Article

The Protestant Search for 'the Universal Christian Community' between Decolonization and Communism †

Gene Zubovich

John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics, Washington University in St. Louis, 1 Brookings Dr, St. Louis, MO 63130, USA; gzubovich@wustl.edu; Tel.: +1-314-935-8328

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Abstract: This article investigates the history of American Protestant thought about peoples living beyond the North Atlantic West, in Asia in particular, from 1900 to the 1960s. It argues that Protestant thought about the Global South was marked by a tension between universalism and particularism. Protestants believed that their religion was universal because its core insights about the world were meant for everyone. At the same time, Protestant intellectuals were attentive to the demands of their coreligionists abroad, who argued that decolonization should herald a greater appreciation for national differences. The article traces three distinct stages of Protestant attempts to resolve these tensions; support for imperialism in the early twentieth century, then for human rights at mid-century, and finally for pluralism in the 1960s. In doing so, it shows that the specter of the Soviet Union intensified the Protestant appreciation of national differences and ultimately led to the disavowal of Protestant universalism.

1. Introduction

In 1900, evangelist John R. Mott called for missionaries to 'give all men an adequate opportunity to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and to become His real disciples' ([1], p. 3). Mott's clarion call expressed the optimism of his fellow Protestants that they could reach every corner of the world with their message 'in this generation'. This massive undertaking would be one step in the ultimate goal of Christianity, which Mott described as 'a means to the mighty and inspiring object of enthroning Christ in individual life, in family life, in social life, in national life, in international relations, in every relationship of mankind' ([1], p. 16).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Protestant leaders insisted that Protestant values could become part of a universal system of international relations. In articulating these global ambitions, they had to present their system in such a way that, by their standards, it could make do with the range of racial, religious, and cultural diversity of the world. By claiming that their religion was universal, Protestant intellectuals were forced to reinvent Christianity as a worldview that would find common ground among all the peoples of the world. This article argues that, ultimately, Mott's project was disavowed by American Protestants because they were unable to meaningfully explain to themselves why everyone should embrace Protestant values as decolonization and demands for the recognition of national differences were gaining momentum in the mid-twentieth century. Although they fell

well short of making Protestantism acceptable to the whole world, that process nonetheless pushed Protestant intellectuals to become less tribal, to embrace human rights and decolonization, and to ultimately espouse a more pluralistic understanding of international relations.[1]

Protestant intellectuals developed a Protestant internationalism not only in competition with other religious traditions but also in opposition to political systems they viewed as 'secular'.[2] The clash between Protestant universalism and the particular demands of Protestants in the Global South took place in what Protestant intellectuals saw as a competition with socialism, whose banner would be taken up by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) following World War I (WWI). Rather than simply being anti-communist, Protestant intellectuals were deeply enmeshed with this secular state and its ideology, which they condemned and praised, fought and mimicked. This article argues that Protestant intellectuals worked out their conflicting ideological instincts about their religion and its relationship to ethno-nationalism through their relationship with the Soviet Union and other communist nations [7].

This article focuses on the ecumenical 'Protestant establishment', those non-fundamentalist elites in the 'mainline' denominations who, like Mott, held a great deal of sway in American religious and political life for the first half of the twentieth century.[3] In doing so, it offers a corrective to the literature on Cold War Christian nationalism in the United States, which shows that the United States was portrayed as a religious nation in order to emphasize the country's superiority over its irreligious enemy [11–13]. If the bipolar Christian nationalism of Billy Graham and John Foster Dulles was premised on their belief in irreconcilable differences between a Judeo-Christian America and an atheistic Soviet Union, Protestant internationalists held a multipolar view of international affairs and saw the Cold War as a conflict between people of the same faith, not between religion and irreligion. Their experiences were shaped by global institutions that put them in contact with fellow Christians behind the 'iron' and 'bamboo' curtains, who saw no conflict between communism and Christianity. From the vantage point of Protestant internationalists, who viewed the diversity of their religion rather than the threat of atheism as their great challenge, one can see that Protestant attempts to reckon with the Soviet Union began almost as soon as the Soviet Union did—far earlier than most works on Cold War nationalism acknowledge. Stepping back from Cold War era religious mobilization into a longer chronological frame also helps explain why the hold of the Cold War and Christian nationalism over the American imagination came to such a sudden end in the 'Sixties'.

