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Beyond Christian Nationalism: How the American Committee on Religious Rights and Minorities Made Religious Pluralism a Global Cause in the Interwar Era

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Academic Editor: Mark T. Edwards

Received: 4 October 2016; Accepted: 8 December 2016; Published: 16 December 2016

Abstract: During the 1920s and 1930s, the American Committee on Religious Rights and Minorities offered a potent challenge to the view of the United States as a Christian nation. The Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish members of the committee drew on a wealth of interfaith commitments to develop a critique of religious persecution around the world, especially the increasing anti-Semitism across Europe. In an era marked by isolationism, nationalism, and Christian triumphalism, the committee offered a competing vision of pluralist internationalism.

Keywords: pluralism; internationalism; religious minorities; interwar Europe

In January of 1927, the queen of Romania arrived for an official visit to the United States. She promptly found herself greeted by a charitable yet unquestionably forceful rebuke. The protest came from an interfaith committee that objected to the treatment of the minority religious communities of her nation by its majority Orthodox community. Signed by the committee's distinguished membership, the petition implored the queen to devote "personal consideration to those religious minorities in Roumania suffering under the practice of discrimination," a reference in particular to a new wave of anti-Semitic violence that had begun the previous year and had already sparked an outcry from prominent Americans. Despite the fact that this committee was affiliated with the Federal Council of Churches, an ecumenical organization representing the mainline Protestant denominations in the U.S., its members included Roman Catholics and Jews, and their petition expressed concern not only for Romania's Baptists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians, but for its Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Unitarian residents as well. "It is our conviction that if your royal influence could be further exerted on their behalf their present condition would be vastly improved," committee members declared, signaling their conviction that Americans had both the right and the responsibility to directly lobby foreign leaders in matters of interreligious relations [1,2].

Issuing petitions such as this one represented the principal work of the American Committee on Religious Rights and Minorities (ACRRM), which had been established as an informal working group in 1920 with the initial goal of examining the "status of religious minorities" in the newly independent nations of Eastern Europe. In its initial statement of purpose, the group declared its mission to be investigating the plight of "Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews and Greeks where any or all of these religious bodies are being restricted in the exercise of their right." Throughout the twenties and thirties, the committee formalized its structure and expanded its efforts more broadly across the globe, though its work increasingly came to be dominated by efforts to combat the growing anti-Semitism in Europe [3].

The ACRRM represented a who's who of the U.S. religious and political establishment of the interwar period. At various points during the twenties and thirties, its members included

political luminaries such as Herbert Hoover, William Jennings Bryan, Charles Evans Hughes, and William Howard Taft. The many notable religious leaders affiliated with it included a number of leading Protestants: the committee's chairman, Arthur J. Brown, a noted Presbyterian minister and missionary; Charles S. Macfarland, who served as general secretary of the Federal Council of Churches; Charles H. Brent, an Episcopalian bishop who had served as chief of the military chaplaincy during World War I; and Ralph Sockman, a New York Methodist who earned national fame with his weekly radio broadcasts. The influential theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, though he did not officially join the committee, nevertheless attended its meetings during the early thirties. Equally prominent Catholics and Jews joined the group. Cardinal James Gibbons, who was widely revered as the *de facto* leader of the U.S. Catholic Church, and James J. Walsh, a Catholic physician and dean of the school of medicine at Fordham University, were among the representatives of Catholicism (though Gibbons served only a short time before his death). The rabbi Stephen Wise and Oscar Straus, who years earlier had become the first Jewish cabinet member in the U.S., represented Judaism [3,4].

The existence of a committee made up of powerful religious and political leaders who were committed to advancing the interests of minority faith communities abroad challenges many conventional understandings of American religion during the interwar period. On the surface, any group that advocated the greater involvement of the United States on the world stage seems aberrant in a decade best remembered for the isolationist "return to normalcy." Yet the ACCRM seems anomalous even in the context of those Americans who did support continued engagement abroad.

As many recent scholars have noted, the allied victory in World War I reignited a spirit of Christian triumphalism in the U.S. Believing that the armies of good had slain the forces of evil, leading Christians—in reality, leading Protestants—sought to sustain the American presence on the world stage through a variety of movements intended to foster global peace. Especially during the twenties, Christian pacifists forged international connections in various arenas in an attempt to prevent future calamitous wars. Underlying all of these efforts, however, was the fundamental assumption that the U.S. was a Christian nation with the responsibility of exporting Christian values to a world in desperate need of them [5–9].

