THE ECUMENICAL AND SOCIAL LEADERSHIP OF
G. BROMLEY OXNAM

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G. Bromley Oxnam’s death in 1963 silenced the voice of one of America’s leading progressive voices in religion.¹ Oxnam was a product and leader in what could be termed the Golden Age of Mainline religion. He actively participated in the ecumenical movement, holding leadership positions in the Federal Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches. A theological liberal in the traditional sense of the concept, Oxnam embraced the social gospel in all its depth. He believed that social ills should consume a major portion of the church’s agenda, which would in turn bring the Kingdom of God into existence within history. Consequently, Oxnam felt it a moral duty to expand his activities beyond the institutional church. He was active in numerous social action organizations and he was a strong supporter of labor movements. His social activism, which ironically had its roots in his positive conception of the American nation, brought him under the suspicion of the House Un-American Activities Committee. In 1953 Oxnam demanded a hearing before the Committee to clear his name and to challenge the methods of the Committee.²

Numerous aspects of Oxnam’s career merit investigation. This paper will investigate elements of his career that seem to have a symbiotic relation: his ecumenism, his social activism, and his challenge to the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Ecumenism

A leader in the Federal Council of Churches and active participant in both the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches, Bromley Oxnam had a commitment to the concept of organic union held by so many in the first half of the twentieth century. By 1946, Oxnam had paid his dues in many of the committees of the Council and was elected its president, a position that he exercised with great leadership.³

²Miller, 566–579.
In 1951 Oxnam delivered “The William Henry Hoover Lectureship On Christian Unity” at The University of Chicago. Part of his lecture described an imaginary Sunday morning in a Vermont village where the Protestant churches had united. In a description all too similar to the realities of small-town Protestantism, he described small, competing churches, each with substandard facilities and each with its own minister, giving the city about ten ministers.

For Oxnam there was no reason why these churches could not combine their duplicated efforts to have a united ministry. The people who worked together during the week and the youth who attended the same school during the week should “worship together... In being together a new understanding of ‘belonging to the blessed community,’ the worldwide Church has come.” Oxnam asked all the questions as to how this union at a local level could be achieved. He recognized the obvious questions about ordination, laity, polity, and creedal and confessional development. In spite of the barriers, Oxnam believed that the solution lay in the creation of “a visible, organized body.” He did not see the barrier to unity as being in the obvious questions. The problems separating denominations involved infrastructures, not theology. 

Oxnam saw the healing of the church’s divisions as not so insurmountable as might be assumed. Protestantism in 1950 had more real unity than people commonly believed, in Oxnam’s view. While there were 256 different denominations, a figure cited to prove the fractiousness of the churches, 82% of the membership lay in thirteen of the 256. Citing several tables of statistics, Oxnam concluded that 94% of the church membership was found in eleven denominations, while only 6% was found in 166 of the sectarian groups. For Oxnam, this number expressed a measure of real—though not organic—unity.

The work of the Federal Council of Churches also expressed a growth toward unity. Unlike the practical unity of the eleven churches, the Federal Council constituted a step toward organic union. This organization, along with the World Council, provided a structure in which all the denominations could work together, which increased the momentum toward union. While these structures were not a church, Oxnam believed that they provided the structure upon which a united church could emerge. For Oxnam, the divisions over doctrine and polity, while they were major problems, should not be. Religious discussion and theological debate should concentrate on finding an irreducible minimum which, for Oxnam, lay in “a common faith in Jesus Christ as God Incarnate and Savior,” not a detailed creed.