The article begins by surveying the development of an international Protestant politics in the early twentieth century, as leaders from the North Atlantic West created international institutions that included more and more leaders from the Global South. It then looks at how the existence of a socialist alternative to Protestant internationalism pushed some religious leaders to act more forcefully against imperialism and racism, two of the key concerns of Asian leaders. The article

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1. This was not the first time that Protestants imagined their religion as a political system. During the European reformation, Protestantism became a state religion in a number of German principalities. See [2]. In British North America, European exiles created a Puritan commonwealth on the principles of a particular dissenting branch of Protestantism. See [3]. While these nation-building projects had come and gone over the centuries, what stood out about the twentieth century was the Protestant attempt to transcend national boundaries and, instead, to formulate an international Protestant politics.

2. Recent works on 'secularism' have emphasized criticism of the concept's historical construction. In particular, some scholars have emphasized secularism's Protestant roots. This 'Protestant secularism', they argue, has an embedded bias against religions that emphasize practice and ritual, like Catholicism and Islam. Whether or not Protestant assumptions were embedded in notions of the secular in the United States, Protestant intellectuals continued to self-consciously define themselves in relation to a domestic and international 'secularism'. For an overview of the 'Protestant secularism' literature, see [4]. On the origins of an oppositional relationship between Protestant internationalism and secularism, see [5,6].

3. This article focuses on those intellectuals and leaders in positions of power in ecumenical Protestant organizations centered on the Federal (after 1950, National) Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. William R. Hutchison refers to this group as 'the Protestant Establishment', whose membership mostly came from the 'mainline; denominations, including the Northern Methodists, Northern Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Disciples of Christ, American Baptists, and Evangelical Lutherans. See [8]. Although Mott's emphasis on evangelization would be taken up self-consciously by the neo-fundamentalists of the 1940s, the institutions he helped create were firmly in the hands of the Protestant establishment. On the neo-fundamentalists, see ([9], pp. 15–35). On the invention of the Protestant 'mainline', see [10].

concludes by showing how the questions of race and colonialism so drastically transformed Protestant internationalism by the 1960s that it bore little resemblance to Mott's original enthusiasm for evangelization. Despite the abandonment of Mott's project of converting the world, the search for a yet more universal Protestantism moved the Protestant establishment toward ideas and practices that would remake America's relationship to the world.

2. Universal or Indigenous? The Ambiguity of Protestant Internationalism

In 1900, the same year that Mott called for the "evangelization of the world in this generation," hundreds of thousands of people gathered together in New York City to celebrate a century of missionary work. Called the 'Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions', it was attended by past, present, and future presidents, including William McKinley, Benjamin Harrison, and Teddy Roosevelt, along with dignitaries from the North Atlantic West [14]. Missionaries from around the world were in attendance. At Carnegie Hall, the white missionaries were seated together: 'To the left of the main isle were placed delegates from Japan, Korea, Oceanica, the West Indies, China, Central America, Mexico, and South America. To the right were Siam, India, Ceylon, Burma, Assam, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, North and South America, Persia, Arabia, and Africa.' [15]. For several weeks in New York, Protestant clergy and laity boasted about the worldwide reach their missionaries had created over the previous century, often with the help of imperialism. 'When the American flag shook out its starry folds at Santiago and Manila, the question of sovereignty, and also of responsibility, was settled', one speaker declared to thunderous applause. 'For better or for worse, we are in for it. The white man's burden is on us. The Lord give us straightness of shoulder and stiffness of backbone to bear it' [16].

A decade later Mott brought together many of the same missionaries in Edinburgh, Scotland, to continue the negotiations that took place in New York. Comity agreements, which divided up the world between Protestant denominations, were formalized at Edinburgh and a permanent International Missionary Council was created soon after the 1910 meeting to ensure continued cooperation between Protestants worldwide. Again, this was an overwhelmingly Euro-American affair with only a few exceptions [17].

