

**Sacralizing the Cold War:  
The Lived Religion of President Eisenhower's Pastor**

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History

Edward L. R. Elson pastored powerful people. When his Washington, DC, church building sat empty during the week, Elson prayed for his 1950s congregants while sitting in their assigned pews: President Dwight Eisenhower, committed laymen; Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, officiating Elder; FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, Sunday school teacher and elected trustee; Postmaster General Arthur Summerfield; Dorothy Thompson, renowned journalist and chief organizer of the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME).<sup>1</sup> From 1946 to 1973, every United States president except President Kennedy heard him preach at National Presbyterian Church, and from 1969 to 1981, he served as chaplain of the United States Senate.<sup>2</sup>

Elson not only led a powerful church, but he led it in a time of perceived crisis. Historians have begun to reveal the way the early Cold War was understood as a holy war. In *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, William Inboden focuses on the “theology” of President Truman, Dulles, and President Eisenhower, examining their “beliefs about God, humanity, and how the world should work.”<sup>3</sup> He shows that for these Cold warriors, religion functioned as both a cause and as an instrument. “As a cause it helped to determine *why* the United States opposed the Soviet Union” and as an instrument it was a factor in “*how* the United States fought the Soviet Union.”<sup>4</sup> As a cause, Inboden contends that the classic explanations of the origin of the Cold War—balance of power realities, security concerns, political and economic ideology— together or separate, are not sufficient without understanding the role religion played. As

Americans identified their nation with God's kingdom, they looked in horror at the expansion of "godless communism." As Eisenhower put it while on the campaign trail, "What is our battle against communism if not a fight between anti-God and a belief in the Almighty? Communists know this. They have to eliminate God from their system. When God comes in, communism has to go."<sup>5</sup> Religion and atheism clearly delineated good and evil nations for the first Cold warriors. Religion was thus also seen as a potent instrument in "strengthening anticommunist resolve at home and undermining communism abroad."<sup>6</sup>

Jonathan Herzog picks up on religion as instrument in his book *The Spiritual Industrial Complex*, situating the "spiritual battle against communism in the wider context of religion's ever-changing relationship with American society."<sup>7</sup> Religious and political leaders were concerned about what they perceived as America's secularization in the first half of the twentieth century. Herzog defines secularization not as an unstoppable force of modernization but as a process within social environments brought about through specific actions that make religion seem less important for solving social problems. On this view, just as secularization was the result of deliberate actions, so also could religion be re-endowed with perceived political, social, economic, and intellectual value through deliberate action. Herzog argues Cold warriors attempted to wield political, social, and security institutions to take the US from a secularized to a sacralized nation in the early Cold War through the concerted efforts of the spiritual-industrial complex, that is, the top down, "deliberate and managed use of societal resources to stimulate a religious revival in the late 1940s and 1950s."<sup>8</sup>

This paper takes yet another perspective on religion in the Cold War: the way one pastor's practice of his faith sanctified the Cold War. Where earlier texts have focused on the "official" theological ideas of Cold warriors and the religious history of secular Cold War era

institutions, this paper asks how Edward Elson's *vernacular religion* aided and abetted the sacralization of the Cold War at home and abroad. Vernacular religion—as theorized by folklorist Norman Primiano—is a methodology of studying how individuals live their religion. As opposed to top-down treatments of “official” religion as an institution or denomination, vernacular religion examines the everyday life of an individual's belief process and the verbal, behavioral, and material expression of their religious belief. One's belief process is in dialectical relationship with—being formed by and forming—the many structures the individual encounters: “physical and psychological predispositions...family, community affiliations, religious institutions...political and economic conditions.”<sup>9</sup> Vernacular religion highlights the everyday practices of religious life of those on the margins *and* at the center of “official” religion.<sup>10</sup>

Edward Elson practiced his vernacular religion in ways that shaped the spiritual dimensions of the early Cold War. This article will explore the structures that shaped and were shaped by this pastor's unique, lived faith. First, it will examine those influences on his religion stemming from his life before 1953 as he remembered it in oral history interviews and his autobiography. This provides the background for understanding how his vernacular religion formed and was shaped by representing “official” institutional Presbyterianism to President Eisenhower: baptizing him, preaching to him week after week, conducting a home blessing for their Gettysburg farm on Thanksgiving, and corresponding with him via letters. Finally, Elson's religion incited him to advocate for the Arab Middle East, traveling and lecturing throughout the area with the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME), the organization for which he was the longtime Chairman of the National Council. Elson expressed his vernacular beliefs in sermons, books, articles, and his co-organizing the Foundation for Religious Action in Social and Civil Order (FRASCO). Ultimately, the way Edward Elson lived his religion authorized

Eisenhower's sacralization of the Cold War even as it advocated for a stronger Arab-American connection within the religious parameters of the Cold War.

### **Living Modern American Faith**

Looking back over his life, Elson's saw his early life as punctuated by a feeling of "progress" and Christian faith. Born in 1906, he remembered the way the kerosene lanterns in his family home in Monongahela, Pennsylvania, gave way to gas lamps, and finally to electricity, and the way his father stopped carrying buckets of hand-pumped water when the newly installed electric pump carried the water to the house automatically. In 1916, ten-year-old Edward rejoiced when Congress passed the eight-hour workday for railroad workers, allowing his father, who was an engineer on the Pennsylvania Railroad, to spend more time at home. He remembered the Great War far less than the Spanish Flu, from which he and his father suffered and many in their railroad community died.<sup>11</sup> Through all of this, Elson's early home life was saturated with religion; his "father prayed daily, read the Bible, attended church with unvarying regularity," and his mother taught Sunday school and raised her children with the ideal of serving God, country, and others as the supreme way of life.<sup>12</sup>

In high school, his football coach, John Lewis, inspired Elson by exemplifying "virtues of Christian manhood." Elson recalled, "more than any minister or layman I met in my growing years, this man's qualities of manhood and character influenced my life for good."<sup>13</sup> He was accepted to and planned to attend the US Military Academy West Point, hoping to hone the discipline he learned from his parents, his coach, and his church. Then, in a Christian camp meeting—a holdover from the days of tent revivals—Elson spent an entire day wrestling internally with God, as he reflected and prayed. "Churning thoughts, turbulent feelings, conflicting desires, and competing forces all rose within me." At day's end and for the rest of his

life he knew: “I did not choose the Christian ministry; Christ chose me.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, instead of West Point, he attended Asbury College, a conservative Methodist university.

