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More East than West: The World Council of Churches at the Dawn of the Cold War

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ABSTRACT

Before there was hybrid warfare or its more innocuously styled component information warfare, there were Soviet Active Measures (Активные мероприятия). Conceived in 1948 and fully implemented by the 1970s, Active Measures were a palate of techniques designed to both deceive the West and to turn Western public opinion toward whatever the Soviet policy of the moment might be. “More East than West” presents a brief introduction to the Active Measures program which is followed by a single case study, that of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The image of the World Council of Churches as a Cold War pawn of the Soviet Union has become set in the American popular consciousness. It was not always so. At its birth in 1948, the WCC was seen as a promising ecumenical experiment that might serve to better unite the Christian churches of the world. Its birth, however, coincided precisely with the emergence of the Cold War and the organization was soon dragged kicking and screaming into the conflict. The Americans in the era of President Harry S. Truman saw in the group a potential ally for the Roman Catholic Church in erecting a spiritual barricade against the encroachment of atheistic communism. After 1961, the Soviets saw the group as a useful conduit for propaganda messages as designed by the Active Measures program that designed and disseminated Soviet propaganda throughout the Cold War. In the end, Soviet influence came to dominate the group’s political positions, but it never became an actual front group and successive American Presidents carried on a range of relationships with the WCC. This article offers a history of the early years of the Cold War struggle over the soul of the WCC.

KEYWORDS

Active measures; front groups; KGB; Russian orthodox church; Harry S. Truman; Nikita Khrushchev; Pope Pius XII; Pope Paul VI; Myron C. Taylor; Visser ‘t Hooft; ecumenical movement; Amsterdam assembly; Evanston assembly; George Marshall; John Foster Dulles; Alan Dulles; CIA

In the beginning, there was fear

The Cold War developed quickly, settling by the early 1950s into a pattern of hard polarity. Hopes that the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe would end died in Potsdam and Yalta, the American Red Scare had begun, McCarthyism was on the rise, and containment was the primary element of American foreign policy.¹ The Americans owned a nuclear monopoly in the first flush of the Cold War and by the end of the 1950s the American nuclear arsenal still dwarfed that of the Soviet Union.

So vast was the gap that Gen. Curtis Lemay assured appalled American planners that Russia could be obliterated without the loss of a single American life.² Given the vast nuclear imbalance of the time, it was doable, and at the cost perhaps of one of the most unthinkable acts of mass murder in a peacetime context in human history, the sudden

disappearance of major Russian cities would have brought the Cold War to a conclusion before it ever really started.

While the Americans at the time greatly overestimated Soviet nuclear capabilities, the Kremlin was not so sanguine. The answer, adopted first under Khrushchev, was simple: strategic deception.³ Empty bunkers were built like a shell game on a New York City street corner, opening occasionally to show waiting satellites a missile, or at least a reasonable facsimile thereof. This presumably gave the Soviets space and time to build, but at the cost of committing them to a ruinous militarization process that their economy could not hope to support—a fact that was not lost on the Reagan Administration of the 1980s.

This was the era when American nuclear planning envisioned a MAD scenario, that is, Mutually Assured Destruction.⁴ To most at the time, MAD seemed to live up to its name—an apocalyptic scenario that had the potential to destroy all life on earth; a denouement that only a madman would dream of putting into practice. Implicit in this scenario was the certainty that what nuclear weapons and radiation could not accomplish, the resultant dust storms would in what came to be called nuclear winter. Nuclear winter was posited to be an extinction event along the lines of that which doomed the dinosaurs.⁵

MAD rested on the assumption that by employing the full force of the nuclear triad—intercontinental ballistic missiles, conventional airplanes, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles—the potential destruction would be so great that any rational enemy would be deterred.⁶ MAD targeted both cities and military targets, hoping to destroy a sufficient degree of an enemy's nuclear weapons before they could be launched, making the exchange survivable. In its most extreme formulation, MAD worked precisely because it was based on MAR: Mutually Assured Rationality.⁷ No rational man would undertake to end the world or to kill millions, if not billions, of his fellow human beings. It is a sense of shared rationality that the world of 2017 most sorely lacks, and what made the ascension of Donald Trump most worrisome to many.⁸

By the early 1960s, American nuclear policy was already in transition from the MAD approach to the more malleable flexible response doctrine championed by President Kennedy's Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara.⁹ Flexible response was a retooling of the entire American defense posture, both nuclear and conventional, that took place under Sec. McNamara.¹⁰ In conventional terms, it allowed the US the flexibility to respond to Soviet aggression at a time and place of its choosing. A change of regime in one part of the world could result in a similar US move elsewhere. In my own experience, a classic example of the doctrine in action was the overthrow of Ethiopian Emperor Hailie Selassie by the Soviet supported military force that came to be known as the Derg in 1978. This was quickly countered by a US supported takeover of Somalia.¹¹ This allowed both Russian and American personnel the opportunity to switch countries and in passing at airports regale the other side over copious libations with horror stories of what awaited them in their new port of call. In retrospect, the US got a Soviet-built deep water port and unending tribal conflict in Mogadishu while the Soviets got an infinitely nicer but strategically challenged perch on the Horn of Africa. A good time was had by all in those years, for it was a time when the Cold War had unwritten rules and an unspoken gentlemen's agreement gave opposing sides a degree of camaraderie and assistance when needed.

The nuclear aspect of flexible response was more problematic. Rather than the all-or-nothing, use-it-or-lose-it posture of MAD, flexible response posited a measured nuclear exchange that could at first eschew targeting major cities and would spare the leadership

of each side under the theory that, eminently rational men that they were, the leaders could halt the conflict before it became too onerous.¹²

Under flexible response, nuclear war was theoretically winnable and had we known then what we know now, it might have been won had the US taken the irrational step of initiating a nuclear conflict. The theory was almost tested in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, but the Russians backed down and missiles failed to fly.¹³

Which brings us back to Gen. Curtis “Bombs Away” LeMay. As Gen. LeMay lamented, what the Soviets were good at was propaganda and this is what they dispensed with a reasonable degree of success. Deception, after all, was practiced from the earliest days of Lenin’s rule, with the literature of the time filled with descriptions of Potemkin villages: model factories whose luxuries were disassembled and set up at the next factory on the itinerary of the latest group of Western political tourists.¹⁴ Words, after all, are cheaper than nuclear bombs and infinitely less expensive than delivery systems for a nuclear arsenal. Moreover, in the immediate post-War world, the Soviet Union had only words. The United States controlled the world’s nuclear weapons while the almost unimaginable destruction that World War II wrought on Russia left them with little in the way of conventional weapons with which to face the Western democracies. So it was to words and the covert support of the party faithful in the Western world that Stalin turned.¹⁵

The origins of the Active Measures campaign

Active Measures was at the heart of Soviet policy as it confronted the West in an era when nuclear war was much feared but increasingly unlikely to occur.¹⁶ It made a virtue of weakness as the myriad of Eastern European political jokes of the era attested. Why do the Five Year Plans seek to catch up to the West but not to surpass it? So they won’t see the holes in our clothes was the knowing answer. If economic and military parity is beyond reach, deception is the only logical step.

Active Measures were the ultimate creature of the Soviet system.¹⁷ Its primary hallmark is univocality—every official voice saying the same thing in the same way. This was true whether in times of crisis or just another day in the bureaucratic salt mines, and it requires a level of coordination and discipline impossible in democratic countries.¹⁸ Its objectives were grandiose given the means at hand: to influence global discourse in favor of Soviet positions at the expense of the West. One of its practitioners in the 1980s, Gen. Oleg Kalugin, minimized the impact of Active Measures, and in this he was certainly correct at the time:

None of these active measures had a determining effect on the outcome of the cold war, but they were a nuisance for the United States and played a role in our ongoing propaganda battle.¹⁹

But they formed a model that would be exploited brilliantly by the Putin regime in a time where the technology to marry ends to means does exist.

The beginnings of the Active Measures campaign was tentative at best, with pieces of what would become a centralized program parceled out to different parts of the intelligence apparatus. For example, the key disinformation (*Дезинформация*) component was tasked to the Information Committee (*Комитет по информации*), a doomed marriage of the civilian KGB (*Комитет государственной безопасности* or Committee on State Security) and the military GRU (*Главное разведывательное управление* or Main Intelligence Agency—shorthand for military intelligence) Foreign Intelligence Directorates from 1947–1951.²⁰ Military and civilian

agencies seldom cohabit well together, but the presence of the GRU in a mission for which it was ill suited suggests the importance of the nuclear imbalance in the Active Measures program.

By 1959, the KGB's First Chief Directorate, responsible for foreign intelligence, had seized control of the program, both centralizing it and devoting considerably greater resources to the effort. General Ivan Agayants took control of what had become known as Department D in the 1960s and the Active Measures campaign as we understand it today was well and truly born.²¹

Structure

Active Measures were difficult for the West to counter for a number of reasons, but first and foremost was their structure. They were by design and definition covert actions—actions not intended to be traced directly to their origin—but they skillfully mixed overt (white), mixed (gray), and covert (black) messages through a variety of channels designed to convey a single message.

