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Review by **Dianne Kirby**, University of Ulster

To act as a reviewer of a published article in the construction of which, however minimally, you have been involved, might be seen as representing a conflict of interest. Nonetheless, since the rapidly expanding field of religion and U.S. foreign policy remains relatively small, the editor decided that despite my having been one of the hitherto anonymous reviewers of the article for *Diplomatic History*, I should still proceed. This perhaps unorthodox 'double role' allowed me to reflect on the critical work undertaken by journals and reviewers in nurturing new research from both emerging and established scholars. This demanding process combines rigor with a constructive critique intended to blend new insights with substantive experience of the field. It is a procedure that above all illustrates the value, indeed the necessity, of collaboration within the historical profession in the construction of a meaningful past. To meet the present interest in the complex and varied phenomenon of religion, and its place in foreign affairs, an especially challenging question at the present time, requires close cooperation between individual scholars across the disciplines.¹

¹ *Diplomatic History* has been at the forefront in publishing new scholarship on religion and U.S. foreign policy, including a roundtable issue devoted to the subject that, in particular, included Patricia R Hill, Commentary, 'Religion as a Category of Diplomatic Analysis,' and Andrew J. Rotter, 'Christians, Muslims and Hindus: Religion and U.S.-South Asian Relations, 1947-1954,' *Diplomatic History*, 24, 4, 2000. Subsequently it has published a number of important articles: Seth Jacobs, "Our System Demands the Supreme Being: America's Religious Revival and the Diem Experiment," 1954-1955,' 25, 4, 2001; Leilah Danielson, 'Christianity, Dissent, and the Cold War: A.J. Muste's Challenge to Realism and U.S. Empire,' *Diplomatic History*, 30, 4, 2006; David Zietsma, "Sin Has No History": Religion, National Identity, and U.S. Intervention, 1937-1941' *Diplomatic History*, 31:3, 2007, George J. Hill, 'Intimate Relationships: Secret Affairs of Church and State in the United States and Liberia, 1925-1947,' *Diplomatic History*, 31:3, 2007; Seth Jacobs, 'The Perils and Problems of Islam: The United States and the Muslim Middle East in the Early Cold War,'

The 21st century has witnessed a veritable avalanche of writing on the topic of religion and politics in the contemporary world. This has been accompanied by renewed interest in religion on the part mainstream historians whose previous diet consisted more of economic, political, military, social and cultural studies. While the subject of religion in U.S. history has been far from neglected, indeed there is a rich record, more recently it has become of interest to scholars of U.S. diplomatic history and foreign relations.² There are various explanations for its previous neglect in this latter sphere,³ while the current attention reflects contemporary preoccupations. And beyond doubt, understanding the religious dynamic will provide compelling new insights into the present as well as the past. Hence, while it will continue to defy any single narrative, a key variable, which is essential for a full and nuanced analysis of America's perceptions of itself and its place in the world, is the religious dimension of U.S. foreign policy. In this respect, Mark Edwards' article is a welcome and valuable contribution.

Numerous claims have been made about the marginalization of religion in the conventional discourse of international relations, which have been seen as prioritizing political and economic factors.⁴ Certainly scholars of international relations have failed to give a proper accounting of the role assumed by and accorded to religion in the international arena and little enough attention was paid to it as an important component of international relations during the course of the twentieth century. However, despite popular assumptions about secularization, twentieth century governments throughout the world, being all too aware of the extent and reach of religious influence and power, and in keeping with their policies of preceding centuries, neglected neither religion nor its representatives or adherents. That religious actors sought political influence should be of no surprise. It was deemed essential in the on-going struggle against secularization. Moreover, as Joseph Nye observed: "for centuries, organized religious movements have possessed soft power." The idea of religious soft power is that religious actors may, first, seek to influence foreign policy and international relations more generally by encouraging governments to pursue foreign policies and programs that reflect their values, norms and beliefs. Second, they seek to build transnational religious networks to further their goals.

Christian Realists were part of a courageous generation of ecumenically minded Christians who asserted the right of the church as an institution to occupy itself with world problems. Having witnessed the Great War, the Depression and the emergence of the new total states, the outbreak of war generated within churchmen a sense of western

Diplomatic History, 30, 4, 2006; Andrew Preston, Bridging the Gap between the Sacred and the Secular in the History of American Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 30:5, 2006.

² William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). Inboden particularly stresses the personal religiosity of presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower in determining the nature and conduct of the Cold War.

³ See introduction to Kirby (editor). *Religion and the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴ Robert A. Seiple & Dennis R. Hoover (editors), *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004).

civilisation in crisis.⁵ The leadership given by Christians during the Second World War, and the widespread conviction that the war should be fought not only to defeat the Axis enemy but also to achieve a new social and political order, gave impetus to those determined to see the churches reassert their influence.⁶ Churchmen, after the Depression and two global conflicts and conscious of both their own culpability and their institutions' systemic failures, saw the post war period as an opportunity for Christianity. Acknowledging the guilt of the churches in contributing to the historical processes that climaxed in global conflict, Christian leaders still considered faith to be the solution, advocating the new order be built on a renewed relationship between political and moral power. Christian leaders harbored aspirations that the West's common Christian traditions combined with Christianity's supranationalism and universalism could provide the foundation for a new Christendom.⁷ In addition, to a notable degree Christian advocacy of change at times appeared to be as much a precaution against potential revolutionary upheaval as a protest against injustice.