While Elson attended Asbury, differences between liberal and conservative Christianity widened, as the Scopes-Monkey Trial polarized the church in 1925. In Elson’s view, many students and a few faculty members voiced “exceedingly reactionary and excessively conservative mentalities.” While no liberal himself, Elson published articles in the student newspaper arguing that Asbury should stay within the denominational groups that were seen to be straying from theological orthodoxy to influence them from within. The school erupted in counter-speeches and prayers for the welfare of his soul.<sup>15</sup> Considered a liberal in this conservative context, Elson preferred to remain amid difference rather than split over dogma.

After graduation, he attended graduate school at the University of Southern California to study with Dr. Ralph Tyler Flewelling, the primary American proponent of philosophical personalism. From Flewelling’s philosophy, Elson adopted a clear spiritual justification for his masculine individualism. Flewelling responded to what he saw as socialism’s critique of liberalism—societies based on the individual “cannot yield the highest culture” because “the individual is forever misusing his freedom”—by submitting the individual to the higher culture of personalism. “The dominant principle of personalism is the dependence of individual culture upon the moral and spiritual values.”<sup>16</sup> Throughout his pastoral ministry, Elson preached on this theme, calling American individuals to correct the selfishness of individualism with spiritual values. In 1951, he declared over his congregation, “there is only one way to have a better Washington and a better America and that is to have better Washingtonians and better Americans...It is axiomatic that no one is sinless... Let every citizen begin with personal heart-searching and conscience testing, and humble repentance...”<sup>17</sup>

Elson crossed denominational lines when he brought his Methodist training to his first pulpit of La Jolla Presbyterian Church in California, before this ministry was interrupted by World War II. Elson was eager to serve his country, having already enlisted as a chaplain in the reserves before the US entered the war. He was stationed in Europe for 197 days of combat, serving as part of the Seventh U.S. Army in the Battle of the Bulge.<sup>18</sup> When the war ended, Elson met Eisenhower for the first time, when the general asked him to deliver a formal communique to the Nazi “German Christians,” which declared they would be allowed to worship as they saw fit under the same freedom of religion enjoyed in America. He also worked at the Dachau concentration camp on the day it was liberated, documenting war crimes. Expressing a mild antisemitism, what horrified him more than the “bodies of men, women, and children stacked to the ceiling inside the crematory and as high as the roof on the outside” was the way—in his words—the Christian “clergy at Dachau were treated worse in many ways than other prisoners.”<sup>19</sup> His experiences of Jewish suffering at Dachau never influenced his pro-Arab sympathies of events in the Middle East in the years to come.

Not long after returning to the States in 1946, and now remarried, Elson was offered the pastorate at National Presbyterian Church just four blocks from the White House. Here he pastored a local congregation that was also the symbolic national representative of the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA). In the early 1950s, this church was a member of the National Council of Churches (NCC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), the two flagship ecumenical organizations of liberal-leaning, mainline Protestantism. Although at Asbury he was considered a religious liberal among conservatives, he was now a conservative among liberals. While he found mass evangelist and foremost neo-evangelical Billy Graham’s methods questionable, he had more in common with Graham doctrinally than with many in the liberal

NCC that questioned the supernatural elements of Christianity. Doctrinally, Elson was a conservative evangelical pastoring the national church of one of the foremost liberalizing denominations. Yet, his vernacular religion was far more than his set of propositional beliefs, and in many ways, he departed from the neat binary of evangelical vs. mainline so endemic to American church historiography.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps the best example of Elson's self-presentation of his unique belief came in the sermon, "A Time for Intolerance," preached in March 1953, just weeks after Eisenhower joined the church. While lauding the American value of tolerance he saw in 1950s culture, he cautioned his parishioners about the limits of tolerance. He listed five moments when he thought there ought to be a limit to Christian tolerance. First, he declared, the Christian is to be tolerant of other faiths, but not of other religions seeking to impose "their own will upon a total national or social life."<sup>21</sup> While not stated, given his anti-Zionist stance, it seems he conflated Judaism and the pro-Zionist lobby.<sup>22</sup> Second, the Christian ought to be tolerant of different moral standards, but not of scandalous behavior that is a disgrace to "Christian morality and destructive of American idealism." Elson began the third tenant, "the Christian will be tolerant toward other races" but followed it with a question, asking, "must one tolerate the accusation that concern for better race relations always has political motivations?" Here, Elson condemned individual race prejudice, but seems to reject the existence of structural racism in American life. Finally, fourth, the Christian can be tolerant of those who hold to different "political philosophy, economic theory, and public morality" but cannot in any way tolerate "the forces that would destroy both our church and our cherished Nation," namely, the new "world religion" that is communism.<sup>23</sup> Here, Elson wove together conservative American republicanism with a "generous" spirit of

Christian tolerance, even as the application of his “limits of tolerance” could easily be applied toward antisemitic, anti-civil rights, and anti-communist ends.

### **America’s Cold War Spiritual Recovery**

Elson’s unique vernacular religion shaped the religious landscape of 1950s Washington, DC. His sermons were well known for their combination of the Christian gospel with American patriotism. In the 1950s Cold War, the political theater in DC took on a religious cast.

Eisenhower supplanted the traditional role of the clergy at his first inauguration by leading the nation in prayer, his first act as president. Under Elson’s pastoral care, Eisenhower became the only president to be baptized in office. Prayer found a new public life: Eisenhower created the National Prayer Breakfast, and he internationalized the Day of Prayer for Peace that President Truman had established. Other ploys in the Cold War crusade for spiritual recovery were the addition of “one nation under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 and the adoption of the national motto “In God We Trust” printed on Postage stamps and currency beginning in 1955.<sup>24</sup>

