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America's Mosque: The Islamic Center of Washington, Protestant Inclusivism, and the Cold War Genesis of "Multireligious America"

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Abstract: This article examines the contested nature of American efforts to expand America's twentieth century notion of tri-faith idealism—the unity of the three monotheistic faiths of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism—to include Muslims both at home and abroad. It does so through a contextual, historical study of the construction and dedication of the Islamic Center of Washington. The construction of the Islamic Center ultimately proved a lightning rod that electrified competing wings of Protestant Christian nationalism within in the United States—namely "inclusivist ecumenists" and "exclusivist populists."

Keywords: tri-faith idealism; religious pluralism; Cold War; American Protestantism; American Islam; Eisenhower administration

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On 28 June 1957, Dwight Eisenhower became the first American president to deliver an official state address at a mosque. Removing his shoes at the shrine's entry, Eisenhower paced into the Islamic Center of Washington, a religious sanctuary strategically located on Washington's Embassy Row. Thirteen years prior, a coalition of Middle Eastern diplomats to the United States had launched plans to build the holy place. In the midst of the Second World War, they noted the absence of an Islamic hub in Washington, D.C. alongside the capital's other noteworthy monotheistic faith centers, such as the Catholic National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.[1] While Americans had rallied around a tri-faith religious identity of Protestant, Catholic, and Jew in the conflict against Nazi fascism, some Americans now wondered, especially in light of the new global struggle against the Soviet Union's "atheistic communism," whether Islam might also be included in this spiritual coalition of America's monotheistic faiths. Even more, in the midst of the Cold War, the public optics of the Islamic Center went beyond just promoting an ethic of religious pluralism and inclusion at home. They equally served the cause of recruiting Muslim nation-states of the Middle East as pro-democracy and pro-freedom allies in the global campaign against communism. Eisenhower consequently used the mosque's dedication to summon Muslims into a global faith alliance against the "godless" Soviet Union. For the American president, support of the mosque's construction was a calculated Cold War move: he desired to strengthen spiritual and diplomatic ties to a region crucial to his nation's "rollback" of communism. As such, in the hands of Washington policymakers, the mosque itself had become a tool of American diplomacy.[2]

Beyond highlighting the role of religion as a means to wage the Cold War, the president's speech also pointed to a potential transformation underway within American national identity. Eisenhower and the American Muslim backers of the Islamic Center indeed sought to forge a new multireligious identity for the American nation, incorporating Islam into the "tri-faith idealism" of the mid-twentieth century. The recently baptized president made exactly such a pitch to the American people as he reflected upon the American ideal of religious liberty. Americans, he asserted, had fought the Second World War in part to defend the individual's right to believe. For Eisenhower and a host of

Americans, religious belief and participation, particularly within the three monotheistic traditions of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism, defined American civic identity in the mid-twentieth century.[3] Now within the Cold War, could an even broader civic–religious identity be attainable, one hospitable to Islam as well? There within the Islamic Center, Eisenhower began to lay the groundwork for such an inclusive multireligious American religious identity—uniting Christian, Jew, and Muslim in a global faith-based alliance that was meant to counteract the advance of communism across the globe.[4]

Yet, not all Americans were ready to embrace Eisenhower's Cold War inclusivism. In fact, the construction of the Islamic Center of Washington exposed deep divisions within American Protestantism. It catalyzed a fierce debate over America's religious identity in the Cold War and tested the breadth of American religious pluralism. This article examines the contested nature of American efforts to expand America's twentieth century notion of trifaith idealism—the unity of the three monotheistic faiths of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism—to include Muslims both at home and abroad. In particular, it probes the limits of the Eisenhower administration's interfaith and diplomatic activism. The construction of the Islamic Center ultimately proved a lightning rod that electrified competing wings of Protestant Christianity within the United States—namely "inclusivist ecumenists" and "exclusivist populists." This article shows that while inclusivist ecumenists had begun to champion a global ethic of interfaith cooperation and "universal brotherhood," exclusivist populists questioned Eisenhower's move, defended America's "Christian heritage," and warned of the impending end times. In end effect, "inclusivists" argued for the inclusion of non-Protestant religions within American civic–religious identity and foreign relations, whereas "exclusivists" maintained that Christianity exclusively professed divine truth and, therefore, was the single religion that could offer the American nation a solid theological grounding.[5] While a framework for "multireligious America" might have appeared in Eisenhower's address, its implementation and acceptance amongst the American public and across the globe would ultimately prove tendentious at best, foreshadowing the contested public state of Islam in America at the turn of the twenty-first century.[6]

This essay seeks to expand scholarly understandings of Christian nationalism through attending to American Protestant postures towards non-Christian religions, namely Islam, during a century that transformed the United States into a "post-Protestant nation." According to multiple studies, Christian nationalism functions as a public Protestant ideology within the United States, which claims that the United States is an explicitly Christian nation with a divinely ordained role in the world, either, for instance, to promote democracy or to eradicate evil.[7] These understandings of American Christian nationalism assume this ideology resolutely excluded non-Christian faiths from American civic identity. Additionally, they suggest Christian nationalists explicitly campaigned for the reclamation of Protestant Christianity as the sole religious foundation for American national identity. However, more liberal variants of Christian nationalism also existed within the twentieth century (Edwards 2019). In particular, some "inclusivist ecumenists" laid the intellectual groundwork for "multireligious America" through outlining religious pluralism as an innately Christian, national ethic. To love one's neighbor entailed allowing that neighbor to believe freely and uncoerced. In the eyes of Protestant inclusivists, the American defense of religious liberty at home and abroad was a Christian practice that befit a Christian nation. Some thus were inclined to power-sharing at home and abroad. American participation in interreligious dialogue and faith-based coalitions also stood out to these Protestant inclusivists as a resolutely Christian practice. As such, in the mid-twentieth century, Christian nationalism could be yielded in opposing ways towards the "religious other." It could either call for peaceful embrace and dialogue or it could push for judgement and rejection. Even then, while Protestant inclusivism and exclusivism appeared diametrically opposed, they at times shared a similar goal of preserving Protestantism's privileged standing at home. In the 1950s, for example, some Protestant inclusivists promoted a "multireligious framework" in order to maintain the dominant position of the modernist mainline Protestant establishment in response to the quickening religious pluralization of the American public.[8]