However, the very existence of the ACCRM challenges this simple characterization of Americans' self-understanding in the interwar period. Committee members were clearly committed to exporting American values to the rest of the globe, but those values were neither exclusively Protestant nor Christian. Rather, they sought to transmit a more recently articulated value: that religious pluralism represented a positive benefit to society. Those on the ACCRM championed this view, which had begun to circulate among elites during the final decades of the nineteenth century and had gained widespread currency among progressive political and religious leaders during World War I. Two facets of this view bear noting. First, for most observers in the interwar years, religious diversity meant the presence of Roman Catholics and Jews. Efforts to expand inclusiveness to members of other faith traditions, which had occurred fleetingly at the close of the nineteenth century, largely diminished in the early twentieth. Second, despite the spread of these views in elite circles, it would take World War II and the Cold War for such values to pervade the general population. Nevertheless, when it came to Catholics and Jews, the view of prominent leaders in the political and religious realm was that rather merely being tolerated, members of these communities should be welcomed as partners and contributors in national life [10,11].

The ACCRM took this view a step further, however. Drawing on an increasingly widespread commitment to minority religious rights, its members advocated a pluralist internationalism that sought to instill such views in other countries, particularly newly independent ones. To be sure, this concern was not new. Governments in Western Europe—and, at times, even U.S. presidential administrations—had sporadically expressed concern for the protection of the rights of Jewish minorities in Eastern Europe since the late nineteenth century. However, what was novel was the level of sustained commitment to minority rights that developed in the U.S. during the post-World War I

years, and the way in which that commitment merged with a changed understanding of the nation's own pluralism [2,9].

In this essay, I argue that the ACRRM offers a lens through which to consider a conception that held that the United States was a religiously pluralistic society whose citizens could advance respect for religious diversity in the international realm. By tracing the evolution of the committee's work, it will become clear that what began as an informal group with a limited internationalist vision rapidly grew in confidence and expanded the scope of its work. I will further demonstrate that the committee did not exist in a vacuum. Its members were religious and political leaders who had embraced ideals of pluralism within American society, and who matched their defense of religious minorities abroad with a commitment to an inclusive view of minority faith traditions at home.

Ultimately, I will suggest that despite its failure to meaningfully prevent religious persecution, the ACRRM nevertheless proved extraordinarily significant. Over the course of two decades, its members combined two commitments that had emerged independently: an increasing enthusiasm for religious pluralism and the belief that American ideals represented a beacon for the rest of the world. Furthermore, in these commitments, the ACRRM exemplified a broader phenomenon of the 1920s: the emergence of combined efforts by Protestants, Catholics, and Jews to advance a progressive internationalism, over and against continued conservative, evangelical arguments for Christian nationalism.

1. The Founding and Influence of the ACRRM

What became the American Committee on Religious Rights of Minorities began as a special committee within the Federal Council of Churches, an ecumenical body which, having reaped the benefits of a close relationship with the federal government during World War I, greatly expanded the scope of its work during the interwar period. Yet, despite its connection to a Protestant interdenominational organization, the ACRRM included Roman Catholics and Jews from the outset. This reflected the increasingly common perception that the religious culture of the United States encompassed those three traditions. During the early 1920s, the committee appears to have met sporadically (the records of meetings from the early years are incomplete). In its early years, the ACRRM seemed to lack confidence about acting on its own. Instead, it sought greater involvement of the U.S. in the League of Nations. Committee members argued that success in shaping global affairs—especially those related to minority religious groups—would be best accomplished by linking Americans' endeavors with the work of the newly formed international body. Such a position was unsurprising. The majority of the ACRRM's members were staunch internationalists who lamented the isolationist turn in Washington that had kept the U.S. from joining the League. The Federal Council of Churches was itself a staunch advocate of American membership in the international body, endorsing the organization as "an earnest endeavor to establish the principles of the Kingdom of God among nations" [2,9,12].

Thus, it was unsurprising that, in 1923, committee member and former Harvard University president Charles Eliot urged the group to push for "the immediate entrance of the United States into the League of Nations," which he believed to be "the best way to secure the rights of religious minorities." In the same spirit, the ACRRM requested that the federal government appoint a delegate to represent the U.S. in the League's Commission on Minorities. "We believe that the unnecessary suffering of minorities in the various countries," the committee declared, "will be greatly relieved in the interest of the United States in their welfare is made evident." That the U.S. had become an influential global power was beyond dispute among committee members [13,14].

