THE CENSURE OF A BISHOP:
CHURCH AND STATE IN THE MCCARTHY ERA

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“Bishop Oxnam has been to the Communist front what Man O’War was to thoroughbred horse racing.” On March 17, 1953, California Representative Donald L. Jackson spoke these words on the House of Representatives floor and by extension behind a wall of Congressional immunity, adding his voice to a chorus of anticommunist rhetoric that had plagued the country since before the end of World War II. His comments were directed toward Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, Methodist Bishop of the Washington, DC area, who had recently questioned the authority of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to investigate church groups and members of the clergy. Continuing his diatribe, Jackson went on to say that, “having served God on Sunday and the Communist front for the balance of the week, over such a long period of time, it is no great wonder that the Bishop sees an investigating committee in every vestry.”

Jackson’s oratory, which earned him a standing ovation from his colleagues, did not go unanswered by Oxnam. Four months later, on July 21, 1953, Bishop Oxnam appeared before HUAC in the Caucus Room of the Old House Office Building for a hearing he had requested in order to clear himself of any charges associating him with Communism. In a statement he had prepared, the Bishop attacked the Committee. “It is alleged that the Committee has files on a million individuals. ... The preparation and publication of these files puts into the hands of irresponsible individuals and agencies a wicked tool. It gives rise to a new and vicious expression of Ku-Kluxism, in which an innocent person may be beaten by unknown assailants, who are cloaked in anonymity and at times immunity, and whose whips are cleverly constructed lists of so-called subversive organizations.”

Garfield Bromley Oxnam, born in 1891, made his first significant mark in The Methodist Church, then called the Methodist Episcopal Church, through his leadership of the Church of All Nations in Los Angeles in the early 1920s. Offering among other things a free clinic, church school, library, and youth camp open to individuals of all races and religions, the

1Congress, House, Representative Donald L. Jackson, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., Congressional Record (March 17, 1953): 2024.
Church of All Nations testified to Oxnam’s liberal Protestantism and his commitment to social causes and the Social Gospel. His acquaintance with some of Los Angeles’ union leaders demonstrated Oxnam’s sympathy with some of the goals of labor. At the same time, Oxnam preached nonviolence and did not embrace Marxism as other Methodists, such as Harry Ward, would do. He refused to support the Industrial Workers of the World and forcefully condemned Communism in the post-World War II period, at one point calling it a “clear and present danger.” After leaving the Church of All Nations in 1927 to teach at the Boston University School of Theology, Oxnam went on to serve as President of DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, as president of the Federal Council of Churches, and as Bishop of The Methodist Church for the Omaha, New York, and Washington DC areas.

The Bishop’s comments at his 1953 hearing were part of a larger conflict between HUAC and various religious groups and individuals. They illustrated both the high level of emotion that was present in a period marked by the fear of Communism and the fact that such fear penetrated the complexities of the relationship between church and state. The United States’ Cold War with the Soviet Union brought with it an atmosphere of distrust of anyone who could be accused of having Communist sympathies of any nature, but what kind of impact did anti-Communism in the United States have on the religious lives of Americans? Conversely, what role did religion play in the McCarthy era?

This article seeks to answer these questions by examining the Oxnam hearing itself and reactions to that hearing. The public response shows that McCarthyism affected, but did not destroy how people viewed the principle of “separation.” For a majority of Americans, the perceived Communist threat impacted their judgment of religion and religious leaders. Some argued that the danger of Communist subversion warranted government checks on clergy. At the same time, HUAC’s apparent violation of the principle of the separation of church and state, with its investigation of the Bishop and other church officials, undermined the Committee’s credibility. The relationship between anti-Communism and the principle of the separation of church and state was complicated in this era, as Oxnam’s case illustrated. Both ideas affected and were influenced by the other.

