestants aided and abetted the Christian conservative ascendancy that wields power even into the present.[2]

The world ecumenical movement that helped to renew Christian American nationalism was rooted in the missionary crusades of the nineteenth century. Global Christian youth groups like the international Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), and the World's Student Christian Federation (WSCF), all headed by the missionary statesman John R. Mott, pursued "the evangelization of the world in this generation" before World War I. Veterans of those agencies joined Mott at the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, to launch two of the three flagships of twentieth-century Protestant ecumenism, the standing Life and Work and Faith and Order conferences. The third, The International Missionary Council (IMC) led by British missionary veteran J. H. Oldham, was begun in 1921. At the IMC's Jerusalem meeting in 1928, Oldman and Mott imagined an interfaith front against what they called the growing "worldwide spirit of secularism". However, the WSCF, Life and Work, and Faith and Order eventually closed ranks around an intra-Protestant approach to perceived existential religious and political threats, culminating in the creation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948.[3]

Ecumenical Protestants were not always wrong to believe that somebody was out to get them. There is ample evidence that America did experience something of a "religious depression" after World War I as charted by Handy, Green, and Sehat. There was remarkable Christian entrepreneurship during the 1920s, to be sure. There were also multiple successful challenges to the public authority of Protestant officials. So whither the Christian identity of the United States? Many theologically liberal Christians within the social gospel and ecumenism welcomed a new age of Protestant-secular cooperation. Conservative evangelicals, meanwhile, wondered if the Bible ever sanctioned such a thing as a "Christian nation". Nevertheless, Protestants as well as Catholics across the theological spectrum began to mobilize for spiritual reconquest during the 1930s—to take America "back" for god.[4]

Beginning in the Great Depression, church leaders partnered with American businessmen to advance what Kruse has termed "Christian libertarianism". Both groups were fearful of what they believed to be the state socialist trajectory of the New Deal, including its possible threats to the racial and gender hierarchy of the country. Convincing people that America had been founded upon god-ordained principles of capitalist morality, free markets, and limited government would be crucial to the success of their cause. Backed by corporate funding and mass advertising, theologically liberal and conservative Protestants flooded the public square with Christian nationalist mottos such as "In God We Trust" and "One Nation Under God"—which implied that true Americans pledged loyalty to god and not to the government. In doing so, they set fresh terms for an ongoing debate about the sanctity of American government and politics. The new Christian nationalists would assert Protestant

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[2]　In addition to the essays in this series, see (Verhoeven 2018) on Christian nationalism as a contested project from the beginning. See also the edited collection, based on a *Religions* Special Issue (Edwards 2017). On the culture wars, see (Hartman 2019). See (Thompson 2015), who also explores connections between Protestant ecumenism and Christian nationalism.

[3]　(Edwards 2015).

[4]　See (Smith 2003). For accounts of interwar mobilization by liberal and conservative Protestants, see, respectively, (Cherry 1995) and (Carpenter 1997).

supremacy over state and society in the guise of protecting religious freedom. The Christian nationalist endgame was always Christian self-determination, even if it often proved a self-defeating strategy.[5]

However, the Cold War era libertarian Christian nationalism of Billy Graham, Billy James Hargis or William F. Buckley, Jr. was first witnessed in America among young Christian internationalists with proclivities toward democratic socialism. The graduates of the YMCA, SVM, and WSCF during the 1920s began to establish themselves as up-and-comers in the new international social gospel crusade led by the IMC and Life and Work. Those persons included the promising theologian Henry Pitney Van Dusen (eventually president of Union Theological Seminary in New York), the Christian socialist pastors and professors Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr, and the student Christian organizer and political activist Francis Pickens Miller. Fearing the spread of secularism's sister "Humanism" in America, Mott first called those four along with a few dozen other men together to invent a new social Christianity. The resulting Theological Discussion Group would assume leadership positions throughout the country's premier home missions agency, the Federal Council of Churches (FCC). The FCC and Theological Discussion Group members, in turn, would join Mott and Oldham on the frontlines of Protestant internationalism during the 1930s.[6]