When stretched globally, the quest for a "multireligious America" at home drew upon one of the longstanding convictions at work within American Christian nationalism: that of American imperial expansion (Conroy-Krutz 2015). Within the Cold War, American policymakers, and even some ecumenical Protestant inclusivists, transformed liberal missiological convictions such as interreligious dialogue and multireligious coalitions into means of expanding America's hegemony across the globe. The Islamic Center, as such, particularly showcased the contest over American hegemony abroad. Washington diplomats, along with some Protestant inclusivists, wanted to use the center to forge new diplomatic, economic, and religious partnerships with Middle Eastern nation-states, effectively drawing that part of the globe into America's postwar "hidden empire."[9] From this angle, "America's Mosque" instrumentalized Muslims in the Middle East as agents in the American struggle against Soviet communism. For some, this utilitarian diplomatic approach undercut an inclusivist ethic through precluding the actual "knowing" of the "religious other" that Protestant inclusivism encouraged. In response, local actors often pushed back. Muslim Americans looked to the Islamic Center as a means of calling the United States back to its original constitutional principles of religious freedom and inclusion. They sought to claim greater civic agency and public recognition for their communities within the United States. Meanwhile, some Protestant inclusivists protested the weaponization of interreligious partnership and called for genuine power sharing at home and abroad. Finally, in order to advance their nations' respective interests, Muslim diplomats to the United States were not wary of positioning their home countries as "non-aligned" players within the bipolar Cold War conflict. "America's Mosque" thus revealed the complex ways that religion and diplomacy intersected in the Cold War—often with competing and conflicting end goals in mind.

In order to probe the contested and complex nature of Eisenhower's multireligious Cold War coalition, this paper first explores the place of Islam within the tri-faith idealism of mid-twentieth century America. It then discusses the organization of the Islamic Center, with a particular eye given to the work of American Muslims in pushing the American government to more fully integrate their faith into the nation's civil religious identity. Finally, it concludes with a survey of American Protestant responses to the Islamic Center, documenting how notions of Christian nationalism were stretched in the mid-twentieth century in both inclusivist and exclusivist directions.

1. Tri-Faith Idealism and Islam in 1950s America

By the mid-twentieth century, Americans of various faiths had long debated which religious traditions most aligned with the American ideals of freedom, constitutional governance, and democracy. At the turn of the twentieth century, many American Protestants had historically believed only Protestant Christianity proved compatible with these foundational American political values.[10] Yet from the 1920s into the early decades of the Cold War, a swell of Americans proved ready to challenge the more exclusive vision of the American Protestant establishment. In particular, these inclusivist challengers called for a domestic and global multireligious coalition that could counteract the "global giants" of secularism and totalitarianism. While a cohort of Protestant missionary ecumenists laid the missiological groundwork for Islam's inclusion in such a coalition, they faced a long road to convincing the American public and their fellow Protestants—steeped in exclusivist thought—that Islam ought to be drawn into the American civic fold. They found more willing partners, however, in the diplomatic policymaking circles of Washington.

Despite the preponderance of exclusivist thought within American Protestantism, a new multireligious American identity appeared at the national level in the 1920s. In the early 1900s, a broad swath of American Protestants opposed immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe and questioned the "assimilability" of migrant Catholics and Jews in particular. Such a response only grew in the aftermath of the First World War and Bolshevik Revolution with the passage of highly restrictive "quota" legislation of the 1920s, which placed extreme limits on immigration from the so-called "less desirable" regions

of the European continent. Often remembered as a decade of economic prosperity, the 1920s also witnessed American revivals of anti-immigrant xenophobia, Protestant nativism, and the Ku Klux Klan.[11] Following waves of mass immigration and the scars of the First World War, however, a small but dedicated contingent of American Protestants, Catholics, and Jews championed a broader and more inclusive religious pluralism to counteract the machinations of the Klan at home and the rise of fascist regimes abroad. In 1927, they founded the National Conference of Christians and Jews in order to smooth over confessional difference and oppose the rising nativist tide (Schultz 2011, pp. 15–67). As these "tri-faith" proponents put it, the United States had become a safe haven for the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish traditions—the major monotheistic faiths united in their dedication to human personhood and the "brotherhood of man." In the 1930s, "tri-faith idealism" gained prominence in Washington, in part due to the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe and the liberalization of the Protestant missionary movement. In response to the "irreligion" of Nazism, Franklin Delano Roosevelt championed religious freedom and "Judeo-Christian" values as foundational to American democracy and a world democratic order. Tri-faith idealism thus quickly emerged not only as a potential marker of American civic identity but also as a worthwhile foreign policy tool (Preston 2012; Gaston 2019, pp. 72–125).

