

Nuclear Fear in Religious America: Theological Responses to the Atom Bomb, 1945-1954

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Introduction

Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Alamagordo, Bikini...

*I'm gonna preach you all a sermon 'bout Old Man Atom that's me
I don't mean the Adam in the Bible datum.
I don't mean the Adam that Mother Eve elated.
I mean that thing that science liberated.
That thing that Einstein says he's scared of,
And when Einstein's scared brother, you'd better be scared*

In 1950 the popular country-western vocal group Sons of the Pioneers released their views on the discussion of nuclear power in the form of the song 'Old Man Atom.' The song starts with the ominous rumbling of what can only be the detonation of an atomic bomb followed by four of arguably the most famous, or infamous, nuclear detonation sites. The remainder of the song consists of a Southern-accented *Sprechsang* who assumes the role of the atomic bomb itself, and wants nothing more than to have "[his] nucleus bombarded by neutrons," in other words, trigger a nuclear reaction. The only way of stopping this calamity, according to the Sons, is a higher level of cooperation between the various world governments. From their point of view the solution was simple: "They gotta get together or disintegrate."¹

To a contemporary ear the song may seem highly idiosyncratic, since its genre is oft affiliated with conservative political opinions, and would therefore not be likely to advocate a coordinated world government that supersedes American sovereignty. Yet its lyrics are highly indicative of the sentiments expressed by the American public at the time of writing. Firstly, the song's use of religious figures illustrates the incorporation of religion into historical events such as the atomic tests and the subsequent bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Secondly, the song's views on world cooperation are

¹ Sons of the Pioneers, "Old Man Atom" (1950). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB-oJLq5rWo>

driven by a sense of upcoming Armageddon, best expressed in the final verse: “So listen, folks, here is my thesis: Peace in the world, or the world in pieces!” Like many American citizens, The Sons of the Pioneers could not escape that foreboding sense of apocalyptic dread that the advent of the nuclear bomb had brought forth.

While nuclear testing and radioactivity had already been publicly visible for some time, for example in science fiction and medical innovation, American society and the world en masse witnessed the true power of nuclear energy first hand at the end of what was already the most devastating war in world history. On August 6 and 9 in 1945 the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japanese soil, the first in Hiroshima, and the other in Nagasaki. As the news of the devastation slowly reached the American public, the first responses were those of elation, possibilities, but also the sense of a coming unexplainable destruction on a global scale.² As world history turned to the next chapter, known as the Cold War, nuclear proliferation and fear became entwined in the increasingly antagonistic relationship between the communist Soviet Union and the capitalist United States. All communities, religious and otherwise, in the United States lived in the shadow of atomic threat.

From the onset, the United States and its inhabitants responded and were profoundly affected by the entrance of the atomic bomb. Paul Boyer labels American society in August 1945 as fearful yet enthusiastic towards atomic energy, and even somewhat hopeful of its potential applications.³ The immediate diverse responses demonstrate that every member of American society philosophized on the ramifications of the bomb. Boyer’s argument goes further though, for he claims that American society and its social foundations had been dramatically altered by the atom bomb:

² D. Steele, “America's Reaction to the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (Dickinson College, publication date unknown) <http://users.dickinson.edu/~history/product/steele/seniorthesis.htm>

³ P. Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) p.8, 12.

Another surprise that narrowed my focus to 1945-1950 was the realization of how quickly contemporary observers understood that a profoundly unsettling new cultural factor had been introduced – that the bomb had transformed not only military strategy and international relations, but the fundamental ground of culture and consciousness.⁴

In order to fully understand not just the bomb on a cultural level, but the whole of American society, Boyer argues that a ‘nuclear-central’ perspective on American society in the 1940s and 1950s is crucial to understanding both its inception and its long-term ramifications.

With this ‘nuclearist’ point of view in mind, this thesis aims to analyze how exactly the prominent theologians and spokespersons of the mainstream denominations in the United States responded on a political and theological level to the discovery and subsequent early proliferation, 1945 to 1954, of the nuclear bomb. Furthermore, this thesis aims to investigate how an adherence to an eschatological belief system may have influenced religious responses to the bomb across the dominant denominations. The United States was, and still is, a predominantly religious society. If nuclear proliferation affected all aspects of American society as Boyer claims, how did the largest religious denominations respond to the nuclear bomb and its portent of global doom?

The scope of this thesis will predominantly be the period after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings up until approximately the mid-1950s: this includes initial responses to the nuclear bomb, as well as the USSR’s first successful nuclear detonation in August 1949, and the invention of the hydrogen bomb and other variants. This period covers the important technological advances in nuclear technology by both the United States and its adversary Soviet Russia. Aside from the technological developments, this period also showed an intensification of the Cold War and the beginnings of the Second Red Scare in American society, with McCarthyism as a growing political force, China’s Communist revolution, and the

⁴ P. Boyer, *By The Bomb’s Early Light* p. xxi.

start of the Korean War, the first real Cold War proxy conflict. With both nuclear devastation becoming more efficient and available to opposing nations, and the growing force of anticommunism in American society, the period of 1945 to 1954 was extremely dynamic. Acknowledging this fact, one of the sub-questions of this thesis is did the mainstream denominations change in opinion with regard to nuclear technology during this period?

The narratives created by the mainstream religious denominations within Protestantism, being the dominant form of religion in America, altered as historical events and nuclear development continued. An important factor in this analysis is the adherence to eschatology; while most closely affiliated with millennialism and other 'end-of-time' religions, eschatology, the belief in the end of times, is a concept present in all of Christianity.⁵ Andrew Weigert offers both a useful definition of Christian eschatology and a framework from which to understand its relationship to nuclear technology: Weigert makes the distinction between fundamentalist and liberal eschatology, with the former adhering most strongly to Biblical literalism and using Scripture to interpret and predict historical events whilst the latter favors a more hermeneutical and modern approach.⁶ By using the adherence to eschatology, from fundamentalist to liberal, as the variant factor among the mainstream Protestant denominations, I aim to analyze in what ways, if any, 'Doomsday thinking' played a role in interpreting the nuclear bomb and in what ways the concepts of Armageddon became entangled with global nuclear destruction.

This thesis aims to incorporate a literary analysis of the statements, sermons, and other forms of cultural texts made by the mainstream Protestant denominations to understand how and in what forms nuclear fear was incorporated into their daily lives and culture. Furthermore, the different narratives between the denominations will be compared to see in what way they differ, and whether or not the varying religious backgrounds and adherence to eschatological thinking have played a role in interpreting

⁵ Weigert, A.J., "Christian Eschatological Identities and the Nuclear Context" in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 27 no. 2 (Wiley, 1988) p. 177.

⁶ *Ibidem* p. 178.

nuclear proliferation differently. To obtain a perspective on the different narratives records of sermons, but also opinion polls, secondary analysis, official statements by the Federal Council of Churches and prominent figures such as Reinhold Niebuhr will be consulted. Furthermore, articles on the subject of nuclear power from religious magazines such as *Christianity and Crisis* and *Christian Century* will be consulted. What this thesis aims to analyze is what narratives and responses were created across the various denominations, and in what ways, if at all, they vary in the different levels of eschatology.

Scholarship on the effect of the nuclear bomb on American communities and society in general is extensive, and religion is no exception. Where this thesis differentiates itself from other works is that it focuses on the general narratives and responses created rather than specific denominations, which paints a far more cohesive picture. Even in detailed works generalizations regarding the Christian responses to atomic warfare tend to occur. For example, in Boyer's *By the Bomb's Early Light* he claims that the most vocal responses protesting the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings came from Christian churches, yet he also states that general approval among the American public stood at approximately 84%.⁷ In a society as strongly religious as the United States, would the approval rating not have been lower if Christian churches so heavily denounced the atomic bombing? By focusing on the narratives rather than the actual denominations, I hope to explain this discrepancy.

Furthermore, this thesis argues that responses to the atomic threat developed roughly in two phases: the first phase, tentatively labeled the atomic phase, jumpstarts in 1945 with the atomic assault on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although historians such as Matthew Lavine argue that nuclear consciousness developed as early as the 1890s, it is evident that after the 'debut' of the atomic bomb on a global scale nuclear narratives developed widely in American society. According to Lavine one essential characteristic of this phase was the fact that nuclear narratives were a singular entity: "a history of

⁷ P. Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light* p. 184, 200-203.

nuclear culture that is coeval with the history of the Cold War suffers from the implicit assumption that both were born in the same flash of light.”⁸ The first phase, I would argue, is one where nuclear fear stood as a singular entity in creating the different responses.

The second phase starts with the detonation and discovery of RDS-1, also known as ‘Joe 1,’ the Soviet Union’s first atomic bomb in August 1949. It is during this phase that the narrative of atomic fear started being integrated into a general anti-communist rhetoric. While the Second Red Scare was already a prominent cultural force as early as 1947, historians such as Rob Craig argue that the discovery of Joe 1 intensified anti-communist rhetoric and added the fear of a nuclear attack.⁹ I argue that after 1949 mainstream Christian responses to the nuclear bomb started undergoing changes as the atheist communist forces became a more viable threat, which allowed for a more pro-nuclear stance that was noticeably different from the general responses before 1949.

It is not hard to see nuclear culture still at work today: Hollywood has just released new iterations in the *Godzilla* and *X-Men* franchises, both products of nuclear culture. As their existence demonstrates, nuclear consciousness is still as much a contemporary phenomenon as it was a productive phenomenon 70 years ago. By going back to the initial phases of nuclear power and its cultural, social, and religious consequences it may be possible to gain a better understanding of how the nuclear bomb functions as a cultural force in society today, and what narratives that were created in its initial phase still reverberate in contemporary society.

⁸ M. Lavine, *The First Atomic Age: Scientists, Radiations, and the American Public, 1895-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p. 8.

⁹ R. Craig, *It Came from 1957: A Critical Guide to the Year’s Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2013) p. 8-12.

*It is an awful responsibility which has come to us.
We thank God that it has come to us, instead of to our enemies.
And we pray that He may guide us to use it in His ways and for His purposes.¹⁰*

In his historic, and oft quoted, press conference after the surrender of Japan President Truman addressed a nation that was both celebratory and fearful of what may lay ahead. Whether through meaningless religious rhetoric to appease a large constituency or a sincere appeal to a higher power, Truman's message was clear: America the chosen and holy nation of God, the Christian God that is, had been given the ultimate power that could literally change the world. But as Truman's words echoed and news of the devastation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki slowly reached the American public, a great uncertainty washed over the United States. Whether through Divine Providence or not, America, and the rest of the world, had entered a new atomic age.

Whether this was the first atomic age or the successor of a previous nuclear era is an issue contested by some historians. Matthew Lavine argues that American society had already been introduced to the concept and potential of the atom long before the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki took place. He describes the opinions on nuclear energy as incredibly varied but with a few common themes present: mainly feelings of fear, untapped potential, and mystery.¹¹

The main argument of this chapter is that the first phase of atomic fear in the United States was in many ways a continuation of Lavine's first atomic age. Starting from the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and ending with the reveal of RDS-1, Soviet Russia's first atomic bomb in 1949, American

¹⁰ Footage from *The Atomic Café*,
J. Loader et al, *The Atomic Café* (Libra Films, 1982).