As the twenties progressed, however, isolationist sentiments took deeper root in the American psyche. It became clear that repeated petitions and demands had not moved the U.S. any closer to membership in the League of Nations. Nor was the League itself proving particularly successful in achieving large-scale improvements for religious minorities. The ACRRM therefore formalized its work and increasingly began to act as a force for direct change rather than as an agent lobbying

the federal government. Committee members believed that “the treatment of religious minorities” constituted “one of the chief problems which have followed the World War” and decided to act on the belief that “entire freedom is the right of every religious body the world over” [2,3,15].

And act they did. Dissatisfied with the response to the petition it issued to the queen of Romania on her visit to the U.S. in 1927, the committee dispatched an investigative group to her country the following year. Upon its return, the group reported continued hostility to various Protestant sects and to Roman Catholics, but it expressed its greatest concern for “Anti-Jewish propaganda,” which it denounced as a “widespread and ugly manifestation of racial and religious hatred.” The full committee issued a 143-page report detailing the treatment of members of Romania’s various faith communities, which was publicized widely by the Federal Council of Churches [16,17].

The crises of the 1930s pushed the ACRRM to maintain its focus to the “countries of Eastern and Southeastern Europe,” while expanding to new areas of concern, including Mexico, Egypt, Palestine, and, in particular, Soviet Russia. In increasingly forceful rhetoric, members demanded that U.S. leaders “use their great influence to secure the universal recognition of the principle that religious freedom or the right to worship God freely according to the dictates of conscience is a primary human right.” In one of its most widely reported actions, the committee circulated a public statement denouncing the persecution against Jews, Protestants, and Catholics in the Soviet Union—persecution, it noted, that was “on a scale unprecedented in modern times.” The *New York Times* cheered the “clearness and disinterestedness” of the committee’s discussion of the “human issues involved in violation of religious liberty in Russia,” and urged that the report “have the widest possible circulation” [18–20].

That Americans at large would endorse such a project is unsurprising; religious liberty had, after all, long been a core tenet of the political culture of the United States. What is extremely noteworthy here, however, is that the acceptance—indeed, the embrace of—religious minorities had now become a value that leading Americans sought to export abroad. Even more telling of the cultural shift was the way in which the *New York Times* viewed the committee’s membership. For the newspaper’s editors, it was to be expected that an interreligious body would speak for the views of leading Americans. The differences separating Protestants, Catholics, and Jews had become akin to divergences of political affiliation. They were minor distinctions that in no way rendered someone less deserving of the right to speak for the nation.

Indeed, as the 1930s progressed, the concerns of non-Protestant minorities occupied an ever-growing focus of the ACRRM. Its members expressed concern for Roman Catholics following a “great . . . demonstration” against them in Northern Ireland. The group also raised anxieties about Orthodox minorities in Poland, which marked a notable shift, given that Orthodox churches had often been the source of persecution of minorities elsewhere in Eastern Europe [21,22].

However, by far the greatest occupier of the committee’s time during the 1930s was the explosion of hostility toward Jews throughout Europe. Within a year of Hitler’s rise to power, the group issued a statement—again, circulated in the press—that denounced as “deplorable” the increasing “persecution of Jewish citizens” in Germany. As they had done for over a decade, committee members grounded their critique in assertions of a fundamental right to free religious practice. “We are concerned solely with the question of justice and humanity, the common, inalienable rights of men everywhere, irrespective of race or religion.” As the decade progressed, “anti-Semitism was growing by leaps and bounds in Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary, and Roumania,” and combatting it demanded larger and larger effort. Moreover, it increasingly seemed that values of pluralism at home had come under attack. In one public statement, the ACRRM blasted the “cold pogrom” against German Jews, but, even more worryingly, the desire of the Nazis to spread anti-Semitism to the rest of the world, including the United States [21,23,24].

The specter of the various crises of the 1930s also inspired the ACRRM to adopt a more public presence. At a 1935 event at the Carnegie Hall Free Synagogue, committee members sought to expand public awareness of persecution against minority faiths—especially Jews—in Russia, Mexico, and Germany. The three speakers chosen reflected the interfaith membership of the group: ACRRM

chairman Arthur Brown spoke for Protestant communities, while diplomat William Sands represented Catholicism and former New York attorney general Carl Sherman represented Judaism. In its report on the event, the *New York Times* noted the “closely integrated fight” by members of all three faiths. Such language reinforced the degree to which Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were viewed as equal partners in these efforts. However, the story noted another development as well: with the Great Depression continuing, economic anxieties had trumped religious ones. Concern for the preservation of religious values was increasingly seen as less important than policy reforms to ease hardship. This reality would hinder the ACRRM all the more as the decade progressed [25].