Eisenhower’s faith was sincere and thoroughly American. He was raised in a devout River Brethren home but had never been baptized. He broke with the pacifist church of his youth with his choice of career and rarely attended chapel in the military. Prior to his presidency, his central creed was more American than Christian: “I believe fanatically in the American form of democracy, a system...that ascribes to the individual a dignity accruing to him because of his creation in the image of a supreme being.” In December 1952, Eisenhower famously elaborated this belief after a meeting with Soviet general Zhukov with whom he worked in the war. He declared, “our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is. With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept...what was the use of me talking to Zhukov about that? Religion, he had been taught, was the opiate of the

people.”<sup>25</sup> Eisenhower believed in what he saw as the essential social function of religion for American life and cared little about specific dogma. But more than just a statement on civil religion—as many scholars have seen it—this declaration of faith showed Eisenhower’s understanding of the spiritual roots of the Cold War.<sup>26</sup> As long as Zhukov and the communist order he represented continued to believe religion was an opiate of the masses and not, as Eisenhower believed, an essential ingredient for free government, global conflict must continue.<sup>27</sup>

Elson courted the president-elect’s church membership as soon as the pastor returned from the Middle East in November 1952.<sup>28</sup> Elson contacted Dwight’s brother, Milton Eisenhower, to put in a good word to his brother about the NPC. In a letter to the president-elect, Elson presented the significance of NPC as the national representative of the major mainline denomination, the PCUSA. Finally, he concluded by proposing a meeting in which the President could meet Elson and two current elders, J. Edgar Hoover and Lt. General William S. Paul, to further discuss the church.<sup>29</sup> At this meeting, on January 2, 1953, Eisenhower disclosed his previous difficulties with attending church. When the president-elect had served as president of Columbia University, he had been pressured to join the Episcopal church even though he was uncomfortable with the “excessive liturgy,” and kneeling to receive the Eucharist at the front of the church.<sup>30</sup> Elson happily explained the simplicity of worship in his Presbyterian church and the way elders served communion pew by pew while congregants stayed in their seats. Elson took pride in how “the dignity of worship and the order of service at the [NPC] at that time were perfectly suited to President Eisenhower’s personal preferences.”<sup>31</sup> Elson’s vernacular religion, and the way it radiated out into the performance of the order of service, found political legitimation in the dignified disciplined commander-in-chief.

The first opportunity for Elson to practice his religion by sacralizing Eisenhower's Cold War presidency came on January 20, 1953. Elson conducted a solemn, twenty-minute pre-inaugural service of worship and dedication for the president and cabinet. While pre-inaugural worship was a longstanding tradition, this was the first time the president invited the whole of his administration to join him at his own church. Elson carefully planned the service so each of the spiritual images would find their clear fulfillment in Eisenhower's ascension to the presidency: from the opening hymn "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past" to the New Testament reading wherein Paul urged putting on the whole armor of God to wrestle "against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Elson chose these passages because they seemed to him "the most apt and helpful at this particular time in history."<sup>32</sup> Elson engaged in figural interpretation to see Eisenhower as the fulfillment of these Biblical passages. In doing so, Elson arrayed the beginning of inauguration day with a sacralization of the United States' place as God's chosen people, who providentially-democratically chose a leader to put on God's armor to wage war against the communist rulers of darkness of this world.

The service ended with a series of prayers, some written by Elson for the occasion. He prayed for President Eisenhower:

Almighty God...Grant unto thy servant, Dwight David Eisenhower, now and henceforth, health of body, serenity of soul, clarity of insight, soundness of judgement, a lofty moral courage, a sanctified stewardship of office, and a constant and confident faith in Thee...Make him a channel of Thy Grace and an instrument of Thy Power upon this earth, that righteousness and truth, justice and honor may be promoted and upheld among the men and nations of this world.<sup>33</sup>

Elson invoked God's benediction on the new president, revealing his own perspective on the proper role of an American Cold War leader and giving religious institutional legitimacy for Eisenhower to understand himself as a conduit of God's grace and power in waging a holy war among the nations of the earth. Between the end of this service and the inauguration, Eisenhower

decided to open his presidency with prayer. The words of Elson's prayer over him still in his ears, his own prayer bears marked similarities. However, the main difference lies in the fact that he, who was not a clergyman, stepped into the clergy's role, praying over the whole nation gathered in the National Mall and around radios and televisions across the nation:

Almighty God, as we stand here at this moment my future associates in the executive branch of government join me in beseeching that Thou will make full and complete our dedication to the service of citizens everywhere. Give us, we pray, the power to discern clearly right from wrong, and allow all our words and actions to be governed thereby, and by the laws of this land. May cooperation be permitted...so that all may work for the good of our beloved country and Thy glory.<sup>34</sup>

Eisenhower felt the sacralization of his calling from Elson, and he began his presidency conflating the good of the United States and the glory of God .

Prayer proved a powerful way of strengthening anticommunism at home and undermining the spread of communism abroad. Elson knew the social power of prayer, and he made sure his parishioners recognized it as well. Before the first cabinet meeting, Elson wrote to Eisenhower, saying, "since you symbolize today a moral resurgence and spiritual counter-offensive in our world, the establishment at this time of the practice of prayer as the initial act at cabinet meetings would have a tremendous effect upon the cabinet and the country."<sup>35</sup> Elson then offered to prepare these prayers personally or to arrange for representatives of other denominations and faiths to do so as well. Eisenhower adopted this public practice of prayer, although there is no evidence that he accepted his pastor's latter offer, preferring to either offer his own prayers or simply pause for silent prayer.<sup>36</sup>

Eisenhower realized the Cold War foreign affairs potential for prayer when he spoke at the WCC to Protestants from across the globe in 1954. Speaking "as a private citizen" and member of a WCC constituent church, he urged "every single person, in every single country in the world, who believes in the power of a Supreme Being, to join in a mighty, simultaneous,

intense act of faith...a personal prayer...for a just and lasting peace.”<sup>37</sup> The Cold War strategy of such a call was that only the atheist communist would be excluded from a prayer for peace. In effect, every religious person, especially in the third world, would stand in spiritual solidarity with the American free world in support of peace, against what would seem like a belligerent, atheist communism. The United States Information Agency under Abbott Washburn enthusiastically assumed the call for international prayer and publicized the speech and presidential admonition to pray throughout the world.<sup>38</sup> Of course, Eisenhower could only claim to speak as a member of a WCC constituent church because Elson baptized him into the NPC on February 1, 1953, just twelve days after his inauguration. Thus, Elson’s solemn practice of his religion in providing the official ordinances of the church to the president provided a precondition for Eisenhower’s Cold War use of religion.