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5Oxnam, On this Rock; An Appeal for Christian Unity, 103.
For those who questioned that such unity was possible, Oxnam pointed to the existence of the meeting of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam with its “many races and of many nations . . . [that] can worship, witness, and work together.” The many groups, with their different creeds, overlooked differences in polity and theology in the goal of a united meeting. By meeting together, the various groups implied that all present represented authentic expressions of the Christian faith. Yet, the creational and ecclesiastical positions prevented the willing parties to form a union in name as well as desire. Dialogue and moves toward unity, then, should shift from doctrine to a concentration on the common affirmation of faith and a common recognition that all the groups were working toward the same goal. The words “I believe,” according to Oxnam, were not as important as the words “I love” my fellow person.8

The logistics of creating union served as the real issue. Oxnam, however, seemed to think that problems would just work themselves out. To be certain, the united church would require a polity and a concept of ministry. He envisioned that recognition of various ordinations would pose no problem to those with a firm commitment to union. A national system of re-ordination, according to Oxnam, could plausibly solve the problem, with all the various ministers laying hands on one another. This service would meet the problems of both apostolic succession and mutual recognition.9

Once union was achieved, the passage of time would bring the doctrinal and organizational standards closer to uniformity. In making this judgment and in calling on the denominations to set aside doctrinal concerns, Oxnam believed that he had found a non-creedal manner to effect union. In expressing his loose concept of ordination, Oxnam revealed his own perspective as a member of the Free Church tradition with its less rigid view of ordination as a theological concept.

While Oxnam had a strong commitment to organic union, a large portion of his ecumenical activities addressed social issues. The push for social change by ecumenical agencies had a long heritage in the Federal Council. In 1912 the Council adopted “The Social Creed of the Churches,” a statement based largely on the tenets of the Social Gospel movement. This creed offered a set of defined social policy objectives which included proper housing for all citizens, fair divorce laws, the elimination of child labor, worker safety codes, retiree pensions, the right to strike, and a minimum wage.10 When the Federal Council voted to create The Commission for a Study of the Bases of a Just Durable Peace, it did so fully

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8Oxnam, The Church and Contemporary Change, 112.
9Oxnam, The Church and Contemporary Change, 115-116.
in keeping with its heritage. Chaired by an active ecumenist better known for his Cold War politics, John Foster Dulles, the committee also included Oxnam, as well as the popular theologian Georgia Harkness. The Commission had four goals. First, they were to develop a clear standard “regarding the moral, political, and economic foundations of an enduring peace” for the local churches and laity. Second, the commission was to take actions that would equip the local church actively to pursue actions leading to peace. Third, the members were to engage in dialogue with the World Council in an effort to be international. Fourth, the Commission was to work to assemble a group of Christian leaders after the end of the European wars in an effort to make the pursuit of peace a goal of every level of the church. 

This last proposal seems to be the most tangible goal set by the Council in its directive to the Commission.

In pursuing these goals the Commission sent a document, “A Just and Durable Peace,” to 45,000 churches. The year 1941, at the time of the Council meeting, had not yet seen American entry into World War II. The increasingly volatile situation, however, strongly suggested that few countries—and few churches—would be excluded from the growing hostilities. The Commission looked to pragmatic responses to aggression. A “Memorandum” produced by the members stated that aggression had “wide economic repercussions” when it excluded countries from markets, limited the acquisition of food or raw materials, limited freedom of immigration, and altered the international monetary system by artificially adjusting the value of its gold and silver reserves. That the Commission listed four areas with what the members considered to be international repercussions implied that they sought a rationale for war.

By the next meeting in 1942, with the United States fully in the war, the Commission fully engaged itself in the writing of proposals. Adopting a 13-point “Statement of Guiding Principles,” the members affirmed that moral law governed the world. All social ills, then, could be attributed to disobedience of the moral law. In keeping with this view, the Commission issued three challenges to the church. First, the church had a “supreme responsibility” to participate in world affairs. Second, the Christian community should translate its beliefs into policy. Finally, the church should work to bring the Kingdom of God on earth.

One year after adopting the “Six Pillars,” the Commission continued its discussions on the merits of a world organization. Still heartily endorsing the idea of world organization, the Commission warned that an organization based on negativism and threats of power would not succeed, a warning that in hindsight seems all too accurate. Members of the

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11 Annual Report, 1941, 94.
12 Annual Report, 1941, 52.
Commission, along with Oxnam, sought a strongly moralistic organization. Not only must the organization be “universal in membership,” it must be “redemptive in purpose.” While the idea of universal membership certainly had a basis in secular political thought, the idea of a redemptive organization seemed to be a religious concept. The Commission may have been naive to think that a world order could be built on a moral basis. They may have been, however, wise enough to think that an international organization without some defined moral basis would simply transfer the weaknesses of nationalism to the new organization.