Ever since Thomas Jefferson first coined the phrase “the separation of church and state” in his writings on the first amendment, the dialog over its meaning has been contentious and changing. In the introduction to Church and State in American History, co-editors John F. Wilson and Donald L. Drakeman looked at the relationship between church and state in terms of spheres. Strict interpretation of the term “separation of church and state”

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2Miller, 83 – 85, 531, 103 - 347.
implies that each sphere exists apart from the other. In actuality, throughout U.S. history these spheres have intersected one another. If or how that intersection occurs often depends on the way the American people at the time interpret the principle of “separation.”

How do we understand the nature of the relationship in the early Cold War, when civil liberties were threatened by anti-Communism? The United States in the post-World War II era experienced a religious boom. Church membership from 1950 to 1959 grew from 57 to 63.3 percent of the population. By 1958, 97 percent of Americans claimed to believe in God. At the same time, the country hung under a cloud which scholars have come to refer to as McCarthyism, a phenomenon of vivid anti-Communism characterized by an intense fear and hysteria that penetrated virtually every aspect of American society. Postwar tension and mutual distrust between the United States and the Soviet Union accompanied an increasing fear of Communism at home.

Certain personalities and organizations inevitably emerge in any discussion of McCarthyism. Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, who lends his name to the phenomenon, capitalized on the frenzy and touched off a witch-hunt in his infamous 1950 speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, in which he claimed to have uncovered the names of 205, or 81, or 57, Communists in the State Department. Meanwhile, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with the untiring leadership of J. Edgar Hoover, helped to create an “anticommunist consensus” by directing a campaign of harassment against the Left. But the vehicle of anti-Communism of most concern to this article was the House Un-American Activities Committee. On August 12, 1938, Representative and first chairman of HUAC, Martin Dies, spoke on the purpose of the brand-new Committee:

The Committee has no preconceived views of what the truth is respecting the subject matter of this inquiry. Its sole purpose is to discover the truth and report it as it is. ... In investigating un-American activities, it must be borne in mind that because we do not agree with opinions or philosophies of others, does not make such opinions of philosophies un-American. ... The utmost care therefore must be observed to distinguish clearly between what is obviously un-American, and what is more or less an honest difference of opinion with respect to some economic, political or social question.

Though Dies’ statement presented a word of caution against abuse of power and unfounded accusations, it provided no real guidelines to define what kinds of activities were to be considered un-American and suggested that the committee was able to determine anything “obviously un-American.” As a result, as HUAC was swept up in an anti-Communist frenzy in the McCarthy era, it probed government officials, the labor movement, the entertainment industry, and education, as well as religion.

Protestantism in the postwar era, of course, did not exist in a vacuum. McCarthyism affected it as well. Though the nature of religion, or even Protestantism, in these years is well beyond the scope of this article, it is obviously necessary to keep a few trends in mind when examining how Americans defined the relationship between church and state. First, as previously noted, religion thrived during this period. The Methodist Church, along with several other Protestant denominations, witnessed a dramatic increase in membership. In 1951, it reported 9,065,727 members. By 1959, that number had increased to 9,671,000. Although they do not reflect the level of involvement or commitment of each member, these figures suggest that organized religion was playing a greater role in the lives of more Americans. Secondly, the success of the ecumenical movement, most evident in the increasing relevance of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the National Council of Churches (NCC) reflected a tendency of the Protestant church community to become more involved in national and world affairs that often collided with church issues.

Finally, the Protestant churches in this period, along with other religious groups, had to adapt to immense changes that were occurring in the United States. As a nation, America was attempting to redefine its place in the world in the aftermath of World War II and amidst its conflict with the Soviet Union. Protestants, Catholics, Jews, atheists, and others faced the challenges of a political culture that witnessed a pattern of suburban growth and affluence (against a background of urban poverty), a population boom, reassessment of race relations that exploded with the commencement of the Civil Rights Movement, and the rising importance of consumerism.