¹¹ M. Lavine, *The First Atomic Age: Scientists, Radiations, and the American Public, 1895-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p. 9-12.

responses and opinions were very similar to those of the first age, in particular the mixed emotions of nuclear-powered possibilities and fear, a fear fuelled by the revelation of what devastating potential the bomb really possessed. Religious communities in the United States shared the sense of dread, but initially felt the need to express moral indignation against the use of such harrowing technology, in particular because of America's supposed sacred position in the world. What characterizes this phase in American religious responses to the nuclear bomb is the lack of anti-communist rhetoric in discourse concerning the bomb. As Lavine argues, the nuclear narrative during this phase was very much a separate entity from anti-communist rhetoric, despite the fact that the latter had already secured a potent political position as early as 1947.

This chapter will first provide a brief general overview of the technological advances made in nuclear technology and the political and historical events that occurred during this period. Secondly, an analysis of the initial responses on the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings from a general perspective and the first mainstream Christian publications on said events will be provided. As the nuclear bomb further developed and became more ingrained in American culture the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America commissioned an official response to atomic warfare by twenty-two of the more prominent theologians in American society. An analysis of the themes and statements made in this short pamphlet will be provided as it offers insight as to how Christian intellectuals envisioned how Christianity in general should, and should have responded to the atomic bomb. Furthermore, alternate responses from the more pacifist-inclined mainstream denominations and theologians, such as A.J. Muste, will be included. In conclusion, a comparison will be drawn between the mainstream narratives and the ones that deviate.

-The Historical Context of the First Phase-

To understand how exactly Christian responses developed during the first phase, it is crucial to first briefly recapitulate the major events in American history during 1945 and 1949 with regard to nuclear technology and the growing Cold War. Unsurprisingly this summary starts with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 and the subsequent capitulation of Japan, an event of which the morality is still discussed to this day.

The United States enjoyed a monopoly on this newfound nuclear weapon, and was no longer hesitant to flaunt its power openly. Starting in June 1946 the United States was to conduct the first in a series of nuclear experiments, codenamed Operation Crossroads, on the remote Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The initial goal of the experiments was to test the effects of radioactivity on battleships, but the event was also an attempt to assuage nuclear fear and reassure the American public that America was in control. Paul Boyer describes the events as “nearly swamped in publicity, ballyhoo, and sensationalism.” The first of two tests, however, was a public disappointment, as the actual explosion was barely noticeable to the attending audience.¹²

As the journalists turned their attention away from the tropical isles, the second test, to be held on July 25, was to rekindle their interest anew. Codename Test Baker produced a far more impressive sight than its older brother Test Able, and for the first time ever the American public finally witnessed the devastating long-term effects of the atom bomb. Boyer states that “[i]t was Bikini, rather than Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that first brought the issue of radioactivity compellingly to the nation’s consciousness.”¹³ Scientific reports had made it abundantly clear that nuclear radiation was both incredibly lethal and

¹² P. Boyer, *By The Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) p. 83.

¹³ *Ibidem* p. 90

tenacious. It took a year after the first military use of the atom bomb for scientists and the American public to begin understanding exactly how their deadly weapon worked. The last of the nuclear tests during Phase I was Operation Sandstone in 1948; its goal was to test a new design of the hull of the atomic bomb itself, rather than the effects of radiation on battleships. Though the operation was deemed a success, its effect on the American public was far smaller than Crossroads, in particular due to the more technical nature of the tests.¹⁴

Though the characteristics of Phase I imply communism, or rather the antagonism towards communism, was not a significant factor in nuclear rhetoric, that does not mean that communism itself did not play a powerful role in the American political and social landscape between 1945 and 1949. In fact, the political events during Phase I were to set the stage for the synthesis of anti-communist sentiment and the nuclear debate that is characteristic of the Second Phase. As such, and to maintain chronological order, it is imperative they be mentioned here.

The general attitudes towards Soviet Russia and communism in general had already gone through different stages before the conclusion of World War II. The United States and Soviet Russia had a complicated relationship from the onset, and what had become known as the First Red Scare in the 1920s had been transformed into a somewhat lovable, if not suspicious, relationship with 'Uncle Joe' during World War II.¹⁵ Growing conflict over the newly liberated European regions was to quickly dampen the cooperative mood between the war-time allies, and old suspicions began to crystallize into the well-known conflict that was to last over 40 years.

As the world leaders grew apart, American society was quick to rekindle its pre-war attitudes towards communism. In what became known as the Second Red Scare, Congress and other political forces, in

¹⁴ United States Atmospheric Nuclear Weapons Tests Nuclear Test Personnel Review, "Operation Sandstone, 1948" (Department of Defense, 1948) p. 5

¹⁵ J.P.D. Dunbabin, *The Cold War: The Great Powers and their Allies* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008) p. 7-8.

particular the House Committee on Un-American Activities, initiated a veritable witch hunt against communist sympathizers on American soil. The 1946 Taft-Hartley Act gave unprecedented power to the HUAC and though repealed in 1947, it allowed the HUAC to accuse various corporations in the cultural industries, in particular Hollywood, in a very public manner. Andrea Carosso describes American society during the Second Red Scare as an “atmosphere of internal suspicion and fear which would shape the first half of the decade.” He argues that communism served as a national fuel for paranoia, but was separate from nuclear fear until the detonation of RDS-1 in 1949.¹⁶ This point will be elaborated upon in the next chapter, but for understanding the social context of Phase I and how it shifted into Phase II, the fact that anti-communism was already a powerful force in American society is essential.

¹⁶ A. Carosso, *Cold War Narratives: American Culture in the 1950s* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013) p. 19.

-Initial Secular and Religious Responses to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Bombings-

Not surprisingly, it did not take long for the American public and press to respond to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and, three days later, Nagasaki. Without even fully comprehending the extent of the damage, the American press began reporting on and molding the first opinions on nuclear weaponry. While the concept of nuclear energy and weaponry had already become known before the 1945 attacks, the essential difference was the fact that atomic weaponry was no longer hypothetical, but a very real entity.¹⁷ The attacks did not change the incredibly varied discourse, but they most certainly intensified them.

One of the most fundamental aspects of the bombings, and a debate that is alive to this day, is the discussion of the morality and necessity of having used the bomb. Whether or not it was actually true, American public opinion quickly decided that the use of the bomb was justified. A census held during August 10 and August 15 revealed that nearly 85 percent of asked Americans approved the use of atomic weaponry on Japanese soil, with 10 percent disapproving and 5 percent withholding an opinion.¹⁸ While ignorance towards the severity of the weapon may account for such a staggeringly high rating, other factors contribute as well, such as the highly racist anti-Japanese propaganda campaign aimed at dehumanizing the antagonist and the sentiment that the nuclear attacks actually saved American and Japanese lives because of a quick and explosive conclusion to an otherwise problematic land invasion.¹⁹ The latter narrative was visible as early as August 7 1945: the *New York Times* front-page article on Project Trinity stated that “[b]ehind [the successful detonation of the atom bomb] was sober

¹⁷ D. Steele, “America's Reaction to the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (Dickinson College, publication date unknown)

¹⁸ Ibidem

¹⁹ P. Boyer, *Fallout: A Historian Reflects on America's Half-Century Encounter with Nuclear Weapons* (Ohio State University Press, 1998) p. 3-4.

consciousness of possessing the means to insure the speedy conclusion of the war and save thousands of American lives.”²⁰ On the surface, it seems evident that the average American cared little for the devastation wrought in the Japanese cities. Rather, they were relieved that one of the largest wars in human history was resolved in such an awe-inspiring fashion.

Closer inspection of that very same *New York Times* newspaper, however, reveals many of the other sentiments previously discussed, such as awe, uncertainty, and a fear of escalation. Nearly all of the articles of that day on nuclear power liken it to the ‘power of the universe’ unleashed, and the *Los Angeles Times* was quick to label the advent of nuclear warfare a “new ... epoch for war and peace.”²¹ But underlining the sense of awe was a perhaps even stronger sense of dread, best verbalized in the article on page 10 of the *New York Times* of August 7 by Hanson Baldwin. The article prophetically discusses radiation sickness, American guilt, and the coming arms race but most importantly labels nuclear power as “forces...outside human experience.” While such existentialist claims are scattered here and there in the other early writings on the bomb, it is most succinctly, and pessimistically, expressed in this article. In terms very similar to the later “peace in the world, or the world in pieces” rhetoric by the Sons of the Pioneers, the article states that “[a]tomic energy may well lead to a bright new world in which man shares a common brotherhood, or we shall become –beneath the bombs and rockets- a world of troglodytes.”²² The article highlights the duality in sentiments towards nuclear energy that would become characteristic of Phase I: on the one side there is optimism towards nuclear energy, its potential and its proven ability to end World War II. On the other side there is a minor yet very present sense of dread that nuclear escalation may just bring the end of the world. While

²⁰ Wood, L., “Steel Tower ‘Vaporized’ in Trial of Mighty Bomb” in *The New York Times* (The New York Times Company, 1945) p. 1.

²¹ Author Unknown, “Man’s Most Destructive Force, One Equal to 2000 B-29 Loads, Blasts Nips” in *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, 1945) p. 1.

²² Baldwin, H.W., “The Atomic Weapon: End of War against Japan Hastened but Destruction Sows Seeds of Hate” in *The New York Times* (The New York Times Company, 1945) p. 10.

cautiously avoiding ethical issues, Americans did sense that in some ways Pandora's Box had been opened.

While American journalists were still struggling to create a coherent narrative out of the events that had just unfolded, the American public quickly sought out whatever means could help them forget about the bomb, or make sense of it all. For many, religion and its inherent eschatological framework was the answer, as both religion and eschatology saw a revival directly after August 1945.²³

It is generally agreed upon that the initial mainstream Christian responses, especially those from theologians and publications, condemned the actions of the American government towards Japan, especially with regard to the wanton destruction and slaughter of innocent civilians that the epilogue of World War II had brought upon the world.²⁴ *Catholic World* editor James Gillis remarked that the United States had irrevocably broken Christian ethics with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and further stated that these attacks were in complete opposition to the conduct of civilization.²⁵ Writing for *Christianity and Crisis*, Reinhold Niebuhr stated that although the bomb helped secure victory, the results were disproportionate when compared to the crimes committed by the Japanese empire.²⁶ The first responses by the writers of the *Christian Century* were one of dire portent, foreshadowing the significant impact of the atom bomb on the human psyche.²⁷ While 85% of the United States enjoyed their quickly-gained victory, American theologians worried about the consequences of its actions and what the future may hold for the United States.

One direct effect the atom bomb had on theological thinking was the revived significance of eschatology. Although eschatological rhetoric and prophetic reading of the Bible had existed in the

²³ R. Haberski, *God and War: American Civil Religion since 1945* (Piscataway : Rutgers University Press, 2012) p. 13-15.

²⁴ Ibidem p. 14.

²⁵ Gillis, J.M., "The Atom Bomb" in *Catholic World* (Paulist Press, 1945) p. 449.

²⁶ R. Niebuhr. "Our Relations to Japan" in *Christianity and Crisis* (New York, 1945) p. 5-6.

²⁷ P. Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light* p. 6.