Yet the significance of the ACRRM was not limited to its success or to the scope of its work. It was noteworthy for its approach to religious pluralism in four important ways. First, it was not merely a group of Christian—or Protestant—Americans demanding religious toleration abroad. On the contrary, the committee always maintained an inclusive membership. If a Catholic or Jewish representative needed to resign, another member of the same faith was quickly appointed. The committee’s publicity likewise emphasized the makeup of the group. Media reports noted that membership consisted of “men of differing political and religious convictions—Jews, Protestants, and Catholics” and saw this as an asset as it made its case both domestically and abroad. Most notably, despite the committee’s formation under the umbrella of the Protestant Federal Council of Churches, the Catholic and Jewish representatives were not relegated to second-class status in the group. They were fully integrated into the group’s work, so much that the prayer of invocation at meetings rotated among representatives of the three faiths [4].

Second, and closely related, their documentation of the plight of religious minorities abroad pushed ACRRM members to think critically about religious and racial minorities in the United States. At a 1939 meeting, George Haynes, the founder of the Urban League and a professor at the City College of New York, urged committee members to recognize that from the perspective of “Negroes, Indians, Mexicans and Orientals in the United States,” it seemed that “organized religion is failing them in their struggles for justice and goodwill.” During the interwar period, the committee never matched its enthusiasm for activism on behalf of religious minorities with support for racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, though some of the committee’s members were active in other programs of the Federal Council of Churches that did seek to improve race relations in the U.S. Regardless, the committee’s invitation to Haynes emphasized the extent to which its members envisioned a broadly pluralistic society rather than one dominated by a specific ethnic and religious identity [13,26].

Third, the diversity of the ACRRM and the breadth of its activities assured its focus was on all minority faiths, which set it in stark contrast to its counterparts in Europe. Throughout the 1920s, the committee maintained close contact with politicians and groups that shared its commitment. Yet, these Europeans were often far narrower in their definition of religious minorities than were members of the American committee. In its own report on the condition of “religious minorities” in Romania, one organization noted that “Roman Catholics and Protestants” had leveled complaints against the majority Orthodox community. While the ACRRM made the plight of Jewish Romanians a constant focus of its work, such concerns went largely unaddressed by European Christian groups [27].

Finally, the broadness of the committee’s inclusiveness grew even more expansive as time progressed. By the late twenties, the ACRRM began to press even beyond the threefold Protestant-Catholic-Jewish representation of religious diversity in the United States. In 1930, its members passed a resolution calling for religious communities in the United States to “use every proper resource consistent with their faith and practice to keep alive and develop a stronger moral consciousness of the inestimable value of the principles of religious freedom for the welfare of religion and of humanity.” The resolution was directed not only to churches and synagogues but also to “the representatives of other religions” [18].

Thus, the ACRRM represented a body fully committed to the ideal of pluralism. Whether in details as small as the prayers at meetings or as large as its definition of minority faiths in other

nations, it was broadly inclusive of Catholics and Jews. Moreover, despite its limited view of American diversity as consisting of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism, the committee's constant attention to the plight of minority communities pushed its members to think about diversity in new ways. Thus, the ACRRM embodied an expanding understanding of pluralism as it exported its vision to the world at large.

2. The ACRRM and American Opinions on Pluralism

Despite its tireless efforts, the ACRRM was, on the face of it, a failure. In the two decades between the World Wars, the committee, like other similar endeavors, failed to meaningfully alter the status of religious minorities in most of the countries targeted by its efforts. However, as much attention as its members called to the growing persecution of Jews in Germany and Nazi-controlled territories, as well as hostility to minority faiths elsewhere, there existed little political will in the United States to act in the international realm. By the outbreak of World War II, the committee found itself impotent as it continued its denunciations of Nazi Germany.

Despite its inability to end the rampant persecution of minority religious communities during the interwar period, however, the ACRRM had enormous significance. It marked the first sustained attempt by leading Americans to articulate a new view of religious pluralism on the global stage. While much of the group's rhetoric was couched in language of tolerance of minorities, the fundamental premise of their work was that religiously diverse societies should be embraced as the norm. Committee members took as their starting-point the conviction that Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—and, by 1930, adherents of other traditions as well—were all important contributors to the civic life of the United States.

