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# REFRAMING THE COLD WAR: FRED SCHWARZ AND REINHOLD NIEBUHR'S SPIRITUAL WAR AGAINST COMMUNISM IN THE EARLY COLD WAR ERA

Introduction by Professor Jennifer Burns

Yasmin Samrai's essay, *Reframing the Cold War: Fred Schwarz and Reinhold Niebuhr's Spiritual War against Communism in the Early Cold War Era*, offers a creative reading of two major figures in mid-century 20th America: the anti-Communist crusader Fred Schwarz and the neo-orthodox preacher Reinhold Niebuhr. Rarely have these two figures been brought into the same analytic frame, for Schwarz is seen as a populist rabble-rouser while Niebuhr was an elite figure beloved by the nation's intelligentsia. Drawing on archival material about Schwarz's organization held at the Hoover Archives, and carefully reading Niebuhr's most significant writings and public exhortations, Samrai draws them together by emphasizing their shared analysis of Communism as false religion. Without collapsing the differences between the two, she argues that their similarities demonstrate the deep connections between religion and national identity. The religious right, she notes, has deep roots in the twentieth century. Samrai's paper is distinguished by clear writing and skilful use of both primary and secondary sources. The paper shows a young scholar in the making who is not afraid to take chances tackling a difficult topic. It is an outstanding achievement for an introductory level course in U.S. history.

## **The Spiritual Cold War: Fred Schwarz and Reinhold Niebuhr's Battle against Communism**

### **Yasmin Samrai**

In 1960, a group of Christian anti-Communists in Belmont, Massachusetts published a pamphlet uncovering the sinister conspiracy behind the peace symbol.<sup>1</sup> The V sign – popular amongst socialists, counterculture activists, and anti-Vietnam War protesters during the Sixties – was really an inverted cross, they informed readers. After careful research into religious symbolism, they discovered that “the inverted fallen-man figure... has for centuries been a favourite of Satanists.” Of course, the peace symbol bore no historical connection to Satanism, yet this perverse misinterpretation offers a glimpse into the anti-Communist worldview. It reveals a tendency to view the Cold War through a religious lens, to willfully misinterpret Communist symbols as part of an Aesopian code, and to regard anti-Communists as uniquely positioned to uncover the deception. “Communism is upside down Christianity,” as one crusader declared. “This ‘Red Morality’ is a Religion of its own!”<sup>2</sup>

In the early 1960s, anti-Communist evangelicals did much more than listen to Billy Graham on the radio, complain about the perceived disintegration of traditional values, and say prayers to the nation in church on Sunday mornings. They also travelled to mass meetings, subscribed to newsletters, and instructed their children on the dangers of the enemy force. These evangelicals, who had a penchant for seeing the Cold War through a biblical prism, saw an apocalypse on the horizon: the escalation of the nuclear arms race, the botched invasion of the Bay of Pigs, the Soviet construction of the Berlin Wall, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the assassination of Kennedy all in the space of three years, 1960 to 1963, seemed to usher in the end-times. Moreover, as Soviet Russia, under Nikita

1 Pamphlet on Communist Peace Symbols, “Peace Symbols: The Truth About Those Strange Designs,” 1960. Box 1, Folder “Communism,” A. E. Bennett Collection, 1958-1979, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, California. The pamphlet was originally published by *American Opinion*, a publishing company owned by the conservative anti-Communist group the John Birch Society.

2 Pamphlet written by Vladimir Kozina on Communism. “Communism As I Know it,” 1966, 2-3, A. E. Bennett Collection.

Khrushchev, advanced its second phase of religious persecution and raised a new generation in an atheistic country, religious anti-Communists felt it was crucial to save America's Christian spirit.<sup>3</sup> Since Communism would eradicate religion in the Soviet Union, so the evangelical thinking went, it could easily spread to the U.S. and carry out the same horror.

In this moment of seeming crisis, where they felt their nation and faith were under threat, Christian anti-Communists turned to conservative movements to mobilize a religious front.