One must question the realism of the moral basis proposed by the Commission. In specifying the undergirding philosophy of a successful organization, the Commission stated that,

We believe that the only world organization which will contribute to a lasting peace is one which conforms to the law of God and opens the way for the expression of the spirit of Christ in the community of nations.

The 1945 meeting of the Commission largely centered on the now concrete proposal for a United Nations. Adopting a list of nine recommendations, the Commission responded to the Dumbarton Oaks proposal, which was the provisional document for a world organization. The proposals included a call for a study of the non-military causes of war, guarantees for the smaller nations, and an easier method of amending the charter. The emergence of atomic power caused Oxnam to herald especially the need of a world organization. As Council President, he joined Dulles in calling for international control of atomic energy and a suspension of its military use until the development of these controls.

With the war drawing to a close and the creation of an international organization at hand, the Commission issued a proposal, Christian Action on Four Fronts for Peace. The four fronts included the Inner Front, which involved an individual commitment to “pray God to renew a right spirit within us.” The Church Front called on the institutional church to do what lay within its ability to support the new organization. The Peace Treaty Front called on the churches to work for and support treaties that aimed for justice and “the general welfare,” rather than punitive retribution. Finally, the United Nations Front called on the Christian community to work to make the emerging United Nations an organization that gave “common effort against the common threats” to humanity.

In 1946 the Biennial Meeting of the Federal Council voted to send a telegram to the head of the United States delegation to the United Nations. Signed by Oxnam, the telegram pledged the support of the Council for the policies of the United Nations and expressed a desire to join “in

14 Biennial Report, 1944, 91.
15 Biennial Report, 92.
16 Annual Report, 1945, 54.
17 Annual Report, 54.
the efforts of the United Nations to build a world of peace with justice and goodwill." The telegram addressed issues that the first assembly would consider, and expressed a special support for the inclusion of a statement of religious liberty in the forthcoming international Bill of Rights. It also called for "a comprehensive system of disarmament which will include provisions for international inspection and controls." Oxnam closed the telegram with a benediction:

We pray that God, the ruler of men and nations, may guide you and your colleagues in the heavy responsibilities which are yours as you seek to make the United Nations an effective agency for the preservation of international peace and security.18

Oxnam's ecumenism had a certain Protestant triumphalism about it. His moves toward unity ignored the structures of Roman Catholicism. Since he did not ignore the Orthodox Churches, one can conclude that his opposition involved things other than theology. Despite his erudition, Oxnam had a strong opposition to the Roman Catholic Church. In his imaginary church in Vermont, only the Protestant churches united. With a subtle tone of anti-Catholicism, Oxnam envisioned that the creation of a united Protestant Church would make the little town an "unprofitable field" for any Catholic priest.19

For some reason Oxnam saw the theological divisions between Catholicism and Protestantism as far more impassable than those within Protestantism. Oxnam believed that the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church was rigidly authoritarian. While the spirit of cooperation during these high points of ecumenism suggested that the two branches of Christianity could engage in dialogue, Oxnam did not have the open mind toward Rome that he had toward Protestantism. He found especially unsuitable the Catholic idea that the ultimate goal of ecumenism included a return to Roman Catholicism of the various bodies. To be certain, there were difficult historical and theological reasons that made a return by Protestants to Roman Catholicism untenable. For Oxnam, however, these reasons did not constitute the fundamental problem. Protestantism, to Oxnam, represented a "free mind," while Roman Catholicism represented an "insistence upon the authoritarian Church."20 These two views, which are at best extreme simplifications, made the Roman Catholic-Protestant division insurmountable.