Francis Miller's role in shaping both Christian internationalism and Christian nationalism in America has been neglected. As Mott's chosen successor to the chairmanship of the WSCF, Miller was well-placed to give voice to a Protestant counterforce zealous for the integrity of the world church. Miller had served as a private during World War I and so was sensitive to the destructive power of nationalism. Like most of his ecumenical associates, he decided that the deification of the nation-state in fascism, communism, and Americanism was the result of collective unbelief or the "spirit of secularism". The emergence of "national religion" during the 1930s stemmed from what Miller called, in his contribution to the revealing titled ecumenical collaboration *The Church against the World* (Miller 1935), the "domestication of Protestantism". Miller's essay was a good reminder that Christian antisecularism has enjoyed a long and varied history beyond and well before the laments of contemporary evangelical culture warriors.[7]

To save the soul of Western Christianity, Miller and associates looked to give old words new meaning. Their love–hate relationship with the assumed face of secular humanism, John Dewey, began to shine forth during this time of Protestant reinvention. Miller, for one, roasted Dewey as typical of the totalitarian consequences of secularism. As Miller complained of Dewey's book, *A Common Faith* (1934), "the imagination which was supposed to possess universal qualities capable of inspiring flesh and blood men of all lands and races to enter into a common faith is the very stuff out of which religions like the Nazi religion are eventually compounded." Francis endorsed classical theological solutions to cultural catastrophe. "The primary task of the American Protestant church is to recreate among its members belief in the reality of Christendom," he concluded. The most obvious meaning of Christendom involved the enchantment of the North Atlantic Community that he and his wife Helen (a University of Chicago-trained political scientist and atheist) believed was in formation. Given the Millers' anticolonial concerns, which were shared by much of the ecumenical movement leadership, the next Christendom looked to a global realm of self-determination.[8]

Ecumenical Protestants set about effecting Francis's Christendom-beyond-borders at the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work at Oxford in 1937. Oxford was the culmination of decades of Anglo-American church collaboration and fellowship (over half of the delegates to Oxford were from Britain and America). It was also a beginning, as plans for the WCC quickly followed. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Oxford, however, was its antisecularist tone—given how much its

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[5]   On Christian libertarianism and the Christian nationalist revival, see (Kruse 2015). See also (Greene 2015).
[6]   (Warren 1997; Edwards 2012).
[7]   (Miller 1935, pp. 82, 96, 106–19). The "spirit of secularism" quotation is from Wilhelm Pauck, "The Crisis of Religion," in (Niebuhr et al. 1935, pp. 47, 64, 69).
[8]   (Miller 1935, pp. 111, 118).

membership accepted the authority of non-Christian forces like the social sciences. Fear of national and global religious reversal had dominated discussions at the Jerusalem IMC. With Oldham at the helm of Oxford, the conference theme became "the life and death struggle between Christian faith and the secular and pagan tendencies of our time". The Church and Community committee, of which Van Dusen was a member, reported, "human life is falling to pieces because it has tried to organize itself into unity on a secularistic and humanistic basis without any reference to the divine Will and Power above and beyond itself. Nor is there any hope in the ascription of sacred quality to nation or State or class." Reinhold Niebuhr's theological analysis of the "sins" of secular capitalist culture highlighted Oxford's commitment to weaponizing traditional doctrines in a brewing global culture war.[9]

Bold expressions of Christian supremacy were a way for ecumenical Protestants to assert their freedom from a disintegrating world order. Francis Miller again was not to be outdone. Starting in the "smallest units of society", he had written for the Theological Discussion Group in preparation for Oxford, "the World Christian Community extends outward until it binds in one fellowship of Faith, men and women of every class, race, nation and culture"—becoming by default the "soul of political and economic world society". Did Miller and friends believe a transnational Protestant fellowship possible? That was beside the point. Such declarations were one critical means to strengthen existing unities as well as look forward to new ones. Protestant ecumenism continued to traverse theological and geopolitical boundaries.[10]

Ecumenical spokespersons also invoked the "Christian World Community", which suggested that their faith was predestined to head any planet-rebuilding process. "For increasing numbers of Christians," Oxford attendees reported, "the Christian World Community which possesses no geographical locus, no tangible structure, no unity of language or uniformity of custom, is a reality of far greater meaning and authority than the innumerable local, racial, and national communities which have traditionally claimed human devotion." Many ecumenical Protestants during Oxford waxed wistful for a pre-nationalist past in order to manage a precarious present and future. The Anglo-American contingent accorded itself the luxury of imperial nostalgia. Yet their writings and discussions did point to a shared commitment to post-imperial world order. Christian internationalism was a geopolitically progressive force.[11]