During both the inter-war period and the war itself, Christian leaders had deprecated the identification of national interests with righteousness.⁸ The presentation of the Cold War rivalry as an apocalyptic struggle in which the survival of religion was at stake created the space in which state and church could come together. The west's declaration that it was defending western civilization and Christianity from atheistic communism indicated its recognition that for many people religion was more relevant and meaningful than democracy, a malleable and a contested concept to which each side laid claim.

Edwards' scholarly treatment of what is in effect 'political Christianity' is a necessary reminder that the contest between secularization, modernity and religion is a historical reality that embraces all faiths and nations.⁹ Edwards' article draws attention to three politico-religious activists, Francis Pickens Miller, Henry Pitney Van Dusen and John Coleman Bennett, all of whom were dedicated to the goals identified by Nye through the movement with a complicated and contested history known as Christian Realism. The movement sought to influence foreign policy by persuading the public, elected officials

⁵ Keith G. Robbins. 'Britain, 1940 and Christian Civilisation,' in idem. *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London: 1993, 195-213).

⁶ John Nurser cites numerous examples, including a manifesto by a group of European Catholics living in America that involved Jacques Maritain, 'the outstanding Catholic philosopher of our time'. Published in *Commonweal*, 21 August 1942. Their manifesto claimed that the issue at stake in the war was 'the very possibility of working toward a Christian civilisation.' Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations: Christian Churches and Human Rights* (Georgetown 2005, 87).

⁷ Kirby. 'The Churches and Christianity in Cold War Europe,' in Klaus Larres (editor), *Contemporary Europe Since 1945*. (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁸ Gerald L. Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁹ It is worth noting that American identity and the link between Christian superiority and American exceptionalism emerged in part in opposition to and victory over Muslims, to which the American national anthem is testimony. Euro-American secularist traditions emerged from Christianity, the political role of which seems never to be equated with 'political Islam.' Yet the former resembles the latter as neither make clear or complete distinctions between religion and politics.

and key policy-makers that Christianity was possessed of the means to help resolve international crises and promote global peace and justice. It is part of a larger process that is of particular relevance today, in which religious actors continue to organize to influence what others do through direct and indirect methods. Of course the best known member of the group was Reinhold Niebuhr.

Seeking to add to his name these additional Protestant theorists of American nationalism and internationalism in order to recover the broader community orientation of Christian Realism, Edwards addresses a number of crucial questions. He queries whether “high prestige” churches and their leaders should be welcomed as part of the foreign policy “power elite”. Edwards doubts that access to the corridors of power translates into actual influence, discerning little tangible evidence in terms of policy outcome from the activities of his protagonists. He suggests that it is difficult to see any discernible outcome beyond coincidence if the measure used is the ability to influence state policy or make a policy impact. In Edwards’ estimation, the effectiveness of the Christian Realists he studied was marginal in terms of actual policy-making as they advocated national and international reforms that were “counter-intuitive to Cold War normalcy” (p. 73).

Edwards is uncertain that church-persons ought to enter the ranks of decision-makers. Convinced that the activism of Christian Realists deserves the same recognition accorded other international non-governmental organizations, he suggests that it was ‘the tenuous nature of connections between Realists and Washington in the fight against totalitarianism that marks them as worthy of study’ (p. 93). Edwards’ observations about influence and policy outcomes expose the dilemma confronting politico-religious activists and their organisations: does working with the state enhance their power and influence or does it in fact compromise it and in the process facilitate its appropriation for state ends?

This was a dilemma that particularly exercised the transnational ecumenical movement that tried to transcend the Cold War in pursuit of policies based on Christian principles aimed at global outcomes. Edwards is particularly effective in illustrating the importance of the transatlantic Christian community’s active engagement with the consequential inter-war issues that concerned the whole international community. Although these activities are well known amongst those interested in religious history, IR scholars have not sufficiently noted them. . Hence, Edwards’ article is to be welcomed for drawing attention to these Christian activists, their deliberations, conferences and world outlook, as well as to the excellent literature on them which is now available.

Edwards’ work is important in elucidating the interaction between often very astute Christian leaders, who laid claim to moral power, and their often equally astute counterparts within state apparatuses who increasingly themselves made moral claims, but with the additional advantage of possessing coercive and other forms of practical power. It is Edwards’ contention that in trying to pressurize governments to imagine social justice on a global scale, Christian Realists sustained hope for social democratic reform during the Cold War rollback of ‘radicalism’, witnessing the non-military uses to which ‘chosen’ American power could be consecrated. Christian Realists supported

military strength and vigilance against the Soviet threat, but with a combination of cooperation with the United Nations and aid to the developing world. Their support for the former was a significant contribution to the ability of America's Cold War administrations to present containment as a moral crusade.

