

Religion and Morality During the Early Cold War: The Rockefeller Foundation's Cautious Approach to Funding New Morals

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1: Introduction

In 1941, when Henry Luce released his article 'The American Century,' he eloquently defined the strength and leadership of the United States not just in material terms but also normatively: defending constitutional democracy in the world and breaking down U.S. isolationism.¹⁾ In the immediate period after World War II, ideological conflicts over political and economic systems in the United States and the Soviet Union overshadowed politics across Europe and soon spilled over into the so-called Third World. After Joseph Stalin died in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev's development assistance to the Third World expanded. Simultaneously, decolonization in Asia and Africa accelerated, and more newly independent countries were searching for post-colonial political and economic systems. However, Third World intervention under the Eisenhower administration was deeply influenced by the dichotomic U.S.-Soviet conflict and domino theory, which failed to capture the nuanced interests of local elites.²⁾ The discourse that ridiculed U.S. foreign policy, exemplified by *Ugly American* in 1958, was prevalent, and the United States was often criticized for being materialistic.³⁾ The United States as the guardian of democracy, as Luce had hoped, did not necessarily remain a shining star but rather was constantly challenged.

For the Rockefeller Foundation (RF), the leading U.S. private foundation running grantmaking programs worldwide, these domestic and international challenges to fundamental American values – democracy, freedom, and individualism – were not merely external issues. It was also an intellectual and moral issue related to the RF's mission: to improve the welfare of humanity and to advance knowledge. For the RF, advocacy of American values as a counterforce to the failed materialistic image of the United States was more than just rhetoric in opposition to communism. The late 1940s and 1950s imposed multifaceted questions upon the RF's activities. It was a period when the scientific method had become more influential within the social sciences than ever before, and scientific progress had both produced technical euphoria and the tragedies of the atomic bomb. The expansion of federal government and business organizations and the experience of World War II were continuous forces in restructuring the postwar U.S. and international society. These dramatic social transformations blurred moral judgment and led to value relativism. The RF leaders and staff became conscious of

how the values underpinning democracy could be systematically articulated and propagated throughout the world, including the newly independent countries.

This study will focus on how the RF recognized the myriad challenges of the early Cold War period and responded to them from a religious and moral perspective. By doing so, this study will elucidate the complex and nuanced relationship between religion, particularly Christianity, and morality during the Cold War from the private sector perspective of the RF. There are three major findings.

First, there was a conflict in the debate over the source of morality in the post-war RF. Historically, John D. Rockefeller, Sr. and his son, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., are known for their tremendous donations to Christianity. The RF, on the other hand, has maintained a delicate distance from religious organizations, a relationship that needs to be adequately discussed. Research conducted by Lori Ryan and William Scott in 1995 sheds light upon the RF's internal conflict over different opinions on the source of morality and support for religious organizations, especially among John F. Dulles (long-time Trustee of the RF), on the one hand, and Chester Barnard (President from 1948 to 1952) and Joseph Willits (Director of the Division of Social Science from 1939 to 1954), on the other hand.⁴⁾ However, it remains underexplored how their perceptions of external conditions, such as emerging communism in the world, changing postwar American society, and the rise of the Third World, influenced their demands for revitalizing moral values and shaped the RF's grantmaking policy.

As this paper demonstrates, the diverse view on the moral foundations among the RF officers functioned as the generative spectrum to stimulate RF's grant-making program. On the one hand, Dulles sought to reconstruct a Christian-based morality, and the RF funded certain research and educational projects by Christian denominations and institutions. On the other hand, the foundation staff expected philosophers and social scientists to investigate underlying moral values and principles (like Hannah Arendt and John Rawls) or to address moral dilemmas in international politics (like Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, and George Kennan).

Second, the debate over religion and morality inside the RF had many variations during the Cold War that went beyond anti-communist rhetoric and were intertwined with issues of domestic society and Third World independence. The Cold War is also known as the War of Religions.⁵⁾ This religious war unfolded as a direct and indirect manifestation of the moral superiority of the West in the form of the defense of religious values by the West and criticism of Soviet atheism. The Roman Catholic Church was a genuine anti-communist force. The mobilization of religious rhetoric during the Cold War extended beyond the old religious circles to political leaders such as Presidents Truman and Eisenhower and policy elites such as Kennan and Paul Nitze, whose religious rhetoric about American civilization and values was generally rooted in Christianity. In short, religious faith became the 'bedrock of freedom and the lodestone of Americanism.'⁶⁾ John Foster Dulles was another active

advocator who propelled U.S. Christian morality, countering criticism of the U.S. from the Soviet Union.⁷ Dulles was also a longtime trustee of the RF and one of the leading proponents of carrying out the Foundation's program on religion and morality immediately after the war. This Dulles' proposal within the RF was based upon his equivalence of religious morality with American Christianity, which fitted well within the conventional framework of studies on the religious Cold War.⁸ However, this paper identifies diverse perceptions over why moral values were essential to the United States in the postwar and Cold War context.