In other ways, Edinburgh was a turning point. Although the meeting was dominated by North American and European representatives,[4] it was the first major international missionary gathering to articulate the idea that the non-Western religions, including Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism, were not enemies of Christianity and that non-Western Christians would be partners in a global Christian movement ([17], pp. 205–47).

With the gradual inclusion of non-western Christians, some Protestants began to rethink their earlier endorsement of imperialism. When the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900 and the Amritsar protests in India in 1919 were put down by European armies, missionaries largely sympathized with the colonial powers. But the rebellions did make them increasingly attentive to the twentieth century reality that colonial peoples would not stomach imperialism for much longer.

With the post-WWI trouble in Europe, and especially with the rise of communism and fascism in the interwar era, ecumenical Protestants began reconceiving their religion as a supranational political force that provided a necessary antidote to the petty nationalisms and materialism they believed were rising across the world [5,6,18–20]. They called for unity among Protestants, at home and abroad, at this crucial hour. As Theodore Trost argues, 'for many leaders...the impulse toward church union was anchored not so much in ecclesiology or church doctrine as in the sense of responsibility for a world torn asunder by war during the first half of the twentieth century' ([21], p. 2). Bringing Protestants from across the world together would be a political act in opposition to the forces tearing it apart.

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[4] Since the conference was a gathering of missionaries and representation was based on the money they devoted to missionary work, the 1215 delegates were comprised of 509 British missionaries, 491 North Americans, 169 continental Europeans, and 27 South African and Australians. Only 19 were not of European descent.

By the time the International Missionary Council met in Jerusalem in 1928, the self-conscious attempt to create a universal Protestant body out of a diversity of races and cultures was well underway. The meeting site itself stood as a symbol of the new emphasis on diversity, conceived by the conveners as a meeting point between East and West. At Edinburgh in 1910, only 10 of the 1356 delegates came from outside the North Atlantic West. At Jerusalem in 1928, conveners made sure that half of the total delegates came from non-Western nations. As Michael G. Thompson argues, 'the [International Missionary Council] implemented a kind of early affirmative action quota system', which resulted in 'the first truly representative global assembly of Christians in the long history of the Church' ([19], p. 109).

Four years later, philosopher William Ernest Hocking took stock of the missionary situation in East Asia. The investigation in 1932 was prompted by the Great Depression, which forced missionary groups to tighten their belts. He reported on the ineffectiveness of missionaries, who needed more and better education. The calls for greater efficiency in Hocking's report, however, were obscured by the withering critiques of the old ideology of missions. No longer can imperialism be supported, Hocking insisted, in Asian nations where mass movements protested against Western rule. He reassured his readers that the 1900 Boxer rebellion had been 'the last serious act of... resistance' against 'the flood of international idea and practice'. Now, 'newer nationalism is inclusive' and takes the best of Western ideas 'as its own' ([22], p. 22). Partly because of the widespread anti-Western sentiment and partly because the new nationalism was not as threatening to the West, Christian institutions should be handed over to locals as quickly as possible, he advised. Social development—building schools, hospitals, orphanages—should be emphasized over conversion. And common ground must be found between Christianity and other world religions.

The problem, as Hocking saw it, ran deeper than the tarnishing of Christianity because of its close association with colonialism. Spreading Christianity could itself be a form of cultural imperialism because the religion is so embedded in a distinctly Euro-American history and culture. Therefore, he came to believe that Christianity, in its current state, could not be exported to Asia. As read by many admirers and critics, Hocking indicted the whole missionary project as hopelessly parochial and a barrier to the search for the unity of mankind [23]. But what to do about the problem of a religion rooted in 'Western' culture that claimed it was for everybody was less than clear. According to Hocking, the Protestant church had done more than any other group to create 'the universal Christian community', which is now functioning 'as preparation for world unity in civilization'. The philosopher argued that:

> The world must eventually become a moral unity: to this end, it was necessary that the apparent localism of Christianity should be broken down. It must not be thought of as solely the religion of the West. It was because Christianity is *not* western, but universally human, that it must be brought back to the Orient and made at home there. ([22], p. 8)

Hocking's criticism moved in two contradictory directions. First, he wanted push forward the political project of Protestant universalism to find a stripped-down Christian core and use it to bind together all nations in a way that no other faith could do. Second, he wanted missionaries to respect cultural differences and to indigenize the Christian faith, which implied pluralism and a weakening of the ties that bind nations together [24–32].