Eisenhower did not want his faith to be on the political stage, but Elson knew his mere example would powerfully contribute to the “nation’s spiritual recovery.”<sup>39</sup> Much to Eisenhower’s anger, the press was sitting in the back of the church during his baptism. Eisenhower was happy to use religion to support the Cold War effort, but he was less willing to parade his own faith in that pursuit. Elson, on the other hand, regarded the president as “a symbol of the incipient spiritual renaissance of our times,” saying as much on a nationally broadcasted televised interview.<sup>40</sup> Hoping to use the exemplary power of the president’s spiritual life to both sacralize American culture and keep communism at bay, Elson dedicated his popular book *America’s Spiritual Recovery* to his parishioner-president. In the forward, J. Edgar Hoover commented, “The fact that Dr. Elson could dedicate his important account of America’s spiritual recovery to Dwight D. Eisenhower...is in itself a significant sign of the times.”<sup>41</sup> Hoover elevated the book’s importance: “when spiritual guidance is at a low ebb, moral principles are in

a state of deterioration. Secularism advances in periods when men forget God. And it is in these periods that the godless tyranny of atheistic Communism has made its greatest inroads.”<sup>42</sup> In Hoover’s estimation, Elson’s book helped fill the urgent need for spiritual guidance.

Aside from contributing to the political-theological theater, Elson contributed concretely to waging the Cold War with religion as well. Sharing Eisenhower’s frustration at the way the country’s major religious organizations (especially the National Association of Evangelicals and the NCC) were divided and thus unable to launch a unified campaign against communism, Elson co-founded the Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order (FRASCO) with Charles Lowery. The core purpose of this organization was to “pin-point the religious issue in the crisis of our time...to unite all believers in God in the struggle between the free world and atheistic communism which aims to destroy both religion and liberty.” FRASCO was inherently interfaith, inviting members of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish congregations. It expected members to maintain doctrinal differences and join together to combat “Communism and secularism...in the social and civil order.”<sup>43</sup> Elson and Lowery brought together a remarkable group to serve as the board of directors: Billy Graham contributed religious celebrity and his neo-evangelical network; Henry Ford II the backing of big-business; Herbert Hoover the legitimacy of a former president; George Meany the support of big-labor; and missionary kid and publisher of *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* magazines Henry Luce brought his media empire.<sup>44</sup> Each November, 1954-1957, FRASCO hosted an annual conference. The theme remained consistent: allegiance to spiritual values in opposition to communist materialism. While FRASCO never had the same status as the NCC or NAE, that was never its goal. Instead, it succeeded in forging among Americans a spiritual unity in opposition to the atheist Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup>

As Eisenhower's time in office progressed, it seemed America had indeed made a spiritual recovery. "Church membership rose from 49 percent in 1940 to 69 percent in 1960..."<sup>46</sup> Elson thought the addition to the Pledge of Allegiance, "One nation, under God" had become a symbol calling the US toward greater public piety. At the second pre-inaugural service of worship at the NPC on January 20, 1957, Elson preached on the new motto. It had been

legislated into our pledge of allegiance...printed on our postage stamps and impressed on our coins. Now let us each impress it deep within our own hearts and manifest it in our lives and national conduct. Such testimony...will sharpen the irreconcilable differences between the two great poles of power in our world today. But it will also give us the strength to live in these times and play our God-appointed role in history.<sup>47</sup>

For Eisenhower, his God appointed role was manifest in waging the Cold War, with religion, the CIA, and massive nuclear buildup.<sup>48</sup> For Elson, his self-understood role was to preach the gospel, not "solely as a weapon of ideological conflict." And yet, he realized, like J. Edgar Hoover, that when people are spiritually weak, "they are ideologically vulnerable. Therefore, when God is found for God's sake, when God is served and righteousness is pursued, we are thereby stronger in meeting the conflicts of the age."<sup>49</sup> Elson was not solely a political-theological ideologue. His vernacular religion was a classical Christianity with both conservative and liberal theological tendencies that also recognized the geo-political utility of religion.

### **"Praise Be to Allah and Long Live Eisenhower"**

The way Elson lived his vernacular religion not only sacralized Eisenhower's presidency but also advocated for a stronger Arab-American diplomatic connection within the religious Cold War. "All of my life I have been interested in Palestine as the Holy Land, the land of the Book and the people of the Bible. Originally, this grew out of family Bible reading, Sunday School instruction, and more specifically out of my theological education."<sup>50</sup> Developing out of this youthful interest, Elson devoted his considerable energy and connections to improving people-to-

people relations between the Arab Middle East and the United States, travelling throughout the area as the chairman of the National Council of the American Friends of the Middle East and spiritually authorizing Eisenhower's pro-Arab foreign policy decisions.

When looking back on his life in 1968, Elson presented his own work with the Middle East within a 150-year history of Presbyterian-American relations with the area. "[T]he United States had through its missionaries, educators and travelers...developed an attitude of friendliness...with the people of the Middle East." He related how Presbyterian missionaries had sought not to make converts but had merely attempted to live the Christian life for the Arab world to witness, slowly penetrating the culture, establishing educational institutions, freeing women from "their confinement under Moslem culture," and bringing the "beginning of industrial activity." Then, at the end of World War II, Jewish refugees from Europe poured into Palestine, and in 1948, Truman recognized the nation state of Israel. "The loss of goodwill in the Middle East was immediate, pervasive, and disastrous...we lost in 48 hours through this action the good will which had been created over a period of 150 years."<sup>51</sup>

Seeking to restore the lost good will, Elson's parishioner, Dorothy Thompson, convened a group of likeminded individuals on May 15, 1951, to form the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME). The group, whose board of directors Elson would join in 1952 and whose National Council he would chair over the next two and half decades, shared an almost mystical belief in the mingled fate of the Middle East and the West: "We believe that our great civilizations...derive their strength essentially from the same wellsprings and that a better mutual understanding...will result in greater harmony of action." Driven by this belief, the group set out to "interpret the culture, the problems and the aspirations of the Middle East" to North

Americans, and to interpret the “real America with its ideals of freedom, justice and peace for all the people of the world” to the Middle East.<sup>52</sup>

The AFME was, on the face of it, a private non-profit seeking to improve relations between two parts of the world, but it was later revealed to have been funded by the CIA.<sup>53</sup> Hugh Wilford has demonstrated that, while the CIA benefited in numerous ways from the work of the AFME, it would be a mistake to think it was merely a puppet or front organization.<sup>54</sup> “The relationship between the CIA and the [AFME] was less like that of a patron and client than an alliance of partners united by a shared purpose and outlook.” That said, the relationship was anything but straight forward. The AFME professed to be a private organization that supported the Middle East, and yet it relied on the US government for its financial funding. Equally, because the CIA held the largest portion of the AFME’s annual budget, it maintained the final say in AFME affairs.<sup>55</sup> Thus, when Elson travelled to the Middle East, he went vicariously on the CIA’s dime.