The Active Measures programs, despite such notable successes as the anti-neutron bomb campaign during the Carter Administration of the 1970s, were of marginal impact during the Cold War in the West. They had more impact in the less developed countries of Africa and in the always conspiracy-minded Middle East, but these successes were transient at best. This does not minimize the impressive breadth and persistence of the campaign which in retrospect was remarkable.

By the mid-1970s, the Active Measures campaign was reaching its zenith, and after 1975 the integration of the white, gray, and black strands had become virtually seamless.²² This was helped in no small amount by the Western revulsion against the Vietnam War, the publication of the “Pentagon Papers” by Daniel Ellsberg, and such tell-all books as Phillip Agee's anti-CIA epic rant *Inside the Company* which was published in 1975.²³ For those of the age to remember the Vietnam era, popular disgust with America and all of its works did not originate with the election of Donald Trump. Rather, it is a cyclical process that is peculiarly American.

Campaigns

Active Measures campaigns were many and varied, but by the 1970s they had taken on the same deadening sameness that was the hallmark of Soviet life.²⁴ The process had been bureaucratized, the ideas stilted, and the campaigns took on the flavor of factory work, which is what they were. Clearly, assignment to Department D was a dire career message for all concerned.²⁵ But if creativity was at a minimum, breadth and ambition were not lacking. A partial table of contents from an August 1987 State Department report on Soviet Active Measures suggests the scope of such operations:

- Chapter II. Soviet Religious Organizations as a Tool of Influence
- Chapter III. The Soviet Peace Committee
- Chapter IV. Recent Anti-American Forgeries
- Chapter V. The U.S.S.R.'s AIDS Disinformation Campaign
- Chapter VI. Soviet Disinformation on Chemical and Biological Warfare
- Chapter VII. The Soviet Propaganda and Active Measures Campaign on Afghanistan
- Chapter X. Soviet Active Measures in the United States²⁶

Of these, several are of particular interest for what would follow in the Putin era as they illustrate not only the persistence of the Active Measures campaign, but also its ability to combine tools, means, and modalities to interrelate campaigns (комбинация or the art of combinations). The earliest and perhaps most successful examples were the peace campaigns and the ecumenical religious front groups. Groups like the World Peace Council and the Christian Peace Conference were fully controlled Soviet front groups, and were for that reason largely ineffective in the West. The World Council of Churches (WCC), by contrast, originated in 1948 wholly independent of Soviet control. Indeed, Stalin's wariness of any organization he could not fully control meant that no Russian or Eastern European satellite churches attended the first WCC gathering in 1948. To fully understand this history, therefore, it is necessary to briefly examine the role of religion in the Soviet state in the post-Stalinist era.

Introduction: the Soviet Union backstory

By the 1980s, the Soviets had achieved a near monopoly on the word “peace” (мир).²⁷ There were peace committees in myriad countries, a well-meaning few of whom were not actually front groups. There were disarmament groups and anti-nuclear groups, just as there were local groups and international groups. What they had in common was a perception of the Soviet Union as champions of peace and the United States and its allies as war mongers of the first order.²⁸ The peace program combined neatly with the religious program whereby the officially atheist Soviet state and its Warsaw Pact allies deployed a small army of “peace priests”—a ragtag collection of idealists, intelligence operators, and agents of influence who were able to infiltrate the ecumenical movements that were inevitable at the conclusion of the Second World War.

The appearance of the peace priests and the Soviet foray into global ecumenism came at a time of increasing pressure on religion within the Soviet Union. Nikita Khrushchev—he of the famed 1956 “Secret Speech” that became for a season the Holy Grail for which Western intelligence agencies strived—was engaged in a destalinization policy that allowed Alexander Solzhenitsyn to publish the stunning account of life in the gulag with *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.²⁹

On the religious front, however, Khrushchev's view was more fundamental. Communism and religion could not coexist, and so an intensive drive against faith was launched in 1959. It did not abate until Khrushchev's removal in 1964.³⁰ During that time, churches and mosques throughout the Soviet Union were closed and the monastic institutions were decimated. The gulag archipelago was soon newly populated with believers who were too stubborn to abjure their faith, even if for official consumption only.³¹

The pressure on Russian religious communities was ramped up in 1961. The primary target was the Russian Orthodox Church, the spiritual heart of Russian society. The Church saw numerous churches closed, and in 1961 the Monastery of the Caves (Киево-Печерская Лавра) in Kiev was closed as well.³² Founded in 1051, the monastery and cave complex suffered considerable damage in the communist era but remains today a leading attraction for the faithful and tourists alike in the Ukraine.³³ Jehovah's Witnesses, the True Orthodox Church, Baptists of various denominations, and Pentecostals were also restricted by 1961. By the time of Khrushchev's fall, only 6,000 places of worship remained open in the Soviet Union.³⁴

At the same time, KGB control of the Russian Orthodox Church was consolidated. Boston University's Keith Armes makes this clear based on the 1991 opening of the KGB archives to journalists and scholars:

The opening of some KGB archives since August 1991 has made available for the first time clear evidence of the subordination of the Orthodox hierarchy to the Soviet government. An investigative journalist, Alexander Nezhny, was able to establish the close relationship between a number of bishops and the "organs," and to determine the identities of the bishops involved on the basis of the chronology of missions abroad undertaken by hierarchs at the behest of the KGB and references to the agent names (*klichki*) by which they were known. In particular, the KGB affiliation of three prominent hierarchs is now established: the recently deposed Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev (code name "Antonov"), Metropolitan Yuvenali of Krutisk and Kolomna, who was head of the foreign relations department of the patriarchate (code name "Adamant"), and Metropolitan Pitirim of Volokolamsk and Yurev, head of the publishing department of the patriarchate (code name "Abbat"). It is also established that the present patriarch, Aleksii II, served the KGB under the poetic name "Blackbird" (*Drozdov*).

Investigations carried out in the KGB archives by Lev Ponomarev, chairman of the short-lived Russian Supreme Soviet Commission to Investigate the Causes and Circumstances of the Putsch,³⁵ and Father Gleb Yakunin, who served as a member of that commission, make it clear that the chain of command for controlling the church ran directly from the Politburo through the CPSU Central Committee Department of Agitation and Propaganda, to the USSR Council of Ministers' Council on Religious Affairs, and finally to the KGB, which had a special subdivision (Fourth Department of the Fifth Administration) for religion. There is abundant evidence of the KGB's control of the church's activities abroad and its success in ensuring that the World Council of Churches (WCC) consistently adopted positions advantageous to the Soviet leadership.³⁶

The ecumenical opening

Khrushchev's persecution of religion within the Soviet Union was however not reflected in the regime's attempts to infiltrate the post-War ecumenical movement with a particular focus on the World Council of Churches (WCC).³⁷ In the post-War Western European religious landscape, two approaches to the Soviet threat emerged. Pope Pius XII fully supported the United States, endorsing the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan.³⁸ In keeping with Catholic historical tradition, the Pope was wary of ecumenism and thus the Catholic Church would have no involvement in the WCC. The WCC for its part held that religion should not be identified with any particular political or religious system. Rather, it could act as a unifying force in a world that was already polarized between East and West.³⁹

The first WCC gathering took place in Amsterdam in 1948. It consisted of churches from the United States and both sides of the European divide. The Russian Orthodox Church was not among their number. American Ambassador to Russia Walter Bedell Smith offers an explanation for the decision to forego the gathering. First and foremost was Soviet opposition to the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church did not attend either, but at the time of the decision this was not yet clear. Second, and perhaps more ironic, was outrage over the implication that the Soviet government dominated the churches of satellite states through the Russian Orthodox Church. This was revealed in a secret telegram from Smith to Secretary of State George Marshall:

Opening speech by Russian patriarch largely historical but concluding paragraphs noted and vehemently denied charges by “enemies of orthodoxy” and “of Russian people” that Russian Church attempts “subject sister churches to its influence, direction and domination.”⁴⁰

Such suggestions were made in Amsterdam, but if it was of any consolation to Patriarchs Christopher of Alexandria and Alexander of Antioch, not by the churches of satellite states.⁴¹

The verbal battles between East and West were joined by dueling elites from each system, but the WCC in 1948 cleaved to neither East nor West, neither capitalism nor communism. In this it followed the great Protestant theologian Karl Barth:

Let us not join in this conflict! It doesn't concern us as Christians. It is not a genuine, necessary or interesting conflict. It is purely a conflict over power. We can only warn of the much greater sin of wanting to sort out this conflict by means of a third world war ... The following question stands as a warning to us: Since the opposition between East and West consists simply in this battle of giants, how can it be Christian from any point of view to come out in support of either East or West? Is it not the case that the path of the community of Jesus Christ at present has to take its own alternative, third direction.⁴²

This neutrality was reflected in the final document issued by the WCC at the conclusion of the Amsterdam Assembly. In “The Church and the Disorder of Society,” a careful examination of the attraction to communism was made and attempts to bridge the gap between Christianity and communism were proffered. The consideration was carefully phrased and is worth some examination in light of what would happen later as Soviet influence over the WCC increased.