It was no coincidence that many of the members of the ACRRM had long records as champions of an inclusive, pluralistic religious culture in the United States. Foremost in this realm was Charles Henry Brent, an Episcopalian who served as a bishop in upstate New York and who had been the chief of chaplains of the American Expeditionary Force in Europe during World War I. Brent had used the chaplaincy corps as a vehicle for enacting an inclusive vision of national life. During the war, he had emphasized his commitment to fostering “a sense of brotherhood among the chaplains,” and to ensuring that, regardless of whether they were Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, all chaplains would have “a spirit of respect for one another's convictions.” Brent himself had emphasized that all religions shared a common interest. At the headquarters of the military chaplaincy, he had staff members from all three faiths, and “each of us had to care for the interests of the others as he would care for his own.” Such an approach helped to alleviate the sense that Catholics and Jews were religious minorities in a Protestant army. Brent further contributed to such a spirit by participating in a Rosh Hashanah celebration by Jewish soldiers during the war [28–30].

During the 1920s, Brent became active in efforts to foster this spirit of religious pluralism back in the United States. He joined the American Association on Religion in Universities, an interfaith effort of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews to encourage inclusiveness on college campuses. The group—which was active for much of the twenties and which achieved its greatest success in the establishment of a school of religion at the University of Iowa—sought to challenge the perception of students who witnessed “divisions and competitions” or “strife” among faith traditions, rather than “the undergirding unity” that existed among Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism, and, ultimately, other religions as well [31].

While Charles Brent enjoyed enormous stature from his prominence during World War I, many other noted Protestants joined or contributed to the efforts of the ACRRM. Many of these men had demonstrated an equally longstanding commitment to the endorsement of pluralism in the United States. Charles Macfarland, another founding member of the committee and a key figure in the Federal Council of Churches, served on the Federal Council's Committee on Goodwill between Jews and Christians. That body, formed in the early 1920s, sought to “promote understanding” between the two traditions through pulpit exchanges, community discussions, and a curriculum for schools that

would promote “studies of the contribution of the Jew, the Catholic, and the Protestant” to national life. The work of the Committee on Goodwill was built on the foundational belief that members of all three faiths represented stakeholders in American society [32,33].

Other Protestants in the orbit of the ACRRM were equally involved in the interfaith movement of the twenties and thirties. The noted Union Seminary theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who did not join the committee but attended several of its meetings, stressed in correspondence his affinity for Judaism and his sense of having “more in common” with many liberal Jews than with conservative Christians. Another contributor to the ACRRM was Everett Clinchy, who became director of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ), which was established in the late twenties. Under Clinchy’s leadership, the NCCJ exemplified the ideals of a pluralistic nation. Responding to the “spiritual, moral and social issues” that resulted from the Great Depression, the new interfaith organization proclaimed that “as Catholics, Jews, and Protestants we regard society as a cooperative human brotherhood.” Echoing the same critique that the ACRRM directed abroad, NCCJ members lamented that American society failed “to reflect the principles of justice and brotherhood which our religious teachings share in common.” Thus, even as they expressed their pluralist vision internationally, religious leaders such as Clinchy did not lose sight of imperfections at home. Two other ACRRM members, Charles Brent and Charles Macfarland, also joined the NCCJ, which became the lasting institutional embodiment of the interfaith movement of the twenties [34–36].

Roman Catholic members of the ACRRM likewise demonstrated a longstanding commitment to a broader idealization of religious pluralism. In large part, this was due to the reality of life as a minority faith community, and it reflected a pragmatic solution to the realities of American society more than a shift in outlook. Nevertheless, regardless of their motivation, Catholics’ rhetoric invoked a newfound embrace of diversity. The aging Cardinal James Gibbons, who was a member of the committee in its earliest days, had long denounced any claim of conflict between Roman Catholicism and citizenship. He insisted that there was “no barrier” that separated Catholics from other Americans. Gibbons also acknowledged that an “overwhelming majority” of non-Catholic Americans “understand and appreciate” their Catholic neighbors. Indeed, on occasion Gibbons drew direct parallels between the experience of Catholics and that of Jews in the United States, highlighting the status of both as minority faiths whose presence was valued in a pluralistic society. Another Catholic member of the ACRRM, New York physician James J. Walsh, devoted his career to demonstrating the compatibility between Catholic faith and the commitment to education and progress that defined American culture in the early twentieth century. This was precisely the ideology that the committee would itself embody and export abroad: that differences of religion were minor and in no way affected a person’s ability to be a good citizen [37,38].