Third, this paper indicates that religion and morality, often referred to in Cold War religious struggles, were carefully separated and examined within the RF due to the concern that the foundation's funding of religious organizations would be viewed as propaganda. The term 'moral and spiritual,' often used in 1946 among RF's officers, was gradually replaced by terms such as 'moral and ethics' and 'social philosophy,' while the word 'religious' was generally understood as one of the multiple sources – not the sole authoritative moral source – within the RF. Thus, the conflict over the sources of morality and ethics indicates that the RF was not necessarily monolithic in the context of religious and Cold War confrontations. Rather, many RF officers sought sources of moral values beyond religious anti-communist rhetoric. Although RF officials were less likely to doubt the fundamental values of democracy, freedom (including freedom of religion), and individualism, they hoped to avoid doctrinal explanations of such moral values as much as possible and to construct a more 'objective' and systematic establishment of morality and ethics through philosophical and empirical analysis.

The following sections provide background on the RF's postwar engagement with issues of religion and morality by presenting the Rockefeller family and the RF's tenuous relationship with religion during the interwar period. Next, this paper analyzes the process by which the RF, in the immediate postwar period, agreed to begin funding empirical and historical research in this area and to fund 'research' projects of two religious organizational bodies. After that, it discusses how the RF redefined its original interests from religion and morality to morality and ethics, or social philosophy, in the 1950s. Finally, it examines the RF's funding of related research in the 1950s and its expectations towards such research.

2: Controversial relationship between Rockefeller Jr. and religious movement during the interwar period

The RF, founded in 1913, has deep Christian origins. The founder, John D. Rockefeller, was raised as a devout Baptist. Additionally, Rockefeller's employed advisor, Frederick T. Gates, who shaped RF policy in its earlier years, was a former head of the American Baptist Education Society.⁹ However,

the relationship between the Rockefeller family's and public interests remained nuanced and sometimes even controversial. Primarily when a harsh labor dispute and subsequent massacre occurred in Ludlow, Colorado, in 1914, John D. Rockefeller Jr., the principal shareholder of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company and the owner of Ludlow coal mines, encountered severe public criticism.¹⁰⁾

The Ludlow crisis became a watershed event for Rockefeller Jr., who was about to inherit an enormous industrial fortune from his father. By leveraging this fortune, within a few years of this crisis, he embarked upon a unification movement of Christian churches to achieve harmonious relations between labor and capitalists. With the guidance of his industrial adviser and later prime minister of Canada, Mackenzie King, and public relations expert Ivy Lee, Rockefeller Jr. became heavily engaged in the Interchurch World Movement and later established the Institute of Social and Religious Research, which sponsored numerous studies on church life including the inquiry into how churches might more effectively satisfy social needs in a small industrial city.¹¹⁾

From 1919 to 1935, Rockefeller Jr. supported this approach using his financial assets and time. However, due to accumulated controversy among denominational leaders and officials of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (FCCCA), Rockefeller Jr. abandoned his unification effort.¹²⁾ Like Gates and Raymond Fosdick (RF's President from 1936–1948), he, as the Chairman and active member of the RF's Board in its first couple of decades, 'fully accepted the position that the Foundation, as such, should not get into this field of [religion].'¹³⁾ Barnard, in his letter to Henry P. Van Dusen, the President of the Union Seminary Theology (UTS) and a member of the Trustee of the RF (from 1947 to 1963), explained that '[f]or a long time the officers of the Rockefeller Foundation have believed that it was inadvisable and not practicable for the Foundation to support any kind of religious activity.' 'The conservatism expressed above,' he added, 'was carried over to the field of ethics and morals because of their close relation to religion.'¹⁴⁾

3: Post-war U.S. Moral Deficit and the Rockefeller Foundation's Cautious Approach to Christian Morality

3-1: RF's Moral and Religious Concern in the late 1940s

John Foster Dulles, a senior member of the Trustee of the RF since 1935, triggered the formative proposal on the post-war discussion on morality and religion. In 1946, he sent a note to Barnard, then a member of the Trustees of the RF, suggesting 'consideration of the establishment of a Division of Moral Philosophy.'¹⁵⁾ Dulles identified three main challenges that the U.S. had had – two primarily from Germany and one now from the Soviet Union – and characterized the challenges as 'atheistic' against 'our system of personal freedom.' Personal freedoms, Dulles emphasized, would not be

restored 'except in a religious and theistic society.'¹⁶⁾

In response, the Special Committee on Moral and Spiritual Values, chaired by Barnard, was established within the RF to investigate this problem. In his memorandum, Barnard articulated three general problems on morals and ethics: the decline of Christian morality, the absence of a shared morality in a rapidly changing modern society, and the conflict of morality among different nations.¹⁷⁾ While Dulles tried to link religious rhetoric to anti-communist and anti-Soviet discourse, Barnard did not necessarily link the problem of a lack of morality to the U.S.-Soviet conflict. Instead, he was concerned about the declining role of morality in society.