Christians should ask why communism in its modern totalitarian form makes so strong an appeal to great masses of people in many parts of the world. They should recognize the hand of God in the revolt of multitudes against injustice that gives communism much of its strength. They should seek to recapture for the Church the original Christian solidarity with the world's distressed people, not to curb their aspirations towards justice, but, on the contrary, to go beyond them and direct them towards the only road which does not lead to a blank wall, obedience to God's will and His justice. Christians should realize that for many, especially for many young men and women, communism seems to stand for a vision of human equality and universal brotherhood for which they were prepared by Christian influences. Christians who are beneficiaries of capitalism should try to see the world as it appears to many who know themselves excluded from its privileges and who see in communism a means of deliverance from poverty and insecurity. All should understand that the proclamation of racial equality by communists and their support of the cause of colonial peoples makes a strong appeal to the populations of Asia and Africa and to racial minorities elsewhere. It is a great human tragedy that so much that is good in the motives and aspirations of many communists and of those whose sympathies they win has been transformed into a force that engenders new forms of injustice and oppression, and that what is true in communist criticism should be used to give convincing power to untrustworthy propaganda.⁴³

The report went on to consider the conflict between Christianity and Marxism:

(1) The communist promise of what amounts to a complete redemption of man in history; (2) the belief that a particular class by virtue of its role as the bearer of a new order is free from the sins and ambiguities that Christians believe to be characteristic of all human existence; (3) the materialistic and deterministic teachings, however they may be qualified, that are incompatible with belief in God and with the Christian view of man as a person, made in God's image and responsible to Him; (4) the ruthless methods of communists in

dealing with their opponents; (5) the demand of the party on its members for an exclusive and unqualified loyalty which belongs only to God, and the coercive policies of communist dictatorship in controlling every aspect of life.⁴⁴

Capitalism too came in for criticism:

The Church should make clear that there are conflicts between Christianity and capitalism. The developments of capitalism vary from country to country, and often the exploitation of the workers that was characteristic of early capitalism has been corrected in considerable measure by the influence of trade unions, social legislation and responsible management. But (1) capitalism tends to subordinate what should be the primary task of any economy—the meeting of human needs—to the economic advantages of those who have most power over its institutions. (2) It tends to produce serious inequalities. (3) It has developed a practical form of materialism in western nations in spite of their Christian background, for it has placed the greatest emphasis upon success in making money. (4) It has also kept the people of capitalist countries subject to a kind of fate which has taken the form of such social catastrophes as mass unemployment. It is the responsibility of Christians to seek new, creative solutions which never allow either justice or freedom to destroy the other.⁴⁵

Enter the Russian Orthodox Church & co.

Why was the 1948 discussion of capitalism and communism so evenhanded, even though many of the American delegates found the criticism of capitalism offensive? Much of the answer lay in the absence of the Russian churches. This was rectified in 1961—ironically at the height of the Khrushchev crusade against religion in Russia—when the Russian Orthodox Church joined the WCC. With them came the Georgian Orthodox, Armenian, Estonian Lutheran, Latvian Lutheran, and Baptist Churches, and with them too came a cadre of KGB operatives. The KGB contingent in the Russian delegation grew with each subsequent Assembly.⁴⁶ The influx of Russian churches and their KGB compatriots changed the Assembly's voting pattern and enforced a far more rigid control of Soviet Bloc churchmen than was possible in Amsterdam. Thus, each subsequent Assembly would reflect to ever greater degrees Soviet propaganda themes.

The American context

Today the politicization of religion is taken for granted. It was not always so. Before the “fundamentalist phenomenon” of 1979, religion was a private matter in the United States. The trend toward fundamentalist withdrawal from public affairs stems from the pyrrhic victory of the Tennessee Scopes Trial in 1925 in which a Tennessee teacher, John Thomas Scopes, violated state law by teaching evolution in his classroom. The resulting show trial brought the best legal minds in the country to bear on a case in which Scopes was convicted. The resultant furor, however, caricatured religious fundamentalists in particular and Southerners in general, as backwards, ignorant, and just plain silly.⁴⁷ In Menken's telling:

Such obscenities as the forthcoming trial of the Tennessee evolutionist, if they serve no other purpose, at least call attention dramatically to the fact that enlightenment, among mankind, is very narrowly dispersed. It is common to assume that human progress affects everyone—that even the dullest man, in these bright days, knows more than any man of, say, the Eighteenth Century, and is far more civilized. This assumption is quite erroneous. The men of the educated minority, no doubt, know more than their predecessors, and of some of them,

perhaps, it may be said that they are more civilized—though I should not like to be put to giving names—but the great masses of men, even in this inspired republic, are precisely where the mob was at the dawn of history. They are ignorant, they are dishonest, they are cowardly, they are ignoble. They know little if anything that is worth knowing, and there is not the slightest sign of a natural desire among them to increase their knowledge.⁴⁸

This induced fundamentalist Protestants to unconsciously follow the lead of the Catholic Church of the day and to withdraw to the greatest extent possible from mainstream culture, centering their lives on the church/parish community and keeping their children from the hands of Satan and educating them in religious schools for Catholics and homeschools for Protestants.⁴⁹ Protestant fundamentalists could therefore watch appalled from the sidelines as the Supreme Court first removed prayer from public schools in 1962 and then legalized abortion in the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973.⁵⁰ It was not until the 1979 emergence of the Moral Majority led by Virginia pastor Jerry Falwell that the religious right as an electoral factor fully emerged onto the American public square.⁵¹

Pres. Truman, the Vatican, and the WCC

This history of separation between state, religion, and political action is what made Pres. Harry S. Truman's religious initiative so bold. Religion in the public square in America in the 1940s was a polite, largely elitist affair conducted by intellectuals from the Mainline Protestant denominations. Such men dominated the State Department and the newly minted CIA, and it was their voices heard most loudly in Amsterdam in 1948. This elite concern for matters of faith is what made the Truman initiative possible.

The problem the West faced in its conflict with communism was the appeal of Marxism to social and economic justice. The capitalist record in these areas was, and is, a weak point. Religious faith has traditionally been the bulwark against reform. In the religion-rich United States in these pre-Civil Rights era years, religion could be used as a natural defense against precisely the kind of critique of capitalism as was offered by the WCC in Amsterdam. In Western Europe—a more secular culture that even then was on its way to what today might be called post-Christianity—the answer was less convincing.⁵²

The European scene was quite different from that of the US. There, Protestant religious activism was channeled into parliamentary politics via Christian Democratic parties while the Catholic Church engaged in a protracted and ultimately losing battle against secularism in Catholic countries like Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal.⁵³ The widespread interest in the WCC's ecumenical approach appeared to bridge the gap, offering an America that needed no convincing of the evils of communism and a crisis-ridden and demoralized Western Europe engaged in the rebuilding of a war-ravaged continent a middle way.

The elite Protestant nature of the American governmental Brahmins was reflected in the confidence that Pope Pious XII's pro-American and strongly anti-communist stance would be a good basis on which to build. Myron C. Taylor, an industrialist and formerly President Roosevelt's envoy to the Pope, suggested that a religious bulwark against communist expansion could be constructed from a religio-ideological alliance with the Papacy.⁵⁴

The Catholic Church, however, was far from the bastion of American ideals that the President and the Protestant intellectuals around him believed it to be. In the 1940s, a great deal of scholarly ink was spilled arguing the pros and cons of Pope Leo XIII's 1899

encyclical *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae* which made what he dubbed “Americanism” a heresy of the Church.⁵⁵ Based more on contemporary French politics than on anything in America, the ruling is based on what many critics in the 1940s deemed a misreading of the autobiography of Isaac Thomas Hecker, the 19th-century founder of the Paulist Fathers.⁵⁶ The bulk of the encyclical centers on points of doctrine of interest to few in the present day, but is important for two primary points. First, it reasserts the doctrine of papal infallibility, itself still a novel doctrine in Catholicism.⁵⁷ Second and most to the point, it condemns the American habit of turning religion into a kind of spiritual smorgasbord in which each is empowered to pick and choose the doctrines of their liking, leaving the rest on the table.

This was in keeping with the Church’s withdrawal from American public life which began in the 1890s, reached its zenith in the 1920s, and in the economic and political realities of the post-War world was already antiquated. Yet it was still a matter of passionate debate within the Church. In the Truman era, the Pope’s unwavering support for the American stance in the Cold War was perhaps heartening, but in the global battle against communism, Stalin’s too-oft quoted quip “and how many divisions does the pope have” seems again apropos.⁵⁸ For Truman, the way forward would have to be via the long and twisting path of Christian ecumenism.

