Philanthropy as Exchange: American Missionaries and the International Religious Liberty Debate

Is missionary work philanthropy? It hasn't traditionally been seen that way, especially by those outside of the missionary enterprise. And missionaries themselves might well object to the secular implications of the term to describe what is, at its core, a deeply religious enterprise. But if taking the broadest definition of philanthropy, an act or gift done or made for humanitarian purposes, then some missionary work is and has been undoubtedly philanthropic. The extent of non-evangelizing activity by missionaries has waxed and waned over time, subject to distinct criticism at times and actively encouraged at others, but throughout history missionaries brought more than just their faith.[1] As Robert Speer, secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, one of the largest denominational missions boards of the early 20th Century, noted, missions "successes" included not only souls won to Christ but also colleges, universities, schools, hospitals, dispensaries, and publishing houses.[2] Mainline Protestant missions influenced by the Social Gospel movement in the so-called "heyday" of missionary activity, roughly 1880 to 1930, focused with particular intensity on social reform and "good works," but missions of all faiths and denominations have, to some extent, combined elements of social service and evangelism. As Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision International, today the largest Christian humanitarian organization in the world, argued: "You can't preach to people whose stomachs are empty. First, you have to give them food."[3] As a result, while not all missionary work is philanthropic in nature, much of it does incorporate philanthropic elements, whether from necessity or intent.

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[1] For a good survey of changing attitudes towards social engagement by missions see William Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
[2] Robert E. Speer, *Missionary Principles and Practice* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910), 501-2, quoted in Hutchinson, 100.
[3] Pierce quoted in David King, *God's Internationalists: World Vision and the Age of Evangelical Humanitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 110.

But missionaries brought more than hospitals, schools, and orphanages; they also brought ideas, beliefs, and values. In some circumstances this influence was positive, empowering socially marginalized and disfavoured individuals and communities, laying foundations for mass movements, encouraging critiques of western imperialism, developing radical thinking, and encouraging national self-determination for developing nations.[4] But more often the influence was parochial and culturally-specific, to the detriment of indigenous populations. With good reason has missionary history, as Lamin Sanneh noted, traditionally been linked to colonial history.[5] Anthropologists in the final quarter of the 20th Century explored and exposed the variety of ways in which missionaries abroad imposed their own cultures on those with whom they worked, while scholars spurred on by the Civil Rights Movement and American Indian Movement noted the many ways in which missionaries at home decimated Native American and African American cultures, all adding to the image of missionaries as narrow-minded purveyors of cultural destruction.[6] Portrayals of missionaries in popular culture embedded such views in public consciousness while scholars, as William Hutchison observed, tended to overlook missionary history because, unable to cast missionaries entirely as villains as a result of their undeniable hard work and self-sacrifice, they were nevertheless embarrassed

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[4] See, for example, chapters by Everett Wilson and Lamin Sanneh in Joel Carpenter and Wilbert Shenk (Eds.), *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), and those by Mark Hanley, William Svelmoe, and Scott Flipse in Daniel Bays and Grant Wacker (Eds.), *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003).

[5] Lamin Sanneh, "Mission and the Modern Imperative – Retrospect and Prospect: Charting a Course," in Carpenter and Shenk (Eds.), 301-3. Some have argued that philanthropy itself includes elements of imperialism. See, for example, Peter Buffett's description of "Philanthropic Colonialism" or Ashley Smith on "humanitarian imperialism." Peter Buffett, "The Charitable-Industrial Complex," *New York Times*, 26 July 2013; Ashley Smith, "Humanitarian Imperialism and its Apologists," *International Socialist Review*, Vol. 67 (September 2009).

[6] For a good overview of anthropological criticisms of missionary work see Sarah Ruble, *The Gospel of Freedom and Power: Protestant Missionaries in American Culture After World War Two* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 91-120. On 19th Century missionary impact on minority groups at home see Heather Curtis, *Holy Humanitarians: American Evangelicals and Global Aid* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 191-8, 330-1 (for an introduction to relevant scholarship).

by missionary attitudes towards other faiths and cultures.[7] Missionaries and cultural imperialism, it appeared, went hand-in-hand.

While some of this might be evidence of the secular academy's historical unwillingness to take religion seriously as a motive for action, missionaries themselves provided ample support for viewing themselves as cultural imperialists. Although missions workers had been raising the occasional searching question about their methods and activities since the mid-19th Century, doubts about the missionary enterprise were exemplified by the 1932 publication of *Re-Thinking Missions*, subsequently known as the Hocking Report, after the chair of the committee which produced it, Harvard University philosopher, William Ernest Hocking.[8] Funded by John D. Rockefeller, the laymen's committee was intended to analyse the condition of Protestant missions and outline an approach for the future. Although the report did not question the fundamental legitimacy of missions, it did raise questions about some of the traditional assumptions made by missionaries, including a parochial tendency to look down on other faiths and a failure to understand that others held to their faiths with equal sincerity as Christians to theirs. It also challenged the traditional view that Christianity was intended or entitled to displace the other developed religions of the world. Although it outraged many, especially fundamentalists who saw in it a call for relativism in questions of faith, the Hocking Report said little that had not been asked by missionaries for decades and it raised questions about the role and purpose of missions that saw mainline Protestant denominations slowly reduce their

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[7] Hutchison, 1-2. Examples of missionaries in recent popular culture include novels such as Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), and films including *The Mosquito Coast* (1986) and *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* (1991).