Beyond Washington's tri-faith idealism, an even wider inclusive ethic of religious toleration had also begun to show up within the American Protestant missionary field. As waves of exclusivist Protestant missionaries spread across the globe to convert the world, some American Protestant missionaries instead found themselves converted (Hollinger 2017). Engaging sophisticated foreign cultures and encountering complex religions they had once thought "heathen" led them to reconsider their global outlook.[12] Their shifting view of foreign religions paralleled new historical–critical views on Scripture and efforts to downplay creedal differences in favor of collective and cooperative ecumenical action. Due to their embrace of these new currents of thought, these Protestants eventually were called "modernists." As historian David Hollinger has put it, these modernist Protestants advanced a "missionary cosmopolitanism" characterized by an open posture to the world and its religions, an eagerness to learn from the "righteous" examples of "religious others," and a desire to forge interfaith partnerships around shared spiritual values.[13]

This emerging missiological impulse partially culminated in the 1932 "Laymen's Report," a seven-denomination study of American Protestant foreign missions, with Harvard philosopher William Ernest Hocking serving as lead author. The report called on American Protestants to no longer pursue direct evangelization or to support formal Western imperialism. Detaching Christianity from empire, the report urged Protestant missionaries to instead seek out mutual partnerships with the "forces of righteousness" in the world. It stressed interreligious dialogue and the need to build coalitions amongst the world's great religions, all of which contained, according to the report, a fundamental commitment to human service, peace, and international fellowship.[14] In making this claim, the Laymen's Report reflected the currents of the Social Gospel and Protestant postmillennialism, alongside the growing call for "interreligious dialogue" first outlined at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago (see note 14). The one-thousand-year reign of peace and justice awaited, if only Christians could forge new global partnerships around the shared commitments of modern liberal religion. Uniting around these liberal values, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims, the report argued, could work together to forge a new "world culture" that would bring about "world unity."[15] American Protestants accordingly needed to detach Christianity from its Western markers and weaken their nation's longstanding American Christian nationalism in the process. In this new missiological understanding, the United States no longer stood as the chosen nation in God's providential outworking of history. Rather, it was one node within a much larger web of mutual partners. Such a mindset naturally steered Protestant modernists towards multilateralism—forging spiritual and political alliances that could promote peace and justice in the world. Reflecting Hocking's logic, Protestant modernists were wholehearted

Wilsonian internationalists. They readily supported plans to create both a United Nations and a world ecumenical council in the World Council of Churches [16].

The Hocking Report suggested that the world's great religions could foster a global ecumenism that could oppose the forces of irreligion in the world—"the anti-religious" modern philosophies, such as Marxism and secularism (van Dusen 1940). By uniting around shared liberal convictions, religious devotees could check these global giants into place. Yet the report's clarion call for domestic and global religious pluralism faced noteworthy opposition at home. In response, many American Protestants insisted upon the exclusivity of God's revelation in Christ (and in American democracy and capitalism). Could Christians truly identify divinity and truth in a religion such as Buddhism or Islam? Hocking argued yes, but other noteworthy modernist figures, such as Henry van Dusen at Union Theological Seminary, proved less sure. As van Dusen put it, other great faiths of the world, such as Islam, offered but "partial apprehensions of God." They were "pale before the disclosure of God in Christ."[17] As such, even a liberal modernist like van Dusen espoused aspects of an exclusivist ethic. The revelation of God in Christ was not only singular but also the surest path to global peace. Even more, that revelation in Christ found its fullest expression in Protestantism. Protestant Christians thus needed to be proactive in opposing not only political totalitarianisms, such as fascism and communism, but also spiritual totalitarianisms, such as Catholicism and Islam. The postwar hour would thus be one of fierce global competition between the democratic Protestant Christianity of the United States and varying modes of political and spiritual totalitarianism.

While Protestants debated the finer details of the Hocking Report, so too did policymakers in Washington. Most notably, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Assistant Secretary of State Francis B. Sayre pushed back against Hocking's call for new multireligious coalitions. "Titanic forces"—communism and fascism in particular—certainly threatened the globe, Sayre admitted. Such global giants had in their crosshairs the "fundamental teachings of Christ" and "many of the most precious values of Western civilization." However, the answer was not to forsake the exclusivity of Christ, as Hocking suggested. Instead, Americans—"those who profoundly believe in Christ and the Christian way"—needed to make their faith "more virile and dominant in the world today." In Roosevelt's wartime administrations, Christian nationalism thus found equal expression alongside the president's preferred "Judeo-Christian," "monotheistic" ethic that brought together Protestant, Catholic, and Jew in opposition to Nazi irreligion.[18]

For the inclusivist wing of Protestant modernists, however, the Hocking Report's missiology had practical ramifications upon American diplomacy across the globe, especially in the Middle East. William Eddy was one such cosmopolitan modernist who had grown up in Lebanon at the turn of the twentieth century. Born in 1896 the son of Presbyterian missionaries, Eddy was formed in an environment that discouraged direct proselytizing. Instead, he absorbed Protestant commitments to acts of service in education and health care amongst Muslim populations. His vision extended to geopolitics as well. Eddy went on to enjoy a prominent career in the foreign service and encouraged diplomats to forge cooperative relationships with Arab politicians. Building on the insights of the Hocking Report, he called for a moral alliance with Islam against communism (Herberg 1955).

Whether Islam ought to be included within such a multireligious coalition continued to be contested at the national level, however. In 1955, for instance, just two years before the dedication of the Islamic Center, American sociologist William Herberg released his landmark text *Protestant*, *Catholic*, *Jew*, a scholarly and sociological work on American religious identity. As Jewish refugees from Tsarist Russia, Herberg's family had directly experienced the early twentieth-century constraints of America's religious pluralism. In 1904, they migrated to the United States, where a wave of nativist Protestant sentiment awaited them upon their arrival in New York City. As a grown man and prominent scholar, Herberg drew upon tri-faith sentiment in publishing one of the century's landmark religious volumes. Even as he articulated a Cold War ethic of inclusion, however, Herberg's celebrations of tri-faith idealism notably placed limits on American religious pluralism. In

his view, American "religious normality" only applied to Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. He suggested anything else outside of these three great faiths lay outside of "the American Way of Life." Herberg grouped Muslims together with Buddhists, atheists, agonistics, and "humanists" as standing outside of the American tradition.[19] Herberg's landmark book, published in 1955, thus simultaneously spoke to the expansion of religious pluralism yet also its curtailment in mid-century America. Protestants, Catholics, and Jews belonged, Herberg argued, but Muslims did not. The pluralist, inclusivist argument of the Hocking Report proved contested, both within American Protestantism itself and across the nation at large.