As an even smaller minority, and, unlike Roman Catholics, existing outside the boundaries of Christianity, Jews likewise felt an obligation to prove their commitment to American ideals. Like Gibbons and Walsh, the Jewish members of the ACRRM articulated a positive vision of pluralistic societies and actively participated in efforts to build acceptance of religious diversity within the United States. Oscar Straus had long championed inclusion, and as early as the 1890s had publicly denounced the “bigoted fanatics” who falsely claimed “that this is a Christian country in the sense that Protestant Christianity is the basis of our government, and that the rights of Catholics, Jews and Free-thinkers need not be considered.” During the 1920s, he became involved with various interfaith organizations as he used the Protestant periodical *Outlook* to emphasize his personal history of support for religious minorities abroad. Likewise, Stephen Wise worked with Charles Macfarland and other members of the Committee on Goodwill between Jews and Christians. The rabbi served as a speaker for one of the public addresses to businessmen’s clubs that became a core aspect of the committee’s efforts to expand the popularity of its ideals among respectable professionals. Like their Protestant counterparts on the ACRRM, both Wise and Straus became involved with the National Conference of Christians and Jews [39–42].

As the religious leaders affiliated with the ACRRM offered a voice for pluralism, their message was echoed by the various political luminaries aligned with the committee. Charles Evan Hughes, one of the initial members of the group and the eventual Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, served as a public face for one of the most prominent interfaith events of the 1920s: the Goodwill Dinner held in New York City in 1926. The evening, organized by the Committee on Goodwill between Christians and Jews, drew a crowd in the hundreds and included representatives of major Protestant denominations and the three principal branches of Judaism. Hughes guided the festivities, and in his keynote address emphasized that the U.S. represented “a nation which was founded in neither race nor creed,” and thus it was essential to foster a spirit of “mutual understanding, friendly accord, and earnest cooperation for the common good” among Christians and Jews alike. This was precisely the view of a healthy society that the ACRRM worked to transmit abroad in the same years [43].

Herbert Hoover, who served alongside Hughes on the ACRRM in its earliest days (both men withdrew as they rose to higher office in the twenties), likewise had a longstanding commitment to the advancement of pluralism. Despite the anti-Catholic rhetoric that would tarnish his 1928 campaign against Al Smith, Hoover had been instrumental in fostering the inclusion of Catholics in national life during World War I. Early in the war, he identified the benefits of embracing Catholics as full partners in the war effort, and, in correspondence with Charles Brent, came to emphasize an inclusive vision. During the 1920s, Hoover sustained personal ties with Protestant and Jewish leaders of the interfaith movement, including several members of the Committee on Goodwill Between Jews and Christians [44,45].

3. Conclusions: Legacies of the ACRRM

In the decades between the two World Wars, the American Committee on Religious Rights and Minorities brought together influential figures from the political realm and from the three major faith traditions in the United States in support of a common cause: a pluralistic international vision. The Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish members of the committee all shared a longstanding commitment to advancing the belief that religious pluralism represented a social strength, not a weakness that should cause concern. These luminaries worked to foster an embrace of diversity within the United States, and in the early 1920s formed the committee to spread this value to the world. Despite powerful countervailing forces at home and abroad, ACRRM members publicized, combatted, and tried in vain to build support against the rampant persecution of minority faiths in Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and, most tragically for the course of history, in Nazi Germany.

The ACRRM offers a critical challenge to assumptions about Christian nationalism in the United States amid the rampant isolationism of the 1920s and 1930s. First and foremost, the committee was internationalist, not nationalist. Its members recognized the value of international organizations such as the League of Nations, and they believed that the United States had an obligation to actively participate in global affairs. However, unlike many other internationalist movements in the U.S. during the same period, the ACRRM was intentionally inclusive rather than exclusively Christian. It modeled interfaith interaction in the minute details of its work, and in its public actions it gave equal prominence to its Catholic and Jewish members. In both its words and its deed, the committee offered a new ideal of pluralist internationalism, which proved to be its lasting legacy. Though its message did not become dominant during the interwar period, the ideals it cultivated became core values that permeated American society during the second half of the twentieth century [46–48].

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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