[8] William Ernest Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932). On the Hocking Report and its impact, see Hutchison, 158-75; Grant Wacker, "Second Thoughts on the Great Commission: Liberal Protestants and Foreign Missions, 1890-1940" in Carpenter and Shenk (Eds.), 293-5. See also the life and writings of Pearl Buck, a Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winning writer and child of missionaries to China who, in later life, became increasingly critical of the missionary enterprise. Grant Wacker, "The Waning of the Missionary Impulse: The Case of Pearl S. Buck," in Bays and Wacker (Eds.), 191-205.

missions activity in the second half of the 20th Century. It also contributed to the sense that missionaries tended to be conveyors of a faith deeply shaped by their cultural background.

For American missionaries the connection between faith and culture has been particularly close, driven in part by an understanding of the United States as a covenantal nation endowed with God's favour which emerged with particular force during the Second Great Awakening of the early 19th Century. The emergence of Scientific Racism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries which held white westerners as superior in almost all respects and then the development of American international power as a result of World War Two and the Cold War further connected faith and national identity. American missionaries were shaped by the nation's power and implicated by it, and, as "American power and responsibility became the new normal" after 1945, the connections between Christianity and Americanism that had been an inherent part of missionary activity from the beginning became more obvious.[9] Evangelical missionaries were particularly susceptible to what Richard Pierard called "a syncretic confusion of Christianity and America."[10] Largely untroubled by the consequences of the Hocking Report, arguing that their focus on saving souls rather than on social welfare activities left them untainted by the risk of cultural imperialism, missionaries' conviction that evangelical Protestantism held the answer to salvation nevertheless combined with a growing sense of American global dominance in an increasingly bipolar world. Not until the Lausanne Congress of 1974 would evangelicals acknowledge, "Missions have all too frequently exported with the gospel an alien culture, and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than Scripture."[11]

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[9] Ruble, 2, 22. For studies of the complex interplay of faith, philanthropy, and Americanism in missions work at either end of the long 20th Century, see Curtis, *Holy Humanitarians* and King, *God's Internationalists*.
[10] Richard Pierard, "Pax Americana and the Evangelical Missionary Advance" in Carpenter and Shenk (Eds.), 164-5.
[11] "The Lausanne Covenant," (1974) available online at https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant#cov (accessed 15 April 2020).

The middle decades of the 20th Century then, the period between the emergence in the early 1940s of a self-conscious evangelical movement, which dismissed claims of missionaries' cultural interference, and the Lausanne Covenant of 1974, offer a useful period in which to consider the question of evangelical missionaries, American identity, and philanthropy. This chapter challenges an implicit assumption in the broad definition of philanthropy, and in the associated understanding of missionary activity, that the relationship only went one way, from provider to recipient. While acknowledging American evangelical missionaries' implicit cultural biases, it draws on Daniel Bays and Grant Wacker's understanding of missions as sites of cultural exchange to argue that the relationship between the missionaries and the people they served was more complex and more interactive, what I've termed philanthropy as exchange.[12]

The chapter uses as a case study the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA), which by the 1970s was one of the largest missions organisations in the US, its parent organisation, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), and the missions they served in the mid-20th Century. As the group experiencing the most growth in missionary numbers after 1945, evangelicals offer a dynamic case study for this period. At the same time, their focus on soul-winning, and denial of participation in culturally-influencing activity, helps to show both the intertwining of Christianity and Americanism and the way in which experiences shaped missionaries abroad separate from a self-conscious understanding of their cultural impact. To trace and explore the nature of this exchange, the chapter uses evangelical campaigns for religious liberty for Protestant minorities abroad, especially those in Catholic countries. Religious liberty was important to Americans in the 1940s and 1950s. It was one of the four freedoms used by President Franklin Roosevelt to define American aims during World War

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[12] Bays and Wacker (Eds.), 8.

Two and yet reports from around the world in the years following the war's conclusion suggested it was under threat from both communism and government action.[13] As such, it was very much in the public consciousness, even as debates about the proper relationship between church and state emerged in the US. EFMA and the NAE came to see it as one of the benefits missionaries could bring, alongside more traditional philanthropic activities such as schools and orphanages. Using these examples we can see that while the missionaries brought their own cultural assumptions to the missions fields, once there, they were required to engage with the political, legal, and social cultures of the nations in which they served, and this engagement fundamentally shaped the missions, their organisations, and their thinking about religious liberty, with consequences for missionaries, missions, and the United States more generally.

American Missionaries as Cultural Imperialists?