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10Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstracts of the United States (74th and 81st editions), Washington, DC.: 57 – 58, 46 – 48. These statistics include only those membership numbers of the Methodist Church as it was composed in the fifties. In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Methodist Protestant Church united to form The Methodist Church.

11Even as the ecumenical movement was strengthening among mainstream Protestants, division between the churches of the NCC and more conservative Protestants became more apparent. The American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) was formed by conservatives who protested the “liberal” NCC. This division between mainstream and conservative Protestantism would become especially clear in reaction to the controversy surrounding Oxnard. While the National Council of Churches strongly supported the Bishop, others like Carl McIntire, who had been instrumental in the formation of the ACCC, attacked Oxnard as a representative of “the popular, radical, pro-communistic element in religious circles in America.”
The House Un-American Activities Committee’s probe into religious circles began in 1948, when it published a pamphlet titled, *100 Things You Should Know About Communism and Religion*. The pamphlet denied that HUAC was in any way investigating religion and claimed that its purpose was to, “protect your religion and faith from Communist attack by showing you exactly what the Communists are up to.” It specifically listed two “suspicious” Methodist organizations—the Epworth League, which had not existed since 1939, and the Methodist Federation for Social Action, which the pamphlet claimed was “a tool of the Communist Party.” Two years later in 1950, an article entitled “Methodism’s Pink Fringe,” by Stanley High, appeared in the *Reader’s Digest*. This article implied that the Methodist Federation for Social Action was a Communist front organization and questioned the loyalty of the Federation’s executive secretary Jack McMichael, and former secretary Harry Ward, among others. It generated a variety of responses within The Methodist Church. Several church members, including Bishop Oxnam who wrote a reply to the *Digest* that was never printed, condemned the High article. At the same time, the Methodist Council of Bishops proceeded to distance itself from the Federation as a result of High’s claims.

Joseph B. Matthews, an extreme anti-Communist who had recently been named chief investigator of Senator McCarthy’s Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, directed yet another attack on Protestant clergy in a July 1953 article in *The American Mercury*. In “Reds and Our Churches,” Matthews went so far as to say that, “the largest single group supporting the Communist apparatus in the United States today is composed of Protestant clergymen. ... Clergymen outnumber professors two to one in supporting the Communist-front apparatus of the Kremlin conspiracy.” Protest against this article was immediate. Democratic members of McCarthy’s subcommittee, as well as religious publications such as the *Christian Century* denounced it. In the November 17, 1953 issue of *Look*, Bishop Oxnam along with the Reverend Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr refuted Matthew’s charges. Oxnam concluded by urging everyone to, “have done with this untrustworthy, injudicious, insincere and inaccurate attack upon the Protestant clergy.”

Oxnam’s words took on a personal meaning. Only four months before the response was published, he voluntarily went before HUAC to counter the

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2HUAC, *100 Things*, 15.
5Ellwood, 109.
charge made by Representative Jackson that he had been working as a
Communist front-man. Bishop Oxnam had been publicly critical of the prac­tices of HUAC in various articles and speeches in the early 1950s, but a
statement by HUAC chair Illinois Representative Harold H. Velde, who had
suggested that the Committee might begin investigating various religious
groups and members of the clergy, marked the beginning of the events lead­ing to Oxnam’s hearing. The Bishop’s response to Velde led to
Representative Jackson’s remarks on the House floor. “I believe the
Communist party is a conspiracy and that conspirators should be discovered,
tried, and if guilty, punished. I believe that the Federal Bureau of
Investigation is far better qualified for that duty than Mr. Velde’s
Committee.”