The Oxford conference was equally significant for how it brought foreign policy elites into the fold. There had been an explosion of "nonpartisan" internationalist institutions in the years before, during, and following World War I. Oldham had long wanted to assemble some of the "best men" on behalf of Christian reconstruction, and that included his contacts in Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA) and the Round Table Group. The international relations professor, author, and administrator Lionel Curtis would not attend Oxford like his friend, the British Ambassador to the United States Lord Lothian, but he was like-minded in conviction that Christianity could and must be a globally integrative force. In *Civitas Dei: The Commonwealth of God* (1938), Curtis Christianized the Round Table's longstanding vision of a Commonwealth of Nations. A world of competing nationalisms had to progress toward a genuine internationalism, and Curtis believed that only the British and Americans together could lead the way. His Commonwealth was a fitting approximation and expansion of Oxford's vision of a Christian World Community. *Civitas Dei* would be re-titled *World Order* when it was published in the United States in 1939 to make it more palatable for the country's foreign policy secularists.[12]

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[9]   (Oldham 1937, vol. 10, pp. 68–69). On the Jerusalem conference, see (Hogg 1952, pp. 241, 246–48).
[10] Francis Pickens Miller, "The Church as World Community", Paper presented before the Theological Discussion Group, November 1936, 3, in The Theological Discussion Group Papers, Yale Divinity School Library (hereafter TDGP), Box 2, Folder 24.
[11] (Oldham 1937, p. 221).
[12] On Curtis's book, see (Lavin 1995).

    Life and Work's imprint on the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) was subtler. The CFR's leadership resisted the religious turn of previously de-Christianized intellectuals during World War II and Cold War eras. Still, fears of Nazi and Soviet dominations moved many CFR affiliates to think twice about the liberating potential of secularization. Several joined Oxford in rediscovering the geopolitical resources of Western Christianity. CFR researcher and Miller mentor Raymond Leslie Buell (also president of the Foreign Policy Association) became more outspoken in his faith, sparring with Niebuhr over theological matters and working with Van Dusen on ecumenical statements on world order. Buell confessed to the latter that "the two great ideological problems of the future are to bring back both Russia and Germany into the Christian tradition." Helen Miller continued her exit from the church. Nevertheless, in wartime writings, she also confessed that "North Atlantic civilization" and even "democratic procedure" itself had originated in an amalgam of Greek, Roman, and Christian cultures. Common enemies bound her and Francis ideologically even if they rarely shared a pew together.[13]

    CFR elders worked with the Millers in war planning but did not undergo such a conversion. The same could not be said of their premier foreign policy journal *Foreign Affairs.* The threat of another continental war had driven some contributors to demand that the "torch of human civilization" be relit with the ideas and values of Judeo-Christianity. A host of public intellectuals calling for re-Christianization began to frequent *Foreign Affairs* after 1934. Among its stronger antisecularist voices were radio personality Dorothy Thompson (called one of the most influential women in America), the Millers' friend Andre Siegfried, and the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain. While Catholic internationalists like Maritain and ecumenical Protestants generally refused institutional cooperation until the 1960s—there were notable exceptions like the National Conference on Christians and Jews (NCCJ), which had grown out of ecumenical Protestant circles—the Catholic church in Europe and America were reliable partners with the WCC in advancing antisecularism. For his part, Maritain joined the several American Protestants hoping to make theocracy great again. He charged that "the fundamental problem to which a Christian civilization must apply itself . . . is how to construct a Christian system of politics." *Foreign Affairs*'s boldest proponent for a revival of Western Christian civilization was the British macrohistorian Arnold J. Toynbee, a RIIA member, interventionist, and friend of Van Dusen and the ecumenical movement. Any "secular world order" such as Germany and Russia were then advancing would be temporary, Toynbee suggested. The "conversion of the modern world" was at hand. A new ethical world system would soon emerge in tandem with "the gradual triumph of Christianity" in the West and throughout the world. In giving writers like Toynbee a platform, *Foreign Affairs* became an occasional mouthpiece for the ecumenical movement.[14]