Truman’s own view was of the sort that the heresy of Americanism sought to condemn: simplistic, eclectic, and deeply millenarian.⁵⁹ In keeping with American habit and tradition, he saw the world in stark Manichean terms. There was good and there was evil. Democracy and capitalism are good. Dictatorship and communism are bad. One is godly and the other atheistic. The world is an arena for struggle, for conflict between good and evil, but the light at the end of the tunnel is the eschatological promise that good will eventually triumph, that here will be a Judgment and that in the end, America is the nation of destiny, the coat to which all men will cleave. Truman’s representative to the religious world, Myron C. Taylor, no doubt agreed, but he was so closely identified with the Vatican that the Protestant intellectuals concerned with the WCC saw him with suspicion.⁶⁰

Enter State Department officer J. Graham Parsons, a Protestant of the first order assigned to Taylor’s staff. His observation of the situation was acute: “[the prospect of the] head of the Church of Rome ... sitting on his tiny little island in the centre of the city surrounded by a Red Sea of Communist Italy ... sort of boggled the mind.”⁶¹ The State Department itself was of little help in the effort to coordinate an anticommunist Catholic/Protestant coalition. For example, to the idea that the US could offer diplomatic recognition to the WCC as the same sort of sovereign state of Protestantism that they held with the Vatican and Catholicism, the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs George Walbridge Perkins, Jr. informed Secretary of State Dean Acheson on February 16, 1950 in a cable stamped “secret”:

Subject: Relations with the Holy See and with Leaders of Protestant Faiths

In response to your inquiry, it would not be practicable to parallel establishment of diplomatic relations with the Holy See by the appointment of a corresponding emissary to a Protestant agency such as the World Council of Churches. The World Council is an association of denominations without reference to nationality and not a sovereign entity like the Holy See. Mr. Taylor looked into this question and reported to the President that the Council would not accept representatives of governments.

If it were decided to establish diplomatic relations with the Holy See, American Protestant opposition might be mitigated through designation of a Special or Personal Assistant to the President for the [Page 1793] specific purpose of maintaining contact with faiths other than Roman Catholic. A less controversial solution would be for the President to designate a single person as his personal representative in dealings both with the Holy See and with other faiths.

The latter course was essentially that followed with Mr. Taylor, who did meet frequently with Protestant groups and devoted considerable effort with limited success in promoting cooperation between them and the Catholic Church. It would probably be desirable that this aspect of the work of a successor to Mr. Taylor be given more emphasis and be more widely publicized than was the case in the past. Bishop Oxnam, one of the leading critics of Mr. Taylor's mission to the Vatican, advised Mr. Taylor that opposition would be greatly lessened if his designation were changed to "Representative to the Religious Peoples of the World."⁶²

Protestant leaders indeed demurred to be part of any organization or initiative that would link Protestants to Catholics, even in the current conditions of Cold War with the Soviet Union. This shocked Taylor of course,⁶³ but is in keeping with American history and temperament. The Protestant/Catholic divide in America dates to colonial times and in some parts of the country is yet to be breached. In fact, it was not until Will Herbert's 1950 best-seller *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* that the idea of Mainline Protestantism sharing the American public square with other faiths was actually widely broached.⁶⁴

Undaunted by such difficulties, Taylor approached the WCC in much the same way he had the Vatican with the overall objective of forming a religious alliance against communism in Western Europe.⁶⁵ The difficulty of such an undertaking was obvious—Protestants have no equivalent of the papacy. WCC Secretary General Visser 't Hooft was an influential theologian and tireless advocate of religious ecumenism, but in his world, influence did not amount to authority.⁶⁶

Nor do Protestants enjoy any particular sense of unity. This was less clear to such Brahmins as Parsons in his day. Then, there were the Mainline Churches who had long since personified the American religious balance, and then there was the great unwashed of schism-happy Baptists, ever-smiling Evangelicals, deeply withdrawn fundamentalists, and the strange and emotional world of the Pentecostals and Holiness churches, to name but a few. And that was in America alone.⁶⁷ Add to that the European schisms of language, history, and ethnic enmity, all stewing in the wreckage of World War II and threatened by an aggressive Stalinist enemy to the East, and the naiveté of the American approach becomes obvious.

Soviet Active Measures and the emergence of containment

The Russian decision to forgo the Amsterdam meetings was reasonable given the predominance of Western, and in particular American, influence over the organization. John D. Rockefeller provided a good deal of the financial support that made the Amsterdam Assembly possible and so much of the organizational influence in this early period was American.⁶⁸ The drive against organized religion in the Soviet Union had not yet begun, but of greater importance, the Active Measures campaign was still in its formative stage. The value of religion as a propaganda tool was not yet obvious to the Soviet state.

Active Measures was at the heart of Soviet policy as it confronted the West in an era when nuclear war was much feared but increasingly unlikely to occur.⁶⁹ It made a virtue of weakness as the myriad of Eastern European political jokes of the era attested. Why do the Five Year Plans seek to catch up to the West but not to surpass it? So they won't see the holes in our clothes was the knowing answer. If economic and nuclear parity is beyond reach, deception is the only logical step.

Active Measures were the ultimate creature of the Soviet system. Its primary hallmark is univocality—every official voice saying the same thing in the same way. This was true whether in times of crisis or just another day at the bureaucratic salt mines and it requires a level of coordination and discipline impossible in democratic countries.⁷⁰ Its objectives were grandiose given the means at hand: to influence global discourse in favor of Soviet positions at the expense of the West.

By 1959, the KGB's First Chief Directorate, responsible for foreign intelligence, had seized control of the program, both centralizing it and devoting considerably greater resources to the effort. General Ivan Agayants took control of what had become known as Department D in the 1960s and the Active Measures campaign as we understand it today was well and truly born.⁷¹

Active Measures was designed to combat precisely the kind of influence that American dollars might buy in organizations like the WCC. Despite this influence, what the Americans were selling was not altogether palatable even to Christian churchmen in Europe. The US, at a loss as to how to handle a wartime ally with whom peacetime coexistence was far from assured, were operating on the basis of George Kennan's famous "Long Telegram" and the policy of hard containment that grew from it. Kennan's analysis, by chance or design, mirrored much of the WCC's analysis of both capitalism and Soviet communism, while pointing a way forward in the emerging bipolar world of 1948.

Summarizing the Soviet view of the West, Kennan states:

(f) It must be borne in mind that capitalist world is not all bad. In addition to hopelessly reactionary and bourgeois elements, it includes (1) certain wholly enlightened and positive elements united in acceptable communistic parties and (2) certain other elements (now described for tactical reasons as progressive or democratic) whose reactions, aspirations and activities happen to be "objectively" favorable to interests of USSR These last must be encouraged and utilized for Soviet purposes.⁷²

This observation would be a guiding principle of the Active Measures campaign, and would govern the Soviet approach to the WCC after the Russian Orthodox Church and the state churches of other Soviet satellites joined in 1961. Those with compatible interests were, in this view, susceptible to being utilized for Soviet purposes, and this was precisely what would eventually befall the WCC.

Kennan goes on to analyze the sectors of Soviet society, including the Russian Orthodox and other Eastern Churches that would be brought to bear in the struggle between East and West. In his concluding exhortations to US policy, Kennan's view proved to be prescient to what would follow in our own day with the fall of the Soviet state and the emergence of Putin's Russia. It urged the Americans to adopt a measured response based on an informed and educated electorate capable of formulating flexible responses to the opportunities presented by the manifold weaknesses of the Soviet system.

In the end though, the Milwaukee-born Kennan was a highly educated American elite whose internationalist outlook stemmed from his time at Oxford while his faith was deeply rooted in the Mainline Protestantism of his day.⁷³ What emerged then from the “Long Telegram” was exactly what Kennan warned against: a panic that would give birth to the anti-communist hysteria of the 1950s at home and a policy of rigid containment abroad. Containment in its various stages would remain the only guiding American foreign policy of the Cold War period.⁷⁴ And it was precisely this policy which the Americans urged on the WCC.

The hardline anti-communist policy was delivered to WCC Secretary General Willem Visser ‘t Hooft by Myron C. Taylor. It was received with some suspicion, given the American identification with the Vatican coupled with the determination among many of the WCC’s members to tilt to neither East nor West, but to God. In ‘t Hooft’s recollection, the US position: “expressed the conviction that all who believed in God and in freedom should be brought together to fight communism” and the US simply wanted the WCC to “invite to the Assembly representatives of national governments engaged in this fight.”⁷⁵

What followed typified the difficulties faced by Truman’s religious appeal. Anti-communism as a general principle was not a hard sell to European churchmen. But as ‘t Hooft pointed out with some irony, the WCC was based first and foremost on the principle of the separation of church and state.⁷⁶ This is a principle that was not unfamiliar to the Americans, but in the current emergency such legal niceties could be conveniently overlooked. Taylor stressed that American Protestant ministers were fully behind taking a very hard line against communism, which was certainly true, but not of great relevance to the ecumenical mission of the WCC.