Elson contributed to the stated goal of the AFME through his unique performance of his religion. When he travelled to seven capitals in the Middle East as AFME’s first annual cultural exchange visitor and lecturer in 1952, he expressed his vernacular beliefs by speaking on “The Spiritual Significance of the World Crisis.”<sup>56</sup> He hoped to convey the way Americans and Arabs were “common inheritors of a faith that man, the individual, is possessed of dignity and freedom as the gift of God at his creation” and that this dignified free individual is in danger of being “overwhelmed by [communism’s] mass-man.” While the address avoided specifically Christian ideas, it conformed clearly to a sermon, warning his Iraqi audience of the dangers of the new communist religion just to their north and casting a vision for an eschatological world of cooperation between the Middle East and the West where “each area of the world will contribute

by its own culture to a world never before envisioned...” defined by justice and righteousness.<sup>57</sup> Having interpreted what he saw as best in American culture to the Middle East, Elson returned from his trip, invigorated to interpret the Middle East to the recently elected president.

While Elson’s performance of “official” religion to Eisenhower cannot be said to have been the cause of the President’s pro-Arab policy or his enactment of the Eisenhower Doctrine in the Middle East, Elson made sure that the president felt the full support of his pastoral ministry when making decisions regarding that part of the world, beginning with the Suez Crisis of 1956. When Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser seized control of the Suez Canal from the British on July 26, 1956, the British and French devised a scheme whereby Israel would invade Egypt, the British would intervene to stop the fighting, and Britain would reacquire the canal as an apparent side effect. Eisenhower was blindsided by this overt imperial action. Not wanting to be seen siding with colonial powers or as an enemy of Arab nationalism, Eisenhower demanded an immediate cease-fire, supporting Nasser. The situation concluded in early November, and England and France, both symbolically weakened, were now aware that they could no longer operate in the world without America’s consent or apart from US Cold War objectives.<sup>58</sup>

Elson wrote to the president three months later to encourage him, saying that in his opinion, Suez had been the highest moment in his career as president and that he was certain that the president had acted “from the highest possible moral elevation.” He went on to say that he had spoken to his fellow congregant, John Foster Dulles, about the American public’s perception of the President’s action. He was happy to let the president know that, since talking with Dulles, he had “been seeking to marshal church leaders in support of your position.” Reaching out to his contacts at the NCC, Elson was confident that they would release a statement in support of the president the following week. Closing the letter, Elson displayed his own perspective: “The

world is greatly blessed by your leadership...and your unwillingness to be manipulated by a minority segment.”<sup>59</sup>

Elson attached a lengthy postscript to his spiritually authorizing note that pleased Eisenhower. Relating a story from one of Elson’s missionary contacts in Lebanon, the letter told how a devout Muslim man had come from a “Communist-infested section of North Syria” to a missionary hospital so his wife could undergo an operation. When the nurse came to report the success of the procedure to the worried husband, he proclaimed, “praise be to Allah and long live Eisenhower.” The letter concluded, “the political climate here is quite changed. Gone, for the present, is our fear of waking to find the Communists ‘in’.” Eisenhower’s actions at Suez had, according to Elson’s Presbyterian connection, “captured the hearts of the people of this region.”<sup>60</sup> When the American public was less understanding of the president’s action, Elson’s encouragement spiritually sanctioned his actions and demonstrated the effectiveness of one of the president’s goals, to develop pro-American feelings throughout the Arab world. Whether or not the story was true, Elson used it to pastorally care for Eisenhower as he made pro-Arab decisions in the Middle East.

As Elson prepared to travel in the Middle East once again in the fall of 1957, he contacted Secretary of State Dulles, letting him know that if “I can be of any possible service to you through my many contacts in the Middle Eastern nations, I am at your command.”<sup>61</sup> While neither the President nor Dulles wanted to appear to be sending their private pastor traveling with the AFME on government business, the heads of state that he visited throughout the region knew they were meeting with the president’s pastor.<sup>62</sup> Apparently for all involved, his travel was a great success. The AFME reported how Elson “was declared State Guest in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia[,]” and how he had “received the Lebanese Medal of Merit and the

Second Order of the Jordan Star.”<sup>63</sup> Upon returning home, Elson met with Eisenhower to report on his trip, whereupon the president asked him to also meet with Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs William Rountree to provide diplomatic intelligence.<sup>64</sup>

The AFME’s delighted over the media attention Elson and his pro-Arab sermon, “Promise to the Promised Land,” received upon his return. Here, from the spiritually authoritative pulpit looking down over all his powerful parishioners, Elson retold the history of the Middle East, beginning with Abraham and ending with Eisenhower. Conspicuously absent from the narrative was God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17 in which God promises the land of Canaan as an inheritance to his descendants, a passage frequently employed by the Zionist movement Elson so despised. Also of note was the way the narrative transitioned smoothly from Biblical to post-Biblical history. Suddenly, the land was empty and the “blood brothers of the ancient Hebrews,” the Arabs, inhabited Palestine. Elson elaborated on the eighteen hundred years the Arabs owned the land and on the tragic consequences of the creation of the Nation State of Israel in 1948. He gestured behind him to the altar at the front of the church, upon which the ordinance of communion was served. “Our Holy Table, made of wood from the Cedars of Lebanon, is a sign of our association with the area.”<sup>65</sup>

Bringing the sermon to its conclusion, he proclaimed the great importance of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the January 1957 declaration that any nation, especially in the Middle East, could request aid from the US military to secure and protect territorial and political independence from international communism.<sup>66</sup> Elson then offered a specific foreign policy application: “What Israel has done by her capitol and skills can be done in varying degrees elsewhere—given technical aid, capital, hard work, and cooperation.” For Elson, the Middle East mattered spiritually “because we are a people of a Book—a Book which came out of the Middle