United States since the 1800s, one famous example being the ‘Manifest Destiny’ rhetoric, the nuclear bomb and its warning of global destruction had allowed ‘end-of-time’ thinking a new level of credibility. For those who already adhered to an eschatological framework, the bomb was merely a confirmation, and a viable culprit, of the philosophies they believed it. Eschatology, however, had never enjoyed too prominent a position in mainstream theological rhetoric. While the atom bomb did not fully change this phenomenon, it did catapult eschatology back into the minds of both millennialist and mainstream theological thought, a change that is somewhat apparent in later articles found in the *Christian Century*.²⁸

It is evident that initial mainstream Christian responses disapproved of the actions of the United States in Japan. Aside from the moral objections, the events allowed a reconsideration of eschatology within mainstream theological rhetoric. To fully understand, however, what narratives formed and were maintained in the early period after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is imperative to expand the scope of analysis beyond just August 1945. As such, the following paragraphs will discuss what themes were present in the *Christian Century* up until July 1946, and in what ways these themes were similar or different from the general themes already discussed in this chapter.²⁹

The first element worth discussing is the confirmation that both reader and writer felt a great tragedy had occurred in Japan, and that it was the Christian’s responsibility to provide relief to the devastated cities. In the editorial “Christ for Japan,” the writers stress the need for providing humanitarian aid, but also creating a sustainable and profitable missionary effort that would help bring Protestantism to the Japanese empire.³⁰ This editorial met with praise from the *Christian Century* readers, and throughout

²⁸ P. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992) p. 115-117.

²⁹ July 1946 marks the start of public atom bomb testing with Operation ‘Crossroads’ and would therefore be considered beyond the scope of initial responses to the atom bomb.

³⁰ P. Hutchinson, et al, “Christ for Japan” in *The Christian Century*, vol. 63 no. 5 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1946) p. 135-137.

the various issues of early 1946 multiple letters to the editor can be seen that openly supported both the need for relief and missionary work.³¹ This confirms the notion that Christian publications morally opposed the bombing of the Japanese cities. Furthermore, the article and responses illustrate the evangelical opportunities seen by the Christian communities after the fall of the Japanese empire.

The duality of optimism and fear regarding nuclear energy that was present in general responses in American society was, to some extent, apparent in these Christian publications as well. On the one hand, there was a sense of unlimited possibilities that had yet to be unlocked in atomic energy that would be a boon to mankind. Articulated most strongly in an editorial response, the members of the First Congregational Church in Los Angeles stated that

[i]t may well be our use of the atomic bomb will be decried by history as the greatest atrocity in the war, but assuredly atomic energy is one of God's greatest gifts and ought to be explored and expanded for the upbuilding and benefit of all by scientific groups...³²

This letter, in response to an editorial arguing in favor of atomic energy, shows that Christian responses to the atomic bomb did not necessarily diverge from more general responses, in that they too saw an opportunity in nuclear energy to better mankind.

But the reality of the situation was not lost upon them either. For every hopeful letter or editorial on the atom bomb, there is another that discusses the ramifications of the bomb on world stability, and the possibility of global destruction. In the aptly titled article "Is World Disaster Inevitable?," T.R. Hogness discusses the necessity of a higher level of international cooperation, in particular with the Soviet Union, in order to avoid nuclear devastation:

³¹ Letters to the editor in *The Christian Century*, vol. 63 no. 8 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1946) p. 242.

³² Letters to the editor in *The Christian Century*, vol. 63 no. 2 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1946) p. 51.

At this moment, as we emerge from a great war, nationalism, hatred and race prejudice are at their height. But the emergence of the atomic bomb has made the situation so urgent that a solution must be found or our civilization will perish. Under these circumstances, hard as they are, we must decide whether we shall have another war or a world government.³³

The fusion of apocalyptic rhetoric and the need for world government is interesting, but not necessarily original. Like the scientific community, many theologians stressed the need for world cooperation in order to avoid nuclear disaster. Many joint efforts, in particular from the scientific communities, argued in favor of a stronger world government in order to prevent nuclear crisis.³⁴ Even the FCC's Conference on a Just and Durable Peace held in 1942 spoke of similar sentiments before the advent of the atom bomb, stressing the need to end US isolationism and create a stronger world government after the conclusion of World War II.³⁵ The same sentiments of world cooperation are uttered by Charles E. Merriam in the March edition of *Christian Century*: like Hogness he argues that world cooperation is essential to mankind's survival. His addition to the discussion is that religion, and in particular Christianity, should guide the world to a moral consensus.³⁶ The rhetoric of world government had already come to exist before the atom bomb shocked the world, but, as these articles illustrate, its advent had strengthened the notion that mankind needed international cooperation in order to survive. There is one more article by Charles Clayton Morrison in the March edition of the *Christian Century* that addresses the need for world government; however it distinguishes itself in two ways. Firstly, this is the earliest article that directly addresses eschatological thinking within the context of the nuclear crisis.

³³ T.R. Hogness, "Is World Disaster Inevitable?" in *The Christian Century*, vol. 63 no. 8 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1946) p. 233.

³⁴ P. Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light* p. 33-36.

³⁵ A. Malvern, "'Time's' Report on Federal Council Conference on a Just and Durable Peace" in *Collectivism in the Churches*, Bundy, E.C., (Illinois: Church League of America, 1958) p. 318.

³⁶ C.E. Merriam, "The Atom and World Community" in *The Christian Century*, vol. 63 no. 10 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1946) p. 298-299.

Morrison argues that the scientific communities and Christianity have found common ground on the coming end of the world:

Christianity puts its finger upon that in man's nature which science now gravely fears may cause his destruction and the destruction of the earth with him. Science and Christianity are now looking at the same thing in man. Science has no word for it, but Christianity has. That word is sin.³⁷

The article denounces science as the one path forward simply because of its lack in eschatological experience. According to Morrison, this is the reason why Christianity should guide the world government movement. Since Christianity is already attuned to the worst of man, the 'sin' in Morrison's argument, it is primed to guide the world to cooperation. Secondly, and whether this is related to the stronger belief in eschatological thinking or not, the article strongly rejects any other religion as a viable basis for cooperation:

Christianity affirms that these all are false religions, bad religions, because their gods are mere idols, the work of man's hands or of his darkened imagination. They deify race or class or an ancient culture or the nation or man himself. These false religions are the trouble-makers of the world. There can be no world community while they hold sway.³⁸

Out of all the articles proposing a world movement, this article stands alone in that it claims Christianity is the one true religion to steer the world away from Armageddon. Regardless of its more extreme convictions in comparison to the other theologians, Morrison, alongside Hogness, Merriam, and others clearly advocate that world government is the next logical step in preventing nuclear annihilation.

³⁷ C.C. Morrison, "The Atomic Bomb and the Christian Faith" in *The Christian Century*, vol. 63 no. 11 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1946) p. 332.

³⁸ *Ibidem* p. 331.

The final narrative present across the various issues of *Christian Century* in early 1946 is one that had not yet been connected to nuclear fear, but was nevertheless visible. The Soviet Union and its impact on the balance of power was an issue much discussed both by writers and readers, and on varied terms. The aforementioned articles on world cooperation stressed that even Russia needed to be included in this movement, but refrained from discussing whether such cooperation was feasible. Hugh Stevenson Tigner described the situation in far more antagonistic terms, arguing that the communist forces considered America no more than “the epitome of all evil” that was meant to be conquered.³⁹

Communist fear had already taken a hold in American society long before nuclear threats became entangled in that very same fear. The editors of *The Christian Century* explain why America should be against the Soviet Union, but omit any discussion of the use, or misuse, of nuclear weaponry, indicating that the two were separate issues at the time. An earlier editorial does discuss the use of atomic weaponry against the Soviet Union, albeit briefly: “...we believe that there should be no big stick shaking. And that means no atom bomb shaking.”⁴⁰ In one paragraph the article dismisses the use of atomic weaponry against the Soviet Union, before moving on to other arguments. Such a suggestion is remarkable, but not surprising, considering America’s nuclear monopoly. The shortness of the paragraph further shows the separated state of the two narratives.

A closer look at the publications of the *Christian Century* after Hiroshima and Nagasaki shows that, in some ways, Christian narratives followed the general narratives present in American society: there was a dualistic feeling of opportunity and unease, and the need to create a world government to prevent nuclear disaster. Many of these narratives would remain constant throughout the First Phase, and would

³⁹ H.S. Tigner, “Can the Communists Cooperate?” in *The Christian Century*, vol. 63 no. 13 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1946) p. 394.

⁴⁰ C.C. Morrison, et al, ‘War with Russia?’ in *The Christian Century*, vol. 63 no. 11 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1946) p. 327.

find an official point of articulation in the reports commissioned by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America.

-The Federal Council's Official Report: Atomic Warfare and the Christian Faith-

As the initial period of shock and disbelief of atomic power came to a close and the American government openly displayed nuclear weaponry during the Bikini Atoll tests of 1946, the overarching organization in American Christianity, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, commissioned an official statement by its most prominent theologians on the subject. While the 24-page pamphlet was not officially considered for adoption by the FCC, it provides valuable insight on the responses and opinions of the Christian intellectuals during the First Phase.

The Federal Council of Churches can best be described as an umbrella organization housing prominent members of the different denominations within the United States. Active from its inception in 1908 up until its incorporation into the National Council of Churches in 1950, the FCC was both an attempt to encourage cooperation between the various denominations and set forth a clear political agenda. In his, arguably rather critical, analysis of the FCC, Edgar Bundy explains that from the onset, it was an attempt at interdenominational Christian cooperation on a local, state, and national level, while also creating a political platform to form and exert pressure. From the very beginnings, the FCC sought out to invite and incorporate important political figures, such as Theodore Roosevelt and later John Foster Dulles, into its organization, allowing for both a national religious as well as a political dimension to grow within the council.⁴¹

The FCC was therefore not only national in its scope, but was a veritable political force whose influences extended into the White House up until the 1950s.⁴² As atomic power unfolded and became embedded into the American consciousness, the FCC appointed a commission to produce an official statement on

⁴¹ E.C. Bundy, *Collectivism in the Churches: A Documented Account of the Political Activities of the Federal, National, and World Councils of Churches* (Illinois: Church League of America, 1958) p. 7-10.

⁴² *Ibidem* p. 63.

this new weapon and its relation to Christianity. Released in 1947, *Atomic Warfare and the Christian Faith* was the result of a commission held in early 1946 consisting of theologians such as Robert L. Calhoun, Angus Dun, and both Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr. While its official status towards the FCC is questionable, since it was never considered for adoption, the cabal of theologians who wrote the pamphlet provide a narrative that is remarkably cohesive with regard to the general rhetoric of Phase I, and, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, it provides a sharp contrast with a similar publication released in 1950 by members of this very same cabal. Furthermore, while the FCC never officially adopted the report it was held in high prestige by various theologians: the April 1946 editorial of the *Christian Century* was committed entirely to the newly released report, and labeled it a “profoundly illuminating document” on the subject of the atomic bomb.⁴³ As such, it is important to discuss the various arguments presented in this short pamphlet in detail.