These two parallel commitments of universalism and national particularity went unreconciled in Hocking's thought. Indeed, they were irreconcilable. Should Protestant Christianity be made indigenous, making it more Chinese and Japanese, or should it be made more universal by stripping away its Western particularities to get at a core universal message? Was 'the apparent localism of Christianity' to 'be broken down' or was Christianity to be 'made at home' in the Orient? This was the central, unresolved ambiguity in the Protestant international project.

Hocking did not recognize the tension between the universal and the indigenous in his thought. He emphasized instead that both positions meant that Protestants should renounce cultural imperialism. As a practical matter, missionaries should talk less and listen more, they should respect

and cooperate with independence movements, and they should forfeit some of their institutional power so that non-Western Christians could have more of it. The 1932 Hocking report was, to date, the most important attempt to sever the missions project from its historical role of justifying and supporting Western imperialism. Would the emergence of the post-colonial nation-state in East Asia help or hinder 'world unity in civilization'? Hocking did not tell us.

3. Protestant Internationalism as an Alternative to Socialism

The great competitor of Protestant internationalism for much of the twentieth century was socialist internationalism. As Samuel Moyn argues, by the 1930s Protestant internationalists positioned themselves in relation to 'a Soviet enemy that claimed for itself the mantle of secularism'. ([18], p. 24). The Soviet Union was promoting the cause of national independence throughout the world in a more vociferous and sustained way than Protestant internationalists were doing, so too did Soviet intellectuals posit a universal system of values that purported to solve the political crises of the era. Through the Third International, activists in China, colonial Southeast Asia and Africa, Latin America, and India came to envision the universal system of socialism as the best means for attaining national independence and developing their young nations [33]. At a time when the United States championed white supremacy and the European powers swapped colonies between themselves, socialist internationalism found many sympathetic ears in the Global South. American missionaries in Asia noted this development and sent reports back home about the popularity of socialism abroad.

While the ur-theorist of socialism, Karl Marx, wrote about imperialism as a force that would thrust the backwards peoples of Asia into the modern world, Lenin instrumentalized anti-imperialism in his revolutionary struggle in Russia. During WWI and the civil war that followed, he renounced territorial concessions, called for national independence for colonized nations, and granted cultural autonomy to many nationalities in the former Russian Empire. According to Francine Hirsch, Soviet experts pursued a policy of 'double assimilation' within the USSR, which encouraged people to become Soviet by becoming members of an ethno-nationality ([34], p. 14). Lenin created new republics, like the Belarussian and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics, which would have some linguistic and cultural autonomy, while remaining part of the Soviet Union's political community. This was a compromise reached after a debate between rival factions in the Bolshevik party. Some members of the party had maintained, according to Terry Martin, that 'once the proletariat had seized power... national self-determination became irrelevant' ([35], p. 2). The simultaneous promotion of nationality and Soviet unity was a compromise between the universalist ambitions of Soviet socialism and a recognition of the vigor of nationalism among certain ethnic communities during World War I. 'In an effort to reconcile their anti-imperialist position with their strong desire to hold on to all of the lands of the former Russian Empire,' Hirsch writes, 'the Bolsheviks integrated the national idea into the administrative-territorial structure of the new Soviet Union' ([34], p. 5).

The challenge for Protestant intellectuals was not simply that there was a competing universalist ideology that promised to solve the same problems of colonialism and international disorder. Ecumenical Protestant leaders were forced to deal with attacks from the right that used the USSR as a reference point. Similarly, many Protestant intellectuals were influenced by the social gospel and their program for reform was described as 'communistic' by American conservatives [36–42]. Socialism also claimed to be secular and scientific, opposed to what Soviet leaders saw as the superstition of religious leaders. Many of the ecumenical Protestant intellectuals likewise saw themselves as invested in science against their anti-Darwinian fundamentalist opponents [43,44]. Americans involved in international Protestant ventures defined themselves in relation to this socialist other, but, while fundamentalists and many Catholics positioned their faith as communism's polar opposite, ecumenical Protestants had a more ambivalent relationship with the Soviet Union, which was full of fear, jealousy, mimicry, and compromise. In the complicated relationship with the USSR, communism acted as a mirror to the parochialism of American Protestantism, moving them further in their aspiration to discard their cultural baggage and emerge as a yet more universal force on behalf of social justice in the world.