"There is," the NAE and EFMA's Clyde Taylor observed in 1959, "the basic resentment on the part of our European leaders of evangelists and pastors coming over to these countries from either England or the United States. They feel that they are old historic churches and countries and do not need folks to come over and help them do their job."[14] Taylor's comment came in response to complaints from a Salvation Army colleague in Italy that certain American missionaries were alienating their Italian colleagues with their attitudes and behaviour.[15] Nor was the difficulty limited to Italy. As Allen Koop observed, evangelical missionaries in post-war France found little traction for their work, seen as no different from the American technicians, economic advisers, businessmen, and military personnel who were already

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[13] See, for example, Robert Root, "Twilight of Religious Liberty," *Christian Century*, 16 April 1947, p.491-93; "Terror Sweeps Colombia," *Christian Life*, October 1950, 27; "Red China's Captive Americans," *Life*, 19 May 1952, pp.51-55; "Burial Above Ground," *Life*, 8 September 1952, pp.126-46.
[14] Clyde Taylor to Norman Marshall, 12 May 1959, Papers of the Evangelical Fellowship of Missions Agencies, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College (hereafter EFMA Papers) Box 104, File 6.
[15] International Secretary to Norman Marshall, 2 April 1959, EFMA Papers, Box 106 File 6.

intervening in French economic and political life.[16]   And it was not only in Europe that missionaries found such a response. In Colombia, the government lost no opportunity to accuse Protestant, especially American evangelical, missionaries of cultural invasion and damage. "... [I]t is unfortunate that at a time when the country is making such remarkable progress and advance, there should still be planned the sending of missions to us as if it concerned a savage nation," President Gustavo Rojas Pinilla lamented in November 1953.[17]   The following year, Minister of Foreign Affairs Evaristo Sourdis asserted, "it is injurious to the dignity of Colombia as a sovereign nation ... to be considered as a country to be conquered in respect to religion."[18] In the view of those on the outside, therefore, post-war American evangelical missionaries were little different from their predecessors in their sense of cultural superiority.

American values and assumptions clearly underlay much of the work done by missionaries. Notable for the rarity of its self-reflection was a 1954 comment by Stanley Rycroft of the mainline Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA that: "We shall have to think through quite carefully this whole problem. We may be a little unfair sometimes when we apply to some other country the standards of our own."[19] Despite the fact that many NAE and EFMA officials and their in-country counterparts had significant experience of the life and culture of other nations, they showed little apparent willingness to acknowledge the complexities of being a religious minority in nations where religion and national culture, as well as religion and politics, were so intertwined. Claims by government officials and religious leaders that missionary activity risked damage to the national culture were too often dismissed

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[16] Allen Koop, "American Evangelical Missionaries in France, 1945-1975" in Carpenter and Shenk (Eds.), 180-202. Of course, the predominance of Catholicism in France might also account for some of the French disinterest in Protestant missionary activity.

[17] Quoted in NAE press release, 6 November 1953, EFMA Papers, Box 3, File 26.

[18] Frank Hall, "Colombian Hits Persecution Cry," *The Tablet* (Brooklyn, NY), 5 February 1955, EFMA Papers, Box 85, File 4.

[19] Stanley Rycroft to Claud Nelson, 17 November 1954, EFMA Papers, Box 85, File 1.

by evangelicals as poor cover for the influence of the Catholic Church. At the same time, they drew on explicitly American-centric definitions of religious liberty. Protestants were, they asserted, being consistently denied, "liberty of press, liberty of public assembly, and liberty of education."[20] Much of the evangelical missionary campaign for religious liberty abroad was conducted in terms which reflected another Rycroft comment: "Would it be too much to ask that Protestants should enjoy the same freedom to proselytise in Colombia that the Roman Catholics do in Protestant USA?"[21] As Americans, brought up with such rights and assumptions, it is perhaps not surprising that evangelicals turned first to definitions with which they were most familiar but it provided further evidence for those who saw in the activity of American missionaries an attempt to shape the world in the image of the United States.

A closer look, however, suggests that the story is rather more nuanced. American values were part of evangelicals' earliest interventions abroad because missionaries called on the American government to defend their rights as *American citizens* living in other countries. Calls on the State Department to protect missions property, release individuals who had been imprisoned, and protest cases of physical harm were made on the understanding that people and property were protected by American laws.[22] But American treaty provisions were no use in protecting non-American Protestants and evangelicals' language was beginning to expand beyond protests about American citizens. "It is one thing to ask missionaries to leave," a colleague wrote to Taylor in 1953, "but it is an entirely different thing to interfere with the freedom of worship of a local Protestant church which is a self-governing body made up of local Colombian believers."[23] "[T]his case does not only involve us, but by implication it involves

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[20] CEDEC Statement on Colombia, 7 April 1954; NAE press release, 28 April 1954. Both EFMA Papers, Box 85, File 2.
[21] Stanley Rycroft to Claud Nelson, 17 November 1954, EFMA Papers, Box 85, File 1.
[22] These included Treaties of Friendship, Navigation, and Commerce with both Colombia and Italy, as well as the peace treaty the US signed with Italy at the end of World War Two.
[23] Harold Commons to Clyde Taylor, 20 October 1953, EFMA Papers, Box 84, File 23.

