

American Presbyterianism and the Cold War¹

The Cold War—a time when the threat of nuclear holocaust hung over the world. For more than four decades, Communism and freedom, embodied by the superpowers of the USSR and the USA, vied for the hearts of men—and sometimes fought it out, via client states, in faraway mountains and jungles.

The Cold War was the premier diplomatic reality of the post-World War II world, but its effect went far beyond foreign policy. Its specter, like a mushroom cloud, hung over Western society, including America. Think of the 1950s, a decade characterized by commercialism and entertainment: bobby socks and coonskin caps, Elvis, Coca-Cola, refrigerators, television, tail-fins on cool cars. Nevertheless, one could not escape the overriding anxiety of the nuclear age and the fear that the air-ride sirens would go off and we would all have to “duck and cover.” Even the beach party had nuclear overtones: the bikini, after all, was named after Bikini Atoll, site of nuclear tests in 1946.

The Cold War affected every aspect of society, including the religious realm. And behind the military and political struggle was an ideological battle, between godless Marxism on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Western values rooted in Christian principles. Surely there would be no question, then, as to which side found the universal support of the Church.

However, in reality, the picture is far more complex than what might appear at first blush. For during the Cold War, many Protestant denominations and churchmen adopted a position of moral equivalence toward the superpowers—or, in some cases, even favored the leftist regimes. Foundational to such behavior was a commitment to a social gospel that often found expression in socialism and pacifism.

An overview of American Protestantism, then, reveals a spectrum of beliefs and attitudes—from those who favored a Communistic approach and criticized American foreign and military policy, to those who embraced a typical American patriotic position, to those who critiqued both Russian and American officials for being in opposition to genuine freedom.

There are numerous reasons to justify this topic. For example, there is a direct correlation within Presbyterianism between ecclesiastical reform movements and separations, on the one hand, and issues of war and peace on the other. Further, many of the key players in American foreign policy in the twentieth century have been Presbyterian. And, it is noteworthy that the formal declaration of the Cold War occurred on a Presbyterian college campus—a campus in the heartland of America, in the state of Missouri.

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Fulton, Missouri, had never seen such excitement. The small college town was playing host to the President of the United States, Harry S. Truman, and to the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Winston Churchill.

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With bold strokes, Churchill delivered his famous “Iron Curtain” speech to a packed Westminster College gymnasium, March 5, 1946. In some ways, this marked the formal beginning of the Cold War.

But a presentation on American Presbyterianism and the Cold War has its justification not only because of that dramatic event at a Presbyterian school. People in the Reformed tradition have always had an influential role in America, and this is certainly true with regard to matters of war and peace. Woodrow Wilson was the son, nephew, and grandson of Presbyterian ministers. Dwight Eisenhower was a member of National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. At least four Secretaries of State over the past century were Presbyterian and were willing to bring their faith to bear on the problems of diplomacy. William Jennings Bryan is well-known for his non-interventionism and belief in arbitration to settle disputes. John Foster Dulles was active in church work. Condoleeza Rice is the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. And when reporters asked Dean Rusk what he had learned in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, he said, “I learned something about the answer to the first question in the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of 1647.” What was that?, they wanted to know. “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”²

But beyond significant monologues and high government officials, the Presbyterian denominations in America have helped to shape (as well as to reflect) public opinion.

In our treatment of the topic, we will regard theology rather than political ideology as the foundational consideration. This is not the approach that has always been taken by historians, even when taking religion into account with regard to the Cold War. While we appreciate the possibility that politicians may have sought to prostitute the church for propagandistic advantage, our own perspective leads us to concentrate on the theological and religious factors which led Presbyterians of diverse persuasion to go in different directions on the political questions of the day, including, the Cold War.

I. The Rise of the Social Gospel

Radical currents, starting in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth, were sweeping away much that had been held dear. The maelstrom caused much confusion and produced many inconsistencies.

People committed to a “social gospel”—that is, a message more concerned with societal matters and institutional change than with individual conversion—formed the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) in 1908. Comprised of several Protestant denominations, the FCC furthered the aims of churchmen desirous of enacting a new social order which would be collectivistic in nature.³

These ecclesiastics tended to be pacifist. Specifically, they deplored World War I. Nevertheless, they viewed that “war to end all wars” as providing an opportunity for

² Much of this information can be found in James H. Smylie, *American Presbyterians: A Pictorial History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1985), 203ff. The quote by Dean Rusk is cited in Donald W. Shriver, Jr., *The Seeds of Peace*, a sermon at the Princeton University Chapel, September 27, 1981 (Union Papers No. 1, June 1982), 10. We would also note that Condoleeza Rice, President George W. Bush’s Secretary of State in his second term of office, is the daughter of a Presbyterian minister.

³ C. Gregg Singer, *The Unholy Alliance* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1975), is probably the best source to document these facts.

restructuring the world along the lines of their social thinking. A war to make the world safe for democracy held appeal for those churchmen committed to the democratic ideal.⁴

The influence of the FCC must not be underestimated. Many prominent people were involved directly in the organization at a time when there were serious proposals for church union across traditional lines. The appeal was to forget about doctrine, since doctrine divides; let everyone think about Jesus, and all will be well.

Following the First World War, the PCUSA General Assembly issued several pacifist-sounding statements. The Assembly commended Presidents Harding and Hoover for their work in international agreements; advocated United States participation in the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague; opposed the forcing of students into military education (as being against the cultivation of peace); argued for the legitimacy of conscientious objector status; and urged the church as a whole to study and pursue peace.⁵

The 1924 Assembly pledged “all its energies to the outlawing of war and to the hastening of the day when nations shall learn war no more.”⁶

The 1927 Assembly declared:

Resolved, That this Assembly take note of the fact that the chief denial of our Christian faith lies in the hostile attitudes of nations and races and in their preparedness and continued preparation for war. We recognize that the same Christian principles of love, service and mutual trust that we profess and seek to practice in individual relationships, are equally applicable to the relationships of nations and peoples.⁷

II. A Generation of Unrest (1920-1945)

The pacifistic and socialistic trends in the Presbyterian Church had their origin in left-wing theology, beginning in the late-nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the fundamentalist-Modernist struggle caused great turmoil in the Northern Presbyterian Church. In 1936, the General Assembly completed the process of purging the Church’s most consistently Reformed element. Among those essentially booted out of the Northern Presbyterian Church was J. Gresham Machen, former Princeton Seminary professor and intellectual champion of American fundamentalists.⁸

⁴ Ibid. See also Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, *An Appeal to the 150,000 Churches of America*, a paper issued in 1921 in connection with the Washington Disarmament Conference; and the FCC’s *Working Towards a Warless World*, a 1921 pamphlet.

⁵ Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, *Minutes of the General Assembly* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly), for the following years: 1922 (pp. 70-75); 1926 (p. 253); 1928 (pp. 56-57); 1930 (pp. 67, 72, 134); 1932 (pp. 83-84), 1935 (p. 104). See also the *Minutes* for 1934 with regard to commending the President for his arms embargo to Paraguay and Bolivia in light of their war (p. 204); and for 1935, in which a left-wing social agenda is linked with an endorsement of the U.S. membership in the International Labor Organization (pp. 100-01).

⁶ *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1924), 112-13.

⁷ *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1927), 246-67.

⁸ *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. by Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), is one of several books which deal with this denomination. D. Clair

Organizationally, Northern Presbyterianism thus experienced a great divide in 1936. Although there was still a reservoir of conservative belief in the PCUSA, the denomination had turned a corner. The tolerationists who preferred appeasement to rocking the boat were solidly in charge. This policy led to increasing influence by Modernists, who were basically committed to radical politics and theology.

The appeasement of left-wing churchmen translated into a pacifistic trend with regard to international affairs. The 1937 General Assembly declared that “Christ’s ideal for the world is that of home in which God is the Father of all, and all the members of the human race are brethren.” That same Assembly also received the results of voting by the presbyteries on deleting from the Westminster Confession of Faith the words which permitted the civil magistrate to wage war “upon just and necessary occasions.” This amendment received the affirmative votes of 183 out of 279 presbyteries, three short of the requisite two-thirds majority. Another attempt in 1938-39 likewise obtained a majority vote of the presbyteries but not the necessary number for ratification.⁹

Meanwhile the rise of totalitarian regimes abroad caused great consternation to liberal churchmen. The strong pacifism which almost became church doctrine clashed with the realities in Europe and the Far East.