Additionally, by the 1950s, Protestant inclusivists were not necessarily unified as to why they ought to adopt an inclusivist framework. The Hocking Report suggested inclusivism reflected the natural outworking of modern, liberal values. In other words, inclusivism was simply the enlightened approach, and it very well could require yielding cultural power in pursuit of mutual partnership, shared liberal ideals, and peaceful global order. In contrast, a more utilitarian approach also appeared after the Second World War. Some inclusivists, such as those at the helm of the National Council of Churches, sought to maintain the mainline Protestant establishment's cultural and social privilege by welcoming co-religionists underneath a Judeo–Christian, or alternatively, multireligious, civic framework. The clear understanding, however, was that mainline Protestants would continue to wield dominant cultural power. As such, some Protestant inclusivists and exclusivists in fact shared common domestic and foreign goals: maintaining Protestantism's establishment standing at home, and by the 1950s, waging the Cold War abroad. In this regard, both inclusivist and exclusivist strategies were face-saving Protestant efforts to deal with real religious pluralization in the United States and new diplomatic challenges across the globe (GhaneaBassiri 2010).

2. America's Mosque and Cold War Religion

As evidenced by Herberg, American Muslims faced tremendous barriers and pressures in the United States. Not only did immigration quotas restrict the domestic flourishing of their familial and religious networks, but so too did American notions of "acceptable religiosity" exclude them from the American civic–religious fold. They therefore encountered tremendous pressures to conform to "more acceptable" standards of civic and religious identity. Numbering about 75,000 in the mid-1950s, the American Muslim community pushed back on Herberg's constrained understanding of American religiosity (Elkholy 1966). Abdallah Igram, a second generation Arab-American and decorated veteran of the Second World War, especially led the charge. In particular, Igram challenged the American military to recognize his Muslim faith and his service to the American war cause. In letters to Eisenhower, Igram requested that American "dog tags" include the letter "M" alongside "P", "C", and "J" to indicate whether a service member was of the Muslim faith. Such consideration of the sincerely held beliefs of American Muslim service members killed in battle could also extend to the tombstones in national cemeteries, with the Muslim star and crescent, respectively, appearing on the gravestones of American Muslims, just as the Christian cross and Jewish Star of David graced the respective grave markers of deceased Christian and Jewish soldiers. Additionally, Igram organized the first meeting of the International Muslim Society in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1952, which aimed to strengthen Muslim American communities while also registering Muslim support for the monotheistic ideals of American civil religion. Rebranded as the Federation of Islamic Associations in America shortly after the first congress, the organization's constitution emphasized the "spiritual and moral values" and "common grounds, beliefs, and common ends" that Islam shared with other religions. In a new age of "international strife and unrest," the group called on American Muslims to "contribute their proper share in the establishment of world peace." In their view, Muslims just as much as Protestants, Catholics, and Jews supported "the dignity and supreme worth of every human being, brotherhood, love among all mankind, and the absolute equality of every person before God." (Inboden 2008). American Muslims

thus pushed against the boundaries of Herberg's study. They called for a broader ethic of pluralism that included the Muslim faith.

In the context of the Cold War, Eisenhower's administration proved keen to expand tri-faith idealism and to use it as a diplomatic tool against the Soviet Union. As already indicated, many of America's policymaking elite came from strong Protestant backgrounds and harbored idealistic commitments to global religious liberty. They also held grave concerns about Soviet communism as a new form of "irreligion" threatening the world. With the stakes of war greatly escalated by nuclear weapons, American policymakers in the 1940s and 1950s turned to culture and religion in order to wage war against the Soviets.[20] They also set their sights on building a global democratic order underneath what they saw as the benevolent leadership of the United States. By the early 1950s, that vision for global hegemony increasingly extended to the oil-rich Middle East. America's Cold War leaders began to apply George Kennan's policy of "containment" beyond the strategic "spheres of interest" of Western Europe and Japan. Increasingly, Americans and their British allies set their sights on Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, and Afghanistan. At the helm of this foreign policy stood William Eddy, who used his missionary roots and wartime service in the Office of Strategic Services to gain American diplomats audiences with prominent Saudi officials. Moreover, the Dulles brothers, John Foster who served as Eisenhower's Secretary of State and Allen Welsh who served as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, also proved eager to shape Middle Eastern affairs. Through the powerful Aramco oil firm, the United States struck a strategic partnership with King Faisal II in Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the C.I.A. helped orchestrate a successful coup in Iran in 1953, displacing the liberal prime minister Mohammad Mossadeq, who entertained notions of nationalizing Iran's oil industry. Thereafter, Mohamed Reza Pahlavi was named Iran's new shah. The Eisenhower administration also backed bold economic development programs across the region, such as supporting the American engineering firm's Morrison–Knudsen in its construction of a dam on the Helmand River in Afghanistan, the same firm that had constructed the Hoover Dam and the San Francisco Bay Bridge. As one commentator put it in the terms of the era, such actions supported the development of "strong democratic beliefs" and crucial economic partnerships across the region.[21]