In characteristically dire terms, the pamphlet starts its argument not with an overview or introduction of the general topic, but rather an almost judgmental tone towards the scientific community who had unleashed this energy upon the world:

Our latest epochal triumph of science and technology may prove to be our last. The scientists who know most about the nature of atomic energy have been the first to declare themselves frightened men. With admirable restraint, but with impressive urgency, they have sought to awaken both military leaders and civilians to the alarming realities which as scientists they see more clearly than laymen who lack their special knowledge.⁴⁴

The commission acknowledges their shared objective with the scientific community, however, in that they should both focus on educating the populace on the dangers of this new weapon. There is,

⁴³ C.C. Morrisson, et al, “Theology and the Bomb” in *The Christian Century*, no. 15 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1946) p. 457.

⁴⁴ R.L. Calhoun et al, *Atomic Warfare and the Christian Faith: Report of the Commission on the Relation of the Church to the War in the Light of the Christian Faith* (London: Friends’ Peace Committee, 1947) p. 4.

however, one noteworthy difference in the attitudes towards science and its position in society; the commission makes it very clear that science brought this upon mankind, and therefore should not take a leading position in guiding it further:

[t]he basis of any hope for the redemption of mankind simply through progress in the sciences and technology, always an unsound hope, has been permanently wrecked by the latest achievement in that very progress.⁴⁵

Though the argument is not anti-intellectual, as characterized by later fundamentalist organizations, it is noticeably acerbic towards the results of the scientific communities, and strongly denounces science as a basis for development in society. Rather, the commission pleads that these developments signal the necessity of Christianity in an increasingly dangerous world: [s]eek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, as the only sure ground of ultimate security."⁴⁶

While the appeal towards a faith in God as salvation against the nuclear crisis should not be considered particularly surprising considering the source, the anti-scientific rhetoric is an element that stands out given the period it was written in. After the unveiling of the atom bomb, the men who brought it into existence, the members of the Manhattan Project but also scientists in general, rose greatly in prestige as they were considered the only true experts on the subject, a reputation that unsettled them and yet was exploited by them in order to inform the public.⁴⁷ This document stands out in its critical nature towards the scientific community, revealing that, at the very least, not all members of the Christian faith shared the same idolatry towards the scientists as the rest of the United States. Though it briefly considers the scientific possibilities of atomic energy, its overall tone in the initial pages is disapproving towards the sciences for bringing such an all-destructive force into the world.

⁴⁵ R.L. Calhoun et al, *Atomic Warfare and the Christian Faith* p. 7.

⁴⁶ Ibidem p.4

⁴⁷ P. Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light* p. 49-51.

While its views on the responsibility of the scientists may be somewhat restrained, the commission leaves no room for discussion on the use of the atom bomb in war, both past and present. After a general overview of the new elements of atomic warfare and its repercussions, both on society and the environment, the commission reveals its stance on the past use of atomic weaponry:

[w]e would like to begin with an act of contrition. As American Christians, we are deeply penitent for the irresponsible use made of the atomic bomb. We are agreed that, whatever be one's judgment of the ethics of war in principle, the surprise bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are morally indefensible.⁴⁸

The commission produces several arguments with regard to atomic warfare and the American nation. Firstly, the pamphlet denounces the idea that the atomic bombings prevented a disastrous land-war and saved the lives of both American and Japanese soldiers:

[b]oth bombings... must be judged to have been unnecessary for winning the war. Japan's strategic position was already hopeless, and it was virtually certain that she had not developed atomic weapons of her own. Even though use of the new weapon last August may well have shortened the war, the moral cost was too high.⁴⁹

The commission concludes that Japan had not been given a sufficient warning of the consequences of continuing the war, and that it was the responsibility of the United States to practice restraint and first demonstrate the capabilities of atomic weaponry before actually unleashing it on the Japanese cities. For the theologians, the atomic bombings were proof that the United States had "sinned grievously

⁴⁸ R.L. Calhoun et al, *Atomic Warfare and the Christian Faith* p. 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem* p. 10.

against the laws of God and against the people of Japan,” and that the bombings are nothing more than morally reprehensible.⁵⁰

The moral objection of the atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is one of the essential elements of the pamphlet, and from it two observations regarding Christian opinions on the atom bomb can be made: firstly, as argued by many historians, the Christian response towards the bombing was one of indignation. While the general populace saw no reason to object to the bombing, the Christian communities, in particular its theologians, saw it necessary to condemn the actions of the United States upon other nations. The second observation comes from the terminology used by the commission, in particular the statement that America has sinned against God; such strong language signifies the extreme objection Christian theologians had against the implementation of the bomb, and serves as a strong contrast to later conclusions made during Phase II by similar committees.

Another element of the pamphlet is its appeal to a world organization in order to thwart the chances of a cataclysmic global war. The atom bomb, they argue, is “a barrier to international good will,” and they “believe... that the only conceivable road toward effective control of atomic warfare and other forms of mass destruction is the road of international comity and joint effort.”⁵¹ The committee, in light of the atomic bomb, makes a very direct appeal to the necessity of a joint effort between nations, through the then-infant United Nations for example, in order to stall nuclear proliferation. The appeal for increased international cooperation is not a new sentiment, as both the scientific communities and various contributors to the *Christian Century* voiced similar opinions, as discussed in previous paragraphs. It is evident that the commission of the FCC adheres to this position and urges both cooperation and a pragmatic approach in order to include the various national powers.

⁵⁰ R.L. Calhoun et al, *Atomic Warfare and the Christian Faith* p. 10.

⁵¹ *Ibidem* p. 13.

The last observation is perhaps its most telling one, considering some of the authors of this text. The commission argues that not just the use of atomic weaponry is sinful, but in fact the entire concept of 'total war' could be considered as such:

[a]ll things considered, it seems necessary to include in any condemnation of indiscriminate violence not only the use of atomic bombs in August, 1945, but the policy of wholesale obliteration bombing as practiced at first the by the Axis powers and then on a far greater scale by the Allies.⁵²

The pamphlet takes on a noticeably pacifist stance against not just atomic weaponry, but indiscriminate destruction of both military facilities and civilian territory. Arguing from this point of view, they state that the use of atomic weaponry can never be condoned since its effects are indiscriminately targeted towards both military forces and innocent civilians. This rhetoric may not be surprising, since Christian pacifism is not an unfamiliar concept, but the inclusion of this argument in this official statement is noteworthy, in particular since one of the members of the committee is Reinhold Niebuhr and because of the hawkish and anti-communist stance similar commissions take just three years after the publication of this document. These points will be elaborated upon in the following chapter.

Finally, it is important to state the omissions of the report on atomic warfare. Despite pleading for international cooperation and a world government, the commission makes no mention of the Soviet Union or any possible threat of communism on either religion or American society, and what role the atom bomb would play in this relationship. This lack of anti-communist rhetoric is indicative of the characteristics of Phase I: nuclear fear and anti-communist sentiment at this point had not become part of the singular narrative of the Cold War, which explains why this extensive report on atomic weaponry and the Christian faith makes no mention of the atheist communist forces who, at this point in time,

⁵² Ibidem p. 11.

were already perceived to be the antagonist of the United States through the events known as the Second Red Scare. Furthermore, this report makes no mention of any sort of eschatological thinking; while there are minor allusions to cataclysmic events and worldwide destruction, none of this is linked to any possible prophecies in Scripture.

The report created by the twenty-two theologians is important because it strengthens but also deviates from the narratives already found in American society during Phase I. It is noticeably critical of the scientific communities for bringing the bomb into existence, yet maintains a glimmer of hope for the possibilities of nuclear energy. It also condemns not just the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki but also the concept and use of total war, taking a very pacifist stance against recent military developments. The omission of both eschatological thinking and anti-communist rhetoric is particularly telling, since it provides evidence that the nuclear discussion had not yet been superseded by the threat of communism, which is in accordance with the characteristics of Phase I.

-Parallel narratives-

One of the key elements of the First Phase is the visibility of pacifist rhetoric. Both in published arguments and official statements a clear anti-nuclear approach, especially from the perspective of warfare, can be seen. Although theologian A.J. Muste does not deviate from this pacifism, in fact he became the central spokesperson for it in the Second Phase, it is important to briefly discuss his initial views on the atom bomb, as they set the stage for the Peacemaker movement in the Second Phase.

Muste denounced the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the concept of total war behind it. He also shared the idea that America had sinned by using these weapons, and should never resort to using atomic weaponry ever again.⁵³ Much like the general rhetoric of Phase I, Muste was an ardently against the use of atomic weaponry and favored a pacifist approach to better world relations.

What separates Muste from the others is his far harsher critique of American society and government with regard to foreign policy. Leilah Danielson argues that although Muste and the Pacifist movement shared some principals with Christian Realism, it strongly believed that the United States “was guilty of excessive secularism and materialism, manifest most alarmingly in the twin evils of conscription and atomic weaponry.”⁵⁴ Muste’s ideas, partly inspired by Gandhi’s *satyagraha* principles of non-violence, criticized America’s secular modernity and stressed a radical Christian pacifism as a solution to the intensifying Cold War.⁵⁵ As such, Muste during the First Phase followed the general rhetoric of pacifism and anti-nuclear sentiment, albeit in a more critical and extreme form.

⁵³ R. Haberski, *God and War: American Civil Religion since 1945* (Piscataway : Rutgers University Press, 2012)p. 15-16.

⁵⁴ L. Danielson, “‘It Is a Day of Judgment’: The Peacemakers, Religion, and Radicalism in Cold War America” in *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, vol. 18 no. 2 (University of California Press, 2008) p. 216.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem* p. 217.

Muste's ideas and the Peacemaker movement had little visibility during the First Phase of nuclear fear. Although founded in 1948, the Peacemakers remained on the fringes of theological discussion until the late 1950s, where America's forays into foreign territory made them the subject of criticism on both a national and international level, and raised the appeal of pacifist rhetoric.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, minor as the movement may have been in the late 1940s, it stands as one of the few somewhat alternate narratives in nuclear discussion among theologians, differentiating itself in its far harsher criticism on American society. It is in the Second Phase, where the general rhetoric takes a more hawkish stance, that Muste's pacifism plays a more significant role as a counter narrative to the general rhetoric, in particular to Niebuhr's Christian Realism. It is, however, important to acknowledge that this movement was founded during the final years of the First Phase.

⁵⁶ Ibidem p. 217.

-Conclusion-

In understanding how theology responded to the atom bomb, it is important to distinguish in what ways their responses differed from general responses. Firstly, in both general and religious rhetoric a duality of sentiment can be seen: the atom bomb had brought with it the prospect of nuclear energy, but also the portent of atomic annihilation on a global scale. For Americans, from a religious perspective or not, the atomic bomb brought uncertainty and mystery, which was very much aligned to the sentiments towards nuclear energy experienced before the atom bomb became a reality.

Secondly, and interestingly, like the scientific community a great number of Christian theologians openly supported the idea of a world movement, either through the United Nations or a similar organization. Both the report commissioned by the FCC and various articles argue that world government, or cooperation as some called it, was imperative in order to stop nuclear calamity. The religious responses actually find common ground with the scientific community, especially the former members of the Manhattan Project, in that they believed international cooperation was necessary to impede nuclear proliferation. A core difference between them was of course the necessity of religion, in particular Christianity, to guide that progress.