When war finally came, the PCUSA stood in favor of the war effort. But behind that support was the determination by many in the church that this “necessary evil” would serve as an instrument for societal change domestically and overseas. As one commentator has put it, “The emphasis [in General Assembly pronouncements] is not on the justness of the war but on the justness of the peace.” And, “By concentrating on the

Davis’ contribution, “Machen and Liberalism,” maintains: “Obviously Machen knew of liberalism’s social and political face, perhaps as important to its supporters as its theology. While some attention could be given to Machen’s conservative political stance and its emphasis on limited government, predisposing him against liberalism in general, it would be a mistake to think it was all that important to Machen. Rather it is the theological issues that must be considered” (247). The OPC through the years apparently has not taken any positions on the Cold War as such, out of respect for the doctrine of the “spirituality of the Church” (that the Body of Christ should deal only with ecclesiastical matters), as well as out of a concern to attack left-wing ideology in its theological aspect. Nevertheless, many members of the OPC have been active members of the John Birch Society. Also, see a 1987 issue of *Journey* magazine, a publication of Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Lynchburg, Va., in which the editor, Richard Knodel, Jr., wrote in critique of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization: “. . . how Christians can be ‘salt and light’ within the U.S.S.R. without being either for or against socialism is one monumental task. It’s pure ‘fuzzy-wuzzie.’ But this is the kind of pabulum coming forth from *mainline evangelicalism*. And *this* is the planetary system which is presently exerting such a gravitational pull upon the calvinistic system! We don’t need it. Covenant theology is vastly superior! With it we needn’t be so muddle-headed in the face of the leviathan ‘statisms’ of our day. Jesus is our Christ. And salt is more than the mystical darkness of a Russian Orthodox cathedral” (Vol. II, No. 4, July-August 1987, p. 3).

⁹ Robert F. Smylie, “A Presbyterian Witness on War and Peace: An Historical Interpretation,” *Journal of Presbyterian History*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Winter 1981) 500-01. Even Lefferts A. Loetscher made the connection between left-wing politics and the tolerationism in the church: “This spirit of postwar pacifism, already so widespread in the country and in the Church, operated strongly against any party—in this case the extreme conservatives—which sought to force a struggle over any issue. Against the background prevailing in postwar America, the vivid, even bloody, military figures of speech sometimes used by conservative speakers and writers were singularly unattractive to most Americans of the day” (*The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954] 120-21).

aims of the war, and on the nature of a just peace, Presbyterians sought to assure United States commitment to the restructuring of a just world order.”¹⁰

The Federal Council of Churches’ Commission on a Just and Durable Peace, chaired by John Foster Dulles, early in 1943 issued a series of political propositions, known as the “Six Pillars of Peace.” The FCC’s commission in this statement demonstrated its commitment to an international collectivism.¹¹

III. The Post-World War II Challenge

A. Left-Wing Presbyterianism

The Federal Council of Churches continued to advocate socialism and collectivism after World War II. The FCC painted a rosy picture of Soviet intentions, portraying the Russians as being paranoid aggressors because of the militarism of Germany and Japan.¹²

John Foster Dulles reported to the Council’s executive committee that the charter of the United Nations was a wondrous document for the promotion of human liberty. That committee then adopted a statement urging that the United States ratify the UN charter.¹³

Another prominent theme by the FCC was the necessity for international control of the atomic bomb. As historian C. Gregg Singer noted, it is possible that “the Council was interested not so much in the international control of the bomb per se, as in giving Russia a position equal to that of the United States in the determination of this and other related issues.”¹⁴

This ecumenical organization had to face renewed charges in the late 1940s that it was riddled with Communist sympathizers and even agents. The resulting loss of credibility for the FCC led its supporters to dissolve it in 1950. However, replacing it was the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC), with the same personnel and programs continuing unabated.¹⁵

The FCC and NCC had many Presbyterians in places of leadership and responsibility. Statements by Northern Presbyterian General Assemblies mirrored the sentiments expressed by the Federal and National Councils.

At least three major topics relating to war and peace appear in PCUSA General Assembly minutes in the late 1940s and 1950s. First, there was ardent support for the United Nations.¹⁶

Secondly, the Korean War is referred to cryptically in 1951 as “the crisis in world affairs.”¹⁷

¹⁰ Smylie, “Presbyterian Witness,” 502-03.

¹¹ Singer, *Unholy Alliance*, 136ff. The second pillar reads as follows: “The peace must make provision for bringing within the scope of international agreement those economic and financial acts of national governments which have widespread international repercussions.” The language may seem innocuous, until one realizes that those “economic and financial acts” included all kinds of New Deal and similar legislation.

¹² Singer, *Unholy Alliance*, 140ff.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 139-40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 180ff.

¹⁶ Smylie, “Presbyterian Witness,” 503.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 503-04.

Third, the Assembly began to call for the reduction and elimination of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, biological, and chemical.¹⁸

This commitment to the ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament came to expression in a variety of ways in the 1960s and 1970s.

It was not only the Northern Presbyterians who took positions on international affairs. The Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS, or Southern Presbyterian Church), as a result of being increasingly enamored with social issues after 1940, also became involved with issues of international relations. This interest grew at the General Assembly level in the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1960, that denomination “confessed” its involvement in the destruction of human life in war, and declared that “Christians the world over should work with every means at their disposal to prevent war. They must pray for the ultimate world-wide abolition of nuclear weapons, and, indeed, of all means of warfare involving mass destruction.” While cautioning that unilateral disarmament would constitute abdication of responsibility, it stated that Christians should do all in their power to work for a warless world, enforced by an international police force, and based upon “a just international order.”¹⁹

The 1969 Assembly, one of the most radical up to that date, called for ratification of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty; urged the United States government to consider the possible destabilizing nature of an anti-ballistic system; and urged the government to “participate fully in international conversations regarding multilateral de-escalation of the arms race.”²⁰

The patterns of arguing for a “just peace” based upon the change of societal structure thus manifested themselves in both the Northern and Southern mainline Presbyterian denominations.

B. Conservative Presbyterianism

The name perhaps most associated in Presbyterianism with anti-Communism is that of Carl McIntire, pastor from Collingswood, New Jersey, who was among those defrocked by the PCUSA in 1936. He was among those who seceded from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1937 who subsequently founded the Bible Presbyterian Synod. This small denomination suffered a split in the mid-1950s, with Dr. McIntire spearheading the group known as the Bible Presbyterian Church (Collingswood Synod).

McIntire founded the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) and the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) as direct challenges to the National

¹⁸ The key year was 1956, in which there were calls for both elimination of weapons of mass destruction, and strong support of the United Nations; cited in *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* (New York: The General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1980) 27-28.

¹⁹ George A. Chauncey and Y. Jacqueline Rhoades, ed., *Social Pronouncements of the Presbyterian Church in the United States: Excerpts from Statements Adopted by the General Assembly, 1960-1969* (Richmond, Va.[?]: Board of Christian Education, n.d.), 36-38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27-28. The 1964 Assembly declared, “[The threat of mankind’s extermination by nuclear weapons] is in itself a moral issue transcending anything the world has ever known. The Church cannot now transfer to others the responsibility for providing a new instrument for the world’s salvation. As nuclear warfare threatens total death, the Church is called in desperate urgency to declare the nature of life and how to achieve its fulfillment” (*ibid.*, 32).

Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches (WCC). This fiery preacher often himself led protests at meetings of these two left-wing organizations, especially because of their ties with Communism.

McIntire carried on his fight against Communism through such institutions such as *Christian Beacon* magazine, Faith Theological Seminary in Elkins Park (Philadelphia), Pennsylvania, and the Twentieth Century Reformation Hour radio broadcast. His refusal to adhere to the so-called “Fairness Doctrine” led to the revocation of his radio license to operate WXUR in Media, Pennsylvania, in the early 1970s after a protracted battle with the Federal Communications Commission. Some of the specific views to which he objected being broadcast on his station were defenses of the National and World Councils of Churches.²¹

IV. The Vietnam Experience

A. Left-Wing Presbyterian Bodies

The conflict in Southeast Asia marked a shift by the mainline Presbyterian churches in that they bore witness against the United States involvement in that effort.

The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) first addressed the issue at the 1966 Assembly. Warning that “No nation is righteous before God; therefore, we ought not to suppose our cause completely just or our motives completely pure,” that Assembly went on record that U.S. presence in Vietnam only exacerbated the situation in that country.²²

The church’s highest judicatory in 1967 felt that the Vietnam War was the most urgent moral issue before the church. It wrestled with the dilemma that one could not responsibly withdraw unilaterally, yet continued involvement meant running the risk of World War III and nuclear holocaust. The Assembly warned against engaging in acts of inhumanity just because the enemy was perpetrating them.²³

The next year, the Assembly declared:

This war has revealed once again the brute facts about human nature: the universality of sin expressed in our pretensions to be righteous by our own acts and ideologies, and our desperate need to be forgiven and redeemed. . . . It is a fresh reminder of our complicity along with all men in the crucifixion of Christ.²⁴

The invasion of Cambodia caused the General Assembly in 1970 to call for an end to the war. Asserting that there was no honor or moral victory to be obtained by continuing

²¹ Carl McIntire’s book *Servants of Apostasy* (Collingswood, N.J.: Christian Beacon Press, 1955) is an attack on the World Council of Churches, including the fact that the organization was riddled with Communists and was supportive of Communism.