Barnard's feelings about the problem of morality were widely shared by intellectuals outside the foundation, to whom Barnard sent a letter for external advice. William Ernest Hocking, a philosopher at Harvard University and adviser of the RF, for instance, offered three explanations for American moral malady in his reply to Barnard's letter: erroneous focus on the altruistic, or 'soft,' side of Christianity and the detriment of the 'harder' virtues of 'pugnacity and self-assertion'; distrusted general principles and the conceived gap between high moral principles and concrete circumstances; and spreading relativism as the only defensible moral position among American universities.¹⁸⁾ Furthermore, Hocking expressed his concern with the relationship between the U.S. and the newly independent nation-state, claiming that '[t]he vast difference among nation-state, the reality of the condition called 'backwardness' could undermine the principle that 'all nation-state are created equal' and could deteriorate the international relations.¹⁹⁾

Joseph Willits, Director of the RF's Division of the Social Sciences (DSS), reported on his 'stirring experience' of discussions on moral issues from his research trip to Europe. He documented that J. B. Kessler, one of the Managing Directors of the Shell Oil Company, observed the expanding worldwide gap between material power (based on scientific and technological knowledge) and moral wisdom. Kessler claimed that the question of how the United States, the world's most influential country, could increase 'social and moral wisdom' and 'keep pace with its power' would be crucial, and asked what the RF was 'doing to even up this unbalance?''²⁰⁾ The following month, John D. Rockefeller Jr. sent a letter to Barnard regarding President Truman's Committee on Universal Training. Referring to a statement by the committee, Rockefeller Jr. cited that '[a]ny adequate program must recognize the fact that the nation's security depends not only on its military strength but also on the physical, educational, spiritual, religious and moral fiber of its young men,' and urged Barnard to think how the RF could take advantage of the opportunities.²¹⁾

From his conversations with many internal and external professionals, Barnard laid out the future guidelines the RF might follow. In the 1948 annual report, he announced that 'the field of empirical research related to moral problems is now being considered,' although Barnard remained cautious toward RF's support of religious organizations. The report emphasized that the RF believed

that 'no satisfactory solution to the problems of our civilization' would be obtained without 'tak[ing] into account the ideals and spiritual aspirations of men.'²²⁾

In multiple reports, Willits, whose division was actively engaged with moral and spiritual issues, also formulated thoughts on this matter. When facing a reduced budget for his division in 1948, Willits even emphasized the funding for studies on 'social philosophy' alongside the emphasis of maintaining a budget for the funding area studies and other social sciences. Willits argued that 'the United States must exemplify its conviction in a way of life, a culture, a system of values and a coherent philosophy of social well-being which goes beyond anti-communism and a crude materialism.' He admitted that '19th Century liberalism and protestant ethics no longer carry the conviction they once did' and people ought to have 'an alternate value system and code of ethics to give meaning to existence'; otherwise, the individual would feel frustrated and insecure. It was long overdue for Willits to express a 'positive statement of our philosophy' at home and abroad where 'the communist ideology generates a fervor, passion and conviction that stands in marked contrast to our pallied individualism.'²³⁾

3-2: *The RF's Rebuilding of the Relationship with Religious Institutions*

For Barnard, the first notable case of RF's relevant funding in this direction was research work by the Department of the Church and Economic Life (DCEL) of the FCCCA in 1949. As the author of *The Functions of the Executive* (1938), a book on modern business management, as well as former president of the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company, Barnard was particularly interested in the systematic analysis and application of moral and ethical principles into a modern business organization and economic activities. In securing support from his colleagues at the RF and the FCCCA, Barnard cautiously informed the staff at the FCCCA about the RF's perspective: There were no objections within the RF to supporting the research work of the FCCCA, but a smaller likelihood of funding the work of the FCCCA in general.²⁴⁾

Founded in 1908, the FCCCA, working for ecumenical movement in the United States, was a service agency for its constituents, the twenty-five national church bodies of Protestant and Orthodox denominations, whose combined membership was just under twenty-eight million in 1948 (renamed the National Council of Churches of Christ in 1951). The FCCCA strived to improve productivity in the rapidly industrializing United States by addressing employees' voices and raising working conditions and wage levels. This belief in and practice of 'democracy' in American industrial society was rooted in the belief that democracy is an expression of Christianity. As a subdivision of the FCCCA, the DCEL had been constituted to enlarge the former Industrial Relations Division program²⁵⁾ and analyzed contemporary economic life and the possible application of Christian moral principles. Cameron Hall, Executive Secretary of the DCEL, formulated what the Council precepted as moral

concepts and the present crisis of 'moral disintegration of Western Civilization.' He noted that although many moral concepts became irrelevant to the exacting demands of economic life on an operational level, people tended to recommend outdated ones to solve contemporary economic problems uncritically. Furthermore, the value and need for moral concepts in economic life were 'reduced to the mere requirements of productive efficiency and the maintenance of law and order.' Lastly, he conceived a general tendency to 'formulate and apply moral concepts with primary reference to the personal and group, rather than public.'²⁶⁾

In October 1948, an RF grant in aid of \$1,500 made possible the DCEL conference in Pittsburgh. This conference profoundly impacted the daily activities and thinking of churches throughout the country, strengthened by a vigorous follow-up by state and city councils working with the Federal Council promoting 'little Pittsburghs.' Following its success, the RF provided the DCEL with three-year grants totaling \$100,000 in 1949, additional contributions of \$125,000 in 1952, \$125,000 in 1955, and \$5,000 in 1960 for its research activities. These research series were published and utilized for educational activities of the FCCCA.²⁷⁾ Overall, the RF officers evaluated the high equality of its research organization and outputs by noting that '[t]he Department has been eminently successful in enlisting on its Study Committee and on various specialized projects' participation by 'able men from business, labor, agriculture, government, churches, and universities' and seriously addressing the present-day economic realities and the difficulties with the application of general principles of Christian morality.²⁸⁾ Barnard also evaluated the appropriation for the DCEL as 'a very successful project' in 1952 when he was about to retire from the RF's presidency.²⁹⁾

If the RF's funding of the FCCCA offered a chance to deal with the question of economic life and morality within the U.S., RF's grants for the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) were an effort to re-establish a universal morality in the face of conflicts between different moral values upheld by different nations. In the middle of the post-war revival of the international Christian ecumenical movement, the Commission was established under the World Council of Churches (WCC) to influence international political organs like the United Nations and consolidate the concept of human rights as the foundation of religious liberty.³⁰⁾ The WCC is the worldwide Christian inter-church organization founded in 1948 to promote ecumenism, which dates back to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910.