A key difference between general responses and mainstream Christian responses is the issue of morality not just regarding the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but of the use of atomic weaponry in general. Across the various publications, a very clear anti-nuclear, even pacifist, sentiment can be recognized. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was by many considered a sinful act, and even with the consideration of the bombings stopping the war early and saving American lives the attacks were labeled disproportionate in scale. Despite the 85% approval rates on the atomic attacks, Christian theologians were very openly against the use of nuclear weaponry, in the past or future.

As Matthew Lavine has stated, nuclear fear during the first years was still very much a separate entity from the growing anxiety towards communism. The publications analyzed in this chapter certainly support this idea: while themes of anti-communism and anxiety towards the Soviet Union were certainly present, which seems logical concerning the years in which they were published, they were discussed separately from the atomic bomb. No articles or reports mentioned atomic weaponry as a viable option against the Soviets, nor did they discuss the viability and repercussions of the Soviet Union becoming an atomic power. I would argue that Lavine's argument can be extended towards the first years of atomic fear, 1945 to 1949, in that atomic fear and communist fear were still two very separate entities that functioned simultaneously in American society. It would take a very cataclysmic event to bring these two narratives together, and in August 1949, 4 years after its debut, the atomic bomb would shake the foundations of American society once again.

ATOMIC BLAST IN RUSSIA

President Truman's traumatic announcement that Russia has the atom secret cause State Departments all over the world to stir uneasily... Will the atom shatter a world to fragments? Or will it be a boon to mankind? Will man destroy himself? Or use his power to make existence of paradise? 1950 may tell the tale...⁵⁷

In a tone that is strikingly similar to the cliffhanger of a Saturday morning cartoon, the headlines of August 1949 all featured the same historic event: the detonation of RDS-1, or 'Joe 1' according to the American classification, the Soviet Union's first atomic bomb. The event and subsequent announcement had surprised both Americans and Russians, as the United States had not suspected the Soviet Union to discover the secret so soon, and the Soviet Union had wanted to keep the detonation classified.⁵⁸ The unveiling would dramatically alter the nature of both nuclear fear and the Cold War, as the Soviet Union had effectively leveled the playing field. For better or worse, the United States had lost its nuclear monopoly, and now had to suffer the paranoia of a potential nuclear attack on its own soil.

In some ways the announcement stirred the same sentiments as those found in the First Phase: the fear of atomic global destruction, uncertainty of what the future holds, and yet also a cautious optimism towards the potential of nuclear energy in creating 'paradise on Earth.' The key difference, however, is the cataclysmic event that happened on the August four years after the unveiling of the atom bomb. The Soviet Union now possessed the same weapon which could level a city in a single blow. Among other important events, it is this difference between the First and the Second Phase that serves as a catalyst for the radical changes in theological rhetoric concerning the bomb.

⁵⁷ NY Post Headline of Russian Atom Bomb. Footage provided by MyFootage.com
<http://www.myfootage.com/details.php?gid=63&sgid=&pid=14327>

⁵⁸ W. Burr, "U.S. Intelligence and the Detection of the First Soviet Nuclear Test, September 1949" (The National Security Archive, 2009). <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb286/>

The loss of an American nuclear monopoly was not without its consequences. The previous chapter demonstrated that Christian published responses maintained a visibly pacifist rhetoric, and fully denounced the use of the atom bomb in any situation. This chapter aims to analyze to what extent the Soviet possession of the atom bomb changed this position into a far more aggressive stance. Andrea Carosso argues that it was RDS-1 that catapulted nuclear fear to a new dimension, and brought the narrative of the Cold War together with the atom bomb.⁵⁹ It was during this era that mainstream Christian responses took on a tone far more aligned with Christian Realism, not only going back on condemning any use of the atom bomb but also altering its views on the concept of total war and America's relation to the Soviet Union. With regard to the mainstream Christian responses, it was during this phase that nuclear power and the Cold War finally became a single entity of fear that ravaged through American thought and imagination.

First, a general overview of the important historical events, both from a technological and political perspective, will be provided. Secondly, this chapter will take the detonation of RDS-1 as a critical point in American nuclear history. As such, and like the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a brief analysis will be provided on how Americans, both religious and in general, responded to the unveiling of Russian nuclear power, and in what ways the narratives discussed in the previous chapter started to transform. A pivotal element will be the 'sequel' to the report on atomic weaponry by the Federal Council of Churches in 1950, as it not only crystallizes the general sentiment of the prominent theologians during the Second Phase, but also vividly displays the differences in rhetoric between Phase I and Phase II. Finally, the philosophies of both Reinhold Niebuhr and A.J. Muste, the latter briefly discussed in the last chapter, will be analyzed in detail, as both theologians provide not just the cornerstones of the main arguments present in this phase, but also represent the ideological ends of the discussion.

⁵⁹A. Carosso, *Cold War Narratives: American Culture in the 1950s* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013) p. 25-26.

-The Historical Context of the Second Phase-

The period of 1949 up until 1954 was a particularly turbulent time for the United States as event after event raised the fears of potential conflict, nuclear destruction, and communist world domination. Much more strongly than in the First Phase, the threat of communist forces loomed on the horizon, influencing the relationship between the United States and the world. In order to understand how and why Christian theological thought concerning these events changed as radically as it did, it is imperative to first describe what historical events from a technological and political perspective took place.

The detonation of RDS-1 in August 1949 started the events of Phase II, for it was then that [n]uclear buildup became entwined with the Cold War scenario... and the race for pre-eminence in the development of nuclear weapons took center stage.⁶⁰ In very similar terms to Boyer's nuclear-centric perspective, Carosso argues that 'Joe-1' elevated nuclear fears from the periphery of American thought to the center stage, in particular because for the first time, Americans could now become the victim of a nuclear attack.⁶¹ Although nuclear power had existed in the American consciousness for years, the detonation of a nuclear weapon by a nation other than the United States had radically changed the attitudes towards the destructive weapon.

One of the direct ramifications of the unveiling of the Russian nuclear program was the accelerated development of the vastly more powerful hydrogen bomb. Although development and public knowledge of the weapon started as early as 1946, RDS-1 and the proliferation of communist forces around the globe spearheaded a movement by Congress and President Truman to create the weapon as quickly as possible. In 1950, Truman requested a billion dollars for development of the new weapon, and

⁶⁰ A. Carosso, *Cold War Narratives: American Culture in the 1950s* p. 25.

⁶¹ *Ibidem* p. 26-27.

with the American public hesitant yet supportive of the h-bomb, the first prototype was detonated in November 1952.⁶² This prototype, however, was stationary and not yet combat-operational. The first true hydrogen bomb was the Castle Bravo test on February 28 1954, a test that drastically exceeded expectations and caused the infamous incident involving the Japanese fishing boat the *Daigo Fukuryū Maru*, the Fifth Lucky Dragon, which was severely contaminated after it was caught in the unexpectedly large fallout of the explosion.⁶³

Alongside the technological developments, events that unfolded in the communist world were to expand the fears of communism in the United States drastically, as the Cold War grew larger and larger in scope. By the time the Russians discovered the atomic secret the Second Red Scare had already left an indelible mark on American society. RDS-1 had added considerable fuel to that fire, but another event just two months after the Russian bomb would shock American society once more. On October 1 1949, after years of civil war, Mao Zedong ushered in the People's Republic of China. For Americans the news of the 'loss of China' was a grave revelation. In what John Dunbabin calls the "nadir of the Cold War," the news of China functioned as a warning for American politicians who had kept their eyes on Europe, in particular on the divided Germanies, to instead extend their focus to the Asian territories. In response to the essential doubling in size of communist territory, American policy makers invented the 'Domino Theory,' the idea that if one Asian nation fell to communism, others in its direct vicinity would also be at risk of falling.⁶⁴ This idea would very quickly draw the United States into its first actual Cold War conflict, and in the later years of the Cold War would lead it to its first defeat in Vietnam.

After the invasion of North-Korean forces into South Korea on June 25 1950, the United States would quickly find itself forced to uphold its doctrine of containment and enter the Korean War. For Truman,

⁶² P. Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) p. 339.

⁶³ C. Sublette, "Operation Castle: 1954 – Pacific Proving Ground" (The Nuclear Weapon Archive, 2006) <http://nuclearweaponarchive.org/Usa/Tests/Castle.html>

⁶⁴ J.P.D. Dunbabin, *The Cold War: The Great Powers and their Allies* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008) p. 165-166.

the nation held little strategic importance but the matter was an issue of international prestige, especially after the loss of China. The war lasted for three years, cost the lives of over 34,000 American soldiers and many more wounded, and eventually ended in an armistice and a division of the two regions across the 38th parallel.⁶⁵ America's first foray into proxy conflicts was a divisive one, both literally and figuratively, as it was America's first conflict without a positive resolution.

Calling the Second Phase a dynamic period in history seems almost an understatement. Between the loss of a nuclear monopoly, the extreme amplification of the destructive capabilities of said nuclear weapons, the communist gain of a vast amount of territory, and the first actual conflict of the Cold War which resulted in a stalemate, American citizens had to cope with a large amount of shocking revelations in a relatively small time period. In this context it is not hard to see theologians adjusting their initial views on atomic weaponry, for an ever-changing world required a new vision towards the potential of global annihilation and international conflict.

⁶⁵ Ibidem p. 176-177, 185.

-RDS 1 as the Catalyst?-

The first responses to RDS 1 seem to paint a far more composed demeanor than when the atomic bomb was unveiled four years before. It was naturally still the main headline for the major newspapers, but poll figures and Christian periodicals suggest that for many Americans, RDS 1 was just the continuation of an already very familiar nuclear narrative. It was not until actual conflict arose that the American populace started responding much more intensely to the events of the Cold War.

Despite initial lukewarm responses, many historians posit that the Russian atom bomb did not just break America's hold on the nuclear monopoly, but initiated a new era of nuclear fear. JoAnne Brown states that Joe-1 signaled the "loss of the illusion of safety," and spearheaded the creation of various civil defense institutions such as the Federal Civil Defense Administration and the now-famous *Duck and Cover* instructional film.⁶⁶ On both a political and social level, civil defense became a central element in the fight against communism.

Poll results regarding nuclear fear and the threat of a Soviet attack both support and reject the idea that RDS-1 revived atomic anxiety and brought it to the center of the Cold War. With regard to general results concerning expectations and fear of nuclear energy, there was a significant increase of approximately 30% in those sentiments in the periods between 1945 and 1950 to 1951 and 1956.⁶⁷ When asked how likely Russia's use of atomic weaponry on American cities was, over 90% answered that it was very likely. Approximately 80% also believed that Russia would use a hydrogen bomb on the

⁶⁶ J. Brown, "'A is for Atom, B is for Bomb': Civil Defense in American Public Education, 1948-1963" in *The Journal of American History*, vol. 75 no. 1 (Organization of American Historians, 1988) p. 69.

⁶⁷ H.G. Erskine, "The Polls: Atomic Weapons and Nuclear Energy" in *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 27 no. 2 (Oxford University Press, 1963) p. 2.

United States.⁶⁸ These poll results, both taken in mid-1950, illustrate that the nuclear bomb was a very real threat for the American public, as a significant amount truly believed America would become the victim of a nuclear attack.