    Toynbee's optimism found at least one sympathizer among the CFR, John Foster Dulles. Though a Presbyterian since his youth, Dulles did not awaken to the political worth of religion until after Van Dusen (a longtime associate) had invited him to the Oxford conference. Even then, he was initially wary about mixing church and state. His first post-Oxford writing which Curtis wrote the Foreword to, *War, Peace and Change* (1939), offered a Wilsonian critique of nationalism as a form of bad faith. But Dulles at first did not extoll the world-making power of Protestantism as Curtis and others had. He kept his distance from the Millers' and Van Dusen's interventionism out of fear of political religion. "It is indeed difficult, if not impossible," Dulles complained of Century Club work, "to conduct a modern totalitarian war on any basis other than the objectives of God and of State are one." He warned FCC leaders that, in every "so-called 'Christian' country", churches inevitably become the "hand-maiden of national politics". Better to repent of the belief, common during wartime, that the "Nation" can be an "instrument of the Divine will". At the same time, Dulles also accepted leadership of the FCC's Just and Durable Peace campaign, which he boasted that the country's "Christian leaders" (namely FDR's

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[13] Raymond Leslie Buell, to Reinhold Niebuhr, June 14, 1943; Raymond Leslie Buell, to Henry Pitney Van Dusen, December 8, 1943, both in the Raymond Leslie Buell Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Box 11, Folder 13.
[14] (Benda 1934; Thompson 1940; Siegfried 1939; Maritain 1939; Toynbee 1939). On Catholic thought, see (Moyn 2015). On the NCCJ, see (Schultz 2011).

administration) all supported. Dulles would finally pivot to Christian Americanism as the possibilities of postwar Soviet expansion became evident. He then attempted to rally world ecumenical leaders behind Truman's and Eisenhower's holy war against "godless" international communism.[15]

In other words, Protestant ecumenism was a Christianizing force in geopolitics even as it itself was reshaped by the bipolar world climate of World War II and the Cold War. Dulles's journey from Christian internationalism to Christian nationalism, at least, followed in the footsteps of ecumenical leaders such as Miller and Van Dusen. Francis's Christian Americanism became more pronounced as World War II transitioned into the Cold War. Why did Miller sell out his vision of a nonaligned World Christian Community only to show off his jingoistic colors? Much of the American ecumenical community, of which Miller was a part, reluctantly reconciled themselves to Christian nationalism in the hopes of advancing progressive goals. The American Century, they believed, was a temporary evil to achieve a Christian World Community—a national and world order characterized by self-determination. Miller and other self-professed realists were naive about the coercive dynamics of American globalism for which they served as key Protestant apologists. Their fights for social justice nevertheless persisted well into the age of superpower rivalry.

The ecumenical transit from fomenting Christian internationalism to celebrating Christian America was seen in the interventionist journal *Christianity and Crisis*. The bi-monthly was launched in February 1941 by Miller, Van Dusen, and Niebuhr as an alternative to *The Christian Century*, which remained pacifist. *Christianity and Crisis* was part of the overall pressure group strategy worked out between Lothian, the Millers, and Van Dusen. As such, it should be considered alongside *Foreign Affairs* as a part of the history of public diplomacy (indeed, their audiences overlapped). Niebuhr quickly became the journal's editor and most prominent voice, as Van Dusen and Miller were otherwise preoccupied. Yet all three founders were critical in securing an audience for their publication among the CFR and other Washington insiders.[16]

In fact, it was Miller (not Niebuhr) who penned the journal's first article. His goal was to garner readers' support for lend-lease to Britain—no easy task given that many ecumenical Protestants had outlawed war in 1929. He couched his appeal in the very civilizational terms that he and friends had sworn off. According to Miller:

> For more than a thousand years this civilization of ours has been emerging around the shores of the North Atlantic Ocean. The fact which differentiates our civilization from all others is that here men organized states on the basis of consent rather than on the basis of force—here men made the dignity of human life the test of policy—here men won the right to freedom of speech and freedom of worship. Wherever its waters touched there free men lived.

Miller's memory of the making of the West was selective, but it was in keeping with his and Helen's faith that a North Atlantic Community was something worth fighting for. Francis made a similar appeal in *Foreign Affairs*, arguing that "the survival of the American way of life depends upon the survival of this civilization." His *Christianity and Crisis* salvo equated the defense of the Atlantic area with the "preservation of Western Christendom". He removed overt religious supplications for his CFR readers, however.[17]

Other *Christianity and Crisis* contributors echoed Miller's plea that American power be used to promote Protestant Christian supremacy. They were trying to foster situations of strength in which

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[15]   John Foster Dulles, to Henry Sloane Coffin, May 20, 1940; John Foster Dulles, to Walter Van Kirk, June 13, 1940; John Foster Dulles, Address, FCC Biennial Meeting, December 10, 1940, all in John Foster Dulles Papers, Public Policy Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University (hereafter JFDP), Box 19; John Foster Dulles, to Sumner Welles, August 19, 1942, in JFDP, Box 21. On Dulles's religious life and shifts, see (Toulouse 1985).