religious freedom for every other non-Catholic group in Italy," argued Earl Smith for the Church of Christ in Italy, a sentiment reinforced by Frank Gigliotti who indicated that the aim of the NAE was not only liberty for EFMA-affiliated missionaries but "religious liberty … for Italy."[24] These broader aims were reflected in responses from the State Department to requests for action and support. "While the Embassy will always be ready to extend the fullest protection to American interests, it must avoid exposing itself to the grave and politically damaging charge of interference in internal Italian affairs … It is, therefore, difficult to intervene on behalf of Protestant missionaries who are Italian citizens," US Ambassador to Italy, Claire Booth Luce, reminded one correspondent.[25] "The problem," a State Department official responded to an enquiry about why the government was not doing more to help Protestants in Spain, "is difficult to solve in view of the fact that it involves Spanish nationals, and, therefore, is an internal matter within the jurisdiction of the Spanish Government."[26] Such comments suggest that evangelicals, who had perhaps once regarded the problems in these countries as difficulties preventing their missionaries carrying out their roles, were increasingly regarding the restrictions on Protestants in a broader sense of restrictions on groups of national believers. This in turn forced them to understand the limits to American influence: they, as Americans, might be able to help facilitate resolutions but they could not solve the problems by outside influence: they had to engage with the laws and governments of the countries in which they served.

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[24] Earl Smith quoted in Church of Christ News Release, 25 September 1952 and Frank Gigliotti to Charles Fama, 13 May 1953, both EFMA Papers, Box 104, File 5.

[25] Clare Boothe Luce to Brooks Hays, [u.d., April 1953?], Americans United for the Separation of Church and State Papers, Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University (hereafter Americans United Papers), Box 23, File 17.

[26] William B. Macomber, Jr to Catherine May, 25 February 1959, EFMA Papers, Box 88, File 12. See also Howard Cook to Rev. Gardener Winn, 2 January 1953, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD (hereafter State Department Records), Central Decimal Files 1950-1954, Box 5030 (Declassification No.: NND842913).

Perhaps the best example is the actions of evangelicals in Italy who turned to the nation's courts to fight their cause. Because the problems facing some Protestant denominations were rooted in the law, it would take the courts to gain what they required: "clarification and rewriting of the Penal Code and the education of the Civil authorities to obey the law in conformity of the new Constitution."[27] This was not the imposition of an American understanding of religious liberty but a campaign to encourage the Italian courts to interpret existing laws in ways which allowed greater freedom to national Protestants. Although largely funded by US-based denominations, the legal office set up in 1953 by the Italian equivalent of the NAE, the Federal Council of Evangelical Churches in Italy, was primarily intended, as W. Dewey Moore of the Italian Baptist Mission explained, to "enable[] our Italian brethren to carry on more effective work through a full-time legal service" and to "speak with one intelligently-informed voice … in all matters that have to do in any way with religious liberty …."[28] The aim was to give Italian Protestants a voice to speak on their own behalf, not to have missionaries speak for them. Leading figures in US-based missionary organisations, including EFMA, were certainly in regular correspondence with one another but this was in addition to, not in place of, work by Italian Protestants in their own defence.

Writing about the first decade of NAE activity, James DeForest Murch observed of the work of evangelical missions: "They have been depending too much on the work of *foreign* missionaries."[29] The examples above indicate that missionaries were increasingly looking beyond those national borders and coming to see their fights abroad as a crucial battle for the

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[27] Special Meeting of the NAE Commission on Evangelical Action, 6 November 1951, EFMA Papers, Box 2, File 50.
[28] W. Dewey Moore to Clyde Taylor, 17 April 1953, EFMA Papers, Box 104, File 5. For a brief survey of success before the courts prior to 1953 see Federal Council of Evangelical Churches in Italy, "Religious Intolerance in Italy 1947-1952," Papers of the National Association of Evangelicals (hereafter NAE Papers), Buswell Library, Wheaton College Special Collections, Box 104, File 6.
[29] James DeForest Murch, *Cooperation Without Compromise: A History of the National Association of Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 107 (emphasis in original).

right to religious liberty on behalf of *all* evangelical Protestants. Further evidence comes from evangelical willingness to evoke the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and call on the UN to intervene to defend the rights of religious minorities. Given evangelicals' general suspicion of the UN and the fact they had forcefully objected to the adoption of the UDHR, their willingness to call upon both was surprising but also indicated a pragmatic understanding that this might help them achieve their goals of protecting national Protestants.[30] This is important in challenging the perception of missionaries as little more than carriers of their own cultural assumptions. Without denying the clear influence of American ideals of religious liberty on evangelical missionary thinking, their actions were also increasingly shaped by an understanding of both the *national* context in which they were working and the *limits* of American power and authority. In drawing on the legal frameworks in each country, and in calling on the UDHR, evangelical missionaries were actively engaging with non-American sources of authority for their defence.