Taylor did not mention the strident anti-Catholicism reflected by many Mainline ministers and espoused with passion in non-mainline churches throughout America in this period. Nor did pointed references to the manifest benefits of the Marshall Plan and the undeniable fact that WCC financing, like the Marshall Plan itself, was the result of American largess, move the WCC leadership. The WCC held fast to their founding principle of independence from government control.⁷⁷

In the end, the WCC Assembly in Amsterdam took place, to US consternation, without the Roman Catholic Church. The Pope, whose wholehearted support of the American position on containing Soviet communism motivated Truman’s involvement in the first place, declined to attend given the strong anti-Catholic feelings of the Protestant delegates. An invitation was extended to the Russian Orthodox Church, despite the WCC’s awareness that it was by 1948 operating largely as an arm of the Soviet government. That invitation was declined as well. Stalin was clearly not about to participate in a forum where the outcome could not be fully controlled from Moscow.

This was, as events would show, a miscalculation that Khrushchev would rectify. As we will see, the participation of the Russian Church and its satellites would turn the American public’s perception of the WCC from an ecumenical organization free of government control to that of a subsidiary of the Soviet propaganda machine.

Truman’s initiative thus ended in failure. A good part of the blame could be laid at the door of what the Catholic Church might call Americanism, but what might more properly be called parochialism. Truman and those involved with the program operated from the perception that the Mainline Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic hierarchy

were the only significant players and that both shared a broad perception of the world; that atheistic communism was antithetical to religion and that capitalism, whatever its defects, was the only bulwark against communist subversion.

Further, the Catholic/Protestant divide was only in the process of being healed in the United States—an achievement that made Will Herbert's *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* an unlikely best-seller.⁷⁸ That the divisions were far deeper in Europe given the bloody religious history of the continent did not occur to the Americans until it was too late. Moreover, from the relative security of America—economically vital after the War and holding a monopoly of nuclear weapons—the need to preserve some distance between church and state in Europe was not easily apparent. America after all had no state church tradition. It was this factor that made the need to preserve a viable space between churches and governments imperative in Western Europe.

But if Truman's initiative was a failure, it was a noble one.⁷⁹ Truman recognized religion as an important aspect of the struggle against Soviet communism and sought, however imperfectly, to achieve a broad international coalition in support of Western ideals. It was the last such effort from an American Administration. As the Cold War grew frigid, American churchmen turned inward. The WCC was demonized as a Soviet puppet and was thus caught up in the McCarthy-era Red Scare.

The WCC comes to America: the Evanston assembly and beyond

How deeply this image of the WCC as a creature of the Soviet Union impacted the image of the WCC in the United States after 1948 can be seen in the flavor of press clippings from the time. The Amsterdam Assembly and its relatively even-handed treatment of the communist/capitalist controversy was at first taken with caution rather than panic in the United States. In 1949 for example, the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), a body representing “twenty-three Protestant and four Eastern Orthodox denominations” warned against acquiescing to the repression of religion in communist countries, but warned also of the danger of fascism to the freedom of religion. The FCC vowed to send a delegation to meet with the WCC. What makes the FCC statement most remarkable however is that it urges the Senate to delay ratification of the NATO treaty until “the American people have had adequate opportunity to understand it fully.”⁸⁰ Moscow's position on NATO was not dissimilar.⁸¹

By 1954 the ambiguity was gone and the WCC was pictured in the same way as such Soviet owned and operated front groups as the World Peace Council and the Christian Peace Conference. An article in the *New York Times* screams “Bishop Denies He is a Red,” which runs alongside of a two column-width picture of Ilona Massey, a Hungarian-born actress, who the article assures readers, will in congressional testimony “Tell of Life Under Hungarian Reds.” In the piece, Bishop John Peter of the Reformed Church of Hungary asserts that “‘in no sense of the word’ could he be called a communist” although Christianity and Communism are fully compatible.⁸²

What follows is the kind of slashing, no-holds-barred interview that is so lamentably rare in 2017. Most telling is Bishop Peter's denial that he is an informer who was responsible for the “entrapment, imprisonment or execution” of fellow churchmen.⁸³ This charge stems from accusations made by Bela Fabian, described as a refugee leader of the dissolved Hungarian Democratic Party in a magazine article which was read into

the Congressional Record. When asked the same question by a reporter from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* however, the Bishop was more evasive in his answers.⁸⁴

At this point, Representative Alvin M. Bentley, “chairman of a subcommittee of the House Committee on Communist Aggression” then got into the national press spotlight by inviting Bishop Albert Bareczky, head of the Hungarian delegation to the WCC’s Second Assembly in Evanston, Illinois, and the much maligned Bishop Peter, to testify before his subcommittee. The Congressman asserted that four of the five-member Hungarian delegation were “all thorough going collaborationists.” Of the fifth member Congressman Bentley could not say. The invitation was actually a mere publicity ploy. Both the congressman and the gentlemen from *The Times* were well aware that the Hungarians’ visas did not permit them to travel anywhere other than the sites of WCC activities or living quarters.⁸⁵ But it made for good Cold War theater.

The Evanston Assembly which took place from August 15–31, 1954 was a risk for the WCC who already were being perceived as either a front group or to borrow from the wit and wisdom of the late and too little lamented former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, as at best squishy soft on communism.⁸⁶ It was an even bigger risk for the United States given the strictures of the McCarran Subversive Activities Control Act of 1950 which sought to control communist activities in the United States through the newly established Subversive Activities Control Board and the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 that revised U.S. immigration laws to prevent the entry of communists into the United States.⁸⁷ Members of the Eastern European church delegations who were known to be communist agents or sympathizers should not, under the strictures of these acts, have been permitted to attend the Evanston Assembly.

This not only included the Hungarian delegation who rose to press scrutiny, but to members of other delegations who were not yet known to the American public. The Czech theologian Josef Hromádka, a founding member of the WCC and later president of the Christian Peace Conference—a fully controlled Soviet front group—managed to so irritate Secretary of State John Foster Dulles that, in a private conversation with the British Ambassador Sir Roger Makins and Gen. Douglas MacArthur about the 1955 Bandung Conference, Dulles compared the speech of India’s President Jawaharlal Nehru to the one made by Hromádka at the Amsterdam WCC Assembly seven years earlier! “Hromadka had taken the general line that Western civilization had failed and that some new type of civilization was necessary to replace it. Nehru’s speech had the same general ring.”⁸⁸

How great a concern this was to the Eisenhower Administration is reflected in the record of a meeting of the National Security Council on March 24, 1955 which centered primarily on the WCC Assembly. The tenor of the discussion revealed that the issue was primarily one of appearances rather than of national security:

Secretary Humphrey inquired whether the granting of admission permitted these aliens to go anywhere they liked in the United States. The Attorney General responded in the negative, stating that their travels were to be very carefully supervised and controlled.

The Attorney General stated that the Department of Justice was receiving very “bitter” mail critical of the United States for permitting these people to enter the country. In response to the President’s inquiry as to the source of these criticisms, the Attorney General said the mail emanated from patriotic organizations and individuals.

The Attorney General then asked Mr. Allen Dulles [Director of the CIA] if he was going to make a report on what those people who had been permitted entry previous to

this time actually said and did when they returned to their home lands. Mr. Dulles replied in the affirmative, and Mr. Cutler thereupon read the highlights of a report which he had received from the Director of Central Intelligence, outlining highly critical and false propaganda charges which some of these visitors had made. Mr. Cutler noted that among other things some of the representatives from iron curtain countries who attended the recent Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches made the following accusations or complaints when they went back behind the iron curtain: a) They were put under surveillance by U.S. secret police; b) they—and even the Archbishop of Canterbury—were fingerprinted in the same manner as Chicago gangsters; c) there was a crime wave in Chicago; d) Bishop Peter referred to an Evanston memorial to World War II dead which bears the inscription “December 7, 1941 – blank,” and charged that the failure of local officials to insert the second date was proof that the war had not ended so far as the United States was concerned. Mr. Allen Dulles pointed out in this connection that in some instances the governments of these people probably compelled them to make such charges when they returned home.

In reference to the foregoing, Mr. Cutler made a comment about the happiness expressed by the Secretary of State at the February 17 meeting over the fact that these religious people were permitted entry to this country. The Secretary said that he wanted to correct any misunderstanding on that score. He said he was happy that such a great organization as the World Council of Churches wasn't driven away, for he thought it would have been scandalous if the World Council had been forced by our policies to hold its meeting outside the United States.⁸⁹

The Secretary of State who was pleased that the Assembly was made possible in the United States was none other than John Foster Dulles, who had been much involved with the WCC's Amsterdam Assembly and whose voice in support of Western values was much heard at the time. In contrast to this balanced “inside the beltway” view, the portrait of the WCC as a fellow traveler if not an actual Soviet front group dominated the press coverage of the group throughout the Red Scare, and indeed, for much of its post-1961 history. This was not without some justification.