There are, however, a number of incongruities that point out against RDS-1 as the sole catalyst for Phase II. Firstly, while Americans felt that nuclear attack by an antagonistic force was likely, other poll results also reveal that the perceived likelihood of one's own death or the death of family by a nuclear attack were relatively split in the middle: feelings of safety were relatively lower in more densely populated areas, but the national total only favored feelings of lack of safety by a margin of 8%. When compared to the results of a similar poll taken in 1961, these margins are approximately 30%.⁶⁹ This indicates that RDS-1 was perhaps not such a cataclysmic event as claimed. If that were the case, sentiments of fear would have been significantly higher in the early 1950s period rather than the early 1960s. If anything, this shows that elements other than Russian possession of the bomb also played a significant role in alarming American society.

Despite claiming that Joe-1 destroyed American feelings of safety, JoAnne Brown also states that it was the advent of the Korean War that catapulted the need for civil defense in American society, in particular in the educational sectors.⁷⁰ From a chronological perspective this argument is relatively sound, since both the FCDA and civil defense films such as *Duck and Cover* were not commissioned until 1951, which seems rather late to be in response to RDS-1. Brown argues that it was during the period of the Korean War that both nuclear and communist fears came to the forefront in American society, which would indicate two things: firstly it confirms the main characteristic of Phase II, the fusion of nuclear narratives with Cold War narratives, and secondly it indicates that RDS 1 was indeed not the sole

⁶⁸ H.G. Erskine, "The Polls: Atomic Weapons and Nuclear Energy" p. 4.

⁶⁹ Ibidem p. 6.

⁷⁰ J. Brown, "'A is for Atom, B is for Bomb': Civil Defense in American Public Education" p. 73.

factor in initiating Phase II. Rather, it was a combination of the aforementioned historical events, in particular the Korean War, which initiated the change from Phase I to Phase II narratives.

The 1949 volumes of *The Christian Century* support the notion that RDS-1 perhaps did not have the enormous impact originally thought. Starting from the August 1949 volumes, only a few articles discuss atomic power and its military proliferation. When compared to the near-endless slew of articles concerning the bomb in 1945 and 1946, the remarkably low number of nuclear-central articles in 1949 and onward is certainly telling. This is not to say that the bomb was not discussed entirely, however. Sporadically editorials and sent letters did briefly elaborate on the topic, though hardly in terms that were revolutionary. A letter sent in response to an editorial condemning the use of the bomb remarked that “atomic war, or war utilizing any form of radioactivity, is the height of social and international insanity.”⁷¹ The disdain towards atomic weaponry was an element that remained intact from the First Phase, though it was significantly less visible in the initial period of the Second Phase.

One trend that had already started in 1946 was the increasingly anti-communist rhetoric in articles, editorials and letters. What is interesting about these articles in contrast to earlier discussions is that their vision was set entirely on combating communism in the United States, rather than outside.

Contributors such as Hugh Stephenson Tigner and Paul Hutchinson argued that communism was a silent yet dangerous force in the United States that people should be far more attentive of.^{72 73} These articles, especially when considering the lack of articles discussing atomic weaponry, indicate that communism was considered a far more dangerous phenomenon in the eyes of the editors of the *Christian Century* and its readers.

⁷¹ Letters to the editor in *The Christian Century* no. 39 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1949) p. 1140.

⁷² H.S. Tigner, “Academic Freedom and the Communist Teacher” in *The Christian Century*, no. 39 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1949) p. 1136.

⁷³ P. Hutchinson, “How to Fight Communism” in *The Christian Century*, vol. 66 no. 36 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1949) p. 1030.

It should be noted that the advent of RDS-1 did not change pacifist rhetoric concerning atomic weaponry. After the unveiling of the Russian bomb, the October 26 issue of *The Christian Century* urged its readers to re-examine an article series submitted by Cuthbert Daniel and Arthur M. Squires as it was considered essential to avoiding “vapid talk about the atomic crisis.”⁷⁴ The article series is remarkably congruent with the rhetoric of the First Phase: despite being dismissive of the industrial potential of atomic energy, it urges international cooperation and a global effort to avoid military application of nuclear weapons.⁷⁵ The suggestion to reread the article series indicates that to the editors of the *Christian Century* the rhetoric of pacifism and world cooperation had not yet lost its appeal, even with the loss of a nuclear monopoly.

The lack of atomic discussion following the unveiling of RDS 1 suggests that its impact on American society, religious or otherwise, may not have been as significant as initially thought. Further inspection of the 1950 volumes confirms this suspicion. Anticipating and later responding to the Communist revolution in China, numerous editorials and letters appeared on the viability of democracy in the Asian territories, and what America’s strategy should be concerning the new communist nations.⁷⁶

Furthermore, the suspicion of internal communism, a narrative already present, also remained visible. Communist allegations towards senators, politicians and even the Federal Council of Churches were openly discussed, and often dismissed, by both the editors and readers of *The Christian Century*.⁷⁷

What did rekindle atomic fear and its discussion, it seems, was the confirmation by President Truman that the hydrogen bomb was in fact being developed. The editorial staff noted that “an arms race in the making of hydrogen bombs is just about the most dangerous conceivable,” and worried that this

⁷⁴ H.,Fey, et al, *The Christian Century*, no. 43 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1949) p. 1251.

⁷⁵ C. Daniel, A.M. Squires, “A Road to Atomic Peace” in *The Christian Century*, vol. 66 no. 18 (Chicago: Christian Century Co., 1949) p. 554.

⁷⁶ H.S. Quigley, “Democracy’s Dilemma in Asia” in *The Christian Century*, vol. 67 no. 1 (Chicago: Christian Century, 1950) p. 12-13.

⁷⁷ P. Hutchinson et al, “The Truth about the Federal Council” in *The Christian Century*, vol. 67 no. 15 (Chicago: Christian Century, 1950) p. 451.

announcement would not just spur the Soviet Union into developing a hydrogen bomb, but would cause an increasingly catastrophic arms race that could only lead to global annihilation.⁷⁸ These editorials and responses indicate that the unveiling of RDS-1 had already become part of a grander narrative including the growing arms race and communist antagonism.

⁷⁸ M. Frakes et al, "President Truman Steps Up Arms Race" in *The Christian Century*, vol. 67 no. 7 (Chicago: Christian Century, 1950) p. 198-199.

-The Federal Council's Second Report: The Christian Conscience and Weapons of Mass Destruction-

The turbulent times of the Second Phase called for a new statement of consensus by the overarching Federal Churches of Christ in America on the morality of the atom bomb. The report, called *The Christian Conscience and Weapons of Mass Destruction* was the result of a commission of nineteen of the most prominent theologians in American Christian society and was intended to provide a concise yet detailed statement concerning the possibility of using nuclear weaponry against antagonistic forces, in particular the Soviet Union. The report was approved by the FCC and would also be taken into consideration by the National Council of Churches, which was to supersede the Federal Council shortly after the publication of this document.⁷⁹

The introduction to this chapter jokingly referred to this report as the 'sequel' to the 1946 *Atomic Warfare and the Christian Faith* report, also commissioned by the FCC and also attended by twenty-two prominent theologians, of whom nine, including Reinhold Niebuhr, Robert Calhoun, and Angus Dun, returned for this commission. This new report also discussed similar topics to the last report, including issues of morality concerning the atom bomb, continued proliferation, world cooperation, and the concept of total war with regard to Christian ethics. Perhaps even more fittingly, even the titles of both reports sound remarkably similar, making the moniker 'sequel' even more appropriate.

But the contents of the two reports could not have been further apart. Whereas the 1946 report was remarkably pacifist in tone and rhetoric, this new report took a far more aggressive stance against those who threatened Christianity and the United States. Ray Haberski notes that the report was a striking example of civil religion and Christian Realism gaining dominance in the religious field, allowing a

⁷⁹ A. Dun et al, *The Christian Conscience and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Report of a Special Commission Appointed by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America* (New York: Department of International Justice and Goodwill, 1950) p. 2.

rhetoric that stood squarely against the concepts of pacifism, concepts that nearly half of the members lauded as essential to survival just four years earlier.⁸⁰

It is not just the viability of pacifism that the report dismisses. In only 24 pages, the same amount as the previous report, the commission produces statements on four main topics: the problems of pacifism in relation to the Cold War, the semantics and moral ambiguity of total war, the atom bomb, and suggested strategies against the proliferation of communism. It should be stated that, unlike the last report, this report did not receive the full consensus of all members; Robert Calhoun and Georgia Harkness both protested aspects of the report, in particular the absolutism regarding nuclear warfare. Although the report should be considered as one opinion, their dissent signifies the uncertainty that was present during this commission.⁸¹

After the introductory discussion on modern warfare, the report begins its argument by discussing the philosophy of pacifism in relation to the Christian faith:

[t]he clearest and least ambiguous alternative is that urged upon us by our most uncompromising pacifist fellow-Christians. They believe that the refusal of all kinds of military service and an unqualified witness against war and for peace is for them the will of God.⁸²

The commission recognizes the amiable, if not unrealistic, position of pacifist Christians such as A.J. Muste, and acknowledges the pacifist element that is inherent in Christianity in general. The tone towards pacifism is almost celebratory, as if under ideal circumstances or with more fortitude all Christians should adhere to this principle. The argument, however, quickly turns towards a far more pragmatic approach:

⁸⁰ R. Haberski, *God and War: American Civil Religion since 1945* (Piscataway : Rutgers University Press, 2012) p. 21-22.

⁸¹ A. Dun et al, *The Christian Conscience and Weapons of Mass Destruction* p. 23.

⁸² *Ibidem* p. 8.

[w]ithout minimizing the moral heroism it can require, we are even envious of the great inner simplicity of that non-violent way. But most of us find ourselves called to follow a course which is less simple and which appears to us more responsible because more directly relevant to the hard realities of our situation. And we believe it is the way in which most Christians should go.⁸³

Arguing the rhetoric of justice, law, and order, the commission posits that like in the old days of persecution, Christians should once again take up the “sword and shield” to protect the institutions of civilization.⁸⁴ Regardless of what that sword and shield actually entails, it is very clear that the commission is dismissive of pacifism as a guiding force for Christianity.

Secondly, and this is where the hesitance from within the commission starts appearing more prominently, the report distinguishes between two different dimensions of total war: the first being the concept of nations fully industrialized for warfare and the problem of recognizing guilty parties within such nations and the other a total loss of morality during war. This distinction is meaningful, since it allows both a moral position whilst condoning, or at least accepting, destruction on a larger scale. The first dimension, that of the industrialized war nation, is used to stress the ambiguity between civilian and soldier:

[t]he traditional distinction between combatants and non-combatants is far less clear. Only small children and the helpless sick and aged stand outside the war effort. It is practically impossible to distinguish between guilty and innocent.⁸⁵

The commission argues that in this concept of total war, destruction and death of the possibly innocent is unavoidable since a war is fought by an entire nation, making the idea of military or non-military casualties nearly pointless.

⁸³ A. Dun et al, *The Christian Conscience and Weapons of Mass Destruction* p. 9.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem* p. 6.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem* p. 10.