Missions as Exchange

As can clearly be seen, American missionaries certainly took their cultural assumptions with them into the field. But, perhaps inevitably, those assumptions ran up against the cultural, legal, and political behaviours and traditions in the countries in which they served. The interaction between the two perspectives led to what this chapter refers to as philanthropy as exchange: that is, as missionaries increasingly engaged with the issue of religious liberty for Protestants and used the tools available to them within each country, the lessons they learned had a crucial impact on missionaries and those back home who supported them. American missionaries never entirely abandoned their Americanism, nor perhaps would it be realistic to

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[30] Evangelicals argued the UDHR failed to properly recognise the source of rights by asserting that rights inhered in man and not that they were granted by God. Sue Nichols, "Evangelical View of Human Rights Expressed by NAE," *United Evangelical Action*, 15 December 1949, 3-4.

expect that they would, but a closer look at their work indicates that the relationship was more complex than a simple attempt to impose American concepts of religious liberty. Influence went both ways and missionaries were shaped by their experiences abroad as much as they shaped their communities. Three examples, drawn primarily from the NAE's work in and on behalf of Italy and Colombia, illustrate this exchange: defining the boundaries of religious liberty, deepening their anti-Catholicism, and increasing their perceptions of the government as an ally in their fight.[31]

Evangelicals' battles for religious liberty abroad forced them to think carefully about the meaning of religious freedom and how it was protected. They were not questions that needed asking in the United States where evangelicals were protected by the First Amendment and by their position as part of the dominant religion. But as a minority faith in countries where the majority religion and national culture were intimately intertwined, evangelicals faced challenges. When political leaders claimed repeatedly that their nation's laws protected religious liberty, the burden was on the missionaries to show why the restrictions imposed on them went beyond the protection of "public order" or safety and pushed into the realm of what they termed "persecution." At the heart of evangelical objections was an American opposition to an established church, but it was based less on American constitutional theory and more on very specific experiences of missionaries abroad.

NAE correspondence with colleagues abroad was full of claims that local and national government officials were unfairly wielding their power of approval to restrict the activities of evangelical missionaries and delegitimise their efforts. The problems began early, they

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[31] Italy and Colombia were, of course, not the only countries in which evangelical missionaries served, nor were they the only countries in which religious liberty was an issue. But work on behalf of Protestants in these two nations in particular account for a large proportion of the material in the NAE and EFMA archives which indicates that they took up a large proportion of the organisations' time and resources.

claimed, with the government using visas and residence permits as a way to discriminate against Protestants. "The Colombian government is refusing visas to every ordained clergyman who applies," Taylor complained to a colleague in May 1955.[32] W. Dewey Moore wrote to Taylor in April 1953 that the Italian government's reasons for denying residence visas to five of their missionaries was "a bit 'fishy'" since all but one of the individuals facing difficulties were "Protestant religious workers."[33] Once missionaries were able to enter the country, however, the concerns expanded to other areas of government control over the religious life of their citizens. Restrictions on where Protestants could meet and worship, the enforced closing of churches with no clear reason provided, the imprisonment of ministers, and the closing or forbidding of Protestant schools, hospitals, and orphanages were among the most common complaints expressed to the NAE. In each case the problem was government action which restricted the ability of individuals to follow their faith. From the denial of access to water for a Protestant building, to the taxing at crippling levels of non-recognised denominational buildings, from government foot-dragging in regards to requests for authorization to build or operate churches, schools, and hospitals to low-level harassment by local officials in areas where evangelical churches operated, including warnings not to hold religious services and the occasional arrest of individuals for preaching, speaking, or handing out religious literature in public spaces, evangelicals saw myriad examples of what could happen when the secular authority was given too much power over the living out of individual faith.[34] Only harm could come from giving the government too much authority to regulate the practices of individual and communal faith. "We are convinced," Taylor protested to the State Department, "that a

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[32] Clyde Taylor to W. Stanley Rycroft, 31 May 1955, EFMA Papers, Box 85, File 3.
[33] W. Dewey Moore to Clyde Taylor, 17 April 1953, EFMA Papers, Box 104, File 5.
[34] See, for example, Sidney Correll, "Protestant Purge is on in Spain," *United Evangelical Action*, 1 August 1952, 3-4; Herman Parli, "Why Italy Persecutes the Protestants," *United Evangelical Action*, 15 October 1952, 3-4; "How Rome is Strangling Protestantism in Spain," *United Evangelical Action*, 1 October 1953, 7-8; Clyde Taylor, "Roman Catholic Persecution in Colombia," *United Evangelical Action*, 15 November 1957, 3-4; "Are Colombian Protestants Being Persecuted?" *United Evangelical Action*, 1 July 1958, 4-5, 15.

determined effort is being made, first in Colombia and later perhaps to be carried out through the rest of the Latin American countries, of a definite attack on the Protestant minorities."[35]

"The situation in Colombia has gone from one of violent persecution to legalized restriction and curbing of the religious freedom of non-Catholics," noted Stanley Rycroft, while the UK-based Evangelical Alliance asserted, "There is a new effort to clothe the persecution with an air of legality … the government is attempting to strangle Protestantism by "legal" means."[36] Their experiences made evangelicals acutely sensitive to issues of religious liberty. It was not only a reminder that the rights taken for granted by American citizens within the United States were not available to all around the world or reinforcement of the importance of the American principle of separation of church and state, but that these experiences illustrated how seemingly neutral laws, such as operating permits, could be used in practice to limit religious freedom. This was especially important in the US given the enormous growth of government since the New Deal of the 1930s. As government expanded into new areas of American life, evangelicals feared religious liberty might be at risk. "[T]his basic American heritage of freedom is imperilled by subtile [sic], insidious trends and influences that dangerously tend toward the state restricting and controlling … religion," the NAE stated in 1959, noting "growing concern" about government actions.[37] Minimum wage and overtime laws threatened the right to voluntary religious service, anti-discrimination legislation in relation to the mails risked the freedom to "expose the heresies" of other faiths[38], and social security reform raised the spectre of government redefining church roles according to the NAE throughout the 1950s. Rather than simply seeing such reactions as conservative opposition to government growth,