John F. Dulles, Chairman of the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace of the FCCCA, played a pivotal role in elevating the conventional ecumenical movement into a permanent body of international relations. He asked to arrange a conference of Church Leaders to consider the problems of peace and war.³¹⁾ The gathering was held in Cambridge in 1946 under the joint sponsorship of the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the WCC, both of which aimed to set up a joint permanent Commission for international affairs (later CCIA).³²⁾ This 1946 Cambridge Conference was

significant because 'for the first time the most official bodies of the non-Roman Churches have devised a method and mechanism of cooperation in the area of contemporary international life.'³³⁾ The CCIA's primary responsibility shall be to serve the churches, councils, and conferences involved with the WCC and the IMC 'as a source of stimulus and knowledge in their approach to international problems and as their organ in formulating the Christian mind on world issues.'³⁴⁾ Dulles became the first of three vice presidents of the CCIA and played an active role in 'establish[ing] a two-way line of communication between the churches in different countries and international political organs.'³⁵⁾

With the grant of \$15,000, the RF contributed to stabilizing CCIA's activities and making the Commission a permanent body. The RF financed the earlier preliminary meeting to review its activities and preparatory study, which was distributed and utilized at the Amsterdam meeting of the WCC and later published as a study volume entitled 'The Churches and International Disorder.' This preliminary meeting successfully generated membership churches' interest in world problems and demonstrated a willingness to take more direct initiative. Consequently, the WCC and the IMC constituted the Commission as a permanent organ to represent them in the area of world affairs, and two parent bodies assumed financial responsibility for the work of the CCIA (an annual budget appropriation of \$35,000), which enabled the CCIA to organize its activities more stably.³⁶⁾ In his reply to the CCIA's report of this progress, Phillips Mosely, adviser of the RF and well-known professional in Soviet studies, expressed RF's gratitude on its behalf.³⁷⁾

4: Discontinued Consensus on what Morality is

4-1: Controversy Caused by Lack of Definition of Morality

Until the end of the 1940s, Barnard seemed to form somehow an organizational consensus on the RF's policy in moral and spiritual values. That was to support empirical research of moral and religious problems. For most of the RF's officers, including Barnard, their interests were placed within the broader field of morals and ethics, of which the religious component constituted one theme. However, Dulles, the Chairman of the RF's Trustee in 1951, seemed to adhere to his Christian morals and ethics. In his memoranda for the trustee meeting of April 1951, Dulles made a provocative statement in his analysis of the current RF policy and crisis of U.S. immorality. He proclaimed what he conceived as a startling and shocking 'fact': 'the increasing tendency of individuals and foundations to finance the development of the material aspect of our civilization with decreasing support for its moral development.' Dulles concluded that '[w]e are expanding material power without expanding correspondingly, the capacity to subject that power to moral controls and use it for moral purposes.'³⁸⁾

Dulles' statement was disturbing to Barnard because it 'almost explicitly said that the Trustees

had been negligent in their duty' and they had kept RF's activities out of the religious field.³⁹⁾ Barnard complained to Dulles about the misunderstanding so that Dulles would withdraw his line of discussion at the Trustee meeting.⁴⁰⁾ Barnard also cautiously conveyed his viewpoints to his successor, Dean Rusk (President of the RF from 1952 to 1961). In his memorandum to Rusk, Barnard described Dulles' statement as 'misleading historically.' Barnard reemphasized his view that 'we can safely and usefully give support for research in the field of morals and ethics, particularly on the empirical side which has been so much neglected by the philosophers in this field.' However, he was 'strongly convicted' that 'it would be erroneous ... for the Foundation to give support to religious institutions as such,' because it would lead the RF to face 'serious public relations problems.'⁴¹⁾

Despite Barnard's careful instruction, in March 1953, Rusk submitted his request for financial aid of \$600,000 for the educational program of the UTS for religious leaders in the world.⁴²⁾ It immediately provoked the question among RF officers if 'other countries would consider this program just another propaganda move, especially if it were associated with the Christian movement.'⁴³⁾ Rusk's five-page memorandum pointed out the most critical aspect of RF's policy in this field: lack of 'precise definition of 'moral and spiritual' values.'⁴⁴⁾ Because of this lack of consensus on what constituted the moral foundation among the RF's officers and trustees, for Rusk, the RF's funding of the UTS was a possible choice, while others, including Barnard, remained reluctant.