Cold War historians typically view the Cold War conflict through a political or economic lens. They emphasize backyard fallout shelters, red telephones, and the nuclear arms race, omitting one key weapon in the anti-Communist arsenal: religion. However, this characterization of the conflict risks omitting how Christian Americans constructed the Cold War in their own imaginations. Since the 1990s, a small but growing number of historians have addressed the Cold War's religious dimensions.<sup>4</sup> However, most of this scholarship focuses on the religious rhetoric of President Dwight D. Eisenhower and national political figures. Eisenhower, who realized that religious faith could be instrumental in the Cold War, might have conceived or constructed the international religious front in the early stages of the Cold War, but the spiritual rhetoric did not drive the spiritual rhetoric and appeared in theological seminars and populist movements, and continued to be

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3 Jonathan P Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 45. Following the anti-religious campaign of 1921-28, the Soviet Union increased its attack on religion in the next phase of 1928-41. By 1930, citizens were forced to work on Sundays to prevent them from attending church. They were also not allowed to invite a priest into their house, donate money to their local church, or perform repair works on church buildings. Russian children were "baptized" by the State as "Little Octobrists" and the dead were given as "Red Funeral." On December 25 and 26, labourers would celebrate the "Days of Industrialization" in lieu of Christmas.

4 See, for example, Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*; Jeff Broadwater, *Eisenhower & the Anti-Communism Crusade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Joel Kovel, *Red Hunting in the Promised Land: Anticommunism and the Making of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Dianne Kirby, "Catholic Anti-Communism in the United States and the Early Cold War Era," in *North American Christian Community and the Cold War* ed. Paul Mojzes. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018).

employed once John F. Kennedy became president in 1961.

This study contributes to the literature by examining two individuals, evangelical Fred Schwarz and theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who erected the banner of religious anti-Communism to defend Christianity against Communism. Putting Schwarz and Niebuhr in dialogue with one another forces us to confront unavoidable differences. They illustrate the opposite ends of the Christian anti-Communism spectrum: they have different intellectual backgrounds, different religious beliefs, and are based on either side of the country.

However dissimilar Schwarz and Niebuhr are, their interpretation of the Cold War ultimately converges. Both characterize Communism as a heretical inversion of Christianity and both advance a strikingly similar view of the Cold War as a spiritual struggle between two religions. Their shared tendency to redefine a state of political hostility as a great spiritual battle reflects a broader trend within American religious history of conflating politics and piety. Comparing these anti-Communist Christians helps to challenge the distinction historians have made between establishment theologians and popular religious movements when writing about the Cold War.

Schwarz, located on the West Coast, and Niebuhr, located on the East Coast, participated in separate social spheres and religious traditions in the early 1960s. Schwarz, a balding, bespectacled physician-turned-preacher with a thick Australian accent, seemed unlikely to become the next hero for evangelical anti-Communism. Originally from Brisbane, Schwarz had trained as a general practitioner and psychiatrist in Australia before an encounter with the Australian Communist Party sparked an obsession with the writings of Marx and Lenin. Another life-changing encounter in America in 1952 – this time with the Southern Baptist minister and prominent evangelical Billy Graham – inspired Schwarz to launch the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade (CACC) in 1953. Graham had encouraged Schwarz to bring his energy and knowledge to the U.S. to enlighten Americans about the evils of Communism. Schwarz, suspecting that America would become the main battleground for the spiritual struggle, abandoned his job in Australia and moved to America. He described the CACC as an “educational organization devoted to the battle

against Communism and Christian Faith.”<sup>5</sup> To promote the organization, he went on a whirlwind tour of America’s major cities, denouncing “godless Communism,” making public appearances, and delivering radio addresses. He reached audiences across the country – including those in Houston, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Indianapolis, and San Francisco – in an ambitious attempt to extend the anti-Communist front.<sup>6</sup> From there, the CACC multiplied rapidly, acquiring eight offices in eight states across the East and West coasts of America.<sup>7</sup>

Niebuhr, on the other hand, was a Protestant theologian and a public intellectual. He captivated his colleagues and students at the Union Theological Seminary, America’s oldest and most prestigious Christian seminary, with his mellifluous voice and bright blue eyes. He was a favourite amongst high-brow intellectuals, who admired his wisdom and wit, his power of mind and political insight. In the 1930s, Niebuhr had jettisoned his post-First World War pacifism and socialist convictions and embraced military force to resist evil.<sup>8</sup> While his intellectual thought took many turns during his lifetime, by 1960, his ideas on the Cold War had crystallized. It was in this year, aged 68, that Niebuhr retired from teaching at the New York seminary, after serving as a professor there for 30 years.