In order to defend himself and respond to charges levied against him by
the Committee, Oxnam requested a hearing before HUAC. His appeal was
granted and the date was set for July 21, 1953. The session lasted ten hours
and received extensive media coverage. The Committee consisted of five
Republicans and four Democrats. Staff members present included Counsel
Robert L. Kunzig. Because Oxnam had requested the hearing, an exception
to the rule that disallowed any kind of oral statement by the witness was
made and he was permitted to speak for fifteen minutes before question­ing began. In his statement, Oxnam denied having any Communist sympathies.
“When I declare, ‘I believe in God, the Father, Almighty,’ I affirm the theis­tic faith and strike at the fundamental fallacy of communism, which is athe­

ism.” He went on to criticize the methods of the committee, particularly
regarding the release of individual files. Following his statement, committee
members questioned the Bishop about his role in various organizations as
well as his relationship with others in The Methodist Church, including Jack
McMichael and Harry Ward who were identified by committee members as
Communists during the hearing. Equipped with an immense amount of
notes, the Bishop apparently answered each question to the satisfaction of
the committee, which moved at the end of the hearing that it had, “no record
of any Communist Party affiliation or membership by Bishop Oxnam.”

Nationally, Oxnam’s hearing attracted wide attention. Media representa­tives from across the country were sent to cover the event, which took place
in a very crowded room. According to the *Christian Century*, “an hour
before the hearing was due to open, capitol police were having a hard time
holding back the crowd which sought admission. The room was packed long
before the gavel fell.” The Bishop later described the scene in his book, *I
Protest*. “Every square foot between the front row and the Committee bench

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18Quoted in Roy, 233.
19Congress, House, Hearings Before the Un-American Activities Committee, *Testimony of
Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam*: 3588.
20*Testimony of Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam*, 3801.
was crowded by journalists.” After noting the attention his hearing had gained, Oxnam related that, at that point, he began to question the wisdom of appearing before HUAC. Nevertheless, he decided in the end that “silence seemed no longer the answer. ... [C]hurchmen must speak out everywhere.”22

The nature of the media coverage and the public response to Oxnam’s hearing not only revealed that the nation supported the Bishop and condemned HUAC’s attacks. It also served as a way of discerning the public definition of the principle of the separation of church and state within a McCarthyist environment. The national attention this event attracted proved its importance. Newspapers across the country, from major papers such as the New York Times to small, local ones such as the Rockford Register Republic in Rockford, Illinois, printed stories of the Oxnam-HUAC confrontation on the front page. The New York Times included Oxnam’s complete opening statement and U.S. News and World Report printed the entire transcript of the hearing in its August 7 issue. Oxnam supporters collected accounts of newspaper articles on the hearing in a scrapbook and presented it to the Bishop with the words, “To a Happy Warrior.... Whose strength is as the strength of ten.”23 The scrapbook listed the states alphabetically, each accompanied by various local news clippings concerning the event.

Media response overwhelmingly favored Bishop Oxnam. According to Robert Moats Miller, Oxnam’s biographer, 80 percent of the editorials covering the hearing backed the Bishop.24 Time labeled Oxnam the “winner,” and Newsweek called the hearing the “Bishop’s Attack.” The title of the Philadelphia Inquirer’s piece is representative of several with its clear expression of the success of Oxnam’s challenge, “Oxnam Charges ‘False Witness’ to Red Probers: Methodist Leader is Applauded at House Committee Hearing While Investigators are Jeered.”25 Support for Oxnam fell into two categories. All reports favorable to Oxnam were highly critical of the House committee, but that criticism tended to focus on two distinct HUAC flaws: its shoddy investigative practices and its violation of the principle of the separation of church and state. Both sets of criticism of the committee revealed how the public defined church and state relations.