4-2: Ambiguous Departure from Christian Morality

Within one month of Rusk's proposal, fundamental and critical questions were raised by Herbert A. Deane, Consultant for the DSS at the RF. He emphasized the urgent need for the RF to examine, clarify, and redefine 'the nature of our concern with morals and ethics.' In formulating his suggestions, he evoked three sets of questions and their underlying assumptions, which had not been clearly articulated in relevant policy discussions in previous years. First, Deane asked whether traditional religious organizations were 'the best – or even a suitable – instrument for either re-examining the codes of [morals and ethics] or their reformulation in the light of contemporary problems and knowledge.' Second, supposing that 'the fundamental principles of morality are in our possession – for example, in the tenets of Protestant Christianity –,’ he questioned if they could 'educate and persuade [people] to be better Protestant Christians' and if the RF ought to support such similar projects to make 'better Roman Catholics,' 'better Jews,' 'better Mohammedans' or 'better Buddhists.' Third, he asked if 'the world – or the United States – needs a common faith, a common set of moral and religious principles, to which all or most men will give allegiance.'⁴⁵⁾

As far as RF was concerned, Deane elicited negative opinions by addressing the second and the third question, while the first set would be the area in which the RF could 'properly take action.' Notably, Deane considered it would be 'sheer provincialism' to assume that Christianity should be the

world religion. He regarded 'the effort of Luce and others to equate Christianity and 'Americanism' and to insinuate that other religious beliefs or agnosticism or atheism are somehow 'un-American' and dangerous to the health of our society' as 'an unfortunate departure from the basic principles of liberalism and democracy.' Furthermore, Deane considered such tendencies would be against the trend in the 'underdeveloped areas' where 'the rise of political independence and cultural nationalism and anti-Westernism in Asia and Africa' overwhelmed the Christian movement. Lastly, Deane doubted 'the abilities of the theologians as a group to contribute to the clarification or rational assessment of present issues in morals and ethics.' For him, the UTS course on 'totalitarian and secular ideologies from a comparative perspective' would be undesirable for RF to support.⁴⁶⁾

Leland C. Devinney, Associate Director of the DSS, also expressed concern about RF's funding for religious institutions or activities. First, he believed that religious activities would be 'a matter for private rather than public support' and 'a quasi-public organization like RF' ought not to undertake direct support of religious groups. Second, he assumed that religious organizations and activities could gain 'widest and most successful appeal to private donors' and would have 'a less critical need of foundation assistance.' Third, if the RF ventured into the religious field, he thought that the RF ought to prepare 'widely acceptable criteria' for favoring groups of 'liberal Protestants,' which were most likely to receive RF support, in opposition to 'Fundamentalist Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and the other major world religions,' although he could not find any advantages of liberal Protestants compared to other religious groups. Lastly, like Deane, Devinney warned against the danger of prevailing tendencies to search for 'a single, simple, coherent, and completely authoritative view of morals and ethics.' He suggested that the preferences or convictions of 'eternal verities' would make society stagnant and lead to the rise of 'authoritarianism and intolerance.'⁴⁷⁾

Willits also prepared his note on morals and ethics for Rusk. He listed four pitfalls the RF should 'avoid in support of work in morals and ethics' to clarify the scope of operation. First, Willits differentiated church and religion from morals and ethics. Although he acknowledged the vital influence of religion and the church upon the formation and maintenance of morals and ethics, Willits argued that church and religion did not and ought not to take a monopolistic responsibility. Like Devinney, Willits even criticized churches for having too often lagged on moral issues or having been arrogantly determined to impose a dogma that turned out to be highly unethical in the light of later experience. Secondly, Willits stated that the RF should not identify religion with the church by acknowledging the sharp contrast between the dedicated preachers and so many of the preaching profession and the official bureaucrats of the church. Third, Willits claimed that the RF should not become a partisan among religious denominations – Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Mohammedanism. To Willits, RF's function was aiding efforts to understand, not imposing a point of view. Lastly, Willits implied that the RF should not financially support the operating budget of church

bodies because religious bodies received one out of every two philanthropic dollars in this country. In contrast, higher education received only eight percent of charitable dollars.⁴⁸⁾

Consequently, despite the ongoing dispute within the RF, it had decided to support the UTS as an eclectic framework – ‘other appropriations’ – beyond the existing division activities, at \$525,000 in 1954. Although this grant was described in the 1954 annual report as ‘[a] somewhat unusual grant,’ the UTS was considered as ‘a great university’ and a ‘usually favorable position’ to conduct ‘advanced religious studies on an interdenominational and interfaith basis.’⁴⁹⁾ By June 1959, 99 fellows from 45 countries participated in the program. In 1959, the RF provided an additional \$75,000 for the participation of 23 fellows from 20 countries.⁵⁰⁾ In 1961, an additional \$100,000 over five years was decided to give the program ‘permanent status.’ With this round of support, the program changed its nature from the original Rusk proposal’s language of ‘religious education’ to ‘study the moral, ethical, and intellectual questions confronting society today.’⁵¹⁾ Two main promoters of RF’s support to the UTS were Rusk, RF’s President until 1962, and Van Dusen, President of the UTS and a member of the Trustee of the RF until 1963. This consequence indicates that while RF officers expressed reluctance to subsidize the UTS, a group that encouraged such funding was also at the top of the organization’s decision-making, creating a multi-layered grant-making process. In this sense, the RF’s departure from Christian morality in the 1950s remained ambiguous.