Before Protestants and Catholics could dialogue, Oxnam believed that the Roman Catholic Church must renounce certain of its doctrines on authority. The final authority in Catholicism, according to Oxnam, lay in "the infallible head of the Church." Protestant and Orthodox bodies, however, were seen by Oxnam as democratic and affirming of a concept

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18Biennial Report, 1946, 270.
19Oxnam, On This Rock, 99.
20Oxnam, On This Rock, 77.
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of "diversity in unity." A fundamental philosophy for Oxnam came in the affirmation of freedom of thought. He saw this idea as totally incompatible with the structure and theology of Catholicism. Willing to compromise with many Protestant bodies, Oxnam did not extend this willingness to the Roman Catholic Church. "We can pay too great a price for union. We shall unite upon the basis of the free mind and trust the future to history." When Oxnam did express hope for dialogue with Catholics, he did so only with a large degree of condescension. While he disparaged the Catholic hierarchy for calling on Protestants to return to the Catholic faith, he was guilty of applying the same standard to Catholics. Rome must abandon its hierarchy and meet with Protestants as a "repentant" organization. Likewise, Oxnam said that "it is only a united, non-Roman Christianity that can hope to save Roman Christianity from its exclusiveness and its ecclesiastical totalitarianism."

Unlike his dealings with other bodies, Oxnam's dealings with Catholicism at best reflect a conscious inflexibility. Why did he have this attitude toward Catholicism when he seemed so positive toward overcoming other barriers to reunion? I am not sure that one can find a satisfactory answer to that question. Robert Moats Miller devotes an entire chapter in his biography of Oxnam to his anti-Catholicism. While he saw Oxnam's attitude toward Catholicism as complex, Miller concludes that his view mixed traditional Protestant bias with his own personal conflict with Catholic leaders, especially Cardinal Spellman. In his own rigid pursuit of western liberal democratic values, Oxnam encountered Catholics with whom he disagreed. I think it is safe to assume that he also encountered Protestant fundamentalists with whom he disagreed, as well. But he had a difficult time, perhaps because of his own Protestant bias, in separating Catholic personalities from the institution. Oxnam could admire John Ryan and Dorothy Day, but only as exceptions. He saw Spellman as the norm. In making that assessment, Oxnam made a strong value judgment that was not entirely fair. Whatever one concludes about his Catholic views, perhaps the most interesting thing that his thought illustrates is that anti-Catholic bias was not limited to "benighted fundamentalistic bigots bogged down in the Bible Belt."

Oxnam the Social Activist

Oxnam saw a need for a new approach to social problems with the close of World War II. Distressed by the doctrinaire atheism of the Soviets and what he saw as the functional atheism of those committed to an

21Oxnam, On This Rock, 85, 88.
22Oxnam, On This Rock, 93.
23Oxnam, The Church and Contemporary Change, 112.
24Miller, 398-496.
25Miller, 399.
absolute free market, Oxnam wrote frequently about the need for the religious community to provide a religiously based labor and economic program.

Since quality of life was a religious concern, Oxnam sought a middle way between pure free enterprise and collective ownership, both of which he saw as ultimately violating fundamental rights. The presence of the church would serve to balance the self-centeredness of various world views. Above all, Oxnam, with his literal understanding of the Kingdom of God, saw the church as having an interest in the labor movement because the “demand for the Kingdom involves the establishment of justice and brotherhood.”

The work of the National Resource Planning Board represented a middle approach to labor rights, according to Oxnam. This organization worked for “full employment, . . . and a balance between economic stability and social adventure.” In addition to the calls for international democracy and post-war peace, this organization called for “syndic economy,” a term referring to some type of regulated capitalism. Labor rights would include: a right to education, adequate housing, access to health-care, and moves toward full employment.