[16]   See (Hulsether 1999).

[17]   (Miller 1941a, 1941b). The author of "The Crisis" is not identified, which is why many scholars have assumed Niebuhr was the author. Given the similarities between the editorial and the Millers' writings in *Foreign Affairs* and in *The Giant of the Western World* (1930), it is evident that Francis was the main author.

Oxford's antisecularist ambitions could move forward globally. When writers called for the "rescue of Christendom", they meant both a geographical location but also a hope held by "all progressive peoples". The editors themselves followed older British ecumenicists in asserting that "Christian civilization" had birthed liberal freedom and government. It should be protected against "advancing secularism". The editors also gave opportunity for celebrity thinkers like Toynbee and theologian Paul Tillich to maintain that the secular would ultimately serve the sacred. Reiterating his earlier theory of Protestant secularism, Tillich observed that "without the participation of the secular spirit in the work of spiritual reconstruction nothing can be done."[18]

Christianity and Crisis brethren (most contributors were men) offered up recipes for re-Christianization as a precursor to support for civil and human rights. Contributors made no pretense to infallibility or righteous indignation. Led by Niebuhr's tragic sensibility, the journal regularly explored the theme of "Defending Justice Despite Our Own Injustice". Christians must rail against the evils of totalitarianism all the while aware of the "Unconscious Fascism" within their own societies. The socialist message of earlier ecumenical publications was muted in *Christianity and Crisis*, but the editors still called for social justice at home and abroad. Writers were outspoken in demanding minority rights, including an end to Jim Crow, support for refugees, and the closing of Japanese internment camps. They also adopted a fairly radical version of anticolonialism that rejected paternalism in favor of "full partnership" of subject peoples in their transition to independence. *Christianity and Crisis* had little practically in common with the Christian libertarianism that would prevail as the public face of American Protestantism in the second half of the twentieth century.[19]

Yet ecumenical persons and projects helped to create intellectual conditions in which Christian libertarianism could thrive. Francis, for one, looked upon postwar evangelical attacks on the welfare state with dismay. He and his spiritual opponents occupied the same Christian nationalist space, nonetheless. That became clear in a *Christianity and Crisis* piece that Miller wrote arguing again for the creation of a "real world-wide community of Christians". He asked readers to think of World War II as an "opportunity" to finish what the evangelical and missionary movements of the nineteenth century had started: Namely, the Christianization of the West. Still, Miller believed America needed to play a central role in that endeavor. As he explained, "the destiny of America is not the destiny of a race, or of a class, or of a military imperialism. . . . Our destiny is to create an order within the framework of which all men everywhere can through service to God realize freedom and security for themselves and for their children. That is America's God-given mission." Miller believed the Christian American way of life could be championed without falling into hubris or imperialism. He remained committed to the spread of social rights within and beyond his North Atlantic community. Yet he also confessed that the ends of America and those of the kingdom of god were symbiotic. Christian nationalism and internationalism were no longer binaries for Miller, if they ever had been.[20]

Niebuhr agreed. The venerable critic of personal and group pride backed his way into Christian Americanism. Niebuhr never became a member of the CFR, but his Christianized version of realistic Wilsonianism endeared him to several of its members. In "Anglo-Saxon Destiny and Responsibility" (Niebuhr 1943), Niebuhr made his clearest pitch for Anglo-American union in service of an ideal of world community. "It would serve no good purpose to try to compare the special destiny of the Anglo-Saxon peoples with that of Israel in olden times," he observed. "Nevertheless only those who have no sense of the profundities of history would deny that various nations and classes, various social groups and races are at various times placed in such a position that a special measure of the divine mission in history falls upon them. In that sense God has chosen us in this fateful period of world history." Niebuhr spent most of his time and energy in the article decrying the dangers of

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18   (Cairns 1941; Baillie 1942; The Archbishop of Canterbury 2014; Van Dusen 1942; Niebuhr 1944a; Toynbee 1947; Tillich 1942).
19   (Niebuhr 1942; Hough 1941; Parsons 1942; Reid 1942; Wrong 1944; Bates 1942). See (Zubovich 2018).
20   (Miller 1942a, 1942b).