The US government shared this suspicion to a degree, but did not let this prevent them from engaging in a range of contacts with the WCC, and on occasion enlisting their assistance in various ways. In its formative years, the WCC and the Truman Administration appears to have harbored the same dream of Christian unity being mirrored in political terms, ideally through a United States of Europe that could provide a bulwark against Soviet expansion. State Department officer Edwin McCammon Martin recalls that the initiative actually came from the WCC rather than originating with the Americans.⁹⁰

In the aftermath of the 1956 Suez Crisis—a time in which the United States made the fateful choice of focusing on the Middle East and its oil supplies rather than to keep its promises to support the Hungarian uprising⁹¹—Secretary of State Dulles turned to the churches domestically and to the WCC internationally to call for support, prayers, and friendly sermons.⁹²

By 1967, the Johnson Administration who even then was drowning in a sea of blood and discord over Vietnam, returned to an old favorite: Catholic/Protestant amity and the WCC's role in promoting this felicitous if ahistorical outcome. The occasion was Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (On The Development of Peoples), which was issued on March 26, 1967.⁹³ The encyclical was in fact a remarkably progressive document

that emerged in the wake of Vatican II, which revolutionized the Catholic Church.⁹⁴ *Populorum Progressio* is wide ranging, but its key passage might be: “The hungry nations of the world cry out to the peoples blessed with abundance. And the Church, cut to the quick by this cry, asks each and every man to hear his brother’s plea and answer it lovingly.”⁹⁵ The text and the wider sentiment mirrored precisely the calls which had come out of each WCC Assembly for social justice.

While the American solicitude for the Vatican had not changed, the times certainly had. The Cold War was still very much on, but the US concern by 1967 was becoming more absorbed in the effort to create support for the Vietnam adventure, leaving other aspects of foreign policy to run on autopilot. Hubert Humphrey, he of the Agnewesque epithet as the avatar of politicians who were squishy soft on communism American politicians, was a man who was considerably more than Lyndon Johnson’s puppet and apprentice warmonger as the 1960s generation viewed him. A deeply religious populist from Minnesota, he was among the early supporters of the civil rights movement and held the lonely progressive fort during the worst of the McCarthyite period.⁹⁶

In a conversation with Monsignor Joseph Gremillon, Executive Director of the Papal Commission on Peace and Justice, Monsignor Marvin Bordelon, Executive Secretary of the National Secretariat on Justice and Peace, and John E. Rielly, Assistant to the Vice President on May 11, 1967, Vice President Humphrey reveals much about the interests of American Cold War policy as balanced against his own sorely tried moral stance. It is a window into the time and place that is worthy of consideration:

The Vice President opened the conversation by commenting on what a powerful document the Pope’s encyclical on “The Development of Peoples” was. He had discussed it with the Pope and he had been thinking about how one could best translate this into action. We should not be content just to have it discussed for a few weeks then dropped...

The Vice President wondered whether the energies of Vietnam could be redirected and rechanneled into positive development avenues after the war was over. He hoped this would be so but was not sure...⁹⁷

In the end, this may have been much ado about nothing much. The Catholic Church did not join the WCC, Protestant/Catholic relations beyond the rarified strata of religious elites in the US was not significantly affected, American foreign aid patterns did not change as Johnson’s guns and butter policies could not stand up to the costs of a distant hot war in Vietnam, and Lyndon Johnson himself did not run for reelection. Humphrey’s presidential campaign could not escape the shadow of Vietnam, allowing Richard Nixon to at last assume the presidency.

Ironically, in the US the noble sentiments of Pope Paul VI’s encyclicals would have less lasting public impact than that of *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI’s encyclical on the sacredness of human life that forbade birth control and abortion. The Catholic debate on *Humanae Vitae* is still passionate in the US today.⁹⁸ Yet its window into the time, the place, and the continuing hope that the WCC could reach at least a working relationship with the Vatican and buttress the Western riposte to Marxism is important to recall at a time in which the popular view of the WCC in the US was decidedly negative.

Soviet influence or Soviet control?: the KGB and the church

The Soviets meanwhile, continued their efforts to guide if not control the WCC. A signal success in 1969 was documented in the KGB archives:

August 1969

The agents 'Svyatoslav', 'Adamant', 'Altar', 'Magistr', 'Roshchin' and 'Zemnogorsky' travelled to England to take part in the work of the CC of the World Council of Churches. The agents were able to counter hostile activity and to promote agent 'Kuznetsov' to a leading post in the WCC.⁹⁹

The Nixon Administration advanced arms control agreements with the Soviet Union, created the opening to China in 1972, and maintained its domestic religious credentials primarily through the "pastor to presidents," Dr. Billy Graham.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, it saw the WCC in more practical political terms than did the previous administrations from Truman to Johnson, and thus enjoyed more concrete support from the WCC than was apparent previously. For example, a 1969 intelligence memorandum notes that when the Administration became concerned with the rise of Liberation Theology in Latin America, the Nixon administration turned to the WCC: "Although Protestantism throughout the world is highly factionalized, the World Council of Churches has helped to moderate these differences in Latin America and has promoted cooperative missionary programs. Today, a number of ecumenically-minded Protestant churchmen are cooperating with one another and with progressive Roman Catholics in support of social reform programs."¹⁰¹

Similarly, on the question of Jewish prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union, Billy Graham turned to National Security Advisor and soon to be Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to enlist both President Nixon and the WCC in support of the issue, and in particular to support the daughter of one Mrs. Rivka Alexandrovich, who Graham asserts is the youngest such prisoner in the Soviet Union. Kissinger promised to do just this, although whether he followed up on the promise is lost to history.¹⁰²

Graham was privately critical of the WCC at this time, worried that its drive for social justice had long overshadowed its evangelical mission of winning souls for Christ. "Some of the World Council's advocates of ecumenism increasingly have questioned whether Christians even have the right—let alone the duty—to disturb the honest faith of a Buddhist, a Hindi or a Jew." Further, "... [as the WCC] gradually moved further from Orthodox ties ... the gulf between it and Evangelicals has deepened."¹⁰³

Thus the pattern of the common American public view of the WCC as either a Soviet front or at best a fellow traveler was joined with a religious critique of the organization as more concerned with religious amity than Christian duty. This suspicion of the WCC would continue throughout the Cold War period. As American government records indicate however, successive Presidents saw the organization in much more reasoned terms and a channel of productive communication with the organization remained throughout the Cold War period.

For their part, the Russians treated the WCC with suspicion as they did all organizations that they did not fully control. Conversely, they also recognized an opportunity to advance whatever initiatives the Active Measures campaign of the moment required through the good offices of the WCC. The presence of the Russian Orthodox Church and its satellite churches after 1961 greatly aided in the endeavor. This allowed the Soviets

to maintain at least the aura of ecumenism in a neutral political environment, and allowed favorable positions taken by the WCC to be rebroadcast as gray area support for the Active Measures program.

In the 1980s, (Western) disarmament remained a concern and a prominent strand of the Soviet effort, but after the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan the Soviet pose as champions of peace was on even shakier ground than usual. The Soviets reacted by both increasing the number of KGB agents dispatched undercover to WCC events and by enlisting the support of senior officials of the organization. In 1980 for example, “a KGB report signed by the head of the Fourth Department states, ‘... the secretary general of the World Council of Churches, Philip Potter, has been in Moscow as a guest of the Moscow Patriarchate. A favorable influence was exercised on him by agents ‘Svyatoslav,’ ‘Adamant,’ ‘Mikhailov,’ and ‘Ostrovsky.’”¹⁰⁴

In a report on the 1983 Vancouver WCC Assembly submitted to the Communist Party Central Committee (CPSU-CC), Soviet successes were detailed. The Russian delegation to Vancouver contained no less than 47 intelligence agents, making the pretense of independence by the Orthodox Church more a matter of fiction than fact.¹⁰⁵ The report states:

DOCUMENT 172. COPY NO. I

To the CPSU CC

Secret

On the Results of the VI General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver (Canada)

The VI general assembly of the World council of churches (WCC) took place in Vancouver (Canada) from 24 July to 20 August 1983. In its work 950 delegates from 300 member churches of the WCC, uniting about 500 million believers from 100 countries of the world, took part.

As observers and guests of the assembly about 1,000 representatives of other churches which have not joined the WCC, and in addition more than 1,000 correspondents of the mass media were accredited. The conference took place under the slogan ‘Jesus Christ, life of the world’.

Imperialist circles of the West, more and more worried by the involvement of religious figures in the anti-war movement, tried to direct the activity of the assembly into channels profitable to them and to divert participants from discussion of current problems of peace, disarmament, the prevention of nuclear war and social justice.