East; and because we are people who love and revere the Holy Land—a land holy to three great faiths...wherein may be determined the future issues of peace and war and human destiny.”<sup>67</sup> Beyond those listening in the pews, Elson knew members of prominent newspapers sat in the back of his church, ready to publish his words. That the AFME annual report presented this sermon and the media attention it received as a central way the organization fulfilled its CIA funded goals for that year indicates that Elson recognized the social and political power of his sermons, even though he said he did not preach with politics in mind.<sup>68</sup>

Eisenhower saw Elson as an expert on the oriental Arab mind.<sup>69</sup> The president solicited Elson views seeking to understand how to maintain what good will remained toward the US after siding with the British against Arab nationalists by invading Lebanon and Jordan in 1958.<sup>70</sup> Elson began his response to the president, “if we combine spiritual motivation and moral rectitude with military firmness...we can exploit the present crisis in the Middle East for constructive ends.”<sup>71</sup> Once again, the pastor framed the Cold War conflict in the Middle East in religious terms. He encouraged the president that the Arab people would understand if he spoke in spiritual terms and proceeded to give him a list of things the Arab community wanted to hear from him. He told the president to assure the people of the Middle East of both America’s abiding friendship and how the US shares “with them their aspirations for self-fulfillment, for freedom under God, and the achievement of national destiny. Nationalism is good when spiritually disciplined.” Elson believed the president should declare to them that Arab unity is natural and laudable and pledge that the US would work through the UN to resolve lingering issues regarding the partition of Palestine. The pastor synthesized the situation: “Israel fears extinction; the Arabs fear Israel expansion. If we are to assure Israeli survival, we can have friends in the Middle East only if, at the same time, we guarantee *Israel’s containment*.” Finally,

Elson summarized, “it is the combination of unbridled nationalism, the drive toward Arab unity, and [their] excessive pre-occupation with Israel which gives Communism its opportunity to disrupt, destroy, and colonize the Middle East.” Thus, we must “interpret our spiritual motivations to them in their terms, and patiently and firmly attempt to guide them.”<sup>72</sup>

Eisenhower could not have missed the startling analogy Elson drew between the Soviet Union and Israel as Elson recommended the *containment* of Israel, mirroring the primary foreign policy of the Cold War since Truman of containing the Soviet Union and communism.

Eisenhower “very much liked” Elson’s presentation of the situation in the Middle East. The president agreed that Israel needed to be kept out of the broader conflicts in the area and was frustrated by the way Arab leaders focused almost entirely on Israel and not on the perceived Soviet threat. Eisenhower continued, “the religious approach offers, I agree, a direct path to Arab interest.” While the president reported how he wanted to generate a more positive relationship with the pan-Arab world, he felt that this could only be carried out within a broader domestic support for the Middle East by the American people, a goal he had contributed to through a few speeches but felt the clergy “ought to be active in.”<sup>73</sup> Elson could not have helped but feel his sermon, “Promise to the Promised Land” the preceding fall had found its mark.

Eisenhower applied Elson’s prescriptions in two ways. First, Elson reported how a few days after the exchange of letters, the president gave a speech at the UN. “I listened with avid interest and was pleased to find some of my ideas and phrases coming through from the lips of the President of the United States as he addressed the whole world through the United Nations.”<sup>74</sup> Second, Eisenhower convened a meeting in September 1957 with Frank Wisner, Deputy Director of Plans at with the CIA, John Foster Dulles, and Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs William Rountree. Paraphrasing Elson, Eisenhower told those in the

room that “we should do everything possible to stress the ‘holy war’ aspect,” encouraging Islamic jihad against godless communism. Dulles recommended establishing a task force which would deliver guns, money, and intelligence to the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Lebanon. The two actions taken because of this meeting were first the establishment of a Jordanian intelligence service by which the CIA supplies intelligence to Jordan to this day and second, the placement of Jordan’s King Hussein on the CIA’s payroll for the next twenty years of his reign.<sup>75</sup> Elson would have been pleased to know the foreign policy effects of the way he lived his religion.

The way Elson lived his religion sacralized the Cold War and worked toward a closer US-Arab relationship, shaping how the US waged the Cold War in the Middle East in the 1950s. When Elson expressed his unique faith in sermons, important people thought differently. When he prayed, he shaped the contours of America’s political-religious landscape and Eisenhower’s own faith. When he baptized the president, he sanctified his Cold War agenda as well. As Elson travelled to the Middle East, he represented both the AFME and the president’s spiritual sympathy for the Islamic world. In the end, for better or worse, it is as J. Edgar Hoover said: “Dr. Elson makes a real contribution because he speaks from a life of broad experience and a deep awareness of Christian values in our national life. A man of God, with deep spiritual discernment, he lives his religion. To come under the influence of his personality is in itself inspiring.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For these famous congregants see Elson to Eisenhower, November 23, 1952, Folder 3, Box 1, Record Group 253, Reverend Edward L. R. Elson Papers, 1924-1988, Presbyterian Historical Society Archives, Philadelphia PA (hereafter EEP); Elson to Dulles December 1, 1955, Elson, Edward, 1955, John Foster Dulles Papers, Box 91, Reel 35; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library (hereafter JFDP) Edward Elson, *Wide Was His Parish* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), 98; William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 264; Edward Elson, interview by Larry LeSueur, *Longines Chronoscope*, CBS, December, 1954, <https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.95930>. See also, “How I Pray for My People,” *New Christian Advocate*, July 1959.