The Protestant intellectuals most closely engaged with the Soviet Union were not just church leaders; they were experts in foreign affairs before the professionalization of foreign policy analysts took place during WWII and the Cold War. For example, the future Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam travelled to the USSR in 1926 on a fact-finding mission that met with Stalin and other high-ranking officials, and he gave a series of public talks on everything from the Soviet New Economic Policy to the condition of the peasantry [45].

During his trip, Oxnam met with Soviet Foreign Minister Georgy Chicherin, who he described as 'one of the ablest diplomats in Europe.' At the meeting, Oxnam 'was struck immediately by the number of pictures of Oriental leaders' on Chicherin's wall ([45], p. 67). The Soviet Union was leading a great anti-imperialist drive across the world, Oxnam concluded, that was already succeeding in places like Persia and China. If Americans cling to imperialism, he instructed his fellow Protestants, they will find that 'there are lined up in the East one billion out of a total world population of one billion seven hundred or eight hundred million' led by the USSR ([45], p. 75). For Oxnam, accepting the inevitability of decolonization was a dramatic turnabout. In 1919, just seven years earlier, he had personally witnessed a riot in India and he recoiled at the burning of several Christian churches by Hindu nationalists. His diaries record him praising the actions of the British troops at the Amritsar massacre, which left 379 unarmed protesters dead. 'The Indians little realize the power of modern weapons, but I understand they were taught something of a lesson at Amritsar,' he wrote. 'One feels terrible over the whole situation. It means that mission work will be slowed up for years' ([46], pp. 93–97). It took a trip to the USSR for Oxnam to disavow imperialism.

Oxnam called for the recognition of the Soviet Union soon after he returned from his trip, a move that found support among ecumenical Protestants but one that was largely opposed by fundamentalist Protestants and the Catholic clergy who, in very different ways, feared the spread of atheistic communism. In the 1930s, as Oxnam became involved in popular front groups that aided republican fighters in Spain, he found himself clashing once more with Catholic supporters of Francisco Franco. For Oxnam, genuine concern about the Vatican's policies and the American Catholic hierarchy's resistance to a variety of liberal values merged with historic Protestant antipathy toward Catholics. His resistance to joining Catholics in the 'Judeo-Christian' Cold War alliance against the Soviet Union would bring him before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1953 ([12], pp. 105–56; [20], pp. 128–51; [46]).

During World War II, Oxnam lead his fellow Methodists in transforming the values of the Jerusalem Conference of 1928 and the Hocking report of 1932 into a political program for the reconstruction of international affairs after the war. Oxnam orchestrated the Methodist Crusade for World Order, which was among the most impressive mobilizations on behalf of the United Nations and human rights in the 1940s ([47], pp. 161–62). At this moment, they turned to human rights as a political framework that best expressed Hocking's ideas. It occurred at a historical moment when the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union muted criticism of the communist nation and when the spirit of wartime unity meant that universalist ideals were ascendant and pluralism was looked upon with suspicion.

In 1943, Methodists gathered at Ohio Wesleyan University to discuss the postwar peace. At this meeting, Methodist Bishop Francis J. McConnell explained to the audience at the university that human rights stood at the heart of Christian civilization. For McConnell, Christian civilization was not an immanent development but a long-term project. He told listeners that it took millions of years of the earth's physical development to allow life to be created and it took thousands of years of Judaism to make people receptive to Christianity. In the same way, it will take a long era of human rights to create the groundwork for Christian civilization, McConnell argued. In the midst of global war against nations that rejected the basic premises of liberalism, it was the grounds on which Christianity rested that had to be defended, which included 'freedom to think, to question established beliefs and institutions, and to publish results, to work with some degree of security as to livelihood'. For Christianity to thrive, 'a basis must be kept under Christianity,' McConnell argued ([48], p. 32).