²² Smylie, “Presbyterian Witness,” 504-05. [Note: The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. merged with the United Presbyterian Church of North America in 1958, forming the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America; the enlarged denomination was still referred to as the “Northern” Church.]

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

the fighting, the body demanded: “Put an end to the strife and bloodshed. Leave Vietnam promptly.” “There will be no inner peace nor public tranquility until it is done.”²⁵

In 1971, the Assembly claimed that Vietnamization was simply an excuse for continued brutalization of the Southeast Asians. The war allegedly did not fit the just war criteria since there had been a disregard of Asian lives, the warfare was worse than whatever bloodbath might follow surrender, justice mandated the full participation of the Vietnamese in a political settlement, and indiscriminate (or even diabolical) weapons were part of the military policy.²⁶

The 1972 Assembly stated that only dishonor came to the United States for its continued pursuit of the war. “To be obsessed by the fear of defeat keeps us as a people from contrition and from the power of new moral birth and makes us liable to both the judgement of God and history.”²⁷

As in the past, statements and concerns of the National Council of Churches paralleled those of the mainline Presbyterian churches. In the mid- and late-1960s it was issuing statements questioning American participation in the war, and commending those who felt led out of “Christian conviction” to join in anti-war protests and rallies.²⁸

B. Conservative Presbyterianism

Carl McIntire was one of those who stood staunchly in favor of the United States fighting Communism in Southeast Asia. He personally campaigned in all 50 states for a firm resolve on the part of the U.S. government to settle for nothing less than victory in Vietnam.

The *Presbyterian Journal* during the Vietnam War often carried news and editorials dealing with it. Left-wing churchmen many times were the objects of Dr. Taylor’s attacks.

Along with the *Presbyterian Journal*, one of the other organizations which had issued a call for a new denomination was the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship (PEF), which had founded the Executive Commission on Overseas Evangelism (ECOE, pronounced “echo”) to send Presbyterian missionaries to the foreign field. As in the 1930s in the Northern Church, denominational bureaucrats took a dim view of this rival to the official program, and the 1971 Southern General Assembly voted to condemn ECOE.²⁹

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ For example, International Affairs Commission, General Committee Meetings, Minutes, March 18-19, 1966; “Policy Statement on Viet Nam,” adopted by the General Board on December 3, 1965; “Resolution on Viet-Nam,” adopted by the General Board, February 24, 1966; Office Memorandum, to Advisory Committee on Peace from Lauris B. Whitman, “A Proposed Commission of Investigation of Charges of American Involvement in ‘War Crimes’ in Vietnam.” Other related documents include: “Policy Statement on China,” approved by the General Board, February 22, 1966; Staff Report to Advisory Committee on Peace, “The Use of Existing NCC Resources,” March 28, 1966; “Policy Statement on Southern Africa,” approved by the General Board, February 23, 1966; “Proposals for Planning a More Effective and More Ecumenical Program at the Church Center for the United Nations,” c. 1966; and Ad Hoc Committee on Cuba, Latin America Department, Division of Ministry, “Report and Recommendations on the Church in Cuba.” See also Singer, *Unholy Alliance*, 250ff.

²⁹ For a detailed account of this, see Frank J. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: The Silver Anniversary Edition* (Lawrenceville, Ga.: Presbyterian Scholars Press, 1999) 50-58.

PEF's annual conference coincided with the announcement that there would be a Continuing Church. One of the evenings at the conference was given over to the presentation of the work of ECOE. The Rev. Mr. Jimmy Lyons, Choctaw Indian chief originally from Oklahoma, was chosen to defend ECOE's formation and policies. In a rousing speech to an enthusiastic audience, Lyons explained why the PEF Board had felt compelled to form an independent sending agency at that time. The latter part of his address was unabashedly patriotic as he lashed out at Assembly pronouncements and actions which not only violated Scripture and common sense, but which, he said, approached absurdity and treason. He noted the "pseudo-pious, pompous, ponderous profundity" which churchmen had employed in favor of the Black Manifesto. He attacked the use of benevolence funds to send church officials to Paris to talk to the Communist Vietnamese and to issue statements which would have passed the censors in Moscow, Havana, Hanoi, or Peking without a word being cut out. Lyons exclaimed,

No doubt many of these so-called Protestant church leaders would say, "Well, we're merely exercising the right to express our opinion"—well, I'm merely expressing mine. But it is more than opinion that this action and many others like it are part of the total denominational program. It is *not* the program of the Church of the living Christ, it is a bony relic dug from an accursed grave, it is the hand of Judas—I shall not touch it nor support it.

The preacher affirmed that we are to love our enemies, but "Love was never meant to be perverted into support for the work of Satan and anti-Christ." Lyons roared,

Yes, I'm alarmed—and if you're not alarmed I wonder what it's going to take to make you that way. Yes, I'm alarmed—but more than alarmed, I am filled with implacable resolve. Hear this well, Presbyterian: Thou shalt not crucify America on the iron spear of the Bolshevik and claim the sanction of Christ! Thou shalt not crucify the Bride of the Lamb on the twisted witch's claw of peace when there is no peace and claim to stand in apostolic succession! Thou shalt not strip the Church of the seamless robe of Christ to clothe her in the mantle of Caesar!³⁰

Out of the Continuing Presbyterian Church movement was born the denomination now known as the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the largest evangelical Presbyterian denomination in the country. As shall be shown, the PCA figured significantly in the debate in American Presbyterianism on the Cold War. But what is important to note at this point is that the dissension over Cold War politics, including

³⁰ This material dealing with Jimmy Lyons may be found in *ibid.*, 52-56. Ralph Didier documented his struggles in leaving the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in 1973, as well as the radicalism in that denomination which prompted him to make that break, in *Hang On To Your Heritage* (Orange, Calif.: Covenant Press, 1977).

involvement in the Vietnam War, played a significant role in the ecclesiastical separation from the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1973.³¹

V. The New Era of Détente

A. Left-Wing Presbyterian Bodies

Issues of war and peace continued to occupy the attention of liberal Presbyterian Churches, both North and South, even after the end of American involvement in Southeast Asia.³² One of the first major developments was the adoption by the 1975 United Presbyterian General Assembly of a recommendation from the Assembly Committee on Hunger, Population and World Peace that the Advisory Council on Church and Society (ACCS) “undertake ‘A Study on Peacemaking and Foreign Policy’ to include ‘Practical suggestions for our churches and members to help them participate in a new world vision and era of peacemaking.’”³³

The most significant statement was the document, *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling*, which ACCS submitted to the 1980 UPCUSA General Assembly for approval. The Introduction recognized that the 1975 Assembly had called for a reassessment of “the concept of peacemaking and the direction of our country’s foreign policy in the light of our biblical and confessional faith and a markedly changed situation in the world today.” The major factors making for a changed situation included the following: “the United States’ defeat in Southeast Asia and the loss of prestige and power in the changing world situation”; “the unwillingness of the emerging nations to accept the continued domination of the developed nations”; “the increasing insecurity over the perilous nuclear

³¹ See Rick L. Nutt, *Toward Peacemaking: Presbyterians in the South and National Security, 1945-1983* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1994): “Observers of current Protestantism in the United States describe the secularization or politicization of the mainline denominations, by which they mean the establishing of groups within churches centered around specific issues—often political in nature. The groups may caucus for or against the right to choose abortion, or the place of homosexuals in the life of the church and nation, or another such concern. The SPPF [Southern Presbyterian Peace Fellowship] and the Continuing Church adherents manifested that development within the PCUS regarding national security questions. The two groups were diametrically opposed, and both stood some distance from the broad middle of the denomination” (50). He also wrote: “The Vietnam War did not cause the PCUS, either in its General Assemblies or its membership, to join the historic peace churches in their pacifism. It was, however, a turning point in the denomination’s official stand with regard to national security and U.S. foreign policy. The correspondence and debates noted above reveal that this was no transformation within a left-liberal leadership of the church but one that touched many members. The fissure of the church over the war was one factor that contributed to the decision of many in the Continuing Church Movement to separate themselves from the PCUS and form the Presbyterian Church in America. That action removed the most vocal and fervent opposition to peace and justice ministries from the church. The development of peace ministry in the church accelerated and expanded in the years that followed the Vietnam War” (91f).

³² However, according to the Archivist of the Historical Foundation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, neither of those denominations took positions on the Cold War or nuclear weaponry. Susan Knight Gore, email (August 19, 2010).

³³ “Chronology of Major Developments Related to the Process of Churchwide Study and Policy Development on Peacemaking and Resistance Initiated by ACCS Following Referral of Six Overtures by the 1983 General Assembly,” 1.

weapons stalemate in which any miscalculation could annihilate humanity”; “concern for the hungry oppressed of the world.”³⁴

The paper contended that this is a new *kairos*, a special season comparable to the advent of Jesus Christ, in which God’s people are being summoned to faith and obedience with regard to military peace and social and economic justice.