The State Department followed up on Washington's diplomatic and covert maneuvers with new propaganda campaigns to the Middle East. Notably, this wave of "psychological warfare" depicted Arab Muslims as partners with the United States against immoral, atheistic communists (Abdul-Rauf 1978; Glass 2018; Bashir 2014). The State Department in particular showcased the work of a dedicated group of Turkish, Egyptian, Saudi, and Iranian diplomats in Washington, D.C. These Muslim diplomats had begun to fund a shared effort to build a mosque and community center in the heart of the nation's capital. The original impetus for the mosque's construction came in 1944 when Mehmet Munir Ertegun, a practicing Muslim and the Turkish ambassador to the United States, died and no suitable religious site could be identified in the region to hold his funeral. A Palestinian-American businessman, A. Joseph Howar, brought together Muslim diplomats from twelve countries to form a planning and construction committee, titled the Washington Mosque Foundation, and to address the noticeable absence of a mosque in Washington, D.C. Beyond attending to this shortcoming, the foundation looked to the mosque as a way to further establish and solidify Islam as a part of American life, while also enhancing the diplomatic interests of the Foundation's constituent nations. By 1946, the committee had purchased a small plot of land in D.C.'s Embassy Row. Funds for construction soon arrived from eleven diplomatic missions, including Afghanistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen. While Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan led the fundraising, oil executives and Arab communities in Detroit and Los Angeles also committed funds. By 1951, construction began on the USD 1.25 million center. Special building materials—tiles, rugs, and chandeliers—came directly from Morocco, Malaysia, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. The Egyptian government likewise sent specialists to write verses from the Quran on the mosque's walls. By the mid-1950s, construction on the center was

complete. In 1957, Eisenhower joined the Muslim diplomatic community in dedicating the new mosque, which included an outreach center, classrooms, and a library. All told, the construction of the mosque stood out as an endeavor of high cultural cooperation between the United States government and crucial allies across the Middle East (Dudziak 2000).

In the 1950s, scenes of Jim Crow segregation and religious intolerance tarnished America's international reputation.[22] American policymakers sought to use the construction of the Islamic Center to offer a different image to the world and, specifically, the Middle East. At the mosque's dedication, Eisenhower assured his "Islamic friends that under the American Constitution, under American tradition . . . this place of worship is as welcome as could be a similar edifice of any religion." He continued by praising "Islam" for its "contributions to the building of civilization." "The Muslim genius," he outlined, "has added much to the culture of all peoples. That genius has been a wellspring of science, commerce, and the arts and has provided for all of us many lessons in courage and hospitality." He affirmed that Americans and the Muslim diplomatic community shared "a sense of brotherhood" and a "strong bond of friendship with the Islamic nations." Eisenhower also issued a challenge to the American people to extend their Cold War ethic of Protestant, Catholic, and Jew to Muslims as well. Using a popular Cold War slogan, he declared that these four "monotheistic" faiths were jointly dedicated "to the peaceful progress of all men under one God." "Judaism, Christianity, and Islam" were "religions . . . closely linked to one another through their origins, teachings, and histories." As the president of the board of the Islamic Center added at the ceremony, Muslims were "four hundred fifty million" strong and came "from many different national states and far-flung parts of the world." They felt "joyful today that their religion and their culture have found such a magnificent and beautiful expression on American soil." One correspondent covering the ceremony additionally noted, "Moslems" across the globe naturally professed "strong democratic beliefs" and positioned themselves "firmly on the side of the West in the present ideological struggle of the world." At the dedication of the center, a multireligious national identity was being forged.[23]

Eisenhower's address fit squarely with his Cold War inclusivist vision of the United States. In the mid-1950s, the president irked some of his Protestant co-religionists in his refusal to invoke the "Judeo-Christian tradition" in public addresses due to its exclusivist character. In a private letter to his brother Milton, Eisenhower urged him to no longer use "the 'Judaic-Christian heritage'" in his writings and addresses and instead to "use a term on the order of 'religious heritage.'" He offered the following rationale: "this is for the reason that we should find some way of including the vast numbers of people who hold to the Islamic and Buddhist religions when we compare the religious world against the Communist world." Eisenhower's abandonment of "Judeo-Christian"—which he now perceived as too exclusivist—segued with his emerging commitment to forging a global multireligious coalition against "atheistic communism." Yet Eisenhower actually disgruntled some of his fellow Protestants, who argued that such terminology was too vague—a reminder that Protestant inclusivists were far from unified regarding the proper application and domestic outcomes of their multireligious approach. In the 1950s, some inclusivists were reluctant to yield too much cultural and social ground. Instead, they promoted inclusivism to preserve their prominent national standing and control religious pluralization on their own terms (Mosque in Washington 1957; Harris 1953; Washington is Rapidly Becoming the Spiritual Capital of Nation 1954; Washington Has Notable Religious Places to View 1963; Oakes 1961).

Internationally considered, however, the Protestant inclusivism of the 1950s had more unified intentions and outcomes in light of the Cold War confrontation with Soviet communism. In Eisenhower's official state visit to the Islamic Center, the State Department believed it had on its hands a public relations coup. It aggressively distributed copies of Eisenhower's 1957 speech and spread images of the mosque's construction through its embassies across the Middle East. Egyptian newspapers featured photographs of Eisenhower and his wife Mamie removing their shows at the mosque's entrance. Iranian

state media likewise broadcast Eisenhower's address. State propaganda portrayed the United States as a cosmopolitan and tolerant nation-state accepting of all Muslims. So too did the American press. Headlines praised the president for supporting "a monument to our belief in religious freedom" and heralded the mosque as a truly "international" institution. The mosque's minaret marked Washington as a "world city" in "the present global struggle twixt darkness and the light." Profiles on Washington, D.C. portrayed it as a new hub of religious diversity and pluralism, with one periodical even outlining a city-wide tour of "notable religious places to view," and another heralding the city as "the spiritual capital of the nation." (Nye 2004; Immerwahr 2019). For Eisenhower and the diplomatic establishment, American support for the Islamic Center testified to this pluralist ethic of religious inclusion.