5: Diffusing Interests beyond Religious Morality and Revitalizing Democracy in the World

5-1: Prevailing Interests of Morality, Democracy, and the Third World

The RF’s officers entangled the post-war debates on moral deficits with grounding values and principles of democracy. They applied such discussions to broader contemporary affairs by boosting relevant research and utilizing it to newly independent nations to construct a democratic society. This inquiry transformed the officers’ attitudes toward the RF’s moral and religious programs. Several prominent RF figures reflected this tendency in their memoranda. In his letter to Rusk, Barnard wrote that Willits, ‘who was most sceptical’ about this area, ‘changed his attitude.’⁵²⁾ Over three or four years from 1949, Willits took the initiative in specifying what the RF could do regarding morals and ethics. As time passed, his discussions ‘focused more and more on legal philosophy and political philosophy.’ By the summer of 1952, morals and ethics had been ‘trimmed down to legal and political philosophy.’⁵³⁾ In his memoranda, Willits claimed the need for the ‘most intense and continuous study in their factual, analytical, historical, and philosophical aspects’ of moral questions by listing international relations within the first line among dozens of issues.⁵⁴⁾

Under Willits’ initiative, the Legal and Political Philosophy (LAPP) program, the extensive grant

program for political theory, was established at the RF in 1952 and sustained until 1962 with \$1.7 million in funding. The LAPP program supported notable scholars, including Henry Kissinger, Allan Bloom, Leo Strauss, John Rawls, and Hannah Arendt.⁵⁵⁾ For Willits part, in considering RF's larger scale of grants for 'scientific studies in the social field,' which he also directed under his division, Willits was aware that 'the evaluation of social ends remains outside the methods of science, and therefore the efforts of social philosopher.' Such efforts, in his thinking, certainly benefitted scientific studies, especially 'to state and to criticize the assumptions, concepts, and procedures of the scientists' who examined the daily operation of large organizations and group behavior involving 'value-judgments.' In this sense, he presumed that this policy of 'strengthening the philosophy approach to human and social problems' was 'not proposed as competitive with the scientific approach, but as complementary to it and fruitfully related to it at every point.'⁵⁶⁾

Implications of philosophical and legal analysis of the underlying values of a democratic society were not limited to the study of the United States and Western societies. A growing number of newly independent countries from the 1950s captured the attention of RF officers due to the potential applicability of intellectual output from the LAPP in these new nations. At the meeting of RF's Advisory Committee on the LAPP in 1955, Rusk argued that advocates of democracy were falling behind communists in providing 'a rigorous, a systematic, and above all a hopeful explanation of politics and history.' Consequently, Rusk considered that communists 'have effective means of propagating their beliefs among the peoples' like 'European 'intellectuals,' Oriental nationalists, rural and urban workers in both Europe and the Orient.'⁵⁷⁾ Additionally, at the LAPP Advisory Committee Meeting in 1956, Rusk suggested the potential importance of the RF's program in legal and political philosophy for 'the underdeveloped countries' referring to 'a sharp increase in the funds available for key underdeveloped countries,' which was another of Rusk's initiatives.⁵⁸⁾ Rusk's proposal was widely supported by the meeting participants. Professor Lon L. Fuller, Harvard Law School, referred to Robert Bowie, Assistant Secretary of State, whose opinion 'was that the greatest deficiency in the underdeveloped areas field is in legal and political philosophy.' He specified 'a need for meaningful concepts in countries like Japan, Korea, etc.' He explained that the problem was that 'they pick up our laws without any background of our institutions' and insufficient understanding led to 'too much copying of our institutions.' Professor Willard Hurst, University of Wisconsin Law School, suggested that 'constitutional law as such may be closely related to problems of land use, property and land tenure.' Rusk replied to their comments that 'backward countries are looking to us for help in the legal field.' As one of the 'major entries into underdeveloped countries,' he suggested, intellectual aid in law 'can be given without cold war overtones.'⁵⁹⁾

Rusk was convinced that the RF should address issues in the Third World more seriously. Not only due to its vulnerability to communist penetration, but he also thought that essentially the U.S.

failed to overcome the lack of its moral leadership: '[t]he need for deeper moral insight is widely felt in this period of rapid change and mounting peril. ... Friendly representatives of other cultures regularly plead for stronger moral leadership from the United States. They have pointed out the anomaly that the United States, which should have so much to offer in moral and spiritual values, rests so much of its effort abroad upon material goods while communism, essentially materialistic, seems somehow to challenge so many in non-material terms.'⁶⁰⁾

To rectify the ill-conveyed image of the United States, he advocated for his belief that U.S. strength ought to be underpinned by intellectual and moral strength during public addresses and informal speeches. Rusk championed Woodrow Wilson and 'the lofty concepts of the Preamble and the opening Articles of the Charter of the United Nations' as a persuasive and a 'more productive, more realistic and more workable' moral basis upon which to build a reasonable world order than 'appetite, rivalry, ambition, greed[,] deception and raw power.'⁶¹⁾

Rusk equated the U.S. Constitution to the UN Charter. Democracy was based on 'moral judgments in which individuals are sovereign, and [democracy] works through rules by which sovereign individuals might live together in peace.' He called for 'strengthening of the ancient verities which lie at the heart of our moral and political order.' By the ancient verities, Rusk meant 'Christian morality, constitutional government, unalienable rights; of the freedom of minds to think and speak, of spirit to worship; of regard for Truth and Beauty and Right.' He perceived that these ancient values transformed Western life and 'are now sparking the flames of freedom in other parts of the world.' Rusk believed that democratic values could be extended into an UN-based international order and thus include newly independent countries.⁶²⁾ Therefore, to Rusk, who occupied his presidency at the RF for about one decade from 1952, the restoration of U.S. moral leadership and the search for the moral foundations of democracy were inextricably linked. Concurrently, his background as a high-level foreign policymaker in the Asian region and his vision of international relations convinced him that his exploration of American values could serve as a precedent for bringing democratic legal systems and participation in the UN-based international community to the newly independent regions of Asia and Africa.