Regarding these goals Oxnam asked, “Do they not flow from Christianity?” Of course, he saw these ideas as fully in line with his understanding of Christianity. Moreover, he saw them as a logical extension of democracy and he believed that workers would see them in that light. Oxnam hoped that all levels of the economy—management, owner, economist, and worker—could move beyond pure self-interest to an ethical basis of decision making. “Is it too much to hope . . . that together in the light of the ethical ideals of religion they [labor and management] may reach common decision as to direction and together agree upon the methods we shall use and the speed with which we shall move?” The question was not purely rhetorical for Oxnam. It may be too much for workers and management to cooperate in a positive manner. But the decision, according to Oxnam, leaves two alternatives for humanity. Work together and create a “progressive order” for the future, or face an inevitable revolution.

While on the surface, it might seem that the goals of employer oppose those of employee, this division according to Oxnam was artificially created by external forces. Extremists on the Right and the Left, moreover, sought to exploit the natural fears of the worker and the employer and create division. The ethical ideals of Jesus, according to Oxnam, will allow the two divisions to “create as brothers an economic order a little nearer the heart’s desire.”

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27 Oxnam, Labor and Tomorrow’s World, 55-56.
28 Oxnam, Labor and Tomorrow’s World, 57-58.
What are these ethical ideals? First, he believed that Christianity proposed that "men and not things are the goal of social living." Oxnam saw this principle as first rediscovered by Gladden, Rauschenbusch, and Ward. Democratic systems best employ this principle. The teachings of Christ applied to the state result in a system that views the state as the instrument for the people, rather than vice-versa.\textsuperscript{30}

Oxnam saw the second ethical principle of Jesus as "the solidarity of the human family." Human solidarity means that solid measures must be taken to ensure economic opportunity. Likewise, the church must speak out against false notions of racial superiority. Balancing this emphasis on human value is the third ideal: "the supremacy of the common good." Oxnam thoroughly Christianized the idea of the common good. It was not some idea of the survival of the fittest or denial of minority rights. That people do not seek what is best for all humanity results from the emphasis on training for competition. The community leadership must be trained to think of "old age, sickness, and unemployment [as] group problems."\textsuperscript{31}

Next, Oxnam believed that "Jesus calls for equal rights for all." He contended that all citizens had basic economic rights, as well as political rights and that these rights stemmed not just from political theory. They grew out of the Christian witness. This equality did not mean equal income or an equal luxury level. It did mean, for Oxnam, that both the doctor and the garbage collector have a right "to be well born, the right to a home, the right to an education, the right to work, the right to leisure, [and] the right to cultural and spiritual development." Closely related to this principle was Oxnam's idea that the ethical ideals of Jesus rejected competition as a basis for social organization. Progress did not fundamentally depend on competition. Indeed, Oxnam believed that strife resulted from competition. The law of progress depended on mutual cooperation.

Finally, Oxnam affirmed the ethical ideals of Jesus as proposing that "love and not force is the social bond." With this ideal, Oxnam affirmed a positive view of humanity. He thought it the tendency and capability of humans to do the right thing. Failure to act justly resulted from a choice to violate natural law.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Civil Rights: The Challenge to the House Un-American Affairs Committee}

Socially progressive individuals seemed especially threatening during the deterioration of Soviet-American relations in the 1940s and the 1950s exacerbated this tension. Many citizens stood accused of collaboration with the Soviet Union because of their political and social views. More often,

\textsuperscript{30}Oxnam, \textit{The Ethical Ideals of Jesus in a Changing World}, 16-17.

\textsuperscript{31}Oxnam, \textit{The Ethical Ideals of Jesus in a Changing World}, 22-28.

\textsuperscript{32}Oxnam, \textit{The Ethical Ideals of Jesus in a Changing World}, 28-37.
people stood accused because they participated in forums connected with politically unpopular people and movements. Methodist Bishops were no exception.