Ominous clouds hang over human history. There are frightening risks in the continuing arms race and looming conflicts over diminishing energy resources as centers of power struggle for control. Our fear for safety has led us to trust in the false security of arms; our sin of war has led us to take life; and now we are in danger of taking our own lives as well. Furthermore, economic systems fail to allow a quarter of the world’s population full participation in their societies, creating recurrent patterns of starvation and famine in Asia and Africa as in the 1970s.³⁵

The document declared that “The church is faithful to Christ when it is engaged in peacemaking.” This shalom is said to be not only absence of warfare, but also economic and political justice for the human family. “Our insensitivity to today’s patterns of injustice, inequality, and oppression—indeed, our participation in them—denies the gospel. Christ alone is our peace. . . . Our structures of military might, economic relations, political institutions, and cultural patterns fail to meet the needs of our time.”³⁶

Furthermore, “The church is obedient to Christ when it nurtures and equips God’s people as peacemakers.” Specific guidelines were given to assist congregations to develop worship services which emphasized peacemaking, and to study “foreign policy subjects in light of biblical and theological considerations.”³⁷

Finally, “The church bears witness to Christ when it nourishes the moral life of the nations for the sake of peace in our world.” Church people are “to work with all people who strive for peace and justice and to serve as signposts for God’s love in a broken world. To deny our calling is a disservice to the church and the world. To affirm our calling is to act in ‘faith, hope, and love.’”³⁸

The Southern Presbyterian Church echoed its Northern counterpart by adopting the first part of the statement (“An Affirmation of Policy and Direction”) in 1981.³⁹ For years these two denominations had cooperated on matters of peace. Their merger in 1983 produced the Presbyterian Church (United States of America), or PC(USA).

That same year the re-united General Assembly was faced with several overtures from various presbyteries, asking for advice on “Resistance to Military Policy Through Withholding of Taxes”; “Developing a Theological Position on Peace and Urging a Study of the Implications of the Just War Doctrine”; and “A Study of the Issue of Just War as an Element of Faith.” The Assembly referred these overtures to the Advisory Council on Church and Society as well as the Council on Theology and Culture for study. The

³⁴ *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling*, 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-6, 8-10, 29-41.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

³⁹ Cited in Robert Heyer, ed., *Nuclear Disarmament: Key Statements of Popes, Bishops, and Churches* (New York/Ramsey [N.J.]: Paulist Press, 1982), 269ff.

referral requested that the task force “include in its work the study of non-violence as a means for social change.”⁴⁰

In response, a series of essays entitled, *The Peacemaking Struggle: Militarism and Resistance*, was prepared. The essays denounced nuclear warfare as being unthinkable; warned that the U.S. since World War II had begun to look like a “national security state”; and opened the door for resistance, including civil disobedience, for those who “conscientiously” object to U.S. policy.⁴¹

Resistance to the pursuit of this latest peacemaking effort by the PC(USA) was led by Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom, a group with ties to the Institute for Religion and Democracy (IRD).⁴² The latter group led the charge against the National and World Councils of Churches for their support of Marxian revolution; their fight caught the attention of *60 Minutes* and *Reader’s Digest*, which ran stories on the connections between the ecumenical bodies and Communism.⁴³

The PC(USA) eventually adopted a position which allowed for civil disobedience if a person believed such was necessary in order to bear witness for peace.

It is abundantly clear that the emphasis among liberal Presbyterians on “peacemaking” did not cease after the end of the Cold War. Further, “peacemaking” was employed in order to foster a broader agenda of social transformation—i.e., socialism.

B. Conservative Presbyterianism

1. Presbyterian Church in America

The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) first took a stand on a Cold War matter in 1977. Rev. Frank K. Chapo of Johnson City, Tennessee, an Hungarian who described himself as “one who had to flee on foot from the Communists,” introduced a personal resolution which called upon the President and the Congress “to reconsider their decision to withdraw our ground forces from South Korea, and to continue to maintain our military presence there.” Furthermore, the resolution which had noted the brutality and anti-Christian nature of North Korea, asked the Moderator of the General Assembly to convey copies of this resolution to the President and the Congress, “and to our sister churches in South Korea with assurance that we stand with them as brothers against any enemies of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”⁴⁴

The 1978 PCA General Assembly recorded its unalterable opposition to atheistic communism and that the Churches urge their members to register their opposition by

⁴⁰ “Chronology of Major Developments,” 1.

⁴¹ Ronald H. Stone and Dana W. Wilbanks, ed., *The Peacemaking Struggle: Militarism and Resistance* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985).

⁴² Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom was a “special organization” which operated within the PC(USA) in compliance with its guidelines for such groups. The denomination eventually abolished the provision in its book of order that formally recognized such groups.

⁴³ See Joseph A. Harriss, “The Gospel According to Marx,” *Reader’s Digest* (February 1993).

⁴⁴ *Minutes of the Fifth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Montgomery, Ala.: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, 1977) 62, 69.

writing the President of these United States and their Congressmen, urging them to exert every possible effort to resist the further encroachment of this Godless ideology.⁴⁵

Also in 1978, PCA missionary-at-large Jimmy Lyons, whose travels had taken him to Southeast Asia, also developed a slide presentation on refugees in that part of the world. He also wrote a book, *Safe in the Harbor?*, which highlighted the plight of those who had fled the Communist takeover.⁴⁶

Another private contribution to the literature was Matsu Crawford's *My Head is Bloody but Unbowed*. An octogenarian at the time, Mrs. Crawford wrote of her personal experiences, from the 1940s to the 1980s, with left-wing churchmen seeking to subvert the message of the Church to Marxism, and of others naively being led to do the same. She documented Communist-led activity in schools and churches and religious institutions.⁴⁷

Nuclear War

The PCA addressed the question of the ethics of nuclear war in 1987. An *Ad Interim* Committee on Christian Responsibility in a Nuclear Age originally authorized four years earlier presented its report which was overwhelmingly adopted. In this report, the PCA put "This Age in Theological Perspective":

The momentous events of August 1945, for all their bearing on the subsequent affairs of men and nations, did not radically alter the course of this age. The truly decisive events are rather the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and his session at God's right hand. These events, together with the next in the series, namely, the return of the Son of Man from heaven in power and glory, give us as Christians our fundamental perspective on the present. The "nuclear age," with its undeniably profound challenges, nevertheless falls within the inter-adventual period; our thinking about it is governed by the even more profound perspective of the history of redemption.

The report drew the conclusion that "war will continue to be a liability until the return of Jesus Christ," but also said, "It would be wrong, however, to conclude that no mitigation of the effects of the fall is possible in the sphere of international relations. Just as

⁴⁵ *Minutes of the Sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Decatur, Ga.: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, 1978) 44-45, 110. Pastor Gene Case of Woodville, Mississippi, a staunch advocate of historic Southern Presbyterianism and the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, requested that his negative vote be recorded. It is also noteworthy that PCA minister Ralph Didier's independent congregation, Covenant Presbyterian Church of Orange, California, expressed concern about the introduction into church business of secular issues such as troop withdrawals from Korea, especially when those issues are "of a partisan political nature" (ibid., 41).

⁴⁶ Jimmy Lyons, *Safe in the Harbor?* (Manassas, Va.: Reformation Educational Foundation, 1979) 12-13.

⁴⁷ Matsu Crawford, *My Head is Bloody but Unbowed* (Manassas, Va.: Reformation Educational Foundation, 1983).

Christians may work to limit the suffering caused by natural disasters, so they may work to limit the suffering caused by unjust and unnecessary wars.”⁴⁸

This report reaffirmed the Westminster Confession teaching that the civil magistrate may wage war “upon just and necessary occasion”: “Inasmuch as the state has been ordained by God to protect human life, to secure human rights, and to promote human values, its use of the sword must be consistent with these ends, and always proportionate with them.” Appeal was made to Old Testament theocratic warfare in order to draw three principles applicatory to today’s nations. First, “for all its evident non-pacifism, the Old Testament does not foster the spirit of militarism which glorifies war and cultivates the martial arts as the supreme cultural achievement.” Second, the solidarity of human societies means that there can be no absolute distinction between combatant and non-combatant: “Wars are between nations; kings in making war put their people as well as their armies at risk.” Third, “all nations should recognize the limitations of military prowess.”⁴⁹

With regard to nuclear weapons, the report said:

In an extreme case, as a last resort, it might be necessary to subject enemy civilians to direct attack, if there were no other way to prevent the annihilation of [a] country justly at war against a totalitarian aggressor. In view of the biblical view of the solidarity of human societies, this extreme measure cannot be ruled out absolutely as a matter of principle. However, this position ought to be held with the greatest caution and reserve, inasmuch as the general principle of noncombatant immunity from direct attack provides an important limitation in the conduct of warfare that is designed to prevent unnecessary taking of human life.⁵⁰

The report continued:

Other things being equal, nuclear disarmament is desirable as a means of reducing the risk of nuclear war; but it is not in itself a moral absolute. One must consider not only how to avert a nuclear holocaust, but also how to prevent the loss of freedom of entire peoples. Given the dilemma of possible escalation to an all-out nuclear war, on the one hand, and the near certainty of enslavement to a totalitarian power, on the other, it is not clear that the nonuse of nuclear weapons is an absolute moral obligation. The degree of risk must be weighed against the degree of threat; it is not certain that any use of nuclear weapons would lead inevitably to a holocaust that would destroy the earth.