Attempts were undertaken to create around the assembly and at it the most anti-soviet sensation, to arouse distrust among participants towards the peace-loving policy of our state, to blacken the position of the churches of the USSR, portraying them as a propagandist instrument of the Soviet government and agents of the KGB which do not speak up in defence of the rights of believers in the USSR.

For this purpose representatives of many anti-soviet centres, such as ‘christian solidarity international’ (Geneva [sic]), the so-called ‘Club of life’ created in the USA half a year before the beginning of the work of the assembly, the reactionary ‘International council of churches’ (USA) and others, gathered in Vancouver.

So-called ‘Yakunin readings’ (Yakunin is serving a term of punishment for anti-soviet activity) were specially organised. Slanderous leaflets, photo-documents, brochures and provocative letters were circulated among the delegates and guests of the assembly. There

was strong pressure on the leadership of the WCC with the aim of directing the work of the assembly into anti-soviet channels.

As a result of the active work of the delegations from churches of the USSR and the socialist countries and the support for their positions from progressive circles of the assembly, attempts by anti-soviets were unsuccessful and its work took on a clearly expressed anti-imperialist and anti-American character. In the speeches of many delegates was heard a sharp criticism of the aggressive policy of the USA and its allies. Thus, one of the delegates from the FRG [West Germany], U. Tukhrov, declared '... that supporters of the arms race are pushing mankind to a more dangerous crisis than existed in the years of nazism'.

In the final documents adopted at the assembly, the peace initiatives of the Soviet state were reflected. The assembly spoke out against the siting of American nuclear missiles in Europe and for the declaration that weapons of mass destruction were illegal.

'We call on the churches,' it says in the Declaration on peace and justice, 'to redouble their efforts to convince their governments of the necessity of reaching agreement and turning away- now, before it is too late- from the plans to site additional or new forms of nuclear weapons in Europe and quickly to begin cutting back on them with the aim of subsequently completely liquidating the nuclear forces present.' The Declaration contains a call for a freeze on nuclear weapons, the renunciation of further research, production and siting of weapons in space and a ban on the development and production of all forms of weapons of mass destruction.

The Declaration also contains calls for the attainment of positive results in the Geneva talks on limiting and reducing strategic weapons. The assembly also adopted a declaration condemning the policy of the USA in Central America; a declaration condemning apartheid in South Africa; a resolution on the Pacific region in support of the struggle of the people living there, for political and economic independence and for a Pacific ocean free from nuclear weapons; a resolution on the Middle East with the demand for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all territory they occupy and a call to the churches to support the UN conference on the Palestinian question; a declaration on human rights directed mainly at support for the struggle of peoples for social and economic equality.

There was an attempt undertaken at the assembly to push through an antisoviet resolution on Afghanistan. By the efforts of the delegation of the churches of the USSR this attempt was thwarted. As a whole its content had close similarities to the well-known proposal for the political settlement of this question put forward by the Secretary General of the UN.

The results of the assembly evoked a large, positive response among the international public. Right wing circles, especially in the USA and the FRG, acknowledge with unconcealed irritation that the assembly did not proceed in accordance with the scenario they had worked out - the adoption of resolutions hostile to the Soviet Union. And in this, it must be noted, a great part was played by the delegation of the Russian orthodox church.

The western press notes that it will now be more difficult for governments of these countries to challenge the progressive position of their churches on the question of nuclear weapons in Europe, and the anti-war movement has received important support on the eve of the decisive demonstrations in the autumn of this year against the siting of new American weapons.

The Council for religious affairs attached to the USSR Council of Ministers considers it expedient to increase the co-operation of the churches of the Soviet Union with the World Council of Churches, ensuring that its activity in the sphere of the practical resolution of the problems of international security and disarmament will become more effective. In this connection it would be desirable to hold one of the regular sessions of the central committee of the WCC in the USSR.

Chairman of the Council for religious affairs attached to the USSR

Council of Ministers

V.A. Kuroyedov

No. 253/s, 24 August 1983¹⁰⁶

As the Yuri Andropov-era document indicates, the Soviets were able by the 1980s to influence if not fully control the stances of the WCC on issues in which they had an interest. They had votes, discipline, and a united front in writing and debating the “Faith and Order” documents adopted by the WCC Assemblies. But as useful as the WCC could be to the Soviets, attending a meeting of an organization that was not a fully controlled Soviet front was no easy matter. Khrushchev it will be recalled first gave the go-ahead in 1961 at the height of the anti-religious campaign domestically. By 1981 however, the Soviet Party was in flux. Leonid Brezhnev was dying and would pass from the scene in 1982, to be succeeded by Andropov, a former KGB Director who would die in turn only two years after assuming power.

In Active Measures terms, Andropov was an ideal candidate for leadership as his KGB tenure from 1967–1982 saw the rapid development and massive implementation of the campaign.¹⁰⁷ Andropov upon assuming power portrayed himself to Western circles a kind of closet liberal who would make changes in the stodgy Brezhnev era of intransigence, or more specifically, to the Brezhnev Doctrine which locked in the borders of the Eastern European Soviet Empire as stable and unchanging.¹⁰⁸ It may be safely assumed Andropov’s approval marked the outcome of the Sofia Consultation that took place in the Bulgarian capital from May 22–31, 1981.

The Sofia Consultation was held to decide on the participation of Eastern Orthodox churches in the WCC, with the Vancouver Assembly of particular importance.¹⁰⁹ The decision to maintain its WCC participation was a foregone conclusion, but there was some concern with maintaining tight control of what was said by members of the church delegations, with the centralization of authority under the control of the Central Committee (implying the CCs of both Church and Communist Party), and that the final positions taken by the WCC reflect Soviet interests:

13. The consultation considers it essential that during the General Assemblies and meetings of the Central Committee contact should be maintained between the Orthodox representatives in order to make a better contribution of the Orthodox to these meetings. It would be desirable to have special consultations in preparation for the work of the Central Committee.

14. Special attention was given to the Orthodox preparation for the Sixth Assembly in 1983. The Orthodox Churches represented at the Consultation understand the Sixth Assembly of the WCC in Vancouver as a very privileged opportunity for them and are determined to bring on this occasion a full contribution to the ecumenical dialogue and community. They consider their consultation in Sofia with the leaders of the WCC as an integral part of the

preparation for this ecumenical event. They expect that every effort will be made by the WCC leadership and the host churches in Canada to secure full participation of all Orthodox delegates in conditions excluding external interference and leading to fruitful work.¹¹⁰

The Soviet success with the WCC did not go unremarked throughout the communist world. Fidel Castro, in a 1980 meeting with East German leader Erich Honecker, enquired somewhat wonderingly:

Fidel Castro: Is it correct, that you have so many Protestants in your country? Are they indeed religious?

Erich Honecker: They are church members, and of course they are religious, otherwise they were not members. I had conversations with the bishops. This was the first time ever in the history of the GDR. They said: We don't want to be partisans of the West. We are GDR citizens. The members of our congregation work for socialism. We conceive of ourselves as a church within socialism. I couldn't say anything against that. The vast majority of the people feel attached to their state, to socialism, and the leaders of the church are smart, they take that fact into account. They exert an influence on the churches in the Federal Republic and in the USA. At the World Council of Churches, they have introduced a resolution calling for the continuation of detente and disarmament. It has been presented to the governments of all countries. The Protestant churches of the GDR and the USA have issued a common statement calling for the continuation of detente. Hence, certain changes become apparent here.

Of course, the church does not want to join together with us completely. This is evident, they can't do that. However, it is still better to have a church that is loyal to the socialist state than one that works against it. In the USA, too, there are quite a lot of people who oppose the policy of confrontation, otherwise [Secretary of State Cyrus] Vance would not have had to go. He was against the military adventure in Iran. What you said about Muskie confirms our information that [Senator Edmund] Muskie indeed wants to act more independently. We have to exploit that.

Fidel Castro: I believe that a lot of people understand that the third world war would also be the last.¹¹¹

By 1989 the Russian relationship with the WCC had matured to the point that the WCC Central Committee was invited to hold its meetings in Moscow, which was duly done. The results from the KGB point of view were more than satisfactory:

July 1989

In accordance with the plan confirmed by the leadership of the USSR KGB, agent-operational and organisational measures were enacted to guarantee state security for the duration of the preparation and holding of events of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Moscow, in which more than 500 foreign religious figures took part. As a result of the enacted measures, the executive committee and CC of the WCC adopted public statements (8), and messages (3), conforming to the political line of the socialist countries. Agent and operational-technical measures were conducted in relation to 29 objects of operational interest to the organs of the KGB and external surveillance was conducted on 9 objects. A positive influence was exerted on the foreigners via our agents, and additional confirmatory and personal data were received, as well as reports on their political views and positions held in their own countries. Numerous interviews useful to us were

conducted. In order to resolve organisational and operational questions meetings (2) of KGB operational groups were held. Head of the 4th department of the 5th Directorate of the USSR KGB colonel V.I. Timoshevsky.¹¹²

The appearance of these KGB documents in the West helped to perpetuate the image of the WCC as a Soviet pawn, even after the formal demise of the Soviet Union. A prime example was an article in that ultimate bastion of Americana, *The Reader's Digest* which appeared in 1993. *The Reader's Digest* was founded in 1920 to condense and simplify news and articles deemed of interest to Americans who might be either too busy or too educationally or intellectually limited to read books, journals, or quality newspapers for themselves. Its remarkable commercial success speaks many condensed volumes about American intellectual history in the twentieth century.¹¹³

In an article that would rocket around the country, and would draw ironic commentary from more elite religious journals, *The Digest* published an article entitled "The Gospel According to Marx." In it, it repeated much of what we have said here of the group's pro-Soviet positions, but in smaller words and with the clear suggestion that the WCC is simply a Soviet front group, which it was not (quite).¹¹⁴ *The Reader's Digest* would publish attacks on the WCC no less than three times after 1993 for its allegedly pro-communist leanings.