The House Un-American Affairs Committee compiled a file on Oxnam concerning thirty years of his work. The file contained information linking him with numerous organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Committee for Spanish Freedom, the American League Against War and Fascism, and the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, to name a few.\(^{33}\)

In 1953, Committee chairman Harold Velde announced his desire to investigate church agencies and leaders for possible ties to Soviet and Communist conspiracies. Oxnam immediately denounced the idea. Several days later Committee member Donald Jackson returned Oxnam's file, suggesting that Oxnam opposed the investigation because he was involved in a conspiracy:

Bishop Oxnam has been to the Communist front what Man O' War was to thoroughbred racing. . . . [He has] served God on Sunday and the Communist front for the balance of the week. . . . If reprinting Bishop Oxnam's record of aid and comfort to the Communist front would serve any useful purpose, I would ask permission to insert it here, but suffice it to say that the record is available to any member who cares to request it from the (House Un-American Activities) Committee.\(^{34}\)

Later, Jackson said that the volume of the records prevented full documentation. He added, however, that Oxnam "is alleged to have been associated in the past with the following groups and organizations which have been cited as subversive and Communist." His response then listed several agencies mentioned in Oxnam's file.\(^{35}\) As far as Oxnam was concerned, Jackson and the Committee had accused him of being a conspirator without a fair hearing.

On June 5, 1953, Oxnam telegraphed the Committee requesting an opportunity to personally appear to clear his name.\(^{36}\) On Tuesday, July 21, 1953, Oxnam had his day in court (or Congress, as the case may be). From 2:30 pm until 12:20 am, Oxnam defended himself before the Committee, addressing virtually every item in his file.\(^{37}\) Oxnam began with a rather lengthy statement detailing his reasons for requesting an appearance and proclaiming his innocence of the implied charges.

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\(^{34}\)Congress, House, Committee on Un-American Affairs, *Testimony of Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam*, Oxnam Exhibit No. 2.

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\(^{36}\)Oxnam, *I Protest* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 14. Oxnam wrote this book to give his side of the Committee accusations. He had a goal beyond merely clearing his name. "This book is concerned with procedures that repudiate American tradition and practice, procedures that involve the informer, that tend to label sound reform as subversive, that make no distinction between progress and revolution. . . . The American must protest. He must do more. He must throttle this threat to freedom. He must preserve the free society." 6–7.

\(^{37}\)*Testimony of Oxnam*, 3585, 3805.
Oxnam stated that the Committee had released portions of his files over a period of seven years in a deliberate attempt to damage his reputation. While he said that some of the material was true, he added that some was not true and much was "irrelevant and immaterial." All the material, however, was arranged and released with a design "of creating the impression that I have been and am sympathetic to communism, and therefore subversive."38

Before addressing the issue of organizational involvement, Oxnam argued that his basic philosophy was incompatible with Communism. Quoting from the Apostles' Creed, which he affirmed, the Bishop declared that he had a theistic world view, which by necessity contradicts "the fundamental fallacy of communism, which is atheism."

Because I believe the will of God is revealed in the gospel of Christ, I hold that all historically conditioned political, economic, social, and ecclesiastical systems must be judged by the Gospel, not identified with it. This is to say, I reject communism, first, because of its atheism.39

Next, Oxnam announced that he held a spiritual, non-materialistic view of reality. As Oxnam saw it, spirituality was antithetical to the materialism of Communism. He rejected certain social views, economic theories, and political theories of Communism. Oxnam saw the Soviet state and its political system as a form of totalitarianism. He opposed all totalitarianism, "left or right," and went on record before the House that his "opposition to Communism is a matter of public record in books, numerous articles, addresses, and sermons, and in resolutions I have drafted or sponsored." In short, Oxnam categorically denied membership in the Communist Party.40

Oxnam felt that he must explicitly answer all of the implied allegations before he challenged the Committee's propriety in investigating him and making public statements about his files. Once he declared his innocence, he questioned the manner in which the Committee had carried out its various investigations. First, he attacked the Committee's practice of "releasing unverified and unevaluated material." The Committee released material with no disclaimer as to the accuracy of the information and without a guide to its context. "I am here formally to request that this file be cleaned up," Oxnam declared, "that the committee frankly admit its inaccuracies and misrepresentations, and that this matter be brought to a close."41

The files of the Committee, Oxnam said, investigated over a million people. Information released from the files stems from one of two reasons.