McConnell's assertion that Christianity must stand on liberal values clashed with the analysis of Reinhold Niebuhr, whose 1944 book *Children of Light and Children of Darkness* was a critique of liberalism. Niebuhr was insistent that only the insights of Christianity on the nature of man could serve as a grounding for liberal democracies. Those insights included a belief in a power beyond mankind, awe at the vastness of the universe, and a chastened sense of the power of individuals and nations. Christianity should come to the aid of liberalism, Niebuhr argued, not the other way around [5,49,50].

Niebuhr developed a distinctly religious international politics, but he narrowed the meaning of Protestant internationalism in two ways. First, he argued that Protestant Christianity did not have a monopoly on ultimate values and that Jews and Catholics, too, could come to liberalism's defense through their particular values. Secondly, Niebuhr's conception of what counted as religious resources was remarkably thin. As David Hollinger argues, 'Niebuhr presented a series of quite general virtues as products of Christianity, without explicitly denying the possibility that these virtues might be cultivated and propagated without Christianity' ([51], p. 218).

Together, McConnell and Niebuhr represented diverging ways of dealing with the problem of translating Protestant principles into universal political ideas that could make do with the ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of the world. How could Protestant values be sold to Buddhists and Hindus, let alone to the Soviet Union? Niebuhr doubled-down on the important role of Christianity and called on his coreligionists to oppose the USSR [11–13]. McConnell, on the other hand, saw no easy path to reconciling Protestant values with a diverse world, and he retreated to what he believed was the more neutral language of secular liberalism. He was not unusual in this regard. O. Fredrick Nolde, the Protestant liaison to the State Department and United Nations on human rights, likewise believed that Protestant principles must be translated into a language that was more universal than Protestantism, if human rights were to make any headway in a world organization that included the officially-atheistic USSR ([52], pp. 98–100). 'We must reckon with government in its international form,' he told his colleagues in 1946. The 'problem is: here the Churches [represent only] a minority of the earth's population' ([53], p. 86).

Most Protestant intellectuals continued to have it both ways in the 1940s. They continued to preach both universalism and pluralism, as Hocking himself had done in the prior decade. The Methodist missionary and best-selling author E. Stanley Jones wrote in 1944 that 'each nation must dare to be itself, must dare believe that it has a call and a commission to offer humbly to the rest its own interpretation of the Universal Fact. Just as each individual must allow the Spirit of God to pull out the stops and play all over the keyboard of his life, so each nation must present itself to God to be played over so that its notes, definitive and distinctive, may be a part of the universal harmony' ([54], p. 8). Jones' line of reasoning left unanswered why Christianity must be the score that the world plays and why the new nations of the Global South would remain in the orchestra.

The vibrant discussions among Protestant intellectuals in the 1940s inspired the Methodist Board of Missions to carefully consider the issue of racism. The final product of dozens of ensuing study groups and conferences was Edmund Soper's *Racism: A World Issue*, published in 1948 [55]. The book's chapters covered the major regions of the world and offered an appraisal of the history and current state of race relations in each country. It was among the most careful and nuanced studies of racism available in the 1940s. The book was meant to explain to its readers the problem of racism across the world and to encourage them to take action against it.

The exploration of racial practices in the Soviet Union, in particular, was designed to provincialize American racism. For Soper, the Soviet Union provided a model for how to deal with a plurality of racial minorities in one nation. He looked to a country that, according to Yuri Slezkine, 'was the world's first state to institutionalize ethnoterritorial federalism, classify all citizens according to their biological nationalities and formally prescribe preferential treatment of certain ethnically defined populations' ([56], p. 415). Soper concluded that the differences between the USSR and US resulted from the different legal systems. In the United States, immigrants are expected to 'merge, lose their former distinctive features, and become completely amalgamated,' whereas the USSR had a policy of

'local and racial autonomy' and the stated purpose was 'to retain [the nationality's] own distinctiveness, language, traditions, and customs' ([55], p. 80). Soper believed that human rights could function along the lines of the 1936 Soviet Constitution, which protected the cultural rights of minorities. We are 'beginning to realize that the racial problem is not a problem by itself but one which is a part of another, that of basic human rights,' Soper wrote ([55], p. 80). He urged American Christians to develop a social ethic in America to match the force of communism in the USSR.

