
This is a carefully researched, clearly written and fascinating book about what drove American foreign policy in the crucial days of the cold war. Its central thesis is that this policy cannot be understood simply in terms of fear of Soviet aggression or a desire to keep the world safe for American markets. At its heart, its very soul, was a deep spiritual conviction that the world was engaged in a life and death struggle between those who believed in God, and therefore in human beings made in his image with inalienable rights, and a system which elevated the state to supreme position, and which therefore only accorded human beings such rights and liberties as fitted in with its fundamental ideology. Furthermore, this civil religion, which sought to unite not just theists, but spiritual people throughout the world, was formed and shaped not by religious leaders, but from the White House, in particular by Presidents Truman and Eisenhower. As Inboden puts it:

> Despite their manifest divisions, Protestant leaders of all persuasions had succeeded in placing Cold War concerns in the forefront of American pews and pulpits. They helped develop a public vocabulary that spoke of America’s world role in spiritual terms … [Nevertheless, the theology of containment] … was a theology that had been constructed not in the churches, but in the White House itself.

The presidents did this not just because religion was an important instrument of policy in the cold war, but because they themselves believed it to be what the struggle was fundamentally about. Eisenhower, for example, though not a regular churchgoer in earlier years, not even in his Mennonite upbringing, had been brought up to be a regular Bible reader and was baptised when he came into the White House. He composed and said his own prayer before his inaugural address, and opened cabinet meetings with prayer.

Inboden approaches his thesis from a number of different sources, some of them unpublished or very little researched until now. For example, Senator H. Alexander Smith who was chairman of the Subcommittee on East Asian Affairs at a crucial time in US dealings with China, was a member of the MRA (at a time when that organisation had prominence and some influence). Smith kept a daily journal in which he noted down what God had guided him to say to congress that day—as well as his spiritual struggle not to block that guidance.
by smoking one of his beloved cigars. More significant was the influence of former foreign missionaries to China, or those who came from such families, some of whom occupied key positions. But their deep love for China did not lead them to total agreement on whether or not the nationalist regime should be given more support, despite its corruption and or whether Mao's policies were really as bad as people feared.

Another figure, very little researched before, was Myron Taylor, a liberal Episcopal layman whom Truman appointed as his personal envoy to liaise with Christian leaders in Europe to get them behind his proposed united front. This highlights another major theme of the book, the way that Truman and later Eisenhower, much to their frustration, failed to get the mainstream denominational leaders behind this grand religious strategy, because of what they saw as their continual squabbles about less crucial doctrinal matters. Their worst frustration was the virulent anti-Catholicism that was then present in the Protestant leadership. Despite Taylor's indefatigable travelling and negotiating, he could not get an agreement for the Vatican to be invited to send official observers to the WCC conference in Amsterdam in 1948, though eventually it did prove possible, despite strong domestic opposition, to appoint an American ambassador to the Vatican. European church leaders in particular disliked being drafted into an anti-communist crusade. As the leader of the United Lutheran Church put it, the WCC

Is not an association to stop communism, nor an effort to block communism as such ... I wish our President could be disabused of the idea that there is some moral unity in Mohammedanism, in Judaism and Christianity that could be associated structurally or in an informal way to stop the on-rush of communism or atheism.

Inboden argues in fact that the influence of the main Protestant denominations, at its height immediately after the Second World War, was beginning even then to decline in influence. He distinguishes between fundamentalists, who were then marginal, and evangelicals, whose influence was increasing and came to a focus in the close relationship between Eisenhower and Billy Graham. Furthermore, as shown in the appointment of Taylor, the Presidents began to bypass the churches and to set up organisations more expressive of their own sincere, but minimalist, religious doctrine.

The two key figures of this period from the point of view of Christian influence on politics were Dulles, Secretary of State under Eisenhower, and Reinhold Niebuhr, until his stroke in 1952. Dulles had been very well known