Even then, Eisenhower's administration and its Protestant inclusivist supporters co-opted the Islamic Center as a tool in asserting a new American hegemony across the globe. The Islamic Center served as a crucial link between the United States and Muslim nation-states that were throwing off the West's old colonial order—historically maintained by Great Britain and France, America's major Cold War allies—in a wave of postwar decolonization. Following the demise of that old imperial order in the Second World War, America's postwar empire was not so much predicated upon colonies and American troops on the ground. Instead, it drew upon economic networks, trade, and the diplomatic tools of soft power: culture, religion, and rhetoric.[24] The mosque certainly stood as a symbol of international goodwill, yet beyond such overtures also lay America's concrete strategic interests: counteracting Soviet communism and ensuring ready access to Middle Eastern oil. As one correspondent writing on the Islamic Center bluntly commented at the time, "the economics of the Middle East and America are most complementary . . . Arab countries have the greatest oil reservoirs; America and its allies need this oil." Moreover, while the U.S. government used the mosque to broadcast its ostensibly democratic convictions, the partnerships it forged in the Middle East relied upon unsavory dictators who cared little in practice about democratic governance. Both King Faisal and Pahlavi, whose visits to the Islamic Center in the 1950s were highly touted in the American and international press, proved to be autocratic leaders who governed far from the ideals of American freedom and democracy. By instrumentalizing the Islamic Center as a tool of American diplomacy, Eisenhower's Cold War pluralist ethic in fact obscured deeper ways of "knowing religious others" that an inclusivist interreligious ethic might have encouraged. Eventually, the "weaponization" of faith in the Cold War frustrated some within the inclusivist wing of American Protestantism. In this regard, the dedication of the Islamic Center revealed the complex ways domestic and international concerns overlapped in religion and foreign policy. In the hands of different camps, the center at once could represent the creation of a multireligious civic identity at home but also the advancement of American hegemony abroad. It also exposed growing divisions within American Protestantism regarding the proper response to domestic religious pluralization and global decolonization (Kaemingk 2018).

3. Inclusive Ecumenism and Exclusive Populism

While the Islamic Center revealed much about American diplomacy and religion in the Cold War, it also exposed the longstanding fault lines within American Protestant circles regarding religious pluralism. For Protestant inclusivists like Eddy, the construction of the mosque in Washington reflected America's global mission to promote and defend globally valid liberal values. To be a Christian nation meant being a tolerant nation, some opined, inclusive of "religious others" and open to the forging of interfaith partnerships against secularism and totalitarianism. In this understanding, the United States could ostensibly remain a Christian nation while still welcoming non-Christian faiths. Religious pluralism could in fact be a decisively Christian practice. Moreover, for some inclusivists, branding pluralism as a Christian value stood as a way of preserving the prominent standing of Protestantism in a swiftly changing nation. Internationally, it could also help establish connections—and win American standing—with "religious partners" in

rapidly decolonizing regions (Americans Must Learn to Live Tolerantly with Peoples of Different Religious Beliefs 1957; Mosque in Washington 1957; Sawyer 1953). Scores of letters accordingly poured into the White House and local newspapers supporting Eisenhower's address echoing such sentiment. One letter writer celebrated America's founding principle of "religious liberty" and urged his fellow readers that "the people of the one God should stand together in these trying times against atheist communism." Another noted how Jesus Christ had ordered his followers "to love our neighbors . . . whether Moslem, Jewish, or whatever." Yet such love also had its limits: the author simultaneously suggested that "the people of the one God" could "stand together in these trying times against atheistic communism." A *New York Times* op-ed added, "We have no quarrel with Islam as a religious faith. The Moslems, who preach the brotherhood of man, are our brothers." Another writer praised "Moslems in Washington" for "their strong democratic beliefs." They were "firmly on the side of the West in the present ideological struggle of the world." (Johnson Seeks Prayer Center: Backs Inter Faith Building at Breakfast 1964, p. 8). For American inclusivists, the Cold War itself opened up the door of religious inclusion to Muslims, yet within the matrix of the Cold War, crossing the threshold of that door ultimately required fierce opposition to secular enemies. Whether this multireligious coalition against communism promoted genuine understanding between different religious groups also remained in question.

For a time, the tide of this cosmopolitan ethic of inclusion and interreligious partnership seemed to sweep over Washington. Following the Islamic Center's construction, the 1960s witnessed the passage of legislation that dismantled Jim Crow segregation and reformed America's restrictive and racist immigration quotas. With the Hart–Celler Act of 1965, America's gates were opened up to the world and, in particular, to migrants from the Eastern Hemisphere and Global South. With time, waves of migration from across the "decolonizing world" fostered further religious diversity within the United States. Reflecting the American government's inclusive Cold War inclination, policymakers in the 1960s continued to take action. At the 1964 presidential prayer breakfast, for instance, President Lyndon Johnson called for the construction in Washington of an "edifice fitting memorial to the God who made us all." Drawing inspiration from the United Nation's "Meditation Room," which had been opened in 1952 as an interreligious shrine in the U.N. Building, Johnson envisioned a "center of prayer open to all men of all faiths at all times" at the very heart of Washington. Alongside memorials to Washington and Jefferson, a new memorial dedicated to the "Almighty God" could witness to the American ideal of religious liberty and "government under God." In the Cold War confrontation with communism, an all-out, pro-religion ethic of pluralism found expression amongst Washington leaders and some ecumenical inclusivists (New Mosque and Islamic Center Announced for New York 1969, p. 279; Fowler 1970; Islamic Center Here Seek Funds Abroad 1970, p. 39).

While new interfaith centers were envisioned, announcements of the construction of new mosques also began to punctuate American newspaper headlines by the late 1960s and early 1970s, an indication, in part, of the initial effects of immigration reform. For instance, by the end of the 1960s, Muslim diplomats and the Muslim community of New York City announced the planned construction of the "Islamic Center of New York," which would be located in close proximity to the United Nations. In addition to New York's Muslim community of roughly 30,000 families, the planning for the USD 19 million mosque and cultural center drew upon the leadership of U.N. ambassadors from "25 predominantly Islamic nations in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East." Ambassador Agha Shahi of Pakistan spoke of the mosque's cosmopolitan vision and purpose, stating that its strategic location in New York—"the capital of the world"—reflected the impulse to bring together "all the races of mankind, and all the living cultures" to "live and work together and grow in mutual understanding." Beyond this cosmopolitan ethic, the center was designed to put the Islamic community on New York's map—and the nation's too. With a school, library, museum, bazaar, and apartment complex all included in the design, the center signified

the public-facing aspirations of the Islamic community in New York City (Mead 2002; Sutton 2014).