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38 Testimony of Oxnam, 3588.
39 Testimony of Oxnam, 3588.
40 Testimony of Oxnam, 3588-3589.
41 Testimony of Oxnam, 3589.
The Committee exercised "inexcusable incompetence" or it deliberately selected portions of the files for political purposes. The result was the same: "to question loyalty, to pillory or to intimidate the individual, to damage reputation." In short, Oxnam did not deny that subversive activities needed investigation. But, he accused the Committee of having transcended that role for one of political harassment.

After opening remarks, Oxnam and the Committee members engaged each other for the next several hours. Writing after the testimony ended, Oxnam expressed his hope that his appearance would lead to the end of Committee harassment. If his testimony raised the national consciousness—and there is good reason to think that it did—"then the day was well spent." With the end of the testimony, Oxnam effectively cleared his name.

Many spoke out in support of Oxnam after the testimony. Harold Fey of The Christian Century called Oxnam "one of the most courageous of American churchmen" for his testimony. Oxnam estimated that 80% of the papers issued favorable statements. Methodist Information, a press agency, and the Methodist Commission on Cultivation and Promotion issued a twelve-page statement affirming Oxnam in the aftermath of the testimony.

One mild challenge to the testimony came from an unexpected source. Reinhold Niebuhr questioned Oxnam's disavowal that the churches had communist elements. Oxnam's strong protestations that Communism and Christianity were incompatible would keep organized religion from addressing that "there are in fact communist sympathizers and fellow travelers in the church." To be certain, the question was beyond the scope of a congressional investigation, according to Niebuhr. However, Niebuhr thought the "Christian left," of which he was once a part, "too uncritical of the Marxist alternative."

Interestingly, that Niebuhr confronted some of the presuppositions of Oxnam's liberalism personifies the debate emerging in the 1950s between classic liberalism and the emerging Neo-orthodoxy of Niebuhr. Niebuhr's response to the Committee Hearings reflected his judgment on much of liberalism: that it embodied a certain naïveté about human nature. One must question Niebuhr's assessment in Oxnam's case, however, in light of the Bishop's attack on all forms of totalitarianism.

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42 Testimony of Oxnam, 3589.
43 Oxnam, I Protest, 186.
45 Oxnam, I Protest, 186.
48 Niebuhr, 937.
Conclusion

Oxnam died ten years after his testimony. His career included higher education, the pastorate, and service as a bishop in the Methodist Church. The active citizen became a leader in the ecumenical movement and in many religious and secular progressive organizations. It is a fair assessment to label him as a democratic and theological liberal.

The Bishop had a positive view of human and social potential. He believed that the Kingdom of God could be created within history (in classic Social Gospel terms) and he believed that Protestant and Orthodox communities could easily unite. Much of his work in the Federal Council involved social concerns, and he believed that the churches should focus on social action first as an aid to reunion.

Despite his social progressivism and his cultural enlightenment, Oxnam had a virulent anti-Catholicism that could rival any provincial. He did distinguish between Catholic individuals and the hierarchy, but the fact that he did not see the Catholic hierarchy capable of reform is puzzling. Oxnam's liberalism was ever eager to argue that the Gospel as he understood it had corporate implications. That he saw the Catholic institution as capable of embracing these implications is a significant contradiction.

Oxnam demonstrated courage in challenging the House Un-American Activities Committee. By the 1950s his social views were beginning to fall into disfavor. Add to that assessment the conspiracy "scares" of that era and Oxnam seems even more poised to fall into disrepute. Yet, he bravely challenged what he saw as harassment for political purposes. His courage is commendable.

Oxnam's life in many ways parallels the history of American Protestant liberalism. His fortunes advanced with the corresponding advancements of ecumenism, labor activism by the churches, and the general optimism espoused by Oxnam types. The year 1963 saw more than Oxnam's death. It saw the beginning of the end of Protestant liberalism as a mainstream movement. Oxnam's death marks that decline.