At the very moment when Protestant leaders publically aligned themselves with human rights and antiracism, they were pushed further in these directions by their coreligionists from communist nations. In 1948, the long dream of a Protestant international came to life in the World Council of Churches' (WCC) inaugural gathering in Amsterdam. What should have been a celebratory moment of the work begun by Mott in Edinburgh in 1910 was clouded by deep divisions between American Protestants and those from communist East-Central Europe. The Czechoslovak theologian Josef Hromadka, in particular, became a spokesperson for communism at the meeting's discussion of economic affairs. The gathering tried to strike a middle way between capitalism and communism, which it called 'the Responsible Society,' but this was a perilous position for American representatives to take during the Red Scare ([5], pp. 124–53; [20], pp. 209–13).

At the 1948 Amsterdam assembly, the representatives elected T.C. Chao, a backer of Mao's communist government in China, as one of the WCC's co-presidents. Chao was forceful in his insistence that China has a distinctive history and its adoption of communism should come as no surprise. He pointed to the long history of imperialism in the country and praised Mao for liberating China from the West and from its feudal past. In the new era that was dawning, religion would no longer be the handmaiden of imperialism. The task now, in China and elsewhere, was for the Christianity to 'confess its sins and shortcomings in seeking to save its own life by occasionally siding with reactionary forces,' he wrote to American Protestants ([57], p. 1067). At a moment when American Protestants were uniting their coreligionists from many lands and translating their religious values into a purportedly universal system of human rights, Chao was insistent that China would go its own way and that Protestantism should accept, and even celebrate, national differences.

Tensions persisted in the ensuing decades as Protestant intellectuals returned to the question of Protestant universalism. The Harvard scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith cited his experience teaching in India in the 1940s as an affirmation that 'man's life today is cast in a multicultural context. We live in a pluralistic world' ([58], p. 505). Smith was responding to the experience of living in a religiously-diverse city in India, where he regularly encountered Buddhists and Muslims in the Christian college where he worked. He would have also been familiar with Indian critics of Anglo-American supremacy, like Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas, who objected to the Protestant embrace of human rights on the grounds that 'the oneness and universality of the Church is not so manifest as to speak one word and to act in unison in this sphere, and the attempt to do so when we are not ready has only been done by the domination of a certain kind of politics, which may be called Anglo-American' ([20], p. 67). Smith thought of these experiences in 1960 as he explained to his coreligionists that they now lived in 'an age of minorities' and that they, too, needed to change the way they thought about their status. 'Christians have tended to think of themselves as secure in a position of authority,' especially in the countries where they predominate, where 'white men have assumed that they are dominant and Negroes, for instance, a minority to be dealt with in one way or another' ([58], pp. 505–6). Internationally, the 'West has built up a diplomatic and economic world order of its own pattern into which other groups have, with more or less success, gradually come to play a role; but the west remains Western' ([58], pp. 505–6). Smith's attack on religious chauvinism was bound together with antipathy for racism, colonialism, and economic inequality in a general criticism of Western domination.

In his critique of earlier efforts to create world unity in a way that had smuggled in Christian and Western supremacy, Smith held out hope for a form of universal brotherhood. His argument built on the works of Hocking, Soper, and other Protestant intellectuals of the 1930s and 1940s. But unlike Hocking and others who attempted to balance out pluralism and universalism, Smith placed all the emphasis

on coming to terms with the world's diversity through the acceptance of difference. He explained that 'the whole of mankind with its radically different civilizations, religious traditions and value systems, its radically different economic and political statuses, should become one community, so that we should be loyal to each other across cultural and creedal as well as political frontiers, both in theory and in practice—this is quite a new challenge' ([58], p. 506). The challenge of diversity was so great for Smith that he predicted it would take an entire age to resolve. Making peace with ethno-national pluralism was akin to the challenge that Greek philosophy presented to early Christianity and that Darwinism presented to Christian orthodoxy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Pluralism was the immediate goal now. The creation of a world community would come in some distant future. And this was not a uniquely Christian challenge, Smith observed; 'communists are a minority, and the world will have no peace until they abandon their explosive unwillingness to remain so' ([58], p. 506).