Beyond this inclusive ecumenism, however, the American public, and in particular pockets of American Protestantism, had also been shaped by what some historians have characterized as a populist, Jacksonian nationalism, which when combined with fundamentalist Protestant Christianity, called for spiritual and cultural warfare against perceived religious enemies at home and abroad.[25] Just as some Protestant modernists were recasting their faith in a cosmopolitan, inclusive fashion, so too were Protestant fundamentalists particularly seeking to defend what they saw as America's rightful religious identity. For these fundamentalists, God had chosen America to be a Christian nation, a proponent and defender of fundamentalist creeds, limited government, free enterprise, and civic liberty. Defending America's biblical, political, and economic identity was thus a sacred task. Not only were they called to defend the infallible nature of Scripture, but so too were they to thwart collectivist trends in their nation, such as the League of Nations, the New Deal, or the Great Society. Their mission in part found its roots in the rise of dispensational premillennialism at the turn of the twentieth century. Far from leading them to withdraw from public life, the portent of Christ's apocalyptic second coming led them to "occupy until his return." Anticipating the eschaton, fundamentalists emphasized the importance of conversionary mission and the perceived waywardness of non-Christian religions. Collaborating with Muslims was foolhardy, fundamentalists claimed, because Islam erred from the truth. They certainly called on their nation to oppose Soviet communism but downplayed the need for interfaith alliances, save for their support of "covenant brothers" in Israel. Their end-times prophecies naturally led them to support the Zionist cause (Spenser 1964; Roosevelt 1962).

For all these reasons, the construction of mosques and interfaith centers, and the presence of presidents at their dedications, struck at the very heart of the exclusive ethic of American Protestants. Not only did it deliver a blow to America's purportedly Christian identity, it also was the wrong way to conduct domestic and foreign policy. Exclusivists accordingly attacked the construction of the mosque along with efforts to establish multifaith prayer rooms in the United Nations and U.S. Capitol building. They warned that these initiatives proved an "insidious menace" that "threatened the very foundation of Christian civilization." Expressing their fear of collectivist movements, they forewarned such interfaith endeavors would quicken the creation of a "universal theocratic state," a vessel the Antichrist would use in the end times. Another exclusivist author warned that "a temple" would be "erected in Washington D.C. for 'the citizen of the world' to develop 'universal understanding' in place of his 'nationalist limitations.'" Such a "modern-day Tower of Babel" would bring together "the six international faiths: Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam." It would lead the American people astray as it fostered a "new world religion" and a "new group of world servers."[26] In these ways, the construction of non-Christian faith centers in the Cold War activated exclusivist fears of the end times and emboldened them further to reclaim their nation from ostensibly anti-Christian forces (Gaston 2019, pp. 230–56).

The dedication of "America's Mosque" thus proved a flashpoint within an ongoing struggle between inclusivist and exclusivist religious wings in the United States. For some inclusivists, its construction aligned with an international identity and purpose: to foster peace, understanding, and multilateral partnerships amongst different religions and nationalities. Its construction also overlapped wholly with America's tradition of religious liberty. Beyond this desire for genuine dialogue and cooperation, other Protestant inclusivists supported the mosque in order to control religious pluralization on their own terms and maintain Protestant hegemony at home. Some Protestant inclusivists thus showed a willingness to expand America's "tri-faith" identity to include Muslims. Internationally, such a move had clear implications in building a stronger front against "Soviet irreligion." In contrast, exclusivist Protestants opposed such domestic endeavors because they jeopardized America's singularly Christian foundation. For premillennial

evangelicals, such developments were additionally surefire signs of the end times. Not only did the mosque threaten their understanding of America's Christian identity, it also appeared as a certain step towards the establishment of a world state that would dominate the globe.

4. The Civic and Religious Ramifications of America's Mosque

The construction of the Islamic Center thus revealed the growing bifurcation of American religious identity between inclusivist and exclusivist wings. In their abandonment of a more exclusivist Christian nationalism, the cosmopolitan, inclusivist wing of American Protestantism, joined by American Muslims, stood primed to embrace Eisenhower's ethic of interfaith toleration and unity against irreligious foes. From the 1970s onwards, this wing promoted new understandings of the United States as a "multireligious nation."[27]

In the heyday of conflict with the Soviet Union—the "evil empire"—however, even once exclusivist Christian nationalists eventually found their way on board with forging such multireligious partnerships. In the 1980s, for instance, Protestant evangelical leaders waxed poetically about Afghani mujahideen as Islamic "freedom fighters," propelled forwards by their devotion to faith in a "holy war" against the Soviet invaders in Afghanistan (McAlister 2018). The evangelical warming to the mujahideen in the 1980s stood as a reminder that multireligious coalition-building in the Cold War could very well serve an express utilitarian purpose. In multiple instances, it was not necessarily intended to promote true inclusion and dialogue at home as it was meant to counteract the Soviet Union abroad (or to preserve the privileged domestic standing of Protestants).

As the religious demographics of the nation began to shift in the 1970s and the Cold War came to a close in the late 1980s, however, the vitriolic response to the construction of America's mosque reappeared. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 soured some Americans' view of Islam, a religion whose complex sectarian divisions many knew little about. When the United States lost its bipolar foe by the 1990s, American Protestant evangelicals began to champion a new "global struggle with Islam" across the "10/40 Window"—a geographic paradigm designed to replace the "two worlds" framework of the Cold War. Even their premillennial theories began to shift, as some evangelicals increasingly hypothesized that the Antichrist would actually arise out of the Middle East as opposed to a revived Roman Empire (McAlister 2018, pp. 213–30; Kish 2017). While American Protestants had largely lost their outsized influence upon foreign policymaking in Washington by the turn of a new century, the inclusivist and exclusivist values they had outlined in the 1950s and 1960s still had staying cultural power amongst a predominantly Protestant public, as the smashing 1990s and early 2000s commercial success of the *Left Behind* book series, centered on apocalyptic warfare in the Middle East, in part suggested. Protestant evangelicals' Jacksonian penchant for unilateralism and the defense of liberty likewise made them some of the most fervent supporters of America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. All the while, documented instances of Islamophobia—including targeted attacks on mosques and public burnings of the Quran—rose across the United States (Lipka 2015).