Conclusion

The WCC's birth in 1948 coincided so closely with the beginning of the Cold War that it was inevitable that it be drawn into the confrontation. In the process, the line between its religious message of Protestant ecumenism was often lost in the din created by its need to take political positions so as to remain relevant to a rapidly changing post-War world. Where in 1948 the sympathies of its leadership were primarily oriented to the West, it maintained an independent voice and offered powerful and incisive critiques of both capitalism and communism.

In the end, however, its religious message came to be overshadowed by the politics of the time. In this, the WCC evinced some considerable naiveté about the Soviet system and its drive to control the political discourse of the day. Specifically, the Active Measures campaign by which the Soviet Party would determine the narrative and the security services would act to assure to the greatest degree possible that this line would be followed by all public voices was alien to the churchmen whose humanism and manifest good will had led them into the ecumenical movement in the first place.

But Soviet machinations were not the core of the problem. Ecumenism was simply perceived differently in different quarters. To American policy makers, ecumenism had to be based on the creation of a united front linking Mainline Protestants with Catholics in support of Western values. To Europeans, five centuries of conflict between Protestants and Catholics could not be so easily dismissed. The papacy itself, whether in the conservative pontificate of Pius XII or the visionary reform of Paul VI, could no more escape the strictures of its history than could European Protestants. The Russian Orthodox Church meanwhile, a deeply conservative and nationalistic institution at the best of times, survived both Stalin and the religious persecutions of the late 1950s by acting slavishly in the interests of the Soviet state.¹¹⁵ The faith communities of the satellite states were no more independent than were the peace priests of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In this respect, anyone who lived in Russia or Eastern Europe under the Soviet system understood the game well. Ecumenical gatherings around the world were prizes worth their weight in gold, or more precisely, in hard currency which could be redeemed at the stores that were open only to resident foreigners and local elites who had legal access to Western currency. To them went the little luxuries from the West that were deeply prized in those years. In other words, it was not simply a matter of ideological belief or naked fear that drove Russian and Eastern European churchmen to conform to whatever line was desired by Moscow. Participation in the WCC gave them access to a better life and they were in no mood to lose it over a few minor religious principles.

The public perception of the WCC in America became increasingly negative after the Evanston Assembly in 1954, but the American government did not necessarily share this view and it maintained a bridge to the group throughout the Cold War. Yet this range of official contacts remains unknown to the press and public. Even the fact that President Eisenhower offered a key address to the Assembly is today largely forgotten.¹¹⁶ The image of the WCC as a communist dupe however remains, aided in large part by the vast audience for the wit and brevity of *The Reader's Digest* and its ilk.

Yet the most important point to be made is that the WCC survived the Cold War and remains a champion of ecumenism in the modern world. That the organization survived the East/West Cold War confrontation and thrives today is a fitting conclusion in itself.

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84. Clay Cowran, "Hungarian Bishop Refuses to Say if He's a Soviet Agent," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 17, 1954, 2. In the same edition of the paper however, the WCC, then engaged in its second Assembly in Evanston, Illinois, gets quite positive coverage on page 1.
85. Charles Grutzner, "Hungarian Bishop Invited to Testify," *New York Times*, August 26, 1954, 12.
86. The term was applied to Senator and later Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 147.
87. Michael J. Ybarra, *Washington Gone Crazy: Senator Pat McCarran and the Great American Communist Hunt* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2004). These restrictions remain part of immigration law. Ilona Bray, "Can Communist or Other Totalitarian Party Members Become Naturalized U.S. Citizens?" *NOLO*, <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/communist-membership-affects-eligibility-naturalized-us-citizenship.html>.
88. "Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington," April 7, 1955, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1955–1957, CHINA, VOLUME II, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v02/d193>.
89. "Memorandum of Discussion at the 242d Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 24, 1955," FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1955–1957, SOVIET UNION, EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN, VOLUME XXIV, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v24/d93>.
90. Theodore A. Wilson interview with Edwin McCammon Martin, July 6, 1970, Paris, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/martinem.htm>.
91. Johanna Granville, "'Caught with Jam on Our Fingers': Radio Free Europe and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 5 (2005): 811–39.
92. "Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State in Washington and Dr. Roswell Barnes in New York, February 22, 1957, 11:45 a.m.," FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1955–1957, ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE, 1957, VOLUME XVII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v17/d133>.
93. The full text can be found at "ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLES, Populorum Progressio: Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Paul VI promulgated on March 26, 1967," *Papal Encyclicals Online*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6develo.htm>.
94. No one could hope in a lifetime to wade through the literature of the conclave (earnest grad students have tried God knows). A good brief discussion can be had with John W O'Malley, "Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?" *Theological Studies* 67, no. 1 (2006): 3–33.
95. "ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLES, Populorum Progressio: Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Paul VI promulgated on March 26, 1967."
96. No friendlier biography can be offered than Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2003).
97. "Memorandum of Conversation," FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1964–1968, VOLUME XXXIV, ENERGY DIPLOMACY AND GLOBAL ISSUES, Washington, May 11, 1967, 11 a.m., <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v34/d288>.
98. The text of *Humanae Vitae* can be found at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html. On its impact in terms of religious violence, witness the Catholic rescue group Lambs of Christ, Jeffrey Kaplan, "America's Last Prophetic Witness: The Literature of the Rescue Movement," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 2 (1993): 58–77.
99. Corley (see note 32), 362.
100. Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham in the White House* (New York: Center Street, 2007), ch. 16.
101. "Intelligence Memorandum 2609/69, Washington, October 9, 1969," FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E–10, DOCUMENTS

- ON AMERICAN REPUBLICS, 1969–1972, Washington, October 9, 1969, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d13>.
102. “Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and Billy Graham of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association,” FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME XIII, SOVIET UNION, OCTOBER 1970–OCTOBER 1971, May 24, 1971, 6:50 p.m., <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v13/d231>.
 103. Gibbs and Duffy (see note 100), ch. 23.
 104. Armes (see note 36), 73.
 105. Corley (see note 32), 291.
 106. *Ibid.*, 291–4.
 107. Shultz and Godson (see note 17), 186.
 108. Matthew J. Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2003).
 109. “Sofia Consultation,” *World Council of Churches*, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/first-plenary-meeting-documents-december-1999/sofia-consultation> (accessed May 31, 1981). Cf. Todor Sabev, *The Sofia Consultation: Orthodox Involvement in the World Council of Churches: [Meeting Organized by the World Council of Churches, Held in Sofia May 1981]* (Geneva: World Council of Churches-Orthodox Task Force, 1982).
 110. “Sofia Consultation.” (see note 109).
 111. “Transcript of Conversation between Cuban Premier Fidel Castro and East German leader Erich Honecker, Havana, (excerpt).” *Wilson Center Digital Archive*, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111220.pdf?v=9e8618bf2cbf04a539a233add66278fa> (accessed May 25, 1980).
 112. Corley (see note 32), 383. For the structure and member churches of the WCC by 1989, see *From Harare to Porto Alegre 1998–2006* (Geneva: World Council of Churches).
 113. For an excellent and in many ways unique study of *The Readers Digest*, see Joanne P. Sharp, *Condensing the Cold War: Reader’s Digest and American Identity* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2001).
 114. The text of “The Gospel According to Marx” can be found at http://www.pravoslavieto.com/docs/eng/gospel_accord_marx.htm. It is a theme to which the *Digest* would return no less than three times, which such more intellectually inclined Protestant journals as *The Christian Century* found to be ironic and given the current pro-Gorbachev climate in the West less than timely. See “Reader’s Digest Attacks WCC Again,” *The Christian Century* 110, no. 3 (1993): 78–80.
 115. For a brief article that tries to nuance though not refute this finding, see Philip Walters, “The Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet State,” *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science* 483, no. 1 (1986): 135–45.
 116. Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Address at the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Evanston, Illinois,” <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9991> (accessed August 19, 1954).