By far, the majority of Oxnam’s supporters chastised HUAC for its inaccurate, misleading charges of un-Americanism. HUAC tactics appeared bent on trapping the Methodist. At one point in the hearing, Robert Kunzig, the

24Miller, 581.
Committee’s chief counsel, asked Oxnam about a meeting of the Friends of Soviet Russia where the Bishop had allegedly spoken more than thirty years prior. Many perceived this questioning as an indication of the shameful, unfair practices of the committee. An editorial in the 
*Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Kentucky) stated, “Nevertheless the Bishop’s ordeal has been valuable. It has proved what many people have been reluctant to admit, that the procedures of some investigating committees are grossly unfair and that their methods of gathering information are slip-shod.” The 
*Milwaukee Journal* called the hearing “a lesson to America,” and continued, “... we run grave risks of destroying our way of life unless we curb the un-American tendency of Congressional Committees to set themselves up, without rules of fair play or even of common decency, as arbiters of loyalty.” A piece in the 
*St. Louis Post-Dispatch* concluded, “Revulsion of the public conscience against the excesses of congressional investigators is long overdue.” Columnist Bruce Catton had biting words for the Committee. “Not only was HUAC forced to eat its words in the matter of Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam; it got laughed at to boot. ... We are all a little better off because one fearless man in the witness chair was able to rebuke the Committee counsel for his tactics. ... No matter what happens afterward, Mr. Velde and his merry men are never going to look the same.”

The Christian news media generally mirrored the response of the secular press with its support for Oxnam and criticism of HUAC tactics. The 
*Christian Advocate* not surprisingly stood behind its Bishop, painting him as a kind of stalwart of truth, calling the hearing a “vindication,” and printing an article which presented media coverage from across the country to demonstrate the favorable public reaction that Oxnam received. The 
*Christian Science Monitor*, in a response typical of both secular and Protestant coverage, saw Oxnam’s hearing as proof that the Committee needed to reform its methods to practice “better anticommunism.”

Across the country, people supported the Bishop in letters to the editor and through direct correspondence with Oxnam. Characteristic of the letters to the editor that appeared concerning the hearing, one person writing to the 
*St. Louis Post-Dispatch* defined the significance of the event in this way, “In thus appearing and exposing the vicious and un-American methods of the Committee, the Bishop rendered a patriotic service.” Wilbur F. Murray, of Bethesda, Maryland in his letter to the 
*Washington Post* pointed out that media coverage of the hearing undermined the committee and damaged its credibility in the eyes of the public. The public paid close attention to this

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*Inquirer,* July 22, 1953.


27*Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Kentucky), July 23, 1953, editorial page; 
*Milwaukee Journal*, July 27, 1953, 14; 
*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 22, 1953, 2c; 
Bruce Catton, “Witness for Democracy: Bishop Oxnarm Speaks His Mind,” 
*Nation*, August 1, 1953, 86.

28*Christian Advocate*, August 6, 1953; 
event, which is evidenced by the amount of mail that the Bishop received. Most of these letters illustrated the themes of support for Oxnam that we have noted thus far. They both praised the religious leader for his courage and denounced HUAC’s methods. Though there were letters critical of the Bishop, admonishing him for his association with organizations the government considered subversive, the great majority applauded his actions. Ed Conners, of Chicago, wrote to “congratulate [the Bishop] on [his] fine work in fighting the witch-hunters who would destroy democracy in the U.S.” These letters and others like them suggested that Bishop Oxnam’s encounter with HUAC impacted the way people began to perceive the committee and its witch-hunting tactics. The irrational accusations of McCarthyism were beginning to be exposed and the Oxnam hearing helped to undermine them.

Officially, The Methodist Church stood behind its Bishop. Annual Conferences across the country sent Oxnam copies of resolutions passed which supported him and condemned HUAC. At its annual meeting in Omaha, Nebraska, the Methodist Council of Bishops issued a statement asserting that, “these recent accusations and insinuations have been answered in detail by him ... and his statements, clearly and forthrightly made, are convincing to all unbiased and fair-minded men.” Similarly, the 1953 annual conference of the Association of Council Secretaries offered Bishop Oxnam its “deep appreciation for his courageous leadership in maintaining the great American tradition of freedom of speech and freedom to debate all the issues of the day.”