Schwarz sought to galvanize Christian resistance against Communism through a program of education. He described the overarching mission of the CACC as “evangelistic, educational and dedicational.”<sup>9</sup> Here, “evangelical” carries a different connotation from the spiritual rebirth or “born-again” movement that characterized the Religious Right from the mid 1970s to the present in

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5 “What is the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade?” 1958. Box 1, Folder “Crime,” A. E. Bennett Collection, 1958-1979.

6 Michelle M. Nickerson. *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 150

7 “What is the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade?” A.E. Bennett Collection.

8 Robert B. Horwitz, “The Revival of Reinhold Niebuhr: A Foreign Policy Fable,” *Public Culture*, vol. 28 (2016), 114.

9 *United States Government Memorandum*, “Information Concerning Anti-Communism Crusade, North California Branch.” (Schwarz Report, 1961).

the U.S.<sup>10</sup> Instead, the CACC described itself as evangelical because it focused its efforts on recruiting Christians to the anti-Communist cause. Schwarz, in particular, concentrated the CACC's efforts on evangelism and education by beginning with the premise that Americans needed to be informed about Communism to combat it. He opened his sensationalist book, *You Can Trust the Communists (to be Communists)*, with a warning: "In the battle against Communism, there is no substitute for accurate, specific knowledge. Ignorance is evil and paralytic."<sup>11</sup> Schwarz's belligerent and moral tone reflects the crusading nature of the CACC's spiritual war against Communism. Moreover, most members on the CACC's Board of Directors were ministers and had a missionary background, suggesting the organization drew on the evangelical strategies of Christian missionaries. For example, the director of the Michigan office Dr. George Westcott was a former medical missionary worker in Africa, while another director named Captain E.R. Barnes served as a missionary in the Mau Mau camps of Kenya. They promoted anti-Communism like missionaries preaching Christianity. In other instances, the CACC imitated the tactics of prominent 1960s radio and television evangelicals in its use of modern media.

Accordingly, the CACC ran programs to awaken the general public to the Communist threat. Intense, week-long, and taught by the "finest faculty" of Republican politicians and conservative celebrities, the anti-Communist seminars treated participants to a packed schedule of anti-Communist lectures, discussions, and film screenings lasting from 8.30 a.m. to 10.00 p.m.<sup>12</sup> The first school was held in 1958 in St. Louis; schools quickly multiplied across the country. The most popular were located in California, where Schwarz had relocated his base of operations from Iowa in 1960.<sup>13</sup> Over the 1960s, tens of thousands of Californians attended these

10 Jennifer Burns "The Regan Counter-Revolution" (lecture, Stanford University, California, MM DD, 2018).

11 Fred Schwarz. *You Can Trust The Communists (to be Communists)*. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 3.

12 "Anti-Communism School Series Will Open Monday in Anaheim," *Los Angeles Times*, March 5, 1961. Accessed through ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.

13 "What is the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade?" A. E. Bennett Collection

seminars.<sup>14</sup> A religious right-wing movement had been strengthening in Southern California since the early 1950s, which might explain why the state was the most receptive to the CACC's educational program. Encouraged by the outpouring of public support, Schwarz launched the CACC's most ambitious anti-Communist school in August 1961. Participants filled the massive, 16,000-seat Los Angeles sports arena while thousands more watched on their television screens at home. The numbers alone reveal the schools' dramatic growth in popularity and prominence since their launch in St. Louis.<sup>15</sup>

Closer inspection of the rallies reveals other strategies Schwarz practiced in his anti-Communist crusade. The rally in August 1961, and similar events, began with rituals that stirred not only participants' Christian faith, but also their patriotism. In the Los Angeles sports arena, the crowd watched a performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" (the American national anthem) and then listened to evangelists denounce Communism. Afterwards, they recited the Pledge of Allegiance and said a prayer to God. This combination of political and religious rituals reveals how the organization appealed to Americans' patriotic and religious sentiments. In *One Nation Under God*, Kevin Kruse argues that members of the Religious Right had a propensity to propel religion into the political sphere. The CACC seemed to share this propensity, perceiving the Cold War through a religious lens and combining religious and political rituals.<sup>16</sup>