national self-righteousness. But, much like Miller, he also accepted that America had been uniquely blessed. Neither wanted the United States to go it alone, Niebuhr favoring Anglo-American alliance and Miller wanting a more expansive North Atlantic partnership. Whatever multilateral arrangement developed during the war, however, had to be Christian. Only as Christianity stayed in "sufficiently close relation to the national life" could a people work toward virtuous ends. In *Christianity and Crisis*, thanks especially to Miller and Niebuhr, the American Century found its Christian dress.[21]

Christian nationalists like Miller were vital to setting one of the cornerstones of wartime Christian nationalism: That democratic government was derived from Christian tradition and could not survive without it. The notion that Christianity and republican government were indispensable allies dated back to the revolutionary era in North America, yet it was repurposed in the twentieth century to serve antisecularist, counter-totalitarian causes. "Democracy is not Christianity," Miller wrote, "but it depends upon Christianity. Tendencies toward democratic forms of government will appear wherever the Christian faith is a living reality in the hearts of people. Where the Christian faith disappears, the democratic faith will also disappear and in due course democratic institutions will follow suit." In Miller's rush to define America's world mission, he left Dewey behind.[22]

Miller was far from the only Protestant booster to reinvent the Christian origins of democracy. His ecumenical community quickly abandoned talk of Christendom and Christian World Community when stealing democratic rhetoric back from secularists. In the long run, expressions of Christian democracy proved vital to social criticism by civil and human rights activists.[23] But in the meantime, ecumenical church leaders reinforced the notion that democracy was an ideology to be adhered to rather than a process to be respected.

FDR's "Arsenal of Democracy" had initially generated a lot of dissent, notably from pacifist Christian communities like the *Christian Century.* Yet democratic faith also advanced inter-Christian and interfaith work toward national unity. Catholic and Protestant thinkers alike agreed with Vice-President Henry Wallace that "democracy is the only true political expression of Christianity." They believed that exporting democracy was a worthy aim yet doubted that it could be done on an emaciated foundation of scientific secularism. Maritain, for one, prophesied that the "new Christendom" would be a democracy. Henry Sloane Coffin, the venerable New York pastor and past president of Union Theological Seminary, explained that the democratic way of life rested upon "faith in the capacities of the common man, faith in the self-evidencing power of truth and righteousness, [and] faith in a just Lord of the universe who has fashioned and orders it that men and nations can live together satisfactorily only in brotherhood." Wartime Christian democracy broke with the aspirations of interwar participatory democrats for free discussion. Maritain and company did not find their sentiments at all incompatible with a progressive political platform, however.[24]

The most consistent socialist within *Christianity and Crisis*, the theologian John Coleman Bennett, was also one of its strongest voices for Christian democracy. Admitting the emergence of a "frankly pagan civilization" in America and Europe, Bennett tried to convince readers that "the Christian conception of the human situation seems to fit exactly the needs of democracy." Bennett sided with Catholics in arguing that one of the hallmarks of Western democracy, the "limitation of political power", was the brainchild of medieval theocracy (not Athens) which had kept rulers in check by threats of eternal punishment. Bennett advanced a model for democracy which presupposed substantial Christian interference in public and private life. As adherents to standards that transcended state prerogatives, Bennett concluded that Christians had two supreme tasks: To keep politicians "under the judgment of God" and to bolster respect for "the dignity of all persons regardless of race or class".[25]

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21 (Niebuhr 1943).
22 (Miller 1942b, p. 6). On the tradition of "Christian republicanism," see (Matthew Bowman 2018).
23 (Zubovich).
24 (Wallace 1942, pp. 12, 46; Maritain 1970; Coffin 1940).
25 (Bennett 1940, 1941, 1943).