By the time of Smith's 1960 article, Protestant international thought had gone through three great stages in the quest to develop a world community. First, in 1900, Mott believed that the Christian Gospel must be brought to every corner of the world in order to create a more just international order. In 1932, Hocking insisted that the project of exporting Christianity and respecting cultural difference were one in the same. By 1960, Smith cast suspicion on any rendering of Christianity as a universal system, even in the guise of human rights or a Western economic and political order. Smith, like other Protestant intellectuals, was pushed in this direction by Marxist critics like Chao and Thomas in a post-WWII context of rapid decolonization and the ascention of communism. Without ever giving up on the notion that a universal international system was, in fact, possible, he placed all the emphasis on rooting out all pretense of universality.

Mott's ambition to spread Christianity throughout the world was taken up by evangelicals, who did not share the ecumenical Protestant concern for pluralism in the 1960s and 1970s [9,59–69]. Indeed, evangelicals did not just affirm the missionary project that Hocking had rejected in 1932. They explicitly defined their missionary work against the ideology Hocking, Smith, and others had laid out. In 1958, the evangelical intellectual Carl Henry chastised his liberal coreligionists for their 'naïve confidence... that recognition and admission into the family of nations has a reformatory effect' ([70], p. 23). Henry was writing about a recent pronouncement by the main ecumenical Protestant body that urged the United States to recognize 'Red' China and admit it into the United Nations. But Henry's point was broader: American Christians had little to gain in such dialogues and should instead focus on spreading the gospel, which was mankind's only hope. He was skeptical of the 'reformatory effect' that the world was having on ecumenical Protestant intellectuals, who had inherited Mott's institutions but had largely repudiated his vision.

The Protestant celebration of difference, which coincided with the election of John F. Kennedy as America's first Catholic president, is typically narrated as the end of Protestantism's propriety claim over the American nation [71–74]. The Protestant establishment, whose influence in the 1960s still dwarfed evangelical power, made more room for Jews and Catholics in public life and embraced church-state separation, a process that aided Protestant intellectuals' move toward pluralism. As Sydney Ahlstrom put it, 'the decade of the sixties seems in many ways to have marked a new stage in the long development of American religious history. Not only did this intense and fiercely lived span of years have a character of its own, but it may even have ended... a unified four-hundred year period... in the Anglo-American experience' of Protestant exclusivism ([75], p. 1079). Such narratives typically focus on the domestic advent of 'Tri-Faith' America, ignoring developments abroad. As this article has shown, pluralism came to the United States not only through Protestant interaction with American Jews and Catholics, but also through encounters with Hindus and Buddhists, socialists and nationalists in the Global South. Viewed from a more global vantage point, the 1960s marked an even more decisive break; intellectuals like Smith renounced Protestantism's proprietary claim over the entire globe.

That Smith believed communism must come to terms with its own particularity signals the importance of this secular other to the history of Protestant thought. The engagement of some American Protestants from the 1920s to the 1950s with communism moved them to increasingly make peace with secular ideas and pushed them toward antiracism and anti-colonialism. They kept thinking about what Christianity's relationship to international affairs should be, and they derived it from biblical exegeses, from denominational histories, from ethical investigations, and from the insights of ecumenical discussions with coreligionists from a diversity of nations and cultures. They did this with a new sense that there were other equally tenable traditions of international affairs and that they had to relinquish their universal claims. Human rights, to take one example, were no longer defended as a universal translation of Protestant values that could be adopted by everyone. Rather, they were reconceived as a neutral tradition with multiple interpretations and understandings, paving the way for a secularized revival of human rights in the 1970s.[5] Ecumenical Protestant intellectuals continued to relate to international affairs in distinctive ways, informed by theology and tradition, but they now did so without claiming that such understandings were for everyone.

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[5]　As Barbara Keys argues, "Before the 1970s, women's, peace, labor, and religious groups with longstanding internationalist agendas were the main guardians of a discourse of international human rights. The achievement of human rights liberals in the 1970s was... to popularize for more secular audiences the human rights talk of religious groups" [76].

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