Schwarz took advantage of popular culture to spread the anti-Communist message, staging a sequel rally a few months later in October 1961 at the landmark Hollywood Bowl. He strategically capitalized on the glamour of the venue by billing it "Hollywood's Answer to Communism" and inviting a number of celebrities. As Jonathan Herzog writes, "in the early Cold War, America was a nation of moviegoers, and Hollywood a seat of concentrated power."<sup>17</sup> Guest speakers included then B-list actor Ronald Rea-

14 McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 64.

15 Kevin Michael Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*. (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 153.

16 Ibid. Kruse dates the invention of Christian America to no further than the 1930s, and the consolidation of patriotic piety in the mid-1950s to early 1960s.

17 Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 158.



gan, yet to make his mark on the Californian political stage, along with fellow actors John Wayne and Dale Evans, who dazzled the audience with their stardom and gave the event gravitas.<sup>18</sup> “It had all the embellishments of the Hollywood spectacular,” one reviewer remembered.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the CACC targeted the whole family by appealing to Americans of all ages, creating a “cult of wholesomeness”. Conservative parents could listen to Schwarz speak at one of his seminars, while their teenaged children read comic books about the red menace in the daytime and attended Youth Nights in the evenings. The CACC produced an illustrated comic book in 1961 called *The Two Faces of Communism* to extend its program of education to younger readers. Featuring a white, affluent, nuclear family, it dramatically captures the organization’s fundamental beliefs. The two children refuse to believe that the red menace persists, so at the mother’s insistence, (“Honey, please explain to them why you think communism is such a threat to our future”) the father confesses his past involvement with the ideology. He recounts a time during college when he fell under the ideology’s spell owing to a charismatic professor. “There are three basic hypotheses to our program: Atheism! Materialism! Economic Determination,” the professor tells the father in another frame. To the family’s relief, the father reveals that he managed to break the hypnotic spell by turning to the Bible. “My Christian ideals outweighed everything else, and I realized the great deception,” the father reveals to his children. He discovers later that the professor was one of many Communist agents trying to infiltrate his university. Filled with pride for their father’s heroic deeds, the children promise to heed his advice and join the spiritual resistance against Communism. This comic book and other literature published by the CACC<sup>20</sup> shows the organization tried to recruit Americans of all ages by giving them an easy portal into the realm anti-Communist thought. Schwarz authored several books to bolster his educational agenda. He stands out as a savvy opportunist, who recognized the potential

18 Kruse, *One Nation Under God*, 154.

19 John C. Waugh, “Hollywood Glitters As Anti-Red Rally: Joint Sponsorship,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, Oct 19, 1961. Accessed through ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Christian Science Monitor.

20 Christian Anti-Communism Crusade. *Two Faces of Communism*. Comics with Problems No. 27, 1961, <http://www.ep.tc/problems/27/01.html>, 1-32.



of popular media to reinforce Cold War religious messages, reach a younger audience, and inspire a popular religious front against Communism.

Along with such key strategies, CACC leaders, led by Schwarz, crusaded against Communism by speaking in a hyperbolic and alarmist tone. In 1962, *Time* wrote about the “spell-binding Dr. Schwarz,” who captivated evangelicals with his “salesman’s exuberance and extroversion” and “fiery anti-Communist message.”<sup>21</sup> “Fiery” was an apt description. In a filmed version of his “stump speech,” Schwarz distilled the spiritual war into digestible soundbites, speaking in an urgent tone. He warned that the Christian civilization is “under deadly peril from Communism” and called for viewers to “fling [themselves] into the struggle for Christ, and for freedom.”<sup>22</sup> Consequently, in his attempt to vilify Communism, Schwarz employed religious rhetoric and resorted to crude generalizations and hysteria. In the same film, Schwarz warns, as the camera pans over images of children, “Our children could be taken from us, placed in the Communist incubator, raised in the godless Communist image!” For Pat Boone, the successful pop singer who spoke at the CACC’s rally in Los Angeles in August 1961, such a possibility was out of the question. “I don’t want to live in a Communist United States,” he boomed melodramatically to the audience. “I would rather see my four girls shot and die as little girls who have faith in God than leave them to die some years later as godless, faithless, soulless Communists.” Stirred by his words, the audience erupted in wild applause.<sup>23</sup> However, Schwarz’s inflamed rhetoric and frantic speaking pace alienated some college students at the same event. For example, an opinion