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- <sup>2</sup> Edward Elson, *Wide Was His Parish*, 87; Wolfgang Saxon, “Edward L. R. Elson Dies at 86; Influential Cleric in Washington,” *The New York Times*, August 28, 1993, sec. Obituaries.
- <sup>3</sup> William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 21.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 5.
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, 259.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America’s Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 6-10.
- <sup>9</sup> Leonard Norman Primiano, “Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife,” *Western Folklore* 54, no. 1 (1995), 44.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 44-47. Vernacular religion de-naturalizes hierarchy in the study of religion. Analyzing someone at the center of “official” religion through the lens of vernacular religion de-naturalizes the categories often used to study religion and allows for greater nuance in the study of how Christianity interacted with American Civil Religion.
- <sup>11</sup> Elson, *Wide Was His Parish*, 20, 22.
- <sup>12</sup> Edward Elson Oral History, interviewed by Paul Hopper, January 11, 1968, Folder 2, Box 14, Record Group 253, EEP, 25; Edward Elson, *Wide Was His Parish*, 19.
- <sup>13</sup> Edward Elson, *Wide Was His Parish*, 26. Elson to Lewis, November 1, 1951, Folder 16, Box 1, Record Group 253, EEP. For more on “Christian manhood” in the early twentieth century see Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, (New York, NY: Liveright, 2020).
- <sup>14</sup> Edward Elson, *Wide Was His Parish*, 25-27.
- <sup>15</sup> Edward Elson Oral History, interviewed by Paul Hopper, January 11, 1968, Folder 2, Box, 14, Record Group 253, EEP, 33-34.
- <sup>16</sup> Ralph Tyler Flewelling, “Can Civilization Become Christian,” *The Personalist* 1, no. 1 (1920), 13.
- <sup>17</sup> Edward Elson, “Washington Confidential: Another View,” Sermon delivered to National Presbyterian Church, May 20, 1951, Folder 2, Box, 2, Record Group 253, EEP.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 63-64.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 74, 70.
- <sup>20</sup> David A. Hollinger, *Christianity’s American Fate: How Religion Became More Conservative and Society More Secular* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022); Heath W. Carter, “Beware Drawing Bright Lines Between Evangelical and Ecumenical Protestants,” *ChristianityToday.com*, February 17, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/february-web-only/david-hollinger-christianity-american-fate-ecumenical.html>.
- <sup>21</sup> Edward Elson, “A Time for Intolerance” Sermon delivered to National Presbyterian Church, March 23, 1953, Folder 2, Box 2, Record Group 253, EEP.
- <sup>22</sup> For an extreme example of the Christian, Arabist, tendency to conflate antisemitism and anti-Zionism see Elson’s contemporary, State Department worker, Edwin M. Wright’s oral history. Edwin M. Wright Oral History Interview, interview by Richard D. McKinzie, July 26, 1974, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/wright>, Truman Presidential Library.
- <sup>23</sup> Edward Elson, “A Time for Intolerance.”
- <sup>24</sup> Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 257; Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 105-108.
- <sup>25</sup> Quoted in Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 259.
- <sup>26</sup> For how this quotation is used in scholarly treatments of American civil religion see Patrick Henry, “‘And I Don’t Care What It Is’: The Tradition-History of a Civil Religion Proof-Text,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49, no. 1 (1981): 35–49.
- <sup>27</sup> Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 260.
- <sup>28</sup> It is not precisely clear what kind of relationship Elson and Eisenhower shared. In 1991, Eisenhower’s secretary, Ann Whitman, said, commenting on Eisenhower’s faith, “I think he thought that Dr. Elson was a complete phony.” And that “he used to gripe about going to church.” Ann Whitman, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library Oral History, interviewed by Martin Mack Teasley, February 15, 1991, <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/oral-histories>. However, it is evident from the context that Whitman found all religion hypocritical. Hugh Wilford is less certain, but takes this quotation to indicate that Elson may have had little influence over Eisenhower in *America’s Great Game: The CIA’s Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East*, (Basic Books, 2017), 186, 315-316 fn20. Inboden, on the other hand argues for a “close relationship” and that Elson did indeed influence Eisenhower’s

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policy planning on occasion in *Religion and American Foreign Policy*. This paper argues that regardless of their personal relationship, Elson clearly supported Eisenhower's effort to sacralize the Cold War conflict.

<sup>29</sup> Elson to Eisenhower, November 23, 1952, Folder 3, Box 1, Record Group 253, EEP.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Elson, Diary 1, January 2, 1953, Folder 12, Box 10, Record Group 253, EEP.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid; Elson, *Wide Was His Parish*, 114. Thus both John Foster Dulles and J. Edgar Hoover served the president communion as elders of the church.

<sup>32</sup> "Eisenhower Aides Join Him at Church," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1953.

<sup>33</sup> Elson, *Wide Was His Parish*, 112; "Eisenhower Aides Join Him At Church," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1953.

<sup>34</sup> Prayer from Inaugural Address of President Eisenhower, January 20, 1953, published in "This Nation Under God: A Recognition of the Basic Sources of Our Nation's Religious Heritage" May 3, 1953, Folder 2, Box 2, Record Group 253, EEP. The preface of this pamphlet presents "the teachings of Dr. Edward L. R. Elson...closely paralleled by the...declarations of President Eisenhower."

<sup>35</sup> Elson to Eisenhower, January 14, 1953, Folder 3, Box 1, Record Group 253, EEP.

<sup>36</sup> It is worth noting that on at least one occasion, "when reminded that he had begun a cabinet meeting without first pausing for [prayer]...he snapped, "Oh goddamit, we forgot the silent prayer." Quoted in Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Anchor, 2012), 442. Elson overlooked these moments, choosing to see Eisenhower as a "genuinely good person...having an exemplary practice of his Christian faith." Elson, *Wide Was His Parish*, 132.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 71.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 448-50.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Elson, interview by Larry LeSueur, *Longines Chronoscope*, CBS, December, 1954, <https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.95930>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. This difference of understanding between Elson and Eisenhower was intense yet proved a short-lived conflict. Eisenhower recorded, "We were scarcely home before the pact was being publicized, by the pastor, to the hilt. I had been promised, by him, that there would be no publicity. I feel like changing at once to another church of the same denomination. I shall if he breaks out again." Quoted in Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 266. Eisenhower did not leave the church but began anonymously tithing each year up front and inviting Elson to play golf and attend private dinners with him at the White House within weeks. Eisenhower to Elson, April 8, 1953; Eisenhower to Elson, June 4, 1953; Eisenhower to Elson June 5, 1953; Eisenhower to Elson July 8, 1953; Folder 3, Box 1, Record Group 253, EEP.

<sup>41</sup> J. Edgar Hoover *Forward* in Edward L. R. Elson, *America's Spiritual Recovery* (F.H. Revell Co, 1954).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. For more on Elson and Hoover's relationship see Lerone A. Martin, *The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover: How the FBI Aided and Abetted the Rise of White Christian Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 91-104. Martin chronicles the way J. Edgar Hoover "built up the FBI as a white Christian force that partnered with white Evangelicals to aid and abet the rise of white Christian Nationalism." Elson is presented as one of the foundational figures "of mainstream white evangelicalism" that "willingly partnered with J. Edgar Hoover and the extralegal practices of his FBI to bring America back to their God." While the portrait of Elson's vernacular religion presented here nuances Martin's use of Elson, it should be clear that Elson spiritual patriotism and his ambivalence toward "better race relations" resonates with Martin's demonstration that Hoover too found his works sacralized by his pastor.