This reaction to the Oxnam hearing, which claimed that Oxnam served as a courageous figure fighting the shoddy practices of an out-of-control House Committee, demonstrated two important points, both of which are illustrated in a letter written to the editor of the Christian Science Monitor on July 28, 1953. Writing to applaud press coverage of the hearing, Warren Waldo wrote, “Now, we have no quarrel with congressional committees that honestly try to root out [C]ommunism in the nation. It is necessary. But it seems to me that under cover of this patriotic and necessary action, some of our congressmen are trying to discredit all social thinkers and liberal workers in America.” Waldo acknowledged the necessity of searching for Communism while condemning and questioning the methods of anticommunists in extending that search to others, in this case to “social thinkers and liberal workers.” Waldo’s comments suggested that questioning HUAC’s methods was not the same thing as rejecting the rationale behind its actions. Many, like Waldo, still believed that it was important to “root out [C]ommuni-

29St. Louis Post-Dispatch, July 30, 1953, 2b; Washington Post, July 24, 1953.
nism in the nation.” Communism was still considered a threat. Most of the support that Bishop Oxnam received did not consider the investigation of religion in order to uncover Communism a violation of the principle of the separation of church and state. Waldo made no reference to this idea in his assertion of the necessity to uncover Communism, and other critics of HUAC’s tactics also seemed to assume that “rooting out [C]ommunism” was necessary.

Even Bishop Oxnam himself, though he clearly objected to the methods the House committee used, did not oppose investigation. He cooperated fully during his hearing, even though committee members accused two other Methodists, Jack McMichael and Harry Ward, of being Communists. Oxnam conceded that Ward took “the Communist position.” He went even further with McMichael, claiming that he believed “that Jack McMichael was tied up with the Communist group.”33 Though many Americans were able to criticize HUAC for unfairly accusing Bishop Oxnam of having Communist sympathies, they did not go so far as to question the government’s right to investigate the churches. These Americans accommodated their perception of the relationship between the spiritual and political spheres to an anti-Communist environment. Fear of the influence of Communism made it acceptable for the government to monitor church officials.

Not everyone ignored the implications of the Oxnam hearing on the nature of the relationship between religion and the state. Though not as numerous as those who criticized HUAC’s sloppy methods of gathering and publishing misleading information on certain individuals, these critics pointed out the flagrant violation of the principle of the separation of church and state that existed in HUAC’s investigation of the political ideals of a clergyman. Doris Fleeson’s editorial in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch stated this connection most ominously in the title, “Oxnam Hearing Forces Church to Account to Civil Power: First time in history of U.S. that clergy has been called to justify political opinions.” Other papers, such as the Atlanta Constitution, printed a piece by columnist Thomas L. Stokes, who wrote that the “assumption of authority by the House committee over Protestant churches would, of course, be a direct invasion by the state into religion. ... Religious freedom is one of the great issues down through history, and if the House committee intends to infringe it, then it must be prepared for the consequences.”34 Stokes suggested here that HUAC and other McCarthyites, like J. B. Matthews, had bitten off more than they could chew in threatening the religious freedom of Americans. Because freedom of religion was something many Americans held dear, especially in a period when religion seemed to be becoming important to more and more people, a threat to that

34St. Louis Post-Dispatch, July 23, 1953; Atlanta Constitution, July 24, 1953.
freedom could undermine HUAC’s credibility a great deal, according to Stokes.

Letters to the editors of several newspapers revealed that some did note the clashing of the religious and civil spheres. A letter printed in the Chicago Daily Sun-Times claimed that, “every honest man knows that even to insinuate that any clergyman of standing in America, whether Jewish, Protestant or Catholic, is a Communist or sympathetic with [C]ommunism, is not only nonsense but also dangerous to our cherished freedoms of thought and religion.” In assessing the Oxnam hearing, a reader of the Courier-Journal noted one of the effects of the postwar red scare. “The threat of [C]ommunism, apparently, has so blinded people that they have forgotten on what our liberty rests and that freedom cannot be preserved by violating its principles.” Some in The Methodist Church also noted the violation of the principle of the separation of church and state in the Oxnam hearing. Though most annual conferences passed resolutions which “expressed confidence” in Bishop Oxnam, the Indiana Conference of 1953 went even farther in challenging the right of Congressional committees “to sit in judgment upon the traditional beliefs, doctrines, and workings” of the church.36