21 “Crusader Schwarz.” *Time* Vol. 79, February 9, 1962. Accessed through *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost. The publication behind this glowing account of Schwarz is no coincidence. Henry R. Luce, a prominent publishing baron in the early Cold War period, had founded the weekly news magazine *Time* in 1923. The son of an American missionary, Luce’s publications helped to reframe the Cold War in religious terms. See, for example, Clare Boothe Luce, “The Communist Challenge to a Christian World.” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 24, 1956.

22 Ken Anderson. *The Crimson Shadow*, 1953 (Muskegon, Michigan: Gospel Films Associated Press, 2013).

23 Report on The Southern California School of Anti-Communism, August 28 to September 1, 1961,” Box 1, Folder “Communism,” A. E. Bennett Collection.

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writer for *The Stanford Daily*, Stanford University's student newspaper, compared him to a "kangaroo in some previous incarnation" and, more disparagingly, to the Nazi dictator "Hitler."<sup>24</sup>

Exploring the religious dimension of the Cold War might lead us to overemphasize the unabashed anti-Communism of conservative grassroots organizations like the CACC and, subsequently, overlook the arguments made by public intellectuals in American religious political culture. In contrast to Schwarz, Niebuhr developed an academic case for the irreconcilability of Christianity and Communism. Having abandoned the radical activism of his youth, the retired Niebuhr did not share the CACC's evangelistic tactics nor expressed desire to inspire a mass anti-Communist movement. Nevertheless, he did seek to offer an educated case against Communism using his intensive theological training and academic background. In 1960, at Union Theological Seminary, he delivered a lecture to colleagues, students, and other well-educated members in the audience on the rise of Communism and utopianism as perceived threats to religion. Niebuhr began with a bold statement. "Communism has gotten to be the great alternative to Christian civilization and it is so potent partly because it is – and I hope you won't be shocked by this – partly Christian," he said. He suggested that the spiritual revival in the early 1960s was, in part, a symptom of deep-seated anxiety amongst Christians about the potential alignment of their faith with Communism. Indeed, Niebuhr saw fundamental similarities between Christianity and Communism: after all, both espoused equality and compassion for the poor, competed for the same adherents, and believed in an eventual utopia.

It was this discussion of utopianism that motivated Niebuhr's resolute anti-Communism, which he believed wrongly seduced people by promising them the kingdom of heaven on earth. For him, the promise of earthly utopia amounted to a "Christian heresy" because it assumed the perfectibility of humankind on earth and justified giving a monopoly of power to a small few. He had spent the past 30 years crystallizing this religious assessment of Communism, so his 1960 address noted above could be read as

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24 Decrer Davis, "Anti-Communist Rally Could Become Threat," *The Stanford Daily*, Volume 140, Issue 19, October 18, 1961.

the culmination of a lengthy examination of Communism.<sup>25</sup> For example, at the 1948 World Council of Churches meeting, Niebuhr led a committee in the drafting of an official statement on Communism. The report summarized his fundamental disagreements with Communism, stating that it enchanted mankind with the false promise of utopia absent from divine intervention, denied individuals' relationship with God, and replaced loyalty to God with loyalty to the state.<sup>26</sup> Evidently, Niebuhr weighed the virtues of Communism against its vices, taking an honest and balanced approach in contrast to the CACC's unabashed anti-Communism. While Schwarz generalized or distorted Communism to bolster his argument, Niebuhr's tactics reflected the nuanced thought of an intellectual. He acknowledged the appeal of Communism, yet struck a blow at what he saw as the hollowness and heresy in its ideology.