Recalling the World Council of Churches' prophesy that "legitimacy" would replace "sovereignty" as the measure of state conduct through group promotion of a counter-hegemonic framework of "responsibility", Edwards notes in conclusion that during his 2004 re-election campaign George Bush spoke of effecting a "Responsible Society". However, beyond rhetoric, it was evangelical Christian conservatives rather than the more liberal tradition from which Christian Realism derived that seemingly exercised the most influence over the former president. In contrast to the Christian Realists, Evangelical Christians proved especially effective in delivering funds and votes as well as exhortations, factors that invariably facilitate access to the corridors of power. However, Evangelicals have discovered, as did their Christian Realist counterparts, that access to power does not necessarily equate to a voice in its exercise. Moreover, whereas Christian Realists belonged to a generation that sought a unified Christian voice that could command authority, the considerable disparities between different groupings of evangelicals militate against any such outcome. Indeed, with Far-right Christian organizations often criticised by more moderate evangelicals, who in turn are scorned by fundamentalists, their lack of agreement about U.S. foreign policy means that their different views can be disregarded. When there are groups whose views support administration policies, government can present them as more representative than they actually are.

It was of course the Christian Realists who provided the example of and a rationale as to why Christians should seek influence within the corridors of power. The nuclear threat and the religious dimension of the Cold War anti-communism fashioned first by Harry Truman and subsequently continued by Dwight Eisenhower allowed evangelicals of all stripes to construct a closer relational identity with the rest of the United States than had previously been the case. The seemingly real possibility of nuclear war in the context of the world-view induced by Manichaeic Cold War rhetoric reduced the distinctions that had separated secular and evangelical America.¹⁰ The chance to merge with mainstream culture eventually generated a political-religious power base for the new Christian Right. Having abandoned their concerns about the United Nations, evangelicals are now actively and increasingly involving themselves in the international arena, clearly inspired by American triumphalism in the 'victory' over 'godless' Soviet communism.

¹⁰ *In Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007), Angela M. Lahr cogently illustrates how evangelical and national identities evolved in the context of a Cold War presented as an anti-communist crusade against evil. She emphasises the indispensable role played by the atomic bomb and how it inspired deliberations on the end of human history among believers and non-believers alike. While premillennial dispensationalists conceptualized history as time partitioned into certain ages and with a definite end, secular and mainstream Christian critics of nuclear weapons postulated on global annihilation.

'Winning' the Cold War consolidated the link between Christian superiority and American exceptionalism that informs American national identity. It also vindicated the American model of modernity, which further reinforced the nation's deep religiosity and opened the door for America's religious market place to extend its global reach. Hence the wisdom in Edwards' conclusion that diplomatic historians should continue studying "the multiplicity of religious incarnations in foreign affairs", advising that: "The consequences of ignoring them for the culturist project of liberating traditionally exclusive social formations could be as great as overplaying them"(p 94).

Following the plethora of pseudo-scholarship on religion, Islam above all, that followed 9/11, this is sound advice for today's scholars as they seek to define the place of religion in the twentieth century and its implications for the twenty-first. Bearing in mind the well-worn adage that history is very often a construct of the present, there certainly is little doubt that much of the current interest in religion is influenced by contemporary events. The most obvious are: the ongoing prosecution of the 'war on terror' conjoined with the conspicuous rise of political Islam that often is made to appear as the nefarious other; a twice elected American president who laid claim to guidance from god; the increasing involvement of the Christian right in the international arena, and, not to be overlooked, the popular assumption that U.S.-Vatican relations in the shape of Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II played a significant role in the demise of the Soviet bloc.

Scholars used to take for granted the notion that there was a link between 'modernization' and 'secularization', based on the radical Enlightenment assumption that the combination of science, education and democracy would gradually dissolve the religious mindset of the educated classes and eventually also that of the ordinary people. Events in recent decades have forced scholars to re-think the inexorable forward march of the secularization hypothesis and its teleology of modernity. Edwards' work joins those of other scholars who are challenging the notion of what seemed a 'resurgence' of religion to those who had neglected to notice its persistent significance. In the fundamental reappraisal of previous paradigms now taking place, some suggest the relationship was not as once thought between secularization and modernization, but rather between modernization and religious pluralism.¹¹

As the search continues for new 'master narratives' that will help historians make sense of the multitude of incidents that individual research unearths, the study of the religious dimension, in all its incarnations, in domestic and international affairs will inevitably be crucial. Studies such as that undertaken by Mark Edwards into the religious dimension of the world's quintessentially modern country and most powerful international player should prove significant in the formation of a new 'big story'.

¹¹ See Peter L. Berger *The Desecularization of the World*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999. Also Berger & Samuel P. Huntington, *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Dianne Kirby has been writing about religion in the international arena, most particularly during the Second World War and early Cold War, for over twenty years, beginning in the 1980s with a doctorate on the 'Church of England in the Period of the Cold War, 1945-56.' The book she edited on *Religion and the Cold War* Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003, following a 2000 conference of the same name, has been described as ground breaking and commended for opening up a previously neglected area. The Institute of Historical Research's *Reviews in History* stated that: 'It has opened a door for future researchers, demonstrating that the subject of religion during the Cold War lies firmly within the borders of mainstream history'.

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