These examples clearly show that the impact of the Oxnam hearing on the principle of the separation of church and state was not lost on everyone. Though McCarthyism colored the way many Americans perceived the principle, others were not so willing to acknowledge the necessity of allowing civil authorities investigative powers over clergy despite the threat of Communism. The principle of the separation of church and state was deeply entrenched in the United States and, although McCarthyism could threaten it temporarily, it could not kill it completely. Some saw dangerous implications in the Oxnam hearing, which included a threat to religious freedom but extended beyond it as well. In the words of an editorial in the New Republic, “This, then, is what we need to grasp about the Oxnam hearing: it is a new encroachment; the congressional committees are moving in upon the churches. ... It is required by what the committees are groping toward: the substitution of enforced conformity for independent judgment, and of authoritarianism for the American founding principles.”37

Reaction to the hearing overwhelmingly supported Oxnam, but critics of the Bishop were also present. On one extreme stood those anti-Communists who detested Oxnam’s affiliation with groups and organizations with Communist leanings and tended to side with HUAC. Those on the far right had been attacking Bishop Oxnam long before the hearing in 1953. In 1946,

37New Republic, August 3, 1953.
Elizabeth Dilling, author of *The Red Network*, published *Red Churchmen*, which condemned Oxnam for his early work in the Church of All Nations in Los Angeles, for his affiliation with the "Communist-aiding American Civil Liberties Union," the Federal Council of Churches (which she called the "Federal Council of Anti-Christ"), the American League Against War and Fascism, and for his support of "dirty plays" like Robert Sherwood’s *Idiot’s Delight* and "Communistic Jews."\(^3\) The tireless anti-Communist Dr. Carl McIntire, editor of the *Christian Beacon* and a prominent leader in the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC), weighed in to attack Oxnam in his pamphlet "Bishop Oxnam: Prophet of Marx." According to McIntire, "As perhaps no other man, Oxnam represents the popular, radical, pro-[C]ommunistic element in religious circles in America. ... In the name of Christ, Oxnam has championed the socialist principles of Karl Marx, and became, I believe, the leading "religious disciple" of Marx in the free world."\(^3\)

Several letters to the editor of the *Christian Advocate* criticized Bishop Oxnam, though not as harshly as Dilling and McIntire. One reader wanted Oxnam to admit to poor judgment, and another faulted him for not coming out "hammer and tongs to warn the people against these sinister forces." Casper Murphy, of Chicago, called for the church to "put its house in order" by providing church leaders with information about questionable organizations and expelling members who had been "misusing their membership to further their ‘un-American’ and unchristian activities."\(^4\) These individuals clearly believed that Communism remained a danger that should be combated and that Oxnam had not gone far enough to dispute it.

There were those who criticized Oxnam not because of his affiliations with Communist causes, no matter how obscure, but because he succumbed to anti-Communist forces and, by extension, accepted their legitimacy. One letter to Oxnam from Muriel I. Symington illustrated this point of view. The writer chastised the Bishop for repeatedly denying that he was a Communist instead of telling his accusers that this was not their concern. Kenneth Leslie, editor of *One*, formerly *The Protestant*, noted that, "Bishop Oxnam appeals directly to the Committee’s hatred of [C]ommunism. He shares their desire to ‘beat down the Communist menace.’" In his hearing, Bishop Oxnam, who was at one time an editorial advisor of the magazine, conceded to the committee that Communist support backed *The Protestant*. Leslie claimed that, in so doing, the Bishop "swallowed gratefully falsehoods about others." Columnist Milton Mayer leveled similar charges against Bishop Oxnam. Commenting on Oxnam’s refusal to challenge the committee’s accusations against others such as Methodists Harry F. Ward and Jack