Unsurprisingly, Niebuhr had limited influence on popular anti-Communism, as he largely spoke within an intellectual vacuum and could not mobilize a mass resistance. His anti-Communist message, articulated in his characteristically measured tone, reached few Americans outside of academia and the educated elite. At this point in his career, Niebuhr only reached small audiences at the Union Theological Seminary and readerships of magazines like *The Atlantic* – a sharp contrast to the crowds of thousands packed into stadiums to cheer on Schwarz. Additionally, Niebuhr's rationality and composure had become out of touch with the radical movements of the 1960s on both the secular and religious fronts. Left-wing radicals and student protests – some of whom had become enchanted with liberation theology – as well as conservative Christians accused Niebuhr of being part of the theological establishment.<sup>27</sup> Niebuhr's earlier work *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, published in 1944, might help to explain his aversion to the zealous tactics of his counterpart and struck a measured tone. In this book, Niebuhr warns that the children of darkness, conscious of the power and potency of self-interest, are

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25 Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 48-49.

26 Clare G. Fenerty. *The Red War on Religion*. (New York: Tablet, 1946), 1, 11-12, Pamphlet Collection. Hoover Institution. Cited in Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 69.

27 Horwitz, *The Revival of Reinhold Niebuhr*, 115.

sinful because they knew no law beyond the self.<sup>28</sup> When he wrote the book, the children of darkness were fascists, Nazis, and Stalinists. However, as the Cold War intensified, he began to apply this criticism to militant anti-Communism.<sup>29</sup> Though he was never in direct dialogue with Schwarz, Niebuhr almost certainly had conservative grassroots organizations like the CACC in mind when he made his 1960 speech. Convinced that any means necessary must be used to win the spiritual war, these children of darkness became precariously close to mirroring the Communist enemy they so despised.<sup>30</sup> Still, Niebuhr did not jettison his anti-Communism. Like Schwarz, he wanted Americans, who he believed were stumbling in the darkness, to see the light.

Setting aside their different religious traditions, rhetorical styles, and strategies, both Schwarz and Niebuhr viewed the Cold War through a similarly religious lens. Both reframed the conflict as a spiritual one and depicted Communism as a powerful religion. Admittedly, religious language pervaded the Cold War from its very beginning. Early Cold War documents, such as the top secret National Security Council policy paper from 1950, known as NSC 68, demanded the mobilization of a “superior counter-force – spiritual as well as material” to defeat communism.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover presented himself as a defender of Christianity against “atheistic Communism.”<sup>32</sup> Such religious language was ubiquitous in anti-Soviet rhetoric during the Cold War. Nevertheless, Schwarz and Niebuhr came to interpret Communism as more than just a godless

28 Reinhold Niebuhr. *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defenders*. (New York: C Scribner’s Sons, 1944).

29 Reinhold Niebuhr. *The Irony of American History*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952).

30 Horowitz, *The Revival of Reinhold Niebuhr*, 122-23.

31 “National Security Council Report, NSC 68, ‘United States Objectives and Programs for National Security’,” April 14, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archives, US National Archives. <http://digitalarchive.wilson-center.org/document/116191>.

32 A guest editorial by John Edgar Hoover, “Let’s Keep America Healthy,” November 25, 1950. Box 1, Folder “Communism,” A.E. Bennett Collection. Originally published *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

ideology or a rejection of Christianity. They believed that the Soviets burned with diabolical zeal and had found a powerful religion in Communism.

For Schwarz, Communism was “Satan’s substitute program for the regeneration of Christ.”<sup>33</sup> Echoing him, William P. Strube Jr., an energetic anti-Communist and evangelist, who became Executive Secretary of the CACC in 1955, declared that “Communism is a religion spawned in Hell by Satan himself in his ruthless, relentless war against Christianity.”<sup>34</sup> Responding to this reinterpretation of the Cold War as a spiritual conflict, the California Attorney General, Stanley Mosk, strongly condemned the CACC’s “Devil Theory of anti-Communism,” which he believed was guilty of “oversimplifying complex economic and political problems.”<sup>35</sup> Speaking at a conference held at the County Federation of Labour in Los Angeles, Mosk also condemned anti-Communist zealots including Schwarz for caricaturing the Soviet Union. He argued that comparing dialogue with America’s rival to “negotiating with the Devil” risked hindering diplomatic progress.<sup>36</sup> However, the anti-Christian communists’ messianic vision of the Soviet threat made fraternizing with the enemy, at best, absurdity and, at worst, treason and heresy.

