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978-0-521-51347-0 - Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment

William Inboden

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### RELIGION AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY, 1945–1960

The Cold War was in many ways a religious war. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower and other American leaders believed that human rights and freedoms were endowed by God, that God had called the United States to defend liberty in the world, and that Soviet communism was especially evil because of its atheism and its enmity to religion. Along with security and economic concerns, these religious convictions helped determine both how the United States defined the enemy and how it fought the conflict. Meanwhile, American Protestant churches failed to seize the moment. Internal differences over theology and politics, and resistance to cooperation with Catholics and Jews, hindered Protestant leaders domestically and internationally. Frustrated by these internecine disputes, Truman and Eisenhower attempted instead to construct a new civil religion. This public theology was used to mobilize domestic support for Cold War measures, to determine the strategic boundaries of containment, to appeal to people of all religious faiths around the world to unite against communism, and to undermine the authority of communist governments within their own countries.

William Inboden is currently the Senior Vice President of the Legatum Institute. He previously served as Senior Director for Strategic Planning on the National Security Council at the White House. He has also worked at the State Department as a member of the Policy Planning staff and in the Office of International Religious Freedom, and at the American Enterprise Institute as a Civitas Fellow.

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*For Rana*



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## Preface and Acknowledgments

In recent years, when friends and acquaintances would inquire about the topic of my book, their responses almost invariably included some version of “well, that is certainly quite relevant these days.” I think they are right. As a factor in international relations, religion has acquired – or perhaps re-acquired – a new salience that before had been neglected in the years preceding “the eleventh of the ninth,” 2001. Whether as the declared motivation for those who attacked the United States on that day, or in the personal convictions and public statements of recent British Prime Minister Tony Blair, or likewise in the worldview of the American President whom I worked under at the National Security Council, George W. Bush, religion cannot be ignored.

Yet historians sometimes risk tripping into anachronism or even inanity when trying to make political judgments on the present day from their study of the past. In some cases that can well be an appropriate and helpful exercise, one in which I at times participate myself. But it is also a path fraught with methodological peril. Excavating the origins of the Cold War is a sufficient challenge in its own right. To speculate here on what the early Cold War’s religious dimension means for current events would, I believe, do justice neither to the past nor the present. The point is more basic: not only is religion a major factor in foreign policy today, it was a major factor in the early Cold War as well, and in many other eras besides. Readers are welcome, of course, to draw their own further applications from the story that follows.

Though I did not realize it at the time, this book had its beginnings almost a decade ago in a research paper written under the supervision of Jon Butler. I am grateful to him, and to John Lewis Gaddis and Harry Stout, for exceedingly helpful guidance throughout the entire process. Many thanks also to Paul Kennedy, Jonathan Spence, John Demos, and Robert Johnston for their support and wisdom during my graduate school years. And I am forever

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indebted to David Kennedy, whose mentorship of an eager undergraduate helped set the course for much of my subsequent studies.

For generous grants that made possible much of the research and writing, I am grateful to the Mustard Seed Foundation, the Pew Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, the Earhart Foundation, International Security Studies, the Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion at Yale, and the Civitas Program in Faith and Public Affairs. The Rivendell Institute at Yale, particularly Jon Hinkson, Dave Mahan, and Greg Ganssle, also provided support of the most enduring kind. And while numerous archivists made research more often a joy than a trial, special thanks are due to Martha Smalley of the Yale Divinity School Archives, Dwight Strandberg of the Eisenhower Presidential Library, and Randy Sowell, Dennis Bilger, and Liz Saffly of the Truman Presidential Library.

I had the great privilege to spend one year on a fellowship at the American Enterprise Institute, where much of this writing was accomplished. AEI's reputation for supporting innovative thinking in a collegial environment is well deserved. I particularly benefitted from the insights of Michael Novak, James Lilley, Walter Berns, Michael Greve, Kim Hendrickson, and the late Jeanne Kirkpatrick. A special measure of thanks to Chris DeMuth, Keith Pavlischek, and Jim Skillen, whose collective vision made the fellowship possible.

In the process of preparing for publication, Heather Morton lent her exceptional talents to the editing of the manuscript. Jeremi Suri and Leo Ribuffo provided extensive feedback, much of which I was wise to incorporate. Andy Beck and Bonnie Lee provided capable, encouraging, and especially patient editorial guidance throughout the process. Other valued conversation partners in the small but growing field of religion and foreign policy include Timothy Shah, Tom Farr, Joe Loconte, Mike Cromartie, Chris Seiple, Scott Flipse, and Charlie Edel.

Though research and writing are solitary endeavors, I have been helped along the way by the friendship, encouragement, and support of many. During my time at the State Department and the National Security Council, I had the honor of participating in the practice of foreign policy with some exceptional colleagues and supervisors. Working with them on present-day issues helped enhance my reading of the past. Seeing firsthand the singular pressures that policy-makers labor under, and the complexities of the process from writing memos to conducting negotiations to making decisions, gave me a new perspective and empathy as a historian for those policy-makers who have gone before, including those whose archives provided the material for this book. I make particular mention of Steve Hadley, J. D. Crouch, Jim Jeffrey, Peter Feaver, Mike Gerson, Pete Wehner, Steve Krasner, Mitchell

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My parents, Bill and Connie, encouraged my love of history from a very young age, and they along with my siblings Brian and Jennifer provided a foundation for me that continues to this day.

When I first set out on the path that led to this book, I had not yet met the woman who would become my wife. Along the way I came to know, to love, and to marry Rana, who is a living display of Solomon's wisdom: "An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain." In everything from inspiration to the index, she was indispensable. It is to her that I dedicate this book.