These considerations apply to “first strike” as well as to retaliatory use of nuclear weapons. An absolute commitment to a policy of “no first use” of nuclear weapons no matter what the circumstances may be, is in effect a

⁴⁸ *Minutes of the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Decatur, Ga.: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, 1987) 518-19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 520-23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 524.

form of unilateral disarmament, entailing surrender to an aggressor equipped with superior conventional forces. “First strike pacifism,” in distinction from nuclear pacifism as such, is an untenable ethical position; if it is morally wrong to strike first because of the risk of escalation, it is morally wrong to strike second for the same reason.⁵¹

2. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

In 1982, the RPCNA took an unusual stand for a conservative denomination. It said:

1. acknowledging our submission to God and His Word we affirm the Kingship of Jesus Christ over all men and nations
2. acknowledging it is the task of the Church to be a prophetic voice to the world in which we live
3. acknowledging that in a world filled with hatred and violence, the Church is called to the role of peacemaker
4. acknowledging that our failure to declare the whole counsel of God has contributed to the threat of nuclear war
5. acknowledging that the proliferation and possible use of nuclear arms is a demonstration not only of man’s contempt of man but of man’s contempt of God and His creation
6. acknowledging that murder is forbidden by God and that the use of nuclear arms involves the massive, indiscriminate killing of human beings
7. acknowledging that the nations that forget God shall surely come to death

We call upon all men and nations to repent of their arrogance and independence of God, to trust in Him that they might do that which is honoring to Him and be blessed by Him.

We call upon you:

- a. to acknowledge your position as a servant of God, called to do justice, to protect human life and;
- b. to do all in your power to work to eliminate the use of all nuclear weapons by all nations.⁵²

The RPCNA has had a long heritage of advocating the acknowledgement of Christ’s mediatorial kingship, and of testifying against the United States of America for its failure to profess in its Constitution that its ultimate allegiance is to King Jesus. Indeed, for most of its history, the RPCNA has prohibited participation in the political process because of the nation’s professed religious neutrality (though that stance was modified in the 1960s). Like the liberal Presbyterians, the RPCNA, as reflected in this statement on nuclear war,

⁵¹ Ibid., 525.

⁵² Quoted in *Presbyterian Journal* (April 10, 1985) 10. See *Christian Statesman* CXXX 6 (November-December 1987) for some Covenanters reflecting on the Vietnam War.

concluded that both the United States and the USSR are under God's judgment for their idolatry. However, unlike the liberals, the RPCNA made that judgment of "moral equivalence" on a traditional theological foundation. Or, perhaps we could say it this way: conservatives such as those in the PCA emphasized the realpolitik of supporting the United States as being relatively better than the Soviet Union, while the RPCNA critiqued all nations for their shortcomings—that is, their theological failings with respect to the Lordship of Christ.

Another factor in the RPCNA's 1982 stance is a long-standing commitment to peace among the nations, reflected in positions taken as far back as the late nineteenth century, and continuing throughout the twentieth century. In the years leading up to the First World War, the Synod pleaded for peace. In the 1920s and throughout the 1930s, the denomination adopted the agenda of the ecumenical movement. One could even say that it had become a "peace church." This came in a context of the church flirting with liberalism, and struggling with how to reconcile its historic commitment to the gospel and Christ's mediatorial kingship, on the one hand, with a social gospel on the other.

VI. Summary Analysis

As has been demonstrated, American Presbyterianism did not speak with a unified voice on matters relating to the Cold War. The various Presbyterian denominations diverged greatly on these issues. Comparing and contrasting their positions will be helpful in determining why this is the case.

First, the similarities between liberal and conservative Presbyterian bodies are noteworthy. Both sides spoke to the issues. Both demonstrated a willingness to address the government directly on certain matters. Both spoke prophetically against the country for its sins. Both were willing to advocate civil disobedience against the wicked practices of the State, although in the case of left-wing churches the issue was the arms race while for conservative churches it was abortion.⁵³

But almost totally different visions of what constitutes righteousness led the two camps into basically different directions. Although the RPCNA's statement makes generalization tricky, the left-wing churches employed a Biblical hermeneutic which merely concentrated on certain moral principles, while the conservative churches sought to deal seriously with the whole counsel of God and not ignore Scripture passages which indicate that "peace" may not always be possible in a fallen world.

The question of the applicability of the "law of Christ" to international relations brought varying responses. The liberals most emphatically employed Jesus' words about turning the other cheek in the quest for peace. On the other hand, Dr. G. Aiken Taylor of the *Presbyterian Journal* rejected such a notion, believing it be naïve and extremely dangerous.⁵⁴

⁵³ Writing of 1930s and 1940s churchmen such as H. Reinhold Niebuhr and John Foster Dulles, Heather Warren says: "The way [these] Christian realists combined their theology with politics set a precedent for later movements in American Protestantism, the civil rights movement in the 1950s and '60s, and the Religious Right in the 1970s and '80s." See her *Theologians of a New World Order: Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian Realists, 1920-1948* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 131.

⁵⁴ See G. Aiken Taylor, "Of Wolves, Sheep and the Ship of State," *Presbyterian Journal* 37 no. 8 (June 21, 1978) 12: "With Christian people pressuring government to 'beat swords into plowshares' as the way to persuade ungodly nations to behave in a godly way, the future civil tranquility of this country may well

Differences emerged regarding attitude towards Communism and the Soviet Union. The left-wing denominations sought to separate the atheistic Communist Party from the “religious” people and even from the government, which was not seen as being so bad in and of itself. On the other hand, the conservative groups perceived Russia and its Communism as a godless threat to the Church and to freedom in general.⁵⁵

The liberal Presbyterians sought “Christian unity” with the Russian Orthodox Church. The conservatives showed a desire to evangelize Russia, believing that only the gospel, including the doctrine of justification by faith alone, is sufficient to effect profound change in that land.⁵⁶

There were eschatological differences between the liberals and conservatives. Left-wing material spoke of the specter of annihilation by means of a nuclear holocaust (ironically, paralleling certain forms of Dispensationalism with a belief that Armageddon will be accompanied by nuclear explosions). Conservative Presbyterians, whether pre-, a-, or post-millennial, agreed that human history will end at Christ’s Second Coming, an event totally in God’s hands.⁵⁷

Several issues divided Presbyterians with regard to political philosophy. A study of left-wing Presbyterian statements revealed that they advocated socialistic solutions to society’s ills. Conservative bodies operated more or less out of a context in which limited government means non-interference by the State in the means of production and the economy in general.

The liberals’ socialistic tendencies dulled their senses to some of the worst of the Soviet system—not just the brutality, but the Statism of it. Coupled with that trend was

depend on officers and crew for the ship of state who realize that you don’t pacify a pack of wolves by letting them into sheepfold”; and “Dangerous Men in Government,” XXXIV 46 (March 17, 1976) 10, with specific reference to Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.): “The most dangerous men may well be those who, on the basis of a Christian profession, wear blinders which keep them from recognizing that the world is made up of people among whom ‘there is non righteous, no not one,’ and who sincerely believe ‘turn the other cheek’ is God’s rule for national policy as well as for a Christian’s witness.” Also, Morecraft, telephone interview.

⁵⁵ Smylie, interview. See *Church and Society* magazine, LXXIV 2 (November/December 1983).

⁵⁶ Of particular note was the fascinating effort of the Russian Reformation Foundation (RRF) led by former Defense Department linguist Jack Anderson and his wife Kim. The RRF had as its goal the translation and distribution of classic Reformed works, such as Calvin’s Institutes and the Westminster Confession of Faith, into Russian—something which had never been done. See “Russian Reformation Foundation Reaches a Milestone: First Chapter of Westminster Confession Translated into Russian for the First Time,” *The Counsel of Chalcedon* IX 6 (August 1987) 4-5; and “Russian Reformation Foundation: On the Front Line for Russian Believers,” *The Highroad for ALL* IX 4 (Fall 1987) 1, 6. [*The Highroad* was the publication of the Alliance of Loyal Laity, an unofficial group within the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.] The RRF was a mission of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Manassas, Virginia, a congregation which at one time was affiliated with the RPCUS, but is now the flagship congregation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church—Hanover Presbytery.