While the debate over religious pluralism and American civic–religious identity experienced flashpoints in the Cold War, it ultimately extended beyond that bipolar epoch into an era shaped by a global war on terror. With Islam projected to be the second largest non-Christian religion by 2050, second only to the "religiously unaffiliated," the inclusivist and exclusivist convictions forged in the Cold War, as well as civic adherence to the constitutional principle of religious freedom, remain highly relevant within the contemporary United States (Lipka 2015).

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Notes

1 For a comparable study on how American Catholics used religious space to solidify their presence as Americans, see: (Tweed 2011).

2 See (Eisenhower 1957, 1958). On the history of the Islamic Center, see: (Abdul-Rauf 1978). On the role of religion in Cold War diplomacy, see: (Inboden 2008; Herzog 2011).

3 On the role of religion in Cold War America, with particular attention to its status as a near civic duty, see: (Kruse 2015; Finstuen 2009).

4 On the rise of tri-faith idealism, see: (Schultz 2011).

5 For more on this framework of Protestant inclusivism and exclusivism, see: (Howard 2021).

6 On the rise of this missionary cosmopolitanism and religious polarization, see: (Hollinger 2017; Zubovich 2022). On the history of Islam in America, see: (GhaneaBassiri 2010).

7 For recent scholarship on Christian nationalism, see: (McCullough 2014; Edwards 2018; Perry and Whitehead 2020).

8 On the history of Protestant modernism, see: (Hutchinson 1989, 1992; Hollinger 2013). On this more utilitarian, inclusivist approach of the mainline establishment, see: (Coffman 2013; Gaston 2019).

9 On post-1945 American empire, see in particular: (Immerwahr 2019).

10 See (McCullough 2014). See also: (Strong 1885). As documented by multiple historians, American Protestants were notoriously anti-Catholic throughout the nineteenth and into the mid-twentieth centuries.

11 On 1920s nativism and religious intolerance, see: (Gaston 2019, pp. 46–71; Gordon 2017). On Catholic responses, see (McGreevy 2004).

12 On this nineteenth century Protestant mindset, see: (Conroy-Krutz 2015, pp. 19–50; Gin-Lum 2022).

13 On the international emergence of American "missionary cosmopolitanism," see: (Hollinger 2017). On the history of Protestant modernism, see: (Hutchinson 1989, 1992; Hollinger 2013).

14 See (Missions 1932). Howard, The Faiths of Others, pp. 79–135. *Re-Thinking Missions*. See also: (Hutchinson 1987).

15 On these multilateral commitments, see: (Zubovich 2022; Engel et al. 2018; Reynolds 2016; Leustean 2014; Edwards 2012).

16 Re-Thinking Missions, p. 33.

17 Francis B. Sayre to William Eddy, 14 December 1938 and 8 February 1939, Princeton University Library, Department of Special Collections, Mudd Manuscript Library, William Eddy Papers, Box 8, Folder 5.

18 William Eddy, "How Arabs See the West Today," Address at the Middle East Institute, 19 December 1950, Series IV, Box 1, Princeton University, Seely Mudd Manuscript Library, Department of Special Collections, William A. Eddy Papers. On Eddy's dynamic career, see: (Sutton 2019).

19 For this more utilitarian approach of Protestant mainline inclusivists, see (Coffman 2013; Gaston 2019).

20 See (Sawyer 1953). For more on American diplomacy in the region, see: (Duran 2013).

21 See for instance: Ahmed Al-Rawi, "The Campaign of Truth Program: U.S. Propaganda in Iraq during the Early 1950s," in (Muehlenbeck 2012).

22 Eisenhower, "Remarks." President of the Board, quoted in (Abdul-Rauf 1978, p. 74; Sawyer 1953). On Cold War American perceptions of the Middle East, see (McAlister 2005).

23 Dwight Eisenhower to Milton Eisenhower, 1957, in (Chandler 1970). See also: (Gaston 2019, pp. 174–83).

24 On the history of crude, religion, and the American turn to the Middle East, see: (Dochuk 2019; Sawyer 1953).

25 See (Sutton 2014; Hummel 2019). On postwar American evangelicalism and its fundamentalist roots, see: (Marsden 1980; Carpenter 1997).

26 Notably, some within the mid-century evangelical Protestant camp—namely the media-savvy "neo-evangelicals"—eschewed the caustic opposition of populist exclusivism and turned to broader inclusive categories in order to maintain Protestant Christianity's privileged standing in Cold War America. Billy Graham, for instance, at times turned to a pluralistic Judeo–Christian framework in the 1950s in his Cold War crusade against communism. Graham in this sense paralleled the approach of some ecumenical Protestant inclusivists, who saw their embrace of religious pluralism as a means to preserve their privileged standing in light of unfolding religious pluralization. In the 1970s, evangelical Protestant leaders would again draw upon this approach, only using even broader categories, such as "family values," to build wider coalitions with religious allies against what they saw as the growing tide of secular humanism. As such, American Protestants did not necessarily fit into a clean-cut binary of liberal ecumenists promoting inclusivism and conservative evangelicals advancing exclusivism. Inclusivism and exclusivism were in one sense two parts of a single strategy of preserving Protestant standing at home. For more on this utilitarian approach, see: (Gaston 2019; Buss 2003; Hummel 2019).

27 See for instance: (Wilson 1981).

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