<sup>43</sup> Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 279-82.

<sup>44</sup> Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 162-163.

<sup>45</sup> Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 289.

<sup>46</sup> Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 448-50, 440.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Elson, "A Nation Under God" Sermon delivered to National Presbyterian Church, January 20, 1957, Folder 4, Box 2, Record Group 253, EEP.

<sup>48</sup> H. W. Brands, *The Devil We Knew: Americans and the Cold War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 46-74.

<sup>49</sup> Elson, "Evaluating Our Religious Revival," *The Journal of Religious Thought*, 59.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Elson Oral History, interviewed by Paul Hopper, Interview 7 of 8, September 22, 1968, Folder 4, Box 14, Record Group 253, EEP, 230.

<sup>51</sup> Edward Elson Oral History, interviewed by Paul Hopper, Interview 7 of 8, September 22, 1968, Folder 4, Box 14, Record Group 253, EEP, 235-238.

- <sup>52</sup> American Friends of the Middle East Second Annual Report of the Executive Vice President: 1952-1953. American Friends of the Middle East Annual Report. Jun 1, 1953, <https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/19073>.
- <sup>53</sup> Neil Sheehan Special To the New York Times, “5 New Groups Tied To C.I.A. Conduits; Got Funds of 3 Foundations the Agency Aided Student Unit Favors Ending Links 5 New Groups Tied To C.I.A.” *The New York Times*, February 17, 1967, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1967/02/17/archives/5-new-groups-tied-to-cia-conduits-got-funds-of-3-foundations-the.html>; Hugh Wilford, *America’s Great Game*, Ch. 9; Hugh Wilford, “American Friends of the Middle East: The CIA, US Citizens, and the Secret Battle for American Public Opinion in the Arab—Israeli Conflict, 1947—1967,” *Journal of American Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017): 93–116.
- <sup>54</sup> Wilford identifies several ways the CIA benefited from AFME work: AFME established non-embassy buildings the CIA could operate out of in the Middle East; Middle Easterners were more likely to accept an invitation to visit the United States from AFME than from an official government organization. *America’s Great Game*, 127-130.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, *America’s Great Game*, 130-131.
- <sup>56</sup> Elson Travel Report, Oct 17-31, 1952, Folder 14, Box 10, Record Group 253, EEP; Elson, “The Spiritual Significance of the World Crisis,” Address to the Iraq Academy, Baghdad, Iraq, October 31, 1952, Record Group 253, Box 7, EEP; American Friends of the Middle East Second Annual Report of the Executive Vice President: 1952-1953. American Friends of the Middle East Annual Report. Jun 1, 1953, <https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/19073>; Edward Elson Oral History, interviewed by Paul Hopper, Interview 7 of 8, September 22, 1968, Folder 4, Box 14, Record Group 253, EEP, 240.
- <sup>57</sup> Elson, “The Spiritual Significance of the World Crisis,” October 31, 1952, Box 7, Record Group 253, EEP
- <sup>58</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, (Basic Books, 2019), 272-273.
- <sup>59</sup> Elson to Eisenhower, February 24, 1958, Folder 3, Box 1, Record Group 253, EEP.
- <sup>60</sup> Eisenhower to Elson, February 25, 1958, Folder 3, Box 1, Record Group 253, EEP.
- <sup>61</sup> John Foster Dulles to Elson, January 8, 1957, Box 116, Reel 45, JFDP.
- <sup>62</sup> Edward Elson Oral History, interviewed by Paul Hopper, Interview 7 of 8, September 22, 1968, Folder 4, Box 14, Record Group 253, EEP, 242-244.
- <sup>63</sup> American Friends of the Middle East Annual Report: 1957-1958. American Friends of the Middle East Annual Report. Jan 1, 1958, <https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/19078>
- <sup>64</sup> Eisenhower to Elson, August 5, 1957, Folder 3, Box 1, Record Group 253, EEP.
- <sup>65</sup> Eisenhower to Elson, August 5, 1957, Folder 3, Box 1, Record Group 253, EEP.
- <sup>66</sup> Editorial Note, January 5, 1957, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Near East Region; Iran; Iraq*: Volume XII, Doc. 183; <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v12/d183>.
- <sup>67</sup> Edward Elson, “Promise to the Promised Land” Sermon delivered to National Presbyterian Church, August 11, 1957, Folder 4, Box 2, Record Group 253, EEP.
- <sup>68</sup> This would confirm the fears of American Zionists who accused Elson of trying to wield his spiritual authority to influence the President in a pro-Arab direction. See Eliezer Whartman, “Eisenhower’s Pastor the Reverend Elson’s Views on Israel,” *The American Zionist*, February 1956, Folder 7, Box 14, Record Group 253, EEP.
- <sup>69</sup> In as much as he drew on his “expert” knowledge of the Middle East to buttress the US empire, Elson can be usefully understood according to Edward Said’s definition of the American Orientalist. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 291.
- <sup>70</sup> Ivan Pearson, “The Syrian Crisis of 1957, the Anglo-American ‘Special Relationship’, and the 1958 Landings in Jordan and Lebanon,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (2007): 45–64.
- <sup>71</sup> Elson to Eisenhower, undated, Folder 3, Box 1, Record Group 253, EEP. While the document is undated, the words of this letter match precisely Elson’s recording of it in his Oral History, dating it to Sunday, July 24.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>73</sup> Eisenhower to Elson, July 31, 1958, National Security Archive, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB78/propaganda%20133.pdf>.
- <sup>74</sup> Edward Elson Oral History, interviewed by Paul Hopper, Interview 7 of 8, September 22, 1968, Folder 4, Box 14, Record Group 253, EEP, 242-244. Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy* confirms Elson’s memory, demonstrating the many quotations and ideas Eisenhower used in this speech, 296-297.
- <sup>75</sup> Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*, Reprint edition (New York: Anchor, 2008), 136-137. Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 294. Inboden makes the connection to Weiner’s reporting on this meeting.
- <sup>76</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, *Forward*, in Edward L. R. Elson, *America’s Spiritual Recovery*.