⁵⁷ For an example of left-wing eschatological perspective, see Ronald H. Stone, “The Justifiable War Tradition,” Stone and Wilbanks, *The Peacemaking Struggle*, 195: “If a government over a long period of time is threatening the survival of humanity on the planet, it begins to lose its legitimacy. . . . If [governments’] constituted regular practices are to plan to destroy all human life under certain circumstances, they need to be changed.” Another perspective in the same volume was offered by Donald E. Gowan and Ulrich W. Mauser, “Shalom and Eirene,” 123-33.

An official position is found in *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling*, 23, with a reference to the arms race “where mutual capacity for annihilation threatens the world.” But see especially Wilbanks and Stone, *Presbyterians and Peacemaking*, 10ff.

the liberal belief in a dichotomy between commitment to God and commitment to any system. The liberals felt that there is no totally right system of government, either ecclesiastical or civil. Thus, there is no totally wrong system of government, either—everything is a mixture of shades of gray. What was missing is the commitment to *sola Scriptura* with regard to government.

Internationalism played a large role in the thinking of the liberal Presbyterians, who allege that the nation-state is obsolete. The United Nations therefore became crucial on this scheme for the preservation of world peace. Such a peace could come, of course, only if it was a “just peace,” by which liberals meant a redistribution of the wealth. Conservative Presbyterians, on the other hand, deplored the U.N. as not only fostering Communism, terrorism, and radicalism, but also as a joining with the enemies of the United States and of freedom.⁵⁸

With regard to war and peace, the liberals stated that war is “evil.” It may be a “necessary evil”—the least odious of choices—but it is still morally wrong. Pacifism was viewed as a legitimate Christian position. Conscientious objector status was sought for those with scruples against war in general or a given conflict in particular. Tax resistance and civil disobedience measures were explored as legitimate ways to end the “arms race.” Many in this camp rejected the just war theory, but many appealed to it in order to oppose nuclear warfare.

Conservative Presbyterians overwhelmingly rejected pacifism as a valid Biblical view and approved of warfare as long as it fell within the just war guidelines. The Christian Reconstructionists, while not rejecting the just war criteria in terms of tactics, did repudiate the notions of “balance of power”: treaties are not to be made with those nations which are (ideologically) at war with you.

Nuclear weapons were considered “immoral” and intrinsically evil by liberal Presbyterians. The conservatives did not accept that notion, but did caution that they can certainly be used in a diabolical fashion.

This article has already pointed out that there have been historical connections between left-wing theologians and radical politics.⁵⁹ There is no question that there is a conjunction between a left-ward direction and a resultant commitment to “peace”

⁵⁸ See Gary DeMar, *God and Government: A Biblical and Historical Study*, I (Atlanta: American Vision Press, 1982), 21, for a typical description of the United Nations as being a form of “centralism” forbidden by God. Dr. DeMar at the time of the writing of this book was a member of Chalcedon Presbyterian Church.

See John C. Bennett and Harvey Seifer, *U. S. Foreign Policy and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977) for typical thinking among liberal Presbyterians on foreign policy matters.

⁵⁹ The phenomenon of political and theological parallelism was not confined to Presbyterianism. For example, among Lutherans, during the Cold and Vietnam Wars, “secular, political concerns generally aligned with theological controversies” (David E. Settje, *Lutherans and the Longest War: Adrift on a Sea of Doubt about the Cold and Vietnam Wars, 1964-1975* [Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2007] 52). Settje also noted that a “blast” signed by 96 students at Concordia Lutheran Seminary against J.A.O. Preus, President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), for his pro-Vietnam War stance, “came during a battle between Preus and the seminary over biblical criticism. This friction eventually led students to walk out of the seminary and Preus and his backers to fire the seminary president and other faculty members. This letter came in the midst of a major theological quarrel that later splintered the denomination; it is noteworthy that they disagreed on the Vietnam War as well and saw it as another battleground” (140). The Missouri Synod experience thus paralleled that in the PCUS, where there was ecclesiastical division between conservatives who supported the Vietnam War and saw it as a manifestation of the Cold War, and the liberals who controlled the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly—leftists

In this regard, it is important to understand that the ties are definitely theological, and that the very documents calling liberal Presbyterians to “peacemaking” contained deviations from historic, traditional Presbyterian theology. A careful reading of how the liberals use concepts such as the sovereignty of God, sin, the atonement, and “reconciliation” in ways that differ from Presbyterian doctrine. The notion of *kairos* was utilized by liberals to assert that this is a significantly new era. Although it is possible on an historic postmillennial base to believe that a great transformation can transpire, it is through the spread of the gospel that such would occur. The liberals’ idea of the golden age was that of world peace itself.⁶⁰

The United Nations in all of this was regarded almost like a new messiah. It is easy to demonstrate that salvific terms often appeared in reference to that organization.⁶¹

During the Cold War, within American Presbyterianism another war was raging, a war that was fought over the nature of the Kingdom of God and of His righteousness. The battle lines were drawn between those who believed in historic Christianity in terms of its content, and those who rejected that content; between those who regarded personal conversion as the foundation of a just society, and those who emphasized institutional changes to the virtual exclusion of heart regeneration; between those who used terms in their traditional meaning, and those who felt free to use old terms but give them new meanings; between those who believed in a limited government, and those whose belief in limited government had to do with obedience to a “militaristic” State and not to the extent of State authority. And, although the Cold War itself may be a fading memory of the past, this Presbyterian war, both within and across denominational lines, goes on.

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‘Dull, Duller, Dulles’

both in terms of Vietnam and in terms of theology. However, unlike the LCMS situation, where the conservatives won the day and the liberals were forced out, it was the conservatives who felt compelled to leave the PCUS.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 16: “As Christians we must decide what we are called to be and do in the light of new awareness. We are not doomed to be imprisoned in fear, insecurity, greed, pride, and cynicism that reflect the past. Our Christian faith can free us from such chains. A truly new age and quality of life for all peoples on this globe are possible. Such a new age we believe to be the will of God now. We have the opportunity to serve God in its creation.”

⁶¹ See James S. Sutterlin, “The United Nations and the Christian Commitment to Peace,” *Church & Society* LXXVI 2 (November/December 1985): “Peace among nations in possession of this terrible destructive capacity has become the inescapable condition of the survival of civilization and of the human species itself. Peace must represent a point of unison between all faiths and ideologies” (18); “In speaking at an ecumenical service at the beginning of the last session of the United Nations General Assembly, Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar said, ‘Whatever be our conviction, we meet on this common point: that human dignity has to be upheld, that justice has to be promoted, that the glory of the human enterprise has to be enhanced and that, therefore, human relations have to be based on peace.’ ‘Peace,’ he stated, ‘is creativity joined to benevolence.’ In this fortieth anniversary year of the United Nations, it is well to recognize that a strong United Nations is needed to ensure this peace and the global justice which is its only sure foundation” (20).

Born into a family of diplomats who were committed to American expansionism, John Foster Dulles (1888-1959) put his mark on American foreign policy in the twentieth century. From proposals for restructuring international relations in the 1930s, to meeting the challenges of World War II, to dealing with various diplomatic headaches while Eisenhower's Secretary of State, to being a key player in the Cold War, Dulles was an indefatigable warrior for his vision of how the world should work.

Democrats dug at his dour demeanor: "Dull, Duller, Dulles," they derided. But it was not merely a matter of demeanor which characterized Dulles (and which caused the caricature): behind the seriousness—which was wedded to a penchant for detail—was a certain type of liberal piety, a 'do-goodism' which constituted what might be called a secularized faith.

In 1937, Dulles attended a conference at Oxford University organized by the Universal Council for Life and Work, a predecessor body of the World Council of Churches. Entitled "Church, Community, and State," this conference marked a turning point in Dulles' life, where "he 'began to understand the profound significance of the spiritual values that my mother and father had taught.'" But, of course, Dulles' Christianity was not one driven by traditional theological understanding, but rather one that emulated "universalist ideals of brotherhood and equality."⁶² An historian has commented that "Dulles' faith was more an idealised commitment to the betterment of humankind in this world than a conscious acceptance of a transcendental reality. His religious orientation was neither exclusively Christian nor was he interested in missionary ventures to 'Christianize' the world. He never seemed to believe in the necessity to pay homage to a higher being, his devotion being directed rather to the 'universal brotherhood of man.' Yet he always couched his humanistic creed, as expounded in numerous public speeches, in Christian terminology."⁶³

However, Dulles recognized man's innate depravity, expressed in selfishness which leads to war. One biographer believes that Dulles' "explanation for the endemic conflict among nations was an idiosyncratic amalgam of Protestantism, Bergsonianism, and Wilsonianism." ("Wilsonianism" is a reference to President Wilson's idealism, including the principle of self-determination; Henri Bergson was a Sorbonne philosopher with whom Dulles studied, who advocated a fluid approach regarding reality; and the reference to Protestantism has to do with an affirmation of human sinfulness.)⁶⁴ The resultant mixture of realism and idealism was a heady brew which led him, on the one hand, to nuclear brinkmanship with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and to a search for lasting peace on the other.