Christianity and Crisis followed Bennett in outspoken support of Christian democracy. Contributors chided Dewey for not recognizing the "Christian Sources of Democracy". At times, the journal joined in the tri-faith moment of the 1940s and 1950s. Failing to achieve "ecclesiastical unity", one writer noted, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders might still find moral power together in preaching that "religion and religion only can make democracy safe in a crucial time by undergirding it with spiritual sanctions." "Responsible freedom", as Miller often called it, depended upon American awareness of the "dependence of their political institutions and procedures upon the existence of a living Christian culture at the heart of their national life". Miller criticized the secularist privileges resulting from separating church and state. He called upon public schools to teach Christian anthropology and morality. His *Christianity and Crisis* wedded religious to political consensus in ways that undercut participatory democrats' pleas for inclusive, open dialogue.[26]

Reinhold Niebuhr offered the most famous statement on the need for "Judeo-Christian" over Deweyan democracy in *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (1944). More than most ecumenical Protestants, Niebuhr embraced the new ethos of Judeo-Christianity promoted by interfaith groups like the NCCJ. The term Judeo-Christian presupposed Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant unity over and against all forms of irreligion. It was also a reflection of increasing demographic diversity and the search for a post-Protestant religious source of cultural unity. Like Bennett, Niebuhr believed democratic revitalization lay in an understanding of human nature that mediated between sentimentalism and pessimism. A new "religious culture" was needed—one which recognized how man's self-transcendence over natural processes made him both creative and destructive. Niebuhr dismissed Dewey's empirical naturalism as a "covert religion" futilely trying to find fulfillment in the historical process itself. Judeo-Christian political morality instead encouraged greater realizations of social justice without believing they could ever become fully actualized. Democracy, Niebuhr suggested, was the most suitable form of government because it allowed for necessary reassessment, experimentation, and self-criticism. It could restrain oligarchy without itself falling victim to tyrannical rule. While Niebuhr never explicitly endorsed a Christian foundation for democracy, nor did he demonstrate much sympathy for non-Christian or pluralist versions of democratic governance. Niebuhr's ambivalence left his work open to appropriation by libertarian Christian nationalists.[27]

Ecumenical Protestants followed Miller, Niebuhr, and *Christianity and Crisis* in advancing Christian nationalism and Christian democracy during the early Cold War. They brought together the FCC with other home missionary organizations to form the supersized National Council of Churches (NCC) in 1950. With the Christian libertarian banner, "This Nation Under God", literally hanging over their inaugural gathering, the NCC boasted that the "American way of life" was inseparable from Christian faith. American and world church leaders, politicians, and ambassadors united in challenging their audience of four thousand to stand aligned against "atheism", "secular materialism", and other alien worldviews. "We dare to believe," announced Hermann Morse, a chief NCC architect and veteran Christian nationalist, "that a Christian and a Protestant America can be the strongest force in the world against the new and the old paganisms that are contending for the mastery of the world." Morse's declaration was seconded by the NCC's first president. "Together," he concluded, "we shall move forward with renewed resolve and great hope in the building of a Christian America in a Christian world."[28]

The addition of "Christian world" pointed to key differences between ecumenical and evangelical versions of Christian nationalism. Those disjunctions would be lost as the latter subsumed the former. Led by the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), Billy Graham, *Christianity Today*, and groups like Campus Crusade for Christ, the so-called new evangelicals (to distinguish themselves from their

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[26] (Leiper 1943; Robbins 1942; Miller 1947).
[27] (Niebuhr 1944b, vol. xiii, pp. 10, 32, 71, 78). See (Gaston 2019).
[28] (Barstow 1951; Morse 1951; Sherrill 1951).

fundamentalist mentors) looked to triumph over their ecumenical foes. In the years ahead, new evangelicals abandoned cultural isolation and stressed instead that the nation had been theirs all along. They hoped Christian nationalism would be their ticket into the halls of political, financial, and mass cultural power. However, their numbers alone were never enough to explain their extraordinary successes in the second half of the twentieth century. New evangelicals depended upon support from the NCC churches, particularly from the latter's Republican-voting majority with an inclination toward Christian libertarianism.[29]