5-2: Religious and Moral Dimension in International Politics

Despite their seemingly optimistic vision of the applicability of a liberal democratic system in newly emerging countries, Rusk and his RF staff embraced nuanced interests in international relations and foreign policy studies. They assumed that moral consideration often conflicted with national interests. Moreover, they considered the Cold War struggle to be understood not just in military and economic terms but also from religious and ideological vantage points. For instance, the RF funded the establishment of the Committee on International Relations at the University of Notre Dame in

1949. With a three-year \$69,000 grant, the Committee was to interrogate ‘the interrelations of religion, democracy and international order, with special attention to the rise of the political religions of the twentieth century and their relations with traditional religious groups.’⁶³⁾ Notre Dame University has been a center of liberal Catholic social movement in the United States, while it also provided a basis for exile intellectuals from Central Europe whose research interest was about fascism, totalitarianism, and religious movement.

Among such figures, Waldemar Gurian, a Russian-born German-American political scientist, was essential to attract RF’s funding for the Committee. Gurian, who fled the Nazi regime to the United States in 1939, emerged as a collaborator with the RF to propel Christian democratic values in post-war Germany. Immediately after his immigration, he conceived the pluralism embodied by American democracy as the source of the spiritual essence of ‘New Christendom’ and highly supported U.S. entry into the war in 1941. In 1948, returning to U.S.-occupied Germany as one of the RF’s first fellows, he lectured on the Soviet Union, totalitarianism, and Catholicism. Gurian integrated democratization, the promotion of Christianity, and the alliance with the United States for post-war Germany’s reconstruction and confrontation against Soviet totalitarianism. With the RF’s interest in finding collaborators in post-war Germany, he received constant travel grants for an annual return to Europe in the following few years.

In parallel to the RF’s effort to solidify Soviet studies, including establishing a Russian Institute at Columbia University in 1946, Mosely, founder of the center, invited Gurian to engage and expand this mission at Notre Dame.⁶⁴⁾ The Committee actively published research on Soviet Communism and religious life in Eastern Europe. It attracted émigré scholars like Ferdinand A. Hermens (German Catholic) and Stephen Kertesz, a former Hungarian diplomat who evacuated from the Communist revolution and became a scholar of Bolshevism, as the Committee’s members. Furthermore, the Committee took place in many seminars and symposiums on contemporary religious and ideological confrontations, inviting Morgenthau, Arendt, Mosely, and other prominent practitioners and experts in Sovietology. These efforts made the Committee the hub of Russian studies in the Midwestern region.

The Committee received high evaluation from RF officials and financial support until the mid-1960s (approximately \$310,000). Furthermore, in his letter to an RF’s officer, Morgenthau expressed his ‘high opinion of the values of the work’ of the Committee, adding, ‘as far as Catholic institutions are concerned[,] its contribution has been unique.’⁶⁵⁾ Mosely also admired that the committee ‘filled an important gap in the area where political international relations and cultural-philosophical relations impinge.’ He remarked that many works ‘attempted, not only to examine the actual happenings in world affairs but to relate them to systems of values and to the clash of ideologies or value-systems.’⁶⁶⁾

Moreover, there was an equally strong emphasis on philosophical or theoretical studies in this area. One reason for this was Rusk's continuing interest. Another was the active management of the grants program by Kenneth Thompson, a distinguished student of Morgenthau, who joined the RF's DSS in the early 1950s. Rusk considered that there 'is a never ending debate about the role of moral principles in foreign affairs,' and sympathized with the so-called realist scholars in the 1950s, including Morgenthau and Niebuhr. They designated the 'moral dilemma' as their central concern instead of propagating a universal moral framework and uncritically employing it in changing international conditions and foreign policy circumstances.

Although Rusk felt that Kennan and Morgenthau 'went too far in their criticism of legalism and law,' he 'encouraged the Rockefeller Foundation to support the work of Kennan and people like that.' Using his 1950 and 1953 grants from the RF, Kennan attempted to investigate 'the legalistic and moralistic trend in the United States foreign policy in the last fifty years.'⁶⁷⁾ This research was partly published as his *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* in 1951, which became a classical critique against 'abstract legalism and moralism'. Instead of exercising abstract reasoning, from a practical point of view, Rusk also acknowledged the difficulty of actual foreign policymaking, which always involved a moral dilemma — how to balance moral principles and national interest — and issues of public opinion, i.e., how to deal with fluctuating public opinion to formulate a coherent foreign policy under continuous pressures. Likewise, the RF granted Niebuhr in 1957 to study 'the relation between moral and strategic consideration in concrete policy issues' over the past twenty years. He specifically questioned when moral sentimentality overwhelmed strategic interest and whether strategic considerations negate moral issues.⁶⁸⁾ His research published in 1959 as *The Structure of Nations and Empires* was considered 'one of the five proposals which the Advisory Committee [at the Rockefeller Foundation] felt were of such distinguished merit.'⁶⁹⁾ With RF grant extensions, Niebuhr completed his study in 1966.⁷⁰⁾