Some might regard Dulles as being a "traditionalist" in terms of his views of man's depravity and the necessity of the assertion of political and military power. Nevertheless, we cannot get away from the fact that Dulles, even under the influence of neo-orthodoxy, was still heterodox in his views. He had not abandoned his basic liberal theological commitment, which had come to expression in his defense of New York Presbytery in its protection of heretics who rejected such doctrines as the atonement and the virgin birth of

⁶² Richard H. Immerman, *John Foster Dulles: Piety, Pragmatism, and Power in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1999) 14-15.

⁶³ Martin Erdmann, *Building the Kingdom of God on Earth: The Churches' Contribution to Marshal Public Support for World Order and Peace, 1919-1945* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2005) 119.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 13, 18.

Christ. Furthermore, there is no question but that liberalism continued to dominate the ecclesiastical scene, the efforts of Reinhold Niebuhr and other neo-orthodox thinkers notwithstanding to the contrary. Therefore, while we appreciate that it is important to pay attention to nuanced theological differences, at the end of the day the Niebuhrian school (of which Dulles was an adherent) did not have much practical affect on the leftward drift of mainline denominations—a leftist tilt which tended toward accommodation with Communist regimes rather than brinkmanship. Indeed, isn't that the very reason why the "later" Dulles was regarded with suspicion by many of his ecclesiastical colleagues?

Fiery Fundamentalist

Born in a Presbyterian manse in Ypsilanti, Michigan, Carl McIntire (1906-2002) was caught up in the Modernist-fundamentalist controversy which embroiled the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Along with J. Gresham Machen and others, he was suspended from the ministry for his militant defense of orthodoxy—a judgment confirmed by the 1936 PCUSA General Assembly. That same year, he was a founding minister of the Presbyterian Church of America (later known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. A year later, he was a key player in the formation of the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC).

In 1938, a civil court decision forced him and his followers out of the Presbyterian church building where he had ministered in Collingswood, New Jersey. He subsequently conducted services under a tent; eventually a large church building, capable of seating 1000 people, was built for his Bible Presbyterian congregation.

Dr. McIntire was tireless in his denunciation of leftist theology and ideology, particularly in the "mainline" Protestant churches. He also never shrank from fighting for freedom—as exemplified in his battle with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) over WXUR radio station in Media, Pennsylvania, over the so-called "Fairness Doctrine." After losing that battle, McIntire, for about half a day, operated a pirate radio station from a converted WWII mine sweeper off the coast of New Jersey, until technical difficulties forced it off the air.

In December 1973, he appeared, uninvited, at the first General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church (later called the Presbyterian Church in America), where G. Aiken Taylor felt compelled to introduce him: upon introduction, he dramatically stood up in the balcony and waved to the Assembly. Later, in the Press Room, in front of a local television station news crew, he announced the "first First Amendment March on Washington, D.C.," for freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of radio and TV.⁶⁵

Carl McIntire faced ridicule for his militant stances. However, his one-man protests at ecumenical gatherings earned him grudging respect and even affection from liberal participants: in 1991, several of the delegates came up and said to him, "Hey, Carl, how ya' doing?"⁶⁶

⁶⁵ This present author was present in the Press Room when Dr. McIntire made his announcement.

⁶⁶ Randall Balmer, "Fundamentalist with Flair," *Christianity Today* (May 21, 2002), accessed on-line (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_McIntire).

Perhaps most significantly, the president of Fuller Theological Seminary paid him a posthumous compliment. Richard Mouw admitted that when McIntire would attack churchmen from the Eastern Bloc at ecumenical meetings (such as the World Council of Churches) as being agents of Communist regimes, he thought that the firebrand was overreaching. However, now that archives in Russia have been opened, he acknowledged that McIntire was right all along. Mouw wrote: “To my knowledge, no one in the world of ecumenical Protestantism ever apologized to McIntire for the cavalier manner in which they dismissed his charges. I, for one, believe we owed him an apology. . . . You were right, Dr. McIntire!”⁶⁷

Missionary Kid and Magazine Editor

Born in Brazil, G. Aiken Taylor (1920-1984) brought a flair for publicity and a nose for news to the premier conservative publication among Southern Presbyterians in the twentieth century. Founded by Dr. L. Nelson Bell (medical missionary to China, whose daughter would later marry Billy Graham), the *Southern Presbyterian Journal* was dedicated to preserving the historic testimony of the Southern church. When Dr. Taylor became Editor in 1958, the name was changed to *Presbyterian Journal*—reflective of a broader emphasis which sought to reach out to folks across the nation, and not merely in Dixie.

The “MK” used his post to expose the liberalism in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (PCUS). In 1973, the time came for ecclesiastical separation, as the denomination now known as the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was formed. Without Aiken Taylor and the *Journal*, the movement would not have enjoyed the success which it did.

In 1983, after a quarter of a century as a journalist, Dr. Taylor’s talents were used elsewhere. He became President of Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, Pennsylvania, but died, unexpectedly, within a few months.

Dr. Taylor celebrated the catholicity of the church, as seen by his great interest in interchurch relations and the promotion of what became the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). He also was seen as being to the left of the PCA spectrum, as witnessed by his openness to the charismatic movement. But he was steadfastly opposed to Communism and the leftist ideology that spawned it, both inside and outside the visible church.

Choctaw Indian Chief

Born in Oklahoma, James Lyons (1929-) came to faith in Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Southern Presbyterian Church—meaning that breaking ties with that

⁶⁷ Richard J. Mouw, *Christianity Today* on-line, May 21, 2002.

denomination when the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was formed in 1973 was particularly poignant.

A Choctaw Indian chief, Lyons served with the Thunderbird Division—in the forward observer party for 105 Howitzers—in the Korean War. After wrestling with alcoholism for a number of years, he was ultimately delivered from that sin.

He attended Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia, and pastored in Gadsden, Alabama; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Swannanoa, North Carolina. It was during his stint in the Tar Heel State that he came to prominence as a major player in the Continuing Presbyterian Church movement, which led to the formation of the PCA. He eventually became a missionary evangelist with Mission to the World (MTW), the world missions agency of the PCA, and traveled all over the globe in support of missionaries.

As a result of his travels, he also became involved in portraying the plight of refugees from Communism—the “boat people” of Southeast Asia—after the fall of the Republic of Vietnam in 1975.

Jimmy Lyons is indubitably one of the most colorful figures of twentieth-century conservative Presbyterianism, and it was a dull PCA General Assembly which did not exult in one or more instances of his sense of humor. At the Sixth General Assembly (1978) in Grand Rapids, when the moderator was asking him to indicate his position on the question before the court, he kept on saying, “I can’t tell you that, sir.” When the moderator insisted, “If you don’t tell me if you’re for or against the motion, I won’t recognize you!” Pastor Lyons replied, “With malice toward none, I wish to call for the question on the whole she-bang!” At the Eighth General Assembly (1980), while there was a pause to change the tape which was recording the proceedings, he went to a microphone and said, “Mr. Moderator, point of personal privilege—I’d just like the Assembly to know that, come October, I’m going to be a grandfather!” And in 1999, he complained about the high cost of hotel rooms at the General Assembly: at a hundred dollars a night, he said, he doesn’t sleep, he sits up and watches it!

After retirement in 1994, Jimmy and his bride of many years lived for a time in the world’s only golden, air-conditioned teepee—in Calvin, Oklahoma (“How Reformed can you get?”). They now reside in Alabaster, Alabama, a Birmingham suburb.

A Little Old Lady Who Exposed Communist Infiltration

Born in 1902, Matsu (Mattie Sue) Crawford graduated with honors from Winthrop College, Rock Hill, South Carolina. With her minister husband, she was a Southern Presbyterian missionary. In 1940, after a decade of service in Japan, World War II forced their return to the States. Vernon Allen Crawford’s first pastorate was Vineville Presbyterian Church in Macon, Georgia. His first Sunday in the pulpit there was December 7, 1941.

In 1949, Pastor Crawford became Executive Secretary for Augusta-Macon Presbytery, and the Crawfords moved to Milledgeville, home to the Georgia State College for Women. In 1952, Mrs. Crawford was asked to teach fifth grade at the laboratory school connected with college; she quickly discerned the efforts to

indoctrinate schoolchildren with “progressive” ideas. In an article in the *Presbyterian Outlook* entitled “Confused Children for a Confused Age,” she asked “if perhaps modern art were not an instrument in the hands of those who would try their hand at bending the minds of children in the classroom, confusing them for a purpose not conducive to fostering our American ways of life.” She also in that article related her experience with a modernist art teacher who had been brought into her classroom, and noted that “Picasso had once said, ‘I am a Communist, and my Art is Communistic.’” When the college president tried to fire her (ostensibly because she did not have a master’s degree), she appealed to the Chancellor of the University System of Georgia, who investigated the matter, entered a “maladministration” verdict, fired the president who had been in his post almost two decades, and restored Mrs. Crawford to the classroom.⁶⁸

That incident is emblematic of the feisty character of this diminutive Southern lady, who was always gracious yet never shy to express her views. When this present author was interviewing her in the 1980s about the formation of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) out of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), she wryly observed that the PCUS was like a Cadillac—a beautiful car, but somebody forgot to put gas in the tank. She also said that there were “two great organizations in the world—the Vatican and the Board of Women’s Work of the Southern Presbyterian Church.”