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[35] Clyde Taylor to Albert Gerberich, 7 October 1953, EFMA Papers, Box 84, File 23.
[36] Stanley Rycroft, "Is Religious Freedom a God-Given Right," *National Council Outlook*, April 1954, 22; John Savage, Evangelical Alliance press release, 24 March 1954. EFMA Files, Box 85, File 2.
[37] General Convention Business Minutes, 9 April 1959, 4, NAE Papers, Box 34, File 6.
[38] Report of the Board of Administration to the 1949 annual conference, conference booklet, April 1949, 17, NAE Papers, Box 40, File 1.

evangelical sensitivity can be seen as concern that without close attention laws might be used, deliberately or inadvertently, to limit religious freedom at home, just as their missionaries experienced abroad.

Underpinning these actions was a long-standing evangelical concern about the influence of the Catholic Church in US politics and government, a concern exacerbated by missionary experiences of religious liberty in Catholic countries. The situation was seen by American Protestants to be so severe that in 1947 a small group, including Taylor and other NAE leaders, came together to form Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (POAU), an interest group dedicated to maintaining the separation of church and state and religious liberty by primarily opposing Catholic involvement with government.[39] "Catholicism everywhere in the world," POAU's Executive Director Glenn Archer warned, "is seeking to dominate national capitals through the techniques of politics, labor, publicity, and censorship." "Will Roman clericalism," he asked, "someday dominate our own beloved country?"[40] If such a reality were to be avoided, Archer argued, Americans of all faiths would need to be vigilant and to resist even the smallest attempts to challenge the separation of church and state at home. Of particular concern in the late 1940s were proposals to provide federal funding for education, sparked in part by concern that the nation's education system needed reinforcing if the country was to win the Cold War. Such proposals were largely supported by the Catholic Church, which pushed for inclusion of its own extensive school network, and opposed by Protestants who interpreted them as the entering wedge in the collapse of church-

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[39] The organisation still exists, although it has dropped the opening words, and its early anti-Catholicism, and is now Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, or simply Americans United. See the organisation's home page at https://www.au.org/. International developments played a role in the organisation's discussions: at its first, informal, meeting one of the agenda items was "The Italian Constitution", presented by Gigliotti. See "Informal Conference on Church and State," Agenda, and POAU Manifesto, Americans United Papers, Box 16, File 10. For a good introduction to POAU's anti-Catholicism, see Steven Green, *The Third Disestablishment: Church, State, and American Culture, 1940-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[40] Glenn Archer, "The Cure for Clericalism," speech to the 1961 NAE Conference, 13 April 1961, EFMA Papers, Box 17, File 4.

state separation. Protestants were particularly alarmed when, in 1947, the US Supreme Court permitted New Jersey to reimburse parents from tax funds for the costs of sending their children to religious schools via public transport, seeing the first gap in the wall of separation between church and state.[41] The mainline *Christian Century* called *Everson* "the thin edge of the wedge which would ultimately crack open the Constitution," while the NAE's Clyde Taylor grimly concluded it was simply "the first battle" in the war. But evangelicals and some mainline Protestants were under no illusions about the significance of *Everson*. As Archer told the NAE: "[T]he Catholic demand for bus funds is part of a world pattern."[42]

Evangelicals were already convinced as a result of the experiences of their missionaries in Catholic countries, which had deepened their suspicion to almost conspiratorial levels. Early complaints about individual priests riling up mobs of locals to attack Protestant churches or encouraging violence against missionaries and their congregations slowly turned by the 1950s into claims of a more pernicious and dangerous influence of the Catholic Church over government policy-making. In Italy, Taylor expressed concern about "the very serious problem of clerical infiltration and control in government." [43] When schools, hospitals, and orphanages were closed, denied licences to operate, or prevented from being created at all, evangelicals complained that local officials were paying too much attention to the local clergy. When the national government closed churches belonging to the Churches of Christ and the Assemblies of God, evangelicals saw the influence of the Catholic Church behind the action. "The hand of the Minister of the Interior is becoming more and more heavy with all the weight of the Vatican back of it," the Foreign Missions Board of the Southern Baptist Convention

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[41] *Everson v. Board of Education* 330 US 1 (1947).
[42] Charles Clayton Morrison, "Supreme Court Widens Breach in the Law," *Christian Century*, 19 February 1947, 227; EFMA Report to the Executive Committee of the NAE, March 1947, NAE Papers, Box 60, File 16; Glenn Archer, "The Cure for Clericalism."
[43] Clyde Taylor to Luther Smith, 19 February 1960, EFMA Files, Box 104, File 7.

reported to Taylor.[44] In Colombia, Taylor observed that President Pinilla "feels that he must have the support of the Roman Catholic Church to stay in power."[45] When the government in 1953 closed large sections of the country to anyone other than Catholic clergy following agreements with the Vatican, evangelicals were quick to argue that this was further evidence of the tactics employed by the Church when it had power and influence.