Henry Luce, the media mogul, Christian Republican, and New Deal critic became one of the new evangelicals' most important boosters from within Protestant ecumenism. Luce was much more willing to support Christian nationalism, especially after the possibilities of Soviet expansion became clear. Following World War II, he became an active member of the New York-based Layman's Movement for a Christian World, an ecumenical project (with NCC support) which aimed at the "building of Christianity into the every-day life of the world". The Layman's Movement reflected the "tri-faith" sensibilities and nonsectarian appeals to "spiritual values" of the International Council on Religious Education that curated it. Its members tended to be businessmen, lawyers, and bankers (including J. C. Penny and Alfred H. Williams, President of the Federal Reserve Bank) looking to roll back what they saw as the creeping socialism of Rooseveltan liberalism. Ecumenical Protestants needed to continue to make real the "Church Universal", Luce told one dinner meeting of Gotham's greatest, but they must also stem the tide of "secularism" in America. "We face a race between Christianity overcoming secularism or Christianity becoming secularized," he warned. The financially chosen needed to invest their wealth in "Christianizing our society". Though not completely shunning celebrity liberal theologians like Niebuhr and Tillich, Luce's media empire tempered its support for the NCC and instead threw in with Billy Graham as the best hope for achieving Christian America. The secularism in his American Century was forgotten as Luce touted Christian and free market revitalization as one in the same aim.[30]

Christian libertarianism and Christian Americanism grew together under the guardianship of Graham's evangelicals. Backed by Luce and a heavenly host of corporate leaders, they would take over the national Christianization program of NCC churches. Evangelicals would develop a reciprocal relationship with the federal government, pledging their loyalty while receiving numerous financial and social privileges. Their antistatist rendition of Christian Americanism continues to yield political influence even into the present.[31] All that is not to say evangelicals stole Christian nationalism away from their ecumenical rivals in any direct or immediate way. Nor was the critical edge of Christian nationalism that ecumenical Protestants had wanted to wield—the ability to stand above their country and judge it for failing to live up to Christian standards—entirely absent within postwar evangelicalism. Yet Christian patriotism, no matter how critical, was easily coopted by the wartime state.

The transition from Christian internationalism to Christian nationalism, from a Christian World Community to Christian America, was especially costly to progressive Christianity. In time, ecumenical quests for expanding civil rights at home and human rights abroad would be attacked by conservatives as un-American and un-Christian. Francis Miller, for one, would complain constantly to friends during the 1950s about libertarian Christian complaints against the NCC and WCC for being too big, secular, and political. He would challenge Graham after one rally to take a stronger stand against

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[29] See (Sutton 2014). I follow Sutton in defining fundamentalism as an interdenominational subset of conservative evangelicalism held together by shared readings of the end times. The new evangelicalism downplayed the eschatological obsessions of their predecessors. However, as Sutton maintains, Cold War evangelicalism actually thrived because of their "politics of apocalypse". See also (Lahr 2007).

[30] John Foster Dulles, to Henry Luce, April 7, 1944; Henry Luce, to Robert Miles, March 23, 1951, both in the Henry Luce Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Box 34, Folder 11; Weyman C. Huckabee, to Henry Luce, March 6, 1946, in HLP, Box 42, Folder 1. A transcript of Luce's address can be found in Weyman Huckabee, to Kipp Finch, December 5, 1949, in HLP, Box 42, Folder 1.

[31] On evangelicals and the state after World War II, see (Schaeffer 2012). On corporate support for conservative Christianity, see (Moreton 2009; Gloege 2015; Grem 2016; Hummel 2019).

segregation. Like Niebuhr, he would be deeply disappointed by the globe-trotting evangelist's special relationship with Richard Nixon. Graham and followers, in turn, would revive the ecumenical slogan "Judeo-Christian" during the 1970s and redeploy it in service of the conservative Christian nationalism of the Reagan, Bush, and Trump administrations.[32]

Ecumenical Protestant contributions to Christian American renewal remind us of the dynamic constructed, inventive nature of all nationalisms.[33] The "Christian" identity of America was never an inherent or assumed possession. It was relative to a myriad of contested theocratic projects from the beginning. Sometimes the Christian nationalist adventures were ironic, as was the case with twentieth-century ecumenical Protestantism. What had started as a campaign for a more peaceful and just—and Protestant—world order would end in support of the patriotic correctness of the postwar conservative movement. Even at the time, some ecumenical Protestants stood in horror at their own creation, worrying that democracy had become a false "religion", an idol demanding uncritical worship. "The best minds and stoutest hearts of our time are putting into the struggle for a democratic world order something akin to the evangelistic fervor of vital Christianity without any conscious support of evangelical faith," one worried. The World Christian Community had come to serve the nationalist cause after all.[34] Yet neither ecumenical nor evangelical expressions of Christian nationalism have been able to counter what is arguably one of the most secular countries in the world today.[35]

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[32] (Hummel 2017).
[33] (Green 2015).
[34] (Johnson 1945; Niebuhr 1947).
[35] (Kidd 2018).

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