She was a remarkable and accomplished person—a novelist, an award-winning poetess, and a “character” as well as being a masterful checkers player—this present author can personally attest to those last two items (he never did beat her at checkers, despite several attempts—when she was an octogenarian!).

Matsu Crawford died on February 14, 2006, just a fortnight shy of her one-hundred-fourth birthday. Her obituary stated, “An author of seven books and hundreds of poems, she never lost her zest for life or her passion for God’s work in the world. She remained vigilant in prayer for her nation and her family to the end.”⁶⁹

The Pen is Mightier Than the Sword: The Presbyterian Publisher Who Helped End the Cold War

Dr. Edwin P. Elliott, Jr. (1947-2009) hailed from a long line of Presbyterians. His father, Edwin P. Elliott, Sr., was one of the first ministers in Vanguard Presbytery, the first presbytery of the Continuing Presbyterian Church movement (which became the Presbyterian Church in America [PCA] in 1973). One of the unique aspects of their ministry was that they became a father-son team in 1978, as the younger Elliott went from a pastorate in Water Valley, Mississippi, to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Manassas, Virginia, which his father had founded six years earlier.

In the 1980s, the congregation became disenchanted with the PCA presbytery, and it withdrew from the denomination. The Elliots also left the PCA, and founded Hanover

⁶⁸ Crawford, *My Head is Bloody But Unbowed*, 4, 8-11.

⁶⁹ Asheville [N.C.] *Citizen-Times*, February 18, 2006 (accessed on-line).

Presbytery. The Reformed Presbyterian Church (Hanover Presbytery) continues to this day, testifying to a simple, minimalistic church polity.⁷⁰

From the back side of the church building, adjacent to the old Southern Railway tracks, Edwin, Jr., ran a typesetting business. The noise of the clanging bell at the grade crossing and the horn of locomotives accompanied by the roar of their engines could sometimes make conversation problematic in the print shop. But such distractions did not deter the wide-ranging interests or tremendous influence of the publisher. Because of him, the venerable *Christian Observer* magazine, founded in 1813, found new life in 1987 after being out of business for fourteen years. This publication, which has always served the Presbyterian and Reformed world, has the distinction of being the oldest ecclesiastical magazine in the country. Dr. Elliott's assistance enabled *Presbyterian & Reformed News*, an independent newspaper covering the PCA, to go to press. His publishing agency, Reformation Educational Foundation, had many books in its stable—including the first history of the PCA,⁷¹ and Matsu Crawford's *My Head is Bloody But Unbowed*, which had exposed Communist infiltration in churches.

Edwin Elliott's influence extended far beyond merely the Calvinistic community. He was a significant player in conservative circles, and served on the local Republican Party. Many pro-life organizations could thank him for not only his generous printing prices, but also his uncanny insight into human psychology and political strategy. Indeed, Mother Theresa thanked him in person for his labor.

One of his finest moments came in regard to the overthrow of the Communist regime in Romania. This tale of intrigue began because of Edwin's long-standing association with the Magyar (Hungarian) Reformed Church, which boasts a global membership of two million.

László Tókés was a parish minister in Timișoara, Romania, where many ethnic Hungarians live. In December 1989, Tókés, due to his opposition to the Communist government, was being forced by the Securitate (Romanian secret police) to take a pastorate in a rural area. But his parishioners would not allow him to be forced out, and a riot ensued. However, in a closed society with no freedom of the press, how could the word get out to the world—and how would the rest of Romania know what was happening? One of the keys was the production of press releases from a fax machine—a machine which Edwin Elliott had helped to spirit into the country. Soon, the news from Timișoara, being broadcast on stations such as Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, spread like wildfire throughout Romania. Within about a week, the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena were arrested and very quickly executed.

It is all well and good to preach against tyranny. But Edwin Elliott, Jr., was not only a man of words but a man of action—and his actions helped to start a revolution in

⁷⁰ For a brief period, Hanover Presbytery was affiliated with the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States (RPCUS), which was known during this time as the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the Americas.

⁷¹ Frank J. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: The Continuing Church Movement* (Manassas, Va.: Reformation Educational Foundation, 1985). In the interest of full disclosure, we would note that the present author was the founding editor of *Presbyterian & Reformed News*.

Romania, part of a movement that had rippled throughout all of the Communist bloc, which in turn led to the end of the Cold War.⁷²

American Protestantism and Peacemaking

These Presbyterian peacemaking efforts should be seen in a broader ecumenical context, in which numerous of the “mainline” denominations, along with other faith groups, were taking similar stands.

For example, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches in 1981 said: “The rapid advances in military technology and the significant increases in arms production and sales are creating less security for all of God’s people on earth. With the development of strategic nuclear weapons with first-strike capabilities, the assumption that mutually assured destruction will deter war has been supplanted by a dangerous new doctrine of limited nuclear war as a legitimate foreign policy option.” The next year, the General Board declared: “We believe that the use of nuclear weapons cannot serve the cause of righteousness and will lead to the destruction of the world.”

The American Lutheran Church (ALC) declared that “any use of weapons of mass destruction is immoral on the basis of the criteria for waging a just war. Weapons for nuclear, biological, or chemical warfare raise particularly serious questions.” It also stated that “goal of U.S. policy must be the *elimination* of nuclear weapons from the earth.”

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1979 called upon President Carter and the U.S. Congress “to question the role of the United States as the world’s largest producer and exporter of arms and to intensify their efforts to reverse the dangerous and burdensome arms race”; “to pursue with urgency a comprehensive ban on nuclear testing and effective limitations on the development, production, and sale of arms”; and “to seek seriously the development of peaceful ways to resolve conflicts between nations and to plan expeditiously for conversion to a healthy economy based on production for non-military purposes.” Two years later, the denominational General Assembly voiced its “deep conviction that this most heinous obscenity of the continuing nuclear armaments research, development, and production be brought to an immediate end”, and “call[ed] upon the leaders of the nations to stop this madness and get on with those things that make for peace.”

The Episcopal Church’s House of Bishops in 1982 deplored the fact that the U.S. had never renounced the notion of a nuclear “first-strike”. The *episkopoi* opined: “We believe it to be the responsibility of the United States to take the bold initiative in nuclear disarmament, and to keep on taking it. The United States is the first to possess a nuclear weapon. The United States is the only nation to have used that weapon in war. If it comes to pass that these weapons, which the United States continues to refine and aim

⁷² Much of the information in this vignette comes from personal conversations which the present author had with Dr. Elliott over a period of many years. The details in this account were confirmed by Bob Williams, the current editor of the *Christian Observer*, and by Francis, Edwin’s brother.

and stockpile, are used in war again, it is difficult to believe that any history a surviving neutral nation might record would fail to fix blame on the United States.”

The Lutheran Church in America in 1982 declared its support “for a multilateral, verifiable freeze of the testing, production, stockpiling, and deployment of nuclear weapons and delivery systems as a step toward the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons and to work actively to achieve such a goal.”

The Reformed Church in America’s General Synod in 1980 stated: “The nuclear arms race is first and foremost a false religion. It is, to be sure, also bad politics, bad economics, bad science, and bad war.”

The United Church of Christ in 1979 lamented that “Billions are being spent for arms, while people’s basic needs, such as food, housing, health care and education are underfunded.” Two years later, the General Synod affirmed “a commitment to nuclear disarmament through negotiation with all existing and developing nuclear powers”, and stated its “forthright desire for nuclear disarmament even if this process much begin with unilateral initiative on the part of the United States.”

The United Methodist Church’s General Conference in 1980 said: “If humanity is to move out of this period of futility and constant peril, the search for new weapons systems must be halted through comprehensive international agreements. . . . The vast stockpiles of nuclear bombs and conventional weapons must be dismantled under international supervision, and the resources being used for arms diverted to programs designed to affirm life rather than destroy it.”

Even the Southern Baptist Convention, in 1978, urged multilateral arms control and also called upon all nations “shift funds from nuclear weapons systems to basic human needs, such as education, medicine, and relief from hunger.” In 1982, the Convention affirmed “the historic Baptist commitment to peace with justice as a goal in personal, social, and international relationships.”⁷³

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⁷³ These examples are cited in John Donaghy, ed., *To Proclaim Peace: Religious Communities Speak Out on the Arms Race* (Nyack, N.Y.: Fellowship Publications, 2nd revised edition, 1983).

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