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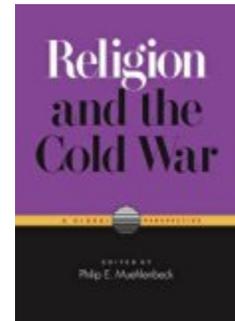


Philip Muehlenbeck. *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012. 288 S. \$65.95 (library), ISBN 978-0-8265-1852-1; \$27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8265-1853-8.

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## Woods on Muehlenbeck

In spite of the vast body of literature on the Cold War, the role of religion in the global conflict has only recently received the systematic attention of historians. At least one historian, Seth Jacobs, has attributed this neglect of religion in studies of U.S. foreign policy to a tendency amongst historians to assume the separation of church and state.[1] Another group of scholars complicates this view by hewing closer to interpretations that focused on the ideological impact of religion on the worldviews of U.S. foreign policymakers.[2] More recently, scholars employing cultural history methodologies have challenged the presumptions of the separation of church and state in foreign policy. Writing against post-revisionist histories of the Cold War that hinge on understandings of balances of power and geopolitics to explain U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War, such studies have eschewed explicit links of causation as a staple element of historical interpretation, opening the door to considerations of the intersection of religious and political thought, as well as the possible organizational power of religious institutions.[3]

It is certainly not a stretch to say that each essay in Philip Muehlenbeck's edited collection, *Religion and the Cold War*, offers new insights for scholars of religion or the global Cold War. The volume's greatest contribution is Muehlenbeck's effort to assemble a set of essays that shift "the study of religion away from the United States, Western Europe, and the Middle East" (p. viii). Essays on the authoritarian state and liberation theology in Brazil,

the institutionalized "religion" of "Marxist-atheism" in Poland's security apparatus, "the Pomak Question" in Greece and Bulgaria, and the rise of political Islam in the Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami party during the Afghan-Soviet War all point to the global significance of religious thought, popular practice, and institutions in twentieth-century world affairs.

Muehlenbeck's collection aptly represents how, in a short period of time, historians of U.S. foreign policy and international history have, as Andrew Preston notes in the introduction of *Religion and the Cold War*, moved religion from "the periphery of the historical imagination" to the center. On this point, Preston asserts that religion not only infused Cold War conflicts, but also "came to define the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union and between East and West" to the extent that Preston believes "we would do just as well" to speak not simply of "*Religion and the Cold War*," as the collection's title suggests, but of "the *religious* Cold War" (p. xi).

Indeed, the range of possible avenues of inquiry opened by the category of "religion" is one of the many strengths of the collection. For example, Jonathan Herzog's contribution argues that U.S. policymakers saw communism, "not only as a political and economic system of belief, but also as an entire religious scheme" (p. 47). Religion, in Herzog's interpretation, is the lens through which the United States and the Soviet Union perceived each other. Likewise, in an essay on U.S. pro-

paganda in early Cold War Iraq, Ahmed Khalid al-Rawi shows how U.S. policymakers believed that Islam functioned as “the defining factor in shaping Arab culture” and therefore directed their propaganda efforts as portraying communism as “an atheist ideology that was the sole enemy of Islam” (p. 113). In both essays, Christianity shapes the worldview of U.S. policymakers and functions as the diplomatic tool U.S. policymakers used to wage their anticommunist attacks.

The familiar link between early Cold War anticommunism and Christianity is flipped in David Ayer’s fascinating study of Hewlett Johnson, “Britain’s Red Dean.” Johnson openly supported communist regimes and proffered, during a trip to Cuba in 1964, the idea that Christianity and Christians “must be at the heart of revolutionary struggles for freedom.” Though only suggesting a connection, Ayer believes that “Britain’s Red Dean,” in part anticipated Latin American “liberation theology” (p. 82). Though Herzog, al-Rawi, and Ayers largely position their essays within a bipolar framework, many of the collection’s most insightful essays offer alternatives to bipolar interpretations of the Cold War through examinations of religious groups within states—including Copts in Ethiopia, Buddhists in Vietnam, and Muslims in Bosnia.

The geographic and topical diversity of essays in the volume does raise questions about attempts assess or synthesize the relationship between the Cold War and religion. One of the four main points Preston establishes in his preface to the volume is a caution to historians to avoid generalizations, given the enormous diversity of religious thought and practice. Similarly, as Preston also notes, because religions are neither static nor monolithic, historians must take into account the sheer diversity of the roles religion played within the Cold War as well as the role Cold War politics played in shaping religion. Preston’s point is well taken, as is his assertion that any account of the Cold War that does not include religion is incomplete. However, this notion of “incompleteness” does somewhat counter the point that Muehlenbeck, the collection’s editor, seems willing to make in his preface when he states that religion “was a factor in the Cold War, not the factor” (p. viii).

Undoubtedly, the thirteen essays in this volume il-

lustrate how influential religion was in mid- to late twentieth-century international and national politics. At the same time, historians of the Cold War have also pointed to the inability to generalize the experience of the “Cold War” for the entire world.[4] If we cannot generalize or synthesize the relationship between religion and the Cold War and we also cannot locate a finite definition of the Cold War—I wonder if the Cold War in *Religion and the Cold War* functions more as a temporal marker or periodization than a historical event that we can draw any unifying logic around. The essays in the volume certainly don’t support this claim; there are themes that one could draw to connect the different analyses. However, I think the volume might have illustrated common themes, such as the relationship between anticommunist states and religious intuitions or factions, more successfully if the essays had been grouped or organized thematically rather than chronologically. This minor point aside, *Religion and the Cold War* is an essential contribution to religious history, history of the Cold War, and twentieth-century international history.

#### Notes

[1]. Seth Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-1957* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

[2]. Dianne Kirby, *Religion and the Cold War*, Cold War History Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Andrew Preston, “Bridging the Gap between the Sacred and the Secular in the History of American Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 5 (2006): 783-812.

[3]. In her assessment of religion as a category of historical analysis, Patricia Hill embraces culturist methods with the caveat that the challenge of studying transnational religious history requires innovative approaches, such as scholarly collaboration. Patricia R. Hill, “Commentary: Religion as a Category of Diplomatic Analysis,” *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000): 633-640.

[4]. Prasenjit Duara, “The Cold War as a Historical Period: An Interpretive Essay,” *Journal of Global History* 6, no. 3 (2011): 457-480.

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