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\(^3\)Elizabeth Dilling, *Red Churchmen* (Chicago?: Patriotic Research Bureau?, 1946?).
\(^3\)McIntire, 3.
\(^4\)*Christian Advocate*, September 10, 1953.
McMichael, Mayer wrote that in order, "to get the pack’s fangs out of his neck he threw Harry F. Ward to them ... and on top of Harry Ward he threw another half dozen men accused of wrong-doing by the likes of [Whittaker] Chambers."

The reaction to Oxnam’s hearing demonstrated that McCarthyism influenced how many people defined the principle of the separation of church and state. Ironically, both Oxnam’s harshest critics of his loose affiliations with Communist front organizations and those supporters who praised his courage in combating HUAC’s shoddy tactics shared the belief that proper investigation was essential to destroying Communism in the United States. On the other hand, several people did note the implications the Oxnam hearing had on the principle of the separation of church and state, signifying how jealously Americans guarded the principle. The newspaper articles and letters chronicled in this article show that, in many cases, the violation of this ideal by HUAC led to a decrease in the committee’s and McCarthyism’s credibility.

The criticism that HUAC encountered following the Oxnam hearing barely slowed the committee down. Its investigation of the clergy did not end. Less than ten days after Oxnam stood before the Committee, it called Methodist Jack McMichael, executive secretary of the Methodist Federation for Social Action, to testify. Committee members had claimed during Bishop Oxnam’s hearing that McMichael and Harry Ward possessed some kind of Communist connections. Nevertheless, both Representatives Jackson and Velde insisted that their actions were not investigations of religion. In his infamous speech of March 17, Jackson stated that, “there is not the slightest suggestion of a blunderbuss, overall investigation of any church.” Rather, “this is a matter concerning individual Communists in the various fields.” In his comments preceding the Oxnam hearing, Chairman

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42 Oxnam’s own views on church and state relations appeared to illustrate the general manner in which most saw the relationship in the McCarthy era. He helped found Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, or POAU, in 1948, which focused on resisting the movement to gain public funds for private Catholic schools. Oxnam was also a major critic of Myron Taylor’s mission to the Vatican, which he saw as the first step toward the recognition by the United States government of the Roman Catholic Church as a state. The Bishop believed that this was a dangerous violation of the principle of the separation of church and state. Nonetheless, Oxnam voluntarily and quite civilly appeared before the House Committee, a state power, allowing its members to question his political beliefs. Similarly, though the American people considered religious freedom a basic civil right, the majority tended to overlook violations of the principle of the separation of church and state in exchange for protection against “Communist infiltration” into the United States.

43 Roy, 313.
Velde reiterated those remarks. The swell of patriotism that flooded the nation during the Cold War affected all areas of American life, including religion. It was during this period that the words “one nation under God” were added to the pledge of allegiance, demonstrating the country’s commitment to religious ideals in light of what anti-Communists referred to as “atheistic [C]ommunism.” Religion and McCarthyism both seemed to be gaining ground in the postwar era. Public response to the Oxnam hearing revealed how Americans perceived the relationship between church and state in a Cold War atmosphere. It shows that while anti-Communism clearly had a great impact on the way Americans defined the principle of the separation of church and state, that principle also helped to undermine the irrational inquisitions of McCarthyism.

"Congress, House, Representative Donald L. Jackson, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., Congressional Record (March 17, 1953): 2024; Congress, House, Hearings before the Un-American Activities Committee, Testimony of Bishop G Bromley Oxnam: 3586. Opening the hearing, Velde commented on the situation by stating that “it is incidental to this hearing that the witness is a man of the cloth. No inference should be drawn from this hearing as to the loyalty or disloyalty of any member of the clergy.”

"Ellwood, The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace, 117."