The scope and tone of their discussions suggested evangelicals saw some kind of religious Domino Theory at play in their battles over religious liberty. In a confidential report to evangelical missions in October 1953, the NAE wrote: "from official sources we have been informed that they are convinced that Colombia is but the exper[i]mental ground where the "Catholic Action" of the Roman Catholic Church is working out its future strategy for all of Latin America."[46] "… [A]s the battle goes in Rome, so it will go on in South and Central America, and in Spain, Portugal and other Catholic-dominated regions," warned Gigliotti.[47] This was much more than just a fight for Colombia or Italy; it had consequences for the rest of the world including, possibly, the United States. Missionary experiences abroad were lessons to be learned, evangelicals argued, to ensure that the United States did not go the same way. Although evangelical hostility towards Catholicism pre-dated these post-war debates, the battles for religious liberty that evangelicals perceived as fights against the hierarchy of the Catholic Church fundamentally expanded and deepened their anti-Catholicism at home. It thus provides another example of how missionary activity abroad shaped those who remained at home.

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[44] George Sadler to Clyde Taylor, 20 November 1951, quoting Dewey Moore, EFMA Files, Box 2, File 49.
[45] Clyde Taylor to Rev. J. Hubert Cook, 30 September 1953, EFMA Files, Box 84, File 23.
[46] Anon, "Confidential News Report," 30 October 1953, EFMA Files, Box 3, File 26.
[47] Frank Gigliotti to Clyde Taylor, 24 May 1951, EFMA Files, Box 2, File 49.

Coming to see the involvement of the US government as a benefit to their aims was a third and final element that evangelicals learned as a result of their engagement with Protestants abroad. This engagement is important in the context of evangelical history. Scholarship largely holds that evangelical engagement with national-level politics did not begin in earnest until at least the late 1960s.[48] Although free from the party politics that would characterize the New Christian Right from the 1970s onwards, the NAE's extensive engagement with the federal government, especially the State Department, from the late 1940s in regards to religious liberty issues tied to missionary activity suggests, in fact, that evangelicals were quite deeply engaged with politics at least a decade earlier and that missionary engagement abroad was a significant part of what prompted that engagement in the first place. As evangelicals lobbied against US government policies that appeared to violate their concept of the separation of church and state, such as federal funding for education or the appointment of an envoy to the Vatican, that connection with government became increasingly important on the domestic front too.

The NAE's first approach to the State Department came in 1946 over the denial of visas to missionaries to enter Colombia.[49] The successful resolution of that difficulty, and those that followed, played a major role in convincing evangelicals that the government was worth working with. As Taylor wrote to a colleague in July 1954: "I believe in helping the Government whenever we can, because we certainly expect them to help us."[50] That it was visa issues which prompted evangelicals to reach out to the US government was crucial. Visas

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[48] Some studies which have begun to challenge this include: Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015); Axel Schäfer, *Piety and Public Funding: Evangelicals and the State in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press, 2014); Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[49] Clyde Taylor to EFMA Missions members, 1 August 1946, EFMA Papers, Box 1, File 4. See also Memorandum of Conversation, 9 May 1946, State Department Records, Central Decimal Files 1940-1949, Box 1667 (Declassification No.: NND812044).
[50] Clyde Taylor to Robert Lazear, Jr., 14 July 1954, EFMA Papers, Box 84, File 24.

and re-entry permits fell under the heading of consular and diplomatic activity, issues which

required government involvement but which did not reflect requests for special treatment. Visa

issues were also among the least complicated for the State Department to address, requiring

relatively limited action for a significant success rate.[51] Such success worked to convince

evangelicals new to this direct contact that working with and through the government could

bring tangible benefits. "[T]he State Department," Taylor informed evangelicals in 1949, "is

willing at every level to go to the defense of American citizens who may be missionaries, and

American organizations who may be Mission Societies, where they may legally and

diplomatically intervene on our behalf."[52]

Evangelical calls on the US government expanded rapidly from the late 1940s onwards as first

violence and then legal restrictions impacted missionary work. Over time, Taylor and others

at the NAE built strong relationships with key figures in the State Department and American

embassies and action by the government in response to requests, such as demanding an

investigation into the vicious beating of Rev. Julius Allen DeGruyter of the World Wide

Evangelization Crusade in Colombia in 1955, formal and informal requests to reopen churches

or schools, or quiet requests for protection for people and property, helped to reinforce

evangelicals' belief that the government was a valuable ally. The new American Ambassador,

Taylor confided to colleague in Colombia, "certainly is on our side of the fence … I am sure

he will do everything he can to advance our cause …."[53] In Italy too, the NAE noted the "the

fine cooperation … received from Ambassador James Dunn in Rome and other members of

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[51] "Such intervention was always informal, and invariably successful," reported the Charge d'Affaires in Colombia, Thomas Maleady, in June 1954: "My intervention in each instance was confined simply to requesting action on applications already filed, and at no time did any foreign official evidence any feeling that my action was unwelcome." Foreign Service Despatch, 2 June 1954, State Department Records, Central Decimal Files 1950-1954, Box 930 (Declassification No.: NND969002).