These grants for Kennan and Niebuhr were merely a few of many cases of financial support for theoretical studies of international relations. This distribution of funds was particularly intensified after Thompson joined the RF in 1953. His core interests also rested with a theoretical consideration of international relations where moral and ethical considerations occupied central concern.⁷¹⁾ Thompson was instrumental in holding the Conference on Theory of International Politics in Washington, D.C., in 1954. This conference has recently gained scholarly attention due to its symbolic move towards solidifying the 'realist' paradigm within post-war U.S. International Relations.⁷²⁾ Participants included scholars such as Niebuhr, Morgenthau, John Herz, Arnold Wolfers, and William T.R. Fox and practitioners like Nitze and Bowie,⁷³⁾ who all received some financial support as an individual or through their associated institutions from the RF. The conference's underlying concern was the moral issues and national interests in international politics.⁷⁴⁾

RF's funding for research on morals and ethics in international relations might suggest a seemingly opposite 'reality' to enhancing moral values. It implied the limitations and constraints of moral values and ethical considerations against pursuing self-interests in foreign relations. Importantly, however, Rusk suggested the potential benefits of studying 'the concept of reciprocal or mutual national interests,' as well as 'the structure and activities of the United Nations to international politics,' to mitigate this contradiction in his 1953 memoranda.⁷⁵⁾ These research themes demonstrate that Rusk envisioned international relations as not just a struggle for power but also potential cooperation, the pursuit of mutual interest, and moral legitimation, which could be accomplished or supplemented through effective international organization. However, it is essential to note that Rusk, Thompson, and other RF's staff, as well as theorists of international relations supported by the RF did not overlook the potential conflict between democratic procedure and foreign policymaking and between public opinion and elitism.

This theme was familiar among RF's staff in the 1950s. In a 1946 report which reshaped the perception of the understanding of the RF's mission statement – advancement of knowledge for the wellbeing of human beings – Bryce Wood, consultant for the RF at that time, proposed that the RF could pursue the knowledge for the U.S. which might serve U.S. national interests because it possibly benefitted for the world as well.⁷⁶⁾ Raymond Fosdick, then RF's President, read this report and was convinced about what he half-consciously felt 'the changing trends in our work in international relations since 1935.' Fosdick found the reason for this in the following section of Wood's report; 'the main cause was the fear that the foreign policies of the democratic states might not result in effective resistance to the expansionism of the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo coalition.' 'In a time of gathering crises,' he continued, 'security, more than peace, seemed vital.'⁷⁷⁾ In the face of constant political confrontation in the post-war world, the RF leaders expected a more mature U.S. foreign policy and knowledge for such policy formation.⁷⁸⁾ For them, it was not acquired simply by exhibiting U.S. religious and moral superiority or following universal religious and moral codes. On the contrary, it was supposed to be achieved through a subtle reconciliation between interests and morality in concrete reality. It was precisely because this lesson had a common thread, whether in foreign policy, in the practice of democracy, or in the administration of the Foundation's programs, that the RF sought such knowledge. In retrospect, it was a constant discursive exploration for RF's leaders and officers who sought to untangle the moral constraints of U.S. international prestige and leadership.

6: Conclusion

This paper reconstructs the debate on religious and moral problems within the RF from the immediate post-war to the mid-1950s. During this period, the RF, as a private international actor, experienced

and recognized complex transformations of social, economic, and political landscapes both domestically and abroad. The experience of the war, the emerging influence of communism around the world, and the increasing number of newly independent nations were part of these dynamics. Crucially this rapidly changing environment made conventional moral framework obsolete, whereas the United States, the post-war economic and military superpower, had trouble with adequately equipping moral leadership.

In the face of confrontation with the Soviet ideology, religious rhetoric and movements were attractive for U.S. foreign policymakers indulging John F. Dulles to present its moral 'superiority.' The RF, as the nexus of foreign policy establishment (both Dulles and Rusk later became the Secretary of State), was influenced by such anti-communist discourse to some extent. However, as this paper indicates, trying to be independent and 'objective,' the RF cautiously reformulated its funding policy in religion and morality. Dulles and RF officials agreed on the need for a more robust moral system to be put forth by the Western Bloc. However, a perception gap existed between whether this should be done through funding for traditional religious organizations and propelling religious values or whether it could be accomplished through the work of philosophers and social scientists. RF officials concluded that when the RF got involved in the sensitive issue of rebuilding such a moral system, support for the latter, philosophical and empirical research, was appropriate to avoid the slander of propaganda and to express the reliable value system persuasively. In this vein, RF's support for the FCCCA's and WWC's empirical research and constant cooperation with Gurian and his Committee at Notre Dame would be remarkable while contributions to the general operating budgets of religious organizations were withheld. The exceptional case was the RF's funding for an educational program at the UTS, which was terminated when its President stepped down as RF's trustee.

In general, the staff at the RF carefully disentangled the prevailing equation of Americanism and Christianity as well as religion and morality. The RF officers expected that 'objective' empirical or philosophical research on the values that support democracy would result in revitalizing democratic society and devising mature foreign policy. This attitude was partly derived from Rockefeller Jr.'s and the RF's experience in the interwar period. More than that, it was based on professional and intellectual enthusiasm for cultivating studies of moral and philosophical questions, which thus extended into the field of political and legal philosophy as well as theoretical and empirical studies of international relations, although the anxieties motivating them might also have been backed up by the intellectual rivalry and attractiveness of communist intellectualism.

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