The second dimension of total war is far less ambiguous, as it involves removing any shackles of morality in favor of military strategy and necessity. For the commission, the two dimensions provide the borders between what is acceptable in warfare and what is not: given that the distinction between innocent and guilty is unclear, it is better to submit to total military conduct than to face defeat at the hands of an evil force, even if it means the possibility of civilian casualties. To commit acts of war without any moral restraint, however, could never be condoned. In essence, the distinction provides an interesting escape that simultaneously allows the preaching of a higher morality while still condoning warfare against other nations:

[t]he only possible justification for war is that it offers a possibility of achieving a moral result, however imperfect, to prevent an overwhelming moral evil and to offer a new opportunity for men to live in freedom and decency and in just and merciful relationships.⁸⁶

Through what can only be called the manipulation of the semantics of total war, the commission allows itself a cautious position in which, from a Christian perspective, the wholesale destruction of a nation can be condoned, as long as the moral reasoning behind it is sound.

What then does the commission have to say on the use of atomic weaponry? Following the reasoning of the first definition of total war and its moral repercussions, the commission sees little difference between small weapons and large-scale weapons of mass destruction, as it is not the weapon that can reason, but the person wielding it; the number of casualties is not what makes an act morally irreprehensible, it is the reasoning behind it that can justify its use. Through this rhetoric, the commission is initially dismissive of the use of atomic weaponry:

⁸⁶ A. Dun et al, *The Christian Conscience and Weapons of Mass Destruction* p. 11.

[w]ith a single atomic bomb, destruction is produced that is as great as that from a large fleet of airplanes dropping conventional explosives... If such weapons are used generally upon centers of population, we may doubt whether enough will remain to rebuild decent human society.⁸⁷

In the debate between the ethics of atomic weaponry versus conventional weapons, the commission at first recognizes the moral superiority of conventional weaponry, as they are far more accurate and minimal in their range of destruction, which is more morally reassuring than the wholesale destruction that atomic weaponry brings.

Such a position seems more aligned with pacifist ideas towards nuclear weapons, favoring an abandonment of the technology to prevent global destruction. The discussion, however, does not end with that conclusion. In light of what the commission calls the threat of “world tyranny,” it cannot condone the complete removal of atomic weapons from the military arsenal:

[a]s long as the existing situation holds, for the United States to abandon its atomic weapons, or to give the impression that they would not be used, would leave the non-communist world with totally inadequate defense. For Christians to advocate such a policy would be for them to share responsibility for the world-wide tyranny that might result. We believe that American military strength, which must include atomic weapons as long as any other nation may possess them, is an essential factor for the possibility of preventing both world war and tyranny.⁸⁸

It is from this core statement that two observations can be made: firstly, despite expressing sincere doubt and restraint regarding the use of atomic weapons, the commission makes it extremely clear that without nuclear weaponry the Western world has no chance of competing against its antagonists. It is here that the commission’s pro-nuclear attitudes are expressed fully. Even if nuclear bombs may cause

⁸⁷ A. Dun et al, *The Christian Conscience and Weapons of Mass Destruction* p. 13.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem* p. 14.

global destruction, the United States cannot afford to dismiss its nuclear arsenal. Secondly, while the commission refers numerous times to a 'world tyranny' or 'totalitarian force' this statement marks the first time in the pamphlet that communist forces are referred to, most importantly as an adversarial force. This recognition of Soviet Russia signifies one of the cornerstones of Phase II, as communist antagonism and nuclear fear had finally been synthesized into the grand narrative of the Cold War.

The final main theme discussed in the pamphlet is in fact general strategies regarding the Cold War. It is at this point that the commission turns its attention to the adversarial competition with the Soviet Union and suggests strategies other than mutually assured, or one-sided, destruction. The commission rejects the idea that war with the Soviet forces is inevitable and therefore the United States should do everything in its power to prepare for this war. Rather, the report suggests a strategy that focuses on economic and cultural prosperity in the capitalist nations:

[a] fatalism and defeatism which assumes the inevitability of war with world Communism deflects us from the very strategy which offers us the hope of any real victory: namely, the building up of the economic and social and moral health of the areas in our world not already under complete Communist domination.⁸⁹

For the commission to suggest such a strategy is not necessarily remarkable, but the fact that the commission felt the need to express Cold War strategies in a pamphlet that covered the topic of weapons of mass destruction illustrates how deeply intertwined the two originally separate narratives had become during the Second Phase. Unlike Phase I, where atomic fear and communist forces stood as two separate entities, the two narratives had now become part of one singular entity, the Cold War.

Aside from the more visible anti-communist rhetoric, the report is decidedly more negative towards the concept of world government, an idea that was also widely applauded during the First Phase as essential

⁸⁹ A. Dun et al, *The Christian Conscience and Weapons of Mass Destruction* p. 16.

to avoiding global conflict. While the pamphlet refers numerous times to the necessity of a stronger United Nations, it notes that human society is further away now than it has ever been at legitimizing this world order:

[t]he world we live in... is without strong uniting morals or spiritual bonds. It possesses no overruling law and in the United Nations an institution which marks only the beginnings of common order. In large measure our world is a 'frontier' of self-regarding, mutually distrustful human masses.⁹⁰

In a tone that is remarkably pessimistic of the human condition, the commission concludes that world government is not a viable option in the current state of affairs, and stresses the need for a healthy capitalist society as opposed to the communist states.

The 1950 report commissioned by the FCC reveals a number of characteristics central to the Second Phase. In discussing pacifism, total war, the atom bomb, and the Cold War the report displays a visible uncertainty and pessimism towards the world. The report is cautiously in favor of the atom bomb, in particular to counterbalance the threat that the communist world presented to American society. It is especially this anti-communist rhetoric that makes this document essential to understanding the Second Phase, for it demonstrates that for the theologians that produced this report, atomic fear and communism were now uttered in the same breath. They had become inseparable and part of the same conflict, that of capitalism versus communism.

⁹⁰ A. Dun et al, *The Christian Conscience and Weapons of Mass Destruction* p. 9.

-The Prominent Narratives: Niebuhr's Realism and Muste's Pacifism-

The rhetoric most prominently visible in the second FCC pamphlet does not just provide a sharp contrast with the earlier report in 1946, but it also reveals an adherence to the philosophy of Christian Realism. Christian Realist ideas, most closely associated with commission member Reinhold Niebuhr, is known as a more pragmatic Christian approach to international politics, both with regard to warfare and atomic proliferation. Leilah Danielson argues that during the 1950s mainstream Protestant political rhetoric predominantly adhered to the principals of Christian Realism, while the fringes followed the philosophy of A.J. Muste's aforementioned pacifism.⁹¹ This development and new-found adherence to Christian Realism can clearly be seen in the 1950 nuclear report. As such, it is important to briefly discuss its elements and their relation to atomic warfare.

Christian Realism's existence and political visibility existed long before the advent of the atom bomb, and was largely a concept that followed Reinhold Niebuhr's own personal philosophies. Although a complicated and occasionally conflicting rhetoric, with regard to its ideas and relation to the atom bomb three core elements can be identified that help explain the philosophy: firstly, inherent in Niebuhr's thought is a form of realistic pessimism, one that was significantly enhanced by the atom bomb. Campbell Craig argues that Niebuhr was almost welcoming of the atom bomb, as it confirmed his notion of the eternal sin of mankind. For Niebuhr, the atom bomb functioned as a catalyst that had the potential to drive the world towards "a very radical step [that was] necessary to secure the survival of

⁹¹ L. Danielson, "It Is a Day of Judgment': The Peacemakers, Religion, and Radicalism in Cold War America" in *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, vol. 18 no. 2 (University of California Press, 2008) p. 2-3.

civilization.” In this sense, the advent of the atom bomb was actually a positive development that could lead to greater international solidarity and power.⁹²

This international power, however, was one that was certainly based on nuclear power and favored the United States. Craig states that although Niebuhr acknowledged the arduous balance between pacifism and the possibility of nuclear war, he still supported the development of nuclear weaponry, especially against what he identified as the Red Threat.⁹³ Niebuhr’s virulent distrust of communism is the second important element in understanding Christian Realism in the nuclear context, as it directly influenced pro-nuclear sentiments. Mark L. Kleinman argues that from the beginning, a strong distrust of the Soviet Union stood at the centre of Niebuhr’s ideas of global cooperation, despite still being in favor of said cooperation.⁹⁴ Upon Russian acquisition of the atom bomb, Niebuhr stressed the imperative of maintaining American nuclear power, an argument that is clearly visible in the FCC report.

The third and most important element of the Christian Realist school of thought is the concept of *Jus ad Bellum*, or Just War thinking. Just War, not to be confused with Total War, refers to a series of ethical constructs regarding Christianity and the necessity of warfare. Nigel Biggar argues that the concept is crucial in understanding Christian ethics and atomic warfare, and it is referred to multiple times by historians and contemporary theologians, including Niebuhr, alike. Tracing its origins back to the writings of St. Augustine, Biggar identifies discrimination between innocent and guilty and proportionality as its central concepts:

[i]n going to war, according to Christian doctrine, we may not intend to wreak vengeance on the enemy. We may intend only to stop the aggression and restore a just peace. If this is our

⁹² C. Craig, “The New Meaning of Modern War in the Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr” in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 53 no. 4 (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) p. 690.

⁹³ *Ibidem* p. 691.

⁹⁴ M.L. Kleinman, *A World of Hope, A World of Fear: Henry A. Wallace, Reinhold Niebuhr, and American Liberalism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000) p. 3.

intention, we will cause only such damage as may reasonably be thought necessary to achieve these ends. Disproportionate damage, deliberately inflicted, indicates that our intention is otherwise.⁹⁵

With regard to the atom bomb, the concept of *Jus ad Bellum* demands considerable restraint from its user, but it does not fully condemn its application. When challenged by a veritable threat to religion and society, which for Niebuhr and many others meant the Soviet Union and other communist forces, it is the Christian's prerogative to contain that threat in order to maintain a just civilization, as long as the military action refrains from using gratuitous force. Practically speaking, this meant that the United States had the right to maintain its nuclear arsenal, but only as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union, and never as a first aggressor.

As stated, Leilah Danielson claims that Christian Realism became the dominant rhetoric in American theological thought in the 1950s. Taking into account the arguments provided in the approved FCC pamphlet, this argument certainly holds some validity, in particular concerning the *Jus ad Bellum* rhetoric. The report, as stated, is noticeably wary of communism and doubtful of a full global cooperation between the Western world and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, like with Niebuhr's personal ideas, the commission concluded that atomic bombs were a necessary evil in counterbalancing the communist proliferation of nuclear weaponry. These conclusions are in direct accordance with Christian Realist ideas.

The similarities between the FCC report and Niebuhr's personal philosophies become far more striking with regard to the concept of *Jus ad Bellum*. As stated, the report advocated in favor of a constantly re-appraising strategy towards the use of atomic weaponry. The commission claims that in times of crisis it is imperative the United States maintain a strong military force to protect society. War, total, atomic or

⁹⁵ N. Biggar, "Christianity and Weapons of Mass Destruction" in *Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction*, ed. by Hashmi, S.H. and S.P. Lee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 170-171.

otherwise, is only justified when it uses appropriate force to maintain law and order. These ideas are fully concurrent with the concept of Just War, indicating that the commission, and by extension the Federal Council of Churches, had incorporated a far more 'Niebuhrian' view, and thus a more pro-nuclear view, into their institutions.