[52] EFMA Report to the NAE Board of Administration, April 1949, Papers of Herbert J. Taylor, Billy Graham Center Archives Wheaton College, Box 66, File 22; Report of the Executive Secretary to the 1950 EFMA Convention, EFMA Papers, Box 210, File 1.

[53] Clyde Taylor to Robert Lazear, 16 November 1951, EFMA Papers, Box 84, File 21.

the U.S. Embassy …" regarding the ongoing difficulties for evangelicals and praised the "sincerity and genuineness of our friends in the State Department."[54] Even in Spain, where the NAE acknowledged that the US had little influence, Taylor noted that the embassy staff were "all very much on our side of the fence."[55] "We have some very wonderful friends there," Gigliotti informed NAE President Thomas Zimmerman about the State Department, "Clyde Taylor and the Washington office are in touch with all of them."[56]

As Axel Schäfer has noted, NAE successes "generated an awareness of the opportunities provided by working with government agencies."[57] As evangelicals expanded their engagement with the government at home through participation in social service funding programmes, informal networks such as International Christian Leadership and the prayer breakfast movement, or via publicity, protest, and calls for evangelical letter writing campaigns on issues such as federal aid to education, President Truman's firing of General Douglas MacArthur, or the existence of an American envoy to the Vatican, the opportunities for success increased and they moved further and further into political activity. Their engagement with the State Department was only part of this process but, as one of the earliest formal connections made by the newly-formed NAE, it played a significant role. And as evangelicals became increasingly politically active, their engagement became more and more influential and so the lessons learned over visa issues and calls for protection for missions became more valuable.

Conclusion

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[54] Special Meeting of the NAE Commission on Evangelical Action, 6 November 1951, NAE Papers, Box 2, File 50; Frank Gigliotti to Clyde Taylor, 2 May 1951, EFMA Papers, Box 2, File 49.
[55] Clyde Taylor, Confidential Report on Spain, 17 August 1953, EFMA Papers, Box 88, File 6.
[56] Frank Gigliotti to Thomas Zimmerman, 14 August 1961, EFMA Papers, Box 4, File 21.
[57] Schäfer, 99.

There is no doubt that American evangelical missionaries serving abroad in the decades after World War Two brought with them their cultural background and assumptions, whether that was about the possibilities of American power and influence around the world, or in thinking about religious liberty in terms defined by the American experience under the First Amendment. But many, as Hutchison argued, also brought a "sensitivity" to the dilemmas of cultural interaction that should not be overlooked.[58] Missionary pressure played an important role in pushing countries like Colombia, Italy, and Spain to become more protective of minority religious rights in the mid-20th Century. Meanwhile, missionary experiences shaped both the missionaries and those at home who supported them. The example of religious liberty battles for minority Protestant groups abroad is only one small example of a range of ways in which missionaries were shaped by their experiences, but it helps to show clearly how philanthropic missionary work abroad could have an impact back home in the United States and indicates that missionaries could and did learn from the people and cultures around them.

Those influences, like the impact of the missionaries themselves, could be both positive and negative. Long inclined to reach across national borders to see transnational communities of faith, religious liberty debates encouraged evangelicals to look outwards and build more extensive connections to people who shared their faith. It also encouraged evangelicals to understand that events around the world had significance for the United States too, but in terms that were not limited to Cold War rhetoric in which the US was in the leadership role. Their campaigns also forced them to think carefully about what religious liberty actually meant, especially when those debates became more prominent in American society as a result of *Everson* and the battles over federal funding for education. As a result, when evangelicals protested such programmes, they did so not as a knee-jerk reaction to policies to which they

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[58] Hutchison, 205.

objected, but with positions that had been shaped and informed by the missionary experience abroad and a determination that they should not be repeated at home. Significantly, the defence of missionaries brought evangelicals, the NAE included, into contact with the federal government. As the number of successful interventions increased, so too did evangelical confidence in the government as a reliable ally. This would have major consequences for the political activism of evangelicals on domestic issues from the 1950s onwards, encouraging them to turn to the government as a way to achieve their aims. While they were not always, even often, successful, the confidence they built and the connections they developed would be the foundations on which the New Christian Right would build in the last quarter of the 20th Century. Finally, illustrating that exchange was not always positive, missionary experiences abroad deepened evangelical distrust of the Catholic Church to almost conspiratorial levels. This anti-Catholicism had a profound effect on American law and politics in the middle of the 20th Century, from Supreme Court cases in which Protestant-Catholic antipathy formed the context, to outright battles over federal funding for education or the ability of a Catholic to become President. Seen solely in domestic terms, evangelical anti-Catholicism appears hysterical and overblown; placed in its international context their position becomes more understandable, if no more defensible.

That American evangelical missionaries acted as agents of US cultural power and influence in the world in the period after World War Two is well documented and not in doubt. But in focusing on what missionaries brought with them, alongside their faith and philanthropic actions, we should not lose sight of the fact that missions were also sites of exchange in which missionaries learned, and the knowledge and understanding gained they took home with them with important consequences for the United States.