Conservative Christians were not the only ones reframing the Cold War. Niebuhr developed an almost identical view of the Cold War claiming, like Schwarz, that Communism was not just a political and economic ideology with anti-religious elements, but a sinister religion itself. Even as he formulated sophisticated arguments in his 1960 lecture, Niebuhr resorted to moralistic rhetoric and drew on religious imagery. He denounced Lenin’s “demonic genius” and Stalin’s delusional thought that he was “a kind of saint.”<sup>37</sup> Many of these ideas had been percolating in Niebuhr’s mind since the 1930s, when he recanted his former socialism and began to articulate his new beliefs. He wrote in *The Atlantic* that

33 Ken Anderson. *The Crimson Shadow*, 1953.

34 William P. Strube, *The Star over the Kremlin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1962), 51.

35 Jacqueline R. Braitman and Gerald F. Uelmen. *Justice Stanley Mosk: A Life at the Center of California Politics and Justice*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2013), 107.

36 Braitman and Uelmen, *Justice Stanley Mosk*, 108.

37 Niebuhr, “Communism as a Rival to the Christian Faith.”

“Communism is ostensibly a highly scientific and irreligious social philosophy. In reality, it is a new religion...which rests ultimately not in reason but upon an act of faith, that it expresses itself so violently against a competing religion.”<sup>38</sup> Like Schwarz, Niebuhr turned to public mediums to rid Americans of their illusions about Communism and awaken them to its pseudo-religious character. He described Marx’s works as the Communist Bible, compared the Communist Party to a sect within the church, and argued “the writings of Lenin have achieved a dogmatic significance comparable to that which the thought of Thomas Aquinas had for the medieval church.”<sup>39</sup> He feared that Communist works might replace Christian theology in America. While Niebuhr did not rouse mass support like the CACC did, he and Schwarz converged on the same conclusion about the essence of the Cold War conflict.

They both relied on a Christian framework to defend their spiritual base and denounce Communism as a heretical, demonic force. Together, they illustrate that, although religious anti-Communism was a broad movement in the early Cold War era, many Christians – even as dissimilar as Schwarz and Niebuhr – reinterpreted a political strife between the two global powers as a spiritual struggle. Schwarz and Niebuhr stand out Communist crusaders because they projected Communism as not only an ideology, but also a religion unto itself. For them, the great battle between America and the Soviet Union was not simply a conflict between the God-fearing and the God-rejecting, but a conflict between two religions. Since Communism was a genuine religion in their eyes, albeit a sinister and inverted one, the Soviet Union could not be defeated with the usual implements of warfare nor outperformed economically. Annihilating a religious rival – faith fighting against faith – would require spiritual strength. Consequently, Schwarz and Niebuhr turned to written, oral, and visual mediums to proclaim the spiritual struggle and keep the Christian spirit alive and free from Communism.

More broadly, the similarities between Niebuhr and Schwarz’s reinterpretation of the Cold War illuminate how Christian anti-Communism fits into the larger story of American reli-

38 Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Religion of Communism,” (John Davis Batchelder Collection, Library of Congress, 1857), *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1931, 462.

39 *Ibid.*, 467.

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gious history. By interpreting a geopolitical struggle through a religious lens, both figures imposed a religious framework onto a political conflict. This fusion of politics and religion would come to characterize the patriotic piety of the Religious Right: a conservative form of Christianity that emerged in the 1960s, upset by the cultural wave and perceived decline of traditional values. By the 1970s, they began to mobilize politically and, by the 1980s, they had found a champion in Ronald Reagan.<sup>40</sup> By marshalling religious arguments against Communism during the early Cold War era, Christian anti-Communists like Schwarz and Niebuhr illustrated the unique role Christians could play in politics and, arguably, laid a foundation for the Religious Right to flourish.

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40 Herzog, *Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 209.