While the claim that Christian Realism became the dominant rhetoric during the Second Phase may hold some validity that does not mean that pacifist ideas had become completely usurped by this religious pragmatism. Pacifism was the dominant rhetoric in Phase I, uttered by both Niebuhr and Muste, but while Niebuhr and the second commission took a vastly different route, the adherence to pacifism maintained its positions among some circles in Christian thought, as evidenced by the acknowledgment by the nuclear commission.

Furthermore, the editorials and external contributions to *The Christian Century* illustrate that among some theological circles pacifism had not yet lost its appeal. Although there is no evidence to support that these contributors and readers were directly influenced by A.J. Muste, his name is never even mentioned across the various volumes, it is evident that not every theological thought concerning nuclear warfare had become usurped by Christian Realism, making nuclear pacifism a counter narrative to the Niebuhrian argument.

Muste's pacifism did not rise to prominence until later in the 1950s, but the publications do provide some evidence that others held the same point of view. Contrary to Niebuhr and the commission, Muste and his Peacemakers stayed consistent throughout the two phases, maintaining an anti-nuclear stance and a strong distrust of modernization and science regardless of any technological or international events that were to take place.⁹⁶ While the commission, and by some extent Niebuhr, adhered to these

⁹⁶ L. Danielson, "It Is a Day of Judgment': The Peacemakers, Religion, and Radicalism in Cold War America" in *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, vol. 18 no. 2 (University of California Press, 2008) p. 11-12.

same principles during the First Phase, their arguments underwent a radical change following the events described in this chapter. It is for this reason that the two can be considered parallel narratives: while one maintained the same rhetoric throughout the two phases, regardless of who was preaching it, the other changed its points of view dramatically, bringing the two in argumentative opposition to each other.

-Conclusion-

It was unavoidable for one unified pacifist narrative to stay exactly the same after the whirlwind of events that occurred in between 1949 and 1954. RDS 1, China, Korea, the division of Germany, and the hydrogen bomb would stir new sentiments and fear across the theological landscape, ushering in the Second Phase of nuclear fear. Unlike the First Phase, where atomic fear and communist suspicion functioned as separate entities, the two had now fused together, becoming part of grand Cold War narrative.

The original hypothesis was that RDS-1 jumpstarted the change in rhetoric among theologians, as its existence meant the end of a significant military and nuclear monopoly for the United States. Several historians support this idea, but primary analysis unveils a more complicated set of dynamics. Simple chronology reveals that both government institutions and Christian magazines were far more responsive to the events of China, Korea, or the increasingly devastating arms race that was growing between the United States and the Soviet Union. This evidence suggests that RDS-1 was not a single factor in initiating Phase II. Rather, it was the combination of said events that brought nuclear fear and the Cold War together.

Regardless of whether the stance was pacifist or realist, nuclear discussion was now synonymous with Cold War strategies. No source illustrates this synthesis better than the second report commissioned by the Federal Council of Churches; not only does it contradict nearly everything stated by the former commission on nuclear weaponry, it displays the synthesis perfectly by including, in fact spending a significant portion of its contents on Cold War strategies and how to compete with the Soviet Union, regardless of the fact that the topic was atomic technology and its consequences. This illustrates how deeply ingrained nuclear discussion had become in the overall rhetoric of the Cold War.

Furthermore, while publications such as *The Christian Century* maintained a stronger pacifist rhetoric akin to the First Phase, the commission, and by extension its members bar the ones who dissented, adopted a position far closer to Niebuhr's Christian Realism. This position, inherently more hawk-like in nature and in many ways at opposite ends with pacifism, condoned the use of atomic weaponry as a counterbalance for the growing threat that was the Soviet Union. This is another crucial element of Phase II alongside the synthesis of nuclear fear and communist suspicion: as the Cold War intensified and America was drawn into actual conflict the general sentiment towards nuclear weaponry became a lot more allowing and flexible in order to counter the heightened threat. While responses were still far-between and varied between the roster of pacifism and realism, the events of Phase II signified a growing pro-nuclear sentiment to defend the institutions of capitalist democracy, as opposed to the absolute pacifism of Phase I.

Conclusion

Writer Tim McHyde has had a breakthrough: through careful analysis of the Bible and its prophecies he has been able to construct a fully accurate timeline of the events that have yet to pass. Luckily for those less enlightened he has provided a short list of the prophecies on his website:

[n]uclear Middle East War: Israel and Atomic Iran in prophecy, [n]uclear World War III, [t]he invasion of America by a confederacy of communist nations (of course that's the only way, as no single nation could defeat the US), [a] global meteor storm setting fires everywhere, [a] nuclear winter from particulate in the atmosphere blocking the Sun...

These outlandish prophecies, and many more, are certain to happen, according to the author, and for a single payment of 50 dollars, anyone interested can learn the truth and find salvation in the teachings of Jesus Christ.⁹⁷

The writings above show an example, albeit rather extreme, of how 'nuclearism' and Cold War antagonism can still be detected within the writings of Christian communities. As the Cold War raged on, the narratives of nuclear and communist fear became more and more ingrained in American thought, theological or otherwise. Even in contemporary examples, in a time where the balance of power has shifted dramatically, writings of nuclear devastation at the hands of communist forces can still appear.

The main argument of this thesis was to illustrate when and how the narratives of communism and nuclear fear became a single entity in theological writing. During the early years after the unveiling of atomic weaponry through the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Christian responses were mainly those of indignation, pacifism, and arguments in favor of stronger global cooperation. After several

⁹⁷ T. McHyde, "Christians: 'Finally Understand Bible Prophecy (Including What Event To Expect Next) Thanks To A Prophetic Timeline Breakthrough Based On Two Overlooked Keys in the Words of Jesus'" (Escape All These Things, 2014).

cataclysmic events in rapid succession in 1949, these responses radically changed. While some publications maintained a pacifist rhetoric, others, most notably the Federal Council of Churches' nuclear commission, created an official response far more aligned with the philosophy of Christian Realism, and therefore far more 'hawkish' in nature. Furthermore, nearly all responses after 1949 mentioned nuclear technology in the context of the Cold War, either as part of the growing arms race or a deterrent of sorts.

The original hypothesis was that RDS 1, the Soviet nuclear bomb, was the catalyst in bringing this change in narrative. Closer examination, however, reveals that RDS-1 could not have been the sole contestant in bringing the change in argument and fusing together the narratives of communism in America and nuclear fear. Rather, it was the culmination of several events, RDS 1, the communist revolution in China, and ultimately the Korean War that forced together the two originally separate narratives. After 1949, nuclear discussions had ultimately become a part of the grander Cold War narrative.

The role of eschatology in the discussion of nuclear narratives during these early phases remains unclear. The aforementioned contemporary example and several sociological studies conducted in the 1980s indicate that there is a direct correlation between Biblical literalism, eschatology, and a disposition towards interpreting Biblical events through nuclear technology.^{98 99 100} While this may be the case, examples of eschatological thinking in the theological publications between 1945 and 1954 consulted are sporadic and hardly indicative of a rhetorical trend. While many publications do display a sense of absolutism and dread of global destruction, they do not specifically connect this to prophecies in the Bible or any other kind of eschatological framework. This does not necessarily imply that

⁹⁸ A.J. Weigert, "Christian Eschatological Identities and the Nuclear Context" in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 27 no. 2 (Wiley, 1988) p. 179.

⁹⁹ C.B. Strozier, and L. Simich, "Christian Fundamentalism and Nuclear Threat" in *Political Psychology*, vol. 12 no. 1 (International Society of Political Psychology, 1991) p. 93.

¹⁰⁰ S. Kierulff, "Belief in 'Armageddon Theology' and Willingness to Risk Nuclear War" in *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion*, vol, 30 no. 1 (Wiley, 1991) p. 82-83.

eschatology was irrelevant or inexistant during these years, but it does illustrate that its rhetoric had not yet become visible, or perhaps fashionable, in publications during this time period.

The clearest example of the phase shift was the change in rhetoric between the two official reports commissioned by the Federal Council of Churches in 1946 and 1950. As such, their core differences will be briefly recapitulated. Firstly, the two are on opposite ends with regard to nuclear weaponry. The 1946 report argues that there is no reason, moral or otherwise, for a nation to resort to nuclear weaponry. The 1950 report, however, claims that it is imperative the United States maintain its nuclear arsenal as a counterbalance to the communist forces. Secondly, while the 1946 report condemns the entire concept of Total War, the 1950 report goes through great philosophical lengths to acknowledge the fact that in modernized warfare civilian casualties cannot be avoided, but that does not mean warfare should be avoided altogether. The commission agrees that, despite the moral ambiguities, warfare for the protection of civilization is a just cause. Thirdly, the 1946 report argues strongly in favor of a world government or organization to combat nuclear proliferation. While the 1950 report does not entirely abandon this argument, it is markedly more pessimistic of the concept, and instead argues in favor of a strong capitalist world front to combat communist nations. Lastly, while the 1946 commission completely omits any mention of a communist threat, the 1950 report contributes a substantial amount of its content to the discussion of combating communist expansion.

Even taking into account all the historical events that unfolded in between these two commissions, the shift from pacifism to a more pragmatic realist approach is striking. Considering the Christian Realist influences that are clearly visible in the second report, one hypothetical explanation is that Reinhold Niebuhr and other members of similar disposition gained a majority voice during the second commission, explaining the radical shift in tone between the two reports.

That explanation, however, comes with its own questions, in particular regarding Niebuhr himself. The 1946 document, which he also did sign, was undoubtedly pacifist in nature, and very much in contradiction with Niebuhr's own philosophy. This incongruity was pointed out by both his contemporaries and later historians: in what Ray Haberski calls a "difficult balancing act," Niebuhr had to consider both the options of potential atomic devastation versus his *Jus ad Bellum* beliefs, which lead to sometimes contradictory statements which he later acknowledged himself.¹⁰¹ Whether or not his pacifist ideals were an exception to his beliefs, a brief dalliance, or a true temporary shift in philosophy is unclear, but it is evident that later events quickly reinstated his core beliefs in Christian Realism, which in turn gained a dominant position in the official statements from the commission, and by extension the Federal Council of Churches themselves.

As a final remark, the limitations of this study have to be acknowledged. One of the main points of focus of this thesis has been the publications in *The Christian Century*, mainly because it covered a variety of different theological and denominational backgrounds. This singular publication already provided a myriad of different sources, but I am confident there is more to be discovered in other publications, in particular the ones that exist on the peripheries of theological publications. Furthermore, this thesis covered the early periods of atomic weaponry and its impact on the religious communities in the United States. Naturally, the narratives did not end or stop changing after this period, of which one example was the growing prominence, or perhaps resurgence, of the pacifist movement in the late 1950s. Further study could help enunciate how the narratives described in this thesis evolved as atomic history moved on.

It is evident that the atom bomb has left an indelible mark on American society, and the world as a whole. From that fateful moment in August 1945, Americans, religious or otherwise, were confronted

¹⁰¹ R. Haberski, *God and War: American Civil Religion since 1945* (Piscataway : Rutgers University Press, 2012) p. 17.

with a force that exceeded every conventional weapon, and was likened to the power of the cosmos itself. Some responded in fear, others in indignation, and later others responded with a call to arms using this new technology. It was clear that America had lead the world into the nuclear age, of which we can still feel its reverberations to this day.

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